



## THE PURITAN MOVEMENT

The puritans were originally the people who fought for certain changes in the form of worship under Elizabeth. Charles I was opposed to these changes. But his opposition only strengthened the resolve of the people leading to a protracted civil war in England which resulted in the execution of the king. The period from the execution of Charles I in 1649 to the restoration of the Stuart monarchy under Charles II in 1660 is known as the Puritan Interregnum.

Starting from a desire for minor changes in worship the popular will took the form of a movement which had the impact of a second renaissance. The Renaissance had a negative side to its achievements: it tended to support self-aggrandisement and sensuality. The Puritans advocated for a tempered living, for curbing passion and following the ideals of peace, holiness and morality. They also advocated for open fight against tyranny. That theirs was not a hypocritical stand is substantiated by the organised resistance that they created against the king, making the parliament supreme.

Their first work in the realm of culture and literature was to have the theatres closed in 1642. This step may have offended the playwrights in the beginning but it made them aware of the degeneration into which drama has sunk at that time. It made them think of writing as a serious work, and not as a means of winning cheap popularity by showing senseless murders, intrigues and lustful activities on stage.

The ideals of Puritanism influenced literary writing in a concrete manner as can be seen from a survey of poetry and prose during this period. George Herbert and Robert Herrick had sympathy with the Puritans and in their religious verses they upheld the values of Puritanism. John Milton is one person who clung to these ideals more tenaciously. His poetry, lyrical as well as epic is testimony to the restraint he was able to apply over his emotions which were so exuberant. In 'Paradise Lost' he raised poetry to heights of sublimity and eloquence.

In prose also the Puritanism made significant contribution. The pamphlets of Milton have various subjects. But in his convictions Milton shows the fire of a Puritan, a person who is sincere



and virtuous and is determined to fight for them. Richard Burton and Jeremy Taylor are two other writers who sponsored the practical and moral advantages proceeding from virtuous life. In his book 'Anatomy of Melancholy' Richard Burton dwelt upon at length over the ills that were born out of life given to sensual pleasures. Jeremy Taylor was a preacher. His sermons have been printed and in spite of imaginative leaps they make their point forcibly. His two books 'Holy Living' and 'Holy Dying' have commanded respect for brilliance of argument and exposition of religious ideals.