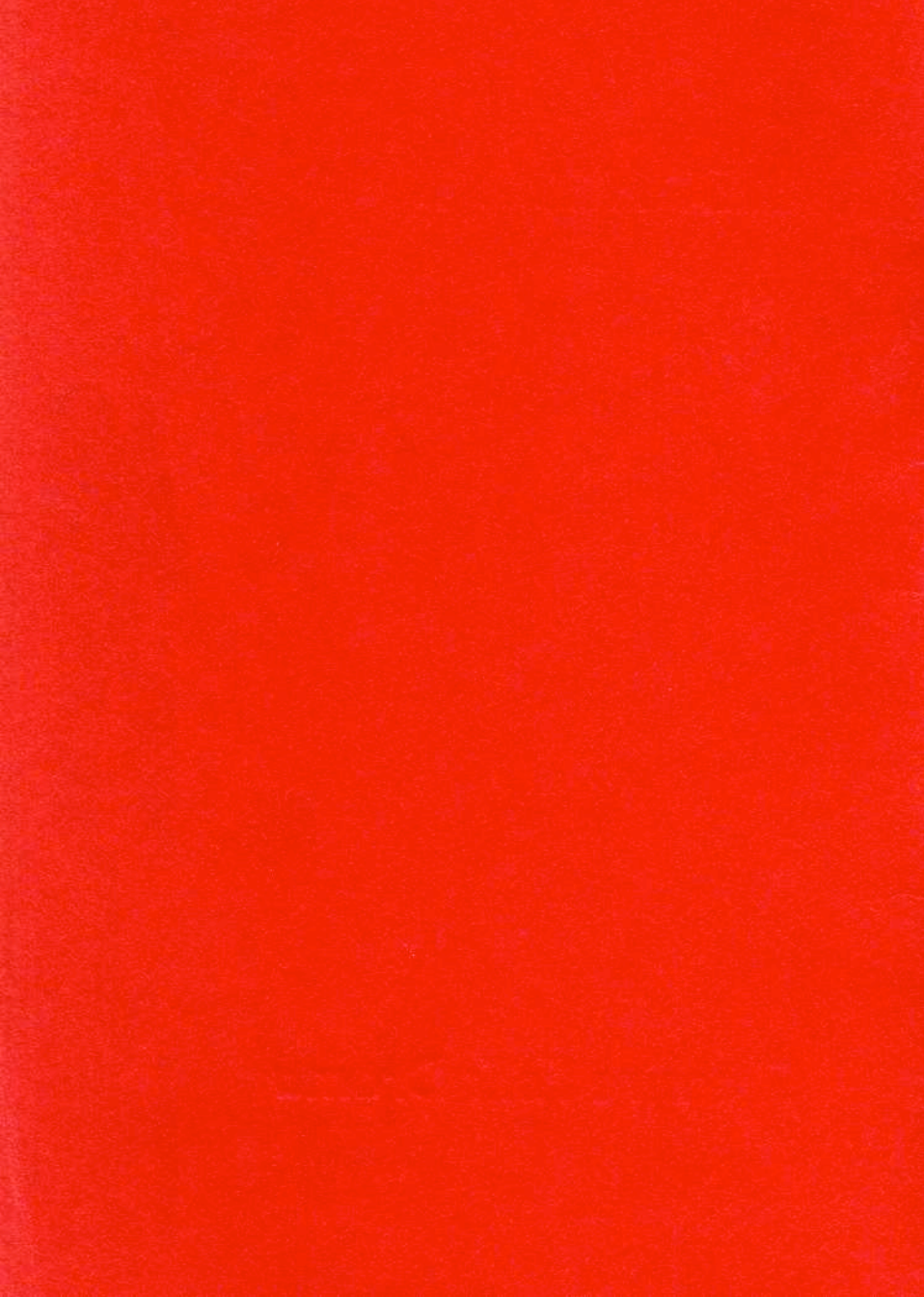


ALEX HELM



Cheshire Folk Drama



**Cheshire
Folk
Drama**



ALEX HELM



The Guizer Press
Ilstock, Leicestershire

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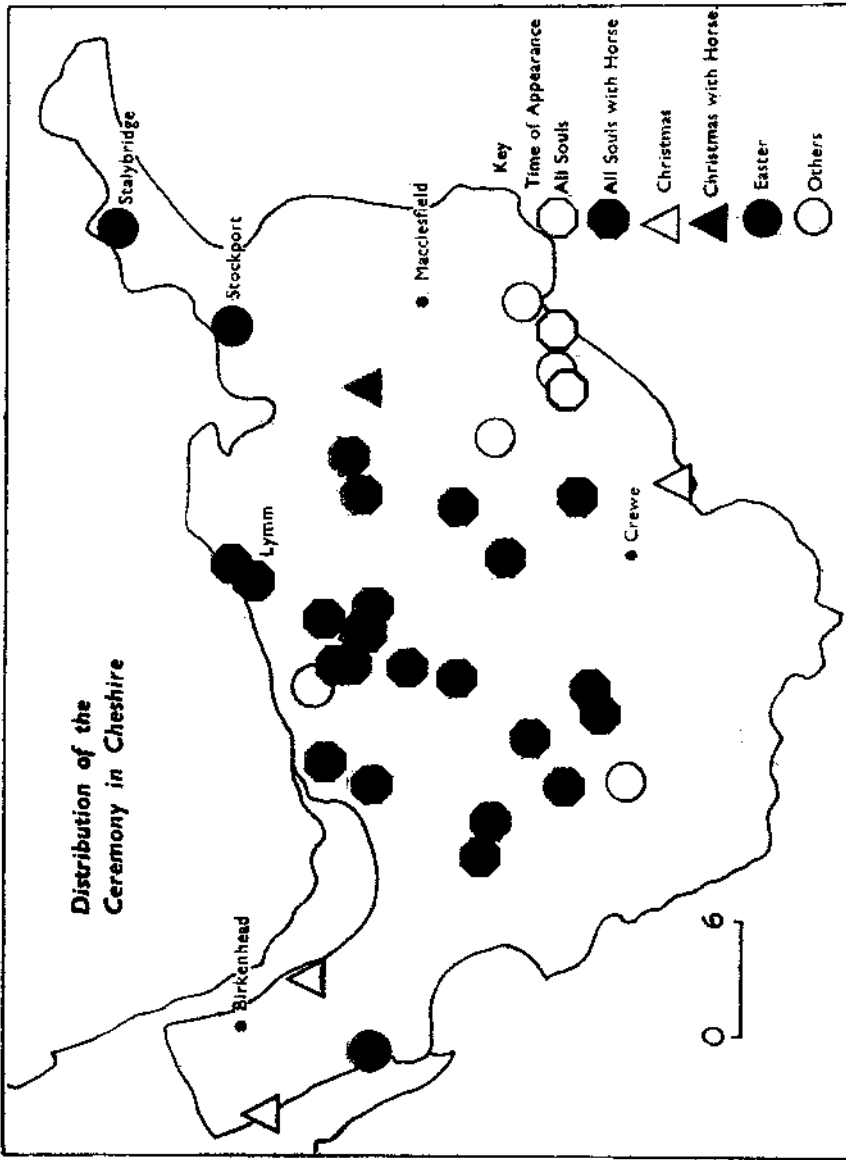
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FOREWORD

The information in this book is extracted from the Ritual Drama section of a Geographical Index of Traditional Ritual Custom being compiled by Dr E.C.Cawte, Dr N.Peacock and the present editor. The purpose is to make available all information relating to the seasonal dramatic ceremony in Cheshire. The information given under each location is factual and taken from the sources given: only in the Introduction is there comment and discussion. Texts which are already in print are not repeated here, though there is a note of where they can be found. Only original sources are used despite a large number of derivative works known to exist. Other information under the places named is usually summarised for brevity. Finally, after each location is given a four-figure Grid Reference for identification on the one inch Ordnance Survey maps.



Introduction

Cheshire is predominantly a dairy-farming county with pockets of industry on its borders. In the north-east Stalybridge and Stockport belong to the Manchester industrial conurbation, whilst in the north-west, Runcorn and Birkenhead belong to that of Liverpool. Crewe owes its present size to the railway works which grew up there in the nineteenth century, whilst Congleton and Macclesfield today depend largely on the production of ribbons of man-made fibres for their industry. Both these towns have a connection with the silk ribbon trade dating at least from the early eighteenth century, superseding the manufacture of 'points', - thongs of tough white leather furnished with tin or silver tags which were used as fasteners for clothing before buttons and buckles were used. Industries at Lymm were fustian cutting and salt extraction by the open pan method, and Nantwich still has the largest salt mine in the country. Apart from these industrial centres amongst others, the county depends on agriculture for its livelihood: its communities are largely rural and movement within the county borders by public transport is still far from easy.

Under these circumstances it is not surprising that a unique form of the Folk Play existed in the county until comparatively recently. The ceremony everywhere belongs to the old-style winter months, a period running from roughly All Souls to Easter, with most occurring at Christmas or on Plough Monday, but only in Cheshire does it appear throughout the whole of this period with the majority at the beginning at All Souls. Basically, the Cheshire action is the familiar Hero-Combat play in which one champion overcomes another who is then revived by a 'doctor'. The action is described by texts which have normally been passed on by word of mouth. The unusual feature is that many of the examples have an additional character, a hobby-horse, known in the county as the Wild Horse, who, with his Driver or Groom appears at the end of the action to add point to the collection. Otherwise the pattern of the action is typical, falling naturally into the Introductory Song, the Presentation, the Combat, Lament and Cure, and finally, the *Quête*.

