Spring 5-1-1898

The Mystery Plays and Their Relation to Subsequent English Literature

Benjamin John Fitz

University of Colorado Boulder

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholar.colorado.edu/print_theses

Recommended Citation

Fitz, Benjamin John, "The Mystery Plays and Their Relation to Subsequent English Literature" (1898). University Libraries Digitized Theses 189x-20xx. 81.

https://scholar.colorado.edu/print_theses/81

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by University Libraries at CU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in University Libraries Digitized Theses 189x-20xx by an authorized administrator of CU Scholar. For more information, please contact cuscholaradmin@colorado.edu.
THE MYSTERY PLAYS
AND THEIR RELATION TO SUBSEQUENT ENGLISH LITERATURE.
A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the
University of Colorado
by
BENJAMIN JOHN FITZ
A Candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts.
1898
Ludus Coventriae.
York Mystery Plays.
The Towneley Mysteries.
Chester Plays.
Ancient Mysteries.
Annals of the Stage.
English Mystery Plays.
English Mystery Plays.
Religious Drama.
English Miracle Plays.
Theatre en France.
Litterature Francaise, Moyen Age.
History of the Grotesque in Art and Literature.
The Chances of Death and other Mediaeval Studies.
English Writers, Vol. IV.
The Works of Chaucer.
The Works of Shakespeare.
The Works of Milton.

BIBLIOGRAPHY.

Edited by J. O. Halliwell.
Edited by L. Toulmin Smith.
Published by the Surtees Society.
Edited by Thomas Wright.
William Hone.
Collier.
Pollard.
Charles Davidson.
Miss Bates.
Marriot.
L. Petit De Julleville.
L. Petit De Julleville.
Wright.
Karl Pearson.
Morley.
Edited by Skeat.
Edited by Masson.
CONTENTS.

Introduction.

1. Art in the Middle Ages.

2. A brief history of the mystery plays.

3. Mystery plays throughout Europe.

4. The English mystery play.

5. A brief comparison of the cycles.

6. General characteristics and peculiarities of the mystery plays.

Thesis.

1. Late survivals of the mystery play.

2. Mysteries and moralities.

3. The mysteries and the literature of the XIV and XV centuries.


5. Mystery plays and Shakespeare.


7. Conclusion.

"Sir John Mandeville, Voyages and Travels, ch. iii.

Monastic Tales of the XIII Century."
ART IN THE MIDDLE AGES.

The ideals and the aspirations of an age are reflected in its art and literature. In art and in history there is nothing isolated, nothing without a cause. We observe in the middle ages the gathering of forces that have produced our own art and civilization; if we could not do this history would not be evolution. To understand the motives of mediaeval art, and in particular the motives of the mystery play it is necessary to have some understanding of the men of the middle ages.

The mediaeval mind had in it much that was childish, but with the weakness of childhood it had its strength—undoubting faith. To the men of the middle ages the life of Christ and the story of the Gospels was invested with an intense realism. At the sacrament of the Holy Communion did they not behold the very blood and body of the Saviour? Was it not possible to look upon the head of John the Baptist? Was not the crown of thorns to be seen at Paris?* Had not the true cross been discovered by the illustrious St. Helena and carried to Constantinople? Were not miracles wrought daily by the relics of the blessed saints and martyrs? Jacques DeVitry' relates that by the bones of St. Martin, two beggars, one lame, the other blind, were healed against their will. Caesar of Heisterbach tells of a bridle of St. Thomas of Canterbury "through which God wishing to reward the martyr deigned to work many miracles."

The devil was accepted with all the credulity of a childish mind. He was a buffoon—but he was more than that and was ready at the least

* Sir John Mandeville, Voyages and Travels. ch. II.

' Monastic Tales of the XIII Century.
portunity to take position of the human soul. The Faust legend with theory of demonical possession and its superstititious attitude toward human knowledge is a true product of the middle ages.

That wonderful mediaeval phenomenon, the Crusades, was the result the religious attitude which I have just indicated. The spiritual port of Christianity was not fully understood. The church was the mortal as well as the spiritual conqueror of the world. Men had yet learn that the true dominion of Christ was not to be established in Jerusalem or Rome. With this marvelous outpouring of mediaeval energy and religious fervor in the Crusades, art had its development. In the words of Hegel; "The spirit unable to find satisfaction, created for itself fairer images, and in a calmer and freer manner, than the actual world could offer."

The highest and earliest art forms grew up in connection with the church. The Latin hymns, and the musical and dramatic elements in the service, gave rise to the liturgical drama, the immediate predecessor of the miracle play. With the growth of the cities and the rise of the bourgeoisie began the erection of the Gothic cathedral, the grandest embodiments of the human yearning for the infinite. The Gothic church and the mystery play are contemporary products, they were both developed in the XII and XIII centuries and both ceased to be produced in the XVI century. The cathedral was a triumph of mediaeval symbolism, the whole building was a cross, the lofty towers pointed to heaven, and the solemn crypt below reminded men of the darkness of the grave.

The brutality of war and the coarseness of mediaeval life came at length under the refining influence of chivalry; the songs of the Jongleurs took on poetical form in the hands of the Trouveres; the
Troubadours sang the Songs of Charlemagne, and developed lyric and epic poetry; the Minnesingers and Meister-singers did in Germany what the Troubadours and Trouveres did in France. The "Romance of the Rose" held the attention of Europe. Chaucer in the XIV century followed in the well-beaten path of the mediaeval epic. The Latin Hymns with their majestic cadences surpassed in metrical beauty all poetical attempts in the vernacular. They are the basis of the prosody of the miracle plays.

The religious plays were constructed on the precedent set by the early dramatic representations in the church liturgy, having for their central scene the passion and resurrection of Christ. The Gothic cathedral, the songs of chivalry, and the miracle plays are the most typical embodiments of mediaeval art. The beautiful and the grotesque are mingled in the cathedral and the mystery play, but the impression of size and grandeur is never lost.

On the tower of Notre Dame de Paris stands a figure of the devil, sculptured by a mediaeval artist, grotesque as if he had stepped from the mystery stage and become petrified upon the tower of the church before which he had been wont to act, but terrible in his grotesqueness as he leans over the parapet and looks out with a malignant leer over the human sea of Paris.

II.
A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MIRACLE PLAY.

The miracle play was the drama of the middle ages, it was both the means of amusement and the means of religious instruction. On its rude scaffold the people of the middle ages saw Adam and Eve yielding
the first temptation, they laughed at the grotesque antics of the
temptation, they beheld with reverence the crucified Christ,
and felt the pathos in the lament of the Mater dolorosa. What a power
of plays must have been upon the mediaeval mind!

I have already indicated the dramatic element of the church
ritual and the realism with which the mediaeval world invested things
with the advent of the XII century the church service came to be
enlivened by dramatic representations. On Easter, Good Friday,
Christmas, the worshippers beheld angelic forms in the heart of the
cathedral, and saw represented with realistic art the glorious drama of
birth and resurrection of their Saviour. What a combination, the
cathedral and the Gothic Drama! We can picture to ourselves
a crowd of mediaeval worshippers as they beheld the angels crying
exultant tones:

"Alleluia, resurrexit hodie dominus!"*

then through choir and nave would peal out the Te deum laudamus.

It is not necessary for my purpose to show the relation of the
church to the pagan stage, or to trace the full evolution of the miracle
from these dramatic scenes in the church liturgy. There are,
ever, certain isolated dramatic attempts which are of interest in
connection with our present subject.

A drama called Χριστός Πατρός was written according to some
authorities in the IV century by Gregory Nazianzene. This drama
is placed by Dr. Brambs as late as the X century. Pollard, page XII

45
treats of the life and suffering of Christ, but unlike the miracle cycles it is founded on strictly classical models. St. Gregory embodied in his work about seven hundred lines from Euripides with other lines from Aeschylus. From the quietness of a convent in Saxony six plays were given to the world in the X century. These plays of Hroswitha are modelled upon Terence and it is doubtful if they have had any great influence in the history of the modern drama; but this crude work of the literary nun of Gandersheim shows the same dramatic impulse which later in the hands of the trade guilds produced the miracle cycles. In England the distinction between the miracle and the mystery, insisted upon in France, was never observed, but strictly speaking the miracle was the first to be played. The earliest representation of this sort in England was the play of St. Katherine, acted at Dunstable in the XII century (1119). In the next century these saint plays or miracles became common.

