

Remarks on the first regular Comedy
of English literature and its author.

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Remarks on the first regular Comedy of English literature and its author.

Mr. Schmerler (Programm des Realgymnasiums zu Borna 1889) says: "From the rough elements of the Moralities Marlowe suddenly proceeded", and Schlegel said of all the English poets prior to Shakespeare: "They were not worth writing or speaking of". These two gentlemen did so only, the one to elevate Marlowe the other Shakespeare the higher, as though even such geniuses could rise out of a *ההו וכהו* in poetry; and yet Shakespeare was by no means a "deus ex machina"; he had excellent predecessors in almost every kind of poetry, in which he himself no doubt produced the best. Historians and Poets had furnished him with subjects. Many of these, treated by Shakespeare in his different pieces, were treated by poets anterior to him, partly twice, thrice and more. King Lear is founded upon an old ballad, Othello on an old Italian novel, Hamlet on a Danish and Macbeth on a Scotch tradition; one of which is found in Saxo-Grammaticus and the latter in Holinshead. And there were some of these poets, of whom just and impartial critics speak with great consideration and high respect. Shakespeare seems a mere impossibility, were he not preceded by men as Godefroy of Monmouth, Robert of Gloucester, Holinshead for history, Wicklyffe and Chaucer considering the polished language, Marlow, Surrey regarding poetry. Shakespeare as well as his great contemporaries: Spenser, Sidney, Bacon, Jonson, Beaumont and Fletcher &c. are the product of their time and of all the favorable influences working in it, for instance: the discovery of America, the Reformation, the Revival of literature. But this time again has issued from its former periods, is coherent with them and not to be understood, severed from them, as they were preparatory and not without considerable importance for it. The English poetry has developed itself and at last reached its summit in Shakespeare with an astonishing steadiness, in which there were scarcely any long pauses nor retrocessions. And in this development the different periods are all more or less distinctly to be seen. Especially interesting among them is the progress in English literature from the Interlude to the true Comedy in our modern sense, and here we meet

Nicolas Udal

whose life and works we shall now take into close consideration, he being the one who composed the first regular Comedy, properly so called.

The dramatic productions of England, as of all other countries in Christian Europe exist in no more ancient form than that of Plays founded on the Old and New Testament with additions from the apocryphical gospels. They developed themselves out of the Roman Catholic liturgy, of which they formed part. The legends of the lives of Saints or Martyrs have also afforded subjects for exhibitions of this kind. *) Their proper designation is Miracles or Plays of Miracles, whereas others called them Mysteries as Percy, Dodsley. In their earliest state these pieces as: "Death of Abel, Noah's Flood, the Resurrection, the Adoration of the Magi" &c. were of the simplest construction, closely following the incidents of Scripture; the Text was taken from the Vulgata and of course the language was latin. The authors of these pieces, being clergymen, had not the intent to instruct and edify the spectators by word of mouth, as they were unable to understand Latin, but by sight only. — By degrees, however, more invention was displayed, the plays grew into a regular series of connected dialogues, formally divided into acts and scenes. The first performances are known to have taken place in England before 1119. Matthew Paris relates that the Miracle-Play of St. Catherine had been represented at Dunstable at that time. But the most ancient specimen extant of a Miracle-Play in English must have been written about 1250. It relates to the descent of Christ into Hell, to liberate from thence Adam, Eve, John the Baptist, and the Prophets. — Besides this and a few other single pieces as, the Scrivener's Play, the Play of the Sacrament &c. there exist in England 3 whole sets of Miracle-Plays, treating, as before said, the principal incidents of the Old and New Testament:

1. The Towneley or Widkirk Collection, consisting of 30 different plays, written about the reign of Henry VI.
2. The forty-two Miracle-Plays, represented at Coventry on the Feast of Corpus Christi, written at least as early as the reign of Henry VII.
3. The Chester or Whitsun-Plays, written we do not know when; some critics say between 1268—76, others about 1600; but they were performed till 1577. All these plays were acted much earlier than they were printed.

It is certain that, as churches and chapels of monasteries were the earliest theatres, so ecclesiastics were the earliest actors of Miracle-Plays; but in cities and large towns the getting-up and acting of Miracle-Plays soon devolved into the hands of the trading companies. Till the XII. century they formed part of the liturgy; in the XIII. separation begins and in the XIV. century it is achieved. The poets were at this time mostly laymen and emancipated themselves more and more from the traditional treatment of the subject, allowing their own poetical imagination a fuller play. The Latin language having

*) J. P. Collier, *Annals of the Stage*, II.

been supplanted by French in the XIII and XIV centuries made room for plain English, and at last the comic element, being never entirely excluded from even the most serious Miracle-Plays, enters the longer the more irresistibly. This element deserves our particular attention. Its origin is surely not to be looked for in the liturgy, nor are, however popular on the whole that may be, all the persons treated in its way. The Deity himself, the Redeemer, Maria and mostly the Apostles are considered too sublime to be joked at. The herdsman in the field, however, as for instance in one of the pageants of the Towneley Collection, Joseph, Christ's stepfather, the Roman soldiers on the grave &c. are particularly made an aim of jest and risibility.

Miracles were played till the middle of the XVI century and some still longer. They died away of weakness from old age. Since the XV. century, Moralities arose in England and not long after, they greatly flourished and gained quite a particular form in England. What Mr. Collier says about their origin: "As Miracle-Plays, repeated year after year to the same audiences and precisely in the same form, had become rather tedious, abstract impersonations by degrees found their way into them, to give them some degree of attractiveness. Such characters became more and more numerous, they interfered with the action and the progress of the plot. The scriptural characters sank by degrees into comparative insignificance and thus arose a new species of plays, which are called Moral or Moral-Plays", is for several reasons impossible. What Mr. Percy says:*) "As the old Mysteries frequently required the representation of some allegorical personage, by degrees the rude poets of those unlettered ages began to form complete dramatic pieces, consisting entirely of such personifications. These they entitled Moral-Plays" is almost the same as Mr. Collier's; and Mr. Warton derives as improbably the origin of the Morals from the 'Speaking characters' which, in the reign of Henry VI &c., addressed monarchs on their entrance into cities &c.

The Moralities had their own sphere, sometimes touching Miracles, but by no means supplanting them. They went alongside each other, but did not even follow one after the other. The improvement of the Morals upon the Miracle-Plays, which consisted of scriptural persons only, was the introduction of Allegorical Characters; but it is a fact, Morals very early entered an alliance with the farce and this formed the transition to true comedy. Yet wearisome as they must have been and often unintelligible by their personifications, for common people, in the earliest Morals yet known we find efforts made to render them more attractive and amusing to the audience by introducing individual characters, particularly of gross buffoonery and vicious propensities; 'The Devil', existing already in the Old Mysteries, is retained in the Morals, but 'the Vice' is a new character, seldom found in any play anterior to the Reformation. But after that period he appears almost in every play as most wicked by design under different names as 'Hypocrisy' in 'Lusty Juventus', 'Nicole Newfangle' in 'Like will to Like', 'Inclination' in 'The Trial of Treasure' &c. It is generally clothed in a Fool's habit, as indeed the Vice and the domestic Fool of the king and the nobility gradually blended together. — It was found the longer the more, that a real human being, with a human name, was better enabled to awaken the sympathy and keep alive the attention of an audience, and not less to impress them with moral truths than a being representing only a notion of the mind, and as Morals, thus improved, were rather often played in the intervals of entertainments and banquets of the Great, they were called 'Interludes' short plays particularly designed by the author for performance at the royal court &c., on above mentioned occasions, and though already in the year 1464 players of Interludes as 'Interludentes' are mentioned and in the Household-Books of the kings Edward IV.

