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THE LITURGICAL ELEMENT IN ENGLISH DRAMA.

A Thesis Presented for the
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By
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Much has been written concerning the relation between Religion and the Drama. Almost every standard treatise on drama insists upon the use that religion has made of the dramatical element. Historians of literature, with rare exceptions, concede also that drama is religious in its origin and they have taken considerable pains to show that, not only for its birth, but also for its growth and development is drama indebted to religion. These learned writers have treated of religious drama in general and of English religious drama in particular; they have done this in so excellent a manner that it would be presumptuous for anyone else to enter into exactly the same territory.

There is, however, one field which does not appear to have been particularly well cultivated, or rather, the prospect of whose rich harvest does not seem to have attracted the special attention of any laborer. It is that particular aspect of English drama which concerns the intimate relation that exists between this department of literature and the liturgy. Would it not then be most interesting to enter this field and there gather the rich sheaves which are to be found in abundance? This can be best accomplished by tracing the liturgical element throughout the whole course of English drama from its origin to the present day.

Before entering upon the subject proper it may not be out of place to state in what sense the term 'liturgy' is herein used.

The word 'liturgy' is commonly used in two senses and this double use sometimes leads to confusion. On the one hand the word refers to the Sacrifice of the Holy Eucharist, the chief official service of the Church, wherein the marvels of Creation, Redemption and Sanctification are repeated day by day in harmonious concord. On the other hand liturgy means the whole body of official services: rites, ceremonies, prayers and sacraments of the Church as opposed to private devotions. Thus we term liturgical, those services which are contained in any of the official books, the chief of which are the Missal, the Breviary, the Ritual and the Martyrology. It is in this latter sense that the term will be made use of in the following pages. A glance at the origin of the Church's public ceremonies will be of assistance in the development of the proposed subject.

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Profoundly engraven on every human heart is the belief in a mighty Being, either as the only one having a lawful claim on man's homage, or as merely the supreme among the nation's supposedly numerous divinities. Closely linked with this belief is the firm conviction that worship is due to the above mentioned Being, and that to this worship there must be given some exterior manifestation. This tendency to give outward expression to one's most inmost thoughts and feelings is deeply implanted in human nature, whether that nature be represented by the young child or by the aged man; whether by the highly civilised nation or by the most

barbarous tribe. The human mind tends strongly towards a realistic demonstration of man's beliefs and emotions. Thus in everyday intercourse with our fellow men we find ourselves making use of gesture to enforce our words and to render our meaning clearer. Is it, then, surprising that religious emotions, too, are emphasised by actions? Prostrations, genuflections, striking of the breast, lifting up of the hands and all such actions are naught else than the natural expression of the fear, reverence, respect, hope and love welling up from the depth of a heart which realises ever so little its own inferiority or guiltiness, and its consequent dependence on the Supreme Arbiter of life and death, the Giver of all good things. Let us turn to the history of God's chosen people for examples in illustration of what has been stated above. Readers of the Old Testament are familiar with the picture of Miriam going forth dancing and all the other women following with music and dance. There, too, is seen King David "dancing with all his might before the Lord,"giving vent to his gladness and joy in the contemplation of the unrivalled glory and majesty of the All-holy God. Again we read that in token of sorrow and repentance the Jewish people clothed themselves in sackcloth and sprinkled ashes on their heads. What does all this signify if not the endeavour to make manifest the emotions of the inward soul?

Man, however, is not only an individual being,

he is also a social being, a member of the great human family; hence his worship of the Divinity should be public and in common with his fellow men, for society as such owes homage to God. Mankind has ever realised this obligation and has at all times practised worship in common. Evidence of this is found in the history of the most ancient nations. One has only to call to mind the prescriptions of the Egyptians, of the Greeks and of the Romans with regard to the official worship to be paid to the gods. As to the Hebrews it was none other than God Himself Who prescribed in minute detail the rites and ceremonies to be observed in public worship, or, in other words, God instituted the official service of the Old Law. Later, when the New Dispensation replaced the Old, official service, far from being abolished, was practised with greater solemnity until it has culminated in the touchingly symbolic ritual or official service existing to-day in the Catholic Church.

This official service or 'liturgy' has been defined by Dom Gueranger as "The Collection of the symbols, of the chants and actions by means of which the Church expresses and manifests her worship of God." The same writer calls liturgy a divine element emanating from three sources: "Under the impulse of the spirit which animated the admirable Psalmist and the prophets," he says, "the holy Church at one time takes the subject of her canticles from the books of the Old Testament, at another time.....she entones the

canticles written in the books of the New Covenant; and finally she at times sings her own new canticles."

Another writer speaking of liturgy as a social form of prayer continues, "She (the Church) knows well how to sum up entire creeds in a sign; how to clothe in the most eloquent language the least action of the Son of God which the Gospels have preserved for us...The liturgy is the very soul of these consecrated temples which, without it, would be but lifeless temples of stone. It is the incense of praise which the Church raises to God on high." And again, "it is as the setting which gives the central jewel (Holy Mass) the colour proper to the time." It is the necessary outcome of the twofold nature of man.

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But, it may be asked, what has all this to do with drama? More perhaps, than appears at first thought. Drama is the offspring of religion. It was brought forth,we may say, at the foot of the altar. As has been said, the Church's elaborate ritual is a strikingly dramatic representation of the mysteries of religion and of the events recorded in the Gospel. But where lies the source whence the Church draws her dramatic inspiration? In the realisation that its simplest as well as grandest ceremonies in the immediate presence of and for the worship of the King of Kings, the Divine Prisoner of the Tabernacle, as man's poor offering to acknowledge and requite Infinite Love has dwelt among us these nineteen hundred years and will continue to be with us

until time shall be no more. Thus inspired, Holy Church has made of drama as she has of all the arts and sciences, the handmaid of religion; in fact when man attempts to represent to his mind the divine action he is producing what is in germ a drama. Great ages of faith have always been great ages of drama, for when literature was docile to the Church it shared in her glorious mission of presenting a divine and noble lesson, its true function being to aid in driving home to the hearts of men the truths taught by their divinely appointed custodian.

Drama has, let it be repeated, ever been closely associated with the religious life of the people and as a consequence, the morality of the stage has ever been in direct proportion to the moral standard of their religion. When nations worshipped such degraded deities as Bacchus and Moloch the evil spirits whom in reality they were worshipping, led them on by means of immoral dramatic performances, to excesses most disgraceful to mankind; in other words, the stage became a school in which the lowest vices were only too well taught. Roman drama especially, became throughly obnoxious to moral sense; so much so, that actors and playwrights were looked upon by all self-respecting Romans, pagan and Christians, as persons to be avoided, nor would the State accord professional actors the rights of citizenship.

Naturally then when the Church, the great exponent of Christian ideals and principles went forth in all the

fulness of her divinely constituted power to "teach all nations" she was bound to combat the forces which placed obstacles in the way of her noble mission. In the front rank of these forces was the pagan drama whose baneful influence was an impediment to the inculcation of Christian ideals and principles, a hindrance to the reception of the teachings of the Gospel, a source of immense peril to immortal souls.

So powerful a weapon in the hands of the demon was the pagan drama that even some of the noblest minds succumbed to the spell of its licentious representations. Witness the known example of the great Alipius who entering the theatre very unwillingly, soon became so fascinated by its sensual charms that, as he himself confessed, he could hardly be induced to withdraw from its corrupt performances.

Ever solicitous for the welfare of her children Holy Church opposed this drama with all her energy and raised her authoritative voice against attendance at the indecent and utterly degrading abominations presented on the ancient stage. Most vigilant guardian that she is, the Church was ever on the alert when deadly peril threatened the precious deposit confided to her care.