We have seen how on Good Friday, Easter, and Christmas, the church became a theater for the dramatic representation of sacred subjects. The growing popularity of the sacred dramas, the introduction of pagan elements which developed such festivals as the feast of the ass and the feast of fools, and the development of the comic element led to attempts, on the part of the church authorities, at restricting these representations. An appetite for sacred plays, however, had been created which had to be satisfied. The plays had reached a point in their development where they must either suffer restriction or leave the church, and they left the church. The sacred dramas played originally in the choir, came to be represented in the...
nave, then in the church-yard or "ad januas monasterii,"* and finally passing out of ecclesiastical control they were transferred to the market-towns. With the growth of the towns and the rise of the guilds complete cycles were developed treating the great theme of the Scriptures from the fall of man to the second coming of Christ and the final resurrection of the dead.

III.

MYSTERY PLAYS THROUGHOUT EUROPE.

The miracle play was a characteristic literary phenomenon of all European countries. All these plays bear the impress of Latin Christianity; in all of them some survival of Latin can be seen pointing to their liturgical origin. A few examples will serve to show this interesting survival of Latin. In the York play of the Last Supper Jesus says to Judas:

Quod facis fac cius

at you shal do, do sone.

A little later John says:

Domine quis est qui tradit te?

Lord who shall do that dreadful deed?

I quote from a speech of Misericordia in the Coventry play on the Nativity and Conception.

Thu seyst veritas mea et misericordia cum ipso,

Suffyr not thi sowlys in sorwe to slepe.

That helle hownde that hatyth the bydlyth hym ho,

Thi love man, no lengere hym kepe.

See the directions in the Orlean Christmas play, XII Century.

* See the directions in the Orlean Christmas play, XII Century.

The Latin quotations, in most cases, are familiar passages from the Bible, and are generally followed by a paraphrase in the vernacular.
In a German crucifixion play, Longius, the Roman soldier who pierced Christ's side, speaks thus:

Vere filius Dei erat iste
Dyre is des waren Gotes sun,
Er hat zeichen an mi getan
Wan ich nim schen wider han.

The Latin quotations, in most cases, are familiar passages from the Vulgate, and are generally followed by a paraphrase in the vernacular.

France was the center of mediaeval literature. For this reason and because of the close relation of France and England, we may expect to find much in the history of the French mystère that will help us in our study of the English plays. In general we may say that the French and German plays throw considerable light on our subject, the Italian and Spanish plays little.

The mystère originated in the Latin liturgical drama, it passed through the intermediate semi-liturgical stage where it was written partly in Latin partly in French, and finally in the hands of the people it became entirely French. This evolution was accomplished in the XII century. The earliest French mystery is the Representation d'Adam. It was played in the XII century before the doors of the church; in it was represented a magnificently conceived "paridis terrestre" in which the devil seduced Eve by flattery and deceit. In the temptation scene of this primitive dramatic attempt there is true literary merit. The devil said to Eve:*

Tu es faiblette et tendre chose.

* Theatere en France, Julleville.
Et es plus fraîche que la rose.
Tu es plus blanche que cristal
Ou que neige sur glace en val.

This play is of large proportions including the fall of Adam and Eve, the murder of Abel, and the procession of the prophets who announce the coming of the Messiah.

The French make a careful distinction between the miracle and the mystère. The miracle was a representation of the life and miraculous acts of a saint. No less than forty-three of the XIV century plays describe some miraculous intervention of the Virgin.* The name mystère, on the other hand, was applied to the representation of the sacred story centering about the passion of Christ. In the evolution of the drama the mystère superseded the miracle, and the mystère was in turn superseded, with the development of allegory and comedy, by the moralités, sotties, and farces. The word mystère began to be used in the XV century.

These French mysteries can be studied in three cycles, the cycle of the Old Testament, the cycle of the New Testament, and the cycle of the saints. The material of these vast cycles was taken from the entire sacred history, the apocryphal books, and the lives of the saints. These plays, grand in conception, weak in execution, picture a Christ with a realism that destroys His sublimity. The subject is above the power of the mediaeval artist but the mediaeval audience beheld the play with the eyes of the believer rather than the critic. There was nothing, even in the accumulated horrors of a play like

* Tales of the Virgin, Penn Historical Studies.
the "Actes des Apotres," to offend the artistic taste of the age. At times the writers of mysteries rise far above the ordinary level of their work; in the treatment of the Virgin they are at their best and the love of Mary for her son, the Homme-Dieu, is represented with poetic power. In general the plays present a variety of literary form and considerable skill in metrical composition; pastorals, satires, songs both joyous and sad, and farces are introduced. An abuse of the comic element and an inability to truly reproduce a subject so comprehensive and sublime are their great defects.

IV.

THE ENGLISH MYSTERY PLAY.

The resurrection and Christmas plays formed the dramatic art of the miracle play. The fully developed miracle play was the consummation of the mediaeval dramatic power, the germ of the Elizabethan drama. Cycles were developed, covering the entire range of biblical story, which were played annually by the guilds on the occasion of some great religious festival. A play was assigned to each trade and often there seems to be some connection between the subject of the play and the nature of the trade assigned to present it; the plasterers of York gave a play on the creation, and the bakers gave the play of the Last Supper. An investigation of the town records of England shows that cycles of religious plays, and isolated plays on miracle subjects as well, were common from the XII until the XVII century.

The feast of Corpus Christi was established in 1264. The York and Coventry cycles were played on Corpus Christi, the Chester on Whitsun-
There is evidence that miracles were played at Chester, York, Coventry, New-Castle-upon-Tyne, Durham, Lancaster, Leeds, Kendall, Bristol, Witney, Cambridge, Manningtree, Beverley, Dublin, and Cornwall. But four complete cycles have been preserved, the York (1360-1579), Chester (Oldest MS. 1581), Coventry (1468), and the Towneley or Widkirk (XV century) probably played at Wakefield. There are numerous references to plays acted in London but the London plays were not controlled by the guilds. Of the New-Castle-upon-Tyne cycle the Noah play alone is extant. A collection of plays found in the Digby manuscript is of later origin than the York and Chester plays, and like the Coventry cycle marks a transition to the morality play. The Chester cycle is the oldest of the four and there is good reason to believe that Ralph Higden author of the Polychronicon had a hand in its authorship. The Widkirk cycle abounds in comic scenes. Its shepherd play is frequently quoted as giving us the first sketch of a purely English comedy. Five Widkirk plays seem to be borrowed from the York cycle. The York plays are now more accessible than the others on account of Miss Toulmin Smith's excellent edition. Collier and the early historians of our drama make no mention of the York cycle. In my comparison of the miracle play with subsequent literature I have given preference to the Coventry cycle. It was the latest of the four cycles to be written.

and it comes into direct contact with more of our literature than do
the others. Haywood in the XVI century alludes to the Coventry cycle
by name and it is probable that Shakespeare in his allusions to the
miracle plays had in mind the plays of Coventry.*

Picture to yourself a mediaeval market-town in Merrie England
during the festival of Corpus Christi; the town is thronged with people
who have come to witness the procession of the ecclesiastics and the
guilds with their tapers and banners; the wooden stages, mounted on
wheels and called pageants, come up one after another to represent,in
thirty or forty plays, the great story of the Bible supplemented by the
tales from the apocryphal New Testament and mediaeval myths, and made
realistic by touches of English country life. The plays of York and
Wakefield reflect the life and scenes of Yorkshire rather than of
Palestine. The audience saw Adam and Eve, as nude as in the primitive
Eden, tempted by a serpent who "comes up out of a hole" in the stage.
They heard a group of English shepherds discussing, in a simple English
manner, the meaning of the "Gloria\textsuperscript{a} excelsis" sung to them by the angels.
They saw the actual crucifixion of Christ and the division of his
raiment, and they saw the graves giving up their dead at his second
coming. No wonder that architecture and pictorial art are much in-
depted to the miracle play! No wonder that these mediaeval people de-
manded for centuries their passion play, overlooking in the dramatic
representation the crudities which we see in the printed text.

---

J. Halliwell-Phillipps. Outlines of the Life of Shakespeare. Vol. I,
age 46.

Note the drawings of Albert Durer.
A BRIEF COMPARISON OF THE CYCLES.

