



A STUDY ON THE INFLUENCES OF FRENCH REVOLUTION ON WILLIAM WORDSWORTH

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Abstract

French Revolution left a powerful impression on the poets of Romantic Age. Their poetic works were coloured by the ideals of French revolutionists. The present paper discusses the influences of French Revolution on William Wordsworth. French Revolution is a cardinal movement in the human history. It inspired literary, political and artistic circle. The Revolution inaugurated the golden era for mankind in general. This paper also discusses the principles of liberty, fraternity and equality which are upheld by the French revolutionists.

Keywords: French Revolution, Romantic Age, Liberty, Fraternity, Equality

Early life: William Wordsworth was born at Ceckermouth, Cumberland, in the Lake District, on 7th April, 1770. His father was a law agent. He received his primary education at Hawkshead Grammar School, near Windermere. He went St.John's College, Cambridge University for his higher education. After his graduation, he went to France where he came in contact of Annette Vallon. As the result of this affair, he became the father of an illegitimate daughter, Caroline in 1792. Wordsworth returned from France due to some reasons and settled with his sister Dorothy, near Bristol. Here he met Coleridge who became his close friend. In 1798 both friends published famous creation Lyrical Ballad and visited Germany in the same year. In next year Wordsworth settled in Lake District with his sister Dorothy. He married with Hutchinson in 1802.

The French Revolution stirred whole Europe whose events extended for a decade from 1789 to 1799. It was a turning point in the life of Romantic

writers and gave them an opportunity to reflect the spirit of the golden age. The reaction of the French Revolution in England came to be called English Romanticism. William Wordsworth was the first romantic poet who came under the influence of the Revolution. Liberty, fraternity and equality were the principles of French revolutionists which influenced Wordsworth very much. Cumberland was a democratic village where had Wordsworth lived long. The ideals which were practiced by French revolutionists were thus the ideals in which the poet had been brought up. He practiced brotherhood even at Cambridge:

We were brothers all

In honour as in one community

Scholars and good gentlemen.

Although the French Revolution in its earlier phase did not give new jolt to the mind of the poet. Wordsworth wrote eulogistically about it:

Bliss was it in that down to be alive,

But to be young was very heaven.

Revolution gave the feeling of exhilaration to the poet because it was ushering in the era of peace, equality and brotherhood of mankind all over Europe:

Europe at that time was thrilled with joy

France standing on the path of golden hours,

And human nature seeming born again.

Wordsworth visited first time France in July, 1790. He noticed a wave of enthusiasm in the people of France. The hearts of people of France were filled with national feeling. He impressed:

Songs, garlands, mirth

Banners, and happy faces, far and high.

The Revolution brought a new hope to the romantic poets, described in the poem:

But now

To the wide world's astonishment appeared

A glorious opening, the unlooked-for dawn,

That promised everlasting joy to France.

Wordsworth visited second time France in November 1791. He met Michael Beaupuy, a revolutionist. Wordsworth saw the miserable condition of France in contact of him. He taught the poet that the Revolutionists were fighting against unjust law, tyranny, poverty and injustice. The poet was much impressed by the efforts of Revolutionists. William Wordsworth shared his view on revolution with Beaupuy:

I wish him believed

That a benignant spirit was abroad

Which might not be withstood, that poverty

Abject as this would in a little time

Be found no more that we should see

Better days to all mankind.

Wordsworth came in the influence of French. He attached himself with Girondins. He wrote

revolutionary songs to cheer up revolutionist in French. Wordsworth came back to England in 1793. But Wordsworth could not change his revolutionary idea. All of sudden in 1793, England declared war with French. This incident shook the faith of him. He turned into the sympathy for his countrymen when he heard that French people who were advocacy for liberty, equality and fraternity, became very cruel and entered into a new face of bloodshed and horror. The horrible September massacres filled the mind of the poet with the feelings of deep revulsion. This incident developed the feeling of hate in the heart of the poet for the French revolution and revolutionists. His peace was disturbed. He expressed:

I scarcely knew one night of quite sleep

Such ghastly visions had I of despair

And tyranny, and implements of death

And long orations which in dreams I pleaded

Before unjust tribunals.

Because of these incidents, poet withdrew himself from revolution movement. He found peace in the Political Justice of Godwin. He admired the theory of Godwin. Godwin was father-in-law of P.B. Shelley. But very soon he realized that he was on a wrong place. He turned himself from politics and go back to poetry:

Till demanding proof,

And seeking it in everything I lost

And feeling of conviction and, in fine,

Sick wearied out with contrarities

Yielded up moral questions in despair.

Now Wordsworth changed his attention from Godwin to Cumberland. He also changed his rational philosophy into Nature. Dorothy, Coleridge and life style of peasants helped Wordsworth in the restoration of his normal state of mind. Wordsworth claims that his sister rendered a great service to him that restores his shattered faith in the goodness of man. He wrote:

Ah! Then it was

That thou, most precious friend! About this
time

First known to me, didst lend a living help

To regulate my soul.....

We can say that French Revolution played a huge role in influencing not only romantic writers but also entire Europe. According to Albert Hancock, in "The French Revolution and The English Poet", French Revolution came, bringing with it the promise of a brighter day, the promise of regenerated man and regenerated earth. It was hailed with joy and acclamation by the oppressed, by the ardent lovers of humanity, by the poets, whole task it is to voice the human spirit.

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