

27.5.20
Lecture No. 31
Dr. Hempati Jha

English (Hons.)

(1)

DI / Paper II (Poetry)

Topic : John Keats' "On First Looking into Chapman's Homer" (Continued...)

Summary:-

In its simplicity, straightforwardness and workmanship Keats' sonnet stands out as a memorable poem in English literature. He conceives the field of poetry as a golden region and poets as so many kings, great and small. These kings are vassals of Apollo. He has visited their lands (i.e., read their poetry). For a long time he had heard of the great Homer, but it was only through Chapman's version that he had come to know Homer. And when he had read those poems, he was filled with wonder and delight such as an astronomer may feel on discovering a new star or as Cortez felt when he first came upon the mighty Pacific Ocean.

The Beauty of the poem, "Chapman's Homer", consists firstly, in the perfect harmony that exists between the idea and the metaphorical expression; secondly, in suggesting the poet's feelings with a marvellous adequacy;

② thirdly, in the glow of romantic wonder that pervades the rest; and lastly in the perfect workmanship of the poem as a sonnet. Nothing could be happier than conceiving the domain of poetry as "realm of gold" or the poets as princess bound in fealty to Apollo. The slight incongruity in the mediæval idea of fealty and the classical God is so thoroughly Elizabethan in its way as to escape the attention of all but the most fastidious. The epithet "deep brow'd" applied to Homer is worthy of Homer himself. The sonnet interprets, with exquisite art, the poet's feelings of delight in the study of poetry itself and his wonder at the discovery of Homer through Chapman's translation. The picture of Cortez and his men looking at each other with wild surprise upon a peak in Darien is not only worthy of a painter's brush, but is instinct with all the wonder of romance. As Sidney Colvin remarks: "Nor can there be a finer instance of genius than the image of the explorer, where a stray reminiscence of schoolboy reading is converted into the perfection of poetry."

Finally, the poem achieves

that balance between the statement in the octave and the conclusion in the sestet which is the characteristic of all the great sonnets. Though this is one of the earliest poems composed by Keats, here also like the other poems of Keats, workmanship is perfect. Every word suggests a concrete picture, every phrase ~~is~~ is haunted by thousand associations. The verbal melody is always in harmony with the image expressed. Matthew Arnold has expressed himself about Keats in these words:

"No one in English poetry, save Shakespeare, has in expression the fascinating felicity of Keats, his perfection of loveliness."

(concluded.)

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