

The Problem of the "Ludus Coventriae"

Author(s): Madeleine Hope Dodds

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THE PROBLEM OF THE 'LUDUS COVENTRIAE.'

THE cycle of plays known as the 'Ludus Coventriae' exists in a single MS. (British Museum Cotton MS. Vespasian D. viii) which bears the following notes:

- (1) The date 1468.
- (2) At the beginning the signature Robert Hegge, Dunelmensis,' and before the 29th play 'Ego R.H. Dunelmensis, Possideo : *Ου κτησις αλλα χρησις.*'
- (3) On the fly-leaf in an Elizabethan hand 'The plaie called Corpus Christi.'
- (4) On the fly-leaf in the hand of Richard James, Sir Robert Cotton's librarian c. 1630: 'Contenta Novi Testamenti scenice expressa et acititata olim per monachos sive fratres mendicantes: vulgo dicitur hic liber "Ludus Coventriae," sive ludus Corporis Christi: scribitur metris Anglicanis.'

The fourth note is the only evidence upon which the name usually given to the manuscript is founded, and at the one point upon which James's evidence can be tested, he breaks down. He says that the contents are from the New Testament. This shows that he had not read or even examined the manuscript, as the first seven plays are founded upon the Old Testament; then follow two plays on apocryphal gospels, while the tenth opens with a medieval allegory. It is not until half-way through the tenth play that the New Testament is at last reached. James's evidence therefore is by no means satisfactory. He apparently knew and cared nothing about the contents of the manuscript, and the form that his blunder takes suggests that he was equally careless of its history, for his mistake can be traced to a probable source.

The Coventry Corpus Christi cycle was exceptional in that it consisted only of New Testament plays. It survived later than most of the other mystery cycles; and plays, though perhaps not the old ones, were still performed at Coventry as late as 1606¹. In 1630 some memory of these plays probably survived in literary circles, as curiosities

¹ Chambers, *The Medieval Stage*, II, 362.

of the old popish days, when there were still monks and friars in the country, and James, stumbling upon a volume of plays which evidently belonged to those times, may have jumbled up all these fragmentary ideas into his note. Probably he did not know that Corpus Christi plays were acted at other places besides Coventry.

James's error might have been detected long ago, but for a very curious coincidence. Dugdale, when writing his *History of Warwickshire*, examined the manuscript of the 'Ludus Coventriae.' In a rather late compilation of the annals of Coventry he found a note that in 1493 the King 'came to se the playes acted by the Gray Freirs.' Another version of the annals states that the King came to see the plays 'at the Grey Friars,' and it seems probable that 'by' in the first quotation is equivalent to 'beside.' Unfortunately Dugdale was misled by James's note, and imagined that the plays were acted by the Grey Friars in person¹.

It is not necessary to go into the ingenious conjectures to which this blunder has given rise. The idea that the plays were performed by the Grey Friars of Coventry has now been abandoned by most authorities, and the present theory is that the cycle was performed by strolling players, and did not belong to any one town. Yet there are difficulties in this hypothesis. All the available evidence goes to show that the strollers performed single plays, which lasted not more than two or three hours. The companies also seem to have been small, containing as a rule about half a dozen players. The 'Ludus Coventriae' is so long that it would take nearly a week to act (see below). The scenes often require a great many characters, and extra persons are sometimes introduced quite unnecessarily, as for instance the priests and handmaidens who wait on Mary in the Temple. It is true that the whole easily splits up into separate plays, but it seems to have been arranged deliberately, if clumsily, as a cycle. The purpose for which this was done is undiscovered.

The manuscript of the 'Ludus Coventriae' opens with a Prologue spoken by three Vexillators or standard-bearers, who announce the order of the pageants which are to follow. Every commentator upon the text has noticed that the pageants promised in the Prologue do not exactly correspond with those given in the text, but no complete comparison of the two lists has yet been made; in fact, the only modern editor of the manuscript, Halliwell-Phillipps, expressly stated in his edition of it for the Shakespeare Society that 'in the order of the

¹ Craig, *The Coventry Corpus Christi Plays*, E.E.T.S., p. xxii.

pageants, I have not regarded the speeches of the vexillators.' Very interesting results, however, are to be obtained from a point-for-point comparison such as is given in the table below. Halliwell-Phillipps's numbering is noted for the sake of reference, but the plays of the text have been re-divided in order to make them correspond as closely as possible to the Prologue. The differences between the two, which are in italics, are therefore only those which are absolutely irreconcilable.