The song takes two forms; it is either the purely begging song

which includes the verse 'Good master and good mistress...' as at Alderley, which is found with other customs or on its own throughout the country, or an adaptation of the Pace-egging Song, as at Antrabus, in which characters are introduced who do not otherwise take part in the main action. Neither song appears to be an integral part of the play, though it may be a remnant of the singing processions which were a feature of similar actions in the Balkans. Indeed, at Frankby on the Wirral, the song was only added if the performers wanted to give a longer performance. The song usually occurred at the beginning, but could be at the end, or even be divided between the beginning and the end. In its pace-egging form its obvious place is at the beginning since it could be considered a form of Calling-on Song as used in the Sword Dance actions of the north-east. Indeed, the Pace-egging Song is a variant of *The Seven Jolly Tradesmen (When Joan's Ale was New)*, and many of the sword dancers introduced themselves as tradesmen.

Following the song, the action is introduced by a Presenter who calls for room in which to perform. This character is given unimaginative names - Enterer In, Letter In or Door Opener, etc. - which describe his function rather than his character. He may be replaced by all the performers reciting the lines in chorus as at Huxley, or exceptionally, as at Halton, by the Old Woman. This character was needed to clear a space in which the action could take place, and this space was maintained by the remainder of the players who stood in a line to the rear, stepping forward to declaim their lines and then retiring to place.

This is typical of the ceremony everywhere, though in Cheshire the names of the characters who appear first and the lines they speak are rather more stereotyped than usual. The influence of the chapbook versions may be responsible for this; King George's lines in particular are an exact copy of those in the printed texts. Similarly, the Black Prince of Paradise (or Morocco) is a constant chapbook character. The Alderley text is almost entirely a chapbook version with the Wild Horse and a song added. Alderley is near Manchester where many chapbooks were published and this proximity may be responsible. The Lament following the death has some interest. The chapbooks give it to the King of Egypt, but the Cheshire versions

to an Old Woman, Mary or Martha, who claims the dead man as her son. She is generally veiled, a familiar device where a 'Female' character was involved, and her lament establishes two of the three generations of the Life Cycle Drama best seen in the Wooing Plays of the East Midlands. No Hero-Combat action has the three generations discernible but the Cheshire Plays establish two of them clearly by the introduction of this 'Female' and her claim to be the dead man's mother. The Lament ends by calling the Doctor, who, after describing his travels and cures, and demanding an impossible fee, revives the fallen champion.

This concludes the action proper and the *Quête* follows. Dairy Doubt, usually played by the smallest member of the company, follows a stereotyped pattern; he skips round in a circle declaiming his lines, with his hands clasped behind him and on the line

'Five yards in and five yards out'

he releases his hands to let fall a very lengthy shirt tail. Beelzebub invariably has some 'nonsense' added to the lines which he uses in other districts; Paddywhack, where he appears 'with Charlie on my back', may be a Cheshire variant of the southern Johnny Jack. Tossport, at Huxley, appears to have come from the Pace-egg plays of Lancashire.

The most outstanding character of this section is the Wild Horse, which consists of the skull of a real horse, or a wooden horse's head, mounted on the end of a pole approximately four feet long, which the performer stoops forward to grasp. Over him is thrown a blanket or sack, so that the whole effect is of a three-legged monster, which can move its jaws by an arrangement of strings. The 'animal' can also drink a bottle of beer, swallow fire-irons and pokers, or carry a ladle with which to collect contributions. It is invariably restive, stamps and curvets, struggles with the Driver and makes a point of sitting on the knees of the prettiest girls. Meanwhile, the Driver is delivering lines which are intended to extract practical sympathy from the audience: the horse has seen better days, has done and seen impossible things, as described in lines derived from the fourteenth century anti-monastic satire *The Land of Cockayne*, and furthermore, is used to drag in topical allusions which the audience can appreciate.

Although all Cheshire plays are usually described as Souling Plays, implying their time of appearance and the inclusion of the Horse, the map shows that such plays were confined mainly to north and central Cheshire, the purely agricultural area. As a character in the Play the Horse is unknown on the county borders, on the Wirral or in the industrial areas, and it is difficult to establish now whether he really belongs to the ceremony or whether he was an addition. Ormerod, 1818, does not include him as a character at Sandbach, but Crossley, 1949, writing of the same place, does, so that here at least he may have been a late addition. An Old Horse ceremony without dramatic action formerly existed in Derbyshire and Nottinghamshire: in this, the performers took round a skull as in Cheshire, used some of the Driver's lines from the Cheshire actions and sang the song 'Poor Old Horse' to extract contributions. On the evidence of Continental examples, the Roumanian Calusari, (the word 'Calusari' means 'Little Horses'), and the La Soule Horse and Play, one might reasonably guess that the Cheshire Plays have, for some unknown reason, retained a character lost elsewhere. The Horses found in the East Midlands Wooing Plays are perhaps nearer to the Cheshire characters in purpose than anything else, though the latter are silent like the various Doctor's horses found in other Hero-Combat examples. The latter do not seem to belong to the Cheshire category but are probably late rationalisations of a country doctor making his rounds on horseback before cars came into common use.

Outside the Play-cum-Horse area of central and north Cheshire, texts are typical of Hero-Combat actions elsewhere. In the north-east of the county at Stockport and Stalybridge, the performances took place at Easter and were dependent on the printed chapbook texts formerly prevalent in south Lancashire and the western West Riding. In the south-east, the plays seem to have been Christmas performances with nothing exceptional of note, though Ormerod's version is so literary as to make one suspect that this too has been influenced by an early chapbook. The comment by Green, 1859, on the Knutsford example, that it was like Ormerod's Cheshire version, may mean that here too, was a literary text, or that his memory of the *action* was that it was the same. A similar comment applies to the Burwardsley ceremony. On the Wirral peninsula, the actions at

Frankby, Neston and Bromborough appear so diverse that no accurate summary is possible. At Frankby the performance was at Christmas, at Neston at Easter, and although the basic actions were the same, no useful judgment can be formed as to why two almost adjacent villages should favour a different time of ceremonial appearance. Of Bromborough's silent performance one can say nothing more than that insufficient detail is known to allow any comment, beyond noting that actions everywhere probably had their origin in some form of mime.

In one respect however, all performances were alike; the disguise had dwindled to dressing up in character. The convention of dressing the champions in military uniforms seems fairly common, as does Dairy Doubt's long shirt tail. The Alderley costumes are possibly the most unusual, but even here the probability is that they were determined by availability. It was usual for the Horse's Driver to appear in hunting dress or groom's clothes. Despite the modern approach to the disguise, an essential part of the ceremony, there was an attempt to preserve the anonymity of the performers, perhaps best seen in the Old Woman's veil. Beezebub always carried his frying pan and club, though at Antrobus the club became a clog. This seems meaningless unless 'clog' was a misunderstanding of 'clod' (of earth), which in turn had been misheard for 'club' as the play was handed down orally.

If preservation of anonymity were not enough to maintain the 'luck', there is other evidence that essentially this is what the gangs set out to bring, even if time had obscured this motive from the performers. The practice of groups who met, fighting to capture the other's Horse's skull and with it the 'luck', is well known in the county. The ceremony of burying the skull after the performances may be a relic of preserving the 'luck' for the twelve months before it could be brought out again. At Lymm, the performers were said to have refused to take a collection because they were out to spread 'luck', not to collect it. This statement was made by a person with no knowledge of the background of the actions as a whole, but who only knew the ceremony in his own area.

As dispensers of 'luck' the gangs seem to have adopted the usual pattern of lawlessness. The account from Weaverham which says that

parents were reluctant to permit their children to either watch performances or follow them, is probably true of a wider area. Why the Timbersbrook performances were not considered suitable for the female members of the family is not clear: whether it was on account of crude dialogue or behaviour, or whether the ceremony was not considered 'proper', the informant could not remember. Information from Antrobus in 1949 was that there were two texts, one of which was for polite society and the other for a less particular audience. Conversely, at Weaverham in 1888 the gang were invited into the kitchen so that the maids could look at them, and the musician played for the girls to dance whilst the performers were given beer, although the same gang was labelled lawless.

Certainly this lawlessness was a contributory factor to the decline of the ceremony, though the final blow came when men did not return from the 1914-18 War and the gangs could not be re-established. It was only when outside interest was awakened that performances began again and still continue. The map shows all the known locations where the Play existed; possibly there are others unknown to the editor. This booklet is an attempt to place on record all the information at present available for the county: should readers know of more, he would be glad to hear so that records can be kept up-to-date. To maintain a distinction, the various play locations are separated according to their time of appearance: in some instances a reasonable guess could be made when this was, but, apart from assuming that a 'Souling Play' was performed at a particular season of the year, it has been preferred to maintain indeterminate examples separately. The Alderley example is particularly troublesome; although all the evidence points to All Souls, there is no doubt that performances were given at Christmas. Whether this was done for convenience towards the end of its active life so that it could appear on the occasion of the tenants' ball on the Stanley estate, or whether it had always been so, is not clear. On the evidence therefore, it has had to be included in the Christmas Play section. The overall seasonal distinction makes it clear that the ceremony in Cheshire was diverse and not confined to Souling Plays as is generally believed, though most belong to this unique form of the Hero-Combat action.

Souling Plays

These were performed on or about October 31st., All Souls' Eve. The performances, although similar in action to Hero-Combat versions everywhere, occur at the beginning of the old-style winter months, during which all these dramatic ceremonies were performed. Although a few examples elsewhere became attached to November 5th celebrations, and were used to raise funds for a bonfire, this does not seem to have been the reason for the early seasonal appearance of the Play in Cheshire.

ANTROBUS

SJ6581

Text and other details collected by Alex Helm from Mr J.S.Sutton, 1949. Song recorded by Mr Tony Foxworthy, 1967.

