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"THE EVOLUTION OF THE ENGLISH DRAMA!"

Each human soul has an affinity to some mysterious oblivion peopled with passing dream shades. In childhood there is a tightly-drawn relationship that affords long moments of reverie, in which elusive spirits sing and recite of intangible yet intoxicating deeds of heroism carried on in an ideal region of heroic life. The whole environment is teeming with a vague and charming minstrelsy. As the ties of the world claim our thought, and as our attention is directed to all that is external and material, these cords become loosened and we remember the touch of our halcyon world only half-consciously. It is thus in the history of our drama. In the childhood of the world its race listened to an unspoken music that sank into the mind of the individual as he toiled in the field or moved toward his temple of worship. But afterwards when races multiplied and life became less simple, the introspective thought was stifled by the outward mechanism, and Time, hitherto unrecognized, became the potent factor in material existence, to wrestle with which required the concentration of all thought. Hence we proceed from the passionless lyric of unspoken imagery to the sympathetic drama of expressed struggle and heroic action.

In our Garden-of-Eden state the peaceful happiness of the tranquil solitude soothed man to gentleness. Sin had not wedded his nature with that of the lower animals, whom he controlled. While men still lived in unconsciousness of strife, their thought took shape in lyrics, but, as ambition for supremacy seized the race, the drama arose. As the brilliant sun of knowledge shed its light on the awakening world, motives and jealousies became disclosed which hitherto had lain dormant in the still twilight of consciousness. So in the history of expression. While man lived in a semi-embryonic state, while his thoughts and dreams and inward whisperings formed his field of action, while his fellow-being was no object of curiosity to a mind wholly unacquainted with investigation, so his drama was an unwritten chant of heroic deeds performed by ideal creatures in a mythical era beyond the furthest verge of Time and Tense. However, when his inward life received the shock of external
action

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action, when earthly struggle commenced, his energies were directed outward to grapple with material problems. Then this tangible world took form in a vital literary history of action, a passionate expression of man's ambitious life which thrilled the chords of life and love and struggle all the way down through the ages, until out of the crudities and imperfections of nascent thought was evolved the whole man of expression in Shakespeare.

The Hellenes were a race composed of several kindred tribes whose common idea of their individual origin was that they sprang from the soil which they tilled. The remarkable achievement of this race was the evolution of the Homeric Olympus. Out of the vague prehistoric chaos of tradition which abounded in repulsive forms totally hideous to the human mind Homer brought forth the clear and living types of godhead holding a definite province in the government of the world or a special relation to the energies of mankind; each too a person of a certain aspect and with certain qualities. The love of beauty was the mainspring of all Greek endeavour although the love of knowledge and love of freedom inspired their thought and action. Poetry and drama as first inspired, is the index of the capacity of the Greek--a special form of their energy in which the other forms are implicit. The part assigned them in the drama of the nations was to create forms of beauty, to unfold ideas which should remain operative, when the short bloom of their own existence was over and thus to give a new impulse, a new direction to the whole current of human life.

In its birth and in its maturity, surely drama has been strangely united. It has been said that the man of genius sometimes is such in virtue of combining the temperament distinctive of his nation with some gift of his own which is foreign to that temperament. So it was with Homer; a distinct perfection even though a dawning mind. So it is in Shakespeare, the basis is English, and the individual gift a flexibility of spirit which is not normally English.

There is no clue to these secrets of Nature's alchemy. The Hellenes appear in the dawn of dramatic history with their unique temperament already distinct. We can point only to one reason, and that a subordinate cause which must have aided its development, namely the geographical

ical position of Greece. No people of the ancient world were so fortunately placed. No where are the aspects of external nature more beautiful, more varied, more stimulating to the energies of body and mind, a climate which within three parallels of latitude nourishes the beeches of Pindus and the palms of Cyclades; mountain-barriers which at once created a frame-work for the growth of local federations and encouraged a sturdy spirit of freedom; coasts abounding in natural harbours; a sea dotted with islands and notable for the regularity of its wind currents; ready access alike to Asia and to the Western Mediterranean;---these were circumstances happily congenial to the inborn faculties of the Greek race, and admirably fitted to expand them. Such was the favoured land which saw the beginning of Western civilization and the creation of primal drama. A like cause influenced the development of the learning which in England evolved Shakespeare and his drama. The successful wars in France and the Netherlands for the religious freedom of the Protestant reformers; the conquests in the West Indies; the new discoveries in remote parts of the Globe; all contributed to stimulate the energies of the nation, to turn its attention to great enterprises and to strengthen the rising consciousness of its power and greatness. It was, however, the triumph over Philip's "Invincible Armada" that tended to elevate the national sense of self-consciousness and patriotism to the height of poetical enthusiasm.

