

THE WAKEFIELD MYSTERIES.

The place of representation.

Although much has been written in recent years upon the subject of the English Mysteries, and especially upon the four great collections known as the Coventry, Chester, York and Towneley (or Widkirk) Mysteries, little or nothing has been done to elucidate the question as to where the last named plays were represented. The object of this paper will be to show that there are important reasons for believing that they were performed in Wakefield, and should therefore be called 'The Wakefield Mysteries'. This conclusion is 'prima facie' a reasonable one, considering the fact that all the other great English Cycles are connected with important towns, and it may also be supported by a variety of evidence, partly external and partly derived from the text of the plays itself. Yet since the first publication of the plays under the auspices of the Surtees Society in the year 1836,¹⁾ no attention has been paid to this question, and in the recent edition of the Early English Text Society²⁾ nothing has been added to the remarks made by the previous editor of the text.

The only manuscript of these mysteries which is known to exist was discovered in the possession of the Towneley family early in the 19th century, and after passing through the hands of various gentlemen by sale under auction and otherwise, it was acquired by Mr. Bernard Quaritch in 1883,

¹⁾ The Towneley Mysteries, London 1836, Nichols and Son.

²⁾ The Towneley Plays, George England and A. W. Pollard, London 1897, Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co.

and now remains in the possession of his executors. It is unfortunately in an incomplete condition: and it must have contained originally more than the 32 plays which are now to be found in it: for twelve leaves are apparently lost between the first and second plays, two more are missing at the end of the fourth, two more at the end of the seventeenth, and twelve more at the end of the twenty-ninth. These missing leaves would provide room for four or five additional plays of the average length, as well as for the lost portions of the incomplete ones.

The dialect used in the plays is that of the North of England, with some forms belonging to the East Midlands interspersed here and there; and in the thirteenth play a 'Southern tooth' is adopted for a definite purpose for a few lines only.

When we turn to the special subject which is to be discussed in this paper, it will at once be seen from the following quotations what uncertainty has prevailed, and is still prevailing, in the minds of writers upon the question of the place of representation.

Professor Ten Brink¹⁾ says — 'The country fair, held once a year at Woodkirk, in the neighbourhood of Wakefield, may have been still more important than these towns': (he refers to York, Leeds & Beverley) 'according to a happy hypothesis, Woodkirk fair was the place where the Guilds of Wakefield and other neighbouring districts enacted those Corpus Christi Plays which have become so famous under the name of the Towneley Mysteries'.

Mr. J. A. Symonds²⁾ likewise adopts the view that the Towneley Plays belong to Woodkirk, which he identifies with Widkirk — 'the Widkirk, Chester and Coventry plays abound in local references, and illustrate the dialects of their several districts'.

¹⁾ English Literature II, 256. 7, translation by W. C. Robinson 1893. It will be shown later that there were two annual fairs at Woodkirk.

²⁾ Shakspeare's Predecessors in the English Drama p. 108.

Professor A. W. Ward¹⁾ tells us — ‘in general, there is no reason to doubt that the composition of the Towneley Plays is due to the friars of Woodkirk or Nostel’. This however seems to be a somewhat bold assumption.

Mr. J. P. Collier²⁾ speaks throughout his work of the ‘Widkirk Miracle Plays’, and supposes that they belonged to ‘Widkirk Abbey’.

Professor Alexander Hohlfeld, in his masterly essay³⁾ entitled “Die altenglischen Kollektivmysterien” considers that the Towneley mysteries were acted in “Wakefield oder seine nächste Umgebung (Woodkirk)”.

Dr. Charles Davidson⁴⁾ favours the view that the plays belonged to Woodkirk.

Jusserand, in his “Literary History of the English People” (p. 466) says that the Towneley Mysteries are a “collection of plays performed at Woodkirk, formerly Widkirk, near Wakefield”.

