

is born. Joseph is very tender in his bearing toward the Virgin mother, addressing her with such fond, caressing words as "Loe ! Marye sweete, my darlinge deare ;" " My deare hearte root," and other loving phrases. A signal judgment punishes those who dare to doubt her maiden purity. The humanizing influence of these affecting scenes, and of this worship of holiness and meekness—of the Divine Child and stainless mother—upon our uncouth ancestry, must have been of incalculable benefit. It did much in a rude and stormy age to invest with a tender reverence all womankind ; and inspired the iron chivalry of the time with a religious enthusiasm for the succour of human weakness and frailty.

The play of the Shepherds abounds in a good deal of coarse humour and rude mirth. It gives a minute picture of Mediæval country life. In some versions a wrestling bout occurs ; in others a sheep-stealing plot is discovered. On the whole the shepherds are a rather disreputable set, although one of them self-assertingly boasts that there is

A better shepherd on no side
From comely Conway unto Clyde.

They lunch on Lancaster jack-cakes and Hatton ale. Their names, too, Harvey, Tudde, Tibbs, and Trowle, have a remarkably English sound. They wrestle and engage in rude horse-play till the voices of the heavenly choir are heard singing "*Gloria in excelsis Deo.*" The shepherds were evidently unacquainted with Latin, and offer some very absurd interpretations of the unknown words. When the star appears they sing a doggerel chorus, and proceed to offer their rustic gifts to the infant Christ. One gives him a bell, another a spoon to sup his pottage, one a cape, "for he has nothing elles."

In the meantime the three gipsy kings have seen the Star in the East, and bring more seasonable offerings. They arrive at Herod's palace inquiring,

Can ye aught say what place or where
A childe is born that crown shall bear,
And be of Jews the King?

SERVANT.—Hold your peace, sirs, I you pray !
For if King Herod heard you so say,
He would go mad, by my fay,
And fly out of his skin.