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George Crabbe as Social Critic of His Times

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GEORGE CRABBE AS SOCIAL CRITIC OF HIS TIMES

BY

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

GEORGE CRABBE

Give him the darkest inch your shelf allows,
Hide him in lonely garrets, if you will,—
But his hard, human pulse is throbbing still
With the sure strength that fearless truth endows.
In spite of all fine science disavows,
Of his plain excellence and stubborn skill
There yet remains what fashion cannot kill,
Though years have thinned the laurel from his brows.

Whether or not we read him, we can feel
From time to time the vigor of his name
Against us like a finger for the shame
And emptiness of what our souls reveal
In books that are as altars where we kneel
To consecrate the flicker, not the flame.

—Edwin Arlington Robinson.

The life and literary activity of George Crabbe fell within a period of radical and epoch-making social change. During his long life, his mother country had been involved in the revolt of the Colonies in America and in the Napoleonic struggle on the continent, while at home she had to cope with internecine strife, political and social, aggravated and kept astir by the effects of the Industrial Revolution. Speculative thought synchronized with these events, particularly that set in motion by the philosophical leaders of the French Revolution, and tried to keep pace by offering various theories for adjusting a disordered and disrupted social order.

Yet with all these Crabbe had no part. He is a figure unique—almost paradoxical. He had learned as a poverty-stricken villager and simple
country parson the vast changes that had taken place among the common toilers of the soil. He became a poet, who, as a simple artist, left bold and realistic sketches of their sorrows and miseries during this period of upheaval among the classes in England, which were natural consequences of the introduction of machinery into agriculture and industry.

The poet Crabbe may be said to have contact with two great literary trends. As to form, he held to the tenets of Pope and marched in the rear ranks of the Classicists. As to his humanitarianism and fearless realism, he was in the vanguard of the Romantic élan. As a depicter of the lives of the rich and the lowly, and as a creator of well-drawn and distinctive characters, he may be awarded a place in the ranks of Thackeray, Dickens, and George Eliot.

However, it is not the purpose of this study to consider Crabbe as a literary workman or artist. Instead a strict line of demarcation has been drawn, in order that Crabbe's works may be examined in the light of those social problems which were the setting of his portrayals and an object of deep concern to English political leaders and social critics of that time.

To attain this objective it was necessary to build this study about four focal topics: 1. Crabbe's expression of his purpose to depict the crying social ills of the agricultural poor of his times. The most logical point of inception for this study seemed to present itself in the explicit expressions of the poet himself. While these are to be found in the various prefaces and forewords of Crabbe's poems, they form in a particular manner the theme of "The Village," one of the first of Crabbe's social poems. It is here that the poet evinces his determination to cast off the shackles of the conventional pastoral and the vogue of sentimentality and to show the
peasant groaning under the afflictions of a deranged social order which had
become opposed to his well-being. So determined is Crabbe to set his pic-
ture in reality that he chooses for his locale not the "Sweet Auburn" of
Goldsmith's tender sentiment, but the storm-wrecked, tide-washed village of
Aldborough, among the scenes of his own early poverty and humiliations.

2. Before attempting a study of the social conditions which form the
bases of Crabbe's realistic portrayals, it was deemed necessary to make an
examination of the environment and experiences which contributed toward
making Crabbe a truthful delineator of rural society. In general, Crabbe's
poetry must be received from the mouth of a country clergyman, born and
brought up among the lowest rank of the middle class, and scarcely removed
from their local prejudices and range of ideas. It is here that the clue to
Crabbe's genius as a realist is found. His method, wholly modern and scienc-
tific, displays a decided aptitude for making observations, for evaluating,
selecting, and later synthesizing material already stored up for future use.
Moreover, in order to evaluate Crabbe's theories of social justice it was
also necessary to consider his fitness to give an unbiased criticism.
Crabbe's non-partisanship in the matter of politics and his aloofness from
all revolutionary trends were given emphatic notice.

3. The poetry of Crabbe must be considered as an expression of the
social ills in England due to changed methods of manufacture and agriculture.
To interpret the poetry of Crabbe merely on his own evidence would lead to
very vague and unsatisfactory conclusions. No doubt this one-sided method of
interpreting Crabbe's poetry accounts for much of the criticism which rele-
gates the works of the poet to those of a morbid pessimist. The main pur-
pose of this study is to determine in how far Crabbe's portrayals coincide
with social realities. His poems must be paralleled by modern research done in regard to those problems, and with utterances of his own contemporaries which prove that those evils were actually demanding recognition. This has been done, much to the credit of the poet, and has given a better means of an enlightened interpretation of his works from the standpoint of social criticism, and an enhanced appreciation of his powers of delineation as a poetic realist.

In order to penetrate into the sordid scenes of Crabbe's peasant life, the reader must be familiar with the vast changes which entered not only into the humble confines of the rustic laborer, but into the domain of every class. Changed methods of production, whether of manufacture or of agriculture, required a new economic system and that expedient was the capitalistic system. The reorganization of the upper classes to include the moneyed aristocracy and the rise of a proletariat are matters of equal importance. And whether the reader enters the squalid cottages of the poor in "The Village" or the comfortable homes of the thrifty middle class workmen in "The Borough," or the palatial halls of the squire or merchant in Crabbe's "Tales," he will observe that it is this strong demarcation of social classes Crabbe seems to make the motif throughout. If social distinction entered into society in general, it had its place in the Church of England in particular. Crabbe, although a member of the clergy and a holder of benefices himself, scores the defections in the ministry whether it be in the person of the apathetic priest in "The Village" who neglects his spiritual duties to the poor or of the zealous priest in the "Tales" who in order to gain the ear of his aristocratic flock is called to sacrifice his priestly ardor for virtuous living.

There are no problems upon which Crabbe has written in which he has
displayed more sympathy of treatment or more minute powers of observation than those of labor and food with their resultant demand for the care of the dependent poor. Deprived of the produce of his plot of ground about his cottage door, and his share in the grazing common, the peasant became solely dependent upon the labor of his hands. But work was uncertain and poorly paid. The expenses of wars demanding excessive taxation together with the inevitable high prices for food prevented even the right-minded capitalist from giving the laborer his just due. The methods of poor relief themselves favored, rather than eliminated, the exploitation of the worker. Little children were snatched from their parents without restraint of law, and put to work which eventually stunted their souls and bodies or brought them to an early grave. Parishes too poor to bear the burden were required to furnish food and housing for the aged and needy. For the man who failed in his financial enterprises, together with his family, there was imprisonement, which meant an association with the lowest dregs of human society.

Again the prevalence of immorality and crime might be considered a secondary motif running through Crabbe's poetry which often renders the reading of his verses unsavory. Yet a study of Crabbe as a social critic must take into consideration the immorality which was as much the result of the law that prosecuted it as the effects of poverty. One of these evils which had such dire effects for the individual, and for society in general, was the practice of poaching. Legislation which was made favorable only to the landed classes, and punishments out of all proportion to the transgression which were meted out to offenders, only enticed breaches of law and encouraged social antipathies. As for social immorality, besides being a reflection on the evils inherent in the Poor Laws of England and a frequent concomitant of ignorance and poverty, it affords an interesting opportunity
for contrasting Crabbe's method of portrayal with that of the ultramodern
realist. The latter ventures upon subjects of far more consequence to the
maintenance of social solidity than did Crabbe, and for the purpose of
distorting moral values and of licensing the abandonment of age-old ethical
and social codes.

4. Finally Crabbe has been considered as a social teacher. While it
is true that in this study of Crabbe as a critic of the social evils of
his times there has been no attempt to prove anything new in his theories
of social justice, these having been amply defined and presented by ex-
ponents and critics of Crabbe's works since the author's time, yet a
synthesis such as this cannot fail to be both profitable and timely.
Crabbe's social philosophy can be summed up very briefly: Due to the Primal
Fall of man, both rich and poor have an equal inclination to evil; conse-
quently both rich and poor are to see their common brotherhood in their
common weaknesses. However, to the rich and upper classes there is added
the grave duty of recognizing the ills of the poor and lower classes and of
doing what is in their power to ameliorate their condition.

Since all men have an equal inclination to evil, Crabbe describes with
equal force the small tradesman who adulterates his goods or evades the
custom laws, the parish clerk who embezzles the parish funds, the absentee
landlady who makes no effort to ascertain the ills and miseries of her
rustic tenants, and the selfish and egoistic tradesman who surfeits in
luxury while utterly insensible to the temptations and sorrows of the poor
about him. All this displays in Crabbe a marked facility for penetrating
into human nature, founded on deep feeling and sympathy for the well-being
of his fellowmen.

A study of Crabbe's poetry will show that he applied his theory to
problems of State as well as to those of the individual. Thus Crabbe could give no suggestions forremedying the social order because the evils lay not in any particular system but rather in the corrupt nature of man himself. The poor man made rich to-day will adopt the vices of the rich man to-morrow. As long as man is what he is, there will be class struggle: the poor will covet the goods of the rich, and the rich will exploit the poor.

A study of Crabbe's social philosophy, as unassuming and as simple as it is, cannot be otherwise than timely in presence of the social upheaval that is wrecking the civilized world to-day. Economic and social remedies must go back to events contemporaneous with the poet, for it was then that the evils of the present-day capitalistic system that are embracing the world had their beginnings. It is only from the vista of time that the world can appraise problems that had their incipience in the past, and to judge from their effects in the present, the nature of their causes. And Crabbe in his evaluations was far ahead of his times, because he saw that the source of the evils lay in the inherent degradation of man rather than in any particular economic system. The evils in capitalism to-day are those of the days of Crabbe, and the world in being eager to shuffle off an effete capitalism is equally as short-sighted as it was when it embraced it in the days of Crabbe.

Crabbe's pessimism, dark as it is, is ethical as well as satirical. And pessimism such as this cannot be out-vogued, even though it may be unpopular. Although Crabbe shows but the under side of the fabric, his principles of social justice are founded on those which are the bases of the utterances of a Leo XIII. and a Pius XI. It is this same divine spark of universal truth that enkindled the admiration of so recent a poet as Edwin Arlington Robinson and evoked his sincere tribute to the "fearless truth" of George Crabbe.
CHAPTER II

THE SOCIAL PURPOSE OF CRABBE'S REALISM

Thy verse from Nature's face each feature drew,
Each lovely charm, each mole and wrinkle too.
No dreamy incidents of wild romance,
With whirling shadows, wilder'd minds entrance;
But plain realities the mind engage,
With pictured warnings through each polished page.
Hogarth of Song! Be this thy perfect praise:--
Truth prompted, and Truth purified thy lays;
The God of Truth has given thy verse and thee
Truth's holy palm--His Immortality. 1

Crabbe's treatment of peasant life has frequently been compared to
that of divers realistic painters—the early Dutch school, Hogarth,
Wilkie, and very recently to Millet and Van Gogh. 2 William Hazlitt saw
the significance of Crabbe's realistic portrayals in their relation to
the study of the fine arts which had come into fashion about the latter
part of the eighteenth century, and which tended to "restore the enfeebled
and perverted eye of nature." Hazlitt likewise called attention to the
fact that Crabbe's earliest genre poem, "The Village," had been recom-
mended to the notice of Doctor Johnson by Sir Joshua Reynolds at a time

1Poem ascribed to John Duncan Esq., New College, Oxford. Quoted in
The Life and Poetical Works of the Rev. George Crabbe, ed. by his Son
(London, 1847), p. 91. All references to this edition of Crabbe's life
and works will be designated as Life by his Son.

2Samuel J. Looker, "In Praise of Crabbe," The Nineteenth Century and
when public taste had been directed in a good measure to that sort of poetry which leans for support on the truth and fidelity of its limitations to nature. What the realistic painters have done from the days of the early Dutch school until Van Gogh, Crabbe has emulated through the medium of words. And Alfred Ainger seeking for the motive behind Crabbe's art, says of him, "If Crabbe is our first great realist in verse, he uses his realism in the cause of a true humanity."4

If, like Hogarth, Crabbe has espoused the cause of humanity, his purpose must be sought in the actual expression of the poet. Just as Wordsworth in his "Preface" to the Lyrical Ballads (1798) announced his divorce from the criteria of the Classical creed, so Crabbe in the opening lines of "The Village" declares that he will abandon the idyllic song of rustic swains piping to each other "in smooth alternate verse" as portrayed by the poets down the ages. Instead he will make his theme—

The Village Life, and every care that reigns
O'er youthful peasants and declining swains;
What labour yields, and what, that labour past,
Age, in its hour of languor, finds at last;
What form the real Picture of the Poor; 5
Demand a song—the Muse can give no more.

What is the meaning of this spirit of revolt which would have Crabbe break away from the traditional portrayal of rustic joy and poetic fancy

5George Crabbe, "The Village," I, Poems, ed. by Adolphus William Ward (3 vols., Cambridge, 1905-1907), I, 11. 1-6, p. 120. All references to the works of Crabbe, edited by Ward will be designated as Poems.
to deliberately chose that which is unlovely and sordid?

The pastoral poem, the idyll, and the bucolic style in verse from ancient times had been based traditionally on an optimism imaginary and superficial. With Gay, Allan Ramsay, and Thomson, there had come some signs of a movement towards reality, but not a complete break from the purely fictitious character of the rustic theme. Sentimentalism which followed brought an added and new charm, although more alluring. If interest was taken in country life, it was that of the "jaded town-dweller," who sought it for the enjoyments which Goldsmith had pictured in his "Deserted Village." The village theme was still one of happiness, whether that of nymphs and amorous shepherds or of sturdy, contented, jovial rustics. Crabbe, on the contrary, approaches his portrayal with a rebellious mood based on his ten years of bitter experience. His village smacks of the soil.

Herein lay the distinction between the sentimentalists and benevolists: the sentimentalists through their idealistic philosophy contrasted the idealistic elements in the country with the vice and artificialities of the city; the benevolists were awake to the real sufferings and poverty of rural communities. Crabbe held with the benevolists in his desire for a recognition of the true condition of the agricultural laborer. In "The Parish Register" he would again address the sentimentalists, those "gentle souls, who dream of a rural ease," and whom "the smoother sonnet" pleases:

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it lights up those aspects of life which other poets have been loathe to
dwell upon. The lives of the rustics are to be drawn in their entirety
for the first time with a "minute and accurate brush." English country
life at the end of the eighteenth century is to be depicted by an "observer
whose resolute purpose is to alter in no particular the image of truth, were
it even almost always a bitter truth." 11

The Muses, he explains, sing of happy swains and peasants' pipes
because they know nothing of their pains--

...but peasants now
Resign their pipes and plod behind the plough;
And few, amid the rural-tribe, have time 12
To number syllables, and play with rhyme.

True, Dyer, Cowper, Burns, and Goldsmith also deserted the beaten path
of the idealistic portrayal of the village theme. But Crabbe goes farther
than any of these; farther than the "Deserted Village" of Goldsmith to
which "The Village" is generally conceded to be an answer. For Goldsmith's
idealism of the village and villagers of Auburn was far removed from the
sordid realities of the poverty, ugliness, and hardships which Crabbe had
found in the lives of the inhabitants of Aldborough. But it was the purpose
of Goldsmith to portray the English rural village in its ideal state of
rural loveliness, "enshrining rural innocence and joy" and to show how
man's vices, invading it from the outside, might bring all to ruin. Crabbe
aims to awaken a sympathetic recognition of rural sins and sorrows which
sprang from causes in operation within the center of the community itself. 13

11Legouis and Cazamian, op. cit., p. 999.
12Poems, I, "The Village," I, 11. 21-25, p. 120.
13Ainger, op. cit., p. 51.
In other words, Crabbe makes his villagers bear the guilt of their own miseries, thus freeing them from the former conception that the rusties' misfortunes were due to their own ignorance and stupid simplicity.14

If Crabbe had for his purpose to paint the peasant and villager stripped of the fanciful adornment of the conventional bucolic, the poet wanted also to rid him of another literary depiction equally unjust, one that had become the heritage of the rustic through the development of the drama in its distinctive spheres of tragedy and comedy. Classical antiquity had sympathy only for the higher classes—for kings and princes. The foolish, the ridiculous, as presented in comedy, was reserved for the common people. Despite the changed attitude towards the lower classes wrought by English philosophy at the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries, the spirit of the common people, as far as its literary expression was concerned, lay bound in the narrowest shackles. Here and there an isolated voice was heard in their behalf. With George Lillo (1665–1739) there arose the burgher–tragedy that made its influence felt in France and Germany. Richardson and Fielding in their way also labored to emancipate the lower classes from ancient literary prejudices and conventions. 15

In the poetry of chivalry the peasant appeared in dark, brutish colors. Or again there was the absurd idealization, especially of the peasant, which was equally as insulting to the rustic as it was opposed to


15 Ibid., pp. 33, 34.
the portrayal of the upper class. The dramatic pastoral partook of this absurd representation in a perfect caricature of the peasant as a mixture of sympathy, generosity, and ideal love. 16

In his "Preface" to "The Parish Register" Crabbe expresses his eager desire to avoid both extremes, that of "pastoral simplicity" and "rustic barbarity."

In the "Parish Register," he [the reader] will find an endeavour once more to describe village-manners, not by adopting the notion of pastoral simplicity or assuming ideas of rustic barbarity, but by more natural views of the peasantry, considered as a mixed body of persons, sober or profligate, and hence, in a great measure, contented or miserable. 17

A year after Crabbe's death, the North American Review pointed out the significance of the poet's revolt from these traditional methods of depicting the lower classes:

Mr. Crabbe is certainly entitled to the praise of a reformer. Before his day, no poet would have dreamed of resorting to humble life for anything beyond a theme of ludicrous caricature, or the personages of a Beggar's Opera. Even at the present time, critics are apt to shake their heads with looks of peculiar wisdom, when they come in contact with such innovations: they are willing to admit that 'The Borough' is well enough in its way, but deem the effort to invest such subjects with poetical attraction as hopeless as to draw living waters from the rock. 18

The great literature of a period vibrates in harmony with its times. English literature from the very outset of the eighteenth century had become social in its aims and national from its angle of consideration. The causes of this social trend in literary activity were found in the

16 Ibid., pp. 54, 35.
secure establishment of parliamentary and party government which left the liberties of the people safe in their own keeping and gave the nation a freedom for a social development equal to its political progress. Moreover, the wars which were going on during a large part of the century were fought on foreign soil and thus offered no hindrance towards national advancement. A rapid industrial development synchronized with these events. The capitalistic system took on greater virility; the merchant classes grew more important and powerful. As land was still the basis of social standing, the new bourgeois commercial class began to acquire land with all possible alacrity. Meanwhile England became proud of her liberties, her free institutions, and her material prosperity.

According to Mrs. Oliphant, Grabbe's poetic task in this new age was to tear down the wall that served as the artificial barrier of the peasant from the general sympathy and to prove that the Arcadian fields were regions of labor and utter wretchedness. "Grabbe forged the last link in the chain--overthrew the last delusion. He led the student of Belinda's Curls back to human life as Cowper did, and Burns; but he taught him a sterner lesson--a lesson equally essential to the clearing and opening up of the new world." 20

Thus if Grabbe wrote in a spirit of defiance against the picture of social falsities customarily propogated concerning country life, it was to

I grant indeed that fields and flocks have charms
For him that grazes or for him that farms;
But, when amid such pleasing scenes I trace
The poor laborious natives of the place,
And see the mid-day sun, with fervid ray,
On their bare heads and dewy temples play;
While some, with feeblor heads and fainter hearts,
Deplore their fortune, yet sustain their parts;
Then shall I dare these real ills to hide
In tinsel trappings of poetic pride?

Concerning Crabbe's fidelity to his picture Kebbel writes:

He would tell the whole truth. He would paint the poor as they really were. If he asked us to compassionate their poverty, he was not justified in throwing a veil over their vices. Crabbe, in fact, was too much in earnest to be otherwise than perfectly truthful. He scorned to trick out the real sufferings and sorrows of the peasantry in borrowed plumes, or to make them the subject of poetic embellishment and embroidery.

At the time of the writing of "The Village," Crabbe had had little experience other than that which he had derived from his experience in his native district inhabited by laborers and fishermen by day, who became smugglers and poachers by night. He had entered their cottages and described what he had witnessed. Later when his duties as a clergyman led him into the halls of the better class farmers and country gentlemen and into the cottages of the better class of laborers, he saw that the picture was not one of unmixed gloom. However, he held against the idealists until the last. Yet to see in Crabbe only a confirmed pessimist is to misapprehend his purpose. In "The Parish Register," which is considered an amended

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version of "The Village" there are "fair scenes of peace" as well as of vice and misery, both of which Crabbe portrays to express his intention of being just.

