

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF
HENRIK IBSEN

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VOLUME V
EMPEROR AND
GALILEAN

A WORLD-HISTORIC DRAMA

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY
WILLIAM ARCHER



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WILLIAM HEINEMANN

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THE SELECTED WORKS OF
HENRIK IBSEN

VOLUME

THE EMPEROR AND GALILEAN

(1873)

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EMPEROR AND GALILEAN.

INTRODUCTION.

IN a speech delivered at Copenhagen in 1898, Ibsen said : " It is now thirty-four years since I journeyed southward by way of Germany and Austria, and passed through the Alps on May 9. Over the mountains the clouds hung like a great dark curtain. We plunged in under it, steamed through the tunnel, and suddenly found ourselves at Miramare, where the beauty of the South, a strange luminosity, shining like white marble, suddenly revealed itself to me, and left its mark on my whole subsequent production, even though it may not all have taken the form of beauty." Whatever else may have had its origin in this memorable moment of revelation, *Emperor and Galilean* certainly sprang from it. The poet felt an irresistible impulse to let his imagination loose in the Mediterranean world of sunshine and marble that had suddenly burst upon him. Antiquity sprang to life before his mental vision, and he felt that he must capture and perpetuate the shining pageant in the medium of his art. We see throughout the play how constantly the element of external picturesqueness was present to his mind. Though it has only once or twice found its way to the

stage,¹ it is nevertheless—for good and for ill—a great piece of scene-painting.

It did not take him long to decide upon the central figure for his picture. What moved him, as it must move every one who brings to Rome the smallest scintilla of imagination, was the spectacle of a superb civilisation, a polity of giant strength and radiant beauty, obliterated, save for a few pathetic fragments, and overlaid by forms of life in many ways so retrograde and inferior. The Rome of the sixties, even more than the Rome of to-day, was a standing monument to the triumph of mediævalism over antiquity. The poet who would give dramatic utterance to the emotions engendered by this spectacle must almost inevitably pitch upon the decisive moment in the transition—and Ibsen found that moment in the reaction of Julian. He attributed to it more “world-historic” import than the sober historian is disposed to allow it. Gaetano Negri² shows very clearly (what, indeed, is plain enough in Gibbon) that Julian’s action had not the critical importance which Ibsen assigns to it. His brief reign produced, as nearly as possible, no effect at all upon the evolution of Christianity. None the less is it true that Julian made a spiritual struggle of what had been, to his predecessors, a mere question of politics, one might almost say of police. Never until his day did the opposing forces confront each other in full consciousness of what was at stake; and never after his day had they even the semblance of equality requisite to give the struggle dramatic

¹ It was acted at the Leipzig Stadttheater, December 5, 1896, and at the Belle-Alliance Theater, Berlin, on the occasion of the poet’s seventieth birthday, in March 1898. It must, of course, have been enormously cut down.

² *Julian the Apostate*. 2 vols. London, 1905.

interest. As a dramatist, then—whatever the historian may say—Ibsen chose his protagonist with unerring instinct. Julian was the last, and not the least, of the heroes of antiquity.

Ibsen had been in Rome only two or three months when he wrote to Björnson (September 16, 1864): "I am busied with a long poem, and have in preparation a tragedy, *Julianus Apostata*, a piece of work which I set about with intense gusto, and in which I believe I shall succeed. I hope to have both finished next spring, or, at any rate, in the course of the summer." As regards *Julianus Apostata*, this hope was very far astray, for nine years elapsed before the play was finished.¹ Not till May 4, 1866, is the project again mentioned, when Ibsen writes to his friend, Michael Birkeland, that, though the Danish poet, Hauch, has in the meantime produced a play on the same theme, he does not intend to abandon it. On May 21, 1866, he writes to his publisher, Hegel, that, now that *Brand* is out of hand, he is still undecided what subject to tackle next. "I feel more and more disposed," he says, "to set to work in earnest at *Kejser Julian*, which I have had in mind for two years." He feels sure that Hauch's conception of the subject must be entirely different from his; and he does not intend to read Hauch's play. On July 22, 1866, he writes from Frascati to Paul Botten-Hansen that he is "wrestling with a subject and knows that he will soon get the upper hand of the brute." His German editors take this to refer to *Emperor and Galilean*, and they are probably right; but it is not quite certain. The work he actually produced was

¹ The poem was never finished at all. It is doubtless that of which a fragment has been recovered and is about to be published (1907).

