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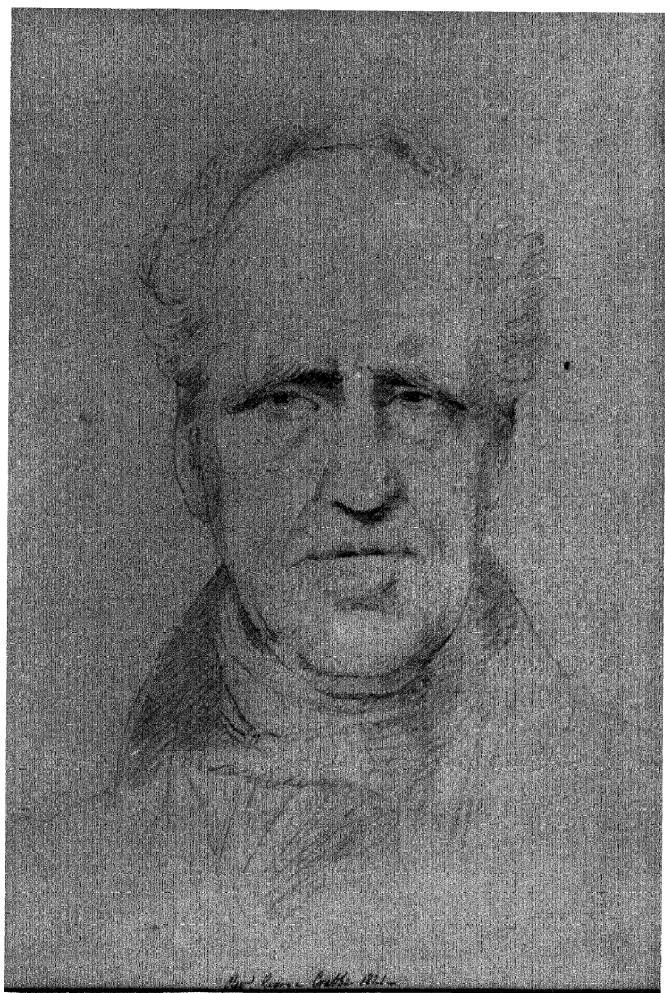
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GEORGE CRABBE: SELECTED POEMS

This selection of Poems by George Crabbe, made by Philip Henderson, includes: *The Village* (Part I); *The Parish Register* (Baptisms) and ten complete sections from *The Borough*, including *Peter Grimes*.

These poems give us the best of Crabbe and pictures of Georgian and Regency rural and provincial society such as we get nowhere else.



GEORGE CRABBE

POEMS

SELECTED WITH AN
INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY
PHILIP HENDERSON

LONDON

LAWSON AND DUNN

1946

NOTE

The text used in this edition is taken from *Poems by George Crabbe* edited by Sir Adolphus Ward (Cambridge University Press, 3 vols., 1905-7), by kind permission of the Cambridge University Press.

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*Frontispiece from a drawing of George Crabbe by Chantrey.
(By courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.)*

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INTRODUCTION

I

GEORGE CRABBE (1754-1832) was born at Aldborough, or Aldeburgh, as it is usually written today, a remote and lonely town on the Suffolk coast. In his time it was a good deal lonelier. A narrow street of mean scrabbling cottages ran along the edge of the shore; behind this lay the wide main street where the professional classes lived in pleasant Georgian houses; the church dominated the town on rising ground to the west. The beach came right up to the doors of the fishermen's cottages and in winter the sea often broke right over them, smashing the roofs and making whole families destitute. There was very little business in the port. On days when it was too rough to put to sea, the fishermen lived by poaching on the lands of the wealthy farmers, by smuggling, or on what they could filch from the wrecks. It was a population degraded and brutalized by poverty. The protectionist policy of the Napoleonic wars had raised the price of corn to 112s. a quarter, and the farmers grew rich and steadily richer while their labourers starved on a wage of eight shillings a week¹. The fishermen spent much of their time drinking, gambling, cock-fighting, and whoring, and their starving children scuffled for food in the streets with the pigs and chickens among piles of refuse. At night the town was hideous with riot.

Today, Aldborough is still an old-fashioned seaside resort, with shabby Edwardian boarding-houses along the front, blue and white striped bathing-boxes and fishing boats drawn up on the beach and nets drying in the sun. In summer the sea changes from yellowish brown, as the muddy waves curl over the shore, to grey-green and deep indigo with the passing clouds. Behind the town and to each side of it lies marsh and brown heath: the haunt of sea-birds and birds of the river estuary, curlews with their sobbing watery cries, swift-winged oystercatchers and the

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rare bittern. For generations the sea has encroached, invading the flat sandy land and leaving a desolation of marsh and melancholy water.

Crabbe's father was warehouse keeper and collector of the salt duties of the port, a man of many talents and skilled in mathematics. His mother was a gentle creature, mild and patient—as, indeed, she had need to be, for her husband had a violent temper and in later years drank heavily and threw the crockery about the room. As the family sat at home in the evening, they used to dread the sound of his approaching steps. But, in better times, before the death of his young daughter threw him into a state of savage misery, Mr. Crabbe was a devoted father and used to read Milton and Young aloud to his family, instead of spending his evenings at the pub. He had a small sailing boat in which he delighted to navigate the river Alde; he also had a share in a fishing boat and often went to sea, taking his children with him. On such occasions he was sorely disappointed with the awkwardness of his son George. 'That boy', he said, 'must be a fool. John and Bob and Will are all of them some use about a boat; but what will that *thing* ever be good for?' Such is the traditional treatment of poets by their fathers.

Mr. Crabbe, however, was far from being a fool himself. He soon perceived that there was something remarkable about his clumsy son George, and sent him to school at Bungay. Here, George early gave evidence of a scientific turn of mind and at the age of twelve was removed to a more advanced school kept by a mathematician with whom Mr. Crabbe bandied nice mathematical points by correspondence. George had already decided to become a doctor, but there was no money for his training, and so after leaving school at an early age his father put him to work in the warehouse at Slaughden quay. Fortunately this occupation did not last very long, and at about the age of sixteen he went as surgeon's apprentice to a doctor in a village near Bury St. Edmunds. But the doctor turned out to be a farmer

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as well, and the surgeon's apprentice had to help on the land and share his bed with the ploughboy. After a year, he left the farm and apprenticed himself to a surgeon at Woodbridge. Crabbe was eighteen by this time, had already written quantities of verse, and had met and fallen in love with Sarah Elmy, who lived part of the year with her uncle at Parham. Two years later he published at Ipswich his *Inebriety*, an amusing and accomplished satire on drunkenness, which was also a satire on Pope—a production which would have done credit to a University man. Its publication passed quite unnoticed, and at the conclusion of his apprenticeship at Woodbridge he was forced to return to the warehouse, quarrelling violently with his father among the casks of butter and cheese. At last sufficient money was found to send him to London, ostensibly to walk the hospitals and attend lectures. But he was too poor to lead the life of a medical student, and after lodging in Whitechapel for about ten months returned once more to Aldborough, where, in spite of his inadequate knowledge, he was engaged as assistant to a local doctor. Shortly after this, he set up his own practice in the town, but his passion for botany did not recommend him to his patients. Seeing him returning to town with handfuls of weeds, they concluded that as he got his medicines from the ditches they could not be much good. So, one gloomy day towards the close of 1779, as he stood gazing disconsolately down into a leechpond, Crabbe decided to give up doctoring altogether and devote himself to poetry. He set sail from Slaughden quay and arrived in London with three pounds in his pocket, a box of clothes and a case of surgical instruments.