It will therefore be our purpose to discuss the merits of the rival claims of Woodkirk (or Widkirk) and Wakefield for the honour of having given birth to and fostered the growth of what is probably the most original and characteristic of all the cycles of English Mysteries: but before proceeding to this discussion, a few remarks may be made upon the appropriateness of the title, “Towneley Plays” or “Towneley Mysteries”.

It has already been stated that the Surtees Society first published the plays in question under the title of “The Towneley Mysteries”, in the year 1836; and the recent edition of the Early English Text Society has been brought out under the name of “The Towneley Plays”. The justification for these titles is not far to seek, as it lies in the fact that the unique manuscript volume, from which these works were printed, is supposed to have been for some centuries in the possession of the Towneley family of Towneley Hall in Lancashire, to whom it belonged in the year 1814, when it

¹⁾ English Dramatic Literature I p. 36.

²⁾ History of English Dramatic Poetry, London 1831.

³⁾ Anglia Vol. XI, 219—310.

⁴⁾ Studies in the English Mystery Plays, Yale 1892.

was sold by auction, though it is not known how or when such possession was acquired. But it would have been more in accordance with the analogy of the custom adopted in connexion with the great classical authors, if we were to speak of the Towneley Manuscript of the plays, and to name the plays themselves after the place where they were acted.

The title "Widkirk Plays" seems however to have absolutely no justification. Its origin is as follows. When the Towneley Library was dispersed by auction sale in 1814, Mr. Douce, a well known Shaksperian critic of the day, annotated the catalogue of manuscripts at the request of the owners; and he wrote concerning the volume which contains the Mysteries that it was supposed to have formerly "belonged to the Abbey of Widkirk, near Wakefield, in the County of York". But Mr. Douce himself, as the Surtees Society Editor informs us, appears to have subsequently considered this supposition as not worthy of much regard. For only eight years later, when supplying an introduction to the "Judicium" from this series, published by Mr. Peregrine Edward Towneley, Mr. Douce relinquished this position altogether, and then expressed his opinion that the manuscript had formerly belonged to the Abbey of Whalley in Lancashire (which was quite adjacent to Towneley Hall) and had passed into the hands of the Towneleys at the dissolution of religious houses in the middle of the 16th century. It may therefore be fairly asserted that, in default of evidence to support either of these views, Mr. Douce's opinion is not one that carries conviction: and yet the Surtees Society Editor declares that "the supposition that this book belonged to the Abbey of Widkirk, near Wakefield, has upon it remarkably the characteristics of a genuine tradition". He has accordingly built up an argument which not only rests on no real foundation, but is also — in some respects at least — in direct contradiction to the plain indications given by the text itself, and to certain facts hereafter to be mentioned: and in consequence of this argument these plays have frequently been called "The Widkirk (or Woodkirk) Plays" — a title which seems to be both unjustifiable and misleading.

There is no place of the name of Widkirk in the neighbourhood of Wakefield, nor indeed in any part of the district

to which the dialect of the plays seems to point. But about four or five miles north west of Wakefield there is a village called Woodkirk, or West Ardsley, where a religious establishment was founded by the Earls Warren early in the 12th century, and placed under the control of the Priory of S. Oswald at Nostell, which is some five miles south of Wakefield. This establishment was not however an Abbey, as Mr. Douce and the Surtees Society Editor wrongly asserted, but merely a cell of Augustinian or Black Canons. It was moreover taken for granted that at the fairs held at Woodkirk¹⁾ under a charter granted by Henry I, on the feasts of the Assumption and the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin (Aug. 15 and Sept. 8 respectively) dramatic representations of sacred subjects were provided for the delectation and instruction of the visitors. More than this, one writer has gone so far as to state that the plays were probably written in "Woodkirk Monastery", and acted in the Church which still exists there.²⁾ Finally, in the "Athenæum" of Dec. 2, 1893, Professor Skeat has shown that there is no philological difficulty in assuming that Widkirk and Woodkirk are simply varieties of the same name. Unfortunately, however, a diligent search has revealed to the writer no trace of the former pronunciation, though the following spellings have been discovered in various documents: — Wudechirche (1202), Wodekirk (1293), Wodkirk (1379), Wodkyrc (1379), Woodkirk (1490 &c), Wodkyrke (1546), Woodkirke (1595), and Woodchurch (1623, 1642, 1716, 1756, 1765, &c.). There is moreover at the present time no knowledge of any pronunciation such as Widkirk in the locality itself, where Woodkirk and Woodchurch are apparently used at pleasure.