The earliest indication of dramatic bent is the choral chant over the victor in war or tournament. The bard croons his verses to the measure of the gay dance about the altar. As the conception of music or harmony was in itself very crude and simple, so we find these first verses quite primitive in form, yet for all, displaying a clear and distinct idea of measure, which requires but the higher civilization to mould them into perfection. Pindar is the poet that unites ancient lyrical myth with actual dramatic leaning, and creates the first step in the growth of the drama. In his odes of victory, we find the vague dreamy character of the deeds of a mythical hero outshone and relieved by the clear description of the actual deeds of the living victor. The Homeric Olympus became actual, the heroes are seen under a new light,---neither that far-off, though clear, light as of a dreary twilight world which the former lyrics shed around them heretofore, nor as yet that searching sunshine of noon-

tide which was shortly to follow.

While we may be wrong in speaking of these creations of Pindar as drama, yet their affinity to the Attic production is so close as to be almost a prototype. The great human passions and living realities of existence have for the first time been thrust upon the awakening soul of man.

Aeschylus but amplifies this idea, Pindar celebrated only great events and high purposes whereas those of the Attic school produce songs inspired by wine and conviviality definitely associated with the wine-god Dionysus. It shows the affect of external and worldly prosperity and social intercourse. It is the result of a wider, more luxurious, less religious civilization. It presents a strong contrast to the tranquil solemn chant formerly associated with the Greek celebration of a victory, whether between two Olympian gods or between one of the gods and a man. We have now sunk in our evolution of dramatic form and character to the level of man's struggle with man, and even to man's dominion over demons.

This song of Dionysus was originally sung by one voice, while the chorus always from the beginning, the moving spirit in Greek poetical conception performed the dance ever growing more complex. Arion, one of the earliest of the dramatists who followed Pindar, changed the ancient form of the chorus from a mere background or accompaniment to the actor (who was the bard) from mere human instruments to satyrs, and thus vindicated the right of the deity to an honor which had been temporarily alienated from his worship. Arion assigned the song of Dionysus to specially appropriate performers who stood in a recognized relation to that god. And he was also making the performance something more lively, more characteristic than an ordinary choral song. Still as yet there was nothing properly dramatic in such an entertainment.

Thespis, who followed Arion as the bard at these festivals, elevated the chorus from a mere adjunct to his verse measure, by addressing his song to the satyrs and hence creating a vehicle for a lively address humorous or satirical. Even here, however, action could not yet be represented as taking place before the eyes of the spectators, even though the reciter of verses ^{at} vividly related great deeds.

Aeschylus made his first appearance as a poet in five hundred B. C., and gained the first prize at the Dionysia in 484 B. C. The entertainment

tainment which he found existing was such as Thespis had made it---a goat-song or tragedy which was still essentially lyric and not yet properly dramatic. Instead of the single reciter, Aeschylus introduced two persons both, like the single reciter detached from the chorus. The two persons could hold a dialogue and could represent action. By this change, Aeschylus altered the whole character of the lyric tragedy and created a drama. The dialogue between the two actors now became the dominant feature of the entertainment; the part of the lyric chorus though still very important had now only a diminished value.

The age of Aeschylus regarded the resplendent myth of Homeric Olympus and like legends as history, and this with actual extant history supplied the tragic themes. In that picture of the past, which lived before the imagination of the men who had fought at Salamis, no heroic glory lit up the period between Homer and themselves. The essence of that tragedy was in viewing the heights of the past from the heights of the present, so blending them in a single imaginative view that the heroic past became, in very truth, the present. When Aeschylus took a subject from the heroic legends and made it into a play, his paramount aim was to present his story in the most effective and vivid manner--that which seemed to him most beautiful and impressive. He was a poet and an artist moved by the gods to give dramatic embodiment to these great forms; human but raised above common humanity; from whom the Hellenes traced their lineage and through whom their lineage ascended to the gods of their race who in the primal idea of all, had sprung from the soil of Greece. Stirred by that great endeavour Aeschylus poured forth the deepest thoughts and feelings which his life had bred in him; yes, and felt himself called to be a teacher--to move the minds and nourish the hearts of his people. But these thoughts and sentiments which he uttered as the course of the drama suggested do not warrant the assumption that the poet had a definite and coherent system of doctrine in his mind. His answers to great doctrinal questions are vague and unsatisfactory. As yet the scope of drama is limited and does not touch the soul of existence. As for the Athenian spectators in the theatre they went to see the heroes in bodily presence and to hear their living voices; they went to see what Aeschylus would make Agamemnon do and say. They looked also to hear wise thoughts from actors or from chorus, and they welcomed

welcomed such wisdom which worked upon them mainly by deepening beliefs with which they were already imbued. Each of the great dramatists colored the collective experience of Hellenes with his own views of life and gave prominence to certain thoughts of his own, but in so far as Attic Tragedy was directly didactic, the larger part of what it did consisted in clothing Hellenic maxims with forms of new energy and beauty.