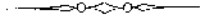
The Antrobus gang continued the custom up to the outbreak of the first World War when some of the men were killed. There was a gap in the existence of the team from then until the late 1920's when performances were resumed with the help of the late Major A. W.Boyd, and were still continuing in 1967. Mr Sutton claimed that his version was the 'pure' one, though he admitted that there was a lot of '*ad libbing*,' particularly by the Doctor, Beelzebub and the Driver. Two versions collected by Major Boyd follow the main outline of the text below and have lines not given by Mr Sutton. Where these are included they are shown in *italic*, but only major differences are noted. Minor ones, transposition of words, alternative words, etc., are ignored since they are obviously the result of different recollections.

According to Mr Sutton, the Doctor wore an alarm clock on his wrist whilst Beelzebub was dressed more or less on the popular idea of a poacher. The horse's head was found in the loft of a local pub; the man who was the Horse often used to decorate his heels with rushes, was covered with a horse blanket and had a kicking ribbon* on his tail. For the 1949 performance the costume was as follows:

Letter In	Evening dress, top hat, cane.
King George	Red tunic, white trousers, wooden sword, peaked cap with National Fire Service badge.
Black Prince	German uniform, spiked helmet, black face, wooden sword, National Fire Service badge.

* A kicking ribbon is probably a kicking strap, a device used to hobble cows at milking time to prevent them knocking over the milking pail.

Derry Doubt Small boy, dirtied face, scarf round neck, shirt tail out.
 Mary Woman's dress, no veil.
 Beelzebub Horned hat, clog on shoulder, frying pan in hand, blacked face, torn trousers, knee boots.
 Doctor Morning suit, beard and moustache. 'Medical' kit - stethoscope, alarm clock, hammer, knife, (which he sharpened on a whet stone).
 Dick's Leader Hunting dress, charcoaled moustache.
 Dick Skull painted black, horse brasses hanging from neck, bell on head, sack over body.



$\text{♩} = 110$ throughout

1. Here come one, two, three joll-y good hearty lads and we're
 all in one mind, For this night we've come a -
 soul-ing good nat - ure to find, For this night we've come a -
 soul-ing as it doth ap - pea - r, And it's all that we are
 soul ing for is your ale and strong beer.

2. And the next that steps up is Lord Nel - son you
 see, With a bunch of blue rib - bon tied
 down to his knee; And the star on his bos - om like
 sil - ver doth shi - ne, And I hope you will re -
 me - m - ber that it's soul cak - ing time.

And the next that steps up is a miser you see,
 He wears his old rags to every degree;
 And when he does sell them, he sells them so dear
 That no-one will buy them until this time next year.

Letter In knocks on door and enters house or inn

Letter In

Now ladies and gentlemen, light a fire and strike a light,
 For in this house there's going to be a dreadful fight
 Between King George and the Black Prince,
 And I hope King George will win.
 Whether he wins, loses, fights or falls,
 We'll do our best to please you all.

Exit

King George

In comes I, the champion bold,
I've won £10,000 in gold,
'Twas I who fought the fire dragon and brought him to the slaughter,
And by these means I won the King of Egypt's daughter.
I've travelled the whole world round and round,
But never a man of my equal found.
*I almost slew a giant dead
And with my broad sword cut off his head.*
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in, Black Prince and clear the way.

Black Prince

In comes I, Black Prince of Paradise, born of high renown,
I've come to take King George's life and courage down,
If that be he who standeth there, who slew my master's son and heir
If that be he of royal blood,
I'll make it flow like Noah's flood.

King George

Ah! Ah! Mind what thou sayest.

Black Prince

What I say, I mean.

King George

Stand back, thou black Morocco dog! or by my sword thou'll die.
I'll pierce thy body full of holes and make thy buttons fly.

Black Prince

How canst thou make my body full of holes and make my buttons fly?
When my body is made of iron,
My fingers and toes of double joints,
I challenge thee to yield!
Prepare!

They fight and Black Prince falls dead. Enter Mary

Mary

Oh! King George! What hast thou done?
Thou's killed and slain my only son, my only heir,
See how he lies dead and bleeding there!

King George

Well, Mary, he challenged me to fight,
Better to fight than to die.
Ten pounds for a doctor, five for a quack!
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in Quack Doctor and clear the way.

Enter Quack Doctor

Quack Doctor

In comes I, who never cometh yet,
The best quack doctor you can get.
Here I come from the continent to cure this man King George has
slain.

Mary

How camest thou to be a doctor?

Doctor

By my travels.

Mary

And where hast thou travelled?

Doctor

*Icaly, Picaly, France and Spain,
Three times out to the West Indies
And back to old England to cure disease again.*

Mary

And what disease canst thou cure?

Doctor

All sorts.

Mary

And what's all sorts?

Quack Doctor

All sorts; the Hump, the Grump, the Ger, the Gout,
The pain within and the pain without.

In my bag I've got spectacles to blind humble bees, crutches for lame mice, plasters for broken backed earwigs. I've pills and I've powders for all kinds of aches, including headache, earache, also cold shakes. I've lotions and I've motions, also some fine notions that have carried my fame far wide over five oceans.

Mary

And what are thy fees to cure my son?

Doctor

Five pounds, Mary, but you being a decent woman, I'll only charge you ten.

Mary

Well, cure him!

Doctor (to Black Prince)

Here, John, take three sips from this bottle down thy thrittle throttle
Now arise and fight thy battle.

Mary

Thou silly man, as green as grass, the dead man never stirs.

Quack Doctor

Oh, Mary, I quite forgot. I took the right bottle off the wrong cork.
I have another little bottle here in my inside? - no, outside? - somewhere round the backside pocket, which will soon bring him to life again.

Stoops and gives another drink. Black Prince stirs.

Black Prince

Oh! my back!

Mary

What ails thy back, my son?

Black Prince

My back is broken,
My heart is confounded,

Knocked out of seven centuries into fourteen score,
Which has never been known in Old England before.

Quack Doctor

Here, John, take three drops of this down thy thrittle throttle.
Now arise and fight thy battle.

King George and Black Prince fight again. Enter Letter In

Letter In

Lay down your swords and rest
For peace and quietness is the best.
*He who fights and runs away
Lives to fight another day.*
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in, Derry Doubt, and clear the way.

Derry Doubt dances in

Derry Doubt

In comes little Derry Doubt,
With my shirt lap hanging out,
Five yards in and five yards out -
Out goes little Derry Doubt.

Dances in and out

If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in, Beelzebub, and clear the way.

Beelzebub

In comes Be-i-l-ze-bub,
On my shoulder I carry my club,
In my hands a dripping pan,
And I reckon myself a jolly old man.
With a rin-tin-tin, I sup more drink,
I'll drink a pot dry with any man.
I've just done six months in gaol for making a whip crack out of a
mouse's tail.

*Early Monday morning, late on Saturday night,
I saw a 10,000 miles away a house just out of sight.
The doors projected backwards, the front was at the back.*

*It stood alone between two more and the walls was whitewashed black.
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in, Wild Horse and clear the way.*

Enter Wild Horse and Driver

Driver

*In comes Dick and all his men,
He's come to see you once again.
He was once alive, but now he's dead,
He's nothing but a poor old horse's head.
Stand around Dick, and show yourself!
Now, ladies and gentleman, just view around,
See whether you've seen a better horse on any ground.
He's double ribbed, sure footed, and a splendid horse in any gears.
And ride him if you can!
He's travelled high, he's travelled low,
He's travelled all through frost and snow,
He's travelled the land of Ikkerty Pikkerty,
Where there's neither land nor city;
Houses thatched with pancakes,
Walls built with penny loaves,
Pig puddings for bell ropes, and black puddings growing on apple trees;
Little pigs running about with knives and forks in their backs,
Crying out, 'Who'll eat me?'
He's a very fine horse, he's of a very fine mould,
We've got to keep him clothed to save him from the cold.
If you look down this horse's mouth, you'll see holes in his socks.
This horse was bred in Seven Oaks,
The finest horse e'er fed on oats;
He's won the Derby and the Oaks,
And now he pulls an old milk-float.
But that's not all this horse's history!
Oh no! He's as many rinkles and jinkles in his head as there are
furrows in an acre of new ploughed land. His ears are made out of
a lady's pocket book, his tongue from an old box hat, and his tail
from a tachin end.**