It therefore seems altogether unreasonable to persist in speaking of Widkirk Plays on the grounds already mentioned, because: —

¹⁾ This fair was called "Wodekirk Fair" in the 14th & 15th centuries but more recently "Lee Fair", and in later times was famous, amongst other things, for the disputations of scholars from the Grammar Schools of Wakefield & Leeds.

²⁾ See "Old Yorkshire" by William Smith Vol. I p. 10. The days of play acting in Churches must have gone by long before these mysteries saw the light.

- (1) the only authority for the name is a statement given in a note in an auctioneer's catalogue, but afterwards contradicted by the author himself;
- (2) there is no such place as Widkirk in the neighbourhood of Wakefield;
- (3) there is no authority for identifying the imaginary Widkirk with Woodkirk;
- (4) there is no evidence that any religious plays were ever acted at Woodkirk.

There is however a place called Whitkirk about four miles to the east of Leeds, and about eight miles north east of Wakefield. But as no abbey or other monastic building is known to have existed there, no attempt need be made to connect the mysteries with it.

Nor need any attempt be made to connect the mysteries with the "Abbey of Whalley in Lancashire", mentioned by Mr. Douce as his second conjecture, as the dialect used does not possess the necessary characteristics.

As was stated at the commencement of this paper, writers upon the subject of the English Mysteries have only been able to make indefinite statements as to the place where the so called "Towneley Plays" were represented, though some have rightly pointed out their close connexion with Wakefield. The following considerations, which include many points not hitherto referred to by critics, seem to render it practically certain that the ancient city of Wakefield itself was the home of these mysteries.

I. Wakefield and its Trade Guilds are mentioned more than once in the original manuscript. Thus at the commencement of the first play (*Creatio*) we find the words:

In dei nomine amen.

Assit Principio, Sancta Maria, Meo. Wakefeld.

And in the margin is added the word "Barkers", undoubtedly referring to the guild of tanners who undertook the performance of this particular play: the same guild took the corresponding play at York, as we learn from Miss Toulmin Smith's introduction to her valuable edition of the "York Plays".

The second play (*Mactatio Abel*) has a marginal entry at the commencement: —

Glover Pag.

the imperfect word being part of the word Pageant, or its mediæval latin equivalent, *Pagina* or *Pagonna*; the Gaunters (or Glovers) took the corresponding play in the York series.

The third play is thus headed: —

Processus Noe cum filiis. Wakefield.

"*Processus*" being practically a synonym with "*pagina*".

The eighth play (*Pharao*) has a marginal note at the beginning

Litsters Pagonn,

and in another hand a later place: —

lyster play

referring to the ancient guild of dyers at Wakefield: the "*Lytsteres*" at York took the play entitled "*The trial before Herod*".

The twenty seventh play (*Peregrini*) has the words: —

fysher pagent

written underneath the title in a later hand.

It is unfortunate that no historical records of these Wakefield trade guilds have yet been discovered, but there is sufficient evidence in the manuscript copy of the plays to show that the craftsmen of the town took care to form themselves, as in other towns, into societies for the protection of their rights. References have however been recently found to most of the trades mentioned above: thus in the 14th century the tanners were frequently brought before the Wakefield Manor Court for imposing on their customers by substituting various skins in place of ox-hide leather: as regards the litsters or dyers, we learn that in 1312 the Lord of the Manor sold the right of dyeing in the town of Wakefield for the sum of 8 shillings and 8 pence a year: and in 1329 the right of fishing in the river Calder at Wakefield was valued at 12 pence, while in 1339 it had risen to 5 shillings per annum.¹⁾ There is thus no need to suppose, with Mr. Pollard,²⁾

¹⁾ See "*Wakefield Town life in the 14th century*" pp. 35, 36: by J. W. Walker F. S. A., 1900.

