

PART II.—PAPERS, ETC.

Pageantry

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I APPRECIATE most deeply the great honour you have done me to-day. Even the most famous archæologist would, I suppose, feel a thrill at being asked to occupy the Presidential chair of this distinguished Society, which during its long history has numbered among its members so many of the great and learned. To me, conscious of my utter unworthiness, the compliment was as overwhelming as it was gratifying, and I can only say that my appreciation is in inverse ratio to my pretensions.

But though I can make no claim to distinction or scholarship, I fancy I may pride myself on being one of the very few present here to-day who attended the last Langport Meeting thirty-one years ago, when my father occupied the position to which you have now called me. Though only a boy at the time, I think I may say that my appreciation of history, pride in Somerset, and reverence for the attainments of others (in which I yield to no one) date from that meeting.

I wish I had some of my father's eloquence and erudition with which to welcome you to-day. Not having these gifts, all I can do is to say on behalf of my neighbours and myself how proud we feel to have the Society meeting in our midst, and to express the hope that the antiquities we can show you will prove not unworthy of your consideration.

The subject on which I desire to ask your attention this

morning is one which up to now no one has seemed to think worth disentangling from the great mass of dramatic history ; and yet, I suggest, it is of interest and importance, inasmuch as it represents the first definite step in the fusing of the separate arts of rhetoric, music, dance and dialogue, into what we know as drama and opera to-day ; and it is in the belief that pageantry is worthy of serious study that I am venturing to put my own theories before you.

Pageants are very much to the fore at the present time, not only in this country, but on the Continent also, and I believe they are of very great value in nearly every instance. Most of them are genuine pageants, though in a few cases the word is applied either to a series of tableaux, or to representations which should properly be described as open-air plays.

I propose this morning to describe, in the barest possible outline, the genealogy and vicissitudes of the genuine pageant, as we know it to-day.

My task is the more difficult as, although the essentials of pageantry are distinct from those of other branches of the drama, the line of demarcation was for many centuries ill-defined ; in fact the word only came to have its present significance about five hundred years ago ; whereas drama is nearly as old as civilization.

So I must make my apologies beforehand, not only for my very amateur remarks on a subject which deserves expert handling, but also for the digressions and omissions which are inevitable in a subject so interwoven with the other and better understood branches of dramatic art.

First of all it is necessary to find a working connotation of pageantry. I suggest the following :

- (1) A pageant is played not merely for the amusement of the audience ; there must be a definite ethical idea to be conveyed.
- (2) A pageant must combine epic and lyric ; song, dance and rhetoric ; though primarily a spectacle, the audience must be helped to regard itself as part of the " crowd " ; in fact a pageant is something to be acted rather than to be watched.

- (3) The presentation must be direct and vivid, the effects broad and general; the appeal to the imagination rather than to the intellect; *e.g.*, words, when used, should be intended to suggest a train of thought, rather than to provide brilliant dialogue.
- (4) While a "chorus-leader," "guide," or whatever you choose to call him or her, is almost essential in order to keep the main idea continually in view; the "crowd" is of infinitely greater importance than the "principals"; it follows therefore that a pageant should be on a much larger scale than a play—if possible in the open air, freed from the narrow confines of the ordinary stage.

In tracing the history of pageantry as far as we know it, it is not always easy to draw the line between the pageant and the play. But it is noticeable that in every country which has developed a drama of its own, the drama has always been recognised by the priesthood as a convenient means of bridging the gulf between the soaring heights of its own theistic philosophy and the thick heads of the average worshippers.

Thus we always see this universal tendency of mankind (and womankind!) to dress up and "make believe" first of all fostered by the ministers of religion for their own purposes; then comes the second stage, when the cry of "art for art's sake" is raised, and the playwright, shaking off the shackles of priestly precept and direction, naturally yields to reaction and assumes a more or less anti-religious bias; then the third stage, when again the priests see that the drama is too valuable and too powerful to be allowed to remain entirely outside their own cognisance, and they are bound once more to give official countenance to the art—as indeed they must to *all* arts, if religion is to have an appeal to anything except lukewarm intellectualism.

As far as this country is concerned, the wheel has for the second time turned full circle, and to-day we see priest craft and stage craft working together to an increasing extent; and because the appeal of religion is to the simple as well as to the lettered; because religion is something to be done rather than

something to be looked at, the pageant, rather than the stage play, must be the natural form of the religious drama of the people.