By dint of repeated warnings, threats and excommunications the Church endeavored to drive the ancient drama from the theatre. But as Doctor John Talbot Smith writes..."the task was well nigh impossible. The people would not give up the pleasures of the theatre...There have been decrees uttered...Decrees cannot

kill such things....The innocent indulgence in it must be guided, wisely,developed, nobly restrained." For the play instinct is innate in the human heart. The people wanted plays; the people would have plays. The Church in her divinely inspired wisdom recognized the attraction of the drama and the possibilities latent in it for the instruction of the multitudes. She therefore saw to it that drama should be provided, but drama of such kind that would not be only moral but also edifying and pious. To quote Dr. Smith again: "They (the Christian leaders) founded a Christian stage of a highly religious character, wrote plays for it, trained both actors and audiences..."Thus the very means that had hitherto been used as a tool of licentiousness became, in the hands of the ministers of the Christian religion, a mighty factor contributing to the moral enlightenment and instruction of the people. The extreme disapprobation with which the Church had regarded dramatic performances--a disapprobation justified as we have seen not only by the scandals of the ancient theatre but also by the direct association of the latter with the persecution of Christianity--gave way, slowly but surely, in obedience to the well-known principle of "enlisting strong human tastes as far as could be lawfully done, on the side of religion." (Saintsbury).

Thus ever has the Church acted. When endeavoring to wean the converts, either Jews or pagans, from those of their customs which were not in accordance with the teachings

of Christianity, this good mother has not rudely cut asunder the bonds which attached these new children to the observances of a lifetime, but has gradually done away with these customs and substituted other practices in their stead. She has pressed into the service of religion whatever may help to simplify and make pleasant the teaching of it. Thus she made drama a means of imparting to her children the important truths of religion.

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In its office as handmaid of religion, drama has the tendency to make every great mystery a realised actuality. Our Divine Lord Himself, the Teacher par excellence, demonstrated this by combining action with word during the whole of His public ministry. In answer to the question of the disciples of John the Baptist He performed astounding miracles more convincing than the most eloquent words could have been, thus leaving no doubt as to His real identity. How dramatic, too, the Divine Master's reply to the accusers of the poor woman taken in adultery! These self-sufficient men understood but too well the lesson of the writing in the sand. Again to teach His Apostles the great lesson of humility He humbly kneels at their feet to perform the office of a lowly slave. Who but a Judas could fail to be touched at such a spectacle? Many similar examples from the Gospel narrative could be quoted but let these suffice.

Holy Church, then, is but following the example of her Divine Founder when she speaks to us in a dramatic manner.

Thus it is not at all surprising to find that between drama and the services of the Church there exists an intimate relation, or in other words that drama and liturgy are closely interwoven. In all truth it may be asserted that liturgy is dramatical and that true drama is liturgical. Liturgy is dramatical? Does not such an assertion savour of irreverence of holy things? Are not the stage and the pulpit at variance with each other? Are they not utterly opposing elements? In answer to the above let us quote a striking passage from Rev. Brother Leo's excellent essay on "Religion and the Drama." The reverend author writes:

> One Good Friday many years ago- a small boy went to church.....but this was the first time that he had had the privelege of witnessing the whole of the Good Friday ceremonial. When the Gospel came, and the three deacons began to chant the story of Our Lord's Passion as told by St.John,the small boy was thrilled, enraptured. He gained an understanding of the matter in a very short time..... It was wonderful. He closed his eyes and in imagination lived over the scenes in the court of the High Priest. Why,it was just like going to the Theatre!
>
> Like going to the theatre?.....
>
> Here he was in Church and on Good Friday too, enjoying that wonderful feeling that heretofore he had secured only in the theatre.....He is a zealous and accomplished priest.....and he expressed the hope that the parents and teachers of a later generation do not make the mistake of condemning all manifestations of the dramatic instinct in her soulful and impressive liturgy...
>
> If the average altar boy could be brought to realise that when he serves

> at Mass he is an actor in the most wonderful and impressive drama in the world, undoubtedly his devotion would be increased....."

What, in effect, is more dramatic than the central act of worship in the Church, the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, the renewal of the Sacrifice of Calvary which Robert Hugh Benson so aptly styles "The tragedy of the murder of God; and that interwrought with the most bewildering pangs and motive, and overshot with gleams of love and pity." This great tragedy binds all the mysteries of the liturgical year"into one mysterious unity, for there on the altar is our Lord with whole continuity of His life. He is freed from the bonds of time and space. "The Desired of all nations" so longed for by the ancient prophets, is there as in His first tabernacle, the immaculate bosom of His Mother; the Babe of Bethlehem, the Child of Nazareth is there; the Sufferer wrestling in Gethsemane, the High Priest of Calvary, the Conqueror of death, the King enthroned at the right hand of His Father and sending them the Paraclete; He, the Risen Lord is there, living the new, timeless life of the Resurrection."

With this central mystery of Christian faith, this symbolical representation of the expiation of human sin, the vitalizing act of the Church's liturgy, is naturally and organically connected that offspring of Christian and religious worship, dramatic action. The Church enriches and surrounds the Holy Mass with varied and colorful liturgical ceremonies so that a powerful appeal may be made to the senses. In order that her message may find expression in the ideals of group

life among her children she urges active participation in her "Great Drama" through the 'Missa Recitata' or the 'Missa Cantata'. Dr. Ward, in his excellent history of the English drama shows how the Holy Mass has all the elements of true drama--Introduction, Central Action and Close. He points out also the lyrical, epical and pantominical parts of the Holy Sacrifice. Chateaubriand, too, in his 'Genie du Christianism' (1V.Ch.21.) goes into details concerning the same subject, calling special attention to the dialogue form of various parts of the Holy Mass, particularly the Confiteor and the Preface.

The august Sacrifice of the Altar is then, not a meaningless spectacle, but a living and most touching tragedy. Every action, every gesture of the celebrant and of his assistants is symbolic and most instructive. This fact is so evident that even non-Catholics, quite ignorant of the teachings of our Holy Religion, admire the beauty and grandeur of the ceremonies used during the Holy Sacrifice and are very deeply impressed by them. Often have these persons been heard to remark that the Catholic Church knows how to touch the heart of man, and that this same Church realises that, when all is said and done, a man is but a grown up child who loves not only to witness action, but also to take part in it.

An author who cannot be accused of any leaning towards Catholicism writes:

> "She (the Catholic Church) is the only Church that has been loyal to the heart and soul of man, that has clung to her faith in the imagination.....She has never lost sight of the truth that the

> product, human nature, is composed of the sum of flesh and spirit.....She is the only poet among the churches....(Jas.Russel Lowell in'Fireside Travels')

Charles Warren Stoddard, a noted convert,after lamenting his former blindness concerning Catholic worship continues his thoughts in the following words:

> "Do we not see in the chalice on the altar our Lord entering into the Garden of Gethsemane? It is the first scene in the mystical drama and every breath is hushed. The Divine One is burdened with the fore-knowledge of His doom. He kneels in the garden; we kneel with Him, and are to follow Him, step by step, to the end. At the Confiteor He has fallen bathed in the sweat of His blood; He is betrayed witha kiss, led away captive, grievously smitten and denied. The celebrant turns to us at the Dominus Vobiscum and in his glance we see the conversion of Peter. Our Lord is led before Pontius Pilate. He is despoiled of His garments--at the unveiling of the chalice--scourged and crowned with thorns. Pilate washes his hands of the crime, and at the moment, the priest moistens his fingers. "Behold the Man!" cries Pilate; and the voice at the altar pleads "Orate Fratres". At the Preface we hear the warning bell. The awful progress of the tragedy is watched in breathless silence; only from the organ loft comes the wail of the singers. The bell rings; He is condemned to death and made to bear the cross, While His brow is wiped with the handkerchief of Veronica, and the effigy of the sorrowful face is retained forever. He is nailed to the cross."

