

**THE FOURTEENTH OF  
JULY, AND DANTON;  
TWO PLAYS OF THE  
FRENCH REVOLUTION**

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The Fourteenth of July, and Danton; Two Plays of the French Revolution by Romain Rolland & Barrett H. Clark

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THE  
FOURTEENTH OF JULY  
AND  
DANTON

TWO PLAYS OF THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

BY  
ROMAIN ROLLAND

AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION  
WITH A PREFACE  
BY  
BARRETT H. CLARK



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## ROMAIN ROLLAND AND THE PEOPLE'S THEATER

It is perhaps a little surprising to learn that the author of *Jean-Christophe* has written at least sixteen full-length plays. Most of these, it is true, antedate the publication of the first parts of his epoch-making novel, but since nothing that comes from the brain of Romain Rolland can fail to possess significance and interest, a brief inquiry into his dramatic writings and theories on the drama will reveal an aspect of the man which has hitherto strangely enough scarcely been touched upon. His plays for a people's theater, and his book of projects, are as integral a part of his development as *Jean-Christophe* itself.

The life of M. Rolland seems to have been a perpetual struggle between conflicting mental forces: for years he read philosophy, and suffered agonies before he at last found himself spiritually; until the completion of *Jean-Christophe* he was a prey to doubts regarding the utility of art and the end of life. He applied in turn to the great master-minds of the world—Empedocles, Spinoza, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Beethoven, Tolstoy—seeking for a satisfactory philosophy of life. Small wonder, therefore, that his work should bear the imprint of the masters who have at one time or another been his guides and inspiration.

His two years' sojourn in Rome, from 1890 to 1892,

awakened a passionate interest in the Italian Renaissance, which he immediately translated into plays. It is likely that *Orsino*, *Les Baglioni*, and *Le Siège de Mantoue*, plays of the Renaissance, were inspired by Shakespeare, for whose historical dramas M. Rolland professes a decided partiality. The plays are not published, but if we can judge from the fact that Mounet-Sully wished to produce *Orsino*, they must have shown some of the power of the later plays. At Rome he was associated with the aged revolutionist Malwida von Meysenbug, whom he had met at Versailles some time before, and doubtless the story of her eventful life had its part in shaping his ideals. Four other plays—three of them on classical subjects—belong to this period: *Niobe*, *Caligula*, *Empédocle*, and *Jeanne de Piennes*. It is probable that these also belonged to the writer's period of apprenticeship. At the end of M. Rolland's stay in Rome he went to the Wagner Festival at Bayreuth, in company with Malwida.

Even at this time he was already dreaming of a new theater in France, and his theoretical writings of later times bear unmistakable proof of the impression made upon him by the Bayreuth theater and Wagner's epoch-making ideas on art and the people.

After his marriage in 1892 Romain Rolland returned to Italy, where he gathered material for his thesis, which he presented and successfully upheld at the Sorbonne in 1895. His subject was *The Origins of the Modern Lyric Theater. History of the Opera in Europe Before Lully and Scarlatti*. This he published in book form in 1895. But in addition to his uni-

versity studies and his lectures, he found time to experiment with the dramatic form, and in 1896 he published his *Saint Louis*. As this was later included in a volume called *Tragedies of Faith—Les Tragédies de la Foi*—together with two other plays, he evidently conceived it as one of a series of works based upon a single underlying idea.

*Saint Louis* depicts, in the author's own words, "religious exaltation." In *Saint Louis* and the two other plays which accompany it—*Aërt* and *Le Triomphe de la Raison*—"One can observe the presence of the main currents and passions of the French youth of to-day." All three show "the ardor of sacrifice, but a sacrifice which is courageous, militant: a double reaction against cowardice of thought and cowardice of action, against skepticism and against the relinquishment of the great destiny of the nation." But in spite of this "program," M. Rolland is an artist far too austere to write thesis-plays; he has often spoken in contempt of them. Nor did he in the least appeal to the great public; for his plays have as yet not proved acceptable to them. *Saint Louis* is a beautiful poem, not a tragedy after all, but a triumph, for no hero may see the fruits of his labor, and if a temporary failure seems for a moment to cloud the sky, it is only temporary. This is the message of *Saint Louis*. The good monarch who, "dying at the foot of the mountain, sees Jerusalem only through the eyes of his army," is a figure of hope. *Aërt* takes us from the time of the Crusades to "an imaginary Holland of the seventeenth century." *Aërt*, the son of a murdered patriot, is imprisoned by