CHAPTER - I

Introduction

The dawn of the twentieth century witnessed the re-emergence of drama as an important literary force though the preparation for this re-emergence was started by the fourth quarter of the preceding century. Drama had been relegated to a comparatively insignificant position by the Victorian writers. As a matter of fact, during the greater part of the nineteenth century English drama was considered more as a part of the general industry of entertainment rather than a serious contribution to the world's art of the theatre. One could well protest that in the Victorian period there was no theatre. This does not mean, of coures, that there were no stages, no actors and no audience, but that England was not taking a considerable or worthy part in the development of a dramatic form of expression. The lingering and rather futile efforts to protect the interests of the two historic theatres of London, Drury Lane and Covent Garden, by giving them a monopoly of "legitimate drama", were abandoned in 1843, when an Act of Parliament granted a comprehensive freedom to the stage. Drama was thus liberated like any article of commerce, and, as the population in England was growing rapidly in number and in wealth, there was a swift expansion of dramatic output. But what was offered to the new public must, unfortunately for the dramatic literature of England, be considered in terms of quantity rather than quality. Commercial standards became more frankly accepted and the

ideal of the "long run" supplanted the old conceptions of a classical repertory in which it was the function of the leading players to appear continually in order to display their powers and graces in a great variety of traditional and testing parts. The old policy, however, of a classical routine was maintained by Charles Kean who become the lessee of the Princess's in 1850 and by Samual Phelps at the Sadler's Wells. Kean, on the one hand, was endeavouring to sustain the best kind of dramatic appeal by throwing in costly embellishments which a later taste would have considered unnecessary and even absurd. Phelps, on the other, did splendid work, not only for the public that still wanted Shakespeare, but for the Shakespearean text itself by going back to the Folio for his matter instead of using the adaptations and versions which had been started during the Restoration with the authority of, surprisingly, Dryden and had continued to grow in numbers and stupidity throughout the eighteenth century. Even John Philip Kemble, who had been considered somthing of a purist in these matters played a musical version of The Tempest which contains lyrics in the style of an eighteenth century ballad opera. Against such what may be called, for want of a more appropriate term, barbarism, long taken for granted even by the cultured people, Phelps made a strong and splendid stand at the Sadler's Wells and during his management there which lasted from 1844 to 1862, he maintained a dignified level of dramatic art while the national theatre as a whole was only concerned with rhetoric and sensation and with reaping the

financial benefits of its newly earned freedom. The drama, of course, was still governed by the State Censor, for whose office Lord Chamberlaine was responsible, and by local licensing authorities who could restrict productions either on account of unsuitable premises or unsuitable matter such as might give moral offence or be a likely cause of riot and unrest. But in mid-Victorian times there was little interference with the industry and the players lived and worked in that companionable anarchy which is so picturesquely described in the Crummles episodes of Dickens's Nicholas Nickleby.

After the Act of 1843, there was a rapid growth of the theatres proper or Lord Chamberlaine's houses as they were known; they could increase and multiply according to popular demand; while the old saloon theatres, which had been outside the patent and had dealt mainly in imported romantic dramas and light operas, found that the new rivalry necessitated new measures. The saloon theatres accordingly relied more and more upon song and dance and became the parents of the music hall, while the orthodox houses were occupied by all that Victorian England could offer in the name of drama. Victorian theatre was dominated by the French tradition in farce and melodrama with the result that many English writers who might have been the "abstracts and brief chronicles" of their time, or who might at least have given to the actors opportunities for fulfilling the high function assigned by Hamlet to the players, remained mere hacks

engaged in adapting imported materials - that, too, of a very low standard.

A distinct change was made by T.W. Robertson (1829-71), whose comedies seem to a generation used to Ibsen, Bernard Shaw, and other playwrights of the drama of ideas to be painfully stilted and artificial. Robertson, nonetheless, was the supposed rebel and realist of his times; he believed, not without reason, that he was bringing the drama back to life from the reign of anarchy to which it had been driven. He became dramatist to the Bancrofts management at the Prince of Wales's theatre. There in that theatre a new school of realistic staging and acting was begun in self-conscious revolt against the tawdry romanticism, the pomposities of rhetoric and spectacle, and the wild fustian of the general drama of the time. Robertson's most important contribution to the theatre of that period was his refusal to accept battered types which passed for figures of fun. To the play-goers of fifty years later Society (1865) and Caste (1867) seemed almost laughbly artificial, but they were considered by contemporary critics as daring essays in naturalism and actuality. Before Robertson's time the writing and the acting of character-parts were limited by certain acknowledged formulae. There was a routine of the ridiculous character and situations in the theatre, as there was afterwards in the music halls; but the fun was stale and there was no stuff for thought. The Bancrofts working on Robertson's pieces abolished these traditional restrictions

upon truth and tried to substitute fresh and individual characters for the stale humours of the type. The whole policy was to let in the air of actuality into the dead stale atmosphere of the playhouse; and in the invigorating change they had important allies in two actors of consequence, Sothere and Hare. As naturalism - but naturalism in quite a loose sense - was the basis of his work, so Robertson sought to make actors understand that it should be theirs too. He,it should be admitted, established a school of natural acting which completely revolutionized the then existing method and, by so doing, did incalculable good to the stage. Unfortunately, Robertson lacked able successors.James Albery was credited with wit and imagination,but he found the job of the adapter easier than that of the creator and H.J. Byron altogether fell from the standards which Robertson endeavoured to institute. Adaptations went briskly on and it was significant that when Beerbohm Tree went into management at the Haymarket in 1887 he relied mainly upon plays of foreign origin. Until the eighties of the nineteenth century were well advanced, the practice of adaptations from the French and sometimes, as in the case of the popular farce <u>The Private Secretary</u>, from the German was held to be the legitimate as well as the customary occupation of a British playwright. To create episode or character was s rare thing. Among those who occasionally created and more often adapted were Albery, Gilbert, Godfrey and Tom Taylor.

But, while the mid-Victorian years were largely sterile in authorship, as is evident from the above,important changes

were being made in the organisation and social status of the English theatre. In early Victorian time the actor was usually expected to be, as most of them really were, a Bohemian and might even be an outcast. The playhouse itself might be rough and ready and the society to be met there only a shade better. The Bancrofts were responsible, not only for blowing fresh air in the quality of stage-writing and production, but for reintroducing the theatre to the attention of the prosperous middle class and of those who might previously have hesitated before being seen in such a place. Whether it was that they raised the tone by raising prices or were able to raise the prices because they had raised the tone is not easy to ascertain. But the fact remains that they gave to their theatre a "cachet" and a "clientile" which confirmed the place of drama among the arts of a civilized London community. A man visiting a theatre would no longer be taken as a man whose character was suspect. Their theatre was as attractively upholstered as their stage was attractively set. Play-going was made safe for the well-to-do; and respectability replaced the old notions of a rakish entertainment for a rackety people. The half-guinea stall, which became a familiar London institution, was introduced and , what was more, it was sold and filled. It is interesting to notice that complaints made some sixty years later about the high prices of seats in London theatres were not based on any historical sense of comparative values. The half-guinea of 1880 was at least

equivalent in general purchasing power to the Pound of 1928. The return of wealthy people to the play-going class did not work altogether for the good; their taste might have been more limited than their purse, and they certainly did not demand a form of theatrical art which should be inellectually ambitious. The intellectually sluggish people took the theatre for a place of light entertainment and did not think that drama was a form of art. But it was, on the whole, an excellent thing that the English theatre should be rescued from its association with the street-corner melodramas. The Bancrofts may not have found the polite and cultivated society of play-goers which is postulated as essential to the production of good drama; but they rendered admirable service to the drama by restoring it to its place among exercises and adornments of a civilized community. The time of drama as art, the time of intellectually fertile theatre-goers, was, however, still to come.