The next cycle in the drama was led by Sophocles who made another most important change in the form of Tragedy by introducing a third actor. There was a change of thought now too in the relation between gods and men which necessitated this formal change. Aeschylus had vindicated the ways of heaven to men by insistence upon the great law which he regarded as all-pervading--when a man suffers, it is a divine Nemesis upon sin. The belief in destiny helped on the doctrine of retribution. Sophocles has more sympathy. As a rule the Sophoclean person suffers either for what he himself has done or else being innocent he suffers from no intelligible reason which the poet can assign. The human lot is narrowly limited, and if a mortal trespasses on the limit, the jealousy of the gods will swiftly smite him. But more than this, Sophocles can declare that never to be born is the best lot and the next best to die as soon as may be after birth. Life is the shadow of a vapor and old age is misery. In short, Sophocles is impressed with the woes of humanity which may be due to no fault of a man's own. He also rises high in the scale of civilized thought by teaching that suffering is not necessarily an evil but may educate and ennoble the character, and even if there can be nothing of comfort or compensation for the individual victim, his suffering may still have been ordained for the good of mankind. The chief formal change which he made in Tragedy aided him in working out this tendency of his mind. A third actor made it possible to exhibit the interaction of human motives with greater subtlety and fullness. The dialogue now became still more important than Aeschylus had made it. The chorus lost nothing of its value in the lyric and metrical province, but it ceased to take so active a part in the drama. The fine delineation of human character in action was the supreme and distinctive excellence of Sophocles.

Euripides, the next dramatist, found Tragedy with its general conditions fixed in a manner which he could not attempt to alter. Three actors

actors, a chorus, subject matter to be taken from the heroic legends--- these were the essentials. Aeschylus and Sophocles had added an unwritten law as to its spirit which they both observed with unwavering constancy; it was that the treatment should be ideal. Now, Euripides was a poet fertile in ideas, full of views on all the questions of his day whether religious, moral, political or social. He introduced a most vital change; he brought the diction and thought of the heroic persons far nearer to that of everyday life. He added small traits of character which in contrast to the finer touches of Sophocles did not deepen the significance of those persons, but merely made them appear more commonplace. Here the light of common day was let in upon the heroic age, with disastrous results for dramatic effect. A new treatment of the chorus was an inevitable consequence. Both Aeschylus and Sophocles had maintained the organic bond between chorus and dialogue. This was possible because the animating spirit of their dialogue was one which could be continued in lyric utterance, it was noble, it belonged to the age of the heroes. But after a dialogue in which two disputants had displayed the latest novelties of rhetorical casuistry, how could a choral ode be in accord with it? Hence the choral odes of Euripides came to be either wholly irrelevant to the dramatic context or connected with it only slightly and occasionally. It is a significant fact that Euripides made concessions to the new popular taste in adopting the new florid style in music into his choral lyrics. A step in the same direction was the monody---a solo sung by an actor who accompanied it with an expressive dance. Such monodies were elements of operatic ballet thrust into Greek Tragedy. Euripides also introduced the explanatory prologue which was a great boon to mental ignorance and indolence.

The influence of Euripides on later drama is greater than that of any of the other Attic dramatists. At Rome from the latter part of the third century onwards, he was much extolled. Ennius translated his Medea; Pacuvius and Attius took him for their chief model. Dante, who does not name Aeschylus or Sophocles numbers Euripides among the great poets of Greece. In the period of the Renaissance, Euripides was more popular than either of the elder dramatists. Racine was his disciple; and his influence predominates in Milton's Samson Agonistes. He displays romantic coloring, a sense of natural beauty lit up by fancy, which no other Greek

writer has manifested with equal splendor.

This was the highest point reached in the Greek drama. Euripides had established a concord of spirit and body which he impressed upon the creations of his mind and in which resides the peculiar secret of their beauty. Therefore the truly classical drama of Greece cannot be understood --indeed is not conceivable--apart from the phase of Hellenic society and Hellenic thought in which each had its birth.

