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The rise of the theatre from the church in France

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GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

THE RISE OF THE THEATRE FROM THE CHURCH
IN FRANCE

Submitted by

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THE RISE OF THE THEATRE FROM THE CHURCH IN FRANCE.

CHAPTER I

THE THEATRE OF THE ANCIENT WORLD.

Man is an imitative creature and all dramatic art is based entirely upon the principle of imitation. Can there, indeed, exist a more striking and more immediate means of imitation than the theatre, where man makes himself known to man, not only by the thoughts and sentiments directing his life, but in reproducing that life to his eyes? Hence, it is not surprising that the art of dramatic representation is in universal favor, and that it always has been since the early mysteries of the Middle Ages, which required for their performance four, five, ten, sometimes forty days, down through the ages until now when the Passions are still represented in the valleys of the Basques and in the mountains of the Tyrol.

Religion has for a long time been, and still is closely associated with the art of the stage in that part of the drama which is most elevated. The relation between religious beliefs and dramatic art is even sufficient to constitute a law of origin - a law based on the fact that everywhere the theatre had its beginning in the religious creed. With every people, the theatre was born and de-

veloped in the shadow of the altar. For example, the Greek Tragedy was "the serious picture of the most noble life, the apogee of art whose aim is to give us a not only faithful, but living picture of that which pertains to divinity".(1)

A study of antiquity and the oriental world seems to completely contradict this law, and the most religious peoples seem to be the greatest strangers to dramatic art. Neither the Egyptians nor the Jews knew the theatre, and the same is true of the Arabs, the Persians and the Turks. But these are the exceptions which prove the rule. With the Egyptians, life seems to have been only a meditation on death and eternity, - a double idea which is noticeable in Egypt's monuments, its obelisks, its sphinx - even in the care which surrounds its sepulchres. The capricious inventions of the theatre would have seemed decidedly incompatible with such rigidity of belief. With the Jews, too, religious laws left nothing to the flights of the imagination, and with the Turks, the Persians, and the Arabs, the influence of the dogma made the narrative form dominant, to the exclusion of the active element of the drama.

The old Aryan race and its descendants, the Hindoos,

(1). W. Schlegel, Cours de Litterature Dramatique,
t. I. P.44.

had a theatre which was a direct outcome of their cult. The Aryan religion was merely a pompous naturalism with the worship of "Agni", the celestial fire; "Indra", the atmosphere; "Varouna", the king of the waters, and other like divinities, and the Aryan theatre was the representation of its sacred legend. M. Ed. du Meril describes the Hindoo theatre as "resplendent with color, streaming with light, greater than nature, and more poetic than life, but with a poetry which does not know where to place its feet, and floats on the billow, inconsistent and disproportionate, like a dream."⁽¹⁾

Entirely different characteristics observed in the Chinese theatre lead to analogous conclusions. Here the theatre is less visibly an issue from the cult, but its dramas, personifying the struggle between good and evil, seem much related to the Chinese religion of ancestor-worship and materialistic atheism.

With the Greeks the early theatre seems to have been associated with the worship of Dionysus. Tragedy, in fact, was born in Greece and magnificently developed there, because Greece was its natural soil. Tragedy is nothing else than the national religious drama of Greek antiquity. It came out of the religious ceremonies of the ancient cult. At first it

(1). Ed. du Meril, "Histoire de la Comedie".

was, as before indicated, a hymn to Dionysus. This hymn was gradually changed by admitting a dialogued recitation, at first only an episode, into the intervals of songs by the chorus. The history of the progress of tragedy in Greece is the history of the encroachment of dialogue over hymn, of personages over chorus. The chorus gradually became secondary, as in Euripides, and was only a traditional accessory - a formality which preserved for the tragedy its religious character and the reminder of its origin.

The origin of tragedy explains why the names of legendary personages such as Oedipus, Hercules, and Achilles constantly reappear in Greek drama. These heroes were known to everyone and interested everyone because they were closely connected with the gods, whose rites constantly filled Greek minds. Religious faith and love of country are related sentiments and thus the religious drama was allied to the national drama in Greece.

