

## Sidney's An Apology for Poetry - I

classmate

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"An Apology for Poetry" is an influential work in the field of literary criticism written by Sir Philip Sidney. It was written in 1580 and first published in 1595 after his death. It is believed that Philip Sidney in his "Apology for Poetry" reacts against the attacks made on poetry by the Puritan, Stephen Gosson. In 1579, appeared a treatise entitled 'The School of Abuse' written by Stephen Gosson. There was a tendency among the Puritans of that age to condemn poets and poetry in general and Stephen Gosson was also one of them. There can be little doubt that if this work did not actually inspire the Apology, it was in Sidney's mind when he wrote it, and that in parts of the work, though he nowhere makes any mention of Gosson, he was directly replying to him. Gosson calls poets "pipers and jesters", denounces poetry, music and the drama all alike as "caterpillars of the common-wealth". Mainly his arguments are that a man can use his time in a better way than in poetry, that poetry is the mother of lies and the nurse of abuse and that Plato, therefore, had banished poets from his ideal world.

Philip Sidney gives a reply to all these charges against poetry and also writes exhaustively on the nature and functions of poetry. The work has a great historical significance and was published posthumously in 1595 in two different titles, Apology for Poetry and The Defence of Poesie. Against the above charges, Sidney has answered them in following ways.

Poetry is the source of knowledge and a civilizing force, for Sidney. Gosson attacks on poetry saying that it corrupts the people and it is the waste of time but Sidney says that no learning is so good as that which teaches and moves to virtue and that nothing can both teach and amuse so much as poetry does. In essay societies, poetry

was the main source of education. He remembers ancient Greek society that respected poets. The poets were always to be looked up. So, poetry is not wasted of time.

To the second charge, Sidney answers that poets does not lie because he never affirms that his fiction is true and can never lie. The poetic truths are ideal and universal. Therefore poetry can not be mother of lies.

Sidney rejects that poetry is the source of abuses. To him, it is people who abuses poetry not the vice-versa. Abuses are more nursed by philosophy and history than by poetry, by describing battles, bloodshed, violence etc. On the contrary, poetry helps to maintain morality and peace by avoiding such violence and bloodsheds. Moreover it brings light to knowledge.

Sidney views that Plato in his Republic wanted to banish the abuse of poetry not the poets. He himself was not free poeticality, which we can find in his dialogues. Plato never says that all poets should be banished. He called for banishing only those poets who are inferior and unable to instruct the children.

For Sidney, art is the imitation of nature, but it is not slavish imitation as Plato views. Rather it is creative imitation. Nature is dull, incomplete and ugly. It is artists who turn dull nature in to golden color. He employs his creative faculty, imagination and style of presentation to decorate the raw materials of nature. For Sidney, art is a speaking picture having spatiotemporal dimension. For Aristotle human action is more important but for Sidney nature is important.

Artists are to create arts considering the level of readers. The only purpose of art is to teach and delight like the whole tendency of Renaissance. Sidney favors poetic justice that is possible in poet's world where

good are rewarded and wicked people are punished.

Plato's philosophy on 'virtue' is worthless at the battlefield but poet teaches men how to behave under all circumstances. Moral philosophy teaches virtues through abstract examples and history teaches virtue through concrete examples but both are defective. Poetry teaches virtue by example as well as by precept. The poet creates his own world where he gives only the inspiring things and thus poetry holds its superior position to that of philosophy and history.

In the poet's golden world, heroes are ideally presented and evils are corrupt. Didactic effect of a poem depends upon the poet's power to move. It depends upon the affective quality of poetry. Among the different forms of poetry like lyric, elegy, satire, comedy etc epic is the best form as it portrays heroic deeds and inspire people to become courageous and patriotic.

In this way, Sidney defines all the charges against poetry and stands for the sake of universal and timeless quality of poetry making us know why the poets are universal genius.