The Decline and Fall of Arcadia: A Study in Eighteenth Century Thought

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THE DECLINE AND FALL OF ARCADIA:

A STUDY IN EIGHTEENTH CENTURY THOUGHT

by

BARRBRA J. RICHARDS
SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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PREFACE

The eighteenth century is not, today, a fashionable one. It is commonly regarded as a valley of cultural depression between the glorious hills of the seventeenth century on the one side and the exciting heights of nineteenth century romanticism on the other.

But it was a time of singular activity and of singular change. Humanity, as Pater says,¹ is loath to abandon its decayed ideas and its moribund gods. The eighteenth century was courageous and energetic enough to do both. Something new was born, which we call democracy in government and romanticism in the arts. There was no corner of life untouched by the Zeit-Geist. It is to the eighteenth century, more than to any other, that we owe our modern world, for better or for worse.

The connection of these great changes with the decline of the neo-classic pastoral may seem remote, but in fact it is not. The decline of the pastoral was but one aspect of the great new spirit that was stirring abroad. And so the history of its decline is not merely a literary exercise and it has more than literary significance, although that in itself is sufficient apologia. From a study of literature, we can lay a finger on the pulse of life; we can trace a new psychology more exactly and with greater chronological accuracy

¹Marius, the Epicurean, Chapter I.
than from the text-books. To say that the rise of Stephen Duck early in the century may help us to understand the success of Napoleon at the other end of it, may sound grandiloquent, but I believe it to be true.

Nevertheless, I have attempted always to keep within the limits of my subject, with varying degrees of success. I have not concerned myself with parallel developments in the fields of politics and the other arts, except where they seem to be inextricably intertwined. Even then, I have not attempted to distinguish, usually, between cause and effect. I have likewise avoided, as far as possible the tempting term "romanticism", since the growth of realism in pastoral poetry is by no means synonymous with, or even parallel to, the growth of romanticism, although there is a strong connection.

Time is the chief factor which has prevented my presenting little more than a simple history of the fall of the pastoral. There are important conclusions to be drawn from the facts and I am aware that I have not always drawn them, or at least made them sufficiently clear to the reader. For instance, the chronology of the decline, beginning to gather impetus in the 'fifties of the century and reaching full speed in the 'seventies, has further causes than those which I have attributed to it, and obviously a significance stronger than I can at present grasp. I am aware too, that my attempts to summarize the change in the climate of opinion during the century are pitifully inadequate.
I can only defend them by saying that they are porter's work and seem to do what they have to do reasonably adequately in this paper.

My thanks are due to Dr. Foerster for his help and constructive criticism during the labour pangs of this study.

April 25th, 1950.
GENERAL STUDY

Like most of the words which the critics have seized upon, the word "pastoral" has been used so often, and so vaguely, that it has become a pale abstraction. But it was a brave word once. Definition is an impossible task, since I am far from being an Aristotle. However, I cannot let the word pass without some comment. To draw general conclusions from specific cases is a dangerous procedure, but I think it is the only one feasible here. I would remind the reader that this is merely an ad hoc study and that the value of it outside this paper is negligible.

We can father the pastoral, as we can almost everything which makes life sweet and noble to live, upon the Greeks. The suggestion that it developed from primitive worship, from the lament for the death of the year daemon, the mourning of the

1 I can do no better than to quote Miss Edith Hamilton in her book The Greek Way: "This little remant preserved by the haphazard of chance shows the high-water mark reached by the region of thought and beauty the Greeks entered. No sculptures comparable to theirs; no buildings ever more beautiful; no writings superior. Prose, always late of development, they had time only to touch upon, but they left masterpieces. History has yet to find a greater exponent than Thucydides; outside of the Bible there is no poetical prose that can touch Plato. In poetry they are all but supreme; no epic is to be mentioned with Hume; no odes to be set beside Pindar; of the four masters of the tragic stage three are Greek."

2 Langhorne and Egger suggest an aboriginal source. Marion K. Bragg mentions the theory, but is inconclusive.
withering plenty of summer, is attractive but unsupported. At any rate, the form seems to have crystallised early and in Theocritus it springs, like Pallas out of Jove's head, full born and mature.

A study of the characteristics of the bucolic as Theocritus wrote it may be considered a basic study of pastoral form. Although Virgil was the accredited model for later writers, he added very little that was new; he polished rather than cut. Theocritus called his works idylls, that is, "little pictures". There are thirty in all, but scholars for the past few hundred years have been divided as to whether they are all pure pastoral. And indeed, it seems a moot point whether there is such a thing as "pastoral form". But perhaps that is because Aristotle was apparently not interested in pastoral and so we speak with less authority. The idylls of Theocritus lean towards drama, with a strong lyric note, and his amaeban verse is adapted by most of his later followers.

But it is the atmosphere that is the all important thing. It is doubtful whether the Sicilian landscapes were realistic

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3 Almost certainly this was due to common ignorance of Greek during the Middle Ages. Theocritus was not read until the Renaissance. By that time, taste had largely been fixed.

4 Discussing the various forms of poetry at the beginning of The Poetics, Aristotle mentions epic, tragedy, comedy, the dithyramb and the music written for the aulos and the lyre. It seems likely that he included the pastoral in the latter class and that he did not discuss it in detail because he considered it not primarily as poetry, but as music.
even when they were being written. Certainly they were not true to the country life which Virgil knew. Later still, they were positively ironical. But pastoral still demanded its happy swains and lovesick herdsmen. It was interested, not in holding the mirror up to Nature, but in holding it up to Theocritus. It follows then, that the pastoral is ex natura a very highly stylized and artificial literary genre.

It is stylized not only in atmosphere, but in themes. The motifs of the idylls of Theocritus recur again and again in pastoral poetry. The elegiac note of Idyll I (the lament for Daphnis), the love lay (in Idyll III, the complaint to Amaryllis and in the beautiful Idyll VII), the singing contest (in Idylls VIII and IX), the love philtre theme of Idyll II, are all part of the pastoral tradition. There is only one pastoral convention which is not found in Theocritus: that device which Ruskin has called the pathetic fallacy. This was begun by Bion and Moschus and brought to fruition by Virgil.

It would seem unlikely that such a stylized and artificial literary genre, practically divorced from reality and academic in the extreme, would be destined for long life. Yet of such strength it proved that only the homeopathic treatment of the eighteenth century had power to kill it, as we shall see. And even afterward there were a few very disturbing ghosts like

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5 Virgil's own Georgics in contradistinction to the Eclogues are sufficient proof.
Adonis and Thyrsis. The truth is that it survived by its very formlessness. It was a mould into which the molten thought of each century could easily be poured. Virgil, for instance, used it to flatter Augustus (Eclogue V), to foretell the birth of a mysterious child (IV), to thank gracefully his friends for restoring his farm and to complain about the evictions of peasants from their farms to acquire land for the returning soldiers (Eclogues I and IX). During the Middle Ages, it was discovered that the pastoral was admirably suited to allegory, and that it gave unparalleled opportunities for political, social and religious allusion. In the words of Petrarch, "Ex hujusce sermonis (i.e. allegory) genere, poetica omnis intexta est". In accordance with this principle, Petrarch wrote his twelve eclogues, confessing himself that they could be understood only with a key. It was discovered too that the pastoral could accommodate the mediaeval vision. So we have the Olympus of Boccaccio in which a pastoral heaven is drawn, sometimes with disastrous results. Mediaeval "escapism", which recurs again and again both in literature and the plastic arts, found expression in the Arradián setting which Sannazarò restored from Virgil and in which he garners up every treasured experience of his life and imagination. The pastorals of the Pleiade in France, with the possible exception of those of Marot, are mere imitations. They fail because

6After the eighteenth century, the formal pastoral survived only as elegiac verse.
no attempt was made to adapt the convention to the spirit of the age, and unless poetry has contemporary significance, it is dead at heart. As we shall see, this was to be the ultimate downfall of the pastoral in England. English Renaissance pastoral, however, was very much alive. Although Spenser openly acknowledged that it was his aim to provide English poetry with one of the poetic kinds "wherin it faulteth" after the best continental models and criticism, he was never merely imitative. In The Shepheardes Calendar, he uses his own stanza form; he largely discards classical names; his country scenes may be unrealistic, but they are more English than Sicilian. Spenser's followers too, managed to inject the pastoral with some vigour and strength, but the careful reader can already see the warning signs. Even more clearly can he see them in Milton's Lycidas. Lycidas is undoubtedly a great poem, but it is encrusted in ice. Johnson was not its first critic, but he has said the final word upon it.7 It is faulty in its very perfection. There is a practically unbroken line of development between Lycidas and eighteenth century pastoral. The Puritans were not the type of people to enjoy masquerading as shepherds and shepherdesses. Pastoral was

7Lives of the English Poets, Milton: "It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions. Passion plucks no berries from the myrtle and ivy, nor calls upon Arethuse and Minicius, nor tells of rough satyrs and fauns with cloven heel. Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief."
put into cold storage, and when it emerged in the eighteenth century, it was even more icy than before.

It is necessary to note one further quality of pastoral. It is not written by shepherds, but about them. Hence it is not, and never can be, an accurate picture of country life, and where a strong rural feeling exists, pastoral dies. It follows then that it will best thrive in an urban civilization, in a leisured and somewhat cultured atmosphere; in a civilization too, that does not take itself too seriously and is optimistic rather than pessimistic. Because pastoral, even the best, is never more than a game, albeit a charming and pleasant game. When all has been said, it is never more than a Cockney's Sunday afternoon. And Sunday afternoons cannot set a pattern for the rest of the week.

On The Nature of Eighteenth-Century Pastoral

Eighteenth-century pastoral found its immediate inspiration in France, in the theorisings of Rapin and of Fontenelle, especially of the latter. His Discours sur l'Eloge was widely read both in French and in the English translation by Motteux (1695, reprinted 1719). Fontenelle recommends imitation of models, but the main point of his argument may be summarised in the following sentence: "L'illusion et en même temps L'agrement des bergeries consiste donc à n'offrir aux yeux que la tranquillité de la vie pastorale dont on dissimule la bassesse; on en laisse voir la simplicité, mais on cache la misère."
In England, the first critic to define the pastoral within rigid limits was William Walsh. He, likewise, insisted upon extreme artificiality as the foundation of successful pastoral. But it was Pope, the contemporary literary giant, who did most towards divorcing reality from the pastoral. The *Discourse on Pastoral Poetry* (1709) urged entire removal from real life, the glorifying of the Golden Age and the Portrayal of what Pope called "the best side" of country life. This is how he expresses his guiding principle: "We must therefore use some illusion to render a Pastoral delightful; and this consists in exposing the best side only of a shepherd's life and in concealing its miseries." Pope's own pastorals, advertised as they were by the quarrel with Ambrose Phillips and given the stamp of authority by the writer's subsequent fame and later still by the approval of Johnson, were a tremendous force in popularising the form and in preserving it in the face of numerous and bitter gibes.