During that terrible year in London from 1780–1, during which he lodged with a hairdresser in the City, Crabbe wrote and starved and made himself a poet by sheer force of will. But he was unable to sell anything he wrote and his applications to great men were equally fruitless. Then, just as he was giving up, a letter to Burke, in which he enclosed the first drafts of *The Library* and part of *The*

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Village, brought an unexpected result. Burke asked him to call at Charles Street, St. James's, was enthusiastic about the poems and showed them to Johnson and Reynolds, and did all he could to get them published. In this he was unsuccessful, though he read *The Library* to Dodsley and Johnson remarked of *The Village* that it was 'original, vigorous, and elegant'. What was more important still, Burke was impressed by the ability, modesty and quiet courage of the poet himself and invited him down to Beaconsfield to finish his poems at leisure. During their walks among the classical shades of the park, Crabbe told his patron everything about himself, confessing that he now felt 'a strong partiality for the Church'—which was not altogether surprising, for the Church was about the only profession in which he could hope to support himself and a family in any reasonable degree of comfort and security. It was arranged that he should be ordained forthwith by the Bishop of Norwich, and was appointed curate at Aldborough in 1781.

Old Mr. Crabbe was now very proud of his son and lovingly transcribed *The Library* with his own hand. The other inhabitants of Aldborough were not so impressed by the ex-warehouseman and unsuccessful doctor in his new clerical habit. So Crabbe wrote to the Chancellor, Lord Thurlow, whom he had previously met through Burke, complaining of the difficulties of his position, and Thurlow replied that he would try to find an early opportunity of serving him. Preferment came sooner than expected, and, after a few months at Aldborough, Crabbe found himself chaplain to the Duke of Rutland at Belvoir Castle. This was what is usually called a brilliant opening for a young man, but Crabbe was by no means pleased. He discovered that he had merely exchanged the hostility of Aldborough for a new kind of humiliating dependence. Proud, independent, and solitary by nature, he could never accustom himself to the manners and ceremonial of an eighteenth-century nobleman's household, however obliging that nobleman

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might be. The domestics, too, were insolent and made fun of him; at table he was compelled to drink many glasses of salt water because he would not join in the Tory toasts. It was at Belvoir that he finished *The Village*, sending it for a final correction to Burke and Johnson, who substituted a few lines on the first page which are not an improvement and miss the sense of the original, though they are usually printed as Crabbe's. *The Village* was published in 1783, and at once established its author's reputation. Next year Crabbe married Sarah Elmy who, up till that time, says his son, had 'still prudently resisted every proposition of immediate marriage'.*

When the Duke of Rutland was appointed Lord-Lieutenant of Ireland in 1783, he presented his chaplain with a portrait of Pope by Kneller, and told him that he might continue living at Belvoir as long as it suited him. Crabbe now found himself entirely at the mercy of the duke's servants, so removed to the neighbouring parsonage of Stathern, where he was his own master at last. There were few visitors at Stathern. 'During my father's residence there', his son informs us, 'and also at his other country places, he very rarely either paid or received visits, except in his clerical capacity.' One frequent visitor, however, was the poet and mechanist, Edward Cartwright. Few men could tell a story so well as Cartwright, who lived at Doncaster, where 'vast machines were worked under his direction'. When Mrs. Crabbe visited this machine shop, 'full of engines thundering with resistless power, yet under the apparent management of children, the sight of the little creatures condemned to such a mode of life in the days of their natural innocence, quite overcame her feelings, and she would burst into tears'.

Soon after this Crabbe moved to Muston. All this time he

* *The Life of the Rev. George Crabbe*, by His Son first appeared as the first volume of *The Poetical Works* in 1834. It has been reprinted in the *Worlds' Classics* and is one of the most charming biographies in the language.

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was writing and making periodical bonfires of his compositions. At least one work destroyed in this way was a treatise on botany and there were three novels, too. In 1792 he returned to Suffolk and settled at Parham. On the death of his wife's uncle he became heir to this property, but finding the place not to his taste he moved again to Great Glemham, where he began work on *The Parish Register*.

It would be strange if Crabbe's circumstances had not predisposed him to cynicism and a recognition of the vanity of human wishes. After waiting so long to marry the woman he loved, he married her at last only to find that she had become a neurotic invalid. In hot weather Mrs. Crabbe was a prey to moods of suicidal depression, from which she suddenly reacted to the opposite extreme of boisterous high spirits. As a result her husband began to shrink from society and became more solitary than ever, taking refuge in literature and botany. He would sit for hours poring over the weeds, stones, and insects on his desk. 'He cultivated botany, especially that of grasses, with insatiable ardour', his son tells us, 'entomology was another especial favourite; and he gradually made himself expert in some branches of geological science also. He would find luxury in the most dry and forbidding calculations. He had a veritable passion for science; the science of the human mind, the science of nature in general, and the science of abstract qualities.' Doubtless the study of grasses and stones was less disturbing than overmuch familiarity with human beings; as Julian Benda remarks, it is quite possible to love humanity in the abstract without ever wishing to see a single human being. It cannot be said, however, that Crabbe had any great love for either God or man, and this may explain why he never became a great poet. Nor did he hate humanity with the passion of a Swift, for he might have achieved greatness through hate. As it was he seems to have regarded mankind with much the same calm and reasonable curiosity as that with which he examined his plants and insects—much the same, with the addition of distaste and moral censure, for

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stones and grasses could not annoy and irritate him like men. Just as in botany he preferred the commoner lichens and weeds, so in humanity he chose to write about the most derelict and degraded types, deriving most satisfaction from reflecting upon the mouldering remains of his parishioners in the churchyard and comparing them as he knew them to have been in life with the boastful epitaphs set up over their graves. This was the sort of sepulchral joke that the Reverend Crabbe relished to the full.

For the rest he continued to lead the life of a quiet and industrious country clergyman. He used to take his family for long drives in the huge one-horse chaise, though usually on these excursions he surrendered the reins to his wife, when she was not feeling too suicidal, for if he saw a weed or a bunch of moss on a stone by the roadside he was liable to drive into the hedge, and it was his habit to read aloud in the most dangerous fashion as they spanked along the country roads. Kind, sympathetic, invariably gentle, unsparing of himself in the service of his parishioners, not only attending to their ghostly needs but doctoring them as well, Crabbe was never popular with the poor because he could not help accompanying his acts of charity with moral lectures which were resented.

After *The Village*, Crabbe published nothing of importance for over twenty years, unless we except a comparatively conventional poem like *The Newspaper* (1785), in which he shows a healthy dislike for the popular Press. Newspapers had not, of course, by then become so violent and vapid as the penny Press of our own day, but Crabbe rightly saw in them the principal enemy of literature—though, fortunately, neither the radio nor the film had come to compete with the newspaper in the great function of poisoning the public mind.

Crabbe remained in Suffolk for twelve years. *The Parish Register* was published in 1807. He began work on *The Borough*, while he was living at Rendham, and it appeared in 1810. In the same year he returned to Muston, generally

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acknowledged to be, with Burns and Scott, one of the leading poets of the day. At Belvoir, his son tells us, 'he now enjoyed from time to time the opportunity of mixing with many public characters, who, if their pursuits and turn of mind differed widely from his own, were marked with the stamp and polish of perfect gentlemen; and no one could appreciate the charm of high manners more fully than he whose muse chose to depict, with rare exceptions, those of the humbler classes of society. He was particularly pleased and amused with the conversation of the celebrated 'Beau Brummel'. For a man who had spent the greater part of his life among 'the humbler classes of society', as Crabbe had done, there was nothing particularly strange in such a preference.