Thus the evolution of our drama follows the law of the growth of nations, through three great stages of transition. From the high altitude of same Greek simplicity and sinlessness, when a noble sense of the beautiful prevented them from diverging into Asiatic license and intemperance, we drop into centuries of chaos. An era of confusion dominated when Roman brutality waxed wonton and bestiality were a soft word to express the tempers of men; when spirituality wallowed in the dust and Christianity with its new strange light sought to cast rays into the dungeons of iniquity; when man abiding far from God in the flesh sought after him in the spirit; when men's faculties and sensibilities were so abruptly widened within this searching light of Christianity that beauty heretofore the guiding star of Greece became a snare, a tragic disease, and celibacy and solitude was the ideal existence.

This stirring of the spirit; this conflict of Nature and Soul; this striving after a thoroughly balanced view of existence; characterizes the vast chaotic period of transition from the healthful, natural ancient world of Greece to the aesthetic, sophisticated epoch foreshadowed in the Renaissance.

As we enter upon the track of the drama through this monstrous maze, we may only take the best thread out of the vast snarl and follow whither it leadeth through the history of religion. We need not speak of the Latin imitation of the Greek drama, for such it merely was, but at this moment we must mention how Christianity destroyed the dark and sinful, and upheld and nourished the true and good, so that the plot, character and purpose of the drama had gradually to be readjusted and revolutionized to meet the growing light.

Life on earth to the Greek had been a perfected existence, consequently the magnificence of his aim; but now in the days of Rome it was
seen

seen to be a thing by no means rounded in itself but only one term in an infinite and unknown series. It is henceforward impossible to translate the world into the language of purely aesthetic form.

At Rome in these early centuries of Christianity, the cry against the drama waxed loud and not without reason, for the Roman stage in its impossible imitation of the Greek, was from the outset, dull, trifling, vulgar and in time became brutal, foul, horrible. The most celebrated Latin dramatists, Plautus and Terence, belonged to the lowest ranks of society, for the followers of the art so honored and beloved in republican Athens, were disdained at Republican Rome and even under the Empire, not all the golden patronage of a Nero or a Domitian could eradicate from Romans of the good old stock, their prejudice against the histrionic craft. The scorn of the Roman state was based, however, on grounds less worthy than those whereon rested in these later times the disapproval of the Christian church. Again and again the church urged her members to refrain from attending the theatre, threatening to cast forth from her communion those who persisted in this amusement. Actors she would not receive save on condition of the relinquishment of their profession. There was a striking case of the actor Genesius, who, being baptized on the stage in mimicry of the Christian sacrament, was so impressed by the solemn ceremony that henceforth he held himself christened in very truth, sealed his profession with his blood in Diocletian's persecution, and was enrolled by the church upon her list of saints.

But still in the fourth century and even in the fifth, we find the church warning, rebuking, excommunicating her theatregoers. St. Augustine, in his wild youth at Carthage, dearly loved a play. This taste repented later was destined to rise against him in whimsical form enough, when, centuries after he had been laid to rest in bishop's vestments, he appeared on the mediaeval stage as a didactic master of ceremonies. But the church; although her prohibitions and penances, her denunciations and excommunications together with the tide of tumultuous times and the working of inherent decay, finally swept the ancient drama from the boards; had resorted meanwhile to subtler means for weaning her children from those pagan plays. And yet those very means created within the people such a taste as was to carry out its own aim and withal perpetuate the influence

of classical drama.

As early as the close of the second century, a Scriptural tragedy founded upon Exodus and having for its chief characters Moses, Sapphira and God from the Bush had been written by a Jew named Ezekiel. In the fourth century, Apollinarius the Elder, a priest of Laodicea, rewrote parts of the Old Testament history in Homeric hexameters, and worked over other parts into dramatic form, while Bishop Apollinarius, his son, recast the New Testament into Platonic dialogue. A curious drama entitled "Christ's Passion" has been long believed to be from the pen of St. Gregory Nazianzene, Patriarch of Constantinople in the latter part of the fourth century. The play is cast in Attic mould, hymns of the church being substituted for the original choruses. The action takes place behind the scenes and is announced by messengers, usually by the Virgin Mary. There are a few verses from Aeschylus chiefly from the Prometheus Bound and from Euripides is borrowed a third of the entire verse of the play, including Mary's lament for the crucified Christ which is identical with Agave's lament for her son in the Bacchantes. This portion of the loan was not returned to the owner; for the lamentation having been applied to a use so sacred was afterwards omitted by the monastic copyists from all texts of Euripides.

