

MODERN PASSION PLAYS.

BY MAXIMILIAN J. RUDWIN.

BY the term "modern passion plays" the writer does not mean the Biblical peasant-pageants produced at stated intervals down to the present day in certain parts of Europe. The passion play at Oberammergau and in other villages in Catholic Germany, Austria and Switzerland is by no means modern. It is not even a revival, as is the case with the mystery plays of other countries,¹ but rather a survival of medieval dramatic folk-art. The author has in mind those dramas, which, based on the Biblical account of the passion of Christ, have been written according to the laws of modern dramatic technique. We have gotten accustomed by this time to see the Bible subjected to the processes of modern criticism, but we are to watch now the process of adapting the Gospel narratives of the life and passion of Christ to modern dramatic requirements. That the Biblical story is not fit for dramatic treatment our realists could not fail to see. In realism, as we all know, the subject-matter must be matter-of-fact material, and the sense of fact must prevail over reason and imagination, which cannot possibly hold true, with all our implicit belief in them, of the Gospel narratives. And, what is the greatest obstacle to the dramatization of the life of Christ, the fate of Jesus is from the Christian standpoint not a tragedy.²

¹ Passion plays were also produced in England, Italy and the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century; for England see *Open Court*, Vol. I (1887), pp. 290-292; for Italy, *Macmillan's Magazine*, Vol. LX, pp. 44 ff., and *Living Age*, Vol. CLXXXI (1889), pp. 562-566; and for the passion play in San Francisco see, among other sources, *Theatre*, Vol. I (1879), pp. 213-216, and *Overland*, Vol. LIV (1909), pp. 497-507, and Vol. LVI (1910), pp. 215-221.

² By this I do not mean that the life of Jesus does not present any tragic moments. As he walks on the road to Golgotha he is the most tragic figure in the world's history. Giving his impressions of the passion play at Oberammergau in 1850, Eduard Devrient, director of the Royal Theater in Dresden, says: "Wie Christus nun dahingehet mit der unermesslichen Liebe in der Brust, für alle zu sterben: diese ungeheure einsame Grösse hat mir erst

Christ is not a tragic hero dramatically. His fate does not awaken pity and fear, which, after all, is the object of all tragedy. He is not human, not one of us: and so by unraveling his fate before our eyes we cannot be made to imagine ourselves in his place and beat our breasts. We feel neither pity for him, nor fear for ourselves. For this reason modern poets who turned to the Bible for dramatic material chose lesser Biblical characters for their heroes: and where Christ has been introduced, he is not the hero. Of the contemporary poets who have dramatized Biblical material, Sudermann (*Johannes*, 1898)³ places John the Baptist, Paul Heyse (*Maria von Magdala*, 1899),⁴ and Maeterlinck (*Marie-Magdeleine*, 1910)⁵ Mary Magdalene, and Rostand (*La Samaritaine*, 1897)⁶ the Samaritan woman in the center of their dramas, while Christ, if he appears at all, is fairly passive. This hesitancy to make Christ the chief protagonist of a play is not the result of the unreligious nature of our modern literature, for our modern poets do not hesitate at all in suggesting Christ as central figure in their non-biblical dramas. Parsifal is reminiscent of Christ, and in Strindberg's *Advent* (1899) the supernatural play-mate of the children is Love or the Christ-Child personified. The Evangelist in Henry Arthur Jones's *The Galilean's Victory* (1907), who preaches a faith of the heart, is a true representative of the Nazarene, and Manson in Kennedy's *The Servant in the House* (1907), who teaches the lesson of fraternal love, is the symbolized Christ. Jerome K. Jerome suggestively identifies Christ with the protagonist of his play, *The Passing of the Third Floor Back* (1908), and the title-hero in Lady Gregory's *The Traveling Man* (1910) is none other than the Galilean preacher.

But, strange to say, in plays based on the Gospel narratives, the chief character has been kept resolutely off the stage. Jesus

die Gewalt der dramatischen Kunst vor die Seele gebracht." But what I do mean is that according to the Christian system of salvation this death, quite aside from the ensuing resurrection, did not mean defeat, but victory to Christ.

³ Sudermann's *Johannes* (*Poet Lore Plays*, No. 48), is, in contradistinction to Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (*Poet Lore Plays*, No. 53), in form and substance a Biblical play despite the freedom with which the story of the Baptist as told by the Evangelists is treated.

⁴ English translation by M. Winter, New York, 1904. It was played in this country in 1902-3 with Mrs. Fiske in the title-role.

⁵ English translation by A. Teixeira, New York, 1910. It was produced at the New Theatre in New York in 1910-11 with Olga Nethersole in the title-role. Hebbel's *Maria Magdalena* (1844) is not a Biblical play.

⁶ This *évangile en trois tableaux en vers* was presented for the first time in Paris in 1897 with Mme. Sarah Bernhardt in the title-role, and has been repeated for several years there during Holy Week. It was also given in this country in 1910-11, on one of Mme. Bernhardt's numerous American tours, in spite of the protests of the Catholic clergy.



ACT III, MAETERLINCK'S "MARY MAGDALENE."

An eye-witness describing the crucifixion.

does not appear at all on the boards in any of our contemporary Biblical dramas. His character is portrayed by his personal influence on the other figures in the play. Our dramatists seem fully to realize that a god has no place in the modern drama. Christ does not appear in Sudermann's *Johannes*, though his baptism by John is mentioned. Only directly after the beheading of the Baptist do loud exultant hosannas announce the entry of the Nazarene into Jerusalem.⁷ In Heyse's "Mary of Magdala" and Maeterlinck's "Mary Magdalene" an indirect characterization of Christ is attempted by picturing his spirit and his influence over the central figure of the play. In the former play Christ keeps himself resolutely behind the stage, and in the latter he is seen only once for an instant just before the final curtain, walking past the window on the way to Caiaphas. Rostand, however, in *La Samaritaine* brings Christ on the stage, but even here he is just as passive as John in Sudermann's *Johannes*, though he is the title-hero. *The Samaritan Woman*, however, is, as I shall show further on, no drama at all.

