

Three Chester
Whitsun Plays.

With an Introduction and Notes

by

JOSEPH C. BRIDGE,

M.A., D.Mus., F.S.A.

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Chester:

PHILLIPSON AND GOLDR.

1906.

Chester Mystery Plays,

NOVEMBER 29th, 1906.

The following Music was performed:—

IN "THE SALUTATION AND NATIVITY PLAY":

1. "Hec est ara Dei celi," to music adapted from the York Plays.

BEFORE "THE SHEPHERDS' PLAY":

2. The Shepherds' Trio, "As I outrode this enderes night," from the Coventry Plays.

IN "THE SHEPHERDS' PLAY":

3. "Gloria in Excelsis," to traditional setting from Chester Plays. This being the only music now remaining.
4. Before the Play of the "Three Kings" was sung the "Lullaby" from the Coventry Plays: "Lullay thou little tiny child."
5. Between the Third and Fourth Plays (which were amalgamated) was sung the traditional Carol: "We Three Kings of Orient are."

JOSEPH C. BRIDGE.

The only remaining Music of the Chester Plays from the M.S. of James Miller, written in 1607. British Museum. Harleian 2124. (Sung by the Angel to the Shepherds.)

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The first staff is in G major (one flat) and 4/4 time. It begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic and a crescendo leading to a forte (*f*) dynamic. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). The lyrics are: Glo - - - - ri - a in ex - cel - sis.

The second staff is also in G major and 4/4 time. It begins with a fortissimo (*ff*) dynamic and a decrescendo leading to a piano (*p*) dynamic. The notes are: G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter), G4 (quarter), A4 (quarter), B4 (quarter), C5 (quarter). The lyrics are: De - - o De - o De - o De - o.

P R E F A C E .

THE City of Chester has a glorious literary heritage in its Cycle of Mystery Plays, written probably in the 14th century. For nearly three hundred years they were acted by the citizens: from father to son descended the traditional rendering, and deep and keen was the interest taken by all concerned, until the opposition of the Church, at the close of the 16th century, brought the representations to an end.

The plays were performed on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday in Whitsun week, on movable waggons called "pageants," and started at the Abbey Gate in presence of the Abbot. Passing before the Mayor at the High Cross, they traversed the City in regular order, and played at appointed Stations, where the competition for a suitable "stand" was so keen that in one case it ended in a lawsuit. Each "pageant" and play was provided by one of the City Companies or trade-gilds, though sometimes the gilds shared the expense; one Company using the "pageant" on Monday and the other on Tuesday.

If any gild showed a desire to shirk such representation the Mayor could, and did, issue a notice commanding a performance. It was also the Mayor's duty, as officer of the King's peace, to issue a proclamation on these occasions, and the regulations for the control of the Plays and populace were most stringent and comprehensive.

The Citizens had to rise "very betimes" in order to get through their arduous task, and at York a proclamation ran thus:—"That every player that shall play be ready in his pagiaunt at convenyant tyme, that is to say, at the mydhowre betwix iiiijth & vth of the cloke in the mornynge, and then all oyer pageantz fast

foll ouying ilk on after oyer as yer course is, without tarieng. Sub pena facienda camere vi^s viii^d.”

The authorship of the plays is generally attributed to Ralph Higden, the author of “Polychronicon” and a monk of Chester, where he is said to have died at a great age, in 1353. But there is no evidence to justify such a definite statement as this. All we know of the origin of the plays is found in the following:—

- i.* A “Banes,” XV. Cent., giving Sir John Arneway as the “deviser.” He was Mayor 1268-1276;
- ii.* A Proclamation, *c.* 1520, giving Arneway as the “deviser,” and Francis, a monk, as the writer;
- iii.* A “Banes,” *c.* 1570, giving Arneway as “deviser,” and a “Dom Randall” as the writer;
- iv.* An account of the Plays, by Archdeacon Rogers, *c.* 1575; one version gives “Randall Higden” as the writer, and places the time in the Mayoralty of Arneway, 1328; the other version gives “one Randoll a monke,” Arneway as Mayor, and the date 1339;
- v.* An endorsement on a Proclamation in the Harleian MSS., supposed to be written by one of the Holmes’, *c.* 1628, stating “Hignet” was the writer;
- vi.* A similar endorsement on a copy of the Plays about the same date.

If the religious tendency of the Chester Plays was owing to a guiding hand from the Monastery, that hand was, according to our earliest tradition, one Henry Francis, whose name occurs in deeds dated 1377-82.

It is quite possible that Henry Francis and Ralph Higden may have translated and revised some of the Plays, and rendered literary help in reducing the cycle to unity, and that is all we can say with safety.

A close study of the Plays seems to lead to the following conclusions:—"In approaching the consideration of the four great cycles of Miracle Plays still extant (the York, Towneley, Chester, and Coventry), it must be remembered that no one of them, in the form in which it has come down to us, can be regarded as a homogeneous whole, the work of a single author. . . . In the Chester cycle, of which we have no extant manuscript *earlier than* 1591, the number of the Plays is only twenty-five, and marks of amalgamation are easily traced. Thus, each cycle, as it has come down to us, must be regarded rather as an organic growth than as the work of a single author."¹

The earliest authoritative allusion to the Plays, with date, is in the Baker's Charter, 2 Edward IV., 1462, where it is recited that "there hath been tyme out of mind a company of bakers . . . and to be redy to pay the costes & expenses & play & light of Corpus Christi as oft-tymes as it shall be assessed," and the last time of performance, wholly or in part, was in 1576, though the Archbishop of York had inhibited them as far back as 1571.² When the citizens found the Plays were to be entirely "things of the past," it is probable that some of them wished to have a "book of the words," and this will account for the fact that the MSS extant all date from about this period. They are:—

- a. 1591, by "Edward Gregorie a Scholar of Bunbury"; now in possession of the Duke of Devonshire.
- b. 1592 } by George Bellin. B.Mus.; add. MS. 10305;
- c. 1600 } B.Mus.; Harl. 2013.
- d. 1604, by William Bedford; Bodleian.
- e. 1607, by James Miller, B.Mus.; Harl. 2124.

George Bellin was an Ironmonger and Clerk of the Parish of Holy Trinity, and therefore looked upon

1—Pollard, "Miracle Plays," Introduction, xxx.

2—There are indications in Bellin's MSS. of a performance in 1600, but all attempts to trace it have failed.

as a competent scribe. He must have borrowed and copied each play from the Gild that possessed it, for the original and authentic play book was lost as far back as 1567. The language of these plays is of the early part of the 15th or the end of the 14th century, but, as stated before, it is highly probable that they existed even before that date.

There is little doubt that some of the plays are translations from French and Latin originals.

Our indebtedness to France in these matters is best shown in Thomas Wright's introduction to the "Chester Plays," published by the Shakesperian Society. He says:—

"How far the English sets of Mysteries, which we find in the 15th Century, and which, perhaps, existed in the 14th, were translations from French originals, I am inclined to doubt; but if any were so, the Chester Mysteries appear to have the greatest claim to that distinction.

"In notes to the present volumes I have shown several instances of similarity between these Chester Plays and some of the printed French Mysteries of the earlier half of the 16th Century, which I suspect to be only reproductions or alterations from older French compositions of the same description. Mr. Collier had previously pointed out one or two remarkable coincidences, in passages taken from the Chester and French Mysteries, in his History of Dramatic Poetry (Vol. II., pp. 132, &c.)"

It has sometimes been stated that the Plays were performed in French and Latin. That is not possible. The crowd went to listen and enjoy these plays, and their ordinary conversation was in English. French was the language of the Court and of official proclamations, but not of the common people, not of the tradesmen in the town or the members of the trade guilds.

