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AMATEUR VALUES IN PAGEANTRY¹

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EMERSON, once asked to speak on the Peerless One we remember today, began, "Shakespeare—" but could find no words to go farther. "Shakespeare—" again he faltered. "Shakespeare—" for the third time he launched his theme, but still words failed. He smiled serenely and concluded by taking his seat in more eloquent silence.

Perhaps it may seem to you a far cry from Shakespeare to pageantry,² but perhaps it is not so long a way as a first impression might indicate. I think it was Emerson too who suggested the many-hued holiday in Shakespeare: the poem hanging in the berry bush catching the poet's eye, and the street one long masquerade to Shakespeare passing by. For he recognized, after all the years, Shakespeare as undisputed master of the "old proud pageant of man," beyond our power to comprehend or phrase—Shakespeare, turning the kaleidoscope of human endeavor into forms ever rich and strange, into a pageant of life, colorful, luminous, ever changing, continually refreshing.

But what has Shakespeare, the playwright, to do with the dramatic form we designate *pageant*? We recall that more than two centuries before he was born the merchants and tradesmen of England, performing on "pageant"-stages (as they called their rude movable platforms of the public squares) their long cycles of Miracle- and Mystery-Plays, prepared the way for him, made him possible. We remember that on the Continent, too, these dramatic representations of Bible and saint stories were widely popular, as is indicated by such survivals as the Passion Plays of Oberam-

¹ An address delivered before the Drama League of America at Detroit, Michigan, in the Art Museum, Wednesday, April 21, 1915, Shakespeare's birthday.

² The reference in this address to *A Pageant of the North-West* I have taken from my introduction to the published *Book of the Pageant*.—F. H. K.

mergau in Bavaria and of Selsach in Switzerland, which suggest how intimately the religious pageant-drama was cherished by the masses of the people to fulfil their inborn desire for the mimetic, for active participation in the dramatic art, to satisfy their craving for an outlet of their thrilling life, individually and collectively. From such a ready soil came forth at length the emancipated play proper, to yield in due season the full flower of an Elizabethan Shakespeare; just as in the ancient days the poetical achievement of Greece was slowly formed from the primitive processional dances of the first Hellenic priests.

We may well remind ourselves that the great Greeks came to regard their dramatic festival as a heroic institution of religion, a visible representation of the glory of the world of Hellas, dedicating the heart of the people to enduring truth and beauty. So, in later times, the mediaeval church became to the illiterate masses a moving ritual of Christianity.

The pageantry of religion, then, forms the vividly dramatic background of a Sophocles and of our timeless Shakespeare. And so we may regard the pageant-form, in a sense, as the parent of the drama proper. Is not the new pageantry, then, this youngest child of the ancient pageant-mother, worthy of consideration on this holiday of Shakespeare's birth? Is not the revival of pageantry by the people one of the most significant phases of the great dramatic movement of our time, suggesting, perhaps, in its vast visionings, a new form of communal expression, democratic, socialized—a new art of all the people? Perhaps this is its most common and promising characteristic: it is essentially *of the people*, the community furnishing at once its theme, its actors, its audience. The people are its protagonist, the people participating, not passive spectators merely. For this reason it would seem particularly adapted to give the people an adequate outlet for their constant desire to express in dramatic form their native, though too often arrested, sense of beauty. In a recent conversation concerning the American pageant, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, the foremost English actor, said: "It's splendid! By all means let the people do it for themselves." That is the main thing: the people are doing it for themselves.

Beginning in Sherbourne, England, in 1905, the new pageant-form has not been long in finding its way to New England, nor indeed in covering the entire distance across the continent from Yankee Maine to cosmopolitan California. An organization, the American Pageant Association, has been formed to conserve and cherish it as a fine art. By 1913 there were at least forty-six pageants, festivals, and masks presented in fifteen different states, and last year no fewer than sixty-four in twenty-three states in various parts of the country from Rhode Island to Nevada and California, from Texas to North Dakota. It has reached gigantic proportions. The *Pageant and Masque of St. Louis*, for instance, was produced at a cost of more than \$125,000, on a stage nearly 1,000 feet long from end to end and 200 feet in depth, 7,500 St. Louisans were actors, and 150,000 people came each night of the pageant-week to form the audiences that filled the vast amphitheater of Forest Park for the most pretentious drama ever staged by a community. Now comes the word that old Boston will commemorate her tercentenary with a colossal historical pageant that will surpass even St. Louis in size and splendor.