Very shortly after the appearance of Pope's work, the same rules were again repeated by Thomas Tickell in a series of articles in *The Guardian*. In No. 22 (April 6th, 1713), following Fontenelle closely, he demanded that the pastoral poet should imagine "a rural scene of perfect ease and tranquillity where innocence, simplicity and joy abound"; taking pains to "hide what is wretched", he should allow his swain to suffer only very trifling distresses,

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8In his Preface to *Virgil*, printed in *The British Poets*, vol. 85.
such as an unkind mistress, the loss of a lamb, a thorn in his foot or the failure to win a prize for dancing.

These statements recur at frequent intervals in the first fifty years of the century, and each essay reads very much like all the rest, i.e., like Fontenelle's original essay. The writers' great horror was anything which might have been considered "clownish" or "low." Thus Formey: 9 "Shepherds ought to be delicate and ingenious; that is to say, in all their speeches, there must be nothing rude and farfetched. . . . They must all be morally as well as poetically good." So too, Blair: 10 "We shall be disgusted if he gives us too much of the servile employments and low ideas of actual peasants as Theocritus is censured for having sometimes done." Burnaby Greene finds 11 distasteful the pastorals in which "the manners of the mere peasant are the sole soundation." These disgust the reader "with the filthiness of a dunghill".

So generally accepted was this pastoral convention, that even Johnson was to accept it, in the second half of the eighteenth century. He, of all men had no illusions about the happiness or virtues of countrymen. In Rasselas, shepherds are "envious savages." 12 In The Rambler (37) he refers to "the mean and

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9 Elementary Principles of the Belles Lettres, translated from the French by S. Foreman.
10 Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres, Lecture XXXIX.
11 An Essay on Pastoral Poetry.
12 Rasselas, Chapter XIX, A Glimpse of Pastoral Life.
despicable condition of a shepherd". A letter to Mrs. Thrale from Skye, (Sept. 21, 1773) mentions "the cunning that clowns never be without". Boswell informs us that Johnson spoke of farmers as "worthless fellows" who had all the vices of their betters without being ashamed of them and — most significant of all — that he found Crabbe's statements as to the false notions of rustic happiness quite congenial with his own. In The Rambler (202) and The Idler (71) he violently attacks the common treatment of poverty by poets and philosophers. Although, throughout The Lives of the Poets he abuses the pastoral; yet he accepts it and its conventions. His attitude is clearly shown in his review of Pope's Pastorals. He can accept the pastoral because he regarded it purely as a literary exercise. Similarly, a superior writer in the Monthly Review remarked of a certain Four Pastorals: "For us, we look upon the best pieces of this kind as merely (sic) amusing and the least useful of any species of writing."

The truth of the matter, then, is not that the Cockney has forgotten the other days of the week; it is that he chooses to ignore them. As John Scott wrote: "Describing vice and folly will not prevent their existing and it is agreeable to forget for a moment the reality of their existence."

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CHAPTER TWO

THE CLIMATE OF OPINION

The neo-classic type of pastoral which I have just sketched, being even more artificial and stylized than previous pastoral, could not have existed, in conception or in practice, in a vacuum. It was supported by the whole climate of opinion of the time, aesthetically, socially, and philosophically.

It is difficult for us, accustomed as we are to battles of ethics, manners, taste, religion, to comprehend the gentlemen's agreement on behaviour, morals, and taste which existed in the early eighteenth century. Yet against this agreement, hardly one dissentent voice was raised. "There are things", said Chesterfield, "which a gentleman does, and there are things which he does not do." And Chesterfield always had the last word. It is this agreement which makes it possible to generalize about the climate of opinion.

Since Charles I had paid the penalty of his connoisseurship, royal patrons had been few. With the accession to the throne of George II, the darkness deepened. But whatever may have been thought, it was not the arts themselves, but royal patronage that was dying out. Pope directs us to the truth when, invoking Dullness, he thunders:

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1 The phrase is Basil Willey's.
2 Letters to his Son. Letter LXXVIII, Sept. 20, 1748.
3 This enlightened Prince spoke very bad English, found Shakespeare intolerable, and claimed, no doubt with entire truth, that he hated both painting and poetry.
"You, by whose care, in vain decried and curst,
Still Dunce the Second reigns like Dunce the First."

The first two Hanoverian Kings were singularly obtuse in the fine arts. Just as the political power of English kings in the seventeenth century had passed into the hands of the English nobility and middle class, so now there was a similar transference in artistic patronage. Culture became the heritage of the salons, the houses in Bloomsbury, the country mansions; but not yet, and not for a long time, of the cottage and small town house.

This limited group fostered a very real kind of culture. Art was, for them, a part of their ordinary life. Their very household goods were things of beauty, valued by connoisseurs and collectors: china, glassware, silverplate, books beautifully printed and bound, Chippendale chairs and cabinets. Architecture was safe in the beautifully proportioned "Georgian style" and even the common people, by observing the rules of proportion laid down for their guidance in Gibbs' handbooks, kept hold of a secret the loss of which William Morris was later to bewail. The pictures of Gainsborough, Reynolds, Romney, and Zoffany; the school of miniature portraits that culminated in Cosway; the engravings of Vertue and Wobllett; the busts and statues of Roubillac; the furniture and decorations of the Adams brothers; all these were the most natural outcome of the ethos of the age. The new fashion for landscape gardening did not become fashion-

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*Dunciad. 11, 5 and 6."
able because King William introduced it, but because it was timely. The trees were habitually carved into cones or pyramids or globes, into smooth, even walls or into fantastic groups of men and animals. The flower beds were laid out symmetrically in architectural figures. Long, straight and formal alleys, a perfect uniformity of design and a constant recurrence of similar forms were necessary to a well-arranged garden. Sir William Temple, in his essay *On the Garden of Epicurus*, accurately reflected the prevailing taste.\(^5\)

But this culture, though real, was limited. In painting, portraiture was the only genre which the English patron favoured. His own face, and those of his numerous progeny were all that he considered necessary, in the way of beauty, to perpetuate for posterity. And the personal conceit of the sitter was equalled only by the technical conceit of the artist. Thus Jervas—who gave lessons in painting to Pope—on finishing a copy of a Titian, glanced complacently from one to the other and then observed: "Poor little Tit - how he would stare". As might have been expected, the quality of the painting deteriorated as this attitude continued. The portraits of Kneller and Hudson bore little resemblance to any particular sitter, though they all betrayed a somewhat indefinite likeness to a type, the idealized English lady and gentleman of the period. The formal gardens

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\(^5\) The Gardens of Governor's Palace, Williamsburg are a fair example of eighteenth-century horticulture and topiary.
too, are beautiful but unsatisfying. We miss the irregular beauty of hill and dale, of straying hedges and tangled groves. Similarly in architecture, we miss the breathtaking splendour of the despised "Gothic".

Yet it was a culture which answered the needs of the class from which it sprung. Wealth and leisure were on the increase, widely diffused. The civil disturbances were almost forgotten and quite forgiven. The limited liability of the wars waged overseas with small professional armies disturbed very little the even tenour of life within the island. Never was an Empire won at smaller cost than the British Empire in Canada and India. As for Australia, Capt. Cook, in G. M. Trevelyan's phrase "merely had to pick it up out of the sea". The wealthier classes could afford to look for quality in everything. They were ready now, after squabbling for the past century over rights of King and subjects, to agree amicably on a little thing like taste. They were content to sit back and enjoy the good things which Fortune had brought them. It did not occur to them to conceive very highly of art, although they enjoyed it as gentlemen should. Far away yet was the theory of genius later upheld by the generation of Hugo, Musset, and Lamartine in France and the English generation of Wordsworth, Shelley, and Byron. Now, the poet was not a child of the gods,

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6 In many ways, the eighteenth century may be said to be England's balmiest period.
who spent lonely hours waiting for the wing of the Muse to touch him, not the mouthpiece and instrument of the pantheistic force of the Universe. He was, above all, a gentleman. He knew what his public wanted; there was a perfect understanding between them. And he gave them their desire without demur. He gave them the neoclassic pastoral.

The Aesthetic Background

The best thing about peace, a Tory Squire might have decided as he relaxed in his library (those libraries to which the twentieth century can offer no parallel) is that it gives one time, time to drink, to gamble, to hunt, to enjoy oneself after the fashion set by the Court, but time too, to begin thinking about life and about art. One would not, of course, dream of going too deeply into matters, especially artistic matters, as that misguided fellow Shaftesbury persisted in doing in religion, but it was good to know where one stood.

As he sat there, pleased with himself and with life in general, we would not expect our Squire to demand that his art present to him those miseries which he knew existed, but preferred to ignore. And so we find that the aesthetic theory of the time was opposed to realism, not only in the pastoral, but

These discussions of background are my own impressions which I have gathered over the five years during which I have been acquainted with this period. They are not drawn from background books and secondary sources although, of course, they owe something to them indirectly, especially to the works of Willey, Turbeville, and Lecky.
in every form. Critics and artists alike attempted to obey Aristotle's command to "follow Nature". To them, however, Nature was the essence or Platonic Idea of a kind imperfectly realized in empiric reality, and they aimed to improve upon reality and strive for the idealized type-form, "la belle Nature". To later critics this has become familiar as the theory of "beautiful imitation". Johnson and Reynolds are, of course, its best known supporters, but the idea is expressed at the beginning of the century, by Bellori, Dennis, and others.

Jonathan Richardson, writing in 1719, expresses the whole theory well:

Lastly, Nature must be the foundation, that must be seen at the Bottom, but Nature must be raised; and Improved, not only from what is Commonly seen to what is but Rarely, but even yet higher, from a Judicious and Beautiful Idea in the Painter's Mind so that Grace and Greatness may shine throughout; more or less, however, as the Subject may happen to be. And herein consists the Principal Excellence of a Picture or Drawing.

It is sometimes amusing to see what circuses antics of logic our critics perform. James Beattie, while admitting that poetry must be "natural", that it must "exhibit real matter of fact, or something like it; that is, in other words must be either according to truth or according to verisimilitude",

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8 Giovanni Pietro Bellori, the famous Italian aesthetic philosopher and critic.
9 John Dennis, of Dunciad notoriety.
10 An Essay on the Whole Art of Criticism as it Relates to Painting, 1719.
explained that this was far from meaning that it should be "an exact transcript of real existence". Ingeniously he points out that Aristotle had spoken of an "imitation of Nature", not a representation, a copy, or a draught. Even more ingenious however, is Mickle in the Advertisement to his Eastern Tale Providence; or Arandus and Emilié (1762). He actually attacks the extravagance of plot, characters and diction in tragedy and romance, claiming that his poem deals with ordinary people and common events; "except one, the descent of an angel; and the one that the author wishes he could have found proper means to do without". He does not mention the small detail that the whole tale turns completely on this one event.

Artistic licence too, covered a multitude of sins. Prior wrote in 1718:12

Poets are allowed the same liberty in their descriptions and comparisons as painters in their draperies and ornaments: their personages may be dressed, not exactly in the same habits which they wore, but in such as make them appear most graceful. In this case, probability must atone for the want of truth.

Art, in fact is superior to Nature. Reynolds wrote:13

The object and intention of all the arts is to supply the natural imperfection of things, and often to gratify the mind by realizing and embodying what never existed but in the imagination.