Official proclamations concerning the Plays were often in French or Latin, but the Plays were certainly given in English.

Before the Plays commenced it was customary to send mounted messengers round the city, who read the "Banes" or "Banns" announcing the Plays, and Bellin has left us a manuscript of one which has been often printed. But a much older, more interesting, and valuable "Banes" has been found by Canon Morris amongst the Harleian MSS. (not numbered or catalogued), and has been printed in his "Chester during the Plantagenet and Tudor Period."*

First, we must notice that it is in the same metre and rhyming stanza as the Plays themselves, and may have been written with them. Secondly, it sheds light on some very important points. Here is one:—

The worshipfull wyves of this towne
 Ffyne our Lady thassumpcon
 It to bryng forth they be bowne
 And meyntene with all their might.†

Here we have "The Assumption" definitely classed as one of the Chester series (a point hitherto unknown), and also, we see that it was provided by women; this is unique, I think. In none of the other cycle centres do the women manage a Play by themselves.‡

* By his kind permission reprinted here.

† It is worth noting, that in 1483, at York, four men came before the Mayor, " & by the assent of all the Innholders of this said Citie-tuke upon them to bring furth yerely during the term of VIII. yere, then next following the pageant of the Coronacion of our Lady perteyning to the said Innholders, etc." It seems likely, then, that the "worshipful wyves" were the ale-wives of Chester, and it is by no means improbable that Chester again followed the lead of York. As Mrs. Green says, "Cooks and brewers and hostellers were naturally deeply interested in the preservation of the good old customs, and it was, in some cases, certainly this class (the most powerful in a mediæval borough), who raised the protest against the indifference and neglect of the townspeople for public processions and merry-making, because 'thereby the victuallers lose their money'; and who insisted on the revival of these festivals for the encouragement of trade." (Town Life XV. Century, I., p. 153).

‡ Canon Morris says: "It is omitted from Bellin's transcript in 1600, and was, in all probability, discontinued in Edward VI.'s reign, in deference to the religious feeling of the time."

Again,

“ Also Maister Maire of this Citie
 Withall his bretheryn accordingly
 A solempte procession ordent hath he
 To be done to the best
 Uppon the day of Corpus Christi
 The blessed Sacrament carried shalbe
 And a Play set forth by the Clergy,
 In honor of the fest.
 Many torches there may you see
 Marchaunts and craftys of this Citie
 By order passing in their degree
 A goodly sight that day.
 They come from Saynt Maries on the Hill.
 The Church of Saynt Johns untill
 And there the Sacrament leve they will
 The sauth as I you say.”

It will be seen that the Mayor and Corporation had ordered a procession and that the clergy were to provide a play.

This may account for the transference of the gild Plays to Whitsun week. The Clergy, anxious to have the Corpus Christi procession *to themselves* without the Trade Gilds, may have said to the citizens “ If you will have your plays at another time we will, at our own charge and expense, provide a play on Corpus Christi, so that there shall be no loss to the Citizens in that respect.”¹ Thus the plays got transferred to Whitsuntide.

My third quotation must be :—

“ Sir John Arnway was Maire of this citie
 When these Playes were begun truly
 God grant us merely
 And see them many a yere.”

This is the earliest mention of their origin.

1.—This is precisely what happened at York, where after 1426 the Corpus Christi procession and the plays were separated.

In addition to the ordinary series of Mystery Plays, we find that the Play of the "Assumption" was performed at the High Cross in 1488, and before Prince Arthur in 1497, both at the Abbey Gates and at the High Cross; and also in 1515 in St. John's Churchyard. We find, also, the Cappers, Pewterers, and Smiths undertaking Plays in 1520-1; and in 1529 "King Robert of Sicily" was performed at the High Cross.

The Mayor of the City had also a Midsummer Show or procession, with giants and other monstrosities, but this had nothing whatever to do with the Mystery Plays; though occasionally some of the best known actors were retained to ride in the procession in the dresses which they had worn in the Plays.

In conclusion, let us remember that these plays *were the only Bible* possessed by the people in the middle ages. For the sake of dramatic contrast they sometimes contained frivolous language, yet the main bulk of them is thoroughly religious in tone and style, and at Chester an expositor also appears to explain and enforce the moral lesson of each play.

In addition to the religious element there are historical, dramatic, and philological aspects to be considered, and altogether there seems no reason why, with reverent care on the part of players and audience, these plays may not still impart to us valuable instruction. "Not only do they bear witness to the spirit of the times in which they were written, but they tell us that we too should let the 'mysteries' which they represent, kindle in our hearts enduring gratitude, and produce in our lives corresponding graces and virtues."

Although we have used the title "Mystery Plays," it is right to say that this was not the title used in Old England. It is believed that Dodsley, about 1750, was the first to apply the French name of "Mysteries." Abroad there was a distinction drawn between Plays on the Miracles of the Saints and Mysteries drawn from the Bible narrative, but this division did not exist

in England, and Chaucer and other old writers always refer to "Miracles." Those who wish for more general knowledge on this interesting subject should read "English Miracle Plays," by A. W. Pollard. Clarendon Press, 7/6; and "The Mediæval Stage," by E. K. Chambers; Clarendon Press, 25/-; while further information respecting the Chester Plays may be found in "Chester during the Plantagenet and Tudor Periods," by Dr. Morris, Giles Griffith, Chester (subscription price £1 1s.); and in articles in "Chester Archæological Society's Journal," New Series, Vol. IX.; and the "Chester Queen's School Annual" for May, 1898, Phillipson & Golder. The Early English Text Society has issued Volume I. of a critical edition of the Plays, price 15/-, and the remainder is preparing for the press.

The following Plays have been printed from Thomas Wright's edition in the Shakespeare Society's publications, and from the E.E.T. Society edition, by kind permission of Dr. Furnivall. They have been condensed and the language slightly modernized for dramatic representation by the English Drama Society, under the direction of Mr. Nugent Monck.

JOSEPH C. BRIDGE.

Chester,
Nov., 1906.

The Banes or Proclamation
of the Plays.

The Banes or Proclamation of the Playes.

.....

The comen bannes to be proclaymed and Ryddon with the
Stewardys of every occupacon :—

Lordings Royall and Reverentt
Lovelie ladies that here be lenth
Sovereigne Citizens hether am I sent
A message for to say.

I pray you all that be present
That you will here with good intent
And all your eares to be lent
Hertfull I you pray.

Our worshipfull mair of this Citie
With all his royall cominaltie
Solem pagens ordent hath he
At the fest of Whitsonday tyde.

How every craft in his decree
Bryng forth their playes solemplie
I shall declare you brefely
Yf ye will awhile abyde.

The worshipfull tanners of this towne
Bryng forth the heavenly manshon
Th'orders of angells and their creation
According done to the best.

And when the angells be made so clere
Then folowyth the falling of Lucifere
To bring forth this play with good chere
The tanners be full prest.

You worshipfull men of the draperye
Loke that paradysse be all redye
Prepare also the mappa mundi
Adam and eke Eve.

The waterleders and drawers of Dee
Loke that Noyes shipp be sett on hie
That you lett not the storye
And then shall you well chrue.

The barbers and wax chandlers also that day
Of the Patriarche you shall play
Abram, that put was to assay
To sley Isack his sonne.

The cappers and pynners forth shall bring
Balack that fears [fierce] and mightie Kyng
And Balam on an asse sytting :
Loke that this be done.

Youe wrights and slaters will be fayne
 Bring forth your cariage of Marie myld quene,
 And of Octavian so cruell and kene
 And also of Sybell the sage.

For findyng of that Royal thing
 I grant you all the blessing
 Of the high imperiall King
 Both the maister and his page.

Paynters glasiars and broderers in fer
 Have taken on theym with full good chere
 That the Sheppards play then shall appere
 And that with right good wyll.