** The meaning of this is not clear.*

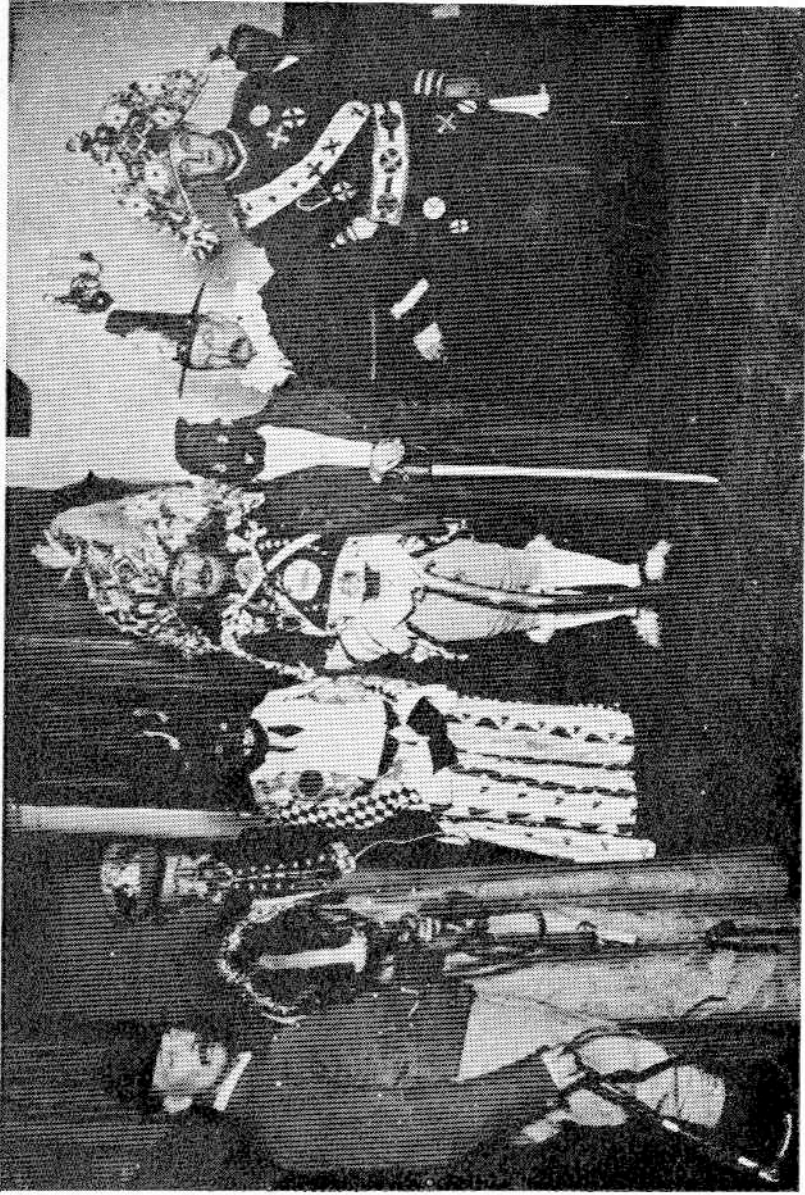


Plate 1 The Alderley Edge performers circa 1937

Left to right: The Groom, Horse (Young Ball), Col. Slasher, Beelzebub, St. George, Prince Paradise, Doctor, Enterer in

Stand round, Dick!

As I was going round Frandley Brow the other day, this horse broke loose, ran into a lady's parlour, broke all the glass wheelbarrows, wooden fire-irons, &c. Now I ask you all to open your hearts to buy Dick a new sprung cart. Not one for him to pull, oh dear, no! but for him to ride in. If you don't believe these words I say, ask those chaps outside there. They're better liars than I am.

Song (Tune - Flanagan's Band)

Oh! for now our play is ended and we can no longer stay,

But with your kind permission, we will call another day, &c.

(Finishes) It's a credit to old England and the boys of the Antrobus gang.

ASTBURY

SJ8461

Frederici, 1867, gave three verses of a 'souling song', adding that the last stanza, 'Step down into your cellar' was sung also by the guisers in the parishes of Astbury, Rode and Lawton at Christmas. A correspondent to Comber *et al.*, (1961), confirmed that the 'geysers Men' went round the parish on the evening of November 2nd, one dressed as Lord Nelson, another as a soldier and another as a doctor. After a fight, the doctor brought the supposed dead man to life again. No text was given to illustrate the action and the informant died before further details could be obtained, but it is clear that some form of dramatic action was involved.

BUNBURY

SJ5758

Tunstall, 1931, quoted a fragment of a play text which included an Old Woman, Knight George who was killed by the Turkish Champion, Doctor, Beelzebub, Little Jerry Doubt and a Dobby Horse with Driver. Although the book was fictional, Miss Tunstall told the editor in 1949 that she had based her account on scraps of information gathered from elderly residents of Bunbury. The dramatic passages given are identical with lines in the Halton version, (q.v.)

COMBERBACH

SJ6477

The text of this play was first published by Boyd, 1929, who noted that it had been performed since 1918 and still continued. The text

follows that of Antrobus, (q.v.)

FRODSHAM

SJ5177

Old performers helped to revive this action in 1912 and the text was published by Myres, 1932. A version collected by the editor in 1949 was substantially the same, but the Horse had become 'King Dick' instead of 'Dick' and had only one Driver instead of the two in Dr Myres' version. Other characters were Open the Doors, King George who killed the Turkish Champion, Old Woman, Doctor (John Brown), Big Bellzie Bob, Dairy Doubt and Little Box.

GREAT BUDWORTH

SJ6677

The words of the song were collected in 1949 by the editor from Mr A.E.Foster who had learned them from his father, but the tune could not be remembered.

We are two or three good hearty lads and we are all in one mind,
This night we come a-souling good nature to find,
Good nature to find as it would appear,
And it's all that we soul for is your money and strong beer.

Your lanes are very dirty and your meadows blow cold,
And to try your good nature, this night we make bold;
And to try your good nature as it does appear,
For it's all that we soul for is your money and strong beer.

Then turn out all ye young men and your maidens also,
And if you be right willing, with us you may go.
We will bring safe back again, you've no need to fear,
For it's all that we soul for is your money and strong beer.

Then the next that steps up is Lord Nelson you'll see,
He's a bunch of blue ribbon right down to his knee;
He's a star on his bosom like silver doth shine,
For it's all that we soul for is your money and strong beer.

One of the characters was the Horse and Mr Foster remembered that the action concluded with the singing of unrelated songs, one of which was 'Murphy and his Donkey'. Mr Foster senior's recollections dated from *circa* 1880 and he said that performances continued until the Great War. In 1957 Major Boyd told the editor the play had been re-

vived the year before.

GULDEN SUTTON

SJ4568

The text and music for the introductory song were given by Cathcart-Smith, 1947. The characters included Open Doors, King George who killed the Turkish Knight, Martha, Doctor Brown, Beelzebub, Paddywhack, Dairydoubt, Dick (the Wild Horse) and his Leader. The closing song, a variant of the pace-egging song, introduced the Sailor, Lady, Doctor and Miser. Miss Cathcart-Smith added to these details in letters to the editor in 1949 and said that performances were discontinued *circa* 1927, but up till then she had seen it performed annually all her life. It was always acted by men or boys and there were three different performances on November 1st by three separate companies. Costume details were as follows:

King George	Red coat, helmet (like a policeman's in shape)
Turkish Knight	Military uniform
Martha	Long skirt, hat with veil, black kid gloves
Dr Brown	Black coat, top hat if available
Miser	Rags
Dick	Two blocks of wood hinged at one end. Outside painted black or a dark colour with eyes painted on. Inside 'mouth' painted bright red with large teeth at top and bottom. Mounted on a stick.
Others	See illustration on title page.

Music supplied by accordion or concertina.

HALTON

SJ5381

A text published by Holland, 1886, included an Old Woman, Knight George who killed the Turkish Champion, Doctor, Belzebub, Jerry Doubt, the Horse and Driver. The account added that in the 1850's the text was longer but gave no indication in what way. Boyd, 1951, gave two photographs of the gang in the 1880's.

HIGHER WHITLEY

SJ6180

No text has survived from here, but the horse's skull used is still preserved in the Manchester Museum. A photograph of this was given by Hole, 1940. Boyd, 1951, said that this skull was used over fifty years

ago and was buried after the performances and a mock funeral service held over it.

HUXLEY

SJ5161

Collected by Brian Ballinger from Bill Gresty, (72), Newtown, Tattenhall, September 21st, 1958

Costume

Beelzebub Carried a frying pan, knocking it with a stick. Wore a kilt. Black face.

Tosspot Had a pigtail and a beard of cow's tail ends. Black face.

King George and the Violent Soldier

Uniforms of Cheshire Yeomanry. Wooden swords.

Old Woman Woman's clothes, blouse, &c.

Doctor Top hat and spectacles.

Paddywhack and Violent Soldier also had black faces. Horse's head was made of wood, but the horse was discontinued in the last few years of the Play's existence. When it appeared it was introduced between Paddywhack and Tosspot. Performances ended *circa* 1913 and the gang went round Huxley, Tattenhall and Weaverton. The music for the songs was not collected, but a melodeon provided the accompaniment.

Song

Here we are one, two, three hearty lads, and we're all in one mind.

We have come a-souling good nature to find,

We have come a-souling as it does appear,

And it's all that we are souling for is your ale and strong beer.

For your lanes they are dirty and your meadows grow cold.

It's to find your good nature this night we make bold.

To try your good nature as it does appear,

And it's all we are souling for is your ale and good beer.

Dear master, dear mistress, do not tarry or spin,

But look for a jug to put some beer in.

And when we have got it, how soon we will see,

When we have drunk it, how merry we will be.

Step down in your cellars and there you will find
Both ale, rum, gin and brandy and the best of good wine.
And if you will draw us one jug of your beer
We'll come no more souling until this time next year.

All

Please open the doors and let all our merry actors in,
For we are all in favour for King George to win.
Whether he sits, stands, rise or fall,
We'll do our best to please you all.
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in Big Head and clear the way.

Big Head

In comes I that never came yet,
With my big head and little wit.
Although my wits they be so small,
I'll do my best to please you all.
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in King George and clear the way.

King George

In comes I, King George, that great and noble man of old.
With my sword and spear I won £10,000 in gold.
'Twas I who fought the fiery dragon
And brought him to the altar;
And on that very same day I won the King of Egypt's daughter.
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in Violent Soldier and clear the way.

Violent Soldier

In comes I, the Violent Soldier,
Slasher is my name.
Sword and buckle by my side,
I hope to win this game.

King George

What art thou but a silly lad?

Violent Soldier

A Turkish Knight, come from Turkey land to fight.
I'll fight thee, King George,
King George, thou man of courage bold.
If thy blood be too hot
I'll quickly fetch it cold.

King George

This battle shall prepare.

They cross swords, dig in ribs, falls to ground.

Old Woman

King George, King George, what hast thou done?
Thou hast killed and slain my only son,
My only son, my only heir,
See how he lies bleeding there!

King George

He challenged me to fight and why should I deny?
I knew that in this battle either he or I would surely have to die.

Old Woman

£10, £10 for a doctor!
Is there never a doctor to be found?

Doctor

Yes! Yes! In comes I, Doctor Brown,
The cleverest doctor in the town.

Old Woman

How came you to be a doctor?

Doctor

By me travels.

Old Woman

Where have you travelled?

Doctor

Through hickity, pickity, all Germany and Spain,
To cure this dead man that lies here slain.

Old Woman

Can you cure my son?

