

"Morality Play"

The morality plays came after the religious plays and we find their performances during the reign of Henry VI. These plays like the 'miracles' continued till the beginning of the Elizabethan reign. The actors of the morality plays were allegorical, symbolical or abstract. The purpose of these plays were didactic. The miracles and the mysteries both dealt with the teachings of the church both devotional and theological. How the exposition of the ethical doctrine was also needed to complete the cycle. It is this ~~ethic~~ ethical doctrine which the moralities tried to bring home to the minds of the people. The morality plays are dramatised allegories. It is through the personifications of abstractions such as 'Justice', 'Peace', 'vice', 'virtue' that the plays tried to present in a graphic way the conflict between sin and righteousness for

the possession of human soul. The purpose behind these personifications was to impress the audience. Early morality plays have an earnestness in these things. There are allegorical characters in miracle plays also but they owe their introduction to religious sources and are not essential to the story. One of the earliest morality plays is the 'Castle of Perseverance' dealing with old faith. Another important play is 'Everyman' which presents the summoning of the soul to present itself before God. Beauty, strength, friendship etc. all leave him, the only support that it gets is the support of 'Good Deeds'. The continued success of 'Everyman' was a great encouragement. It paved the way for the possibilities of morality plays in England. One thing very remarkable about the morality plays is

that they emphasised much and paid great attention to the plot construction. The weakness or the defects of dramatic personae were compensated by the ingenuity of construction. With the lapse of time the character of the play changed and now they dealt with a single aspect of human life. Thus, we see that the treatment had narrowed. The characters were now less abstract and farcical element was also being introduced to lighten the burden of solemn tone. Vice, a character peculiar to the morality play was allowed to entertain the audience. Devil was itself a comic character. The following plays show the transition stage of the morality play. They are

- (i) Comedy and morality in 'Tom Tuller and his wife'
- (ii) Tragedy and morality in 'King Cambyses' and 'Aplius and Virginia'

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(iii) History and morality in
'King John'.

The morality play approached
nearer to the actual drama
when actual virtues and vices
were replaced by real people.

The end.

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