Even more incomprehensible to the modern reader will be Goldsmith's

12Preface to Solomon on the Vanity of the World, 1718.
13Discourse XIII. The whole discourse is built round this theory.
It is the business of Art to imitate Nature, but not with a servile pencil; and to choose those attitudes and dispositions only which are beautiful and engaging.... to copy Nature is a task the most bungling workman is able to execute; to select such parts as contribute to delight is reserved only for those whom accident has blessed with uncommon talents.

Theories on sublimity in art were another force to remove art from daily life. The ideas of Longinus had been adopted and popularized by Burke who had also added his own ideas on the subject. Contemporary clothes, manners, architecture, and fashion, closely copied, would have given an ephemeral quality to the work, besides adding that touch of familiarity which breeds contempt. Johnson accounts for Shakespeare's greatness by the fact that "his characters are not modified by the customs of particular places unpractised by the rest of the world; by the peculiarities of studies or professions which can operate upon but small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions", but are "the genuine progeny of common humanity such as the world will always supply and observation will always find".

It is not difficult to see how the men who wrote in this vein found it easy to smile upon the neoclassic pastoral as we have found it to be in the early days of the century. Here, in the sunny valleys, bathed in light that never was on "sea or shore", we find indeed that idealized nature type which the

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14 Essay XV. On the Cultivation of Taste.  
15 Treatise on the Sublime.
critics so loved. But critics do not make a fashion. Let us now proceed to discover the views of the layman in the subject of the pastoral.

The Social Background

I thank your ladyship for the information concerning the Methodist preachers; their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tainted with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors in perpetually endeavouring to level all ranks and to do away with all distinctions. It is monstrous to be told you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl upon the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting, and I cannot but wonder that your ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.

(Letter from the Duchess of Buckingham to Selina, Countess of Huntingdon)

I have chosen an extract from this letter as a keynote to the whole early eighteenth-century attitude towards the lower classes. There was indeed a gentlemen's agreement; but it was between gentlemen only, and the common man was entirely excluded. Between the rich and the poor there was a gulf so wide that the poor were not even considered by many as human beings.

Even Thomas Brerewood, one of the very realistic poets of the countryside, described peasants as:

Happy Machines, devoid of thought,
From whence our greatest Ills are wrought,
Inured to Labour, Cold and Heat,
Their Round of Life they still repeat;
No passions stir their grov'ling Minds.
With Health and Quiet bless'd, they know
The best Enjoyments here below.*

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16Galfred and Juetta; or the Road of Nature. Canto 3.
The peasant, in fact, was regarded as a Clown, devoid of interest to the more fortunate classes. A typical picture is Ward's:

Where rural swains their noisy Revels make  
And o'er their Joans their leathern Britches shake;  
Where Sunburnt Slaves, on Holy Days repair  
With their tann'd Trulls, to every wake and Fair;  
Dance round their Maypoles, till their clumsy Feet  
Foyson their Nostrils with their stinking Sweat,  
Till sick of their dull Sports, the Gluttons fly  
To th' Alehouse Orchard, hungry, hot and dry;  
There, with March Beer, coarse Apple Pye and Cheese  
Cram their wide Gullets and their Palates please  
Till drunk and mad, then to conclude their Feast,  
With sturdy blows decide who danced the best.17

William Hamilton of Bangour, in his address To the Countess of Eglantine, with the Gentle Shepherd (1726) has as his theme the wickedness of the age and its effects upon the peasants.

Soame Jenyns's Epistle Written in the Country (1735) opens with a comparison of the country as it is with the country as it is shown by poets:

In days, my Lord, when Mother Time  
Though now grown old, was in her Prime  
How happy was a country Life.  
But now, whatever poets write,  
'Tis sure the case is altered quite.  
Virtue no more in rural plains,  
Or Innocence or Peace remains;  
But Vice is in the country found,  
And country girls are quite unsound.

But the Augustan attitude is best shown by a work of later date, an article in the Annual Register of 1761 entitled On the Country Manners of the present Age, which is devoted to the civilising

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effects which the great popularity of travelling, due to better roads, had recently had upon the country gentleman and his lady. It is the first part of the article which is here relevant:

The clown who works at plough and cart, nay, even the tender of sheep for whom we have so much respect in pastoral and romance, excite our veneration little more than a link boy or a hackney coachman... and so little do we expect to find the manners of the Golden Age prevail among our rustics that we see, without remorse or surprise, some bumpkin Phillis condemned to the gallows for the murder of her bastard child, or a refactory Damon committed to the house of correction, set in the stocks, or sent abroad for a soldier.

It was generally acknowledged that conditions among the peasants were bad, morally and materially. The Augustans had no illusions. But to their minds, and in accord with the prevalent aesthetic theories, this was all the more reason why their poetry should be written about the swains of Arcadia rather than the clowns of England. It was not that they imagined any resemblance between the two; they knew that there was none. It was simply that the English peasant did not interest them, and that if he had, it would not have occurred to them to put him in their poetry. For that, above all, was sacrosanct.

Let us now, having seen what the critics and the laymen felt, see how the intellectual class affected the matter.

The Philosophical Background

Contending kings and fields of death too long
Have been the subject of the British song.

(Tickell's Poem to the Lord Privy Seal)\(^{18}\)

\(^{18}\) Printed in Vol. 1 of Dodsley's Collection.
An easy-going generation settled down in the pleasing faith that their barns were full of good things for many years to come and that they might eat, drink, and be merry. In Europe, the "new man" had turned away from his intellectual struggles with his environment and was attempting to understand his own nature. This turn to self-reflection constitutes the century of the Enlightenment. The mental activity of the Renaissance had been vital, spontaneous and unconscious, like the wakening from sleep, that of the Enlightenment was self-conscious and attitudinizing. Man in his supremacy occupies the entire foreground. The proper study of mankind was indeed man. Already, on the Continent, the all important trend towards individualism was underway. Utilitarian problems were becoming prominent, and a few daring souls were feeling their way again to the oldest question of all:

When Adam delved and Eve span
Who was then the gentleman?

But the English had found their peace, and they were determined to make the most of it. I doubt if the optimism of the early years of the century was anything more than a fashion. It was a question of believing what was said rather than saying what was believed. The Tory Squire had earned his happiness, and happy he was going to be, if he had to grit his teeth to do it. Yet on the other hand, he could not shut his eyes to what
was going on in the rest of Europe. The system of Philosophy which he evolved for himself is a masterpiece of ingenuity and self-deception. Of course, it did not include the "vulgar"; they, not indoctrinated yet with the Rights of Man, were still contented with that state of mind into which it had pleased God to call them. Thomson, referring (in The Seasons) to popular superstitions about comets, says:

But above

Those superstitious horrors that enslave
The fond sequacious herd, to mystic faith
And blind amazement prone, the enlightened few,
Whose godlike minds Philosophy exalts
The glorious stranger hail,19

and elsewhere:

While thus laborious crowds
Fly the tough oar, Philosophy directs
The ruling helm.20

However, the Vulgar had to be accounted for.

In the Theodicee of Leibnitz, "the enlightened few" found a pointer to the solution of the problem in its well-sounding but somewhat misleading phrase that all is for best in this best of possible worlds. The creed found in England a prophet of solemn pomp in Pope, whose Essay on Man has fixed in pregnant lines the main half truths of the Leibnitzian philosophy, which he had probably learned from Bolingbroke. The same optimism appears in Shaftesbury and shows its presence in Paley. It was

19 The Seasons, Summer (in the passage at the end of the poem in praise of Philosophy).
20 Ibid.
generally accepted that the universe presented the spectacle of a continuous scale or ladder of creatures, extending without a break from the worm to the seraph. In this scale, there must be such a creature as man:

Of Systems possible, if 'tis confess
That Wisdom infinite must form the best,
Where all must full or not coherent be,
There must be, somewhere, such a rank as Man. 21

If we do not like the rank or position assigned to us, we must console ourselves by reflecting that there would be a gap in the chain without us. Man may be unhappily placed "on this isthmus of a middle state" 22 between animal and angel, but this uniqueness is due, not to the Fall or Satan, but to the requirements of plenitude.

This "optimism" then, was not essentially a joyous or a hopeful creed. It was, in essence, an "apologia for the status quo" (Basil Willey's phrase). As such, it was not particularly harmful, but let us follow its social implications in the notorious Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil of Soame Jenyns (1757), of which Dr. Johnson made such short work. Jenyns begins to explain that the evils of imperfection are "privations" essential to the whole system: "The beauty and happiness of the whole depend altogether on the just inferiority of the parts". 23 We do not want a universe of

21 Essay on Man, Epistle I, section II.
22 Ibid. Epistle II, Section I.
archangels. Plenitude demands the ant and the bee with their own inferior "happiness" as well as angel or man with theirs. It is here that the social implications of this teaching become horribly apparent. The social order, we are now told, is as much divinely ordained as the natural order. Just as the lower animals enjoy their ignorant bliss, so the human poor are happy in their own inferior way. Ignorance, says Jenyne, is the "opiate" of the poor, "a cordial administered by the gracious hand of Providence." And is it for us to frustrate the kindly purposes of providence? No, let us not presume to deprive the poor of their opiate by "an ill-judged and improper education." There is much more of the same stuff, but I will spare the reader.

What emerged as the outcome of this kind of "optimism" was a gospel of hopelessness. The status quo represented the last word of divine wisdom. Why bother to endeavour to improve the lot of the poor when the scale of being is fixed and un-improvable? Why reveal their real sufferings in poetry? Why break up the wonderful tissue of optimistic nonsense they had created for themselves, when they themselves knew it was a little thin in places? Rather, put a good face on the matter, forget the weekdays, enjoy the Sunday afternoons with Damon and Phillis. For in their hearts, they knew it would soon be too late....

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CHAPTER THREE

ARCADIA ATTACHED

Poetry has hardly ever received more, and seldom so much honour.

(George Saintsbury, The Peace of the Augustans)

If poetry and belles lettres began as the amusement of a limited class at the outset of the century, this situation was not so to remain. Richard West, writing to Horace Walpole in January 1736, gives his view of the situation:

Poetry, I take it, is as universally contagious as the small pox; everyone catches it once in his life at least, and the sooner the better; for me think an old rhymster makes as ridiculous a figure as Socrates dancing at fourscore. But I can never agree with you that most of us succeed alike.

And later in the same letter he continues:

It is a difficult matter to account why, but certain it is that all people from the duke's coronet to the thresher's flail are desirous to be poets.

It was inevitable in this atmosphere, that the spirit of poetry would burst the narrow container into which it had been poured.