"Consummatum est" The bloody drama is over, to be renewed on thousands of other altars before millions of spectators.

The man who has no faith and who incidently comes into our church at the hour of Holy Mass, admires the grandeur of our ceremonies, the beauty of the chants, the piety of the faithful. All this speaks to his heart and he cannot help

but feel that there are souls in the bodies of the worshippers and that God is present in those souls.

As with Holy Mass so with other acts of religion. Chambers cites several examples of liturgies that possess symbolism and mimetic action, such for instance as the ceremonies prescribed for the dedication of churches, the Palm Sunday procession, and the other Holy Week ceremonies. Indeed, who that witnesses the ceremonies peculiar to Holy week could fail to notice that a drama, more realistic than that acted in any theatre, is being acted before his very eyes? The solemn and significant procession of Palm Sunday with its mystical knocking at the door of the church, the Office of Tenebrae, inspiring with reverential awe even very young children, plaintive voices lamenting over the sorrows of Jerusalem, the stripped altar, the empty tabernacle, the extinguished light, the solitary crucifix gleaming ghastly white in the darkened church, the clergy robed in vestments of deepest mourning--What is all this if not intensely dramatic? Dramatic, too, beyond all expression, are the ceremonies peculiar to Holy Saturday: "As when a man wakes and sees the sunlight in his room," sunlight after the noonday darkness that overspread the earth on the first Good Friday; the re-appearance of the lights, the penitential violet giving place to the festal white, the soul-stirring pealing of the organ after the mournful silence of three days--all this causes every fibre of the Christian heart to thrill with

inexpressible emotion reaching the climax when the glad "Alleluia" resounds through the sacred edifice, and when the light of the Resurrection bursts through the sacred edifice in full glory athwart the gloom of the early dawn. The triumph of the Victor Who has conquered death and hell is heralded on Easter morn by the joyful "Haec dies quem fecit Dominus; Exultemus et laetemur in ea". There is no room for comparison between the joy felt by the patriot as he acclaims the victory of an earthly warrior and the elation experienced by the fervent Christian as he greets his risen Saviour coming forth gloriously from the darkness of the tomb. This feeling of exultation increases year by year as the faithful disciple of Christ draws nearer to the day when he, too, must fall a prey to death; he knows with the certainty of faith that another day will dawn when death must yield up his prey through the merits of Him Who in His glorious resurrection overcame both death and hell.

Somewhat dramatic, too, is the Divine Office in choir. It is an official prayer offered in common. The whole choir turn, bend, rise up as one person, with rhythmical regularity inspired by devotion.

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In all these ceremonies enhancing the grandeur of the liturgical offices Holy Mother Church has for her purpose to impart instruction more easily to her children, in accordance with the pedagogical principle that knowledge received through both sight and action is more vivid and lasting than

that received through mere oral instruction or reading. Every-one of the ceremonies which are included in the liturgy are peculiarly well-fitted to imparting a clearer knowledge and understanding of the truths involved. In order, as has been already asserted, to fulfil the great mission confided to her care by her Divine Founder the Church has always employed every means in her power. Whatever could in any way contribute to the teaching of all nations, whatever is beautiful or excellent in human endeavor, has been transformed by this church and called into service. This is doubtless the reason for the theatrical recital prescribed in the 'Concordia Regularis', composed in the tenth century. Chambers in his work 'The Mediaeval Stage' gives a full translation of the now famous Quem Quaeritis ceremonies. We read how the friars were to enact in the church the scene that took place at the Holy Sepulchre on the first Easter morning. The Latin text is as follows:

Quem quaeritis sepulchre christiocle?
(Sanctarum Mulierum Responsio)
Jhesum Nazarenum crucifixum O celiocle.
(Angelice voces consolatio)
Non est hic, surrexit, sicut, praedixerat;
Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit, dicentes:
(Sanctarum mulierum ad omnem clerum modulatio)
Alleluia, Resurrexit Dominus hodie,
Leo fortis, Christus Filius Dei.
Deo gratias dicite eis.
(Dicat Angelus: Venite et videte locum...)

This simplest form of liturgical celebration was elaborated in many ways by the addition of Biblical sentences and hymns, particularly the 'Victimae paschali', as also by the

representation of St.Peter and St.John running to the grave and in some cases by the appearance of a person representing the risen Saviour. On the continent of Europe this dialogue was once intimately connected with the Mass, but later became separated from it as is evident from the two English Tropers still in existence. Chambers translation of the Quem Quaeritis ceremonies is as follows:-

> While the third lesson is being chanted let four brethren vest themselves. Let one of these, vested in an alb, enter as though to take part in the service, and let him approach the sepulchre without attracting attention,and sit there quietly with a pālm in his hand. While the third respond is chanted, let the remaining three follow, and let them all, vested in copes, bearing in their hands thuribles with incense, and stepping delicately as those who seek something, approach the sepulchre. These things are done in imitation of the angel sitting in the monument, and the women with spices coming to anoint the body of Jesus. When,therefore, he who sits there beholds the three approach him like folk lost and seeking something,let him begin with dulcet voice of medium pitch to sing Quem quaeritis,and when he has sung it to the end let the three reply in unison Jhesu Nazarenum. So he, Non est hic, surrexit, sicut praedixerat. Ite, nuntiate quia surrexit a mortuis. At the word of this bidding let those three turn to the choir and say Alleluia! resurrexit Dominus. This said, let the one still sitting there, and as if recalling them, say the anthem, Venite et videte locum. And saying this let him rise and lift the veil, and show them the place bare of the cross, but only the clothes laid there in which the cross was wrapped. And when they have seen this let them set down the thuribles which they bare, in that same sepulchre, and take the cloth, and hold it up in the face of the clergy, and as if to demonstrate that the Lord has risen and is no longer wrapped therein, let them sing the anthem Surrexit Dominus de Sepulchro and lay the cloth upon the altar. When the anthem is done, let the prior,sharing in their gladness at the triumph of our King, in that, having vanquished death, He rose again, begin the hymn Te Deum laudamus. And this begun,

all the bells chime out together."

From the above extract one learns of the custom of placing the cross in the sepulchre after the services of Good Friday, a custom that obtains to this very day in certain parishes in Western Canada.

Regarding the dramatization of the Christmas mystery we read in Chambers:

> "A praesepe or 'crib' covered by a curtain was made ready behind the altar and in it was placed an image of the Virgin. After the Te Deum five canons or vicars representing the shepherds approached the great west door of the choir. A boy in similitudinem angeli perched in excelso sang them the 'good tidings' and a number of others involtis ecclesiae took up the Gloria in excelsis. The shepherds, singing a hymn, advanced to the praesepe .....The dialogue of the trope .....follows, and so the drama ends."

How clearly and eloquently this simple representation must have brought home to the congregation the fundamental mystery of the Incarnation! The effect of this elementary acting can be easily appreciated by anyone who has endeavored to impart to children some knowledge of this mystery. The pupils have, perhaps, carefully memorized the text of the Catechism regarding the Incarnation and Birth of the Saviour. The teacher, especially if she be young, has discoursed most learnedly, and has succeeded in quite bewildering (and wearying) her little auditors. But let her hold up before the class a large coloured picture of the first Christmas night, or better still, let her show lantern views of the same scene.. Lo! the transformation! The light of intelligence beams forth from the eyes of her delighted young charges. Or again, let these same tiny people put on a Nativity play; the effect will exceed all expectation.

The mind of the youngest will have grasped the mystery in a marvelous manner.

