

than in the Greek, the stage (*pulpitum*) not being separated from the first rows of the audience by an orchestra occupied by the chorus; and this led in earlier times to the absence of masks, variously-coloured wigs serving to distinguish the age of the characters. Roscius, however, is said (in consequence of an obliquity of vision disfiguring his countenance) to have introduced the use of masks; and the innovation, though disapproved of, afterwards maintained itself. The tragic actors wore the *crepida*, corresponding to the *cothurnus*, and a heavy toga, which in the *protexta* had the purple border giving its name to the species. The conventional costumes of the various kinds of comedy are likewise indicated by their names. The comparative nearness of the actors to the spectators encouraged the growth of that close criticism of acting for which Italy has always been famous, and which manifested itself in all the ways familiar to modern audiences. Where there is criticism, devices are apt to spring up for anticipating or directing it; and the evil institution of the *claque* is modelled on Roman precedent. In fine, though the art of acting at Rome must have originally formed itself on Greek example and precept, it was doubtless elaborated with a care unknown to the greatest Attic artists. Its most famous representatives were Gallus, called after his emancipation Q. Roscius Gallus (d. c. 62 B.C.), who, like the great "English Roscius," excelled equally in tragedy and comedy, and his younger contemporary Clodius Æsopus, a Greek by birth, likewise eminent in both branches of his art, though in tragedy more particularly. Both these great actors are said to have been constant hearers of the great orator Hortensius; and Roscius wrote a treatise on the relations between oratory and acting. In the influence of oratory upon the drama are perhaps to be sought the chief among the nobler features of Roman tragedy to which a native origin may be fairly ascribed.

The ignoble end of the Roman—and with it of the ancient classical—drama has been already foreshadowed. The elements of dance and song, never integrally united with the dialogue in Roman tragedy, were now altogether separated from it. While it became customary simply to recite tragedies to the small audiences who continued (or, as a matter of courtesy, affected) to appreciate them, the *pantomimus* commended itself to the heterogeneous multitudes of the Roman theatre by confining the performance of the actor to gesticulation and dancing, a chorus singing the accompanying text. The species was developed with extraordinary success already under Augustus by Pylades and Bathyllus; and so popular were these entertainments, that even eminent poets, such as Lucan (d. 65 A.D.), wrote the librettos for them, of which the subjects were generally mythological, only now and then historical, and chiefly of an amorous kind. A single masked performer was able to enchant admiring crowds by the art of gesticulation and movement only. In what direction this art tended, when suiting itself to the demands of a recklessly sensual age, may be gathered from the remark of one of the last pagan historians of the empire, that the introduction of pantomimes was a sign of the general moral decay of the world which began with the beginning of the monarchy. Comedy more easily lost itself in the cognate form of the *minimus*, which survived all other kinds of comic entertainments because of its more audacious immorality and open obscenity. Women took part in these performances, by means of which, as late as the 6th century, a *mima* acquired a celebrity which ultimately raised her to the imperial throne. Meanwhile the regular drama had lingered on, enjoying in all its forms imperial patronage in the days of the literary revival under Hadrian (117-138); but the perennial taste for the spectacles of the amphitheatre, which reached its climax in

the days of Constantine the Great (306-337), hastened the downfall of the dramatic art in general. It was not absolutely extinguished even by the irruptions of the northern barbarians; but a bitter adversary had by this time risen into power. The whole authority of the Christian church had, without usually caring to distinguish between the nobler and the looser elements in the drama, involved all its manifestations in a consistent condemnation; and when the faith of that church was acknowledged as the religion of the Roman empire, the doom of the theatre was sealed. This doom was not undeserved; for the remnants of the literary drama had long been overshadowed by entertainments such as both earlier and later Roman emperors—Domitian and Trajan as well as Galerius and Constantine—had found themselves obliged to prohibit in the interests of public morality and order, by the bloody spectacles of the amphitheatre, and by the maddening excitement of the circus; the art of acting had become the pander of the lewd or frivolous itch of eye and ear; and the theatre had contributed its utmost to the demoralization of a world. The attitude taken up by the Christian church towards the stage was in general as unavoidable as its particular expressions were at times heated by fanaticism or distorted by ignorance. Had she not visited with her anathema a wilderness of decay, she could not herself have become—what she little dreamt of becoming—the nursing mother of the new birth of an art which seemed incapable of regeneration.

Though already in the 4th century actors and mountebanks had been excluded from the benefit of Christian sacraments, and excommunication had been extended to those who visited theatres instead of churches on Sundays and holidays, and though similar enactments had followed at later dates, yet the entertainments of the condemned profession had never been entirely suppressed, and had even occasionally received imperial patronage. Gradually, however, the *mimes* and their fellows became a wandering fraternity, who doubtless appeared at festivals when they were wanted and vanished again into the deepest obscurity which has ever covered that mysterious existence—a stroller's life. It was thus that these strange intermediaries of civilization carried down such traditions as survived of the acting drama of pagan antiquity into the succeeding ages.