The general manner of his life continued as before. His two sons, now grown up, were both clergymen with neighbouring livings; he collected his weeds, stones, and insects; he wrote innumerable lines of poetry; he doctored, baptized, married and buried the poor; and he looked after his wife with great tenderness, often cooking her supper himself and taking it up to her room when she felt too unwell to come down. But in 1813 'an event occurred which broke up the family and spoiled, if it did not entirely terminate, the domestic habits of years'. After a long period bordering upon insanity, Mrs. Crabbe died at last. At her death her husband became so ill that he asked that her grave should not be closed until it was seen whether he should recover. He did recover and the Duke of Rutland offered him the living of Trowbridge in Wiltshire, which he added to his other small collection of livings. There were two in Dorset, for instance, with which he had been presented somewhat earlier by the Chancellor, who had remarked good-humouredly at the time that 'by God, he was as like Parson Adams as twelve to a dozen'. Crabbe was unpopular with his parishioners at Muston and they venomously rang the bells for his successor before he himself had left the residence. After his wife's death his son found a letter from her

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to his father on the back of which his father had written: 'Nothing can be more sincere than this, nothing more reasonable and affectionate, and yet happiness was denied'.

II

Crabbe settled at Trowbridge in the summer of 1814, and on 8 June made the following note in his diary: 'Evening—solitary walk—night—change of opinion—easier, better, happier'. Trowbridge was indeed the beginning of a happier time. It was, in fact, almost like the beginning of a new life. After his wife's death, his son tells us, he seemed to have 'thrown off some weight or obstruction which had been, for many years previously, giving his bodily condition the appearance of a gradual decline. . . . In those days, "life is as tedious as a twice-told tale" was an expression not seldom in his mouth'. Now, at sixty-two, surrounded by young girls and 'healthfully excited by his warm reception among the most cultivated families', he seemed to be enjoying the pleasures of youth for the first time. 'Perhaps he had never looked so well . . . his temples getting more bare, the height of his well-developed forehead appeared as increased, and more than ever like one of those heads by which Wilkie makes so many converts to the beauty of human decay. He became stouter in person than he had been, though without fatness; and, although he began to stoop, his limbs and motions were strong and active.' His son was delighted to observe his 'tempered exuberance', remarking that such a renovation of health and strength at sixty is rare enough, 'and never, I believe, occurs unless there has been much temperance in the early period of life'.

Among his parishioners at Trowbridge Crabbe soon acquired the reputation of a dissipated man, a dandy and a gambler, for his manners ran counter to what were then considered, among the lower and middle classes, as the settled laws of clerical decorum. For this rubicund rector was seen sometimes at a concert, a ball, or even a play.

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'All his intimate friends, I think, were ladies; and I believe no better proof could be given of the delicacy and purity of his mind and character. He loved the very failings of the female mind. . . .

Therefore my age is as a lusty winter,
Frosty but kindly

were lines he could never read without being deeply moved.' The increased tenderness of the love scenes in his later poems, *The Tales* and *Tales of the Hall*, which he was writing at this time, provoked some good-natured raillery and 'though *love* might be out of the question', adds the Rev. Crabbe junior, 'I believe he inspired feelings of no ordinary warmth in more than one of the fair objects of his vain devotion'. The devotion could not have been altogether vain because at sixty-two he proposed to a girl of eighteen and was accepted. It is true that he thought better of it afterwards, though this was by no means his only *affaire* in the lusty winter of his age. 'Damme, sir!' exclaimed a local squire, 'the very first time Crabbe dined at my house, he made love to my sister.' And it is not to be supposed that she was a Bridget Allworthy, either. At the same time he developed a passion for fossils. He would spend hours alone among the quarries near Trowbridge, hammer in hand, 'not much pleased if anyone interrupted him . . . in short, solitary in so far as he could manage to be so, unless when some little boy or girl of a friend's family pleaded hard to be allowed to attend him, and mimic his labours with a tiny hammer'. He used to take his note book with him, and every now and then he would lay down his hammer to insert a new or amended couplet. On his yearly visits to London, when he stayed with the Hoares in Hampstead, he became a well-known figure at Mr. Murray's literary receptions at Albemarle Street. He was a frequent visitor at Holland House and once astonished Wordsworth by his knowledge of botany as the two nature poets walked together on Hampstead Heath. In his last years he

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suffered badly from the *tic douloureux*, which he used to describe as a sort of acute tooth-ache. On one occasion he had a tooth pulled out to relieve it, but without result, and it is possible that he was suffering from an attack of this malady when Chantrey drew him.

III

In his poetry, which has been sufficiently criticized elsewhere, Crabbe set himself to give a picture of eighteenth-century country life as it really was. *The Village* opens with a bitter commentary on the classical conventions of pastoral verse; together with *The Parish Register* and *The Borough* it gives the other side of the charming picture painted by Gray and Goldsmith. It is equally far from the pious rustics of Wordsworth, as harmless as their own sheep. It is not a pretty picture. Crabbe was an honest writer before everything else; his passion for science gave him a scrupulous regard for accuracy, and the exactness of his descriptions are probably unparalleled in English poetry. Indeed, he regarded the elegant traditions of eighteenth-century pastoral verse as nothing short of an insult to the poverty of the English village labourer. But one cannot altogether escape the suspicion that he rather enjoyed being able to paint so black a picture, and I suspect a certain masochistic relish for the cruelty and squalor he draws with such minuteness. Certainly Crabbe loathed the conditions he described, and wanted to see them altered, but they had made such an indelible impression on him in childhood that he never really escaped from them all his life. Again and again he returns to them in thought, as one meddles with an old wound that still aches. Even when he was comparatively prosperous he was still troubled by dreams of unimaginable meanness and squalor, and one particular dream of frequent occurrence was of some impudent boys (was he thinking of the domestics at Belvoir?) whom he could not beat because they were made of leather. 'The leather lads have been at me again', he would observe

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gloomily the next morning. And how fortunate it was that he could conclude *The Village* with that horrific account of the parish workhouse and those lines that Wordsworth was never tired of repeating:

The lame, the blind, and, far the happiest they!
The moping idiot and the madman gay.

While there are plenty of reasons for a revival of interest in Crabbe today, in his time he was a godsend to the classicists. Here was a man still using the manner of Pope, though he might be 'Pope in worsted stockings', and writing as a matter of fact far more realistically than Wordsworth ever did. Crabbe does not pretend to use the language common in lower and middle-class society; but neither did Wordsworth, when it came to it, with his extreme simplicity of diction that is itself a form of artificiality and his mysticism that can hardly be called a true reflection of the minds of cottagers and clowns. What is so delightful in Crabbe is just this combination of eighteenth-century poetic diction with a prevailing mood of half-humorous grimness. He is a better psychologist in *Peter Grimes* than Wordsworth in *Peter Bell*, who becomes a 'good and honest man' by observing the devotion of a donkey. If Wordsworth's great moments of exaltation were beyond Crabbe, so was Crabbe's wry humour and sharp observation beyond Wordsworth, who could never have written of any of his pious characters:

He gave reforming charities a sum,
And bought the blessings of the blind and dumb.