PROLOGUE.

TEXT.

Introductory stanza, spoken by 1st Vex.
1st pageant. One stanza by 2nd Vex.
The Creation of Heaven, the Fall of Lucifer.

2nd pag. Two st. by 3rd Vex.
The Six Days of Creation, the Temptation and Fall of Man.

3rd pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
Cain and Abel.

4th pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Building of the Ark, the Flood.

5th pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
Abraham and Isaac.

6th pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
Moses and the Two Tables of the Law.

7th pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Prophets.

1st play [H.-P. I to end of st. 9]. The Creation of Heaven, the Fall of Lucifer, *the Creation of Earth*. [The Five Days of Creation cannot be divided from the Fall of Lucifer without breaking a stanza in two.]

2nd play [H.-P. I last 3 st. and II]. *The Day of Rest*, the Temptation and Fall of Man.

3rd play [H.-P. III]. Cain and Abel.

4th play [H.-P. IV]. The Building of the Ark, *the Death of Cain*, the Flood.

5th play [H.-P. V]. Abraham and Isaac.

6th play [H.-P. VI]. Moses and the Two Tables of the Law.

7th play [H.-P. VII]. The Prophets.

These seven plays are all in the same style; they are short and straightforward, keeping strictly to the Bible narrative, except for the Fall of the Angels, and the Death of Cain, which are treated very briefly. There are no subordinate incidents, comic relief, or allegorical characters. The stage directions are few and all in Latin. The scenes are sometimes divided by the directions 'introitus Noe,' 'explicit Moyses,' etc.

There is no 8th pageant in the Prologue.

There is no 9th pageant in the Prologue.

10th pag. Two st. by 3rd Vex. and one st. by 1st Vex.
The Betrothal and Marriage of Mary.

8th play [H.-P. VIII]. *Prologue, spoken by Contemplacio*.

The Barrenness of Anna.

9th play [H.-P. IX]. *Prologue by Contemplacio*.

The Dedication of Mary in the Temple [the fifteen psalms of Mary].

10th play [H.-P. X]. *Prologue by Contemplacio [printed by H.-P. as the epilogue of the last play]*.

The Betrothal and Marriage of Mary.

PROLOGUE.

11th pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Salutation and Conception.

12th pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
The Return of Joseph.

There is no 13th pageant.

TEXT.

11th play [H.-P. xi]. *Prologue by Contemplacio.*

Scene in Heaven between the virtues Justice, Truth, Mercy and Peace, and the Three Persons of the Trinity, the Salutation and Conception.

12th play [H.-P. xii and first 22 lines of xiii]. The Return of Joseph.

13th play [H.-P. xiii]. *Prologue by Contemplacio.*

The Visit of Mary to Elizabeth. Epilogue by Contemplacio explaining the origin of the 'Ave,' 'Benedictus' and 'Magnificat.'

This section is separated from the rest of the series by the prologues and epilogue of *Contemplacio*. The plays are divided from each other by the prologues. The style is different from that of the earlier plays. The object of this cycle dealing with the Girlhood of the Virgin is to explain the origin of those parts of the church service which relate to her. The scenes are very long and long-winded. Allegorical characters are introduced freely. There is an attempt at humour in the aged Joseph, who does not want a young wife, but the writer jokes with difficulty. The stage directions are fairly full, partly in Latin, partly in English.

14th pag. One st. of four lines only
by 1st Vex.

The Trial of Joseph and Mary.

15th pag. One st. of four lines only
by 2nd Vex.

Joseph and the Midwives, the Birth
of Christ.

14th play [H.-P. xiv]. The Trial of
Joseph and Mary.

15th play [H.-P. xv]. Joseph and the
Midwives, the Birth of Christ.