While the scattered and persecuted strollers thus kept alive something of the popularity, if not of the loftier traditions, of their art, neither, on the other hand, was there an utter absence of written compositions to bridge the gap between ancient and modern dramatic literature. In the midst of the condemnation with which the Christian church visited the stage, its professors, and votaries, we find individual ecclesiastics resorting in their writings to both the tragic and the comic form of the ancient drama. These isolated productions, which include (in the latter part of the 4th century) the *Passion of Christ*, usually attributed to St Gregory Nazianzen, were doubtless mostly written for educational purposes, whether Euripides and Lycophron, or Menander, Plautus, and Terence served as the outward models. The same was probably the design of the famous "comedies" of Hrotsvitha, the Benedictine nun of Gandersheim, in Eastphalian Saxony, which associate themselves in the history of Christian literature with the spiritual revival of the 10th century in the days of Otto the Great. While avowedly imitated in form from the comedies of Terence, these religious exercises derive their themes—martyrdoms,¹ and miraculous or otherwise startling conversions²—

¹ *Gallioanus* Part II.; *Sapientia*.
² *Gallioanus*, Part I.; *Callimachus*; *Abraham*; *Paphnutius*.

from the legends of Christian saints. Thus from perhaps the 9th to the 12th centuries Germany and France, and through the latter, by means of the Norman Conquest, England, became acquainted with what may be called the literary monastic drama. It was no doubt occasionally performed by the children under the care of monks or nuns, or by the religious themselves; an exhibition of the former kind was that of the *Play of St Katharine*, acted at Dunstable about the year 1110 in "copes" by the scholars of the Norman Geoffrey, afterwards abbot of St Albans. Nothing is known of it except the fact of its performance, which was certainly not regarded as a novelty.

These efforts of the cloister came in time to blend themselves with more popular forms of the early Christian drama. To what extent the mimes, or *joculatores* (as in the early Middle Ages they came to be more generally called), kept alive the usage of entertainments more essentially dramatic than the minor varieties of their performances, we cannot say; but we know that in Northern France they at a very early date appropriated the beginnings of the religious drama to secular uses. Doubtless in both Celtic and Teutonic populations there survived the remnants of religious rites containing dramatic elements, and the heathen festivals, of Roman or other origin, communicated something of their character to the Christian, at which the *joculatores* were apt to appear. In different countries these entertainers suited themselves to different tastes, and with the rise of native literatures to different literary tendencies. The literature of the *troubadours* of Provence, which communicated itself to Spain and Italy, came only into isolated contact¹ with the beginnings of the religious drama; in Northern France the *jongleurs*, as the *joculatores* were now called, were confounded with the *trouvères*, who sang the *chansons de geste* commemorative of deeds of war. As appointed servants of particular households they were here, and afterwards in England, called *menestrels* (from *ministerium*) and *minstrels*. Such a *histrion* or *minimus* (as he is called) was Taillefer, who rode first into the fight at Hastings, singing his songs of Roland and Charlemagne, and tossing his sword in the air and catching it again. In England such accomplished minstrels easily outshone the less versatile gleemen of pre-Norman times; while here as elsewhere the humbler members of the craft strolled from castle to convent, to village-green and city-street, exhibiting as *jugglers* their pantomimic and other tricks.

Both the literary and the professional element had thus survived to become tributaries to the main stream of the early Christian drama, which had its source in the *liturgy* of the church itself. The service of the mass contains in itself dramatic elements, and combines with the reading out of portions of Scripture by the priest, its *epical* part, a *lyrical* one in the anthems and responses of the congregation. At a very early period—certainly already in the 5th century—it was usual to increase the attractions of public worship on special occasions by living pictures illustrating the Gospel narrative and accompanied by songs; and thus a certain amount of action gradually introduced itself into the service. When the epical part of the liturgy was connected with its spectacular and to some degree mimical adjuncts, the lyrical accompaniment being of course retained, the *liturgical mystery*—the earliest form of the Christian drama—was in existence. This had certainly been accomplished as early as the 10th century, when on great ecclesiastical festivals it was customary for the priests to perform in the churches the *offices* (as they were called) of the Shepherds, the Innocents, the Holy Sepulchre, &c.,

¹ *The Foolish Virgins* (Provençal mystery of the 12th or 11th century).

in connection with the gospel of the day. In France in the 12th, or perhaps already in the 11th century, short Latin texts were written for these liturgical mysteries; these included passages from the popular legend of St Nicholas as well as from scriptural story. In the same century the further step was taken of composing these texts in the vernacular—the earliest example being the mystery of the Resurrection. In time a whole series of mysteries was joined together; a process which was at first roughly and then more elaborately pursued in France and elsewhere, and finally resulted in the *collective mystery*—a mere scholars' term of course, but one to which the principal examples of the English mystery-drama correspond.

