THE VICTORIAN POETRY (1832-1880)

• The Victorian Age (1832-1887) is one of the most remarkable periods in the history of England. It was era of material affluence, political consciousness, democratic reforms, industrial and mechanical progress, scientific advancement, local unrest, educational expansion, empire building and religious uncertainty.

• It witnessed the flowering of poetry in the hands of a host of poets, great and small. It marked the growth of the
English novel, and laid the foundation of English prose on a surer footing.

• The note of individuality was the hallmark of Victorian literature. The literary figures of the Victorian age were endowed with marked originality in outlook, character and style. Victorian literature in its varied aspects was marked by a deep moral note. The marked characteristic of the age is that literature, both in prose and poetry, seems to depart from the purely artistic standard of art’s sake and to be actuated by a definite moral purpose. TENNYSON, BROWNING, RUSKIN were primarily interested in their message to their countrymen.

• They were teachers of England and were inspired by a conscious moral purpose to uplift and instruct their fellowmen. The literature of the
Victorian age was co-related to the social and political life of the age. A few literary artists of this age struck the note of revolt against the materialistic tendencies of the age, and sought to seek refuge in the overcharged atmosphere of the Middle Ages. An escapist note is also perceptible in the Victorian literature and this is particularly noticed in the works of the Pre-Raphaelite Poets.

The most important poets of the Victorian Ages are-

- ALFRED LORD TENNYSON
- MATTHEW ARNOLD
- ROBERT BROWNING
- ARTHUR HUGH CLOUGH
- MRS. ELIZABETH BROWNING etc.
MATTHEW ARNOLD (1822-1888)
MATTHEW ARNOLD was one of the greatest poets of the Victorian Age but he was considered more a critic than a poet. A poet who is at heart a critic and whose poetry is “a criticism of life under the conditions fixed for such criticism by the laws of poetic truth and poetic beauty”. Matthew Arnold belonged the group of the reflective, thoughtful and intellectual poets of the Victorian age. His poetical works are not very bulky. As early as 1849 he had published “THE STRAYED REVELLER and OTHER POEMS”. In 1852 was published “EMPEDOCLES ON ETNA” and “OTHER POEMS” by “A”. then followed “POEMS” in 1853 with a remarkable preface. This volume contained famous poems of Arnold such as “SOHRAR AND RUSTAM”, “THE SCHOLAR GIPSY”. In 1855 was issued “POEMS BY MATTHEW ARNOLD”, second series containing many old and published poems and a few new
ones such as “BLADER DEAD” and “SEPARATION”. In 1867 “NEW POEMS” was published. This volume contained “THYRSIS RUGBY CHAPEL”, “DOVER BEACH”, “A SOUTHERN NIGHT” etc. The poems of Matthew Arnold can broadly be classified into narrative, dramatic, elegiac and lyrical poems besides a few sonnets which he wrote form time to time. Arnold was not a born poet like Shelley whom he criticized as an “ineffectual angel”, but a man who wrote poetry for it served as a good and helpful medium of expressing his views about life and its problems. But Arnold’s poetry lacks spontaneity, passion, rapture, qualities by which great poetry is judged.

ROBERT BROWNING (1812-89)
ROBERT BROWNING was another important poet of the Victorian era. Browning began his poetic career under
the inspiring example of P.B. Shelley. His earliest work in poetry is “PAULINE“(1833). The poem is a monologue addressed by Pauline on the development of a soul. In 1840 Browning produced “SORDELLO” representing the life of a little known Italian poet. In 1842, Browning produced “DRAMATICS LYRICS” followed by “DRAMATIC ROMANCES AND LYRICS” in 1845. In 1855, Browning brought out “MEN AND WOMEN” which was dedicated to Elizabeth Barret Browning. In “DRAMATIC PERSONAE“ (1864) Browning carried forward his study of human beings and produced a number of dramatic monologues. In 1868-69, Browning produced “THE RING AND THE BOOK”. Besides composing lyrics and dramatic monologues Browning also penned a few dramas at intervals. He bought all his dramas in a collection known as “BELLS AND POMEGRANATES”. Browning is the author of eight plays.
The most characteristics of Browning’s poetry is his profound interest in character. He is a great master of the art of presenting the inner side of human beings, their mental and moral qualities. It is in his dramatic monologues that Browning is seen at his best. He uses the dramatic monologues for the study of character, of particular mental states, and moral crisis in the soul of the characters concerned. Browning is an optimist to the care. Browning’s optimism is best seen in his treatment of love. Browning is one of the greatest of love poets in the English language. Browning was a highly original genius right from the beginning.

ARTHUR CLORGH (1819-1861)
ARTHUR CLUGH was another poet of Victorian Age. He was also representative Victorian poet expressing in his narratives, descriptive and lyric verses of
doubts, the uncertain questioning and criticism of the Victorian Age. He was the truest expression in verse of the moral and intellectual tendencies. The doubt and struggle towards settled convictions of period in which he lived. His entire work in poetry is intellectual in character and is marked with introspective self analysis and self declination. Clough’s important works are—“THE BOTHIC OF TOBER- NO VOUNET”, “AMOURS De”, “VOYAGE”, “DIP TYCHUS” etc.

ELIZABETH BARETT BROWNING (1806-61)
The wife of Robert Browning was another important figure and occupies a place of her own among the poets of Victorian Age. She was a few years older than her husband and began composing poems, which were rather old fashioned in form and showed a curious mingling of her influence of the Bible, the Greeks, Byron
and Shelley. Her important works are—
“THE COY OF CHILDREN”, “LADY GERALDINE’S COURTSHIP”, “SONNETS FROM THE PORTUGUESE”, “AURORA LEIGH”, “COWPER’S GRAVE” etc. Mrs. Browning is the poetess of humanitarianism and deep pity. Her poems evoke the chords of sympathy in our hearts and bring tears to our eyes. Her love poems are rich in emotion and exhibit the intensity of her passion and love for Browning. But her poetry suffers from numerous and defects.

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