The vynteners then as doth befall
 Bring forth the 3 Kings Royall
 Of Colyn or pagent memoryall
 And worthy to appere.

Then shall you see how that Kynges all
 Came bouldly into the hall
 Before Herode proude in paille
 Of Crysts byrth to heare.

The mercers worshipfull of degre
 The presentation that have yee
 Hit falleth best for your see
 By right reason and style
 Of caryage I have no doubt
 Both within and without
 It shall be deekyd yt all the Rowte
 Full gladly on it shall be to loke
 With sundry cullors it shall glime
 Of velvit satten and damaske fine
 Taffyta ser-nett of poppyngee grene.

The gouldsmyths then full soone will hye
 And masons theyre craft to magnifye
 Theis two crafts will them applye
 Theyre worshipp for to wyne
 How Herode King of Galalye
 For that intent Cryst to distrye
 Slew the Innocents most cruely
 Of tow yeres and within.

Semely smythis also in hyght
 A lovely caryage the will dyght
 Candilmas day for soth it hyght
 The find it with good will.

The buchers pagene shall not be myst
 How Satan tempted our Savyour Cryst
 It is an history of the best
 As witnesseth the gospell.

Nedys must I rehers the glover
 The give me gloves and gay gere
 The find the tounbs of Lazarey
 That pagene cometh next.

Also the Corvesers with all their myght
 The fynde full fayre syght
 Jerusalem their caryage hyght
 For so sayth the text.

And the bakers also be dene
 The find the Maunday as I wene
 It is a carriage full well besene
 As then it shall appeare.

Flechers bowyers with great honors
 The Cowpers find the Tormentors
 That bobbyde God with gret honors
 As he sat in his chere [chair].

The Iron mongers find a caryage good
 How Jesus dyed on ye rode
 And shed for us his precyus blud
 The find it in fere.

Cryst after his passion
 Brake Hell for our redempcion
 That find the cookes and hostelers of this towne
 And that with full good chere.

Also the skynners they be boune
 With great worshipp and renowne
 They find the Resurrection
 Fayre maye them befall.

Sadlers and Foysters ("Fusterers") have the good
 grace

They find the Castell of Emawse
 Where Crist appered to Cleophas
 A faire pagend you shall see.

Also the Taylers with trew Intent
 Have taken on them verament
 The Assencyon by one assent
 To bringe it forth full right.

Fysshe mongers men of faith
 As that day will doe their stayth
 To bringe there caryage furth in trayth
 Wyt Sunday it hight.

The worshipfull wyves of this towne
 Ffyne of our lady thassumpcon
 It to bryng forth they be bowne
 And meyntene with all theyre might.¹

The Shermen will not [be] behynd
 Butt bryng theire cariage with good mynde
 The pagent of prophetys they do fynd
 That prophecied full truly
 Off the coming of Antierist
 That goodys faith wold resist
 That cariage I warrand shall not myst
 Butt sett forth full dewly.

1—Played in 1488.

The hewsters that be men full sage
 They bryng forth a wurthy cariage
 That is a thing of grett costage
 Antycryst hit hight.¹

They weyvers in very dede
 Ffynd the day of Dame, well may they spede
 I graunt them holly to theire neede
 The blysse of heven bright.

Sovereigne syrs to you I say
 And to all this ffayre cuntre
 That played shalbe this godely play
 In the whitson weke
 That is brefely for to sey
 Uppon Monday Tynsday and Wennysday
 Whoo lust to see theym he may
 And non of theym to sek.

“*Erased in the Booke.*”

{ Also maister maire of this Citie
 Withall his bretheryn accordingly
 A solempne procession ordent hath he
 To be done to the best
 Appon the day of Corpus Christi
 The blessed sacrament caried shalbe
 And a play sett forth by the clergie
 In honor of the fest
 Many torches there may you see
 Marchaunts and craftys of this citie
 By order passing in their degree
 A goodly sight that day
 They come from Saynt Maries on the Hill
 The Church of Saynt Johns untill
 And there the sacrament leve they will
 The sauth [sooth] as I you say

Whoo so comyth these plays to see
 With good devocon merelye
 Hertely welcome shall he be
 And have right good chere.
 Sir John Arnway was maire of this citie
 When these playes were begon truly
 God graunt us merely
 And see theym many a yere.

Now have I done that lyeth in me
 To procure this solempnitie
 That these playes contynued may be
 And well sett fourth alway.

Jhu [Jesu] Crist that sytys on hee
 And his blessed mother Marie [*erased*]
 Save all this goodely company
 And kepe you nyght and day.

1—See another copy of the *Banes*. “First with his Doctor that godlye may expounde, and Enocke and Hely persons walking one grounde.”

2—This copy of the “*Banes*” is altogether different from that given by Ormerod, and has been overlooked by previous editors of the “*Chester Mysteries*.”—*Rupert Morris*.

THE
CHESTER
WHITSUN
PLAYES.

The Salutation and Nativity.

The Sixth Pageant.

The Wryghtes and Sklaters' Plaie.

“The Salutation and Nativity.”

[ENTER GABRIEL.]

Gabriel.

Hail be thou, Mary, maiden free,
Full of grace! God is with thee.
Among all women blessed thou be
And in the fruit of thy body.

Maria.

Ah, Lord that sits high in see
That wondrously now marvels me
A simple maiden of my degree
Be greet thus graciously!

Gabriel.

Mary, ne dread thee nought this case
With great God found thou hase
Amongst all other special grace.
Therefore Mary, thou mone
Conceive and bear, I tell thee
A child, his name Jesu shall be
So great shall never be none as he
And called God's Son.

And our Lord God, believe thou me
 Shall give him David his father's see
 In Jacob's house reign shall he,
 With full might ever more.
 And he that shall be born of thee
 Endless life in him shall be
 That such renown and royalty
 Had never none before.

Maria.

How may this be? Thou art so bright;
 In sin know I no worldly wight.

Gabriel.

The Holy Ghost shall in thee light
 From God in majesty.
 Therefore that Holy—as I have hight—
 That thou shalt bear through God's might
 His Son shall called be.

Maria.

Now sith that God will it so be
 And such grace hath sent to me
 Blessed ever more be he
 To please him I am paid.
 Lo God's chosen meekly here
 And hold God prince of power.
 Lief that it fall in such manner
 This word that thou hast said.

Tunc ibit Angelus et salutabit Elizabeth.*

Maria.

Elizabeth, neece, God thee See!

Elizabeth.

Mary, blessed mote thou be.
 And the fruit that comes of thee
 Among women all.

* In another version, "Tunc ibit Angelus, et Maria salutabit Elizabeth."

Wondrously now marvels me
That Mary, God's mother free
Greets me thus, of simple degree,
Lord! how may this befall?

Blessed be thou ever for-thy¹
That lived so well and steadfastly
For that was said to thee, lady
Fulfilled and done shall be.

[MARIA gaudens incipiet canticum Magnificat.]

Maria.

Elizabeth therefore will I,
Thank the Lord, king of mercy,
With joyful mirth and melody
And laud to his liking
'Magnificat' while I have tome²
'Anima mea dominum'
To Christ, that in my kind now come,
Devoutly I will sing.

And for my Ghost joyed hase³
In God my heale and all my grace
—For meekness he see in me was,
His fear of mean degree—
Therefore bless me well, may
All generations for aye;
Much has God done for me to-day.
His name aye hallowed be!

Much has that Lord done for me
That most is in his majesty
All princes ne passes in postie⁴
As sheweth well by this.
Therefore with full heart and free
His name always hallowed be
And honoured evermore be he
On high in heaven bliss.

1.—for-thy—therefore.

2.—tome—time.