The productions of the mediæval religious drama it is usual technically to divide into three classes. The *mysteries* proper deal with scriptural events only, their purpose being to set forth, with the aid of the prophetic or preparatory history of the Old Testament, and more especially of the fulfilling events of the New, the central mystery of the Redemption of the world, as accomplished by the Nativity, the Passion, and the Resurrection. But in fact these were not kept distinctly apart from the *miracle-plays*, or *miracles*, which are strictly speaking concerned with the legends of the saints of the church; and in England the name *mysteries* was not in use. Of these species the miracles must more especially have been fed from the resources of the monastic literary drama. Thirdly, the *moralities*, or *moral-plays*, teach and illustrate the same truths; not, however, by direct representation of scriptural or legendary events and personages, but allegorically, their characters being personified virtues or qualities. Of the moralities the Norman *trouvères* had been the inventors; and doubtless this innovation connects itself with the endeavour, which in France had almost proved victorious by the end of the 13th century, to emancipate dramatic performances from the control of the church.

The attitude of the clergy towards the dramatic performances which had arisen out of the elaboration of the services of the church, but which soon admitted elements from other sources, was not, and could not be, uniform. As the plays grew longer, their paraphernalia more extensive, and their spectators more numerous, they began to be represented outside as well as inside the churches, and the use of the vulgar tongue came to be gradually preferred. Miracles were less dependent on this connection with the church services than mysteries proper; and lay associations, guilds, and schools in particular, soon began to act plays in honour of their patron saints in or near their own halls. Lastly, as scenes and characters of a more or less trivial description were admitted even into the plays acted or superintended by the clergy, as some of these characters came to be depended on by the audiences for conventional extravagance or fun, every new Herod seeking to out-Herod his predecessor, and the devils and their chief asserting themselves as indispensable favourites, the comic element in the religious drama increased; and that drama itself, even where it remained associated with the church, grew more and more profane. The endeavour to sanctify the popular tastes to religious uses, which connects itself with the institution of the great festival of Corpus Christi (1264, confirmed 1311), when the symbol of the mystery of the Incarnation was borne in solemn procession, led to the closer union of the dramatic exhibitions (hence often called *processus*) with this and other religious feasts; but it neither limited their range, nor controlled their development.

At times favoured, at times denounced by the clergy, dramatic entertainments thus lustily flourished for a series of centuries, in some countries more, in others less, religious in their character, and variously reinforced by the efforts

of the craftsmen of the acting profession. In France, where they had always preserved a secular side, they soonest advanced into forms connecting themselves with later growths of the drama. At Paris the fraternity of the *Bazoche* (clerks of the Parliament and the Châtelet) in 1303 acquired the right of conducting the popular festivals; but after the *Confrérie de la Passion*, who devoted themselves originally to the performance of passion-plays, had obtained a royal privilege for this purpose in 1402, the *Bazoche* gave itself up to the production of moralities. A third association, calling itself the *Enfants sans souci* (the Devil-may-cares), having about the same time acquired the right of acting *sotties*—short comic plays with allegorical figures—the other companies took a leaf out of their book, interwove their mysteries and moralities with comic scenes from popular life, and gradually began to confine themselves to secular themes. Thus the transition to the regular drama here easily prepared itself; already in 1395 we find the brethren of the *Passion* performing a serious play on the story of *Griseldis*; and among the abundant literature of *sotties* and *farces* (from Italian *farsa*, Latin *farcita*), which after mingling real types with allegorical personages had come to exclude the latter, the immortal *Maistre Pierre Patelin* (acted in 1480 by the *Bazoche*) is, however slight in plot, in all essentials a comedy. No Italian mystery has been preserved from an earlier date than 1243, about which time associations were in this country also founded for the production of religious plays. These seem to have differed little from those of Northern Europe except by a less degree of coarseness in their comic characters. Plays on Old Testament subjects were called *figure*, on New *vangeli*; in the 15th and 16th centuries they were elaborated and produced with great care, and bore various names, of which *rappresentazioni* was the most common.¹ The spectacular magnificence of theatrical displays accorded with that of the processions, both ecclesiastical and lay,—the *trionfi* as they were called in the days of Dante,—and the religious drama gradually acquired an academical character assimilating it to the classical attempts which gave rise to the regular Italian drama. The poetry of the Troubadours, which had come from Provence into Italy, here frequently took a dramatic form, and perhaps suggested his early experiments in this to Petrarch, the father of the Italian Renaissance. After his death there are traces of similar literary efforts in the *volgare Provenzale* dialect. Meanwhile remnants of the ancient popular entertainments had survived in the improvised farces acted at the courts, in the churches (*farsa spirituale*), and among the people; the Roman carnival had preserved its waggon-plays (*carrè*); and numerous links remained to connect the popular modern comedy of the Italians with the *Atellanes* and *mimes* of their ancestors. In Spain, where all traces of the ancient Roman theatre (except its architectural remains) had disappeared after the Moorish conquest, the extant remains of the religious drama date from a still later period than the Italian—the 13th or 14th century. Its beginnings presented themselves in an advanced form, which aroused the opposition of the clergy, who sought to take the plays under their own control. In the secular literature of Spain nothing dramatic can be proved to have existed till the latter part of the 15th century. It had probably been customary from early times to insert in the mysteries so-called *entremeses* or *interludes*; but it is not till 1472 that in the couplets of *Mingo Revulgo* (i.e., Domingo Vulgus, the common people), and about the same time, in another dialogue by the same author, we have attempts of a kind

