

18th Century Verse Satire
During the middle of the seventeenth century a great change had started coming over the spirit of English literature. The emotional fervour of the Elizabethan age was so high pitched that it could not last for a long time. The writings of Bacon and Milton had started throwing hints of the emergence of fresh interests though the full significance of this change was not realised until the Restoration. We come face to face with the changes for the first time in the later poems of Abraham Cowley, Edmund Waller and Sir John Denham. The distinct proclamation of this new note became loud and frank with the emergence of Dryden on the scene. Poetry took a shift from the lap of nature to the arena of court and became involved with the practical politics of the day. Hence, the eighteenth century poetry came to be known

was as 'court poetry' or 'town poetry' or the 'poetry of politics'. In this age mostly satires were written. The important features of the age are - (i) the literature of the age became involved with the problems of the practical politics (ii) the triumph of the classical ideal - a natural result of the Renaissance. This spirit of classicism was supported by the political needs of the age. The process of change was accelerated by the emergence of a set of brilliant writers in France who exerted influence upon the literature of Europe. (iii) The new spirit was more critical and analytical than creative and sympathetic. We find the display of poet's intellect more than poetic imagination. This is because their main purpose was to attack the political life of the day. (iv) The King and the court also influenced the literature

of the time.

The important poets of the age are :-

- (i) John Dryden :- There was something of a poet in him from the very beginning. While at school, he tried his hand at an elegy to the memory of a school fellow. Then he translated the third Satire of Persius as a school task. He composed some more verses while at Cambridge but they failed to establish him as a writer of verses. His first memorable poem entitled 'Annus mirabilis' was composed in 1665 when the great plague was raging in London. In 1670 he published 'Essay on Dramatic Poesy' which received political recognition and he was asked to accept the post of Poet Laureate and Historiographer Royal. His three poems on Restoration entitled 'Astrea Redux', 'On the Coronation' and 'To Clarendon' have been com

posed in heroic couplets. John Dryden is best known for his satires though there are comic plays too to his credit. His first satire is 'Absalom and Achitophel' in which the King, Shaftsbury, Monmouth and Buckingham all have been attacked. 'The Medal' is his second satire which is an attack on the medal cast by the ~~followers~~ followers of Shaftsbury on his acquittal by the court. A retort came in the form of 'The Medal of John Bayes' by Stedwell to which Dryden replied with 'Mac Flecknoe'. John Dryden belonged to a family which had strong Puritan tendencies but in 1686 he turned Roman Catholic. This change of religion inspired his new work entitled 'The Hind and the Panther'. The poem gave him some fame but did not give any pecuniary advantage to him. The poem was published in 1687. Dryden is best in his satires. His political satires represent the maturity.

of his mind and art which converted the occasional matters into stuff of lasting poetry. He perfected the device of satirical portraiture by the selection of weak spots in the character of the victim.

- (ii) Alexander Pope :- He represents the poetical ideal of the age in the best manner. His position in the first half of the eighteenth century is as central as that of Tennyson in the Victorian age. He was the son of a linen draper, was somewhat precocious and took much delight in study. The influence of French literature on him is very marked and can be seen in lucidity of expression and elegance of form. Pope made his mark as a poet from 'Rape of the Lock' composed in mock-heroic style. The poem is expressive of the artificial tone of the age and the frivolous aspect of women. His other poetical works are

'Eloisa to Abelard', 'The Pastorals', 'The Windsor Forest', 'Dunciad', 'Essay on man', 'Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot' and his translation of 'Iliad and Odyssey'.

(iii)

Dr. Samuel Johnson :- Son of a poor book seller, he reigned the literary world for nearly fifty years after Pope. He was a versatile genius though mainly a prose writer. He was bulwark of neoclassicism. The two poems which made him very famous are 'London' and 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'. These poems reflect the moving and vigorous personality of Dr. Johnson. The first is remarkable for vivid picture of London City with miserable life of hack-writers of the grub street. The second is more general and characteristic of a moving and melancholic contemplation of human vanities.

(iv) Samuel Gorton :- By profession he was a doctor. His 'Dispensary' is an amusing description of a doctor's quarrel. It has been written in Dryden's versification.

(v) Sir Richard Blackmore :- His works include 'Creation and Redemption'.

(vi) Matthew Prior :- His works are 'The Town mouse and the Country mouse', 'On several occasions', 'Solomon on the vanity of the world', 'Admiral or The Progress of the mind'. The Town mouse is a burlesque of 'The Hind and the Panther'.

The end.

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