Stephen Duck

The first crack in the vase was represented by the person of Stephen Duck. He was one man and he was a phenomenon; but he was the beginning of a trend which was later to be strengthened by other currents. His career was certainly an unusual one. He began life as a farm labourer, educated himself, and began to write poetry. This attracted much attention from persons of
distinction and Duck was brought to Court in 1730, given a house
to live in, and awarded an annual pension by Queen Caroline.
He became a friend of Pope, who frequently called upon him.
Duck's rapid rise from one class to another in this way, created,
naturally, a great deal of bad feeling, especially when it was
rumoured that he was being considered for the laureateship. He
is given considerable prominence in a collection of Essays,
Letters and other Occasional Pieces Relating to the War of the
Dunces published in 1732 by Savage, especially in a poem called
Harlequin-Horace; Or the Art of Modern Poetry the work of one
James Miller:

What though in Pope's harmonious Lays combine
Art that is noble, lovely and divine:
Yet still unhappily to sense tied down,
He's ignorant of the Art to please the Town.
Heav'n grant I never write like him I mention,
Since to the Bays I could not make pretension,
Nor Thresher-like obtain a pension.

Swift also broke out against the thresher with considerable
asperity. His best known effort in this direction is the poem
On Stephen Duck, The Thresher's Favourite Poet. A Quibbling
Epigram, 1730:

The Thresher Duck could o'er the Queen prevail;
The proverb says no fence against a flail.
From threshing corn he turns to thresh his brains,
For which her Majesty allows him grains.
Though 'tis confess that those who ever saw
His poems think them all not worth a straw.
Thrice happy Duck, employed in threshing stubble
Thy toil is lessened and thy profits double.

Perhaps the most cruel satire, however, was a parody
of Duck's work which appeared in 1730 under the title of
The Thresher's Miscellany; or poems on Several Subjects by Arthur Duck. The author, we are informed in the Preface, was "got upon the Foundation of Eton College" and was later a student at Cambridge, where, he says, "I could not so much as Rhime myself into a College Fellowship". This he took "in High dudgeon, more especially since it is well known that the whole race of the Ducks were born poets". The verses on Roger and Ursula are typical of the entirely unjustifiable attack on Duck's work. Ursula, the kitchen wench, is solicited by Roger, a ploughman, in the middle of the night:

Up started Roger, and rubbing his eyes
To his dearest sweet Ursula in a Passion he flies;
Then, leaning his Elbows on Urs'la's broad back,
He complained that his Heart was e'en ready to crack.

Urs'la being Wax'd at the Weight of her love,
Cry'd Cupid, why doest Thou thus treacherous prove?
In an angry mood she then turned her about,
And the Dish-clout lapp'd over the face of the lout.

Roger being angry at such an affront
And not at all minding what would come on't,
He gave her a kick, with such wondrous Mettle,
As tumbled fair Urs'la quite over the kettle.

The farmer, aroused by the scuffle, comes downstairs and turns both out of doors. The poetry is nothing akin to Duck himself, but it does show how the fear of anything "low" in poetry still persisted.

Numerous attempts, usually less successful, were made by other persons of the labouring classes to emulate Duck's success. The reaction on the part of the "upper classes" was not enthusiastic.
The poet Edward Young wrote in 1730:

His hammer this, and that his trowel quits,
And wanting sense for tradesmen, serve for wits:
By thriving men subsists each other trade;
Of every broken craft a writer's made.1

The author of an article in The Gentleman's Magazine, 1731, sees no cause for rejoicing in the fact that

nothing has increased their society so much as poetry.
We are taught it at school; if not, believe we are born poets.
Every corner abounds with its Professors; the Bellman nightly salutes his Master and Mistress; the Marshall, his Gentlemen soldiers every Christmas; every street rings with ballads, the Royal Palace resounds with Odes, and every Churchyard with its productions.1

A passage from The Adventurer for Dec. 11th, 1753 shows that poetical aspirations among the lower orders still persisted even twenty years after Duck's death:

They who have attentively considered the history of mankind, know that every age has its peculiar character.... The present age, if we consider chiefly the stage of our own country, may be styled with great propriety The Age of Authors; for perhaps there never was a time in which men of all degrees of ability, of every kind of education, of every profession and employment were posting with ardour so general to the press. The province of writing was formerly left to those, who, by study, or appearance of study, were supposed to have gained knowledge unattainable to the busy part of mankind; but in these enlightened days, every man is qualified to instruct every other man, and he that beats the anvil or guides the plow, not contented with supplying corporal necessities, amuses himself in the hours of leisure with providing intellectual pleasures for his countrymen.

Horace Walpole, writing to Hannah More as late as 1784 remarks; "When the late Queen patronised Stephen Duck who was

1Epistles to Mr. Pope. Epistle one. As quoted by Rose Mary Davis. Stephen Duck, the Thresher Poet. University of Maine Studies, 2nd Series. No. 8.
only a wonder at first and had not enough genius to support the character he had promised, twenty artisans and labourers turned poets and starved."

The Grub Street Journal looked with alarm on these activities of the lower classes. Reviewing a book of verse by a Spittlesfields weaver, it has:

Far be it from me to presume to direct her Majesty in the disposal of her favours. But was I so happy as to have the ear of the liberal princess, I would beg leave to represent that the best way to encourage the weaver would be to wear the manufactures of Great Britain; and that the most suitable encouragement to the thrasher would be to give him a small farm on the country; laying both under an absolute restraint never more to write a line of verse.2

I have dealt at somewhat great length with the opposition3 created by the efforts of the proletariat in literary fields because I think it illustrates the exact depth of the neo-classic contempt and fear of anything new. The decline of the pastoral is to be a story of attempts and violent attacks, of compromises and apologies because of this great stronghold of neo-classic belief. But The Grub Street Journal could howl as much as it pleased. Something was in the air. The most famous of the proletarian aspirers was Robert Dodsley, but there were others: Henry Jones of Drogheda, Ireland, a bricklayer turned poet and dramatist; James Woodhouse, the poetical shoemaker; Ann Yearsley, the poetical milkmaid; Robert Bloomfield, the

3Rose Mary Davis suggests that a great deal of this opposition may have been caused by Pope.
ploughboy poet; and a greater ploughboy, Robert Burns, who may perhaps be regarded as the culmination of the movement.

A real countryman, with mud on his boots and a flail in his hand, had come into contact with Arcadia. One might have expected that the Arcadians would have fled at the sight of him. What actually happened was that they persuaded him to lay down his flail, wipe the mud off his boots, and become one of them. Before being presented at Court, Buck wrote *The Thresher's Labour*; afterwards he wrote *Penelope to Ulysses*. But *The Thresher's Labour* was a great advance and, what was perhaps equally important, it was a great success. Dr. Clarke wrote to Mrs. Clayton: "We have some people of taste for such performances who think that none but a thresher could write *The Thresher's Labour* and that the author of *The Shunamite* must be the best poet of the age." Certainly Duck made it quite clear that his poem was not of the conventional pastoral tradition:

Can we, like Shepherds, tell a merry Tale;
The voice is lost, drown'd by the louder Flail.
But may we think—alas, what pleasing thing
Here, to the Mind, can the dull Fancy bring?
Our eyes behold no pleasing object here,
No cheerful Sound diverts our listening Ear.
The Shepherd well may tune his voice to sing,
Inspired with all the beauties of the Spring.
No fountains murmur here, no Lambkins play,
No linnets warble and no fields look gay;
'Tis all a gloomy, melancholy Scene
Fit only to provoke the Muse's Spleen.

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1 Thompson, Memoirs I. 187. As quoted by Rose Mary Davis, *op. cit.*
2 Poems on Several Occasions. 10.
There is no attempt here to hide the seamy side of life.

The poem gives us a bird's eye view of a typical year of Duck's life as an agricultural labourer. He begins his account at the end of the harvest season when the master calls his labourers together and assigns them their posts for the threshing:

Now in the Air our knotty weapons fly,
And now with equal force descend from high:
In briny streams our Sweat descends apace,
Droops from our locks, or trickles down our Face.  
No intermission in our Work we know;
The noisy Threshal must for ever go.  

But when the work is completed, the Master is far from satisfied:

Why, look ye, rogues, d'ye think that this will do? 
Your neighbours thresh again as much as you.  

When the time comes to eat, the labourers, far gone with fatigue, cannot relish food;

Down our parch'd Throats we scarce the Bread can get,
And quite o'erspent with Toil, but faintly eat.  

Evening finds them almost too fatigued to find their way home:

Homewards we move, but spent so much with toil,
We slowly walk, and rest at every stile.
Our good expecting Wives, who think we stay,
Go to the door, soon eye us in the way.
Then from the Pot the Dumplin's catched in haste, 
And homely by its side the Bacon plac'd.  

The Arcadian swain has no place in the poem. Rather, the hardships of country life are stressed:

Think what a painful life we daily lead;  
Each morning early rise, go late to bed.  
Nor, when asleep are we secure from Pain;  

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6Ibid. p. 7.  
7Ibid. p. 7.  
8Ibid. p. 13.  
9Ibid. p. 8.
We then perform our labours o'er again:  
Our mimic Fancy ever restless seems  
And what we act awake, she acts in dreams.  
Hard Fate—our Labours ev'n in sleep don't cease.  
Scarce Hercules e'er felt such Toils as these.  

Crabbe, some fifty years later, realized the difficulty of utilizing actual experience in agricultural occupations for the purposes of poetry, and in this connection, bore Duck in mind;  

Save honest Duck, what son of verse could share  
The poet's rapture and the peasant's care?  
Or the great labours of the field degrade  
With the new peril of a poorer trade.  

(A curious and complete reversal of attitude from the early century.)  

Although Duck later prostituted his Muse by sinking into the conventional neo-classic tradition, he had done valiant service. He had given the eighteenth century its first breath of realism; he had defied the convention at least once. Later, other currents were to complete his work, but at this early date he is the greatest single force in the creation of a new genre.

As we have seen, attempts were made to heal the wound in the neo-classic edifice; but even from within there was sabotage.

John Gay

During the very heyday of neo-classicism, one man, John Gay, wrote a very venturesome poem: The Shepherd's Week. In it, he parodies almost all of the conventions of the pastoral as he knew it.

