

**THE CHESTER
PLAYS, PART I**

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The Chester plays, Part I by Hermann Deimling

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HERMANN DEIMLING

**THE CHESTER
PLAYS, PART I**

The Chester Plays.

Early English Text Society.

Extra Series, No. LXII.

1892.

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The Chester Plays.



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DR. HERMANN DEIMLING.

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INTRODUCTION.

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THE MSS. AND TEXT OF THE PLAYS.¹§ 1. *The 4 MSS., W B h H.*

THE text of the Chester Plays has come down to us in four MSS.,² Addit. 10,305 (W, A.D. 1592), Harl. 2013 (h, A.D. 1600), both written by George Bellin; Bodley 175 (B, A.D. 1604, written by Wm. Bedford), and Harl. 2124 (H, A.D. 1607, partly written by Jas. Miller, and printed in the present edition). The oldest of these MSS. (W, Addit. 10,305) was published by Thomas Wright for the (Old) Shakespeare Society in the years 1843 and 1847. Wright's print is, on the whole, very correct and trustworthy. In a few passages it departs from the MS. and follows the second MS. of the British Museum, Harl. 2013 (h), written (like W, Addit. 10,305) by George Bellin, the writer of the former. Wright marks these substitutions either in his notes (*e. g.* I. p. 261 or II. p. 214) or by brackets. Besides this publication of the whole set of Chester miracle-plays, the following have been published singly: the first and tenth by J. H. Markland in 1814, the twenty-third by Collier in 1836, the second and twenty-third by Marriott in 1838. Collier's publication is noteworthy, as his text follows a MS. which seem[d] to be [but is not] lost. According to the preface of his "Five scriptural dramas," this mislaid MS. was written in the year 1591 by "Edward Gregorie, a scholar of Bunbury,"

¹ The late Dr. Doering intended this description of the MSS. and text of the Chester Plays to form the Second Part of his Introduction; but as he left only an unfinished sketch of the First Part, I think this completed portion, which he sent me before his lamented death, and then had back again, had better go out with Part I. of his book. I hope some reader of it will volunteer to complete the work. All the material for it is in hand.—F. J. F.

² That is, five, the Devonshire MS. (p. viii) is still in the Duke's hands.—F.

and was, in 1836, in the possession of the Duke of Devonshire.¹ Collier, however, in his "History of English Dramatic Poetry," 1831, vol. ii. 227 mentions the MS., with the addition that its perusal was granted him by J. B. Nichols, Esq., F.S.A., and that it was said to have been "at one period" in the possession of the Egerton Family; but he could still use it in the Duke of Devonshire's library in 1836 for his above-mentioned publication. I am much indebted to Lady Louisa Egerton for her kind help in searching for this MS. But all her endeavours to find it proved fruitless, as did my inquiries of several booksellers who bought part of Collier's library. Everything in the splendid library of the Duke of Devonshire concerning the English Theatre and its history, is in Devonshire House; but the catalogue (which I used by Lady Louisa's kind permission), contains no indication of a MS. of the Chester Plays. To judge from the other MSS., and according to Mr. A. H. Bullen,—to whom I wish here to express my deep obligations for his help in my search after this MS.,—it must have been in folio; and in the Devonshire House Catalogue, in which the books are arranged and numbered according to their size, there is not a single number in folio. The housekeeper, who remembers Collier quite well, was positive that a *big* MS. could not have escaped her notice, if it had ever been in the Devonshire House Library.² Collier's text disagrees in several places with that given by the other MSS. Its relation to them I shall speak of hereafter.

Till it is found, or some other source for Collier's text indicated, Wright's MS., which I designate by W, must be regarded as the oldest. It is in the Brit. Mus. (Add. MS. 10,305) and consists of 168 leaves, paper in folio, of which the last two are wanting, so that the twenty-fourth miracle play ends in W with verse 612. The MS. contains only our plays, and is all written by one hand. The side and bottom edges of many leaves, especially in the beginning and near the end of the volume, are injured. There is no space left between the stanzas or half-stanzas. The writer signs his name, George Bellin, at the end of every play except the last incomplete one. He dates his copy 1592. His name is also to be found after

¹ The Devonshire MS. was, and is, all right, and was partly collated by Mr. A. W. Pollard for his edition of 'Specimens of English Miracle Plays, Moralities and Interludes,' Oxford 1890. See the Appendix to this Introduction.—F. J. F. Mr. Pollard printed the play of Noah's Flood, and the Sacrifice of Isaac, from the Histories of Lot and Abraham, the fourth of the Chester Plays.

² She mistook or forgot. The MS. has since been found.