But by stubbornly refusing Christ admission to the stage our contemporary dramatists have not succeeded in making their plays modern. In dramatizing the Biblical narratives the author is confronted with a dilemma. He must choose between the natural and supernatural view of his plot. If he wants to give us a modern drama he must eliminate the supernatural elements out of the story. The modern drama demands, as the very essence of its art, an absolute freedom of will on the part of all the participants of an action, and its purpose as a drama is defeated by any predestination of the action which is not inherent in the characters themselves. The individual human wills involved in a certain action must not be confronted in the drama of to-day by a divine will, with which they cannot cope on equal terms. Hence no Biblical play can be modern if it does not remove from the story the supernatural character of Christ and his supernatural influence upon the other figures in it.

This criticism holds true of Heyse and Maeterlinck. The conversion of the erring Magdalene by the ministrations of Christ cannot be explained in a natural way and hence has no place in a modern drama. It is therefore not shown at all like several other essential acts of Maeterlinck's play, about which we are merely told in the dialog, and so by accepting the supernatural elements of his plot Maeterlinck defeats himself as a dramatist. The conclusion, which

⁷ In Hebbel's *Herod and Marianne* (1850) the birth of Christ is in a parallel manner announced to the king by the three Wise Men at the end of the play after the execution of his wife.

is the only dramatic part of the play, is predetermined, and hence the lack of suspense.

Though Maeterlinck's play is more poetic, Heyse's is more dramatic. Heyse's Mary of Magdala, who was married as a child to an old man, wins our sympathy in her revolt against her life and the laws of her religion, while Maeterlinck's Mary Magdalene, with sensuality as sole motive of her conduct, repels us. An especial feature of Heyse's dramatic version is Mary's association with Judas. This relationship formed before Judas met Jesus helps to make Judas humanly intelligible. Though full of resentment over Mary Magdalene's humiliation in Simon's house and her change of heart towards him, which he rightly attributes to Christ's influence, his betrayal of Jesus is primarily actuated by noble motives. This Judean zealot sees a great danger for the future of his country in the Galilean's teachings of non-resistance. "Love thine enemies and bless them that hate thee," is in the eyes of the patriot nothing short of treason. He considers it his duty to save Israel from the shame of seeing one of its sons, who was once called a saint, kiss the dust of the feet of the emperor. Judas has no use for a Messiahship of peace and meekness rather than of force, and he may also have a secret hope that when Jesus is seized he will resort to the power of the sword and redeem Israel from its oppressors. This humanization of the character of Judas alone will insure Heyse's play a place in the world's literature.

Realizing the difficulty of dramatizing the Gospel narratives, Rostand foregoes any attempt to be dramatic. In the technical sense *La Samaritaine* is no drama at all;⁸ it is a lyric poem in dialog form,—a poetical and reverential narrative in verse. The supernatural element abounds throughout the play. The initial scene, in which the shades of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob arrive from Sheol by a common presentiment of an impending miracle, prepares us for the supernatural and lyric treatment of the whole play. As in "Mary Magdalene," the plot of this play is the conversion of an erring woman through Christ. Photine, the woman of Samaria, meets Jesus in the solitude by the well of Jacob and is awakened by him to religious ecstasy. She returns to the town, harangues her townsmen in the market-place and finally succeeds in leading them to the well of Jacob to listen to the teachings of the Messiah. But in this play too, as pointed out above, Christ is not the central

⁸ Cf. F. W. Chandler, *Aspects of the Modern Drama* (New York, Macmillan), p. 63.

figure. He is only indirectly characterized by his influence on the woman of Samaria.

These dramas cannot properly be called passion plays, since in none of them does the suffering and death of Jesus form the central plot. Within the last few years however prominent authors have turned to the passion for their fable and have given us passion plays.⁹ The author of *The King of the Jews*, whose aim is a glorification of the Messiah, still accepts the supernatural view of the plot, and so defeats himself as a dramatist, while the author of *Jesus* endeavors to give us a natural interpretation of the Gospel story. He aims to produce a modern drama out of the Christian saga by stripping it of all its supernatural elements. He forgets however that the dramatist must count upon the cooperation and collaboration of his public, which is still, if not dogmatically, at least traditionally Christian, and hence indisposed to accept a natural interpretation of the Christian story of Jesus. But a rationalistic dramatization of the Christian legends is bound to cause a disillusionment to the most unprejudiced mind. It is just as impossible to give, in literature, a natural interpretation of the Christian mythology, as it is of the Greek mythology. The rationalization of the supernatural in the Bible has been abandoned long ago by our theologians as absurd. But try as a playwright might, he will find it almost impossible to remove the supernatural element completely out of the passion story and yet have an intelligent plot, conformable to logic. Deviations from the plot abound for this reason in the two passion plays under discussion, and yet the subject-matter has not been made dramatic according to our present-day conceptions of the drama in either of them, as the writer hopes to point out.

In *Jesus* we are assured on a fly-leaf at the beginning of the book that "the persons who founded Christianity (?) are here stripped of supernatural embellishment: and they are represented as simple, real, ardent Orientals in the throes of a great and impending tragedy." How many of the numerous persons in the five

⁹ *The King of the Jews: A Sacred Drama*. From the Russian of "K. P." (The Grand Duke Constantine). By Victor E. Marsden. Funk & Wagnalls Co. This play was performed at the Imperial Theater at St. Petersburg in December, 1913, and January, 1914, with the author in the role of Joseph of Arimathea. The "K. P." appearing on the title-page is a printer's error. The initials always used by the late Grand Duke Constantine were "K. K." (Konstantin Konstantinovich).

Jesus: A Passion Play. By Max Ehrmann. Baker & Taylor Co.

M. Dearmer's *The Soul of the World: A Mystery Play of the Nativity and the Passion* (1911), has a religious motive, but is of small literary value.

Walter Nithak-Stahn's German play, *Christusdrama* (1912) has been inaccessible to me.

