

Victorian Prose

Victorian age was, for the most part, an age of prose with towering personalities like Ruskin, Carlyle, Arnold etc. though there have been great poets also like Tennyson, Arnold and Browning. What is meant by the age of prose is that the prose writers outnumber the poets in various fields - history, essay, criticism, stray articles and biography. Three names that stand out very prominently in the domain of prose are John Ruskin, Thomas Carlyle and Matthew Arnold.

John Ruskin is a well-known figure in Victorian literature. He was a prose writer and the first art critic. He has given a good account of his home life in his delightful 'Praeterita'. The book throws light on his whimsical humour. His power of reminiscence reminds us of Dickens' 'David

Copperfield'. The first fruit of his foreign tour is the first of the five volumes of 'Modern Painters'. He devoted the first twenty years of his literary life to art criticism. This does not mean that he was unaware of the social matters. His attitude to social matters is very clear in 'The Seven Lamps of Architecture'. 'The Stones of Venice' is said to be art criticism but it is "really subsidiary to the larger matters of life and conduct suggested by those eloquent stones." Legouis calls Ruskin's prose "poetic and decorative prose." His other books are 'Unto This Last', 'Sesame, and Lilies', 'Fors Clavigera' and 'Munera Pulveris'. Thomas Carlyle is another towering personality of the age. According to Legouis "his voice resounded in his generation with more force and aroused wider echoes than

any other." His 'Sartor Resartus' which is a sort of allegorical autobiography was published some time in 1833-34. His writings during the period of maturity are 'The French Revolution', 'Cromwell's Letters and Speeches', 'Frederick II' and 'The Life of John Sterling'. He has written various essays on social politics also, namely 'Chartism', 'Heroes and Hero worship', 'Past and Present', and 'Latter-Day Pamphlets'. His 'French Revolution' is his literary masterpiece. The book describes the frenzy of those terrible years. Carlyle was a versatile genius. As a critic he is none the less. He is a moralist. According to him historical dramas much teach some moral lessons. He preached for change of moral doctrine in the society. Matthew Arnold is another prose writer of the age though his prose is nothing but

his critical writings which comprise of 'Essays in criticism', 'Culture And Anarchy', 'Friendship's Garland' and 'Literary influence of Academies'. He had classical spirit in him and this had endowed him with the quality of disinterestedness, of self detachment. It is this spirit which animates all his works whether be critical or creative. Arnold knows how to hit whether in prose letters or social satire. Arnold believed in practicality and the proof lies in the sagacity of his educational proposal. Two things, very important with regard to Arnold, are his emphasis on literary interpretation of Bible and spiritual interpretation of the scriptures. In this way we find that in addition to being one of the pillars of the Victorian poetry, he occupies an important place in the domain of prose.

also.

Cardinal Newman associated with the Tractarian movement, better known as Oxford movement had some very fine books to his credit. The first is his 'Autobiography' his spiritual autobiography - 'Apologia pro vita sua'. This is his most significant writing. The dogmatic principle asserted in this book finds brilliant elaboration in two books entitled 'The Development of Christian ~~Doctrines~~ Doctrine' and 'A Grammar of Assent'. The essays of Newman, criticism expert, are instructive in character.

John Stuart Mill is another great writer of the Victorian period. He being a man of political economy, his books are valuable for the students of politics and economics but his 'Autobiography' is valuable for the students of literature. It "supplies

us with a Psychological Key to the man's writings. His treatise 'On Liberty' and 'Representative Government' are very famous and it is on these books that his reputation as political thinker. His essay on 'Nature' had raised a whirlwind in the domain of literature.

James Martineau is a very prolific writer of the period, a professor of moral philosophy who later on became the principal of the Manchester New College where he was first appointed as a lecturer. His principal works are 'Endeavours after a Christian life', 'Hours of Thought', 'A Study of Spinoza', 'Types of Ethical Theory', 'A Study of Religion' and 'The Seat of Authority in Religion'.

The end.

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