With the Romans the theatre was in reality a foreign importation, but even there it was introduced by and presided over by religion. Romulus celebrated games in honor of the gods of Rome, and these games were immediately succeeded by theatrical representations. To appease its gods, Rome borrowed from Etruria its games, its actors. At the same time, dramatic poetry arose as a consequence of the cult of ancient divinities, and after honoring the gods of the Earth, the

Forest, the god of the Good Spirit, the old peasants of Latium improvised the Fescennin verses, a sort of dialogue, the type of which is still found in Italy in the "Commedia dell' arte". This form of poetry led directly to the works of Plautus and of Terence, represented by order of the edile in the celebrations to Jupiter or Cybele, as a part of the solemnities. Caesar, in building the first amphitheatre, the Flavians in constructing the Colosseum had given to Rome the only theatre suitable for such representations as these - scenes of splendor, of debauchery, and of murder, ominous performances whose immense massacres had for object the honor of the gods and the offering to the manes of a bloody worship and in which the art of the theatre was effaced entirely. Thus Rome closed the ages of antiquity by pushing paganism to its most odious consequences, and by preparing the way for a new creed which was to renew everything including the art of the theatre which was again reborn in the shadow of the sanctuary.

CHAPTER II

THE ORIGIN OF THE DRAMA OF THE MIDDLE AGES IN FRANCE.

When Europe began to recover from the inundation of the barbarians, there arose here and there monasteries which slowly gathered together the remaining threads of civilization, and awoke instincts from which dramatic art proceeded.

The theatre, as well as history, shows us modern thought arising in the bosom of the church and detaching itself little by little to commence an independent and laical life.

Drama exists, not in the manuscript of its author, but in the soul of its spectators and in the passions which it arouses there. We do the theatre of the Middle Ages an injustice if we, as modern dramatic critics, scorn its lifeless debris which remain to us - for certainly those dramatic works which were unfolded before the people were not without a power which made their audiences see and touch the most serious and most constant objects of their thoughts - heaven, the miracles, the passion of Christ and the future destiny of man. All these were brought close to the people of those earlier centuries and rendered palpable, by means of that very vulgarity of detail which shocks our modern literary taste. Spectators did not ask for scholarly and laborious preparations. With them, faith and emotion were

placed before words. They lived by hope, with heaven as their father-land; the church their home, and their pleasures the magnificent rites of the Catholic creed.

Thus there came to life, in the early monasteries, the germ which gradually developed into the drama of the Middle Ages, - a drama which presented striking analogies with the drama of antiquity. Just as in the ancient world, the drama arose spontaneously from the chants and the rites of the church. Often it was associated with the celebration of a sacrifice. The songs of the choir occupied the most important place, and the discourse of the single actor was secondary in nature.

During the Middle Ages, the church liturgy without doubt played one of the most important parts in social life. At its very beginning, that is, in the 9th and 10th centuries, the theatre was blended completely with the creed, or rather the creed was the theatre.

In reality the germs of the drama had existed for a long time in the liturgy and were noticeable at the time of Charlemagne. One of these germs is doubtless to be found in the symbolical nature of the ritual itself - especially evident in the rites of Holy Week. The church made the significance of these rites even more striking by the characterization of the anniversary celebrated by means of special responses. The nature of these responses executed by

alternate voices of "préchantre" and choir, constituted a second germ of the drama, linking the first origins of modern drama to the old traditions of Greek music and tragedy through the catholic liturgy.

Not alone the structure of the compositions called responses, but all the varieties of antiphonal song constituted a powerful dramatic germ which in the latter half of the 9th century, exceptionally favorable circumstances developed into real dialogue.

The liturgy contained, further, recitals which were called "lessons", and which occupied a large place in the services. These recitals were of a narrative and oratorical nature, and the fashion in which they were delivered in a half-singing melopoeia, with modifications and inflections according to the variations of text, resulted in a certain "sense" of drama - more especially when the recitals were divided among several voices more or less completing the personages who figured in the liturgical tale. The songs of the Passion, of Palm Sunday, and of Good Friday have preserved in the actual liturgy excellent examples of these appropriations of positions of the "lesson".

In the Middle Ages everyone knew and loved the religious ceremonies, and in order to vary its long services, to mitigate the fatigue of long recitals, and perchance to wake up the spirit of old monks and young novices tempted

by drowsiness, the church introduced into its creed the multiple melopoeia and rites more especially **dramatical** by nature. Interpolations were placed in the liturgy to make the services longer. **These** were at first very short, but they kept on developing and soon formed a sort of dramatic cycle corresponding to the cycle of the liturgical year.

At this period the drama was a dramatic service rather than a drama in the modern sense of the word. In fact a touch of the drama was given to the rites by its use of dialogue long before anyone thought of introducing a really dramatic element. The dramatic element was first represented in little spectacles of "Bergers" or of the "Sépulchre", to which gradually other dramas were added and little by little were formed the dramatic cycles of Christmas and Easter - the mystery plays of the Nativity and of the Resurrection. One of the means of developing the drama of the Resurrection was the relating, in the recitation, of the sad and divine events by which the redemption of humanity was accomplished. The possible influence which these dialogued lamentations had on the development of the Easter drama is shown in a "Cantique dialoguée de la Résurrection", in Latin verse, published by M. Mone, after a manuscript of Lichtenthal and reproduced by M. Édelest and Du Méril. (1)

(1). Du Méril. Origine latines du théâtre moderne.
p. 108.