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Such embryonic representations as the Quem Quaeritis and the Praesepe, given in the interior of the churches, have, as noted above, been designated liturgical drama. At first the text was brief and was taken from the Gospel or the Office of the day. It was in Latin and prose, but, by degrees vernacular and verse crept in. As the play, for such they became, grew in length and scope they were acted, not in the sanctuary, but in the body of the church; even this place became too small. Then the performances were held first in the church-yard, afterwards in the very streets of the town. Lay actors took the place of clerics and non-liturgical matter was introduced. Still, though no longer strictly liturgical, the plays did not cease to be religious, for, from the stage were promulgated doctrine, dogma and dramatized versions of Holy Writ.

From what has been said it is easy to conclude that the first main element in drama is the liturgical element. Scripture was the source whence the great dramatists drew their marvels as the poets of antiquity borrowed their features from Homer. It is in Scripture that the history of Cain and Abel is recorded, the first great tragedy that the world has witnessed.

As with drama in general, so with early English drama in particular, the subjects were taken from Holy Writ

and from the lives of the saints. In France the name Miracle was applied to representations of the latter, while the term Mystery was given to scenes from the Old and New Testaments regarding the life of Christ. Though England had both Miracles and Mysteries, the term Miracle was there used indiscriminately for both species of plays, while the name Mystery, to distinguish a certain class of play, was not used until long after the true religious drama passed away.

The earliest 'Miracle' of which we hear in England is the 'Ludu de Sancta Katherina', performed at Dunstable about the year 1110. The authorship of this play is unknown but the first version is believed to have been prepared by Geoffry of St.Albans, then a teacher at Dunstable. The success of this play encouraged the writing and performance of a great number of 'miracles'. On these the oldest extant in the English language, 'The Harrowing of Hell', belongs to the great thirteenth century. Its subject, the Descent of Christ into hell is taken from the apocryphal Gospel of Nicodemus. This poem was written in the East Midland dialect and is dialogue in form; hence commentators are of the opinion that it was intended rather as a recitation than as a dramatic representation. If this supposition is true then the Harrowing of Hell is a link between old recitative poems of the Anglo-Saxon period and the Moralities of the Later centuries. Another extant drama is Jacob and Esau written only a few years later.

Of other plays belonging to the fourteenth and

fifteenth centuries the detailed history is lacking, but references are found in various biographical sketches and also in prohibitions issued by the religious innovators against the performances of plays representing miracles wrought through the intercession of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints. The only extant English plays based on miracles of the saints are Mary Magdalen and St.Paul's Conversion.

Now that drama was being acted under the open sky it began to be influenced by elements which materially altered its form. The short, inclement winter days were not at all adapted to the performance of long Christmas plays, while the Easter season was scarcely more favorable. The institution of the feast of Corpus Christi most opportunely solved the difficulty. The outdoor processions in connection with the new festival suggested a novel method of presenting the plays. These plays were now adapted to outside performance and as a consequence rapidly gained favour with the people. The Mysteries now in the hands of the guilds were joined into a long,continuous pageant that lasted throughout the entire summer day.

The Corpus Christi plays are, as is to be expected, replete with the liturgical element. The various pageants opened a wide field to the authors and as it was hardly in keeping with the reverence due to the Most Blessed Sacrament to show forth dramatically the Last Supper and the miracle of Transubstantiation, not these scenes, but others more or less directly connected with them were presented. Here were seen the priests of the Jewish Law offering the prescribed sacrifices,

figures of the Perpetual Oblation of the New Law. There, Abraham was preparing to immolate the youthful Isaac; while further on was a group of Jews gathering the miraculous manna. In another place could be seen the Brazen Serpent on which a number of Israelites had fixed their gaze; while the scene of the Multiplication of Loaves was vividly portrayed by a neighboring group of actors.

The Guilds mentioned above took great pains to render these representations as effective as possible. Under their skilful management arose the four famous cycles which have come down to modern times. The York Cycle, the best preserved of the series, contains no less than forty-eight separate dramas, as well as a solitary fragment which was probably added towards the close of the fifteenth century. The whole series is now preserved in a manuscript in the British Museum (Add.MS.3529). In it the various component parts are clearly apportioned to the various guilds. Pollard gives a list of contents of the York Cycle showing the scope and the distribution of plays among the different Trade Guilds. This Cycle is thought to have been compiled as early as 1340-1350 and shows evidence of having probably a single author. It is ascribed to a Northumbrian monk. In order to make the various scenes more impressive the author has made use of invention and imagination, thus taking a decided step towards dramatic development.

The cycles followed very closely the Bible narratives and there are several features that give additional evidence of

the descent of the Mystery from the liturgical offices. These features are pointed out by Chambers. The music was similar to church music. Again, the dialogue is sometimes a translation of the Latin text, also many of the plays close with the Te Deum as was the case with the liturgical dramas inserted in the office at Matins.

In these dramatic performances the whole life of Christ was annually put before the minds of the people. The mysteries of the Christmas season lent themselves readily to representation on the stage. This fact is well illustrated in the life of the great St. Francis of Assisi. In order to recall vividly to the poor people among whom he labored, the birth of Christ, the Saint made a representation of the crib of Bethlehem. He laid on the straw the figure of a child and had some of the peasants play the role of the shepherds, others that of the Kings with their retinues bringing their symbolic gifts. The sons of St. Francis took with them into the various countries this custom of their saintly Founder so that by the middle of the thirteenth century plays were given in connection with the successive feasts of the ecclesiastical year. These plays have never been surpassed as a means of illustrating and enforcing the lessons of the liturgy.

In the Nativity Plays the liturgical element is very prominent. In the York play referring to this mystery we find St. Joseph saying:

> ".....So mekill pepull is comen to towne
> That we can nowhere harbered be,
> Silke prees it is."

Mary exclaims after the miraculous birth of her Divine Sin:

"Hayle my Lord God! Hayle Prince of Pees!
Hayle my Fadyr and Hayle my Sone!

Then explaining to her spouse the meaning of the wondrous light Mary continues:

"For Balam tolde ful longe beforne
How that a sterne shulde rise full hye,
And of a maiden (He) shulde be borne."

Joseph refers to another prophecy:

"That Abacuc in mynde gon mene
By prophicie
He said oure Savyoure shall be sene
Between bestés lye."

The prophecies of Hosea and Isaias are recalled by one of the shepherds:

"Balaham brother, me have herde say
A sterne shulde schyne and signifie
With lightful lemes like ant day."

After the Angels' song we learn

"And aungell brought us tythander newe
A Babe in Bedlam shulde be borne."

This message decided the shepherds to seek the promised Babe Whom they find in the stable "be-twyne two bestes tame." To the Divine Infant they make the simple prayer "God sonne forget-me-not."

The Christmas play of the Chester cycle contains the Angelical Salutation almost word for word:

"Heale by thou Mary Mother free
Fullof grace, God is with thee."

And when Elizabeth in astonishment asks "Whence is this that the Mother of my Lord should come to me," Mary answers

in the sublime words of the Magnificat.

The Second Towneley Shepherds' play (Secunda Pastorum) is purely secular until the Angel appears and exhorts the shepherds:

"At Bedlam go se
Ther lygs that fre
In a crib full porely
Between two bestys."

The shepherds then hasten to the stable and there, hailing the new born Saviour they offer their simple gifts. The Virgin Mother then says to them:

"The Fader in Heven, God omnypotent,
That sett all on seven, His Son has He sent.
.....
I conceyved hym even thrugh myght as he ment,
And now is He borne.
He kepe you from wo;
I shall pray hym so;
Tell forth as ye go,
And myn on this morne."

Then follows a discussion among the shepherds in which mention is made of the miraculous star, and of "that Chyld and that lady." One of the shepherds, Gib by name, reminds his companions of the prophecies of David and Isaias and repeats the words "Ecce Virgo Concipiet."

