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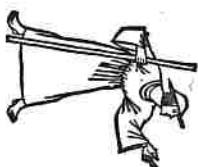
Introduction by Malwyn Mills

Everyman and Medieval Miracle Plays

EDITED WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd, London

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£2.75

His commandments truly if ye keep with good
heart,

*before
healty*

As this story hath now showed you befor,
And faithfully serve him while ye be quart,
That ye may please God both even and morn,
Now Jesus, that weareth the crown of thorn,
Bring us all to heaven's bliss.

THE COVENTRY PAGEANT OF THE SHEARMEN AND TAILORS

THE ANNUNCIATION

The true Coventry cycle is represented by only two surviving pageants, which were once acted by the Shearmen and Tailors and by the Weavers of Coventry respectively. The following text is the first part (lines 1-203) of the pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors, and comprises a prologue by Isaiah, the Annunciation to Mary, the Doubt of Joseph, and the Journey to Bethlehem. It is immediately followed in the complete pageant of 900 lines by the Nativity and the Visit of the Shepherds. A dialogue between two unnamed Prophets then separates the above episodes from the rest of the pageant, which includes Herod and the Magi, the Magi at Bethlehem, the Flight to Egypt, and finally the Massacre of the Innocents.

Two interesting features of the part of the pageant given here are the prophetic prologue spoken by Isaiah and the Doubt of Joseph. The first of these is already found in embryo in an eleventh-century Christmas trope (see p. 79). It links up with the dialogue between the two unnamed Prophets later in the pageant, and it probably shows the influence of the liturgical Prophet plays and of the sixteenth-century sermon (*Sermo de Symbolo*) from which these plays are derived. The Doubt of Joseph (or Joseph's Trouble about Mary, as it is sometimes called) occurs in all the English cycles. There is very little biblical warrant for this episode, which may originally have been suggested by the apocryphal gospel known as Pseudo-Matthew, chapters x-xi. It certainly gave the medieval dramatist an opportunity for pathos and broad humour, and he did not fail to make the most of it.

We are dependent on Sharp's transcripts (published in 1817 and 1825) of the pageant of the Shearmen and Tailors, the manuscript of which was destroyed in the burning of the Free Reference Library at Birmingham in 1879. But a sixteenth-century manuscript containing the Weavers' pageant is still preserved and has been edited by Hardin Craig for the Early English Text Society. This manuscript is on deposit by its owners, the Broadweavers' and Clothiers' Company, in the City Archives at St. Mary's Hall, Coventry.

CHARACTERS

ISAIAH

GABRIEL

JOSEPH

MARY

ANGEL

THE ANNUNCIATION

[*Isaiah's prophetic prologue*]

5 *Isaiah.* The Sovereign that seeth every secret,
He save you all and make you perfect and sound,
And give us grace with his mercy for to meet;
For now in great misery mankind is bound:
The serpent hath given us so mortal a wound
That no creature is able us for to release,
Till thy right unction of Judah doth seize.

10 Then shall much mirth and joy increase,
And the right root in Israel spring,
That shall bring forth the grain of holiness;
And out of danger he shall us bring
Into that region where he is king,
Which above all other far doth abound;
And that cruel Satan he shall confound.

15 Wherefore I come here upon this ground
To comfort every creature of birth; *earth*
For I, Isaiah the prophet, have found *who is born*
Many sweet matters whereof we may make mirth,
On this same wise:
For though that Adam be deemed to death *condemned*
With all his children, as Abel and Seth,
Yet *Ecce, virgo concipiet*—
Lo, where a remedy shall rise!

⁷ Till thy true unction (i.e. spiritual influence) takes possession of
Judah.
¹³ Which is far richer than all others.
¹⁸⁻¹⁹ Many agreeable things at which we can rejoice, as thus.
²² Behold, a virgin shall conceive.