At the present time this association of priest and player seems to be happy and harmonious. It is much to be hoped that both parties will continue to exercise that tact and forbearance which are necessary for the maintenance of the alliance; for it is indisputable that the pageants which are at present so popular in the country are serving a very high purpose at a critical period of our history, for they are inculcating a lofty ideal of nationhood and of our collective obligations; they preach an eloquent sermon based on the lessons of history.

Let us turn for a few minutes to see how pageantry has risen, flourished and decayed through many ages and in many lands.

We must give pride of place to India, if only for the reason that the origin of Indian drama is of the highest—the god Brahma himself is said by Hindu writers to have instructed the sage Bharata to invent dramatic representations; while an entertainment known as *Natya* (which approximated closely to religious pageantry) is said to have been frequently performed by nymphs and spirits before the gods. Be that as it may, in the same way as the Greek drama followed on the Homeric poems, so did Hindu drama develop from the heroic hymnody of the Vedas, and we first come on it, full fledged, somewhat earlier than the third century, B.C.

At this time the Indian drama had passed out of its first stage and was well on in its second, quite divorced from the shackles of religion; but even while the great Ka'lida'sa (the Indian Shakespeare as he has been called) was penning his profane masterpieces, *Babhavuti* was coming back to the sacred influence with his heroic dramas concerned with the adventures of Rama.

I suppose that Bhuddism has had a more powerful influence over its adherent peoples than any other religion has ever had, and from this fact may be traced the comparatively short period of dramatic emancipation. At all events, from the third to the fourteenth centuries, A.D., Hindu drama continues to come more and more under religious influence, and shows

a sad artistic decline. The play has become a pageant, but a pageant of an unfortunately conventional and circumscribed sort, owing to the fact that Indian drama was never really national, but was the preserve of a literary class.

Hindu audiences must have been very long-suffering ; some of the pageants of this period run into fourteen acts !

When its known history begins, Chinese drama was in its first stage ; it was definitely associated with religious rites, and closely resembled the "morality play" of mediaeval England. It is by Chinese writers ascribed to a period of great antiquity, and consisted of ballet and pantomime, with symbolic reference to harvest, war, peace, and other more obscure subjects. Towards the end of the sixth century, A.D., the Emperor Wan-te is said to have invented "genuine" drama, *i.e.*, he cut loose from religious control, and for a long period pageantry vanished from the Celestial Empire. Indeed it is not till the fourteenth century that Chinese drama gets clear of the bonds of intellectualism. At that period we read of the production of a genuine historical religious pageant called Hang-Kong-Tseu, which must have been written with precisely the same objects, and under the same influence as are our pageants to-day.

There appears to have been one peculiarity of the Chinese pageant which playwrights of to-day would doubtless like to re-introduce—if they dared ; the principal actor, in addition to his own part, took that of a "chorus," or perhaps I should say, of a press agent, and interspersed among his lines many laudatory speeches as to the wit and learning of the author !

In an art so universal and so age-long as pageantry, one would have expected to find a great influence exerted by ancient Egypt. But except in as far as the natural theology of the Egyptians was adopted and put to dramatic use by the Greeks—the affinity between Osiris and Dionysus for example—the Egyptians, although possessed of all the ingredients of pageantry, do not appear to have evolved anything in the way of drama beyond the rough pantomime and licentious buffoonery of the lower classes.

When we turn to Hellas, however, we find that although the Greeks undoubtedly owed something in the beginning to out-

side sources, the development of drama, including pageantry, was thereafter of native growth, and has proved itself to be apparently everlasting—for its great masterpieces are as fresh and true to-day as when they were first written.

In discussing Greek pageantry the temptation to digress is almost irresistible; there are so many pleasant bye-ways which tempt one from the narrow road which I have chosen. I will try, however, to avoid the primrose paths, only remarking that if anyone desires to explore the origins of the Morris Dances which are being so enthusiastically revived in our county at the present time, the Phallic processions of Megaris (from which came subsequently the old Attic comedy) seem to provide a useful starting-point.

It is in the Rhapsodes of the Ionian lyrical tragedy that we come again upon the line of the modern pageant; these were introduced into Attica at a very early period, together with the cyclic chorus of the Dorians, and were at once seized upon for their educative value by the priests, and linked up with the rites of Apollo at Delphi. By the middle of the sixth century, B.C., we find the Epic and the Lyric firmly established in combination as religious pageantry, with "crowd," principals, and heroic or religious motive all complete; it is significant to our purpose that the "crowd" was always of more importance than the principals; indeed, even by the time of Sophocles the number of principals had only reached three.

