

Transitional Poets or Precursors of Romanticism (16)

The age of Dr. Johnson is known as the period of transition in English literature. As the age of Chaucer is a meeting ground of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance spirit, similarly this period witnessed a struggle between the old order of classicism and the new order of Romanticism. Some poets showed their strict adherence to the classical school of Augustan tradition, while others tried to abandon the practice of the neo-classical tradition. They are known as the transitional poets or the precursors of Romanticism for they showed leaning towards the new spirit of Romanticism. Though they maintained allegiance to the school of Pope, they sought fresh subjects, fresh forms, fresh modes of feelings and expression. The trend got a different shape with the publication of the 'Lyrical Ballads', that was called the Romantic Movement.

This shift from the old to the new was the result of many forces and different movements, following different lines. The precursors of Romanticism did not make deliberate efforts to shake off the yoke of the neo-classicism. But each one ploughed some new furrows and opened up new vistas through which Romantic Revival might be perceived. Actually the budding seeds of Romanticism are clearly discerned in their poetry, for they made varied experiments both in forms and spirit.

The neo-classical poets adhered to the close couplet. The Pre-Cursors of Romanticism made experiments in other kinds of verse. The monotony of heroic couplet and iambic pentameter in Milton's poetry and Spenser popularized blank verse and Spenserian stanza. The neo-classical poetry was the poetry of city life, of coffee houses and drawing rooms. It rarely breathed fresh air blowing straight from woods.

or fields. But, the Pre-Cursors of Romanticism made fresh observation of Nature and discovered a fresh beauty in the Landscape. Love for Nature became increasingly prominent in the poetry of Gray, Collins, Cowper, Blake and Burns. Gray's Elegy presents a characteristic view of Nature and Collins' Ode to Evening reveals a delicate feeling for Nature.

The Neo-Classical poetry appeals to intellect and does not touch the cords of heart. The neo-Classical poets abhorred the exhibition of any manifestation of feeling. Unlike that, the poetry of the precursors of Romanticism was the return to feelings, sentiment, emotion, passion, aspiration and melancholy. Edward Young's 'Night Thoughts' was the first great appeal to melancholy. He was followed by Blair's 'The Grave', Warton's 'The Pleasure of Melancholy', Gray's 'The Elegy written in Country Churchyard' and Collins' 'Ode to Evening'. Melancholy was nourished also upon a yearning regret for the past, return to the beliefs of other days, to old legends and out worn poetic forms. A golden age of antiquity is revealed in 'The Passion' of Collins.

The Transitional poets left the town life of classicists and went to the Middle Ages for their inspiration and themes. They also roamed in the world of the supernatural. The revival of the ballad literature also increased inclination towards medieval ages. The medieval was accompanied by the heroic and legendary world of Celtic antiquity. Macpherson's works aroused men's curiosity and speculation in

M.A. HAQUE

the Celtic mythology.

(18)

M.A. HAQUE

Thus, we see that the transitional poets or the precursors of romantics contributed much to the revival of Romanticism. They individually paved the path on which Wordsworth and Coleridge treaded firmly and championed the cause of Romanticism. No doubt, they were not thorough Romantics, for they were associated with Augustan School. However, they are justly called the precursors of Romantics.