Nor must Crabbe be considered only the poet of the poor and outcast. As a writer of the "Tales" he has proved himself to be a skillful delineator of the rich as well as of the poor. Crabbe's son and biographer gives the following observations on "The Borough" by the poet, which show his interest in the middle class:

I have chiefly, if not exclusively, taken my subjects and characters from that order of society where the least display of vanity is generally to be found, which is placed between the humble and the great. It is in this class of mankind that more originality of character, more variety of fortune, will be met with; because, on the one hand, they do not live in the eye of the world, and, therefore, are not kept in awe by the dread of observation and indecorum; neither, on the other, are they debared by their want of means from the cultivation of the mind and the pursuits of wealth and ambition, which are necessary to the development of character displayed in the variety of situations to which this class is liable.23

The middle class also had been as much without representation in poetry as in politics, or if represented it was in the romantic disguise rather than in its real character. But as Courthope writes, "The time had come now for a poet, inspired with something of the old Chaucerian humour, to turn the light of Truth on the constitution of English society, and, by exposing its shame and self-deceptions, to earn for himself from the great romantic poet of the period the praise of being 'Nature's sternest painter yet her best.'"24

23Life by his Son, p. 55.
Grabbe's methods of portrayal were those of the novelist and scientist rather than of the poet, for he had by nature a keen power of observation.

Yet it is these impersonal and realistic means of representation that give to Grabbe his fitness to mirror the social conditions of his times.

No Muse I ask, before my view to bring
The humble actions of the swains I sing--
How pass'd the youthful, how the old their days;
Who sank in sloth, and who aspired to praise;
Their tempers, manners, morals, customs, arts;
What parts they had, and how they 'mploy'd their parts;
By what elated, soothed, seduced, depress'd,
Full well I know--these records give the rest. 25

In his "Preface" to "The Borough" he acknowledges that the scope of his genius lies within the bounds of observation and experience.

From the title of this Poem; some persons will, I fear, expect a political satire,—an attack upon corrupt principles in a general view, or upon the customs and manners of some particular place; of these they will find nothing satirised, nothing related. . . . What I thought I could best describe, that I attempted:—the sea, and the country in the immediate vicinity; the dwellings, and the inhabitants; some incidents and characters, with an exhibition of morals and manners, offensive perhaps to those of extremely delicate feelings, but sometimes, I hope, neither unamiable nor unsatisfactory. 26

Later in his "Preface" to "The Tales" Crabbe does not deny that the function of poetry is to lift the soul from a contemplation of painful realities of actual existence and to give it repose by substituting objects of interest and satisfaction. As to his own choice of subject and manner of presentation he writes:

. . . but what is there in all this, which may not be effected by a fair representation of existing character? may, by a

faithful delineation of those painful realities, those every-
day concerns, and those perpetually-occurring vexations themselves, 
provided they be not (which is hardly to be supposed) the very 
concerns and distresses of their reader? for, when it is admitted 
that they have no particular relation to him, but are the troubles 
and anxieties of other men, they excite and interest his feelings 
as the imaginary exploits, adventures, and perils of romance;--
they soothe his mind, and keep his curiosity pleasantly awake; they 
appear to have enough of reality to engage his sympathy, but 27 
possess not interest sufficient to create painful sensations.

The aim of Crabbe has been analyzed as "an attempt to extend the range 
of imaginative sympathy, by applying the traditional forms of poetry to 
objects scientifically observed in the domain of actual life." In other 
words, Crabbe was a photographic satirist. He did not believe that poetry 
should always be pleasant, but rather that it should be an exact representa-
tion of life, vibrant and pulsating. His bold realism was forced upon 
him from the standpoint both of the poet and of the social critic.

It is here, too, that the distinction can be drawn between the radical 
differences of Wordsworth and Crabbe in point of view, purpose, and emphasis. 
Crabbe threw about his subjects none of that poetic glamour which Wordsworth 
demanded for his commonplace subjects. But Wordsworth wrote not of poverty 
as a recorder of social and economic dissonances, but as a lyricist of 
people in humble life.

It is true that in his depiction of misery, misfortune, and depravity 
Crabbe has sketched without reserve that which persons of refinement would 
rather leave unexposed, yet he always effects in the concluding picture, 
the consoling scene of purified repentance or expiation; a more felicitous

... of fortune, or a glimpse into a brighter future. The good and the beautiful achieve the final victory. As Pesta has also remarked, Grabbe had need to probe the very essence of human society, in order to draw out the bonds of convention, prejudices and other external influences which held in check its natural development.

29 Pesta, op. cit., p. 41.
30 Ibid., p. 35.
CHAPTER III
CRABBE'S LIFE AND HIS SOCIAL OUTLOOK

With tenderest sympathy for others' woes,
Fearless, all guile and malice to expose:
Steadfast of purpose in pursuit of right,
To drag forth dark hypocrisy to light,
To brand th' oppressor, and to shame the proud,
To shield the righteous from the slanderous crowd;
To err, lenient and to frailty mild,
Repentance ever was thy welcome child:
In every state, as husband, parent, friend,
Scholar, or bard, thou couldst the Christian blend.

It was the unique trait of Crabbe's genius to find his poetical subjects in his own environment. If he produced sharply contrasting scenes among rich and poor alike, it was because his own experiences had brought him into social contact with all classes. For the life of Crabbe falls very naturally into two periods of marked contrast: The first twenty-eight years were passed in indigence and difficulties; the last fifty years were spent in honor, comfort, and modest affluence. It was in the first period that Crabbe came under the principal influences that enabled him to become the portrayer of misfortune, misery, and human depravity, and which made him even in his riper years, the apt and sympathetic exponent of the "simple annals of the poor." If in the latter part of his life Crabbe's experience was enriched by association with men of culture and leisure,

1Poem ascribed to John Duncan, Quoted from Life by his Son, p. 21.
As broadening of his powers served not to make the poet aristocratic in taste, but rather enabled him to depict with greater accuracy the sharp cleavage that had broken into English society owing to the vast social changes then at work.

Crabbe was born December 24, 1754, at Aldborough, a small seaport in the County of Suffolk, described as a poor wretched place, consisting of two parallel and unpaved streets, running between mean and scrambling houses, the abodes of sea-faring men, pilots, and fishers.2 Crabbe describing these squalid scenes in "The Village," justly attributes their forbidding aspect, not to a lack of thrift among the inhabitants but to the "niggard hand" of nature.

But these are scenes where Nature's niggard hand
Gave a spare portion to the famish'd land;
Here is the fault, if here mankind complain
Of fruitless toil and labour spent in vain.3

Crabbe's ancestors were evidently too obscure to possess a history, and although they had been for many generations farmers, their advancement stopped at the rank of yeomen.4 From his early youth the poet became accustomed to a life of toil and hardship. His father, a warehouse-keeper, to meet the demands of an ever-increasing family, became a collector of salt duties. Among his obligations was the pursuit of smugglers who abounded along the coast and throughout the environs of the village. This

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2Life by his Son, p. 3.
4All biographical notes unless otherwise indicated, have been obtained from René Huchon, George Crabbe and His Times, 1754-1852. Translated from the French by Frederick Clarke (London, 1907).
Ancient practice of smuggling made a lasting impression on the sensi-
tivities of the youth, for as a poet he makes much of illicit trading.

There is another evil which Crabbe depicts from first-hand observation, 
and that is the vice of drunkenness. After the death of a son in June, 
1766, the father became a constant frequenter of the public house. Thus 
young Crabbe was the witness of the heartrending scenes caused by drunken-
ness in his own family as well as in the homes of his neighbors; while his 
father became for him the type of dwellers in "The Borough," who spent 
their days in toil and their nights in occasional orgies. During his 
free time Crabbe found his way into the inns where he took into his impres-
sionable young mind the manners and customs of the inhabitants and frequent-
ers of the village: the drinkers, the traders who arranged their deals with 
the smugglers, the poor laborers—all of whom he was later to depict with 
the dexterity of the realistic painter.

The references to the school system which occur in Crabbe's poetry 
also found their actuality in the life of the poet. In the absence of 
regularly installed primary schools, there were what may be styled "dame 
schools," or those conducted by schoolmistresses, who for a small sum 
instructed the pupils. Crabbe in spite of his later unpleasant educational 
experiences pays his tribute of loyal gratitude to the faithful "old matron," 
in the lines:

If aught of mine have gain'd the public ear; 
If Rutland deigns these humble Tales to hear; 
If critics pardon what my friends approved, 
Can I mine ancient widow pass unmoved? 
Shall I not think what pains the matron took, 
When first I trembled o'er the gilded book? 
How she, all patient, both at eve and morn, 
Her needle pointed at the guard's horn; 
And how she soothed me, when, with study sad,
I labour'd on to reach the final sad?
Shall I not grateful still the dame survey,
And ask the muse the poet's debt to pay?

Notwithstanding his poverty, Crabbe's father determined to secure for his son an education. The place chosen was Bungay, a small town on the borders of Norfolk, about thirty miles north of Aldborough. Here Crabbe, who was yet very young, suffered much from the exceedingly severe discipline. How long the boy remained here is not known, but what he suffered remained indelibly impressed upon his sensitive mind.

We name the world a school,—for day by day
We something learn, till we are call'd away;
The school we name a world,—for vice and pain,
Fraud and contention, there begin to reign;
And much, in fact, this lesser world can show
Of grief and crime that in the greater grow.

It was in his twelfth year that he was sent to school again. This time it was to Stowmarket, a small industrial town twenty-five miles west of Aldborough. Here Crabbe found his place among the poor little "fags," bound under a form of slavery then prevalent in the schools of England.

If Crabbe wrote burningly of the miseries within poorhouses and prisons, he also wrote as vigorously of the evils of the school system of England, including those found in the infant schools, schools for boys corresponding to present day elementary schools, schools for girls, and boarding schools for children of the rich. Even after the passage of many years Crabbe drew some of the bitterest pictures which came from his pen,

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of the brutality and greediness of the upper classman. Thus in the "Tales of the Hall" Crabbe in the person of George recalls the cruelties of the school tyrant "in that still-hated school."

"Call to your mind this scene—Yon boy behold:
"How hot the vengeance of a heart so cold!
"See how he beats, whom he had just reviled
"And made rebellious—that imploring child;
"How fierce his eye, how merciless his blows,
"And how his anger on his insult grows;
"You saw this Hector and his patient slave,
"Th' insulting speech, the cruel blows he gave." 7

Crabbe made progress in mathematics, but was destined by his father for the medical profession. In his thirteenth year he left school for good and received no university training.

In order to be fitted for his medical career, Crabbe was bound out by a seven years' contract to a Mr. Smith, an apothecary at Wickham Brook, a tiny village about twelve miles southeast of New Market. The poverty of his master was such that Crabbe was forced to depend for livelihood on running errands and working as a ploughboy on his master's farm.

In 1771 Crabbe took up a place in the dispensary of Mr. Page, a surgeon and apothecary at Woodbridge, but in the summer of 1775 when he returned to Aldborough he had acquired during his seven years' apprenticeship neither money nor science. In order to relieve the poverty of his own family he had to take his place among the common laborers at the customs house, rolling barrels of salt and butter-casks.

In this same year despite his incompetence he became the parish surgeon to the poor. Of Crabbe's experiences with the miseries of the poor,

7Ibid., ll. 15-22, p. 320.
Ashen writes:

How many "fractures" must he have reduced, or tried to reduce for this sun! How many times must he have entered the humble, unpaved cottage, open to all the winds of heaven, which then did duty for a poor-house, and which can still be seen standing alone in the middle of a field facing the railway station. How many vices must he have discovered, how many poor wretches must he have heard groaning on the seven miserable beds for which five pairs of sheets, four pairs of blankets and one pair of curtains had to suffice. And this handful of shivering and emaciated paupers, huddled together round the five tables and upon the ten chairs of which the furniture was composed, dressed in their uniform, on the right sleeve of which burned the bright red of the piece of cloth with the two large black letters F A, the cruel badge of their odious servitude—must not these poor creatures have shown the young doctor to what depths vice and human ingratitude may lead? 8

But Crabbe was mindful of his own shortcomings in the science and practice of medicine and a few years later presented in "The Village" the "quack" made possible by the lax hiring of physicians for the poor.

A potent quack, long versed in human ills, 8
Who first insults the victim whom he kills; 8
Whose murd'rous hand a drowsy Bench protect, 8
And whose most tender mercy is neglect. 8

Paid by the parish for attendance here, 8
He wears contempt upon his sapient sneer; 8
In haste he seeks the bed where Misery lies, 8
Impatience mark'd in his averted eyes; 8
And, some habitual queries hurried o'er, 8
Without reply, he rushes on the door. 8
His drooping patient, long imbued to pain, 8
And long unheeded, knows remonstrance vain; 8
He ceases now the feeble help to crave 8
Of man; and silent sinks into the grave. 9

Crabbe spent the end of 1776 and the first six months of 1777 in London for further surgical study. On his return to Aldborough he found

8Ashen, op. cit., pp. 64, 65.
his practice, except that among the very poor, taken over by another. He
himself fell into abject poverty, living in a "hut", the like of which
he was later to describe in picturing the sufferings of the poor and out-
east. Finally in 1779 he could endure Aldborough no longer and determined
to stake his fortunes on a literary career in London. He had already pub-
ished a poem, "Inebriety," in 1775. It was an original choice of a sub-
ject in which Crabbe had tried to collect into one typical picture individ-
ual traits of characters drawn from life. But this had brought him no
fame.

Finally in the beginning of April, 1780 he embarked at Slaughden Quay
on the Unity smack and made the voyage living among the sailors. On his
arriving in London by the Thames, the traveller was greeted by a spec-
tacle of motley animation composed of thieves, smugglers, and slatternly
women from the neighboring ale houses. What hardships Crabbe endured
during this period of his stay in London are found related in the Poet's
Journal, a unique document in the history of eighteenth century literature,
which tells of the daily and hourly struggle with poverty of "a candidate
for fame."

After being repulsed by Mr. Dodsley and Mr. Becket, another book-
seller, Crabbe finally succeeded in having "The Candidate" published by
John Nicholls. This poem received scathing reviews, principally because
of "that material defect, the want of a proper subject." At the end of
February or beginning of March, 1781, he addressed himself to Edmund Burke,
to whom he sent a letter and a copy of "The Library," a type of satiric

10 Life by his Son, p. 15.
and didactic poem prevalent in England and France at that time. Burke became at once the powerful patron of Crabbe. Through Burke's influence the poet became a clergyman and was appointed to the curacy of his native town. However, his townsmen, remembering his squalid upbringing and former lowly occupations, were not pleased to have Crabbe imposed upon them as their pastor and regarded him rather as a parvenu.

Burke mentioned Crabbe's case to the Duke of Rutland, who offered him the post of domestic chaplain at Belvoir Castle. At this improvement in his fortunes Crabbe felt in a position to claim the long-pledged hand of Miss Sarah Elmy, to whom in his earlier years he had dedicated a number of love lyrics and the Poet's Journal. Belvoir Castle was situated in Leicestershire near the north-eastern point of a triangle formed by Nottingham, Grantham, and Melton Mowbray, a favorite hunting country of England. The owner had a famous pack of hounds and every year invited his friends, the country gentlemen of the district, sporting clergy and neighboring farmers to meet in the hunting-field. It was during the earlier of these years that Crabbe brought out "The Village," which was finished at Belvoir during the year 1788.

Huchon points out the advantages that this life was to offer the poetic career of Crabbe:

However, . . . it was no small advantage to find oneself transplanted from hostile and vulgar surroundings into a princely abode and into a society conspicuous for its rank or intelligence. This select circle, on the fringe of which Crabbe was about to live, was to afford him an opportunity of studying manners and the life of the great world and of comparing them with those of the rustics and fishermen of Aldborough.11

11 Huchon, op. cit., p. 137.
Grabbe published "The Newspaper," in March, 1785. It was an impersonal satire depicting the struggle between Pitt and Fox from the standpoint of party spirit in general, and achieved moderate success. Shortly after Grabbe left Belvoir Castle for Stathern, a village about four miles from Belvoir Castle.

Grabbe in his position stood half-way between the lord of the manor and the rural population. His own son bears witness to his constant solicitude for the welfare of the poor.

At Stathern, and at all his successive country residences, my father continued to practice his original profession among such poor people as chose to solicit his aid. The contents of his medicine chest, and, among the rest, cordials, were ever at their service; he grudged no personal fatigue to attend the sick-bed of the peasant, in the double capacity of physician and priest; and had often great difficulty in circumscribing his practice strictly within the limits of the poor, for the farmers would willingly have been attended gratis also. 12

In 1789 he moved to the small and very retired village of Muston. Through the influence of the Duchess of Rutland with Chancellor Thurlow, Grabbe had secured two livings, one at Muston in Leicestershire, and the other at West Allington in Lincolnshire. He chose to live at Muston.

November 28, 1789, Grabbe and his family arrived at Parham. October 17, 1796 he went to Great Glamham Hall situated in a well-farmed region of Suffolk. October, 1801 he went to Randham in Suffolk and in September 1, 1805 returned to Muston.

"The Parish Register," after being in process of composition for four years, made its appearance October 29, 1807. "The Parish Register" contains

12Life by his Son, p. 36.
added aspects not found in "The Village." These were the pictures of
rich and noble, represented by Sir Edward Archer, by the noble lady
who leaves her estate tenantless, by Richard Monday, the foundling who
dies in honor and wealth, and by the thrifty Widow Goo; and the general
portrayal of the rustic now being superseded by clearly drawn portraits
as for example, Isaac Ashford and the Widow Goo. "The Borough," which
followed shortly after in December, 1809, was a continuation of "The Parish
Register" and depicted the middle class on a yet wider plan.

The "Tales in Verse" were published September 14, 1812. The under-
lying theme of the "Letters" in "The Borough" and of almost all the "Tales"
was the question of happiness, approached in Crabbe's own way by the
"study of progressive corruption." The critics were more favorable to
the "Tales in Verse." Their heroes were less humble than those of "The
Village" and "The Borough" and included squires, literary aspirants,
clerks, well-to-do farmers, and successful tradesmen. For as Crabbe's
social experience broadened, he became in a position to enlarge the field
of his art: his villagers became the citizens of "The Borough," his
poor parishioners developed into the well--to-do Englishmen of the "Tales."

March 15, 1814 when the living at Muston was given to the Reverend
Henry Byron, cousin of Lord Byron, Crabbe exchanged Muston and Allington
for Trowbridge and Croxton. In the spring of 1814 he took up his duties
as cure of Trowbridge in Wiltshire where he was within reach of William
Lisle Bowles, of Lord Bath, and of other interesting people who came to
take the waters. 13

13 The Cambridge History of English Literature, ed. by A. W. Ward and
Begun at Trowbridge, the "Tales of the Hall" occupied Crabbe for two years. They appeared in the beginning of July, 1819 and were given the best reviews by the critics. Between 1822 and 1824 he tried to write another collection of tales. These were published two years after his death which occurred February 3, 1832, and were known as "Posthumous Tales."

Crabbe's tastes remained throughout his life essentially bourgeois; while his life and ideas were confined to a limited circle of experience. Crabbe travelled little even in his own country. With the exception of his stays in London and an occasional visit to Edinburgh, his life was spent mainly in hamlet and village. Thus his outlook on literature was necessarily provincial. In fact, the experience out of which he wrote "The Village" was limited in comparison with that of Goldsmith. His village was also much narrower in aspect than that of Goldsmith, for it was but a faithful representation of his own native place. If twenty-four years later, after a period of acquaintance with the happier aspects of country life in other parts of rich and prosperous Suffolk, Crabbe wrote in a much more cheerful vein, he was still stern and unremitting in his presentation of poverty, misery, and sin. In making her contrast between the disposition of Crabbe and Goldsmith, Julia Patton says of Crabbe:

His grave nature fitted him for sympathy with peace and quiet content and a sober sort of pleasure, but not with rollicking, mirthful revelry; it fitted him for sympathy with hardship and suffering, and deepened by his own abundant share in such experiences became capable of profound searching into the "pity and horror" of the commonplace lives of the commonplace people whom he knew.

14 Patton, op. cit., p. 96.
15 Ibid., pp. 96, 97.
While events were occurring that were changing forever the face of Europe, Crabbe was pursuing the even tenure of his clerical life as a village parson. With all the lovers of freedom he rejoiced at the fall of the Bastille, but during the years of excess following the Revolution, retained his sober good sense and fair-mindedness.

Crabbe's son vehemently protests against the rumor that had spread during his father's second residence at Suffolk that the poet was a Jacobin. He states that his father had not approved of the origin of the war then raging while he lived at Farham, Glemham, and Randham, but had actually given offense to those who held the opposite view. As to the misapplication of the term Jacobin the son writes:

None could have been less fitly applied to him at any period of his life. He was one of the innumerable good men who, indeed, hailed the beginning of the French Revolution, but who execrated its close. No syllable in approbation of Jacobins or Jacobinism ever came from his tongue or from his pen; and as to the "child and champion of Jacobinism," Napoleon had not long pursued his career of ambition, before my father was well convinced that to put him down was the first duty of every nation that wished to be happy and free.16

Compatible with his quiet life was the leisure of mind that enabled Crabbe to become the great character-student among his contemporaries. However, as Laura Wylie points out, this was bought at the price of an almost entire aloofness from the main intellectual currents of the time. Crabbe evidently took no part in the speculative activity that was all around and about him, among radicals and conservatives alike, who eagerly sought a social philosophy that would give a satisfactory solution to the problems that were arising under changed social conditions. Crabbe's

16 Life by his Son, p. 49.
attitude is especially notable in view of the fact that he published his first important poem eight years before the outbreak of the French Revo-

lution; and his last, four years after the fall of Napoleon; that he pos-

sessed the friendship of men like Burke and Johnson and had ready access to Jennys

on's early poems and Ebenezer Elliott's "Corn-Law Rhymes." But it was this isolation from the main thought of the times which gave Crabbe a freedom from an absorption into the ideas which were shaping the future, and made it possible for him rather to study at a close range "the human aspects of his own age and to picture those qualities of character and circumstance that were at once the outcome of past conditions and the material with which the future was to deal. 17

In his party affiliations also Crabbe was no politician. This is indicated in his foreword to "The Newspaper" where he disclaims all political purpose, since he is about to satirize the papers then caught in the embroilment of political issues.