Another of the achievements of the Bancrofts, which must not go unheeded in any discussion of the development of drama in the mid-nineteenth century, was the organisation of theatre throughout the country. Provincial production had hitherto been left to stock companies or to the travelling troupes working on local circuits. "Lovers of Vincent Crummles will know that the strolling players added more to the strange pleasures of life than to the attractions of the theatre as a recreation for educated and adult people [1]".

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1. Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 7 P 606.

The great alteration in the mid-Victorian era was noticed in the touring companies with casts efficiently chosen in London and trained under expert supervision. The national development of communications made travels far easier than it had been before. Moreover, it was made possible to carry scenery from place to place instead of relying upon the uncertain local provision. In 1867 the Bancrofts organised for tour an exact reproduction of the London presentation of Roberstson's masterpiece Caste and the quality of the performance appears to have been greatly appreciated in the towns which were visited. Buckstone's Company from Haymarket followed suit and it soon became common for actor-managers to go on tour and thus bring to the various provincial towns a smoothness and a virtuosity of performance to which the local audiences were quite unused. By the end of the nineteenth century all the great London actors and important foreign visitors like Sarah Bernhardt habitually took their companies on tour and the centralisation of the theatrical activity in the capital was considerably diminished. There were obvious advantages in this, but the old stock companies which were replaced by the new touring combinations, had been very much valuable as training schools. A player brought up in them had to learn to play all kinds of parts at very short notice; he had therefore to be elastic enough in his technique and had to be versatile in his range. He might be king one day and begger the next. But with the touring companies from London the

players went on repeating one part and then was expected to continue in another role of the same kind. He became a specialist and was cast only for parts in which he was known to have specialized. The result was the elaboration of smoothness in certain types of work, but not the creation of actors with plastic masks and personalities who were ready to go anywhere and to do anything. Even those who least approve of the type of drama produced under the old conditions of the pre-Bancrofts stage would admit that those conditions were likely to evoke a rich and resourceful type of acting in which full command of movements and of direction were absolutely essential.

It is plain from what has been said of the early and mid-Victorian stage that the play was not the thing; it seemed that nobody thought seriously of the play as a form of art. The play-goer's motive was rarely literary, nor did he regard it as the function of the dramatic art to hold mirror up either to human nature, to current manners, or to the problems of the hour or of eternity. The period was one of intensely dramatic changes in the national life. The economic structure of the society was altering; science was coming up to challenge dogma; the strife of classes and generations was taking shape in conflicts whose natural artistic expression should surely have been dramatic. But to the student, who wishes to draw the picture of the social landscape of the time, the stage offers extremely little help. In no sense

were the actors the abstracts of their time. Both the pride in the new progress and the protests against it were made vocal in the novel and in poetry. Unfortunately, the English stage was so far divorced from the national culture that it totally failed to interpret in terms of drama the immensely important and immensely exciting development in the knowledge, wealth and power of the English people. If ever history was throwing material to the playwright, it was then; but the playwright was too busy with imported French trivialities or concocting the farces of the routine types to pay any attention to his great opportunities of doing for the theatre what Dickens and Thackeray were doing for the novel. It was only after Ibsen had revolutionized the European theatre by making his drama into a vivid criticism of actual social values that the English who had a similar artistic purpose came to use the dramatic medium for such a purpose.

But although there was an absence of a great school of playwrights in England, there was no dearth of good actors; there was both demand for and supply of great acting. There is the man who writes, the man who acts, and the man who makes the spectacle. That is a simple analysis that is capable of much refinement in one way or of expression in another. The history of the theatre shows that those three parties are continually engaged in rivalry as well as in co-operation. A struggle for the balance is even in progress. Accordingly, whereas one epoch or generation is particularly distinguished for the quality of its plays and of the authors whom it attracts to theatrical service,

another is the golden age of the actor who is admired for himself alone and not in relation to the splendours or the subtlety of the play in which he acts, while at another time emphasis centres on display of scene or on the mass-effects controlled by the producer and the pageant-master. The theatre of England in the nineteenth century, or atleast until the renaissance of English dramatic composition in the 1880's was predominantly an actor's theatre. The play-goers thought in terms of the actor and his indivudual magnetism. It was the mark of the time that whereas the man of culture in 1920 would have considered whether to go and see the new Galsworthy or the new Shaw, his predecessors in polite playgoing society would have considered whether to go and see Kemble or Kean or Macready or Phelps or Irving. The primary interest was not in the thing written, but in the thing done. The great actors did not wish to be brief chroniclers appearing in the works of the moment but liked to take part in the histrionic tournament provided by rival appearances in the great historic roles. They appealed to connoisseurs who would match their Hamlet or Macbeth against another's. What mattered was neither the mind of the original Shakespeare nor the absence of a new one, but the arrival of a new virtuoso who would berattle the town with his rhetoric or conquer it with his grace in some grand Shakespearean part.

Henry Irving was possibly the most famous actor of that time. The sovereignty of Irving in the theatre of the time can best be understood if we remember to what extent

the theatre was under the domination of the actors. Irving carried on the social service of the Bancrofts in bringing honour to his art and rescuing his profession from squalor and disrepute. Yet of this one of the most eminent Victorians, whose name was almost synonymous with the national theatre of England of his time, many undeserving comments have been made. When we speak of Irving we do not speak much of his managerial career, which, for the living English drama, did not have much of significance. It is to be noticed that as a manager he seldom experimented with a new play, and of the few which he did produce, only The Cup and Becket by Lord Tennyson could expect to be remembered by the posterity. But even these productions were soon forgotten. Irving did not imprint his mark in the history of the English theatre as a manager; he is remembered, rightly, as an actor.

