

CALIFORNIA PLAY AND PAGEANT

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California Play and Pageant by Various

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**CALIFORNIA PLAY
AND PAGEANT**

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A record by reminiscence and picture of the plays that have taken place and the pageant customs that have developed upon the campus of the University of California. Published by the English Club.

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GENESIS OF THE GREEK THEATER

GENESIS OF THE GREEK THEATER

When the Class of '94 reached the last term of their senior year, the manner of observing class day became a matter of considerable moment, for there were many in the class who desired to break away from the traditional observance and institute what they believed to be a more pleasing ceremony. Before this time the celebrations were held in Coed Canyon, a little distance east of the Agricultural Building. The program consisted of a class history, a class poem, a prophecy, and a dispensation. These were as a usual rule very amusing to those who were intimately acquainted with the members of the class, but there was little of real interest for the invited guests, since an appreciation of the humor was in a large measure dependent upon a knowledge of the goings and comings and various escapades of the graduates.

The dispensation was made as ludicrous as possible and was the only feature of the exercises that was the least dramatic. The dispensator, who usually appeared in some comical garb, was given full swing, and strove to present to each member of the class something indicative of that student's peculiarities or shortcomings. I remember to have seen a set of boxing gloves given to one student who had shown a very pugnacious spirit during his college life; another had the mask of a donkey's head placed over his own, and one who had paid particular attention to the military department was given a toy sword. In presenting these gifts the dispensator enlarged upon the salient characteristics of his victim and offered such advice as he saw fit—usually humorous or satirical. Such, in brief, were the class day exercises of old—very simple, and, to those on the inside, very amusing.

But the Class of '94 had in mind the presentation of a spectacular performance in which all the class should take part in costume. For this purpose the old place was ill adapted. It was not large

enough, and only those in favored position were able to hear and see with any degree of comfort. The necessity of finding a better place was evident, and I started out to do so. Fortune led me to the spot on which the Greek Theater now stands.

Within a few days Robert Mann, a classmate, visited the place with me. We tested its acoustic properties and found them excellent, and we were sure that everybody in the audience would be able to see the play. So we reported the matter to the class and invited them to visit the spot. They did so, and looked it over carefully. The only objection offered was that to reach it required too long a walk. But this was overruled, for every one was heartily pleased with the place. At the next meeting, which occurred in what was then Professor Bacon's room in North Hall, Robert Mann, in a somewhat jocular vein, moved that the exercises be held in the place and that it be called Ben Weed's Amphitheater, and the motion carried.

The play which we presented was a composite, many members of the class having a hand in the making of it; but those who had it more directly in charge were Maida Castlehoun, Jessica Peixotto, Ed Wilder, Gelett Burgess, who was at that time an instructor in the University, and Frank Norris.

The play was based on the German Vehmgerichte, the secret courts that flourished in Germany in the Middle Ages. This framework gave abundant opportunity to present the incidents of our college life and initiate into our mysterious rites and privileges the candidates from the Class of '95. For the purposes of the court it was necessary to have an altar; so, permission having been obtained, we cut down a large eucalyptus tree which was in the way in the center of the amphitheater, and used the stump for an altar, and fashioned the trunk and branches into a dais for the dignitaries of the court.

At last everything was in readiness and the day came. Will Denman was master of ceremonies, the Altargraf. Our class, costumed in brown gowns and cowls, and chanting a dirge, wound slowly through the trees toward the court. Upon our approach