

4/5

Scholar Gypsy reflects the spirit of the Age - Theme.

Matthew Arnold is one of the greatest poets and critics of the Victorian age. He is rightly ranked next only to Tennyson and Browning. He is also called the most scholarly poet after Milton. In a true literary tradition, his poetic works reveal his deep insight into his contemporary problems. The present poem, 'The Scholar Gypsy' reflects the Victorian age, marked for its sordid material approach to life, with all its complexities. The whole poem is breathed into a spirit that is distinctly Victorian. Here, Arnold expresses his deep concern about the miserably confused state of affairs, created by the modern materialism. He presents the Scholar Gypsy as a symbol of happy life and deplors the spiritual barrenness of the modern life. However, he gives ample hints that we can regain our lost lots if we recapture our lost faith and hope. Let us see the poem in a brief.

The central theme of the poem is the search for the young scholar who has deserted his college life and has joined the company of Gypsies. He leads a happy and peaceful life with all spiritual blessings, wanting in the civilized life. The scholar wanders in search of the heavenly fire, that may assist him in acquiring true knowledge. He has been seen at several places enjoying the beauties of Nature. In course of his quest, the poet meditates and often becomes melancholic in tone. He feels that the scholar is happy and enjoys the pleasures of life, for he possesses a strong devotion to his fixed aim or single purpose. But, the modern men are unhappy and the modern life, with its beckoning hurry and divided aims, is a death trap. What produces weariness, nervousness, fatigue, misery, despair and decay, is the lack

of a fixed aim. As the modern men lack this quality, they are faced with all sorts of unpleasant moments of life. See how Arnold contrasts the primitive age with the modern age:-

"O born in days when Nits were fresh and clear,
And life ran gayly as the sparkling fountains."

"Before this strange disease of modern life."

With its sick hurry, its divided aims."

The Victorian age is an age of doubt and confusion. People waste their time in useless pursuits. They flitter away their energies in hundred different ways. Their life is marked by new disappointments. They lose tomorrow the ground won today. Their resolutions are weak and their will is equally feeble. They are vague, half-believers of our casual creeds. They fail to have one aim, one business and one desire. Their life is full of despair and they are fatigued and tired of existence. They are tossed from one sorrow to another. On the contrary, the Scholar Gypsy is all happy only because he has faith, hope and single aim. He is free from the contamination of the modern material way of life. Arnold becomes so pessimistic and emotional that he advises the young scholar to avoid any contact with the modern men, lest he should also lose his blessings of happy life. -

"But fly our faiths, our feverish contact fly!

For strong the infection of our mental strife
Which though it gives no bliss, yet spoils for rest
And we should win thee from thy own fair life
Like us distracted and like us unblest.

"Soon, Doon they cheer would die."

The age in which Matthew Arnold was born, was an age of intellectual unrest and questioning. The industrial Revolution was just beginning to make itself felt. Science was trying to question the essentials of the

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traditional faith and religion. Geology had upset faith in the chronology of the Bible. Evolution was an obstacle in the acceptance of the Biblical accounts of Creation. In such an intellectual and moral atmosphere, Arnold does not find peace or happiness. He longs for a faith that may satisfy his heart, intellect and imagination. But, he discovers that the traditional faith is wanting and there is no new creed to take its place. He finds himself between two worlds, one dead and the other yet powerless to be born. This uncertainty and confused situation find full expression in the poem.

Thus we see that the Scholar Gypsy is a true representation of the Victorian age, with all its intellectual, spiritual and imaginative aspects of life. Arnold paints the happy life of the scholar in contrast to the pitiable one of his age and shows that the lack of faith has made us restless. It is only faith that can set the things right:—