

Preface

In this book I have endeavoured to trace and discuss in nonacademic terms the emergence of the mediaeval play from Christian ritual. In other words, the book is frankly addressed to young students and general readers whose interest in the mediaeval theatre has been newly aroused. In writing it I have tried consistently to bear in mind the difficulties which beset those students, of whom there are many, whose contact with the Christian faith is, to say the least, tenuous, and for whom in consequence the liturgy of the Church is a closed book. It is to be hoped that I have dealt with the subject in such a way that the modern reader is able to view the emergence of drama from religious ritual in a completely detached way, as a common human phenomenon which he may compare, if he wishes, with the classical example of the Greek theatre.

In choosing to limit the subject to the period extending from the tenth century to the end of the fifteenth I was moved by the wish to encourage in the reader's mind a sense of the integrity of the mediaeval theatre in its rise and eventual decline. The student, therefore, who wishes to bridge the gap between the mediaeval and Elizabethan periods, will need to consult other and more compendious works which cover the Tudor theatre. Very much the same explanation must be given for my neglect of the mediaeval folk drama, the relevance of which, in view of the present state of our knowledge, must be open to question. I have, nevertheless, tried to give due weight to the survival of pagan habits of mind in mediaeval audiences, in attempting to assess the probable impact upon them of Christian ritual and dramatic stress.

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Francis Edwards

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