That, in writing upon the subject of our Newspapers, I have avoided everything which might appear like the opinion of the party, is to be accounted for from the knowledge I have gained from them; since, the more of these Instructors a man reads, the less he will infallibly understand; nor would it have been very consistent in me, at the same time to censure their temerity and ignorance, and to adopt their rage. 18

Instead he will brook unpopularity and neglect by taking up "general themes."

Unheard we sing, when party-rage runs strong,
And mightier madness checks the flowing song:


or, should we force the peaceful Muse to wield
Her feeble arms amid the furious field,
Where party-pens a wordy war maintain,
Poor is her anger, and her friendship vain;
And oft the foes who feel her sting, combine,
Till serious vengeance pays an idle line;
For party-poets are like wasps, who dart
Death to themselves, and to their foes but smart. 19

Notwithstanding his seeming aristocratic and Tory leanings which he
showed in later days as the rector of a large town and a magistrate, his
motives were rather of gratitude and attachment, and he retained his
indifference as to questions that were purely partisan. In this regard
his son recounts having heard him declare that it was immaterial as to who
the representatives in Parliament were "provided they were men of integrity,
liberal education, and possessed an adequate stake in the country." 20

But Crabbe did see that the problem of adjusting a disrupted social
order remained a social one and not one to be solved by any particular
political party; and in this he was far ahead of his times. 21 Social
issues had always preoccupied Crabbe's attention rather than politics, for
to the poet there was no question of greater importance than the improvement
of the condition of the agricultural laborer. Imbued with such sentiments
Crabbe approved of the efforts of the philanthropists who tried to put more
"humanity" into the customs and laws of England.

In July, 1825 Crabbe was appointed Justice of the Peace, and he
availed himself of this opportunity to show his clemency towards the poor

19Ibid., 11. 3-13, p. 142.
20Life by his Son, p. 49.
21Clement Shorter, Immortal Memories (New York and London, 1907),
p. 123.
unfortunate. He was particularly interested in the efforts of Mrs. the 'tender and delicate' Quakeress, who in 1813 undertook to visit Newgate prison in order to reclaim its female inmates; just as he was especially interested in the question of prisons and almshouses. Again, some lines which Crabbe composed on hearing of Sir Samuel Romilly's suicide indicates in what high esteem he held this statesman who had unremittingly exerted himself in behalf of the reform of criminal law.22

This extreme sensitiveness to the sufferings of the lowly and outcast of society is also attested to by his son:

I think the "Highwayman's Tale," in the twenty-third letter (Prisons), is an instance in point. We see the virtuous young man, the happy lover, and the despairing felon in succession, and enough of each state to give full force to its constraints. I know that my father was himself much affected when he drew that picture, as he had been, by his own confession, twice before; once at a very early period (see the "Journal to Mira"), and again when he was describing the terrors of a poor distracted mind, in his Sir Rastace Grey. The tale of the Condemned Felon arose from the following circumstances:--while he was struggling with poverty in London, he had some reason to fear that the brother of a very intimate friend, a wild and desperate character, was in Newgate under condemnation for a robbery. Having obtained permission to see the man who bore the same name, a glance at once relieved his mind from the dread of beholding his friend's brother; but still he never forgot the being he then saw before him.23

But of the complexity of the rising problems of social maladjustment due to the large urban agglomerations and their shifting population of workers, Crabbe in reality knew scarcely nothing. His experiences must have shown him the antagonism between masters and men which class distinc-

23Life by his Son, p. 55.
tion was creating. He must have known also the evil influences on public morality that were being bred by the promiscuity of factory life. However, the England in Crabbe's mind was always that of his youth and middle age—the rural England prior to the 'industrial revolution,' and covered with farms rather than factories.

24

Huchon, op. cit., p. 463.
CHAPTER IV

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN THE POETRY OF CRABBE

By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not. 1

To understand the "cot" as Crabbe will paint it, it is necessary to be
acquainted with the overwhelming economic and social changes that were being
brought to bear upon the life and status of the agricultural laborer of
Crabbe's age.

At the time of the great Whig Revolution, England was chiefly a coun-
try of commons and of common fields; at the time of the Reform Bill,
England had become a country of individualistic agriculture and of large
enclosed farms. As important as this transformation in social structure
was, there is an insufficient recognition of it to-day, judging from the
little to be learned from the general histories of the age. That this
revolution brought about the rapid introduction of improvements in methods
of agriculture which enabled England to produce corn to feed her fast-
growing population is, it is true, made much of, but that the revolution
had moral and social consequences of no less importance is little stressed
by historians.

2J. L. Hammond and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer, 1760-1852
... was during the thirty-three years from 1780 to 1813, that the Industrial revolution expressed by new methods of farming made the far-reaching changes demanded and justified by national exigencies. As in trade, the capitalist manufacturer superseded the small master-workman and domestic craftsman, so in agriculture the individualist farmer acquired large holdings of land at the expense of the small occupants. Both manufacture and agriculture took on the proportions of big business, which gave to the laboring class without capital no opportunity of becoming masters or employers. The rapid growth of the manufacturing cities brought about a demand for bread and meat which both raised the rent of the landowners and swelled the profits of the farmers. During the Napoleonic wars, England by excluding practically all foreign corn, had maintained a high level of agricultural prices despite increased production due to improved methods. On the other hand, wages were not given a corresponding increase with the advance in the cost of the necessities of subsistence. All this, while it brought about an era of unexampled prosperity to landowners and tenant farmers, plunged the rest of the rural population into a condition characterized by unparalleled sufferings.  

This, in brief, in the general contour of the economic condition of the English farm laborer, the results of which Crabbé would show in many intimate scenes, stripped of all poetic glamour.

Is there a place, save one the poet sees,  
A land of love, of liberty and ease;  
Where labour wearies not, nor cares suppress

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Th' eternal flow of rustic happiness;
Where no proud mansion frowns in awful state,
Or keeps the sunshine from the cottage-gate;
Where young and old, intent on pleasure, throng,
And half men's life is holiday and song?
Vain search for scenes like these! no view appears,
By sighs unruffled or unstain'd by tears. 4

Previous to 1740 there had been little alteration in the character of English industry. Trade was still localized and insular as in Shakespeare's time, that is, the production and distribution of commodities in the town were regulated by trade guilds. The number of masters and apprentices, the wage scale, hours of labor, and consequent amount of production were all limited and controlled according to local demands. In 1735 John Watt invented the spinning machine, which within seventy-five years, brought about the principal transformation in rural life and customs. 5

After this time the very appearance of the medieval village gradually suffered an essential change. The early village offered no picture of beautiful hedges or picturesque stone walls, but lay almost entirely open without enclosing barriers. The principal edifice of the village was the manor house. Adjoining it, stretched the glebe of the person and home farms of the lord, which consisted of a continuous block of cultivated land with barns, stables, and dwellings for steward and manorial servants. Close by lay the village proper which consisted of farmhouses and cottages clustered unevenly along a single straggling road.

he fields offered a curious pattern of three or four large patches of land crossed by long strips of cultivated ground five or six yards in width, separated by narrower strips of grass. Within this lay an expanse of waste and a stretch of wood-land.  

Crawle gives this delightful picture of the life of a cottager who has been given an allotment to improve by his own industry.

To every cot the lord's indulgent mind
Has a small space for garden-ground assign'd;
Here--till return of morn dismiss'd the farm--
The careful peasant plies the sinewy arm,
Warm'd as he works, and easts his look around
On every foot of that improving ground:
It is his own he sees; his master's eye
Peers not about, some secret fault to spy;
Nor voice severe is there, nor censure known;--
Hope, profit, pleasure,—they are all his own.

But Crawle does not remain long in the sunlight of "fair scenes of peace," since "vice and misery now demand the song."

The enclosure movement which involved such tremendous economic and social changes was the "process by which the common field system was broken down and replaced by a system of unrestricted private use."  

Previous to this each landholder was in possession of a number of arable strips, widely separated from each other, and scattered all over the open fields of the village, so that he had a share in each of the various grades of land. The use of land for private cultivation was restricted to

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time when the strips were being prepared for crop or were actually under crop. After the harvest, these lands were turned over for the common grazing. Moreover, each year a half or third of this land lay fallow and formed part of the common pasture.  

Slater explains the two forms of enclosure practiced in England:

In the North and West generally, and also in the extreme South-east corner of England, an Act of Enclosure was generally the enclosure of a piece of waste land which had previously been used as common for pasture and fuel. The moor, waste or other tract of common land was divided among the owners of the neighboring properties, in some sort of approximation to the proportions according to which use had been made of it by their tenants while in a state of commonage. Such enclosure extended the acres of cultivation, and increased the local demand for labour and the local prosperity, while it frequently inflicted serious injuries upon cottagers and other poor tenants who had previously been able to keep cows, geese, or other animals, and to obtain their fuel from the common.  

The other type of enclosure more complicated, more important, and more frequently applied, comprised the engrossing of open-field townships in which both arable and meadow lands were subject to common rights as well as to permanent pasture. Of the four thousand Acts of Enclosure passed during the eighteenth century up to the General Enclosure Act of 1845, almost two-thirds were of this type. Enclosure in this case was disastrous to three classes: the small farmer, the cottager, and the matter. To these classes, the common rights of which they were deprived were worth more than anything which they received in return. The position of these classes was opposite that of the lord of the manor. To him was

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9 Ibid., p. 11.  
11 Ibid., p. 36.
given a certain quantity of land in lieu of his surface rights; the title-owner found his gain in increased rent; the large farmer found himself in possession of a wider field for his capital and enterprise. If the small farmer did receive his proper share in allotment, he was often forced to sell since he was unable to stand the expense of legal costs and the fencing of his property. Then, too, the use of fallow and stubble of which he was deprived often meant more to him than the value of his land for cultivation. The promoter of the General Enclosure Bill of 1796, had endeavored to secure an exemption from the expense of fencing for the poor, but the Select Committee did not approve of the proposal. As a result practically all cases of exemption were those of lords of the manor and tithe-owners. 12

The cottagers who did not own their own property received nothing at all for the common rights which they lost, since the compensation went to the owner of the cottages. Those who owned their cottages found their tiny allotment a poor exchange for the common rights which they had enjoyed. The squatters, although often called cottagers, in their legal and historical standing were of a different genre. The cottager was a part of the village; the squatter, an alien. He usually took up a place on the waste land, built a cottage, acquired a few geese, perhaps a horse or a cow and so established himself. Within twenty years he was usually permitted to buy his encroachment; after that time he was often allowed as in the case of cottagers to claim an allotment. The squatters, like the cottagers, 12Hammond, op. cit., pp. 73, 74.
lost their common rights. 13

If Crabbe is to give the true picture of the rural worker he must enter
the cottage of the laborer now deprived of independence and, in many
instances, even of the means of livelihood.

Go! if the peaceful cot your praises share,
Go, 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 hers, that matron pale, whose trembling hand,
Turns on the wretched heat th’ expiring brand! 14

The work of enclosure went on with increasing rapidity and with a
proportionate disadvantage to the humble people. During the age of Queen
Anne, Parliament had passed two private enclosure bills; during that of
George I, sixteen; of George II, two hundred and twenty-six; of George III,
three thousand five hundred and fifty-four. Or expressed in terms of
acreage—between 1702 and 1760 there were 246 acts affecting about 400,000
acres; between 1760 and 1810 there were approximately 2,200, affecting
more than 4,500,000 acres. According to this estimate, nearly twenty per
cent of the total acreage of England was enclosed during the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries. William Cobbett in his Rural Rides cites the
instance of one farmer in the North of Hampshire who had an aggregation of
eight thousand acres, or what had been previously forty farms. 15

While much is to be said of the greediness of landlords, dishonesty

13 Ibid., pp. 78, 79.
15 Patton, op. cit., p. 27.
16 William Cobbett, Rural Rides, ed. by Pitt Cobbett (2 vols., London,
1893), I, p. 56.
of commissioners, and the selfishness of public men all of whose policies militated against the welfare of the poor cottager and laborer, yet personal avarice cannot be given as the main issue in point. Land was brought into cultivation because it paid to do so. The addition of the cultivated area was necessary for increasing the supply of food, averting famine, and reducing prices. Economically enclosure can be justified; it is the process by which this was carried on and the social effects resulting from enclosure that must be deplored. Arthur Young who never faltered in his conviction that the open-field and commons had to be broken up, realized the loss of not attaching land to the home of the cottager, and in his tracts on Wastes deplored the effect of enclosure on the life of the rural worker.  

Richard Preston, Esq., M. P., in a "Review of the Present Ruined Condition of the Landed and Agricultural Interests" voiced the disaster that had befallen the agricultural workers of the country when he stated:

...a large portion of that industrious part of the community, the little farmers, (the favorites of the ancient system) with their large families (the best hope of the state, and most virtuous part of the community) are ceasing to be farmers for necessity, and becoming pensioners on the poor rate, while in some townships the persons who formerly contributed to the poor, are appealing for relief on the ground of their own poverty; and numbers of them obliged to abandon the cultivation of their farms, are become burdens on those parts of the parish which alone are cultivated.

It is then for the sake of truth that Crabbe dares to strip the life of the rustic of its Arcadian glossings, and to offend the demands of art

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17 Prothero, op. cit., p. 215.
good taste with lines such as these:

Between the road-way and the walls, offence
Invades all eyes and strikes on every sense:
There lie, obscene, at every open door,
Heaps from the hearth and sweepings from the floor;
And day by day the mingled masses grow,
As sinks are disembogued and kennels flow.

There hungry dogs from hungry children steal;
There pigs and chickens quarrel for a meal;
There dropsied infants wail without redress,
And all is want and woe and wretchedness. 19

Exaggerated as this description of Crabbe's may seem, Francis Heath
writing of the English peasantry as late as 1874 after years of attempted
legislation to bring relief to the rural laborer, gives equally sordid
pictures of rural life. According to Heath the most dire distress had for
years existed among the peasantry in each of the four great agricultural
counties of the West of England--Somersetshire, Dorsetshire, Wiltshire, and
Devonshire. The most extreme wretchedness was always thought to exist in
Dorsetshire. He so describes a cottage on the road from Weston-super-Mare
in the direction of Banwell:

Lying a little way back from the road, I descried what I
should have thought was a pigstye, but for the fact that a man
was at a kind of door, cutting up a dead sheep. I called him out
and questioned him concerning himself and his cottage. I was
then invited by him to visit the interior of the latter. Unless
I had seen it I could not have believed that such a place could
exist in England. I had to stoop very low to get inside this
habitation of an English agricultural labourer. The total length
of the miserable hut was about seven yards, its width three
yards, and its height, measured to the extreme point of the
thatched roof, about ten feet; the height of the walls, however,
not being so much as six feet. From the top of the walls, was

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20 Francis George Heath, The English Peasantry (London, 1874),
pp. 25, 26.
carried up to the point the thatched roof, there being no transverse beams of planks. In fact, had there been any, I could not have stood upright in this hovel. There was, of course, no second floor to the place, and the one tiny floor was divided in the middle into two compartments, each being about three yards square; one used for a bedroom and the other for a sitting-room. The ground was irregularly paved with large stones, with earth between and in their crevices. 21

So too must the labor of the rustic be stripped of its poetic softening and glamour and presented in harsh and realistic tones:

Go, 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 e'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. 22

In these lines Crabbe has again shown his power of minute observation and his ability to portray with the utmost sympathy the sufferings and ills of the poor. How graphically Crabbe has done this is shown by comparing his lines with the following description of Heath's written concerning the poor of Wrington who must pursue their daily labor in spite of the inclementies of the weather:

As another result of the limited cottage accommodation in Wrington, some of the labourers were daily obliged to walk two miles to their work from their homes, and of course the same distance in returning home after each day's work. It would not matter what the weather might be: the inevitable two miles' walk must be performed by these poor fellows, often through the pouring rain both going and coming. To farm labourers in general an umbrella is an unknown luxury. Very few families amongst the peasantry in the West of England could be found to possess one, even of the com-

21 Ibid., pp. 47, 48.
monest description. Of course it is often the case that farming operations are suspended during the very wet weather; in which case men who are employed by the day lose their day's wages altogether. But when the rain is not sufficiently heavy to stop work, the labourers are naturally glad enough to do what they can, and a two or three miles walk through a steady rain, not heavy enough perhaps to preclude altogether the much-thinly clad peasant, is, it will be admitted, a miserable prelude to a hard day's toil. Then at the close of the day's employment wet, tired, and hungry, there must be another weary plod, oftentimes through the rain again, and along deep-rutted miry roads, before the wretched cottage is reached, where a scanty meal of the coarsest and com-
monest kind is the sole reward at the best of times for the long hours of cheerless toil.

Synchronous with this movement which was transforming England from an agricultural to a manufacturing nation, and was bringing forth a new class, the proletariat, there took place a social upheaval in which the middle class backed by newly acquired wealth was struggling with the aristocracy for political and social supremacy.

In the "Gentleman Farmer," Crabbe gives in a series of miniature sketches, the changes that had been wrought in the station and condition of the farmer under the new regime. Crabbe describes his "gentleman farmer" as being "far different from that dull plodding tribe" without enlightenment, mutely following in the footsteps of their fathers who had never seen "corn sown by Drill, or thresh'd by a Machine."

He was of those whose skill assigns the prize
For creatures fed in pens, and stalls, and sties;
And who, in places where improvers meet,
To fill the land with fatness, had a seat;
Who in large mansions live like petty kings,
And seek of Farms but as amusing things;
Who plans encourage, and who journals keep,
And talk with lords about a breed of sheep. 24

23 Heath, op. cit., p. 51.
Crabbe then deftly shows the farmer who by his skill becomes the gentleman.

Two are the species in this genus known; 
One, who is rich in his profession grown, 
Who yearly finds his ample stores increase, 
From fortune's favours and a favouring lease; 
Who rides his hunter, who his house adorns; 
Who drinks his wine, and his disbursements scorns; 
Who freely lives, and loves to show he can-- 
This is the farmer made the gentleman. 25

The second is the gentleman born. To him the pursuit of agriculture is rather a fashionable and pleasant avocation.

The second species from the world is sent, 
Tir'd with its strife, or with his wealth content; 
In books and men beyond the former read, 
To Farming solely by a passion led, 
Or by a fashion; curious in his land; 
Now planning much, now changing what he plann'd; 
Pleads'd by each trial, not by failures ver'd, 
And ever certain to succeed the next; 
Quick to resolve, and easy to persuade-- 
This is the gentleman, a farmer made. 26

Materially there can be little doubt that the result of enclosure was a gain, since farming became, not only a means of subsistence to the individual families engaged in it, but a source of wealth to the nation at large. However, the results from a social standpoint were tragic, rather than gratifying. For instead of a harmonious society so graded as to afford no gaps between classes, there stood a capitalistic employing class and an antagonistic proletariat with all confidence and good-will diminished or destroyed, and aflame with suspicion, jealousy, and resentment. 27

25 Ibid., 11. 19-26, pp. 42, 43.
26 Ibid., 11. 27-36, p. 43.
In the village of the eighteenth century there had been practically
ladder of social ascent without any gaps between the lowest and highest
class of society. Between the wealthy yeoman and the gentleman there was
practically no line of social demarcation. The better situated copyholder,
the leaseholder for life, and the rich farmer were often classed with the
yeomen. Again those coming under the general designation of cottagers
might be either little farmers or day-laborers. The cottagers rented their
houses and a small piece of land as well, but ordinarily the social status
of the cottagers was defined by the tenancy of a house, and not by his
cultivation of a holding. Upon him devolved the necessity of working for
others. There were also little yeomen or copyholders in the same position
economically as that of the cottagers, although in a different one legally.
It was necessary for these also to be employed and thus the three lowest
classes formed the material for the agricultural laboring class. Their
sons and daughters were usually servants until they had amassed a suf-
ficient sum to become cottagers themselves.

