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TOPIC- **MYSTERIES, MORALITIES & INTERLUDES**

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The beginning of the English drama may be traced back to the 11th century when incidents from the Gospel and episodes from the lives of the saints were performed on the religious occasions. In France a clear distinction was made between plays based on the themes of the Bible and those based on the lives of the saints. The former were called the 'mysteries' while latter were called the 'miracles' . In England, however, all these plays were called the ' miracle'. As between the English

mystery and miracles plays, the only distinction that can be made is that the latter have greater unity of action, larger human concern, and a better sense of the dramatic than the mystery plays.

The real progress in the technique and art of play - making began when performances were taken over by various corporate bodies. The guilds were the richest bodies and therefore they were the most influential promoters of such performances. Each guild has its own cycle of plays; of these four cycles have come down to us, such as, York, Wakefield, Chester and Coventry. The Chester plays are remarkable for their didacticism.

We mark further development in drama with the growth of 'the morality play' which was based on the moral allegory. The oldest morality plays belong to the earlier half of the 16th century. They depict the spiritual anguish, struggle and development of man. The most notable morality play we find is "Everyman" which appeared towards the middle of the 15th century. When God asks Everyman to submit his account, he

requests his companions to accompany him but all of them- Friendship, Relationship, Beauty, Strength including all his five senses refuse and abandon him ; only Good Deeds remain true to him. The morality plays gave the drama proper the technique of constructing plots based on the action of the characters. In the due course of time the morality plays tended to become more realistic and less allegorical.

With the growth of the moral play in the later phase of its evolution appeared another form of play known as the 'Interlude', perhaps because they were played in the intervals of banquets and entertainments. In character they were light and humorous. They were later introduced between the acts of long and dreary miracles and moralities. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between the morality and the Interlude, except that the latter was seldom anonymous and had a larger concern of realism. They were often based on themes of topical interest. During the Reformation in France the Interludes stressed on the eradication of corruption in the church and vices in the society. They also dealt with the scientific ideas of the age. In the

interlude “Nature” written by one Medwall, sensuality drives away Reason from man, but he is in the end reconciled to Reason by age. The best known writer of the Interlude is John Heywood (1497-1580). For his command over humorous characteristics, he has been often called the ‘Prose Chaucer’.

The English drama had thus, its origin in the church with the clergy, and developed in the society at the hand of the people. Since then, as its themes grew more and more secular in tone, it was taken over from the guilds and corporations by professional players, and with that, gradually the passion and interests of common men and women became predominant.