It has been clearly pointed out by several English critics, that the Passion Play in which the modern drama takes its rise, itself sprang from the liturgical service of the Roman church. It is but the history of the Attic Stage repeated. Ward discovers in the mystical liturgy, with its blending of symbolic action, scriptural narrative and outbursts of song, an artistic conception, a dramatic progression, with pantomimic, epical and lyrical elements. As early as the fifth century, this service; itself so picturesque and impressive and in those early days, still elastic, not bound fast as now to a fixed ritual; was embellished, on high church festivals such as Easter and Christmas, by the addition of living tableaux to illustrate the gospel story. The tableaux would naturally come to be accompanied by antiphonal singing with a growing effect of question and answer, while gesture and action would gradually be introduced. The service of the church being in Latin, there was, from a very early period, especial appeal to the eye. In Germany, at least, the priest was wont, in reading

reading the gospel story, to slowly unfold a roll, which on the side toward the congregation, was pictured overwith figures and scenes forming the subject of the text. Church paintings, carvings, statues, altar-pieces, emblazoned windows, crucifixes were all further and more elaborate attempts at an ocular translation of the Latin gospels for the curious, longing, unlettered people. The tableaux vivants were but another step in the same direction, action another, while the breaking up the Scripture text into dialogue and the gradual addition and substitution of vernacular phrases were the inevitable sequences of these.

The primitive "Passion Drama" was nothing more than the solemn lowering of the Crucifix on Good Friday, the laying it away beneath the altar and the raising it again with anthems of rejoicing on the Resurrection festival. But the hallowed place beneath the altar did not long suffice, as the ritual became more and more magnificent, for the reception of the crucifix or of the gilded picture or carved figure sometimes substituted in this ceremony for the Crucifix. Temporary sepulchres of wood were built in arched recesses of the chancel wall, on the North, and by the fourteenth century, these in turn gave way in many churches both of England and the Continent to permanent structures of stone.

The old liturgical dramas played in the churches, with priests for actors and worshippers for audience, were slow to break away from their intimate connection with the service. Even in the thirteenth century and in the case of a somewhat elaborate Good Friday drama, written partly in Latin and partly in the German vernacular, the play appears to be still blended with the liturgy, one stage direction enjoining upon the Virgin that she; after concluding her chant of lamentation over the crucified Christ; should sit down quietly for an hour and then arise and play again. No part of the play was going on meanwhile, and it would obviously have been an appropriate period for continuing the service, invested, from the recent representation of the Passion, with peculiar solemnity. The mediaeval church-goers, even the meagre and the ragged, long for a service, vivid, exquisite, aglow with life and beauty. But the scientific and philosophic faculties are not yet hungry. The mental world of these thought children is peopled by angels, saints and devils in company with ghosts, fairies and hobgoblins.

After the mental coma produced by the shock of the barbaric invasion, after the blank of the dark age, Europe, leaving science in the main to the Arabians, was content for a few centuries to busy herself in re-sharpening her dulled intellects on that curious, ingenious, ever-turning and never-arriving grindstone, scholastic philosophy. The work was slowly and thoroughly done, wit waxed keen again, and when the passion for truth re-awakened, the instrument was ready. But meanwhile sensation not reason ruled high and low alike. Every superstition and every folly had almost unrestricted sway. Illiterate, illogical--out of this mediaeval Europe what good may come? The Gothic cathedral came and in its heart the nascent Gothic drama.

Saint plays naturally followed close on the original Passion Plays, for what could be more simple, after dramatic representation had once been introduced, than that, on the feast day of some Christian hero whose martyrdom was stained in window, carved in canopy and moulded in bas-relief, breathing figures should yet more vividly copy in action the story already before the eyes of the worshippers. Such living tableaux, pantomimes and plays suitably illustrated the mediaeval homily which was not the tracing of an argument, nor urging of a plea, but primarily, the telling of a story. The mediaeval preacher improved a saint day by relating the usually apocryphal biography of the saint. But the plastic act must be held in the main, responsible for tempting the drama to this extension of its sphere. It was as if the chiselled, painted saint himself, as a French savant has suggested, stepped down for an hour from marble niche or glowing window to play his life drama once again in the cathedral nave,--for the saint plays did not venture within the sacred choir but established themselves in the great body of the church in the very midst of the crowding worshippers.

