

Personal Essays of the 19th Century/sNon-fictional Prose of the Romantic Age/ (Part-1)

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The non-fictional prose of the Romantic Age showed a propensity similar in nature to that of poetry. Not only was poetry an expression of individual feelings thoroughly sweetly falling sounds, prose, too, became a type of expression of the self through a mellifluousness of its own. Whereas the Elizabethan Bacon was a scientific erudite dispensing practical wisdom and the Augustan prose writers were social crudités dispensing morality, a Romantic prose writer mirrored his own personality as an illuminating case history or as a gesture of defiance or showmanship or alienation. Leaving the question of style apart, the output of the non-fictional prose expelled its fictional counterpart. For the first time, periodicals attracted the budding talents of the age and it gave a fresh impetus to the essays, mainly in the hands of Southey and Hazlitt, turned into reviews which paved the way for Macaulay and Carlyle of the Victorian Age. Miscellaneous essays became more intimate and appealing to the readers, and literary criticism shook off the classical rigidity for a humanistic attitude.

In the 18th century periodicals and magazines were controlled by publishers who employed hack writers to puff their wares and disparage those of others. In the Romantic Age the periodicals and magazines came out of this constraint and became the literary and critical voices of the age. The first great modern magazine established under the editorship of Francis

Jeffrey in 1802, *Edinburgh Review*. Was yet prejudiced towards the Whigs; and to upset its popularity the Tories in 1809 founded *The Quarterly Review*, to which Southey was for long a chief contributor. *Blackwood's Magazine*, founded in 1817, projected writers like John Wilson who contributed to it the famous series of conversations called *Noctes Ambrosianae*, based on a variety of Subjects. Leigh Hunt's periodical *The Examiner* provided a platform for Hazlitt's theatre criticism and through its pages Hunt was instrumental in introducing Shelley and Keats to the wider readership.

The familiar essay provided a suitable counterpart for the Romantic poetry with its flaunting of the writer's taste, prejudices and idiosyncrasies with a highly personal, often whimsical style. Charles Lamb's name comes foremost in the familiar essay. Casting a humane and sympathetic look towards the sad aspects of life around him, his essays are pathos personified. But he, quite paradoxically, also gives a humorous treatment to those pictures of sadness. A romantic to the core, he finds his materials in the streets of London, in his relations and in his past. Thus, *Christ's Hospital*, *Poor Relations*, *Dream Children* and *Old China* look back to the past as having a charm of its own. Again, whereas *A Dissertation Upon a Roast Pig* shows his whimsicality at its best, he revolts against the downtrodden in *Modern Gallantry* (on universal behaviour towards women) and *Chimney Sweepers*.

....To be continued.....