In this Towneley cycle the comic element abounds, but it should be noted that never is there any freedom taken with the actual Biblical characters or with the language of Holy writ. In connection with this matter Gayley writes:

> "The injection of crude comedy was a natural response to the civic demand. Indeed, if we consider comedy in its higher meaning as the play of the individual achieving his ends, not by revolt but by adjustment to circumstances and convention, the miracle play was in its essence a preparation for comedy

> rather than tragedy. For the theme of these dramas is, in a word, Christian; the career of the individual as an integral part of the social organism, of the religious whole. So, also, their aim: the welfare of the social individual. They do not exist for the purpose of portraying immoderate self assertion and the vengeance that rides after the beauty of holiness or the comfort of contrition. Herod, Judas, and Antichrist are foils, not heroes. The hero of the miracle seals his salvation by accepting the spiritual ideals of the community. These plays, accordingly, contribute in a positive manner to the maintenance of the social organism. The tragedies of life and literature, on the other hand, proceed from secular histories, histories of personages liable to disaster because of excessive peculiarity--of person or position. Tragedy is the drama of Cain, of the individual in opposition to the social, political, divine; its occasion is an upheaval of the social organism. The dramatic tone of the miracle cycle is, therefore determined by the conservative character of Christianity in general.....In all such stories (Massacre of Innocents) the horrible is kept in the background or used by way of suspense before the happy outcome, or frequently as material for mirth.....It must be said that in the old cycles the plays surrounding even the Crucifixion are not tragedy; they are specimens of the serious drama, of tragedy averted. The drama of the cross is a triumph....But though the dramatic edifice constructed by our forbears is generally comedyit is also divine. And not for a moment did these builders lose their reverence for the House Spiritual that was sacred, nor once forget that the stones which they ignorantly and often mirthfully swung into juxtaposition were themselves hewn by other hands. The comic scenes of the English Miracle should, therefore be regarded, not as interruptions to the sacred drama, nor as independent episodes, but as counterpoint or dramatic relief."

In connection with the various Nativity Plays it may here be remarked that even the songs and carols introduced into the plays exhaled the perfume of the liturgy:

"As I rode out this enderes last night,
Of three jolly shepherds I saw a sight.
And all about their fold a star shone bright;
.....
Down from heaven, from heaven so high,
Of angels there came a great companye.
.....

In the Nativity group there is the play of the Three Kings with its reference to the Star in the East and to the prophecies of Isaias and Osee. The Gospel for the festival of the Epiphany is repeated almost verbatim even to the fact that the Kings returned "by another way into their own country."

In all these Christmas plays the narrative of the Evangelist is really made the text of the play, and this, appealing as it did to the mind and heart of an audience animated by a lively faith, must have had a great influence for good in their daily life; for, as one writer states, the residents of a moorside are transported to the Judean plains and to the presence of the Divine Child in His sweet and touching innocence, and are stirred to the very soul by the thoughts suggested during the dramatic representation. These mystery plays had the advantage over every other kind in that there was not the shadow of doubt in the people's minds concerning the truth of the mystery presented. The other events of the infancy and childhood of our Lord were also included in the Nativity cycle which closes with the finding of the Child Jesus in the Temple of Jerusalem. How liturgical is the response of Jesus to His Mother:

"Wherte shulde ye sake me so?
Often tyman it has been told

My foder werkes, for wele or woo,
Thus am I sente for to fulfyll."

The second group of the cycles represents the various scenes of the Passion of our Divine Redeemer. This group includes the events beginning with Palm Sunday and making mention of Jesus' supper at the house of Simon the Leper, the admirable conduct of Mary Magdalen on that occasion and Jesus' defence of the woman "who loved much". Then are enacted the conspiracy against Christ, the solemn events of Holy Thursday; the Last Supper, the Agony in the Garden, the treachery of Judas, the arrest of Jesus, the flight of the Apostles. The drama continues on through the tragedy of Good Friday with the trials before Pilate and Herod, the remorse and suicide of Judas, the condemnation, the scourging, the painful journey to Calvary with its various heartrending incidents; the Crucifixion, the last words of the dying Saviour, His Death; all were expanded into a play coming to a climax in the unsurpassable glories of the Resurrection. Here again all is clearly permeated with liturgical matter and faithfully adheres to the Biblical text.

The Trope of Easter, mentioned in connection with the 'concordia Regularis' developed into a dramatic scene when brought into connection with the 'Descent from the Cross' which appeared first in a ritual of English origin attributed to St. Dunstan. (967). This simplest form of liturgical celebration was afterwards elaborated and took on the character of a short chanted drama. As already mentioned, priests and monks,

assisted by altar boys were the first actors.

The Passion Plays, properly so-called were thus evolved from the ritual of the Church prescribing the chanting, in parts, of the Passion on Good Friday . Like the other plays they appeared first in Latin then in the vernacular. In this dramatisation of the story of Our Saviour's self-sacrifice devout minds saw a ready and effective means of impressing the theme and doctrine upon an unlearned multitude. The visual representation of the sufferings of our Lord stimulated and sustained the fervour of the people and thus brought them into close personal sympathy with Christ and led them to realise the full significance of the words of the great Apostle, "He loved me and delivered Himself for me." Love for Him Who suffered in their stead filled their hearts and spurred them on to lead better lives. Thus early did the sufferings and death of the Redeemer afford a grand and never-tiring theme for the purification and exaltation of a debesed art form; it served to regenerate the Drama.

Religious drama was at its height in the fourteenth century, though Fitzstephen about the end of the twelfth in his life of Thomas a Becket, describes with approval the representation in London of the sufferings of the Saints, (martyrs) and the miracles of the Confessors. These plays were developments of the Church ceremonial with almost literal employment of the language of the liturgical books.

Belonging probably to a cycle that is no longer in existence is a fourteenth century Scriptural play, "Abraham and Isaac." This is simply a dramatisation of the Bible account of the trial of Abraham's faith. The dramatist made full use of the subject with its struggle between faith in God and a man's natural love for his child. The Scripture narrative is faithfully followed, as these few quotations may serve to show:

(Angel)...Owr Lord commandyth the for to take
Isaac, thy young sone, that thow lovyst best,
And with hys blod sacryfyce that thow make.

(Abraham)..I love my chyld as my lyffe,
But yet I my God myche more
.....
Wyll I not spare for chyld nor wyffe,
But don after my Lordes lore."

And again: (Isaac).. Wy ys yowr best that ye shuld kyll?
Both fyer and wood we have redy,
But queke best have we non....."

As the faithful Abraham is about to slay his well-beloved son the Angel appears:

"I am an angell.....
That fro hevyn to the ys sent.
He (God) knowyth thy will and also thy (harte,
That thow dredyst hym above all thyng
...For Isaac thow schall not shed hys (blood."

God's promise is heard:

"Abraham.....for thys dede
I schall multyplye yowr bothe sede
As thyke as sterres be in the skye."

This play teaches "lernd and layd annd
the wysest if us all
.....
How we shuld kepe to owr powre
Goddes commandments without grochíng,
For when He wyll, he may yt amend,

His commandments yf ye kepe with good hart"

The epilogue to this play is pronounced by a personage, the Doctor, who exhorts the audience to the faithful observance of God's commandments, closing his speech with the words:

"Now Jesu, that weryd the crowne
Bring us all to hevyn blysse. Amen."

In the Chester cycle is found another Old Testament play, 'Noah's Flood'. It is one of the most spirited and entertaining of the English mysteries. It follows with comparative fidelity the Biblical story as to characters and development, and though comic elements are introduced there is no taint of irreverence. In the stage directions we read, "First, God speaketh unto Noe standing without the ark with all his family."