¹ Such a piece was the *San Giovanni e San Paolo* (1488), by Lorenzo the Magnificent, the prince who afterwards sought to reform the Italian stage by paganizing it.

resembling the Italian *conirasti* (v. *infra*). In Germany, on the other hand (the history of whose drama so widely differs from that of the Spanish), religious plays were performed probably as early as the 12th century at the Christmas and Easter festivals. Other festivals were afterwards celebrated in the same way, but up to the Reformation Easter enjoyed the preference. About the 14th century miracle-plays began to be frequently performed; and as these often treated subjects of historical interest, local or other, the transition to the barren beginnings of the German historical drama was afterwards easy. Though these early German plays often have an element of the moralities, they were not as in France blended with the drolleries of the professional strollers (*fahrende Leute*), which, carried on chiefly in carnival time, gave rise to the Shrove-Tuesday plays (*Fastnachtsspiele*), scenes from common life largely interspersed with practical fun. To these last a more enduring literary form was first given in the 15th century by Hans Rosenplüt, called Schnepperer—or Hans Schnepperer, called Rosenblüt—the predecessor of Hans Sachs. By this time a connection was establishing itself in Germany between the dramatic amusements of the people and the literary labours of the *master-singers*; but the religious drama proper survived in Catholic Germany far beyond the times of the Reformation, and was not suppressed in Bavaria and Tyrol till the end of the 18th century.¹

Omitting any notice of traces remaining of the religious drama in other European countries, we come to our own, from whose literature a fair idea may be derived of the general character of these mediæval productions. The *miracle-plays*, *miracles*, or *plays* (these being the terms used in England) of which we hear in London in the 12th century, were probably written in Latin and acted by ecclesiastics; but already in the following century mention is made—in the way of prohibition—of plays acted by professional players. (Isolated moralities of the 12th century are not to be regarded as popular productions.) In England as elsewhere, the clergy either sought to retain their control over the religious plays, which continued to be occasionally acted in churches even after the Reformation, or else reprobated them with or without qualifications. In Cornwall miracles in the native Cymric dialect were performed at an early date; but those which have been preserved are apparently copies of English (with the occasional use of French) originals; they were represented, unlike the English plays, in the open country, in extensive amphitheatres constructed for the purpose.

The flourishing period of English miracle-plays begins with the practice of their performance by trading-companies in the towns. Of this practice Chester is said to have set the example (1268–1276); it was followed in the course of the 13th and 14th centuries by many other towns, including Wakefield, Coventry, York, Newcastle-on-Tyne, Leeds, Lancaster, Preston, Kendal, Wymondham, Dublin, and London, in which last the performers were the parish clerks. Three collections, in addition to some single examples, of such plays have come down to us—viz., the *Towneley* plays, which were probably acted at the fairs of Woodkirk, near Wakefield, and those bearing the names of *Chester* and of *Coventry*. Their dates, in the forms in which they have come down to us, are more or less uncertain, that of the *Towneley* may be even earlier than the 14th century; the *Chester* may be ascribed to the close of the 14th or the earlier part of the 15th; the body of the *Coventry* probably belongs to the 15th or 16th. Many of

¹ The passion-play of Oberammergau, familiar in its present artistic form to so many visitors, was instituted under special circumstances in the days of the Thirty Years' War (1634). Various reasons account for its having been allowed to survive.

the individual plays in these collections were doubtless founded on French originals; others are taken direct from Scripture, from the apocryphal gospels, or from the legends of the saints. Their characteristic feature is the combination of a whole series of plays into one *collective* whole, exhibiting the entire course of Bible history from the creation to the day of judgment. For this combination it is unnecessary to suppose that they were generally indebted to foreign examples, though there are several remarkable coincidences between the Chester plays and the French *Mystère du Vieil Testament*.