All the cycles agree in their conception of the leading characters in Biblical history. Abraham is always the obedient patriarch and Isaac the willing sacrifice; Herod is always the roaring tyrant attired in acenic glory. Joseph is represented as an unwilling husband, Mary always the object of loving adoration, and the character of Jesus is always handled with reverence. The trouble of Joseph about Mary is treated at some length in the four cycles, and in the York and Coventry forms the subject of a separate play. The Shepherd plays in all the plays are genuine English pastorals.

In the use of comic and even farcical passages we have the easiest comparison of the cycles. The Chester and the Towneley cycles are an extreme in the use of comedy, the Coventry cycle uses it very little.

In the following table I have attempted to show how each cycle to the same general plan, and at the same time I have indicated some of the points on which the cycles differ.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHESTER</th>
<th>TOWNELEY</th>
<th>YORK</th>
<th>COVENTRY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>25 plays.</td>
<td>32 plays.</td>
<td>48 plays.</td>
<td>42 plays.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the Surtees Ed. Two plays are printed after Juditium, Lazarus and Bentio Judae, and are probably of a later date.
**Chester.**

- 3. Noah's Flood. (Comic)
- 6. Salutation and Nativity.
- 7. Play of the Shepherds.
- 8. The Kings come to Herod.
- 9. Offering of the Kings.
- 10. Slaughter of Innocents.
- 12. Pastora. (Farce of Mak and the Sheep)
- 17. Crucifixion.
- 20. Pilgrims of Emaus.
- 25. Doomsday.

**Towneley.**

- 3. Processus Noe cum filius. (Comic)
- 10. Anunciatio.
- 12,13. Pastora. (Farce of Mak and the Sheep)
- 14. Oblacio Magorum.
- 17. Purificatio Mariae.
- 16. Magnus Herodus.
- 20. Conspiracio et Capcio.
- 23. Processus Crusis, Crucifixio.
- 25. Extractio Animarium ab Inferno.
- 27. Peregrini.
- 29. Ascensio Domini.

**York.**

- 8,9. Noah and his wife and the flood. (Comic)
- 11. Salutation and Conception. (Serious)
- 12. Prologue of Prophets, Anunciation and visit to Elizabeth.
- 20. Lazarus.
- 26. Conspiracy to take Jesus.
- 27. Last Supper.
- 30. Resurrection.
- 35. Crucifixion.
- 37. Harrowing of Hell.
- 40. Travellers to Emaus.
- 43. Ascension.

**Coventry.**

- 4. Noah's flood. (Serious)
- 11. Salutation and Conception. (Morality)
- 16. Adoration of the Shepherds.
- 17. Adoration of the Kings.
- 26. Conspiracy to take Jesus.
- 33. Descent into Hell. (Very short)
- 35. Crucifixion.
- 37. Harrowing of Hell.
- 40. Travellers to Emaus.
- 43. Ascension.

The miracle cycles illustrate every article of the Apostles' Creed and follow the same historic order. Christ was crucified, "He descended into hell, the third day He rose from the dead," is a summary of the action of every cycle. The account of Christ's descent into hell occurs in the apocryphal gospel of Nicodemus, it found its way into all medieval literature, it is contained in all the cycles, and remains as an article of faith to-day.
These plays of the Harrowing of Hell together with an ancient drawing illustrating them are taken by Dr. Johnson and other authorities as the explanation of two passages in Shakespeare. A copy of this interesting drawing will be found on the following page. These plays have a prototype in the old liturgical drama of the Elevatio crucis, given in the European cathedrals before the development of the mystery cycles. "After the Host and rod had been thurified by incense, procession was formed and the objects of adoration were carried to the main door of the church. The priest struck the door with his foot and sang, 'Lift up your heads 0 ye gates and be ye lifted up ye everlasting doors;' the choir continued, 'And the King of Glory shall come in.' Then the bishop struck the door with his rod. At this a sub-deacon dressed as the Devil, and standing outside the door, cried in a tuff voice: 'Who is the King of Glory?' The choir responded, 'The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.' Then the door was opened and the populace were admitted."† Compare the York play of the Harrowing of Hell.

Jesus (Without). Principes, portas tollite, 
Vnle youre gatis, ye princis of pryde,
Et introibit rex glorie,
ße kyng of blisse comes in þis tyde. 
(Enters the gates of Hell.

Sattan. Owte! harrowe (what harlot) is hee, 
þat sais his kyngdome schall be cryed.
The gates of brass are broken and Christ leads out the chosen souls.

The writers of this York play and the translators of the St. James Bible hold the same cosmological idea. Adam is represented as having been in hell 4600 years.
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS AND PECULIARITIES OF THE MYSTERY PLAYS.

In every cycle and in almost every play we are impressed with the intense realism of the mysteries. This realism, very often out of place it seems to us, must have made the plays a spectacle of tremendous power upon the minds of the audience. The primitive scenes in the garden of Eden were most realistically portrayed. The Adam and Eve of Albert Dürer, like many of his drawings, might well be copies from the miracle stage. In the treatment of the more spiritual subjects like the Immaculate Conception and the coming of the Holy Spirit this medieval realism seems out of place. The representation of the Holy Host upon the stage has to us a suggestion of irreverence; but that the intention of the writers of the sacred plays was devout and reverent does not admit of doubt.

In the manuscript of a play acted in Paris in 1437 is found the following note which shows strikingly the realistic presentation of the religious play. "In the year 1437, on the third of July, was represented the game or play, de la Passion, N. S. in the plain of Veximiel, en the park was arranged in a very noble manner for there were nine ages of seats in height rising by degrees; all around and behind were eat and long seats for the lords and ladies. To represent God was a Lord Nicolle, Lord of Neufchatel, in Lorraine, who was curate of St. Victor of Metz; he was nigh dead upon the cross if he had not been assisted, and it was determined that another priest should be placed the cross to counterfeit the personage of the crucifixion for that; but on the following day the said curate of St. Victor counterfeit-the resurrection, and performed his part very highly during the play.
Another priest, who was called Messire Jean de Nicey, and was chaplain of Metrange, played Judas, and was nearly dead while hanging, for his heart failed him, wherefore he was very quickly unhung and carried off: and there the Mouth of Hell was very well done; for it opened and shut when the devils required to enter and come out, and had two large eyes of steel." Such is the glimpse given us behind the scenes of a mystery acted in the dim past of the XV century, an insight into the inner secrets of the dramatic art which held the mind of Europe from the XIII until the XVI century.

There is not the slightest attempt at reproducing local color in the mystery plays, but we can make the same charge against the Elizabethan dramatists and even Shakespeare himself. The English cycles abound in typical English characters; Cain in the York play is a Yorkshire churl attended by a Yorkshire servant his garcon; the shepherds, Harvye, Tudde, and Hancken, in the Chester Shepherd play, are English in name and character. Solomon, in a German play, regards Eimbecker beer as a very pleasant beverage. When Christ makes his descent to hell, the Devil refuses to give up John the Baptist, and says that he is too meanly clad to be saved. Souls are supposed to be of two kinds, white and black. At death the soul leaves the body in the form of a bird, a black bird flew from the mouth of the traitor Judas after he had hung himself, but a white bird flew away from our Saviour as he gave up His spirit on Calvary.

The anachronisms in the miracles plays are very striking. Note the imprecations used in the following dialogue between Noah and his wife.
Noye. Good wyffe, doe nowe as I thee bydde.

Noyes Wiffe. Be Christe! not or I see more neede,
Though thou stande all daye and stare.

A little later Noah says,
Good wiffe, lett be all this beare,
That thou maiste in this place heare;
For all the wene that thou arte maister,
And soe thou arte, by Sante John!*

In the Coventry play of Joseph's Return, Joseph speaks of the French customs; in the Towneley Herod play, Herod says, "I can do no more French;" in the XIV Chester play, Judas refers to the king of France. In the Coventry pageant of the Temptation, Satan taketh Christ up into a high mountain and showeth him all the kingdoms of the earth including, Nazareth, Spain, Paris, Scotland, and Wales. Herod is surrounded by Oriental splendor, and swears terrible oaths in the name of Mahomet. His soldiers and attendants all seem to be good Mohamadans. In the Massacre of the Innocents (York XIX) Herod exclaims:

Be al-myghty mahounde
To dede I schall hym dayne
So bolde loke no man be
For to aske help ne helde
But of mahounde and me.