*) Percy, Reliques &c., I, III.

and V and of King Richard III. expenses for 'Players', undoubtedly employed as players of Interludes, yet John Heywood 'the Epigrammatist' in the reign of King Henry VIII. is to be considered the real inventor of this species of dramatic representations. He cast aside the allegorical form and the religious and moral tendencies, and placed himself in the midst of the life of the people, he introduced representations of familiar life and popular manners into his Interludes, made use of the common circumstances of every day's life. The miseries which he painted invite our sympathy from the calmness and resignation, with which they are borne. He described man's errors with tenderness and their duties with interest and zeal. His style is natural, simple and unconstrained, his dialogue such as might be uttered in ordinary conversation and his characters are simple and distinct; there is nothing supernatural. — His plays show excellent fun and a fine plot, so that they were an entire novelty, and his productions form an epoch in the history of the English drama. His earliest play probably is:

'A merry play between the Pardoner and the Frere, the Curate and the neybour Pratte' written before 1521, because Pope Leo X. is spoken of in it as living. The plot is this: A Pardoner and a Friar have got the permission of the Curate to use his church for their respective business. They arrive and come to quarrel with each other, first in words, but afterwards they proceed to force of arms, kicking each other cruelly. The Curate, in vain attempting to separate the combatants, calls 'neybour Pratte' to his assistance, but it turns out that the two latter are only the worse for it, and after having been soundly cuffed and beaten, allow the former to depart quietly. In the course of the piece the frauds and impositions of pardoners as well as friars are ridiculed with great humour and a good deal of broad fun.

Another of his 'Interludes' called 'The four P's' is probably written about 1530. The plot is this A Palmer, a Pardoner, a Poticary and a Pedlar lay a wager, which of them shall tell the greatest lie. At last the Palmer says that he never saw a woman lose her patience, and the Pedlar, as chosen umpire declares this to be the greatest lie, and the other three, taken by surprise, consent to it. All this is very comically performed and, for instance, the descent of the Pardoner to Hell, his visit to Lucifer, in order to gain a woman from him by virtue of his relics, is described in a very ludicrous and delightful way, that we may astonish, how Heywood, who became a martyr to his religious zeal, could mix up the most sacred mysteries of the Catholic faith with its idlest legends without the slightest sense of impropriety.

According to his own record (in his preface to 'The English Traveller') he wrote above two hundred plays. Heywood, as will be obvious, has brought us with his Interludes to the very verge of Comedy. They may be full of jutting excrescences, still rough and uneven, not long enough for true comedies, but they have no longer connexion with allegory and abstract characters, on the contrary, their characters are drawn from life or intended to represent real life, whether they be actual or imaginary. They ridicule popular prejudices and common superstitions and touch upon temporary opinions and living manners.

Until this time, the beginning of the XVI. century we have seen English dramatic poetry develop itself quite naturally and consistently without any exterior help or influence, and come, accordingly to the taste of the people, first and particularly to comic plays, but at this period some events take place that have an enormous influence upon the further development of English poetry:

The Reformation, an event which gave an enormous impulse and increased activity to thought and inquiry and agitated the inert mass of accumulated prejudices; its spirit strongly influenced the literature of this age.

The rich stores of the Greek and Roman literatures and those of the Romantic poetry of Italy and Spain were explored by the curious scholars of England and thrown open in translations to the admiring gaze of the people.

Another unusual impulse to the mind of the people at this period was the Discovery of the New World and the reading of voyages and travels. At last many poets of this time availed themselves of the old chronicles and traditions of fabulous inventions, contained in them in an ample measure, and which had not yet been appropriated to the purposes of poetry or the drama.

The 'Andria' of Terence had been translated into English under the title of 'Terenz in English' and was in the translation adapted to the manners of the time and country, and was also acted. — One of the earliest indications of the existence of anything like a classical taste, particularly regarding the stage of England, is the report of Holinshead, that King Henry VIII had a goodly comedy of Plautus played in Latin at Greenwich 1520. 'Jack Jugler' is one of the oldest dramatic pieces extant in the English language, founded upon a classical original, upon Plautus' first comedy 'Amphitrio' and so were after this, many other classic, particularly comic plays of Plautus and Terence made use of, as we shall see.

Especial remark deserves an anonymous Interlude called 'Thersites', though it has no other connection with the Thersites in the ancient Greek history than its name. This Interlude is written in 1537 and, as the title itself says: 'Does declare, how the greatest boasters are not the greatest doers'. It is the oldest dramatic performance, where there is an historical character introduced. There is a great deal of fun in it for the sake of raising laughter. Thersites enters, as just returned from Troie, but all the allusions are from the times of the author and his country. Thersites, having got a new armor, dares King Arthur and the Knights of his Round-Table to fight, wishes to contend with Robinhood. When at last 'Miles a knight' enters, Thersites most cowardly escapes to his mother, leaving his sword behind him as an easy trophy for his antagonist.

The classical taste in English poetry became more and more apparent, and produced its effects upon the English drama. The Greek and Latin tragedies and comedies were not merely translated into English, they were often and by divers poets imitated and among them there is particularly to be viewed in the light of an original dramatic poet, and as one of the earliest and most important that man of whom we are about to treat:

Nicolas Udall

is born in Hampshire in the year 1504. Of his early life we know nothing. The first trace of his education is, that at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, on the 18th of January 1520 Nicholas Udall (Udall) was admitted scholar and on the 3^d of September 1524 became Probationary-Fellow (that is, candidate at the University for a professorship, which he may have got afterwards). In conjunction with John Leland, the famous Latinist, and as well known for his researches into English antiquities, Udall composed in the year 1532, to celebrate the entrance of Anne Boleyn into London after her marriage a dramatic pageant, written partly in Latin partly in English, whereof some verses were set up and some others were spoken and pronounced to the most high and excellent Queen, the lady Anne, wife unto King Henry VIII, exhibited and shown by the mayor and citizens of the famous city of London.

Mr. Collier has given a specimen of Udall's part of it in an extravagantly complimentary dialogue in 'The Judgement of Paris'.*)

"Mercurie: Juppiter this aple unto the has sent,

"Commaunding in this cause to geve true jugement.

"Paris: Juppiter a strange office hath geven me,

"To juge whiche is fairest of these ladies three.

*) Collier, Annals of the Stage II, 446—47.