²⁾ Towneley Plays, Intr. p. XXVIII note.

that the fishers of Wakefield "may have lent a hand at play-acting for the lack of sufficient employment in an inland town": as a matter of fact, fish was abundant in the river, and the Wakefield fishers sometimes went down the river and out to sea.

II. A Knowledge of Wakefield is assumed by the writer. In the second play (Mactatio Abel) Cain is made by the author, when God has pronounced his doom for murdering his brother, to ask a favour as to the place of burial in the following words — (lines 358—367) —

Syn I haue done so mekill syn,
that I may not thi mercy wyn,
And thou thus dos me from thi grace,
I shall hyde me fro thi face:
And where so any man may fynd me,
Let hym slo me hardely:
And where so any man may me meyte,
Ayther by sty, or yit bi strete:
And hardely, when I am dede,
bery me in gudeboure at the quarell hede.

Here we have so plain a reference to Wakefield that it is surprising to find no explanation given of it either in the edition of the Surtees Society, or in the more recent one of the Early English Text Society. Among the benefactions to Wakefield Grammar School,¹⁾ which was re-founded in the 16th century, there is one dated Oct. 3, 1594, by George Savile, of Wakefield, one of the most liberal givers to the School, and in it occur the following words: —

Omnibus Christi fidelibus ad quos hoc praesens scriptum pervenerit, Georgius Savile de Wakefeld in comitatu Eboracensi generosus Salutem in Domino sempiternam. Noveritis me praefatum Georgium pro diversis bonis causis et considerationibus me ad hoc specialiter moventibus dedisse concessisse feoffasse et hoc praesenti scripto meo confirmasse Gubernatoribus Scholae Liberæ Reginae Elizabethæ apud Wakefield in comitatu Eboracensi et successoribus suis unam parvam clausuram cum edificiis superedificatis jacentem prope le Goody-

¹⁾ History of Wakefield Grammar School, by M. H. Peacock p. 35.

boure inter le Goodyboure Lane ex orientali et quandam croftam Henrici Grice armigeri ex occidentali proviso semper quod mihi licebit praefato Georgio Savile et heredibus meis per spatium decem annorum proxime sequentium terram et fundum praedictae clausurae sive alicujus inde parcelli non superedificati effodere et lapidicinas facere pro lapidibus perquirendis ad usum nostrum proprium et non aliter.

We may infer, from the manner in which the reference quoted above is made in the mouth of Cain, that this Goodybower was a well known feature in the town of Wakefield, and it is clear from the deed executed by George Savile that there was abundance of stone in or near it. As a matter of fact the Grammar School was built in Goodybower Close, and the stone for it came from the quarries on the spot. It is also highly probable that the same quarry furnished much of the stone from which the ancient Cathedral, Chapel on the Bridge, and Rectory House were built. A quarry is even known to have been in existence near the School until quite recent times.

A reference to Goodybower and its quarry — “quarell” is the South Yorkshire pronunciation of the word — could not fail to rouse the interest of the audience, if the play was being acted in Wakefield, and this seems to be implied by the mention of Goodybower alone, without the name of the town: if the representations were elsewhere, Wakefield would surely have been mentioned. Or as a “quarell” was a cross-bow shaft, the “Quarell Head” may have been the name of a well known inn in close proximity to the Goodybower: and in this case also the topical allusion in the mouth of a popular actor would be certain to bring down the house, as we say. There are similar allusions in the Chester plays to places well known to the spectators.