This new art of pageantry in the United States should do much to stir the imagination of the people to a new appreciation and to better citizenship. Such results are indicated in a personal letter received from Mr. Luther Ely Smith, a lawyer in St. Louis and secretary of the Executive Committee of the Pageant. He writes:

The entire community responded to the best in literature and art. . . . There was not a soul in the vast audience of 150,000 (it averaged that per night) who did not receive a deep, soul-stirring message. . . . Every person who took part in the *Pageant and Masque*, as an actor or a worker, went through a wonderful experience and came out a better citizen. . . . The pageant-spirit translated itself into civic betterment all along the line, into a demand for better things in the community, both in public and private life. . . . A tangible result that we have is the formation of the St. Louis Pageant Choral Society, based on the chorus of the Pageant, . . . and we find the Pageant spirit to be invoked on all occasions. Three years ago a charter was submitted to our voters, and through a concurrence of conservatism and suspicion was defeated. June 30 of this year (1914) a charter—probably the most progressive and advanced ever submitted to the voters of a large city, was adopted by our city. This was twenty-nine days after the close of our Pageant, and it is conceded on all sides that the pageant-spirit carried it through.

Other tangible and permanent results referred to in this letter—a permanent open-air theater, municipal drama, and concerts—time prevents me from presenting.

Such is the new pageant of the people, in which the dramatic (which seems to be the dominant art-impulse in the masses) is made to include all the other fine arts—poetry, music, dancing, coloring, modeling, building—in a great comprehensive communal drama. As such, it becomes indeed a patriotic embodiment of the life-story of the people, re-creating their romantic yesterdays, interpreting their own stirring day, imaging forth their dreams of a yet fairer tomorrow. If this new art can stir the imagination of the people to do such things for themselves, may not co-operative liberty flower ere long in a fairer state than any we have yet known, into something of lasting beauty?

Our modern attitude toward the drama has become too conservative, too artificial, too much confined to books and walls. Dramatic literature has languished in dull texts and in painted scenery; Sophocles and Shakespeare have been veritably hide-bound in the schools and cabined and cribbed in the theaters. But now, at length, the academic attitude toward the institution of the theater and the profession of the actor is undergoing a great change. The American stage and university are actually joining hands. The classics are being humanized and restored to the sunny playhouse of life, to the spacious Theater of Nature, in which the masters dreamed their dreams and wrought them in immortal mold.

It would seem, too, that the whole modern movement toward a new theater may, in a sense, be designated an amateur renaissance, originating, as it does, with the laity rather than with the profession, with the Drama League playgoers, teachers, and even the tired business man, rather than with the managers and the actors. Mr. Walter Prichard Eaton writes in a letter concerning our amateur experimental work at the University of North Dakota: "I cannot but feel that here [i.e., in theatrical experiments quite independent of professional endeavor], rather than in the present-day professional stage, lies the real hope for the future of the theater in this country."

The new pageantry offers a great opportunity for conserving this promising amateur spirit in the masses; for, after all, the drama of the future must be found in the people themselves; it must be an art-expression of all the people.

Last night Professor Arvold told you of the valuable service the Agricultural College of North Dakota at Fargo is contributing in promoting the idea of the Little Country Theater. Let me give you a glimpse of the work we have accomplished in the University of North Dakota at Grand Forks, through our university dramatic club, the Sock and Buskin Society, by means of our little Elizabethan stage, in our unique accomplishment in *A Pageant of the North-West*; and in the dedication last spring of our theater of nature, "The Bankside." These things we have watched spring forth, flourish, and flower from out the fertile prairie land in the comparatively short space of nine years. In that time we have seen almost the first generation of Americans from the prairie pioneers evolve a truly beautiful dramatic and literary art. A thrill comes to one to think of it; it proves that America, virile with new energy, with good young blood, *can* translate its wonderful life into true native beauty, into a dramatic art adequate, potential, poetic. That is what we have proved for ourselves at the University of North Dakota in nine years. I say this, not in boast, yet with all confidence, that we may all have an even greater faith in the promising signs of the future of a native theatric art in America.