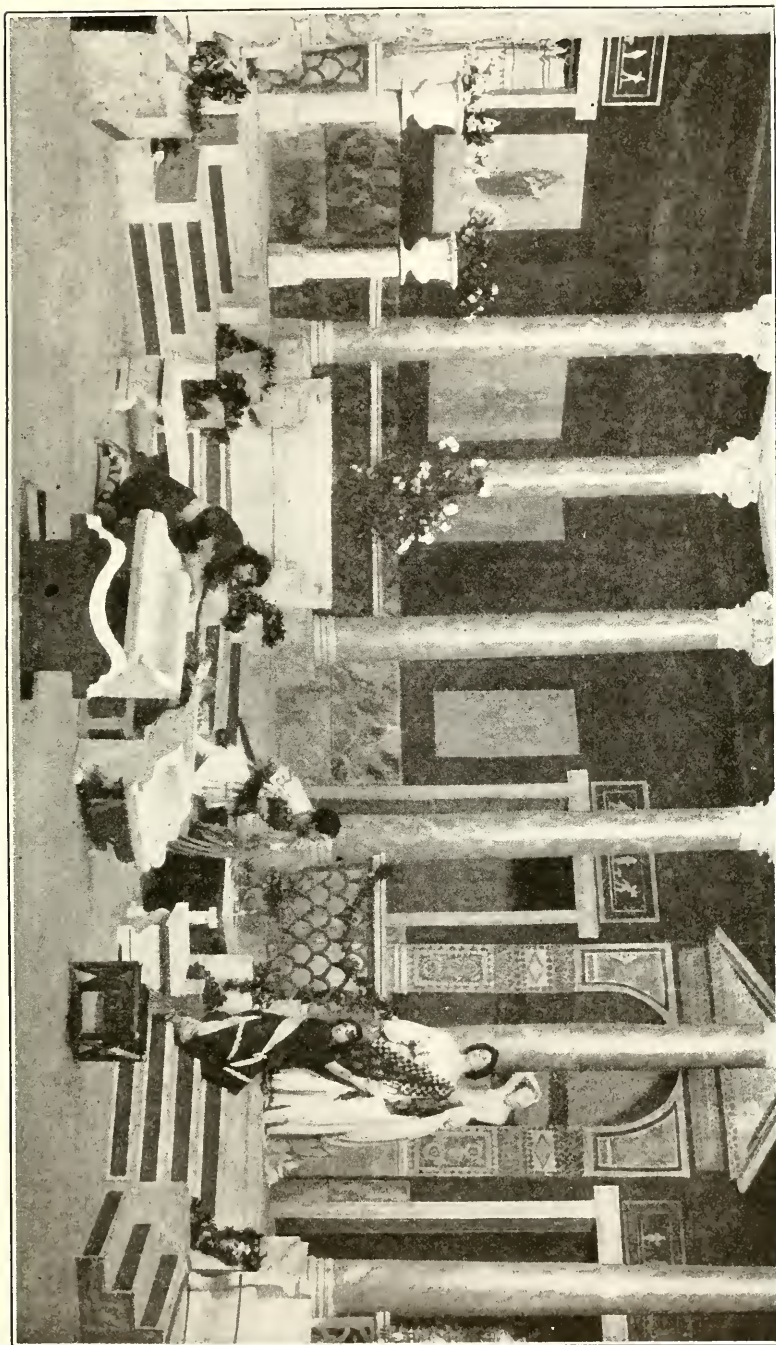
long acts of this drama¹⁰ the author includes among those who have founded Christianity is for the writer hard to tell. He surely cannot mean the priests, traders and money-changers, who are in the majority in this play, and who talk the language of our present-day peddlers. But this much is quite evident, that Jesus has been divested in this passion play of the aureole of divinity, and represented as a rebel-prophet, but not in rebellion against the Romans, as Karl Kautsky, the eminent socialist, once interpreted the "Lamb of God" to have been, but against the rich traders, and the priests and scribes, who are in their employ. The people revolt against the greedy traders and money-changers in the temple, who are paying high rent to the priests for the privilege of doing business and robbing the poor in the house of God, and yearn for a strong man to lead them against their oppressors; and when Jesus with his large following of Galilean peasants appears in the court of the temple, they immediately see in him the desired leader and lend him their support in his rebellion against the temple authorities.

Of the miracles with which the Gospel writers credit Jesus, we hear in this passion play only from the mouth of Judas, but he does not claim to have been an eye-witness. The raising of Lazarus from the dead by Jesus was told him when he later came to Bethany. All other miraculous acts of his master he also knows only from hearsay.¹¹ The only miracle he saw was when Jesus commanded the sea, but then, as one of his hearers, an Alexandrian, remarks, no doubt the storm had spent itself.

The play does not however ignore Jesus's claim to the Messiahship; and this it is which is used by the priests as pretext for his death. He is, as his brother Joses sees him, "a fool upon whom a terrible thought has seized that he was the Son of Man told of by the prophet Daniel." And not only Pilate sees in Jesus "a man-loving fool who fancied himself to be a god," but even Joseph of Arimathæa, who once dreamed the same dreams, acknowledges that by his claim to the Messiahship Jesus greatly erred, but "he is not the first, nor will he be the last to fancy himself touched with fire from the clouds, and called by heavenly voices in the night." In this interpretation of the character of Jesus the author of this passion play has undoubtedly been greatly influenced by Gerhard Hauptmann, whose hero, Emanuel Quint, in *Emanuel Quint: Ein*

¹⁰ Each act has a list of persons as in Hauptmann's *The Weavers* (1892).

¹¹ Although when he later pleads with the priests for the life of Jesus he allows himself a falsehood and claims to have seen the miracles his Master is credited with, with his own eyes.



ACT II. "THE KING OF THE JEWS."
Watching the trial from the next room.