"The manner of these plays," we read in a description of those at Chester, dating from the close of the 16th century, "were:—Every company had his pageant, which pageants were a high scaffold with two rooms, a higher and a lower, upon four wheels. In the lower they apparelled themselves, and in the higher room they played, being all open at the top, that all beholders might hear and see them. The places where they played them was in every street. They began first at the abbey gates, and when the first pageant was played, it was wheeled to the high cross before the mayor, and so to every street, and so every street had a pageant playing before them at one time till all the pageants appointed for the day were played; and when one pageant was near ended, word was brought from street to street, that so they might come in place thereof, exceedingly orderly, and all the streets have their pageants afore them all at one time playing together; to see which plays was great resort, and also scaffolds and stages made in the streets in those places where they determined to play their pageants."

Each play, then, was performed by the representative of a particular trade or company, after whom it was called the fishers', gloves', &c., *pageant*; while a general prologue was spoken by a herald. As a rule the movable stage sufficed for the action, though we find horsemen riding up to the scaffold, and Herod instructed to "rage in the pagod and in the strete also." There is no probability that the stage was, as in France, divided into three platforms with a dark cavern at the side of the lowest, appropriated respectively to the Heavenly Father and His angels, to saints and glorified men, to mere men, and to souls in hell. But the last-named locality was frequently displayed in the English miracles, with or without fire in its mouth. The costumes were in part conventional,—divine and saintly personages being distinguished by gilt hair and beards, Herod being clad as a Saracen, the demons wearing hideous heads, the souls black and white coats according to their kind, and the angels gold skins and wings.

Doubtless these performances abounded in what seem to us ludicrous features, and though their main purpose was serious, they were not in England at least intended to be devoid of fun. But many of these features are in truth only homely and naïf, and the simplicity of feeling they exhibit is at times not without its pathos. The occasional excessive grossness is due to an absence of refinement of taste rather than to an obliquity of moral sentiment. In this, as in other respects, the *Coventry Plays*, which were possibly written by clerical hands, show an advance upon the others. In the same plays is already to be observed an element of abstract figures, which connects them with a different species of the mediæval drama.

The *moralities* corresponded to the love for moral allegory which manifests itself in so many periods of our literature, and which, while dominating the whole field of mediæval literature, was nowhere more assiduously and effectively cultivated than in England. It is necessary to bear this in mind, in order to understand what to us seems so strange, the popularity of the moral-plays, which indeed never equalled that of the miracles, but sufficed to maintain the former species till it received a fresh impulse from the connection established between it and the "new learning," together with the new political and religious ideas and questions, of the Reformation age. Moreover, a specially popular element was supplied to these plays, which

in manner of representation differed in no essential point from the miracles, in a character borrowed from the latter, and, in the moralities, usually provided with a companion whose task it was to lighten the weight of such abstractions as Sapience and Justice. These were the Devil and his attendant the *Vice*, of whom the latter seems to have been of native origin, and, as he was usually dressed in a fool's habit, was probably suggested by the familiar custom of keeping an attendant fool at court or in great houses. The *Vice* had many *aliases* (*Shift*, *Ambidexter*, *Sin*, *Fraud*, *Iniquity*, &c.), but his usual duty is to torment and tease the Devil his master for the edification and diversion of the audience. He was gradually blended with the domestic fool, who survived in the regular drama.

The earlier English moralities¹—from the reign of Henry VI. to that of Henry VII.—usually allegorize the conflict between good and evil in the mind and life of man, without any side-intention of theological controversy; such also is still essentially the purpose of the morality we possess by Henry VIII.'s poet, the witty Skelton,² and even of another, perhaps the most perfect example of its class, which in date is already later than the Reformation. But if such theology as *Every-Man* teaches is the orthodox doctrine of Rome, its successor, R. Wever's *Lusty Juventus*, breathes the spirit of the dogmatic reformation of the reign of Edward VI. Theological controversy largely occupies the moralities of the earlier part of Elizabeth's reign, and connects itself with political feeling in a famous morality,³ Sir David Lyndsay's *Satire of the Three Estaitis*, written on the other side of the border, where such efforts as the religious drama proper had made had been extinguished by the Reformation. Only a single English political morality proper remains to us, which belongs to the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth.⁴ Yet another series connects itself with the ideas of the Renaissance rather than the Reformation, respecting of intellectual progress rather than of moral conduct;⁵ this extends from the reign of Henry VIII. to that of his younger daughter.

The transition from the morality to the regular drama in England was effected on the one hand by the intermixture of historical personages with abstractions—as in Bishop Bale's *Kyng Johan* (c. 1548)—which easily led over to the *Chronicle History*; on the other by the introduction of types of real life by the side of abstract figures. This latter tendency, of which instances occur in earlier plays, is observable in several of the 16th century moralities,⁶ but before most of these were written, a further step in advance had been taken by a man of genius, John Heywood (d. 1565), whose *interludes*⁷ were short farces in the French manner, dealing entirely with real—very real—men and women. Orthodox and conservative, he had at the same time a keen eye for the vices as well as the follies of his age, and not the least for those of the clerical profession. Other writers, such as T. Ingeland,⁸ took the same direction; and the allegory of abstractions was thus undermined on the stage, very much as in didactic literature the ground had been cut from under its feet by the *Ship of Fools*. Thus the *interludes*—a name which had been used for the moralities themselves from an early date—facilitated the advent of comedy, without having superseded the earlier form. Both moralities and miracle-plays survived into the Elizabethan age, after the regular drama had already begun its course.