We find in England in the earlier half of the twelfth century, three Latin plays composed by Hilarius, an Englishman of French education, one of the many youths who flocked to the reed hut in the desert to learn scholastic philosophy of the famous Abelard. Of these dramas, one apparently a Christmas play, deals with the story of Daniel, another with the raising of Lazarus, and a third with a miracle of St. Nicholas, then, as now, a saint of wide and well-deserved popularity, the protector of the weak against the strong, and hence the patron of the young, especially of little children, dowerless maidens and orphans.

We can hardly call the saint plays a dramatic advance upon the passion plays, nor a distinct link in the chain of evolution. They are rather an off-shoot, a sidegrowth, gaining no freedom and originality, in that their less sacred material permitted some license on the part of the poet, but with the loss of the great theme losing heavily in dignity and beauty and essential dramatic quality, and yet indirectly they contributed to the development of religious drama through its original channel.

The earliest manuscript yet discovered giving any sequence of Scripture plays, dates from the twelfth century, and was preserved in France at Tours. In this play there occurs for the first time, mention of the stage as erected outside the church door, God being represented, on descending from Heaven, as coming out of the church. There is here some vivacity of dialogue, but the hymns of the choristers are still interblent with the scenes of the drama. None the less this removal of the stage to the church yard is of great significance. The liturgical Easter dramas were acted in the Holy of Holies in the heart of the choir, under the very shadow of the High altar. The saint plays slipped down into the nave where they could be more generally witnessed; and then came the eventful step by which the theatre passed from under the vaulted roof through the sculptured portal out into the open air. No sooner were the plays established in the church yards than the fairs, a new feature of the mediaeval life, rose around them. All the outlying neighborhood would naturally be attracted to a reverent abbey, on the feast day of its patron saint. It is good sometimes to hear mass, sometimes to confess to the holy fathers and be shriven; sometimes to lay an offering before the shrine; and what better occasion than the great spring Festival? Moreover, if there be rheumatism in the shoulder, or sorrow in the heart, when would the saint be more likely to work his miracles? But presently it came to pass that the Hamlet about the abbey could not house all the guests of fair-time, so tents were pitched in the churchyard and the tents soon grew into booths. By and by the churchyards were found too narrow to hold both the living and the dead, and stage and booth moved on together to large open meadows, and then at last to the market towns where a movable stage was constructed that was wheeled around from street to street, but now the Latin liturgical drama, -passion play and saint play alike, -is left far behind, and the English Miracle Cycle claims attention.

The Miracle Play was the training school of the romantic drama in England during the slow lapse of some five centuries, the miracle with its tremendous theme and mighty religious passion, was preparing the way of the Elizabethan stage, for despite all the crudities and absurdities of detail, these English Miracle Cycles are nobly dramatic both in range and spirit. In verbal expression they are almost invariably weak and bald, but on the mediaeval scaffold-stage, the actor counted for more than the author, and the religious faith and feeling of the audience filled in the homely lines with an unwritten poetry. Within the vast extent of these cyclic dramas as within the length and breadth of the great cathedrals, there was room, however, for human life in all its various aspects. As the grotesque found place among the beautiful carvings of chapter-house and choir, so under the ample canopy of the old Miracle Play, Comedy grew up by the very side of Tragedy, bringing the theatre at once into collision with the Church.

As long as the religious plays, although they had departed from the sacred edifice, remained under the exclusive control of the clergy, there was but little loss in the solemn and tragic effect, but it is not long before we find the Church regarding these out-of-door plays, whose language was fast slipping from Latin into the vernacular, with a doubtful countenance. By the middle of the thirteenth century, many of the Bishops were inclined to prohibit the clergy from taking part in Mysteries set forth in "church yards, streets or green places" permitting them to act only in the liturgical drama still played beneath the consecrated roofs at Christmas and at Easter. The way thus opened, a new class of actors came speedily to the front.

The conditions of feudal life and the exactions of the pleasure-loving Celtic temperament, had early brought into existence, on the continent, a class of jugglers, men skilled in any or all of the several arts of minstrelsy, story-telling, dancing, jugglery and mimicry. Hence it was natural, indeed inevitable that the Miracle Plays, decorously and piously performed, in the first instance, by clergy within their ecclesiastical domains, should, as soon as they had ventured out from the "dim, religious light" of choir and nave into the merry sunshine, be seized upon by these profane imitators, who soon became rivals and supplanters, too often turning what had been illustrated Scripture into scandal and buffoonery. The Her-

man conquest naturally scattered these Gaelic joculators or histriones over England where they soon fell under ecclesiastical condemnation, but here the clergy, aided by the fact that these gay Frenchmen could not readily gain the ear of the humiliated, angry Saxon peasantry, held their own fairly well, and maintained the lead in the establishment of the national theatre. The priests nevertheless did not preserve their laurels as playwrights and actors, without condescending to some of the tricks in trade of their opponents.

