

**NORWICH
PAGEANTS; THE
GROCERS' PLAY**

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Norwich pageants; The Grocers' Play by Robert Fitch

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ROBERT FITCH

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Norwich Pageants.

THE
GROCERS' PLAY.

from a Manuscript

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ROBERT FITCH, ESQ., F. G. S.

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1856.

Norwich Pageants.

THE GROCERS' PLAY.

COMMUNICATED BY ROBERT FITCH, ESQ., F.G.S.

OF the Pageants or Mysteries which formed so important a feature in the amusements of the people in the middle ages, a former paper (Vol. III., p. 3) has given all the information now to be obtained from the Norwich Corporation Records.

Although the books of the several Companies (except that of St. George) in which were the accounts relating to the Pageants, have long ago been destroyed or lost, some additional information has come to light on the subject, of considerable interest. It consists of a series of extracts, made early in the last century, from the Grocers' Book, showing the proceedings and expenditure of the Company about their Pageant, from 1534 to 1570; and also the version of the Play in use in 1533, and the revised and corrected version played in 1563.

The previous paper contains a list of the Pageants played by the several Companies early in the sixteenth century, from the Corporation Records; and as in that paper an idea is afforded of the nature of these performances, by reference to the existing accounts of those of Chester, Coventry, and other places, and the Collection known as the "Townley Mysteries," it will be unnecessary to do more than point out how very strikingly all these Plays resemble each other.

On turning to the list referred to, it will be seen that the third Pageant, the second on the list, was "Paradyse," and was set forth by the Grocers and Raffmen. It is this Pageant to which the following extracts relate.

It will be seen by the accounts, that the carriage in which the play was acted, also termed a "Pageant," was "a Howse of Waynscott paynted & buylded on a Cart with fowre whelys;" painted cloths were hung about it, and it was drawn by four horses having "headstallis of brodc Inkle with knoppes & tassells." It had a square top with a large vane in the midst, and one for the end, and a large number of smaller ones. The Company was evidently unable to afford the cost of four horses in 1534: only one was hired, and four men attended on the pageant with "Lewers."

Among the properties will be observed a prominent one, a "Rybbe colored Redde." Another was a "Gryffon," painted and gilt, in which perfumes were burnt, borne by a lad. The tree too was there, and garnished with apples. The man who played "God the Father" had a mask and wig. The "Serpent" was attired in a "cote with hosen & tayle stayned," and a crown and wig. Eve had "two cotes & a payr hosen stayned;" and Adam, "a cote and hosen stayned." This seems to settle the vexed question about the mode of representing our first parents on these occasions.

The play of 1533 is not stated to be then newly made, and may be merely a copy of a much older one. It begins much in the same manner as the Coventry Play, with God the Father relating the planting of the garden, the creation of man and placing him there, and God's intention to create woman.

It is very much shorter than the Chester and Coventry versions,* and the manuscript is deficient from the call to Adam after the temptation, until Adam and Eve are thrust

* The Townley Manuscript is deficient from the speech of Lucifer, when he expresses his determination to tempt Eve, to the end of this play.

from Paradise. The versification of the rest of the scene appears much more modern than that of the former part. Was this portion the "newe ballet," made by Sir Stephen Prowett, for which he was paid 12*d.* in May, 1534? (See accounts.)

The second version of the play "begone this yere 1565," "newly revid & accordynge unto the Skrypture," is considerably longer than the other, and contains additions of some interest. The "Prolocutor" states that these Pageants set forth in "Wittson dayes," "lately befallen into decayes," and his introduction somewhat resembles the "Banes" of the Chester Plays. New characters are introduced—Dolor and Misery, the former having a "cote & hosen w^t a bagge & cap stayned," but the latter it is supposed required none, at any rate none were provided by the Company. Neither does any attire seem to be provided for the Holy Ghost, who enters at the last to comfort man, and by a curious anachronism talks to Adam of the Gospel, of Christ Jhesu, and Saint Paul. There is another curious one in the commencement, where God the Father opens by stating he is Alpha and Omega, as his apocalypse testifies.

The popularity of these Pageants, however, was gone, and our extracts conclude with a memorandum of the gradual decay of the Pageant-house, and its final destruction about the year 1570.

On the good taste or propriety of these entertainments any observation is needless: they formed a very remarkable feature in the life of the middle ages; and to all who desire to study the manners of our ancestors in those times, they cannot fail to afford a fund of information of a very important nature.

GROCERS' BOOK,

Folio I.

