person." Yet even so she says that she has never seen a "corporeal" vision of Our Lord. It is, I think, admitted by all that God can act directly on the senses which then stir the intelligence, though even then ideas have to be clothed in words as best the recipient can; but also, He can act directly on the soul, which will then, as best it can, put its experience into ideas, and then (if the experience is to be made public or even imagined) into forms expressing shapes, colours and so forth. Lucia's statement that she could not give Our Lady's exact words—"it was rather the sense that came to me and I put what I understood into words"—seems to support the suggestion that it was thus indeed that she received her heavenly communication, even though at other times she said that she repeated Our Lady's *exact* words (not that she did it always in the same way).

No such suggestion is meant to imply a disbelief in the reality of the supernatural nature of the Fatima experiences any more than those of Lourdes which (I venture to repeat) have from youth been a deep assistance to me. But the history of Lourdes is simplicity itself compared with that of Fatima, though I have tried to discuss its records in my mind as carefully as I have tried to study those of Fatima. I know I do not want to be credulous, but also, any critic (in the honest sense) of a marvellous happening must from the outset be ready to think that his view of what seems to him probable may be quite mistaken.

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TWO PLAYS OF RESIGNATION

By

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AT THE EDINBURGH FESTIVAL, two new plays suffused with a religious spirit were performed—although neither of them was exhortatory: Mr. T. S. Eliot's *The Confidential Clerk* and Mr. George Scott-Moncrieff's *Fotheringhay*. In form, *The Confidential Clerk* is a comedy; *Fotheringhay*, a history. Neither play aspires to the state of tragedy; yet both are written in sorrow, and both produce, in different ways, a catharsis.

The sinister suggestions latent in Mr. Eliot's title are not realized: for the confidential clerk is simply a man of business, and all the characters are people ordinary enough, with the partial exception of Colby, the new clerk. Their ordinariness, indeed, is the cause of their unhappiness, and provides the play with its principal theme: the prison of Self. Sir Claude Mulhammer the financier, and his flighty wife Lady Elizabeth, and his protégés Lucasta Angel and Colby, and B. Kaghan the rising young broker, do not understand one another, or themselves, or even from whence they came. The younger people know that they were born out of wedlock, but apprehend little enough else about their world. Sir Claude, in the first act, declares that his principle of action is always to assume that he understands nothing about any man he meets, but that the other man sees into *him* thoroughly; yet even this premise betrays Mulhammer in the end, until he cries, with his eyes shut, "Is Colby coming back?"—knowing now that even the presumed existence of his own son had been an illusion for twenty-five years.

These people, the wrack of broken families, specimens of a generation without certitudes or continuity with the past are involved in the very oldest of dramatic plots—mistaken identity, the missing son, and the comedy of errors. Mr. Eliot revives these devices ingeniously, doubtless with some pleasure in his

anachronisms; and, perhaps consciously, he has written whole speeches that could have been the work of Wilde, and others that could have been Shaw's, and others Ibsen's. Lady Elizabeth, with her "mind study," her Swiss clinics, and her intuitions, would have done credit to Wilde; the bond between Lucasta and Colby, broken by Colby's discovery that they may be brother and sister, has a Shavian touch; while through all three acts, sombrely, the echo of *The Wild Duck* whispers that the truth we seek about ourselves may be our undoing. When all is over, Colby and Lucasta and Kaghan, at least, do know who they are, and in some degree realize their end in life, but they accept the discovery of their true nature with resignation, rather than relief; and upon them all, though most heavily upon Sir Claude Mulhammer, descends a consciousness of the vanity of human wishes.

Everyone in the play (except, perhaps, old Eggerson, the retiring clerk, with his wife and garden and simple virtues) is haunted by a terrifying loneliness and a regret for talents frustrated. Even accomplishment in the arts (Mulhammer would have liked to be an accomplished potter, and Colby a great organist and composer) generally is baffled by the spirit of our age, Mr. Eliot seems to suggest. These people are what Burke called the flies of a summer, unable to link with dead generations or those yet unborn, without memories or high hope. They are seeking for continuity, status, faith; and, beyond all these (though only Colby, perhaps, knows this) some assurance that their lives *matter*, and that the barriers which separate every man from his fellows are transcended by a Reality more than human.

In structure, *The Confidential Clerk* is close to *The Importance of Being Earnest*, even to the revelations in the last act by the old nurse (or rather, here, Mrs. Guzzard, the foster-mother); and it is possible to laugh at certain lines and certain characters. Yet the man who sees *The Confidential Clerk* laughs only like Democritus, at the pathos of all earthly things, for in its essence this play is sad, profoundly sad, as sad as *The Wasteland*. In the second act, especially, occur lines of great tenderness and pathos, as when Lucasta comes to believe that she understands Colby and herself, and is on the brink of self-realization—and this is overwhelmed, in the next instant, by disillusion, or rather illusion of a different sort. Throughout the play, Mr. Eliot treats these people with a

noble mercy and sympathy; they become lovable, indeed, all of them. From Sir Claude to Mrs. Guzzard, they are men and women of kindly natures, honest inclination, and generous hearts. But, being human, they are heir to all the imperfections of the spirit and the flesh; thus they cannot escape the rootlessness of their time, nor the sense of talents run to waste, nor the prison of Self. They do not know themselves or the nature of being.