- "Juno: *All riches and kingdomes bee at my behest:
 "Geve me the aple, and thou shalt have the best.*
- "Pallas: *Adjuge it to me, and for a kingdome
 "I shall geve the incomparable wisdom.*
- "Venus: *Preferre me, and I shall rewarde the, Paris,
 "With the fairest ladie that on the erthe is.*
- "Paris: *I should breke Juppiter's high commaundement,
 "If I should for mede or rewarde geve jugement.
 "Therefore, ladie Venus, before both these twain,
 "Your beautie moche exceeding, by my sentence
 "Shall win and have this aple. Yet to bee plain,
 "Here is the fouerthe ladie, now in presence,
 "Moste worthie to have it of due congruence,
 "As pereles in riches, wit and beautie,
 "Whiche are but sundrie qualities in you three.
 "But for hir worthynes this aple of gold
 "Is to symple a rewarde a thousand fold."*

Already in the year 1533 Udall was famous as a learned man and a teacher. In that year he published 'Flovres for Latine Spekyng selected and gathered oute of Terence and the same translated into Englyssche &c.' This compilation must have been much estimated, for there are editions of the years 1533, 1538, 1544 still extant and many years afterwards 1581 another scholar Mr. J. Higgins made use of it.

From the dedication of the first edition of this work to his scholars it is evident, that before Udall was elected Master of Eton, he had already been engaged in teaching. In the year 1534 N. Udall, twenty-eight years old, became head-master of Eton-school. The acts of this old English boarding-school, wherein his name is very differently written, Woodall, Wodall &c., contain very interesting details about his appointments: His fixed salary was 10 £ annually, besides 20 sh. 'for livery' and other small fees, for instance masses, for the dead, ink, candles &c. On the whole the receipt he got out of his place could by no means be called a splendid one, even considering the difference of time and of the value of money. The fame of Eton, concerning the teaching of the classics was not diminished through Udall, on the contrary, as he was an excellent scholar, so he was a good teacher too and that a severe one. Of the severity with which he treated his pupils, even for small faults and negligences, the poet Tusser gives us an evident example in a poem of his, where he says:

*From Pauls I went, to Eton sent,
 To learn straightways, the latin phrase,
 Where fifty-three stripes, given to me
 At once I had,
 For fault but small, or none at all,
 It came to pass, thus beat I was:
 See Udall, see, the mercy of thee,
 To me, poor lad.*

Udall was very industrious at that time and wrote several comedies, written, as Warton says, undoubtedly to be acted by his pupils, and one tragedy 'De papatu'. The old custom of acting stage-plays had come down from the cloisters to schools, and accordingly at Eton-College Latin stage-plays were

represented in the Christmas-Holidays and at other convenient terms, and these plays were particularly those of Terence and of Plautus. They were first acted to practise Latin speaking, yet afterwards not only for the formal but also for real, moral purposes, and as the latter consideration gained ground, the English language was used more and more, and as Warton says: 'Circa festum divi Andreae ludi magister eligere solet, pro suo arbitrio, scenicas fabulas optimas et accommodatissimas, quas pueri feriis natalitiis subsequentibus, non sine ludorum elegantia, populo spectante, publice aliquando peragant. Interdum etiam exhibet Anglico sermone contextas fabulas, si quae habeant acumen et leporem.'

Though we have no particular testimony for the origin of Udall's famous Comedy of Ralph Roister Doister, we may justly suppose it to have been written at that time for the same purpose as the above mentioned comedies. Why may Ralph Roister Doister not be included in the term of 'Plures Comoediae' that he is said to have composed at Eton? No doubt, Udall was at Eton in his very element, there was the centre of all his activity, and yet all of a sudden he was forced to leave this place and his highly respected situation there. In the year 1541 a robbery of silver-images and other plate from the school was discovered, committed by John Hoorde and Thomas Cheney, two scholars of Eton, to which Udall was suspected to have been privy, at least as having been counsel of it, which he admitted. Thereupon he was committed to the Marshalsea. Notwithstanding his own confessions, he himself and persons high in rank and office used all endeavours possible, that he might be restored to his former position, but in vain. Yet Udall was so much in favor with many noblemen, that he was recommended by them to the king, who received him after a very short time into full grace and allied him to Princess Mary as a teacher of literature and classics. Already in the year 1537 he was presented to the vicarage of Braintree and got it, which living he enjoyed when removed from Eton-school till 1544.

From the year 1541 several years henceforth Udall devoted himself entirely to literature and in 1542 he published a translation of 'Apophtegmes, that is to saie prompte, quicke, wittie and sentencious sayinges of certain Emperours, Kynges, Capitaines, Philosophiers and Oratours, as well Greekes as Romaines, both very pleasaunt and profitable to reade, partely for all maner of persones and especially Gentlemen, first gathered and compiled in Latine by the ryght famous clerke, Maister Erasmus of Roterodame. And now translated into Englyshe by Nicolas Udall'. But to be thoroughly exact, the translation of Udall does not contain the whole book of Erasmus; it is but the 3rd and 4th books he has translated.

After the translation of this work, Udall who, as a fine scholar and a zealous adherent to the Reformation, had a certain predilection for Erasmus, translated Erasmus' Paraphrase upon St. Luke, which he dedicated to Queen Katherine. In an epistle to Queen Katherine, prefacing her daughter Mary's translation of St. John, he describes with great enthusiasm the zeal of high-born ladies for study and spiritual knowledge at that time, as of the Princesses' Mary, Elisabeth and Lady Jane Gray's. He writes equally proud as a scholar and a Protestant clergyman:

"But now in this gracious and blissful time of knowledge, in which it hath pleased God Almighty to reveal and shew abroad the light of his most holy Gospel, what a number is there of noble women, especially here in this realm of England, yea and how many in the years of tender virginity, not only as well seen, and as familiarly traded in the Latin and Greek tongues, as in their own mother language; but also both in all kinds of profane literature and liberal arts exacted, studied and exercised; and in the holy Scripture and theology so ripe, that they are able aptly, cunningly and with much grace, either to indite or translate into the vulgar tongue. Neither is it now a strange thing to hear gentlewomen, instead of most vain communication about the moon shining in the water, to use grave and substantial talk in Latin and Greek, &c. It is now no news in England for young damsels in noble houses, and in

"the Courts of Princes instead of cards and other instruments of idle trifling, to have continually in their hands Psalms, Homilies and other devout meditations, or else Paul's Epistles or some book of holy Scripture matters; and as familiarly to read or reason thereof in Greek, Latin, French, or Italian, as in English."