25 Behold, a maiden shall conceive a child
And get us more grace than ever men had,
And her maidenhood nothing defiled;
She is deputed to bear the Son, almighty God.
Lo, sovereigns, now may you be glad,
For of this maiden all we may be fain;
For Adam, that now lies in sorrows full sad,
His glorious birth shall redeem him again
From bondage and thrall.
Now be merry, every man,
For this deed briefly in Israel shall be done,
And before the Father in throne,
35 That shall glad us all.

in no way
sirs
erious
servitude
soon

40 More of this matter fain would I move,
But longer time I have not here for to dwell.
That Lord that is merciful his mercy so in us may
prove,
For to save our souls from the darkness of hell;
And to his bliss
He us bring,
As he is
Both Lord and King,
45 And shall be everlasting,
In *saecula saeculorum*. Amen.

[SCENE I. *The home of Mary*]

Gabriel. Hail, Mary, full of grace!
Our Lord God is with thee;
Above all women that ever was,
50 Lady, blessed more thou be.

may

Mary. Almighty Father and King of bliss,
From all disease thou save me now;
For inwardly my spirit troubled is,
That I am amazed and know not how.

distress
confused

35 And in the presence of the Father on His throne,
37 I would gladly say,
39 May the Lord who is merciful so evince in us His mercy.
46 For ever and ever.

55 *Gabr.* Dread thee nothing, maiden, of this;
From heaven above hither am I sent
Of embassy from that King of bliss
Unto thee, lady and virgin reverent,
Saluting thee here as most excellent,
Whose virtue above all doth abound;
Wherefore in thee grace shall be found,
For thou shalt conceive upon this ground
The Second Person of God in throne.
He will be born of thee alone,
65 Without sin thou shalt him see;
Thy grace and thy goodness will never be gone,
But ever to live in virginity.

on a mission

Mary. I marvel sore how that may be;
Man's company knew I never yet,
Nor never to do, cast I me,
70 While that our Lord sendeth me my wit.

understanding

Gabr. The Holy Ghost in thee shall light,
And shadow thy soul so with virtue
From the Father that is on height:
75 These words, turtle, they be full true.

alight
high

This child that of thee shall be born
Is the Second Person in Trinity:
He shall save that was forlorn,
And the fiend's power destroy shall he.

80 These words, lady, full true they been.
And further, lady, here in thine own lineage
Behold Elizabeth, thy cousin clean,
The which was barren and past all age,

family
pure

85 And now with child she hath been
Six months and more, as shall be seen;
Wherefore, discomfort thee not, Mary,
For to God impossible nothing may be.

70 And I resolve never to do so.
75 Turtle-dove (as a term of endearment).
78 Those who were damned.
83 i.e. past the age for bearing children.

74 *Mary.* Now, and it be that Lord's will
Of my body to be born and for to be,
90 His high pleasures for to fulfil,
As his own handmaid I submit me.

Gabr. Now blessed be the time set
That thou wast born in thy degree;
For now is the knot surely knyt,
95 And God conceived in Trinity.

Now farewell, lady, of mights most:
Unto the Godhead I thee beteach.
Mary. That Lord thee guide in every coast,
And lowly he lead me and be my leech!

Here the Angel departeth, and Joseph cometh in and saith:

100 *Joseph.* Mary, my wife so dear,
How do ye, dame, and what cheer
Is with you this tide?
Mary. Truly, husband, I am here
Our Lord's will for to abide.

105 *Jos.* What, I trow that we be all shent! *believe; disgraced*
Say, woman, who hath been here since I went,
To rage with thee? *behave wantonly*
Mary. Sir, here was neither man nor man's even, *likeness*
But only the son of our Lord God in heaven. *messenger*
110 *Jos.* Say not so, woman; for shame, let be! *leave off*

Ye be with child so wondrous great,
Ye need no more thereof to treat
Against all right.
Forsooth, this child, dame, is not mine.
115 Alas, that ever with mine eyne
I should see this sight! *eyes*

93 To thy [high] estate.
96 Of greatest power.
98 In every quarter, i.e. everywhere.
102 This time, i.e. now.
112 You need not argue about it any more.

Tell me, woman, whose is this child?
Mary. None but yours, husband so mild,
And that shall be seen, iwis.
120 *Jos.* But mine? Alas, alas, why say ye so?
Welaway, woman, now may I go
Beguiled, as many another is. *certainly*
alas

Mary. Nay, truly, sir, ye be not beguiled,
Nor yet with spot of sin I am defiled;
125 Trust it well, husband.
Jos. Husband, in faith, and that a-cold!
Ah, welaway, Joseph, as thou art old!
Like a fool now may I stand *since*
And truss.

