

ALEX HELM



Staffordshire Folk Drama



Staffordshire

Folk

Drama



ALEX HELM



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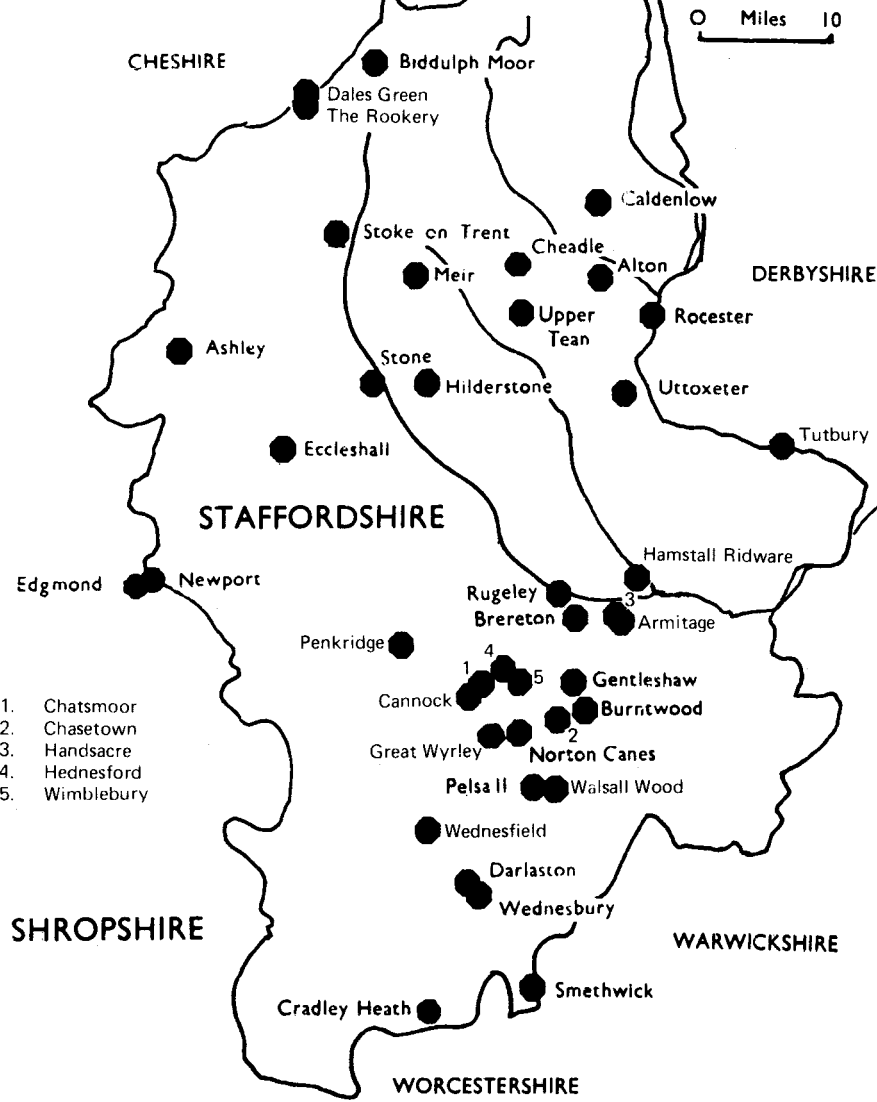
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FOREWORD by Norman Peacock

The information in this book is largely extracted from the Ritual Drama section of a Geographical Index of Traditional Ritual Custom compiled by Alex. Helm, Dr. E.C. Cawte and myself. The purpose is to make available all the useful information relating to the seasonal dramatic ceremony in Staffordshire. The information given under each location is factual and is taken from the sources given: only in the Introduction is there comment and discussion. Texts which are already in print are not repeated here, although 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 and after each location is given a Grid Reference for identification on Ordnance Survey maps.

This work was largely compiled and partially printed before the untimely death of Alex. Helm in 1970. The long delay in the final publication is my responsibility, and I am greatly indebted to Mr. Roy Swinson and to Heatherbank Press in Milngavie, Glasgow, for their patient handling of the later printing. Apart from some amendments to the introduction to the Uttoxeter Play, made in the light of information from Mr. Tom Chambers and Mr. Ron Allan, the text for Staffordshire has been kept in the original form. I have added a note on the two plays from Shropshire, which are closely related to the Staffordshire ones, since I know that Alex. Helm intended to do so.

**DISTRIBUTION of the CEREMONY
in STAFFORDSHIRE and adjacent
counties**



- 1. Chatsmoor
- 2. Chasetown
- 3. Handsacre
- 4. Hednesford
- 5. Wimblebury

STAFFORDSHIRE is a county whose variety of countryside and industry is reflected in the diversity of the traditional ceremonies which formerly existed there. Its central part is undulating lowland through which the River Trent flows in an arc from north-west to south-east, finally turning north-east to pass out of the county near Burton on Trent. To the north-east of these lowlands rise the foothills of the Peak District, and to the south, Cannock Chase; westwards the low ground merges into the Severn Valley and the Cheshire plain. Industries range from agriculture of all types to pottery and engineering. Around Stoke-on-Trent are the pottery towns, and in the south of the county is the beginning of the Black Country with its emphasis on coal and steel works. The raw materials of Cannock Chase have attracted more people than the more mountainous Peak District, and it is not surprising therefore, that the latter area shows fewer traces of custom than elsewhere in the county. Apart from the dramatic ceremonies with which this booklet is concerned, Staffordshire has the unique Abbots Bromley Horn Dance, and there were once hobby-horses at Seighford and Stafford, but no detail of their performance has survived. The Lichfield Morris, of a hybrid Cotswold/North-western type, is perhaps not so well known, but is similarly of great interest, not only because of the circumstances of its recovery, but because of its peculiar nature.* Traces of the North-western Morris, stretching down from south Lancashire through

* Wm. Everett and F.C. Phillips: 'The Lichfield Morris. The Story of the Recovery of a 'lost' Tradition' in *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, VIII, 2, The Society, London, 1957, 83-105.

Cheshire have been noted at Silverdale, Stafford and Betley.* Betley was *once* the home of the famous Betley window,§ but there was no connection between it and the Morris there, whose performers had never even heard of it. Other fragments of morris have been noted in the south-west of the county at Brierley Hill, Kinver and Wolverhampton, but with insufficient details upon which to base any judgment save the inconclusive one that they might have been a northern extension of the Cotswold Morris. The county seems to have been a meeting place for the different kinds of tradition, some of which retained their own characteristics whilst others blended to produce a mixture and still others remained unique.

The known dramatic fragments do not follow this pattern. They fall into two main groups, those of the industrial area south of the Trent, and those found in the towns and villages to the north and east of the river. West of the Trent are only two versions outside the industrial area, at Ashley and Eccleshall. There are two in Shropshire close to the Staffordshire border; of these, the Newport version was almost identical with that from Eccleshall.† Nothing is known of the other from Edmond, save that the performers called themselves 'The Seven Champions of Christendom', were described as 'morris dancers' and used to come round at Wakes. This information is contradictory. Wakes is an unlikely time of appearance for the dramatic action, but not necessarily for morris dancing, particularly if the dance belonged to the North-western type. The name the performers gave themselves is suggestive of a chapbook version of the Play (see p.10), and often a dramatic performance was called 'morris dancing'. Unless further information comes to light the exact nature of the performance will remain in doubt. There are no

* For a classification of these and the traditions mentioned at the end of the paragraph see E.C.Cawte, Alex Helm, R.J.Marriott and N.Peacock: 'A Geographical Distribution of the Ceremonial Dance in Great Britain' in *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, IX, 1, The Society, London, 1960, 1-41.

§ E.J.Nicol: 'Some Notes on the History of the Betley Window' in *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society*, VII, 2, The Society, London, 1953, 59-67.

† Charlotte Sophia Burne: *Shropshire Folk-Lore: a Sheaf of Gleanings*, edited by Charlotte Sophia Burne from the collections of Georgina F.Jackson, Trubner, London, 1883 (-1886), 410, 483-9. The Edmond details are on pp. 410, 482, 491.

other plays near here in Shropshire, and it seems reasonable to consider them as examples of the Staffordshire ceremonies.

As far as is known, the extreme north of the county is bare of the ceremony, but to the west of this blank area is a cluster of Cheshire versions and to the east a similar cluster in Derbyshire, so that it might be expected to find plays in between. Generally speaking, the northern half of Staffordshire has few versions by comparison with the south. There are probably two reasons: first, the proximity of the Black Country towns and villages to each other and second, a greater intensity of collecting in the south. The late Mr William Everett was responsible for the recovery of most of these dramatic fragments, but there is no reason for thinking that his work, and that of others, has exhausted the possibilities of the area. If there were an intensive search in the north of the county even at this late date, the two halves could well show a similar pattern of dense distribution. Such gaps as now exist seem *artificial*, so that the versions appear to form 'islands' which are unnatural.

Apart from the south Derbyshire examples, the nearest of which is about ten miles away, there is a roughly 15 to 20 miles gap between the south Staffordshire and neighbouring plays in Shropshire, Leicestershire and Worcestershire. All but the gaps to the west in Shropshire could probably be filled in, but the versions seem to fade out in this direction where a largely unproductive search has already been made. One could perhaps conjecture that to the south the growth of Birmingham killed all tradition and the Clent and Clee Hills did not support enough settlements for the preservation of tradition. Towards Leicestershire however, the former existence of a team of *Molly-guizers* at Ibstock, twenty miles away, suggests that there may once have been teams in between, if one can rely on the similarity of name. If so, they have not yet been found.

Whatever the reasons for these blank areas, there is enough Staffordshire material to form a picture of the county's dramatic ceremonies. All known examples are Hero-Combat, i.e. two champions fight, one is killed and brought back to life by a 'doctor'. The performances belonged to Christmas though at Cradley Heath and Pellsall, the teams occasionally came out on November 5th also, whilst at Biddulph Moor, November 4th was the only date of performance

remembered. The purpose here was explicit - to collect money for fireworks.

The performances were usually described as *Guizing* or *Molly-Guizing*, though *Molly-dancing* was used at Alton circa 1902. South of the Trent the performances seem to have been more virile, possibly because they generally survived longer than those of the north. One of Everett's informants said that lack of money would soon bring it to life again amongst the miners, and presumably its longer survival was attributable to a shortage of money. This being so, it is probable that the *need* which kept it going was also responsible for its liveliness. Some of the combatants are familiar: King George or Saint George, though not invariably the victor, is typical of all Hero-Combat versions, but his opponent, Bull Guide, Bold Guide, King of Egypt, Gia or Russian King, is less so. The second version from Norton Canes, where Slasher fights and kills the Black Prince and Hector, is possibly the result of chapbook influence, and the peculiar double combat in the Great Wyrley version where the Black Prince kills Beelzebub after being killed himself by King George, is possibly due to uncertain memory on the part of an unreliable informant. Both the Pelsall version, where the Squire's Son kills a Stranger, and the Wednesbury version with its stereotyped champions complete with seconds, seem to owe more to literary tampering than to tradition. Neither seems a very reliable version.