Peer Gynt; and we know that he had a third subject in mind at the time. We hear no more of Julian until October 28, 1870, when, in his autobiographic letter to Peter Hansen, he writes from Dresden: ". . . Here I live in a tediously well-ordered community. What will become of me when at last I actually reach home! I must seek salvation in remoteness of subject, and think of attacking *Kejser Julian*."

This was, in fact, to be his next work; but two years and a half were still to pass before he finally "got the upper hand of the brute." On January 18, 1871, he writes to Hegel: "Your supposition that *Julian* is so far advanced that it may go to the printers next month arises from a misunderstanding. The first part is finished; I am working at the second part; but the third part is not even begun. This third part will, however, go comparatively quickly, and I confidently hope to place the whole in your hands by the month of June." This is the first mention we have of the division into three parts, which he ultimately abandoned. If Hegel looked for the manuscript in June, he looked in vain. On July 12 Ibsen wrote to him: "Now for the reason of my long silence: I am hard at work on *Kejser Julian*. This book will be my chief work, and it is engrossing all my thoughts and all my time. That positive view of the world which the critics have so long been demanding of me, they will find here." Then he asks Hegel to procure for him three articles on *Julian* by Pastor Listov, which had appeared in the Danish paper, *Fædrelandet*, and inquires whether there is in Danish any other statement of the facts of Julian's career. "I have Neander's German works on the subject; also D. Strauss's; but the latter's book contains nothing

but argumentative figments,¹ and that sort of thing I can do myself. It is facts that I require." His demand for more facts, even at this stage of the proceedings, shows that his work must still have been in a pretty fluid state.

Two months later (September 24, 1871) Ibsen wrote to Brandes, who had apparently been urging him to "hang out a banner" or nail his colours to the mast: "While I have been busied upon *Julian*, I have become, in a way, a fatalist; and yet this play will be a sort of a banner. Do not be afraid, however, of any tendency-nonsense: I look at the characters, at the conflicting designs, at *history*, and do not concern myself with the 'moral' of it all. Of course, you will not confound the moral of history with its philosophy; for that must inevitably shine forth as the final verdict on the conflicting and conquering forces." On December 27 (still from Dresden) he writes to Hegel: "My new work goes steadily forward. The first part, *Julian and the Philosophers*, in three acts, is already copied out. . . . I am busily at work upon the second part, which will go quicker and be considerably shorter; the third part, on the other hand, will be somewhat longer." To the same correspondent, on April 24, 1872, he reports the second part almost finished. "The third and last part," he says, "will be mere child's play. The spring has now come, and the warm season is my best time for working." To Brandes, on May 31, he writes, "I go on wrestling with *Julian*"; and on July 23 (from Berchtesgaden) "That monster *Julian* has still such a grip of me that I cannot shake him off." On August 8 he announces to Hegel that he

¹ It was, in fact, a pamphlet aimed at Frederick William IV. of Prussia, and entitled *A Romanticist on the Throne of the Caesars*.

has "completed the second part of the trilogy. The first part, *Julian and the Philosophers*, a play in three acts, will make about a hundred printed pages. The second part, *Julian's Apostasy*, a play in three acts, of which I am now making a fair copy, will be of about equal length. The third play, *Julian on the Imperial Throne*, will run to five acts, and my preparations for it are so far advanced that I shall get it out of hand very much quicker than the others. What I have done forms a whole in itself, and could quite well be published separately ; but for the sake of the complete impression I think it most advisable that all three plays should appear together."

Two months later (October 14) the poet is back in Dresden, and writes as follows to a new and much-valued friend, Mr Edmund Gosse: "I am working daily at *Julianus Apostata*, and . . . hope that it may meet with your approval. I am putting into this book a part of my own spiritual life ; what I depict, I have, under other forms, myself gone through, and the historic theme I have chosen has also a much closer relation to the movements of our own time than one might at first suppose. I believe such a relation to be indispensable to every modern treatment of so remote a subject, if it is, as a poem, to arouse interest." In a somewhat later letter to Mr. Gosse he says : "I have kept strictly to history . . . And yet I have put much self-anatomy into this book."