Udall took a lively interest in all religious questions of that time, he wrote 1549: "An answer to the articles of the commoners of Devonsheir and Cornwall, declaring to the same howe they have been seduced by evell persons and howe their consciences may be satisfyed and stayed, concerning the sayd articles sette forthe by a countryman of theirs, much tendering the welth, bothe of their bodies and solles". 1551 he translated into English Peter Martyr's: 'Tractatus de Eucharistia and Disputatio de Eucharistia'. This work was published by Udall in London under the authority of a royal patent, in which Edward VI. calls him several times "our well beloved Nicolas Udall" and his books "good and profitable". These works, being a sincere and courageous defence of the king's faith as well as his own, were soon honored by the king with other marks of grace and favor: In the year 1551 he was presented by the king to a prebend of Windsor and of course he got that living. As Udall, however, occupied himself much at this time with preaching in London, instead of taking up his residence at Windsor, he seems to have avoided meeting his new colleagues who, on their part, have perhaps not very willingly consented to the presentation of the king; may be, that he was either too impetuous for them in religious matters or that they remembered him to have been imprisoned for participation of a theft. At least, Udall not being present at Windsor from 1551—52, the Chapter at first declined paying him the dividend due to him by his prebend, till the king interfered in his favor. In 1553 King Edward presented him to the more lucrative parsonage of Calborne in the Isle of Wight. Udall kept this living but two years, when he returned to his favorite occupation of schoolmaster, as head-master of Westminster-School. The exact year of his installation is not known, but his name appears in 1555 in the list of head-masters of this school. Even this appointment cannot have lasted long, as Queen Mary in the year 1556 re-established this school into a monastery which it had formerly been. Be this, as it may, Queen Mary continued to favor Udall highly, and there is no reason to believe, that, at the end of his life, she withdrew her favor from him, perhaps on account of his strict adherence to the Protestant Faith, however cruel she may have been to others, considering the religious point of view. In the year 1553, that is at the very beginning of her reign and power, she granted him a warrant directing an Interlude to be performed at the feast of her coronation. After his death Queen Elizabeth honored his memory by permitting a play, called Ezechias, founded upon the second book of Kings, to be acted before her. It was in the year 1564, on one of the Queen's 'Progresses' that she came to Oxford. The kings College men played Ezechias, a tragedy made by Mr. Udall. Warton says it was written in Latin, some others say, in English. By this we see Udall's repute as a dramatic writer to have lasted longer than his life-time. He died according to the registers of Burials in the parish of St. Margaret's in December anno 1556.

In the entry stands: 23 die Nicolas Yvedall.

There is none of all those 'Plures Comoediae' of Udall's left to Posterity, but 'Ralph Roister Doister' (and this one by chance only, as we shall see afterwards), upon which the fame of its author is founded, as the one who has made the first regular English Comedy. It is therefore of some consequence to look for the contents of this play of his, and to examine it more closely.

In the oldest plays of English dramatic poetry we meet with a Prologue; in the Morals and Interludes there are prologues as well, but if there had not been any in all those pieces, Udall would

probably have begun his play with a prologue, imitating, as he avowedly did, the ancient Latin comic poets who generally made use of it, in the interest of the public, for whom it was as necessary as a play-bill is to-day.

The prologue of this play is of four seven-line stanzas, in the first of which Udall himself calls this piece an 'Interlude' and in the 4th he speaks of it again as 'our Comedy' or 'Enterlude'. We know that at that time 'Interlude' was the common term for dramatic entertainments and was alternately used with Comedy; the Comedies of Plautus and Terence being then well known among the English. In the Prologue Udall expressly speaks of the design and tendency of the play, says, that there is no better recreation of man than mirth used in an honest fashion and mixed up with virtue in decent comeliness, refers to Plautus and Terence, as his examples, which he intends to imitate, gives the title of the piece, and wishes, God may give leave and grace to his intention.

The scene of the play is London and the 'Dramatis personae' are taken out of the middle classes of the people of that time, but notwithstanding they represent much more civilized and polished manners of life than in almost any other piece of contemporary dramatic poetry.

There are thirteen characters of more or less importance in it: nine male and four female, all of them have so-called 'Speaking names'.

The hero, whose name is the title of the play, is Ralph Roister Doister, a vain, glorious, cowardly fellow, as his name indicates. He is an imitation of the Miles Gloriosus of Plautus, but something refined indeed. He is no English soldier of that period, the reign of Henry VIII being in the whole peaceful and not able to bring forth such creatures as Ralph Roister Doister who, as all his predecessors in Plautus and Terence, was a rich man, liking to appear splendid and prodigal. He has many retainers and a musical band of his own, singers such as only the king has and the highest and richest noblemen of the realm. Roistering and swaggering and for all that unpolished and rude, he is shunned by all well educated people, flattered, despised, and mocked at by cunning parasites and his very servants. — The second and best delineated character in the whole piece is Matthew Merygreek, Roister Doister's companion and relation, but principally his parasite and flatterer, taken from the Artotrogus in Plautus' 'Miles Gloriosus' and 'Gnatho' of Terence. He is an intellectually much superior being, who insensibly but successfully directs to his pleasure and fancy that fool, whom he too despises. While he treats him with the seemingly finest compliments and flatteries, he serves him up with biting sarcasm and scourges with poignant mockeries all his wretchedness. From the very beginning, when the confounded rogue of Merygreek discovers his whole politics (that enable him to have all, though he has nothing his heart wishes for) and his active power over Ralph Roister Doister in the following verses:

"I can with a worde make him fayne or loth;

"I can with as much make him pleased or wroth;

"I can, when I will, make him mery and glad;

"I can, when me lust, make him sory and sad;

"I can set him in hope, and eke in dispaire;

"I can make him speake rough and make him speake faire."

From the beginning of the play, I say, to the last mediation between the two parties, his cunning dexterity and flattering art of persuasion know cleverly how to give light to Roister Doister's natural foolishness and self-pleasing presumption.

The other apparatus of eleven persons might perhaps have been simplified, but we have to take into consideration, that Udall probably wrote this piece to be played by pupils at schools, and so he wished the greatest number possible to be employed in it.

Among these eleven minor characters the most prominent is that of the nice and rich widow Dame Christian Custance. Her name already indicates the most essential quality of her character, the fidelity to her betrothed Gawin Goodluck who makes his appearance only at the end of the play, to take her home as his proved bride. While Gawin Goodluck is absent on business-affairs, his true friend Tristram Trusty in case of need takes care of the engaged lady, and Sym Suresby, captain of a ship, belonging to Gawin Goodluck, then the servants of both sides: Truepenny, Madge Mumblecrust, Tibet Talkapace, Annot Alyface, as members of Dame Christian Custance's household, and Dobinet Daughty and Harpax, servants of Ralph Roister Doister, at last a scrivener, whose love-letter, written in the name and by the commission of Ralph Roister Doister to Dame Custance, has become a famous example how a writing, by changing the punctuation, may have an ambiguous sense and contrary meaning.

The play is divided into 5 acts of different length and into scenes. It is one of the first dramatic pieces, in which this division is remarked. There were former plays divided into several acts, it is true, but no distinction of scenes.

The first act gives us an excellent exposition of the whole, representing in lively language the principal characters and the plan of the play: Matthew Merygreek enters singing the stage, to give a full amount of his nature, manner of life, and his principles, as well as Ralph Roister Doister's, whom he calls of all men his "*chief banker and chief shoot-anker*". He dwells particularly on the cowardly vanity of Ralph Roister Doister. He tells us of him:

*"All the day long is he facing and craking
Of his great actes in fighting and fraymaking,
But when Roister Doister is put to his prooffe,
To keep the Queenes peace is more for his behoofe."*

And of his amorousness he says:

*"If any woman smyle, or cast on hym an eye,
Up is he to the harde cares in love, by and by:
And in alle the hotte hast must she be hys wife,
Else farewell hys good days, and farewell hys life:
Maister Raufe Royster Doister is but dead and gon,
Excepte she on hym take some compassion". —*

Ralph Roister joins him, complaining: "*Why did God make me suche a goodly person? Come death, when thou wilt, I am weary of my life*". He calls his chief counsellor Merygreek several times, but he will not hear him and does, as though he were in a great hurry. At length he does not refuse giving his counsel in Doister's new love-affairs, consoles him, encourages him, so that Ralph Roister Doister delighted says: "*Gramercies, Merygreek, much bounde to thee I am*". In that intercourse between them, Merygreek flatters Doister most impudently, but without being understood, asks for the name of his adored lady, which Ralph Roister Doister is not able to give, although he knows her dwelling-house, knows that she is worth a thousand pounds and more. By this Merygreek knows her name 'Christian Custance', and drawing his attention to the real value of marriage-money, to her being promised to Gawin Goodlucke, he again cajoles him, says, that such a goodly man as he might get a wife with land, besides pounds of gold to the sum of twenty hundred thousands, he was worthy of no less.