Time prevents consideration now of the interesting experimental efforts of our little Elizabethan stage. I cannot refrain, however, from telling you Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson's remark on seeing a photograph of this, our dramatic laboratory: "That's splendid. Do you know, that gives an actor real contact with the audience!" His words suggest what we have lost in our modern stage of illusion of active participation by the audience in the play.

I must pass on to the amateur values we found in conceiving and creating *A Pageant of the North-West* last spring.

The story represents four successive stages in the development of the great Northwest. The first three parts relate the remarkable

adventures and achievements of three heroic Frenchmen—Radisson, LaSalle, and Verendrye—whose vision of a western empire impelled them to win for the flag of France all the wide wilderness of this then unknown region. The first part deals with the resourceful Radisson, who prepared the way for the historic Hudson's Bay Company, in 1670; the second part with the gallant LaSalle, who sought to unite the warring tribes of the upper Mississippi Valley into a confederacy able to repel invasion and to protect the fur traders who were to follow him; and the third with the far-sighted Verendrye, the first white man to follow the northern course of the Missouri River in the prairie country of what is now North Dakota. The fourth part, presenting the famous expedition of two intrepid Americans, Captains Lewis and Clark, marks the final conquest for the United States of all the country westward to the Great Sea. At their first winter camp, Fort Mandan, on the Missouri River, near the present site of Stanton, North Dakota, they found Sakakawea, the Bird-Woman, whose kindly leadership guided them safely over the dangerous mountain ranges to the sheltered valleys by the Western Sea. It seemed fitting that the present pageant should conclude with the figure of Sakakawea, an embodiment of the undaunted will and the friendliness of the homes in our great Northwest.

In all essentials the historic facts were strictly followed, in many cases the speeches having been retained in their original form. Native Indian music, recorded by Mr. Harold A. Loring, collector of songs and folklore of the American Indians for the United States government, has been introduced, and a group of full-blooded Chippewas, with their costumes, trappings, and instruments, was brought from the Turtle Mountain reservation to participate actively and so lend reality to the scenes. More than this, the native red men were given *speaking* parts in the play, through interpreters, and entered into the action with great enthusiasm. This is probably the first time such an experiment has been tried, the Indian being called upon to re-enact the scenes of his forefathers, using practically the original words and on virtually the same soil.

The text of *A Pageant of the North-West* was written by eighteen undergraduate students, members of the Sock and Buskin Society

of the university, in collaboration, under the direction of the Department of Dramatic Literature and with the co-operation of the Department of History. It was composed of four parts, each part being written by a group of four. One student wrote the prologue, the epilogue, and the interludes, while another wrote the music for the lyrics. The interludes were written in the spirit and form of the old ballad and to indicate the mood of the scenes they introduce; they were designed to be chanted by a chorus dancing a harmonious accompaniment. In its unique communal method of authorship, *A Pageant of the North-West* is, I think, without a precedent in modern pageant-making, and a distinct contribution to pageantry because it has demonstrated that the community, under proper direction, can not only enact in dramatic form its own traditions and history, but can actually create the pageant literature itself, so that literary as well as histrionic art is cultivated in the community. The work, though long and hard—for the writers were more than nine months in collecting the historical data and converting it into pageant form—has been altogether refreshing, recalling the very beginnings of literature in “those happy days,” as Herder calls them, when literature “lived in the ears of the people, on the lips and in the harps of living bards.”

In this co-operative method of authorship the function of the pageant-master is enlarged: he is no longer merely the pageant-writer, but becomes a communal literary artist, directing the aspiring amateur writers of the community (and there are always such) to collaborate in the interpretation and dramatization of their own traditions and their dreams, in stagecraft, dialogue, dancing, poetry, and in music. Do I hear a murmur, “It can’t be done”? I answer that it has been done in our prairie state and that it can be done in dear old Massachusetts or in Maine, in golden, glowing California, or in wide-flung, fenceless Texas. Last summer I had a letter from a distinguished pageant-master in which he insisted, gently but firmly, that while co-operative authorship in pageantry had educational values, of course, it could not be seriously considered as a means of evolving pageantry as a fine art, because, forsooth, with many writers there would be many viewpoints