Hasbach gives in minute detail the fundamental schematization of
village society:

Its great characteristic was completeness of gradation, social
and economic. The smaller gentry connected the great landlord
with the wealthy yeoman; and the yeomanry were intermediate between
the gentry and the large copyholders and farmers. These again
shaded into the little men, whether yeomen, copyholders, or lease-
holders. And as yet there was no proletarian class, solely de-
pendent on wages and in particular on money-wages, and expecting
to leave its children in the same position. The day-labourers as
a class had stock, land and pasture, or at least pasture; and the

28 Dr. W. Hasbach, A History of the English Agricultural Labourer,
Translated by Ruth Kenyon (London, 1908), pp. 76, 77.
farm-servants looked to attain a modest independence: though here and there in the south individual proletarians may already have existed. The small man had not yet lost his hope of rising in the world. Having saved something as servant or cottager, he could take a little farm, and so pass on to a large one, and by thrift and industry might perhaps attain the position of a small freeholder. 29

Between the cottagers and farmers the social difference in pre-
consumer times lay only in the farmer’s having larger property and his necessity of employing labor. He ate the same food with his laborers, worked with them, spoke their dialect, and shared their interests. Thus a man of enterprise and ability without leaving his own social class could rise to a higher position of affluence and comfort. 30

The administration of village affairs was also communal. At regular intervals during the year the commoners met to discharge affairs of public concern, such as the order or variation of crops. The various officials were then elected: the Foreman of the Fields who gave “notice when the fields were open for pasture;” a Field Jury which “settled disputes among individuals as to field concerns;” a common shepherd; a pinner who looked after stray cattle; the chimney peeper whose duty it was to prevent fires by keeping the chimneys of the village in proper condition; and sundry other minor officials. Every villager had the privilege, for payment in money or services, of bringing his share of grain, large or small, to be ground in the mill owned by the lord. Thus through a community of interests and responsibilities each villager might consider himself a shareholder in a great common farm. 31

29 Hasbach, op. cit., p. 103.
30 Patton, op. cit., p. 19.
31 Ibid., pp. 16, 17.
Nor was there any compensation for the loss of the various small offices, of that of the pinder or chimney peeper, for example, as there was in the instance of an aristocrat surrendering one of his sinecures. Thus George Selwyn, when deprived by Burke's Act of 1782 of his profitable title of Paymaster of the Works which he had held for twenty-seven years, was consoled in 1784 by Pitt with the lucrative title of Surveyor-General of Crown Lands. But "the pinder and the viewer received a different kind of justice."32

The English although naturally conservative were compelled by force of the changing economic conditions and the dominance of the commercial spirit to effect a sharper cleavage of society. As the town and small country villages decayed, and offered little or no means of livelihood to the rural worker, the more ambitious, hardy, and adventurous of the rural population were attracted cityward. And just as the city bourgeoisie was growing exceedingly wealthy, so the capitalistic farmers, those who had comprised the former rural middle class and were then too close in rank to the cottager, day laborer, or squatter to excite any profound jealousy on their part, were now through their wealth and pride emphasizing the distinction between their present and former selves.33

As for the nobility, the Restoration and the Revolution of '88 had already brought added power to them. The King dropped back into the position of a great lord among other great lords of almost equal power. Once infected with the virus of commercialism the nobility were in a position to

32Hammond, op. cit., p. 79.

33Richardson, op. cit., p. 278.
make the utmost use of their power: first in Parliament where they were absolute rulers; then through the municipalities, agricultural districts, universities, the Church, and the law courts. In possession of wealth as well as political power they allied themselves with speculators from the cities and prosperous yeomen and thus achieved as great a cleavage of society between landlords, gentleman and yeoman farmers, and the agricultural laborers as between mill-owner and his laboring clientele.  

Other factors which added to the complete break-up of the village communal society, besides those inherent in the process of engrossing and capitalistic farming, were the more luxurious standards of living adopted by the landlord class, together with the higher cost of provisions concomitant with enclosure. There were also the indirect taxes imposed to take care of the interest on the growing national debt due to trade wars and colonial wars. Moreover, it took a particular type of man to become a farmer now that husbandry had become both a science and a financial venture.  

The first to succumb to these forces were the smaller gentry. While a few succeeded in making their way into the upper ranks of the aquirearchy, the majority became clergymen, attorneys, shop-keepers, large farmers, army officers, and civil servants, or they sought in the East Indies the wealth they could not attain at home. Their estates in turn were bought by manufacturers, merchants, artisans, lawyers, and farmers.  

The large farmer became the synonym for prosperity, while money became the basis of social standing. In his portraits of "The Parish Register,"

34 Ibid., p. 277.  
35 Hasbach, op. cit., p. 104.
Crabbe speaks of the "farmers round," who well pleased with constant gain, flourish and complain." And again:

Proud was the Miller; money was his pride;
He rode to market, as our farmers ride.

Crabbe has the squire invite his friend to see his possessions: his
am of oxen and his "patent plough"

His land and lions, granary, barns, and crops,
His dairy, piggery, pinery, apples, hops. 36

The prevailing idea of pride in possession is consonant with Crabbe's
description of the merchant in the "Posthumous Tales."

... no wonder he has pride;
Then he parades around that vast estate,
As if he spurn'd the slaves that make him great;
Speaking in tone so high, as if the ware
Was nothing worth—at least not worth his care;
Yet should he not these bulky stores contam,
For all his glory he derives from them;
And, were it not for that neglected store,
This great rich man would be extremely poor. 37

If in the new caste the wealthy won consideration, so too the man
who was unable to lift himself up from his poverty and misery became the
butt of his more fortunate companions. And even among the ranks of the
cottagers there was drawn a line of distinction between those who made good
and those who were dependent upon wages. Among the former Crabbe depicts
the Widow Goe, that "active dame," who "talk'd of market-steeds and patent-
ploughs."

Famed ten miles round, and worthy all her fame;
She lost her husband when their loves were young,

38 Ibid., "Posthumous Tales," II, ll. 22-30, pp. 293, 294.
But kept her farm, her credit, and her tongue:
Full thirty years she ruled, with matchless skill,
With guiding judgment and resistless will;
Advice she scorn'd, rebellions she suppress'd,
And sons and servants bow'd at her behest.

Among the latter Crabbe places poor Barnaby, who having failed to rise
above his lowly environment, finds himself at the very nadir of social
recognition.

A Spalding once, and once a Barnaby--
A humble man is he, and, when they meet,
Our farmers find him on a distant seat;
There for their wit he serves a constant theme--
They praise his dairy, they extol his team,
They ask the price of each unrivall'd steed,
And whence his sheep, that admirable breed,
His thriving arts they beg he would explain,
And where he puts the money he must gain.
They have their daughters, but they fear their friend
Would think his sons too much would condescend;
They have their sons who would their fortunes try,
But fear his daughters will their suit deny.
So runs the joke, while James, with sigh profound,
And face of care, looks moveless on the ground;
His cares, his sighs, provoke the insult more.
And point the jest--for Barnaby is poor.

As intercommunication between the city and country progressed, roads
and canals were built or improved so that country squires, were enabled
to frequent the city to acquire its education, culture, and knowledge of
affairs. Soon city manners and notions began to penetrate country life and
customs. Thus the contrast between those who could afford the new comforts
and accomplishments and those who could not, became even more strongly
emphasized, especially since the lower classes despaired of ever attaining
them.

41 Richardson, op. cit., pp. 278, 279.
Where Plenty smiles—alas! she smiles for few—
And those who taste not, yet behold her store,
Are as the slaves who dig the golden ore,
The wealth around them makes them doubly poor. 42

Accordingly the cultural development of Crabbe's "gentleman farmer"
steps pace with his advancement in agricultural science.

Fix'd in his farm, he soon display'd his skill
In small-boned lambs, the horse-hoe, and the drill;
From these he rose to themes of nobler kind,
And show'd the riches of a fertile mind;
To all around their visits he repaid,
And thus his mansion and himself display'd.
His rooms were stately, rather fine than neat,
And guests politely call'd his house a seat:
At much expense was each apartment graced,
His taste was gorgeous, but it still was taste;
In full festoons the crimson curtains fell,
The sofas rose in bold elastic swell;
Mirrors in gilded frames display'd the tints
Of glowing carpets and of colour'd prints;
The weary eye saw every object shine, 43
And all was costly, fanciful, and fine.

The duty of the poor man was to adapt himself, his tastes, his habits,
and his ambitions to the arrangement of a society divinely organized by
Providence. The philosophy of the upper classes coincided with that of
Burke whereby "good order is the foundation of all good things," and
according to which the rich were to be benevolent and the poor to be
patient and industrious. 44

Crabbe, however, depicts the covetousness of the rich:

Thus, as their hours glide on, with pleasure fraught,
Their careful masters breed the painful thought;
Much in their mind they murmur and lament,

43 Ibid., II "Tales," III, ll. 49-64, p. 43.
44 Hammond, op. cit., p. 184-186.
That one fair day should be so idly spent;  
And think that heaven deals hard, to tithe their store  
And tax their time for preachers and the poor. 45

After all the cottagers were obnoxious to the rent-hungering landlord  
and the tithe-hungering person who with the large farmer wanted the whole  
common for their cattle; and again to those land-agents who found it  
troublesome to deal with a number of small tenants. 46 "After Adam Smith,  
their extinction was held to be a necessary condition of progress. Men  
hesitated at no means which could serve this end. One of their bitter  
enemies alleged that it was only just that the commons should be taken from  
them." 47

The poor themselves were subject to indignities by reason of their  
inferior position. Cobbett in his Sussex Journal: Lewis relates reading in  
a Register sent from Norfolk, of the farmers who put a bell around the  
laborer's neck:

Born in a farm-house, bred up at the plough tail, with a  
mock-frock on my back, taking great delight in all the pursuits  
of farmers, liking their society, and having amongst them my most  
estimated friends, it is natural that I should feel, and I do feel,  
uncommonly anxious to prevent, as far as I am able, that total  
ruin which now menaces them. But, the labourer, was I to have no  
feeling for him? Was he not my countryman too? And was I not to  
feel indignation against these farmers, who had had the hard-  
heartedness to put the bell round his neck, and thus wantonly  
insult and degrade the class to whose toils they owed their own  
ease? 48

46 Hasbach, op. cit., pp 99, 100.  
47 Observations on a Pamphlet entitled "An inquiry into the Advantages  
and Disadvantages resulting from Bills of Enclosure." Shrewsbury, 1781,  
pp. 4, f. Quoted by Hasbach, op. cit., pp. 100.  
48 Cobbett, Rural Rides, I, p. 90.
This story of Cobbett's, which perhaps may not be given credence in modern times, is based on the fact that the practice was alluded to by some of the Poor Law Commissioners, and on a motion in the Upper House for an inquiry into the state of the country, March 18, 1830, when the Duke of Richmond stated "that he had remonstrated against putting men to draught-work like horses in Sussex, with a man over them to drive them." 49

As the new grouping of rural society progressed the landlord began more and more to take a less important part in village life. Many villages were often left without a resident squire, owing to the concentration of the land into the hands of a few. In place of the ancient nobleman rooted to the soil, there was the large farmer, often of town origin, steeped in the town's tastes and customs, and imbued with a strong inclination for trade and profit rather than with an inherent tradition for sympathetic relations with those to whom he gave employment.

Another evil that worked great hardship upon the lower class was the absentee landlord system, since the tendency of the gentry was to absent themselves more and more and to give their lands over in long leases to men who were interested in agriculture more from the commercial standpoint. Great landlords often spent two-thirds of the year in London and various watering-places, or abroad. Meanwhile their estates were in the hands of agents who had no interest whatever in the welfare of the poor about the estates.

There is genuine irony in Crabbe's description of the "Lady of the

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49 Ibid., p. 91.
50 Hasbach, op. cit., p. 112.
Hall," who dwelt in town, but whose "noble bones were brought to the hall to rest." In drab and dismal colors he sketches the wreck and ruin that has befallen her estate; the mieries of her tenants unheard and unacknowledged; and above all, her own apathy towards the fulfillment of her obligations, content as she was to rely upon the sycophantic services of her agent.

In Town she dwelt;—forsaken stood the Hall:
Worms ate the floors, the tap'stry fled the wall;
No fire the kitchen's cheerless grate display'd;
No cheerful light the long-closed sash convey'd;
The crawling worm that turns a summer-fly,
Here spun his shroud and laid him up to die
The winter death:—upon the bed of state,
The bat shrill-shrieking wo'd his flickering mate;
To empty rooms the curious came no more,
From empty cellars turn'd the angry poor,
And surly beggars cursed the ever-bolted door.
To one small room the steward found his way,
Where tenants follow'd to complain and pay;
Yet no complaint before the Lady came,
The feeling servant spared the feeble dame;
Who saw her farms with his observing eyes,
And answer'd all requests with his replies.
She came not down, her falling groves to view;
Why should she know, what one so faithful knew?
Why come, from many clamorous tongues to hear,
When one so just might whisper in her ear?
Her oaks or acres, why with care explore;
Why learn the wants, the sufferings of the poor;
When one so knowing all their worth could trace,
And one so piteous govern'd in her place? 51

Crabbe discloses his sympathies for the old regime in his serene picture of the "ancient mansion," the fine old seat surrounded by venerable oaks.

There, with its tenantry about reside
A genuine English race, the country's pride.

The "Lady of the Mansion," conscious of the splendors of the past, laments that she is the last to continue the traditions of the venerable place. She administers her estate according to the "habits of the ancient kind." She is personally acquainted with the poor, the sick, the lame, the blind, and so prudent is she in administering her aid that she calls the assistance of the chaplain or the village doctor as the case requires. Moreover, she follows the ancient custom of requiring all at the Hall to attend church services. The servants, too, are kind, grave, proud, and courteous. They likewise share the blessings of her beneficence. The grey-haired butler, faithful to the end, "seems all that he sees--ours!--our house, our land, our walks, our trees!'"

The spoliation that follows is the work of some "genuine Son of Trade." The brook is deepened into a pond called a lake, the refreshing spring is gone and the land is ploughed; the rooks are shot, the trees felled, and the park contained by a new wall. All these alterations which convert the estate into a modern farm, in the eyes of Crabbe are wrought by the "rage of Taste" as "the rule and compass reign," and strip it of its dignity and grace.

Cobbett, like Crabbe, demanded a resident gentry living in sympathy with their tenants.

As an instance of the change which rural customs have undergone, since the hellish paper-system has been so furiously at work, I need only mention the fact, that four years ago, there were five packs of foxhounds and ten packs of harrriers kept within

53 Ibid., I, 114-159, pp. 290-292.
ten miles of Newbury; and that now, there is one of the former
(kept, too, by subscription) and none of the latter, except the
few couple of dogs kept by Mr. Budd! "So much the better," says
the shallow fool, who cannot duly estimate the difference between
a resident native gentry, attached to the soil, known to every
farmer and labourer from their childhood, frequently mixing
with them in those pursuits where all artificial distinctions
are lost, practising hospitality without ceremony, from habit and
not on calculation; and a gentry, only now-and-then residing at
all, having no relish for country-delights, foreign in their
manners, distant and haughty in their behaviour, looking to the
soil only for its rents, viewing it as a mere object of specu-
lation, unacquainted with its cultivators, despising them and
their pursuits, and relying, for influence, not upon the good
will of the vicinage, but upon the dread of their power.54

If the gulf between the rich and the poor was steadily growing
deeper and more unspeakable, the one mighty influence which might have
acted as a medium of interpretation and brought about an understanding
between the two classes—that of the Church—was wanting. On the contrary
the association of the Anglican Church with the governing class was never
more close and binding than it was during the eighteenth century. This
was to be said of the lower clergy as well as of the bishops, for "as
the cure's windows looked to the village, the parson's windows looked to
the hall." When the parson's circumstances enabled him to live like the
squire, he, too, rode to hounds and often treated the duties of his
profession as trifling incidents interrupting his normal life of social
pleasure.55

Crabbe then, opposing "the 'holy stranger' to the dismal walls of
the poorhouse" to Goldsmith's sainted parson, incidentally gives a picture
of the priest in keeping with the spirit and practice of the clergy

54Cobbett, Rural Rides, I, pp. 45, 46.
55Hammond, op. cit., p. 192.
He, "passing rich with forty pounds a year?"
Ah! no; a shepherd of a different stock,
And far unlike him, feeds this little flock:
A jovial youth, who thinks his Sunday's task
As much as God or man can fairly ask;
The rest he gives to loves and labours light,
To fields the morning, and to feasts the night;
None better skill'd the noisy pack to guide,
To urge their chase, to cheer them or to chide;
A sportsman keen, he shoots through half the day,
And, skill'd at whist, devotes the night to play.
Then while such honours bloom around his head,
Shall he sit sadly by the sickman's bed,
To raise the hope he feels not, or with zeal 56
To combat fears that e'en the pious feel?

Again, Crabbe unsparingly pictures this apathetic type of country

Fiddling and fishing were his arts; at times
He alter'd sermons, and he aim'd at rhymes;
And his fair friends not yet intent on cards,
Oft he amused with riddles and charades;
Mild were his doctrines, and not one discourse
But gain'd in softness what it lost in force:
Kind his opinions; he would not receive
An ill report, nor evil act believe;
"If true, 'twas wrong; but blemish great or smally?
"Have all mankind; yea, sinners are we all."

The Methodist movement had evoked some stimulus to zeal, but the
Church in general was an easy-going society, conforming itself with the
manner of thought and mode of life of the rich.

To what famed college we our Vicar owe,
To what fair county, let historians show.
Few now remember when the mild young man,
Ruddy and fair, his Sunday-task began;
Few live to speak of that soft soothing look
He cast around, as he prepared his book;

But nothing hopeless of applause, the while;  
And when he finished, his corrected pride  
Felt the desert, and yet the praise denied.  
Thus he his race began, and to the end  
His constant care was, no man to offend;  
No haughty virtues stirr'd his peaceful mind,  
Nor urged the priest to leave the flock behind;  
He was his Master's soldier, but not one  
To lead an army of his martyrs on.

"There was nothing to encourage self-sacrifice," write Abbey and Overton, "and self-sacrifice is essential to promote a healthy spiritual life. The Church partook of the general sordidness of the age; it was an age of great material prosperity, but of moral and spiritual poverty, such as hardly finds a parallel in our history. Mercenary motives were too predominant everywhere, in the Church as well as in the State." Moreover, the Church was a vast and powerful political mechanism, the power of which was indispensable to the most popular statesmen. In the Upper House of the Legislature the bishops exercised their sway; in the Lower House, the clergy used their influence. These political machinations of the Church, while they made of her a power to be recognized and courted, were detrimental to her spiritual character.

Among the evils existing in the Church of England and responsible for many of the disorders, among both the higher and lower clergy, was the practice of accepting pluralities accompanied by non-residence. Cobbett stated that of the eleven thousand livings in England and Wales, one-half were without resident incumbents. Archbishop Secker of the diocese of

58Ibid., 11. 5-20, p. 304.  
60Ibid., p. 282.  
of Canterbury in 1758, gave this indifference of the non-resident clergy-
men to the spiritual welfare of their parishioners as the provoking cause
of the rise of the new sect [Methodism] which advocated the strictest
piety. When the incumbent of a parish was a non-resident, very frequently
there was not even a resident curate to see to the wants of the parish.

However, the contributing cause that was at the root of much of this
evil was clerical poverty, due to the concentration of many benefices in a
single hand. There was at this time a wide gap between the different
classes of clergy. Those of eminence or good fortune took their rank with
the highest nobles of the land, but the bulk of the country curates and
poor incumbents rarely rose above the rank of the small farmer. Many
lived and died without rising above the position of a stipendiary curate
at the rate of thirty pounds a year. Yet according to Cobbett, there
were bishoprics worth from ten to forty thousand pounds a year.

Crabbe does not fail to give a picture of the destitution of the
poor curate:

Behold his dwelling; this poor hut he hires,
Where he from view, though not from want, retires;
Where four fair daughters, and five sorrowing sons,
Partake his sufferings, and dismiss his woes.
All join their efforts, and in patience learn
To want the comforts they aspire to earn.

Abbey and Overton offer a detailed view of the situation:

When Collins complained of the expense of maintaining so
large a body of clergy, Bentley replied that 'the Parliamentary

62 Abbey and Overton, op. cit., pp. 286, 287.
63 Cobbett, Two-Penny Trash, p. 162.
accounts showed that six thousand of the clergy had, at a middle rate, not 50 l. a year; and he then added that argument which was subsequently used with so much effect by Sydney Smith—viz. that 'talent is attracted into the church by a few great prizes.' Some years later, when Lord Shelburne asked Bishop Watson 'if nothing could be gotten from the Church towards alleviating the burdens of the State,' the Bishop replied that 'the whole revenue of the Church would not yield 150 l. a year to each clergyman, and therefore a diminution would be inexpedient unless the Government would be contented to have a beggarly and illiterate clergy, which no wise minister would wish.' He might have added that, even as it was, a great number of clergy, if not 'beggarly and illiterate,' were either weighed down with the pressure of poverty, or, to escape it, were obliged to have recourse to occupations which were more fit for illiterate men.65

Cobbett also raised an outcry against these conditions:

The other class of persons, to whom I have alluded, as having taxes bestowed on them, are the poor clergy. Not of course of the Church as by Law established, to be sure, you will say! Yes, Gentlemen, even to the poor clergy of the established Church. We know well how rich that Church is: we know well how many millions it annually receives; we know how opulent are the bishops, how rich they die; how rich, in short, a body it is. And yet fifteen hundred thousand pounds have, within the same number of years, been given out of the taxes, partly raised on the labourers, for the relief of the poor clergy of that church, while it is notorious that the livings are given in numerous cases by twos and threes to the same person, and while a clamour, enough to make the sky ring, is made about what is given in the shape of relief to the labouring classes.66

Here penury was not the worst evil attendant upon the multiplication of needy clergy, which was the result of this undue accumulation of the Church's property and revenue in the hands of the few. An exceptionally large class at the close of the seventeenth and during the first half of the eighteenth century supported themselves as hangers-on to the families of the great. Even the ill-paid curate when resident and conscientious,

65Abbey and Overton, op. cit., pp. 287, 288.
66Cobbett, Rural Rides, I, pp. 159, 140.
like the pluralist rector, moved in the circle of the rich. He was in the
world, though not of it. All his hopes hung on the squire. To have taken
the side of the poor against him would have meant ruin, and the English
church was not a nursery of this kind of heroism. "It is significant that
almost every eighteenth-century novelist puts at least one sycophantic
person in his or her gallery of portraits." 67

Crabbe in his "Tales" has the squire instruct the young priest in the
art of becoming a successful pastor. For the rich the squire recommends
generalities and abstractions so that offence be given to none. The poor
are to be soothed into content by arousing their imaginative faculties as
to the good they possess and the evils they forego.

