



## THE PRE-RAPHAELITE POETRY

The eighteenth century academies of art advocated pompous style in art. It was a little before 1850 that a number of young artists opposed its conventions. These artists were D. G. Rossetti, Holman Hunt, Millais and others. They ignored the achievements of Blake, Turner, Constable and Samuel Palmer. They cherished simplicity, sincerity and religious feeling in their works. They called themselves Pre-Raphaelites as they admired the Italian painters who came before Raphael. The movement was originally a movement of painters. It had its say in literature also as its leader D. G. Rossetti himself was both a painter and poet. Therefore D. G. Rossetti and his followers came to be known as Pre-Raphaelite poets. This group of poets consists of D. G. Rossetti, C. G. Rossetti, William Morris and A. C. Swinburne.

D. G. Rossetti displays the influences of Keats and also is not impervious to that of Browning either. He serves as a link of communication between the two romantic movements of England. His poem 'The Blessed Damozel' expresses his love for mysticism. It is



a creation of pictorial beauty and is marked by sincerity, simplicity and lucidity. It minglesthe sensual and the spiritual. Thus, it introduces a new distinctive and refreshing accent into English poetry. 'The House of Life' is his masterpiece. It is a long sonnet sequence dealing with passionate love, at once sensual and intoxicated with a philosophical mysticism. It has sumptuous variety and wealth, symphonic subtlety and musical liquidity. His other important works are 'Love's Nocturne', 'Troy Town', 'Sister Helen', etc. All of them have natural leaning towards medieval majesty and simple poetic diction.

Christina G. Rossetti, the sister of D. G. Rossetti, is almost an equally great poetess. Her poetry pulsates with the spirit of impassioned romanticism. It is pure and sonorous. It is allegorical and symbolical. The religion that it propounds is tinged with mysticism moving from earthly love to divine love. Her lyrical poems remind the readers of the poetry of Herbert and Vaughan. Some of them have unforced directness. 'The Prince's Progress' is more serious and comprehensive. However her short poems are most appealing.

William Morris is of the lineage of Spenser. His poetry is a succession



of pictures drawn from every sphere of human life. It has legendary richness and mysterious beauty. It develops fables and classical antiquity and also glorifies chivalry and adventures of Middle Ages. It is as such marked by dramatic vigour. His important works are : 'The Defence of Guinevere' 'The Life and Death of Jason', 'The Earthly Paradise' and 'The Pilgrim of Hope'.

Swinburne, though a great admirer of Rossetti, has his own style of writing poetry. His poetry is influenced by Greek, Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. His 'Atalanta in Calydon' follows the form of Greek tragedy. However it has Euripidean flavour. It is marked by metrical skill and splendour of passionate suggestiveness that is characteristic of Swinburne. His 'Poems and Ballads' displays definite sadomasochistic overtones of sensuality. Another important work of Swinburne — Songs before Sunrise — celebrates and encourages persons fighting for liberty in Europe. It has, thus, a political theme, but turns philosophical at times.

Besides these poets, Coventry Patmore and James Thomson have contributed much to the growth of



Pre-Raphaelitism. Palgrave's poetry is fresh and natural. It does not have medieval properties and symbolic objects as is clear from his poem 'The Angel in the House'. It deals with middle-class emotion and felicity but 'The Unknown Eros' displays religious eroticism. It has mystical streak. Thus, he moves from gentility to ecstasy. Thomson, on the contrary, moves from the lower middle class hedonism to nihilistic despair. His poems show the relish of the amber pleasures of life as well as aesthetic despair, though different from the despair of Tennyson and Arnold.

In brief, the Pre-Raphaelite poets have caused a sudden turn in the trend of English poetry. Though transitory, the turn has a great significance as it acquired brilliant dominance in the fixed period of its survival.