130 But, in faith, Mary, thou art in sin,
So much as I have cherished thee, dame, and all
thy kin,
Behind my back to serve me thus.

All old men, example take by me—
How I am beguiled here may you see—
135 To wed so young a child.
Now farewell, Mary, I leave thee here alone—
Woe worth thee, dame, and thy works each one!—
For I will no more be beguiled
For friend nor foe. *[He leaves her.]*
Now of this deed I am so dull,
And of my life I am so full,
140 No farther may I go. *weary*

[He lies down to rest, and an Angel says to him:]
Angel. Arise up, Joseph, and go home again
Unto Mary, thy wife, that is so free.
145 To comfort her look that thou be fain,
For, Joseph, a clean maiden is she; *noble*

126 And a gloomy one!
128-9 Now may I stand and go like a fool, i.e. look a fool at all times.
131 Inasmuch as.
137 Bad luck to thee, wife, and all thy doings.
139 i.e. for anyone.
140 Now am I so downcast by this deed.

She hath conceived without any train *guile*
 The Second Person in Trinity;
 Jesus shall be his name, certain, *assuredly*
 And all this world save shall he;
 Be not agast. *afraid*

Jos. Now, Lord, I thank thee with heart full sad, *steadfast*
 For of these tidings I am so glad
 That all my care away is cast;
 Wherefore to Mary I will in haste.

[*He returns to Mary.*]

Ah, Mary, Mary, I kneel full low;
 Forgive me, sweet wife, here in this land.
 Mercy, Mary, for now I know
 Of your good governance and how it doth stand.

160 Though that I did thee misname, *abuse*
 Mercy, Mary! While I live
 Will I never, sweet wife, thee grieve
 In earnest nor in game.

Mary. Now, that Lord in heaven, sir, be you forgive;
 And I do forgive you in his name

For evermore.

Jos. Now truly, sweet wife, to you I say the same.

But now to Bedlem must I wend *Bethlehem*
 And show myself, so full of care.
 Am I to leave you, thus great, behind? *great with child*
 God wot, the while, dame, how you should fare.

Mary. Nay, hardly, husband, dread ye nothing, *certainly*
 For I will walk with you on the way.
 I trust in God, almighty King,
 To speed right well in our journey. *175*

259 Of your good behaviour and how matters stand.
163 Seriously or jestingly, i.e. at all.
171 God knows, wife, how you would fare the while.

Jos. Now I thank you, Mary, of your goodness
 That ye my words will not blame;
 And since that to Bedlem we shall us dress,
 Go we together in God's holy name. *must go*

[SCENE II. *The road to Bethlehem*]

180 Now to Bedlem have we leagues three;
 The day is nigh spent, it draweth toward night;
 Fain at your ease, dame, I would that ye should be,
 For you grow all weary, it seemeth in my sight.

185 *Mary.* God have mercy, Joseph, my spouse so dear;
 All prophets hereto do bear witness,
 The very time now draweth near
 That my child will be born, which is King of bliss.

190 Unko some place, Joseph, hendly me lead, *gently*
 That I might rest me with grace in this tide.
 The light of the Father over us both spread,
 And the grace of my son with us here abide.

Jos. Lo, blessed Mary, here shall ye lend, *stay*
 Chief chosen of our Lord and cleanest in degree;
 And I for help to town will I wend.
 Is not this the best, dame? What say ye?

Mary. God have mercy, Joseph, my husband so meek;
 And heartily I pray you, go now from me. *earnestly*
Jos. That shall be done in haste, Mary so sweet;
 The comfort of the Holy Ghost leave I with thee.

200 Now to Bedlem straight will I wend
 To get some help for Mary so free;
 Some help of women God may me send,
 That Mary, full of grace, pleased may be.

182 I would be glad, wife, if you were resting comfortably.
190 May the light of the Father.
193 The supreme chosen one of our Lord and the purest in state.