Doctor

I'll try my very goodest.

I have in my inside, outside, frontside, backside, topside, middle-side, a bottle, which my Aunt Jane sent me from Spain, to cure this dead man that lies here slain.

Here, Jack, take three drops out of this nip nop,

And let it run down thy yip yop.

Then rise and fight thee battle.

Violent Soldier

Oh! my back!

Old Woman

What ails thy back, my son?

Violent Soldier

My back is wounded, my heart is confounded.

He knocked me out of my seven senses into four score and ten,

What never was done in Old England before,

And I hope will never be done again.

If you don't believe these words I say,

Step in Beelzebub and clear the way.

Beelzebub

In comes I, Beelzebub,

On my shoulder I carry a club,

In my hand a frying pan to fry the ham and eggs in.

One day I thought myself a jolly old man,

I courted lasses plenty,

One by one and two by two,

But none so fair as smiling Nancy.

If you don't believe these words I say,

Step in Paddywhack and clear the way.

Paddywhack

In comes I Paddywhack, with Charlie on my back.

Lightweight from Dover,

Pikel steel whirler from Over,

Fought forty-five rounds in a dusthole
And came out without never a scratch.
I'm expected to make spectacles for broken backed ducks, crutches
for blind spiders,
What do you think of me, man?
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in Tossspot and clear the way.

Tossspot enters wagging his tail

All sing

The next to come in is old Tossspot you see,
He's a valiant old man in every degree;
He's a valiant old man and he wears a pig's tail,
And all he delights in is drinking strong ale.
Fol-de-de-diddle um, fol-de-de-de,
Fol-de-diddle um fol de.

KNUTSFORD

SJ7578

Green, 1859, gave a description of a ceremony here based on that given by Ormerod (see under Sandbach), because it coincided completely with his own recollections of performances given by farm servants in the area. Crossley, 1949, referring to the early twentieth century, said that he himself took part in a play, but did not specify where beyond saying that he lived in Knutsford in his youth. In this team St George was the victor and wore a soldier's tunic, whilst the Doctor carried a black bag. There was also a horse (Old Hob).

LOWER WHITLEY

SJ6179

About 1920 Major Boyd collected a text here which was almost identical with that from Antrobus (*q.v.*). The characters included an unnamed Presenter, King George who killed the Black Prince of Paradise, an Old Woman (Mary), Doctor (John Brown), Beelzibub and the Wild Horse.

LYMM

SJ6887

Julius, 1850, referred to a horse's head ceremony which took place at Lynn (*sic*) 'for a week or ten days before the fifth of November', but did not mention a play. A text fragment was given to the editor by Mr

James Thomason of Lymm in 1950:

Here I come Beelzebub,
And on my shoulders I carry a club
And in my hand a dripping pan,
And think myself a jolly old man.

Stand back thou black Morocco Doll,
Or I'll make thy buttons fly

Interrupted by the Doctor who would say his piece.

Mr Thomason remembered two verses of the song, but was not sure if the second given below was the third or fourth:

Here come one, two, three hearty lads who are all of one mind,
This night we come a-souling good nature to find,
For it's all that we are souling for it's the time of the year.

God bless the master of this house and the mistress also,
And the dear little children that stand round your door,
For it's all that we are souling for it's the time of the year.

The horse's skull was either imitation or real, though the latter was preferred. It had an arrangement of strings and wires to make it lift its head ('rare up'), or turn its head and open and shut its jaws. There was no collection at the end of the performance.

MIDDLEWICH

SJ7066

Holland, 1886, gave the text of a souling song implying that it was the invariable accompaniment of a play. The words are much the same as at Tarvin, and Holland said the tune was like the one he recalled at Mobberley. He printed this tune, which is much the same as the Alderley Edge one, (q.v.).

MOBBERLEY

SJ7879

The words of the souling song here were very like the Middlewich version according to Holland, 1886, who added that when he was a boy the play was much longer. Astle, (1910), gave the full text of the song and a fragment of text, mentioning a skeleton horse's head.

RUDHEATH

SJ7470

The full text was given by Helm, 1965, where the characters were

King George who killed the Black Prince of Paradise, Mary, Doctor (John Brown), Beelzebub, Dairy Doubt, Wild Horse and Driver. These were dressed according to character except Beelzebub and Dairydoubt, who wore their jackets inside out. All, save King George, had black faces.

SANDBACH

SJ7560

This version is unlike any other Cheshire text in dialogue though the basic action is the same. It was first printed in fragmentary form by Ormerod, 1818, and repeated in the second edition, Helsby, 1882. Ormerod found it 'too barbarous' to print in full, but said it was like one loaned to him by Captain Grose which was performed on the Wales/Cheshire border, and similar to one printed in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1788. The MS of the Sandbach play still exists among Ormerod's papers, but examination shows that any similarities with the Newcastle version were confined to the action, the text and characters having little resemblance. The Wales/Cheshire border example has not so far been found. The Sandbach text is important since it is one of the earliest complete ones known to exist: its characters included the First and Second Captains, St George who killed Slasher, the King who lamented the death of the latter, his son; Sir Guy, the Doctor, and the Fool, who declares he is not the Prince of Beelzebub, but declaims the normal Beelzebub lines. The text is very literary and appears to have been subject to some 'improvement'. Crossley, 1949, mentioned a Play which was performed on All Souls' Eve and included a horse. Slasher was the fallen champion, but otherwise there was no connection with the text given by Ormerod.

SANDIWAY

SJ6070

This play was extant in 1888 but it is not certain whether this was its final appearance. The fragment below was collected by the editor in 1949, from Mr F.Prince, a former performer, Mr Prince said that practices were held 'a week before hounds from Cheshire kennels' and performances were given on the first Monday in November. He could not remember the names of the characters save that the horse was called 'Dick'. After the performances the gang went to the back kitchens for the maids to look at them, and whilst the performers drank beer, their musician played for the maids to dance.

Mr Prince remembered the following:

Song (tune not recalled)

Here's two or three good hearty lads, we are all in one mind,
This night we come a-souling good nature to find;
This night we come a-souling as it does appear,
And all that we are souling for is your ale and strong beer.

Turn out all your young men and your maidens also,
And if they are willing, with us they can go,
We'll bring them safe back as it does appear,
And all that we are souling for is your ale and strong beer.

The first that steps up is Lord Nelson you see,
With a bunch of blue ribbons right down to his knees,
He's a star on his breast like silver it shines,
And I hope you'll remember it's soul-caking time.

And the next that steps up is a Lady so fine,
With a red hat and feather, she looks very fine,
And all her delight is in drinking red wine.

Step down in your cellar and see what you find,
There's ale, rum and brandy and the best of all wine;
And if you will draw us one jug of strong beer,
We come no more a-souling until another year.
Fol the day, fol the day, fol the diddle I do day.

Performers open to let Dick come in

Ladies and gentlemen, up comes Dick and all his men,
He's come to see you once again.
He once was alive, but now he's dead,
And for his living he has to beg.
This horse has travelled high and low,
And was never known to lose one drop of sweat for the last seven
years.

This horse had a bad fall;
He came down Luddington Hill and he kicked the front back side
of the cart out, so you see he is hurt past repair.
Now, Dick, make your obedience to the Ladies and Gentlemen.

Whoa, boy, steady!

SEVEN OAKS

SJ6478

Boyd, 1939, noted that the play had come to life again here 'in the last four or five years' - i.e. circa 1935. It appeared to be similar to Antrobus and Comberbach (q.v.), but it has so far not been possible to find details of performances before 1935.

TARVIN

SJ4867

The version given by Boyd, 1929, was written down circa 1891 by a sixteen year old performer and included Open-the-Door, Beelzebub, King George who killed the British Champion, the Champion's Mother, Dr Paul Pry, Bighead, the Wild Horse ('Dick'), and his Owner.

TATTENHALL

SJ4858

Mr Joseph Willis, in describing the Utkinton play, said that the Tattenhall gang used to perform a play circa 1900 which was the same as the Guilden Sutton version. By context, this must have been a souling play.

TIMBERSBROOK

SJ8962

Mrs E.Cliffe (aged 74) told the editor in 1955 of soulcakers who came to her parents' farm. She remembered all the female members of the house being sent upstairs whilst the performance took place. She used to know the text through hearing her brothers repeat it, but has forgotten it.

UTKINTON

SJ5564

Boyd, 1939, referred to the play coming to life again here in 1939 after dying out during the Great War, but he may have been referring to a revival after a performance organised by a local schoolmaster. Dr N.Peacock collected the following version in 1963 from Mr Joseph H.Willis, a former resident, who also said that the gangs in his neighbourhood always fought when they met.

Loud knocking on the door, followed by

Open your doors and let our many actors in.

We have not come to beg,

We have not come to steal,
But have come to earn our daily bread.
If you cannot believe these words we say,
Step up King George and clear the way.

Here would be followed a stepping round of the hobby horse with a loud gnashing of its teeth, whereupon the players would be admitted, headed by the horse's head, to give the performance.

In comes Dick and all his men,
Come to see you once again,
He was once alive but now is dead,
He is nothing but a poor old horse's head.

Enter King George, steps into the circle of players
In steps I King George, a great and noble man of old,
With my broad spear and sword, I won ten thousand pounds in gold.
And that very self-same day, I killed the King of Egypt's daughter
And all the men that brought her.

Here Black Prince of Paradise steps in
In steps I, Black Prince of Paradise, born of great renown.
So I will take thy kingly life and cut thee to the ground.
Step in, King George, thou man of courage bold,
If thy blood be hot, I will quickly make it cold.

Here followed a flourish of swords and the Black Prince fell to the ground.

Enter the Old Woman.

Old Woman
King George, King George, what hast thou done?
Thou hast killed and slain my only son!
My only son and heir,
How canst thou bear to see him lying bleeding there?