The actions found along the Trent and its tributaries show similar combatants, George fighting the Prince of Paradine, Sing Ghiles, Bulgard, Guire (possibly a different spelling of 'Gia' above), Soldier, and Bold Soldier: his Tutbury opponent, Saladin, probably appearing because of a confused idea that the source of the dramatic fragment lay in the Crusades. Both areas show a dependence on the printed chapbook version, even though no record has been found of the booklets being on sale in the county. Most of the texts use it as a basis on which the performers have built, but at Stone and Penkrigde the version was almost word for word that of Walker's *Peace Egg*,* which had an extremely wide distribution and appeal in Lancashire and the western West Riding. This is despite the claim of the Stone per-

* See Alex Helm: *The Chapbook Mummers' Plays*, The Guizer Press, Ibstock, 1969, 14

formers that they had never seen their text in print. If the synopsis given for Great Wyrley is a correct precis of what was actually performed, it would mark an unusual version, but no parallel has come to light elsewhere save in another chapbook version, *The Four Champions*, where St George wins the hand of Rosalind by combat.* Any connection seems very unlikely since the nearest place where this chapbook version was known to be performed was at Adel, north of Leeds.

The real diversity comes at the end of the performance with the *Quête* characters. Devil Doubt and Beelzebub are common everywhere, not only in Staffordshire, but the number of instances where the latter is a 'Female', § Mrs Beelzebub, is remarkable. It could be understood more easily were all the examples in a cluster, when it could be argued that one had given rise to the next, but in fact the versions with this character are spread from Darlaston in the south to Meir in the north. The scattered distribution of this character supports the argument that more collecting would bring more examples to light. Mary Anne at Uttoxeter, where no Beelzebub appears, may be an offshoot of this 'Female', for she not only has the familiar Beelzebub lines, but also a variant of Oliver Cromwell's lines from Irish versions and the concluding lines often spoken by Father Christmas. This character may therefore be an amalgam of several others now forgotten. The mention of Moll Finney at Smethwick is doubtful evidence for the existence of a ceremony here. The informant said that the performance took place at a Christmas party, and it is highly probable that this was a private entertainment organised by someone who knew the dramatic action from elsewhere, and not a Smethwick tradition. The clue to Teddy Funny (Darlaston and Norton Canes) may lie in the line

'I'm Mr Finney, christened Ted',

which indicates him to be an extension of the Cotswold Jack Finney. In Staffordshire his function has changed: he is not the doctor's unwilling assistant, nor does he appear to be anything but part of the post-action entertainment. At Norton Canes he tells feeble jokes,

† *ibid.*, 16.

§ This term is used to describe a man dressed as a woman.

perhaps a more up-to-date equivalent of the nonsense lines given to Beelzebub in the other Staffordshire versions. Mr Merryman (Meir) is an example of a character's function giving the name: in the Cotswolds he would probably have taken the name from the line 'Big Head and Little Wit', but his purpose was clearly entertainment at the end. Beelzebub, here also a 'Female', acts as his partner, but ultimately he takes on the role of Master of Ceremonies, calling on the other performers to do their turn. The character of Donald Duck, reported twice on Cannock Chase, is interesting: one might guess that the performers here were children whose imagination was caught by the late Walt Disney's productions. In the absence of more definite information one can only guess. It is unlikely that Rin-tin-tin at Great Wyrley had any connection with the alsatian dog of silent films, as the account refers to 1908 when his screen adventures were unknown. More likely, the name came from the 'Rink-a-tink' lines which occur at the end of several versions as part of the begging.

As far as present information goes, very little was done in addition to the dramatic performances to attract contributions. At Penkrige there is a note of a dance with sticks 'after the acting', at Stone there was also a 'dance', but no further details are given. There were some attempts at song, such as the round at Burntwood and the carol at Great Wyrley, neither of which had any relation to the preceding action. The performers seem to have placed more reliance on the nonsense speeches such as the Mr Merryman lines at Meir, and possibly they found more return from a direct appeal for contributions as at Penkrige and elsewhere with the 'Rink-a-tink' lines. The emphasis seems to have been on the central action with little evidence of extra material, either in entertainment or multiplied combats to attract the generosity of the audience. Shorter versions imply more performances, and this too may have had some influence on the form of the actions.

Some effort however, was made to disguise the performers, though it is unfortunate that insufficient detail has yet been found to establish a county pattern. There is a complete lack of photographic evidence even from a living tradition such as Uttoxeter. Such costume detail as does exist points to dressing in character with an emphasis

on home-made garments from material ready to hand. Ribbons do occur, as at Stone and Uttoxeter, but they are not used in profusion as for example in Hampshire and Gloucestershire. At Biddulph Moor no special costumes were remembered apart from 'oldest rags and tatters' and whole face masks bought in local shops. Even though it is said that at Burntwood the performers 'went to great lengths to make their costumes as elaborate as possible', no details are given, and one can only guess that this again was dressing in character. The performers who were 'dressed either in newspapers or wore their coats inside-out' at Walsall Wood are even more difficult to imagine. Inside out coats are common enough in ceremonies in the industrial areas, but whether the other costumes were made of newspapers, or whether the account means strips of newspaper fastened to ordinary clothes, is now difficult to say. The costumes at Marshfield, Gloucestershire, are made of newspaper, but here they are strips and not paper clothes. If the Walsall Wood costumes were like the Marshfield ones, then on present knowledge they would be unique, not only in Staffordshire but in the whole of the Midlands and north of England:

One further point perhaps needs comment. The informant at Meir who spoke of the play being said in 'a broad Pottery dialect' raises an interesting topic. His examples of 'yead' for 'head', 'mon' for 'man', etc., could be described as local accent which must of course, be considered in any study of dialect. It is a feature of the dialogue throughout the country that dialect words seldom occur. 'Jubil' and 'turmit' at Biddulph Moor are examples of such dialect words, rare in most texts save perhaps in the use of odd words in the nonsense speeches at the end. Almost every text is in metropolitan English and this has led some observers to conclude that there was once a common archetype from which all existing versions have derived. The use of English obviously far removed from the performers' everyday speech has probably some connection with the fact that all versions have to be written down for study: a collector, not necessarily a student of dialect, automatically transcribes what he hears into the form most familiar to him. The performer writing down a text which uses words outside his normal vocabulary finds difficulty in spelling and

often uses amusing corruptions,* but Staffordshire texts appear to be singularly free from such absurdities. The one doubtful line, of which little sense has yet been made, is

'I won the reef, the Sheaf, the Shamarocker,'

supposedly three crowns of gold. Whilst 'shamarocker' probably means 'shamrock', what the other two imply is now impossible to see, even in their other variants of 'the eep, the sheep, ...'. Probably by the time they had reached this state of corruption the meaning was unknown to performers also.

Although unsatisfactory, the only valid conclusion which can be reached in considering the Staffordshire versions is that much more work is necessary before a definitive opinion can be formed. More information is required concerning the disguise of the performers and whether there were chapbook texts in circulation in the county. Intensive enquiries in the blank areas might show whether they were real or artificial; if the former, then it might be possible to decide why the ceremony did not occur. This in turn might help to explain blank patches elsewhere in the country. If artificial, then such information as comes to light could only serve to explain the rest. The editor would be grateful if any additional information could be made available to him not only to keep records up-to-date, but also to permit a clearer picture of Staffordshire dramatic actions to be made.

At the time of writing therefore, this booklet contains all the versions known to the editor. Such texts as have not previously been published are printed here, whilst those that have are given in precis form so that the reader can have as complete a picture as possible of the Staffordshire Gulzing Plays.

* For example, 'Bold Granny Dear' for 'Bold Grenadier' at Hoe Benham, Berkshire, and 'Punching Ella' for 'Punchinello' at Horsell, Surrey.

Staffordshire Texts

ALTON

SK0742

No text has survived from here but performers were known to Ullathorne, 1902, as 'molly dancers' and Dr G.B.S. Pimblett, (Cawte, 1961), remembered 'mummers' performing a play every Christmas circa 1915.

ARMITAGE

SK0816

The following text was collected by Mr Peter Kennedy from Jack Conway of Handsacre, Armitage, in November 1955. No further details are known.

Enter In

Open this door as I walk in,
The prittiest (*sic*) face I am sure to win
Whether I rise, stand or fall,
I'll do my duty to please you all.
I am not of the ragged set
Or of the royal trim;
If you can't believe the words I say,
Step in Bull Guide, and clear the way.

Bull Guide

Here comes Bull Guide,
Slasher is my name;
From Turkish land I sprang again.
I've come to search this nation round and round
If I can find King George,
I'll give ten thousand pound.

Enter In

King George, King George stands at the door
And swears he will come in,
With his bright buckle and sword by his side
He's sure he'll tan thy skin.
Enter in King George.

King George

Here comes King George, a noble champion bold.
With my bright buckle and sword by my side
I won three crowns in gold.

Bull Guide

What three crowns in gold did'st thou win?

King George

I won the reef, the Sheaf, the shamarocker.
It was I that slew the seven Turks
And brought them to the slaughter,
And by the means of this and that
I won the King of Egypt's daughter.
From a fair body is forced to fly,
Ought to conquer not to die
Seven long years in close cave kept,
Out of that into prison lap.*
Out of that into rock and stone,
Do you think I've come here to be cut down like a dog?

*leaped

Bull Guide

Yes.

King George

Show me the man that dare before me stand,
I'll cut him down with my bright sword in hand.

Bull Guide

Here's the man that dare before thee stand,
Neither cares for thee nor thy bright sword in hand.

King George

Pray, what bold man art thou?

Bull Guide

I am the Turkish Champion, from Turkish land I came,
I've come to fight the darling prince,
King George they call his name.

King George

If thou art the Turkish Champion,
I think myself as good

And before I will surrender, I'll lose my precious blood.

Enter In

Stir up the fire and make a light
To see King George and Turkey fight.
The hour has gone,
The clock's struck one,
It's time this battle had begun,
Tip tap bodge.