Unlike the foregoing plays, which were all intended to edify, these two are broadly comic. There are no allegorical characters, unless the two detractors in the 14th play, Bakbytere and Reyse-sclaundyr, count as such. The stage directions are fairly full and all in Latin.

16th pag. One normal st. by 3rd Vex.
The Adoration of the Shepherds.

15th (*sic*) pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
Herod and the Three Kings, the
Adoration of the Three Kings.

16th play [H.-P. xvi]. The Adoration
of the Shepherds.

17th play [H.-P. xvii]. Herod and
the Three Kings, the Adoration of the
Three Kings, *the Flight of the Three
Kings.* [*The scene of the Adoration is
added in a different hand. H.-P. v.*]

This is omitted entirely in the Pro-
logue. No place is left for it in the
numbering.

18th play [H.-P. xviii]. *The Purifica-
tion.* *In the margin of this play is
written the date 1468.*

PROLOGUE.

16th (*sic*) pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Massacre of the Innocents, the
Flight into Egypt.

17th pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
The Death of Herod.

The 16th, 17th, 19th and 20th plays form a complete cycle, into which the 18th seems to be interpolated. In the 18th play there are full stage directions, partly in Latin, partly in English. In the rest the directions are very short and in Latin only. There is no division into scenes, and the whole appears to have been intended to be acted continuously. The allegorical characters of Death and the Devil are introduced. There is one attempt at humour in the Shepherds' play. The flight into Egypt is treated very briefly.

18th pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
Christ and the Doctors.

19th pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Baptism of Christ, the Descent
of the Holy Ghost, Christ goes into the
Wilderness.

20th pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
The Parliament of Devils, the Tempta-
tion of Christ.

21st pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
The Woman taken in Adultery.

22nd pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Raising of Lazarus.

These five plays are simply written, and have no allegorical characters, except the devils. The stage directions are few and in Latin. The beginnings and ends of the plays are sometimes marked by such phrases as 'Modo de doctoribus disputantibus cum Jhesu in templo,' 'Hic incipit de suscitatione Lazari,' etc. The agreement of the scenes with the description in the Prologue is remarkably close.

This is omitted altogether from the Prologue, and no number is left for it.

23rd pag. First four lines of st. by
3rd Vex.
The Entry of Christ into Jerusalem.

24th pag. Completion of st. by
1st Vex.
The Last Supper, Judas sells Christ.

TEXT.

19th play [H.-P. xix to st. 14]. The
Massacre of the Innocents, the Flight
into Egypt.

20th play [H.-P. xix to end]. The
Death of Herod.

21st play [H.-P. xx]. Christ and the
Doctors.

22nd play [H.-P. xxi]. The Baptism
of Christ, the Descent of the Holy Ghost,
Christ goes into the Wilderness. [*The
first speech of John the Baptist is added
in another hand. H.-P. n.*]

23rd play [H.-P. xxii]. The Parlia-
ment of Devils, the Temptation of
Christ.

24th play [H.-P. xxiii]. The Woman
taken in Adultery.

25th play [H.-P. xxiv]. The Raising
of Lazarus.

26th play [H.-P. xxv]. *Prologue by
Lucifer. The Council of the Jews to
destroy Christ.*

27th play [H.-P. xxvi]. *Philip and
James find the ass and the foal, the
Preaching of Peter and John, the Entry
of Christ into Jerusalem, the Healing of
the Blind, Christ's Lament over Jerusalem.*

28th play [H.-P. xxvii]. The Last
Supper at the House of Simon the Leper,
the Woman with the Ointment, Judas sells
Christ.

PROLOGUE.

25th pag. One normal st. by 2nd Vex.
The Garden of Gethsemane, the Betrayal of Christ.

None of this is mentioned in the Prologue, nor is any number left for it.

26th pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
The Trial of Christ before Caiaphas, the Denial of Peter.

This is not mentioned in the Prologue, and there is no number left for it.

27th pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
Christ and the Three Thieves before Pilate. Pilate's Wife goes to bed.

28th pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Remorse and Death of Judas.