and no unity. "Yes, as many viewpoints as there are writers," I reply, "and all the richer the result for that very reason"; and unity, of course, as there is in the great canvases and wall paintings of the Italian cathedrals wrought by many hands under the guiding genius of a Tintoretto or a Raphael. In a somewhat similar way, the pageant-master becomes the unifying artist of the communal dramatic and literary art; so the miracle is performed—the people themselves under the leadership of the pageant-director as controlling artist make their pageant from first to last, from the selection of a theme and the gathering of materials to devising, writing, and staging the completed work. Only one thing is required, and that is the main thing, without which pageantry is a paradox—community co-operation. A remarkable spirit of working together was evolved in our collaborative writing of *A Pageant of the North-West*, with the result of true artistic unity, of compelling rhythm of color and sound, of sunlight and shadow mellowed into poetry, native amateur poetry of genuinely emotional appeal. Permit me to illustrate by reading from the Epilogue spoken by the Spirit of Prophecy in our pageant—the verse, please bear in mind, of a North Dakota boy, son of the prairie pioneer. It is the voice of the promising amateur spirit of our prairie land. Perhaps it is the voice of the Amateur Spirit of a new American art-form.

In me, I beg of you, revere the prophet,
And listen to my words with ears attentive;
For clearly as the Seer saw New Jerusalem
Descending from the clouds, I, too, see visions.

.
The cloud of war which overspread the sun
Shall pass, and in the bright new day, he
Who but lately fought, shall guide the plow again.
Now mark me well—he who survives till this
Shall feel within his soul new spirit born;
And he who lately builded freedom's fire
Shall be the champion of democracy.

.
In arts of peace, the wise men shall instruct,
And he who once was reckoned rich and proud
Shall then brush elbows with the humble poor.
This duty do I leave you, gentle friends,

This duty deep and mighty at our parting,
 To scatter love where naught but hate is growing;
 To scatter peace where war's red blaze is glowing;
 To raise your hearts above the wrongs of strife;
 To lift your souls above the woes of life;
 To serve, though what you do be unrepaid;
 To face tomorrow trustful, unafraid.

A word now concerning our new Bankside Theater, and I have done. Its establishment marks a new phase in the modern movement toward the Theater of Nature, which is rapidly coming into favor on the Continent and with us. The name was suggested by its location on the banks of a historic stream where in years long past the white man met the Indian in friendly trade. Also it was suggested by that region of old London where stood the theater of William Shakespeare. Our open-air theater is a distinct contribution to the history of the outdoor stage in being the first to utilize the natural curve of a stream as the foreground of the scene, between the stage and the amphitheater. This, as Mr. Walter Prichard Eaton suggests in a letter he writes concerning it, makes "the illusion either by day or by night quite wonderful," and the acoustic properties contributed by the water add much to its effectiveness. May I quote, in conclusion, my words in the Address of Dedication? They suggest, as well as I can phrase it, our dramatic creed in North Dakota, and, I think, the sincere hope of the American Amateur Spirit everywhere.

Simple may be our beginnings here tonight, but not too rude, we hope, to be cherished by those that shall come after. For in the moving pageant of time, Truth, Beauty remain forever unchanged. And tonight the same clear stars that looked down on the white theater of Sophocles more than two thousand years ago at Athens look down on us serenely still at "The Bankside."

May this, our pioneer stage of today, play well its part in the movement toward a new drama, a drama which will interpret for all time the dream of an emancipated people, a drama which will yet give us a new Shakespeare, an American.

May we bear in mind that our peerless Elizabethan came only after the continuing efforts of many generations of folk-players, after slow years of experimentation in which every English trades-

man had a part. England as a nation of amateur actors, I repeat, prepared the way for him, made him possible. Perhaps now in their enthusiastic revival of the community-pageant the people are preparing for another—this time for the Great One foretold by Ibsen in one of his last plays: “Someone is coming after me who will do it better. . . . Only wait—you may be sure he will come, and let us hear from him.” Perhaps the people’s pageant of today is making ready for the coming of the Promised One, of a new Shakespeare, who will interpret for us in lasting letters the marvel of our own day’s life—the new romanticism of our American Age.