The problem of the drama became an economic one as soon as the middle classes started to visit the theatre. As the population of the city of London rose to the millions and among them quite a good number started visiting the theatre, the theatre paid. It was seemingly a favourable condition but the decadence was obviously apparent. The middle-classes were gregarious in the matters of tastes, habits and inclinations as they were individualists in religion, politics and economics. If a play succeeded with a hundred people, it would succeed with a thousand. Thus a formidable chain of commonplaces and established criticism was formed, which could keep an ordinary production on the

stage for twenty months and more. The business hastened to make money; they did not care a rap for a good varied repertory. The new managers -- great managers like Irving being no longer in the forefront -- wanted the profits of speculation, for which a long run was necessary : the works performed were assured, more or less, of popular success which had little connection with the greatness of a play, as play. The costs of production were distributed over a long period; the actors, as they were employed for a long time, were paid less.

The managers,led by the psychology of long run and endless success, grew rich at the cost of quality and variety of the theatrical performance. The actors, deprived of the chance of being tested in various roles by frequent change in performance, had little chance of learning and improving; they ended by each acquiring a "cachet", a limited type of acting of their own, which had a sure effect in a certain sort of part which they always had to play. Indeed, the writers often arranged the characters and the action in view of certain actors who would be able to present them the greatest popular success; a thing which has always occurred since the drama began but as a rule with great actors,who had to act and interpret first class roles. But now this system extended to all the numbers of the cast. The play was now deprived of the popular sap and vigour it had in the past.

Thus when the middle-class began to move towards the drama in mass, it became a middle-class business and its

development was stopped. It became an economic tool in their hands; it dropped into an unseemly depth to which it had never been before, not even in the worst times. What was good in the old repertories and conventions now gave place to mediocrity -- the petty social conventions and mediocre tastes of the then ruling class were imposed on the drama.

Such became the condition of drama, and at this point a rebellious group arose from among the middle-class itself. This rebellious group of the younger sons of the middle-class[1] rebelled against the prevailing condition of drama as against every other thing, particularly the middle-class attitude towards morality. Their rebellion against every other thing can be noticed in their dramas through which they proclaimed, scandalizing the typical Victorians, independence from the bounds of conventions and shallow moralities and respectabilities. The middle-class always has its younger sons who examine them, rise against them and betray them making them ridiculous. Through the sciences, the liberal professions, literature and art, these younger sons always end by acquiring a social and political supremacy; they bring a different spirit into the public and private life by altering relations and proportions, and their predomination signifies the end of the purely middle-class period. Sooner or later the economic system always feels the influence of this new social equilibrium. Norwegian

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1. English Drama - Camillo Pellizzi P 71 (Trans. by Rowan Williams). Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1935.

playwright Henric Ibsen was a younger son of the middle-class who was actually the first source of revolt in nineteenth century drama; it was he who gave the substance and the precise tone to the revolt of the younger sons of the middle-class at the close of the last century. In Italy, as Camillo Pellizzi observed,[1] Ibsen's dramatic work was recognized only by the intellectual few while the general Italian public only knew his work from a bad performance of Ghosts by the actors of half a century ago. To understand Ibsen's significance he must be looked at against his historical background, that of the Protestant middle-class in the northern European countries at the end of the last century -- a world with regard to which the Italy of the same period and successive periods might belong to another time and clime, so different was the historical and spiritual condition there from other European countries. England also belonged to the main stream to which Norway belonged; but whreas Norway was the path-finder, England was the follower.

Ibsen pierced his searching eyes through the Nordic middle-class conscience of the late nineteenth century; their sexual, sentimental, civic, political, economic, intellectual and family conventions were taken up by him for critical reassessment; he saw vast problems concrete in particular cases, among characters not photographically

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1. English Drama - Camillo Pellizzi P 71 (Trans. by Rowan Williams). Macmillan & Co. Ltd. 1935.

realistic but having an esential reality which is historical and superhistorical at the same time; the characters have, not factual, but artistic truth. The society which Ibsen called on to answer his grave questions could not take refuge in a purely argumentative reply, nor could it launch a counter-attack by bringing up the peculiarities and individual defects of characters, for, behind Ibsen's attack there was his art and universality; his characters belong to all times and to all places -- not merely to Norway of the nineteenth century. It was said that Nora and Hedda Gabbler were isolated cases, that the deceased father in Ghosts was a degenerate libertine and that no one had ever pretended that similar cases did not exist even in the best society. This is true; but it is also true that in Nora and Hedda Gabbler exist those elements which are found more or less latent in all women; the father in Ghosts whose influence is felt through the play though he does not appear in person, was not necessarily a bad man, but a man of violent and exuberant impulses, who left behind a long train of ruin owing to the errors and baseness of the social mentality in the midst of which be lived. Ibsen's questions cannot be igonred or escaped, because they touch the living spring of those fundamental characteristics from which humanity cannot free itself without denying its own nature.

The concience of the Protestant middle-class could not escape from Ibsen's criticism ; they were accused on the basis of their own dogmas and moral criteria, and they could not defend themselves except by shutting the doors of their

theatres on Ibsen's face and by calling him and his plays filthy names. In England the censor prohibited the performance of Ibsen's plays. But the younger middle- class rebelled against the old and they were happy to have found such a powerful writer as Ibsen at the head of their campaign against the middle-class mentality and attitude. All the characteristic middle-class writers of the period felt the influence of Ibsen -- influence, quickly discernible or not. But the first of the dramatists of England coming from among the younger sons of the middle-class in the nineteenth century lacked the indignation and the sense of social remorse which are the fundamental sources of Ibsen's inspiration.

Of the English dramatists, Robertson partly freed himself from the conventional, empty types of the old drama, but he, as a rule, put nothing in their place but individuals. His realism is more photographic than artistic. He also acceeded to the popular demand for a happy ending ; the lost officer unexpectedly returns in the midst of general reconciliation. Nor did Robertson hesitate to appeal to the sentimentality of the gallery whenever the plot offered an opportunity. He succeeded in asserting himself before a public used to melodramatic emotions, simply by exciting analogous emotions by means of contemporary subjects. The action is lively, showing the writer to have had expert knowledge of the needs and resources of the stage; but the dialogue falls very often into the

conventional and ingenuous. It remains a fact, however, as F.S. Boas points out, that Robertson had kept before him the ideal of a more natural and lifelike form of comedy.[1]

Robertson preached, if anything, sympathy and charity between people of different castes ; he wanted to teach the people that admirable characters existed in all classes, capable of loving one another. But he was profoundly convinced, as a general rule, that people should stay with people, the middle-class with the middle-class, the nobility with the nobility. The middle-class for whom Caste was intended, and who applauded it for a generation and more, agreed to this species of compromise between a general rule and a particular fact. Evidently, the spirit of middle-class realism had not yet come to maturity in society, or in the public mind, and the middle-classes felt themselves one class among others; they liked to contemplate their own virtues and others' defects, in order to reassert their rights and aspirations. It is certain that Robertson was not the leader of the younger sons of the middle-class in the struggle against the conventional outlook and respectability of their own class.