29th pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
The Dream of Pilate's Wife, the Trial of Christ and the Three Thieves before Pilate.

30th pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
The Crucifixion, the Virgin and St John.

31st pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Miracle of Longinus, the Descent into Hell.

32nd pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
The Burial of Christ, Pilate's Three Soldiers.

33rd pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
The Resurrection, Christ appears to the Virgin.

The 26th to 37th plays form a complete Easter play, which was intended to be acted one half in one year and the second half in the next year. It is long and elaborate. The stage directions are very full and in English. The action takes place on different scaffolds, but there is no division into scenes, and it is evidently meant to be acted continuously. This section is imperfectly described in the

TEXT.

29th play [H.-P. xxviii]. The Garden of Gethsemane, the Betrayal of Christ, *Mary Magdalen brings the news to the Virgin.*

30th play [H.-P. xxix]. *Prologue, a Procession of the Apostles, with John the Baptist and St Paul, expounded by two doctors, then a speech by an expositor [the speech is headed Contemplatio, but there is no name in the stage direction]. The expositor states that last year they showed the Entry into Jerusalem, the Last Supper and the Betrayal of Christ,—this year they will proceed to His Trial and Passion. There follows a scene between King Herod and his Two Soldiers.*

31st play [H.-P. xxx]. The Trial of Christ before Caiaphas, the Denial of Peter, *the Remorse and Death of Judas.* [*The last a short episode in eight lines.*]

32nd play [H.-P. xxx]. *Christ before Pilate and before Herod.*

These scenes take place further on; they occur twice in the Prologue.

This is a very short incident which occurs above.

33rd play [H.-P. xxxi and xxxii to st. 18]. *Prologue by Satan, the Dream of Pilate's Wife, the Trial of Christ and the Three Thieves before Pilate.*

34th play [H.-P. xxxii st. 18 to end]. *The Bearing of the Cross, Veronica's Handkerchief, the Crucifixion, the Virgin and St John.*

35th play [H.-P. xxxiii]. The Descent into Hell.

36th play [H.-P. xxxiv and xxxv to st. 23]. *The Miracle of Longinus, the Burial of Christ, the Three Soldiers.*

37th play [H.-P. xxxv to end]. The Resurrection, Christ appears to the Virgin, *Pilate and the Soldiers.*

Prologue, where the order of events is often misplaced. The cycle clearly begins with the Devil's long Prologue to the 26th play, but the end is not so distinctly marked. The reason for this will be discussed below.

PROLOGUE.

34th pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Three Maries at the Sepulchre, the Message of the Resurrection, Peter and John.

35th pag. One st. by 3rd Vex.
Mary Magdalen at the Sepulchre.

36th pag. One st. by 1st Vex.
The Pilgrims of Emmaus.

37th pag. First four lines of st. by 2nd Vex.

The Incredulity of Thomas.

38th pag. Completion of st. by 3rd Vex.

The Ascension, the Apostles comforted by Angels.

39th pag. Normal st. by 1st Vex.
The Descent of the Holy Ghost.

This is in a different handwriting and is not mentioned in the Prologue.

40th pag. One st. by 2nd Vex.
The Day of Judgment.

Concluding stanza by 3rd Vex. which mentions N— town, and states that the plays will be performed there on Sunday.

TEXT.

38th play [H.-P. xxxvi]. The Three Maries at the Sepulchre, the Message of the Resurrection, Peter and John.

39th play [H.-P. xxxvii]. Mary Magdalen at the Sepulchre.

40th play [H.-P. xxxviii to st. 30]. The Pilgrims of Emmaus.

41st play [H.-P. xxxviii st. 31 to end]. The Incredulity of Thomas.

42nd play [H.-P. xxxix]. The Ascension, the Apostles comforted by Angels, *the Choosing of Matthias.*

43rd play [H.-P. xl]. The Descent of the Holy Ghost.

44th play [H.-P. xli]. *The Death, Funeral, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin.*

45th play [H.-P. xlii]. The Day of Judgment. [*Incomplete.*]

The last plays, except the interpolated Assumption play, are simple and scriptural. The stage directions, with one exception, are in Latin and are few in number. There are no allegorical persons. The scenes are sometimes divided by the directions 'Explicit apparicio Mariae Magdalen,' 'Hic incipit aparicio Cleophae et Lucae,' etc.