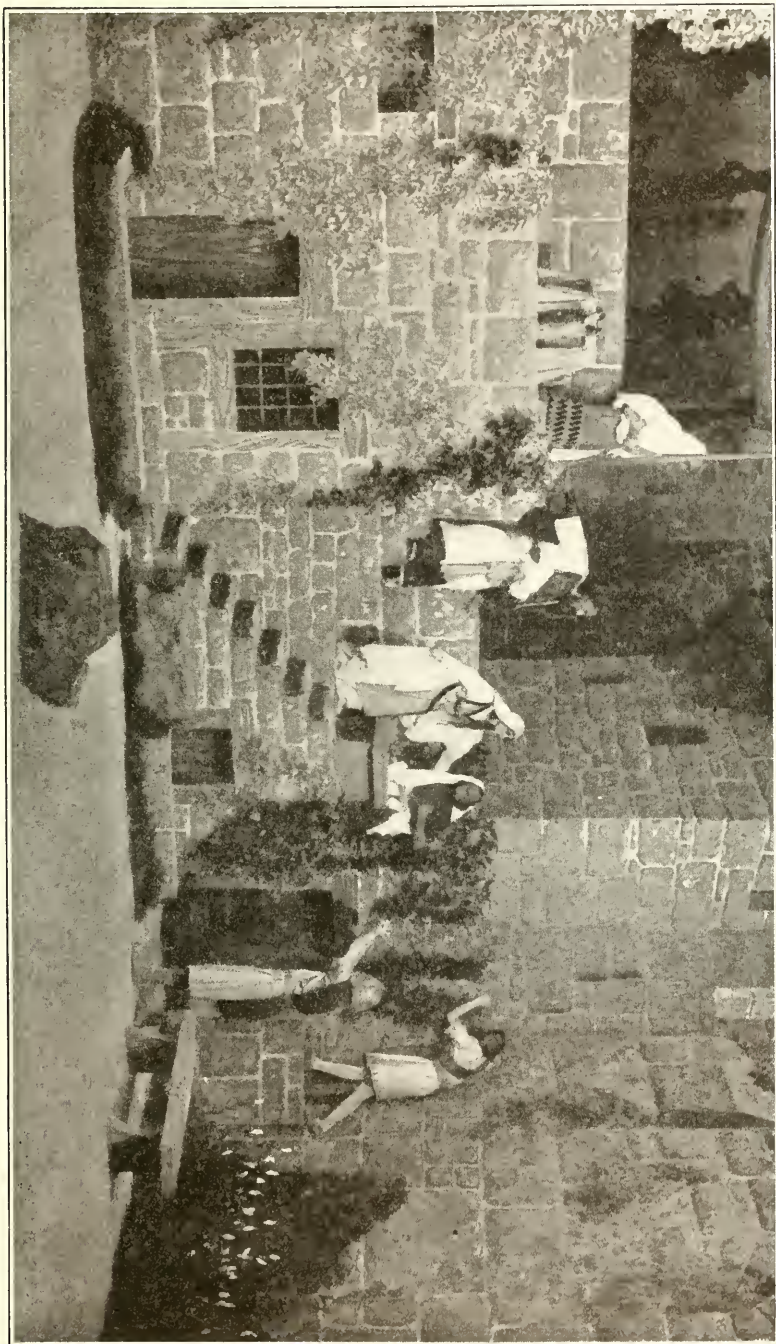
Narr in Christo (1910),¹² a Silesian pietist, who in all honesty believes himself to be the re-incarnated Christ, is only a symbolic figure for the Galilean Essene.

The character of Judas is drawn in this modern passion play very sympathetically. He is not the God-murderer who sells his Master for thirty pieces of silver, but an unwise *Stürmer*, outwitted by the cunning priests. Judas is impatient with Jesus, he wants to bring a crisis into his life and to force him to declare himself. He realizes that the worldly people in Jerusalem cannot be so easily won over as the Galilean peasants and that Jesus would have to show his Father to the people before he could convince them of the approaching judgment day. Judas does not lead the soldiers upon Jesus in the night, they follow him against his will to discover the hiding-place of his master. Neither does he betray Jesus by a kiss; the kiss which he wants to bestow upon his worshiped teacher as a greeting and which is refused him, is not by any means a pre-arranged sign of identity. Jesus is pointed out to the Roman guards not by Judas, but by one of the money-changers. And Judas has not lost his faith in his master till the last minute. From the moment that the soldiers take Jesus captive in the Garden of Gethsemane, till he is led to the cross, Judas does not cease urging him to show that he is the Son of God and to free himself by the divine power within him, in which Judas has not the least doubt. Moreover Judas is the only one of his disciples that remains loyal to Jesus. It is he who of all his disciples pleads for him with the accusers and finally shares his fate at the hands of the Roman soldiers.

But though we gladly forgive the author for his deviating from the traditional character of Judas, which is indeed incomprehensible, we cannot do so in the case of Mary Magdalene. Mary, who came from Magdala, and out of whom seven devils had been driven, who was the most faithful and loving of all the women that followed Christ from Galilee, who brought spices to the tomb, and who later was privileged to clasp Christ's feet, has been identified by some with the sinner who anointed and kissed Christ's feet in the house of Simon, and according to medieval belief was also the same as the sister of Lazarus and Martha,¹³ but she can by no means be identified, as in this play, with the adulteress. Adultery, according to Old

¹² This master-piece of the greatest of all living German writers has recently been made accessible to English readers by the New York publisher B. W. Huebsch. The translation is by T. Seltzer.

¹³ In Maeterlinck's play Mary Magdalene is identified with the sinner in the house of Simon the Lepre, but not with the sister of Lazarus. On the other



ACT III, "THE KING OF THE JEWS,"

In the garden of Joseph of Arimathea.

Testament law, is sexual intercourse of a married woman with any other man than her husband, and this relation alone was punished in Judea by death; unchaste relations between an unmarried woman and a man were disapproved of, but were not punishable by death.

Ehrmann is indebted for the character of the Magdalene to Maeterlinck, just as Maeterlinck is to Heyse.¹⁴ but Ehrmann has gone one step farther in his motivation of Mary Magdalene's love



FROM MAETERLINCK'S "MARY MAGDALENE."

Suggesting to Mary how she could save Jesus.

for Jesus, and this step has proven fatal for him. Already Maeterlinck makes Mary's conversion and love for Jesus spring from her gratitude to the Galilean for having saved her from the condemna-

hand, Martha, the sister of Lazarus, is the wife of Simon the Leper. Another deviation from tradition in this play is that the Last Supper takes place at the home of Joseph of Arimathea.