A consul enters saying:

Lord he sath saie
Fulle wele we understande
Mahounde is god wer raye.

* Chester III.
In the same play a soldier salutes Herod thus:

Mahounde oure god of myght
Sawe þe sir herowde þe kyng.

The disregard of the true relation of historical events reaches the height of the ridiculous in a play, acted at the Theatre of Lisbon, called the Creation of the World. In this play Noah appears upon the scene and is informed by the Eternal Father that the wicked race of man is about to be destroyed. Noah is told to build an ark and, for that purpose, is sent to the king's dock-yard at Lisbon; and God tells Noah that John Gonzalvez, the master builder of Lisbon, is to be preferred to French or English shipwrights. What a remarkable exhibition of patriotism in handling a subject as old as the flood!

If we are to be just to the miracle play we must assume a sympathetic attitude and put ourselves, as much as possible, in the position of the mediaeval spectator. In those days when there were no printed Bibles, when the art of reading was itself a rare accomplishment, the miracle play was something more than a mere spectacle to be enjoyed as we enjoy an opera; it was a realistic embodiment of religious ideals and it produced a familiarity with the Bible which is uncommon even in our age of Sunday Schools. The grandest manifestation of mediaeval art was the Gothic cathedral, and the miracle play beginning in the nave and choir of the cathedral, in the dim light sifted through the painted figures of saints and martyrs, then acted in the shadow of the cathedral's mighty walls, at length went out into the market-place of the town with all the grandeur and colossal power of its early Gothic environment.

The mystery was spectacular and depended as much upon the stage setting and costuming, as upon the spoken dialogue for its artistic
The miracle play was the supreme dramatic effort of the middle ages, it held the attention of Europe for three centuries, it was still popular when Shakespeare began to write. It embraced in its ample theme the grandest theme man can reproduce. Scenes from heaven, earth and hell were portrayed upon that fearless stage. Colossal, sublime conception, weak, often inartistic and even ridiculous, in execution, they are nevertheless the embodiment of the mediaeval yearning for
matic expression. In the words of Julleville*: "This imperfect theatre reflects more completely and faithfully the epoch in which it was composed than does any theatre in any age.

The reformation dealt a death blow to the presentation of the liturgical cycles. We have seen how the Coventry plays were continued in the spirit of Guitt and other forerunners of the reformation. The miracle plays were an essentially Roman Catholic production, liturgical Latin influenced their form, and the doctrine of the church influenced their spirit. The XVI century saw the last of the mysteries as a living liturgical force. The official date of the death of the religious drama in France was 1548. According to Julleville, the mystery perished not from any weakness of its own, but because it was officially executed by the town of Paris. The fraternity known as the others of the Passion who had had charge of the Parisian mysteries, never, was not abolished until 1676. The York cycle was played for the last time in 1579, and the acting of the Chester plays ended with a XVI century. But while the mystery plays were doomed by the meeting of the reformation and the renaissance in the XVI century, they exhibited, nevertheless, a remarkable tenacity of life, and they have survivals even in our own day which preserve their ancient form and spirit.

A Spanish military document quoted by a captain of the Royal Lancashire Militia refers to "miracles of St. Anthony" played in 1693.

Littré, Littérature Francaise, Moyen Age, Tome II. Also, Page 406.
LATE SURVIVALS OF THE MYSTERY PLAY.

The reformation dealt a death blow to the presentation of the English cycles. We have seen how the Coventry plays were continued later than the other cycles and were a standing protest against the work of Wycliff and other forerunners of the reformation. The miracle plays were an essentially Roman Catholic production, liturgical Latin influenced their form, and the doctrine of the church influenced their spirit. The XVI century saw the last of the mysteries as a living literary force. The official date of the death of the religious drama in France was 1548. According to Julliéville, the mystery perished suddenly, not from any weakness of its own, but because it was officially executed by the town of Paris.* The fraternity known as the Brothers of the Passion who had had charge of the Parisian mysteries, however, was not abolished until 1676. The York cycle was played for the last time in 1579, and the acting of the Chester plays ended with the XVI century. But while the mystery plays were doomed by the meeting of the reformation and the renaissance in the XVI century, they exhibited, nevertheless, a remarkable tenacity of life, and they have survivals even in our own day which preserve their ancient form and spirit.

A Spanish military document quoted by a captain of the Royal Lancashire Militia refers to "miracles of St. Anthony" played in 1693.

* Literature Francaise, Tome II, 420.
"for the good of the regiment." A certain Rev. Joseph Spence, in a letter to his mother dated December 2, 1739, describes a play called the Damned Soul which he saw at Turin.* In this play the Saviour, the Virgin, and John the Baptist took leading parts. Mr. Hone, in his work on English Mysteries, mentions a German mystery play which was described to him by an eye witness.† The play was a representation of the Creation, and was acted at Bamberg about 1783. Judging from this description the good people of Bamberg, in the XVIII century, seemed to have been as blind to crudities of stage representation as were their ancestors in the XV century.

Thomas Moore in his "Fudge Family in Paris," a very popular poem in 1818, alludes to an interesting survival of the miracle play. In a letter from Miss Betty Fudge to Miss Dorothy the following lines occur.

The next place,

They call it the play-house—I think—of St. Martin,

Quite charming—and very religious—what folly
To say that the French are not pious, dear Dolly,

When here one beholds, so correctly and rightly,

The Testament turn'd into melo-drames nightly;

And, doubtless, so fond they're of scriptural facts,

They will soon get the Pentateuch up in five acts.

Here Daniel, in pantomime, bids bold defiance
To Nebuchadnezzar and all his stuff'd lions;

* Ancient Mysteries, Hone. Page 182.
† Ancient Mysteries, Hone. Page 183.
While pretty young Israelites dance round the prophet,
In very thin clothing, and but little of it.

From the tone of Miss Betty's letter we can hardly believe that these
plays had as sympathetic and credulous an audience as did their medi­
aeval predecessors. According to the Gazette of France, plays on
Old Testament subjects were very common in Paris at the time described
in the "Fudge Family." A play called Daniel, ou la Fosse aux Lions,
very popular in the year 1817, represented Jehovah in the center of a
circle of brilliant lights which announced the presence of the Eternal.

Nothing could come nearer the unconscious irreverence of the mediaeval
play!

Of the survivals of the miracle play which have come into our
own decade the Passion Play at Ober-Ammergau is the best known. While
it is the direct descendant of the ancient mystery it has lost all
traces of mediaevalism. In this play an internal development of
motives has taken the place of the representation of demons, so charac­
teristic of the mediaeval plays. This passion play, presented every
years, and attracting the attention of the world, is a result of a
ow, made in 1633, by the peasants of Ober-Ammergau.

The old English Christmas carols have always been interesting on
account of their archaic character. Many of these carols, in sentiment
and spirit, bear a strong resemblance to our miracle plays. Compare
the opening lines of a carol found in an old manuscript*, with the
ines addressed to the audience at the beginning of almost any Coventry
agent. The carol begins:

Ancient Mysteries, Hope. Page 93.
Puer nobis natus est de virgine maria.

Be glad, lordlings, be ye more and lesse,
I bryng you tydings of gladnesse,
As gabyel me beryth wetnesse.

Mr. Hone prints a carol in full which is founded on an apocryphal story related in the XV Coventry pageant. On the way from Nazareth to Bethlehem, according to the Coventry play, Mary beheld a cherry tree and spoke to Joseph in these words:

Al, my sweete husbond, wolde ye telle to me,
What tre is yon standynge upon yon hyll?

Joseph replied:

Fforsothe, Mary, it is clepyd a chery tre.

Mary expressed a desire for some cherries, but Joseph unwilling to climb so high a tree spoke to her rather rudely:

Lete hym pluk yow cheryes begovatt yow with childe.

Then followed the miracle of the tree bending so that Mary was able to pluck the cherries herself. I will quote a part of the Christmas carol which relates the same incident.

Oi then bespoke Mary,
With words both meek and mild,
'Gather me some cherries, Joseph,
They run so in my mind;
Gather me some cherries,
For I am with child.'

