

(11) B.A. Part I (English Honours)

Romantic Prose

The first half of the nineteenth century is famous for poetry but it is none the less famous for its prose, because one of the famous poets was a great prose writer also. There have been persons other than the poets who wrote in prose with romantic fervour.

Coleridge, whom we better know as the poet of 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner', 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan' has some prose writings too to his credit though they are not substantial and connected body of prose as compared to those of Hazlitt, Lamb and De Quincey. The prose of Coleridge is a collection of brilliant discursive fragments the reason being his "constitutional tendency to fly off at a tangent", the second reason being his many sided intellectual interests. In spite of the fragmentary character of Cole-

Coleridge's prose, it is valuable because it displays his critical faculty. We may say that his prose is critical prose. The person, who influenced Coleridge the outcome of which was a discovery of Shakespeare, was Lessing. Other persons who influenced him were Kant, Schiller and Schelling. Coleridge's prose whether they are political prose or critical prose has two qualities - (i) clarity and (ii) subtlety. Coleridge exerted profound influence in the domain of religious thought. His 'Aids to Reflection' is an attempt to harmonise reason and spiritual experience. 'On the Constitution of Church and State' is again an attempt to blend together history and spiritual experience. Sharp and pungent sayings can be found in his 'Table Talk'. Once he thought of starting his own journal 'The Watchman' but the plan could not be executed. ASC

Writer, not as a poet, his fame rests on 'Biographia Literaria' though it is a book of criticism.

Thomas De Quincey is another prose writer of the age. The books on which his fame rests are 'The Confessions of an English Opium-Eater' and the 'Reminiscences of the English Lake Poets'. 'The Confessions' exhibit his passion and imagination. 'Dialogue of Three Templars' shows his analytical faculty which was the result of his study of Ricardo. Three notes ~~that~~ which are always present in his writings are (i) meditative, (ii) analytical and (iii) descriptive. His critical faculty can be seen in his 'on the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth'. His descriptive and visualising power can be seen at its maturity in 'Suspicion de Profundis'. Pure the prose has been described as "impa-

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ssioned prose!" In articles like 'The Revolt of the Tartars' we find a blending of fancy, logic and actuality. Fancy and logic give a peculiar flavour to his critical writings. He was a prolific writer for the magazines. He could deal effectively with the 'Logic of political Economy' and take delight in absurdities as 'Sortilege and Astrology'. Two other works are 'The English Mail Coach' and 'The Vision of Sudden Death'.

Leigh Hunt's prose synchronises with his verse. His prose began with his papers in the 'Examiner' and later on in the 'Mount Hybla'. His knowledge of London life is found in 'The Town'. If we want to enjoy the fullest impression of the man, we must read his 'Autobiography'. According to Rickett "What the 'Essays of Elia' are to Lamb, the 'Autobiography' is to Leigh Hunt."

His general attitude to life has found expression in 'The Religion of the Heart' which projects a sunny personality.

Charles Lamb is another prose writer whose fame rests on 'Essays of Elia' and 'Tales from Shakespeare'. 'The Tales' were written in collaboration with Mary. The prose rendering of the comic dramas was done by Mary and that of tragic dramas was done by Lamb. He tried his hands at every kind of writing - poetry, prose, drama, fiction, essay and criticism. His 'Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare', 'Essay on the Tragedies of Shakespeare' and 'on the Genius and Character of Macbeth' are critical writings. His critical essays are, according to Rickett, "autobiographical fragments from which we can reconstruct his inner and outer life".

William Hazlitt started his

life as a portrait-painter and nurtured the ambition of writing an essay on the 'Principles of Human Action'. He loved his work as portrait-painter. We can have a peep into his state of mind in his 'Essay on the Pleasure of Painting'. He wrote for the 'Morning Chronicle' and 'Examiner' also. In the evening of 1798 he heard the lecture of Coleridge and then came his literary awakening. He was a political pamphleteer also. For example we can cite his 'Free Thoughts in Public Affairs', 'Table Talk', 'The Characters of Shakespeare's Plays' and 'The Round Table' also flowed from his pen. The writings of the matured years are 'English Poets' and 'English Comic Writers'. In 1823 came 'Liber Amoris', in 1826 'The Plain Speaker' and then came the 'Spirit of the Age'. Lastly, he wrote 'Life of Napoleon' which

is dull reading.
Walter Savage Landor besides being a poet, was a great prose writer. He wrote in dialogues and hence the tonary conversations' consists of dialogues between characters of every age. We can not say for certain that in the book he revealed the soul of his personages but ~~can~~ certainly the language is admirable and it is due to the language that the book occupies a high rank in the English prose of Romantic period.

The end.

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