¹⁴ In both plays the crisis is Mary Magdalene's dilemma of saving or killing Jesus according as she consents or refuses to give herself to the Roman tribune, who from jealousy has arrested Jesus in the first place; and her

tion of the rabble. But Maeterlinck's Mary Magdalene is not the adulteress who is brought before Jesus for judgment, as is the case in Ehrmann's drama,¹⁵ though the followers of Jesus throw stones at her and call her "adulteress" when she approaches them from curiosity. Adulteress in Maeterlinck's drama is equivalent to harlot, soldiers' wench. Maeterlinck could not have meant to imply that she was a married woman.¹⁶

The whole love episode between Mary Magdalene and Terreno, captain of the Roman guards, whom she would meet every year at Easter in Jerusalem¹⁷ and with whom she seems to entertain more than friendly relations even after she has seen "him who told me of the love of God," is distasteful to the reader. The similar scenes between Mary Magdalene and the tribune Virus in Maeterlinck's play are far less objectionable, although the entire play is based upon her sensuality. Much more does Mary of Magdala appeal to us in the medieval passion plays, where from a *Dame aux Camélias* she is immediately transformed to a saint by the touch of the spirit of God.

The resurrection-scene of this play destroys the unity of action. The author follows tradition in this respect, and the medieval passion plays in the later phase of their development included the resurrection scene, i. e., became merged with the Easter play. It is moreover very probable that the passion play grew out of the Easter play. But the resurrection in this play has only taken place in the feverish mind of Mary Magdalene. Joseph of Arimathæa takes Jesus out of his family tomb,¹⁸ where he laid him two days before, in order to please his wife and children, who say that he thus dishonored and defiled their tomb, and hides him in the earth that no man shall know where he lies, "not even his followers, for they would betray the place," and the priests might carry out their threat and tear his flesh and burn it to ashes in order to prevent his ever rising from the dead, as was rumored. When Mary arrives at the scene, and sees

refusal is due not to any abhorrence of the deed proposed, but rather to her unwillingness to destroy in her soul and throughout the earth that which is the very life in her new life, as some one has expressed it. She cannot purchase the life of Christ through that which he abhors. In spite of all his explanations in the foreword Maeterlinck is in the plot of his drama guilty of plagiarism.

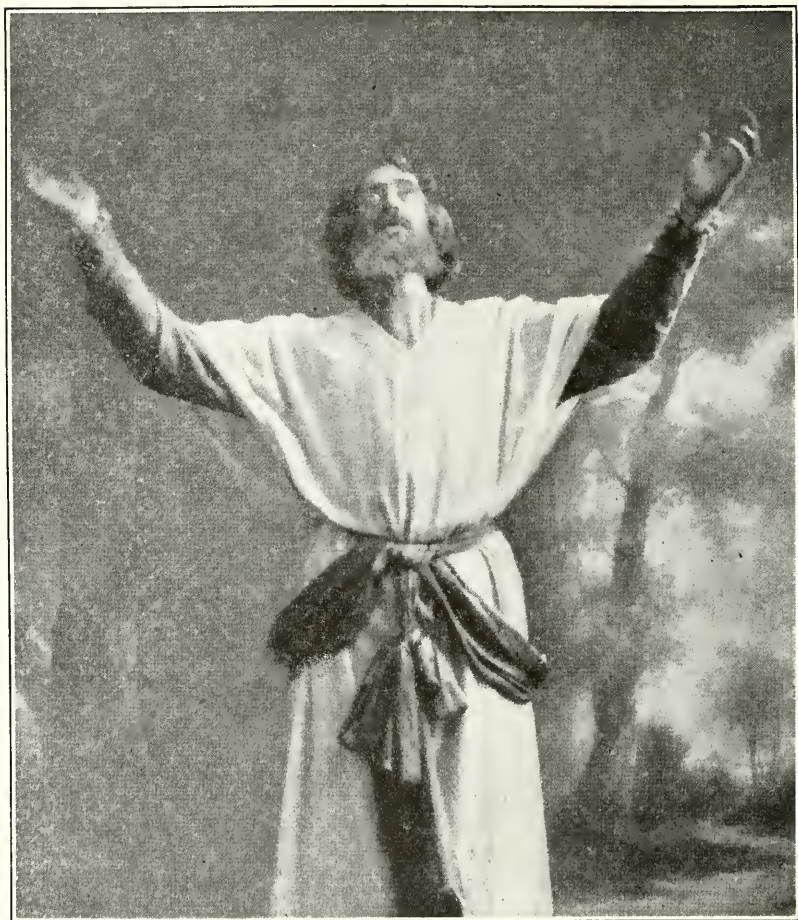
¹⁵ In this play, by the way, Mary is already converted when she is brought before Jesus for judgment on the accusation of adultery.

¹⁶ In both these plays Mary Magdalene does not follow Christ from Galilee.

¹⁷ According to the Mosaic law only men were required to go up to Jerusalem to eat the Paschal lamb.

¹⁸ Why should Joseph of Arimathæa have his family tomb in Jerusalem?

the stone rolled away, the tomb empty, and discovers blood-stains on the piece of linen, with which her persistent lover Terreno dried her tears, a part of the linen with which the body of Christ was wrapped and which was left behind in the tomb by Joseph and his two servants in their haste to get away at the approach of the women



THE GRAND DUKE CONSTANTINE AS JOSEPH OF ARIMATHAEA
IN "THE KING OF THE JEWS."

carrying ointment, she becomes frantic with grief over the crucified "lover of her soul" and thinks that she sees Christ standing by the tomb and hears him calling her.

Of the other characters in this play Pilate is well and sympa-

thetically portrayed. It is interesting to note in this connection that of all the characters in the medieval passion plays of Germany, Pilate has perhaps been best and most finely analyzed. Even Lucifer, one of the chief characters in the medieval drama, has for the first time been consistently drawn only in Arnold Innessen's play of the *Fall of Man*, which dates from the second half of the fifteenth century.¹⁹

A very attractive character is the old Joseph of Arimathea, an admirer of the young heaven-stormer, who in his eyes was "love and fire and storm and love again," and in whom he saw again "my youth, and thought I heard again the far voice singing and almost heard God whispering behind thy words." His apostrophe of Jesus at the grave is one of the most beautiful passages of this poetically arid drama.

