

## THE COMEDY OF HUMOURS

Comedy of Humours is a special type of realistic comedy, reflecting contemporary society of the age of Ben Jonson. It is based on the medical theory of four humours — blood, phlegm, choler and melancholy. The word 'humour' in Ben Jonson's age stood for some characteristic whim or quality of the individual. A proper mixture of the four humours contributed to the balance and normal health of the individual personality. But the imbalance or disproportion of these led to the development of a humorous, whimsical or cynical personality. The excess of blood will make a man naturally sanguine, of choler naturally spleenetic or irascible, and of phlegm sluggish, lazy and dull and so on.

Ben Jonson makes a distinction between humour which is a natural bias and the 'affectation' which is some external he acquires singularity of dress, speech and behaviour. He is concerned with the inner and spiritual eccentricity.

than with the external or physical eccentricity of an accidental nature.

The Comedy of humours is an antithesis of the romantic Comedy of Shakespeare. It is realistic and tries to represent the age very faithfully. Jonson's starting point is the assumption that comedy should be a realistic picture of society and excite mirth through the exposure of human follies. He extends the scope of comedy to include the vices and evils of society, which are not the matters for sport but for surgical dissection or castigation.

The comedy of humours is classical as it maintains strictly the unities of time, place, action and tone. It is true to life. Its chief aim is to teach a lesson, that is correction of folly or vice. It dispenses with the traditional clown or jester. The dialogues are brisk and lovely. The language is well fitted to the nature, class, profession and the education of characters speaking. Its plot is weak. It begins and ends with Ben Jonson.