Lucasta thinks that Colby is different from all the rest of them, for he can withdraw from their midst into his garden of the imagination, a sanctuary from the material world of desolation; but Colby himself knows better: his garden of the mind is as lonely as the real world without. If Colby had conviction of an abiding reality that transcends the Wasteland—why, then, indeed, he never would be solitary in his realm of imagination, for "God would walk in my garden." Lacking this faith, however, the man is left melancholy and unnerved, deprived of love, and scarcely caring who his parents may be. We see him, near the end of the third act, groping toward a churchly vocation; yet only Eggerson, the practical old clerk, has come close to understanding Colby. Lucasta, turning back to Kaghan for some sense of affection and belonging, thinks that Colby needs no human company, being secure in the citadel of self-knowledge; she does not know how like a citadel is to a prison.

Although successful enough as a dramatic production, *The Confidential Clerk* will be remembered more for its occasional lines of melancholy beauty and its penetration into the recesses of Self than as a neat and close-knit play; nor is it, I am inclined to believe, likely to be considered one of Mr. Eliot's principal works. Yet I am not sure of this last: this is a play which touches most movingly upon the sources of longing and the need for enduring love, and so bears the mark of a man of genius.

Resignation is what Colby and Lucasta attain in *The Confidential Clerk*; and Christian resignation in a great queen is the theme of *Fotheringhay*. Mary Stuart had been a prisoner for nearly twenty years when she was brought to the block at Fotheringhay Castle —noblest, like her grandson, in the hour of her death. "In my end is my beginning," was what she said; the words have rung true; and in Mr. Scott-Moncrieff's play we see her when that end is close at hand, in November 1586, with sentence of death

hanging over her, though Elizabeth has not signed the warrant. The action, representing only a few hours, occurs wholly in Mary's state apartment at Fotheringhay, and (what is unique in plays about the Queen of Scots) remains wholly faithful to history, no liberties being taken with characters or events, even to the denial of certain dramatic opportunities. Except for the Queen's subduing of her own pride and her resignation to her end, there is no development in *Fotheringhay*: the course of things is beyond the influence of anyone there, even beyond Sir Amyas Paulet, the keeper of Fotheringhay; and Mary's cause had fallen to its final ruin long, long before, when Morton hanged Kirkcaldy of Grange upon the rock at Edinburgh. Mundane hope never touches this dark castle. Yet the heroic soul of Mary, crushing down despair even though she is broken in body and in prospects, triumphs over the damp walls of Fotheringhay and the tooth of Time.

Now here, clearly, are limitations to try the talents of any dramatist; moreover, Mr. Scott-Moncrieff has confined himself to a handful of characters (the Queen, her two ladies, her doctor, her jailer, an officer of the guard—and three phantoms); he attempts a theme which has been worked upon by poets and playwrights since Schiller; and he chooses to write in unrhymed verse. Perhaps most people who went to see *Fotheringhay* had prepared themselves, then, for a comparative failure of good intentions. Nothing of the sort occurred: *Fotheringhay* is a successful play, strongly convincing, and leaving an impression that endures long. Here and there, room remains for some improvement in the stage production; now and then a line might be mended, perhaps. But the language of *Fotheringhay* is noble, eloquent, and moving; the drawing of character is executed with skill; and, more remarkable still, the play seems to move rapidly, despite the absence of action. Out of *Fotheringhay* a conscience speaks to a conscience. Its lines and its significance are courageous and manly. And apropos of prison-plays, it occurred to me, during the performance, how feeble a thing is *A Sleep of Prisoners* by the side of this drama.

In part, the illusion of action and swift passage of time is produced by two very good actresses: Miss Marie Ney as the Queen, majestic, charming still, though nearly purged of earthly dross; and Miss Catherine Lacey as Janet Kennedy, the Queen's passionate adherent. These two bring life into the silent and ominous audience-chamber. But the problem of action and development is solved also, in this play, by Mr. Scott-Moncrieff's necromancy: he gives *Fotheringhay* historical depth by conjuring up three ghosts, in the second act, to try the soul of Mary and to illuminate, by their reflections, the meaning of her life. Though they are merely of the order of ghosts that dwell in the brooding minds of men still on earth, shades of the dead we have known, still upon the stage they assume a substance and vigour which lets them tower above the pallid and dying Queen, as weary of life as these shadows are eager to snatch at it. For Mary, the rude and violent Past has more reality now than the doomed and motionless Present.