But by the time we find the English Miracle Cycle in full career, the clergy have ceased to be the customary actors, yet the lower orders of the priesthood, however, often forbidden by their ecclesiastical superiors, continued even down to the sixteenth century, to bear some share in the representation of the Miracles of which they remained almost without an exception, the authors and compilers. Regularly at London and undoubtedly elsewhere the Miracles were performed by inferior personages attached to the Church, especially by ^a parish clerks, like Chaucer's "Jolly Absolon" of whom the poet says:

"Sometime to show his lightness and maistrie,

He plaisth Herod on a scaffold hie!

yet, notwithstanding the truly devotional spirit, the rude laughter-loving taste of the populace as wrought upon the playwrights as to bring about the introduction of distinctly comic episodes into the sacred history. In the English cycles, the fun is chiefly furnished in the Old Testament plays, by the buffoonery between Cain and his ploughboy and by the shrill insubordination of Noah's wife when the patriarch would persuade her to enter the ark; while to the story of the Saviour's life and death; evidently regarded then as by the peasants of Oberammergau to-day, in the light of solemn and heart-moving tragedy; a foil was afforded by the clownish talk and actions of the shepherds.

The Miracle Cycle, then, has for its fundamental material, the Christian faith, crudely comprehended, given with startling realism, personal embodiment and physical environment, sprinkled over with legend and anachronistic touches of rural English life, yet still in essential features the Christian history. There is intrinsic dramatic quality in the theme however conceived. No greater theme is possible to art than this.
Allowing

Allowing for all crudities of comprehension still the conception is colossal. So long as light strives against darkness and good against evil, so long will the theme retain its power; and not only this, but so long as spirit is housed in flesh and fact made manifest through form, the theme will lend itself to art, and compel that art either to some vague correspondence

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or to clear correspondence as in the masterpieces of Raphael, with its own magnitude. The soulless must make men and women soulless, the abstract must make men and women abstract, before those can eradicate from humanity the spiritual craving for spiritual life, or the concrete need of concrete revelation of that life.

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What license of poetic imagery we allow to Milton, we may better allow to the Miracle playwrights, for Milton is hardly sincere with his crystal orbs "involving and involved," his classic hell circumscribed by the river of oblivion, his ceraphic gunners waving their fire-tipt reeds above the triple row of cannon; but our mediæval dramatists are supremely sincere. If they used imagery, they did not know it. If they personified, they did not mean it. If the truth was not the symbol, and the symbol not the truth, they did not distinguish. Nevertheless they had the theme, and the theme shaped their dramatic art, as it shaped their plastic art crudely indeed but greatly. A grand dramatic framework is discernible through the awkward language and the naive ideas. In all the groups the cyclic features are the same. Lucifer puts himself in defiant antagonism to God who smites him and his adherents down to hell, creating Adam and Eve that they, and their descendants may fill the vacant seats of heaven. The motives for the fierce Satanic warfare against God and man are thus made plain--revenge and jealousy. Strife is henceforth an assured element. We have the dramatic opposition and the dramatic anticipation of a clash, although the Titan combatants do not meet face to face, we see evil warring against good

good in all the pageants, while the chorus of the prophets leads expectation forward to the second act. Here God, in the person of Christ, openly takes the field against Satan, but in the Coventry Cycle alone is the Devil brought much upon the stage to oppose Him. The temptation in the wilderness which Milton sets, as crucial point, against the fall of man, the old dramatists pass hastily over, reserving their climax for the Harrowing of Hell. They like to represent the wily adversary as prescient of the storming of his feudal hold and as striving by the instrumentality of Pilate's wife to avert the crucifixion. None the less is Calvary the apparent victory of Satan. The two great battle-chiefs have closed at last, and God is overthrown. But there is a third act to come, the triumph act of Christ, opening with the Harrowing of Hell and closing with the Judgment.