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10 Ibid. 16.  
11 Crabbe. The Village. Lines 27 to 30.
The first poem, for Monday, parodies the formal singing match. Two "swains", Lobbin Clout and Cuddy, sing eulogies of their respective mistresses, Blouzelind and Buxoma for the prize of a tobacco pouch. The level of the verse may be judged from the following example picked at random:

Leek to the Welsh, to Dutchmen Butter's dear,  
Of Irish swains potato is the cheer;  
Oats for their feast the Scottish shepherds grind,  
Sweet turnips are the food of Blouzelind.  
While she loves turnips, butter I'll despise,  
Nor leaks, nor oatmeal, nor potato, prize.12

The judge of the match, one Cloddipole, in true classic fashion, awards a prize to each:

Forbear, contending louts, give o'er your strains,  
An oaken staff each merits for his pains.13

The Tuesday poem parodies the love complaint. Weeping, the heroine Marion recalls the romance of her love for Colin Clout:

Straight on the fire the sooty pot I placed,  
To warm thy broth I burnt my hands for haste.  
When hungry thou stood'st staring, like an oaf,  
I sliced the luncheon from the barley loaf.  
With crumbled bread I thickened well thy mess.  
Ah, love me more, or love thy pottage less.14

Like so many of her Grecian predecessors, our heroine turns to the occult—to gypsy lore:

They said that many crosses I must prove,  
Some in my worldly gain, but most in love.  
Next morn I missed three hens and our old cock,

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13 Ibid. Lines 109 to 110.  
14 Ibid. Tuesday. Lines 67 to 72.
And off the hedge two pinners and a smock.  
I bore these lessons with a Christian mind  
And no mishaps could feel while thou were kind.\textsuperscript{15}

And so we take leave of our unfortunate damsel: 

Thus Marian wailed, her eyes with tears brimful,  
When Goody Dobbins brought her cow to bull.  
With apron blue to dry her gyas she sought,  
Then saw the cow well served and took a groat.\textsuperscript{16}

The love complaint of Wednesday's poem, of Sparabella  

lamenting Bumkinet, whom she has lost to the fairer Clumsitis  
(whom she reviles) is even more poignant, since the maiden  
contemplates suicide by various methods. However, while she is  
making up her mind on the most spectacular way to die  

(There plac'd aloft, I'll rave and rail by fits  
Though all the parish say I've lost my Wits)\textsuperscript{17}

sunset comes:  

The prudent maiden deems it now too late,  
And till tomorrow comes defers her fate.\textsuperscript{18}

Thursday's poem satirizes the love philtre theme. The  
heroine Hobnelia practices various country superstitions with  
hemp seed, snails, hazelnuts, peascods, ladyflies, and pippins,  
and eventually wins her lover back.

The poem for Friday is a parody of the pastoral elegy  
or dirge. Two swains lament the dead Blouselind:  

No more her care shall fill the hollow tray,  
To fat the guzzling hogs with floods of whey.

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid. Lines 77 to 82.  
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid. Lines 103 to 106.  
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid. Wednesday. Lines 109 to 110.  
\textsuperscript{18}Ibid. Lines 119 to 120.
Lament, ye swine, in grunting spend your grief.
For you, like me, have lost your sole relief. 19

After a harrowing account of Blouzelind's death, our heroes go
to her mother's farm to drink cider:

Excessive sorrow is exceeding dry. 20

Finally, however, they espy Susan coming towards them:

They seized the lass in apron clean arrayed,
And to the ale house forc'd the willing maid;
In ale and kisses they forget their cares,
And Susan Blouzelinda's loss repairs. 21

I refer the reader to the Proeme entire, since to quote
any single passage apart from the context would be to destroy
the delicious air of irony. It is the boldest piece of raillery
that was ever penned. And it was written in 1714. I have been
unable to find any critical notices of his poem, but I am curious
to know what effects it produced in Arcadia.

Allan Ramsay

It cannot, however, have caused too great a stir, because
we find comparative peace and quiet until 1724 when Allan Ramsay,
who, in The Gentle Shepherd had been a veritable Arcadian,
published Evergreen. The preface is one of the strongest and
most sane of the early demands for poetry.

James Thomson

In 1726 was published a poem called Winter by James
Thomson. It was not by any means a literary bombshell. The

19Ibid., Friday; Lines 65 to 68.
20Ibid., Line 52.
21Ibid., Lines 161 to 164.
first review, in *The London Journal*, June 4th, 1726, praises the alternation of description and reflection in the poem and hails the appearance of a new and noble didactic genius. Thomson's Preface to the second and immediately succeeding editions is not a manifesto of revolt; it censures trivial, worldly verse and exalts nature poetry as philosophical, moral and religious, with reference to the Book of Job, the Georgics, and Milton. And indeed the poem itself gives its neoclassic readers a familiar pleasure. There is the graceful dedication, the Deistic invocation, the intellectual interest in other lands in the incursion into the Polar regions, the moral reflection on a future state, the well known "poetic diction" (the "feathery people", "plumy race", "bleating kind"). The nature description is more realistic, more drawn from genuine observation than is usual at this time, but for us the main importance of the poem lies in one passage: the description of the death of the swain in a snow storm and the subsequent reflections. Collins, later, did not scorn to parallel Thomson's powerful verse in this passage.  

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Collins. An Ode on the Popular Superstitions of the Highlands of Scotland. VIII. The Passage runs:

For him, on vain, his anxious wife shall wait,
Or wander forth to meet him on his way:
For him, in vain, at to-fall of the day,
His babes shall linger at th'unclosing gate.
Ah, ne'er shall he return.

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Into the mingling storm demand their sire
With tears of artless innocence. Alas,
Nor wife nor children more shall he behold,
Nor friends nor sacred home. On every nerve
The deadly winter seizes: shuts up sense:
And, o'er his inmost vitals creeping cold,
Lays him along the snows a stiffened corse—
Stretched out and bleaching in the northern blast.

Now comes the most revolutionary passage of all:

Ah, little think the gay, licentious proud,
Whom pleasure, power and affluence surround:
They who their thoughtless hours in giddy mirth
And wanton, often cruel riot waste;
Ah, little think they, while they dance along,
How many feel this very moment death
And all the sad variety of pain,
How many sink in the devouring flood,
Or more devouring flame. How many bleed
By shameful variance betwixt man and man,
How many pine in want and dungeon glooms,
Shut from the common air and common use
Of their own limbs. How many drink the cup
Of baleful grief, or eat the bitter bread
Of misery. Sore pierced by wintry winds,
How many shrink into the sordid hut
Of cheerless poverty.23

Oddly enough, this seems to have excited little attention,

but by the time the other three poems comprising The Seasons

had been published, by 1730, the public had begun to realize that

here was something new. Even if, in Spring they found swains

chasing rainbows, in the fashion to which they had become ac-

customed, they also found lines decrying the Golden Age convention:

But now those white unblemished minutes whence
The fabeling poets took their Golden Age
Are found no more.24

23. The Seasons. Winter (about quarter way through)
24. Ibid. Spring.
In *Summer*, in the views of the season on the torrid zones are conventional, they found, too, new and realistic pictures of animal life - not merely sheep and goats, but rooks, magpies, reptiles, insects, the household dog sleeping in the sun, and the poultry gathering in the shade. Bewick was doing something of the same kind in his own art. If *Autumn* ends with an idealized picture of country life and contains the classical story of Lavinia and Palemon, it also has such passages as the description of the flood:

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before whose rushing tide,
Herds, flocks and harvests, cottages and swains,
Roll mingled down: all that the winds had spread
In one wild moment ruined; the big hopes
And well earned treasures of the painful year.
Fled to some eminence, the husbandman,
Helpless, beholds the miserable wreck
Driving along; his drowning ox at once
Descending, with his labours scattered round
He sees; and instant o'er his shivering thought
Comes Winter unprovided, and a train of
Of clamant children dear. Ye masters then,
Be mindful of the rough laborious hand
That sinks you soft in elegance and ease;
Be mindful of those limbs in russet clad,
Whose toil to yours is warmth and graceful pride;
And oh, be mindful of that sparing board
Which covers yours with luxury profuse,
Makes your glass sparkle and your sense rejoice.
Nor cruelly demand what the deep rains
And all-involving winds have swept away.25
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Thomson was still an Arcadian, but by virtue of the elevated ground on which he stood, he caught glimpses of the outside world. He was not an explorer in new lands and unknown climes;

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he never left the country in which he had been brought up.

But he saw so much more than his fellows of the regions which were to be discovered.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE DECLINE OF ARCADIA

The eighteenth century is one of paradoxes and cross currents—a "red herring" century, so it will not surprise us to find that movement which in the earlier century served to strengthen the pastoral tradition, later militated against it: I mean sentimentalism. It would be irrelevant for me to trace this feeling in all its aspects—and there are many of them. In the field of pastoral, it had a two-fold effect. It saw the peasant as endowed with all the virtue and happiness of the Arcadian swain; this acted as a kind of apologia for the pastoral. However, even those contemptuous of the artificiality of the formal pastoral came under its softening influence, and this tended to turn attention to the real sufferings of the peasant. Thus Ramsey and Churchill, both of whom were to attack the formal pastoral most bitterly, write in an idealized strain about the common man, Ramsey in The Gentle Shepherd and Churchill in Gotham. This strain is also commonly found amongst poets whose very thorough knowledge of country life cannot be questioned. Michael Woodhall in his poem The Equality of Mankind places the peasant just above the slave, but maintains that he is happy:

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1. The phrase is a familiar one and I connect it with G. K. Chesterton, but I have failed to trace it.
2. v. below.
3. Printed in Pearch's collection, Vol. IV.
Next him, the peasant, whose incessant toil,
Barely requited, tills the rugged soil,
Pressed by the barbarous insults of the great,
The foolish prodigality of state;
Yet his low couch no thorny cares molest,
His even spirits yield unbroken rest.

William Woty, in The Female Advocate (1770), paints the peasants' distress, but insists on the compensating pleasures of country life.

Among a number of poets, there seems to have been an almost involuntary yielding to this convention of the happy peasant. Writers such as James Foot, who paint without restraint the meanness and poverty of the cottager will, in an incidental reference bring in the swain whistling cheerfully on his way to work or toiling tirelessly in harvest time.

Later in the century, it became a fashionable pose to present oneself as a jaded town dweller who fully understood the pettiness of the affairs of society, but was prevented from enjoying the retired philosophic existence he would choose if he were free to do so. Such were the "wish" poems so popular at the time, although Johnson dealt scornfully with them (Rambler 202 Feb. 22nd, 1752). The most typical are John Pomfret's The Choice, Alexander Nicol's The Author's Wish and John Bancks's The Wish. Conger may be said to represent the climax of this type of poetry. The sentimental view of the peasant was further popularized by the georgic type of poem, which had a great vogue. Gray's Elegy too, helped to enhance the belief in the worth of the worker on the soil. Later in the century, this idea of the peasant must
have been strengthened by the writings of Rousseau and by the rose-tinted accounts of primitive peoples which were published by travellers.

If, in essence, sentimentalism was a contrary force to the decline of the pastoral, it was important in that it did attract attention to the real peasant, even if, at the time, it was not the right kind of attention. Its softening influence was counteracted by another new phase of thought: pessimism. When the feeling reached its climax, in The Village, the pastoral may well be pronounced dead. There are, however, remarkably few poems which can be classed as definite forerunners of The Village. Between Duck and Crabbe, there is no one poem which can be said to bridge the gap. The second of Collins's Persian Elegies shows a tendency to dwell on the miseries of human life, chiefly hunger and thirst. This is also the motif of Thomas Warton's Five Pastoral Elegies; the scenes of which are supposed to lie among the shepherds oppress'd by the war in Germany. The weather too, forms a good basis for pessimistic philosophising. Thomas Fitzgerald stresses it at great length in The Fisherman (1731). Poems which deal directly with poverty are rare. Susannah Elamire has a rather blistering one called On Imagined Happiness in Humble Stations. The most outstanding poem of this type, however, is found in a volume of Poems on Several Occasions of one Nicholas James. It is entitled The Complaint of Poverty; it is not a good poem and is interesting clinically rather than aesthetically. But it does show, more than any other single poem before
The Village how the centre of interest was swinging from imagined happiness to real unhappiness. This was followed by several poems, all of which were either pessimistic or realistic in tone, usually the former. Thus James Foot, in his poem Pensoroso, or The Pensive Philosopher in his Solitudes (1771) whips himself into a mood of the deepest pessimism. In a later poem, The Imagination or the Life of a Pen-man, he becomes more realistic in tone. Mary Leaper in her Poems on Several Occasions likewise has a deep note of pessimism.

