

Note for EXTRA SERIES LXX,  
THE DIGBY PLAYS.

# The Graull of Chester

and

# The Graouli of Metz,

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IN the Early English Text Society's edition of the Digby Plays (1896) is printed the following extract from a Chester manuscript relating to the year 1599: . . . .

"the maior caused the Graull not to goe at Midsomer wach, but in stedd a man in complet white Armore on horsback. he, at same show, put downe the diuell Ryding for buchers, and caused a boy to Ride for them as other companies. nor cupps nor canns nor dragon and naked boys would he suffer at show . . . ." (p. xxiv).

May not the following remarks perhaps help to elucidate the passage, and at the same time to throw additional light on the origin of the drama in the Middle Ages?

The noun *Graull* does not occur in the 'New English Dictionary,' but an adjective *grawl* is found there, and connected with the German adjective *gräulich* = horrible. Now this same word *gräulich*, under the French dialect form *Graouli*, is given as the name of a dragon formerly exhibited in annual processions in the city of Metz. It seems thus highly probable that in Chester also, Graull was the name of a dragon which formed part of a public show.

The Metz *Graouli* is alluded to by Rabelais, in the

fourth Book of Pantagruel, chap. 59, entitled, De la ridicule statue appelée Manduce, etc. :

“. . . un gras, jeune, puissant ventru . . . sus un long baston bien doré, portait une statue de bois mal taillée et lourdement paincte, telle que la descripent Plaute, Juvenal, et Pomp. Festus. A Lyon, au carneval, on l'appelle Masche-croute: ils la nommaient Manduce. C'estoit une effigie monstrueuse, ridicule, hideuse, et terrible aux petits enfants, ayant les œils plus grands que le ventre, et la teste plus grosse que tout le reste du corps, avecques amples, larges et horribles maschoires bien endentelées, tant au dessus comme au dessous, lesquelles, avecques l'engin d'une petite chorde cachée dedans le baston doré, l'on faisoit l'une contre l'autre terrifiement cliqueter, comme à Metz l'on faict du dragon de saint Clement.”<sup>1</sup>

A less picturesque and less fanciful account of the legend of St Clement, first bishop of Metz, and his dragon, will be found in a book of Aug. Prost.<sup>2</sup> The bishop was believed to have driven a great number of snakes that infested the city, from the amphitheatre into the river, and by this miracle converted the people to Christianity.

“Dans les processions de la fête de St Marc et des Rogations, en promenait autrefois, à travers les rues de Metz, au milieu du cortège sacré, l'image du serpent de St Clément. C'était un mannequin représentant un dragon ailé fiché au bout d'une longue perche; il était connu sous le nom de Graouli. Les boulangers lui payaient au passage le tribut d'un petit pain, et, le troisième jour des Rogations, les enfants le fouettaient dans la cour de l'abbaye de St Arnould, dernière station de la procession.”

An old play has been preserved in which the victory of the holy bishop over the dragon is described. After converting the people of Metz, and giving them the Host, he leads them to the lair of the monsters, here called

<sup>1</sup> *Œuvres de Rabelais*, ed. Barré. Paris, 1854. 418-419.

<sup>2</sup> *Études sur l'histoire de Metz. Les légendes*. 2me éd. 1897: 227-230.

snakes.<sup>1</sup> The chief snake submits to his exorcisms without a struggle, and acknowledges the power of Christ. It is then bound with the stole of the saint, and cast into the river.

This episode will remind Englishmen of their national hero St George, in the Golden Legend, and of the docility of his dragon, who, after being struck by the lance of the warrior saint, allowed the fair lady Margaret to tie her girdle round its neck, and then followed her like the gentlest dog. The circumstance that the Metz dragon submits without even a blow, is easily accounted for by its victor's being a holy bishop (whose only arms were prayers), and not an armoured knight.

The play of St George was not always performed on the 23rd of April (St George's day), but often later, "according to the *old ancient custom*," says Kelly,<sup>2</sup> "between St George's day and Whitsunday." This date, curiously enough, coincides with those mentioned by Prost for the Metz procession: St Mark's day is two days after St George's day; and the third day of the Rogations, on which the Metz dragon was whipped, is somewhat later, for the Rogations are kept on the three days preceding Ascension day, thus exactly ten days before Whitsunday, and mostly during the month of May. Though the usual date of St George's play is given by Ward<sup>3</sup> as midsummer, yet it was not properly in the middle of summer, but rather about the end of spring.

I would not venture to go one step further and connect the dragon-plays of Metz and of England with the heathenish festivals of midsummer, the traditions concerning which are

<sup>1</sup> *Le mystère de St Clément*, publié par Charles Abel. 1861. 4°.—The snake, being a symbol of the devil, is substituted for the dragon by ecclesiastical writers. See *Acta Sanctorum*, April 23.

<sup>2</sup> *Notices illustrative of the Drama*, etc. Leicester, 1865. 46-47.

<sup>3</sup> *English Dramatic Literature*, I, ed. 1899, 66.

regarded as doubtful by the mythologist Golther,<sup>1</sup> but I hope I have made clear the following points, which may be useful as stepping-stones for further research :

1. The existence of a common name : *Graull, Graouli*, for the Metz and Chester dragons.
2. The analogy between the plays of St Clement and St George.
3. The coincidence of the dates at which both plays were performed, and their popular character.

No doubt a more learned man will find more interesting things to say on the subject.

<sup>1</sup> *Handbuch der germanischen Mythologie*. Leipzig, 1895. 580-590.