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T.S. ELIOT
AS A CRITIC

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From 16th Century to 20th Century, there have been various schools of criticism and critics. They all had their presumptions and principles and they accordingly practised those principles. But with the advent of T.S. Eliot, in the modern age, all assumptions and critics except S.T. Coleridge, perhaps came to an end. Empson has wittily described him as a "penetrating and inescapable influence rather like an east wind". Eliot has given a new dynamism and meaning to the modern English criticism. He has laid the foundation of the modern poetry in conformity with his own criticism. Much of Eliot's literary criticism is an extension of his poetry. For it deals with the issues he has to tackle as a poet. However, it has proved to be much wider significance. The new critics also acknowledge their debt to T.S. Eliot, with their Poetry, Drama and Fiction - all came to a new dimension. His literary criticism finds its full expression in essays as - "The function of Criticism", "The frontiers of criticism", "The frontiers of criticism", "Tradition and Individual

Talent" etc.

T. S. Eliot stands for orderliness both in art and in criticism. Each of his essays is striving for order; art seeks it in life and criticism in art. Each, therefore, must orderly. The end of criticism, accordingly being the elucidation of works of art and the correction of taste, here one would suppose in a place of co-operative labour. Each critic endeavours to compose his differences with as many of fellows as possible, in the common pursuit of true judgement.

T. S. Eliot's approach to criticism is the classical view, he says, cannot get on without giving allegiance to something outside themselves. As the citizens have to give to their government and the believer to the church so the critic has to give it to some common criterion of rightness. Even those, who stand for individual liberty in art listen to their inner voice only. Fact-finding, elucidation and not mere interpretation is the function of criticism. And this is best done when the critic has something outside of himself to guide him - some

standard of perfection to judge a work by, based upon tradition and the accumulated wisdom of time. T.S. Eliot's approach is objective too. To be able to put his finger right at the facts about a work, he must have first a highly developed sense of fact, such as will preclude the imposition of his own opinion on it. Secondly, a critic should have his tools "Comparison and Analysis". A critic must learn things from tradition and the tradition is itself modified by critical tools. "True Criticism", according to Eliot is "about something other than itself". T.S. Eliot avoids impressionistic criticism. He also decries "The Abstract Style", in criticism as it is clear in his statements like "Poetry is the most highly organised form of intellectual activity". In matters of great importance, the critic must not coerce and he must not make judgement of worse or better. A critic must simply elucidate. The reader will form the correct judgement for himself. True criticism, therefore is the institution of a scientific enquiry into a work of art to see it as it really is.

It is "the disinterested exercise of intelligence", such as Aristotle brought to bear on his work. T. S. Eliot's great contribution to poetic criticism is his "impersonal theory of Poetry". According to this, the poet and the poem are two separate things and that the feeling or emotion or vision, resulting from the poem something different from the poet's feeling and vision. Eliot elucidates it by examining first "the relation of the poet to the past", and then "the relation of the poem to its author". The past he says, is never dead; it lives in the present. If we approach a poet with an open mind, "we shall often find what not only the best, but the most individual parts of his work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors assert their immortality most vigorously. Really, Eliot is rather in the line of Aristotle than of his followers. He applies the method of science to the study of literature to be able to see as it really is. This is what his contribution is to the present-day criticism.

As Eliot is one of the leading modern poets and critics, his criticism is a milestone in the progress of the English Criticism.

The End

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