¹ *The Castle of Perseverance*; *Medwall, Nature, The World and the Child*; *Hycke-Scorner*, &c. ² *Magnificence*.

³ *New Customs*; N. Woodes, *The Conflict of Conscience*, &c.

⁴ *Athyon Knight*.

⁵ *Rastell, Nature of the Four Elements*; *Redford, Wit and Science*; *The Marriage of Wit and Science*.

⁶ *Jack Juggler*; *Tom Tiler and his Wife*, &c.

⁷ *The Four P's*, &c. ⁸ *The Disobedient Child*.

Religious drama in England.

Cornish miracle plays.

The Towneley, Chester, and Coventry plays.

Transition from the morality to the regular drama.

Heywood's interludes.

Such, in barest outline, was the progress of dramatic entertainments in the principal countries of Europe, before the revival of classical studies brought about a return to the examples of the classical drama, or before this return had distinctly asserted itself. It must not, however, be forgotten that from an early period in England as elsewhere had flourished a species of entertainments, not properly speaking dramatic, but largely contributing to form and foster a taste for dramatic spectacles. The *pageants*—as they were called in England—were the successors of those *sidings* from which, when they gladdened “Chepe,” Chaucer’s idle apprentice would not keep away; but they had advanced in splendour and ingenuity of device under the influence of Flemish and other foreign examples. Costumed figures represented before gaping citizens the heroes of mythology and history, and the abstractions of moral, patriotic, or municipal allegory; and the city of London clung with special fervour to these exhibitions, which the Elizabethan drama was neither able nor—as represented by most of its poets who composed devices and short texts for these and similar shows—willing to oust from popular favour. Some of the greatest and some of the least of our dramatists were the ministers of pageantry; and perhaps it would have been an advantage for the future of the theatre, if the legitimate drama and the *Triumphs of Old Drapery* had been more jealously kept apart.

The Renaissance and the national drama

The literary influence which finally transformed the growths noticed above into the national dramas of the several countries of Europe, was in a word the influence of the Renaissance. Among the remains of classical antiquity which were studied, translated, and imitated, those of the drama necessarily held a prominent place. Never altogether lost sight of, they now became subjects of devoted research and models for careful copies, first in one of their own, then in modern, tongues; and these essentially literary endeavours came into more or less direct contact with, and acquired more or less control over, the already existing entertainments of the stage. Thus the stream of the modern drama, whose source and contributories have been described, was brought back into the ancient bed, from which its flow diverged into a number of national courses, unequal in impetus and strength, and varying in accordance with the manifold conditions of their progress. Of these it remains to pursue the most productive or important.

The modern Italian drama

The priority in this as in most of the other aspects of the Renaissance belongs to ITALY. In ultimate achievement, the Italian drama fell short of the fulness of the results obtained elsewhere—a surprising fact when it is considered, not only that the Italian language had the vantage-ground of closest relationship to the Latin, but that the genius of the Italian people has at all times inspired it with a predilection for the drama. The cause is doubtless to be sought in the absence from Italian national life during a long period, and more especially during that contemporary with the rise and earlier promise of Italian dramatic literature, of those loftiest and most potent impulses of popular feeling to which a national drama owes so much of its strength. This absence was due partly to the peculiarities of the Italian character, partly to the political and ecclesiastical experiences Italy was fated to undergo. The Italians were strangers to the enthusiasm of patriotism, which was as the breath in the nostrils of our Elizabethan age, as well as to the single-minded religiosity which identified Spain with the spirit of the Catholic Revival. The clear-sightedness of the Italians had something to do with this—for they were too intelligent to believe in their tyrants, and too free from

illusions to deliver up their minds to their priests. The chilling and enervating effects of a pressure of foreign domination, such as no Western people with a history and a civilization like those of Italy has ever experienced, did the rest, and for many generations rendered impotent the higher efforts of the dramatic art. No basis was permanently found for a really national tragedy; while literary comedy, after turning from the direct imitation of Latin models to a more popular form, lost itself in an abandoned immorality of tone and in reckless insolence of invective against particular classes of society. Though its productivity long continued, the poetic drama more and more concentrated its efforts upon subordinate or subsidiary species, artificial in origin and decorative in purpose, and surrendered its substance to the overpowering aids of music, dancing, and spectacle. Only a single form of the Italian drama, the improvised comedy, remained truly national; and this was of its nature dissociated from higher literary effort. The revival of Italian tragedy in later times is due partly to the imitation of French models, partly to the endeavour of a brilliant genius to infuse into his art the historical and political spirit. Comedy likewise attained to new growths of considerable significance, when it was sought to accommodate its popular forms to the representation of real life in a wider range, and again to render it more poetical in accordance with the tendencies of modern romanticism.