"Yet of our duties you must something tell,
And must at times on sin and frailty dwell;
Here you may preach in easy, flowing style,
How errors cloud us, and how sins defile;
Here bring persuasive tropes and figures forth:
To show the poor that wealth is nothing worth;
That they, in fact, possess an ample share
Of the world's good, and feel not half its care;
Give them this comfort, and, indeed, my gilt
In its full vigour causes me some doubt;
And let it always, for your zeal, suffice,
That vice you combat, in the abstract—Yvea;
The very captious will be quiet then;
We all confess we are offending men.
In lashing sin, of every stroke beware,
For sinners feel, and sinners you must spare;
In general satire, every man perceives
A slight attack, yet neither fears nor grieves;
But name th' offence, and you absolve the rest,
And point the dagger at a single breast."

But there are sinners whose sensibilities need never be spared; indeed
the application of the lash upon these but flatters the self-sufficient

67Hammond, op. cit., p. 197.
"Yet there are sinners of a class so low,
"That you with safety may the lash bestow.
"Poachers, and drunkards, idle rogues, who feed
"At others' cost, a mark'd correction need;
"And all the better sort, who see your zeal,
"Will love and reverence for their pastor feel;
"Reverence for one who can inflict the smart,
"And love, because he deals them not a part."

The pastor then must follow the broad and easy path of compromise.

"Remember well what love and age advise;
"A quiet rector is a parish prize,
"Who in his learning has a decent pride;
"Who to his people is a gentle guide;
"Who only hints at failings that he sees;
"And finds the way to fame and profit is to please." 68

The problem of tithes is another that found its way into difficulties
of Church support. Tithes at the time of Grabe were defined as 'the
tenth part of the increase yearly arising and renewing from the profits
of lands, the stock upon lands, and personal industry of the inhabitants.'

Tithes were generally classed as great tithes and small tithes; the first
or praedial tithes consisted of crops and woods; the small or personal
tithes were made up of a tenth part of the profits of certain trades and
fisheries. Usually the great tithes fell to the rector and the small
tithes to the vicar. Tithes in England were earlier than the monarchy,
their payment dating from the end of the eighth century. Cobbett, severe
as he was in the matter of taxes for the benefit of the clergy, in his
"Call Upon the Clergy," pointed out the fallacy of considering tithes a
tax upon the poor. He reminded those of this opinion that tithes should

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69 Cobbett, Rural Ridés, I, p. 135.
be put upon the level of taxes, and that the mass of the people could not suffer since the rent of the landlord was divided with the person.

Crabbe's solution to this problem is a simple one. It may be difficult for the poor man to make up his required portion, but his legal obligation is light when compared with the requirements of duty and gratitude. In the mind of Crabbe the laborer is worthy of his hire:

Ask you what lands our Pastor tithes?—Alas! But few our acres, and but short our grass; In some fat pastures of the rich, indeed, May roll the single cow or favorite steed; Who, stable-fed, is here for pleasure seen, His sleek sides bathing in the dewy green; But these our hilly heath and common wide, Yield a slight portion for the parish-guide; No crops luxuriant in our borders stand, For here we plough the ocean, not the land; Still reason wills that we our pastor pay, And custom does it on a certain day. Much is the duty, small the legal due, And this with grateful minds we keep in view; Each makes his offering, some by habit led, Some by the thought, that all men must be fed; Duty and love, and piety and pride, Have each their force, and for the priest provide.

70 Ibid., pp. 133, 134.
CHAPTER V

CRABBE AND THE DEPENDENT POOR

One of the immediate results of the upheaval in rural conditions due to the enclosure of small farms and the shifting of industry from the country to urban factories, was the scarcity of profitable employment for the laborer. Crabbe has these economic ills in mind when he pens these brief lines:

Whence all these woes?—From want of virtuous will,
Of honest shame, or time-improving skill;
From want of care t'employ the vacant hour,
And want of ev'ry kind but want of power.  

But Crabbe's pictures of distress and misery are no mere hyperboles and are in keeping with those given by England's great parliamentarians of his age. W. Jacob, Esq., F. R. S., in his "Inquiry into the Causes of Agricultural Distress," showed the evils which had fallen on the laboring poor, despite the years of seeming moderate prosperity. He wrote:

At no period in the memory of man, has there been so great a portion of industrious agricultural labourers absolutely destitute as at the present moment. They cannot procure employment, and parochial relief is doled out with a scanty hand, by those who want even the pittance that is bestowed to pay the few workmen they are obliged to employ; This evil is not likely to be lessened, but, on the contrary, must increase as the capital of the farmers approaches nearer to annihilation. To them it will be of no consequence that labour is cheap, and corn

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scarce. The capital, which by setting in motion the labour, would increase the quantity of corn grown, is departed, and a long period must elapse before it can be again collected.

According to Slater, much of the great decline in the prosperity of the laborer towards the end of the eighteenth century was due to the inventions of Hargreave's jenny in 1764 and Crompton's mule in 1779. Spinning had been an important bye industry in the homes of the poor. So important was this that the Rutlandshire magistrates as late as 1793 refused poor relief to those families in which the children did not show a proficiency in spinning according to their ages. With the invention of machinery the industry applied to wool, linen, silk, as well as cotton was carried to the factory into the cities. Thus it was that the families of the laborer had to rely upon their agricultural earnings alone. In a considerable number of villages it happened that the agricultural and industrial changes were simultaneous, with the result that the laborer lost the profit of his spinning wheel, together with his rights of common, of pasture and fuel, and, due to engrossing, the opportunity of renting a small piece of land. At this time, too, the scale of wages had failed to rise in proportion to the increase in the price of food.

At the close of the Napoleonic wars the industrial depression again had its reaction on the agricultural situation. The immediate effects of the depressed condition in agriculture was the demand for permanent labor, at a lower rate of wages. The farmer was compelled to lessen his cost of

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3 Slater, op. cit., pp. 43, 44.
production or lapse into bankruptcy. The Poor Laws as administered between 1813 and 1814 were to his advantage, in that they enabled him to reduce his wages to the lowest point. This gave him an inexhaustible supply of cheap labor, for what he did not pay was supplied by the parish which was bound to care for its able-bodied poor. Permanent and well paid labor could not under these conditions be found.  

Under Gilbert's Act passed in 1782, outdoor relief for the able-bodied poor was compulsory on the overseers. The oldest system was that of the Roundmen, whereby men out of regular work went from house to house offering their services. If employed they were paid partly by the householder and partly by the parish; if not employed, they were thrown on the parish.

In time the Roundman system itself was split into three subspecies: the ordinary system, the special, and the pauper auction. The first and most usual method was that the parish sold to the farmer the labor of the pauper for a certain sum and made up the difference in wage from the parish fund according to the allowance which the scale based on the price of bread and the size of his family, allotted him. By the second method the parish paid the pauper. Under the auction system, the unemployed including the aged and infirm, were put up at the weekly or monthly auction and awarded to the highest bidder.

Crabbe gives a pathetic picture in the character of the old man once skilled in his rustic trade, now in his old age passed from one employer to

4Prothero, op. cit., p. 326.
5Ibid., p. 327.
6Hasbach, op. cit., p. 188.
Alternate masters now their slave command,
Urge the weak efforts of his feeble hand;
And, when his age attempts its task in vain,
With ruthless taunts, of lazy poor complain.

Again, Crabbe ever solicitous for the down-trodden has not failed to
see in their sordid colors, the scenes of misery prevalent among the poor children who were farmed out as apprentices. The horrors of the sweating system with its piece-work, long hours, and unsanitary herding together of children which killed them off or turned them out stunted in body, mind, and soul, have not received the attention of Crabbe. Nor does he portray the harm done to adult labor contingent upon keeping all wages down to the minimum by reason of the competition between adult and child labor. This is no doubt due to Crabbe's concentration upon the evils of the rural rather than the urban poor.

The story of Peter Grimes, horrible and brutal as it may seem, is not fictitious. Crabbe's son George tells that the original of Peter Grimes was an old fisherman of Aldborough at the time when the poet was practicing there as a surgeon. Grimes had had a number of these apprentices from London, together with a sum of money with each. The boys all disappeared in succession in a manner that excited strong suspicion, until finally the inhabitants warned the man that if another disappeared they would have him charged with their murder.

Peter had heard there were in London then—
Still have they being!—workhouse clearing men,

8 Life by his Son, pp. 246-247.
Who, undisturb'd by feelings just or kind,  
Would parish-boys to needy tradesmen bind;  
They in their want a trifling sum would take,  
And toiling slaves of piteous orphans make.

Such Peter sought, and when a lad was found,  
The sum was dealt him, and the slave was bound.  
Some few in town observed in Peter's trap  
A boy, with jacket blue and woolen cap;  
But none inquired how Peter used the rope,  
Or what the bruise, that made the stripling stoop;  
None could the ridges on his back behold,  
None sought him shivering in the winter's cold;  
None put the question,—"Peter, dost thou give  
"The boy his food?—What, man! the lad must live:  
"Consider, Peter, let the child have bread,  
"He'll serve thee better if he's stroked and fed."

Sir Samuel Romilly in the "Diary of His Parliamentary Life," has  
given instances of this evil which have come under his personal observation.  
For example, he refers to the bill proposed by Mr. Bootle to remedy the  "binding of children apprentices, by parishes to which the children belong  
and where their parents are resident."  

This is an evil which has grown of late years to a very  
great magnitude. It is a very common practice with the great  
populous parishes in London to bind children in large numbers to  
the proprietors of cotton-mills in Lancashire and Yorkshire, at  
a distance of 200 miles. The children, who are sent off by  
waggon-loads at a time, are as much lost forever to their parents  
as if they were shipped off for the West Indies. The parishes  
that bind them, by procuring a settlement for the children at  
the end of forty days, get rid of them forever; and the poor  
children have not a human being in the world to whom they can  
look up for redress against the wrongs they may be exposed to  
from these wholesale dealers in them, whose object it is to get  
every thing that they can possibly wring from their excessive  
labour and fatigue. Instances have come to my knowledge of the  
anguish sustained by poor persons, on having their children thus  
forever torn from them, which could not have failed to excite a  
strong interest in their favour, if they were more generally  
known.  

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10 Sir Samuel Romilly, Memoirs of the Life of, ed. by his Sons (2vols.,  
Romilly has cited instances which have also occurred where masters, with two hundred apprentices, on becoming bankrupts were obliged to sell their apprentices to the poor house of the parish in which the factory had been established, there to be supported by those who believed themselves to fraudulently imposed upon. Another evil which Romilly has pointed out existing, was the payment of premiums which were given with the apprentices until some part of the term for which they were bound elapsed. He states that there were instances (and not very few) in the criminal trials where masters had murdered their apprentices that they might receive new premiums with new apprentices. 11

If unemployment and insufficient wages were the causes of much of destitution of the poor, there was an immediate cause for the lack of food inherent in the practice of enclosure itself.

"Our Poor, how feed we?"—To the most we give
A weekly dole, and at their homes they live;—
To the low roof, they see a kind of home,
A social people whom they've ever known,
With their own thoughts, and manners like their own. 12

In these lines Crabbe has sketched with a few bold strokes two of the weighty problems of parish relief: food and housing for the dependent poor.

An extract from the Oxford Journal, Saturday, February 11, 1815, gave as the set of the evils demanding poor relief, the practice of engrossing small tuns and allotments:

It is computed that since the year 1760, there have been upwards of forty thousand small farms monopolized and consolidated into large ones, and as many cottages annihilated: this is the chief cause of the dearness of provisions, and the great increase of the

11 Romilly, op. cit., pp. 373, 374.
Poor Rates. The small farms, besides corn, supplied the weekly markets with provisions, butter, cheese, and a small stock of poultry; and the cottager, by his daily labour and the produce of his cottage, kept his family from becoming burdensome to the parish.

In the unenclosed village, the normal laborer, not dependent upon his wages alone, was able to make up his livelihood from several sources. He gathered his fering from the wasteland; he kept a cow or pig on the common pasture; raised his small crop on his allotted strip in the common fields; and besides his earnings as a laborer, he had the added revenue of the industry plied at home by his wife and children. Another right removed from the laborer which had been his down through the ages, even from Biblical times, was the right to glean. This loss to the laborer and his family was considerable.

With the rise in prices in the "nineties" social conditions became so distressing that Parliament began to take an active interest in the problem. Agricultural writers both for and against enclosure began to offer various means of reform. Social writers, too, began to take their part in urging measures for betterment. In 1795 the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor began to give local and partial relief. At this time the popular remedy offered by the upper classes was that of diet reform.

To those, who regaling in luxury know not the insipid immutritious food of the poor, Crabbe addresses a reproach:

Or will you praise that homely, healthy fare,

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14 Hammond, op. cit., pp. 82, 83.
15 Patton, op. cit., p. 40.
Plentiful and plain, that happy peasants share?
Oh! trifle not with wants you cannot feel,
Nor mock the misery of a stinted meal—
Homely, not wholesome; plain, not plenteous; such
As you who praise would never deign to touch.

There were many who thought the poor improvident and unthrifty; and
that a judicious change in diet would enable the poor to adjust themselves
to a lower scale of wages. However, the poor failed to give up what Pitt
called 'groundless prejudices' to a mixed bread of barley, rye, and wheat
and stubbornly clung to their wheaten bread. The southern laborer went
without milk not from choice but from necessity, since he was no longer
able to keep his cow, which had provided his family with cheese before

To this scarcity of milk was attributed the habit of tea-drinking
which had taken hold of the lower classes. The use of tea was described as
a "vain, present attempt to supply to the spirits of the mind what is
wanting to the strength of the body; but in its lasting effects impairing
the nerves, and therein equally injuring both the body and the mind." 18
But the tea of the poor was not fine kyser, sweetened with refined sugar,
and softened with cream, but spring water colored with a few leaves of
the lowest-priced tea and sweetened with brown sugar. Yet they found this
tea more tasty than barley water.

What has been said regarding milk was equally true of meat which had

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cit., p. 104.
19 Hammond, op. cit., p. 105.
also risen considerably in price. The laborer used to raise and kill his beasts. The necessity of buying flour increased his difficulty in keeping his stock, for when he carried his own corn to the miller he received back the bran with which to feed his stock. 20

To the misery caused by insufficient food and clothing must be added the lack of fuel. It was suggested by one of the writers in the *Annals of Agriculture* that the poor resort to the stables for warmth as they did in the Duchy of Milan. He offered this as a cheap way of providing warmth so that more could escape death from freezing. This plan, however, did not solve the problem of fuel for cooking purposes, and children tore down hedges and trees to get wood.

In 1795 when the price of provisions soared to famine heights, a scale of allowances was established by the Justices of Berkshire at a meeting held at Speenhamland, whereby wages were supplemented by allowances from the rates. This system known as the Speenhamland system and eventually most pernicious in its effects on the poor, was based on a scale proportionate to the price of bread and the size of the family. From the wages of the unmarried men which were reckoned at zero, the scale ascended, fluctuating according to the cost of the quarter loaf and the number of children of the married laborer. Thus able-bodied men whether in or out of work, were dependent upon these rates. All this had a tendency to keep wages down, by making the needs of the unmarried men the important factor, and discouraged early, improvident marriages. 22

22 Prothor, *op. cit.*, p. 327.
Pitt Cobbett, in his annotations of *Rural Rides* calls attention to the evils that were besetting the lower classes through the methods of poor relief legislated in their behalf:

The 36th Geo. III., c. 10 & 23 (1796) extended the application of relief, and allowed relief to be given in aid of wages. The complaint was justly made that the Poor Laws were used as a mode for payment of wages. In 1801 the Poor Rates amounted to £4,000, 000. In 1820 they had risen to £7,330,254. The dependence, industry, and honesty of the labouring classes were being gradually undermined. A commission to inquire into the operation of the Poor Laws was appointed in 1832. The evidence brought before this commission revealed a disastrous state of things. Farmers turned off their men, and then took them back from the parish, at reduced wages paid out of the rates. There were many parishes in which every labourer was a pauper, paid more for idleness than he could get for labour, paid more if he took a pauper wife, and still more for every pauper child. The modest girl might starve, while her shameless neighbour received one shilling per week and sixpence for every illegitimate child. Paupers married at seventeen or eighteen, and claimed parish relief the day after marriage. 23

Due to the prevalence of giving poor relief, the distinction between the vagrant, the rogue, and the pauper was often so slight that often unworthy persons were the recipients of the poor-rate. The State then enacted a law making it necessary for those entitled to relief to wear a uniform and to wear on the right shoulder-sleeve a badge consisting of the initial letter of their parish. Even then there were those, who on being refused aid from the overseers of the public poor-rates who knew the history of their characters, made a further attempt to secure aid by applying to a justice. This practice called for more legislation known as The Work-house Test," which forbade the justices to administer relief except to those who could produce sworn evidence of their claims. 24

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But Crabbe was ever conscious of the sufferings of the worthy poor, and in the following lines portrays the shame endured by those marked with the humiliating insignia of poverty.

See yonder man, who walks apart, and seems
Wrapp'd in some fond and visionary schemes;
Who looks uneasy, as a man oppress'd
By that large copper badge upon his breast,
His painful shame, his self-tormenting pride,
Would all that's visible in bounty hide;
And much his anxious breast is swell'd with woe.
That where he goes his badge must with him go.

Another illegal method of receiving relief was also prevalent. The laborer was not free to roam over England and seek his fortune in another parish than his own, for he was found under the law of settlement and enclosure. If the law of enclosure had removed his possibility of finding a livelihood in his village, the law of settlement forbade his leaving the village. He was entitled to relief from one parish only, that is the one in which he or she had a settlement. Often it was difficult to decide to which parish a person belonged and this gave rise to endless litigation. Crabbe in his delineation of the lawyers "who to contention as to trade are led," and who find "bliss and bread" in "dispute and strife," gives a very apt picture of this struggle that went on between parish and parish. The wily lawyer raises this legal question:

There is a doubtful pauper, and we think
'Tis not with us to give him meat and drink;
There is a child; and 'tis not mighty clear
Whether the mother lived with us a year;
A road's indented, and our seniors doubt

26 Hammond, op. cit., p. 88.
If in our proper boundary or without;  
But what says our attorney? He, our friend  
Tells us 'tis just and manly to contend.  

"What! to a neighbouring parish yield your cause,  
"While you have money, and the nation laws?  
"What! lose without a trial, that which tried,  
"May--nay it must-- be given on our side?  
"All men of spirit would contend; such men  
"Than lose a pound would rather hazard ten.  
"What! be imposed on? No! a British soul  
"Despises imposition, hates control;  
"The law is open; let them, if they dare,  
"Support their cause; the Borough need not spare.  
"All I advise is vigour and good-will:  
"Is it agreed then?--Shall I file a bill?"  

The Settlement Act owed its foundation to an enactment made during the reign of Charles II. in 1662. It was deemed necessary since poor people going from one parish to another would settle in those parishes where there was the best stock, the largest commons or wastes, and the best woods. When they had consumed what the parish had to offer, they would move on to another very much like rogues or vagabonds. By this Act the newcomer could be ejected by order of the magistrates upon complaint from the parish officers within forty days of his arrival and sent back to the parish where he or she was last legally settled. The poor from one parish were sometimes smuggled into another which also gave rise to fierce quarrels. Modifications of the law were made until 1795 a laborer could leave only at the invitation of another village and had to bear a certificate from his own village.

The Reverend George Glover in his "Observations on the Present State of Pauperism" has given an adequate summary of these various problems.

28 Hammond, op. cit., pp. 88, 89.
which Crabbe has inerrantly depicted with but a few strokes of his facile pen.

The first and most painful, as well as alarming feature of our present situation is the degraded and discontented character of our poor: that inroads, which has been made upon our ancient national spirit and independence, and the consequent waste of national industry, which have already divided us into two classes, not of rich and poor, for these are now-a-days relative terms but little understood and often misapplied, but into payers and receivers of parochial aid; which have divested pauperism of all shame and disgrace, and led the poor to look upon the parish as a ready and always available substitute for their own exertions; which have destroyed every incentive to prudent forecast, and taught fraud and importunity to supply the place of that energy of mind as well as body, which could once animate them to search and to find employment in one direction when it failed in another, and inspire them with courage and fortitude to grapple with temporary difficulties and extraordinary pressure by an extraordinary degree of diligence and activity, and by a contented submission to temporary privations; which have rendered necessary all your cruel and impolitic laws of settlement and removal; which are perpetually giving rise to parish squabbles between the overseer and the pauper, to the eternal interference of the magistrate in all the concerns of the poor, and to the multiplicity of petty appeals to the court of quarter session, the legal expenses alone of which are now probably very little short of half a million a year.29

There is no one theme that Crabbe has handled more sympathetically and understandingly than that of the sufferings of the poor in workhouses and almshouses. For Crabbe is not content with merely giving motley pictures of evils which actually existed in the prisons and almshouses of his day, but he probes the very hearts of the aged and unfortunate and brings to the consideration of his readers the sorrows of those whose poverty is their worst and only crime.

