

The Age of Johnson (1745-1798)

GENERAL PROSE

In the period of Dr. Johnson, profound changes are taking place in the spirit of English society. People of age wanted something more natural and spontaneous in thought and language. People were quickened into fresh activity by the renaissance of the feelings. This is an important fact in the history of this period of transition. The emotions, long repressed, were reinstated. We see this in the case of religion. In Pope's time, contemporary society, had been unspiritual. In the great evangelistic revival led by Wesley and Whitefield, the old formality was swept away and a mighty tide of spiritual energy poured into the church and among the masses of the people. The evangelists made their appeal directly to the emotional nature. Handel's "Messiah" foretold the coming change. The spread of the humanitarian spirit quickens the rapid growth of democracy. People were familiar with the notions of liberty equality and the rights of man. French writer Rousseau's slogan 'Back to Nature' sent a strange thrill through the whole European World. There is Revolution in Literature too. There was a steady triumph of the new. It marked out the main lines of its evolution.

Dr. Johnson: He was the greatest English man of letters between Pope and Wordsworth. He was born in Lichfield in 1709. His father was a book seller. He was always sick. He was a pessimist. He did some translation for a Birmingham publisher. He married a widow twenty years elder to him. He had a companion by name David Garrick, who was the greatest actor of his time. During the first few years, he produced *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749) and a tragedy called *Irene* (1749), About 1090 papers were contributed to 'The Idler' (1758 to 1760). "The periodical *Rambler*" appeared on Tuesdays and Saturdays. A significant development in the later half of the 18th century was the creation of the "Magazine". It was an anthology of interesting and significant material which had already appeared in recent newspapers and periodicals. One such magazine was Edward Cave's monthly "The Gentleman's Magazine", "The Magazine" was in course of time more and more devoted to the criticism of books. Dr. Johnson had the scholar's pride as well as the scholar's accuracy. He wanted to say, what he had to say, in the best possible words. He wanted to convey his meaning exactly and correctly to his readers. An inexact word never escapes. Sincerity becomes the leading feature of his writing. Leslie Stephen points out, "he wanted to keep his style above the "grossness" of common style above the "grossness" of common talk; he never wrote 'below referment" John Bailey points out, "he influenced even men so great as Gibbon and young Ruskin, and women so brilliant as Fanny Burney".

Dr. Johnson was occupied for eight years by an immense task "A Dictionary of English Language". In his dictionary, he not only defined the words but also illustrate his definitions by quotations taken from the whole range of English Literature. His work laid foundation for English lexicography, "The Dictionary" made him independent. He received a pension of £ 300 a year. He became the acknowledged Dictator. Smollett called him, "The Great charm' of literature. In his club, he was surrounded by Goldsmith, Sir Joshua Reynolds the great painter, Burke, Garrick and Boswell. He published his didactic tale, *Rasselas* in 1759, an edition of Shakespeare in 1765. and account of his four to the Bebrides with Boswell under the title of "Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland in 1775. He died in 1784 and was buried in Westminster abbey. Macaulay said, "The memory of other authors is kept alive by their works but the memory of Johnson keeps many of his works alive. He lives in the pages

of his biography by his hero-worshipping friend, James Boswell. He was great both as a critic of literature and as a critic of life. "Life", he declared, "is progress from want to want, not from enjoyment to enjoyment. Throughout his life he made a most heroic fight against the melancholy which was the cause of his ill-health. The steady courage of his manhood pervades his work. The essence of his teaching is that we should face the facts of existence honestly. "The Vanity of Human Wishes and Rasselas show that he was saved from utter hopelessness by his strong religious faith. As a prose writer, Dr. Johnson is known for his "Preface to his Dictionary". His style, though vigorous and direct, is too heavy and learned and is called 'Johnsonese'. He used big words which require the mouth of a giant to pronounce them. Goldsmith once remarked, "If you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales". His works have great strength, nobility and dignity.

The Novel

Prose fiction in England before Richardson : The novels firm establishment and popularity date from the age of Johnson. Novel was the greatest achievement of that age. It was with Richardson that prose fiction passed definitely into its modern form. Most of this fiction were purely romantic like the works of Sidney, Lodge and Greene: or didactic like the works of More Lyly and Bacon. Realism had been shown in the work of Nash. French fashions were seen in English soil, AphraBehn and several other women writers began to cultivate a form of story which was marked by brevity.