The regular Italian drama, in both its tragic and its comic branches, began with a reproduction, in the Latin language, of classical models; but tragedy in its beginnings showed a tendency which it was before long to treat themes of national historical interest. Two earliest tragedies of which we hear, written by the Paduan historian Mussato about 1300, were both copies of Seneca; but while the one (*Achilleis*) treated a classical theme, the other dealt with the history of a famous tyrant of the author’s native city (*Eccerinis*). In the next century events of recent or contemporary history were similarly dealt with,¹ but the majority of its Latin dramas were doubtless written to suit the tastes of the friends and patrons of the Italian Renaissance, who, like Lorenzo the Magnificent, wished to domesticate the heathen gods and goddesses on a stage hitherto occupied by the sacred figures of Christian belief. Such were the Latin imitations and translations of Greek and Latin tragedies and comedies by Bishop Martirano, the friend of Lorenzo’s son Pope Leo X., on the adventure of Danaë² and other subjects; the famous *Progne* of G. Corraro (d. 1464), the nephew of an earlier Pope; and the efforts of Pomponius Lætus, who, with the aid of Cardine³ Riario, sought to revive the ancient theatre, especially that of Plautus and Terence, at Rome. Many Latin comedies are mentioned from the 15th century, during which, as during its predecessor, Latin continued the dominant language of the stage in Italy. Nor was the representation even of Greek plays altogether unknown; it was by her performance of the *Electra* of Sophocles that Alexandra Scala caused Politian to envy Orestes.

Early in the 16th century, tragedy began to be written in the native tongue; but it retained from the first, and never wholly lost, the impress of its origin. Whatever the source of its subjects—which, though mostly of classical origin, were occasionally derived from native romance, or even due to invention—they were all treated with a predilection for the horrible, inspired by the example of Seneca, though no doubt encouraged by a perennial national taste. The chorus, stationary on the stage as in old Roman

¹ Landivio, *De Captivitate Ducis Jacobi* (Jacopo Piccinino, d. 1464) *Tragedia*; Verardo, *Ferdinandus* (of Aragon) *Servatus*; *Historia Batava* (expulsion of the Moors from Granada).
² *Imber Aureus*.

tragedy, was not reduced to a merely occasional appearance between the acts till the beginning of the 17th century, or ousted altogether from the tragic drama till the earlier half of the 18th. Thus the changes undergone by Italian tragedy were for a long series of generations chiefly confined to the form of versification and the choice of themes; nor was it, at all events till the last century of the course it has hitherto run, more than the after-growth of an after-growth. The honour of having been the earliest tragedy in Italian seems to belong to Galeotto’s *Sofonisba* (1502), a piece in 15 or 20 acts, regardless of unity of scene. A. da Pistoia’s *Pamfila* (1508) followed, of which the subject was taken from Boccaccio, though the names of the characters were Greek. The play usually associated with the beginning of Italian tragedy—that with which “th’ Italian scene first learned to glow”—was another *Sofonisba*, acted before Leo X. in 1515, and written in blank verse (*verso sciolto*) instead of the *ottava* and *terza rima* of the earlier tragedians (retaining, however, the lyric measures of the chorus), by Trissino, who was employed as nuncio by that Pope. Other tragedies of the former half of the 16th century were the *Rosmunda* of Rucellai, a nephew of Lorenzo the Magnificent (1516); Alamanni’s *Antigone* (1532); the *Catane* of Sperone Speroni, the envious Mopsus of Tasso, who, like Guarini, took Sperone’s elaborate style for his model; the *Oraxia*, the earliest dramatic treatment of this famous subject, of the notorious Aremino (1549); and the nine tragedies of G. Cinthio, among which *L’Orbecche* (1541) is accounted the best and the bloodiest. Cinthio, the author of those *Hecatommithi* to which Shakespeare was indebted for so many of his subjects, was (supposing him to have invented these) the first Italian who was the author of the fables of his own dramas; he introduced some novelties into dramatic construction, separating the prologue and probably also the epilogue from the action, and has by some been regarded as the inventor of the pastoral drama. In the latter half of the 16th century may be mentioned the *Didone* and the *Marianna* of L. Dolce, the translator of Seneca (1565); the *Hadriana* (acted before 1561 or 1586) of L. Groto, which treats the story of *Romeo and Juliet*; Tasso’s *Torrismondo* (1587); the *Tancredi* of Asinari (1588); and the *Merope* of Torelli (1593), the last who employed the stationary chorus (*coro fisso*) on the Italian stage. Leonico’s *Soldato* (1550) is noticeable as supposed to have given rise to the *tragedia cittadina*, or domestic tragedy, of which there are few examples in the Italian drama, and De Velo’s *Tamar* (1586) as written in prose. Subjects of modern historical interest were in this period treated only in isolated instances.¹