From an Act passed in 1722 the establishment of workhouses, 'houses

Kind restraint,' as they were called by the poet Dyer, was made easy.

With poorhouses supplying only shelter, and workhouses which treated poverty rather as a crime than as a misfortune were hated by the poor, who clung to their independence with stubborn pride. These are the "cold parities of man to man" of which Crabbe writes:

Whose laws indeed for ruin'd age provide,
And strong compulsion plucks the scrap from pride;
But still that scrap is bought with many a sigh, 31
And pride embitters what it can't deny.

Down to 1722 parishes that wished to build a workhouse had to secure special Act of Parliament. In 1722, however, a great impetus was given to the workhouse movement by an act which authorised overseers, with consent of the vestry, to start workhouses or to farm out the poor, and also authorised parishes to join together for the purpose. So rapidly did the building of workhouses progress in consequence of this Act, that by 1732 there were said to be sixty in the country and about fifty in the metropolis. Later in the parishes which had adopted Gilbert's Act, high wrought rather to provide labor for the poor, the workhouse was reserved for the aged, for the infirm, and young children. 32

According to Slater, much interesting evidence regarding workhouses is to be found in the reports of the Assistant Commissioners. In London, already at the beginning of the eighteenth century, the workhouse system was thoroughly organized. It was the object of every parish to get its poor into neighboring establishments. He gives as a typical case the

50-Patton, op. cit., p. 30
52-Hammond, op. cit., p. 122.
parish of Holborn which had a workhouse accommodating 460 inmates. Children under fifteen were committed to the care of a contractor named Barnet, who was paid 3s. 4d. per week for each child. His profit consisted in that which he saved from this amount, augmented by the work which he could compel the children to do. At this time there had been some classification of paupers in that the men and old women were kept on one side of the building and the younger female paupers on the other. On the women's side were found young girls above fifteen who were to support themselves after passing out of Barnet's supervision; here were also found prostitutes, imbeciles, sick, and infirm. On the men's side was gathered a similar medley of representatives from all conditions of vice and destitution. The workhouse was under the charge of a master and matron who usually had great difficulty in controlling the unusually inmates. In time a system of special contractors arose who took charge of the disorderly paupers for which they received 4s. 6d. per head a week. But the keepers of these houses usually gave the men 2d. a day and sent them out to walk the streets. These increased their allowance by acts of theft, and, when successful, usually returned to their night's lodging intoxicated. In the words of the master of St. Pancras's workhouse regarding the effect of such pauper education, "they scarcely ever emerged from the bad habits which are formed in the houses." 35

Yet the Commissioners while condemning the bulking of existing workhouses for their lack of order and classification, reserved for this of Holborn their fiercest condemnation against the administration—that they provided food relatively good compared with the "condition of semi-
The workhouse as a school of training in abasement and deceit is revealed in Crabbe's story of Richard Monday, the parish waif.

There was he pinch'd and pitied, thump'd and fed, And duly took his beatings and his bread; Patient in all control, in all abuse, He found contempt and kicking have their use— Sad, silent, supple; bending to the blow, A slave of slaves, the lowest of the low; His pliant soul gave way to all things base; He knew no shame, he dreaded no disgrace. It seem'd, so well his passions he suppress'd, No feeling stirr'd his ever-torpid breast; Him might the meanest pauper bruise and cheat, He was a footstool for the beggar'd feet; His were the legs that ran at all commands; They used on all occasions Richard's hands; His very soul was not his own; he stole As others order'd, and without a dole; In all disputes, on either part he lied, And freely pledged his oath on either side; In all rebellions Richard join'd the rest, In all detections Richard first confess'd. 35

The noble and aged Isaac Ashford takes a more reciprocal view of these evident social benefactions:

"Kind are your laws ("tis not be be denied,) "That in your house, for ruin'd age provide, "And they are just;--when young, we give you all, "And for assistance in our weakness call-- "Why then this proud reluctance to be fed, "To join your poor, and eat the parish-bread? "But yet I linger, loth with him to feed, "Who gains his plenty by the sons of need; "He who by contract, all your paupers took, "And gauges stomachs with an anxious look." 36

Some old masters Isaac would have been content to thank as a friend, but he could not endure the master who regarded the poor as an investment

34 Ibid., pp. 101, 102.
and sought his further profit in what he could save from their scanty dole.

for parish overseers were sometimes allowed to purchase or hire houses in
their own parishes, or to contract with individuals to maintain and lodge
the poor, and to supply employment. In cases where the parish was too small
to afford a poorhouse the representatives of two or more parochial divisions
might unite in hiring or purchasing a poorhouse for their wants. 37

With the exception of the poorhouse Crabbe has stressed no other
malignant evil in the life of the poor so much as that of the debtors' 
prison. During his time the prison was a hotbed of disease, vice, and 
crime. Punishments of criminal offences were extremely severe, based as 
they were upon a code of earlier and more barbaric ages. Batches of thieves 
and malefactors by dozens and scores were weekly "worked off" at hangings.
"In the eyes of the law," says Richardson, "property was as sacred as 
human life; and in the eyes of an aristocratic and bourgeois society, more 
sacred." 38

In "The Borough" Crabbe gives a most detailed and pathetic description 
of those who find their way to the debtors' prison. First among these are 
found those who might be styled professional debtors, those purposely 
deceitful.

Here are the guilty race, who mean to live
On credit, that credulity will give;
Who purchase, conscious they can never pay;
Who know their fate, and traffic to betray;
On whom no pity, fear, remorse, prevail,
Their aim a statute, their resource a jail;—
These are the public spoilers we regard; 39
No dun so harsh, no creditor so hard.

37 Garnier, op. cit., p. 502, 503.
38 Richardson, op. cit., p. 287.
Here are those, too, who honestly have tried to make their fortunes, but who have failed. Among these is the vendor who has lived an anchorite in diet in the spare dimensions of "one backward room." He has moved his wares from street to street in search of a happier fortune, only to acquire corroding sorrow and consuming debt—

... till, after years of pain
He finds, with anguish, he has tried in vain. 40

Here is the "thoughtless and gay female," too, who intermittently finds her way to this heterogeneous group. Nor does Crabbe fail to include that type of debtor who has his place in every sorry group of this kind, the one "bound for a friend, whom honour could not bind." With him is confined not only the "sad merchant, who but yesterday had a vast household in command and pay," but also the criminal and the vicious.

To these we add a miscellaneous kind,
By pleasure, pride, and indolence confined;
Those whom no calls, no warnings could divert,
The unexperienced and the inexpert;
The builder, idler, schemer, gamester, sot—
The follies different, but the same their lot;
Victims of horses, lasses, drinking, dice, 41
Of every passion, humour, whim, and vice.

However, it is not only the man who has failed to meet his financial obligations or the man criminally dishonest who must be placed behind prison walls or in the common almshouse, but also his innocent family and the aged dependents, now unable to find any means of livelihood.

There is your house that holds the parish poor,
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;
There, where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,

40 Ibid., II. 46-82, pp; 504, 505.
41 Ibid., II. 84-103, p. 505.
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day; --
There children dwell, who know no parent's care;
Parents, who know no children's love, dwell there!
Heart-broken 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, far the happiest they!
The moping idiot, and the madman gay.

But the poor are not always in homes, but in equally miserable shacks, the forerunners of modern tenement buildings.

See that long boarded Building! — By these stairs
Each humble tenant to that home repairs—
By one large window lighted; it was made
For some bold project, some design in trade.
This fail'd— and one, a humourist in his way,
(I'll was the humour), bought it in decay;
Nor will he sell, repair, or take it down;
' Tis his — what cares he for the talk of town?
"No! he will let it to the poor—a home
"Where he delights to see the creatures come." 43

What persons experienced in the English prisons during the period of Crabbe's life may be learned from the statements of the Honorable H. G. Bennet, M. P., in his letter to the Common Council and Livery of the City of London.

The prison of Newgate was calculated to hold one hundred and ten debtors, and three hundred and seventeen criminal prisoners. Mr. Box, the surgeon, affirms, that, when the whole number exceeded five hundred, great danger of infectious fever was to be apprehended. In January, 1814, there were eight hundred and twenty-two persons confined there!

No bedding was provided, and the allowance of food to the prisoners was so small as, without assistance of their friends, to be hardly sufficient to support life. To the debtors neither coals nor candles were provided. Garnish was suffered to be taken from all new comers, and from thirteen pounds to one guinea.

The keeper of Newgate never attended divine service; and the ordinary did not consider the morals of even the children who were in prison as being under his care and attention. No care was taken to inform him of the sick, till he got a warning to perform a funeral. There was no separation of the young from the old, the children of either sex from the hardened criminal. Boys of the tenderest years, and girls of the ages of ten, twelve, and thirteen were exposed to the vicious contagion that predominated in all parts of the prison; and drunkenness prevailed to such an extent, and was so common, that unaccompanied with riot, it attracted no notice. 44

Aside from all other evils to be found in the prisons, Mr. Bennet looked upon them as the training schools which sent out into the world, young persons hardened and accomplished in the ways of crime and vice. 45

This same was the opinion of Baron Von Voght expressed in his letter to some friends of the poor in Great Britain, published in 1796.

As for our prisons, who knows not, what the very place which ought to bring back the offender to industry and virtue, is the school of crimes! Who feels not for men whose only crime is poverty, when he sees them crowded into the same work-houses with shameless profligates; and into such work-houses!

The incalculable harm caused by these circumstances, may give us an idea of the good that might be produced; and ought to invigorate our earnest resolution to do every thing which our situation will permit us to do in so great and worthy a cause. 46

If Crabbe has for so many of his poetic themes the almshouse and imprisonment for debt, it is because he finds in the confinement of the poor two necessary evils: the deprivation of the poor of honest pride and

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the housing together of all types, innocent and criminal. Concerning this latter evil Crabbe breaks his usual reticence regarding social practices, not being content with merely drawing his usual drab pictures. In the "Preface" to "The Borough" he explains that he forbears to express any opinion on the handling of the poor with the exception of the practice of collecting the poor into one building.

This admission of a vast number of persons, of all ages and both sexes, of very different inclinations, habits, and capacities, into a society, must, at a first view, I conceive, be looked upon as a cause of both vice and misery; nor does anything which I have heard or read invalidate the opinion; happily, it is not a prevailing one, as these houses, are, I believe, still confined to that part of the kingdom where they originated. 47

In "The Borough," instead of the "ruinous cottage" of "The Village," the town boasts of a "noble building," the gift of "self-denying love." Yet Crabbe openly expresses his disfavor of the system, even when handled with the utmost consideration for the wants of the poor, in that it implies shame and degradation to those who are aided.

Your plan I love not;--with a number you Have placed your poor, your pitiable few:
There, in one house, throughout their lives to be--
The pauper-palace which they hate to see;
That giant-building, that high-bounding wall,
Those bare-worn walks, that lofty thund'ring hall!
That large loud clock, which tells each dreaded hour;
Those gates and locks, and all those signs of power:
It is a prison, with a milder name,
Which few inhabit without dread or shame.

Their food may be plentiful; their rooms and beds may be clean;
they may receive every kindness, not from parish officers but from the best citizens of the town, but--

Alas! their sorrows in their bosoms dwell;
They've much to suffer, but have nought to tell;
They have no evil in the place to state,
And dare not say it is the house they hate:
They own, there's granted all such place can give,
But live repining, for 'tis there they live.\(^{45}\)

Crabbe reiterates his moral: that no provision for the material
well-being of men can satisfy that which, contrary to the fundamental
instincts of humanity, does not consider the tastes and duties of the
recipients, or which attempts to unite in an artificial society, persons
unfitted to live together on account of inclinations, habits, and capaci-
ties.\(^{49}\)

Despite his protestation in the "Preface" to "The Borough" of
unwillingness to prescribe for the care of the needy, in the "Posthumous
Tales," Crabbe has left a bit of trenchant satire in which he gives his
concept of what an almshouse should provide.

"meat, and clothes, and fire;"
A little garden to each house pertains,
Convenient each, and kept with little pains,
Here for the sick are nurse and medicine found;
Here walks and shaded alleys for the sound;
Books of devotion on the shelves are placed,
And not forbidden are the books of taste.
The Church is near them—in a common seat
The pious men with grateful spirit meet;
Thus from the world, which they no more admire,
They all in silent gratitude retire.\(^{50}\)

J. C. Gurwen, Esq., M. P., in his speech before the House of Commons,
May 28, 1816, gave vent to the very sentiments of Crabbe:

The best regulated poorhouses present a dreadful state of

\(^{49}\)Wylie, op. cit., p. 99.
\(^{50}\)Poems, III, "Posthumous Tales," XI, 11. 80-90, p. 295.
CHAPTER VI

THE VICES OF THE LOWLY IN CRABBE’S POEMS

Here, wand’ring long, amid these frowning fields,  
I sought the simple life that Nature yields;  
Hapine and Wrong and Fear usurp’d her place,  
And a bold, artful, surly, savage race.¹

Pauperism has always had its evil consequences in the form of dishonesty, drunkenness, hopelessness, irresponsibility, and discontent. Once the independence of the laborer is removed, leaving no hope of advancement from his stage of degradation, there remains to him no motive for preserving his respectability.

Mr. and Mrs. Hammond well express this dire change in the character of the English peasant laborer:

The peasant with rights and a status, with a share in the fortunes and governments of his village, standing in rags, but standing on his feet, makes way for the laborer with no corporate rights to defend, no corporate power to invoke, no property to cherish, no ambition to pursue, bent beneath the fear of his masters, and the weight of a future without hope. No class in the world has so beaten and crouching a history and if the blazing risks in 1830 once threatened his rulers with the anguish of his despair, in no chapter of that history could it have been written, 'This parish is at law with its squire.' For the parish was no longer the community that offered the labourer friendship and sheltered his freedom; It was merely the shadow of his poverty, his helplessness, and his shame. 'Go to an ale-house kitchen of an old enlosed country, and there you will see the origin of poverty and poor-rates. For whom are they to be sober? For whom are they

Among the evil effects of the Poor Law legislation there were none more
spelling than those which tended to enervate the character of the laborer.
His spirits were broken. He knew that he could go to the parish for relief
and began to rely on the parish for subsistence. Under the scale system
idleness, improvidence or extravagance brought him no loss, nor did economy
and diligence offer him any gain. Moreover, the easy parish work often
brought him a better recompense than that of the independent laborer, for
pauper work was often preferred to that of the independent laborer, since
the pauper required cheaper diet and clothing. Again the pauper, unless he
possessed some property or had skill above the average workman, found him-
self a loser if he became an independent laborer. Many of them became
callous to their own degradation, demanded parish support as their due, and
became discontented with the amount of the wages and quantity of the work
afforded them. These constant struggles which the pauper often waged with
those who employed or paid him, embittered his temper and lead him into
dishonest practices. His work deteriorated to that of the unwilling slave.

Sometimes, too, in districts of surplus population the relief given or
the wages offered was not sufficient to sustain life, or there was a lack of
sufficient employment. The poor then sought to add to their means of live-
lihood by poaching, stealing, and robbery. According to witness before the

p. 31.
3 Hasbach, op. cit., p. 207, 206.
Committee of 1824, in most parishes the unemployed numbered from five to forty-five persons who idled away the day, and spent the night stealing and infesting the roads. Gangs of thieves were formed who broke into corn-lofts and barns. This evil reached its climax in the form of rick-burning, a method sought by the laborers to revenge themselves on the farmer. 4

Here too the lawless merchant of the main
Draws from his plough th' intoxicated swain:
Want only claim'd the labour of the day, 5
But vice now steals his nightly rest away.

Drunkenness also had a large part in the corrupt practices of the poor. Crabbe had seen the consequences of this vice in his own home and gives some vivid portrayals of its accompanying misery and woe.

See the stout churl, in drunken fury great,
Strike the bare bosom of his teeming mate! 6

The best description of the inn-keeper as Crabbe himself knew him, is to be found in the disgusting characterization of Andrew Collette--

The blind, fat landlord of the Old Crown Inn--
Big as his butt, and, for the self-same use,
To take stores of strong fermenting juice.
On his huge chair, and umpire in debate;
Each night his string of vulgar tales he told,
When ale was cheap and bachelors were bold;
His heroes all were famous in their days,
Cheats were his boast and drunkards had his praise;
"As mugs were then--the champion of the Crown;
"For thrice three days another lived on ale,
"And knew no change but that of mild and stale;
"Two thirsty soakers watch'd a vessel's side,
"When he the tap, with dax'trous hand, applied;
"Nor from their seats departed, till they found
"That butt was out and heard the mournful sound."

4Ibid., p. 208.
It is from the mouth of Andrew Collettle that the reader learns of the prevalent vices and of the exploits of the poacher, the smuggler, and the gambler. He boasts of his own prowess by which his "night's amusements kept him through the day," and his skill—

That won the vex'd virago to his will; 
Who raving came—then talked in milder strain—
Then wept, then drank, and pledged her spouse again. 7

Crabbe's adroit pictures of smuggling were also found in original models. He writes of the villagers:

—Beneath yon cliff they stand, 
To show the freighted pinnace where to land; 
To load the ready steed with guilty haste, 
To fly in terror o'er the pathless waste, 
Or when detected in their straggling course, 
To foil their foes by cunning or by force; 
Or, yielding part (which equal knaves demand), 8
To gain a lawless passport through the land.

Crabbe, in a letter addressed to Mr. J. Hatchard, refers to an article published in the Christian Observer, October, 1819, in which Crabbe's poem in the "Tales of the Hall" was criticized on the grounds that neither smugglers nor poachers read the Bible. According to Crabbe the practice of smuggling was most general and not even regarded as criminal.

I am not disposed to question the Sentiments of the Writer of that Article: We are probably too much engaged, both, to have Leisure for comparing the minor Differences of Opinion & Differences very great I presume there are not. Matters of fact ask less Time & this Gentleman will pardon me, I hope, when I assure him that Smugglers pray & read their Bible; I do not mean by Smugglers, nocturnal Ruffians, who if they did not smuggle would rob, even in their Sense of the Word, but men & Women engaged in the Buying & Selling Goods which have not paid the legal Duties. These people look upon this as Traffic of adventurous but not

criminal immoral Nature. I knew at one period of my Life two villages & I am convinced, nay am almost certain, that if I except the Minister & 2 or 3 of more opulent Farmers' Wives, there was not an Inhabitant in either who did not deal in this Trade & this Gentleman will not surely judge so hardly as to suppose the instructed people of two populous Villages to be without piety or prayer. In truth, they are taught that illicit Traffic is hazardous but not forbidden by their Religion.  

However, it was not only the poor who were interested in smuggling and the illicit trading of goods, but those "who should the trade prevent," and who "gave it by purchase their encouragement." These were the rich "who had their pay these dealers to oppose," but who rather abetted the adventurous youth in his crime by making unlawful contracts.

And the good ladies whom at church he saw,  
With looks devout, of reverence and awe,  
Could change their feelings as they change their place,  
And, whispering, deal for spicery and lace:  
And thus the craft and avarice of these  
Urged on the youth, and gave his conscience ease.  

Moreover smuggling was not always as innocent an occupation as Crabbe represents. He himself says that the villagers in their nightly orgies--

Wait on the shore, and, as the waves run high,  
On the tost vessel bend their eager eye,  
Which to their coast directs its vent'rous way;  
Their, or the ocean's, miserable prey. 

Crabbe here refers to the "wreckers" who by tying false lights to the tails of tethered horses, would lure on the rocks the ships they wished to plunder. This was practiced in Cornwall as late as 1811.  

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Another of the common means of augmenting the laborer's scanty means of livelihood, and one allied with the practice of illicit selling of goods, was poaching.

Here too the 'squire, or 'squire-like farmer, talk, How round their regions nightly pilferers walk; How from their ponds the fish are borne, and all The rip'ning treasures from their lofty wall; How meaner rivals in their sports delight, Just rich enough to claim a doubtful right; Who take a licence round their fields to stray, A mongrel race! The poachers of the day. 13

"The history of the agricultural laborer in this generation is written in the code of the Game Laws, the growing brutality of the Criminal Law, and the preoccupation of the rich with the efficacy of punishment," write Mr. and Mrs. Hammond. 14 The maintenance of the Game Laws was a subject of great concern among the aristocratic class in England from the standpoint both of the proper justice to be accorded the poor and of the enforcement of the law against them. The discussions centered therefore upon the abolition or amelioration of the Game Laws and the putting into force a still more severe execution of them. Joseph Chitty, Esq., Barrister at Law of the Middle Temple, in proposing alterations for the protection and increase of game and the decrease of crime, stated:

The Game Laws have recently become the subject of considerable inquiry and discussion. The return of peace had directed the attention of the legislature to questions of domestic policy, and it was not to be expected that these provisions should pass without notice. The attention of the humane has been powerfully aroused by the alarming increase of crime; and exertions have been made with a view to ascertain, and, if possible, to remove its causes.

