

**A WOMAN KILLED
WITH KINDNESS. OLD
ENGLISH PLAYS NO. 2**

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A Woman Killed with Kindness. Old English Plays No. 2 by Thomas Heywood

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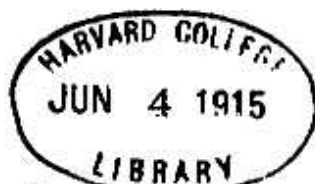
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by Thomas Heywood *****
Edited, with Introduction and Notes, by
F. J. Cox.

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THE PLAY .
AND
ITS AUTHOR.

PERHAPS, of all the dramatists of the Elizabethan and Jacobean epochs, Thomas Heywood is one of the least known to the mass of readers. To many, doubtless, he is scarcely a name even, and the most diligent student of our literary byways would probably be hard put to it to identify him as the author of "Fortune by Land and Sea," or that quaintly-named play, "If you know not Me, you know Nobody." But if his works have remained "caviare to the general," they have been fondly prized and read with delight by men of letters from Charles Lamb downwards. Just as Spencer has been called "the poet's poet," so Thomas Heywood may, in a more limited sense, be described as "the litterateur's playwright." But there is no valid reason why his appeal should be thus circumscribed. His plays, so far from being academic, stilted, or abstruse, smelling of the lamp rather than the sweet air of the countryside, are full of sheer humanity, studied at first hand and portrayed with skilful force through the medium of dramatic art.

The warmth of his human sympathy—devoid of which any work of the imagination becomes valueless and perishes—is Heywood's richest endowment. It has been well said of him that he describes men's errors with tenderness. So large, indeed, is his tolerance, that it leads him to temper his judgments with an excess of clemency, and his villains far too often escape with exceedingly light sentences. In the present play, for example, the worthless Wendoll, after irretrievably ruining the domestic happiness of the man who had befriended him, is allowed to escape practically without any punishment. As he makes his final exit from the stage, and almost at the moment when the woman whom he has seduced is dying, he announces an intention of travelling abroad until the remembrance of his rank offence has grown dim, and then returning, when he hopes that his newly-acquired Continental graces will assist him to advance in Court favour. In Mr. Hardy's grim phrase, it is the woman who pays. The man escapes scot-free, the recipient of a magnanimous forgiveness which his actions do not deserve and his shallow heart cannot understand.

But if this charity of judgment in Heywood is the means of robbing the Furies of much legitimate prey, it remains a very lovable trait of the man. It fascinated Elia, himself one of the most compassionate of men. "In all those qualities which gained for Shakespeare the epithet of gentle," says Lamb, "he (Heywood) was not inferior to him—generosity, courtesy, temperance in the

depths of passion; Christianity, and true hearty Anglicism of feelings, shaping that Christianity, shine throughout his beautiful writings in a manner more conspicuous than in those of Shakespeare; but only more conspicuous, inasmuch as in Heywood these qualities are primary, in the other subordinate to poetry." The tribute paid by Charles Lamb to the genius of his "prose Shakespeare" has been followed by the unstinted eulogies of other literary critics. Hazlitt says that "his imagination is a gentle lambent flame that purifies without consuming." His dialogue he describes as "beautiful prose put into heroic measure." Robert Louis Stevenson swells the chorus of praise by declaring that, if Heywood was not an immortal, he was at least an "immortalette." Mr. J. Addington Symonds remarks that he "is essentially an author whom we love the better the more we read of him. It is impossible to rise from the perusal of his plays without being refreshed and invigorated."

Of the life of Heywood little is known. He shares the obscurity common to most of the great Elizabethans. From the meagre records of his career that are available, we gather that he was born in Lincolnshire probably some ten or twelve years later than Shakespeare and Marlowe. After a residence at Cambridge, he came to London, there to enter upon his life-work as a writer and actor of plays. He was first of all attached to the Lord Admiral's Company of Players, then to the Earl of Worcester's, and finally, on the accession of James I., to the