

"Elizabethan Lyric Poetry"

The people of Elizabethan period were lovers of songs and lyrics. Before Spenser and Sidney every thing was in a tentative and experimental stage. During Elizabethan period English lyric attained much freedom of feeling and expression. Early Elizabethan lyric writers were shrouded in the heavy atmosphere of the fifteenth century but changes came with the lapse of time near about 1580. English poets started composing lyrics which caught the public eyes and received popular applause. The lyrics of this period had a single emotion or idea expressed in rhythmic melody. It was in this period that lyrical forms and rhythms were given proper ~~shape~~ shape and form. These two things form and expression joined together and the lyrics became an expression of the soul - "The Elizabethan lyrical impulse seeks expression

in a great variety of poetical forms. The lyric proper appears now under the pastoral appearance, now as sonnet and sonnet sequence, now in a various composite literary form, such as formal ode and epithalamium, and again as the pure, song books, in madrigal canonet, 'ode' rounded, and catch that altogether delightful and exquisite outburst of bird like music, exotic and Gallicate, and yet so modern ears, at the same time so freshly English and native. Further than this many elegiac and idyllic variations, prolonged to more than lyric length, are frequently heard."

The themes of lyric are praise of the gods, patriotism, revelry and rejoicing and above all love. These are the set themes of lyric in every age. The themes in lyric poetry do not count much what counts is feelings, music and mood. We read the pastorals

pastoral piping during shepherd feasts, shepherds' loves and joys of country life, praise of contentment and ease, flowers and birds, fairy life, songs of Pagan gods and myth is

"Where flowers and fountains,
and nymphs and demi-gods,
And all the Graces, find
their old abodes!"

Love is the first subject of Elizabethan lyric. This is the subject of Elizabethan Sonnets also but in the Sonnets it is refined, elaborate and romantic. There are other themes also but so far as Elizabethan age is concerned the dominant theme of lyric is love. Its apotheosis reached in Spenser's 'Hymn in Honour of Love'. Out of the songs that Sir Philip Sidney wrote, some catch our attention and praise. They are "To you, to you all song of praise is due", "Only you! Now here you are" and "Ring out your bell." The lyrics of Sidney are bold. They are the songs characterised by

enquisite beauty, charm and a note of fancifulness.

We find many songs in Spenser's Shepherd's Calendar. They have loftiness and natural richness.

These two things led him to make of the song a little ode though not as magnificent as Epithalamium.

Merlowe song may recall 'The Passionate Shepherd to His Love'

"Come live with me and be my love."

In answer to this Walter Raleigh wrote 'The Nymph's Reply'. During Elizabethan period many books of songs were written. We may recall the collection of songs by William Byrd. Nicholas ~~young~~ young published 'Musica Transalpina' in which Italian note is pre-dominant. John Dowland's 'Three books of songs' and 'Airs' appeared in 1597, 1600, and 1603. Thomas Campion published 'Four books of Airs'. Around Spenser there were a number of verse writers

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namely Gyles, Fletcher, William Percy and the many sided Thomas Lodge, whose madrigals are unparalleled in sweetness. One of the most astonishing verse writers of the time is Michael Drayton. His literary life opens with 'Harmony of the Church'. In 1593 he reappeared on the scene with 'Shepherd's Garland'. It is an experiment in pastoral verse. Then come 'Baron's War and England's Heroical Epistles'. With these names of song writers we may add the names of John Daniel, Robert Jones and Thomas Morley. Shakespeare's songs are in his dramas and cannot be fully appreciated if snatched from the scene in which they have been implanted. For example we may remember two songs of 'As you like it' "Under the Greenwood tree" and "Blow, blow thou winter wind" and the solemn perfect simplicity of the 'Dirge of Cymbeline'.

The end. //

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