The Prologue is in stanzas of fourteen lines. It is spoken by the three Vexillators in turn, and normally each has a stanza, but although they never speak out of order, sometimes two stanzas are assigned to one Vexillator, and sometimes one stanza is divided between two. This gives rise to the suspicion that the Prologue has been altered from its original form, and that these changes were necessary in order to fit in the Vexillators each in his turn.

Further examination confirms this suspicion. It is noticeable that parts of the Prologue describe the pageants very accurately, while in

other parts the description is incorrect; some pageants are omitted, although numbers are left for them in the Prologue, others are omitted altogether, and two scenes are described in the Prologue which do not occur in the manuscript. The concluding stanza of the Prologue states that :

Of holy wrytte this game xal bene
And of no fablys be no way.

but so far is this from being the case, that the manuscript contains more legendary matter than any of the other extant cycles, except the Cornish. On the other hand it is these legendary portions which are most often omitted or misdescribed in the Prologue.

It may be inferred that the Prologue, including the last stanza, was originally written for a cycle of plays belonging to N—— town. Later a number of other plays were interpolated into the N—— town cycle, and the Prologue was expanded to include them, but the alteration was performed clumsily and incompletely; perhaps it was undertaken rather to serve as an index to the manuscript than as a proclamation, although of course it could be used for the latter purpose if necessary.

From this reasoning it follows that there are two marks which must distinguish the original N—— town plays from the interpolations. In the first place they must be described accurately by the Prologue, and in the second place they must be founded upon stories from the Bible.

The first seven Old Testament plays differ from the Prologue only in two points, one slight difference in order, and one small omission. They are therefore probably part of the N—— town cycle. Then comes a long interpolation, very imperfectly described in the Prologue, and the N—— town cycle is not resumed until the 21st play [H.-P. xx] 'Christ and the Doctors.' This and the four following plays have a closer correspondence with the Prologue than any other part of the text, and they may therefore be regarded as certainly N—— town plays.

There follows another long interpolation, which is very incompletely treated in the Prologue. Here however the discrepancies throw further light on the N—— town series. As the events of any Easter cycle were necessarily much the same, the compiler seems to have been content to leave most of the stanzas in the Prologue which described the N—— town Easter plays, although they do not correspond very closely with those which he substituted. In the N—— town plays there was no scene between Mary Magdalen and the Virgin, no Herod, no Bearing of the Cross, but on the other hand Pilate's wife appeared

in two scenes, while in the text she only comes on once, and there was a complete play on the Remorse and Death of Judas, which is only a minor incident in the text.

From the play of 'The Three Marias at the Sepulchre' onwards the plays correspond with the Prologue, except that the latter omits the choosing of Matthias, a short episode in the Pentecost play. These plays were therefore probably part of the N— town cycle, with the exception of 'The Death, Funeral and Assumption of the Virgin.' This play 'is in a different hand, and is written on a separate quire of different paper. But it was incorporated at the time of the original writing of the manuscript...for it is both corrected and rubricated by the hand of the scribe who wrote the bulk of the cycle!'

This series of plays on the whole fulfils the promise of the Prologue and is founded on Holy Writ. The biblical events are sometimes wrongly grouped, as in the 6th play, where the incident of Moses and the Burning Bush is made the preliminary of Moses and the Tables of the Law. Sometimes, too, the Bible narrative is expanded; the Temptation begins with a Parliament of Devils,—the death of Lazarus and the lamentation of his sisters with their consolers are given in full, and so forth,—but these are expansions on the lines of the text, not wholly extraneous additions. The supposed N— town plays have other characteristics in common. They are frequently divided up into separate plays by such directions as 'introitus,' or 'hic incipit' at the beginning, and 'explicit' or 'Amen' at the end. The stage directions resemble those in the York cycle, being short and entirely in Latin. There are no comic incidents or allegorical characters; the aim of the whole is didactic, and the plays seem to be earlier in form, though not in language, than the others in the manuscript. The Prologue states that the plays were performed at N— town on a Sunday. They cannot therefore have formed a Corpus Christi cycle, as that would have taken place on a Thursday, but it may have been a Whitsun cycle.