We must admit, however, that the field is disappointing. The Village appears to rise unpainted. This is far from the truth. The Village, like everything else, had its ancestors, but they were hybrid. The truth is that the neoclassic edifice was both strong and awespiring. It warded off open attack for many years. There had long been a feeling of dissatisfaction, but it manifested itself in small revolts and compromises rather than in open mutiny.

It was late when a real English peasant appeared in poetry. But there had been several attempts to evolve a kind of cross breed of Arcadia and England. This is suggested by John Scott:

The fairest scenes, when peopled, look more fair,
But these to people ask peculiar care:
We wish not here for Virgil's classic swains,
No dryad nymphs light tripping o'er the plains:
Nor yet the grinning Hobbinols of Gay,
Nor cottage Marians in their torn array.
The rustic life, in every varied place
Can boast its few of beauty and of grace.4

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4 These lines occur in one of Scott's shorter poems in The Poetical Works (1782).
This was a movement which acted for and against realism. It tended to replace the languid swain with something approaching a real Englishman; on the other hand, it undoubtedly destroyed the realistic flavour of the work of writers, William Henry and Elizabeth Fall for example, who had it in them to produce authentic pictures. Extremes examples of this trend are Allan Ramsay's *Richy and Sandy*, which presents shepherds apostrophizing Pan in broad Scots, and Alexander Nicol's *A Pastoral Upon Baladene's Marriage*, which is the conventional singing match, complete with Phoebus Apollo, the tuneful Nixe, and the vine and olive, between Colin, Willie, and Dewy, who shent of the beauties of Bebie and Annie. John Cunningham, to my mind, best illustrates this type of hybrid poetry in his volume of Poems Chiefly Pastoral 1771, by combining a real English setting with the technique of the formal eulogius.

Owing to the aversion of eighteenth-century taste to anything that might possibly be considered "low", it became customary to disguise scenes of common life by writing them in burlesque style. One of the most famous burlesque poems, Gay's *The Shepherd's Week* I have already treated. Another, perhaps even more influential, was *The Schoolmistress* of Shenstone. He wrote of it, "I look upon my poem as somewhat more grave than Pope's *Algy and a good deal less than Mr. Thomson's Castle*. I meant to screen the ridicule which might fall on so base a subject (though perhaps a picturesque one) by pretending to simmer all the time I was writing".

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5 Preface to *The Schoolmistress*. 
Sheastroke frankly intended his poem as a burlesque of Spenser's style and was consequently annoyed when the public refused to see the jokes. He added to the second edition a preface and index especially designed to make it clear that he was being funny, but later he seemed to become resigned and altered his poem so that "what was at first intended merely as burlesque became in the third version a conscious and deliberate attempt to secure picturesque ornament".6

The hodiebrastic and mock-heroic poem also became popular and they too burst their comic confines in the same way. Thus Goldsmith wrote of his own The Beauties of English Poesie: "They were originally intended, I suppose, as a burlesque on those of Philips; but perhaps without designing it, he has hit the true spirit of pastoral poetry. In fact, he more resembles Theocritus than any other English pastoral writer whatsoever. There runs through the whole a strain of rustic pleasantry which should ever distinguish this species of composition."7 The popularity of such poems as these and the fact that the burlesque element was usually overlooked, seems to indicate a strong desire for natural pastoral poetry. But open protests came late.

There is no really outspoken and contemptuous attack on the pastoral until the second half of the century. We have noted that there have been many stirrings of revolt up to seventeen

6 Ibid.
7 Preface to The Beauties of English Poesie.
fifty, when the movement quickens and gathers impetus until, in
the seventies and eighties, the new type of verse is too prolific
to chronicle. Open criticism, we shall find, more or less
follows this line of chronology.

In seventeen fifty, Johnson came out into the open and
attacked the pastoral on the grounds of poverty of subject
matter. Given the support of the great master, other minor
figures now began to speak their minds. Nathaniel Weeks, in

The Abuse of Poetry 1752, remarks

How pastorals, though vain still glut the town,
All what they say amounts to just no more
Than what ten thousand thousand said before.
Who can but smile to hear their nymphs complain
And shepherds singing of despair and pain.
One tells his friend the sufferings of his heart
Arose from Beauty and from Cupid's dart;
But the fair wanton treats him with disdain,
And "tis his fate to love and love in vain.
Another in as wretched verse declares
What gripping pangs of jealousy he bears
And all is pitiful and all is sad,
Two Shepherds next are introduced to sing,
One likes the Summer best and one the Spring;
Both matchless in the art of piping well
A prize is staked for him who shall excel.
A third is called the wager to decide
New Eloquence is heard in all its pride.

Poverty of subject matter also forms the basis of Blair's attack
in Lecture XXXIX of the collection Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles
Lettres.

William Whitehead, in 1762, attacks the pastoral on other
grounds - of its exotic scenery. In "A Charge to the Poets" he
writes:

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8The Rambler 36, July 21, 1750.
Their poets in their turn will grieve I swear
Perhaps with truth, no patron lends an ear.
Complaints of times when merit wants reward
Descend, like similes, from bard to bard.
We copy our distress from Greece and Rome.
As in our northern lays their flowerets bloom.
We feel their breezes, with their heats we burn
And plead prescription to rejoice or mourn.

Horace Walpole, in the *Anecdotes of Painting*, follows
Whitehead's ideas: "As our poets warm their imaginations with
summy bays, or sigh after grottoes and cooling breezes, so
painters drew rocks and precipices and castellated mountains
because Virgil gasped for breath at Naples and Salvator wandered
admirist Alps and Appennines. Our ever verdant lawns, rich vales
fields and hop grounds are neglected as homely and familiar."
Churchill opens his *Prophecy of Famine* (1763) with a fluent gibes
at pastoral. *The Critical Review* too, has little praise to
bestow on pastorals at this time.

There can hardly be any doubt that the pastoral had fallen
into sad disrepute. It seems logical to presume that, between
the heyday of the formal pastoral at the beginning of the century
and its decay at the end, the climate of opinion in the realms
of aesthetics, society and philosophy had changed and that the
unity of the "gentleman's agreement" no longer held good. Let
us now proceed to trace some of these changes.
CHAPTER FIVE

THE NEW CLIMATE OF OPINION

The Aesthetic Background

It is, of course, impossible to assign a date to the growth of new ideas. It is impossible to put a finger on this or that person as having "begun" the new movement, since everyone is a Janus-like figure, looking both backwards and forwards.

It is, however, safe to say that by the 'fifties of the century, the Zeitgeist was moving in new directions. The neoclassics were not yet directly attacked with any degree of violence. Joseph Warton's Essay on Pope, a daring act of iconoclasm, was isolated. Yet each one of their doctrines in turn was being questioned.

Classic models were not entirely rejected, but new models were springing up ready to take their place. Greatest of all perhaps was the re-discovery of the Middle Ages in the "Gothic Revival". The decade of the sixties saw Macpherson's Ossianic Poems and the work of Percy. The Castle of Otranto was published in 1764. Mrs. Radcliffe published her first work also in this year. Even before this, in 1762, we find The Letters of Chivalry and Romance of Hurd. Chatterton came a little, not very much, later.

There was a revival of interest too, in earlier English poets, especially in Spenser and Milton. It was about the middle
of the century that the demand for Spenser became strong. Hughes's edition of 1715 seemed to satisfy the public until 1750, when another edition took the field. This was followed by an edition of *The Faerie Queen* in 1751, and in 1758, three separate editions of the same poem appeared. Another edition of Spenser's works was published in 1778. We find that imitations began to be numerous after 1730 and that the movement reached its climax in the 'fifties. Most famous are Shenstone's *The Schoolmistress* and James Thomson's *Castle of Indolence*. Thomas Warton's *Observations on The Faerie Queene* were published in 1754.

The Miltonic revival was less noticeable and perhaps, in the long run, not so important in the history of English letters. Nevertheless, such poems as *The Enthusiast* and some of the *Odes* of Joseph Warton, Blair's *The Grave* (1743), Young's *Night Thoughts*, Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1751) all show some Miltonic influence.

It must not be imagined that there, as yet, was any suggestion of preferring these to the classical models. In fact, even the most ardent "Gothic" enthusiasts were tentative in their introduction of "Gothicism" to poetry. It might be well enough indeed for country gentlemen to have picturesque ruins built on their estates and, in some cases, even to employ professional

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1 Direct imitators of Milton have been few and usually have come to grief. John Middleton Murry in *The Problem of Style* advises young writers not to attempt imitation. Milton was, indeed, "a star that dwelt apart".
hermits, but the old idea of poetry as something sacrosanct still existed. Even Hurd has nothing stronger to say on the subject than this:

The greatest geniuses of our own and foreign countries, such as Ariosto and Tasso in Italy, and Spenser and Milton in England, were seduced by these barbarities of their forefathers, were even charmed by the Gothic Romances. Was this caprice and absurdity in them? Or may there not be something in the Gothic Romance peculiarly suited to the views of a genius, and to the ends of poetry? And may not the philosophic moderns have gone too far in their perpetual contempt and ridicule of it?

The real bombshell into the neoclassic camp was thrown by Warton. "It is absurd to think of judging either Ariosto or Spenser by precepts which they did not attend to." Professor Saintsbury comments here:

Absurd indeed! But what becomes of those antecedent laws of poetry, those rules of the kind and so forth, which for more than two hundred years had been accumulating authority? It is no good for him to go on: 'we who live in the days of writing by rules,... Critical taste is universally diffused....' and so on. The petard goes on fizzing and sparkling at the gate, and will blow it in before long.

The old aesthetic standards had been weighed in the balance and found wanting. The criticism, however, was not entirely destructive. There was some talk about a new spirit in poetry which we may call Imagination. "Mere Imagination" Reynolds called it early in the century, and Blake at the end commented: "Mere imagination is all in all". The old standard

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2Letters on Chivalry and Romance. Letter I.
3Observations on The Faerie Queene of Spenser. 1er.
5Discourse VII.
6Marginal note to Reynolds's Seventh Discourse. 1sr.
of "Good sense" was not now the sine qua non of poetry. Gray in the 'fifties, writes to "Skroddles": "I insist that sense is nothing in poetry, but according to the dress she wears and the scene she appears in." Shenstone strikes a new note when he writes: "The words 'no more' have a singular pathos, reminding us at once of the past pleasure and the future exclusion of it." Warton goes further by stating, with no Addisonian limitations, that "a poet must have imagination".

Now it is obvious that anything so utterly formal and conventional as the pastoral is "cold iron" to the spirit of Imagination. One or the other would have to go. It was Imagination that won the day.