It is not my intention to fall into the same trap as Jeffrey and Wilson and use Crabbe as a stick to beat Wordsworth, for it is open to any Wordsworthian to reply that Crabbe never rose to the heights of *Tintern Abbey* and *The Prelude*. That Wordsworth should have found him too matter of fact is only natural; but to Byron he was 'Nature's sternest painter, yet the best'.²

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The Village, *The Parish Register* and *The Borough*—these poems give us the best of Crabbe. As he grew older he wrote far too much and though the later *Tales* and *Tales of The Hall* contain many passages of charming landscape painting, their general tendency is towards an increasingly garrulous prolixity. The earlier poems present us with a pretty complete picture of Georgian and Regency rural and provincial society such as we get nowhere else. In a sense the three poems are really one long poem, each being a continuation and expansion of the last. *The Parish Register*, with its description of all the people who bring their children to be baptized, who come to be married or are brought to be buried during one year, is really the least successful because, as M. René Huchon* remarks, beyond this general framework it has neither design nor development, and there is no reason why the characters of one section should not appear in either of the others. But the character sketches are usually sharp and sardonically witty with a touch of Rowlandson grotesque. Most of the children baptized in the year are bastards; the *Marriages* section opens, as one half expects it will, with a senile couple shambling obscenely up to the altar; there is grim humour in the episode of Dawkins and Ditchem, the two old bachelors married at last, one in the hope of children and the other in dread of them, the first only living to envy the latter. As usual, Crabbe is at his best in the *Burials*, watching with ill-concealed satisfaction as Death tidies up the parish of so much human refuse. In *The Borough* his picture of the schools, the prisons, the inns, the condition of the poor, the lawyers, the doctors, the election, the alms-house and its trustees, even the church presided over by ‘lillies male’, is almost uniformly black. No social critic or moralist could be more stern, more scathing in his judgements. But with all this one should not commit the error of supposing Crabbe was anything of a Jacobin. He stood by his Church

* *Un poète réaliste anglais* (1906 trs. 1907). The only complete study of Crabbe and his work.

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and his King with the most purple-nosed, port-drinking Tory, with the most hard-riding, sporting parson of his day, preaching against the excesses of both religious and political enthusiasm. In his eyes Methodism and Jacobinism were the two bogies threatening the stability of society. Tom Paine, with his *Rights of Man*, he abhorred; Voltaire was only another name for the Devil. He did not approve of things as they were, but if they were bad it was because of the sinfulness of man's heart and had nothing to do with the high price of corn or the extortionate bailiffs of absentee landlords. In any case, the country could not be bettered by mob violence. He used his three votes throughout his life quite impartially, sometimes voting Whig, sometimes Tory, according to his opinion of the personal qualities of the candidates, refusing to be intimidated or deflected an inch from his own personal, considered judgement.

Crabbe has none of the flashing elegance of Pope, or the sweet classicism of Cowper, or the exultation of Wordsworth, or the nonchalant brilliance of Byron. For the most part he is rather flat and sombre like the moors and marshes of his native Suffolk. But his poetry has the solid permanence of good workmanship and the dignity and precision of the great Augustan tradition. It is with Crabbe that this tradition closes, as it closes in the plain, homely grace of the pottery and furniture of the period and the still classical architecture that continued to hold its own against the historicism of the Gothic and Greek revivals. It is this tradition that Byron, infected with the romantic fevers and revolutionary unrest of his age, nostalgically longed to recapture. Crabbe is still naturally a part of eighteenth-century England, a part above all of that earth with which the Romantics were already losing touch. Instead of dreaming of the light that never was on land or sea, he gives us the actual Suffolk landscape in a series of pictures that have the detailed precision and sombre colouring of the Dutch genre painters. There

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are times when his gallery of portraits recall Chaucer, for in his poetry is to be found every type from wealthy land-owner to peasant, from genteel spinster to quayside drab. If he seems at times rather prosaic and deficient in imaginative flights it is because he kept both feet firmly planted on the ground. Like Hogarth, he cannot resist pointing the moral, and in this again he is essentially English. It is not for nothing that Wilson described him as 'the most original and vivid painter of the vast varieties of common life that England has ever produced'. He is indeed a master of poetic realism, and in this respect for ease and naturalness he stands alone. He is not essentially a gloomy poet, but it was inevitable that his mind, like the dyer's hand, should become subdued to what it worked in. Below the surface, the social life of his age was not, to say the least, either happy or pleasant, except for the favoured few. Yet, within the Augustan tradition, it was possible to write of meanness and squalor without becoming either mean or squalid, for grace and wit were inherent in it. In his day culture had not yet been multiplied at the lowest common level of taste. There were still certain standards which a writer, or an architect, was expected to observe. The machine had not as yet forced mankind to its own frantic rhythm, nor was Science quite so busily engaged in preparing the extinction of the human race.

What a relief, then, to turn back to the moor and the river, the streets, the pubs and quays of Aldborough as we find them in Crabbe's pages; to the birds of the shore and estuary, and to share the poet's lonely delight in the waste places of the land, with their lichens and weeds and stones; and to recapture his wonder at the vast element that perpetually rakes our human world, its strange subterranean forests blazing in phosphorescence, and its secret life of star-fish, medusa and heraldic sea-horse. Crabbe's descriptions are scientific in their exactness, as in the famous passage on the lichened stones of his church,

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where botany becomes poetry. To appreciate the quality of such passages they should be read after the vaguer rhapsodies of Shelley and Swinburne. Rhetoric would hardly suit Crabbe's microscopic observation; but it is an accent that prevails in the end against many louder voices, because it is the accent of truth.

There could be no finer tribute to the continuing vitality of Crabbe's poetry than Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes*, and the picture of the composer reading *The Borough* in America during the war and being stirred to the powerful nostalgia for his native Suffolk that inspired that truly magnificent opera, where the spirit and temper of Crabbe's poem is translated into sound with a marvellous fidelity. Of his poetry, therefore, we may say that it is—

Like those tall elms in Farmer Frankford's ground,
They'll grow no more, but all their growth is sound;
By time confirm'd and rooted in the land,
The storms they've stood still promise they shall stand.

THE VILLAGE

BOOK I

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,
 Demand a song—the Muse can give no more.

Fled are those times when, in harmonious strains,
 The rustic poet praised his native plains.
 No shepherds now, in smooth alternate verse,
 Their country's beauty or their nymphs' rehearse;
 Yet still for these we frame the tender strain,
 Still in our lays fond Corydons complain,
 And shepherds' boys their amorous pains reveal,
 The only pains, alas! they never feel.

On Mincio's banks, in Cæsar's bounteous reign,
 If Tityrus found the Golden Age again,
 Must sleepy bards the flattering dream prolong,
 Mechanic echoes of the Mantuan song?
 From Truth and Nature shall we widely stray,
 Where Virgil, not where Fancy, leads the way?³

Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains,
 Because the Muses never knew their pains.
 They boast their peasants' pipes; but peasants now
 Resign their pipes and plod behind the plough;
 And few, amid the rural-tribe, have time
 To number syllables, and play with rhyme;
 Save honest Duck,⁴ what son of verse could share
 The poet's rapture, and the peasant's care?
 Or the great labours of the field degrade,
 With the new peril of a poorer trade?

GEORGE CRABBE

From this chief cause these idle praises spring,
That themes so easy few forbear to sing;
For no deep thought the trifling subjects ask:
To sing of shepherds is an easy task.

The happy youth assumes the common strain,
A nymph his mistress, and himself a swain;
With no sad scenes he clouds his tuneful prayer,
But all, to look like her, is painted fair.

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 feebler 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?

No; cast by Fortune on a frowning coast,
Which neither groves nor happy valleys boast;
Where other cares than those the Muse relates,
And other shepherds dwell with other mates;
By such examples taught, I paint the Cot,
As Truth will paint it, and as Bards will not:
Nor you, ye poor, of letter'd scorn complain,
To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain;
O'ercome by labour, and bow'd down by time,
Feel you the barren flattery of a rhyme?
Can poets soothe you, when you pine for bread,
By winding myrtles round your ruin'd shed?
Can their light tales your weighty griefs o'erpower,
Or glad with airy mirth the toilsome hour?