Even such, in outline, is the structure of the Elizabethan drama which the ruder Miracle drama fathered. Still the theme is rebellion against the divine law, as Macbeth rebelled, as Antony rebelled, as Faustus rebelled, each to be dashed to death against the right he had defied. Elizabethan tragedy with the careless strength of a young giant, shook off the troublesome conventions of the stage, unity of time, unity of place. Was not England reared upon dramas that embraced heaven, earth, and hell within their limits, that encompassed all of time that had been and yet should be? What did it matter after that, if Perdita and Marina grew from babyhood to womanhood in a single afternoon, or the scene in the Globe playhouse was shifted back and forth between pre-Christian Britain and Renaissance Italy? May not Shakespeare be forgiven even for providing Bohemia with that unhappy sea-coast and letting Julio Romano, he contemporary with the Delphic oracle, when we remember how his antecedent playwrights made Noah swear by St. John, and Pharaoh by Mahound, the shepherds of Bethelam drink Kly ale, and Joseph and Mary be arraigned before the Bishop and his ecclesiastical court? The Gothic drama abounded in robust vitality. Its nerves were not worn by overmuch civilization. It was not easily shocked. A strain of heathen ferocity showed in it even to the end---

to Hamlet, to the Duchess of Malfi. Greek authority might enjoin the relation, rather than the portrayal of deeds of bloodshed, violence and horror, but Kyd and Webster were scions of a race that had looked for generations upon the Bethelam Massacre, the Harrowing of Hell, Calvary
and

and Doomsday.

Unity of action is as binding on the old York playwrights as on Shakespeare himself. But this sovereign law of the drama was observed by the mediæval playwrights, as by the Elizabethan, less because they consciously proposed to observe it, than because it was inherent in the material they had chosen. Their plots were woven, not in fallible human brains but in the loom of Life, unerring artist.

It was on Christ and Mary Mother that the ardent devotion of mediævalism lavished itself. It was these gracious Presences that made the pageant scaffold holy. The rude, warm heart of England still throbbed in love and adoration for these, long after the snow-white vesture and crimson shoes had lost significance in familiarity. But none the less the material presentment was slowly chilling that great religious heart. An ascending Christ, whom the angels had to draw up by ropes, could not hold fealty forever. The modern world refused allegiance, and the pageant scaffold fell. For, while the Middle Ages, were the ages of art, as they were the ages of faith, it was a romantic art, in certain features a barbaric art, unguided, untaught, and it was a blind faith bowed in ignorant obedience to Rome. The Renaissance drew back the curtain which had so long hidden the classic world, and as the severely ordered beauty of its noble art became revealed, the wild, joyous, youthful riot of the mediæval blood was awed and tamed. But it is not enough to say that the refined taste of the Renaissance period laughed down the crude old dramas. The Reformation frowned them down. They had rendered religious service. Who can doubt it? They had impressed one aspect of the Christian revelation, but it was time that another aspect should claim attention. In the main the Mysteries were faithful to the watchword--"God is love! That patient figure of the buffeted, taunted, crucified Christ; how it tutored, mastered, transformed, exalted the fierce Northmen, who, for five centuries and more, gazed upon the enacted tragedy! The lesson even yet is far from learned. The victories of force, the flash of animal courage, still appeal to English instinct more promptly than the victories of gentleness, the glow of moral heroism. The Reformation, hungering and thirsting after the Divine, could not brook the triviality, the grossness, the falseness of the old religious stage. It swept the land clear of it. It destroyed

records

records and manuscripts,--all with the same headstrong vehemence, the same impetuosity of indignation with which it tore down the long-worshipped images of the Virgin. Nevertheless the Mysteries served the Elizabethan drama well. They not only bequeathed to it scope and freedom, great constructive principles, reality of characterisation and intensity of passion, but they paved the way for its reception. They made England a nation of actors, a nation of theatre-goers, a nation of deep dramatic cravings, who would be content with no such learned and elegant trifling as amused the Court, but cried out for range, for earnestness, for life. To follow the history of Feudal England through a series of plays was little for those whose grandsires had followed the history of mankind. Londoners had looked already on a more heart-moving tragedy than Hamlet.

Between the age of Euripides and the sixteenth century of our era, the stream of time had swept mightily and gathered volume, bearing down upon its tide, the full development of Greek philosophy and Roman law, the rise and fall of Greek and Roman empires, the birth and progress of christianity and Islam, the irruption of Teutonic tribes into the community of civilized races, the growth of modern nationalities and modern tongues, the formation and decay of Feudalism, the theology of Alexandria, Byzantium and Paris, the theocratic despotism of the Papal See, the intellectual stagnation of the Dark Ages, the mental ferment of the Middle Ages, the revival of scholarship, philosophy and art in Southern Europe, and last of all, the revolution which shook Papal Rome and freed the energies of man. How was it possible after these vital changes in the substance, composition and direction of the human spirit, that a drama representative of the New World should be built upon the lines of Greek or Graeco-Roman precedents?