Merygreek relates to his benefactor, that he was often asked, when in company with him walking along street, if Ralph Roister Doister was not Sir Launcelet du Lake, or great Guy of Warwicke. 'Who is this', asked another, 'noble Hector of Troy or great Goliah, Sampson, great Alexander or Charle le

Maigne'? Such was the impression on all the women, who saw him. And to all these flatteries Doister says: "*Yes, for so I am*", and lulls himself into the idea of being loved by any woman and particularly by his favourite Christian Custance, that he assures "*I warrant you, never doubt of that, I know, she loveth me, but she dare not speake*". Merygreek, though by no means taking the report of Doister to the letter, recommends him to be bold in his wooing and in order to call his musicians, that they may with playing and singing set him forth, runs away. The following scene is promoting in nothing the whole affair: The maid-servants of Christian Custance enter the stage, Madge Mumblecrust, Mrs. Custance's nurse, spinning on the distaff, Tibet Talkapace sewing, and Annot Alyface knitting, and are chatting about their good fare with their mistress and mocking at each other. Ralph Roister Doister overhears them secretly and stepping forth tells old Madge Mumblecrust, that he loves her mistress and bids her, she may induce the same to sue to him for marriage. Matthew Merygreek returning in the 4th scene with two of Doister's retainers, pretends for some time to mistake Madge Mumblecrust for Doister's sweet-heart, Mrs. Christian Custance, till, at length, Doister gets very angry and calls him a knave and a foolish harebraine, for his obstinate mistaking. Our hero reconciled promises to old Mumblecrust "*a pecke of argent*", and to commend himself the more for his marriage, tells her all his properties, which Merygreek enormously exaggerates. Though not giving his name, he hands her a letter to Mrs. Christian Custance. After being shown by Merygreek as an extremely good-natured fellow, he orders his people, "*to pipe up a merry note*", and with all of them goes out singing. Madge Mumblecrust, as she is told to do, takes the letter to her mistress, who receives it, without opening it, after having been informed, that it is not from her "*dere spouse*". She scolds her old nurse, for having charged herself with such a foolish service and wants her to speak no more of this "*fonde talke*" nor to bring more letters, for no man's pleasure, but to know from whom.

This forms the first act, which closes with the day. The second, beginning with the following day, is in proportion to the first act very short and contains nothing that might advance the plot:

Dobinet Doughty is sent by Ralph Roister Doister to bring a ring with a token in a clout to Dame Christian Custance. In a long monologue, he indulges in complaints about the wretched condition, in which he is as a servant or musician to Ralph Roister Doister:

"*And now that my maister is new set on wowing,*

"*I trust there shall none of us finde lacke of doying:*

"*Two paire of shoes a day will nowe be too little*

"*To serve me, I must trotte to and fro so mickle.*

"*Go beare me thys token, carrie me this letter;*"

"*Nowe this is the best way; nowe that way is better.*

"*Up before day, sirs, I charge you, an houre or twaine,*

"*Trudge, do me thys message, and bring worde quicke againe*".

"*If one misse but a minute, then his armes and woundes,*

"*I would not have slacked for ten thousand poundes.*"

Arrived before the house of Christian Custance, he meets Madge Mumblecrust, who refuses accepting the tokens of Ralph Roister Doister for her mistress. After she has gone, Truepenny, Tibet Talkapace and Annot Alyface enter. Dobinet Doughtie makes friendship with them, they sing a song and all these three servants are very willing to take the presents to their mistress. Tibet Talkapace snatches them away, to get the thanks alone, but instead of that, they are all, and particularly Tibet Talkapace, much scolded, as Madge Mumblecrust was in the first act:

„Well, ye naughty girles, if ever I perceive
 „That henceforth you do letters or tokens receive,
 „To bring unto me, from any person or place,
 „Except ye first shewe me the partie face to face,
 „Eythor thóu or thou, full truly abyee thou shalt.“

In the III Act Matthew Merygreek is sent out to spy, and to mark, how Doister's letter and tokens were likely to work. He meets Tibet Talkapace, who helps him to speak to Mrs. Custance. Though he did not know her home, he must already have been known to her, for, on his entering her room, she says: *„Welcome, friend Merygreek“*, but notwithstanding that, he is, upon his proposal to marry Ralph Roister Doister, sharply refused: *„Ye speake in jest, I am promised duryng my life and no creature hath my faith and trowth but one, that is Gawin Goodluck, and if it be not he, he hath no tittle this way, whatever he be, nor I know none to whome I have such worde spoken“*. At last she gives him leave to form her answer to Ralph Roister Doister, as he likes, and he avails himself largely of that allowance. He reports from her:

*„Ye shall not (she sayth) by her will, marry her cat.
 „Ye are such a calfe, such an ass, suche a blocke;
 „She despised your maship out of all reason“, &c.*

Ralph Roister Doister is most abated by this answer:

„I will go home and die“

and is in fact desperate; but Merygreek, heartless as he is to Doister, mocks him asking:

*„Then shall I bidde toll the bell?
 „What mourners and what torches shall we have?
 „Who shall your goods possesse?“*

And Ralph Roister Doister, properly a good-natured fellow, thinks not in the least of being mocked by Merygreek and says:

„Thou shalt be my sectour, and have all, more or lesse.“

Merygreek however continues scorning at him, calls in the servants and the Parish-clerk to pray for the late master Roister Doister's soul, and to ring a peal for him. Our great Hero's soul was just departing, when Merygreek invites him, to tarry one hour, and hear what he will say to him: *„If I wer you, Custance should eft seeke to me, ere I woulde bowe“*. Roister Doister accepts the proposition, to speak himself with his beloved mistress, and adopts upon Merygreek's counsel a lusty countenance and courage, that she may know, she has to answer to a man. Merygreek cries to him: *„Up, man, with your head and chin, up with that snoute, hands under your side, man“*, and Roister Doister's spirits are freshened and encouraged, that he thinks best: *„To come behind, and make courtsie“*. Merygreek again takes up sneering at his stupid benefactor. They go to the house of Custance, to serenade her with a song, that Roister Doister *„may winne his dear love Custance“*; yet it is not just Roister Doister, who speaks in his cause, but Merygreek. Custance plainly declares, that she does in no wise like to be served by a fool; when she choseth a husband, she hopes to take a man, and returns the letter sent her by Ralph Roister Doister, asking, if that was a letter to win a woman. Merygreek receives and reads the letter, but so neglecting and varying the punctuation, that the sense and meaning of it is entirely disfigured and overturned, that Roister Doister himself denies its genuineness *„by the Armes of Caleys, it is none of myne“*. (This is the very letter, which Thomas Wilson in his 'Rule of Reason' (printed first 1551) alludes to and says, that it was "an example of such doubtful writing, which by reason of pointing may have a double "sense and contrary meaning".) After Custance having left them with the words: *„God be with you both,*

"and seek no more to me", Roister Doister falls into despair and begins weeping. Upon which Merygreek attempts consoling him, by wishing that he were himself a woman, "*I would have you myself*" and by advising him, to refrain from Custance a while, when he would see her creeping on her knees to him, and pray him to be good to her. Roister Doister consents, but in the meantime, he intends taking revenge on the scrivener, for having disgraced his wooing; he will kill him, though he should be torn therefore joint by joint. The innocent scrivener, pardoned upon the intercession of Merygreek, is brought in instantly, and reads the letter according to the true punctuation so, that Ralph Roister Doister can find no fault with it. The III. Act is closed by the resolution of Ralph Roister Doister, that, "*if force (against Custance) shall neede, all may be in readinesse*".