"Man that I made I will destroy."

In obedience to the command of God, Noe sets to work with a will, his sons and the women helping; Noe's wife prudently saying:

"And we shall bring tymber to,
For wee nothing els mon doe;
Women be weake to underfoe
Any great travayle."

When arrives the moment for entering the ark Noe's wife refuses to do so, and at the command of Noe her sons force their mother in. To relieve her feelings she gives her husband a sound box on the ear. Dramatic,but hardly liturgical!

The forty days speed rapidly by; Noe sends forth the raven, then the dove which as Scripture states returns with the

olive branch.

"A branch of olive from some place."

Seeing this, Noe decides to go forth from the sheltering ark and having alighted on dry land offers the sacrifice which God accepts and in return promises that

"My bow betwene you and me
In the very firmament shall bee
By very token, that you may see
That such vengeance shall cease."

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Drama having, by means of the Miracle Play, taken regular rank as a department of literature, was bound to show traces of the spirit of allegorizing so prevalent in Europe in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The moral allegory is beautiful at all times and in every country. It was popular even among the nations buried in paganism. Christianity did not banish it. On the contrary, it put it to good use in the production of the Moralities. Here again the debt of drama to liturgy was increased. The more strictly these new plays adhered to the spirit and inspiration of the liturgical idea, the better did they succeed in attaining their object. Thus it has ever been. While the dramatic art clings to the beauty of the teachings of Holy Church it will continue to have a significance that would otherwise be lost. This is demonstrated by the fact that the populace never wearied of the mystery plays; it was attracted to religious drama by the element which is called universal. This drama is an expression of the thoughts and feelings common to all people

in whatever time and place they live, and consequently appeals to emotions common to the human race. The religious question always finds an echo in the human heart for, "only the fool says in his heart there is no God." Time and again adults can be seen listening with rapt attention to the religious or other teacher relating the simplest Scripture narrative to children of tender years. Yes, whatever relates to the eternal truths has always possessed an attraction for the upright mind and the docile heart, and hence the Mystery and Morality were for centuries the expression of the highest and holiest thoughts of the people.

The object of the 'Miracle' and 'Mystery' was to teach and enforce the truths of the Catholic faith. The 'Morality' on the other hand, had for its purpose the application of Christian doctrine to conduct. This form of play was very popular in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, and existed side by side with Miracle plays of that period. The Morality drives home to the audience in no mistakable manner the necessity of conforming one's actions to the Divine Law, for it is one thing to know the teaching of the Gospel and another to practise the sublime lessons contained therein. The 'Morality' has been defined by Dr. A. W. Ward as "a play enforcing a moral truth or lesson by means of the speech and action of characters which are personified abstractions--figures representing vices and virtues, qualities of the human mind or abstract conceptions in general." The

Morality was really an offshoot or development of the Miracle Play. Hence it is quite natural that the golden thread of the Liturgy should run through all this series of dramatic performances. In confirmation of this, Gayley writes: "Moral plays, like plays that were originally liturgical, aimed at religious instruction. But as the scriptural-liturgical illustrated the forms of the church service and its narrative content, the moral illustrated the sermon and the creed. The former dealt with history and ritual, the latter with doctrine; the former made religious truth concrete in scriptural figures and events, the latter brought it home to the individual by allegorical means."

The earliest English Morality of which there is record is "The Lord's Prayer." This was produced in the latter half of the tenth century. In it all manner of vices and sins were held up to scorn and virtues called forth praise. Unfortunately this play and a similar on "The Creed" have been lost. The earliest complete moral play extant is "The Castell of Perseverance," a struggle for the soul of 'Humanum Genus' Malus Angelus with the Seven Deadly Sins and Bonus Angelus with the Six Divine Graces are the chief contending forces. There we hear the soul in an agony of doubt as to which counsellor she should heed:

> Whom to follow,wetyn I ne may;
> I stond instodye,and ginne to rave;
> I wolde be riche in greataray,
> And fayn I wolde my sowle save.
>
> As wynde in water I wave,
> Thou (to Bad Angel) woldyst to the world I me toke;

And he (Good Angel) wolde that I it forsake.
Now so God me helpe, and that holy boke
I not wyche I may have."

'Humanum Genus' listens with docility to Good Angel who recommends him to Confession. The last named sends him to the Castell of Perseverance, where he is beset by the Seven Deadly Sins and defended by the Cardinal Virtues. Finally God the Father received the soul into His merciful Keeping, and the play ends with this salutary advice, "Ever at the beginning think on your last ending."

Pre-eminent among the Moralities is 'Everyman'. Both its exact date and authorship are unknown although it is generally believed to belong to the fifteenth century. Its theme is the approach of death and the necessity of being prepared to appear before the Sovereign Judge. "Here beginneth a treatise how the High Father of Heaven sendeth death to summon every creature to come and give an account of their lives in this world and is in a manner of a moral play." 'Introductory words.' The play naturally contains liturgical matter in abundance. In a soliloquy God reviews all that He has done for mankind, and the ingratitude with which His benefits are received. He therefore summons:

"Death, thou mighty messenger."

and bids him

"Go thou to Everyman
And show him in my name
A pilgrimage he must on him take,
Which he in no wise may escape;
And that he bring with him a sure reckoning
Without delay or any tarrying."

Death immediately setting out in search of Everyman finds him

absorbed in the pursuit of honours, riches and pleasures. Deaf to the bribes and prayers of Everyman for a delay, Death warns him

"See that thou make thee ready shortly."

Everyman, in his distress, turns to his old acquaintances, Fellow-ship, Kindred, Goods and all worldly things, but all these now forsake him. He next calls on Good Deeds who replies, "I lie cold in the ground, so sore-bound "that I cannot stir." This friend, however, directs him to her Sister, Knowledge, the latter leads him to that Holy man Confession who exhorts the now penitent Everyman to contrition and penance that thereby he obtain forgiveness for his sins. Good Deeds having now regained strength through the repentance of Everyman, consents willingly to follow him to the grave and to accompany him to the Judgment seat there to plead in his favor. This play abounds in "Scriptural allusions and to traditions of the Church on the efficiency of works for salvation, on the mediating influence of the Blessed Virgin" on temptation, sin, the Four Last Things and the Sacraments. After much salutary discipline the soul of Everyman returns to its Creator:

"Into thy hands, Lord, my soul I commend;
Receive it Lord that it may not be lost.
In manus tuas.....
.....commendo spiritum meum."

The Doctor then delivers a speech exhorting the audience to profit by the lesson taught in the play and he concludes with a prayer that God may bring them all to life eternal "for Saint Charity."

Perhaps there never was preached a more striking sermon on death than that in <u>Everyman.</u> So appealing is the religious content of this remarkable drama that even in this so-called irreligious age it is listed almost every season in England and America, and always proving most impressive as well as chastening to the spirit. It is an out and out Catholic play, so much so, that were the references to Catholic liturgy omitted there would not remain so much as the skeleton of a drama. "What wonder", as Ward says, "that a morality which is successful in bringing these things before hearers and readers should, by a consensus of opinion to which I know of no exception, be regarded as the flower and crown of the literary species to which it belongs?"

Some historians of literature and drama decry the the Moralities as being "dull performances", "artificial plays", and so forth. Whilst these epithets may fittingly be applied to some few of this type of play, they are far from being applicable to the true Morality. The critics referred to above forget that the Middle Ages were ages of faith, when even the humblest peasant understood and appreciated spiritual things better than do many so-called highly cultured persons of a later period. When well written and unique in development the Morality is always welcome, for that which portrays life ever wins a heart interest from all mankind. The constantly increasing popularity of <u>Everyman</u> is an excellent answer to the modern critic.