Le Choeur

"Le Christ s'élançe hors du tombeau avec le trophée de sa victoire. L'Agneau est devenu lion. Sa mort a vaincu la Mort. Il a forcé les portes de l'enfer par la vertu de son sacrifice.

"Oui, c'est lui l'Agneau qui, suspendu en croix, a racheté toutes les brébis. Nul ne compatissait a ses souffrances. Mais le feu du chagrin dévorait Marie-Madeleine.

Les Anges

"Dis-nous, Marie, qu'as-tu vu en contemplant la croix du Christ?

Marie

"J'ai vu Jésus dépouillé, élevé en croix par la main des pécheurs.

Les Anges

"Dis-nous, Marie, qu'as-tu vu en contemplant la croix du Christ?

Marie

"J'ai vu sa tête couronnée d'épines, son visage souillé de crachats, plein de marques de coups.

"J'ai vu ses mains trouées de clous, son flanc percé d'une lance, source vive d'amour.

Les Anges

"Dis-nous, Marie, qu'as-tu vu en contemplant la croix du Christ?

Marie

"J'ai vu qu'il se recommandait à son Père, puis il inclina la tête et rendit l'esprit.

Les Anges

"Dis-nous, Marie, qu'as-tu fait apres avoir perdu Jesus?

Marie

"J'ai pleuré avec sa Mère, je l'ai reconduite à sa demeure; puis, je me suis prosternée à terre et j'ai gémi sur l'un et l'autre.

Les Anges

"Dis-nous, Marie, qu'as-tu fait apres avoir perdu Jesus?

Marie

"Ensuite j'ai préparé des parfums et j'ai visité le sépulcre. Mais je n'ai point trouvé celui que j'aimais et j'ai redoublé mes plaintes.

Le Choeur

"Dis-nous, Marie, qu'as-tu vu dans le chemin?

Marie

"J'ai vu le sépulcre du Christ vivant, j'ai vu la gloire du Christ ressuscité."

CHAPTER III

THE GRADUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE DRAMA IN FRANCE.

The religious drama gradually entered a second phase. It tended to develop, to grow larger, and in growing larger to separate itself from that liturgy which had given it birth. This separation could not be quickly made. There resulted, thus, from the 11th to the 12th centuries a long period of transition, during which the theatre was still liturgical in many respects, although it had begun to become secularized.

A desire to make the representations more agreeable to their audiences arose, and for this several devices were adopted. A first means was the combining of the four gospels, completing them one with another, - even with recourse to the gospels of the Apocrypha with new circumstances and new personages. A second means was the addition to the drama of new episodes and new scenes. Still another means was the amplification of the drama, by remodeling a simple passage of the Bible into an extended scene. For example in a play of the Passion, represented in the abbey at Benedictheuern, the brief passage, in which St. John and the Virgin Mary are at the foot of the cross, occupies fully four pages in the edition of this play by M. Edelest- and du Ménil. (1)

(1). Origines latines du théâtre moderne, ps. 141-145.

The first dramas of the Passion were in Latin prose, but soon the students of the monastic schools, in an attempt to vary the interest, introduced bits of poetry. Their verses were of course in Latin, for not until later was the use of the vernacular introduced. The presence of a large number of spectators from the laity at the representations given by students of the monastic schools, encouraged the introduction of the native tongue. At first these interpolations were simply more or less exact translations, paraphrases of the Latin text, but gradually more and more liberties were taken, until finally the language of the drama became entirely vernacular.

This period of growth which corresponds to the 12th century is the period in which the dramatic art passes from its rudimentary state to the first phase of its development. It enters a period of independence and emancipation. Progress is marked by three circumstances:-

1. The change in place of the scene which is removed from the sanctuary to the parvis.
2. The dominating use of the vernacular which forms the text, while the Latin is used for the choir and accessory indications.
3. The substitution of lay writers for the ecclesiastical writers, the priests and the monks who until then had held the role of interpreting or arranging the sacred

texts.

Among all the mysteries which have been preserved to us, the oldest in which the vernacular tongue appears, still mingled however with the Latin, has for its subject the Biblical parable of the wise and foolish virgins, and is called "L'Arrivée de l'Epoux."