Arthur Wing Pinero and Sir Arthur Jones, who have been discussed at some length in the chapter on the "Exponents" of the twentieth century drama of ideas, gave the modern English middle-classes a realistic and thoughtful

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1. From Richardson to Pinero - F.S.Boas. P 251 - 252.
John Murry. London. 1936.

drama, sometimes also gently satirical and controversial. But the fact that appears to any reader or onlooker who understands the middle-class is that the drama of Pinero and Jones always kept itself within the main tendencies and middle-class mentality and convention. It should be noted, however, that they prompted the middle-classes to come to the theatre to think; sometimes they also accustomed them to contemplate without the veil of middle-class moralities; but they were not Ibsenites in the true sense. It fell upon the Ibsenites of England and on Bernard Shaw in particular -- though Shaw is not another Ibsen --- to challenge the middle-classes and their moralities with an aggressive, hostile, and fierce criticism and almost forced them to acknowledge their moral defeat.

The ground was being prepared for this. All the conditions operating against the blossoming of drama during the Victorian age were slowly and gradually removed. As time passed new trends were introduced in drama and every effort was made by the dramatist to make drama life-like, realistic and appealing to the common man; they made the drama a vehicle of ideas and conflicts of ideas. The moral taboos imposed on drama by the priggish Victorians were also removed and dramatists were at ease in producing once again dramas of really high standard. The vogue for comedies was once again introduced in the wake of the social changes and democratic freedom that came with the new century. The new social problems rising in the new set up of values cried for solution, and drama seemed to be a fitting medium in which

justice could be done in suggesting solutions to the social and other problems of the time. The modern dramatist took his task seriously and gave a new outlook to drama, which it had not seen in the preceding period.

The emergence of the new drama cannot be ascribed to any single cause; but we can discern a dozen or more contributing factors all of which seem significant. There had been a gradual but sure disappearance of the prejudice against theatre-going which was definitely due to the increasing spread of education. This spread of education gave the people a gift of broader outlook. A welcome relaxation of the censorship, a steady rise in the standards of judgement, which also may be to some extent ascribed to the spread of education, an increasing margin of leisure in the life of the ordinary men and women, a deepening conviction that a certain amount of recreation is the natural right of every human being, and the remarkable competence in the theatre are also among the factors that helped the drama emerge as a powerful genre of art. We have to recognize the influence of the new producer with his theories of drama as a composite art --- a systhesis of all arts. The arrival of the new scenic artist and the stage electrician revolutionized production. But the greatest factor of all was, undoubtedly, the change in the dramatist himself who was no longer content with the conventions and moralities of the Victorian age. The new dramatist belonged to the middle-class by birth, but was antagonistic towards this class in his mental make up.

The nineties of the nineteenth century was a period in which we witness a revolt against the Victorian ideas of morality and standards of conduct. This short period in English literature was not a merely irrelevant episode in literary history; it,too, had its importance. The importance of the "nineties" is that this decade seems to represent the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. So many things in Victorian life either declined or came to an end during this period; many things, most of which we associate with our times, began their career. The "nineties" should , of course, better be looked at as a state of mind --- a state in which everything orthodox and conventional is doubted and put to serious questions. This period saw the recession of the Gladstonian, Liberal peace, and the rise of the new commercial imperialism with all its sordid consequences; the end of the Aesthetic Movement, and the rapid rise, from small beginning in the eighties, of the Fabian Movement of informed social criticism; the passing of Victorian insularity, and the rising influence of Continental ideas; the decline of orthodox religion and morality --- all these things concern the "nineties". New social, political, religious ideas were in the air and various thinkers looked at these ideas and problems from various angles. Thus the time was ripe for the New Drama, which was known as the Drama of Ideas, to emerge. With the treatment of actual life in which ideas of all sorts conflicted with each other, drama became more and more a drama of ideas. These ideas for the most part were

revolutionary, and hence drama came to form an advanced battle-ground for the rising generation of young thinkers. Bernard Shaw, of course, was not satisfied merely by showing the "actual life" on the stage ; rather he went a step further and dramatised his version of the future. His dramas, indeed, are vehicles of various ideas and he explores every known problem --- social, political, moral and religious. But his ideas do not merely concern the "real life" as it generally understood ; they also concern man's aspiration for a higher and nobler life. His dramas are larger than life, also because they delve deep into the mystery of life.

To go back to the discussion of the background, the latter years of the nineteenth century saw the almost final breakdown, in the limited areas in which it still held its own, of a pre-industrial way of life and economy. The agricultural depression of those times (1870 - 1902) hit particularly hard the landed aristocracy and the agricultural labourer ; it was then that the change in the village denoted the end of rural England on any significant scale: even a countryman became a "town-bird" at heart. The decline of the rural way of life has been reflected in the barrenness of nature poetry in the late nineteenth and the twentieth centuries; it has also been reflected in the veering of interest towards urban themes.The implication of the loss of the rural way of life has been mourned by Thomas Hardy, Richard Jefferies and many others though this way of life also had its ugliness and vices. Still, the

idealization of rural values was accepted by many writers as something ennobling and they missed it. The pervasive feeling was that any material gain is always balanced against a perceptible spiritual loss and bankruptcy which received the attention of the litterateurs.

Increasing urbanisation had far-reaching impact. This impact was particularly noticeable in the altered social pattern. Of course, the change in the pattern was to be found over the greater part of England throughout the nineteenth century. Money attained a new importance unknown to the previous centuries. Money started playing increasingly large role in the new village economy and it struck at the root of human relationship. An ethics of competition, so long known in urban areas only, emerged with all its viciousness. "The effect of this had been to reduce man to the level of economic man, one whose community relationships were at the mercy of the cash-nexus, and whose psychological motivations were thought of mostly in the terms of self interest."[1] In such circumstances the poor was regarded not as a term to describe a particular condition of society but to describe the character and psychology of a group of people. Private morality was mainly authoritarian and taboo-ridden and personal oddity was considered a sign of degeneracy. The outward show of family life and relationship was maintained in the name of respectability.

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1. The Modern Age - Ed. B.Ford. The Social and Intellectual Background - G.H.Bantock. Penguine 1970. P 16.

From some points of view, in contrast especially with the eighteenth century, the victorian age might be regarded as an age of religion, an age in which Evangelicalism, the religion of the middle class, set the tone of manners, dress and taste which the lower orders in the English society adopted in their struggle towards respectability; it was an age in which public speakers including prime ministers, raised echoes of a submerged religious vocabulary in their speeches. Yet it might also be regarded as an age of religious decay and uncontrolled secterianism. Partly because religious association was one of the few means of showing group solidarity, religion came more and more to reflect the interests of social classes. Many of the religious difficulties about which so much was heard in this period were not purely religious in character; they were often the expression of pain and disgust at social displacement as men outgrew some of the bleaker cults. They had found themselves no longer at home in the local tabernacles and chapels. Religious vagrancy became -- and has remained -- a permanent feature of English life. It was for such vagrants that various substitute religions of science such as Positivism and Spencerian Evolutionism had their attractions. A good deal of dissenting seriousness and zeal found outlet in science which opened up new roads to respectability. In a nutshell, confusion prevailed everywhere; this confusion was caused by the flow of various currents and cross-currents of ideas. Conventional and unconventional ideas came to a loggerhead. The conflict

between the viewpoints -- two sets of ideas - paved the way for the growth of the of the drama of ideas.