Oi! then bespoke Joseph,
With words most unkind,
'Let him gather thee cherries,
That got thee with child.'
The miracle of the bending tree then follows as in the Coventry play and an angel comes to cheer Mary and Joseph on their way. This myth, like many of the stories related in the Coventry plays, has no authority in the apocryphal New Testament. In style and treatment, both carol and miracle play are equally indelicate.

The miracle play had a curious continuation in the puppet show, often referred to as motions. In the Winter's Tale, Autolycus says that he had "compassed a motion of the prodigal son."* These miracle puppet plays were exhibited by itinerant showmen even into our own century. In 1822 M. Michelot described a puppet show exhibited at St. Cloud. The exhibitor of this "motion" made the following announcement in stentorian tones: "Walk in ladies and gentlemen and you will see the Birth of our Saviour, the Doubts of Joseph about the Virgin Mary, his wife, the Passion, the Resurrection." The part showing the "doubts of Joseph about Mary" was represented much as in the Coventry play with no deference to modern refinement. M. Michelot goes on with his description: "Herod with a doctor's cap on his head discovered in the east action of our Saviour sufficient cause for his crucifixion. Pontius Pilate washed his hands of the business with an air the most becoming and indifferent imaginable."† The Tatler of May 14, 1709, describes a puppet show of the Creation of the World, exhibited at Bath, in which Punch and his wife were introduced dancing in the ark of Noah! Mr. Hone relates that on Twelfth Night, 1818, he met a traveling showman who, like Shakespeare's Autolycus "compassed a motion of

Winter's Tale, IV--III--103.
Ancient Mysteries, Hone. Page 189.

26.
the Prodigal Son." It was a puppet-like representation of a mystery with discrepancies of the same character as those which were typical of the mystery of five centuries ago. These puppet shows with all the peculiarities of the mediaeval plays were strange anachronisms in the XIX century.

II.

MYSTERIES AND MORALITIES.

It is not my intention to outline the full history of the development of the morality play, but as it is very closely allied to the miracle play in form and origin it must not be overlooked. The earliest moralities were an outgrowth of the mystery plays and in some cases they were their complements. The mystery gave a vivid, realistic picture of the Bible story; the morality aimed to point a moral, to show the victory of virtue over vice, and to teach men how to live.

These two classes of dramatic composition have been often confused in popular descriptions. Victor Hugo, for example, describes a morality play in his Notre Dame de Paris, but calls it a miracle play. The morality play was the assertion of the mediaeval love of allegory and as a literary type was strongly opposed to the realism of the mystery play. Its stock character were personifications of qualities, vices, and virtues. None of its personages stood out, in any clearness of form or color, from the background of mediaeval allegory, and its plot could rarely be separated from its didactic import.

These types were sometimes mixed but it is rarely impossible to determine to which class a play essentially belongs. We can trace a development of a morality element in the Coventry cycle, but notwithstanding the presence of Contemplacio, Veritas, Justicia, Misericordia, and Pax in the play of the Salutation and Conception, we would never
class it as anything but a miracle play. On the other hand, the use of historical personages and of historical background in Bales King John does not take his work out of the category of morality plays.

The earliest moralities, of which we may take the Castle of Perseverance as the best example, show the same largeness of conception as do the miracle plays, and owe much to them for their dramatic form and treatment. The Castle of Perseverance traces the history of the human soul, not merely from the cradle to the grave but on to the last judgment, even as the miracle cycle outlined the plan of salvation from the creation of the world to the day of doom. The conversation between Misericordia, Justicia, Veritas, and Pax near the close of this morality play bears a strong resemblance to a passage in the Coventry cycle referred to above.

A history of allegory in literature would fill volumes, and on this point we could connect the morality plays with some of the greatest productions of English literary genius. The Seven Deadly Sins, favorite characters with morality writers, receive their full share of attention from Chaucer, Langland, Gower, Spenser, and Marlowe. If we call Peele's David and Bethsabe a mystery play in its most modern form, we might refer to Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress as the most modern type of the morality.

In their later development the morality plays became the organs of sectarian controversy, frameworks for the support of dogma. The reformation abandoned the miracle play as a papal institution, but utilized the morality as a weapon against the Church of Rome.*

* New Custom. God's Promises.
The morality play, in the time of King Henry VIII, became fused with another form of dramatic composition, the interlude; the comic element which from a standpoint of reverence marred, from a standpoint of interest perhaps helped the mystery play, received a fuller development; and a comic character, the Vice, had his place in almost every play. This Vice, it seems to me, has made a strong impression on the Elizabethan drama. Greene uses him in almost every play. Most of Jonson's comedies have some motive character to play the role of the ancient Vice, and in the "Devil is an Ass" the character Iniquity stands in the Marimatis personae as the Vice without disguise. Jonson's plays taken as a whole present but another type of the morality play with a more deep and sublimated allegory.

A direct reference to the miracle plays occurs in Haywood's, 'Our P. P. The Pardoner in describing his descent to hell says:

The devil and I were of old acquaintance,
For oft in the play of Corpus Christi,
He hath played the devil at Coventry.

III.

THE MYSTERIES AND THE LITERATURE OF THE XIV AND XV CENTURIES.

The influence of religion has always been a powerful factor in the making of English literature. Caedmon is not the only bard who has sung the beginning of created things, nor is Milton the only poet who as invoked the Heavenly Muse that he might justify the ways of God to an.
In the XIV century a book had few readers but many hearers. The

dramatic form of the mysteries gave them an advantage over other

literary forms, and made them a part of the people’s life. The spirit

which illuminated the mystery plays was shared by most of the best

literature of the age. Langland in his Vision of Piers Plowman, and

Gower in his Vox Clamantis have much in common with the religious

Drama. The Vulgate and the mediaeval legends of the saints furnished

abundant material for the great writers of the XIV and XV centuries.

The embodiment of Vulgate Latin in English writings, so characteristic

of the mystery plays, was very common. Langland, Gower, and Chaucer

were all influenced by this custom of Latin Christianity. The Cursor

Mundi was a very well known poem in the XIV century. Written about

1320, just before the full development of the cycles, it probably had

a direct influence upon them. It is a metrical version of the Old and

New Testament and includes the same mediaeval legends that are repre-

sented in one or another of our four cycles. Miss Toulmin Smith re-

gards the Cursor Mundi as the model of the York plays. A collection

of old English Metrical Homilies shows the same religious character-

istics and is cast in the same mould as the mediaeval plays.

The mystery plays did not stand apart from the other literature of

the XIV century but shared their spirit with all forms of literary ex-

pression. Different literary types, embodying the same idea, and drawn

from the same sources, must have influenced each other. Direct refer-

ences and allusions to the miracle plays are by no means rare in

Chaucer and other writers of the XIV and XV centuries. Wycliff in his

De Officio Pastorali says: "Herfore freris han taught in englond be

paternoster in englisgch tunte, as men say in the play of York;" then
he goes on to urge the necessity for the translation of the entire Bible. The play of York referred to is the famous play of Our Lord's Prayer acted before 1384. Mention is made of the miracles in Piers Plowman's Creed, an old poem following and imitating the Vision of Piers Plowman.

We haunten no taurnes ne hobelen abouten
At marketes and miracles we medely vs neuer.

Chaucer and the miracle cycles combine in giving us a picture of English life in the XIV century. Compare the "Somnour" of the XIV Coventry pageant, as he reads off his list of English names with Chaucer's red faced Somnour. On the side of vocabulary and the peculiar use of words there is a great opportunity for a careful comparative study of Chaucer and the mystery. The use of the word "harow" as an exclamation of fear is common in both, and the expression "a twenty evil way", found in the Miller's Tale (Line 3713 in Skeat's Ed.) is common in the cycles. Chaucer's Pardoner speaks of a game played with dice, called hazard, and says,

This fruyt cometh of the bicched bones two,
Forswering, ire, falsnesse, homicyde.

The jovial Miller beginning to cry in "Pilate's vois" suggests the Pilate of the miracle stage." Chaucer like the other writers of

Canterbury Tales, Skeat's Ed. A, 3283, 4307. Coventry XXXIII.
his time frequently alludes to Christ's descent to hell,* which, as we have seen, was the subject of a play in each of the cycles. The carpenter in the Miller's Tale swears "by him that harwed helle."