More than that, the very name of Goodybower appears also to indicate that it was the actual place where the mysteries were performed, whether we derive it from “God in the bower” or from “good bower” i. e. sacred bower: and no more fitting place in Wakefield could have been found. Within a stone’s throw of the Church and close to Wakefield Green, it was entirely surrounded by fields and gardens up to the

17th century, and would serve exactly the same purpose as is served by the meadow at Ober-Ammergau, where the plays are now acted.

The other great cycles of English Mysteries seem to have been acted at different points in the cities, and in the case of the Chester, York & Coventry Mysteries there are detailed accounts of the places where the movable stages were erected. But the old plans of the streets of Wakefield do not show any signs that they were ever able to accommodate a large number of sight seers in several quarters of the town: and it is therefore highly probable that a fixed stage¹⁾ was erected in Goodybower, and all the plays acted there. It is quite clear, for instance, from the second play (Mactatio Abel) that no movable stage would be sufficiently substantial to accommodate, as the play seems to require, Cain with his ploughing team of four horses and Garcio, his servant, with another team of five horses or oxen. If the representations were held in Goodybower, it is even conceivable that the pretended ploughing was done in the ground adjacent to the stage, in the same way as Herod in the Coventry mysteries, is supposed to leave the stage, and rage sword in hand amongst the spectators.²⁾

III. Horbury, a small town near Wakefield, is specially referred to in the 13th play. This play (*Secunda Pastorum*) is for many reasons the strongest and most original of the whole series, and it contains the following remarks from the first shepherd — (lines 454—7)

I haue soght with my dogys
All horbery shrogys,
And of fetteyn hogys,
Fond I bot oone ewe.

Horbury is about three miles south-west of Wakefield, and "shroggs" is a local term for rough moorland on which thorns and bushes grow in abundance. These facts have been duly pointed out by the Surtees Society Editor, and repeated by others.

¹⁾ Prof. Davidson (p. 101) considers, though I do not know on what grounds, that the "Woodkirk" plays were not acted on "pageant wagons", but on a fixed stage.

²⁾ In the "pageant of the Shearmen and Taylors".

But it has not yet been stated that in the fifteenth century Horbury was a chapelry of Wakefield, and that there is every reason to suppose that the priests would deem it part of their duty to insist that those who were under their spiritual charge should attend the periodical performances of Mysteries, since these plays were originally written and acted with the special purpose of instructing the unlettered in the Bible story. In this case Horbury would supply a large number of spectators at the representations of the plays, if such representations were held in Wakefield, and the reference quoted above would be specially intended to interest and please the natives of that place. Under any circumstances, visitors from Horbury would certainly be present long after the management of the plays had passed out of the hands of the clergy into those of the trade guilds.

It is perhaps advisable to add that no close connexion of any sort is known to have existed between Horbury and Woodkirk, and therefore there cannot have been any very good reason for a specially large assembly of Horbury spectators if the plays were acted at Woodkirk.

IV. "The Crokyd thorne" is mentioned as a well known landmark. In the same 13th play (*Secunda Pastorum*) in which reference is made to Horbury, the shepherds are represented as agreeing to meet at a late hour on Christmas Eve at "the crokyd thorne" (line 403). The Surtees Society Editor imagines this to be a certain "Shepherds' thorn" in the parish of Mapplewell, which is some 10 miles away from Horbury or Wakefield, and Mr. Pollard repeats this explanation without comment in the edition of the Early English Text Society.

But it seems far more natural to look for this landmark nearer to Horbury and Wakefield. And when we remember that Horbury lies between "Thornhill" on the west and "Thornes" on the east, and that Thornes is equidistant from and lies almost exactly between Horbury and Wakefield, it is surely not necessary to travel any further for the particular tree here referred to.

