

**THE PEOPLE'S THEATER.
TRANSLATED
FROM THE FRENCH
OF ROMAIN ROLLAND**

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The People's Theater. Translated from the French of Romain Rolland by Romain Rolland & Barrett H. Clark

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ROMAIN ROLLAND & BARRETT H. CLARK

**THE PEOPLE'S THEATER.
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THE PEOPLE'S THEATER

Translated from the French of

ROMAIN ROLLAND

Author of *Jean-Christophe*, the plays *The Fourteenth of July*
and *Danton*, etc., etc.

BY

BARRETT H. CLARK

Translator of Sardou's *Patris*, *Three Modern Plays from the*
French, etc., etc.; author of *British and American*
Drama of To-day, etc.



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1918

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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

BEFORE the manuscript of this translation was sent to press it was forwarded to M. Rolland for his approval. As neither my publisher nor I knew the whereabouts of M. Rolland and as we had merely heard that he had left France not long after the publication of his war pamphlet *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* and was residing in a sort of exile, we were by no means sure that the typescript or our letters would reach him. But we tried, sending them in care of his Paris publisher.

M. Rolland was finally located, and we began a correspondence from which I shall use certain parts to illustrate this brief preface.

In my original preface to the present volume I had referred to M. Rolland's having retired from public life and being temporarily crushed, but the first letter I received convinced me beyond a doubt that he was far from it. He would never consent to the publication of any translation of his works without first seeing that it rendered faithfully the spirit of the original. He did not care even to discuss terms, and he added, by way of proof of his commercial disinterestedness, that the proceeds of the Nobel Prize, of which he was the recipient not long ago, and which amounted to over \$40,000, he had spent in works of charity.

The manuscripts were therefore sent to him to Villeneuve, in Switzerland. I asked him to look them over, returning only the pages on which he wished to make corrections. A month later I received a letter, from which I quote the most notable passages. It contained one page of the typoscript of *The People's Theater*—from my brief preface.

I ought first to explain that three years ago I spent an afternoon with a friend who had recently visited M. Rolland. He told me at the time that the author of *Au-dessus de la Mêlée* seemed disheartened by the weight of the great war. It was this hint, together with the fact that after diligent search I could find no record of anything new from his pen, that led me to write the paragraph to which our author refers in his letter. Let me quote a short passage from my original preface:

"*The People's Theater* is more than the exposition of a theory; it is autobiography of a sort. Readers and lovers of *Jean-Christophe* will find in this less ambitious work certain hitherto unknown aspects of the soul of the creator of that monumental work. True, this 'work of combat' is youthful, but there is something attractive in the naïve impetuosity with which the young revolutionary sets to work demolishing the idols of the past and attempting to clear the field for a saner, more robust, and healthier drama, and a theater where the workingman and his family may seek relaxation and find food for mind and soul.

"The years have brought maturity to Romain

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Rolland and a touch of scepticism; the weight of the great war has for the time being crushed him; but a man who could so bravely combat prejudice, tradition, and hatred as he, need fear nothing from the future."

The letter from M. Rolland, dated Villeneuve, May 15, 1918, reads as follows:

"DEAR MONSIEUR: I received the proofs of your translations, which gave me great pleasure in reading. They seem to offer a faithful rendering of the text. Perhaps certain expressions in *Danton* are occasionally softened [a literal translation would, however, have rendered them harsher to Anglo-Saxon ears than the author intended], but I am not altogether sure about this. I see no important observation to make, and you may therefore proceed with the publication of the plays—*Danton* and *The Fourteenth of July*. . . .

"Regarding the preface to *The People's Theater*, I thank you. However, I seriously object to certain sentences (on page 9). First, when you say 'this *work of combat* is youthful . . . naïve impetuosity . . . the young revolutionary. . . . The years have brought maturity to R. R. and a touch of scepticism'—you seem to think that since I wrote the book I have changed my opinions of the works and the authors whom I criticized. Nothing of the kind. I still would demolish those 'idols' today with the same enthusiasm.

"Second, I unqualifiedly protest against the sentence 'the weight of the great war has for the time

being crushed him.' Crushed! Not in the least, my dear sir. [The original is delightfully apt: *Nullement écrasé, cher monsieur!*] I have never felt so alert and combative as at the present moment. I am merely *gagged!* It is quite impossible now for me to make public my ideas, because they are too liberal. During the past two years of the war I have written an Aristophanic, satirico-poetic comedy on the events of the day, called *L'Ane de Buridan*. I am writing two novels, likewise inspired by present-day events and dealing with characters of the epoch. One is a 'novel of meditation' entitled *L'Un contre tous*. Many Swiss papers have published extracts from it, though it is not yet complete. The other is a novel of young love.

"Add to these a Rabelaisian novel, the hero of which, a native of Burgundy, like myself, gives his name to the book: *Colas Brugnon*. This is finished, and was even printed in July, 1914; it awaits publication in the office of Ollendorff, my Paris publisher, until the end of the war, for I am loath to have its gaiety made public amid the sorrows of the present time. And, finally, I am writing numerous literary and philosophical articles, as well as essays on current events. These appear in the Swiss magazines—which do not reach America. Whatever the value of these various efforts, you will agree, when you read them, that the war has not in the least depressed me. On the contrary, my ideas differ from those current nowadays, but that

does not bother me. I am only the freer to judge all things, and freedom of soul is dearer to me than happiness itself.

"It is true that today I care much more than I did ten years ago for Voltaire (the Voltaire of the *Contes philosophiques*), and for Erasmus and Montaigne. But not because of their scepticism (you speak of 'a touch of scepticism'); their free and open irony furnishes me with a weapon against prejudice, convention, and the idols of society. I feel that that combat must be fought again today.

"I authorize you to make use of the explanations in this letter, if you deem them interesting or useful.

"Yours, etc.,

"ROMAIN ROLLAND."

A note appended to the page of my preface enclosed in the above letter is well worth quoting, as it throws some light on M. Rolland's present attitude toward war:

"The only play I have written since *The Fourteenth of July* (with the exception of the Aristophanic comedy elsewhere referred to) is *Le Temps viendra*. It is to be reprinted . . . after the war. The problems with which it is concerned [it was laid in South Africa during the Boer war] have once again assumed an air of actuality; and if I have not reprinted it during the past few years . . . it is because I wished to prevent the various 'parties' using as a polemic weapon a work written

ten years before the present war. It was directed (as I state in the preface) not against one particular European nation, but against the whole of European civilization."

M. Rolland has rendered further comment, I think, unnecessary. It is sufficient only to state that *Le Théâtre du peuple* was a polemic against the convention-ridden theater and drama of the day, and a work of inspiration for those who believed that the theater ought to be a place of recreation as well as education—in the broadest sense—for all people, in particular the working classes.

The chapters originally appeared as articles in the *Revue d'art dramatique*, between 1900 and 1903.

Le Théâtre du peuple contains an appendix, quoting many documents of the French Revolution bearing upon the subject of popular festivals. With M. Rolland's permission I have omitted the appendix.

In a very few instances I have taken the liberty of expanding the author's chapter-headings, to guide the reader in search of particular topics.

BARRETT H. CLARK.

Headquarters, Camp Humphreys,
Virginia.
June 22, 1918.