When Queen Victoria ascended the throne in 1837, Britain was, on the whole, a discontented, poverty-stricken country. By 1887, when she attained the fiftieth year of her accession to the throne, poverty and distress still largely existed. But men could point out the immense strides which had been made to relieve them of such distress. The notice able decrease in the number of criminals[1] is explained partly by a decrease in lawlessness but mainly by the increasing humaneness of the penal code. But other sources of pride were there, the first and the most striking being increase in population -- then regarded as a source of pride in itself. But still more wonderful was the increase in trade. In 1887, for instance, British foreign trade considerably exceeded that of the next two European countries, France and Germany, put together.Even the United States of America was lagging far behind.Britain still kept the lead which the great inventions of the eighteenth century had given her. Her output of coal was still far ahead of that of all her competitors. She was still first in railway and ship building industries. British Capital and British iron and coal were used in factories all over the world. Numerous scientific inventions brightened the lives of the Victorians.

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1. In 1836 there were 52,000 British convicts at home or in colonies. But in 1885 the number came down to 9,000. (A History of Britain. E.H.Carter and R.A.F. Mears - Second Edition. Oxford. 1948. P 893).

But, simultaneously, there is another and different story to tell. While iron and steel and coal trades were booming, and while science was adding remarkably to the material comforts, the oldest and most important of industries -- agriculture, which had been the mainstay of the life in Britain -- suffered a definite set-back. The farmers prospered till the seventies of the nineteenth century, but then the blows began to fall bringing this industry to almost a ruin by 1895. The main reason for this calamity was the import of cheap American corn in large quantities. Again frozen meat began to be imported to Britain from Australia, Newzealand, and Argentina. Cheap food benefited the consumer, but the British farmer suffered. Unlike other countries in Europe, Britain did not put up tariffs to protect the farmers. It was assumed that since industry was booming under Free Trade, agriculture could also take care of itself. The results were disastrous; the decline of British agriculture intensified in the nineties of the nineteenth century affecting the farming community very adversely. It struck a blow not only on the farmers but on the whole national life.

An important change came over the structure of British business during this period. Instead of the old family-owned concerns, industry passed more and more under the control of Limited Liability Companies. This system, unknown on a large scale to the previous decades, became typical of British business. The middle-class started increasingly to invest in industry as share holders in the Limited Companies. It became possible for a section of the

community to live on income derived from the profits. This class was not very interested in bettering the conditions under which industry was carried on so long as dividends were regularly paid.

The conflict between the employer and the employees continued. Trade union carried on the battle for better conditions of labour, higher wages and shorter hours of work; their demands were always resisted though sometimes compromises were effected. But in this conflict the State did not interfere, particularly in the ceaseless dispute over wages between the employers and the employess. But, it must be noticed that the State regarded the trade unions with less disfavour. Moreover, in such matters as Housing and Public Health some important laws were passed. Yet what was done by the State was considered too little and naturally there was demand for more state-control, in the industrial sphere in particular.

It was, in short, a time of confusion - confusion in all the departments of human activity, physical and moral. It was thus a ripe time for the emergence of what is known as the drama of ideas. In this drama the stage is employed by the dramatist to give expressions to certain ideas through the discussions between and among the characters. This drama, dealing particularly with the problems of life, has become far more intellectual than ever before.

Henrich Ibsen, the great Norwegian playwright, may be justifiably regarded as the greatest exponent of the drama of ideas and certainly his influence on the dramatic writings of

Bernard shaw is not negligible. But the drama of ideas as a form of art is not just imported to England from Norway. The dramatists of England themselves did some work in the line which ensured the emrgence of the drama of ideas there. These works done by Pinero and Jones and, before them, Robertson have been discussed in one chapter of this work. But it is seldom remembered and appreciated that the great novelist of the Victorian era, Charles Dickens, also paved the way for emergence of this type of play. It has been maintained elsewhere in the present work that Shaw's dramas are the nearest approach to novels. But any attempt to soeak about the relation between the English drama and the Eglish novel will remain incomplete without a reference to works of Dickens who is correctly looked upon as the most "dramatic" of the English novelists.[1]

The literature of ideas of the twentieth century is mainly Dickensian. There is a tradition of comedy in English fiction which originally sprang from the drama. This tradition reached its zenith in Dickens and,in the twentieth century, is principally noticeable in the novel of ideas of Wells and Orwell and in the drama of ideas of Bernard Shaw.

It will not be out of place to say a few words about the world of Dickens's novels. Among the most important elements in the novels of Dickens are the general nature of the world in which the protagonist lives and his general

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1. Charles Dickens (in From Dickens to Hardy. Ed. by Boris Ford.) - R.C.Churchill. Penguine. 1964. P 123.

situation at the beginning of the story. The protagonist finds himself in a world in which his inner life, the life of the other people, and the time have certain modes of existence. The protagonist begins in isolation, but then moves through successive adventures; he tries to understand the world and to find his real self. "In this interchange between mind and world there is in Dickens's characters a constant attempt to reach something transcendent, something more real than one's own consciousness or than the too solid every day material world."[1]

Oliver Twist is the first of the heroes of Dickens to dramatise the plight of the orphan who is almost lost in an alien, and even hostile, world. The happy ending with which the novel ends is the standard for a large number of Victorian novels. The authenticity is nevertheless given to the plot by the intensity and depth of Dickens's imagination. Oliver, we find, does not take matters into his own hands and accepts a definition of his self which comes from the plot and not from within. In the novels that follow Oliver Twist we find that the central characters are isolated like Oliver; but in all of them, notably in The Old Curiosity Shop, there is an increasing awareness that the only escape from the dark, alien world is death. It seems that it is only evasion of facts and problems, not their solution. In Martin Chuzzlewit, however, Dickens faces the problem more sqarely.

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1. Charles Dickens (The World of his novels) -
J.Hillis Miller.
Havard University Press. 1958. P 329.

Here he brings his hero into the open arena of the society, much as Bernard Shaw at a later date was to do, by minimising the help he can get from his relatives and ancestors. The theme of Dickens in this novel is the futility of dependence on a society which is full of impostures. In Dombey and Son and David Copperfield we notice the most important transformation of Dickens's imaginative vision. The solution to the problem of how to escape from the isolation is sought in romantic love. Florence Dombey achieves happiness through her love for Walter and his love for her; the centre in David Copperfield is the relation between David and Anges. In Bleak House the protagonist is the entire society. The people living in the society are imprisoned by the forces coming from the past. Instead of submitting to the forces of the past and waiting for a comfortable place in the existing society, one must change the world around through independent action. It may be mentioned that both Ibsen and Shaw dramatized this idea. This, of course, is not the last and final stage of Dickens's ideas. It is in the last novels of Dickens that we discover one more change which is a belief that human condtions cannot be completely changed, so long as life lasts. Dickens's heroes in the last novels come back to life, but they come back with the knowledge that value radiates not from any outside power, but from the human spirit; the past actually stands rejected.