In this drama Christ and the prophets speak in Latin, the angel, the virgin, and the oil merchant in Provencal. The drama starts with an invocation, which serves as a prologue, and announces the coming of Christ, warning the virgins to be watching. The angel Gabriel takes up the strain, repeating the warning and announcing the resurrection of Christ. The angel then disappears, and the foolish virgins fall asleep, letting their oil become spilled. When they awake they appeal to the wise virgins saying:

"O vierges, nous qui venons à vous, négligemment nous avons répandu notre huile; nos soeurs, nous venons à vous, suppliantes; en vous nous mettons notre espoir. Malheureuses! chétives! nous avons trop dormi. Compagnes du même voyage, soeurs du même sang, quoique à nous, infortunées, il soit arrivé malheur, vous pouvez nous rendre les joies célestes. Malheureuses! chétives! nous avons trop dormi. Faites part de votre lumière à nos lampes, ayez pitié des vierges folles, que nous ne soyons pas chassées loin du seuil, quand l'Epoux vous appellera dans ses demeures. Malheureuses! chétives! nous avons trop dormi."

But the wise virgins reply:

"Cessez, nos soeurs, de nous prier plus longtemps: nous prier plus longtemps ne vous servirait de rien. Malheureuses! chétives! vous avez trop dormi. Allez plutôt, allez en toute

hâte, prier les marchands doucement cu'ils vous donnent, à vous paresseuses, de l'huile pour vos lampes. Malheureuses! chétives! vous avez trop dormi."

The foolish virgins hasten to the merchants, situated in a far corner of the church, lamenting their carelessness. The merchants tell them to return to their sisters and beg them to help them, but the virgins mourn:

"Ah malheureuses! qu'avons-nous fait? N'aurions-nous pu veiller? Cette peine que nous souffrons maintenant, nous nous la sommes faite a nous-memes. Malheureuses! chétives! nous avons trop dormi. Que le marchand nous livre au plus vite sa marchandise. Marchand, nous venons chercher de l'huile: négligemment nous avons repandu la nôtre. Malheureuses! chétives! nous avons trop dormi."

They kneel at the choir entrance. The Bridegroom, who has come during their absence, addresses them in a terrible voice:

"En vérité, je vous le dis, je ne vous connais pas; vous n'avez point de lumière: ceux qui perdent ma lumière doivent s'éloigner loin du seuil de mon palais. Allez, chétives, allez, malheureuses, à jamais soyez livrées aux tourments, à jamais soyez en enfer!

The devils rush upon the foolish virgins and drag them away.

This drama holds a decided dramatic interest in the excitement which attends the embarrassment of the foolish virgins. It breathes a certain sentiment of horror and of mysterious pity. The plot is determined by a terrible denouement, which must have produced an extremely vivid impression in an age of such strong faith. Eleven times the sad refrain:

"Dolentas! chaitivas! trop y avem dormit!"

falls from the lips of the unfortunates and the twelfth time when Hell is opening to swallow them, the Christ cries:

"Alet, chaitivas! alet, malaureas!
 A tot jors mais vos so penas livres
 En efern ora seret memeis."

This mystery was probably written in the 11th century. The vernacular language mingled with the Latin is that of the south of France.

Another very important part of the Christian dramatic cycle is the "Vies de saints" or "Miracles." Its origin is more recent than that of the dramas of Pâques and Noël, whose successive developments ^{formed} little by little the great mysteries of the "Passion". The "Miracles" were largely the work of monastic students, and like the usual work of the students of the period were in Latin verse, in a rhythmic system. The greater part of these related to St. Nicholas and were represented at the times of celebration to this patron saint of monastic students.

Among these "Miracles de St. Nicolas" represented in the 12th century is one written by Hilaire, a student of Pierre Abelard, written entirely in rhythmic Latin verse with the addition of refrains in the French language. This drama shows that the distance between the clergy and the laity was not so great as may sometimes be supposed. There was indeed between these two large bodies a connecting link in the "clercs" so-called - those who had received the

minor orders in the church and had then returned to civil society, as for example, the lawyers, doctors, notaries of that period. These "clerics" made up in a large measure the "confréries" which in the middle of the 12th century began to represent, along side the latin dramas of the students and about the same patron saint, sacred dramas, enlarged, and in the vernacular. Two of these "clerics", Adam de la Halle and Jean Bodel, made for themselves a lasting place in the dramatic literature of France.