Historical Significance of the Novel : A new form of literary art-the novel a sign that literature offered a fresh field in which modern writers were able to work independently. In the first place the popularity of the novel depended upon the growth of the reading public in which women were becoming increasingly numerous, secondly the novel was a sign that literature was beginning to outgrow the cramping limitations of classicism.

Richardson :

Samuel Richardson 1689-1761 sometimes referred to as the father of the English novel was a printer. He became a novelist at the age of fifty. He began his career as a novelist with the publication of his 'Pamela'. He regarded it as a new species of writing. His aim was to turn young people away from the pomp and parade and promote the cause of religion and virtue". Pamela and Clarissa are models of feminine virtue. While Sir Charles Grandison represents masculine virtue, the method of telling his stories, is by way of letters. A letter is of the nature of soliloquy is the great engine for self-revelation and analysis. As letters are written at the very moment of excitement, we see the character to its very core, in its true colours. This method has a number of advantages.

Richardson owes his place in the history of the novel. His novels are of minute analysis. He lays bare the very heart and soul of his characters. No detail escapes his eye or is below his attention. It is the exact function of the microscope. The novel Pamela tells of a young girl, a lady's maid, who has been tortured by the Son of her mistress. The girl resists all his arts and tricks until at length his heart being softened towards her he makes her his wife. As Saintsbury puts it "Every flutter of Pamela's heart is faithfully registered" Johnson was right in praising him "for his knowledge of the human heart". His Successful novel is or the

adventures of a young lady generally known as Clarissa Harlowe and Sir. Charles Grandison. Clarissa is Richardson's masterpiece. It gave him a European reputation. It is regarded as one of the greatest of 18th century novels, it also contains Richardson's most remarkable character study of the scoundrel Love Lace, whose name became proverbial.

Richardson earned the applause of his contemporaries for his moralities. He himself said that his purpose as a novelist was to promote the cause of virtue and religion. In the history of the English novel Richardson owes his high place for a number of reasons.

(a) He enlarged the knowledge of human nature through his minute Psycho — analysis of his characters. His dialogues are much more important and have the animation and liveliness of real conversation. Never had there been such dialogue before in English fiction. His genius was rather feminine than masculine. His epistolary method has its advantages in bringing us into intimate touch with the writers themselves.

Fielding :

Henry Fielding was one of the greatest of the 18th century novelists. He was a man of very different type. He had wide knowledge of life. It was Sir Walter Scott who called him "The father of the English novel" for some ten years before he took up the novel he had been busy writing plays and this long training in the drama had taught him many valuable lessons in the art of construction. His novels are novels of sentiment. There is much minute Psycho-analysis. His works exhibit all the essential features of a successful novel. He revolutionized the concept of plot construction. It is from Fielding that we get for the first time a closely knit organic plot. Fielding is certainly the father of the novel of character. He peopled the novel with a great crowd of lively and interesting characters and endowed them with life and vitality. Hazlitt points out "He has brought together a greater variety of character from common life marked with more distinct peculiarities and without an atom of caricature. Fielding presents the picture of contemporary life, society, dress, habits and manners in his novels. Every aspect of contemporary life has been presented with rare force and realism and this makes "Tom Jones" an important social document. Here Fielding takes an enormous canvas and crowds it with figures. His hero is a foundling who is brought up in the west of England by a squire named Allworthy. The novel gives the richest picture of English life. Fielding's third great novel 'Amelia' appeared in 1751. In this novel the interest centres in the character of a woman. The novel 'Clarissa' tells of the courage and patience of a devoted wife and of the ill-doings of her weak-willed husband.

Fielding's realism marks a significant advance in the history of the English novel. He went to "The Doomsday Book of Nature" for his subject and reproduced it faithfully and accurately. He was the first English Novelist to localize his scene. He always makes the setting recognizable. Fielding was the first to infuse the novel with an element of humour. Hypocrisy and vice are the object of his satire. Fielding imparted to the novel the dignity and attraction of pure literature. He is the first theorist of the English novel. Through his theory of "The comic epic in prose" Fielding secured dignity and recognition for the novel. Incidental comments scattered all through "Joseph Andrews" and "Tom Jones". They reveal the richness of his brain and thought. They make the novel a social type by bringing the readers into contact with the rich social circle of Fielding's friends. To him the novel was quite as much a form of art as the epic or the drama.

