

The literary execution of these plays, as might be expected, is very imperfect. The most absurd anachronisms and solecisms perpetually occur. The Old Testament characters repeatedly swear—a habit to which they are greatly addicted—by “Sanct Peter and Sanct Poule, by Mahoun and the Sybill.” Titles are strangely modernized. The “Knights” who crucify our Lord speak of “Sir Pylate and Bishop Caiaphas,” The devils talk of “Sir Satan and Lord Lucifer.” The interlocutors in the play quote from “Gregorye, Austyne, and Sir Goldenmouth.” The geography is inextricably confused. The local topography of England is transferred to the fields of Palestine; and London and Paris are familiarly referred to by the shepherds of Bethlehem.

The awful scenes of the Passion are most painfully realized, and are delineated with all the force and breadth of Reubens’ sublime painting. The ribaldry and scurrile jests of the rude soldiery throw into stronger contrast the dreadful terrors of the scene. The monkish authors do not scruple to heighten the dramatic interest by the introduction of legendary stories—often absurdly, sometimes with wonderfully picturesque effect. English and Latin are strangely intermingled according to the necessities of the rhyme or rhythm. The writers manifest a sublime disdain of the servile rules of syntax and prosody, and each spells as seems right in his own eyes. The same word will occur in two or three different forms on the same page. The rhymes are frequently so execrable that in some MSS. and printed copies brackets are used to indicate the rhyming couplets. This was of course the very childhood of dramatic art, and it was therefore extremely infantile in its expression; it nevertheless gave tokens, like the youthful Hercules, of a power of grappling with difficulties, which was an augury of the glorious strength it was afterwards to manifest.

With majestic sweep of thought the grand drama of the ages is enacted in these plays. All the converging lines of providence and prophecy centre in the cross of Christ; and from it streams the light that irradiates the endless vista of the future. Heaven itself seems opened, and the vision of the great white throne and the procession of the palm-crowned, white-robed multitude passes before us. We hear the “sevenfold chorus of hallelujahs