A MASQUE OF AESOP
ANNOTATED EDITION
Inquiries about the production of this play and about the original music to accompany the songs, composed by H. E. Atack and J. A. Dawson, should be addressed to the publishers, Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 103 St. Clair Avenue West, Toronto.
A MASQUE OF AESOP

By

ROBERTSON DAVIES

Decorations by GRANT MACDONALD

Toronto
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A M A S O N E O F A E S O P

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INTRODUCTION

This play was written to be performed by the boys of the Preparatory School of Upper Canada College, as part of the celebrations for their Jubilee Year. When the Headmaster asked me for a play I was happy to comply, because for some time I had been interested in writing something for young actors. The boy actors who played the women’s parts in the theatre of Elizabethan and Jacobean England have long interested me; if a boy could play Juliet, or Rosalind, or Doll Common or the Duchess of Malfi, a boy of today could certainly play anything which asked the same acting qualities of him—good declamation and a broad, direct acting style. If anyone wishes to pursue this matter further, I have argued it at length in a book called Shakespeare's Boy Actors.

Mr. A. G. L. Stephen’s request set me the interesting task of writing something which did not require a theatre for its performance; he also offered the attraction of actors who could sing, and a good student orchestra. Plainly, what was called for was a Masque—a form of entertainment which we have allowed to disappear, but which permits a freedom difficult to achieve in a play of conventional form.

In A Masque of Aesop there is some jumbling of the names of the ancient gods; if Apollo and the Parcae appear in a play it is reasonable to demand that Aphrodite and Hephaistos appear as well, and not Venus and Vulcan, as I have named them. But there are so many grosser anachronisms in the piece that I have decided to leave it as it stands, and if any classical scholar disapproves I must bear his disapproval as I did so often when a school-
boy. This is not simply an impudent defiance of scholars, but a low playwright’s notion that most people know who Venus’s husband was, and how she treated him, while not so many can name the spouse of Aphrodite.

I am grateful to the Headmaster and the staff of the U.C.C. Preparatory School, who worked so imaginatively to give this Masque its first production, and to the publishers, who have seen fit to give this permanent form to my tribute to a school which I deeply admire.

Robertson Davies

Dominion Day

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