This passion play may well be called modern in so far as it attempts to show us the motives for the actions of the characters, while the characters in the medieval passion plays were like figures on the chess-board. The clerical authors of the Middle Ages, whose sole object it was to visualize the life and passion of Christ for the common people, were content to put the Gospel narratives in dialog form without taking the least effort to motivate the actions. It was a sufficient explanation for a man's evil actions that the devil possessed him, but the modern man has to have the actions necessarily flow out of the characters. Nevertheless I would hesitate to call this drama realistic. I cannot help thinking that in spite of all his ingenious manipulations of the plot Ehrmann has not succeeded in giving us a modern realistic drama. In his reproduction of the milieu and the motivation of the actions the drama may be modern, but in the treatment of plot and character the play does not adhere to the laws of modern dramatic technique. There is development in but a few of the characters. Nor do all the characters stand out concretely. This is especially true of the central figure. Jesus does not stand out in bold relief against the large and confused living back-ground as does for example Shakespeare's Julius Cæsar. The plot, with all the deviation from the Biblical account, is a manifest pre-arrangement by the author rather than the result of the inevitable action of character upon character. Nor is the plot fairly rounded out, since in the final act the whole structure of the plot collapses, too, as though we had no interest in any one but Jesus.

¹⁹ For the Devil's role in the medieval church plays the reader is referred to the writer's monograph, *Der Teufel in den deutschen geistlichen Spielen des Mittelalters und der Reformationszeit*. Hesperia: Schriften zur germanischen Philologie, No. 6. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1915.

The weakest points in this drama are the long-drawn-out mass-scenes which in places almost border on the grotesque. One cannot help comparing them with the Judean mass-scenes in Hebbel's youthful drama *Judith*.²⁰

As we turn from *Jesus* to *The King of the Jews* we are transferred into a higher sphere, and we feel that we are now breathing purer air. The modern realistic technique and the ancient devotion cannot be united. *Jesus* fails to move us, and here it is where the failure of the drama lies. One sees that the author's heart-strings were not moved, and hence the absence of emotional content in the play. We would gladly forgive the author his multitude of details if he had spared us the barterings of the traders, the wranglings of the scribes and the bargaining of the disciples with their master; and we would rather have the slaves in the household of Pilate talk in blank verse, as is the case in *The King of the Jews*, than hear Jesus speak in realistic unrythmic prose, though we must acknowledge that the author of *Jesus* tries hard to make his title-hero speak a more select language than the other characters.

The King of the Jews is a poetic drama with minute scenic directions which are typical of the present-day Russian drama. The epic element is very prominent, and the lyric passages are not missing either. There is very little action going on on the stage; hence the liberal use of the dialogue. The trial of Jesus takes place behind the scene, and we at times hear the voice of the crowd demanding his death. The author was especially anxious not to have Christ brought on the stage. You look in vain for him among the *dramatis personae*. The author shares the aversion of the medieval playwrights, who for a long time hesitated to present Christ on the stage. But even if Christ does not disclose himself to our sinful eyes in this play we are not left in the dark as to his outward appearance. While, in *Jesus*, Christ's face is presented as "ugly to look upon," "horrible," "terrible," "frightful," "like one ready for the tomb," Jesus has, in *The King of the Jews*, a beautiful countenance, "majesty and meekness, grief and patience, all in one," out of which a godlike charm flows, and leads all hearts captive. Christ's face shows no trace of his Jewish origin, and even Pilate, the haughty Roman, recognizes in him "that air of majesty, as't were in beggar's filthy rags a king disguised."

The principal sin of Jesus in this play, as the title suggests, is his assumed royalty,—the fact that he allows his followers to call him "King of the Jews." The Sadducees fear that the people in

²⁰ In English translation in *Poet Lore Plays*, No. 36.

their blind belief in him as the Messiah might proclaim him king over Judea, and this would bring on the country the wrath of the Romans, who would then take away from them the little independence which they had so far enjoyed, and in the eyes of the Phari-sees he forfeits his life because he declares himself the Son of God.

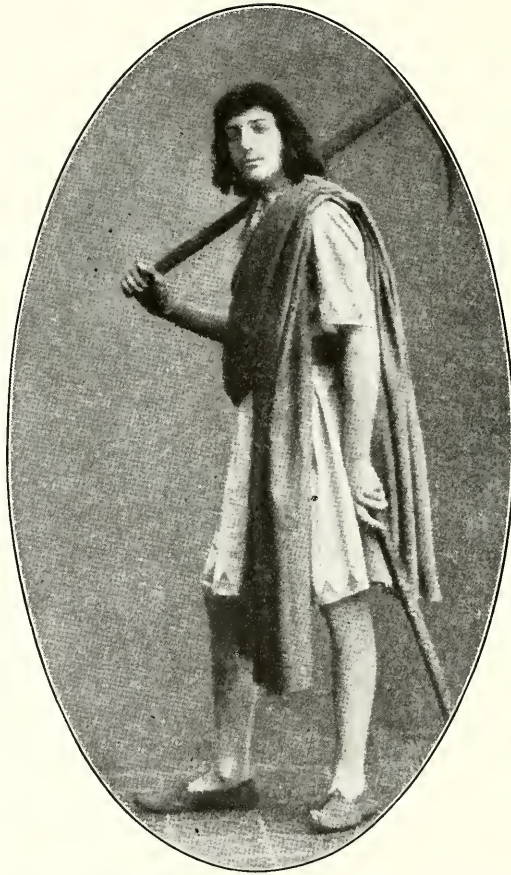


PRINCE CONSTANTINE AS PREFECT OF THE ROMAN COHORTS.

The third son of the Grand Duke.

With all his efforts at motivation the author of *Jesus* fails to account for the barbarous maltreatment of Jesus by the Roman soldiers, unless he wishes to infer that the leader of the Roman guard in Jerusalem, Terreno, takes revenge on Jesus for having alienated from him the affections of Mary Magdalene. In *The King of the*

Jews the torturers of Jesus are not Romans but nearly all Samaritans by birth. And the Samaritans, who hate the Jews, take advantage to vent their spite on their fancied king. The Roman idolaters and heathens, on the other hand, are "more humane than all the Jews professing to believe in one true God," and the Samaritans.