The tragedians of the 17th century continued to pursue the beaten track, at times in vain, seeking by the introduction of musical airs to compromise with the danger with which their art was threatened of being (in Voltaire’s phrase) extinguished by the beautiful monster, the opera, now rapidly gaining ground in the country of its origin. (See OPERA.) To Count P. Bonarelli (1589–1659), the author of *Solimano*, is on the other hand ascribed the first disuse of the chorus in Italian tragedy. The innovation of the use of rhyme attempted in the learned Pallavicino’s *Erminigildo* (1655), and defended by him in a discourse prefixed to the play, was in Italy no more than in England able to achieve a permanent success; its chief representative was afterwards Martelli (d. 1727), whose rhymed Alexandrian verse (*Martelliano*), though on one occasion used in comedy by Goldoni, failed to commend itself to the popular taste. By the end of the 17th century Italian tragedy seemed destined to expire, and the great tragic actor Cotta had withdrawn in disgust at the apathy of the

¹ Mondella, *Isifile* (1582); Fulgini, *Bragadino* (1589).

public towards the higher forms of the drama. The 18th century was, however, to witness a change, the beginning of which are attributed to the institution of the Academy of the Arcadians at Rome (1690). The principal efforts of the new school of writers and critics were directed to the abolition of the chorus, and to a general increase of freedom in treatment. Before long the Marquis S. Maffei with his *Merope* (first printed 1713) achieved one of the most brilliant successes recorded in the history of dramatic literature. This play, which is devoid of any love-story, long continued to be considered the master-piece of Italian tragedy; Voltaire, who declared it “worthy of the most glorious days of Athens,” adapted it for the French stage, and it inspired a celebrated production of the English drama.² It was followed by a tragedy full of horrors,³ noticeable as having given rise to the first Italian dramatic parody; and by the highly esteemed productions of Granelli (d. 1769) and his contemporary Bettinelli. The influence of Voltaire had now come to predominate over the Italian drama; and, in accordance with the spirit of the times, greater freedom prevailed in the choice of tragic themes. Thus the greatest of Italian tragic poets, Count V. Alfieri (1749–1803), found his path prepared for him. Alfieri’s grand and impassioned treatment of his subjects caused his faultiness of form, which he never altogether overcame, to be forgotten. The spirit of a love of freedom which his creations⁴ breathe was the herald of the national ideas of the future. Spurning the usages of French tragedy, his plays, which abound in soliloquies, owe part of their effect to an impassioned force of declamation, part to those “points” by which Italian acting seems pre-eminently capable of thrilling an audience. He has much—besides the subjects of two of his dramas⁵—in common with Schiller; but his amazon-muse (as Schlegel called her) was not schooled into serenity, like the muse of the German poet. Among his numerous plays (21), *Merope* and *Saul*, and perhaps *Mirra*, are accounted his master-pieces.

The political colouring given by Alfieri to Italian tragedy reappears in the plays of U. Foscolo (c. 1760–1827) and A. Manzoni (1784–1873), both of whom are under the influence of the romantic school of modern literature; and to these names must be added those of S. Pellico (1789–1854) and G. B. Niccolini (1785–1861), whose most celebrated dramas⁶ treat national themes familiar to all students of modern history and literature. While Italian tragedy has upon the whole adhered to its love of strong situations and passionate declamation, its later growths have shown a capability of development precluding the supposition that its history is closed. The art of tragic acting at the present day probably stands higher in Italy than in any other European country; if the tragic muse were to be depicted with the features of a living artist, it is those of Adelaide Ristori which she would assume.

In comedy, the efforts of the scholars of the Italian Renaissance for a time went side by side with the progress of the popular entertainments noticed above. While the *contrasti* of the close of the 15th and of the 16th century were disputations between pairs of abstract or allegorical figures, in the *frottola* human types take the place of abstractions, and more than two characters appear. To the *farsa* (a name used of a wide variety of entertainments) a new literary as well as social significance was given by the Neapolitan court-poet Sannazaro (c. 1492); about the same time a “*capitano valoroso*,” Venturino of Pesara, first brought on the modern stage the *capitano glorioso* or *spavente*, the

² Home, *Douglas*.

³ Lazzaroni, *Ulisse il Giovane* (1719).

⁴ E.g., *Bruto I. and II.*

⁵ *Filippo*; *Maria Stuarda*.

⁶ Pellico, *Francesca da Rimini*; Niccolini, *Giovanni da Procida*; *Beatrice Cenci*.