In February 1873 the play was finished. On the 4th of that month Ibsen writes to his old friend Ludvig Daae that he is on the point of beginning his fair copy of what he can confidently say will be his "Hauptwerk," and wants some guidance as to the proper way of spelling Greek names. Oddly enough, he is still in search of facts, and asks for information

as to the *Vita Maximi* of Eunapius, which has not been accessible to him. Two days later (February 6) he writes to Hegel: "I have the great pleasure of being able to inform you that my long work is finished—and more to my satisfaction than any of my earlier works. The book is entitled *Emperor and Galilean, a World-Drama in Two Parts*. It contains: Part First, *Caesar's Apostasy*; play in five acts (170 pp.); Part Second, *The Emperor Julian*, play in five acts (252 pp.) . . . Owing to the growth of the idea during the process of composition, I shall have to make another fair copy of the first play. But it will not become longer in the process; on the contrary, I hope to reduce it by about twenty pages. . . . This play has been to me a labour of Hercules—not the actual composition that has been easy—but the effort it has cost me to live myself into a fresh and visual realisation of so remote and so unfamiliar an age" On February 23, he writes to Ludvig Daae, discussing further the orthography of the Greek names, and adding: "My play deals with a struggle between two irreconcilable powers in the life of the world—a struggle which will always repeat itself. Because of this universality, I call the book 'a world-historic drama.' For the rest, there is in the character of Julian, as in most that I have written during my riper years, more of my own spiritual experience than I care to acknowledge to the public. But it is at the same time an entirely realistic piece of work. The figures stood solidly before my eyes in the light of their time—and I hope they will so stand before the readers' eyes."

The book was not published until the autumn (October 16, 1873). On September 8, Ibsen wrote to Brandes that he was daily expecting its appearance. "I hear from Norway," he went on, "that Björnson,

though he cannot know anything about the book, has declared it to be 'Atheism,' adding that it was inevitable it should come to that with me. What the book is or is not I won't attempt to decide; I only know that I have energetically seen a fragment of the history of humanity, and what I saw I have tried to reproduce." On the very day of the book's appearance, he again writes to Brandes from Dresden: "The direction public affairs have taken in these parts gives this poem an actuality I myself had not foreseen."

A second edition of *Emperor and Galilean* appeared in December 1873. In the following January Ibsen writes to Mr. Gosse, who had expressed some regret at his abandonment of verse: "The illusion I wished to produce was that of reality. I wished to leave on the reader's mind the impression that what he had read had actually happened. By employing verse I should have counteracted my own intention. . . . The many everyday, insignificant characters, whom I have intentionally introduced, would have become indistinct and mixed up with each other had I made them all speak in rhythmic measure. We no longer live in the days of Shakespeare. . . . The style ought to conform to the degree of ideality imparted to the whole presentment. My play is no tragedy in the ancient acceptation. My desire was to depict human beings and therefore I would not make them speak the language of the gods." A year later (January 30, 1875) he thus answers a criticism by George Brandes: "I cannot but find an inconsistency between your disapproval of the doctrine of necessity contained in my book, and your approval of something very similar in Paul Heyse's *Kinder der Welt*. For in my opinion it comes to much the same thing whether, in writing of a

person's character, I say 'It runs in his blood' or 'He is free—under necessity.'"

An expression in the same letter throws light on the idea which may be called the keystone of the arch of thought erected in this play. "Only entire nations," Ibsen writes, "can join in great intellectual movements. A change of front in our conception of life and of the world is no parochial matter; and we Scandinavians, as compared with other European nations, have not yet got beyond the parish-council standpoint. But nowhere do you find a parish-council anticipating and furthering 'the third empire.'" To the like effect runs a passage in a speech delivered at Stockholm, September 24, 1887: "I have sometimes been called a pessimist: and indeed I am one, inasmuch as I do not believe in the eternity of human ideals. But I am also an optimist, inasmuch as I fully and confidently believe in the ideals' power of propagation and of development. Especially and definitely do I believe that the ideals of our time, as they pass away, are tending towards that which, in my drama of *Emperor and Galilean*, I have designated as 'the third empire.' Let me therefore drain my glass to the growing, the coming time."