Lo! where the heath, with withering brake grown o'er,
Lends the light turf that warms the neighbouring poor;

THE VILLAGE

From thence a length of burning sand appears,
Where the thin harvest waves its wither'd ears;
Rank weeds, that every art and care defy,
Reign o'er the land, and rob the blighted rye :
There thistles stretch their prickly arms afar,
And to the ragged infant threaten war;
There poppies, nodding, mock the hope of toil;
There the blue bugloss paints the sterile soil;
Hardy and high, above the slender sheaf,
The slimy mallow waves her silky leaf;
O'er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,
And clasping tares cling round the sickly blade;
With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,
And a sad splendour vainly shines around.
So looks the nymph whom wretched arts adorn,
Betray'd by man, then left for man to scorn;
Whose cheek in vain assumes the mimic rose,
While her sad eyes the troubled breast disclose;
Whose outward splendour is but folly's dress,
Exposing most, when most it gilds distress.

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

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

Where are the swains, who, daily labour done,
With rural games play'd down the setting sun;
Who struck with matchless force the bounding ball,
Or made the pond'rous quoit obliquely fall;
While some huge Ajax, terrible and strong,
Engaged some artful stripling of the throng,

GEORGE CRABBE

And fell beneath him, foil'd, while far around
Hoarse triumph rose, and rocks return'd the sound?
Where now are these?—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),
To gain a lawless passport through the land.

Here, wand'ring long amid these frowning fields,
I sought the simple life that Nature yields; *
Rapine and Wrong and Fear usurp'd her place,
And a bold, artful, surly, savage race;
Who, only skill'd to take the finny tribe,
The yearly dinner, or septennial bribe,
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.

As on their neighbouring beach yon swallows stand,
And wait for favouring winds to leave the land,
While still for flight the ready wing is spread:
So waited I the favouring hour, and fled—
Fled from these shores where guilt and famine reign,
And cried, Ah! hapless they who still remain;
Who still remain to hear the ocean roar,
Whose greedy waves devour the lessening shore;
Till some fierce tide, with more imperious sway,
Sweeps the low hut and all it holds away;
When the sad tenant weeps from door to door,
And begs a poor protection from the poor!

But these are scenes where Nature's niggard hand
Gave a spare portion to the famish'd land;

• THE VILLAGE

Hers is the fault, if here mankind complain
Of fruitless toil and labour spent in vain.
But yet in other scenes, more fair in view,
Where Plenty smiles—alas! she smiles for few—
And those who taste not, yet behold her store,
Are as the slaves that dig the golden ore,
The wealth around them makes them doubly poor

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;
See them alternate suns and showers engage,
And hoard up aches and anguish for their age;
Through fens and marshy moors their steps pursue,
When their warm pores imbibe the evening dew;
Then own that labour may as fatal be
To these thy slaves, as thine excess to thee.

Amid this tribe too oft a manly pride
Strives in strong toil the fainting heart to hide;
There may you see the youth of slender frame
Contend with weakness, weariness, and shame;
Yet, urged along, and proudly loth to yield,
He strives to join his fellows of the field;
Till long-contending nature droops at last,
Declining health rejects his poor repast,
His cheerless spouse the coming danger sees,
And mutual murmurs urge the slow disease.

Yet grant them health, 'tis not for us to tell,
Though the head droops not, that the heart is well;
Or will you praise that homely, healthy fare,

GEORGE CRABBE

Plenteous 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.

Ye gentle souls, who dream of rural ease,
Whom the smooth stream and smoother sonnet please;
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 hearth th' expiring brand!

Nor yet can Time itself obtain for these
Life's latest comforts, due respect and ease:
For yonder see that hoary swain, whose age
Can with no cares except his own engage;
Who, propp'd on that rude staff, looks up to see
The bare arms broken from the withering tree,
On which, a boy, he climb'd the loftiest bough,
Then his first joy, but his sad emblem now.

He once was chief in all the rustic trade;
His steady hand the straightest furrow made;
Full many a prize he won, and still is proud
To find the triumphs of his youth allow'd.
A transient pleasure sparkles in his eyes;
He hears and smiles, then thinks again and sighs:
For now he journeys to his grave in pain;
The rich disdain him, nay, the poor disdain;
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.

Oft may you see him, when he tends the sheep,

• THE VILLAGE

His winter-charge, beneath the hillock weep;
Oft hear him murmur to the winds that blow
O'er his white locks and bury them in snow,
When, roused by rage and muttering in the morn,
He mends the broken hedge with icy thorn:—

‘Why do I live, when I desire to be
‘At once from life and life’s long labour free?
‘Like leaves in spring, the young are blown away,
‘Without the sorrows of a slow decay;
‘I, like yon wither’d leaf, remain behind,
‘Nipp’d by the frost, and shivering in the wind;
‘There it abides till younger buds come on,
‘As I, now all my fellow-swains are gone;
‘Then, from the rising generation thrust,
‘It falls, like me, unnoticed to the dust.

‘These fruitful fields, these numerous flocks I see,
‘Are others’ gain, but killing cares to me:
‘To me the children of my youth are lords,
‘Cool in their looks, but hasty in their words:
‘Wants of their own demand their care; and who
‘Feels his own want and succours others too?
‘A lonely, wretched man, in pain I go,
‘None need my help, and none relieve my wo;
‘Then let my bones beneath the turf be laid,
‘And men forget the wretch they would not aid!’

Thus groan the old, till, by disease oppress’d,
They taste a final wo, and then they rest.

Theirs is yon house that holds the parish poor,
Whose walls of mud scarce bear the broken door;
There, where the putrid vapours, flagging, play,
And the dull wheel hums doleful through the day—
There children dwell, who know no parents’ care;
Parents, who know no children’s love, dwell there!
Heart-broken matrons on their joyless bed,

GEORGE CRABBE

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.⁵
Here too the sick their final doom receive,
Here brought, amid the scenes of grief, to grieve,
Where the loud groans from some sad chamber flow,
Mix'd with the clamours of the crowd below;
Here, sorrowing, they each kindred sorrow scan,
And the cold charities of man to man:
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,
And pride embitters what it can't deny.

Say ye, oppress'd by some fantastic woes,
Some jarring nerve that baffles your repose;
Who press the downy couch, while slaves advance
With timid eye to read the distant glance;
Who with sad prayers the weary doctor tease,
To name the nameless ever-new disease;
Who with mock patience dire complaints endure,
Which real pain, and that alone, can cure—
How would ye bear in real pain to lie,
Despised, neglected, left alone to die?
How would ye bear to draw your latest breath,
Where all that's wretched paves the way for death?

Such is that room which one rude beam divides,
And naked rafters form the sloping sides;
Where the vile bands that bind the thatch are seen,
And lath and mud are all that lie between,
Save one dull pane, that, coarsely patch'd, gives way
To the rude tempest, yet excludes the day.
Here, on a matted flock, with dust o'erspread,

THE VILLAGE

The drooping wretch reclines his languid head;
For him no hand the cordial cup applies,
Or wipes the tear that stagnates in his eyes;
No friends with soft discourse his pain beguile,
Or promise hope till sickness wears a smile.

But soon a loud and hasty summons calls,
Shakes the thin roof, and echoes round the walls.
Anon, a figure enters, quaintly neat,
All pride and business, bustle and conceit;
With looks unalter'd by these scenes of wo,
With speed that, entering, speaks his haste to go,
He bids the gazing throng around him fly,
And carries fate and physic in his eye:
A potent quack, long versed in human ills,
Who first insults the victim whom he kills;
Whose murd'rous hand a drowsy Bench protect,
And whose most tender mercy is neglect.

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

But ere his death some pious doubts arise,
Some simple fears, which 'bold bad' men despise:
Fain would he ask the parish-priest to prove
His title certain to the joys above;
For this he sends the murmuring nurse, who calls
The holy stranger to these dismal walls;
And doth not he, the pious man, appear,

GEORGE CRABBE

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 sick man's bed,
To raise the hope he feels not, or with zeal
To combat fears that e'en the pious feel?

