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E- Study Material
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The Age of Transition

Like all other periods of transition, the one under review is disturbed and confused. It is a matter of great difficulty to trace the different tendencies but with care the task may be accomplished with some accuracy.

- 1) The double tendency - Two movements can be clearly observed in the writing of the time, namely:
 - a) The allegiance to the older order of classicism. In this movement the chief and almost the only figure is that of Samuel Johnson. He is a host in himself, however.
 - b) The search after the new order of Romanticism. In their different degrees, many writers were engaged in the search. It began as early as 1730, with the publication of Thomson's 'The Seasons'.

and though it lapsed for a time, it was to continue with gathering force during the latter years of the century.

- 2.) The New Romanticism - The general features of the Romantic movement were:
- A return to nature - to the real nature of earth and air, and to the bookish nature of the artificial pastoral.
 - A fresh interest in man's position in the world of nature. This led to great activity in religious and political speculation.
 - An enlightened sympathy for the poor and the oppressed. In English literature during this time one has to think of the work of Cowper, Burns and Crabbe, and even of the classically minded Gray, to perceive the reversion that is taking place in the minds of the men.
 - A revolt against the conventional literary technique, such as that of heroic couplet. On the other hand, we have a desire for strength, simplicity and sincerity in the expression of the new literary ideals.
 - Fresh treatment of Romantic Themes in such poems as The Lay of the Last Minstrel, The Ancient Mariner, La Belle Dame, and Merlin. writers.

turned to supernatural stories, legends and the more colorful periods of history, especially the middle Ages.

- 3) The new learning — In the middle and later stages of the 18th century show a minor Renaissance that touched nearly all Europe. The increase in wealth and comfort coincided with a general uplifting of the standards of the human intellect. In France particularly it was well marked, and it took for its sign and seal the labors of the Encyclopedists and the social amenities of the older salons. Many of the leading English writers including Gibbon, Hume and Sterne, visited Paris which was the hub of European culture.

In England the new learning took several channels. In literature we have the revival of the Romantic movement, leading to (a) research into archaic literary forms such as ballad and (b) new editions of the older authors, such as Shakespeare and Chaucer. The publication of Bishop Percy's Reliques (1765) which contained

Some of the oldest and most beautiful specimens of ballad-literature, is a landmark in the history of the Romantic movement. Both Pope and Johnson were moved to edit Shakespeare, the former in ingenious guesses at meanings and fanciful treatment of his text contrasting strongly with the latter's shrewd common-sense notes and attempts to restore the original readings. Other editions by Theobald and Warburton, were examples of scholarly and enlightened research.

4) The New Philosophy - The spirit of the new thinking, which received its consummate expression in the works of Voltaire, was marked by keen scepticism and the zest for eager inquiry. Scotland very early took to it, the leading Scottish philosopher being Hume. It would seem, perhaps, that this destructive spirit of disbelief would injure the Romantic ideal which delights in illusion. But finally the new spirit actually ousted the Romantic ideal by demolishing and clearing away heaps of the ancient mental lumber, and so leaving the ground clear for new creations.