PRINCE IGOR AS RUFUS THE GARDENER.

The fifth son of the Grand Duke.

In this play also, as in *Jesus*, Pilate, the Roman procurator of Judea, is well portrayed. He may be a pitiable figure, yet one that wins our full sympathy. Indeed he almost overshadows the title-hero in prominence. Of the four acts one and a half play in Pilate's palace; and if we miss among the *dramatis personae* Judas, Mary

Magdalene, the disciples, the mother and brothers of Jesus, we are compensated by tribunes, centurions, prefects, Syrian slaves and dancers of both sexes, and flower-girls(!). It is evident enough that it was meant as a court-drama, and the performance was indeed favorably received at the Czar's court.

A foreign element in this drama is the discussion between Procula and the tribunes in regard to the decadence of the Roman women, by which the author of course means our modern women as well. The women are altogether too prominent in this play. Joanna, one of the women, who, according to the Scriptures, followed Christ from Galilee, but who in this play is a bosom friend of Procula, reminds us more of a modern society woman than a Galilean peasant. All too much is made of Procula's dream. Altogether Procula's anxiety for the Jewish "vagrom-beggar-man," as she herself called him but a few days before, is highly improbable. She sees Jesus for the first time at his entry into Jerusalem, and at his trial and crucifixion takes his fate even more to heart than his two admirers, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathæa. To have her, a Roman woman, speak of Jesus as

"He! He—the Just One—the Messiah!—He,
The Truth Incarnate and the Son of God"

is more than the author can make us believe.²¹

The author of *The King of the Jews*, as a member of the Orthodox church, follows tradition in the smallest details, even down to the washing of hands of Pilate. Nay, he does not have enough with the miracles attested by the Gospel writers, but also draws on the New Testament Apocrypha. We find it therefore strange that he makes no mention of the miraculous birth of Christ. The angel with the white lily wand appears to Mary when she becomes a mother, bringing glad tidings of the birth of Christ, but not earlier. The divinity of Christ is not emphasized either. All that his followers believe is that he has been sent by God from heaven to earth to preach charity and peace.

²¹ That Procula should have conceived all of a sudden so deep a reverence for Jesus is as unbelievable as for Wilde's Salomé to have conceived so fleshly a love for the melancholy prophet of the desert. The same criticism can also be made of Maeterlinck's play. Mary Magdalene's transition from sinner to saint in the Belgian's drama is all too sudden. Mary of Magdala, who came at the eleventh hour, becomes the only being that has seen into Christ's soul. She knows all that he is as if she were within him, as she expresses herself. But far more incredible is that courtesan's sudden change of attitude toward the followers of Jesus,—"the uncouth creatures, the oldest, the ugliest, the dirtiest, the most pestilential Jews," as she called them a few days before in the house of the Roman. Modern technique precludes direct divine intervention.

In the miracle of the resurrection the author deviates from the Bible. The one who in this play first sees Christ resurrected is Mary the Mother, and it happens not at the grave but in her little chamber at the house of the beloved disciple John, and she herself thinks it is no more than "a dream, a vision marvelous." The women of Galilee also saw

"Beneath the cedar while the dawn was pale,
Our Lord Himself in yonder silent vale."

A very happy deviation from the Biblical story is that Simon of Cyrene, whose steps, according to the Gospels, chance turned toward the city of Golgotha, rushes here, of his own free will, toward Jesus and swings the cross on his back, remembering the words, which he, who is now led as a lamb to the slaughter, addressed to him at his triumphal entry into Jerusalem when he caught the ass's bridle-rein and helped him dismount:

"One service thou hast done for me this day;
Full soon I want from thee another, Simon."

While neither of these two passion play authors has, in the mind of the writer, done justice to the subject-matter, the method of treatment in *The King of the Jews* seems to appeal more to us, as it is in accordance with tradition. *Jesus* undoubtedly satisfies more our dramatic demands, but our esthetic sense is more gratified by *The King of the Jews*. The former play with its central and commanding figure of the Nazarene and its wealth of historical detail has greater dramatic value than the latter play with its indirect characterization of the title-hero, who is relegated to a secondary place in our interest, and the prevalence of the epic over the dramatic element, so that several of the most important acts are reported in the dialog and we are thus robbed of our participation in them, almost defeats its purpose as a drama. But if the public has to choose between unpoetic realism and poetic unrealism in the passion there is no doubt in the writer's mind that the latter would be the general choice. He need but refer to the hold which survivals of the medieval supernatural and irrational presentation of the Passion such as at Oberammergau still has over the minds of even the most enlightened men and women. *Jesus* is moreover not an acting drama, while *The King of the Jews* has at its presentation at the Imperial Theater in St. Petersburg exerted a most profound and soul-stirring impression upon the court-audience.²²

²² Illustrations with description of the St. Petersburg performance are found in *Illustrierte Zeitung*, Vol. CXLII (Jan. 29, 1914), pp. 189-191.

Mr. John Masefield's *Good Friday*,²³ the latest and most modest attempt at a dramatization of the Passion, is not a drama, but, as the author himself calls it, a dramatic poem. It is of course outside of the province of this paper to pass judgment on this dramatic poem, as well as the sonnets, which together make up the small volume, as poetry, but its dramatic value is so insignificantly small that it can easily be gone over in silence in a discussion of modern passion plays. This latest dramatic attempt of Mr. Masefield, whose contributions to dramatic literature are generally held by his admirers in as high an esteem as his narrative poems, rather serves to prove how little the Passion lends itself to modern dramatic treatment. The author was fully aware of the difficult task before him, and as a result we have a most modest dramatic poem from the great English bard, author of *The Tragedy of Nan* and other beautiful dramas. His only achievement lies in his retelling the Gospel narratives of the events of the last day of Jesus's walk among men in rhymed couplets. He hesitates to swerve from the path of tradition and makes no serious attempt to give a new meaning to the events he reclothes in modern poetic diction. Yet he realizes that many traditional features of the plot cannot be employed successfully in modern dramatic poetry, and so he is forced against his will to deviate on several very important points from the reports of the Evangelists.

