

"Caroline Poetry"

'Caroline' is an adjective from the Latin word 'Carolus' which means Charles. Caroline poets were those poets who wrote during the reign of Charles I that is in between 1625 to 1649 though some of them continued to compose poems of even after 1649. The case is similar to that of Shakespeare whose later plays fall in the 'Jacobean' period but he is never taken to be a 'Jacobean' dramatist. The second point is that some of the poets treated here and in the chapter entitled Cavalier poets are well-known 'metaphysicals'. This is because they fall in the Caroline period. It is for some special traits that the historians have grouped them together under 'metaphysical' poets. According to Rickett "Elizabethan poetry closes with Donne and Caroline poetry begins with him!" The Caroline poets fall under two groups (i) religious

and (ii) Secular. The poets belonging to the first category came to be known as Caroline poets and the poets falling in the secular group were labelled as Cavalier poets.

The most important of the Caroline poets was Robert Herrick. The most striking feature of Herrick was that he could compose religious and secular verses with equal gusto and deftness but not with equal success. In his early years he was an associate of Ben Jonson. His religious poetry was published under the general title of 'Noble Numbers'. His secular poems are also in the same volume under the title 'Hesperides'. He can be seen at his best in secular poems. They are miscellaneous in character - some of them are fairy poems, some of them are love poems, some are poems ~~and~~ addressed to the friends etc. The poems are marked with spontaneity, exquisite

fancy, charm and grace. One thing that is very striking is a complete detachment from the political interest of the hour. Herrick, keeping himself aloof from the political turmoil of the time, preferred to sing of the joys of life. His principal poems are collected in 'Hesperides' and 'Wit's Recreation'.

Of the Caroline poets, who found their interest in religion, George Herbert is one who is very widely known but poetically is not the greatest. His religious verses have been published in a collected form entitled 'The Temple'. The poems in the collection breathe of purest piety and are full of faith, fervour, affection and conceits. The Sacred verses of Richard Crashaw have greater fire and passion than those of Herbert though the charm is sometimes marred by conceits. We have just to mark the flow of words in 'musical Dul'. It is

astorishing. His important poems are 'Wishes to a supposed mistress', 'The weeper', 'The flaming heart' and others. English literature has yet to see a poem which is greater than 'The flaming heart' so far as the rush of sacred love is concerned. His secular poems are called 'Delights of the muse' and sacred poems are 'Steps to the Temple'.

Henry Vaughan was a doctor. After publishing some secular verse he published 'Silex Scintillans'. He is the lone example among seventeenth century poets who after being most disdained for a long time became the most admired. His poems are marked by obscurity, unharmoniousness and platitudes. They vary much more the charms of his poems. Critics say that very few of his poems are of value but then they are the "real pearls." In these poems he is more

musical than Herbert. He, unlike Herbert, worships under the open sky and not in a temple. In many of his poems he anticipates Wordsworth especially in the introspective vision of his childhood in 'The Retreat' where there is a longing to go back to his original home. The only difficulty that lay in his way was his sin which had polluted him and his soul as well. Edmund Waller has also been a great poet of this genre. His 'Divine Poems', in addition to being sacred verses, in- to two periods separated by political troubles and literary revolution. He has written in panegyrics on Cromwell, King and Queen, love lyrics and other verses too. Sir John Denham is best known for his 'Cooper's Hill' published in 1642. This exhibits the poet's skilfulness in formulating his moral reflections and literary judgements.

Francis Quarles wrote 'Religious Emblems' which expounds the value of Biblical illustrations. It is a sort of rhymed commentary. It is true that conceits are very much there in his poems but he is lively also and has homely and shrewd wit.

The end.

Munira Bhushan Sinha
Deptt. of English
S. S. College, Teharabad