The Turk falls down

Enter In

Oh dear, Oh dear, what hast thou done?
Thou'st killed the eldest of my sons,
The eldest son I do declare,
To see him lie bleeding there!
Five pounds for a doctor!

Doctor

No doctor for five pounds!

Enter In

Ten pound!

Doctor

Here am I!

Enter In

How far hast thou travelled, noble doctor?

Doctor

From the fire place to the cupboard.

Enter In

Any further?

Doctor

Yes, over the tops of hills and dips and dale,
Where there's neither man nor mail,
Where there's houses built with shilling loaves
And thatched with penny pikelets.

Enter In

What diseases can'st thou cure, noble doctor?

Docror

I can cure the hitch, the pitch, the pole, the gout

The plague within or a plague without.
If there's ninety-nine diseases in this man,
I'll fetch a hundred out.

Doctor

I have a little bottle in my inside pocket
Called oakum spokum spill water.
He's as good a man as ever stood.

Mrs Beelzebub

I am Mrs Beelzebub
Under my arm I carry my clog,
Over my shoulder my dripping pan,
Don't you think I'm a nice old lady?

Other Actors

Yes.

Mrs Beelzebub

With a rink tink tink,
And a sup more drink,
We'll make the old kettle cry sound.
Now, you ladies and gentlemen, all who are able,
Please put your hand in your pocket
And think of the lable.
The lable is dumb and cannot speak,
Do think of the jolly actors as brave and as bold,
Could eat a plum pudding before it's half cold.
If the old plum pudding chance to be hot,
We'll accomodate you with a dance or a song.

The text is probably corrupt. Bull Guide is also named Slasher and Turkish Champion which may imply that all three characters were once present. The Doctor has a variant of lines from *The Land of Cockayne*, a fourteenth century anti-monastic satire, but in a very abridged and amended form. Mrs Beelzebub's 'lable' should be a 'ladle' and she implies in her final lines that there was some extra entertainment to follow. If there were, it has not been recorded.

ASHLEY

SJ7536

A MS in the Ordish Collection dated 'Oakhill, 1895' in discussing guisers at Stoke, adds 'Averill, gardener, knew them at Ashley'.

Nothing further is given.

BIDDULPH MOOR

SJ9058

The text of this play was given by Fletcher 1966. Subsequent details were given to the editor by Miss Fletcher in 1969. It was last performed *circa* 1914 by teenage boys who did not wear any special clothes, just their oldest rags and tatters. They wore masks, bought local shops, which had eye and mouth slits and large bulbous noses, except for Beelzebub and Little Devil who blacked their faces with Zebro grate polish. This was removed with lard, or if lard was unavailable, 'chip-fat'. The play was performed on November 4th in order to obtain money for fireworks, and the text was as follows:

Devil Doubt

Open this door to let me in,
For I am one bound for to win.
Whether I rise or whether I fall,
I'll do my duty to please you all.
A room, a room, a room, which I desire,
Stir up this fire and make a light,
For to see this jubil* act by night. * jovial
I act by night, I act by day,
I mean to act this jubil act before I go away.
If you don't believe these words I say,
Step in King George and clear the way.

King George

Here am I, King George,
The noble champion bold of all the world
With my bright buckled sword down my side
I won ten thousand pounds in gold,
Because I have fought the fiery dragon
And brought him to the slaughter.
By those means I won the King of Egypt's daughter.

Slasher

Here am I, Slasher,
Brave, bold, gallant Slasher,
Slasher is my name.
I fought a fight with thee

But I fear thou art not able,
For as I draw my glittering sword
I'm sure I'll thee disable.

King George

Disable, disable?
I'm not in thy power,
If I draw my glittering sword
I'm sure I'll thee devour.
Stand back, Slasher, let no more be said,
If I draw my glittering sword,
I'm sure to break thy head.

Slasher

How canst thou break my head?
If my head is made of iron, my body of steel,
My hands of fearsome knuckle-bone?
I'll challenge thee to fight.

Slasher falls crying

Call in the Prince.

Prince

Here am I the Prince, the Prince of Paradise.
King George, King George, what have you done?
Thou hast killed and slain mine only son, mine only heir,
Look how he lies bleeding there.
I'll make you pay ten thousand pounds
A doctor to engage.

King George

What kind of doctor?

Doctor

Here am I, the doctor.

King George

How becamest thou a doctor?

Doctor

From Italy, Sicily, Germany, France, and Spain,
I have now come to cure diseases in old England again.

King George

What diseases canst thou cure?

Doctor

All sorts.

King George

What are all sorts?

Doctor

The itch, the titch, the palsy, the gout,
The pains that's in, the pains that's out.
I cured a man with fifteen devils in his skull
And cast twenty of them out.
Surely I can cure this poor chap.
Here, chap, take a little out of my bottle,
Let it run down thy throttle
If thou art not quite slain,
Rise up and fight again.

Slasher

Oh, my back!

Doctor

What's amiss with thy back?

Slasher

My back is wounded,
My heart is confounded,
To be struck out of seven senses
Into four score,
Likewise I've never seen before.

Enter Beelzebub

Here am I, old Beelzebub,
Over my shoulder I carry my club,
In my hand a dripping pan,
I think myself a jolly good man.
Put up those swords and spears to rest,
As peace and quietness is the best.
I've lived in houses and lands and cities,
..... dumplings and pancakes. (*words not recorded*)

Little pigs running up and down shouting, 'Who'll eat me?'

And then one shouts, 'I'll eat thee'.

Old Peter comes up with a termit* cart

*turnip

He up with a termit and struck th' man in th' neck

And made him shout, 'Termit's ten pence a peck'.

Another struck him in th' crown

And made him shout, 'Termit's' all over Newtown.

Step in the Little Devil Doubt.

Devil Doubt

Here am I the little Devil Doubt,

If you don't give me money I'll sweep you all out.

Money I want and money I crave

If you don't give me money I'll sweep you to th'grave.

Now ladies and gents as you sit at your ease,

Put your hands in your pockets and give what you please.

If you haven't got copper, silver will do,

Pull out your purse and give us a few.

The version has only the basic requirements of the action - fight, death and revival. Beelzebub takes over the *Land of Cockayne* lines spoken by the Doctor in the Armistage version, but has them in their usual form. He also combines the 'termit' lines at Meir. The two places are only ten miles apart so there may have been some contact between the gangs at some stage. Newtown is part of Biddulph Moor.

BRERETON

SK0516

The following text was communicated to R.J.Marriott by Jim Howells in 1957. At the time of collecting, costumes were said to be still in existence, but were never brought to light. The text was said to have been learned from a 'Ragged Theatre' based on Norton Canes. No further details were given.

First Man

I open the door I enter in,

My greatest fortune for to win;

Whether I rise, die or fall,

I'll do my best to please you all.

We are not of the ragged set

But of the royal trim,

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

Shouts

Enter in Bull Guy.

Enter Bull Guy

Bull Guy is my name,
From England's town I've sprung again,
I've searched this nation round and round.
To find King George I'll give ten thousand pounds.

First Man (shouts) (words not recorded)

King George

King George is my name
From the battle field I have sprung again.
I have fought the fiery dragon and led the slaughter
And by the means of this I will have the King of Egypt's daughter.

Bull Guy

Thou have the King of Egypt's daughter,
Thou low bold skull of the earth King crown.

King George

Let me do what I will
I'll try my fortune for to win,
I'll cut you up into flies and send you
To the Devil to make mince pies.

First Man

Mince pies hot,
Mince pies cold,
Mince pies in the pot
Nine days old.
Stir up the fire and make a light
And watch these brave fellows fight.
The clock struck one
The hour is gone,
It's time this battle had begun.

Bull Guy and King George fight with swords.

First Man

Five pounds for a doctor.

Enter a Doctor

No five pounds - ten pounds, here I am.

First Man

How camest thou to be a doctor?

Doctor

By my travels.

First Man

How far hast thou travelled?

Doctor

Between fire grate and the cupboard.

First Man

Any further?

Doctor

Yes, from Ippy Diddy where there's neither house, land nor city.
Wooden bells, leather churches, and black pig pudding for the
bell rope.

First Man

What can you cure?

Doctor

I can the Ipp Pipp, the paul, the gout, (*sic*)
If there's one marrow in this man's body
I'll fetch one hundred out.

First Man

Cure the man.

Doctor

I have got a little bottle in my pocket
Called Ockam Spockam Sperckam Spain,
Here Jack, take a little from this bottle.

Drinks from bottle

And rise up and fight again.
I have healed this man both safe and sound
And made him the best man that stood on England's ground.

First Man (shouts)

Old Woman Behelsibub

Old Woman

Over my shoulder I carry my club

Under my arm my dripping pan.

Don't you think I'm a jolly old woman?

With a ring, ting, ting, make the old kettle cry sound.

Enter in Little Devil Doubt

Little Devil Doubt

Stiff and stout, money I want and money I'll have

Or I'll sweep you all out.

When the Play was performed the First Man danced solo at the end

No trace of the 'Ragged Theatre' at Norton Canes has been found and it is not certain what is meant by the name. Again, the text is probably corrupt; it is not clear for example, which of the combatants is killed. The Doctor's medicine, 'ockam speckam' etc., is probably a variant of elecampane, a popular feature of the cure. Entertainment at the end is indicated by the First Man's solo dance.

BURNTWOOD

SK0609

The text of this play was collected by the late Mr Everett from Mr Astley in 1954, and was published in full in Helm and Cawte, 1967. No details other than the text were collected, save that the performers went to great lengths to make their costumes as elaborate as possible. It was still being performed in 1954 and characters included Enter In, Bull Giude who was killed by King George, Doctor, Black Prince of Paradise and Old Lady Be-elzebub. The final song, 'The Cock sat up in the yew tree', sung as a round, was collected by Mr G. Mendham at the same time as the text.

Raven, 1967, prints two texts of the 'Burntwood Mummers', the second of which is identical with that quoted above. The first text is however, incorrectly located, and is, in fact, from Darlaston, q.v.

CALDENLOW

SK0848

Howitt, 1838, reported a 'young friend' who was at Calden-Low at Christmas witnessing 'the bedizened actors, ... performed the whole ancient drama personating St George, the King of Egypt, the fair Saba, the King's daughter, the Doctor, and other characters. with

great energy and in rude verses'. In the second edition (1840), Howitt amended 'fair Saba' &c., to read 'fair Sabra' (the King's daughter)', indicating that the first name was a misprint for the normal one, or that he thought it was.

CANNOCK

SJ9710

Everett, 1956, found evidence of guizers performing here in 1955. Beyond establishing that one of the characters was named Donald Duck, he was unable to discover more.