Thus we find that the prevailing idea in the mature works of Charles Dickens is one of rejecting the past, much in the manner of the revolting sons of the middle class

like Ibsen and Shaw. When the playwrights of the drama of ideas started writing, their attention was focussed pointedly on Dickens. I have maintained that it was the revolting sons of the middle class who wrote the drama of ideas shattering the conventional outlook; the rejection of the past, in their case the rejection of Victorian attitudes, became their starting point,. The idea of rejection of the past might well bring for Dickens the epithet of being "immoral" as Shaw and Ibsen were branded.It may be mentioned that it was not this idea of the rejection of the past only, but the manner of Dickens also largely influenced the drama of ideas as handled by Shaw. This aspect has been discussed in the chapter on Shaw's technique and treatment of theme. A reorientation toward the future and toward the free human spirit noticed in the last novels of Dickens also largely influenced Shaw.

The characteristics noted in the novels of Dickens are more or less the characteristics of the literature of ideas of the modern age, not excluding dramatic literature. Thus we may claim that in England it is Dickens from whom the drama of ideas particularly stems - even after we acknowledge the indebtedness to Ibsen. The highly unpopular, but widely publicized plays of Ibsen were not the sole factor in the English theatre which could be drawn upon in the interests of a drama critical of the conventional society.

In this connection a few words should be said of a latent strain of edification and didacticism in English drama even before the imapct of Ibsen made itself evident. Shaw

maintained that the spectator would never support a merely voluptuous drama. "From the play of ideas - and the drama can never be anything more - he demands edification, and will not pay for anything else in that arena".[1] The mistake with the comedy and melodrama of the nineteenth century was that, however edifying the homily, its acceptability was guaranteed by the conventionality of the morality. Shaw, again, occasionally proclaimed that an audience might come to the theatre to be edified, but the more a play is unreasonable and morally fradulent, the more they will like it. This often produces the result that the dramatic authors are induced to produce plays of great interest in order to force audiences to swallow the pill of unconventionality, which is, more often that not, bitter. In his own practice Shaw combines edification with a comedy in which the cherished conventions are the butt of the joke.

It is not without thought and calculation that Shaw accepted comedy as the medium of his dramatic expression. Shaw was essentially a man of ideas and the target of his criticism is society. He addresses the society and not the isolated individual. A drama is meant to catch an entire audience of diverse natures and likes and dislikes. In a drama of ideas there shall be debates and discussions; these debates and discussions "offend the intellectual nature of comedy less than the emotional nature of tragedy or

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1 Preface to Three Plays for Puritans in The Complete Prefaces of Bernard Shaw. Paul Hamlyn. London. 1965. P 737.

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'serious' drama"[1], as Ronald Peacock says. It is needless to mention that the drama of ideas appeals to the intellectual nature of man. Thus we find that Shaw's acceptance of comedy as the medium of expression reveals his penchant for cool judgement.

In search of the sources of the drama of ideas it is possible for us to go back to Shakespeare, or even to Euripedes. In the chapter on the dramatic technique of Shaw I have discussed his indebtedness to both these two dramatists. The native sources of the drama of ideas of England which flourished in the late nineteenth and in our century are primarily Dickens, Robertson,Pinero and Jones; the secondary sources may be found in the plays, particularly the last plays, of Shakespeare. The drama of ideas is a "problem play" and in that sense Hamlet is also a drama of ideas; and there is no dearth of ideas in Hamlet. This type of drama, however, found its full play in the last plays of Shakespeare in which the Christian doctrines of reconciliation and forgiveness make the main interest. The difference between the Shakespearean play of ideas and the modern play of ideas is, of course, great; the difference is noticeable mainly in the fact that there is no discussion and debate in the former whereas in the latter "action" is in the discussion.

A secondary foreign source of the drama of ideas of our times may be discovered in Euripedes. This younger

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1. Shaw - Ronald Peacock in G.B. Shaw - a Critical Survey - ed. L. Kronenberger.The World Publishing Company. 1953. P 179.

contemporary of Aeschylus and Sophocles seems to belong to a different generation and to have lived in a different world of ideas - a world in which every principle, religious and moral, had to stand the test of public examination. It was Euripedes who first examined the ideas of the society, attacked the attitudes and gave birth to a drama which was unknown before him. Discussion and debate are frequent in Greek drama,but neither of the other two dramatists ever made the stage so much like a philosophical debating-room or put into the mouths of characters arguments directed against the moral standards and religious beliefs of his countrymen and contemporaries. Many of the sophist thinkers fo the day were attacking the conventional standards and advancing ideas subversive of the existing society. But they did not use the theatre for the purpose; neither did they put wicked and immoral words into the mouths of old legendary heroes. So while the sophists were allowed to argue and preach as they pleased, Euripedes incurred a lot of displeasure of an influential section of the Athenian society. There is, however, much exaggeration in the reports of his unpopularity. The majority of citizens must have found the plays of Euripedes novel and interesting even while they disapproved of the points of view expressed in then. "Euripedes was a great teacher of rationalism and a daring critic of all established institutions and beliefs".[1]

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1. History of Greece (499 - 404 B.C.) - K.C. Chaudhuri. New Central Book Agency. Calcutta 1969. P 329-30.

Having dramatized the position of women in the Athenian Soeicty of his day in Alcestic, Euripedes looked further afield in legend to find themes which should illustrate the fact that women too had feelings and intelligence. The Athenian women also, not to speak of men, had no other thought than their duty towards the male members of the family. Euripedes looked at this attitude to be wrong and psychologically inadequate. In Medea he shows that women are not inferior to men and they also have feelings and intelligence. The conflict in Medea is one between human desires or wills.In Hyppolytus, which follows Medea, the conflict is one between two ideals. In Hecuba Euripedes studies feminine psychology. In the character of Hucuba the love for childeren is turned into lust for vengeance. In Ion the dramatist attacks the morality of the gods. But it is not precisely with that purpose that the play is written. It is written above all to depict human life, human situation. It is life as Euripedes sees it though it is coloured strongly by his views. It required a lot of guts in those days to present Apollo as almost a villain in the piece as Euripedes did. A lot of emotion is surely mixed up here, but the particular appeal of Ion, as of almost all the plays of Euripedes, is to intellect. After he had left Athens his new surroundings gave new impulses to the intellect of the dramatist. The Bacchae is one of the most widely discussed plays of Euripedes. It is a baffling play, not to be summed up in one phrase at all. One thing that is clear is that this play is not directed towards suppression of wine. Dionysus