V. The place of representation was a town of some size. In many of the plays reference is made to "this

town", as for instance in the 24th play (*Processus Talentorum*) which deals with the quarelling of the soldiers about Christ's clothes during the crucifixion, where we find the following: —

- (1) I haue ron full fast in hy
Hedir to this towne. (lines 75. 6)
- (2) For he commes, shrewes, vnto this towne. (line 110)
- (3) I am the most shrew in all myn kyn,
That is from this towne unto lyn. (lines 154. 5)

It is a well known fact that anachronisms and inconsistencies abound in the mysteries; the requirements of time and place are frequently disregarded, mediaeval customs are constantly referred to by such characters as Cain, Noah's wife, Herod, Pilate and others, and the whole setting of the plays must have been incongruous with our modern ideas of propriety. So when mention is made of "this town", it is practically certain that the writer and actor would have in their thoughts the place of representation and not Jerusalem or Bethlehem, or any other place required by the exigencies of the sacred story. The presumption that Wakefield is referred to, and not Woodkirk, is justified by the fact that in the 14th & 15th centuries the former was one of the most important towns in the County of York, whereas the latter could only have been a small village containing a very few houses. This is rendered still more probable by the comparison with Lynn, which was one of the most important towns in the County of Norfolk.

It is instructive to notice that this mention of Lynn, with the mention of Ely in the 13th play (*Secunda Pastorum*) tends to prove that there was some East Anglian influence at work in the composition of these mysteries: certain dialectical peculiarities also point in the same direction.

VI. Wakefield has from time to time maintained a body of stage players. This is the only inference which can be deduced from the mention of a visit of the "players of Wakefield" to York in the year 1446, to which reference is made by Miss Toulmin Smith, in her exhaustive introduction to the "York Plays" (p. XXXVII). An extract from an old Account Book belonging to the Corporation of the City of York shows that at least one Wakefield player was paid on that occasion for his assistance in the performances of the

York mysteries, probably helping in the plays which the York and Wakefield cycles have in common. There is no evidence that a body of players existed in Woodkirk, or any other place in the neighbourhood of Wakefield.

VII. The place-name Wakefield has religious associations. There is no doubt that the name is derived from the Anglo Saxon words, *wæcce*, (a vigil) from the verb *wæccan*, to keep awake, and *feld*, the open country. Wakefield (or as it was often spelt in early days, *Wachefeld*) will thus denote the field where vigils or wakes were celebrated "The wake is one of the oldest of our festivals, and was held long before the re-introduction of Christianity into England by Augustine, who ordained that, in place of the old sacrificial wakes, with their revelry, the festival of the dedication of the church should be kept: and this gives us historical evidence of the institution of church wakes on the foundation of pagan festivals. Then when the Christian religion became firmly established and the church was built, the wake was held on the festival of the patron saint of the church, and on the previous night, or vigil, the people used to wake (or watch) in the church till the morning dawned".¹⁾

This being the case, Wakefield was the natural place for the representation of mysteries, when they were first exhibited by the clergy, as it had been so long connected with religious observances in pagan and Christian times alike: and it remained no less suitable when the representations were undertaken by secular authorities.

VIII. Before the Reformation there was a large number of Chantry Priests attached to the Church at Wakefield. As there were trade guilds in Wakefield ready to undertake the expense of representing the mysteries, so there had always been, in the 14th & 15th centuries, priests connected with the Chantries at Wakefield, who would have been available in the early days of the mysteries to supervise the acting and re-edit the plays where necessary, and in later times to work with the secular authorities, if called upon to do so. In the 15th century there were nine priests connected

¹⁾ J. W. Walker, *Wakefield Town Life in the Fourteenth Century*, p. 67.

with the Chuntries in the Wakefield Church itself, in addition to the Vicar, as well as five others connected with the four chapels in the town, and others attached to the Chuntries in the immediate neighbourhood. As different duties were assigned to different priests, educational needs, for instance, being always specially provided for in the appointment to one of the Chuntries, so there is a probability that the representation of the mysteries would form part of the special duties of one or two of the priests, who possessed qualities suitable for the work. In this case there is no need to resort to the supposition, as Professor A. W. Ward has done, that the plays were written by the religious brethren at Woodkirk or Nostell, though some assistance may have come from these quarters or elsewhere.