14 Hammond, op. cit., p. 162.
Some have attributed many outrages and crimes to the supposed severity in the Game Laws, and have insisted that the whole system is most arbitrary and unfit for the regulation of a free country; whilst others have urged that efficiently to protect Game, and especially to destroy nocturnal poaching, (the forerunner of most crimes) severer regulations for the protection of Game should be introduced. 15

With the growth of riches and luxury of the upper class, there came also a corresponding change that turned the pleasure of the chase into a grand and extravagant spectacle. Game was preserved in great masses, organised in battue, and maintained by large armies of keepers. Pheasants were now introduced for the first time and the woods were packed with birds. The Acts for protecting this game passed after the accession of George III. progressed in a "crescendo of fierceness." The first important one of these was passed in 1770.

According to Blackstone, the proprietorship of game by Common Law is invested in the King; though, as Chitty remarked, it had been contended successfully by the House of Commons as a right given to all owners of the soil to take and kill game found on their own premises. In the earliest periods of civilization game had been a necessity of life before it became a luxury and was regarded as property since it then formed the subsistence of any one who could bring it into his possession. 17

By 23 Geo. 2. c. 12 the penalties for actually selling, or exposing game for sale, had been extended to all classes of persons without exception. By these regulations no one could legally sell game, and only he that

16Hammond, op. cit., p. 163, 164.
100 £ a year in an estate of inheritance, 150 £ a year in estates for life, or leasehold for terms no less than ninety-nine years, could kill game, keep or use a dog or engine meant for its destruction. 18

This brought the control of game exclusively into the hands of the rich. Sir William Elford, like other well-meaning noblemen of his day, voiced his opinion of the injustice implied in these restrictions of the law:

A certain part of the Game Laws of this kingdom have long been considered as a disgrace to its jurisprudence, and as, perhaps, the only glaring instance in which, equality of rights does not obtain among the various classes of the community. That in this part of our code, the greatest partiality in favor of the higher classes prevails, the slightest view of the subject will demonstrate; and all experience has shown that the injustice of the system, is at least equalled by its inadequacy to the intended end. 19

Sir William pointed out that since more than ninety-nine persons in a hundred had no legal means of possessing game, they were consequently supplied by means which involved a scandalous and disgraceful breach of laws.

Punishments for trespassing the Game Laws were as severe as those meted out for criminal offences. For the first offence there was imprisonment from three to six months, and imprisonment for twelve months and public whipping at a second offence.

Under the Act of 1800, if two or more were found poaching they were treated as rogues and vagabonds, i.e. they were punished by imprisonment

18Chitty, op. cit., p. 178.
20Ibid., p. 22.
with hard labor; whereas if the offender were over twelve years, he might be compelled to serve in the army or navy. The results of all this were that the poacher had a strong motive for resisting the law; and secondly that poaching was engaged in by large groups. The Act of 1828 allowed a person to be convicted before two magistrates; the first offence was punished by a term of three months’ imprisonment; the second, by one of six months; and for the third offence was reserved the severe penalty of transportation. Between the years 1827 and 1830 one in seven of all criminal convictions in the country was conviction under the Game Code. The number of persons so convicted was 8,502, many of whom were under eighteen years of age. Some of them had been transported for life, others for seven or fourteen years. The close relation of the increase of crime to the general distress was universally recognised.

The "Three Letters on the Game Laws," published in The Pamphleteer in 1818 were written by a country gentleman in defense of the rights of the aristocracy, yet they give a very adequate insight into the pernicious effects of the Game Laws on the lower classes. He wrote:

I trust it will scarcely be necessary to enlarge upon their destructive moral tendency further than briefly to detail effects which almost every country newspaper must have made familiar to my readers. Discontent against their superiors is one of the first effects produced by Game Laws among the lower orders. Finding himself employed as the agent to transfer the property of one rich man to another, who is obnoxious to no punishment for receiving it, the poacher, when discovered and convicted perceiving himself to be the only victim, is tempted to think that there is one law for the rich and another for the poor; an observation which a poacher made in my presence the other day. This feeling is carefully

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fostered by his employers, who studiously represent game to be every man's property, tyrannically preserved for the benefit of a few, and therefore that it is at least fair, if not meritorious to attack it; whereas certainly no man can have the slightest equitable claim to it except by purchase, who has had no share in the expense of rearing and preserving it. Frequent breaches of the peace, murders, and homicides, are the natural result of the continual contests which are kept alive in a parish, between different portions of its armed population. The regular army, as it may be called, of Gamekeepers and their assistants are assailed in their nightly bivouac by the irregular tirailleurs of the bands of poachers; and the savage spirit and consequences of a war of posts are perpetuated in every village. All moral ideas of right and wrong are confounded.

The writer believed that this condition of affairs prepared the minds of the lower classes for every crime and quoted the words of Crabbe's profligate alehouse keeper—

"He praised the poacher, precious child of fun, 22
Who shot the keeper with his own spring gun."

Crabbe likewise understood full well the contempt of law, civil and moral, that was the result of an illicit traffic in game. This is seen in his portrayal in "The Parish Register" of the rustic infidel who lived a life as wild as the winds, not caring for the laws of God or man.

But him our drunkards as their champion raised;
Their bishop call'd, and as their hero praised:
But he, triumphant spirit! all things dared,
He poach'd the wood, and on the warden snared.

For to this renegade "the wants of rogues" were the "rights of man." 23

The cause of the lowly was championed by the Reverend Sydney Smith in his letters on "Game Laws" published in the Edinburgh Review, 1819. He scored the country gentlemen who would make the punishments for poaching

those affixed to offences of a much higher order. "The very mention of hares and partridges," he wrote, "in the country too often puts an end to common humanity and common sense. Game must be protected; but protected without violating those principles of justice, and that adaptation of punishment to crime, which (incredible as it may seem) are of infinitely greater importance than the amusement of country gentlemen." According to Mr. Smith the poacher scarcely believed that he was doing wrong for taking partridges and pheasants, and the punishment of transportation for his crime only made him desperate. He was prepared to defend what he had taken with his life. Such dispositions could not fail to engender rivalry of personal courage between the villager and agent of the law and to incite one or the other to private revenge.

To transport a man for seven years on account of partridges seemed to Mr. Smith crass tyranny. But concerning that class of punishments which he considered the most singular of all abuses he wrote:

The law says, that an unqualified man who kills a pheasant shall pay five pounds; but the squire says he shall be shot;—and accordingly he places a spring-gun in the path of the poacher, and does all he can to take away his life. The more humane and mitigated squire mangles him with traps; and the supra-fine country gentleman only detains him in machines, which prevent his escape, but do not lacerate their captive.

Men have certainly a clear right to defend their property; but then it must be by such means as the law allows:—their houses by pistols, their fields by actions for trespass, their game by information. There is an end of law, if every man is to measure out his punishment for his own wrong. . . . Better that it should

25 Ibid., pp. 45, 46.
be lawful to kill a trespasser face to face than to place engines which will kill him. The trespasser may be a child—a woman—a son, or friend!—The spring-gun cannot accommodate itself to circumstances,—the squire or gamekeeper may. 26

Crabbe's exposition of the sin and human tragedy involved in poaching is extremely poignant. It is a narrative based on facts related to Crabbe by Sir Samuel Romilly at Hampstead, and told in the "Tales of the Hall," a few weeks before Romilly's tragic death;

Of the two brothers, Robert would be a slave to no man, for to be happy one must be free. It is for this reason that he choses the lawless profession of smuggler and poacher. But his brother James, "better taught," grieves over the choice of his brother—

He sigh'd to think how near he was akin
To one seduced by godless men to sin;
Who, being always of the law in dread,
To other crimes were by the danger led. 27

The smuggler and the poacher are of the same ilk. Both take a perverted view of the morality of their professions. The smuggler asks, "What guilt is his who pays for what he buys?"... "I sin not—take not till I pay." The poacher questions, "Were not the gifts of heaven for all design'd?"... "My own hand brought down my proper prey." Although they attempt to justify their deeds, Crabbe shows the various illegalities and crimes they become subject to.

How fear they God? How honour they the king?
Such men associate, and each other aid,
Till all are guilty, rash, and desperate made;

26 Ibid., pp. 52, 53.
28 Ibid., 11. 190-195, p. 166.
Till to some lawless deed the wretches fly; 29
And in the act, or for the acting, die. 30

Of the relentless prosecution by the keeper who will spare not his own
brother, Crabbe writes:

When the stern keeper told of stolen game,
Throughout the woods the poaching dogs had been;
And from him nothing should the robbers screen,
From him and law—he would all hazards run,
Nor spare a poacher, were his brother one—
Love, favour, interest, tie of blood should fail, 30
Till vengeance bore him bleeding to the jail.

Finally both brothers come to their tragic end:

"Seized you the poachers," said my lord.—"They fled,
And we pursued not—one of them was dead,
And one of us; they hurried through the wood,
Two lives were gone, and we no more pursued.
Two lives of men, of valiant brothers lost!
Enough, my lord, do hares and pheasants cost!" 31

The most disastrous results of these demoralizing conditions befell
the younger generation. Improperly fed and untrained in habits of industry
and thrift, they had no prospects of independence or advancement from the
soil. In common with their parents they found no employment for their
days. Nor were they able to attend school, as their parents could not
afford the fee of two pence a week. As the middling farmers decreased in
number, there were less opportunities for them to take up work as servants,
and they were unfitted to become domestics in the great houses. 32 The gang
system of hiring out young persons later used, was equally, if not more
degenerating. Half-grown lads and girls worked together; together they

89 Ibid., ll. 197-201, p. 166.
90 Ibid., ll. 234-240, p. 167.
91 Ibid., ll. 600-605, p. 176.
92 Hasbach, op. cit., p. 139.
tramped from place to place seeking work and spending an occasional night on a farm. The physical, as well as intellectual and moral results, were deplorable. 33

Crabbe laments the absence of the wholesome amusements of the old village, particularly those of which England had been deprived by Puritanism, and which were yet prevalent even among the poor of France.

Where are the swains, who, daily labour done,
With rural games play'd down the setting sun;
Who struck with matchless force a bounding ball,
Or made the pond'rous quoit obliquely fall;
While some huge Ajax, terrible and strong,
Engaged some artful stripling of the throng,
And fell beneath him, foil'd, while far around
Hoarse triumph rose, and rocks return'd the sound?
Where now are these? 34

In this regard the oppression of the village poor has been laid to the doors of the Church. It was due to the work of Wilberforce and his friends who started before the French Revolution, a Society for the Reformation of Manners, which had as its purpose the enforcing of the observance of Sunday by forbidding social dissipation and freedom of speech which did not conform to the "morose religion that was then in fashion." In reality the poor alone suffered from this campaign, for the magistrates passed up the dissolute behavior of the rich. Sheridan and Cobbett both made efforts to revive the practice of village sports but were unable to cope with social circumstances. 35

Or yet, while day permits those joys to reign, 36
The village vices drive them from the plain.

33Ibid., p. 209.
35Hammond, op. cit., p. 198, 199.
All these things could not fail to have their evil effects on marriage, which forms the fundamental structure of society. "It might, perhaps, be objected to Crabbe's pictures of the poor," writes Kebbel, "that stories of seduction and illicit love figure in them too frequently. But those who are acquainted with the state of our country parishes under the old Poor Law will know that he is guilty of little misrepresentation, though to harp on this one theme so constantly as he does, may perhaps be a defect in art." 37

But ever frowns your Hymen, a man and maid 38
Are all repenting, suffering or betray'd.

But Crabbe emphatically voices the moral intent when in "The Parish Register," he writes:

I would hide the deed,
But vain the wish; I sigh and I proceed:
And could I well th' instructive truth convey,
'T would warn the giddy and awake the gay. 39

57 Kebbel, op. cit., p. 121.
CHAPTER VII

CRABBE AS A SOCIAL TEACHER

That Crabbe had the genius to place on his literary canvas scenes which had actuality and which were decried by those interested in the social betterment of his age, has been amply shown. Yet a study of Crabbe as social critic must include a consideration of those attributes which fitted the poet in a special manner for the role which he assumed. Did Crabbe take up his pen as an aggressive weapon of reform as did Cobbett, Godwin, Paine, and others of his age? Perhaps not as these men, who regarded themselves as dedicated to the cause of radical reform. Yet there are two contrasting elements in Crabbe's poetry which place him in the ranks of those who dared open to the gaze of his age, the wounds and sores of English society, with the hope of providing the saving curative for those ills. These are first, the fearless and unrelenting realism of Crabbe's portrayals, and secondly, the gentle Christian philosophy diffused throughout his lines.

Crabbe is in truth no propagandist, nor has he any new theories of humanity to proclaim. He offers no remedies for the evils he describes, and makes little comment. In fact, the author nowhere appears openly in the guise of a social reformer. In his "Preface" to "The Borough" he himself cites the exception whereby he would prove the rule:

The poor are here almost of necessity introduced, for they must be considered, in every place, as a large and interesting portion of its inhabitants. I am aware of the great difficulty of acquiring just notions on the maintenance and management of this
class of our fellow-subjects, and I forbear to express any opinion of the various modes which have been discussed or adopted: of one method only I venture to give my sentiments, that of collecting the poor of a hundred into one building."

In fact, Crabbe's figures are typical rather than individual. But he does know the strength of appeal that lies in a truthful picture of pathetic and tragic scenes portraying a mirror-like reflection of the familiar without the transformation of the imagination. What mars the poet, in reality heightens the powers of the critic.

That Crabbe has frequently overstepped the bounds of good taste in his sordid and vicious portrayals has been the consensus of his critics. This was the basis of the criticism of "The Borough" written by Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1810. "The poet of the humble must describe a great deal,—and must describe minutely, many things which possess in themselves no beauty or grandeur." However, there is always the danger of going further through pride and delight in the exercise of this power. And Crabbe in many cases has yielded to this temptation. Yet as to his power of depicting the lower classes the writer said:

His chief fault, however, is his frequent lapse into disgusting representations; and this we will confess, is an error for which we find it far more difficult either to account or to apologize. We are not, however, of the opinion which we have often heard stated, that he has represented human nature under too unfavourable an aspect, or that the distaste which his poetry sometimes produces, is owing merely to the painful nature of the scenes and subjects with which it abounds. On the contrary, we think he has given a juster, as well as a more striking picture, of the true character and situation of the lower orders of this country, than any other writer, whether in verse or in prose; and that he has made no more use of painful emotions than was necessary to the production of a pathetic effect.

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Kebbels also points out this besetting sin of Crabbe to enlarge on disagreeable details at too great length, thus making Hazlitt's Witticism that Crabbe "turns diseases to commodity," partially true. But Scott who saw in Crabbe "England's Juvenile" no doubt had a closer insight into the moral purpose of Crabbe who was a satirist first and a poet afterwards. 4

Whatever are Crabbe's faults in this respect he never loses sight of the fact that the prime function of poetry is to please. In his "Preface" to "The Borough" he apologizes for detaining his reader so long with subjects as repulsive as the sufferings portrayed in his "Letter on Prisons." For after all, the sufferings continually about men fail to affect them in a very serious or lasting manner. In fact, the pain caused should serve only as a stimulus to benevolence. In view of this, Crabbe has no fear that his presentation, no matter how faithful and truthful, will have effects that are to be lamented. Crabbe then reiterates the dominant theme underlying his poetic expression, the call of the human heart for sympathy and understanding:

"It has always been held as a salutary exercise of the mind, to contemplate the evils and miseries of our nature. I am not, therefore, without hope, that this gloomy subject of Imprisonment, and more especially the Dream of the condemned Highwaymen, will excite in some minds that mingled pity and abhorrence, which, while it is not unpleasant to the feelings, is useful in its operation: it ties and binds us to all mankind by sensations common to us all, and in some degree connects us, without degradation, even to the most miserable and guilty of our fellow-men."

"Humanitarianism, according to Richardson, is the practical side of sentiment. Whereas sentimentalism is inclined to be abstract; humanitarianism, on the contrary, is the moral and practical aspect of the question. A humanitarian is not only moved by the principles of the cause, but feels that by the action of his own will he can help to bring about the desired result."

6Loc. cit.
Accordingly Crabbe must have the powers of the true humanitarian. Wilson, who with Jeffrey, was one of Crabbe's most sympathetic critics, said of him:

Crabbe is confessedly the most original and vivid painter of the vast varieties of common life, that England has ever produced; and while several living poets possess a more splendid and imposing representation, we are greatly mistaken if he has not taken a firmer hold than any other, on the melancholy convictions of man's heart ruminating on the good and evil of this mysterious world. ... Accustomed to look on men as they exist and act, he not only does not fear, but he absolutely loves to view their vices and their miseries; and hence has his poetry been accused of giving too dark a picture of life. But, at the same time, we must remember what those haunts of life are into which his spirit has wandered. ... He lays before us scenes and characters from which, in real life, we should turn our eyes with intolerant disgust; and yet he forces us to own, that on such scenes, and by such characters, much the same kind of part is played that ourselves play on another stage.

There are abundant sources of evidence which prove that Crabbe was regarded as a social critic of his times, whatever may be the opinions regarding his poetry as an art. The Quarterly Review, 1833, carried a very pertinent criticism in which it saw in Crabbe's poetry the means of adding another thread to "those cords of a man, by which the owner and occupant of the soil are knit together, and society is interlaced."

It is good for the proprietor of an estate to know that such things are, and at his own doors. He might have guessed, indeed, as a general truth, even whilst moving in his own exclusive sphere, that many a story of intense interest might be supplied by the annals of his parish. Crabbe would have taught him thus much, had he been a reader of that most sagacious of observers, most searching of moral anatomists, most graphic of poets; and we reverence this great writer not less for his genius than for his patriotism, in bravely lifting up the veil which is spread between the upper classes and the working-day world, and letting one half of mankind know what the other is about. 9

7 Richardson, op. cit., p. 301.
8 Wilson, Quoted from Life by his Son, p. 135.
9 Quoted from Life by his Son, p. 119.
T. N. Talfourd in his critical estimate of Crabbe's poetry written in 1815, remarked that even those who deny Crabbe the gift of writing poetry, acknowledge that he is a moral writer of great excellence and admit the practical utility of his writing in presenting portraits of actual existence. Hazlitt, although he scores Crabbe for his use of disgusting and unpoetic subjects, accounts for his popularity on no other principle than that the reader finds in his works that interest which binds him to the world about him.

To find the main current of criticism contemporaneous with Crabbe, it is necessary to turn to Francis Jeffrey of the Edinburgh Review. Jeffrey had a keen appreciation of the value of Crabbe's poetry from the standpoint of both realistic art and social criticism. Jeffrey saw truth and force in the delineations of Crabbe's rustic life due to their first sinking into the memory, then by being recalled upon "innumerable occasions, and by being confirmed by daily observation"—powers which the ideal presentation by 'fanciful authors' can never possess. He wrote:

For ourselves at least, we profess to be indebted to Mr. Crabbe for many of these strong impressions; and have known more than one of our unpoetical acquaintances, who declared they could never pass by a parish workhouse, without thinking of the description of it they had read at school in the Poetical Extracts. 12

These opinions of Jeffrey also would prove that he saw in Crabbe the power to bring before his contemporaries the existing conditions among the

12 Jeffrey, op. cit., p. 275.
poor, and to awaken in them at least a sympathetic attitude to their wrongs. Crabbe not only portrays the "common people of England pretty much as they are," but he has grouped them into such "forms as must catch the attention or awake the memory" by "scattering over the whole such traits of moral sensibility, or sarcasm, and of deep reflection, as every one must feel to be natural." He wrote:

Mr. Crabbe, in short, shows us something which we have all seen, or may see, in real life; and draws from it such feelings and such reflections as every human must acknowledge that it is calculated to excite. He delights us by the truth, and vivid and picturesque beauty of his representation, and by the force and pathos of the sensations with which we feel that they are connected. 13

Again discussing the "Chinese accuracy" with which Crabbe brings forth details in "The Parish Register," tedious and unnecessary for the interest of the reader, he continued:

Yet there is a justness and force in the representation which is entitled to something more than indulgence; and though several of the groups are composed of low and disagreeable subjects, still, we think of that some allowance is to be made for the author's plan of giving a full and exact view of village life, which could not possibly be accomplished without including those baser varieties. He aims at an important moral effect by this exhibition; and must not be defrauded either of that, or of the praise which is due to the coarser efforts of his pen, out of deference to the sickly delicacy of his more fastidious readers. 14

In the mind of Crabbe it was the portrayal of the daily sufferings and misfortunes, toils, crimes and pastimes of those about the daily environment of his readers that would stir their primary affections rather than such subjects as palaces, castles, camps, tyrants, warriors, and banditti. In

13 Ibid., pp. 277, 278.
14 Ibid., pp. 285, 286.
fact, he himself held up to ridicule those romantic subjects which were then in vogue.