stands not for wine-drinking only and it is not possible to neglect the joys of life, excitement and emotion; man cannot live by reason and intellect alone. To have too much faith in wisdom is not only foolish but criminal. But from this play it is hard to see what particular view Euripedes took on moral questions. Being a dramatist of the first order, he sees both the sides of the problem and dramatizes the case with a fairness which is the mark of all great artists. It may be taken note of that when the two sides put forward their points of view with arguments, the stage resembles a debating-room. No particular view is taken for granted and all the views are expressed and tested. This attitude of testing before accepting makes Euripedes modern and we understand how his writings influenced the play of ideas of the modern times. It should be noted that discussion becomes inevitable in such plays where different characters put forward different views and "action" in such plays lies in the discussion. Naturally, Euripedes's practice of dramatizing both the sides of a question does prevent his plays from being "dramas". His plays may be regarded as the plays of ideas because he dramatizes ideas through discussions.

The modern drama of ideas is indebted to Aristophanes too who attacked the social absurdities in his comedies, particularly in those of the final period of his literary career. There is a subtle satire in the comedies of Aristophanes when he examines the methods of the sophists or

when he deals with the fondness of the Athenians for law courts. Attack against the individual, of course, is also there, say in Frogs in which Euripedes is taken to task. This comedy reminds us of Bernard Shaws' Fanny's First Play as it contains interesting contemporary literary and dramatic criticism. It may be mentioned,however, that satire and criticism by themselves do not make the drama of ideas.

It is primarily in the comedies of the final period that we find how Aristophanes attacks the generalites. Ecclesiazusae and Plutus could give little offence to the existing government or to any individual in it. The end of the comedies of Aristophanes is not to create laughter for its own sake, but to create a serious mood,and this shows their resemblance with the plays of Shaw. Aristophanes creates laughter by the exposure of the incongruities in life and this is what Shaw considers to be the real stuff of comedy.

The theme of Ecclesiazusae is developed in an unexpected way. The women in the city having stolen their husbands' clothes and usurped their place in the Assembly proceed to make revolutionary proposals -- the abolition of all distinction between rich and poor, common ownership of land and other forms of wealth, tickets for meals provided by the state, abolition of home-life and marriage etc. All this is parody not of any existing state but of Communism like that of the rulers in Plato's Republic.

The relation of Aristophanes' satire of communism to Plato's serious study in the Republic, of course, has

long been a problem. Since this work of Plato appeared, presumably, a few years after the play of Aristophanes, it is now usually assumed that speculation on socialism, Communism and other political and social theories was rife during the days of Aristophanes. Indeed, social and economic problems were very acute in the fourth century B.C. and Aristophanes took up for his themes what everyone was thinking and talking about. The mock communism in the Women in the Assembly and the redistribution of wealth in Plutus may be enjoyed by the audience because neither offends the individual. These are the distant kins of the plays of ideas of our times because in them we find political and social ideas running riot and there are conflicts between the established ideas and the new.

One of the strongest and the most significant features of Aristophanic comedy is its intermingling of serious political appeal and uprorious low-comedy which automatically reminds us of Bernard Shaw. Aristophanes' loathing of his age went deeper than mere external political events, for he hated the intellectual demagogues as bitterly as he hated the political ones. The purpose of an Aristophanic comedy is almost invariably serious, but the dramatist introduces anything that may produce a laugh. Hence it becomes difficult to determine whether he is playful or serious. His art is a brilliant gem with numerous facets apt to deceive the unwary.

No study of Aristophanes could be complete without any reference to the more social dramas, Nephelai and Sphekes. Aristophanes regarded Nephelai as his best work though, as

reports go, it could not,in contemporary popularity, compete successfully with a play of Kratinos.[1] In this play the playwright made pointed attacks against the system of education of the Sophists; attack is also directed against the protagonist of the play, Socrates. In Sphekes Aristophanes ridiculed the love of the Athenians for lawsuits. In all these plays as also in the so-called political plays of Aristophanes the interest lies in the treatment of themes as in their intellectuality.

Plato deserves special mention in the growth and development of the play of ideas. I would like to discuss at some length only two of Plato's dialogues,Symposium and Protagoras to show that his contribution to the genre is of great importance.

Plato showed remarkable talent as a poet,dramatist and scluptor. And although he later on turned away from professional work in the arts, he never ceased to be a poet and a dramatist. It is interesting to note that Plato completely altered the manner in which philosophical thought was presented. Before him (or even before Socrates) ancient Greek Philosophers would express their views in enigmatic aphoristic homily in prose or verse. Plato put dialogues in the mouths of a number of characters, and the conversations, in which different ideas are expressed, brings out one total idea. In itself dialogue is dramatic, but the elements of drama can differ. For example, there may be the drama of the

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1. Prachain Viswa Sahitya (Bengali) - Dr. Narendranath Bhattacharjee. Sahitya Sansad. 1976. P 242.

plot, the drama of the situation, or the inner drama of conflicting ideas and opposing convictions passionately defended by the disputants.

In Plato's works we find all the nuances of outward and inner dramatic action. His Apology is a monologue in which the speaker,Socrates, fights a lie which seems to be groundless before the Athens court. Here the drama of situation is intense ; Socrates reflects aloud on the times in his life when he was faced with the choice whether to submit to the will of others or to go his own way, preserving his integrity and fighting for justice. But in Phaedo we listen to a slow-moving conversation about the immortal soul. Disciples of Socrates and his Pythagorean friends who share his views listen to their teacher's words.

Plato's Symppsium is a genuine drama. Socrates is shown here as surrounded by his friends and disciples, and there is an unusual atmosphere of harmony. But this friendliness only serves to emphasize the special spirit of the discussion and the competition among those present. In Symppsium only one theme is discussed - man's ascent to the highest Good, which is nothing but the embodiment of the highest love. Each of the participants in the discussion preserves the main melody but enriches it with his own variation. As the theme expands, the voices become stronger and more confident. Then Socrates begins to speak and the others listen in silence and reverence. But it turns out that Socrates only repeats the words of the wise priestess Diotima. His voice echoes hers

and later this theme is developed by Alcibiades, who portrays Socrates as the living embodiment of spiritual beauty.

In Symppsium the participants in the discussion are Phaedrus, Pausanius, Eryximachus, Aristophanes, Agathon, Socrates, and Alcibiades. But while the seven voices exhibit outer harmony there is inner turmoil, for frequently one voice contradicts another, only later to merge in the single choir. The contest between the participants in the discussion may be called an "agon" which in Greek means "a struggle". In a classical comedy "agon" is the struggle of ideas passionately defended by the rival sides. Plato's dialogues are often composed on the principle of stage "agon", but it differs in intensity depending on the nature of the rivalry between the characters in the dialogue. Sometimes the rivalry is friendly, at other times it is hostile. In Symppsium the rivalry is of the former kind.