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The Interlude, which, as it were, forms a link between the old plays and the new, was at first a short morality suitable for fewer performers in a place smaller than the public theatre. Liturgical references are found in abundance in the earlier interludes, which treat of the Four Last Things and the retributive justice which does not always delay the punishment of the evil-doer until his earthly career has drawn to a close. The interludes written by John Heywood brings us to the threshold of real drama.

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Crossing this threshold we find ourselves in the presence of England's master dramatist, the immortal Shakespeare. For some reason or other probably connected with the religious condition of the country Shakespeare rejected the mystery play. It may be doubted whether in so doing he acted wisely for, as a certain writer asserts, it is difficult to believe that the great poet gained thereby, or that his drama went home to the people better than did Mystery and Morality. But if the famous dramatist rejected these early plays as such, he did not altogether refrain from making of his art a means of teaching moral truths, in other words he did not divorce it from religion. He felt that the drama "must embody Catholic aspects and customs and atmosphere." So we are justified in expecting to find in Shakespear's works some allusions to the liturgy. Nor are we disappointed. In "Hamlet" there is the speech of the ghost of Hamlet's father, which it would be superfluous to quote; there, in truth, the Catholic teaching

of the existence of Purgatory is set forth; Claudius too, is well conversant with the conditions necessary to his prayer for pardon; "Macbeth" is almost a treatise on temptation and the dangers of dallying with it. In "Henry 1V" we hear the king speaking of an expedition

> "To chase those pagans, in those holy fields
> Over whose acres walked those blessed feet
> Which, fourteen hundred years ago, were nailed
> For our advantage on the bitter cross."

King Henry V prays

> "O God of battles steel my soldiers' hearts
> .....Not to-day O Lord,
> O not to-day, think not upon the fault
> My father made in compassing the crown.
> .....
> .....And I have built
> Two chantries, where the sad and solemn priests
> Still sing for Richard's soul."

After the battle, ascribing all the glory of success to God, the king commands

> "Let there be sung Non nobis and Te Deum.

Quotations might be multiplied but the above will suffice to suppor the assertion that the great English dramatist felt that he could not altogether put aside the liturgical element without running the risk of weakening his plays or of even rendering them incomprehensible to the playgoers of his day.

One cannot refrain from asking what the Mystery Play would have become had Shakespeare consecrated his genius to this branch of the dramatic art; what heights it would have reached and what an immense amount of good might have been accomplished by this means not only among the poet's contemporaries but also among the thousands who have read and

witnessed his plays even in our own day.

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It is almost a truism that the morality and consequent efficiency of the stage is intimately connected with the religious life of the nation. It is therefore not surprising to find that when the so-called Reformation struck at the true religion it inflicted a deep wound on the literary life of England. The Miracle Plays gradually declined though performances in some places are on record as late as the opening of the seventeeth century. It is known that the "Three Kings" was played in 1599. The dramatists of the time catered to the new and often very depraved tastes of their changed audience. With rare exceptions they neglected the fact that man in his deepest nature is a moral being, and that only such plays as show forth the triumph of the moral law possess the power of permanently satisfying the human intellect and heart.

It was the Catholic doctrine that had inspired the poets of the glorious Middle Ages with their noble thoughts, delicate sentiments and artistic forms. When this was rejected by the writers the drama lost its loftiest inspiration and gradually descended to such a low level that even Parliament fearing the results of the coarse plays, voted to close the theatres as being "breeders of lies and immorality". When, after the Restoration, these places of amusement were re-opened, the plays produced were not of a kind to elevate the mind of man or to satisfy the cravings of a noble human heart.

Of late years, however, there is a growing

tendency towards a revival of the religious drama. Man seems again to have become penetrated with that salutary sense of restlessness and unsatisfied longing which made the great Saint Augustine cry out "Our hearts were made for Thee, O Lord, and they will never find repose until they rest in Thee." Though there is much that is unsound and even false in some of the attempts at liturgical plays still they go to prove that only when drama draws its inspiration from the pure source of man's relation with his God, when it inhales the rich perfume of the liturgy, will it merit to attain success and permanence.

There is a widely felt impulse towards the re-creation of the truly great drama of the Middle Ages. Miracles and Moralities are again being written and are being performed either privately or on the public stage. One among the modern dramatists who has produced several such plays, is Mr. John Masefield of the Court Theatre group of players. In fact, some of his productions might almost be classed with the early mysteries. The word "almost" is expressly used, for there are certain features of Mr. Masefield's plays which distinguish them from the older ones. In the first place as his productions are written for present day actors their spelling and diction are, of course, quite modern. Then there are ideas expressed by some of the characters which reflect the twentieth century rather than the fourteenth; this is especially noticeable in the conversations of the Shepherds and Kings in

"The Coming of Christ." These suggest very vividly the aggressive attitude of certain modern laborers towards the capitalist. Again, the early plays are decidedly Catholic in feeling and tone, whereas a child of the Church is instinctively aware that Mr. Masefield has neither Catholic views concerning the divinity of Christ, nor a true Catholic's tender devotion to the Blessed Mother of God. There is certainly some mention made of the Virgin Mother of Jesus Christ but the dramatist seems carefully to refrain from giving her the title 'Mother of God' which so spontaneously rises to Catholic lips.

Apart from these features it might be asserted that the religious drama from Mr. Masefield's pen are liturgical. His 'Esther', partly original, partly a translation of Racine's drama consists mainly of the Scriptural story of Queen Esther. The choirs in this play were inspired by the sacred dramatic poesy of Holy Writ.

Another of his plays, "The Trial of Jesus" is, as its name implies, a Passion Play opening in the Garden of Gethsemane with the Angel Wisdom comforting the suffering Saviour in His mortal Agony. The Gospel narrative of the teachery of Judas and the seizure of his Divine Master is closely adhered to. Jesus is heard saying to the chosen Three,

"Rise, let us go; he that betrays me is here."

After the traitor's kiss, the loving Saviour asks,

"Judas, betrayest thou the Son of Man with a kiss?" Then to the soldiers He says,

"This is your hour and the power of darkness."

The above serves as a prologue to the drama. The play proper opens in the Court of the High Priest. There are present Annas, Caiphas, the accusers, soldiers etc. The scene related in the Gospel is acted including the despair of Judas who exclaims,

"I have sinned in betraying innocent blood."

There are the priests ordering the thirty pieces of silver to be spent for the purchase of the potters field.

The falsity of the accusation against Jesus is brought out very clearly in the discussion of the Jews among themselves and in their speeches before Pilate, the very words of the Gospel being used. Pilate's cowardice and human respect are emphasized as also the noble sentiments of Procula and Longinus.

Mr. Masefield's next play, "Good Friday" is almost a versified edition of the Evangelist's narrative. It presents in a striking manner the sorrowful events of the last day of the mortal life of Jesus Christ. The first act opens with the release of Barabbas in accordance with the infamous choice of the Jewish rabble.

"Go to Barabbas' cell and set him free,
The mob has chosen him."

St. Peter's denial of his Divine Master is clearly portrayed:

"You were his friend; you come from Galilee.

I do not.

Yes. You do.

I tell you, no."

.....

I swear to God I never saw the man.

After that came the trial of Jesus, the warning of Pilate by his wife, the Scourging, the Crowning with Thorns. Then we hear the Roman Governor's weak defence of Christ, and the clamour of the mob:

"Would you crucify your King ?"

He is no king of ours. We have no king
But Caesar. Crucify!

Then the condemnation:

"I, Procurator of Judea, say
That Jesus, called the King,be led away
To death by crucifixion, here and now
In the name of Caesar and of Rome."

The Jews, vexed at the wording of the scroll plead in vain for an alteration:

"Lord Pilate,do not write,'Jesus the King',
But that He called Himself,'Jesus the King."