About the year 1468 someone took this old cycle of plays and amalgamated with it several other cycles which he had before him. His object was twofold,—to convey instruction and to honour the Virgin,—and he selected all his plays with a view to these ends. Between the end of the Old Testament plays and the beginning of the New Testament he interpolated the cycle of 'The Girlhood of the Virgin.' This is complete in itself, and would be appropriate for

¹ W. W. Greg in the *Athenæum* for Sept. 13, 1913. Halliwell-Phillipps was therefore mistaken when he took it for a later addition.

performance on St Anne's Day by a religious guild of St Anne or of the Virgin. It was included by the compiler because it fell in so well with his purpose, as it is very didactic, and written in praise of the Virgin. He inserted some stanzas descriptive of the cycle in the Prologue, and left numbers for others which he never wrote.

The 14th and 15th plays [H.-P. XIV and XV] appear to come from some craft-guild plays other than those of N—— town, as the stanzas relating to them in the Prologue are evidently insertions. These are the only plays in the whole manuscript where the treatment is avowedly comic. They were probably included as part of the history of the Virgin.

The Nativity plays, or rather play, as it is evidently meant to be acted continuously, forms a separate Christmas series, distinct in style and language. The compiler must have chosen it on account of the impressive 'Death of Herod,' which is the best scene in the whole manuscript, but he was not quite satisfied, because there is so little in it about the Virgin, and he therefore inserted the play of 'The Purification.' This play was perhaps taken from some other Christmas series. It is not mentioned in the Prologue, and therefore cannot belong to N—— town, and it has so little affinity to the 14th and 15th plays that it probably is not connected with them.

After the five N—— town plays comes a wholly different interpolation, an Easter play which was intended for representation in two successive years. As it is very didactic and assigns an important place to the Virgin, the compiler inserted it instead of the N—— town Easter series. The beginning and middle of this Easter cycle are clear, but the compiler seems to have cut off the end, and substituted the rest of the N—— town plays. The Resurrection play contains a speech from the thirteenth century East Midland poem of 'The Harrowing of Hell¹' and the very elaborate stage directions in English resemble those of the morality play 'Mind, Will, and Understanding².'

In most of the plays which are here called interpolations the matter is to a great extent legendary, and the lines of the Prologue which promise that they shall be founded on Holy Writ are not applicable. 'The Girlhood of the Virgin' is based upon the apocryphal 'Birth of the Virgin' and 'Protevangelion of James.' The scene between the four 'Daughters of God,' Truth, Mercy, Peace, and Justice, at the beginning of the tenth play, is a favourite medieval allegory which was

¹ A. W. Pollard, *English Miracle Plays*, p. xxxviii.

² Pollard, *The Macro Plays*, E.E.T.S., pp. xix—xx n.

also dramatised in 'The Castle of Perseverance,' a morality of c. 1425¹. The scriptural narrative is not reached until the Salutation. 'The Trial of Joseph and Mary' is entirely apocryphal; so are the Cherrytree Story and the episode of Joseph and the Midwives in 'The Birth of Christ.' The Christmas play keeps closer to the Bible, but contains the addition of the Death of Herod. The Easter cycle includes the legends of St Veronica, the Appearance to the Virgin, and the Descent into Hell, besides numerous small additions to and deviations from the New Testament.

Thus in order to discover the origins of the 'Ludus Coventriae' it is necessary to identify not merely N—— town, but five other places where five different cycles were performed. It has recently² been suggested with some probability that 'The Girlhood of the Virgin' was the cycle performed at Lincoln². Setting aside this complicated problem, there remain the questions of why and where the present compilation was made. It seems probable that the whole cycle was arranged for representation on some particular occasion. It is so long that it can scarcely have been acted often; the whole performance must have taken nearly a week. The cycle dealing with 'The Girlhood of the Virgin' required a whole day, as Contemplacio makes clear in the Prologues. The Easter plays required two days. The other plays were shorter, but in order to put these cycles in their proper places, it would be necessary to spread the acting over six days thus:

1st day. The seven Old Testament plays.