CHADSMOOR

SJ9811

Although two teams were seen here at Christmas, 1955, it is not certain they were indigenous, particularly as one character was believed to have been Donald Duck (see under Cannock). (Everett, 1956).

CHASETOWN

SK0408

Everett, 1956, discovered traces of a performance here at Christmas, 1914, but nothing further.

CHEADLE

SK0043

Masefield, n.d., has the following version, but apart from saying 'Beelzebub is always represented as an old woman' gives no further details.

Fool

Open the door, I enter in,
Your favour I intend to win.
Whether I here rise, stand or fall,
I'll do my duty to please you all.
A room! a room! great gallants all,
And give us room to rhyme,
We've come to show you merry acts
This bolden Christmas time.
We've acted young, we've acted aged,
We've acted on a public stage,
We are not the ragged set,
We are the royal trade.*

* ?train

We've crossed the seas your honours to please
And now return again.
I heard my friends and brothers all say
The Spaniards were come to rule the day,
But since it hasn't been so.
Into the ale-house I did go.
'Ale and 'bacca', I did cry;
Oh! what a jolly man am I!
My face is black.
If you can't believe the words I say,
Step in, Saint George, and clear the way.

St George

Here is Saint George, that noble man, a champion bold,
Sword and buckler by my side.
I won ten thousand crowns of gold.
Wasn't I the villain that fought the fiery dragon
And brought it to the slaughter?
And by that very means I won
The King of Egypt's daughter.
If you can't believe the words I say,
Step in, Bold Slasher, and clear the way.

Enter Bold Slasher

Bold Slasher

Here am I, a soldier bold, and Slasher is my name.
Sword and buckler by my side, I hope to win this game,
Brave boys, and that I will make good
When first I draw my glistening sword
I'll spill Saint George's blood.

St George

Here, my man, don't talk so hot.
There's a man in this house you little think you've got.
I'll lash you, I'll splash you as small flies,
I'll send you to Egypt to make mince pies.

Bold Slasher

My head is made of iron,
My body is made of steel.

My hands and feet are knuckle bone,
I'll challenge thee to feel.

Fool

Strike a light,
And I'll show you how these Spaniards fight.

They fight and Bold Slasher is killed.

St George

I'll give ten pounds for a doctor.

Fool

There is no ten pound doctor.

Enter Doctor

Doctor

You should never call for a doctor,
You should always call for a quack.
I can cure a man if he's got a broken back,
The grunt, the gout,
The pain within and the pain without.
If there's nineteen diseases in this man
I can fetch thee one and twenty out.

St George

How became you a doctor?

Doctor

By my travels.

St George

How far hast thou travelled?

Doctor

I've travelled from Itty-Ditty
Where there's neither houses, land, nor city;
Leathern churches, wooden bells,
Black pig puddings for bell-ropes.

St George

Is that the furthest thou'st travelled?

Doctor

No, not by many a mile.
I've travelled from my grandmother's fireside to my grandmother's

cupboard door

Where I've stole many a lump of bread and cheese
To make me such a lusty man.

St George

Plenty too, for a quack.

To Bold Slasher, giving him a drink

Here, Jack, have a drop out of my bottle.

Let it run down thy throttle.

Rise, Jack, and fight.

Bold Slasher comes to life again.

Bold Slasher

Here I rise in my discharge.

God bless old England!

Likewise for Saint George!

I've been knocked out of seven senses into seventeen,

Out of seventeen into seven score,

The like of which has never been seen

On old England's ground before.

If you can't believe the words I say,

Step in, old Beelzebub, and clear the way.

Enter Beelzebub

Beelzebub

Here comes old Bee'zebub!

Over my shoulder I carry my club.

In my hand a dripping-pan,

I call myself a jolly old man.

A ring ting.

Knocks dripping-pan to make it ring and show its emptiness

A drop more of your old Christmas ale,

And we'll make our kettle cry 'sog' *full of money.

Using the Fool to introduce the action is a typical feature of chapbook versions and these may have had some influence on the text which otherwise has few unusual features. Much of the latter part of the Fool's introductory speech more properly belongs to the end of the text where Beelzebub's 'rink tink' lines have either been shortened or forgotten. Otherwise the action keeps only the essential features.

CRADLEY HEATH**S09486**

The evidence for a team here comes from Drabble, 1962, and refers to guisers being 'commonly played by children from Pelsall (q.v.) to Cradley Heath'.

DALES GREEN and THE ROOKERY**SJ8555**

Mr E. Armstrong, who played the parts of the Doctor and Beelzebub in 'St George', gave details to Helm, 1949. His brother was Black Prince of Paradine. Jacob Stanway was St George, two of his cousins played other characters. They practised with swords, doctor's bag and club. They learned their parts from a pencilled copy and actually performed just before Christmas when mince pies were in the oven and people were generous. Mr Armstrong admitted that the version he remembered might not be complete, but he was unable to remember more.

St George

Room, room, brave gallants, give us room to sport.
 For in this room we wish to resort,
 To resort, and repeat our merry rhyme.
 For remember good service this Christmas time.
 The time to cut up goose and turkey doth appear,
 So we come to spend our merry Christmas here.

Enter the Prince of Paradine

Who are you?

Prince of Paradine

I am the Prince of Paradine, the King of Egypt's son,
 And on the field of battle, great victories I have won.
 Put up thy shield, thy sword display,
 The better man shall live this day.

*They fight with swords and the Prince falls to the ground**The King of Egypt enters**King of Egypt*

I am the King of Egypt, as plainly doth appear,
 I'm come to seek my son and only heir.

St George

He is slain!

King of Egypt

Who did him slay? Who did him kill?
And on the ground his precious blood did spill?

St George

I did him slay, I did him kill,
And on the ground his precious blood did spill,
Had'st thou been there thou mightest have fared the same.

King of Egypt draws his sword

Stand off, thou black Morocco dog, or by my sword thou'lt die.
I'll pierce thy body full of holes and make thy buttons fly
How can'st thou tame my pride,
And lay mine anger too aside?
Since my head is made of iron,
My body made of steel,
My hands and feet and knuckle bones,
I challenge thee to field.

They fight. A cry is heard for a doctor. The doctor enters and St George asks sternly

- Are you a doctor?

Doctor

Yes, I'm a doctor.

St George

What diseases can you cure?

Doctor

I can cure the Itch, the Pitch, the Palsy and the Gout.
If a man has nineteen devils in his soul
I can cast twenty of them out.
I cured Sir Harry of a rag nail almost fifty yards long.
Surely I can cure this poor man.

The doctor kneels down to the Prince who is lying on the floor, and says

Here Jack, take a little out of my bottle,
And let it run down thy throttle,
And if thou be not quite slain,

Rise up Jack, and fight again.

Enter *Beel as bub*

Here comes I, old Beel as bub,
Over my shoulder I carry my club;
In my hand a frying pan,
I think myself a jolly old man.
If you don't believe in what I say,
Enter little Devil Doubt and clear the way.

Enter *Little Devil Doubt*

Little Devil Doubt

Here am I little Devil a doubt,
If you don't give me money I sweep you all out.
It's money I want, money I crave,
If you don't give me money, I'll sweep you all to the grave.

Then the collection is taken from the household.

The version is a condensed form of the chapbook *The Peace Egg* (see p.10), the only difference being the odd spelling of 'Beelzebub.'

DARLASTON

S09796

The text was collected by the late Mr W. Everett and printed by Raven, 1967, under the location Burntwood. Characters included Enter In, Gia, wounded by King George, Doctor Brown, Old Gel Be-elzebub and Teddy Funny. The latter ends by telling jokes after repeating lines which are a variant of those normally spoken by Devil Doubt. Mr Everett noted that the characters blacked their faces, but no other detail was noted.

ECCLESHALL

SJ8329

Performances of this version were known to have been given from 1860-1885 each Christmas by either Newport or Eccleshall men. Burne, 1883-6, printed the text of the Newport play 'corrected from the Eccleshall copy'. Characters mentioned were Open the Door, and King George who killed the Soldier and the Black Prince of Paradise. Burne, 1886, printed the text as 'still acted' from John Bates, sawyer, 1879, who was the source of the first text. Characters included Open the Door, King George, who killed Sing Giles

and Soldier, also called Bold Slasher, Doctor, Black Prince of Paradise, Beelzebub and Jack Doubt. Abell, 1901, noted that performances were still being given.

Two further texts were noted in a MS in the William Salt library and printed by Raven, 1965. The versions are very fragmentary the first having Black Prince, Doctor, and a mention of St Gro (*sic*) whilst the second has a Little Doctor, Black Prince, Doctor, and Bellybab. The latter ends with a song (music not recorded) - 'My coat's all pitches and patches...'

The 'St Gro' given by Raven is due to a misreading of the letter e in 'St Geo' in the MS. The text is otherwise unremarkable.

GENTLESHAW

SK0511

Everett, 1956, noted that the play here was performed at Christmas, 1914, but nothing further.

GREAT WYRLEY

SJ9907

The Great Wyrley version has not been performed since 1908 when there was a series of slaughters of cattle, horses and cows, and a curfew was imposed. Before then the performances were given three days before Christmas regularly. The text which follows is fragmentary and was collected by the late Mr W. Everett in 1956.

The Great Wyrley Molyguisers

Father Christmas

In steps Father Christmas, a merry Christmas to you all, Ladies and Gentlemen - if Ladies present, if not, a merry Christmas, to you Gentlemen. I have outside for your entertainment, several persons, if you will allow me, sir -

Opens door for Beelzebub

Beelzebub

In steps Be-elzebub,
On my shoulder I carry my club,
In hand the dripping pan
Don't you think I'm a dirty old man?
If you don't, I do.
Get away you old quack,

Or with my Bum-she-lay-lee,
I'll break your back.

Enter Black Prince, carries sword, wants to fight for king's daughter, whom Be-elzebub also loves. Enter King George, starts argument with Black Prince over his daughter, as he knows she prefers Be-elzebub, but Black Prince claims her as his birthright. Prince and Be-elzebub fight for her, but he is no match for the Prince, who spears him. The King says the fight was unfair and challenges Black Prince whom he kills.

Enter Doctor

In step Doctor Brown,
Funniest doctor in the town.

King

Why are you the funniest doctor in the town?

Doctor

Because of my travels, sir.

King

What are your travels?

Doctor

Upstairs and downstairs
And behind cupboard doors, sir.

King

Anything else, sir?

Doctor

Yes sir. I have inside, outside, my jacket waistcoat pocket, spectacles for blind mice and crutches for lame ducks. I have come to cure that man you have slain.

King

Cure him.