King George
Why he challenged me out to fight,
Why should I deny?

Old Woman
Quick! Is there a doctor to be found?

Quack Doctor

In steps I, Doctor Brown,
The best Quack Doctor in this town.

From the folds of his cloak he produces an enormous bottle.

Here, Jack, open thy throttle
And take three drops out of this bottle
And if thou are not quite dead
Rise up and fight this battle.

Here enters Beelzebub.

Beelzebub

In steps I, Beelzebub,
In me hand I carries a club,
On me head a frying pan,
And I thinks myself a very good mon.

More prouncing (sic) round of the Horse's head.

The Driver

Me and this old Horse was coming down Luddington Hill,
He fell and broke one shaft and one leg,
And for his living he has to beg;
And what he gets, it is but small,
But he does his best to please you all.
So, Ladies and Gentlemen, open your hearts,
And give poor old Dick something for a new cart.

Song

God bless the master of this house and the mistress also,
And all the little children that round the table go:
Likewise your men and maidens, your cattle and your store
And all that lies within your gates we wish you ten times more.
We wish you ten times more with apples and strong beer,
For we'll come no more a-souling until this time next year.

An informant gave Mr Willis the following as the normal ending, but Mr Willis did not know it himself:

There was an old farmer in Rushton did dwell,
His name was Sam Small, ye all know him well.

He dealt in bad bacon, bad butter and eggs,

And he had an old sow that had run off its legs.

He sends for the butcher to put her in salt,

The Butcher said 'Mester, she ain't worth a groat!'

The Mester said, 'Kill her, afore who dies,

She will do very well to put in the men's pies.'

Then in comes the Waggoner in a deuce of a rage.

'Come Mester, come Mester, come pay me my wage!

Good luck to your horses, good luck to your plough!

And I shanner come back till thou's eaten the old sow.'

Then in comes the Cowman in a deuce of a rage.

'Come Mester, come Mester, come pay me my wage!

Good luck to your bucket, your shovel and brush!

And I'll never come back till thou's eaten old Cush!'

Then in comes the Milk Lad in a blazing old rage.

'Come Mester, come Mester, come pay me my wage!

Good luck to your horse, your tank and gig!

And I shanner come back till thou's eaten the old pig!'

Then in comes the Servant Wench in a terrible rage.

'Come Mistress, come Mistress, come pay me my wage!

Good luck to your floor cloth, your bucket and mop!

And I shanner come back till thou's eaten all pot!'

To ra la To ra la, and that is the tale of the Farmer's Old Sow.

WARBURTON

SJ6989

The performance here was known as soul-appling because the performers collected apples. Mr James Thomason collected the text in 1950 but without the music for the song. The horse's skull belonging to this gang was stolen and was replaced by another from a knacker's yard in Warrington. This was boiled in the boiler at the Saracen's Head to strip off the flesh, after which it was reassembled and the teeth glued in. The Warburton people alleged that the Lymm gang was responsible for the theft since the two villages were always rivals, but the thieves were never caught. The gang went round for four nights ending on November 5th, finishing with a supper at the pub-

lic house. Some of the costumes worn by the players were hired, and usually the disguise was as follows:

Enterer	Very large white blouse stuffed with hay to make him look like a barrel. His hat was the bottom half of a muff box with a small brim trimmed with red ribbon. Large boots with leggings. Wig, false moustache. Black face. Carried large stick with a knob.
King George	Red coat trimmed with gold braid, navy blue trousers with red stripe. Busby on his head and sword at his side.
Turkish Champion	Navy blue military suit trimmed with white braid. White stripe down trousers. Round box hat with white braid. Face painted red. Sword at his side.
Old Woman	Blouse and skirt, large old-fashioned shawl and bonnet with veil.
Doctor	Frock coat, tall hat, glasses and false moustache.
Beelzebub	Old overcoat with leather belt. Old hard hat. Black face. Wig and moustache. Frying pan in his hand and a club over his shoulder.
Driver	Old coat and cap. Wig and false moustache.
The Horse	Decorated with brasses and driven with a brass check chain.
Some	Carried tambourines and concertinas.

The text below is reproduced exactly as given, save for the names of the characters speaking which are shown in brackets where they were not in the original MS.

Song

Here comes one, two, three hearty lads and we're all in one mind,
This night we come a-souling good nature to find,
This night we come a-souling as it does appear,
And all that we're souling for is your ale and strong beer.
Fol-de-diddle-l-doh, fol-de-diddle-dee.

(Enterer)

Please open all these doors and let all our gallant actors in, for it is in favour that King George shall win. Whether he sit, stand, fight or fall, we do our best to please you all. Room, gallants, room I do require. If you don't believe these words I say, step in King George and clear the way.

King George

In comes King George the champion bold, 'tis I that won ten thousand pounds in gold, 'tis I that fought the fiery dragon and dragged him to an altar, and by means of death and slaughter I mean to win the King of Egypt's daughter. If you don't believe these words I say, step in the Turkish Champion and clear the way.

Turkish Champion

In comes I the Turkish Champion both gallant and brave, I have come here to fight King George by money or by means. I'll cut him, I'll slash him, I'll send him off to Turkish lands to make mince-pies of. What art thou but a silly lad?

(King George)

Call me no silly lad but a brave and gallant soldier. Stand back thou black Moroccan dog, else I will make thy buttons fly with this broad sword and buckles by my side. Prepare!

Duel. Slain.

Old Woman

Oh! King George, what hast thou done? Thou hast gone and slain mine only son, mine only son.

(King George)

He boldly challenged me out to fight why should I deny, for in this great battle, either him or I would surely have to die. Is there a doctor to be found?

Doctor

I'm a doctor.

Answer

Come in doctor!

(Doctor)

In comes I John Brown, the best quack doctor in this town, I have come here to cure the man that King George has slain.

(?Old Woman)

How cam'st thou to be a doctor?

(Doctor)

By my travels.

(?Old Woman)

Where hast thou travelled?

(Doctor)

Through Hiccapicatty, Iceland and Spain, Germany and France and back again. I've seen houses thatched with pancakes high, roads paved with dumplings, black puddings growing on gooseberry trees, little pigs running about with knives and forks in their backs crying 'Who'll eat me?'

Old Woman

Can thou cure my son?

Doctor

I'll try my goodest. Here Jack, open thy throttle, take two drops out of this bottle, rise and fight the battle, the battle thou art sure to win.

Turkish Champion

Oh! my back!

Old Woman

What ails thy back, my son?

Turkish Champion

My back is broken, my head is confounded, knocked out of seven score and ten, which has never been done in England and will never be done again. If you don't believe these words I say, step in Beelzebub and clear the way.

Enter Beelzebub

In come I Beelzebub, on my shoulder I carry my club, in my hand a dripping pan, I think myself a jolly old man. With a ring ting ting

ting, I'll drink the barrel dry, Sam. I'll saddle and bridle my old black snail and make my whip of a mouse's tail. If you don't believe these words I say, step in the Wild Horse and clear the way.

The Horse

In comes Dick and all his men. He's come to see you once again. He once was alive but now he is dead, he's nothing but a Horse's head. Stand up, Dick! Poor old Dick! He's one of the finest colts travelling, good action, eye like a hawk, neck like a swan, tooth like a lady's pocket book and read it if you can. He's as many wrinkles and jinkles in his forehead as there is in an acre of well-ploughed land. Stand up, Dick! Poor old Dick! He has but one leg and for his living he's obliged to beg. What he begs for be it great or small, it has to keep poor Dick and maintain us all. Stand up Dick!

Song

And now to conclude and to finish we must,
Put your hand in your pocket and pull out your purse.
Put your hand in your pocket and feel if all's right,
If you've got nowt, farewell and goodnight.
Fol-de-diddle-l-doh, fol-de-diddle-dee.

WEAVERHAM

SJ6174

Recollections were collected by the editor in 1949 from Mr W.H. Roberts who said that by about 1890-1900 the performances had degenerated to a pub-crawl, and parents would not allow their children to either see the performance or follow the 'Horse's Head'. Mr Roberts could only remember fragments and was uncertain of the order of the action. He could not recall the music for the songs, but gave the following for the introduction:

Here come one, two, three, jolly good hearty lads and we're all in
one mind;
This night we come a-souling good nature to find.
Step down in your cellar and see what you can find;
With your ale and strong beer we hope you'll prove kind,
Yes, we hope you'll prove kind with your ale and strong beer,
And then we'll come no more a-souling till this time next year.

And the next that steps up is Lord Nelson, you'll see,
With a bunch of blue ribbon tied down to his knee.
He's a star on his breast like silver it shines
And I hope that you'll remember that it's soul-caking time.
Fol the day, fol the day, fiddle the diddle-di-do-day.

There was a fight between either the King and Beelzebub or the King and the King's Son. The Doctor's speech contained:

In steps I John Brown, the best quack doctor of this town.
I have here a bottle with me that will cure the helligrunts, belly-grunts, or the cat with the bald eye.

The Wild Horse was called Dicky Tatton, and
He once went to Germany for a load of fir trees.
He can swallow the fire irons and poker.

The action concluded with an unrelated song, 'Oh, it's nice to have a house of your own.'

King George wore a uniform and sword, King George's Son a uniform, the Groom had breeches, and Beelzebub dressed as much like a devil as possible. Lord Nelson wore a uniform and star, and the Doctor a frock coat and top hat. The horse's skull was obtained from the Cheshire kennels after the hounds had eaten the flesh. After the final song the Horse used to chase the 'farm wenchies' about the kitchen.

Maylam, 1909, gave information from Rev. Francis Long, Vicar of Weaverham, who said that the performances were still given in 1907 on November 1st and 2nd, and gave characters including Lady and Jack Tar.

DELAMERE FOREST

SJ5 7

This is an area rather than an exact location. In 1949 Mr C. Pearson of Timperley gave the following fragment of the Horse's lines and said that the soul-cakers went out every year.