Chaucer is guilty of the same anachronism in speaking of Mahomet that occurs in the mysteries. The Prioress begins her tale with a beautiful invocation to the Virgin, her story embodies several Latin phrases, and in its subject and treatment reminds one of the French miracles which related the miraculous deeds of the Virgin. The Wyf of Bath says that she made visitations,

To vigileis and to processions,
To preaching eek and to these pilgrimages,
To playes of miracles and mariages.

The Miller's Tale contains more direct references to the miracle play than any of the other Canterbury Tales. This fact is significant when we remember that the Miller is the type of the XIV century English workingman. The popular conception of Noah and his shrewish wife, used in three of the four cycles is alluded to here.

Hastow not herd, quod Nicholas, also
The sorwe of Noe with his felawshipes,
Er that he mighete gete his wyf to shipe?

The parish clerk, the jolly Absalon, is a well known character, and of him Chaucer tells us:

Somtyme to shewe his lightnesse and maistrye
He playeth Herodes on a scaffold hys.

---

This brief study is sufficient, I believe, to prove that the miracle play was a well known institution in the XIV century and that it has influenced the best literature coming to us from that century.

IV.

MYSTERY PLAYS AND THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA.

That the Elizabethan drama is a product of literary evolution, and that the miracle plays contain in the germ the dramatic art of Shakespeare is a generally admitted fact. Ward, Collier, and Symons, all treat the miracle plays as the beginning of the regular drama. The story of Mak and the Sheep, in the Widkirk shepherd play, has been called the first English comedy. Miss Bates, referring to the miracle plays, says, "Londoners had already seen a greater tragedy than Hamlet." It is not my purpose to trace this literary evolution which is pointed out in almost every work on English literature. I intend in this section to call attention to several plays, popular in the XVI century, which are cast in the same mould, use the same sources, and exhibit the same defects as the mystery play. If we look for direct evidence of literary influence we may be disappointed. A great genius like that of Shakespeare or Milton is open to every influence, feels every stimulus, but is indebted for its greatness to nothing but its own inherent power. My purpose in this study is to show the coordination of literary forms.

There was printed at London in 1568 "a newe merry and wittie comedie or Enterlude, treating upon the Historie of Iacob & Esau, taken out of the XXVII chapter of the first book of Moses, entituled Genesis." This play presents its subject in the conventional five

Compare Pageant VI of the Towneley cycle.
acts and, if sufficiently condensed, could without impropriety be placed in any of our regular cycles. The comic element is interpolated into the Bible story, as in the mystery plays, by the action of the servants; the excessive hunger of Esau's servant Ragan throws emphasis upon the central idea of the play. The prologue of Iacob and Esau setting forth the contents of the play very closely resembles the prologue to the Coventry pageants. There are several songs taking the place of the liturgical chants of the mysteries and the play closes with prayers for the clergy, the Queen, and her subjects universal.

The story of the prodigal son was often referred to by the Elizabethan poets and pictorial representations of the prodigal's return were frequently to be seen upon the tiles about the fireplaces in inns and other public resorts.* Shakespeare is full of allusions to this familiar story. As we have already seen, his Autolycus "compassed a motion of the prodigal son." Falstaff's bed at the Garter inn was "painted about with the story of the prodigal, fresh and new."

A "comedy of the prodigal son" has come down to us, from the end of the XVI century through a German translation which has destroyed whatever poetry the play may originally have possessed. This play, on the slender evidence in the Histrionomastix, has been ascribed to Shakespeare. The style of the "Prodigal Son" suggests Greene more than any of the other well known Elizabethan dramatists. The authorship of the play, however, does not concern us here.

In its treatment of the subject the "Prodigal Son" is very crude, the best part of the play being a very close paraphrase of the Biblical

---

* See Thackeray's Henry Esmond, chapter XIV.
Germany seems to be the home of the prodigal and, in accordance with the custom of the time, Italy is made the scene of his dissipation. All his debauchery takes place at a single inn and it is upon the host, hostess and their daughter that the prodigal wastes his substance in riotous living. A morality element is introduced in the personages of Despair and Hope who struggle over the unfortunate sinner, until at last, Hope triumphing, the prodigal returns to partake of the fatted calf and is forgiven although he has sinned against heaven and in his father's sight. The two following quotations will show that this play of the XVI century presents many of the unconscious absurdities of the plays of the XIV century. The directions at the beginning of Act I read: "Enter the father. The prodigal son has a young horseman's switch and is jolly. Afterwards the brother, a simple plain man who goes his own gait." In the conversation between the prodigal and the daughter of his host there is no more attempt to preserve the local color of the Gospel narrative than in the miracle plays.

'\n
'Hon. 'Tis true fair maiden, I travel to see all beauteous girls and to gain experience of the World. But for the tongues I only know two, my mother's and Latin. Pray tell me what you can speak in that way.

Daughter. My fair young sir I only speak Italian perfectly and no other. But pray come into my father's house, there will we make better acquaintance and discourse together.

One wonders in what language the above conversation is supposed to have been conducted.

1 See Lyly's Euphues.
I have already alluded to one of the most graceful of the pre-Shakespearian plays, which can be called "a miracle play in its most modern form"—Peale's David and Bethsabe. Peele was one of the smoothest versifiers of the XIV century and David and Bethsabe has been called, by many authorities, his masterpiece. I feel justified in calling it the highest literary embodiment, if we except Milton, of the spirit of the miracle play. Peele whose name is now engraven in the House of Fame beside the names of Marlowe, Nash, and Greene, deserves through the merits of this play to be remembered with the Northumbrian post-monk and the great Puritan. David and Bethsabe is an outgrowth of the mystery play and marks a step towards Milton. Let the student seeking to connect literary forms compare the invocation and prologue of Peele's play with Milton's invocation to the Heavenly Muse.

The subject of Peele's play is the story of David's love for the fair Bethsabe, his treachery to Urias and the tragedy of Absalom. It is a paraphrase from the second book of Samuel (Ch. XI—XIX, v.8.) transformed by Peele's poetic genius. Note the beauty of David's speech about Bethsabe.

Now comes my lover tripping like the roe
And brings my longings tangled in her hair.

David's treatment of Urias is dramatically pictured but the scene in which the King leads the faithful soldier, whose wife he covets, into a state of intoxication sounds a discordant note in the seriousness of the play. But here Peele had plenty of precedent in every miracle cycle. The ignorant word-play of the shepherds, the dicers jesting at the foot of the cross, and Urias falling into a drunken sleep within the palace of the King, using his arm for a pillow "like a soldier",

are equally grotesque. Nathan's, "Thou art the man", and his curse, "The sword shall never go from thee and thine," could not be more dramatic.

Peele and the mystery writers handled the Hebrew chronicle with true dramatic instinct. They recognized that in many places the terse, strong language of the Hebrew narrative could not be improved upon. Christ's last speech on the cross* and the "Lift up your heads O ye gates" in the Descent into Hell† stand in the original words of the Vulgate. So when the Nemesis of Absalom's rebellion and death comes upon David, and the penitent king cries out in his extreme agony, Peele, after working up the scene in verse almost Miltonic, closes by an almost literal use of the original.

David (looking forth). O Absalon, Absalon, O my son,

Would God that I had died for Absalon,
But he is dead, ah dead, Absalon is dead
And David lives to die for Absalon.∗

V.

Mystery Plays and Shakespeare.

Shakespeare is full of allusions to the stage.

All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:

See II Samuel, 18; 33.
They have their exits and their entrances, says the melancholy Jaques; "Life is but a poor player that strutts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more," says Macbeth; Antonio regards the world but as a stage where every man must play his part and his own is a sad one. Shakespeare's philosophy of life is colored with the imagery of the stage. He often adopts the device of putting a play within a play. The honest artisans of Athens present an interlude before their duke; The Taming of the Shrew is played for the benefit of Christopher Sly, the tinker; the celibate lovers in Love's Labors Lost prepare a play for the visiting princess; and Hamlet uses a play to catch the conscience of the king. Shakespeare's allusions to the stage are not confined to the contemporary drama, he alludes to the interludes, moralities and mystery plays as well. The Clown in Twelfth Night describes a character made familiar by the interludes.

I'll be with you again in a trice, Like to the old Vice, Your need to sustain; Who, with dagger of lath, In his rage and his wrath, Cries, ah, ha! to the devil: Like a mad lad, Pare thy nails, dad; Adieu, good man devil."