There was another factor too, which militated against the anti-realism of the pastoral. In itself, it was not important—a mere passing fashion, but the effect outgrew the cause. I mean the craze for the picturesque. Although the text books on the subject by Price, Gilpin, Knight, and Alison came much later, all the characteristics are clearly expressed in the works of Dyer and Thomson and their immediate followers. This fashion romanticized the ragged, lounging peasant and the hoary beggar and made them suitable subjects for poetry. The style became even more popular in painting and concerned itself mainly with the superficial effects of color, light, and shade.

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7 Letter CVII.
8 Essays on Men and Manners. 41 167.
and hard rough surfaces and irregular outlines, so that the ragged peasant or gypsy made a perfect subject. In the work of Gainsborough can be traced a growing absorption in ugly subjects, in poverty, and in an increased use of detail. G. B. Tinker likens Gainsborough's last picture, The Woodman, for which a broken old pauper was the model, to the work of Crabbe:

Gainsborough perhaps, meant his friend and rival to see in it the conclusion towards which these humble subjects had been tending. Poverty has here no amelioration, no soft and winning touch of ideality. The old man puts one in mind of the poetry of George Crabbe, "nature's sternest painter, but the best!" Typical is the very cur that cowers by the peasant's side— an elegant contrast to the fine collie in the earlier Shepherd Boy, to which the picture is a strange pendant.

In poetry, we find an early example of the picturesque in The Wanderer of Richard Savage (1729):

A meagre mendicant we find,
Whose russet rags hang fluttering in the wind;
Years bow his back, a staff supports his tread
And soft white hairs shade thin: his palsy'd head.

One of the best examples, perhaps the best of all, is in Percival's The Beggar's Petition (1770). This decade of the seventies may be taken to represent the climax of the movement, if such it may be called. It militated perhaps as much against as for realism in the long run, but in the beginning it did serve the very useful purpose of bringing a real peasant into literature. The walls of Arcadia had been scaled.

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9Printed in Pearch's Collection. Vol. III.
The Social Background

One driven by strong benevolence of soul,
Shall fly, like Oglethorpe, from pole to pole. 10

"Strong benevolence of soul" was a characteristic of many of
this age, the "humanitarian age". Men were beginning to realize
at last that even peasants were human beings, presumably to be
cared for as such. The Age of Philanthropy gave expression to
its feelings in the foundation of hospitals, "just as the age
of Faith sung its soul in the stones of cloisters and cathedral
aisles". 11 The growing benevolence of the century was moved, too,
to cope with the appalling infant mortality among the poor,
especially amongst illegitimate children. James Hanway and
Capt. Coram are glorious names in this campaign. Early in the
reign of George III, Hanway's persistent efforts compelled the
parishes of the London area to keep their "parish infants" not
in workhouses, but in cottages in the country.

General Oglethorpe had drawn attention to the scandal of
debtor's prisons. For the rest of the century, English prisons
remained a national disgrace, but the evil had at least been
exposed and its worst abuses mitigated.

A whole new humanitarian spirit was abroad. I can do no
better than to quote Prof. Trevelyan's words on the subject:

From beginning to end of the century, the new Puritanism
of the ardently religious, such as Robert Nelson, Lady

10Quoted by Prof. G. M. Trevelyan. English Social History. P. 347.
Elizabeth Hastings, the Wesleys, Cowper and finally Wilberforce strove to practice the charity of the New Testament in place of the harsher precepts of the Old with which Cromwell's troopers had marched to battle. It was no accident that Uncle Toby, the vicar of Wakefield, Mr. Allworthy and Parson Adams were leading characters in English fiction during its first great period. A keener sensitiveness to the needs and sufferings of others, particularly of the poor, was not only reflected in literature but was seen in the lives of philanthropists and in the successive activities of the age—the foundation first of charity schools; then of hospitals; and, in the last years of the century, of Sunday Schools. It over leaped the boundaries of race and color. It melted the hard prudence of statesmen. Stormy pity inspired much of the eloquence and some of the errors of Burke and of Fox in India and France, and at length stirred the great rebellion of the English conscience against the slave trade.12

There was still a great deal of condescension, however.

The educational work done, for example, is open to retrospective criticism. The charity schools were the first organized attempt to educate the mass of the lower classes instead of the more outstanding members, but they taught that their young scholars should be content with that station in life into which it had pleased God to call them.

God bless the squire and his relations
And keep us in our proper stations.13

Even the religions still tended to look on the wretchedness of the poor as part of a divine system. The "welfare" work of Hannah and Martha More was based on the principle that the poor would be benefited more by Bible teachings than by social amenities. Wilberforce himself, in his Practical View of the

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12 Ibid.
System of Christianity (1798) preached to the poor that, their lowly path having been allotted to them by God, it was their part faithfully to discharge its duties and contentedly bow to its inconveniences. And I need only to remind the reader that Paley's famous, or infamous Reasons for Contentment Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public was published as late as 1792, to press my point still further.

But the fact remains that the working man was beginning to be noticed. He had been involved in two great changes, the agrarian revolution and the industrial revolution, both of which had profound effects upon him and upon society in general.

Although the position of the peasant at the beginning of the century was not enviable, by the end of the century his plight was wretched. It is well described in a pamphlet by David Davies, rector of Barkham, Berkshire, entitled The Case of Labourers in Husbandry Stated and Considered. Davies describes at length the low standard of living, the surliness of outlook and the addiction to petty crimes of the villagers, and attributes that demoralization to enclosures. Arthur Young bears out these statements in An Inquiry into the Propriety of Applying Wastes to the Better Maintenance and Support of the Poor. (1801)

Miserable as the villagers were, however, favorable contrast with town life often made their lot appear more desirable than it was. Overcrowding, no sanitation, collapse of moral standards,
increased gin drinking, appalling working conditions, made the towns appear, to all who knew them, hotbeds of vice. Wendeborn thus writes: "The farther off from London, the more, in general, the air as well as the manners grow poorer. The people appear more civil and tractable, more social and frugal and more given to cleanliness." So too, we find F. M. Eden writing:

In domestic comfort, in the endearments of family union, in certainty of work, of consequent independence, the labourer who is engaged in the varied occupations of husbandry has no reason to regret that fortune has not placed him at the loom or the anvil. Viewed in a political light, the pre-eminence of the original destination of mankind over manufacturers is still more apparent. It facilitates marriage, the happiest lot of human life, it is most favorable to health, to morals, to religion.

I mention this contrast with town life because it is from this that I believe grew the picture of the healthy and virtuous peasant that we sometimes find at the end of the century. It is not a continuation of the pastoral convention, nor, in one sense, is it completely anti-realistic. The health of the peasant seems beyond doubt to have been a fact. Even Crabbe says that slum boys would improve in health and morals if "forced upon some farm". That the peasants suffered physically and spiritually when they moved into the towns is indisputable. Nathaniel Kent testifies that:

Cottagers are indisputably the most beneficial race of people we have; they are bred up in greater simplicity, live more primitive lives, more free from vice and debauchery,

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15 The State of the Poor, Vol. 1.
16 The Village
than any other set of men of the lower classes; and are best formed and enabled to sustain the hard steps of war and other laborious services. Great towns are destructive alike to morals and health, and the greatest drains we have.  

We may summarize the situation thus: The condition of the peasant was undoubtedly worse than it had been at the beginning of the century and, by virtue of the new humanitarian movement that had grown up, was of more import to the upper classes. They were no longer content to accept the convention of the happy shepherd, because they realized now that they had some responsibility in alleviating the very real miseries of the poor. They were willing now that poetry should make known to them what they had not wished to hear before. The scales were off their eyes and dimly they saw the working man in his own right, as a human being. It is the faint, far-off herald of the democratic age.

The Philosophical Background

Even in the heyday of the optimism of the early century, we find that the satirists and moralizing writers were much preoccupied with the generic pride of man. A sense of the importance of the genus homo had been fostered by the mediaeval Christian view of man's place in the universe, but in the eighteenth century there were certain ideas current which forbade man to hold any such opinion of himself. One of those was the so-called "principle of continuity". Lex Continuiti, one of the

17 Hints to Gentlemen of Landed Property, 1774.
component ideas of the great Chain of Being theory. Man was but a link in the chain, and pride, in Pope's words, is the "sin against the laws of order".\(^\text{18}\) (i.e. of gradation.)

The bliss of man (could pride that blessing find
Is not to act or think beyond mankind.)\(^\text{19}\)

Thus the eighteenth century denunciations of pride are often at bottom, expressions of a certain disillusionment of man about himself. True, the conception of the Chain of Being owed its vogue largely to its use in the argument for (so called) optimism. But it clearly implied the dethronement of man from his former exalted position. In the bitter spirit of Swift, this disillusionment touched its extreme where man is placed even below the other animals. Robert Gould anticipates this in his *Satire Against Man*:

What beast beside can we so slavish call
As man? who yet pretends he's God of all.
Whoever saw (and all their classes call)
A dog so snarlish, or a swine so full,
A wolf so ravenous, or an ass so dull?
Slave to his passions, ev'ry several lust
Whisks him about, as whirl winds do the dust;
And dust he is, indeed, a senseless clod
That swells, yet would be believed a God.

It was upon his rational faculty and his intellectual achievements that modern man had been wont to plume himself. But the conception of the graded scale of being tended to fixed attention on the limitations of man's mental powers. Before, in the sixteenth century, Erasmus and Montaigne had dilated

\(^{18}\) *Essay on Man.* IV.
\(^{19}\) *Ibid.* VI.
upon the vanity of speculation and the corrupting influence of
science. The eighteenth century went much further, and finally
the reigning philosophy of the period has as its characteristic
aim, the fixing of the boundaries of human knowledge. It found
them narrow; Nature lay beyond man's ken and God was even more
incomprehensible. In consequence, it became customary in the
end to berate and satirize all forms of intellectual ambition.

It was a destructive period and old ideas were weighed
in the balance and found wanting. Hume's skepticism of the law
of cause, Voltaire's examination of the foundations of religion,
Rousseau's criticism of society, all showed a crumbling and a
rebirth. Similar things were happening in politics. The American
colonies asserted their independence. In France, the Bourbon
family was losing its last grasp of power. Adam Smith was putting
forward strange, new economic theories.20 It was not an age of
intellectual security. It was an age of doubt, of insecurity
and of deep pessimism.

This pessimism embraced many fads, many fashions, many
eccentricities, but it was basic. Anything even remotely akin
in temper was popular. Such was the cult for melancholy, for
gloomy landscapes and a pleasant depression. Tickell writes in
the Lines to the Earl of Warwick:

20 In The Wealth of Nations.
Oft let me range the gloomy iles alone,
(Sad luxury! to vulgar minds unknown).\(^{21}\)

This cult of melancholy went hand in hand with Gothicism, and
the same spirit animated them both.

The Lisbon earthquake in 1756 and the brilliant attack of
Candide upon shallow optimism completed the growth of the new
pessimism. The tone of the whole mood of the century from the
fifties onward was in sympathy with the suffering and misery
of mankind. It was a spirit entirely hostile to the pastoral
and entirely sympathetic to realism.