3.—“and my spirit hath rejoiced.”—This and the four following verses constitute a very interesting mediæval paraphrase of the “Magnificat.”

4.—postie—power.

As he is bowne to do mercy
 From progeny to progeny
 And all that dread him verily
 His talent to fulfil.
 He, through his might, give them mastery
 Disperses proud despiteously,
 With might of his heart hastily,
 At his own will.

Depose the mighty out of place
 And meek also he haunsed^s has,
 Hungry and needy, wanting grace
 With good he hath fulfilled.
 That rich power he hath forsaken
 To Israel, his son, betaken ;
 While to man through him is waken,
 And mercy has of his guilt.

As he spake to our fathers before
 Abraham and his seed full yore
 Joy to the Father evermore
 The Son and Holy Ghost.
 As was from the beginning
 And never shall have ending
 From world to world aye wending
 Amen ! God of mightes most !

Elizabeth.

Mary, now red I that we gone
 To Joseph, thy husband, anon
 Lest he to miss thee make moan
 For now that is most need.

Mary.

Elizabeth, neece, to do so good is
 Lest he suppose on me amiss,
 But good Lord that hath ordained this
 Will witness of my deed.

Elizabeth.

[CALLING.]

Joseph ! God thee save and see
 Thy wife here I have brought to thee.

[EXEUNT.]

[ENTER A MESSENGER.]

Messenger.

Make room, lordings and give us way
 And let Octavian come and play
 And Sybil the Sage, that well fair may
 To tell you of prophecy.
 That Lord that died on Good Friday
 He save you all both night and day
 Farewell lordings. I go my way
 I may no longer abide.

[EXIT.]

[ENTER OCTAVIAN.¹]*Octavian.*

I proved prince, most of power
 Under Heaven highest am I here
 King, prince, baron, bachelor,
 I may destroy in great danger.
 Through virtue of my degree.
 —My name Octavian called is—
 All me about, full in my bliss
 For wholly all this world I wis
 Is ready at my own will.
 Therefore as lord now likes me
 To prove my might and my postie
 For I will send about and see
 How many heads I have.

1.—At the end of the old French printed “*Mystère du Viel Testament*,” there is a Mystery, the plan of which resembles this part of our Chester play, and which is entitled, “*Le Mystère de Octavian et Sibille tiburtine touchant la conception et autres Sibilles*.” Octavian is first introduced discoursing with his Senators on the prodigies which had been seen at the beginning of his reign: the scene then changes, and a “painter” is employed to make a superb statue of the Emperor, which is to be placed on a column, and the Senator determines that the Emperor shall be adored as a god: then the *Sibille tiburtine* comes in, and prophecies of Christ. The scene again changes; they tell the Emperor of the statue and the decree of the Senate; but Octavian expresses some fear that he ought not to be worshipped, and finally determines to send and enquire of the Sibil—the Sibil comes, and tells him he must not be worshipped, and Octavian sees the virgin and child in the sky, accompanied with a vision of Paradise.

All the world shall written be
 Great and small in each degree
 That dwell in Shire or in City,
 King, clerk, knight and knave.
 Each man one penny shall pay
 Warn them boy, I command thee,
 They do the same, say this from me
 So all this world shall wit that we
 Be sovereign of them all.
 Have done, boy! art thou not bown ?

Preco (Page).

All ready, my lord, by Mahoun ²
 First into Judah I will gone
 And summon the people every one
 Both in Shire and City.

[ENTER TWO SENATORS.]

First Senator.

My Lord Octavian we are sent
 From all Rome with good intent
 Thy men there have each one i-ment ³
 As god to honour thee.
 And to that point be we sent
 Poor and rich in parliament
 For so loved a lord, verament
 Was never in this city.

Second Senator.

Yea, sicker ⁴, sir, their will is this,
 To honour thee as god with bliss
 For thou did never to them amiss
 In word, thought nor deed.

1.—bowne—ready.

2.—Mahomet. After the Crusades this became a common form of imprecation. Our forefathers saw nothing incongruous in this use of it. See our old English word "Mawmetry" or "idolatry."

3.—i-ment—determined.

4.—sicker, sickerly—surely, certainly.

Peace hath been long and yet is
 No man in thy time lost ought of his
 Therefore their will is now, I wiss
 To quite thee this, your meed.

Octavian.

Welcome, my friends, in good fay
 For ye be welcome to my paye
 I thank you all that ever I may
 The homage ye do to me.
 But folly it were by many a way
 Such sovereignty for to essay,
 Since I must die, I wot not what day.
 To desire such dignity.

For of flesh, blood and bone,
 Made I am, born of a woman,
 And sicker other matter none,
 Showeth not right in me.
 Neither of iron, tree nor stone
 Am I not wrought, you wot each one ;
 And of my life—most part is gone,
 Age sheweth him so, I see.

And Godhead asks, in all thing
 Time that hath no beginning,
 Nor never shall have ending ;
 And none of these have I.
 Wherefore by very proof showing
 Though I be highest worldly king
 Of Godhead have I no knowing,
 It were unkindly.

But yet enquire of this will we,
 At her that has grace for to see
 Things that afterwards shall be
 By ghost of prophecy.

[EXIT PAGE.]

And after her lore, by my lewtie !¹
 Discussing this difficulty
 Work and take no more on me,
 Than I am well worthy.

1.—lewtie—loyalty.

[ENTER SYBIL.]

Sybil, the sage, tell me this thing
 For thou wit hast as no man living
 Shall ever be any earthly king
 To pass me of degree?

Sybil.

Yea, sir, I tell you without leasing
 A bairn shall be born bliss to bring
 The which that never had beginning
 Nor ever shall ended be.

Octavian.

Sybil, I pray thee specially
 By sign thou would me certify
 What time, that lord so royally
 To reign shall he begin.

Sybil.

Yea, I shall tell you witterly¹
 His signs when I see verily,
 For when he comes, through his mercy
 On mankind he will myn.²

Well I wot, for sooth I wis,
 That God will bring mankind to bliss
 And send from Heaven—believe well this—
 His son, our Saviour.

Jesu Christ, nothing amiss
 Called he shall be, and is,
 Overcome the Devil and his countise³
 And be our conqueror.

But what time, sir, in good faie
 That he will come can I not say,
 Therefore in this place will I pray
 To greatest God of might.

And if I see ought to your paie
 Ghostly, by any way,

[EXEUNT OMNES.]

1.—witterly—truly.

2.—another reading has "wynne."

3.—countise—cunning.

Warn you I shall anon this day
And show it in your sight.

[ENTER PRECO.]

Preco.

Peace I bid king and knight
Men and women and each wight,
Till I have told that I have tight¹
Stand still both stiff and stout!
My lord Octavian much of might
Commands you should be ready dight.
Tribute he will have in height
Of all this world about.

He will have written each country
Castle, shire and eke city
Men and women—leeve you me—
And all that be therein.
A penny of each man have will he
—The value of ten pence it shall be—
To knowledge that he hath sovereignty
Fully of all mankind.

Joseph.

Ah, Lord! what doth this man now here?
Poor mens' weal is ever in weere²
I wot by this boisterous bear³
That tribute I must pay.
And for great age and no power
I wan⁴ no good this seven year
Now comes the king's messenger
To get all that he may.

Ah! lief sir, tell me I thee pray
Shall poor as well as rich pay?
My fay! sir, I hope nay
That were a wondrous wrong.

1.—tight—promised.

2.—weere—uncertainty.

3.—“This boisterous fellow's bearing.”

4.—wan—gained.

Preco.

Good man I warn thee, in good fay
 To Bethlehem to take the way
 Lest thou in danger fall to-day
 If that thou be too long.

[EXIT PRECO.]

Joseph.

