

**AUGUST STRINDBERG
PLAYS; SWANWHITE;
ADVENT; THE STORN**

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August Strindberg Plays; Swanwhite; Advent; The Storn by Edith Oland & Warner Oland

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EDITH OLAND & WARNER OLAND

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AUGUST STRINDBERG
PLAYS

Swanwhite Advent
The Storm

Translated by
EDITH and WÄRNER OLAND

JOHN W. LUCE & COMPANY
BOSTON, 1914

LOAN STACK

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By L. E. Bassett

Boston, Mass., U. S. A.

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FOREWORD

THE plays contained in this volume are representative of that period of Strindberg's life and work, the marvellously productive decade of 1897 to 1907, that followed his crushing mental and spiritual experiences and culminated in the breakdown of 1896, which is the basis of the charge of insanity believed to be true by those who have not followed closely the history of his spiritual career.

Emerging from a few years of literary silence with the record of those torturing gropings for "the light" in the now famed "Inferno," Strindberg turned to a field of dramatic expression, to him wholly new, the mystery play. The result was no less triumphant than it had been with naturalism, and gave us a peculiar atmosphere of *realistic* mysticism even when introducing the realm of the magical. The dialogue is always perfectly natural and the characters are not mere symbolistic marionettes, but flesh and blood creations, characterizations as vivid as those of the great naturalistic tragedies, for it was impossible for Strindberg to write without giving us life — always life, in his astonishing plays, whatever his arrangement of its warring intricacies and passions.

"Advent," the first of the cycle of mystery

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plays, appeared in 1899, about the same time that the first two parts of the great trilogy, "To Damascus," were written. As its purpose is to show the deceit, greed, egoism and vanity of lives whose soul perceptions sense no deeper or finer code of ethics than that of a literal acceptance of the law of Moses, it is bound to hold much that is hideous in its realism, but none the less fascinating as portraiture from this uncompromising truth-teller. It is one of the plays that has never been given a stage production, but there is no reason why it should not play as interestingly as it reads as there is striking originality in the supernatural scenes, and even in this macabre piece, flashes of the grim humor of Strindberg, which is so often missed by his readers and critics, are not lacking. "Advent" certainly leaves no doubt in the reader's mind as to Strindberg's having accomplished the purpose of his stay at Lund, for it was surely written under the spell of the Swedenborgian idea that life is an earthly hell, although the Christian belief in suffering, as a liberator of the spirit, triumphs in the end.

Two years later came the first, and, from the playable point of view, the most important of the group of fairy plays: "Swanwhite," which was one of the most successful plays given at the Intimate Theatre in Stockholm. It is a charming, fanciful, poetic thing and although a genuine fairy play with a happy ending, it has, characteristically, a strain of sad philoso-

phy percolating throughout; for instance, when the little prince exclaims to "Swanwhite" —, "Where are we?" She replies, "Here below! Where the clouds shadow us, where the sea rages, where before sunrise the earth weeps upon the grass! Where the hawk tears the dove, where leaves fall and decay, where hair whitens, cheeks fade, eyes fail, and hands wither. Here below!"

Harriet Bosse, the Norwegian actress who was Strindberg's third wife, is supposed to have been his inspiration for "Swanwhite," although it was Miss Anna Flygare who played the title part when it was produced in 1908.

That Strindberg derived much from Maeterlinckian sources in this play is not only unquestionable but proven by Strindberg's own words in a passage of his "Open Letters to the Intimate Theatre." He says: "When Maeterlinck came into being, about 1890, in the last days of naturalism, I read a criticism of one of his plays. We know, of course, that when a block-head is to criticise the contents of a brilliant piece, the brilliancy sounds foolish. The criticism struck me as satire or nonsense. When, later, in Paris, I came to read Maeterlinck it was a closed book to me, so deeply was I sunk in materialism. But I experienced a certain disquiet and sorrow because I could not comprehend this beauty and depth which I divined and yearned for like one damned from the company of the blessed. Only after the 'Inferno' years,

1896-99, did I get hold of Maeterlinck again, and then he came like a new land, and a new age. . . .

“Under the influence of his wonderful marionette plays, which are not meant for the stage, I wrote my Swedish play: ‘Swanwhite.’ From Maeterlinck one can neither borrow nor steal, one can hardly become his disciple (previous to ‘Monna Vanna’), for to his world of beauty no free entrée exists; but one can be spurred on to seek gold in one’s own dross-heap, and there I confess obligation to the master. Under the influence of Maeterlinck, and borrowing his divining rod, I searched in the wells of ‘Geijer and Afzelius,’ and in Dybeck’s ‘Runics.’ Princes and princesses existed to overflowing; the step-mother motive I had long since discovered in twenty-six Swedish sagas; the raising from the dead was there (and is also to be found in Queen Dagmar’s ‘History’). Then I put everything in the separator, with the maids and the Green Gardener and the Young King, and so the cream was thrown out, and it became mine!

“But it is also mine because I have lived that saga in fancy! A spring, in winter!”

And the disciple soon outstripped the acknowledged master for, as the English critic, Mr. Austin Harrison, Editor of the English Review, points out in one of his eminently intelligent appreciations of Strindberg which have appeared in the Review,

“— he evolved a form and frame of his own