These visions from the abyss are John Knox, Lady Margaret Douglas, and Bothwell. It might have been interesting to pit the Queen's directness and even rashness of mind against the shade of Maitland of Lethington, her Machiavellian adherent or enemy, as expediency dictated; but probably it would have been too much to expect even a Scottish audience to know enough of Lethington to enter satisfactorily into this colloquy. Though in some respects the dialogue between Mary and Knox is the finest part of all the play, upon the stage the scene might have been better contrived: Knox sits down upon a bench, for instance, which seemed out of character in that terrible and restless preacher, and makes him altogether too substantial for a shade. Mr. Scott-Moncrieff catches masterfully the tone of Knox's eloquence:

> "I was God's humble servant and in me
> Shone forth his vengeance on an evil age.
> I came to castigate and cast down pride,
> To stir repentance from the fuming pot
> Of courtiers' fripperies and Frenchy talk.
> I came as Balaam came to warn,
> And Jonah to the Ninevites,
> To scourge your lechery and lust
> And tell your beauties that their cheeks and hair
> Go down to worms and dust."

In his stage-directions, Mr. Scott-Moncrieff refers to the shade of Knox as "only occasionally revealing itself as ludicrous and even, to the compassionate, pathetic." There were touches of the ludicrous and the pathetic in the real Knox, very probably—even

in that fierce and fearless man who flung down church and state and recast the character of a whole nation; but it is extremely difficult to represent such intricacies in a few minutes' time upon a stage. For all that, Mr. Scott-Moncrieff understands Knox, faithfully reproducing his style of argument, which was all passion and denunciation, a world away from the logic-chopping of Calvin. Anyone who reads the colloquies between Knox and Lethington, as recorded in Knox's own *History of the Reformation*, will perceive how impossible it was for Mary's words to make any impression upon the inexorable preacher, convinced of the infallibility of his own conscience; and in such fashion their discourse proceeds in this play.

Lady Margaret Douglas, Mary's jailer in Loch Leven long before and always Mary's hard hater—for she would have had her own son Moray upon the throne—comes next, in this succession of shadows, and counsels the Queen to seek life at any cost, without regard for regal dignity—and slinks back into the Past, baffled by the Queen's resolution. Then dead Bothwell stalks into the hall, hard and rapacious as in life, to reproach Mary for failing him and their common cause, by denying him her submission which rape could not enforce, and thus unmanning him; repelling Bothwell, Mary casts off the errors of her old self:

> "There cries the voice of ugly sentiment!"
> All the deranged possessiveness of man,
> The lush ambition and the gilded letch
> That make parade of constancy and honour
> To set a human heaven against God,
> While justifying every crime and lie
> That plays the pander to an arch-desire!
> Yet mine's the shame that ever I did yield.

At the end of these visions of the night, the Queen cries out, and her attendants hurry to her; but even this poor remnant of a court will not be hers long. Her doctor no longer can search for herbs to ease her pain; her dais is pulled down by order of the Council; her lady Janet is nearly banished from Fotheringhay, saved only by the Queen's entreaty for Janet's sake; and, toward the end, the keeper of Fotheringhay orders her bed to be draped in black. All these indignities Mary meets with that high courage her house commonly showed in adversity, and with a dignity

unbroken, confident to the last of her cause's righteousness and great in her royal authority that no mere man might justly sweep away. Sir Amyas Paulet, portrayed as the man history shows him to have been, is a cross-grained old gentleman, not pleased with his responsibilities, but determined to follow to the letter the instructions of Elizabeth and the Council; Mr. Scott-Moncrieff refrains from the opportunity to exercise dramatic licence by representing Paulet as won over, like other men before him, by Mary's charm and courage.

In the concluding act, the Queen has attained the resignation, that triumph over pride and love of life, which is the greatest victory of all her turbulent days; she waits upon God. Jesting and singing, Mary endeavours to cheer her women with the warmth of her own great heart. Janet asks her if she finds it easy to think on death; and Mary replies,

> "Not easy,
> I am still happed in my rebellious flesh
> That like a horse ill-broken starts
> Incontinent at fear afresh.
> But Christ, my rein, will check my pace
> To teach me walk in His humility."

Then, in the distance, the trumpet sounds which signifies that her sentence of death is proclaimed in every market-place.

Mr. Scott-Moncrieff means his play to be a vindication of a great-souled queen and indomitable woman whose memory romantic biographers and partisan historians have distorted out of all meaning. Mary Queen of Scots, like us all, sinned more than once; but her sins were not what Knox thought they were; and her virtues were of an order so superior to the temper of her age that when the axe fell at Fotheringhay, she stood utterly alone, not a sword drawn on all the Border for rescue or vengeance. *Fotheringhay* is a play written with a burning honesty, and in a style worthy of its subject. It deserves to be seen in more places than Edinburgh.