Now sith it may none other be
 Mary, sister, now hie we!
 An ox I will take with me
 That there shall be sold.
 The silver of him—so mot I thee—
 Shall find us in that City,
 And pay tribute for thee and me,
 For thereto we be hold.

[EXIT JOSEPH.]

[ENTER THE EXPOSITOR.]

Expositor.

Lo, Lordings of the miracle here,
 Friar Bartholomew in good manner,
 Beareth witness withouten were,¹
 As played is you beforne.
 Another miracle if I may
 I shall rehearse ere I go away,
 That befell that ilke day
 That Jesu Christ was born.
 We read in chronicles express
 Some time in Rome a temple was²
 Made of so great riches
 That wonder was witterly,
 For all things in yt—leve you me!
 Was silver, gold and riche perye;³
 Third part the world; as reade we
 That temple was worthy.

1.—were—doubt.

2.—This is one of the legends connected with the ruins of ancient Rome.

3.—perye or perrye—jewels.

Of each province—that book mynd mase
 Their god's image there set was.
 And each one about his neck has
 A silver bell hanging.

But when any land with battle
 Was ready Rome for to assail,
 The God's image without fail
 Of that land rang his bell.
 And that temple there doubtless
 Was called therefore, the Temple of Peace
 That throught this sleight, battle can cease,
 Throughout the world about.

But he that cunningly this work cast
 Asked the Devil as he past—
 How long that temple should last,
 That he there can build.
 The Devil answered subtly
 And said it should last sickerly
 Until a maiden womanly
 Had conceived a child.

They heard and believed, therefore
 It would endure for evermore
 But that time when Christ was bore
 It fell down soon on high
 Of which house is seen this day
 Somewhat standing, in good fay
 But no man dare go well that day
 For fiends fantasie.

That day was seen verament
 Three suns in the firmament
 And wonderly together went
 And turned into one.
 The ox, the ass, there they were lent,
 Honoured Christ in their intent
 And more miracles as we have ment
 To play right here anon.

[EXIT EXPOSITOR.]

[AN ANGEL ENTERS bearing a star. ENTER also OCTAVIAN & SENATORS, to them comes the SYBIL.*

Sybil.

Sir Emperor, God thee save and see
 Look up on high after me
 I tell thee truly that born is he
 That passeth thee in power.
 That bairn thou sees so great shall be
 As none like him in any degree
 To pass all kings and eke thee
 That born are or ever were.

Octavian.

Ah, Sybil, this is a wondrous sight
 For yonder I see a maiden bright
 A young child in her arms clight,¹
 A bright cross on his head.
 Honour I will that sweet wight
 With incense with all my might
 For that reverence is most right
 If that it be thy reade.²
 Incense bring, I command in hie
 To honour this child, King of mercy.
 Should I be God? Nay, nay! witterly
 Great wrong I wis it were.
 For this child is more worthy
 Than such a thousand as am I,
 Therefore to God, most mighty,
 Incense I offer here.

Then an angel shall sing "Hec est ara Dei."

* The prophecies and legends of the Sybils, invented in the earlier ages of the Church, were very popular during the Middle Ages. In the well-known hymn of the Romish Church we have

Dies iræ, dies illa
 Solvet sæclum in favilla.
 Teste David cum Sybilla

1.—clight—closed.

2.—rede or reade—counsel or advice.

Ah, Sybil, hearest thou not this song?
 My members all it goeth among
 Joy and bliss makes my heart strong
 To hear this melody.
 Truly it may none other be
 But this child is Prince of postie
 And I his subject, as I see,
 He is most worthy.

Sybil.

Yea, Sir, you shall believe well this
 Somewhere in earth born he is,
 And that he comes for man's bliss
 His tokening this shall show.
 Reverence Him, I rede, I wis,
 For other God there none is,
 He that hopeth otherwise doth amiss
 But Him for Christ to know.

Octavian.

Sirs, Senators go home anon
 And warn my men every echone
 That such worship I must foregone
 As they would do to me.
 But this child worship each man
 With full heart all that you can
 For he is worthy to believe upon
 And that now I will see.

A Senator.

Ah, Lord, what ever this may be
 This is a wondrous sight to see.
 For in the star, as thinkest me
 I see a full fair maye.
 Sir shall this child pass ye
 Of worthyness and dignity!
 Such a lord—by my lewty—
 I wend never had been none.

[EXEUNT OMNES.]

(Expositor enters through curtain.)

Lordings that this is vereye
 By every sign know you may
 For in Rome, in good fay,
 There is this thing seen.
 Was built a church in noble array
 In worship of Mary, that sweet may
 That yet lasts unto this day
 As men know that there have been.
 And for to have full memory
 On the angels' melody
 And of this sight sickerly
 The Emperour there knew,
 The church is called St. Mary
 The surname Ara Coeli
 That men know well thereby
 That this was fully true.

THE END OF THE NATIVITY
 PLAY.

THE
CHESTER
WHITSUN
PLAYES.

The Play of the Shepherds.

The Seventh Pageant.

The Paynters' and the Glaisor's Playe.

“The Play of the Shepherds.”

First Shepherd (with herbs).

On wolds I have walked full wild
Under bushes my bower to build
From stiff storms my sheep to shield
My seemly wethers to save;
From comely Conway unto Clyde¹
Under tildes them to hide.
A better shepherd on no side
No earthly man may have.
But no fellowship here I have
Save myself alone, in good fay,
Therefore after one fast will I cry
But first will I drink if I may.

[HIC POTAT.]

Ho! Harvey! Ho, ho
Drive thy sheep to the low
Thou may not hear, but if I blow
As ever have I heale:

[Tunc fiat cum cornu et reddit ‘Aho’
Tunc venit secundus.]

1—Possibly this may be “Clwyd.”

Second Shepherd.

Fellow, now we be well met.
 One thing methinks us needs
 Had we Tud here by us set
 Then might we sit and feed us.

First Shepherd.

Yea to feed us friendly—in fay—
 Now might we have our service
 Cry thou must loud—by this day—
 Tud is deaf, and may not well hear us.

Second Shepherd—(vocat submissa voce).

How Tud! come for thy father kin!

First Shepherd.

Nay! fye! thy voice is wondrous dim,
 Why knowest thou not him?
 Fye man, for shame.
 Call him “Tud, Tybbs son,”
 And then will the shrew come,
 For in good faith, it is his won(t)
 To love well his dames name.

Second Shepherd.

How Tud, Tybbs son

Third Shepherd.

[ENTERING.]

Sir in faith now I come
 For yet have I not all done
 That I have to do.

Second Shepherd.

Now since God hath gathered us together
 With good heart I thank Him for his grace
 Welcome be thou—well fair weather,
 Tud, will we shape us to some solace.

Third Shepherd.

Solace would best be seen
 That we shape us to our supper
 For meat and drink well I ween
 To each deed is most dear.

First Shepherd.

Lay forth each man, I beseech
 What he hath left of his livery.¹

Second Shepherd.

And such store as my wife had
 In your sight soon shall you see
 At our beginning us for to glad
 For in good meat there is much glee.
 Here is bread—this day was baked
 Onions, garlick and leeks
 Butter that bought was at Blacon
 And green cheese that will grease your cheeks.

First Shepherd.

My satchel to shake out
 To shepherds I am not ashamed.
 This ox tongue, pared round about
 For your tooth it shall be attamed²

Second Shepherd.

Housing enough have we here
 While we have heaven o'er our heads.
 Now to wet our mouths time were
 'This flagon I will tame if thou read us.

First Shepherd.

Fellows now our stomachs be full
 Think we on him that keeps our flocks
 Blow thy horn and call after Trowle
 And bid him some of our bitlocks.³

1—Allowance. 2—Tasted.

