

done by French chauvinism, in spite of the undoubtedly peaceable feelings of the French people. Von Jagow is of the opinion that the telegram sent by the Kaiser to the King of England on August 1, promising to cancel the order of attack on France if England guaranteed French neutrality rendered this neutrality easy for the French. But in the first place France could not leave the Russians in the lurch if Germany remained loyal to Austria, and, secondly, the Entente would have had to know whether the German Government was inclined on the reception of an affirmative reply from Paris and London, to withdraw their instructions of July 31. In these instructions forwarded to the German Ambassador in Paris, Germany demanded the fortresses of Toul and Verdun from France as pledges of neutrality. If there had been any intention of adhering to these demands, France and England, even after a first agreement, would, of course, have sent a curt refusal. Herr von Jagow, without mentioning the two objectionable fortresses, calls it 'natural' to demand 'a pledge, and that a strong pledge, for the neutrality of France.' He does not, therefore, seem to think that the German General Staff would have been ready to abate much of its first demands. In Herr von Jagow's book the invasion of Belgium is called '*a formal act of injustice*.' It is regrettable that Herr von Jagow lays stress on the word *formal*.

Herr von Jagow declares that it is monstrous to assert 'that the Imperial Government was thirsting for blood and anxious to bring about war,' and adds that only hypocrisy, ill-will, and ignorance can venture to make such assertions. There is also no doubt whatever that the question of guilt cannot be settled fully without a

searching investigation in all directions, and not by a simple formula. However, quite apart from the many ramifications of the guilt one always comes back again to an 'either — or.' Either the German political-military leaders considered the warlike action of Russia in July, 1914, and the world-war as possible, and, in that case, one does not need to go any closer into the policy which was introduced with the unconditional promise to Austria; or they did not expect either Russia's action or the thoroughly logical and perfectly natural intervention of England, and in that case they made an enormous mistake. As we say, no rain will wash that away. It cannot be got rid of by the most elaborate literary camouflage. In the most terrible of all wars America was then challenged by the unrestricted U-boat madness of the eternal sea conquerors, and all imaginable mistakes were then made — this time against the will of Herr von Jagow, who had wisely retired. Thus we came to Versailles.

The Berliner Tageblatt

A NEW PLAY BY JOHN MASEFIELD

BY REBECCA WEST

MR. MASEFIELD's determination to write tragedy has recently become itself a very touching drama. He is like a man who passionately desires to be the host of royalty, and whom royalty is pleased to visit, since he is so loyal a subject and has a rich treasury for entertainment, but who makes an utter failure of the visit because he cannot grasp the etiquette of the occasion. He ardently invokes the Muse of Tragedy; she comes and he greets her with flushed aspiring face and says, 'Your Majesty, I have a new warm blood bath waiting for

you.' She looks at him stonily; does he not understand that she requires not blood baths but spiritual food? Like royalty, she never explains. She hangs about the house for a day or so, but sulkily; and then in a rage rides away, and Mr. Masefield has to finish his work without her aid. Unfortunately, he never notices that she has gone. He continues serenely, certain that Tragedy must dwell wherever there is a nice warm deep blood bath.

The Faithful, which was produced by the Stage Society recently, is a bad example of this. Mr. Masefield's new tragedy is gloomier than anything else on earth, with the possible exception of some of Mr. Masefield's poetry, and it is not beautiful. Mr. Masefield is a student of Spanish history and literature, and either deliberately or unconsciously he has introduced into his work just that union of excessive gloom and sententiousness which is the curse of Spanish fiction and poetry. Now, these are excusable growths in the soil on which they are found. Excessive gloom is an inevitable feature of a culture that has been set back by adverse political and social conditions, for the crude artist believes that he can make a work of art impressive by calamities just as a cannibal king believes he can make his hut look truly a royal residence if he tips the palisade with severed heads. And sententiousness is merely a sophisticated form of the proverb-making which is the peasant's form of wit.

But these things are ridiculous in Mr. Masefield, who is not crude, and who has but the remotest relationship with the peasant. There is no earthly reason why he should have chosen as the theme of *The Faithful* the Japanese legend of the *Forty-seven Ronin*, which is nothing but a tale of clan vengeance like some of our Highland legends. It certainly gives him one opportunity at

the beginning. Kira, an upstart and oppressive lord, desires the lands of Asano, a just lord; he is the host of the Emperor's Envoy, so it falls to him to instruct Asano in the proper ritual of greeting the Envoy; he teaches him the wrong ritual, so that the Envoy is angered and the crowd jeers, and Asano in fury draws his sword on Kira; this is a capital offense, since the Envoy's court is a sacred place, and he is condemned to commit harikari. That single scene (which aptly symbolizes Mr. Masefield's relations with the Muse of Tragedy — his intentions are excellent, but he performs the wrong ritual) held something of the author's former quality as a playwright; it was as if a draggled bird should suddenly lift a sweeping tail set with glowing eyes and reveal that it was in truth a peacock. There was, moreover, some excellent acting by Mr. Hubert Carter, who as Kira was just such a dark warrior, his face a brown convoluted mass of ferocity, as charges at us from Japanese screens and prints.