In Henry V we read: "Bardolph and Nym had ten times more valor than this roaring devil in the old play." This is the devil of the mysteries and moralities.

J. Halliwell-Phillipps has pointed out that Shakespeare undoubt-edly had opportunities of seeing the Coventry plays, which in his time

* Twelfth Night. IV+II--132.
† Henry V. IV--IV--75.
still exercised their ancient function of religious instruction. We have good reason to believe that many of Shakespeare's Scriptural allusions are based on the mystery plays rather than on the Bible itself, and it is certain that there are numerous passages in Shakespeare which can only be explained by a reference to the mystery cycles. King Richard II* says:

Though some of you with Pilate wash your hands
Showing an outward pity; yet you Pilates
Have here deliver'd me to my sour cross,
And water cannot wash away your sin.

In the XXXII Coventry pageant we find the stage direction, "Hic unus afferet aquam," and Pilate says:

As I wasch with watyr my handys clene,
So gyltles of hese deth I must been.

Is it not probable that the Pilate referred to in Richard II was the Pilate made familiar to Englishmen by three centuries of life upon the miracle stage? Hamlet's expression "it out-herods Herod" is clearly an allusion to the melodramatic monarch of miracle fame. In the closet scene the Queen of Denmark, alarmed at Hamlet's manner, cries out:

Forth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep;
And, as the sleeping soldiers in the alarm,
Your bedded hair, like life in excrements,
Start up, and stand on end.

This seems to me to be a reference to the soldiers of the Resurrection play. In the four cycles the fear of the half-sleeping soldiers is

*Richard II. IV--I--239.
strongly drawn. I quote from Chester.

Out, alas! wher am I?
So brighte aboute is heare by,
That my hearte whollye
Out of my breste is shaken;
So foule feared with fantasye
Was I never in non anoye,
For I wote not witterlye
Whether I be on sleepe or waken.

The Massacre of the Innocents, as we have seen, was described in every cycle, and a reference to it must have been readily understood living when the plays of Coventry were still presented at the festival of Corpus Christi. Henry V tells the men of Harfleur that, unless they surrender without resistance, they may expect to see,

Their naked infants spitted upon pikes,
While the mad mothers with their howls confused
Do break the clouds, as did the wives of Jewry
At Herod's bloody-hunting slaughtermen.*

According to the miracle plays the souls of the damned were black and the souls of the redeemed were white. The use of black and white birds to represent souls has been mentioned above. Satan at his fall turns from a bright angel into a dark fiend. In the Judgment play of York we are told that the wicked will dwell in hell with "feendes blake.

We find the same conception of the damned in Shakespeare. The flea on Bardolph's nose reminds Falstaff of a black soul burning in hell.† Aaron in Titus Andronicus says, "Aaron will have his soul black like his face." In King John the Bastard upbraids Hubert:

* Henry V. III--III--40.
† Henry V. II--III--42.
† Titus Andronicus. I1I--I--2 06.
Thou'rt damn'd as black--nay, nothing is so black;
Thou art more deep damn'd than Prince Lucifer:
There is not yet so ugly a fiend of hell
As thou shalt be, if thou didst kill this child.*

In the Coventry play Herod's Nemesis occurs directly after the massacre of the innocents. He is surprised by Mors and carried to his doom. In the Candlemas play, found in the Digby manuscript, Herod is represented as saying in his death agony:

What, out, out alllas! I wene I shall dey this day;
My hert tremblith and quakith for feer,
My robys I rende a to; for I am in a fray,
That my hert will brest asunder evyn heer.--
My lord Mahound, I pray the with hert enteer,
Take my soule in to thy holy hande,
For I fele by my hert, I shall dey evyn heer,
For my leggs falter, I may no lenger stande.

Shakespeare's King John is suddenly overtaken by death even as Herod was; and his death, like Herod's, is a fitting Nemesis to his life. Compare the dying words of John with the speech of Herod just quoted.

King John. Ay, marry, now my soul hath elbow-room;
It would not out at windows nor at doors.
There is so hot a summer in my bosom,
That all my bowels crumble up to dust:
I am a scribbled form, drawn with a pen
Upon a parchment, and against this fire
Do I shrink up.'

The speech of the Porter in Macbeth carries us back to the mystery play of the Harrowing of Hell.

\*King John. IV—III—120.
\1King John. V—VIII—30.
Here's a knocking indeed! If a man were porter of hell-gate, he should have old turning the key. (Knocking within.) Knock, knock, knock! Who's there? the name of Beelzebub? Here's a farmer, thatanged himself on the expectation of plenty: come in time: have napkins now about you; here you'll sweat for't. (Knocking within.) Knock, knock! Who's there, in the other devil's name? Faith, here's an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale; he committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate to heaven; 0, come in, equivocator. (Knocking within.) Knock, knock, knock! Who's there? Faith, here's an English tailor come hither, for stealing out of a French hose; come in, tailor; here you may roast your nose. (Knocking within.) Knock, knock; never at quiet! Who are you? but this place is too cold for hell. I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions that go the primrose way to the everlasting bonfire. (Knocking within.) Anon, anon! I pray you, remember the porter. (Opens the gate.)*

I have touched upon the connection of Shakespeare and the mystery plays very briefly, and I have purposely omitted a discussion of the dramatic evolution which compels us to recognize the religious plays as the predecessors of Shakespeare's drama. But I am confident that the reader cannot turn away from these few pages without seeing that the mediaeval plays have left some impression on the pages of our greatest poetry, that they have done something toward forming the dramatic art of the immortal "Swan of Avon."
MYSTERY PLAYS AND MILTON.

We now stand in the presence of Milton, we feel the influence of the stately verse and sublime power of one of the world's great epics, we see the stern theology of XVII century Puritanism mingled with the beauty worship of the Greek. The same poem that pictures a hell burning with fire and brimstone, pictures also "universal Pan linked with the Graces and Hours in dance" leading on the eternal spring.

But why connect Milton with the mystery plays, the embodiment of mediaeval catholicism? Let us see. Voltaire writing in 1727 said: Milton in 1638 saw in Italy the play of Adam and Eve, and took from that ridiculous trifle the first hint of the noblest work which the human imagination has ever attempted." The play to which Voltaire referred was written by the Italian, Andreini. It set forth in five acts the fall of man and was, unquestionably, a development of the miracle play to which had been added some personifications of a mediaeval nature. Setting whatever value we choose on this opinion of Voltaire, let us note Milton's early literary plan. Milton from the very beginning of his literary career was searching for some grand subject, both dramatic and epic in nature, upon which he could lavish the wealth of his poetic power. In all his early works he had a strong leaning toward dramatic poetry. His Comus and Arcades were masques actually presented, and his Sampson Agonistes illustrates his fondness for dramatic treatment. We find that, very early in his literary career, he had outlined sixty Biblical subjects for dramatic representation. Of this number fifty-two were taken from the Old Testament. The subjects chosen from the New Testament were, Christ's birth, Christ
Christ at Gethsemane, Herod Massacreing or Rachel Weeping for her Children, Christ Bound, Christ Crucified, Christ Risen, and Lazarus. All of these subjects had been treated in one or another of our miracle cycles. Out of these sixty themes Milton selected the Fall of Man, and Paradise Lost in its first conception was a drama. In outlining this drama Milton drew up four successive drafts. The dramatis personae of the first draft suggest the influence of the morality plays. Michael, Heavenly Love, Chorus of Angels, Lucifer, Adam and Eve, Serpent, Conscience, Death, Labor, Sickness, Discontent, Ignorance, Mutes, Faith, Hope, and Charity. What an array of personages, celestial, terrestrial, and allegorical!

Force of circumstances took Milton from the study of the poet into the arena of the politician, but he returned in his maturity to the service of the "Heavenly Muse" who had claimed him as a youth. In the IX book of Paradise Lost he says that his subject "pleased him long choosing and beginning late." During the years of public activity the Puritan policy had driven men of genius from the English stage. This may help to explain Milton's motive in transforming Paradise Lost from its original dramatic form into an epic. Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained are but another version of the great world drama. The work of Caedmon, the mystery plays, and Milton stand in a closely related series.