Up comes Dick and all his men,
He's come to see you once again.
Once he was alive but now he's dead
And nothing but a poor old horse's head.
Come up, Dick!

The horse was unusual in having two boys for the 'body', one at

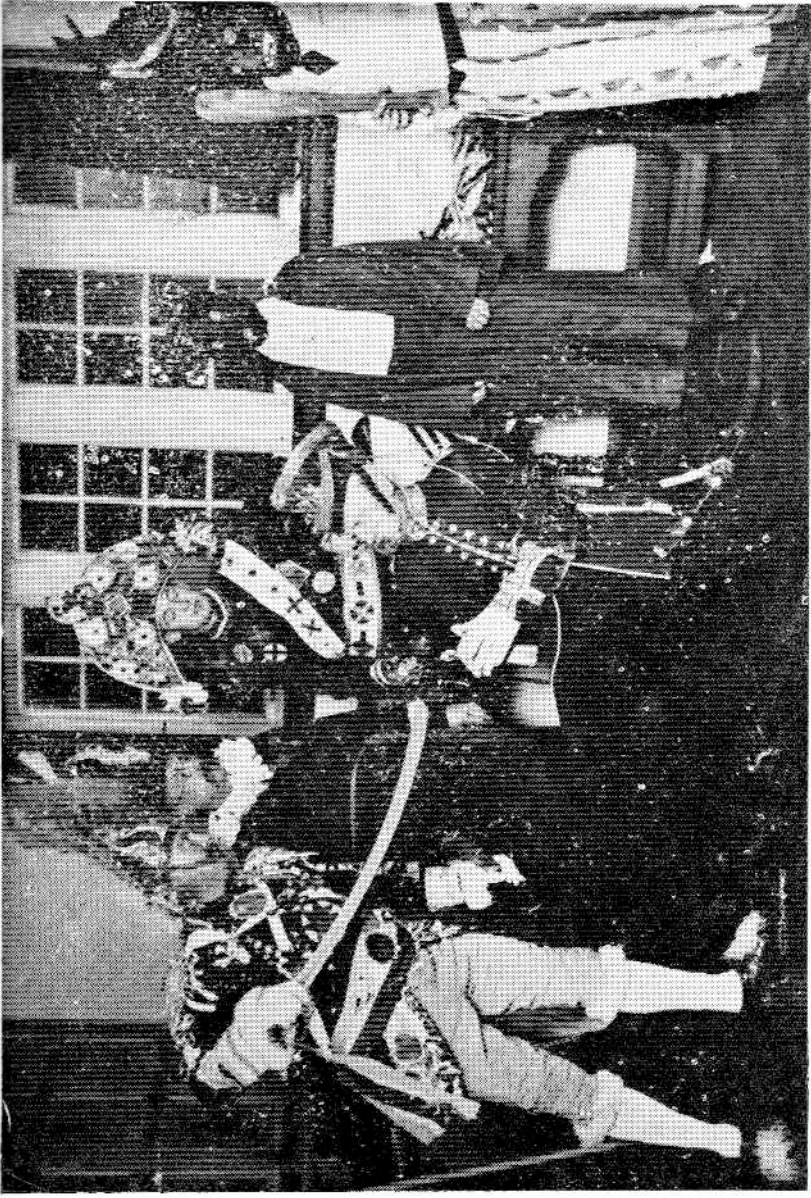


Plate 2. Alderley Edge. The Fight.

the front and one at the back. The other performers wore their coats inside out and their garments were either too big or too small. Their faces were blackened. They also carried a swede scraped out in the middle, with holes for eyes, nose and mouth, and a lighted candle inside it. He could not remember when the play was last performed.

—%83—

Christmas Plays

Dramatic actions throughout the country appear mostly in a period running from Christmas to Plough Monday. The four Cheshire actions which belong to this period occurred at Christmas, at a time when audiences might be expected to give most generously.

ALDERLEY EDGE

SJ8478

Collected by Alex S. Richardson from Alex Barber of Nether Alderley in 1955.

This play was performed regularly at Christmas and New Year up to 1937 by members of the Barber family who were tenants on the Stanley estate. It was originally performed in the farmhouses of the estate, but latterly it was presented in the tenants' hall as part of the Christmas festivities. This change in time of appearance seems to have dated from about 1900 when the play was revived after a lapse of twenty years. Soon after the 1937 performance the Stanley estate was broken up and sold, and the performances lapsed as the tenants were scattered. The costumes are shown on Plate I.

Loud banging upon the door and the Enterer In makes his appearance. He beats his sword on the floor. (When performed in farm kitchens, this used to be an exciting affair with sparks flying from the stone floor and much noise.)

Enterer In

Open the door and let us in,
We hope your favour we shall win,
We do our endeavour to please you all.
Now acting time is come and we do here appear,
The time of mirth and merriment to all spectators here.
A room, a room, a room to let us in.
We are not of the ragged sort, but some of the royal trim.
And if you don't believe me what I say,
Step in St George and clear the way.

Exit the Enterer In after thus introducing St George who struts about the room and says

I am St George, that noble champion bold,
And with my glittering sword I won five crowns of gold.

'Twas I that fought the fiery dragon
And brought him to the slaughter,
And by fair means I won fair Sheba, the King of Egypt's daughter.
But bring to me that man that there before me stand
And I'll cut him down with sword in hand.

Enter Prince Paradise

I am Prince Paradise, that Black Morocco King.
With sword and buckle by my side, through these woods I'll ring.
Through these woods I'll brave boys,
My words I will make good,
And from thy dearest body George, I'll draw thy trembling blood.

St George

What's that thou sayest?

Prince Paradise

What I say I mean.

St George

Pull out thy purse and pay.

Prince Paradise

Pull out thy sword and fight.
Satisfaction I will have before thou goes away.

They fight and Prince Paradise falls wounded.

Prince Paradise

Pardon me St George, for I am wounded sore.

St George

Yes, I'll pardon thee if thou go out and come no more.

Exit Prince Paradise

St George

I am St George, that noble knight,
Who shed his blood for England's right.
For England's right, for England's wrong,
Which makes me carry this bloody weapon.
But bring me in that man there before me stand
And I'll cut him down with sword in hand.

Slasher and St George counter march, clashing swords each time they pass each other.

Slasher

I am a valiant soldier and Slasher is my name,
With sword and buckle by my side I mean to win this game.
This game I mean to win, brave boys, and that I will make good
And from thy dearest body, George, I'll draw thy trembling blood.

St George

Oh! hasher Slasher, don't thou talk so hot,
For in this room thou knows not whom thou's got.
I'll hop thee and chop thee as small as flies,
And send thee over the seas to make mince pies.
Mince pies hot, mince pies cold,
Mince pies in the pot, nine days old.

Slasher

How can'st thou talk of hopping and chopping me,
When my head is made of iron,
My body garbed with steel,
My legs and arms be beaten brass,
No man can make me feel.

St George

If thy head be made of iron,
Thy body garbed with steel,
Thy legs and arms be beaten brass,
I still will make thee feel!

Slasher

What's that thou sayest?

St George

What I say I mean.

Slasher

Pull out thy purse and pay.

St George

Pull out thy sword and fight,
For satisfaction I will have before thou goes away.

Enter Colonel Slasher

They fight and Slasher falls wounded

Slasher

Oh! pardon me, St George, for I am wounded sore.

St George

No pardon will I give to thee but wound thee ten times more.

Slasher dies

St George

Now, Slasher he is dead and gone,
What will become of me?
His body's dead, his ghost is fled,
No more of him we'll see.
Is there never a doctor to be found,
To cure a dead man of his wounds?

Enter the Enterer In

Enterer In

Yes, I heard of a doctor the other day who came from France
and Spain
That can bring a dead man to life again.

St George

Ten pounds for a doctor!

Enterer in

Pooh! Pooh! I don't value twenty.

St George

Bring him in!

Doctor

In I come who never came yet
With my big head and little wit.
Although my head it is but small,
I like my part as well as you all.

St George

Are you a doctor?

Doctor

Yes, master.

St George

By what means?

Doctor

By my travels.

St George

Where have you travelled?

Doctor

Through high Italy, Sicily, Germany, France and Spain,
And now I've returned to my own country again
To cure that man who there lies slain.

St George

What diseases can'st thou cure?

Doctor

Oh! all diseases, come as many as pleases.
The h'itch, the stitch, the pain without, cocks with broken legs;
Bring them all to me, them I will cure.
I cured the lass with a winking eye.
A terrible sight to see
From the lady's head to the gallows head,
A terrible thing to be.

St George

Well, cure me that man.

Doctor

Yes, master, if I can.

The Doctor goes to Slasher

Doctor

Here, Jack! Take a little of this bottle.
And let it run down thy throttle,
Rise, Slasher! and fight again.

Slasher remains motionless

St George

Thou silly fool, that's no cure.

Doctor

No, you never knew a doctor to take a short job in hand
But what he made a long'n of it.
But I've got another bottle in
My pocket called Alec and plain
That will bring a dead man to life again.
Here, Jack, take a little of this nip nap
And let it run down thy tip tap.
Rise! Slasher, and fight again.

Slasher recovers and exit Doctor

Slasher

Oh! horrible, terrible teen,
The like was never seen,
A man knocked out of his seven senses and into seventeen.
Out of seventeen and into seven score,
The like was never seen nor done before,
Neither by bull nor a bear
But by St George I do declare.

St George

Thou silly ass that lives by grass,
Thou thought I'd be a stranger.
I live in hopes to buy some ropes,
To tie thy nose to a manger.

Slasher

Thou mortal man that lives by bread,
What makes thy nose so long and red?

St George

Thou silly fool dost thou not know?
'Tis Lord Stanley's ale that is so stale
That keeps my nose from looking pale.

Slasher

What's that thou sayest?

St George

What I say I mean.