IX. Wakefield has for many generations been called "Merry Wakefield". Thus in Fuller's 'Worthies of England' we read "What peculiar cause of mirth this town hath above others I do not know, and dare not too curiously enquire, lest I should turn their mirth among themselves into anger against me. Sure it is seated in a fruitful soil and cheap country: and where good cheer and company are the premises, mirth in common consequence will be the conclusion, which if it doth not trespass in time, cause and measure, Heraclitus, the sad philosopher, may perchance condemn, but St. Hilary, the good father, will surely allow". These words refer to Wakefield as it existed in the middle of the seventeenth century.

A century later, Wakefield is described in Bruce's 'Geographical Dictionary' as a large, prosperous and well-built town. "The town continues to thrive: and thence, perhaps, its epithet and title, merry, viz: — Merry Wakefield: there being nothing like very good business, very good cheer, and very easy circumstances, to make people merry: for it stands in a fruitful soil, where good provisions are plenteous and where is good company enough".

And in 1816, when Whitaker's 'Loidis and Elmete' was published, Wakefield is still said to have a just title to its ancient epithet — "At a distance of a century and a half from the last writer (Fuller is here referred to) it may be

observed that this pleasant town has lost none of its pretensions to the old epithet".

The above extracts are sufficient to indicate that Wakefield was in olden times celebrated for its merriment, and the reason for this reputation has been found in various facts, according to the ideas and sympathies of the various writers who have discussed the question. But it would be difficult to select an epithet more suitable for describing the condition and aspect of a place where mysteries were habitually performed. Holthausen¹⁾ speaks of "der liebenswürdige Humor des noch nicht pietistisch durch-säuerten Merry Old England" as being exemplified in the "Noah Play" of Newcastle on Tyne, and Wakefield might well have obtained a greater reputation for merriment owing to the specially boisterous form of fun displayed in many of the mysteries now under discussion. Judging from analogy, we may take it for granted that the plays were acted for some days in succession, and that crowds of people would flock into the town from the neighbouring districts, filling the hostleries with song and gossip, and crowding the streets to view the processions with which the representations were inaugurated. Professor Marius Sepet tells us²⁾ what a French town was like in the 15th century during the representation of the mysteries: "une foule incroyable, avertie par cette rumeur qui annonce, on ne sait comment, les grands événements, encombraient les principales rues de la cité, et se pressait notamment sur la place de la maison de ville, d'où devait déboucher le cortège". Mr. Symonds³⁾ describes "the motley crowd of mediaeval days, monks, palmers, merchants in their various costumes, servants of noble families, with badges on their shoulders, hawkers of pardons and relics, artificers, grooms, foresters, hinds from the farm, and shepherds from the fells: all known by special qualities of dress and bearing. Comely women, like Chaucer's Wife of Bath, made it their business to be present at some favourable point of view. The windows and the wooden galleries were hung with carpets. Girls leaned from latticed casements, and old

¹⁾ Das Noahspiel von Newcastle upon Tyne p. 19 (Goteborg 1897).

²⁾ Le drame chrétien au moyen age p. 237.

³⁾ Shakspeare's Predecessors in the English Drama p. 113.

men bent upon their crutches in the doorways. In these circumstances it is not to be wondered at that Whitsuntide or Easter, when the Miracles were played, became a season of debauch and merry making". This often assumed such a vigorous character as to frequently call forth the denunciations of the clergy from the pulpits.¹⁾

No wonder then that Wakefield should obtain a reputation for merriment if it was the scene of the representation of Mysteries.

¹⁾ Reliquiae Antiquae II, 54 quoted by Symonds p. 113.

• WAKEFIELD GRAMMAR SCHOOL, April 1901.

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