It is of interest to note that in addition to the pageant, another branch of Greek tragedy was known as the "Satyr drama," a development of the old Bacchic dances; this phase of the drama seems to have a considerable outward affinity to what were known in Elizabethan England as "Masks."

Whereas the essence of the old Greek comedy was personal vilification, the definition of tragedy as given by Plato is the "imitation of the noblest life." This being so, it is easy to understand how tragedy with its simple requirements was eagerly seized upon by the priesthood, and being adapted to their exalted aims, often developed into pageantry. There are at least fifteen Greek tragedies extant which are in their essence not plays but pageants, and may therefore legitimately be claimed as ancestors of our modern variety.

The religious character of the Attic drama during the whole period of its greatness is shown in many ways : the performances were only held at the Bacchic festivals ; the whole population were supposed to attend, and (in theory) to act in the crowd ; and the place of performance was a sacred spot. An arrangement which would doubtless appeal to at least one political party in modern England was that the entrance money was, from the time of Pericles onwards, provided out of public funds !

The decline of Greek drama, both tragic and comic, was marked by the diminishing importance of its chorus, which finally disappeared almost entirely, and the only contribution which Rome seems to have made to pageantry is in the revival of the chorus, which now becomes a real "crowd" in the modern sense, and takes a much greater part both in the acting and the singing than was ever allowed to its Hellenic prototype.

The fact is that Tragedy (in its Greek sense) never seems to have taken root in Rome, although the sister branch of Comedy flourished exceedingly. Such as it was, it has been called a "freehand copy of Greek tragedy," and for some reason was always frowned on by the authorities. The reason presumably was that the actors were slaves, and though Sulla might make a Knight of Roscius, and many successful actor-managers might purchase their freedom, the stigma of civil disability always stuck to the profession.

Another point which militated against the proper recognition of the art was that Roman taste preferred spectacle to inwardness, and consequently real pageantry never had a chance to develop. By the middle of the second century of our era, the amphitheatre had completely ousted the theatre ; but although plays had ceased to attract, individual actors and actresses still continued to recite and posture to any audiences they could collect, under the name of mimes ; one of the ladies of this calling actually rose to the Imperial Throne. But the profession gradually sank in the scale till in the fourth century actors and mountebanks were excluded from the benefit of Christian sacraments, and those who even attended the theatre on Sundays and holidays were liable to excommunication.

But observe the vitality—nay, the necessity of this art: the persecuted mummers on the one hand, and on the other the Church casting about for some means of conveying the ideas of her mysteries to her rude and illiterate converts.

By the end of this same fourth century the Church was already beginning that phase in relation to the drama which made her the greatest producer of pageants all through the middle age.

The "Passion of Christ," usually attributed to S. Gregory Nazianzen was the first fruit of the series; Hrotsvitha of Gandersheim was a noted producer of educative pageantry in the tenth century; and the art must have very soon found its way to England, for in 1110 we hear of the "play of S. Katherine" being performed at Dunstable by the scholars of Geoffrey, Abbot of S. Albans, and not regarded as a novelty.

Meantime the poor mimes were not slow to take advantage of ecclesiastical interest and get themselves up in the world, witness Tallifer at the battle of Hastings, and the rise of the Troubadors.

Thus it is easy to see how in England (and I do not propose to touch on modern developments in any other country) the first great era of pageantry came into being through the happy association of church and play actor; and also how the "Liturgical Mystery" was the first phase of its development. The Mass contains obvious dramatic elements—the reading of Gospel and Epistle by the priest supply the Epic, and the antiphons and responses of the people the Lyric elements. By the tenth century it was customary for the priest, with the help of his congregation as the "crowd" to perform the "offices" (as they were called) of the Shepherds, the Innocents, the Holy Sepulchre, etc., in connection with the Gospel for the day at the appropriate festivals.

The Christmas crib is of course a survival, and it is interesting to note that performances of this kind are being revived now-a-days in some churches, though the modern variety seem to be plays rather than pageants.