2nd day. The Girlhood of the Virgin.

3rd day. Twelve plays, beginning with the Prologue to 'The Trial of Joseph and Mary' and ending with Christ's prophecy of His death at the end of 'The Raising of Lazarus.'

4th and 5th days. The Easter plays.

6th day. Seven plays beginning with the lament of the Maries and ending with the Day of Judgment.

With regard to the question of the locality to which the MS. belongs, its wanderings may be traced for one or two steps. Robert Hegge of Durham was the owner previous to Sir Robert Cotton. Hegge died suddenly in 1629 at the age of thirty. He and James, Sir Robert's librarian, both belonged to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and James probably acquired the manuscript after Hegge's death. Robert Hegge was the author of *The Legend of St Cuthbert*. His

¹ Pollard, *The Macro Plays*, E. E. T. S., pp. xxiii, xxxix.

² Hardin Craig in the *Athenæum* for Aug. 16, 1913.

father, Stephen Hegge, a public notary of Durham, was also an antiquary, who made copies of his son's book and of *The Rites and Monuments of Durham* (1593), now in Bishop Cosin's Library at Durham¹. Robert Hegge's maternal uncle Robert Swift had a large library, of which he bequeathed the greater part to his 'true brother and friend' Stephen Hegge in 1599-1600². Thus Robert Hegge belonged on both sides to families who delighted in books and in the antiquities of their native town, and it seems possible that he found the MS. of the 'Ludus Coventriae' at Durham.

It is tempting to suppose that the MS. contains the Corpus Christi plays which were undoubtedly performed at Durham in the fifteenth century³, but the language in which the plays are written makes this theory untenable. All the plays are in the dialect of the East Midlands except the addition of 'The Death, Funeral, Assumption and Coronation of the Virgin,' which bears some traces of the northern dialect. It is also northern in treatment, as it assigns a very important place to the incidents of 'The Funeral of the Virgin.' Plays on this subject were performed at York and at Newcastle-upon-Tyne, but it is not mentioned anywhere else, although the 'Assumption' was very popular. It may be conjectured that the manuscript drifted to Durham in the course of the sixteenth century, but the compilation must have been made in the Midlands.

The two extant collections of morality plays, the Digby MS. and the Macro MS., are both connected, rather vaguely, with the monastery of Bury St Edmund's. The former once belonged to Miles Blomfield, and there was a monk of that name at Bury St Edmund's in the sixteenth century. The latter was found among papers which were said to have come from the monastery. Both contain the morality of 'Mind, Will and Understanding,' otherwise called 'Wisdom,' which has a certain affinity to the Easter cycle in the 'Ludus.' There were Corpus Christi pageants maintained by the craft guilds of Bury St Edmund's, but it is not certain whether these were plays or dumb-shows⁴. The MSS. of craft-guild plays were sometimes deposited in religious houses for safe-keeping; for instance the York plays were kept at the Holy Trinity Priory, and the Wakefield plays at Woodkirk Priory. If the monks of Bury St Edmund's were in the habit of transcribing plays,

¹ Fowler, *The Rites and Monuments of Durham*, Surtees Soc., p. ix.

² *North Country Wills*, Surtees Soc., III, 175.

³ *Dur. Curs. Rec.*, No. 44, m. 9 and No. 47, m. 14 d, P.R.O., printed in *Victoria County History of Durham*, II, 256, and Surtees, *History of Durham*, IV (2) 21.

⁴ Chambers, *Medieval Stage*, II, 343.

and the guild plays of the town were also kept at the Abbey, an enterprising clerk who wished to compile a cycle for some particular occasion would find quite a large collection to work upon, and it must have been out of such a collection as this that the 'Ludus Coventriae' was composed. The evidence is very slight, but rather suggestive; such as it is, it points to Bury St Edmund's as the home of the manuscript.

MADELEINE HOPE DODDS.

GATESHEAD.