At the beginning of the IV. Act Sym Suresby enters the scene, after returning from a voyage, to see how it is with Dame Custance, the espoused wife of his master. He is well received by Custance but, as Roister Doister and Merygreek arrive and the first calls dame Custance his "*sweete wife*" who has Roister Doister's ring and tokens still in possession, he suspects that something ill has happened and departs without accepting anything offered him by Custance. Roister Doister confirms him in his suspicion by saying:

"Yea, farewell fellow, and tell thy master Goodlucke,

"That he cometh to late of thys blossome to plucke.

"Let him keepe him there still, or at least wise make no hast;

"As for his labour hither he shall spende in wast.

"His betters be in place now."

Though Ralph Roister Doister threatens: "*Yes, dame, I will have you, whether ye will or no, I command you to love me*", Custance in real despair cries out: "*Avaunt lozell, picke thee hence*", and after Roister Doister has gone with his folks, not without announcing his immediate return, to destroy her house and all that therein is, she sends for her proved friend Tristram Trusty, and calls forth all her servants, to prepare for battle against this most loute and dastarde Ralph Roister Doister. Soon they appear armed with distaff, broom, club, skinner and fire-fork, to begin a pitched battle. Tristram Trusty arrives and hears the whole affair. Soon after him the traitor Merygreek enters, plainly declaring, that he did all for mirth, he meant this wooing but "*pastance*", he never thought Ralph Roister Doister a fit husband for her, but promises, when returning with Roister Doister, being with a sheepe's look full grim and striking at her, his blows shall fall on himself. — In the 7th scene Ralph Roister Doister appears in a most ridiculous array, just like the foolish Don Quixote, armed with a "*potgunne*" covering him to his shoulders &c. and meaning "*to kill fortie is a matter of laughter*". On he goes with his men, without pity for Custance, notwithstanding the intercession of Tristram Trusty. "*No, Sir*", he says,

"I mine owneself will, in this present cause

"Be Sheriffe, and Justice, and whole Judge of the Lawes,

"This matter to amende, all officers be I shall

"Constable, Bailiffe, Sergeant —"

and Merygreek sneering adds:

"And hangman and all".

Custance comes out of her house with her servants and the battle begins; dame Custance cries out: "*On forward, I myself will mounsire graund captain undertake*". At the very beginning Ralph Roister Doister cries for help: "*Out, alas, I am slain, helpe, away, away, away, she will else kill us all*" and runs out. Victorious dame Custance leaves the stage saying: "*Now Roister Doister will no more wowing begin*".

In the V. and last Act Gawin Goodlucke, returned from his voyage, is informed by Sym Suresbye, that Christian Custance was claimed by another, to whom she was likely to have pledged her word for marriage. When she enters the stage, she is not well received by her lover. How much soever she is protesting her innocence, he will not listen to it, declares that pastime with Roister Doister a homely daliance and wants to hear the truth; for which reason he will go directly to Tristram Trusty, having been privy both to the beginning and the end of that love-affair. In the meantime Christian Custance says a touching prayer to God, to help her and bring forth her innocence. And indeed, Goodluck returns entirely satisfied with the news he got from Tristram Trusty: "*Sweet Custance, neither heart can thinke, nor tongue tell, how much I joy in your constant fidelity*". He is going to prepare a fine supper, where they may laugh at Custance's "*fought field*". All of a sudden Matthew Merygreek arrives, begging pardon and favor for Ralph Roister Doister, alleging that they would never have better sport. Christian Custance consents but reluctantly. Ralph Roister Doister, warranted on Merygreek's word, that they all of them cry for mercy, and are most glad of being forgiven by him, enters the party. Nevertheless he is on his entrance accused by Custance of being a usurer, because

"he will lende no blows, but he have in recompense

"fiftene for one, which is to much of conscience."

At length reconciled to all, he makes his musicians come in, that they may have a song. Which song (a prayer for Queen Elizabeth, to give her a long reign, that she may defend the faith, protect the Gospel, Learning and Virtue, for her counsellors and the nobility) is no doubt either changed or added afterwards, as the play cannot be written in the reign of Elizabeth.

This is the end of the play, and the hero — he is not dead; it is no tragedy. Remains to be seen, whether such a comedy (and a comedy it is to be) has been of some influence for the succeeding English poets, if we are entitled to look upon this play as 'one of the most important illustrations of the growth of English dramatic poesy'.*)

As we have already heard, there is of all the 'Plures Comoediae' made by Nicholas Udall none extant, and none anywhere else particularly mentioned for its contents, or ever considered as anyhow important for its influence (upon the development of the English Comedy) but 'Ralph Roister Doister'; do we therefore speak of Nicholas Udall's influence upon the development of the English Comedy, we may as well say, of Ralph Roister Doister's, as his most famous comedy, out of which some passages and names are mentioned in other contemporary comedies.

In 1566 a certain printer Thomas Hacket had got a licence to print 'a play called Rauf Ruyster Duster' and a copy without a title-page was by chance discovered in 1818 at an auction of books in London. By interior reasons and exterior signs it is thoroughly proved to be a copy of that print made by Thomas Hacket. As the original of this comedy exists no longer, we cannot know what other liberties Hacket took with the text; but the play undoubtedly being written in the reign of Henry VIII. or at least under Edward VI., we ought to read Act I, Scene 1: "*But when Roister is put to his proof, to keep the kings peace is more to his behoof*". In our copy, however, Matthew Merygreek is speaking of the "*Queens peace*", which is in all probability an alteration by Hacket to mean Queen Elizabeth, as the play was printed in her reign. On the other hand Ralph Roister Doister swears Act III, scene IV: "*By the armes of Caleys, it is none of mine*", (that is to say, the letter) and Act IV Scene VII: "*Soft, the armes of Caleys, I have one thing forgot*", while Calais was lost in the Vth, and last year of the reign

*) Arber, Introduction to R. R. Doister.

of Queen Mary, and I think the English at that time not to have been so foolish as to swear by the arms of a town no longer belonging to England, which the French of our time think proper and meet for themselves, considering Alsatia and Lorraine still belonging to them.