"What I have written,I have written. GO!"

The whole tragic scene of the Crucifixion and its attendant circumstances is vividly and touchingly described by the noble Longinus:

"The hangman's squad were dicing for His clothes.
.....
He was God's Son.....
For,as He called,fire tore the sky in two,
The sick earth shook.....
The earthquake ran like thunder....
.....the graves opened....."

"Herod, the fox, makes friends with Pilate."
.....
"They have been estranged a long while now;
But now they will be friends."

On reading the above-mentioned drama one becomes convinced that the author has spent many a serious hour in meditating on the Gospel and that the deepest sympathy for our suffering Lord fills his heart.

"The King's Daughter" another drama by the same author is based on the Biblical story of Jezabel. Every detail of the inspired writer's account is brought out even as regards the tragic death of the wicked queen:

".....the wild dogs have torn her body."

"Philip, the King", though historical rather than religious abounds in references to Holy Scripture. It opens with Philip's prayer for the success of the Armada, a prayer anumated by the deepest humility and entire submission to the Will of God. This latter virtue pervades the drama, leading the King to exclaim after learning of his country's defeat

"In bitter days
The soul finds God, God us."

In a play dated 1928 "The Coming of Christ", from the same pen the list of 'Dramatis Personae' includes the Blessed Virgin, the Shepherds, the Three Kings. Angels foretell to Anima Christi the life of poverty and sufferings that awaits the Messiah and speak as though they would dissuade Him from becoming man.

".....You will go
Into a poor mean home, branded from birth

With shame,hunted to exile,forced to toil.
.....No scope for power,
But plying the harsh tool for daily bread."

Again,

"King, priest and governor will turn against you,
Calling you rebel and blasphemer.....
.....Your followers
Will dwindle to a few,of whom some three
Will know the beauty of your thought.
.....

Then in a hurry will come the bonds and insult,
False witness,cruelty and ignominy,
The wild beasts within men yelling for your blood;
You Who would save mankind will be held fast
And nailed upon a cross,where you will think:
'Death with his hell of pain may quench the soul'"

But Christ is not to be turned aside from His mission of love.

Then the Angel of Mercy declares

"Your life will be a bright seed that will flower
Soon, after you have passed."

The Messiah sees in vision the future Prince of the Apostles

who makes himself known as

"A fisherman.....
.....Who'll follow you,
Giving up all;and after,will deny you.
And after,will go telling of your glory
A many hundred miles, to Babylon
.....
And I shall drink your cup,Master,you helping;
and enter glory by you."

The Apostle Paul announces himself as

"A tentmaker, of Tarsus
Who will deny you and denounce your followers
To torment and to death;and then will see
Your truth by sudden lightning of the mind
And then go through the world,telling your truth,

Through scourgings, stoning.....
.....
To the sharp sword outside the city gates
Glad beyond words to drink of your sweet cup."

After these consoling visions Anima Christi again declares

"I am resolute,
I lay aside my glory and my power
To take up manhood."

This dialogue between Anima Christi and the angels seems to be based on the words "Ecce ego, mitte me," and puts one in mind of the beautiful paraphrase of these words contained in the writings of St. Alphonsus Ligouri translated by the Reverend F. Omer, C. SS. R. The text of the paraphrase is as under:

> Ecce Ego, mitte Me. My Father.....
> .....Man, having fallen into sin has need of a Redeemer: permit then that I, Thine only Son, take on myself the task of redeeming him; I will descend on the earth, I will clothe Myself with human flesh, and, by My sufferings I will fully satisfy Thy justice.--But think, My Son, replies the Eternal Father, think what a life of suffering Thou wilt be obliged to lead if Thou takest on Thyself to make satisfaction for man.--No matter, send Me.---Think that Thou wilt have to be born in a stable amidst the animals; that still a child Thou wilt have to flee into Egypt to escape from the hands of those very men that Thou wouldst save, and who, from Thy very birth will seek Thy life.--No matter, send Me.--Think that on returning to Palestine Thou wilt have to live in the poorest and most painful manner, like a simple workman in the shop of a poor artisan.--No matter, send Me.--Think again that when Thou dost appear in public to preach Thy doctrine and show Thyself to the world Thou wilt have indeed a few disciples, but they will be few; by far the greater number of men will despise Thee and end by putting The to a shameful death on an infamous gibbet,--No matter, send Me.
> Ecce Ego, mitte Me.

The Passion and Death of the Saviour are foretold by the Angel Light, in the following words:

"One clad in purple,with the power of Rome,
One crowned with priesthood,one, a king,will judge
Where now we stand.
Your brows will bleed from thorns,your hands from thongs
Your back from scourging; spearmen at your side
Will beat you on your way: spitters and cursers
Will follow you with peltings,to your death.
.....
Now pass to man: Lo,yonder in the East
He waits for you; assume his flesh,and tread
The hard stony road to the Hill of Skulls."

The Chorus of Angels sings:

"Not bright with powers,
Not crowned with flowers,
This King of ours
Proceeds to earth;
But weak and wailing
at a manger railing
among oxen ailing
In winter dearth."

The shepherds in the fields are greeted by the angel of Power:

"Be not afraid: behold I bring you good tidings
Of great joy which shall be to all the people.
There is born to you this day in the city,
A Saviour which is Christ, the Lord,
This is the sign: ye shall find a babe wrapped up
In swaddling clothes and lying in a manger."

Then the celestial song of the angels breaks upon the astonished ears of these simple shepherds:

"Glory to God in the highest;
Peace on earth among men in whom God is well pleased.

The shepherds hasten to the stable and, touched at the sight of the extreme poverty of the beautiful infant

Whom they find with His Mother, they offer to make a comfortable cradle for Him and to provide a room "down home at the croft."

The Kings come with their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh as to their sovereign Lord, Whose miraculous star has led them to His feet.

&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&&

Another modern writer who has made use of Holy Scripture as the source of a play is E. Temple Thurston. His "Judas Iscariot" contains many direct quotations from and references to both Old and New Testaments. For instance, Simon Iscariot, the father of the unhappy Judas, reads from the sacred scroll the words of Enoch concerning the deeds of the expected Messiah. The Wise Men on their way to Jerusalem call on Simon and ask "Where is He that is born King of the Jews for we have seen His Star in the East and are come to adore Him?" Mention is made also, of Herod's cruel decree and the resulting Flight into Egypt. There is also given a graphic account of the resurrection of the son of the widow of Naim, of Christ's walking upon the waters, of His Agony in the Garden and of His betrayal by the miserable traitor who finally in black despair goes to his own place.

So closely does this drama adhere to Holy Scripture that it may be aptly termed a dramatised version of the Gospel story. It brings very forcibly to the reflecting mind the danger of allowing even the smallest evil inclinations to go unchecked.

The success that these later plays have met with proves beyond the shadow of a doubt that the modern audience can fully appreciate and thoroughly enjoy the religious drama to an extent never dreamed of by sceptics. Realising the truth of this fact several Catholic writers in England have in recent years devoted their time and talents to the composition of plays similar to the mediaeval miracle play. One may say that through their drama as through those of the Middle Ages, flows the pure lifeblood of Christianity. Some of these productions deal with the early ages of the Church and depict the victories of the martyrs; others are of a more historical character; but all have a positive religious content.

Among these writers may be mentioned Robert Hugh Benson whose 'Nativity Play' and 'Cost of a Crown' have won well deserved praise; Aubrey de Vere whose 'St. Thomas of Canterbury' delineates the character of a veritable Catholic prelate, loyal to the Church which Christ

"....from His side in water and in blood
Gave birth to on Calvary, and caught it,
Despite the nails, His Bride, in His own arms."

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