Not only was the tempo of the age sympathetic to the suf-
ferings of man, but it was intensely interested in the sufferings
of individual man. It was an extremely introspective age, an
age of diary writers and of letter writers. Tom Paine in the
second half of the century was singing the rights of man and
his theories were borne out by the revolution of the American
colonies and were later to be fixed by the French Revolution.
The seventeenth century had not put much store by the human
personality. It was the abstraction 'mankind' which interested
them. It is to the eternal glory of eighteenth century philosophers
that they discovered the worth and value of the single human
soul, the individual personality. Berkley's "subjective idealism",
which, in essence, exalted the human over the material, was perhaps
the highest reach of this discovery.

\(^{21}\)Printed in Vol. I of Dodsley's Collection.
CHAPTER SIX

THE FALL OF THE NEO-CLASSIC PASTORAL

It would have been almost possible for me to have summarized this chapter under the title of one poem - The Village. As we have seen, the climate of opinion had changed radically from the beginning of the century and the pastoral had now outlived its usefulness; in the new vortex of ideas, it was irrelevant. However, old reverences are long in dying and the pastoral was still honoured, even if it was more honoured in the breach than in the observance. We have looked at some of the attacks which had been launched against it and found that even the most bitter of them are not final. The death blow did not come until 1783. This was the date of the publication of The Village by George Crabbe.

It was a poem at once destructive and constructive. From a glance in the poem at the Auburn parson, "passing rich with forty pounds a year", it has been supposed that Crabbe had Goldsmith foremost in mind. But the poem has a more general significance. Goldsmith was not the chief offender—and indeed, in The Parish Register Crabbe has a passage distinctly in imitation of The Deserted Village. The poem begins with a blistering denunciation of the pastoral in general:

\[\text{Line } 303.\]
flled are those times when in harmonious strains
The rustic poet praised his native plains;
No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse
Their country's beauty or their nymphe's rehearse;
Yet still for these we frame the tender strain,
Still, in our lays fond Corydons complain
And Shepherds' boys their amorous pains reveal,
The only pains, alas, they ever feel.
On Minicio's banks, in Caesar's bounteous reign
If Tityrus found the Golden Age again
Must sleepy bards the flattering dream prolong
Mechanic echoes of the Mantuan song?
From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray
Where Virgil, not where Fancy led the way?
Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains
Because the Muses never knew their pains.2

Crabbe here lays a finger upon one of the chief weaknesses
of the neo-classic pastoral: that it is not written by peasants,
but about them:

They boast their peasants' pipes; but peasants now
Resign their pipes and plod behind the plough;
And few, amid the rural tribe, have time
To number syllables, and play with rhyme.3

It had never been claimed that the pastoral was realistic,
but formerly this had not been one of the demands of poetry.
In Crabbe's poem, the new, high conception of poetry and its
function is apparent:

What form the real picture of the poor
Demand a song.4

A whole thesis might be written around that word "demand".
Poetry is not, by this, a pleasant amusement for a Sunday after-
noon. It is something closely interwoven with life. Because
of this, Crabbe will not trifle with its high calling:

Then shall I dare these real ills to hide
In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?5

2Tbid. 11. 7-22.
3Tbid. 11. 23-26.
4Tbid. 11. 5-6.
5Tbid. 11. 46-47.
He consciously dissociates himself from the idealists:

By such examples taught, I paint the Cot
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not.\(^6\)

It is not so very far from this to Keats's theory of poetry:

Beauty is Truth, Truth Beauty.\(^7\)

although it is still, perhaps a long way to the exalted ideas
of the divinity of poetry and the poet that were later to come.

Cрабe strikes the prevailing tone of his poem in the
first line:

The Village Life, and every care that reigns
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains;\(^8\)

He does indeed, sing "every care". The poem is the last word
in pessimism. His landscape pictures are those of barren country-
side, with weeds choking the sustenance of the peasant. Here
are no nymphs and swains (although he retains the diction), but

Here joyless roam a wild amphibious race,
With sullen wo display'd in every face;
Who, far from civil arts and social fly,
And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.\(^9\)

The few scenes of joy which Crabbe does allow himself to portray
are mere "gleams of transient mirth"\(^10\) broken by riots and
drunkenness. The Sunday holiday of the workers in pleasant,
but even that is begrudged them:

Their careful masters brood the painful thought;
Much in their minds they murmur and lament,\(^11\)
That one fair day should be so idly spent.\(^11\)

\(^6\)Ibid. 11. 53-54.
\(^7\)Keats. Ode on a Grecian Urn. Final lines.
\(^8\)The Village. 11. 1-2.
\(^9\)Ibid. 11. 85-88.
\(^10\)Ibid. 11. 350.
\(^11\)Ibid. 11. 366-368.
Crabbe recognized this undue weighting himself and commented on the incident of the poor man's burial without blessing:

Some apology is due for the insertion of a circumstance by no means common: that it has been a subject for complaint in any place is a sufficient reason for its being reckoned among the evils which may happen to the poor, and which must happen to them exclusively; nevertheless it is just to remark that such neglect is very rare in any part of the kingdom, and in many parts is totally unknown.  

The Village may well be described as a "debunking" poem. Every ideal that previous poets had woven for themselves about country life is exploded. Crabbe indicates the conventional poetic presentation of innocent games and shows how the peasants are really engaged in smuggling. He scorns the idea that country folk are healthy:  

Yo then! and see them rising with the sun,  
Through a long course of daily toil to run;  
See them beneath the dog-star's raging heat,  
When the knees tremble and the temples beat;  
Behold them, leaning on their scythes, look o'er  
The labour past, and toils to come explore;  
See them alternate suns and showers engage,  
And hoard up aches and anguish for their age;  
Through fens and marshy moors their steps pursue,  
When their warm pores imbibe the evening dew;  
Then own that labour may as fatal be  
To these thy slaves, as thine excess to thee.  

He finds the mistaken conception that country diet is healthy, a tragic one:  

Oh! trifle not with wants you cannot feel,  
Nor work the misery of a stinted meal.  

He makes short work, too, of the old sentimental school dream of the peace and tranquillity of country life:

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12 Notes to The Village, Note 2.  
13 The Village. II. 122-131.  
14 Ibid. II. 168-169.
To look within, and ask if peace be there;
If peace be his - that drooping weary sire,
Or theirs, that offspring round their feeble fire;
Or here, that matron pale, whose trembling hand
Turns on the wretched hearth th' expiring brand.  

(A curious anticipation of Cowper in The Winter Evening.)

In Book II, he lays bare the vices of village life, the
hypocrisy, slander, unchastity, poaching, drunkenness. Never
before in the century had there been such ruthless stripping
away of illusions, such utter exposure of realities. The upper
classes are represented as being no better than the lower classes.
The unchaste girl who appears before the Justice of Peace is
not more sinful but merely less fortunate than her upper-class
counterpart:

Some favourite female of her judge glides by,
Who views with scornful glance the strumpet's fate,
And thanks the stars that made her keeper great.  

The conclusion is drawn in the unparalleled lines:

So slave the man of power, pleasure see
In his own slave as vile a wretch as he;
In his luxurious lord the servant find
His own low pleasures and degenerate mind.  

The Village may, in many ways, be considered a manifesto,
a great social document. The working classes have come into
their own. Crabbe deals with them not as "peasants", "swains",
"machines", but as people. He sees that they have emotions,

15 Ibid. ll. 175-179.
16 The few small embers left she nurses well;
And, while her infant race, with outspread hands
And crowded knees, sit cow'ring o'er the sparks,
Retires, content to quake, so they be warm'd. (ll. 383-386)
17 The Village. ll. 426-428.
18 Ibid. ll. 439-443.
great and noble. He sympathises with the man of weak physical constitution who forces himself to work until he dies a premature death, with the labours too old to support himself, a burden on his family. He takes us into the poor-house to show us "the cold charities of man to man".19

There children dwell who know no parents' care;
Parents, who know no children's love, dwell there!
Heartbroken matrons on their joyless bed,
Forsaken wives, and mothers never wed;
Dejected widows with unheeded tears,
And crippled age with more than childhood fears;
The lame, the blind, and, for the happiest they!
The weeping idiot and the madman gay. 20

He does not, as earlier writers had done, urge the upper classes to pity or charity, but he reproaches them:

How would ye bear in real pain to be,
Despised, neglected, left alone to die? 21

He treats the misery of the sick and dying with a beautiful lightness of touch and tenderness which hardens, perhaps too easily, into bitterness, as, for example, where he describes the doctor:

A potent quack, long versed in human ills
Who first insults the victim when he kills;
Whose murd'rous hand a drowsy Bench protect,
And whose most tender mercy is neglect. 22

The death-bed scene is a fine piece of writing, and I should not hesitate to place it beside the work of anyone of the four great tragic masters of the world for tragic power:

19Ibid. 1. 245.
20Ibid. 1. 232-239.
21Ibid. 11. 258-259.
22Ibid. 11. 282-285.
His drooping patient, being inured to pain
And long unheeded, knows remonstrance vain;
He ceases now the feeble help to crave
Of man; and silent sinks into the grave. 23

It was strong meat, but it was inevitable. Before, all
the new trends that are gathered together in The Village had
appeared, but they had been isolated. We found pessimistic
poems of many kinds, protests against the pastoral, realistic
poems, poems sympathetic to the working classes, but never before
had all these ideas appeared in one poem. This is why The Village
seems so much more positive, so much more of a deathblow to the
proud pastoral than anything earlier.

The Village brought Crabbe immediate popularity and fame. The poem itself, and Crabbe as the author, were both peculiarly
qualified to do the work they had to do in the most efficient
way possible. Born of that generation which came to fruition
in the eighties and which led the revolution in English poetry,
Crabbe was in a strategic position. While he was a staunch
admirer of Pope and clung throughout his life to the heroic
couplet, he lived to approve of the Lyrical Ballads, and became
the friend and admirer of Scott just as he had been the friend
and admirer of Burke. More than anyone else he may be said to
bridge the gap between the old school of poetry and the new.
The poem itself is just what was needed. It attacks the neo­
classic pastoral at the very roots. Earlier attacks had all been

23Ibid. 11. 292-295.
at some specific aspect of the pastoral which did not happen to appeal to the writer. *The Village* is the voice of a whole new generation. It is the voice of justice, of humanity. It is the protest of a man who felt deeply and saw clearly against the intellectual tyranny of those who did neither. It is a plea for the rights of the underdog. It is an assertion of the freedom of art to do what it will. It is a breaking of bounds. Between this and the kind of pastoral which Wordsworth was to write, there is no break. It was for this that Duck had patiently suffered attack early in the century; it was for this that all the minor poets had experimented and compromised for some fifty years; it was for this (strange are the ways of Providence) that the sentimentalists had gushed; and for this too, less directly, the American colonists shed their blood and the French Revolutionists were to shed theirs. There is no point indeed, where we can say that life ends and art begins.
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1726 - Miscellaneous Poems and Translations by Several Hands, Richard Savage.
1746 - The Theatre of Wit, or a Banquet of the Muses, Jacob Bickerstaffe.
1748 - A Collection of Poems by Several Hands

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II. SECONDARY SOURCES


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