The latest (so far as I know) of Ibsen's references to this play is perhaps the most significant of all. It occurs in a letter to the Danish-German scholar Julius Hoffory, written from Munich, February 26, 1888: "*Emperor and Galilean* is not the first work I wrote in Germany, but doubtless the first that I wrote under the influence of German spiritual life. When, in the autumn of 1868, I came from Italy to Dresden, I brought with me the plan of *The League of Youth*, and wrote that play in the following winter. During my four years' stay in Rome, I had merely made various

historical studies, and taken sundry notes, for *Emperor and Galilean*; I had not sketched out any definite plan, much less written any of it. My view of life was still, at that time, National-Scandinavian, wherefore I could not master the foreign material. Then, in Germany, I lived through the great time, the year of the war, and the development which followed it. This brought with it for me, at many points, an impulse of transformation. My conception of world-history and of human life had hitherto been a national one. It now widened into a racial conception; and then I could write *Emperor and Galilean*."

I have now brought together those utterances of Ibsen's which relate the external history of the great double-drama, and give us some insight into the spiritual influences which inspired and shaped it. We have seen that, at the time of its completion, he confidently regarded it as his masterpiece. It is the habit of many artists always to think their last work their best; but there is nothing to show that this was one of Ibsen's foibles. Moreover, even towards the end of his life, when the poet was asked by Professor Schofield, of Harvard, what work he considered his greatest, he replied, *Emperor and Galilean*. If this was his deliberate and lasting opinion, we have here another curious instance of the tendency, so frequent among authors, to capricious over-valuation of one or another of their less successful efforts. Certainly we should be very sorry to miss this splendid fresco of the decadent Empire from the list of Ibsen's works; but neither technically nor intellectually—unless I am very much mistaken—can it rank among his masterpieces.

Of all historical plays it is perhaps the most strictly historical. Apart from some unimportant chronological rearrangements, the main lines of Julian's career are reproduced with extraordinary fidelity. The individual occurrences of the first play are for the most part invented, and the dialogue freely composed ; but the second play is a mere mosaic of historical or legendary incidents, while a large part of the dialogue is taken, almost word for word, either from Julian's own writings, or from other historical or quasi-historical documents. I will try to distinguish briefly between the elements of history and fiction in the first play : in the second there is practically no fiction save the fictions of Gregory and the ecclesiastical historians.

The details of the first act have no historical foundation. Gallus was not appointed Caesar on any such occasion as Ibsen describes ; and there seems to be no hint of any intrigue between him and Helena. The character of Agathon is fictitious, though all that is related of Julian's life in Cappadocia is historical. The meeting with Libanius is an invention ; and it was to Nicomedia, not to Pergamus, that Julian was sent shortly after the elevation of his brother to the second place in the Empire.

The chronological order of the events on which the second and third acts are founded is reversed by Ibsen. Julian fell under the influence of Maximus before ever he went to Athens. Eunapius relates his saying, "I go where torches light themselves, and where statues smile," or words to that effect ; but they were spoken at Pergamus to Chrysantius, a Neo-Platonist, who, while deprecating the thaumaturgic methods of Maximus, averred that he himself had witnessed this marvel. For the details of the symposium at Ephesus there is

no foundation, though Gregory and others relate weird legends of supernatural experiences which Julian underwent at the instance of Maximus. Not till after the disgrace and death of Gallus did Julian proceed to Athens, where he did not study under Libanius. Indeed, I cannot discover that he ever personally encountered Libanius before his accession to the throne. It is true that Gregory and Basil were his fellow students at Athens; but the tender friendship which Ibsen represents as existing between them is certainly imaginary.