Realizing the fact that Christ does not lend himself to treatment as a dramatic hero, he does not bring him into the action at all, and the central figure of his dramatic piece is thus stubbornly kept off the stage. Pontius Pilate, the procurator of Judea, stands in the foreground of the action, and the chief effort of the author seems to be to interpret the vexed soul of this Roman. The mental processes of Pilate are very vaguely expressed in the Gospels. The Evangelists represent him as a weakling, who yields to the popular demand and is forced to commit an act which he himself condemns. His historical character is thus to be pitied, but not condemned. Masefield however in his interpretation of the Roman procurator, portrays him wholly as a Roman, who metes out justice to a deluded man guilty of treason against Rome. He sentences Jesus not for fear of the Jews and against his own will, but, as he justifies his action to his wife, according to the dictates of his own conscience and the statutes of the Roman code as a sacrifice to the peace of the land which he governs.

²³*Good Friday and Other Poems.* By John Masefield. The Macmillan Co., 1916. This book appeared after the close of the manuscript.

In his interpretation of the character of Judas, Masefield leaves the traditional ground altogether; and in order not to offend the sentiments of his readers, he does not mention him by name. The envoy of the Sanhedrin speaks of him only as a friend of Jesus. Like Heyse, Masefield tries to make his act humanly intelligible. Judas, who has sold all to follow the Galilean teacher, does not betray him after a while, from sheer lust of money, for thirty pieces of silver in order that a certain Old Testament prophecy be fulfilled. In Masefield's dramatic poem Judas is moved by deep scruples. He considers the claim Jesus lays to the Messiahship as blasphemy, and like other friends and followers falls away from him, although he found him kind in friendship. He is horrified by this self-delusion of the master he reveres, and takes this course to bring it to an immediate end. In Heyse, Judas acts as a patriot; here he is actuated by religious motives. The betrayal does not consist here in pointing out to the authorities a man whom every child in Jerusalem must have known, but in betraying his secret teachings.

But while the actions of Pilate and Judas are well motivated, Procula's intervention on behalf of Jesus is the result in this poem of pure intuition, the effect of a very vague dream. She has never seen Jesus, and like her husband has a deep scorn for all Jews, and yet as a result of a dream pleads obstinately with her husband for Jesus's life, tells him that she would have gone to Herod to plead for Jesus had she but dared, and when she learns of the tragic end of this Galilean peasant, she, the Roman patrician woman, stabs her arm with a dagger in order to wash away her guilt with her blood. And all this on account of a dream as vague as a dream can be. To her husband she describes this dream in the following words:

"I saw a gleam
 Reddening the world out of a blackened sky,
 Then in the horror came a hurt thing's cry
 Protesting to the death that no one heard."

Procula's action is far better motivated in the medieval passion plays. There the dream contains an explicit warning from Heaven for her husband to beware of shedding innocent blood, and it is the fear of a terrible punishment for her husband that prompts her to plead so persistently for a man in whom she has not and cannot have the least interest.

Mr. Masefield's own creation is the madman, who is the vessel of the author's thoughts and emotions. This blind old madman with his lilies is reminiscent of the Sixth Blind Man with his asphodels

in Maeterlinck's symbolical drama, *Les aveugles* (1890), and may perhaps symbolize the idea that truth and response to beauty come only to him who is blind to the world of sense, and that the greatest power of insight lies in insanity. The madman also concludes the dramatic poem, and a brief dramatic monologue, "The Madman's Song," closes the book.

The scene of this little piece is placed in the paved court outside the Roman citadel in Jerusalem. It opens with a dialogue between Pilate and the centurion Longinus. The procurator commands Longinus to set Barabbas free and to have Jesus scourged and put outside the city gate with a warning not to make more trouble in Jerusalem. He wants to spare Jesus however, and asks Longinus to see that the sergeant be not too severe. When Longinus leaves, Procula enters, tells her husband her prophetic dream, and begs him to spare "that wise man." At her departure the chief citizen, the envoy from the Sanhedrin, comes and demands the death of Jesus. He tells Pilate that he has learned from a friend of Jesus (Judas) that this "leader of a perverse crew" claims to be the great king foretold by the prophets, who shall arise and free Israel from the Roman domination. After having examined the depositions in the hands of the envoy in regard to Jesus's sedition Pilate leaves to examine personally the defendant.

A madman enters, who sings a song about lilies he has for sale. He is old and blind, but comes to ask for the release of Jesus, because he has been kind to him. He even offers his life instead to the sentry. A number of citizens appear on the scene, who denounce Jesus for his blasphemy, and thirst for his blood. In the midst of this noise and confusion a voice (Peter's) is heard, denying his master.

Pilate returns after having made an unsuccessful attempt to persuade Jesus to recant, and pronounces sentence upon him. Having achieved his purpose, and seeing Jesus led to his death, the envoy of the Sanhedrin protests to Pilate against the tablet which Pilate out of contempt for the Jews ordered to be hung over the cross and on which Jesus is called King of the Jews, for, as he says, "it cuts his people to the soul."

We hear the Jews mock at Jesus as he struggles past, carrying his cross on his way to Golgotha. Procula, upon hearing from her husband of the crucifixion of Jesus, is horrified and stabs her arm with her dagger to wash away with her blood the stain of guilt. Joseph of Ramah comes to Pilate to ask for the body of his master, and Longinus comes back to describe the horrible scene on the Old

Skull Hill. This condemnation and death of the rebel Jesus offers Herod an opportunity to reconcile himself with Pilate and Rome.

As an interpretation of the Great Tragedy, and likewise as a piece of dramatic art, *Jesus* marks a forward step in the dramatization of the Passion, but whether the next step is going to be in the direction the author of the natural *Jesus* has mapped out, is hard to say. Is it at all possible to present the great tragedy of Golgotha as a human experience in full conformity to logic? Can the story of Christ at all be rationalized and humanized? Or are ancient devotion and modern technique totally irreconcilable, as suggested above? It would almost seem so. Moulding a religious legend into a contemporary drama is at best a thankless work, and in the mind of the writer the drama of the future is not to be sought in the fables of the past. Why anticipate the miracle of the valley of Jehoshaphat?