Doctor

Here Jack, take a drop of my nick-nack,
Rub it up and down thy throttle.
Arise and fight King George no more.

Enter Rin Tin Tin

Rin Tin Tin I carry my tin,
I carry the money box round,

Rin Tin Tin, drop more drink-
It'll make my money box sound!

All join in carol

Awake, awake, ye drowsy soul,
And hear what I can tell.
Remember Christ the Lamb of God,
Who redeemed our souls from Hell.

Chorus

God send you all a joyful New Year,
A New Year, a New Year.
God send you all a joyful New Year.
They nailed Christ's body to a tree,
And wounded him full sore;
And from his dying wounds all rent and torn,
God covered with a pearly gore.

Alternative to last two lines

From every wound the blood ran down,
Until Christ could bleed no more.

Chorus

And when the Jews had murdered Christ,
And shewn their cruel spite;
The sun and moon they did hide themselves,
And went into mourning quite.

Chorus

God bless the ruler of this house
Likewise his mistress too,
And all their happy family
That sit round the fireside's glow.

Chorus

The text is clearly fragmentary and would be unremarkable but for the long stage direction explaining the gap in the text caused by the informant's inability to recall more. A chapbook version, *The Seven Champions*, (see Helm, 1969, 15), has an action where the seven champions fight for the hand of Rosalind, the King of Germany's daughter. The contest is eventually won by St George. The combatants in the above version are clearly different, but the changes may have been caused by a

fusion of the chapbook and traditional versions.

The music for the carol was not collected, but another, more complete version was collected by Cecil J. Sharp in Shropshire in 1911 and printed in *Journal of the Folk-Song Society*, No. 18, The Society, London, 1914, 14-16.

HAMSTALL RIDWARE

SK1019

Kennedy, 1930, printed a text from Mr J. Turner of Walsall in 1924. Mr Turner believed that Hamstall was the last place in Staffordshire where the plays were performed and the text had been written down by the Rector who feared they would be lost. The text was kept in the iron chest in the rectory. The characters named were First Speaker; King George who killed Bulgar, Black Prince, Doctor and Beelzebub.

HANDSACRE

SK0916

All that is known of the mummers here is that they fought with the Brereton mummers (Marriott, 1957).

HEDNESFORD

SK0012

Marriott, 1956, obtained the following fragment from M. Pitt of Hednesford.

I open the door, I enter in;
Whether I lose or whether I win,
Whether I rise or whether I fall.
I'll do my duty to please you all.

Enter the Black Prince

I am the Black Prince of Paradise,
Born of high denounce (*sic*)
If I draw my rusty broadsword
I'll make thy buttons fly.
A room, a room, a gallant room,
Give us room to sport,
Time to make mince pies has now appeared
And we've come to act a little of our merriment in here.

Father Christmas enters

I am old Father Chrirtmas,
Welcome or welcome not.
I hope old Father Christmas

Will never be forgot.
My hair is white, my back is bent,
My knees are weak, my strength is spent.
1880 is a very great age for me!
If I'd been growing all these years.
What a monster I would be!

Bee Hellzebub

In steps little Bee Hellzebub,
Under my arm I carry my club,
In my hand my dripping pan -
Don't you think I'm a jolly old man?

All together

Yes, you are a jolly old man,
Just step round the company and gather what you can.

The text is too fragmentary to permit detailed comment. The lines '1880 is a very great age for me' almost certainly indicates a year when the action was performed, and the date would probably be altered annually.

HILDERSTONE

SJ9434

Townshend, 1897, reported Christmas guisers *circa* 1860, one whom was St George, who fought and killed the Prince of Paradine.

MEIR

SJ9432

Helm, 1949, noted a play text from Mr. John Fenton who was a member of the 'Geyzing' troupe taught by his father. In 1909 they used to make about eight or nine pounds a night, but their outlay was negligible. The troupe made their own costumes, mostly paper and burnt cork, but otherwise as follows.

Door Opener

Big, 'knoble-ended' stick. Ordinary cap and jacket turned inside out. Face rubbed with burnt cork. Trousers had two or three big patches on. Pair of clogs so that he could meet first opposition to anyone trying to throw him out.

Guire (or Slasher)

Big, double-ended paper hat. any uniform jacket (khaki drill), available. Belt with wooden sword, painted silver. Pair narrow,

or tight-legged trousers. Face sponged with reddish colour powder.

King George

Stiff, home-made paper cap, with peak; paper coat of arms stuck on with paste. Bright coloured jacket, paper sash (double), and belt, leather or even lady's white belt. Ordinary blue trousers. Sword like Guire's with tassel on.

Little Doctor

Bowler hat, very old one if possible. Pair of spectacles without lenses. Long black jacket medicine bottle in pocket. Old collar and tie, latter hanging out. Little attache case, lettered 'Doctor P. I. L. L. S.' Pair of trousers, too long in leg. Walking stick. Soot put on for moustache.

Black Prince

Black paper hat with white stars and white paper crescent stuck on front. Black face. Black jacket. White belt and sword like Guire's. Black or dark trousers. Any kind of tin for medals held on with safety pins.

Beelzebub

Old hat, any description, with feather in. Old blouse and skirt. Club, stick wrapped one end very thickly with dark material like a club. Old frying pan. Two sooty spots to represent warts. Men's old shoes (see title page).

Mr Merryman

Straw hat, as old as possible. Dirty collar, but no tie. Long sleeved jacket; long legged trousers. Short walking cane.

The play was said in a broad Pottery dialect, e.g., 'yead' for 'head', 'mon' for 'man', 'divil' for 'devil', &c.

Scene I

Door Opener

Open the door to let me in,
Father, I intend to win,
Whether I rise, sit, stand or fall,

I'll do my duty to please you all.
Christmas time comes but once a year,
And when it comes, it brings us jolly Geyzers here.
Farewell, Ladies and Gentlemen, till this time next year.
Step in Guire, and shew thy face like fire.

Door Opener then opens the door, and then sits down against it

Scene 11

Guire (or Slasher)

I am Guire, and Guire is my name,
Far from England's Town I've sprung again.
I came to search this nation round and round,
To find King George, I'd give ten thousand pounds.

Door Opener

What! Ten thousand pounds?
King George is here at my command and
If you can't believe in what I say,
Step in King George, and clear the way.

King George

I am King George, the noble champion bold,
With my bright sword and buckle by my side,
I won three crowns of gold.

Guire

What three crowns of gold?

King George

The Eep, the Sheep, and the Shamrock. but
When a body's forced to fly, or to conquer or to die
Seven long years I've been close kept,
Out of that prison let
Out of that my heart's a stone brought
My grey hair, skin and bone.
Since I fight the fiery dragon,
I'll fight him to the end.

Guire

Fight who to the end?

King George

Slasher to the end.

They fight here with swords, and Slasher has fallen.

King George

Slasher is dead, and his ghost has fled,
And what will become of me?
He challenged to fight, a fighting man,
And so I did agree.
I'll give ten pounds for a five pound doctor.

Scene III

Door Opener opens door

Little Doctor

I am the little doctor, both good and fair,
Far from my home I do declare.
I carry all pills to cure all ills,
This present time to come.

King George

What can'st thou cure, little Doctor?

Little Doctor

I can cure the Itch, the Stitch, and the Storry Gout,
That plagues within, and that plagues without.
If a man's got nineteen devils in his skull,
I can cast twenty out. That's how my name's found out.
I even cured an old woman
With the Itchy-Pinch, Peenapar,
That could'na sleep for sneezing.
I gave her a pinch of my best snuff,
And she wakened up next morning
And smoked a pipe of bacca as good as any mon.

King George

Canst cure this man, little doctor?

He points to Guire on floor

Little Doctor (kneels down and pulls bottle out of his pocket)

Here Jack, take a little out of my bottle,
Let it run down thy throttle,
And if thou be not quite slain,
Rise up Jack, and fight again.

Guire rises. Here Little Doctor gets up and turns to King George

Haven't I cured this man all safe and sound,

As any man in England's ground?

I've healed his wounds, I've cleansed his blood,

I've given him that that's done him good.

King George

How much thee charge, little doctor?

Little Doctor

Ten pounds - five pounds, thee being an honest man.

King George

Can't pay thee now.

Little Doctor

How's that?

King George

Lost one of my best friends.

Little Doctor

Who's he?

King George

Not such a round-headed, block-headed fool like thee.

Little Doctor (excitingly, in a rage)

I won't be humbugged, bare bitten, I declare,

Step in Black Prince, and do thy share.

Doctor sits down against Guire and Door Opener, as all chairs are arranged for all troupe to sit down when required, and leaves King George to face Black Prince.

Scene IV

Enter the Black Prince

Black Prince

I am Black Prince of Paradise,

And black's my rock a king;

And every wood that pass I through,

I make the valleys ring.

Since I slew the seven Turks,

King George I do not fear,

But from his body to his heart,

I'll draw my dreadful spear

King George

Whose dreadful spear?

Black Prince

My dreadful spear.

Scale up the fire to make a light,

To see two bonny English lads to fight,

The clock's struck one, the hour's just gone,

'Tis time this battie had begun.

As Black Prince and King George are fighting the Little Doctor rushes in between them and exclaims

Put down your swords and be at rest,

For beans and bacon are the best.

If you can't believe in what I say,

Step in Old Bet and clear the way.

Door Opener lets Old Bet in while Little Doctor, King George, Black Prince and Guire get seated.

Scene V

Belzebub

In comes Old Belzebub,

And over my shoulder I carry my club,

I think meself a jolly old man.

Looks round troupe and shouts

Where's Mr Merryman?

There is a bang on door and in dashes Mr Merryman

Mr Merryman (shouts)

In comes one, who's niver bin in yit,

With a durned Big Yead and a little wis.

Who mar yead it is so small,

That I'm the king above them all.

Belzebub

What's thee Fayther?

Mr Merryman

Milk and Weaver.

Belzebub

What's he weave?

Mr Merryman

Horse hair candles, paper parcels, toe rags for crickets, crickets for blind mice, blind mice for church steeples, church steeples for mangel-wurzels, and all such, ob-goblin things as them miss.

Belzebub

Hast got any tales, Mr Merryman?

Mr Merryman

Yiss, I have, Bet.

As I was going across yonder field

I saw the Devil cock up his heels.

His yead was made of iron,

His belly was made of steel,

And his hoofs were made of looking-glass

That shone around that field.

Belzebub

Hast any more tales, Mr Merryman?

Mr Merryman

Yes, I have, Bet.

As I was going down our street

I heard a mon shouting,

'Turnips, turnips, fourpence a peck'.

