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Lecture No. - 08
Class - B.A. I
Paper - I
Topic - "Cavalier Poetry"

Date: 02-09-2020

Two major categories of poets existed during this period. One is known as the Meta-physicals and the other as cavaliers. In the former come Cowley and Donne. John Donne was the main determining influence with his marvelous mixture of passion and thought showing excellent conceits and learned imagery. Their approach to reality was in the main religious and mystical. The other group followed Ben Jonson in their lucid lyrics and classical restraint dealing mainly with themes of love. Though written in Elizabethan lyrical tradition, the poems became more realistic and frank, attaining a high degree of sophistication of style and grace of expression. In this class are included such poets as Robert Herrick, Carew, Lovelace, Suckling etc.

King James I died in 1625, marking, if one may say so, the end of an already weak line of Spenserian poetry which was sustained by Michael Drayton, George Wither (1588-1667), William Drummond of Hawthornden (1565-1649), Giles Fletcher, Phineas Fletcher, Francis Quarles (1592-1649), Henry More (1614-87), Joseph Beaumont (1616-93), and others. The great Petrarchan Italian grace of the sonnets, the visionary romanticism, and the rich luxuriance of descriptive profusion. To quote F. W. Moorman.

The Petrarchan influence, which made itself felt, not only in the sonnet sequences, but also, in the song-books and miscellany lyrics, of the Elizabethan age, loses much of its potency after the year 1600; its chivalrous and dreamy idealism ceases to charm, and there is a return to the greater directness and less ethereal temper of the classical lyric of Anacreon, Catullus and Horace. The swift decline of the sonnet

after the close of the sixteenth century is one of the most remarkable events in the history of the English lyric. This was due, in part, to exhaustion, in part too, to the opposition which the sonnet encountered at the hands of two poets - Jonson and Donne - the impress of whose genius is felt in English poetry far into the seventeenth century."

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The new ideals were Ben Jonson whose profound admiration for the lyrics of Rome or Greece for its "sense of proportion and structural beauty, its restraint, lucidity and concision of style and its freedom from extravagance and mannerism" set the tone for the cavalier lyricists, Jonson cast a tremendous influence on song writers and playwrights. Classical spirit guided many a lesser hand to write numerous epics, narrative poems, romances in verse - much of which is dead and forgotten now, such as, Sheretine and Marianal (1622), Leoline and Sydanis (1642), Pharonnida in six books (1659), Cupid and Psyche (1637), Arcadius and Sephal (1651), Theophila (1652), and so on. It is the poets of the shorter verse that stand out, exhibiting great mastery over metrical finesse, restraint over emotional ardour and a refined sense of music.

o that I were all soul, that I might prove
For you as fit a love
- - - - -
The versal relics for a covering lawn.

These above lines of Thomas Carew show all of Ben Jonson's emotion and control. Among the noted cavalier lyricists of the Ben Jonson school, names of John Suckling, Thomas Carew, Richard Lovelace, John Cleveland and Robert Herrick occur chiefly.

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10-09-2020