It is usual to divide mediaeval religious drama into three classes: "Mysteries," which dealt with scriptural events only;

“Miracle Plays,” which dealt with the legends of the Saints ; and “Moralities,” which illustrated the same truths, but symbolically and in the abstract, rather than directly. The “Mysteries” were played in church (though it is said that the word was not in use in England), but the “Miracles” soon grew much too large, and were played out of doors ; guilds and schools took them for their own, in honour of their own patron saints, and enlarged them and widened their scope, very soon introducing a comic element in places where the original clerical miracle writers would scarcely have thought fitting. Herod soon became the recognised buffoon in every miracle, and the Devil as popular in these pageants as in other phases of life ! Down to the beginning of the fifteenth century the Miracle Play carried on with unabated popularity, the Cornish Miracles (in the native Cymru) and those of Chester, Towneley and Coventry being specially famous.

It is from these “Miracles” that the pageant owes direct descent. The “Mystery,” confining itself to Bible subjects, gradually disappeared ; and the “Morality,” having exhausted the possibilities of allegorizing the eternal conflict between good and evil, became involved in religious controversy, *e.g.*, “Every man” on the Catholic side, and “Lusty Juventus” on the Protestant ; and so, passing through the phase when it was known as an “Interlude,” became merged in regular drama. But the “Miracle” developed on quite different lines, and in the fifteenth century we find the various guilds in Chester, London and other towns giving long plays of the developed-Miracle order ; and the wheeled scaffolds of two stories on which they were played, known as “pageants.”

Very soon the distinctive name was used to denote the play instead of the scaffold, and we hear of the “Glovers’ Pageant,” the “Fishmongers’ Pageant,” and so on, from the name of the Guild which produced it. The scaffold, which was moved about from street to street, was merely the centre point of the stage, for horsemen and other actors used it to pivot on, and possibly also to dress in ; and there is a stage instruction to Herod “to rage in the pageant, and in the street also.”

But it was not only the well-organized guilds that made a practice of pageantry : small parties of strolling players were

to be met with all over the country, wheeling their pageant with them, setting it up and giving their repertory of Miracles on village greens, before castle and manor house, or wherever else the chance of an audience seemed to offer.

Nor were the villagers slow to emulate the triumphs of the professionals; many an English parish had its own troop of players, and we cannot doubt that (though probably modelled on classic lines) the miracles they played were home written and racy of the soil—and all the better for it.

A conspicuously good example has survived in our county to the present day—at Minehead, where all the traditional characters appear every Easter as full of life as they were five hundred years ago. It is gratifying to know that the efforts now being made all over the country to bring the drama and the village together again are meeting with unqualified success; the sons and daughters are proving worthy of their sires.

Thus at last we come on the genuine English pageant as we know it to-day; the general idea of high moral teaching, interspersed with many a flash of homely English wit; few principals and big crowds constantly recruited from the on-lookers; song, dance, epic, lyric, mirth and pathos, all combining in a wealth of vivid colour and sound to emphasize and drive home sound morals and love of country. Surely we do well to call that art to life again?

The only other development we need notice is the "Mask"; originally so called from the masks worn by the performers, who were persons of quality and did not desire to be recognised by the vulgar in the audience, these performances in their least literary and outwardly most splendid form, approximated to pageants. In their most polished guise, for instance those written by the greatest master of the craft, Ben Jonson, they were almost to be classed as regular drama. Where they parted company with the genuine pageant was that instead of being intended to drive home some ethical ideal, the allegories and songs, heroes and demons were staged for the purpose of doing honour to the chief personage in the audience, as for instance the many masks which were written to greet Queen Elizabeth during her progresses through the realm.

From the days of Charles I, through the Puritan era, and after the Restoration down to the second half of the nineteenth century, we observe English drama in its second phase, non-moral in tone, and looked at askance by the pious : but whether the fault lay with the play or the pious is another question ! In such an atmosphere the pageant had no chance.

Now, with the wheel full turned again, Church and Stage have happily joined hands once more, and pageantry is reborn.

Thus, from the Greeks (who in their turn must have drawn from India, China and the East generally), through old Rome and the poor persecuted "Mimes" of the later Empire ; through "Liturgical Mystery," the "Miracle" and the "Riding" beloved of Chaucer's idle apprentice, we watch the coming of the Pageant which brought such colour and happiness to our forefathers ; by which, in this its re-birth, we humble votaries believe, the lovely flowers of faith and art may yet be made to spring in the drab levels of industrialism, and Merrie England rise again radiant in these latter days.