In dei nomine Amen. The xvi day of June in the xxvth yere of y^e reygne of ow^r Sovereygne Lorde Kyng Henry the viijth and in y^e yere of ow^r Lorde God mccccxxxiiij this booke was made by the hands of John Homerson & Robt. Reynbald, than beyng Wardeyns of y^e Crafte of Grocers crafte wⁱⁿ y^e Cyte of Norwyche, the whiche boke makyth mençon of y^e Story of y^e Creaçon of Eve w^t y^e expellyng of Adam & Eve oute of Paradyce, the whiche story apparteynythe to y^e Pageant of y^e Company of y^e foresayd craft of Grocery, wherefor thys sayd Booke ys made for the sustentacion and maynteyns of y^e same, declaryng & showyng y^e name of y^e Pageant, w^t all the Utensyls & necessaryes therto belongynge, all the pcells & charges yerely occupied to y^e same, and also all y^e names of suche men as be Inrollyd in y^e sayd craft of Grocery wⁱⁿ ye foresayd Cyte of Norwiche, &c.

The Story of y^e Creaçon of Eve, w^t y^e expellyng of Adam & Eve out of Paradyce.

Pater. Ego principiū Alpha & ω in altissimis habito,
 In y^e heavenly Empery I am resydent,
 Yt ys not semely for man, *sine adjutorio*,
 to be allone, nor very conveyent,
 I have plantyd an Orcheyard most congruent,
 for hym to kepe & to tulle, by contemplaçon
 let us make an adjutory of our formaçon,
 to hys symylatude, lyke in plasmaçon,*
 In to Paradyce I wyll nowe descende,
 w^t my mynysters angelicall of our creaçon,
 to assyst us in ow^r worke y^t we Intende,
 A slepe in to man be soporaçon to sende,

* From *Plasmator*—creator.

a ribbe out of mañys syde I do here take,
bothe flesche & bone I do thys creatur blysse,
And a woman I fourme, to be his make,
Semblable* to man ; beholde here she ys.

Adam. O my Lorde god Incomprehensyble, withoute mysse
ys thy hyghe excellent magnyfysens,
thys creature to me ys *nu'c ex ossibus meis*,
and *virago* I call hyr in thy presens ; †
lyke on to me in naturall preemynens,
laude, honor, and Glory, to the † I make,
bothe father and mother, man shall for hyr forsake.

Pater. Than my Gardeñ of Plesure kepe thou suer,
of all fruts & trees shall thou ete & fede,
except thys tre of connyng, § whyle ye bothe indure,
ye shall not touche yt, for that I forbede.

Adam. Thy precept lorde, in will, worde, and dede,

* Like.

† Adam's speech in the Chester Play runs as follows :

I see well, Lord, through thy grace,
Bone of my bones thou here make,
And flesh of my flesh she have,
And my shape through thy sawe :
Wherefor she shall be called, I wysse,
Virago nothing amisse ;
For out of man taken she is,
And to man shall she drawe.

And in the *Cursor Mundi*, MS. Cott. Vesp. A. III., folio 5.

Quen sco was broght befor Adam,
Virago gaf he hir to nam :
Tharfor hight sco *virago*,
For maked o the man was sco.

‡ *Thec.* Throughout these plays *thee* and *tres* are invariably spelt with a single *e*.

§ But towch nowth this tre that is of cunnyng,

* * * * *

Eat not this frute, ne me deesplese,
For than thou deyst, thou spakyst nowth.

Chester Play.

shall I observe, and thy request fulfyll,
as thou hast coñmandyd, yt ys reason & skyll.

Pater. Thys tre ys callyd of connyng good & yll,
that day that ye ete therof shall ye dye.
morte moriemini, yf that I do you aspye,
showe thys to thy spowse, now by and bye,
I shall me absent for a time and space,
a warned man may lyve who can it denye.
I make the Lord therof, kepe wyll my place,
if thou do thys, thou shall have my grace,
In to mortalite, shall thou ellç falle,
looke thow be obedyent, whan I the calle.

Adam. Omnipotent god, and hygñ Lord of aff,
I am thy servante, bownde onder thyn obedyens,
and thou my creatour, one god eternall,
what thou coñmandest, I shall do my dylygens.

Pater. Here I leve the, to have experyens,
to use thys place, in vertuse occupaçon,
for nowe I wyll retorne to myn habitaçon.

Adam. O lovely spowse of Godç creaçon,
I leve the here alone, I shall not tary longe,
for I wyll walke a whyle, for my recreaçon,
and se over Paradyce, that ys so stronge,
no thyng may hurt us, nor do us wronge;
God ys ow^r p^{tecto}r, & soverayñ guyde,
In thys place nõ * yll thyng may abyde.

Serpens. O gemme of felycyte, and femynyne love,
why hath the God und^r precept, phybyte † thys frute,
that ye shuld not ete therof, to yo^r behofe,
thys tre ys plesant w^outen refute.

Eva. *Ne forte* we shuld dye, & than be mortall,
we may not towche yt, by Godç coñmandement.

Serpens. *Ne quaq^m*, ye shall not dye perpetuall,
but ye shuld be as Godç resydent,

* None.

† Prohibit.