'Ralph Roister Doister' was reprinted 1818 by Mr. Briggs and 1821 by Mr. F. Marshall, without its author being known; even when reprinted for the third time 1837 in 'the old English Drama' by Thomas White, one did not yet know more about it, though Mr. J. P. Collier had some years before 1818 found out, that no other than Nicholas Udall could be the author. Thomas Warton in his 'History of English Poetry' 1774—81 says, that a certain Nicholas Udall had written 'plures Comoediae', and that an extract of one of these comedies, which however he does not name, was contained in a book called: 'Arte of Logike' by one Wilson, who had made use of it to prove the importance of a clear manner of expression by a contrary example. Mr. Collier having come into possession of a first print of this 'Arte of Logike' of the year 1551 found, that the quotation was exactly the letter written by Ralph Roister Doister to Christian Custance, and Wilson, expressly mentioning an 'Interlude of Nicolas Udall' as the source, out of which he had taken his example, the authorship of Nicholas Udall for our Ralph Roister Doister was evidently proved, which since 1820, when Mr. Collier published his discovery in his notes upon 'Dodsley's Old Plays' was universally acknowledged. Hitherto the scholars of England had considered 'Gammer Gurton's Needle' by John Still, afterwards bishop of Bath, the first regular English Comedy, but since the discovery of Nicholas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister it was stated by Mr. Collier to be anterior to the former, as Ralph Roister Doister was already in the year 1551 in Wilson's 'Arte of Logike' mentioned as existing, while Mr. Still at that time was but 8—9 years of age and could as such not well have written a comedy. Nay he proved Ralph Roister Doister to be much more justly called the first regular English Comedy, it being in many respects superior to Gammer Gurton's Needle. This latter comedy, to begin with the best in it, has at the commencement of the 2nd Act an excellent drinking-song, unfortunately it is not original but an old English song. Mr. Dyce in his edition of Skelton has printed an earlier copy of it from a manuscript. The characters of the play are well copied from life, though almost all very rude, perhaps with the exception of Dr. Rat and the Bailey. Gammer Gurton's Needle pretends only to depict the habits of coarse, rustic life; the plot relates merely to the loss of a needle, with which Gammer Gurton intended to mend her husband Hodge's breeches and which, having been lost, throws the whole village into confusion, till it is at last accidentally found sticking in an unlucky part of Hodges dress. There is a coarse humor displayed in it, of which Warton says: "The writer (Still?) has "a kind of jocularly, which sometimes rises above buffoonery, but is often disgraced by lowness of incident". The language is very broad, provincial dialect, very pleasing for a German, finding therein many German words still unaltered. The authorship of Still is besides very questionable. When Still as Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge once came to Cambridge, he is said to have been called upon to remonstrate against having performed before Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth an English play, which was unbefitting the learning, dignity and character of the university. On the other hand Nicolas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister is neither a perfect comedy in our opinion of such a play. If we take for granted as requirements of a good play, clearness and deepness of ideas and sentiments, copiousness of fancy and imagination, development of the characters, regularity of form and purity of language, we fail in our expectations from Ralph Roister Doister: Its verses are uneven, rough and clumsy. Though every two lines correspond rhyming throughout the play, it will for ever be very difficult to understand the measure of it. There are very different metres in this piece, sometimes almost correct Alexandrines. We think it mere wasting time to search for a general and regularly returning measure. As for the structure of the verse, there is no comedy extant

upon which it had had any influence visible; on the contrary, already at Udall's life-time the Earl of Surrey had used a new stanza measure, the ten-syllabic, unrhymed verse, which we now call blank-verse, in his translation of the second and fourth books of Vergil's Aeneid, and though this new measure was not worthy of great praise in the hands of Surrey, Sackville and Norton introduced it into their drama 'Ferrex and Porrex' and particularly Christopher Marlowe used it, first in his 'Tamburlaine the Great', printed 1590, and then in his other dramas, so that at Marlowe's time already blank-verse substituted prose and rhyme, till then most commonly used in stage-plays. Marlowe himself says in the prologue to the first part of 'Tamburlaine the Great':

"From jiggling veins of rhyming motner wits,

"And such conceits as clownage keeps in pay,

"We'll lead you to the stately tent of war,

"Where you shall hear the Scythian Tamburlaine

"Threatening the world with high astounding terms,

"And scourging kingdoms with his conquering sword."

He considered prose tedious and unpoetical and rhyme unnatural and above all wearisome, wherefore he made great efforts to introduce his favourite measure upon the stage and with complete success, so that Shakespeare, as for the measure of the verse undoubtedly has much profited by Marlowe.

'The Trial of Treasure', printed 1567, has still rhymed lines, as Ralph Roister Doister has according to the habit of that time, and so has 'New Custom', divided as well as Ralph Roister Doister into acts and scenes, printed 1573. But while 'The three ladies of London' by R. W. (Robert Wilson?), printed 1584, is still rhymed; in the 'Three lords and three ladies of London' by the same R. W., printed 1590, the author has avoided his heavy, lumbering and monotonous fourteen-syllabic lines and usually employed blank-verse, though interspersing also prose in such situations as did not seem to require measured-speech.

We see there is no influence of Mr. Udall's rhyming verses visible upon his successors, who made Comedies and Interludes. On the contrary, Udall, but too closely following the model of classic comedies in other parts, has in this point disdained imitating them and joined his predecessors and contemporaries in employing rhyme. But had he used blank-verse in his Ralph Roister Doister, he would probably not have been the first in doing so, would therefore not have exercised an influence upon his successors, as the Earl of Surrey had introduced it before him.

Considering the characters in the play, we may say, that they are old acquaintances from Plautus and Terence, at least the principal ones as Roister Doister and Merygreek; copied almost slavishly from the 'Miles Gloriosus' and 'Thraso'. It would not be difficult to trace the imitation of these two poets in a great many scenes, nay in some it is almost literally the English version of the latin texts, and I beg to give here one example for many: Terence 'Thraso' Act IV, Scene VIII: Thraso and Gnatho are on the stage, speaking about taking revenge on Thais, Thraso's mistress;

"Thraso: Quid nunc agimus?"

"Gnatho: Quin redeamus, jam haec (Thais) tibi aderit supplicans ultra."

"Thraso: Credim'?"

"Gnatho: Imo certe, novi ingenium mulierum

"Nolunt ubi velis, ubi nolis, cupiunt ultra."

"Thraso: Bene putas."

And Nicolas Udall's Ralph Roister Doister Act III, Scene IV: When Roister Doister is disdainfully rejected by his mistress, Dame Custance:

"Merygreek: *But since that cannot be (that Merygreek is his wife) will you play a wise part?*

"Roister Doister: *How should I?"*

"Merygreek: *Refraine from Custance a while now.*

"And I warrant hir soone right glad to seeke to you,

"I shall see hir anon come on hir knees creeping,

"And pray you to be good to hir, sattle teares weeping."

"Roister Doister: *But what and she come not?"*

And some lines before:

"Merygreek: *One maddie propertie these women have in fey*

"When ye will, they will not: will not ye, then will they."

"Roister Doister: *Thou dost the truth tell."*

Notwithstanding all that, it is true, Nicholas Udall begins his own activity with the very names of the play, which are as in Plautus so-called "Speaking-names", names which by dint of their etymology or any signification else direct our thoughts and minds on certain capacities, occupations, peculiar to the respective persons: 'Roister' means a blustering, boastful fellow, from the verb 'to royst' or 'to roister' and 'Doister' is but a proverbial mocking-appendix, *) as 'Ralph' derived from anglo-saxon 'Hrôdvulf' a very martial name, is quite a proper Christian name for this roystering fellow. 'Merygreek' at least much reminds us of the merry Cricket, liking to sing and not to do anything; so Merygreek, who likes to eat from other people's table without doing more than jesting and joking. In the same way the names of the other persons of the play are made.