I went up to the cart and picked the biggest turnip up and hit him at the back of his neck, and made him shout; 'Turnips, turnips, twopence a peck'.

At this stage Mr Merryman calls on any one of the troupe to sing, recite, or even to ask all to sing carols together. When all the singing and reciting is over, Mr Merryman looks to audience.

Mr Merryman

Ladies and gentlemen, as I was going down our garden the other day,

I heard a little bird, singing ever so funny,

Ladies and gentlemen, have you got any money?

The division into Scenes, although unnecessary, is a typically chapbook convention, but there is otherwise little connection with the latter versions. The text has one of

the rare verbal corruptions in the county's examples - 'black's my rock a king' being a corrupt form of 'Black Morocco King'. The costume details, with their emphasis on dressing in character, show no trace of the traditional ribbons or rags. The text does however, retain some traditional qualities particularly in the nonsense speeches towards the end.

NORTON CANES

SK0107

The late Mr W. Everett collected the following version in about 1956. No other detail was available.

Roomer

A room, a room, I enter a room,
And sweep it clean with my old broom.
For here I bring my merry men
To show it's Christmas time again,
Come in St George.

St George

In comes St George, a noble man
A trusty sword in my right hand.
Show me the man that threatens right,
Show me the man that wants to fight,
I'll cut him up as small as flies
And bake him into mince pies,

Roomer

Hush! St George for I've been told,
The King of Egypt's a fighter bold.
Come in King of Egypt.

King of Egypt

The King of Egypt is my name,
I always win this fighting game.
Here is my sabre gleaming bright,
Which of you would like a fight?
Come on St George, I heard you call,
We'll see who is the first to fall.

Fight. St George is slain.

Roomer

What would I give for a doctor? Ten pounds

For a jolly little noble Doctor!

Doctor (outside)

Twenty pounds is my fee.

Roomer

Come in Doctor. Come this way.

St George lies slain in bloody fray.

Noble doctor do your part,

St George is wounded to the heart.

Doctor

There is a pill to make you dance

Out of England into France,

Out of France into Spain,

Over the hills and back again.

I'll cure ye with a little tickle here and there.

Takes bottle of beer from bag and pours it over St George's face.

This is the only physic that pleases;

This is the physic to cure diseases.

Arise St George and fight no more.

Roomer

Come in Teddy Funny.

Teddy Funny

I'm Mr Finney, christened Ted,

Guess what makes my nose so red.

Your Christmas ale I will be bound

Would make the world and me go round.

Roomer

Come in Old Gel.

Old Gel

I am old Gel, with a Rub-a-dub-dub.

I spend all my days at the washing tub.

Spend all my nights in a frying pan -

Don't you think I'm a jolly old man,

Roomer

Enter Father Christmas

Father Christmas

In comes Father Christmas. I haven't long to stay,

I hope you will remember us, before we go away.

Marriott, 1957, collected another version from Mr Sharratt, aged 64, which was performed in the local pubs *circa* 1907. This was as follows:

Open Door

Open this door, I enter in,
Whether I lose or whether I win,
Whether I raise or whether I fall,
I'll do my duty to please you all.

Father Christmas

I am old Father Christmas
Welcome or welcome not,
I hope that poor old Father Christmas
Will never be forgot.
My hair is white, my back is bent,
My knees are weak, my strength is spent.
1888 is a very great age for me,
And if I had been growing all these years.
What a monster I would be!
Time to make mince pies has now appeared,
And we have come to act our little merriment in here.
A room, a room, a gallant room,
And give us room to sport;
For in this house we now wish to resort.

Black Prince of Paradise

I am the Black Prince of Paradise,
Born of high renown;
And if I draw my rusty broadsword,
Soon I fetch thy lofty courage down.

Slasher

Cry grace, thou black Morocco dog,
Or by my sword thou shall die.
I'll pierce thy body full of holes,
I'll make thy buttons fly.

They fight. Black Prince of Paradise is killed.

Slasher

Now the Black Prince of Paradise is dead
And all his courtiers have gone and fled.
Take him and give him to the flies,
And let him never again be seen before my eyes.

Hector

If that be he who stands there,
Who slew my master's son and heir,
Though he be sprung from royal blood,
I'll make it flow like ocean blood.

Father Christmas

Hold, hold, Hector, do not be so hard,
Thou knowest not the man thou hast got.

Hector

Yes, yes, my liege, I will obey,
And with my sword I hope to win the day.

Battle. Hector wounded

Hector

I am a dying soldier,
And Hector is my name.
Many battles I have fought and won,
And always done the same.
But from Slasher have I received this deadly wound,
Hark! I hear the silver bugle calling,
Which summons me off this wicked ground.
Yonder is the way.
Farewell! I can no longer stay.

Father Christmas

A doctor! A doctor!

(Doctor's part forgotten)

Beelzebub

In steps I, Beelzebub,
Under my arm I carry my club,
In my hand a dripping pan -
Don't you think I'm a jolly old man?

All

Yes, you are a jolly old man.
Just step round the company
And gather what you can.

Father Christmas was dressed as usual, Slasher as a smart soldier, Black Prince of Paradise in jet black, including face and hands, Doctor wore a topper, and Beelzebub was in black with feathers in his hair. They carried iron swords made by blacksmith.

It is rare to be able to compare texts from one place collected at different times from different people. The two versions given here show that, apart from the basic action, there was little resemblance between the two. The first version, unlike the second, has no chapbook elements and seems to rely more on traditional lines than printed ones. The Doctor's cure in the Everett version is very unusual and it is unfortunate that it cannot be corroborated from the second text. It seems probable that Norton Canes had more than one gang, each with its individual text, and with no connection between the performers.

PELSALL

SK0203

Drabble, 1952, gives the text of a 'Black Country' play about which, in a communication to E. C. Cawte he says, 'The Guisers was commonly played by children from Pelsall to Cradley Heath until the last war commenced in 1939. They came round at Christmas and went into the house where they performed and expected mince pies and money in payment. It only died out when money was easier and there was no need to go to so much trouble for a few coppers'. The performance sometimes occurred on Bonfire Night. Performers had black faces and wore clothes, appropriate to the occasion, which they could beg or borrow. The smallest was Little Billy Whittle, who also as Presenter. Besides him were the Squire's Son, who killed the Stranger, and the Doctor. Drabble considered the performances were most common in the 1890s.

The text is very short and adheres rigidly to the basic action. The names of the combatants are unusual for the county, though the Squire's Son is found in the calling-on songs of some sword dance versions. Whether or not the Stranger was always used as a combatant here is doubtful: it is more likely that the original name of the character had been forgotten.

A MS from Mr Noel James, taken down from an actor, in the Ordish collection, gives the text of the play from here. The MS is dated 26th December 1899, and its version depends heavily on the chapbook versions formerly current in the industrial north-west.

Prologue by Alexander called Part 1

I open the door I enter in,
I hope my favours for to win.
Whether I rise or whether I fall,
I'll do my endeavour to please you all.
Prince George stands at the door,
He swears he will come in
With his sword and buckler by his side
He swears he'll belt my skin,
Silence, brave gentlemen! If you will give an eye,
Alexandria is my name, and I will show you tragedy.
By rambling near I have took this country for to see
And these actors I have brought so far from here to Italy.
The next I do present, there is a noble king,
Just come from the wars, glad tidings he does bring.
The next I do present, there is a doctor good
If it hadn't been for him, I should have lost my blood.
Old Divious is the next, a miser as you see,
By the landing of his gold is come to poverty.
By the sounding of the trumpets and the beating of the drum,
Make room, you ladies and gentlemen, and let our actors come.
We are the merry actors that travel through the street;
We are the merry actors that fight for our meat;
We are the merry actors that show prison gale.
Step in the King of Egypt and clear the way.

Enter King of Egypt

I am the King of Egypt that plainly does appear,
Prince George is my only son and heir.
Therefore step in, my son and act thy part with me,
And show thy face to all the company.

Enter Prince George

I am Prince George, the champion brave and bold,
And with my sword I won three crowns of gold;
It was I that brought the dragon down to the slaughter,
It was I that gained the Egyptian monarch's daughter,
In Egypt's field I was taken,
And by my valour I soon from them escaped.
I'll sign the gate the hour of eye,
I went and joined no good design,
He gave me a blow that almost struck me dead,
I up with my sword and cut off his head.

Alexander

Hold Slack, Prince George, don't thou be so hot,
For in this place I know(est) what thou'st got.
For it's I that can either slash thee or hash thee
Or cut thee as small as flies
Or send it (thee) to Satan to make mince pies,
Mince-pies hot, or mince pies cold,
I'll send it(thee) to Satan before thou'rt three days old.

Prince George

My head is made of iron,
And my body's made of steel
And my knees are made of knuckle bone.
And no man can make me feel

Alexander

Your head is not made of iron
Your body is not made of steel,
And your knees are not made of knucklebones,
So I can make you feel.
So, Prince George, before thou goest away,
Either you or I shall die this very day;
So mortal wounds thou shalt receive by me
So let us fight out manfully

They fight and Alexander is slain.

King of Egypt calls for a doctor

Five pounds for a doctor!
No doctor yet?
Ten Pounds for a Doctor! No Doctor yet?
Fifteen pounds for a doctor!

Enter the Doctor

Hot tot tot, here comes a little doctor good and hero;
I have travelled far from home,
I have travelled far from here.

Prince George

How far hast thou travelled?

Doctor

From the fireplace to the cupboard,

Prince George

No farther yet?

Doctor

Yes, from Italy, Sicily, Germany, and Spain,
I have come to cure this man that thou hast slain.
Here Jack, take a bit of my nip nap,
Put it down thy tip tap,
Arise up Jack, and fight again.
I've healed his wound, I've cleansed his blood,
I've given him that what's done him good;
I've hills and pills for all diseases-
Take my physic then who pleases.

Prince George

What diseases canst thou cure?

Doctor

All diseases both in and out,
The hips and the pips, the palsy and the gout,
There is nineteen serpents in a man, and I'm sure to fetch twenty
out. I once rode ten miles on an old dead donkey to cure
the old woman of the hipsey pipey, and she couldn't sneeze
for shouting. I gave her one of my small pills and she was
well again on the next morning

Alexander, comes to life again saying

Oh! horrible, terrible! such life was never seen before!
And a man drove out of seven senses into fifteen.
Oh! out of fifteen into fourscore,
Oh! horrible terrible! such life was never seen before!

King of Egypt

Oh! thou silly ass that lives by grass,
How dost thou salute a stranger?
I live in hopes to buy new ropes
To tie thy nose to the manger.

