

**THE SUMMONING
OF EVERYMAN**

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The Summoning of Everyman by John S. Farmer

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JOHN S. FARMER

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OF EVERYMAN**

The Museum Dramatists

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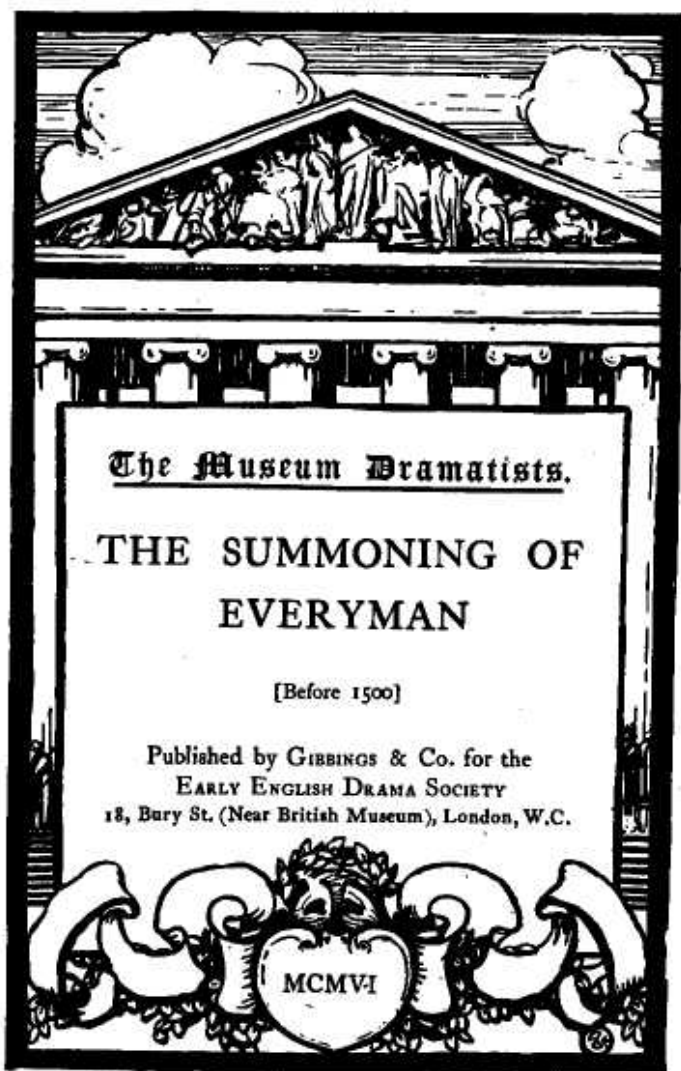
Edited, with an Introduction, Note-Book,
and Word-List,

By JOHN S. FARMER

**“THE PITH AND POINT OF
THE PLAY, SIR!”**

“The surprise and pleasure with which the general public discovered Everyman to be quite humanly interesting when it was acted will lead many . . . to read this and other volumes of the series.”—MANCHESTER GUARDIAN.

“A tragedy, to be sure . . . but one of the most perfect allegories ever formed.”—Prof. GAVIRY.



14415, 14.5.5



Shakespeare
(3, 4)

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THE SUMMONING OF EVERYMAN

INTRODUCTION

"*The Moral Play of the Summoning of Everyman*" seems to lose no hold on human interest through the flux of time. Popular four hundred years ago, when first printed—it ran through several editions—it has, when staged in these later days, been found to be "so humanly interesting" as to command profitable audiences; that is saying much for "these later days."

Obviously written by a Catholic at a time when the (even now) vexed question of "Faith *v.* Good Works" was beginning to loom large in the counsels of the changing order of things, *Everyman* had yet a sufficiency of the virilities of life to hold the public taste; it can still retain that hold! The reason is not far to seek—in its simple, faithful picture of human experience.

The date of composition may certainly be fixed as prior to the close of the fifteenth century. The piece was several times printed; at least twice by Richard Pynson before 1531, and twice by Skot before 1537. The *copies extant* are (1) a very imperfect example of Pynson's first edition in the British Museum; (2) some fragments of the second Pynson edition, formerly belonging to Douce, are in the Bodleian Library; (3) copies of Skot's first impression are in the Salisbury Cathedral Library

and in the Huth Library; (4) a copy of the last Skot edition was formerly in the Library of the Church of Lincoln, which (says Hazlitt) was sold with others to Dibdin for 500 guineas, and at the Jolley sale, in 1844, it fetched £32: this is the copy now at Britwell Court. *Everyman* has been reprinted in Hawkins' *English Drama* (1773); in Hazlitt's edition of *Dodsley's Old Plays* (1874); in Prof. Bangs' *Materialen zur Kunde des älteren Englischen Dramas*; and recently in the Early English Dramatists' Series, *Anon. Plays, I.*, pp. 89-122. The version now given is that of the last named (based on Hazlitt's text). In its preparation the two impressions by Pynson, unknown to Hawkins, and one of those issued by Skot about 1530, have been collated. Hawkins was not aware that Skot printed the piece more than once. The imperfect copy by Pynson, in the British Museum, restores (says Hazlitt) not only words, but portions of lines dropped in Skot's two issues. But, on the other hand, both Pynson's editions, so far as they respectively go, exhibit misreadings, which are set right in Skot's. The facsimiles are from the Skot editions, neither of the Pynson copies having the title: presumably, however, the illustrations appeared in all impressions. They are "stock" blocks to be found everywhere in common use in books of the time.

Dr. Percy, in his *Essay on the Origin of the English Stage* (1793), thought highly of the play, but he does not seem to have been aware that it was not altogether of native growth. Modern research has shown that the wave of

Continental and classical influence which did so much in other ways towards the perfecting of our native drama was also responsible for *Everyman*, which indeed is a translation of the Dutch *Elckerlijck*. This in turn was grounded on the old Buddhist fable popular and well known in Europe as "Barlaam and Josephat," though, as Prof. Hales points out, the plot of *Everyman* (such as it is) was most likely drawn directly from the monkish *Legenda Aurea*.

Everyman, as already said, was written in the interests of the established faith; to uphold the papal authority; to emphasise the claims of the priesthood; to insist on the efficacy of the sacraments. The human race—represented by *Everyman*—is summoned by Death, as God's messenger, to an account. *Everyman* appears, showing signs of confusion and terror, whereupon, Death being withdrawn, he applies for relief to Fellowship, Kindred, Goods or Riches, but they successively renounce and forsake him. Disconsolate, he betakes himself to Good Deeds, who, upbraiding him with his long neglect of her, introduces him to her sister Knowledge, and she leads him to . . . Confession, who appoints him penance; this he inflicts upon himself on the stage, and then withdraws to receive the sacraments of the priest. On his return, after Strength, Beauty, Discretion, and Five Wits have all taken their final leave of him, he gradually expires on the stage; Good Deeds accompanies him to the last. Then an angel descends to sing his *requiem*; and the epilogue is spoken by a person called Doctor, who recapitulates the whole, and delivers the moral.