To me, it seems their females and their men
Are but the creatures of the author's pen;
May, creatures borrow'd and again convey'd
From book to book—the shadows of a shade.
Life, if they'd search, would show them many a change,
The ruin sudden and the misery strange!
With more of grievous, base, and dreadful things,
Than novelists relate or poet: sings. 15

Like Pope he looks about the world; silently he walks the road of life,
viewing "reasoning" man in his aims, his passions, and the faculties of his intellect, and having learned what "waste of life and joy they make," portrays them in their various vicissitudes, giving blame and praise with the utmost sincerity. He concludes:

"'Tis good to know, 'tis pleasant to impart,
These turns and movements of the human heart;
The stronger features of the soul to paint,
To make distinct the latent and the faint;
Man as he is, to place in all men's view,
Yet none with rancour, none with scorn pursue;
Nor be it ever of my portrait told,—
"Here the strong lines of malice we behold." 16

Crabbe's method of dissection has been likened to that of Hogarth,
for Crabbe once a surgeon of the body, as a poet became a surgeon of the soul. In treating his characters he lays bare the secret sources of the vice which led to their ruin. Enchom regards the works of Crabbe as a course of moral medicine. "Just as Hogarth," he says, "wished to circulate cheap reproductions of his Stages of Cruelty among the London populace and reform it by fear, so Crabbe, by showing us the secret havoc wrought in us

by vice and the fatal consequences it entails, tries to make us wiser and better." 17

And it is with this same stripping of all glamour and presentation of naked misery that Crabbe goes to trace the daily lives of the poor, their lowly cottages, their unwholesome food, their struggle for existence either by dishonest means or according to the manner of the laborer under the Poor Laws, their sorrow and despair, and finally their hopeless old age spent among strangers in the poorhouse. According to Lafcadio Hearn, the object of the realist is never to express his own character or feeling in any way, but to report things as they are. 18 Of Crabbe's impersonal realism he writes:

Nowhere through all his work will you find him expressing his own opinions, his likes and dislikes, his prejudices or his pleasures. He took the proper position of the realist, saying to himself, "What has the world to do with my personal liking or hatred? Of what value could they be? My business is simply to make pictures of life, and to do so without putting myself in the pictures at all. 19

The poet himself is very careful to express this impersonal attitude. As early as 1778 in his poem "The Wish" he prays for that happy combination of enthusiasm and judgment that will enable him to warm the soul to virtue and to love.

To paint the passions, and to teach mankind
Our greatest pleasures are the most refined;
The cheerful tale with fancy to rehearse,
And gild the moral with the charm of verse.

If he is to be a stern and relentless delineator of man and his pas-

17 Hushon, op. cit., p. 289.
19 Ibid., pp. 35, 36.
sions, he is to be so without scorn and rancor. He wishes men to find his
pictures true, but so conscientious is he that he declares he would mourn
the mischief should any fix on one person as the character he is describing.

Man's vice and crime I combat as I can,
But to his God and conscience leave the man... 
Yet, as I can, I point the powers of rhyme,
And, sparing criminals, attack the crime. 21

Unlike Dryden and Pope, Crabbe abhors the pasquinade. In his poem
called "Satire" he declares:

I love not the satiric Muse:
No man on earth would I abuse;
Nor with ampeisen'd verses grieve
The most offending son of Eve.
Leave him to law, if he have done
What injures any other son!
It hardens men to see his name
Exposed to public mirth or shame;
And rouses, as it spoils his rest,
The baser passions of his breast. 22

If Crabbe's satirical purpose is neither subjectively nor objectively
personal, then it must be to hold up to the people of his age the various
social evils and sufferings contingent upon the condition of the poor and
lowly. It is by means of this impersonal characterization of the wealthy,
but frugal James Dyson, in the "Posthumous Tales," that Crabbe gives a
concentrated picture of the typical wealthy Englishman of the industrial
class in his relation to the problems of the poor. 23 James has all the
social virtues. He is esteemed, looked up to, relied upon. He is kind to
his equals, ever out of debt, true to his promises. Disdaining to lie, he
has the courage to refrain from shady practices when "tempted in his trade."

He delights in the "social board," and shares his good fellowship with others. Above all, he is the conventional good churchman:

---'twas his pride and boast;
Loyal his heart, and "Church and King" his toast;
He for Religion might not warmly feel,
But for the Church he had abounding zeal.

But what of his understanding of the lowly and their sad condition of life? Jealous of his ability to keep the poor in moral and intellectual inferiority, he is opposed to the instruction of the poor.

"Why send you Bibles all the world about,
"That men may read amiss, and learn to doubt?
"Why teach the children of the poor to read,
"That a new race of doubters may succeed?
"How can you scarcely rule the stubborn crew,
"And what they should know as much as you?
"Will a man labour when to learning bred,
"Or use his hands who can employ his head?
"Will he a clerk or master's self obey,
"Who thinks himself as well-inform'd as they?"

Avarice and greed harden the heart of the rich man and render him callous to the betterment of the poor.

"We're rich," quoth James; "but if we thus proceed,
"And give to all, we shall be poor indeed:
"In war we subsidise the world--in peace
"We christianise--our bounties never cease;
"We learn each stranger's tongue that they with ease
"May read translated Scriptures, if they please;
"We buy them presses, print them books, and then
"Pay and export poor learned, pious men;
"Vainly we strive a fortune now to get,
"So tax'd by private claims, and public debt."

The rich man would have mercy to the criminal condone the crime.

"You make your prisons light,
"airy and clean, your robbers to invite;
"And in such ways your pity show to vice,
"That you the rogues encourage, and entice."
For lenient measures James had no regard--
"Hardship," he said, "Must work upon the hard;
"Labour and chains such desperate men require;
"To soften iron you must use the fire."
To the rich man poverty and idleness are synonymous. Nor can he allow for the degradation through want and vice over which the poor have little or no control.

Active himself, he labour'd to express,
In his strong words, his scorn of idleness;
From him in vain the beggar sought relief—
"Who will not labour is an idle thief,
"Stealing from those who will;" he knew not how
For the untaught and ill-taught to allow,
Children of want and vice, immured to ill,
Unchain'd the passions, and uncurb'd the will.

Crabbe adroitly draws his concluding picture by portraying the rich man's utter disregard for the immeasurable gulf of misery separating the rich from the poor. For, made purblind by his own selfish pursuits, the rich man is too engrossed in his traffic to regard the wants of the lowly other than with scorn and contempt.

George Gilfillan, evaluating the works of the poet fourteen years after his death and commenting on the lack of apparent moral and social purpose, wrote:

And yet, without apparent intention, Crabbe has done good moral service. He has shed much light upon the condition of the poor. He has spoken in the name and stead of the poor dumb mouths that could not tell their own sorrows and sufferings to the world. He has opened the "mine," which Ebenezer Elliot and others, going to work with a firmer and more resolute purpose, have dug to its depths.

Does this mean that the poet never raises a protesting or admonishing voice? True, he is no William Cobbett trumpeting the ills of the poor in notes of figures and laws. His manner is rather that of the gentle country

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24 Ibid., 11. 126-135, pp. 216, 217.
person who would teach the moral lesson of kinship between high and low, and who would impress upon the minds of the rich that the real sting of poverty is the rich man's disregard of the humanity of the poor. Thus in "The Borough", while painting the sordid scenes in the streets of the poor, he cries out:

Here our reformers come not; none object
To paths polluted, or upbraided neglect;
None care that ashly heaps at doors are cast,
That coal-dust flies along the blinding blast;
None heed the stagnant pools on either side,
Where new-launch'd ships of infant sailors ride. 26

Again, Crabbe gives the rich their lesson of true charity when he puts his discourse into the mouth of the village curate representing the lettered poor who feel more keenly the world's contempt. It is a lesson of that noble charity, which is not based on selfish and vain pride or the giving of superfluous wealth which crushes the recipient, but is embodied in the generous, humble gift which lifts up and ennobles the one benefitted.

"Yes, I am taught that men who think, who feel,
Unite the pains of thoughtful men to heal;
Not with disdainful pride, whose bounties make
The needy curse the benefits they take;
Not with the idle vanity that knows
Only a selfish joy when it bestows;
Not with o'erbearing wealth, that, in disdain,
Hurls the superfluous bliss at groaning pain;
But these are men who yield such bless'd relief
That with the grievance they destroy the grief;
Their timely aid the needy sufferers find,
Their generous manner soothes the suffering mind;
There's is a gracious bounty, form'd to raise
Him whom it aids; their charity is praise;
A common bounty may relieve distress,
But when the vulgar succour, they oppress;
"This, though a favour, is an honour too
Though mercy's duty, yet 'tis merit's due;
When our relief from such resources rise,
All painful sense of obligation dies;
And grateful feelings in the bosom wake,
For 'tis their offerings, not their alms, we take. 27

Again in the "Posthumous Tales," Crabbe would teach the perfect lesson
of benevolent charity. If the "Lady of the Ancient Mansion" shares her
blessings with her tenants, it is because--

She holds, so she believes, her wealth in trust;
And being kind with her, is being just. 28

Moreover, charity is to be made the basis of mutual regard, for--

'Tis by opinion that respect is led; 29
The rich esteem because the poor are fed.

He would have the upper classes see for themselves the miseries of
the poor--their scant joys, their bitter indignities. They have been taking
too much for granted in the lives of the really down-trodden.

Or will you deem them amply paid in health,
Labour's fair child, that languishes with wealth?
Go, 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;... 30
Then own thy slaves, as thine excess to thee.

If there be a kinship that can be recognized by each, the rich and the
poor, it is the kinship of vice.

29Ibid., 11. 29-31, p. 288.
Yet, why, you ask, these humble crimes relate,
Why make the poor as guilty as the great?
To show the great, these mightier sons of pride,
How near in vice the lowest are allied;
Such are their natures and their passions such,
But these disguise too little, those too much:
So shall the man of power and pleasure see
In his own slave as vile a wretch as he. 31

The poor, too, find vice the great leveler.

In his luxurious lord the servant find
His own low pleasures and degenerate mind:
And each in all the kindred vices trace,
Of a poor, blind, bewildered erring race;
Who, a short time in varied fortune past,
Die, and are equal in the dust at last. 32

The poor are urged to refrain from envying the great who are their
companions in distress and in those evils inherent in human nature itself.

And know, amid those blessings they possess,
They are, like you, the victims of distress;
While sloth with many a pang torments her slave,
Fear waits on guilt, and danger shakes the brave. 33

If the rich have taken too much for granted in the lives of the poor
by measuring them according to Arcadian standards, so also the poor have
been mistaken in envying the rich their lot of seeming unclouded happiness.

Nor fancy these escape the general doom;
Gay as they seem, be sure with them are hearts
With sorrow tried; there's sadness in their parts.
If thou couldst see them when they think alone,
Mirth, music, friends, and these amusements gone;
Cou'st thou discover every secret ill
That pains their spirit, or resists their will;
Couldst thou behold forsaken love's distress,
Or Envy's pang at glory and success
Or Beauty, conscious of the spoils of Time,

32 Ibid., 11. 95-100, p. 132.
33 Ibid., 11. 101-106, p. 132.
Or Guilt, alarm'd when Memory shows the crime--
All that gives sorrow, terror, grief, and gloom:
Content would cheer thee trudging to thine home. 34

In this regard, Crabbe urges youth not to make false evaluations of
the worth of amusement, feasting, beauty, wine--for when "enchantment
flies," there remains but "the common lot of mankind." 35 Moreover, riches
are but ephemeral things.

Riches, and all that we desire to gain,
Bind their possessors in a golden chain-- 36
'Tis kept in peril, and 'tis lost with pain.

In "The Library" Crabbe goes to such lengths as to have the poor
rejoice in their humble outlook on life.

"Ambition's lofty views, the pomp of state,
"The pride of wealth, the splendour of the great,
"Stripp'd of their mask, their cares and troubles known,
"Are visions far less happy than thy own:
"Go on! and, while the sons of care complain,
"Be wisely gay and innocently vain;
"While serious souls are by their fears undone,
"Blow sportive bladders in the beamy sun,
"And call them worlds! and bid the greatest show
"More radiant colours in their worlds below;
"Then, as they break, the slaves of care reprove, 37
"And tell them, such are all the joys they love."

Lines such as these give evidence that Crabbe does not find his place
as a social critic with the poets from Wordsworth to Byron, who were
shaped by political revolution. Their passion was ever-stress on forms of
government, and they were dimly if at all conscious of the industrial

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36 Quoted from the first draft of 'Silford Hall,' "Posthumous Tales," Life by his Son, p. 516.
changes at work. Crabbe, indeed, had ample opportunity to make criticism of national policies and social systems since he portrayed conditions involving these: the vices of smuggling and poaching as a means of subsistence for the poor; the conditions maintaining in the debtors' prisons and poorhouses; the miseries of the old paupers on the rounds; the various forms of employment, bringing indignities upon the poor, as for example, the exploitation of apprentices and the brutality endured by children.

Behind all these evils Crabbe discerns but one cause—man's innate tendency to evil-doing. In "The Village" he makes his first attempt to depict the social injustice of his times, and in "The Parish Register," he again takes up the theme begun in "The Village," and brings it to a moral conclusion:

Since vice the world subdued and waters dream'd
Auburn and Eden can no more be found. 39

However, man is not entirely the victim of his circumstances. He may choose good or evil, each with its consequent reward. There are contrasting scenes of the cot where peace and contentment dwell and the homes where vice and misery predominate. This is the first lesson that Crabbe would proclaim to the world. To make of Crabbe a misanthrope is to defeat his aims. Crabbe has been said to anticipate Balzac in the minuteness of his descriptions and his close psychological analyses, but unlike Balzac he finds no pleasure in the meannesses which he describes, nor does he paint evil for

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38 Vida Scudder, Social Ideals in English Literature (Boston and New York, 1923), p. 117.

its own sake. It is in the spirit of the Christian that he regards the frailty of man's nature and draws a fitting moral from the incident he has presented.

It is evident then that nothing of the Utopian philosophy of Rousseau and his followers has anything in common with Crabbe's basic regard for the proneness of man to evil. In "The Library" Crabbe voices the ideals of primitivism in the person of the youthful poet.

"Ah! happy age," the youthful poet sings,
"When the free nations knew not laws nor kings;
When all were bless'd to share a common store,
And none were proud of wealth, for none were poor;
No wars nor tumults vex'd each still domain,
No thirst of empire, no desire of gain;
No proud great man, nor one who would be great,
Drove modest merit from its proper state;
Nor into distant elimes would avarice roam,
To fetch delights for luxury at home:
Bound by no ties which kept the soul in awe,
They dwelt at liberty, and love was law!"

But Crabbe hastens to undeceive the youth by giving him the experiences of mankind that have come down the ages as actualities. Man, it is true, is innately a social being and can find no happiness unless associated with his fellow-beings. However, there is always the necessity for that order which requires that the inferior be subservient to the superior.

"Mistaken youth! each nation first was rude,
Each man a cheerless son of solitude,
To whom no joys of social life were known;
None felt a care that was not all his own;
Or on some languid elime his abject soul
Bow'd to a little tyrant's stern control;"
"A slave, with slaves his monarch's throne he raised,  
And in rude song his ruder idol praised;  
The meaner cares of life were all he knew;  
Rounded his pleasures, and his wishes few."

As man's life becomes more complex and he becomes more involved in  
his dealings with his fellow men, laws must be multiplied in order to compel  
man to control his baser passions which would have him ordinate all to  
his own selfish ends, to the ultimate ruin of society in general.

"But when by slow degrees the Arts arose,  
And Science waken'd from her long repose;  
Then Commerce, rising from the bed of ease,  
Man round the land, and pointed to the seas;  
When Emulation, born with jealous eye,  
And Avarice, lent their spurs to industry;  
Then one by one the numerous laws were made,  
Those to control, and these to succour trade."

To upset the existing order which is of necessity imposed upon  
society to Crabbe is "false enthusiastic zeal."

Men are not equal, and 'tis meet and right  
That robes and titles our respect excite;  
Order requires it; 'tis by vulgar pride  
That such regard is censured and denied.

In short, Crabbe has nothing in common with Shelley, who in the words  
of Schindler, believed "that the world could be regenerated by pulling  
down kings and overthrowing religions." Pity, mercy, justice form  
Crabbe's trinal code for the preservation of this essential order in the  
governing of the world. When condemned by the law, the "stern arm of

43 Festa, op. cit., p. 42.
Justice" is to be withheld from those who have never been taught to earn their daily bread—

Whom crimes, misfortunes, errors only teach
To seek their food where'er within their reach;
Who for their parents' sins, or for their own,
Are now as vagrants, wanderers, beggars known,
Hunted and hunting through the world, to share 44
Alms and contempt, and shame and scorn to bear.

But a different measure of justice is to be meted out to the condemned felon, a figure of superlative wretchedness. In his case is mercy to restrain, or even temper justice?

No! she cannot plead
For such an outrage;—'twas a cruel deed;
He stepp'd a timid traveller;—to his breast,
With oaths and curses, was the danger press'd:
No! he must suffer; pity we may find 45
For one man's pangs, but must not wrong mankind.

Again, by the deaths of the keeper and poacher Crabbe would make known the force of the moral law. Thus taught, the lord and the poacher stand in the correct moral relation to each other.

Since this their morals have been more correct,
The cruel spirit in the place is check'd;
His lordship holds not in such sacred care,
Nor takes such dreadful vengeance for a hare;
The smugglers fear, the poacher stands in awe
Of Heaven's own act, and reverences the law. 46

Law has its origin in a higher governance; right order and social justice have their foundations within the consciences of men. Their failure to obey these internal ordinances has its consequences in the dire

calamities of this world. It is this social retribution "that operates on
man's offending race."

Such acts will stamp their moral on the soul,
And while the bad they threaten and control,
Will to the pious and the humble say,
Yours is the right, the safe, the certain way, 47
'Tis wisdom to be good, 'tis virtue to obey.

That man who is obedient to these fundamental laws, no matter how
humble his state, finds happiness and needs no abstract social code. The
world is a safe place for him to live in. This is the lesson that Crabbe
brings before his readers in his drab tale of "Barnaby, the Shopman,"
who, despite his efforts to attain wealth by the sale of smuggled goods,
ends his life in moral and social ruin.

Happy the man whose great pleasure lies
In the fair trade by which he hopes to rise!
To him how bright the opening day, how blest
The busy moon, how sweet the evening rest!
To him the nation's state is all unknown, 48
Whose watchful eye is ever on his own.

Finally Crabbe has not failed to apply his philosophy of moral balance
to the preservation of the integrity of the state. If in opposition to
the Rousseauian theory, Crabbe calls for law to hold in leash the selfish
passions of man, it is luxury with its train of innumerable woes and vices
that works to confound that law--

Till, like a miner working sure and slow,
Luxury creeps on, and ruins all below;
The basis sinks, the ample piles decay;
The stately fabric shakes and falls away;
Primeval want and ignorance come on, 49
But freedom, that exalts the savage state, is gone.

In "The Library" Crabbe points to the tomes of history which tell the melancholy story of nations grown effeminate by luxury and crushed by their more virile neighbors.

Guarded by virtue from surrounding foes;
Their virtue lost, and of their triumphs vain,
Lo! how they sunk to slavery again!
Satiated with power, of fame and wealth possess'd,
A nation grows too glorious to be bless'd;
Conspicuous made, she stands the mark of all,
And foes join foes to triumph in her fall.

It is not only kings and heroes filled with an insatiable hunger for wealth and power, but also lowly slaves risen to the plane of despots who bring their nations to baneful ruin.

Thus speaks the page that paints ambition's race,
The monarch's pride, his glory, his disgrace;
The headlong course, that madd'ning heroes run,
How soon triumphant, and how soon undone;
How slaves, turn'd tyrants, offer crowns to sale,
And each fall'n nation's melancholy tale.

No matter what the angle of approach, there is to be found but one ultimate goal for Crabbe's social program, that of reconciliation between the classes. In his quiet sphere of activity, he labored in the interest of mankind to soften the barriers of time-hardened prejudice, and to draw his fellow men closer to one another rather than to rouse them to antagonism.

His social code is simple and universal in its application. If the rich and the poor, the high and the low, are made level by their innate evil passions, the result of the Primal Fall, they are also on the same

50 Abid., II. 498-500, p. 113.
51 Pesta, op. cit., p. 38.
moral plane in their exercise of liberty of conscience and the fulfillment of their obligations to the State. Sorrow and want may be found in the lot of the poor man, but on account of his inherent human dignity he cannot be sold, "for he goes not with the soil."

Labourers, you say, are grieved with daily toil—True—but the swearer goes not with the soil; He can change places, change his way of life, Take new employments,—nay, can take a wife; If he offend, he knows the law's decree, 52 Nor can his judge in his accuser see.

Like all humankind, the rich and titled are not possessed of unlimited freedom.

Nor have the lords of all this wealth you see
Their perfect freedom: few are truly free:
Who rank the highest find the check of fate, 53
And kings themselves are subject to their state.

Thus it has been shown that as Crabbe's naturalistic portrayals mirror the relation between class and class in the England of his times, so the doctrine of Christian fraternalism found among the homely lines of his poetic utterances offers an enduring remedy for the ills that arise under every social vicissitude. The conservatism of Crabbe's dogma cannot deprive him of the distinction which his abilities have won for him, that of being a genuine social critic of his times.

52 Quoted from the first draft of 'Wilford Hall,' "Posthumous Tales," Life by his Son, p. 516.
53 loc. cit.
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