Alexander

Sir, unto thee I bend, stand off thy slave.
I think thou art not my friend. Oh! slave kind sir
That word is too far to be in the name.
That word is to stop my honour in vain.
Stop, kind sir, with all thy fear,
Point out the time and place and I'll meet you there.

King of Egypt

I'll cross the water the hour of five,
I'll meet you there if I am alive:
I'll cross the water the hour of ten
And I'll meet you there with gentlemen.

Alexander

Sure to express thy beauty thou art not able
Thy face shines like the very kitchen table.
Thy teeth are no white than charcoal.
Thy breath stinks like the salt sea.
So mortal wounds thou shalt receive by me,
So let's fight out so manfully.

They fight and the King of Egypt is slain.

Twenty pounds for a doctor!
Oh, what is here? Oh, what is here? Oh, what is to be done?
Our king is slain and his crown is likewise to be won
Therefore take up his body and bear it hence away
For in this place he shall no longer stay.

All sing together

Bouncing Butler velvet here,
Christmas comes but once a year.
When it comes it's never so near,
So farewell, Christmas once a year.

Alexander

Ladies and gentlemen, you see
Our actors are but poor,
If the worst can please the company
The best can do no more.
Step in, Beelzebub

Enter Beelzebub

Ya ha ha, here comes one that's never been yet
With a big head and little wit:
Although my wit it is but small
I'll do endeavour to please you all
Five and twenty of December,
Christmas comes you will remember
Brings glad tidings of great joy
Roast pudding and lumps of beef, sir,
Ya ha ha here comes old Beelzebub
On my shoulder I carry my club
And in my hand my Keginpan
Don't you think I'm a jolly old man?
Money I want money I crave,
If you don't give me money I'll sweep you all into the grave.

All sing together

To my rink - a - tink - tink and a sup more drink,
I'll make an old kettle cry sound.
I'll mend an old kettle all round.
My coat all pitches and patches
To my honour I give as I look,
My shoes are all stitches and statches,
As I go stacking about.
To my rink - a - tink - tink, and a sup more drink,

I'll make an old kettle cry sound,
I'll buy an old kettle, I'll sell an old kettle,
I'll mend an old kettle all rōund.
My snuff box in my pocket,
As large as you suppose,
As large as any turnip:
As ever used to grow-
To my rink-a-tink-tink, &c.

Burke, 1956, collected information from the area which described the party as 'dancers' in the period 1870's to 1890's. The performers used to visit the informants' home every Christmas or Near Year wearing old clothes and one man with his jacket turned inside out. They had black faces and a concertina player used to play 'Cock of the North' and 'Goodbye Dolly'. This may have been the post-action entertainment which the second informant said took the form of dancing to a concertina and hitting sticks together. This informant also added that they wore rags - i.e. clothes with rags stitched on.

Another witness (Cawte, 1955) said it was performed fifty years or more, before, and the five performers were called Molly Dancers. They started on Christmas Eve and performed for a week, visiting the farms. They had ribbons on their shirts and wore top hats. They did not black their faces. There was a Doctor Jessup:

Take a bit of nick nack

Rise up Jack and fight again

There was no song, but someone played a tin whistle.

The earliest known version of the "Alexander" chapbook was published in Newcastle upon Tyne in 1771 and the Penkridge version shows many similarities to this. The description of this dancing to a concertina and hitting sticks together might be compared with the accounts of Morris dancing in the Bilston area c. 1862 (Hill 1884), although the latter involved more men and was a performance in its own right.

ROCESTER

SK1139

Mr. W. Everett obtained information from a performer, Mr George Cliffe, in 1955, who unfortunately died before he could give any detail of text which he claimed to remember. Fletcher, 1936, is reported

as referring to performances in 1935, but unfortunately this account has not so far been traced.

RUGELEY **SK0418**

Bagot, 1901, mentioned boys from Rugeley performing 'St. George' at either Blithfield or Leigh in the 18th century.

SMETHWICK **SP0288**

Norgrove, 1884, said she had played the part of Moll Finney at a Christmas party in Smethwick where she lived.

See p.11 for comments.

STOKE ON TRENT **SJ8745**

A MS in the Ordish collection, dated Oakhill. 1895, says 'Mummers were called Guisers at Stoke, disused some thirty years. T. Warrilow's (aet. 62) father would go out with them a week at a time'. Nothing further is given.

STONE **SJ9034**

Bladen, 1901, gives a text and description of the performance which last took place in 1897. The players were dressed in any fantastic finery they could get- 'white and coloured calico ribbons and paper. They wore cardboard helmets and were armed with wooden swords.' The information came from a Mr James Hodgkiss who repeated the words from memory. None of those who played it had ever seen the words in print before; but despite this, the version they remembered was very close to some Pace-Egg chapbook versions (see Helm, 1969).

The performers were: St George, who killed both Slasher and Black Prince of Paradise, and wounded Hector; King of Egypt; Doctor; Bold Old Ben and Beelzebub. The performance ended with a dance, the nature of which was unspecified.

TUTBURY **SK2129**

Archer, 1958, described a performance circa 1900, of the ceremony here. There were six performers, one dressed as an old woman with a black face and carrying a cudgel, one like a scarecrow with an old frying pan, two with helmets and sword, and one in top hat and side whiskers, carrying a doctor's bag. They toured farms and gentlemen's houses on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day collecting money

and drinks. The text quoted had several speeches omitted but included St George, who killed Saladin, Old Woman, Doctor, Sam and Black Face (Beelzebub).

UPPER TEAN

SKO139

The following text was written out by Alonzo Hill, a tape weaver, who performed in "Guisers' Tales" here in 1881. The performances were given at Christmas, but no further details were given,

Open-the-door's part

I open the door, I enter in
I hopebold favour I shall win.
Whether I stand, rise or fall,
I'll do my duty to please you all.
A room, a room, brave gallants; room,
A room to let us sport,
For in this room we mean to resort,
Resort, and repeat our merry rhymes,
For now it is Christmas time;
Christmas time comes but once a year;
And when it comes it brings good cheer.
Step in King George

King George's part

I am King George, that noble champion bold, and free,
With my trusy broad sword I won ten thousand pounds in gold.
Now I am come to slay that big man that is boasting so,
'Twas I who slew the fiery dragon and brought him to the
slaughter,
And by those means I won the King of Egypt's daughter.
Step in Black Prince.

Black Prince's part

I am Black Prince, a blacksmith from Paradise, through all the
hills and valleys round I have travelled through. I will make
those valleys ring. I will cut thy giblet full of holes and in the holes
put pebble stones. I will make thy buttons fly.

King George

How canst thou make my buttons fly; when my head is made of iron, my body is made of steel; my legs and arms are made of knuckle bones, no man can make me feel. Stand out, thou black Morocco dog; or by my side thou shalt die.

King George crosses swords with the Black Prince and wounds him

Open-the-door to King George

King George, King George what hast thou done?
Thou's killed and slain mine only son, my only heir,
See how he lies bleeding there!
Step in Doctor.

Doctor

Here am I.

Open-the-Door

How camest thou to be a doctor?

Doctor

By my travels.

Open-the-Door

How far hast thou travelled?

Doctor

To the cupboard, for bread and cheese, upstairs and into bed.

Open-the-Door

Is that all thou rascal?

Doctor

No.

Open-the-Door

How far?

Doctor

Italy, Sicily, Ireland, Germany and Spain, and have come to cure this man that here lies slain.

Open-the-Door

What canst thou cure?

Doctor

The itch, the stitch, the grunt, the gout,

The pain within, and the pain without.

If there's nineteen devils in, I can fetch one and twenty out.

Holding a bottle to his lips, he says

Here Jack, take a drop of my nipnap,

Let it run down thy tiptap,

Rise up Jack, and walk.

See! I have healed his wounds, I have cleansed his blood,

I have given him that which has done him good.

Black Prince rising up, says

Oh! My back!

Doctor

What's amiss with thy back?

Black Prince

My back is broken, my heart is confounded, and my sense is
knocked in four score pieces.

Step in Little Soldier

Little Soldier's part

I am a Little Soldier, Slasher is my name,

With my bright buckle and sword by my side, I am sure to win
the game

This game is already won, and that is very good,

King George thinks himself a very big man, but I think myself as
big as he.

Before I will lie under him, I will shed my precious blood.

Seven years have I been here, and now I am going to be cut down
like a staff.

Stick up! Stick up!

It shall be shown the heaviest battle that ever was known,

So stir a fire and strike a light,

To see two champion boys to fight.

*Beelzebub comes in and parts them dressed in feminine attire and ringing
a bell the while, and says*

Lay down those swords and go to rest,

For Peace and quietness is the best.

Here comes old Beelzebub, o'er my shoulder I carry my club

In my hand a dripping pan,
I think myself a jolly old man.

Four fingers and a thumb, a pair of old shoes that have never been worn. As I was going down a lane, I picked up a twopenny cobb, threw it down a five yard walk, killed a dead dog, an old sow and nine pigs, knocked down a barber's shop and all his wigs. As I was going down a field, I saw a gorse bush, in this gorse bush saw a brown linnet, this brown linnet sung very funny, will you please fill me ladle full of money, my ladle is dumb and cannot speak, will you please fill it for King George's sake. So a-ring a-tink and a sup more drink, for merry lads are we, mince pies hot mince pies cold, mince pies in a pot, nine days old.

UTTOXETER

SK0933

As far as is known, this is the only ceremony which is still performed traditionally in the county. It is performed at Christmas. The performers wear ribbons about 3 feet long, sewn to their ordinary clothes at the shoulders, and hanging to their waists. Feathers are worn in their hats, arranged after the manner of a Red Indian head-dress: these probably give rise to the name of 'Feather Guiser.' There is a report that once they were dressed from head to foot in feathers (Everett, 1954) but this is not substantiated and is probably a fanciful account based on the fact that such a disguise was the normal dress of devils in Miracle Plays. Each performer, except the Doctor, carries a stick 3 to 4 feet long and St. George and Bold Soldier use theirs in the fight.

The play has been the prerogative of the Crutchley family for as long as can be remembered, and is passed on by oral tradition. When interviewed in 1964 by Granada Television, Mr. Bert Crutchley said that they received payment in home-made wine and they went on 'as long as King George could stand'. Allan, 1969, observed that the members of the gang were not particularly keen to collect money, but more intent on preserving the custom.

The following text was recorded by the B. B. C. in December, 1946, and is similar to that recorded by Allan in 1969. Both are somewhat longer than a version obtained by Mr Denis Salt from Mr Bert Crutchley between these two dates. There are slight textual variations

between the three versions (characteristically the biggest divergences are in the dialogue between St George and the Doctor) but they are clearly from the same stock and probably show nothing more than the difference which might be expected from versions recorded at different times.