3—Although bitlock in MSS, it is no doubt a mistake for, or a variation of Bittock—a little bit, or small portion. This is a North Country word, and is found in Cheshire.

Second Shepherd.

Well said, Hankin, by my sooth
For that shrew I suppose seeks us
My horn to blow I will not let
Till that lad hath some of cur leeks.

Third Shepherd.

Blow a note for that mittinge¹
While that horn now in thy hand is.

Second Shepherd.

With this horn I shall make a 'ho,'
That he and all the heavens shall hear
Yonder lad that sits on a low
The loud of this horn shall hear.

(Tunc cantabit et dicat TROWLE)

Trowle.

Good lord look on me!
And my flock as they food have
And my good dog Dotinel
That is nothing choice of his chiding.
(Throws himself down.)
If any man come me by
And would know which way best were
My leg I would lift up where I lie,
And wish him the way by East or West-where.
If I rose when I lay
I would think that trouble lost were
For King nor Duke by this day
Rise I will not, but take my rest here.

Second Shepherd.

For that thou savest our sheep
Good knave take and keep.
Since thou may not sleep
Come eat of this sauce.

1—darling, a term of endearment.

Trowle.

Nay but meat, if I may
 Of your dighting to-day
 I will not by no way
 Till I have my wage.
 I thought, ere this, to have been gay
 See, so ragged is my array
 Aye, pinks is your pay
 To every poor page.

Second Shepherd.

How should we suffer all this shame
 Of a shrew thus to be shente?¹

Third Shepherd.

This lad list to be lame
 And lose a limb or he went.

First Shepherd.

False lad, fye on thy face
 On this ground thou shalt have a fall.

Trowle.

And here, sirs, to do you solace
 Hanken, shepherd, shame thee I shall,

Second Shepherd.

Boy lest I break thee thy bones
 Kneel down and ask me a boon,
 Lest I destroy thee here on the stones.
 (Laughs)
 Cease! lest I shend thee too soon.

Trowle.

Gloe³ thee to grins and groans
 Good were thee thy old rags to save soon.
 (They attack him)

1—shente—ashamed.

2—gloe—to enjoy?

Third Shepherd.

Out alas! he lies in his bones
But let me go now to that lad.
Shepherds he shames and sheendes
For last now am I out shad¹

(The ANGEL, with a star appears)

First Shepherd.

What is all this light here
That shines so bright here
On my black beard?
For to see this sight here,
A man may be affright here,
For I am afeared.

Second Shepherd.

Afeared for a fray now
May we be all now,
Ah! yet it is night;
Yet seems it day now
Never soothly to say now
See I such a sight.

Third Shepherd.

Such a sight seeming
And a light gleaming
Lets me to look.
All to my deeming
From a star streaming
It to me stroke.

Trowle.

Ah! God mighty is
In yonder star light is
Of the sun this sight is
As it now shines.

1—shad—excelled.

Second Shepherd.

Fellows will we
 Kneel down on our knee
 After comfort.
 To the true Trinity
 For to lead us to see
 Our elders lord.

Trowle.

Lord of this light
 Send us some sight
 Why that it is sent.
 Before this night
 Was I never so affright
 Of the firmament.

[Tunc cantabit ANGELUS 'Gloria in
 excelsis Deo, et in terra pax,
 hominibus bonae voluntatis.']

First Shepherd.

Fellows in fear
 May you not hear
 This muting on height.

Second Shepherd.

On 'glore' and in 'glere'
 Yet no man was near
 Within our sight.

Third Shepherd.

Nay, it was a 'glory'
 Now am I sorry
 With out more song.

Trowle.

Nay, it was 'glory, Glory, Glorious'
 Methought that note went o'er the house
 A seemly man he was and curious
 But soon away he was.

First Shepherd.

Nay it was 'glorum, glarum' with a 'glo'
 And much of 'celsis' was thereto
 As ever have I rest or rowe
 Much he spake of 'glasse.'¹

Third Shepherd.

By my faith it was some spy
 Our sheep for to steal,
 Or else he was a man of our craft
 For seemly he was and wondrous deft.

Trowle.

One time, he touched upon 'terre'²
 And that word 'terre' he tamed
 And there I took good intent.
 And 'Pax' also may not be blamed
 For that to this song I assent.

First Shepherd.

Now pray we to Him with good intent
 And sing I will and me embrace
 That he will let us to be kent
 And to send us of his grace.

Angel.

[APPEARING.]

Shepherds, of this sight
 Be thou not affright
 For this is God's might
 Take this to mind,
 To Bethlehem go now right
 There shall you see in sight
 That Christ is born to-night
 To kever³ all mankind.

[EXIT ANGEL.]

Trowle.

To Bethlehem take we the way
 For with you I think to wend

1—A sly allusion to the Glasiors who were performing the play.
 2—There is a play on the word here. *Trowle* thinks of "tar"
 and the "tar-box" which the Shepherds use.
 3—kever—to recover.

xliii.

The Prince of Peace for to pray
Heaven to have at our end.
And sing we all, I rede,
Some mirth to his Majesty,
For certain now see we it indeed
The King's Son of Heaven is he.

Second Shepherd.

Now sith I have all my will
For never in this world so well I was,
Sing we now, I rede us shrill,
A merry song us to solace.

First Shepherd

Now follow we the star that shines
Till we come to that holy stable
To Bethlehem bend we our lines
Follow we it without fable.

Trowle.

Now sing on, let us see
Some song I will assay
All men sing after me,
For music of me learn you may.

(Tunc omnes pastores cum aliis adjuvantibus
cantabunt hilare carmen.)

Now wend we forth to Bethlehem
That is best our song to be
To see the star gleam also
The fruit of that maiden free.

[EXEUNT.]

(THE SHEPHERDS draw near the crib.)

First Shepherd.

Sym, Sym, sickerly
Here I see Mary
And Jesu Christ fast by
Lapped in hay.

Second Shepherd.

Kneel we down in hye
And pray we Him of mercy
And welcome Him worthily
That woe does away.

Third Shepherd.

Away all our woe is
As many man's moe is
Christ Lord, let us kiss
Thy crache or the clothes.

Trowle.

Solace now to see this
Builds in my breast bliss
Never after to do amiss
Things that him loth is.

Maria.

[BECKONING.]

Shepherds soothly I see
That my Son you hither sent
Through God's might in majesty
That in me light and here is lent.

First Shepherd.

Great God sitting in Thy throne
That made all things of nought
Now may we thank thee each one
This is He that we have sought.

Second Shepherd.

Go we near anon
With such as we have brought
Ring, bruche, nor precious stone,
Let see if we have ought to proffer.

Third Shepherd.

Let us do Him homage!

First Shepherd.

Who shall go first? The page?

Second Shepherd.

Nay you be fathers of age
Therefore ye must first offer.

First Shepherd.

[APPROACHING.]

Hail, King! born in a maiden's bower
Prophets did tell thou should be our succour.
This clarkes doth say.
Lo! I bring thee a bell.
I pray thee, save me from hell,
So that I may with thee dwell
And serve thee for aye.

Second Shepherd.

Hail! Emperor of Hell
And of Heaven also
The fiend thou shalt fell
That ever hath been false.
Hail! thou maker of the star
That stood as beforne
Hail thee, blessed bairn,
I bring thee a flagon.

Third Shepherd.

Hail Prince! withouten peer
That mankind shall relieve
Hail thee, foe of Lucifer
The which beguiled Eve.
Hayle! granter of hap
In earth now thou dwelles
Lo! Son I bring thee a cap
For I have nothing else.
This gift I give thee is but small
Though I come hindermost of all
When thou shalt them to thy bliss call
Good Lord yet think on me.

Trowle.