While the action of Paradise Lost and Paradise Regained are limited to a few events, the descriptions and prophecies expand the scheme of the poems so that they cover the whole of the vast subject portrayed in the cycles. Let us see how Milton and the mysteries touch upon the same subjects. The pride of Lucifer which goes before his fall is well portrayed in the miracle play. (Chester I.)
Lucifer.

Aha! that I am wunderous brighte,
Amonge you all shynning full cleare;
Of all heaven I beare the lighte,
Though God hym selfe and he were heare.

Milton says of Satan,

He trusted to have equalled the Most High.

Milton's Satan is, however, a fallen hero "majestic though in ruin," while the miracle Satan is generally grotesque after his fall, he becomes "a devyl ful derke that was an angelle bryht." Milton describes all the heathen gods, Moloch, Chemos, Astarte, Isis, and the Ionian divinities, as devils sharing the fallen state of Lucifer. This naive explanation can be compared with many of the devices of the plays, and suggests the miracle attitude toward Mahomet. The same conception of the object of the creation is expressed in the mysteries and in Paradise Lost. Lucifer and his attendant demons find out that there is another world, the happy seat of some new race called man, about to be created, and their plan is to "surpass common revenge" by laying waste God's new creation. So in the York play:

Satanas incipit dicens,

For woo my witte es in a were,
That Moffes me mykill in my mynde,
The godhede that I sawe so cleere,
And parsavued that he shuld take kynde of a degree
That he had wrought, and I denied at angell kynde

And we were faire and bright,
Perfore me thoght at he
The kynde of vs tane myght,
And per-at dedeyned me.
The kynde of man he thoght to take,
And theratt hadde I grete envye,
But he has made to hym a make,
And harde to her I wol me hye.

Milton describes the gates of hell:

And thrice threefold the gates; threefold were brass,
Three iron, three of adamantine rock,
Inpenetrable.

It is at gates like these that Jesus cries, "Attolite portas principes"
in the miracle version of the Harrowing of Hell.

We have seen that the allegorical characters in Milton's early drafts were more numerous than in the finished poem. Sin and Death are, however, represented as guarding the gates of hell; and Death, grinning horribly to hear his famine should be filled in the new created world, reminds us of Mors as he kills the tyrannical Herod and carries his soul to hell.* The mysteries and Milton have a common authority for this conception. "By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin." Sin opened the clanging portals of the Inferno and the gaping mouth of hell, like a furnace mouth,

"Cast forth redounding smoke and ruddy flame."

Compare this with the illustration of the miracle stage given above.

In the III book of Paradise Lost we find a passage presenting a

* Coventry XIX.
striking parallel to the XI Coventry pageant. A council is held in heaven, the disobedience of mankind is discussed, and the Creator demands, who of the heavenly host will become mortal to redeem man's mortal crime. There was silence throughout the heavenly throng and man,

Must have been lost, adjudged to death and Hell
By doom severe, had not the Son of God,
In whom the fullness dwells of love divine,
offered his mediation. In the Coventry play a council of the Trinity is held and Christ offers Himself for the salvation of mankind.

Filius.  
It peyned me that man I mad,
That is to seyn peyne I must suffre sore,
A counsel of the Trinite must be had,
Whiche of us xal man restore.

Pater.  
In your wysdam, son, man was mad thore,
And in wysdam was his temptacion,
Therfor, sone, sapyens ye must ordeyn herefore,
And se how of man may be salvation.

Filius.  
Fadyr, he that xal do this must be bothe God and man,
Lete me se how I may were that wede,
And sythe in my wysdam he began,
I am redy to do this dede.

In book IV Milton describes the simplicity of Adam and Eve who, as in the miracle plays are naked and are not ashamed until they eat of the forbidden tree of knowledge. We can compare the beginning of Satan's speech to Eve, where flattery is his first weapon, with the
lines already printed from an old French play. In the Temptation scene (Book IX) the Serpent tells Eve why God has forbidden her to eat of the Tree of Knowledge.

He knows that in the day
Ye eat thereof, your eyes that seem so clear
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then
Opened and cleared, and ye shall be as gods,
Knowing both good and evil as they know.

The same conversation is presented in a Chester play.

Serpens.
God is subtillte and wise of witte,
And wotte you well when ye eate yt,
Then your eyes shalbe unknitte,
Like godes you shalbe,
And knowe bouth good and evell alsoe.

The first quarrel of Adam and Eve, and Adam’s cowardly defence of himself before the Almighty are described in much the same spirit in the dramas and in the epics. Eve’s contrition, so beautifully described in Paradise Lost (Book X), is strikingly portrayed in the Coventry play where wishes to be killed by her husband.

Leve spowse now thou fonde,
Now stomble we on stalk and ston,
My wyt awey is fro me gon,
Wrythe on to my necke bon,
With hardnesse of thin honde.

Milton’s geography for the most part is correct and we find no survivals of the ludicrous anachronisms of the mystery, as we sometimes do in Shakespeare. We can hardly have the right to look for anachronisms
in a description of heaven, for there we are free from the limitations of time and space, still the use of artillery in celestial warfare and the description of angels punning on the words "discharge" and "charge" seems a trifle grotesque.*

The Puritans made no use of the great historic chants of the Roman church, but Milton introduces, now and again, into his great poem, angelic hymns of praise and songs of adoration which are but paraphrases of the Te Deum and the Gloria in Excelsis. These old chants formed an important part of the mystery plays. The song of Adam and Eve in Book V expresses, "All the earth doth worship Thee the Father everlasting" in another form.

These are thy glorious works, Parent of good, Almighty.

On Earth join all ye creatures to extol,
Him first, Him last, Him midst, and without end.

In Book VII, when the angels heard the will of the Almighty,
Glory they sung to the most High, good will
To future men, and in their dwellings peace;
Glory to him, whose just avenging ire
Had driven out thy ungodly from his sight.

We have seen, in this study of Milton and the mysteries, how the same ideas were clothed in poetic form in different countries and under centuries and under widely differing religious conditions. Milton coming after the mysteries established a continuity in religious poetry.

---

* Paradise Lost, Book VI, Line 564
VII.

CONCLUSION.

In the preceding pages I have tried to show that the mystery plays, embodying the religious conception of their age, have left an impression on all subsequent literature. Consciously or unconsciously we are influenced by all that has gone before, the thoughts and aspirations that find expression in the literature of the present are never isolated, they are influenced by the past and help to form the future.

Literature is a correlated growth. If I have succeeded in showing that the miracle play is a valuable part of our literary inheritance the purpose of my thesis has been accomplished.

In bringing my work to a close I feel compelled to pay the highest tribute to the religious ideal as a motive force in English literature. Above Caedmon, above the miracle plays, above Bunyan and Milton, towers the indestructable literary grandeur of the Latin Vulgate and the English Bible.
V I T A.

BENJAMIN JOHN FITZ

was born at Stafford, Connecticut, August 1, 1876. He received his early education in the public schools of South Paris, Maine. In 1892 he entered Bridgton Academy, North Bridgton, Maine, and was fitted for Bowdoin College. In 1893 he entered Bowdoin College and completed his Junior year there. He did his Senior work at Colorado College and was graduated in 1897, receiving the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Bowdoin College and from Colorado College. In 1897 he began a course of study leading to the degree of Master of Arts in the University of Colorado. He studied English Literature under Prof. Brackett; Pedagogy under Prof. Allin; and Gothic under Prof. Ayer.

I have read the thesis presented by Benjamin John Fitz, B.A., a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts. The introduction on the History of the Mystery Play is a careful survey of the best authorities. The part on the Influence of the Mystery Play on Later English Literature shows wide reading and careful analysis. I approve the thesis on the grounds of original research.

Very respectfully,

Raymond Brackett

Professor of Comparative and English Literature

in charge of major studies.
University of Colorado,
Boulder, Colorado.

JAMES H. BAKER, A. M., LL. D.,
President.

To the Graduate Faculty:

I have read the thesis presented by Benjamin John Fitz, B. A., a candidate for the degree of Master of Arts. The introduction on the History of the Mystery Play is a careful compilation of the best authorities. The part on the Influence of the Mystery Play on later English Literature shows wide reading and careful assimilation. I approve the thesis on the ground of original research.

Very respectfully,

[Signature]

Professor of Comparative and English Literature.

In charge of major subject.