In Symppsium we witness a dignified competition, an "agon" of like-minded individuals trying jointly to define the highest Good. The personages in Symppsium, all quite real, were selected by Plato on the basis of their different characters. Thus, Phaedrus, who is eloquent and knowledgeable, is impractical, living in a world of poetic fancy ; Eryximachus is a true empiricist and materialist ; Aristophanes is amusing and Agathon somewhat nervous. The reflections of Socrates are a fitting end to the friendly competition at Agathon's home,and the image of the philosopher acquires additional symbolic traits. At the end, all but the host Agathon, Aristophanes and Socrates depart. But

Agathon and Aristophanes are overcome by sleep, while Socrates alone does not know fatigue ; he represents the ceaseless quest for newer and newer ideas.

In the dialogues in which the disputants are true antagonists or opponents, Plato uses the method of philosophical polemics. In these dialogues there is a feeling of inner conflict and mutual dislike ; here the "agon" between the rivals is real, for example, in Protagoras. In this dialogue, in which the question of virtue is discussed, Protagoras and Socrates are worthy opponents. Here is a wonderful example of a Platonic dialogue in which the dramatization of thought leads to a totally unexpected result due to the complex and contradictory development. Plato shows that he is extraordinarily inventive in dramatizing disputes; shows his ingenuity in the endless variety of conflicts he devises between the disputants. He masterfully brings out the resourcefulness of the disputants, Socrates and Protagoras, and the intricate twists of their thinking. In the end it would appear that Socrates and Protagoras have come to positions opposing their initial premises. Socrates denied that virtue could be learned and now he acknowledges that it can be; Protagoras initially proclaimed that virtue could be taught and now, having come to the conclusion that virtue itself is knowledge, he refutes this possibility.

But the opponents have not really exchanged positions. If we look more closely we see that both Socrates and Protagoras retain their initial opinions.Socrates always professed that virtue was something ideal and considered the

purely technical methods the Sophists used in their efforts to teach virtue to be unworthy. If at the end of the dispute he comes to the conclusion that virtue is the highest knowledge, then, naturally, he considers it possible to teach people this knowledge. He himself does nothing but teach others. Protagoras has also not betrayed his belief;he has simply refused to teach virtue as the highest form of knowledge; he does not know how it should be done.

After this discussion on the conditions in England in the late nineteenth century which favoured the growth of the drama of ideas, its sources, and the influences that worked on it, we may now attempt at a definition of the "drama of ideas". It may well be argued that there is no real distinction between the drama of ideas and the problem play or propaganda play. But every problem play may not necessarily become a drama of ideas. Actually there is a separate type of drama in which the pleasure and interest are almost entirely intellectual and in which our emotions are not as much affected as they are both by tragedy and comedy. The excitement of such a play lies in the play of currents and cross-currents of ideas and the interest of speculation. A drama of ideas sets people talking and puts, through talks, various points of view, some of which may be unusual. Problems raised in a drama of ideas need not be solved, but these issues excite the intellectual nature of man. Shaw's Back to Methuselah, Man and Superman, The Simpleton of Unexpected Isles do not give any solution, but these are dramas of ideas because there are discussions among

the characters who explain various points of view, conventional and unconventional, and the "idea" is not used for the sake of characterisation or story-telling. Mrs. Warren's Profession and Widowers' Houses are called problem plays,[1] but they are essentially plays of ideas because what is dramatized in them is not simply a problem, but currents and cross-currents of ideas with different characters upholding different views. A drama of ideas may have a problem of day-to-day life or a philosophical problem for its theme. The essential thing to be noticed is whether there is discussion between and among the characters in which contrary and contradictory view points are expressed and argued away or whether there is conflict of ideas. Somerset Maugham's Sheppy', in which a man suddenly becomes rich and interprets Christianity in a more literary way than usual, is really a drama of ideas, for it satisfies the aforementioned characteristics of this particular genre. Early examples in English are difficult to find though it may be said that considerable elements of th drama of ideas are present in Shakespeare's Corionalus and Troilus and Cressida and in Marlowe's Doctor Faustus ; there is a plethora of ideas in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy in Hamlet. One may include the last plays of Shakespeare, in which one finds so much of philosophical speculations, among the plays of ideas. But in that case we will have to broaden the definition of the "play

1. "... Widowers' Houses and Mrs. Warren's Profession are true problems plays". The Anatomy of Drama - Marjorie Boulton. Kalyani Publishers. New Delhi. 1985. P 154.

of ideas" considerably because Shakespeare seldom used an "idea" for the sake of idea only and in his plays the clash between the individuals is of much more importance than the clash between ideas or ideals. Take the case of Coriolanus. In this play we find arguments for and against aristocracy and democracy, on the privileges of the few and the claims of the many, on liberty, slavery, power, on peace and war. In this play the individual men and women are passionately concerned with their rights as citizens in a community. Yet the overall impression is not that of a conflict between principles held dear by their qualified representatives. Shakespeare's imagination is concentrated more upon the individual men and women who play their parts in a public contention. In the last plays, too, inspite of the fact that there are philosophical speculations, Shakespeare's emphasis is on the individual men and women. There is no denying the fact, however, that the first stirrings of the play of ideas in England are to be felt in Shakespeare.

When we use the term "Play of Ideas" we think of those plays which do not consciously attempt at dramatization of situations and conflicts between personalities, but which consciously attempt at dramatization of ideas through discussions covering a wide field of human thought. Whatever situation there may be in a "play of ideas", it is unimportant, for it gives the feeling that the situation is used for the sake of explaining ideas. We see the characters in an unusual situation, and they go on talking, sometimes endlessly, about problems,

sometimes solving them, sometimes failing and sometimes not even trying to solve. In such plays the interest lies in the idea which is used for its own sake, not for the sake of exposition of the plot, or for portraying the characters.In this plays, naturally, action and characterisation are often sacrificed at the altar of the idea which is expounded, countered and explained. In the last plays of Shakespeare and in the plays of Aristophanes we find stories absorbingly told. The position of Euripedes, however, is somewhat different; not only does he dramatize ideas, but he turns the stage into a debating room. This observation remains valid even after granting that plays of Euripedes give us well-told stories. In the dialogues of Plato there are no stories; only discussions which continue for hours, each character explaining his view point, and, as in Symppsium, driving at one harmonious idea. We are in a different situation with the plays of Bernard Shaw. In his play we do not find any story worth the telling; his characters only talk ; his characterisation sometimes suffers because the characters seem to be the harbingers of one idea or the other. The reader of the "play of ideas" do not, of course, expect any plot or well-rounded character; rather he expects currents and cross-currents of ideas which are discussed by the "dramatis personae" between and among themselves; and whatever "action" is there in such plays, it lies in the conflict between one idea and another.