The character of Ralph Roister Doister is, according to the above mentioned model of Terence, but particularly following the character of Pyrgopolinices by Plautus, exaggerated and rather unnatural, as we have seen before. Although exaggerations in this kind of plays, perhaps in comedies generally, may be justified, nay even natural and intrinsically necessary to produce the conflict, not only with the common sense but also with the more civilized taste and sense of well brought up people, yet we think the weaknesses of our hero exposed in Ralph Roister Doister rather great to be credible for the common sense or an object of ridicule. The affectation of our courtier is indeed diverting as a contrast to present manners, but the eccentricities as well of himself, as of his clown are not easy to be believed. Roister Doister turns out to be not much better than a stupid fellow, a coward pretender.

Merygreek, the Vice of the Moralities, and at the same time the ancient greek and latin parasite is as well as Roister Doister taken from Plautus and Terence. On the whole, he is a coarse, massive figure with burlesque, comic manners; there is little cutting wit and powerful humor, no great comic force in him; all this is, it is true, to our feeling forced and artificial, but it may not have been so to the feeling of the people of yore. His low inclinations are not seldom prominent. Udall lays a stress upon the intellectual superiority of the cunning flatterer, who insensibly but surely guides the awkward fool, whereas he treats him with the grossest flatteries, scourges his whole wretchedness with cutting irony and sharp pointed jeers. But that difference of our Merygreek from the ancient parasite we have to remark, that he mostly profits of the foolishness of Ralph Roister Doister for joke, for the gratification of his good humor to his own merriment, to play with his poor victim, as the cat plays with the caught mouse, not so much to his own material advantage.

These two principal characters, with all their excentricities are pretty well and consistently performed, but they do not excite our growing interest, they enter the stage and are after the first scenes

*) Klein, Geschichte des Dramas, II.

as well known by us as at the end of the play. There is no progress in the development of their characters, as, we must candidly confess, in no theatrical piece at that time, either tragedy, for instance *Ferrex and Porrex* by Thomas Sackville and Norton, or comedy. In different scenes we always see the same persons only in a different light. There is no and there cannot be a high dramatic interest in the play, the conflict and the development of the characters wanting.

In the literary history of almost all modern nations of Europe we meet imitations particularly of the *Miles Gloriosus*, as *Ralph Roister Doister*, and we may as well suppose, as really many critics did, that for instance Beaumont and Fletcher in their 'A king and no king' had taken Udall's *Roister Doister* as a model for *Bessus*, as well, that Ben Jonson in his 'Every man in his humor' by composing the character of the captain *Bobadill*, intended to imitate *Ralph Roister Doister*, as *Plautus* and his *Pyrgopolinices*. But there is no convincing reason extant, that they really did so, as they all of them knew the latin language and its authors almost as well and as thoroughly as their native tongue and its last poets.

The plot of the play is for the above mentioned reasons rather deficient, by which we may understand two other conspicuous deficiencies. The piece is divided into acts and scenes, and as such indeed, one of the earliest examples; but of these five acts there might the second very well be wanting, in as much as in it the chief-action does not promote, and the fifth act must be so, as in it the hero of the play, to whom by his palpable and substantial defeat in the fourth act poetical justice was done, as *Ralph Roister Doister*, I say, partakes of the wedding of his pretended, which renders him, who never inspired us with great esteem for him, entirely despicable and involves not only a moral self-murder but also a poetical one.

What we have said about some whole acts we may as well say of several scenes, for instance Act I, Scene III: the scene of *Christian Custance's* servant-girls. Some of the inferior 'dramatic personae' might likewise very well be spared, since they are by no means necessary for the progress of the action. With this exuberance of scenes, acts and persons is consistently connected the same abundance of useless dialogues, by which the action of the play is neither furthered nor given a better insight into the motives of the acting persons. The exhibition of passion does not deserve our particular praise; it is only a feigned passion, that loves in one moment and being refused, instead of growing into hatred, gets into an entire indifference and even tranquil friendship.

All that is not to be imitated nor is there any imitation visible in any comedy of that time or afterwards; on the contrary, in the following era rise so many very original poets, nay even the most original of all, that it is considered the most brilliant era in the literary-history of England, and there is no poet of comedies that has taken Udall in any way for an example, either for his verse or his diction in general, or his character-painting, or his wit or anything else. In some contemporary comedies there are, it is true, the one or the other sentence, phrase and character mentioned from Udall's *Ralph Roister Doister*, so in 'Like will to Like quod the Devil to the Collier' by *Ulpian Fulwel*, printed 1568, one of the characters is called 'Ralph Roister', but that character presents more a rascal and morally sunken fellow than a stupid swaggering blockhead as our *Ralph Roister Doister* is. *Roister Doister* is used proverbially in *G. Harvey's* 'Four letters', 1592, for a mad-brained fellow. In the 'Return from Parnassus', 1606, there is a line: "The *Roister Doister* in his oily terms" applied to *Marston*; 'Mumblecrust', the name of one of *Christian Custance's* servant-girls, is used in 'Pleasant comedy of Patient Grissel', 1603, and again given to the widow *Minever* by *Captain Tucca* in *Dekkers's* 'Satiromastix', 1602. 'Madge Mumblecrust' is mentioned in the MS. 'Comedy of Misogonus', 1577, but as these names are, as already mentioned 'Speaking names' they do not just prove an imitation; they may very well be a testimony of the

acquaintance with Ralph Roister Doister, but much more they show the authors' determinations to overdo everything, by thus letting us into the characters beforehand and afterwards proving their pretensions to their names. That is no influence upon the development of the English comedy. And if we cast only a glance upon the comedies of the later poets: Robert Greene's 'Honourable History of Friar Bacon and Friar Bongay', George-a-Green, 'The Pinner of Wakefield', Beaumont and Fletcher's 'Rule a wife and have a wife', 'The Chances', 'The Wild-Goose Chase', comedies very high in style and execution, Philip Massinger's 'A New Way to pay old debts' and above all Shakespeare's, though not the best but first comedies 'Love's Labour lost', 'The Comedy of Errors', 'A Midsummer-Night's Dream' and 'The two Gentlemen of Verona', we cannot help saying, that there cannot have been an influence, either formally or materially upon these poets.

The truth is, that in our Ralph Roister Doister the plot is simple and amusing, there is an agreeable intermixture of serious and comic dialogues, a good deal of variety of situation and character, to which few pieces of that time can make any pretension. It is remarkably free from grossnesses, with which 'Gammer Gurton's Needle', for instance, abounds, it never disturbs the grounds of moral principle, after having done them heaped justice on all sides, to be judged by our common sense and natural feeling. The unity of action is well kept up, though not those of time and place. It is divided into acts and scenes, as very few plays were till then.

As written in the reign of Henry VIII it is to be considered a masterly production; had it even followed Gammer Gurton's Needle, it would have been entitled to our admiration on its own particular merits. Ralph Roister Doister signifies a certain progress in the development of the English Comedy, but there is no particular influence upon its further development visible.