Slasher

Pull out thy purse and pay,
For satisfaction I will have before thou goes away.

They fight but Prince Paradise comes In and steps between them.

Prince Paradise

Charge! peace, for quietness is the best,
The clock's struck one, you must obey,
Put up your swords and fight another day.

Exit Prince Paradise and Slasher

Enter Beelzebub

In come I, owd Beelzebub,
In my hand I carry my club;
In my hand a dripping pan,
Don't you think I'm a jolly young man?

St George

Hello, Bobsjack! Are you here today?
Pray tell me some of your rigs.

Beelzebub

No, as I was going down the road, I passed a private lodging house 'twixt Bristol and Birmingham. There I saw a chamber maid peeping through the window. She didn't beat the bed but she did beat the pillow. As I rode my horse a little down the road, it took boggart at a stile, jumped nine hedges and nine ditches, and broke all the necks it had but one.

St George

Pray, Jack, how many necks had it?

Beelzebub

Nineteen and a half, two halves as good as a whole one.
Ladies and gentlemen, e're so bold,
To eat plum pudding before it's half cold,
My hat is dumb and cannot spake,
Pray put something in for St George's sake.

Beelzebub removes his hat and collects a little, then exit. Much banging and thumping; the Groom rushes in ringing a bell and shouting

Groom

Hello! Hello! Hello!

This is to give you notice I have brought Young Ball and I hope he will give satisfaction to you all. He's a fine horse, full of blood, bone, muscle, and action, and if you'd like to see him I'll bring him in.

Someone

Bring him in

The Groom brings in the horse and makes him face the audience

Groom

Make your obedience to her ladyship.

The horse bows three times to Lady (Stanley)

Groom

And now obedience to his lordship.

Horse makes similar obedience to Lord (Stanley)

Groom

And now obedience to the audience.

The horse refuses and there is a struggle but at last he bows to the audience. All the actors enter and make a ring round the horse. They sing the song on the next page while marching round the horse after which the Groom takes the horse round the room to collect.

Ye gentle-men of Eng - land, we'll have you to draw near, And
 mark these lines which we have said a - nd quick - ly you shall
 hear: And quick - ly you shall hea - r with your
 'alf - pence and strong beer, And we'll come no more a -
 act - ing un - til an oth - er year.

The winter it is coming on, dark, dirty, wet and cold;
 And to try your good nature this night we do make bold;
 This night we do make bold with your 'alfpence and strong beer,
 And we'll come no more a'acting until another year.

God bless the master of this house, and the mist-er-ess also,
 And all the little children that around the table go.
 Likewise your men and maidens, your cattle and your store,
 And all that lies within your gates, we wish you ten times more,
 We wish you ten times more with your 'alfpence....

Go down into your cellars and see what you can find
 If your barrels be not empty, we hope you will prove kind;
 We hope you will prove kind with your....

So now we make an ending of what we had begun,

For a'going a'acting, we think there is no sin:

We think there is no sin with your 'alfpence....

BARTHOMLEY

SJ7652

Hinchliffe, 1856, said that Christmas Plays similar to that given by Ormerod (see under Sandbach) had just been discontinued.

BROMBOROUGH

SJ3582

Hole, 1937, referred to a play performed at Christmas *in silence* up to *circa* 1887. No further detail has come to light, but a similar performance appeared to have existed at Mullion in Cornwall (Grove, 1899). Both seem to have had some connection with the dramatic action, but it is difficult to be certain exactly what form the performances took.

FRANKBY

SJ2486

The text, collected from Mr Sidney Wilson from his grandfather, was published by Ellison, 1949. It was performed up to Christmas, 1937 and was called Beelzebubbing. The performers dressed according to character and included Little Wit, King George who killed Bold Slasher, Doctor Brown and Beelzebub. If the performers wanted to give a longer performance they added verses of a Pace-egging song.

Easter Plays

Although the examples listed below occur within the Cheshire boundaries, two at least, Stockport and Stalybridge, are influenced by the chapbook versions printed in Manchester. Easter is the end of the old-style winter months, so that although the three versions listed are not typically Cheshire examples, they mark the county as the only one in England to have dramatic actions throughout the whole season.

NESTON

SJ2977

Gleave, 1895, had 'faint recollections of pace-egging' and it is clear that he was referring to a Play, though he gave no additional detail.

STALYBRIDGE

SJ9798

Hill, 1907, quoted a fragment of Devil Doubt's lines in referring to an Easter Play here. He also mentioned St George, Bold Slasher and Lord Nelson wearing fantastic garments and performing a 'rhyming play'.

STOCKPORT

SJ8989

An account given by E.H., 1882, showed that the version used here was a chapbook published in Manchester by J. Heywood. He described the performers as being 'dressed out somewhat in the style of the Morris Dancers'* who additionally, wore high paste-board caps decorated with gold, beads and other trinkets. 'St George', 1902, remembered the performers from circa 1850 whom he described as 'pace-eggers'.

* A drawing based on this description is given in Alex Helm and E.C.Cawte: *Six Mummers' Acts*, The Guizer Press, Istock, 1967, title page.

Other Plays

Time of appearance not known.

BOSLEY **SJ9165**

Beresford, 1863, said that 'Miracle Plays,' chiefly those of St George and the Turk, were still performed.

BURWARDSLEY **SJ5156**

Mr Brian Ballinger, collecting in December 1957, was told by a lady, aged 81, that she remembered seeing a play here when she was in her teens. No text was recovered.

CONGLETON **SJ8562**

A fragment of text was collected by the editor from Mr E.J. Pedley in 1960, as follows:

In comes I, Beelzebub,
Under my arm I carry a club,
In my hand a frying pan,
And I think myself a jolly old man.

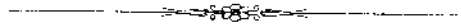
Mr Pedley said that there were formerly three groups in Congleton,

HATTON **SJ5982**

Boyd, 1939, said that the Play died out during the Great War, but had come to life again. By context, this was probably a souling play.

SWETTENHAM **SJ8067**

Mr P.D. Kennedy collected a play from here which had a horse among the characters. B.B.C. Record No 22350, recorded 12th November 1954, gave the song but nothing further.



Note on Music

The Alderley Edge text gives the song tune on its own, and the combination of tune and words given here is conjectural, though it cannot be far wrong. Slight modification is needed for the other verses, and this does not present any problems, but verse three has six lines instead of four, which seems impossible, and the only practical solution seems to be to omit the last two lines. The Lymm MS includes a tune for the song, but the notation is not sufficiently reliable to print. It seems to have resembled the Antrobus one.

The words of the songs in the Souling Plays, as can be judged from this booklet, do not have any distinct geographical variation, and there seems to be a common fund of verses which are found distributed in various ways. To this fund have been added a few verses of the Pace-egggers' calling-on song.

Few tunes have been recorded, but variants of the Antrobus tune have only been recorded in the westward part of the area (Antrobus, Comberbach, Guilden Sutton, Lymm), and variants of the Alderley type only in the east (Alderley, Mobberley and probably Middlewich). There does not seem to be any physical feature dividing these two areas, and it is not safe to draw any conclusion at present. There is a general need for more research on the tunes associated with the Play throughout the country.

Conclusion

Cheshire lies on the extreme west of the distribution of the ceremony in England. No action has yet come to light in North Wales. The Cadi-Ha dancers used to appear on May Day and their ceremonial characters included a Fool and 'Female', possibly relics of a 'Couple', but there was no dramatic action. Shropshire, to the south, has only three known examples of the ceremony all of which are some considerable distance from the most southerly Cheshire example. Derbyshire and Staffordshire to the east and south-east have a large number of actions: in these counties the performers were known as 'Guizers' which may account for the use of the term at Astbury which lies three miles from the Staffordshire border.

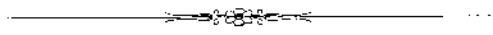
The dramatic action in Cheshire clearly shows that it is unwise to assess the Play by political boundaries, even though it has been convenient to follow this division for the present purpose. The dense distribution of south Lancashire versions has clearly affected the texts of north Cheshire, even though, save for the three Easter performances of Neston, Stockport and Stalybridge, the Cheshire performers have retained their own distinctive time of appearance. Even the main area in which the Horse appears in Cheshire may have been an extension of the Old Ball ceremony of south Lancashire, where a hobby horse, constructed in a similar fashion, appeared traditionally on its own.

Certainly, in the light of our present knowledge, the Horse appears to have no integral part in the action, familiar though it may be in Cheshire. To some extent, this is borne out at Huxley where the character was omitted in the last years of appearance. One must conclude that two independent ceremonies have joined together to become one at some stage of development, but whether the ceremonies were always distinct, or whether they were originally part of a whole from which they fragmented, assumed their own identity, and then came together again, is now impossible to say.

In Cheshire, as elsewhere, the surviving actions are only fragments: one could perhaps guess at the form the whole ceremony took, but it would only be a guess, impossible to prove. Such relics as remain in

Cheshire are the death and resurrection, the 'Female' lamenter who establishes two generations by claiming the dead man as her son, and the ceremonial characters of Beelzebub and Dairy Doubt. To these can be added Paddywhack at Huxley and Big Head at Tarvin, the latter a familiar character of the Cotswold versions. Only Beelzebub and Dairy Doubt have a wide provenance in the county, and this may be due to their perpetuation amongst the chapbook versions, though they are sufficiently persistent throughout all the dramatic ceremonies for them to be considered 'original characters'.

The versions listed in this booklet are all that are known to the present writer, most of them unfortunately no longer performed. At Antrobus, however, the ceremony is still traditionally observed each year. Possibly further enquiries would produce more examples from the Wirral peninsula or from south Cheshire: if any do come to light the editor would be pleased to hear of them so that records can be kept up-to-date.



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ERRATUM

The stage direction *Enter Colonel Slasher* at the head of page 45 should occur at the head of page 44.

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