Smollett.

Tobias Smollett 1721-1771 can be ranked with Richardson and Fielding in the history of the 18th century novel. In early life Smollett spent some years as surgeon on a man-of-war and gained knowledge of sea and sailors. He settled in London. Medicine failing he turned to literature. The success of Richardson and Fielding prompted him to try his hand in fiction and he wrote half-a-dozen novels. The chief among them are (1) Roderick Random 1748 (2) Peregrine Pickle (1751) and (3) The Expedition of Humphrey Clinker (1771). Smollett conceived the novel as 'a large diffused picture of life'. His stories are simply strings of adventures and Unity is given to them only by the personality of the hero. His aim is to keep the readers interest alive by a succession of incidents. His fertility of invention and animation are remarkable, Smollett's novel method is a return to the picaresque tradition. A picaresque novel is a Union of intrigue and adventure and Unity is provided by the central figure. He is a novelist of Sea-life. In his novels we get the real sea, a real ship, a real voyage and the real English Sailors. His descriptions of Sea-life in his novels are vivid and realistic. His Sea-dogs are unforgettable figures in literature. His familiarity with sea-life enabled him to capture the very idiom of Sea-language. Ship scenes in Roderick Random led to drastic changes for the better in the condition of the novel service. Peregrine Pickle is a great sea novel. It is remarkable for its sparkling wit. As Saintsbury puts it 'Peregrine Pickle' can never be thrown to the wolves. English literature cannot do without it.

Fierce satire is one of the leading characteristics of Smollett's novels. As Cross points out, he crowds his pages with well-known characters of his own time, usually for the purpose of fierce satire." He is Swift without Swift's clean and wide vision. "Humphrey Clinker" is his masterpiece. The letter plan which Smollett has used for this novel, enables him to supply deficiency in characterization Characters in "Humphrey Clinker" come to life through the letters which they receive from and write to each other. Exaggeration or caricature is the very essence Of Smollett's art. Continuous laughter is excited through various situations, His novel is remarkable for its detailed descriptions of interior furniture decoration and accessories.

Smollett has widened the scope of the English novel. He widened the appeal of the novel and imparted to it immense variety by describing the life and manners of different countries, As a Panoramic novelist, Smollett has never been surpassed. Smollett is a caricaturist. Men in his novels constantly turn to insect or animals. Smollett is a satirist and reformer. His aim is to paint the monstrous evils in life in their true proportions and colours. He did his best to enlarge the scope of fiction. He was the first novelist to exploit the national peculiarities of Irish Scotch and Welsh.

Other novelists of the period :

Goldsmith was ahead of most of the novelists of his time. Rev. Lawrence Sterne wrote "Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy" and "Gentleman" which appeared in 9 volumes from 1759 to 1767. He owes his rank as novelist to the wonderful power of his character-drawing in the elder Shandy and his wife corporal Trim and Uncle Toby. They are living figures in 18th century fiction. Henry Mackenzie wrote "The man of feeling". It is one of the dampest books in English literature. William Godwin wrote "Caleb Williams" or "Things as They are Francis

Burney laid the real foundation of the women's novel She wrote "Evelina" or —The History of a Young Lady's Entrance into the World" Johnson called her "little fanny- (24 Yrs) She was the founder of the tea-table school of fiction Her 2nd book is "Cecilia"

The Revival of Romance :

In the revival of romance the letter writer Horace Walpole should be mentioned. He took up medievalism. He bought a small house or villakin, near Twickenham and transformed it into a miniature Gothic castle. He installed with great satisfaction his collection of curiosities, art, treasures and stilts of armour and the statue which bleeds at the nose. Byron called the novel 'The first romance in the language". Clara Reeve's "Old English" is a Gothic story. Ann Radiffe wrote 'Romance of the Forest". "The mysteries of Udolpho and the "Italian". Mathew Gregory Lewis wrote "Ambrosio" or "The Monk'. The novelists, in the age of Johnson, returned to the romantic middle ages.