Bodel produced a drama which marks one of the first steps toward the secularization of the theatre and is called the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas". Jean Bodel was a poor poet of Arras, rejected from society as a victim of leprosy, but he left to his native city this miracle play. The "Jeu de Saint Nicolas" is in a way the last dramatic work of a legend of the Middle Ages with Saint Nicolas as the object. The play was probably represented in the public square of Arras, or in the large hall of some manor, and began with the appearance of a "précheur", a sort of prologue, who announced:

"Oyez, oyez, seigneurs et dames,
 (Que Dieu soit gardien de vos âmes!...)
 Pour édifier ce manoir,
 Nous voulons vous parler ce soir
 De Saint Nicolas le confès,
 Qui tant beaux miracles a faits."

The precheur then went on, in the manner of the

prologue of Plautus, and related what was about to take place in the representation. A treasure entrusted to the guard of Saint Nicolas has been stolen; the unfaithful prince to whom it belongs threatens a Christian with death if the treasure is not recovered. The Christian starts to pray; the saint appears to the thieves in the night and prevails upon them to restore the treasure. This is the common basis of Latin and French mystery plays, but Bodel adds a contemporary interest by the setting in which he places the old legend. It is in the midst of a crusade in which the Christians are conquered by the infidels and perish as glorious martyrs, and the enthusiasm of that expedition breathes throughout the drama. There is a certain integrity in the portrayal, a free charm in the dialogue which makes an animated drama with verses which become really poetic with truth and sentiment.

In spite of defects of exaggeration and a lack of local color, Bodel was a real author and poet. His play, the "Jeu de Saint Nicolas", is the first and best example of the miracle play which became the chief dramatic form of the 13th century, and has often been called the "first romantic drama". In origin the "miracle" is a dramatized saint's life, and its connection with the liturgy is therefore slight.

Another example of the miracle play is Miracle

de Théophile by Rutebeuf. It embodies a theme later used in the Faust stories. A monk has bartered his soul to the Devil and finally, grown repentant, recovers it through the intercession of the Virgin. Miracle-plays reach their height in the 14th century. The Quarante Miracles de Notre Dame of that period form a kind of cycle which in volume exceeds the entire extant drama of the early period.

They are extraordinary productions in many respects: dull and tedious if we read them with an eye to depth of sentiment or psychological analysis, but extremely interesting if we view them as an expression of the age and as material for study of social customs. Sequence of incidents occurs without the least regard for what ought to take place. Problems are allowed to become more and more involved, and then, when the difficulties seem insurmountable, the Virgin appears as a "dea ex machina" and troubles are done away with in a trice.

A further secularization of the theatre was shown in the fact that the dramas were sometimes represented outside of the church, the church yard often being the scene for dramatic representation. Thus this epoch of the semi-liturgical mystery coming as it does between the purely liturgical drama of the 9th and 10th centuries and the more developed drama of the later centuries is "like an intermediate link, holding together the two ends of a chain which without it

would seem strangers one to the other."⁽¹⁾

Dramas of a semi-liturgical nature were formed by various procedures. Some were formed by the aggregation of several older dramas; others by the simple development of the primitive legend which had assimilated the elements of the Bible; others by the separation of a liturgical scene into several tableaux.

The mystery of Hilaire, a disciple of Abelard, of the "Résurrection de Lazare" gives us an excellent example of the dramatic works of this second period.

Hilaire's play, written largely in Latin, with only an occasional refrain in the vernacular, is a more or less exact reproduction of the Biblical tale.

The dramas of the intermediate period, in a mixture of Latin and of French, are not entirely lacking in a certain naive grace of composition. But they are distinctly lacking in art. We can not conceal the fact that in the literature of this period the idea of the useful almost completely dominated and excluded the idea of the beautiful.

(1). M. Sepet. Le Drame Chrétien au Moyen Âge. p. 32.

CHAPTER IV

THE FURTHER DEVELOPMENT OF THE DRAMA AND
THE BEGINNING OF DECADENCE

Directly following the period of the origins of the drama, there came the so-called scholarly period of the drama, when the dramatic compositions were largely the work of the masters and pupils of the great cathedral schools. Drama of this period in Latin prose, and in metrical and rhymed verses, abounded in France from the middle of the eleventh to the middle of the twelfth century. The intelligence of the action of the plays was rendered easy for the spectators, ignorant of Latin, by the fact that the subject of the drama was always taken from the stories of legends which religious education and the ordinary liturgy had made familiar to all. The gradual use of the vernacular naturally redoubled the pleasure of the audiences.

