

tainers. That Edward VII had in a sense discovered her was no doubt helpful, too.

Finally, there were significant factors in the way she portrayed Salome that fascinated her public. In presenting her as an apparently innocent girl who, while experiencing a "vision," liberates her perverse and repressed emotions to the point of catharsis, Maud made Salome a mystifying mixture of the erotic and the exotic, artfully shrouded in a veil of Edwardian discretion and good taste.⁹ Her London audiences, supposedly more proper than most of those on the Continent, willingly mistook her bare feet, her painted toenails, her lack of tights, for various degrees of nudity. For many women she represented an enviable freedom, although Maud was the least emotionally liberated of women. For many men, she was little more than a delightfully refreshing sex symbol.¹⁰

Hailed by leading members of London's cultural establishment as a profoundly musical and imaginative artist, sought after by London society, and celebrated by London's West End patrons more interested in entertainment than in art, Maud Allan became a household name. She also became a tempting target for conservative clerics for whom her audacity was a cause for alarm and topic for sermons. For, ever since Cromwell's time – and indeed until 1964 – the portrayal of biblical (and royal) characters on the stage had been forbidden.

The attacks, which were not long in coming, were reported in the San Francisco press. The *San Francisco Examiner* of April 26, 1908, ran a banner headline, "Great Fuss over John the Baptist's Head," and asked whether it is "proper or even good art for a beautiful young woman, a dancer of voluptuous figure, to appear bare-footed in a single diaphanous garment – no tights or undergarments of any kind – with the head of St. John the Baptist the object of amorous pantomime?" Of the leader of the anti-Salome protest in London, the *Examiner*, which never identified Maud as Theo's sister, continued:

Her principal English critic, Archdeacon Sinclair, is at present the most talked about example of England's "muscular Christianity." He is a giant and an athlete, given to delivering in his sermons stern and harsh truths to London fashionable society. The suggested voluptuousness of Miss Allan's dance would be abhorrent to him even in the absence of the Baptist's head. She is a woman, and no woman may depart from the Saviour's ideal of women. In one of his recent pulpit addresses on this subject he said: "The principle from which Christ proceeded to denote the position of woman, who in Greece was a drudge, in Rome a chattel and among the Jews a recluse, was that of absolute uncompromising purity." If *The Vision of Salome* must be given, the Archdeacon declares that it should be given without the Prophet's head, "which is an unwise and unnecessary accessory."

In London, these attacks attracted restrained attention, for no editor cared to tangle too closely with so fashionable a cleric.¹¹ In her autobiography, however, Maud colourfully, graciously, and with a touch of humour – she was a most skilful raconteuse – recounts her attempt to assuage Archdeacon Sinclair's distress. He emerges as more effete than muscular, more ridiculous than persuasive, especially as she lets slip that he declined to see her performance. The image of her parents joining her for tea with the archdeacon adds a final comic touch:

One of the objections I have encountered, and one that I would love to overcome, is that of kind Archdeacon Sinclair. Although he has not seen my portrayal, he was quite shocked at the thought of dragging Salomé from the pages of the Bible and flaunting her crime before the public. . . . Accordingly, one afternoon I went to see him at the Chapter House [of St. Paul's Cathedral], and I shall never forget his kindness and courtesy. His dignity and gravity impressed me greatly. . . . "I am pleased to see you," he said, and I bowed my thanks as gravely as he had spoken.

Appreciating that his kindness was great in seeing me at