Now once again the gloomy scene explore,
Less gloomy now; the bitter hour is o'er,
The man of many sorrows sighs no more.
Up yonder hill, behold how sadly slow
The bier moves winding from the vale below;
There lie the happy dead, from trouble free,
And the glad parish pays the frugal fee.
No more, O Death! thy victim starts to hear
Churchwarden stern, or kingly overseer;
No more the farmer claims his humble bow,
Thou art his lord, the best of tyrants thou!

Now to the church behold the mourners come,
Sedately torpid and devoutly dumb;
The village children now their games suspend,
To see the bier that bears their ancient friend:
For he was one in all their idle sport,
And like a monarch ruled their little court;
The pliant bow he form'd, the flying ball,
The bat, the wicket, were his labours all;

THE VILLAGE

Him now they follow to his grave, and stand
Silent and sad, and gazing, hand in hand;
While bending low, their eager eyes explore
The mingled relics of the parish poor.
The bell tolls late, the moping owl flies round,
Fear marks the flight and magnifies the sound;
The busy priest, detain'd by weightier care,
Defers his duty till the day of prayer;
And, waiting long, the crowd retire distress'd,
To think a poor man's bones should lie unblest'd.

THE PARISH REGISTER

PART I

BAPTISMS

THE year revolves, and I again explore
The simple annals of my parish poor:
What infant-members in my flock appear;
What pairs I bless'd in the departed year;
And who, of old or young, or nymphs or swains,
Are lost to life, its pleasures and its pains.

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.

Is there a place, save one the poet sees,
A land of love, of liberty and ease;
Where labour wearies not, nor cares suppress
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 man's life is holiday and song?
Vain search for scenes like these! no view appears,
By sighs unruffled or unstain'd by tears;
Since vice the world subdued and waters drown'd,
Auburn⁶ and Eden can no more be found.

Hence good and evil mix'd, but man has skill
And power to part them, when he feels the will!

THE PARISH REGISTER

Toil, care, and patience bless th' abstemious few,
Fear, shame, and want the thoughtless herd pursue.

Behold the cot! where thrives th' industrious swain,
Source of his pride, his pleasure, and his gain;
Screen'd from the winter's wind, the sun's last ray
Smiles on the window and prolongs the day;
Projecting thatch the woodbine's branches stop,
And turn their blossoms to the casement's top:
All need requires is in that cot contain'd,
And much that taste, untaught and unrestrain'd,
Surveys delighted; there she loves to trace,
In one gay picture, all the royal race;
Around the walls are heroes, lovers, kings;
The print that shows them and the verse that sings.

Here the last Lewis on his throne is seen,
And there he stands imprison'd, and his queen;
To these the mother takes her child, and shows
What grateful duty to his God he owes;
Who gives to him a happy home, where he
Lives and enjoys his freedom with the free;
When kings and queens, dethroned, insulted, tried,
Are all these blessings of the poor denied.

There is King Charles, and all his Golden Rules,
Who proved Misfortune's was the best of schools:
And there his son, who, tried by years of pain,
Proved that misfortunes may be sent in vain.

The magic-mill that grinds the gran'nams young,
Close at the side of kind Godiva hung;
She, of her favourite place the pride and joy,
Of charms at once most lavish and most coy,
By wanton act the purest fame could raise,
And give the boldest deed the chastest praise.

There stands the stoutest Ox in England fed;
There fights the boldest Jew, Whitechapel-bred;

GEORGE CRABBE

And here Saint Monday's worthy votaries live
In all the joys that ale and skittles give.

Now, lo! in Egypt's coast that hostile fleet,
By nations dreaded and by Nelson beat;
And here shall soon another triumph come,
A deed of glory in a day of gloom—
Distressing glory! grievous boon of fate!
The proudest conquest, at the dearest rate.⁷

On shelf of deal, beside the cuckoo-clock,
Of cottage-reading rests the chosen stock;
Learning we lack, not books, but have a kind
For all our wants, a meat for every mind:
The tale for wonder and the joke for whim,
The half-sung sermon and the half-groan'd hymn.

No need of classing; each within its place,
The feeling finger in the dark can trace;
'First from the corner, farthest from the wall':
Such all the rules, and they suffice for all.

There pious works for Sunday's use are found,
Companions for that Bible newly bound:
That Bible, bought by sixpence weekly saved,
Has choicest prints by famous hands engraved;
Has choicest notes by many a famous head,
Such as to doubt have rustic readers led;
Have made them stop to reason, *why?* and *how?*
And, where they once agreed, to cavil now.

Oh! rather give me commentators plain,
Who with no deep researches vex the brain;
Who from the dark and doubtful love to run,
And hold their glimmering tapers to the sun;
Who simple truth with nine-fold reasons back,
And guard the point no enemies attack.

Bunyan's famed Pilgrim rests that shelf upon;
A genius rare but rude was honest John:

THE PARISH REGISTER

Not one who, early by the Muse beguiled,
Drank from her well the waters undefiled;
Not one who slowly gain'd the hill sublime,
Then often sipp'd and little at a time;
But one who dabbled in the sacred springs,
And drank them muddy, mix'd with baser things.

Here, to interpret dreams we read the rules—
Science our own, and never taught in schools;
In moles and specks we Fortune's gift discern,
And Fate's fix'd will from Nature's wanderings learn.

Of Hermit Quarle we read, in island rare,
Far from mankind and seeming far from care;
Safe from all want, and sound in every limb;
Yes! there was he, and there was care with him.

Unbound and heap'd, these valued works beside,
Lay humbler works the pedler's pack supplied;
Yet these, long since, have all acquired a name:
The Wandering Jew has found his way to fame;
And fame, denied to many a labour'd song,
Crowns Thumb the great, and Hickerthrift the strong.

There too is he, by wizard-power upheld,
Jack, by whose arm the giant-brood were quell'd:
His shoes of swiftness on his feet he placed;
His coat of darkness on his loins he braced;
His sword of sharpness in his hand he took,
And off the heads of doughty giants stroke:
Their glaring eyes beheld no mortal near;
No sound of feet alarm'd the drowsy ear;
No English blood their pagan sense could smell,
But heads dropp'd headlong, wondering why they fell.

These are the peasant's joy, when, placed at ease,
Half his delighted offspring mount his knees.

To every cot the lord's indulgent mind
Has a small space for garden-ground assign'd;

GEORGE CRABBE

Here—till return of morn dismiss'd the farm—
The careful peasant plies the sinewy arm,
Warm'd as he works, and casts 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.

Here grow the humble chives, and, hard by them,
The leek with crown globose and reedy stem;
High climb his pulse in many an even row,
Deep strike the ponderous roots in soil below;
And herbs of potent smell and pungent taste
Give a warm relish to the night's repast;
Apples and cherries grafted by his hand,
And cluster'd nuts for neighbouring market stand.

Nor thus concludes his labour: near the cot,
The reed-fence rises round some fav'rite spot;
Where rich carnations, pinks with purple eyes,
Proud hyacinths, the least some florist's prize,
Tulips tall-stemm'd and pounced auriculas rise.

Here on a Sunday-eve, when service ends,
Meet and rejoice a family of friends;
All speak aloud, are happy and are free,
And glad they seem, and gaily they agree.

What, though fastidious ears may shun the speech,
Where all are talkers and where none can teach;
Where still the welcome and the words are old,
And the same stories are for ever told—
Yet theirs is joy that, bursting from the heart,
Prompts the glad tongue these nothings to impart;
That forms these tones of gladness we despise,
That lifts their steps, that sparkles in their eyes;
That talks or laughs or runs or shouts or plays,

THE PARISH REGISTER

And speaks in all their looks and all their ways.