The introduction of the University system, which replaced the old cathedral schools in France, resulted in the dramatic work being taken over by societies called "Confréries" at the middle of the twelfth century or thereabout. The "Confréries" were companies composed of laymen, formed for the purpose of performing dramatic representations. Established originally in a spirit of piety, these

grave and serious associations had no hostility toward the church. Before the end of the 13th century they had, however, taken away from the clergy a large part of its influence, and during the 14th century they paralyzed it entirely. These "Confréries" took over the ecclesiastical theatre and gave it a more worldly tendency. They retained a large part of the characters of the liturgical origin, but they began to introduce the drama into a new path in which the vernacular was habitually used.

The theatre took on a freer aspect. Art forced itself to make up for weakening of religious impressions, the scope of the drama grew greater when the walls of the sanctuary no longer traced its limits. Instead of several dramatic scenes adapted from the Bible, - as the death of Christ, the resurrection, - there were formed huge compositions which embraced the entire life of Christ, or even the whole religious history of man from creation to the last judgment. Around the Biblical characters were grouped personages created by the poet's fancy. Popular scenes became more frequent; the plot became more animated, but with less majesty and less religious power. The mysteries became little by little what our modern drama is, a real play destined for the amusement of an idle crowd.

To the "confréries" we must attribute the composition of the oldest drama in the French language which

has come down to us - the drama of "Adam", which became attached to the cycle of "Nöel". The text of Adam is in Norman dialect, and shows a certain ingenious art on the part of its author. It presents an abridged but complete tableau of the fall of Adam and of his redemption. With remarkable choice and concentration the author groups within the limits of three acts the revolt of the first man and all the evils which it entailed, the appearance of crime on earth by the murder of Abel, and the promises of redemption announced by the prophetic personages of the ancient law. He adds in the manner of an epilogue the description of the apocalyptic signs which are to precede the dissolution of the universe and the final judgment. It is universal history condensed in a dramatic work, whose effect is redoubled by the energetic brevity of its style. The manuscript opens with certain indications to the actor somewhat as follows:- (1)

1. "d'articuler nettement les mots; 2, de marcher avec dignité en parcourant le paradis; 3, de mettre leurs gestes en harmonie avec les idées qu'ils seront chargés d'exprimer; 4, de se dérober aux regards du public pour opérer le changement de costume qui doit substituer une peau de bête aux brillants habits des premiers humains; 5, de recevoir sur un plastron le coup mortel que Cain porte a son frere."

This last shows clearly the tendency of the repre-

(1). H. Tivier. La Littérature Dramatique en France.
p. 81.

sentation to withdraw from the church to the yard.

The Latin of the Bible appears only as an accessory in the choir songs and discourses of the prophets. We are now, as said M. Sainte Beuve "en face de la première oeuvre dramatique, et c'est bien par là qu'il faut commencer l'étude du théâtre français."⁽¹⁾

The first act is composed of six distinct scenes. In the first, after the reader has recited the first verse of Genesis and the choir has chanted the second, God appears, designated by the name of "Salvator", and Adam and Eve, receive their instructions and promise their fidelity. They then retire, God into the church, and Adam and Eve into Paradise, and a group of demons invade the stage and form a plot, the consequence of which is to be the fall of man. The devil is charged to tempt Adam which he proceeds to do. However, Adam repulses the Devil's first attack and the demons decide to tempt Eve's weakness. For this purpose the Devil takes the form of a serpent, glides into Paradise and coils about the tree of forbidden fruit. From there he addresses Eve, telling her that he is about to initiate her into the secrets of Paradise. He has not found Adam strong enough to be taken into his confidence. Eve succumbs to his wiles, and is led to scorn her husband and the divine order, and to grow in self-esteem and vanity.

(1). Cours professé à l'Ecole Normale Supérieure en
1859 - 1860.

She yields, and tastes with delight the forbidden fruit. The rest happens as in the text of Genesis. God appears and the guilty ones try to make excuses and amends. They are sent out to cultivate the land with sweat and tears. Adam sees that Satan, at his heels, is sowing thorns and is reminded of the last joys of Paradise. Finally death arrives, and the demons come with a horrible uproar, load them with chains, drag them to Hell, and then disappear.

The following act represents the death of Abel. The author portrays the birth and progress of the jealousy in the soul of Cain, shown in the following extract from a conversation between Cain and Abel in the old French:-

Cain: Abel, mors es.
 Abel: E jo pourquoi?
 Cain: Jo m'en voldrai vengier de toi....
 Abel: En Deu est tote ma fiance.
 Cain: Ne te porra de mort guenchir.
 Abel: Del tut me met a son plaisir.
 Cain: Vols oir porquoi te oscirai?
 Abel: Or le me di porquoi.
 Cain: Jo l'toi dirrai.
 Trop te fais de Deu prive.
 Por toi refuse-il ma offrende.
 Pensez-vus donc cue ne l'te rende?
 Jo t'en rendrai or le guerdon.
 Mort remaindras or au sablon.
 Abel: Si tu m'ocies, co iert a tort,
 Deu vengera en toi ma mort.