Open the Door

I open this door, I enter in,
I'll back my favour for to win.
Whether I rise, stand or fall,
I'll do my duty to please you all.
A room, a room, a gallant room,
A room to give us rise;
We come to show you a merry act
On this bold Christmastide.
I've acted young, I've acted age,
I've acted on a public stage.
We are not of that tragic set,
We're of the royal train.
If you don't believe a word I say.
Step in St. George, and clear the way.

St George

Here am I, St George, that nobleman,
That noble champion bold.
And with my sword and buckle to my side,
I won ten thousand pound in gold.
Was it not I that fought the fiery dragon,
And brought him to the slaughter,
And by that loving means I gained,
The hand of the King of Egypt's daughter?
And if you don't believe the words I say,
Step in Bold Soldier and clear the way.

Bold Soldier

Here am I, a soldier stout and bold,
Bold Slasher is my name,
And with my sword and buckle down by my side,
I hope to win this day.

I hope to win this day, brave boys,
And that I will make good,
The first time I draw my glittering sword,
I'll spill St George's blood.
I'll lash him, I'll smash him as small as flies,
I'll send him to Germany to make mince pies.
Mince pies hot, mince pies cold,
I'll send him across the sea before he's nine days old.

St George

Oh soldier, Bold Soldier, don't you talk so hot.
There's a little man in this room you little think you've got.
I'll jab thy giblets full of holes,
I'll make thy buttons fly,
Stand up! Stand up! thou swaggering dog,
Prepare yourself to die.

Bold Soldier

How canst thou make me feel,
When my head is made of iron,
My body is made of steel,
My arms and legs of best beaten brass,
No man can make me feel.

St George

If your head is made of iron,
Your body is made of steel,
Your legs and arms are made of the best beaten brass,
I'll strive to make you feel.
Pull out your sword and fight,
Pull out your purse and pay,
We'll have satisfaction before we go any further this way.
Stir up the coals to make a light,
To see these two brave Englishmen fight.
Come, come, the clock is struck, the hour is spent,
It's time this battle did commence.
Stand up Brave Soldier, it shall be so,
This dreadfulest battle never was know.

Fight. Bold Soldier falls.

St George

Doctor! Doctor! Is there ever a doctor to be found,
To cure this dread and deeply wound?
I'll give ten pound for a doctor!

Doctor

Here am I, most valuable doctor.

St George

What comes thou by a doctor?

Doctor

By my travels.

St George

How far hast thou travelled?

Doctor

I have travelled over Itty-Titty,
Where there's neither houses, land nor city.

St George

Is that the farthest thou's travelled?

Doctor

Yes, and plenty far enough for a quack.

St George

What pains can you cure?

Doctor

I can cure the Itch, the Stitch, the Grunt, the Gout,
The pain within, and the pain without,
And the pain that lies all round about;
And if there's nineteen diseases in this man,
I'll bring one and twenty out.

St George

Cure me this man as he lies slain,
Or else not one farthing for your pains.

Doctor

I'll cure this man as he lies slain,
Or else not one farthing for my pain.
I've a little bottle here what they call Elecampane
Can bring any dead man to life in Uttoxeter again.
Here Jack, take a drop of my nip-nap,

Shove it up thy tip-tap,
Rise and fight again.

Bold Soldier

Here I rise with my discharge,
God bless old England, likewise St George.
The horrible, the terrible, the like was never seen,
A man knocked out of seven senses into seventeen,
Out of seventeen into seven score,
The like was never been fought in this room before,
And if you can't believe the words I say,
Step in old Mary Anne and clear the way.

Mary Anne

In comes old Mary Anne as you may suppose,
I beat many nations with my big nose.
I've beat the Dutch, I've beat the France,
Likewise old Buonaparte and made his heart ache.
Over my shoulder I carries my club,
In my hand a small dripping pan,
I think myself a jolly old maid.
There's one, two, three, four, five, our jolly brave boys,
They stand here so stout and so bold,
They can eat a plum pudding before it was half cold.
And if your plum pudding chance to fail,
They'll beg a drop of that best Christmas old ale.
And if that Christmas old ale chance to be strong,
One of them accommodate you a very good song.
Ladies and gentlemen take your ease,
Put your hand in your pocket and give old Mary Anne whatever
you please.
And a Merry Christmas and a prosperous and a Happy New Year
to everybody.

In the Allan, 1969, version, the Doctor's medicine is called 'Eric of Spain', and 'Open the Door' is also referred to as 'Room'. The fight is described as follows. 'This consists of one clash of the sticks and Bold Soldier drops dead (as near to the bar wall or tables as possible). He always falls on his side – this is a fantastic sight because he is just one great mound of crepe paper.'

The survival of a ceremony has often been the result of the devotion of one family, or even, one man. The attitude of the Crutchley family at Uttoxeter is paralleled by that of the Hardcastle family at Ripon, Yorks. W.R. In both places there are only four performers – they cannot be called actors, because they stand forward and declaim their lines in loud voices with no theatrical diction or action. At Ripon the small number leads to 'doubling-up' and at Uttoxeter there is an indication of a lost part because Chambers, 1969, reports that Mary Anne often begins:

In comes I Beelzebub
Over my shoulder etc.

Cf. also the 'female' Beelzebub at Upper Tean and see also p. 11. Broadly speaking this and the Upper Tean play are similar in their concentration on the main theme of death and resurrection, without the proliferation of characters met with in the chapbook versions.

The self-description 'most valuable doctor' is also used at Ibstock (see p. 9).

WALSALL WOOD

SK0403

The performers in the following version collected by Everett, 1954, dressed either in newspapers or wore their coats inside out. The text was as follows.

Enter Father Christmas

In steps I, old Father Christmas,
Welcome in or welcome not.
I hope old Father Christmas
Will never be forgot.
Stir up the fire and make a light
For in this house there'll be a fight.
These are all the words I have to say,
Come in St George, I've cleared the way.

St George

In steps I St George, a man of courage bold,
With my shining sword I have won three crowns of gold.
I fought the fiery dragon
And brought him to the slaughter;
I saved a beauteous queen
And the King of England's daughter.

Enter Russian King

In steps I, the Russian King,
Whose name through all the world doth ring.

I've searched the country all around
And if St George can be found
I'll lay ten thousand pound
I'll hew him and cut him as small as a fly,
And send him to London to make mince pie.

Fight. St George is slain.

Dr Brown

Here I come, Old Doctor Brown,
The finest doctor in the town.
In my bag I've cures for all
That grows in hedge or garden wall.
My pills and potions, I'll be bound,
Will get him well, who's on the ground.
A light, kind sirs, a light I say,
That I might tend this man today,
I do declare, where is my chest,
That I may give him of the best?
St George who lies upon the ground,
Will live to fight another day.
For Father Time is going, so
We must not tarry or go slow.

Enter Father Time

In I come, old Father Time,
To take this year with sad adieu,
Leaving you one so young,
Who soon must follow one so old.
And as you sit in cot or hall
With glowing fires and chimneys tall,
Remember in this winter cold
There is outside one who is old.
And when you hear the great bell chime,
Spare a thought for Father Time.

Enter Beelzebub

In steps I Be-elzebub,
Over my shoulder I carry a club,
Under my arm a dripping pan,

Don't you think I'm a jolly old man?
A jolly old man I seem to be,
I have three sons as big as me.
As one steps in, the other goes out —
In steps little Devil Doubt.

Little Devil Doubt

In steps little Devil Doubt,
If you don't give me money
I'll turn you all out.
Money I want, money I crave,
If you don't give me money
I'll sweep you to your grave.

The costume has been commented on already (see p. 13). Cf. the description of the dead Bold Soldier at Uttoxeter. (p. 63).

WEDNESBURY

SO9895

Hackwood, 1924, described guisers dressed fantastically in paper, tinsel and coloured rags. Some had blacked, some floured faces, some wore masks, others had false beards and wigs. The combat was done with broad-bladed wooden swords with 'the flat of which a good sounding whack could be given'. He printed a text as acted in the bar-parlour of a Wednesbury tavern in 1879; this had the following characters: Open-the-Door, St George, who killed Hector, Black Prince and Slasher, respective 'seconds' to the two combatants, Safety Sam of Staffordshire, Beelzebub, Little Blue Dwarf and the Doctor. At the end the performers joined hands to dance round during which they sang some popular song.

The version is quite unlike any other Staffordshire text and appears to have been touched up by some literary person.

WEDNESFIELD

SJ9400

Hill, 1884, met some mummers here as they were visiting public and private houses. One gentleman who saw them leaving one house was so struck by their appearance, clothed in different coloured costumes and armed with swords that he offered them money to go through their performance in the lane, which they did.

Marriott, 1957, was told there were mummers here, but nothing further.

Shropshire Texts

In her account of the Eccleshall play, Burne, 1883, refers to plays at Newport and Edgmond in eastern Shropshire, near the Staffordshire border. In view of their relevance it seems appropriate to give some notes on them here.

EDGMOND

SJ7219

A note in the Ordish papers, dated 1872, refers to an old lady still living in Edgmond who remembered when mummers used to come round in the Wakes and call themselves the Seven Champions of Christendom. This was probably an early version of the account by Burne, 1883, of an old lady at Edgmond, then deceased, who remembered that, "the morris-dancers used to come round at the Wakes and call themselves the Seven Champions of Christendom". There is a further statement by Burne that the play was acted by Edgmond men in 1883 and 1884.

NEWPORT

SJ7419

Burne, 1883, implies that the play was similar to the one from Eccleshall, and the version she gives is apparently an amalgam of the two, being collected from a Newport performer and "corrected" from an Eccleshall copy. It was performed in 1885 and possibly as late as 1890.

Additional Notes

Since the main part of the text of this booklet was printed, further information has come to light. This is summarised in the articles by E.C. Cawte, "Amendments to English Ritual Drama" in *Roomer*, The Newsletter of the Traditional Drama Research Group, Vol. 1, no. 5, 1981, and Vol. 2, no. 2, 1982, The Traditional Drama Research Group, c/o Centre for English Cultural Tradition and Language, University of Sheffield, Sheffield S10 2TN.

Two particular additions should be noted:

HAMSTALL RIDWARE

SK1019

Schofield, 1983, has now examined the original MS and has amplified the information given by Kennedy, 1930. (This does not appear in Cawte's articles.)

ROCESTER

SK1139

The letter by Fletcher, 1936, to *The Observer* has now been traced and details are given by Schofield, 1982.

Erratum

MEIR

SJ9342

The grid reference for this place should be amended as above.

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