Now Lord, for to give thee have I nothing
 Neither gold, silver, brooch nor ring,
 Nor rich robes meet for a king,
 Nor jewel have I none to give thee
 For to maintain thy royal dignity
 But my pipe, take that of me
 As thou art God and man.

First Shepherd.

Now farewell, Mother and May
 For of sin naught thou wottest,
 Thou hast brought forth this day
 God's Son which of might is most.
 Wherefore men shall say
 Blessed in every coast and place
 Be thou memorial for me and for us all
 So that we may from sin fall
 And stand ever in Thy grace
 Our Lord God be with thee!
 (Curtain closes).

Second Shepherd.

Brethren let us all three
 Singing walk homewards
 Unkind will I in no case be
 But preach ever that I can, and cry,
 As Gabriel taught by his grace me,
 Singing away hence will I.

Trowle.

I red we us agree
 For our misdeeds amends to make
 For so now I will.
 And to that Child wholly me betake
 For ever sickerly.
 Shepherd's craft here I forsake
 And to an anchorite's here by
 I will in my prayers watch and wake.¹

[RISES.]

1—Probably referring to the Anchorite who occupied the Cell below S. John's Church.

Third Shepherd.

To that bliss bring you
Great God if it thy will be
Amen all sing you
Good men farewell ye.

[EXEUNT.]

Trowle.

Well for to fare each friend
God in his might grant you !
For here now we make an end
Farewell ! for we go from you now.

[EXIT.]

END OF THE PLAY OF THE
SHEPHERDS.

THE
CHESTER
WHITSUN
PLAYES.

The Adoration of the Magi.

The Eighth Pageant.

The Vintners' Playe.

“The Adoration of the Magi.”

First King.

Mighty God in majesty
That ruleth the people of Judye
When thou on man wilt have mercy
And his sins for-bye,
Send some tokening, Lord, to me,
That same star that we may see
That Balaam said should rise and be
In his prophecy.
For well I wot forsooth, I wis,
That his prophecy sooth is.
A star should rise betokening bliss
When God's son is born.

[ENTER TWO KINGS.]

Therefore, these lords and I in fear,
In this mount make our prayer
Devoutly once in the year
For thereto we be sworn.

Second King.

Yea, we that be of Balaam's blood
That prophesied of that sweet food,

When Balaak that king so woode,
To curse would he have made
God's people of Israell.

Third King.

Sir, sickerly you reed on right
Unto that hill I will me dight,
And there beseech God Almighty
On us for to have mind.

First King.

Lord what time is it thy will
Balaam's prophecy to fulfill
Give Thou us grace both lowde and still
And by some sign us show !

Second King.

Yea, Lord, though we be unworthy
On thy men thou have mercy
And by thy birth thou certify
Here to thy kings three!

Third King.

Of all this world thou art the weal,
Thou shalt be called Emanuel.
Deem Thee, Lord, with us to deal
And grant us our prayer.
(The Star appears).

First King.

Ah Lord blessed most Thou be
That on thy people hast pity.
Witterly now witten we,
That wrought is our asking.

Second King.

That our prayer heard has he
I lief full well by me lewty !
For in the star a child I see
And very tokening.

Third King.

Yea, least this be some phantasie
 Yet pray we all especially
 For if he be born verily
 More signs will he us show.

Angel.

Ah, rise up ye kings three
 And come anon after me.
 Into the land of Judie
 As fast as ye can hie!
 The child ye seek there shall ye see
 Born all of a maiden free
 The King of Heaven on earth shall be
 And all mankind for-bye.

First King.

Lords, hie we thither anon
 Now we be bidden thither gone
 I will never abide, by my bone,
 Till I at him be.

[THE STAR DISAPPEARS.]

Lords and I lief well may
 That child will shorten well our way
 That bringing presents to his pay
 And most is of degree.
 Alas! where is the star i-wente?
 Our light from us away is glent:
 Now wot I not where we be lent,
 Nor whitherward lies our way.

Third King.

It were good that we enquire
 If any the way can us lere.
 (Noise without).
 Tell us some tidings.

[ENTER A MESSENGER.]

Messenger.

Sir, tell me what your will is.

First King.

Can thou say ought what place and where
A child is born that crown shall bear
And of the Jews be king?

Second King.

We saw a star shine verily
In the East in noble array
Therefore we come now this way
To worship him with win.

Messenger.

Hold your peace, sir, I you pray
For if King Herod heard you so say
He would go wild, by my fay
And fly out of his skin.

Third King.

And sith a king is so near
Go we to him in all manner.

Messenger.

You may well see he lives here
A palace in to dwell.
But may he wot, withouten were,
That any is born of more power,
You bring yourselves in great danger
Such tydings for to tell.

(Here must the Minstrels play).

[HEROD ENTERS.]

Messenger.

Oh, noble king, and worthy conqueror
Crowned in gold, sitting on high
Mahomed thee save long in honour.
License I require to come to Thee.

Tydings now my lord I shall you tell
That these three kings do tell unto me
From whence they be I know not well
Yonder they stand as you may see.

First King.

Sir Roy, royale et reverent
Dieu vous gardes Omnipotent.

Herod.

Bien soies venues, rois gente,
Me dites toute votre intent.
(Welcome, stranger kings
Tell me what is your intent.)

Third King.

Infant, queruns¹ de grand parent
Et roi de ciel et terre.
(Seeking a child of great parentage
And king of Heaven and Earth.)

Herod.

Sirs, advise you what you sayne
Such tidings make my heart unfain.
I rede you take those words again
For fear of villainy.
There is none so great that me dare gain
To take my realm and to attain
My power—but he shall have pain
And be punished appeartly.
I am king of kings, none so keen
I sovereign, sir, as well is seen.
I tyrant that may both take and teen
Castle, tower and town.
I am king of all mankind
I bid, I beat, I loose, I bind,

1—Another reading has *queramus*.—This may be a remnant of a French Play, but it is more likely that the Playwright simply meant to represent the language of the Court at that period.

I master the moon ; take this in mind
 That I am most of might.
 I am the greatest above degree
 That is or was or ever shall be.
 The sun it dare not shine on me
 If I bid him go down.
 For all men may wit and see
 Both him and you all three
 That I am king of Galilee
 Whatsoever he says or does
 What the devil should this be,
 A boy, a groom of low degree
 Should reign above my royalty.

First King.

Sir, we see the star appear
 In the East, withouten were,
 In a marvellous manner
 Together as we can pray.

Third King.

By prophecies well wotten we
 That a Christ born should be
 To rule the people of Judie
 As was said many a year.

Herod.

That is false, by my lewty !
 But since you speak of prophecy
 Whether you say true or lie
 My clerk soon shall see.
 Sir Doctor, that art chief of clergy
 Look up thy books of prophecy,
 Of Daniel, David and Esay.
 And what thou see'st tell thou me.
 These kings be come a far way
 To seek a child I heard them say
 That should be born in this country
 My kingdom to destroy.

Seek each leaf, I thee pray
And what thou find'st in good fay
Tell now here, for I dare lay
That all these lords lie.

Doctor.

Nay, my lord, be you bold
I trow no prophet before would
Write anything your heart to cold
Or your right to deny.

Herod.

Nay my true clerk, that will not I,
Debate with thee, therefore in hie,
Look well on every prophecy.

Doctor.

The holy scripture maketh declaration
By patriarchs and prophets of Christ's nativity.
When Jacob prophesied by plain demonstration
Said the realm of Judah and same regality
From that generation should never taken be.
And now fulfilled is Jacob's prophecy.
For Herod king that is now reigning
Is no Jew born, nor of that progeny
But a stranger by the Romans made their king.

Herod.

This is false ! By Mahomed full of might
That old villard Jacob (all doted for age)
Shall withhold with no prophecy the title and
right
Of Roman high conquest which to me is heritage.

