CHAPTER IX

SUMMING UP
The Domestic drama was one of the important dramatic forms which flourished in the early seventeenth century. As compared with the other forms current at that time it might appear to be a minor genre; but, the sheer number of plays belonging to this type, recorded in the Diary of Henslowe, besides the outstanding plays surviving, is enough to show that it was after all not so minor as it was made out to be. It looks like a minor form mainly because no dramatist of great merit except Dekker and Heywood used the form for dramatic expression. It was prominent enough to attract the attention of many average dramatists and its popularity with the middle-class audience is unquestionable.

Almost all the other forms of drama like the Sonnet tragedy, Romantic comedy and the Satirical comedy are derived from classical and continental models. As such, however undeniably great and outstanding the achievements of the English dramatists may be in these forms, the fact remains that these forms are not the contributions of the English stage to the dramatic art in general. The Domestic drama unlike the other forms, by common consent, is a robustly independent form of art; it is, as the dramatists emphasised, essentially 'native' and 'homeborn' and truly English in its genesis as well as development. It is free from all borrowed flourishes. It is the 'one unquestioned contribution of the English stage to the dramatic form in general'.
To say that the Domestic drama is a minor form and the achievement of the early seventeenth century dramatists in this field is not great is to miss its true significance. The achievement may be limited to the production of a few important pieces which served as models for the succeeding generations. Mostly the earlier plays are experimental. But the work of Dekker and Heywood in this field can never be called tentative. Both of them are peculiarly suited to the genre by their temperaments, training and inclinations; they made the form their own and achieved the highest success in it. The historical importance of the form is evident from the fact that after the seventeenth century the Domestic drama became a style of almost European importance and a very powerful art form in the hands of the modern dramatists. The tradition was continued after Dekker and Heywood by Lillo and others and it was handed on by the later writers to Lessing. Through him it passed into the hands of Ibsen and attained the high water-mark of artistic excellence. Thus Dekker and Heywood are the unacknowledged ancestors of modern realists. Even after the recent revival of the poetic drama there are occasions when dramatists like T.S. Eliot faintly echo the poignant utterances of Heywood in trying domestic situations in their plays. For example, the words of Edward Chamberlyne in The Cocktail Party

O God, O God, if I could return to yesterday
Before I thought that I had made a decision.

recall the words of Heywood's Frankford:

O God! O God! that it were possible
To undo things done; to call back yesterday!
...the very passage much admired by Eliot.

Its influence on other forms of drama is by no means mean. In a way the Domestic drama paved the way for the evolution of the Sentimental drama. In fact, Aron Hill's *The Fatal Exchange*, Lillo's *The London Merchant*, Benjamin Victor's *The Fatal Error*, are the degraded adaptations of *Yorkshire Tragedy*, Arden of Feversham and *A Woman Killed with Kindness* respectively. The form regained its original strength and prestige in the hands of Galsworthy, its greatest modern exponent.

Dekker and Heywood are the two important dramatists in the early seventeenth century who recognised the full dramatic potentialities of the form and made wholehearted efforts in it. It is mainly because of their efforts the form acquired the status of a distinctive dramatic species and survived as an unquestionable native genre. The plays of earlier writers like the author of *Arden of Feversham*, Porter and Haughton, are either naive dramatisations of gruesome murders or a humorous representation of 'household stuff'. Dekker and Heywood shaped this form into a regular dramatic medium useful for depicting the vital issues of everyday life.

The importance of Dekker and Heywood in the general history of British drama does not consist merely in recognising the innate worth of the Domestic drama alone. Their chief contribution is in making it a full-fledged genre and an important art form, and, in evolving certain techniques of writing which not
only served their purpose but also proved as useful models for the succeeding generations of dramatists. They showed how themes from humble life are subjects enough for tragedy and how simple style is capable of haunting pathos. Another great quality of Dekker and Heywood is that they retained their faith in the goodness of humanity and human institutions amidst what may be called general corruption of manners and taste. It is not because they are unaware of the seamy side of the life of their times: the monopolies, the usury, prostitution and the sufferings of the poor. They cherished their faith in humanity out of a deeper understanding of human relationships. Such was their tolerance that they could never consider human beings as selfish and heartless accumulators. Among the hundreds of characters they presented on the stage, many are ideal gentlemen of the kind of Frankford and Geraldine. Almost all their characters are lovable and even the erring ones are forgivable.

There are grave defects in the art of Dekker and Heywood and much has been made of it. Many sympathetic critics felt that their defects are to a large extent due to the conditions under which they worked. As M.L. Hunt suggests, Dekker may not have been so poor as his critics depicted him to be. And Heywood was free from poverty. However, both of them continued in a kind of bondage under Henslowe, a shrewd businessman who built theatres where and when necessary and readily catered to the needs of the public. In doing this he may have exploited the talents of the
needy dramatists whose unfortunate lot it was to work under him. Therefore, the apparent hurry and carelessness of Dekker and Heywood may be partly attributed to the conditions in which they worked under Henslowe. Yet, they deserve appreciation for what they have done.

The true greatness of Shakespeare is never more striking than when he is seen as one of the Elizabethans. Similarly we get a more tolerable picture of Dekker and Heywood if we examine them as typical Elizabethan dramatists. It is very difficult, of course, to pitch Shakespeare to a particular school and style of drama. Yet, it can be said that his greatest achievement lies in the field of Tragedy and the Romantic comedy. Similarly Ben Jonson achieved the highest success in the Satirical comedy. Like them Dekker and Heywood stand supreme among the dramatists who worked in the field of the Domestic drama.

Their contemporary Webster classed both of them with Shakespeare for their 'right happy and copious industry'. All the three of them were the practical dramatists writing for the public theatres without the professed lofty aims of Chapman and Ben Jonson. They were born dramatists who were capable of conceiving a number of effective dramatic situations and creating life-like characters. They practised the popular forms of art and modified them according to their needs. They never hesitated to give what the public wanted, if it was legitimate. They never
despised the common taste nor did they show any open contempt for the groundlings the 'gentlemen of understanding'. This unites them, however absurd the association may appear to us now. They seem to have lived in close association. For Heywood 'Dekker is but Tom' and

Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose enchanting quill Commanded mirth or passion, was but Will.