The demons carry away to Hell the souls of the two brothers, but they carry that of Abel more gently than that of his brother.

The last act deals with the characters of the an-

cient law, in terms borrowed from the Bible, prophesying the birth of the Messiah.

The oldest example of a representation in the vernacular, pertaining to the cycle of "Pâques", is also of Norman origin with the "Résurrection" as its subject, and appears to have been composed in the first half of the 12th century.

Dialogue predominates and the "lecteur" serves only to furnish brief transitions. The link which binds this drama to the liturgical origins is still noticeable, for the liturgy itself rules its form and the date of its representations. But the development of the dialogue and of the stage, the importance given to episodic scenes and accessory personages, the language and style whose familiarity foreshadows a weakness of the later theatre, all combine to show a direct analogy between the mystery of the 12th century and the so-called lay mysteries of the 15th.

Compared with the drama of "Adam", the drama of the "Résurrection" is, from a literary standpoint, decidedly inferior. In its composition are evident certain defects which developed more and more in the drama of the Middle Ages. Among these defects are the overuse of little details, often foreign to the subject; a too exact imitation of the customs and language of common life; a tendency to depict a coarse realism, which later became vulgar; and

an almost total absence of the loftiness and poetry essential in so sublime a subject.

The movement of secularization did not reach its full height until the 14th century. At this time, the theatre acquired a great popularity, which kept on growing during the 15th and 16th centuries. The mysteries took on daily greater proportions. Religious dramas of this period contained sometimes 60,000 verses. Representations lasted several days and included hundreds of actors. France, Germany, England, Italy, Spain - all gave themselves over to the dramatic fever.

The plays of this period were only the former mystery plays, made larger and slightly revised. Plagiarism was the law of dramatic composition. The style of the new writers was on the whole detestable. Here and there, in their works, one may find some beautiful scenes, some moving features, but these are all submerged by a flood of insipid words of an abominable nature.

The representations of the dramas had a vast effect upon the masses of the people, because the lines of the plays, borrowed from the "Ecriture" reflected, as in a mirror, in the souls of the hearers. The very details of the plays charmed the audiences because they were full of life.

No attention was given to the form of the drama.

The only purpose of meter and rhyme was to fix more firmly in the minds of the actors the roles which they were to perform. There was no unity of time - no unity of place. In one afternoon the audience witnessed the sinning of Adam, the sacrifice of Abraham, the miracles of Moses, the birth of Christ. It was disorder and chaos.

Associations were formed everywhere for the representation of the mysteries, the most celebrated of which in France, was the "Confrérie de la Passion", authorized in 1402 by Charles VI. The Confrérie established itself in the "Hôpital de la Trinité", and there gave to the public, on the days of celebration, various spectacles taken from the New Testament. The spectators were many, and the church favored the new establishment with all its power. The zeal of the audiences was great. The days were not long enough for the representation of the mystery nor for the exhaustion of their curiosity. When night came, action stopped, no matter at what point in the mystery it might be, and the following Sunday no one was missing when the play was taken up again.

The Confrères had made dramatic art popular. They had placed poetry under the eyes and hands of the people. The saints, the apostles, Christ himself, came out of the temple to mingle familiarly with the crowd. They spoke the same tongue and the same language. The imperfections

and the vulgarity which shock us in those pious works today were doubtless than a condition of success. Art belittled itself to better reach the masses and to animate their lives.

The vulgar realism and extravagant fantasy which were daily added to representations began to constitute a real danger at a time when the faith of the Middle Ages was being broken by the keen critics of the Reformation. The divine illusion of faith little by little abandoned the theatre of the Confrères, and in 1548 the Parliament of Paris rose energetically against "ces gens non lettrés ni entendus en telles affaires, de condition infime, comme un menuisier, un tapissier, un vendeur de poisson, qui ont fait jouer les actes des apôtres, en y ajoutant plusieurs choses apocryphes. Tant les entrepreneurs que les joueurs sont gens ignares, ajoutait-il, ne sachant ni a ni b, qui oncques ne furent instruits ni exercés en théâtres."

On Nov. 17, 1548 Parliament, renewed the privileges of the Confrères, authorized them to play, lawful, secular and honest subjects, and expressly forbade them the representation of mysteries taken from the Holy Writ. It was the death-knell of the religious drama of the Middle Ages.