Fair scenes of peace! ye might detain us long;
But vice and misery now demand the song,
And turn our view from dwellings simply neat,
To this infected row we term our street.

Here, in cabal, a disputatious crew
Each evening meet: the sot, the cheat, the shrew;
Riots are nightly heard—the curse, the cries
Of beaten wife, perverse in her replies;
While shrieking children hold each threat'ning hand,
And sometimes life, and sometimes food, demand:
Boys, in*their first-stol'n rags, to swear begin,
And girls, who heed not dress, are skill'd in gin:
Snarers and smugglers here their gains divide;
Ensnaring females here their victims hide;
And here is one, the sibyl of the row,
Who knows all secrets, or affects to know.
Seeking their fate, to her the simple run,
To her the guilty, theirs awhile to shun;
Mistress of worthless arts, depraved in will,
Her care unblest'd and unrepaid her skill,
Slave to the tribe, to whose command she stoops,
And poorer than the poorest maid she dupes.

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 wo and wretchedness:
Yet, should these boys, with bodies bronzed and bare,

GEORGE CRABBE

High-swoln and hard, outlive that lack of care,
Forced on some farm, the unexerted strength,
Though loth to action, is compell'd at length,
When warm'd by health, as serpents in the spring
Aside their slough of indolence they fling.

Yet, ere they go, a greater evil comes—
See! crowded beds in those contiguous rooms;
Beds but ill parted by a paltry screen
Of paper'd lath or curtain dropp'd between;
Daughters and sons to yon compartments creep,
And parents here beside their children sleep.
Ye who have power, these thoughtless people part,
Nor let the ear be first to taint the heart!

Come! search within, nor sight nor smell regard;
The true physician walks the foulest ward.
See! on the floor what frouzy patches rest!
What nauseous fragments on yon fractured chest!
What downy dust beneath yon window-seat!
And round these posts that serve this bed for feet;
This bed, where all those tatter'd garments lie,
Worn by each sex, and now perforce thrown by!

See! as we gaze, an infant lifts its head,
Left by neglect and burrow'd in that bed;
The mother-gossip has the love suppress'd
An infant's cry once waken'd in her breast;
And daily prattles, as her round she takes,
(With strong resentment) of the want she makes.

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

Here are no wheels for either wool or flax,
But packs of cards—made up of sundry packs;
Here is no clock, nor will they turn the glass,

THE PARISH REGISTER

And see how 'swift th' important moments pass;
Here are no books, but ballads on the wall
Are some abusive, and indecent all;
Pistols are here, unpair'd; with nets and hooks,
Of every kind, for rivers, ponds, and brooks;
An ample flask, that nightly rovers fill
With recent poison from the Dutchman's still;
A box of tools, with wires of various size,
Frocks, wigs, and hats, for night or day disguise,
And bludgeons stout to gain or guard a prize.

To every house belongs a space of ground,
Of equal size, once fenced with paling round;
That paling now by slothful waste destroy'd,
Dead gorse and stumps of elder fill the void,
Save in the centre-spot, whose walls of clay
Hide sots and striplings at their drink or play.
Within, a board, beneath a tiled retreat,
Allures the bubble and maintains the cheat;
Where heavy ale in spots like varnish shows;
Where chalky tallies yet remain in rows;
Black pipes and broken jugs the seats defile,
The walls and windows, rhymes and reck'nings vile;
Prints of the meanest kind disgrace the door,
And cards, in curses torn, lie fragments on the floor.

Here his poor bird th' inhuman cocker brings,
Arms his hard heel and clips his golden wings;
With spicy food th' impatient spirit feeds,
And shouts and curses as the battle bleeds.
Struck through the brain, deprived of both his eyes,
The vanquish'd bird must combat till he dies;
Must faintly peck at his victorious foe,
And reel and stagger at each feeble blow.
When fall'n, the savage grasps his dabbled plumes,
His blood-stained arms, for other deaths assumes;

GEORGE CRABBE

And damns the craven-fowl, that lost his stake,
And only bled and perish'd for his sake.⁸

Such are our peasants, those to whom we yield
Praise with relief, the fathers of the field;
And these who take, from our reluctant hands,
What Burn⁹ advises or the Bench commands.

Our farmers round, well pleased with constant gain,
Like other farmers, flourish and complain.—
These are our groups; our portraits next appear,
And close our exhibition for the year.

WITH evil omen we that year begin: •
A Child of Shame—stern Justice adds, of Sin—
Is first recorded; I would hide the deed,
But vain the wish; I sigh and I proceed:
And could I well th' instructive truth convey,
'Twould warn the giddy and awake the gay.

Of all the nymphs who gave our village grace,
The Miller's daughter had the fairest face.
Proud was the Miller; money was his pride;
He rode to market, as our farmers ride;
And 'twas his boast, inspired by spirits, there,
His favourite Lucy should be rich as fair;
But she must meek and still obedient prove,
And not presume, without his leave, to love.

A youthful Sailor heard him;—'Ha!' quoth he,
'This Miller's maiden is a prize for me;
'Her charms I love, his riches I desire,
'And all his threats but fan the kindling fire;
'My ebbing purse no more the foe shall fill,
'But Love's kind act and Lucy at the mill.'

Thus thought the youth, and soon the chase began,
Stretch'd all his sail, nor thought of pause or plan:
His trusty staff in his bold hand he took,

THE PARISH REGISTER

Like him and like his frigate, heart of oak;
Fresh were his features, his attire was new;
Clean was his linen, and his jacket blue:
Of finest jean, his trowsers, tight and trim,
Brush'd the large buckle at the silver rim.

He soon arrived, he traced the village-green;
There saw the maid, and was with pleasure seen;
Then talk'd of love, till Lucy's yielding heart
Confess'd 'twas painful, though 'twas right, to part.

'For ah! my father has a haughty soul;
'Whom best he loves, he loves but to control;
'Me to some churl in bargain he'll consign,
'And make some tyrant of the parish mine:
'Cold is his heart, and he with looks severe
'Has often forced but never shed the tear;
'Save, when my mother died, some drops express'd
'A kind of sorrow for a wife at rest.—
'To me a master's stern regard is shown,
'I'm like his steed, prized highly as his own;
'Stroked but corrected, threaten'd when supplied,
'His slave and boast, his victim and his pride.'

'Cheer up, my lass! I'll to thy father go—
'The Miller cannot be the Sailor's foe;
'Both live by Heaven's free gale, that plays aloud
'In the stretch'd canvas and the piping shroud;
'The rush of winds, the flapping sails above,
'And rattling planks within, are sounds *we* love;
'Calms are our dread; when tempests plough the deep,
'We take a reef, and to the rocking sleep.'

'Ha!' quoth the Miller, moved at speech so rash,
'Art thou like me? then, where thy notes and cash?
'Away to Wapping, and a wife command,
'With all thy wealth, a guinea, in thine hand;
'There with thy messmates quaff the muddy cheer,

GEORGE CRABBE

'And leave my Lucy for thy betters here.'

'Revenge! revenge!' the angry lover cried,
Then sought the nymph, and 'Be thou now my bride'.
Bride had she been but they no priest could move
To bind in law the couple bound by love.

What sought these lovers then by day, by night,
But stolen moments of disturb'd delight—
Soft trembling tumults, terrors dearly prized,
Transports that pain'd, and joys that agonized:
Till the fond damsel, pleased with lad so trim,
Awed by her parent, and enticed by him,
Her lovely form from savage power to save,
Gave—not her hand, but ALL she could, she gave.

Then came the day of shame, the grievous night,
The varying look, the wandering appetite;
The joy assumed, while sorrow dimm'd the eyes;
The forced sad smiles that follow'd sudden sighs;
And every art, long used, but used in vain,
To hide thy progress, Nature, and thy pain.