VERSE

General Characteristics:

The history of our late 18th century poetry is the history of a struggle between old and new. The Age of Johnson in respect of its poetry is an age of modernism, transition, and innovation. Classical poetry was the product of the intelligence and was deficient in emotion and imagination.

It was town poetry.

It was lacking romantic spirit.

It was formal and artificial in style.

It has close couplet.

On the other hand...

Romantic spirit led to the growth of the sense of picturesque.

The Romantic spirit received and this revival brought with it great changes in the temper of verse.

Efforts were taken to introduce simple phrases and the language of nature.

Instead of close couplet, other forms of verse were used.

The Continuance of the Augustan Tradition:

Both Johnson and Goldsmith were strong conservatives in literary theory. In an epoch of change, they held fast to the immediate past. Goldsmith was equally convinced that "the writers of the Augustan age provided the true standard for future limitation". Johnson's two chief poems "London" and "The Vanity of the Human Wishes" belong to the past generation. Goldsmith's two important poems "The Traveler" and "The Deserted Village" are didactic and written in the closed couplet.

The Reaction in Form:

The main feature of the reaction in style was the abandonment of the Popean couplet, in other kinds of verse. Growing admiration of Milton was the immediate cause of the rise and spreading popularity of blank verse. Johnson's "Seasons" was the first important piece of 18th century. Somerville's "The Chase" Young's "Night Thoughts" Blair's "The Grave" Dyer's "The Ruins of Rome" and Akenside's "The Pleasure of the Imagination" were written in blank verse, "The School Mistress" of William Shenstone was the language and style Of Spencer Johnson's "Castle of Indolence" adopts the Gothic machinery of the "Faery Queene"

The Growth of the Love of nature in 18th century poetry:

The growth of a love of nature and of a feeling for the picturesque is one of the most marked features in the history of English poetry between Pope and Wordsworth. Thomas Parnell and Lady Coinchilsea show a genuine sense of natural beauty and the charms of rural life. The Muse of the time voiced best to frequent the coffee-house and the drawing room. It was in the writings of Lamarkshire Mam, Allan Ramsay (1689-1758) that the reviving love of nature became clear. In "The Gentle Shepherd" (1725) which is a real pastoral poem the characters are genuine shepherds and shepherdesses. John Dyer 1700- 1758) a Welshman's "Grongarlill" is a piece of vigorous landscape painting. The love of nature became prominent in poetry.

The Development of Naturalism:

The steady growth of a love of nature and slogan "return to nature" provide the increasing feeling of the picturesque and the charms of the country. Stress was laid upon to bring poetry' back to nature and reality. William Blake was a mystic and a visionary. He could be ranked along with romantic poets. His "Songs of Innocence" and "Songs of Experience" expressed the love of the country and marked him out as a leader in the naturalistic kind of poetry. George Crabbe wrote "The Village" "The Newspaper" "The Parish Register" "The Borough" and "The Tales of the Hall". Crabbe was not influenced by romantic movement.

The Romantic Movement:

By romantic, we connote the principle of spontaneity in literature. It means the assertion of individuality against the conventions of the schools. Romanticism was a part of 18th century movement for the emancipation of the individual. The great French writer Victor Hugo described it as "liberalism in literature". Mr. Watts-Dunton defined romantic revival as "the renaissance of wonder and mystery". Keats' "Endymion" is romantic and Thomas Gray's "Elegy" is romantic melancholy. Richards Hurd (1720-1808) in his "Letters on Chivalry and Romance" maintained "Gothic manners" for poetry. The most important ballad book of the 18th century was Bishop Percy's "The Reliques of Ancient English Poetry". It helped a lot in spreading romantic tastes. "An Essay on the Ancient Minstrels" was the immediate inspiration of Beanie Thomas Chatterton. "The Marvelous Boy" was spoken of in the history of the medieval revival.

He died before he had completed his 18th year. Thomas Rowley is a mythical Bristol priest of the 15th century. Macpherson's 'Ossianic' poems are filled with supernaturalism steeped in melancholy. The desire to get back to nature is good feature of these poems. They captivated readers of all classes, touched their sympathy, set their hearts a flame. The revival of the romantic past came to its head between 1760 and 1770. To this decade belong Hurd's "Letters on Chivalry and Romance" "The Castle of Otranto" and Percy's "Reliques"