But, thereafter, the play was deplorable. The forty-seven serfs, whom Mr. Masefield has reduced to seven no doubt after reluctant consideration of the large stage required for forty-seven extended corpses, refuse to come under Kira's lordship, and become *ronins*, or masterless men. They form a league of vengeance under the leadership of Asano's friend Kurano, who, to disarm suspicion, feigns madness; the form he chooses is not unexpectedly melancholia. A herald then enters, and in sumptuously lugubrious verse, to music which had evidently been composed by Mr. Masefield, informed us that a year had passed and things were still going badly. Kurano and his son have a little talk about Lady Kurano, who has committed suicide, and go off to

have a look at Kira's palace, singing a song about death. The *ronins* file on to the stage and describe how their wives and children are wasting away with starvation, in bald assertions of adversity which sound like a Charity Organization Society's report on a bad district, and they agree to abandon their purpose of revenge. But Kurano comes back with the news that they must come now and murder Kira, for his palace is unguarded. They agree, but each of them first sits down and says his death poem. Kira is discovered in his palace in amorous converse with a serf girl; one would willingly have had this scene prolonged for gross as Kira's proceedings were, they did at least remind one of the human capacity for enjoyment which, in the four hours or so that had passed since the play began, one had almost forgotten. The *ronins* break in and kill Kira; the curtains fall, and then they file back on to the stage and commit harikari on their master's grave. The audience, which long ago had said its death poem, went out with that amazed sense of having been allowed to survive when death was the dispensation of the hour which one used to feel when one came from the cellar after a bad air-raid.

Now, this story is not a tragedy. It is a blood bath. It does not illuminate the workings of the human soul. Its situations are not even conspicuously illustrative of the beauty of fidelity, since the *ronins* had abandoned their purpose of revenge when they got the chance of killing Kira, and the opportunity came to them not as a result of their own efforts but by sheer luck; and the dialogue elucidates nothing because it consists almost entirely of generalizations, chiefly about death. There is indeed a monstrous deal of death to a pennyworth of life in *The Faithful*. For in it

there never comes, as sometimes there came in *Nan* and even in *Pompey the Great*, the essential cry that convinces us that there is speaking a unique soul caught in a unique coil of circumstance; that this is a unique tragic moment in time. When Kurano's son is telling him how Lady Kurano dies he puts it something like this: 'You know Mother killed herself. She said it was a woman's way of being faithful.' Now, not only does this mortuary platitude mean absolutely nothing, but it prevents the audience from feeling that she was a real woman who really died; one could as soon feel sorrow at hearing that an aphorism had split its gizzard.

In the only attempt Mr. Masefield makes to throw off this kind of thing and convey how his characters feel and behave as well as what opinions they hold there is an odd lapse, which shows how entirely abstract his outlook has become. Kurano, coming back from the Envoy's court after the death of Asano, meets a poor girl named Wild Cherry, who is wandering alone because Kira has killed her friend; he tells her that he too has lost a friend at Kira's hands; and they sit down by the roadside and compare their adversities. 'Was your friend fair?' asks the girl. 'No, he was dark,' answers Kurano. 'My friend has fair hair,' says Wild Cherry, 'here is some of it. . . .' Mr. Masefield could never have written that sentence — which since there never has been such a thing as a fair Japanese implies that the girl's friend was an albino — if he had made any attempt to visualize his drama. He has ceased to see. The lack of distinction in his language suggests that he has ceased to hear. He cares for nothing but the adages that are round, and preferably depressing, in the mouth. If Mr. Masefield goes on in this belief that sen-

tentiousness and the multiplication of woes will lift any subject to the level of tragedy, it is impossible to say where he will end.

Ashtaroth: 'A stitch in time saves nine.' (Takes a poniard in each hand and stabs the twins.)

That or something like it will probably be the catastrophe of Mr. Masfield's next drama.

The Outlook

THE TRUE DESTRUCTIVENESS OF WAR

It is customary to say of the devastated areas of France, that they are beyond description. This is one of the recognized gambits of the modern journalist. Having exhausted his vocabulary upon the current events of the day, he invariably tells us, when confronted with the unusual or the unexpected, that words fail him. As indeed they do.

The devastated areas are in one sense quite easily described. The surface of the earth has been churned to the likeness of a choppy sea and it is mostly stripped of vegetation. Ugly fences of barbed wire run here and there with that curious lack of method or intention which is the most striking characteristic of modern warfare as viewed near at hand by an unprofessional eye. The woods are black and dead — perhaps the most desolate features of the landscape. Villages remain at varying levels above the ground. In some cases the land where a village has stood is simply a little stonier than elsewhere. In others the peasants are living in one half or one quarter of their houses. Cities like Soissons and Rheims are for practicable, habitable purposes destroyed. It is impossible to find in certain streets and quarters of these cities a single house which has not been wrecked, and

in Soissons one walks through lanes of bricks and stones collected from the roads and piled on either side.

All this is quite easy to describe and quite easy to imagine, without actually visiting the site. But there is much that cannot be adequately described by a casual first comer. The effect upon the mind of the devastated areas is as difficult to convey as any other spectacle or experience which profoundly appeals to the emotions. It is admittedly beyond the resources of the headline or the tired vocabulary of the newspaper 'correspondent.' Thomas Hardy, the man who gave to Egdon Heath a personality which could be felt, whose scenes have the quality of brooding presences, who often makes us feel that the passion and pain of succeeding generations have been absorbed by his landscapes, could well describe the prospect which lies on either side of the Chemin des Dames, or is viewed from the great Hindenburg redoubt. Even in broad day the dead, unnatural country seems to be haunted. Perhaps it is the silence, or the trees lying under a curse, or the entire absence of life. Or perhaps it is only our own knowledge of what has happened in these regions, our sense of the insane malevolence of the forces of destruction here released, of the anguish and mutilation and fear, of radiant lives smudged out as casually as a fly under the thumb of an idle boy, of the intense concentration within these holes and corners of the battlefield of the best and worst passions of mankind. Something there is that even in the sunlight puts us in the mood to see ghosts — the mood in which men were said to perceive the legionaries standing upon the slopes of the Ring at Casterbridge or in which the evil Quint was seen in full daylight upon his turret.