CHAPTER V

THE END OF RELIGIOUS DRAMA IN FRANCE

In the time which expired between 1548 and about 1630, that is from the middle of the 16th to the middle of the 17th century, the character of the French theatre, at least in its serious drama, underwent a complete change. This was a period of revolution and of transition. The primitive theatre, the national and religious drama of the Middle Ages, succumbed, and in its place was established the classic French tragedy which found its chief exponents in Corneille and Racine.

The success of the mysteries of the Middle Ages was by no means exhausted at the middle of the 16th century. No theatre had ever enjoyed a greater popularity - a popularity which seemed destined to continue. But it was attacked by the progress of the so-called "Protestant heresy", and by the power of a new literary style which gradually conquered the general and dominating opinion.

The "humanists" of the Renaissance, in an attempt to cause a reaction in secondary and superior education against the dialectic studies of the end of the Middle Ages, brought to their followers, among other works of ancient literature, the beauties of thought and form of Greek and Latin-tragedy. In comparing these old tragedies with the

more recent mysteries, there was no hesitation in choice of value of style and art. Seized with admiration of the ancient dramas, masters and disciples tried to reproduce these models, either by imitation in the old Latin, by translations, or by imitations in the vernacular. The theatre of the Renaissance had at its beginning, as did the theatre of the Middle Ages, a decidedly scholarly character. The "Cléopâtre" of Jodelle, which marks the beginning of the new dramatic era, was first represented at the "College de Reims", and later at the "College de Boncourt". The author himself was one of a group of students who had studied at the "College of Coqueret" under the humanist Jean Daurat.

There was in the second half of the 16th century a decided difference between the theatre of the literary peoples and the popular theatre. With the educated, the imitated tragedy of antiquity had become mistress, but the majority of the public was at first positively hostile to the new dramatic form. Thus, the classic tragedy had at its beginning only special audiences in the colleges or in the palaces. M. Rigal⁽¹⁾ states the early history of tragedy as follows:-

(1). Paris, Hachette, 1889, in-8^o.

"Les tragédies du XVI siècle, dit-il, n'ont, point paru sur un théâtre public, et voici sans doute comment on peut résumer leur histoire. Les premières furent généralement composées pour être représentées, mais devant un public spécial, disposé d'avance à acclamer tout ce qui venait de la nouvelle école. Bientôt ces représentations perdirent l'attrait de la nouveauté et devinrent de plus en plus rares, et les poètes finirent par se persuader qu'il valait mieux publier leurs oeuvres sans s'inquieter de les faire jouer. Les représentations des tragiques ne cessèrent pourtant pas d'une façon absolue: mais elles devinrent l'exception et ce fut l'impression qui devint la règle".

The popular theatre continued to function in Paris under the "Confrères de la Passion", who remained, in so far as they could, faithful to the tradition of the Middle Ages. When the attention of Parliament seemed somewhat relaxed, they produced some old mystery, - but more often they produced pieces of the same nature, whose religious character was hidden under the deceptive titles of "tragédies", "tragi-comédies", or "pastorales".

The distance between the literary and the popular theatres was thus great. At the end of the 16th century, the two theatrical systems were in a state of persistent hostility, and consequently, of mutual decadence. Classic tragedy could not even appear on the stage, and, on the

other hand, the Confrères were, in 1599, forced to renounce dramatic art forever. They rented their properties and their privilege to troupes of comedians who, after having travelled through the province, tried to create a more fixed and more fruitful situation in Paris.

In the provinces, the old mysteries, represented in the old style by confreres or bourgeois, had continued their career of religious and literary scruples in spite of the Reform and the Renaissance. The troupes of travelling comedians who, toward the middle of the 16th century, began to dispute the territory with local organizations, had also at their beginning, mysteries at the head of their repertoire, that is, pieces very similar to those which the decree of Parliament in 1548 had forbidden the Confrères de la Passion to represent in Paris.

The first "tragedies" represented by these companies probably had nothing in common with the productions of the classic school, except their name. But toward the end of the century the travelling comedians began to make concessions to the new dramatic style. At about this time they began to secure bribed playwrights who followed them in their course and refreshed and amplified their repertoire. These authors, themselves educated, had a more or less marked tendency toward the theories of the new theatre, and little by little, under their influence, the new types

of "pastorale", and "tragi-comédie" and "tragédie" were made to predominate. The mystery and the morality had been definitely driven from the theatre. A revolution had been accomplished in the theatrical world. But, however complete may seem the victory of classical tragedy over the old Christian drama of France, we may yet note in later drama a relic of the old tradition of the Middle Ages in *Polyeucte*, the *Cid*, *Athalie*, and above all in the *Don Juan* of Molière.

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