Doctor.

Daniel fulfilled with heavenly grace
Prophesied also by divine inspiration
That when he was come, which of all holy was
The most holiest, in earth to take his habitation,

Out of Satan's band to deliver mankind,
 Whom sin original piteously did bind,
 Then both unctious, sacrifices and rites ceremonial
 Of the Old Testament with legal observation,
 Shall utterly cease and take their end final,
 Through Christ's coming which for man's salvation
 A New Testament shall ordain by divine operation
 Offering himself in Sacrifice for mankind's offence,
 Which from Heaven was exiled through his great
 negligence.

Herod.

Fie on that dream, reader! such dotards never
 shall
 Nor no sleeping sluggard make my right title
 cease
 But I shall knightly keep it, whatsoever befall
 Against that young godling, and if he once do
 press
 This kingdom to claim, or put me to distress
 His head off shall I hew.
 Yet look if thou find there
 Where this boy is born for whom these kings
 enquire.

Doctor.

Micheias, enflamed with ghostly inspiration,
 Prophesied that Bethlehem should a prince forth
 bring
 Ruler of God's people and of the Jew's nation
 Should he be born of Israel to be king.
 Esay, unto whom the spirit of prophesy
 Was singularly given through the Holy Ghost
 In this time prophesied that kings witterly,
 And folk of strange nations from many a sundry
 coast,
 That prince's birth to magnify which of might is
 most
 Should walk in great light, and brightness should
 appear
 As did unto these kings in a bright star shining
 clear.

Herod.

Alas, what presumption should move that
 peevish page
 Or any elfish godling to take from me my crown?
 But by Mahomet! that boy for all his great
 outrage
 And all his partakers I shall slay and beat down
 And both of him and his final destruction make
 Such vengeance and such cruelty on them all
 will I take
 That none such a slaughter was seen or heard
 beforene
 Sith Athalia here reigned.
 Yet look and search again
 If these kings shall him find and his presence
 attain.

Doctor.

David of all prophets called most prepotent
 Prophesied that kings from Tharsis and Araby
 With mystical gifts shall come and present
 That lord, that king, and high Messie, (Messiah)
 That in Bethlehem shall be borne
 A child to save that was forlorne.
 And rule all Israel.

Herod.

By Mahoun! thou art foresworn
 Have done; these books were best rent and torn
 For he shall be no king in crown
 But I fully in my weal.
 And mauger David, that shepherd with his sling
 Esay, Jeremy with all their offspring
 Here get no other Messiah nor king
 From my right title to expel.
 This realm is mine and shall be aye
 Manfully to maintain it while I may.
 Tho' he bring with him to-day
 The devil and all his host.
 But go ye forth ye kings three
 And enquire if it so be

But always come again to me,
 For you I think to feed.
 And if he be of such degree
 Him will I honour as do ye,
 As falls for his dignity,
 In word, thought and deed.

First King.

By leave, sir, and have good day
 Till we come again this way.

Second King.

Sir, as soon as ever we may
 And as we see so shall we say.

Third King.

And of his riches and of his array
 From you we shall not leave.

Herod.

Farewell, lords in good array
 But hie you fast again.

[EXEUNT KINGS.]

Herod.

Out alas, what the devil is this?
 For shame almost I fare amiss,
 For was I never so woe, I wis.
 But yet the less it grieves me
 That I let go these kings three,
 For I shall know now which is he
 When they come again.
 All three traitors shall be slain,
 And that same swaddling swain
 I shall choppe off his head.
 And raise the country on every side
 All that ever may go or ride.

So shall this boy loose his pride
For all his great boast.
(He sinks exhausted).
This boast doth me so great annoy
Thay I wax dull and clean dry.
Have done!—and fill the wine in high
I die but I have drink.

[A PAGE ENTERS.

(MUSIC).

Fill fast and let the cups fly
And go we thither hastily ;
For I must ordain curiously
Against this king's coming.

[EXEUNT.

[The ANGEL ENTERS with the star again.
RE-ENTER the three KINGS.]

The IX Pageant, the Mercers.

First King.

Mighty God and most of main
To honour thee we may be fain.
The Star I see is come again
That was out of our sight.

Second King.

The Star yonder over the stable is
I wot we be not gone amiss
For it hath stirred ever ere this
And now there it is glent.

Third King.

What present best will for him fall
Cast we here between us all,
For though he lie in an ox stall,
His might is never the less.

First King.

King of Jews we shall him call
 Therefore of me have he shall
 That am his subject and his thrall,
 Gold ere I pass.
 Sith he shall be king most mighty
 Tribute he must have truly,
 And gold therefore witterly
 Is best, as thinks me.

Second King.

And sith he hath in him godhead
 Methinks best, as I eat bread
 Incense to him through my red
 In name of sacrifice.

Third King.

You say full well, you Sirs two
 And myrrh is good methinks also.
 Since he for man will suffer woe
 And die on rood-tree.

Second King.

Gold, love also may signify
 For it men give not commonly.
 But those they love heartfully,
 This child as we do all.
 And incense betokeneth, believe I,
 Orisons and prayers done devoutly.
 Myrrh, death that man hath bodily,
 And all these him shall fall.
 The star it shines fair and clear
 Over his stable aye entire
 Here is his dwelling withouten were,
 And herein he is lent.

(Curtain draws.)

Third King.

A maiden, sirs, yonder I see
And old man sitting at her knee.
A child also as thinks me
Three persons herein are.

First King.

Hail be thou, Lord Christ and man.
(He kneels.)
Take Lord, here my intention
That I do with devotion
And give me here thy benison
Ere that I go from thee.

Second King.

Hail be thou, Christ Emanuel,
Thou comen are for man's heal.
Bishop I wot thou must be
Incense shall fall best for thee,
And that now here I bring.
In token of the dignity
And that office of spirituality,
Receive Lord, here at me
Devoutly mine offering.

Third King.

Hail conqueror of all mankind,
To do mercy thou hast mind.
The Devil's band to unbind.
Myrrh to thee here have I dight,
To balm thy body fair and bright.
Receive my present, sweet wight,
And bless me with thy hand.

Maria.

You royal kings in rich array,
The high Father of Heaven I pray
To yield you your good deed to-day.
For his mickle might.

And give you will, now and alway
 To yearn the life that lasteth aye.
 And never to fall out of the fay,
 That in your hearts is plight.

Joseph.

You kings all, comely of kind,
 Full faithfully you shall find,
 This goodness that God will have in mind
 And quite you well your meed.

Angel.

I warn you comely kings three
 My Lord would not you spilled be
 Therefore he send you word by me
 To turn another way.
 Herod's fellowship you shall flee,
 For your harm ordained has he,
 Therefore go not through his country
 Nor the gate you came to-day.

First King.

Ah, high Lord, that we honour here,
 That warns us in this manner,
 Else had we wend without were,
 To him that would us spill.
 Farewell, Sir Jasper, brother to you
 King of Tharsis most worthy.
 Farewell, Sir Balthasar, to you I bow
 I thank you for your company.

Third King.

Farewell, Sir Kings, both in fear¹
 I thank you both of your good cheer.
 He that shaped both sea and sand
 Send us safe into our land.
 Kings two, give me your hand,
 Farewell and have good day.

1—in fear—in company.

Doctor.

(To end the play.)

Christ give you grace to take the way
Unto the joy that lasteth aye
For there is no night, but ever day
For all you thither shall go.

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FINIS DEO GRACIAS!

.....

To Him this book belongs
I wish continual health
In daily virtue for to flow
With floods of godly wealth.

PRAY EVER.



These Plays were performed by the
English Drama Society, under the
direction of Mr. Nugent Monck, at
Chester, Thursday, Nov. 29th, 1906.