All the military events at Paris, and the story of Julian's victory over Knodomar, are strictly historical. Helena, however, did not die at Paris, but at Vienne, after her husband had assumed the purple. Her death was said to have been indirectly due to a jealous machination of the Empress Eusebia; but the incident of the poisoned fruit is quite fictitious, and equally so are the vague enormities revealed in the dying woman's delirium. From the fact that Julian is strangely silent about his wife, we may conjecture that their marriage was not a happy one; but this is all the foundation Ibsen had to build upon.¹

¹ I may, perhaps, be excused for quoting at this point an extract from a review of Negri's *Julian the Apostate*, in which I tried to summarise the reasons of Julian's hatred of Christianity: "Firstly, he was unmoved by the merits of the Christian ethic, even where it coincided with his own, because he saw it so flagrantly ignored by the corrupt Christianity of his day. A puritan in the purple, he was morally too Christian to be a Christian of the fourth-century Church. Secondly, he hated the pessimism of Christianity—that very throwing forward of its hopes to the life beyond the grave which so eminently fitted it to a period of social catastrophe and dissolution. He found its heaven and hell vulgar and contemptible, and regarded the average Christian as a sort of spiritual brandy-tippler, who rejected, for a crude stimulant and anodyne, the delicate lemonade of Neo-Platonic polytheism. Thirdly, he resented what he called the 'atheism' of Christianity, its elimination

For the scene in the Catacombs at Vienne there is nothing that can fairly be called a historic basis. It is true that, after assuming the purple, Julian did at one time endanger his position by shutting himself away from his soldiery; it is true, or at least it is related, that Julian "brought from Greece into Gaul the high priest of the mysteries—the Hierophant, as he was called [not Maximus]—and did not decide to rebel until he had, with the greatest secrecy, accomplished the prescribed sacred rites." There is also a vague, and probably mythical, report of his having gone through some barbarous ceremony of purification, in order to wipe out the stain of his baptism. On such slight suggestions did Ibsen build up the elaborate fabric of his fifth act. The character of Sallust, like that of Oribases, is historical: but of any approach to double-dealing on the part of the excellent Sallust there is no hint. As there is no foundation for the infidelity of the living Helena, so there is no foundation for the part played by Helena dead in determining Julian's apostasy.

While Ibsen invents, however, he does not falsify; it is when he ceases to invent (paradoxically enough) that falsification sets in. In all essentials, this first play of the divine from Nature, leaving it inanimate and chilly. Fourthly, like the earlier Emperors, he deemed Christianity anti-social, and the Christian potentially and probably, if not actually, a bad citizen of the Empire. Fifthly, he hated the aggressive intolerance of Christianity, its inability to live and let live, its polemical paroxysms, and iconoclastic frenzies. . . . These were the main elements in his anti-Christianity; and yet they are not, taken together, quite sufficient to account for the measureless scorn with which he invariably speaks of 'Galileans.' One cannot but feel that Christianity must have done him some personal injury, not clearly known to us. Was he simply humiliated by the hypocrisy he had had to practise in his boyhood and youth? Or was Ibsen right in divining some painful mystery behind his certainly unsatisfactory relations with his Christian consort, Helena?"

is a representation of the youth of Julian as just as it is vivid. His character is very truly portrayed—his intellectual and moral earnestness, his superstition, his vanity, his bravery, his military genius. The individual scenes are full of poetic and dramatic inspiration. There may be some question, indeed, as to the artistic legitimacy of the employment of the supernatural in the third act; but of its imaginative power there can be no doubt. The drama progresses in an ever-ascending scale of interest, from the idyllic-spectacular opening, through the philosophic second act, the mystic third act, the stirring and terrible fourth act, up to the magnificent poetic melodrama of the fifth. In a slightly old-fashioned, romantic style, the play is as impressive to the imagination as it is, in all essentials, faithful to historic fact.

When Julian has ascended the throne, a wholly different method of treatment sets in. We could almost guess from internal evidence, what Ibsen's letters prove to be the fact—that he underwent a decisive change of mental attitude during the process of composition. The original first part, we see (that is to say the three-act play which was to have been called *Julian and the Philosophers*), was finished some time before January 18, 1871, on which date he tells Hegel that he is already at work on the second part. But January 18, 1871, was the very day on which, at Versailles, the King of Prussia was proclaimed German Emperor; so that the first part must have been written before the Imperialisation of Germany was even to be foreseen. While the poet was engaged upon the second part of the "trilogy" he then designed, he was doubtless brooding over the great event of January 18, and gradually realising its nature and consequences. That change in his mental attitude was