

THREE PLAYS

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Three plays by David Pinski & Isaac Goldberg

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DAVID PINSKI & ISAAC GOLDBERG

THREE PLAYS

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ISAAC SHEFTEL

THE LAST JEW

THE DUMB MESSIAH

BY DAVID PINSKI
THE TREASURE
A DRAMA IN FOUR ACTS
ONE DOLLAR
NEW YORK: B. W. HUEBSCH

THREE PLAYS

BY
DAVID PINSKI



AUTHORIZED TRANSLATION FROM THE YIDDISH BY
ISAAC GOLDBERG

NEW YORK
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INTRODUCTION

The twenty-seven plays thus far written by David Pinski may be grouped according to several distinct manners which the playwright has developed. Earliest to appear, as a natural offspring of the proletarian tales that first brought him fame as the discoverer of the Jewish working class, was the drama depicting life among humble folk. The outstanding example of this style is *Isaac Sheftel*, 1899. With *The Last Jew* (*Die Familie Zwie*), 1903-4, Pinski rose from his people's sufferings to the vision of their redemption and the psychological reaction of that vision. This phase of his work came to full fruition in *The Dumb Messiah*, 1911. In one of the greatest plays written in the twentieth century, *The Treasure*, 1906, the dramatist glorified the symbolism and satire already evident in *The Last Jew*, producing a bitter comedy that was to have its less acrid sequel in the purely symbolic, optimistic *Mountain Climbers*, 1912. *Jacob the Blacksmith*, 1906, and notably *Gabriel and the Women*, 1908, initiate the full-length treatment of love and the contemporary sex-problem that had been forecasted in the one-act masterpiece, *Forgotten Souls*, 1904, the most recent examples being the brutally realistic *Better Unborn*, 1914, and the remarkably concise, penetrating *Nina Marden's Loves*, 1915-16. Pinski's purely biblical manner, as distinct from the Messianic dramas mentioned above, is most strikingly illustrated by a series of five one-act plays written between 1913 and 1915, *King David and his Wives*.

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It would be inexact to designate these various manners as "periods" in the progress of the playwright. They do not follow one another in chronological sequence; once, indeed, in a single year, 1906, three manners appear in rapid succession. Again, whatever Pinski writes possesses a vital contemporary significance, so that even his biblical plays, though ancient in inspiration, are distinctly modern in meaning. Yet again, some plays reveal a blending of styles; *Mary Magdalene*, 1910, for instance, belongs at once to the playwright's biblical and sex-problem categories.

When we consider what a relatively large number of Pinski's plays dispense entirely with the love interest and in how many others it is a secondary element—true, too, of his tales—we come to a realization of his chief significance to the contemporary drama. Pinski is, first of all, a realistic psychologist. His portrait gallery is a notable collection of seekers, of souls that have lusted for power and found themselves beaten by powers greater than their own. Death, suicide or resignation is the common lot of such seekers.

Tille, Mary, Gail, Nina Marden,—all are spiritual sisters who seek, by divers means, to achieve dominance. Tille (*The Treasure*) purchases it for a day by a lie that upsets the entire community and exposes the hypocrisy that hides beneath religious garb. Mary of Magdala would triumph over Christ by the sheer voluptuousness of her beauty, yet succumbs to a higher beauty. Gail (*Gabriel and the Women*) conquers her wayward husband through patience and the more homely virtues of womankind; she is a modern Griselda. For Nina Marden is reserved the fate of corrupting every man she seeks to inspire; she would employ her beauty to call forth the best in man, yet can bring out only the worst.

So, too, with Pinski's male protagonists. Isaac Sheftel's intense will to be and to do crumbles upon the ruins of his scant foundations. His is the tragedy of creative vision balked by limitations of environment and education. Reb Mayshe, also (*The Last Jew*), falls upon the threshold of a vision never to be seen by his eyes. The soul of the obsessed Menahem Penini (*The Dumb Messiah*) founders likewise upon the rock of disillusionment.

The plays chosen for inclusion in this volume are arranged in chronological order.

Isaac Sheftel was written from the twenty-first of March to the seventh of April, 1899, in Berlin. The actual time spent upon composition was thirteen days, the last act having been written in seven hours, without interruption. The chief character was suggested to the dramatist by the strange figure of a Warsaw workingman who was gifted with inventive talent, yet sold his contrivances to his employer for a mere pittance in order always to be near his beloved brain children.

The Last Jew, known in Yiddish and in other tongues as *The Zwic Family*, was first conceived in 1900, but only after the Kishinev anti-Semite massacre did the background and the action suggest themselves. The first two acts were written in the summer of 1903; the third act was composed on the twentieth of May, 1904, the day of an examination at Columbia University where Pinski was a post-graduate student, which would have led to his degree as Doctor of Philosophy. The fourth act was completed soon after the third, in two or three days.

Peculiar historic interest is attached to the tragedy. It has been given wherever there were enough Jews to organize a small theater; the one exception to this is New York, where it has never been given in Yiddish upon