Too eager caution shows some danger's near,
The bully's bluster proves the coward's fear;
His sober step the drunkard vainly tries,
And nymphs expose the failings they disguise.

First, whispering gossips were in parties seen;
Then louder Scandal walk'd the village-green;
Next babbling Folly told the growing ill,
And busy Malice dropp'd it at the mill.

'Go! to thy curse and mine,' the Father said,
'Strife and confusion stalk around thy bed;
'Want and a wailing brat thy portion be,
'Plague to thy fondness, as thy fault to me.—
'Where skulks the villain?'—'On the ocean wide
'My William seeks a portion for his bride.'—

'Vain be his search! but, till the traitor come,

THE PARISH REGISTER

'The higgler's cottage be thy future home;
'There with his ancient shrew and care abide,
'And hide thy head—thy shame thou canst not hide.'

Day after day was pass'd in pains and grief;
Week follow'd week—and still was no relief.
Her boy was born—no lads nor lasses came
To grace the rite or give the child a name;
Nor grave conceited nurse, of office proud,
Bore the young Christian roaring through the crowd:
In a small chamber was my office done,
Where blinks through paper'd panes the setting sun;
Where noisy sparrows, perch'd on penthouse near,
Chirp tuneless joy, and mock the frequent tear;
Bats on their webby wings in darkness move,
And feebly shriek their melancholy love.

No Sailor came; the months in terror fled!
Then news arrived: he fought, and he was DEAD!

At the lone cottage Lucy lives, and still
Walks for her weekly pittance to the mill;
A mean seraglio there her father keeps,
Whose mirth insults her, as she stands and weeps,
And sees the plenty, while compell'd to stay,
Her father's pride become his harlot's prey.

Throughout the lanes she glides, at evening's close,
And softly lulls her infant to repose;
Then sits and gazes, but with viewless look,
As gilds the moon the rippling of the brook;
And sings her vespers, but in voice so low,
She hears their murmurs as the waters flow:
And she too murmurs, and begins to find
The solemn wanderings of a wounded mind.
Visions of terror, views of wo succeed,
The mind's impatience, to the body's need;
By turns to that, by turns to this, a prey,

GEORGE CRABBE

She knows what reason yields, and dreads what
madness may.

Next, with their boy, a decent couple came,
And call'd him Robert, 'twas his father's name;
Three girls preceded, all by time endear'd,
And future births were neither hoped nor fear'd.
Bless'd in each other, but to no excess,
Health, quiet, comfort, form'd their happiness;
Love, all made up of torture and delight,
Was but mere madness in this couple's sight:
Susan could think, though not without a sigh,
If she were gone, who should her place supply;
And Robert, half in earnest, half in jest,
Talk of her spouse when he should be at rest:
Yet strange would either think it to be told,
Their love was cooling or their hearts were cold.
Few were their acres,—but, with these content,
They were, each pay-day, ready with their rent;
And few their wishes—what their farm denied,
The neighbouring town, at trifling cost, supplied.
If at the draper's window Susan cast
A longing look, as with her goods she pass'd,
And, with the produce of the wheel and churn,
Bought her a Sunday-robe on her return;
True to her maxim, she would take no rest,
Till care repaid that portion to the chest:
Or if, when loitering at the Whitsun-fair,
Her Robert spent some idle shillings there;
Up at the barn, before the break of day,
He made his labour for th' indulgence pay:
Thus both—that waste itself might work in vain—
Wrought double tides, and all was well again.

Yet, though so prudent, there were times of joy,

THE PARISH REGISTER

(The day they wed, the christening of the boy,)
When to the wealthier farmers there was shown
Welcome unfeign'd, and plenty like their own;
For Susan served the great, and had some pride
Among our topmost people to preside.
Yet in that plenty, in that welcome free,
There was the guiding nice frugality,
That, in the festal as the frugal day,
Has, in a different mode, a sovereign sway;
As tides the same attractive influence know,
In the least ebb and in their proudest flow:
The wise frugality, that does not give
A life to saving, but that saves to live;
Sparing, not pinching, mindful though not mean,
O'er all presiding, yet in nothing seen.

Recorded next, a babe of love I trace,
Of many loves the mother's fresh disgrace.—
'Again, thou harlot! could not all thy pain,
'All my reproof, thy wanton thoughts restrain?'
'Alas! your reverence, wanton thoughts, I grant,
'Were once my motive, now the thoughts of want;
'Women, like me, as ducks in a decoy,
'Swim down a stream, and seem to swim in joy;
'Your sex pursue us, and our own disdain;
'Return is dreadful, and escape is vain.
'Would men forsake us, and would women strive
'To help the fall'n, their virtue might revive.'

For rite of churching soon she made her way,
In dread of scandal, should she miss the day.—
Two matrons came! with them she humbly knelt,
Their action copied and their comforts felt,
From that great pain and peril to be free,
Though still in peril of that pain to be;

GEORGE CRABBE

Alas! what numbers, like this amorous dame,
Are quick to censure, but are dead to shame!

Twin-infants then appear: a girl, a boy,
Th' o'erflowing cup of Gerard Ablett's joy.
One had I named in every year that pass'd
Since Gerard wed, and twins behold at last!
Well pleased, the bridegroom smiled to hear—'A vine
'Fruitful and spreading round the walls be thine,
'And branch-like be thine offspring!'—Gerard then
Look'd joyful love, and softly said, 'Amen'.
Now of that vine he'd have no more increase,
Those playful branches now disturb his peace:
Them he beholds around his table spread,
But finds, the more the branch, the less the bread;
And while they run his humble walls about,
They keep the sunshine of good-humour out.

Cease, man, to grieve! thy master's lot survey,
Whom wife and children, thou and thine, obey;
A farmer proud beyond a farmer's pride,
Of all around the envy or the guide;
Who trots to market on a steed so fine,
That when I meet him, I'm ashamed of mine;
Whose board is high up-heap'd with generous fare,
Which five stout sons and three tall daughters share;
Cease, man, to grieve, and listen to his care.

A few years fled, and all thy boys shall be
Lords of a cot, and labourers like thee:
Thy girls, unportion'd, neighb'ring youths shall lead
Brides from my church, and thenceforth thou art freed;
But then thy master shall of cares complain,
Care after care, a long connected train;
His sons for farms shall ask a large supply,
For farmers' sons each gentle miss shall sigh;

THE PARISH REGISTER

Thy mistress, reasoning well of life's decay,
Shall ask a chaise, and hardly brook delay;
The smart young cornet who, with so much grace,
Rode in the ranks and betted at the race,
While the vex'd parent rails at deeds so rash,
Shall d—n his luck, and stretch his hand for cash.
Sad troubles, Gerard! now pertain to thee,
When thy rich master seems from trouble free;
But 'tis one fate at different times assign'd,
And thou shalt lose the cares that he must find.

'Ah!' quoth our village Grocer, rich and old,
'Would I might one such cause for care behold!
To whom his Friend, 'Mine greater bliss would be,
'Would Heav'n take those my spouse assigns to me'.

Aged were both, that Dawkins, Ditchem this,
Who much of marriage thought, and much amiss;
Both would delay, the one, till, riches gain'd,
The son he wish'd might be to honour train'd;
His Friend—lest fierce intruding heirs should come,
To waste his hoard and vex his quiet home.

Dawkins, a dealer once on burthen'd back
Bore his whole substance in a pedler's pack;
To dames discreet, the duties yet unpaid,
His stores of lace and hyson he convey'd.
When thus enrich'd, he chose at home to stop,
And fleece his neighbours in a new-built shop;
Then woo'd a spinster blithe, and hoped, when wed,
For love's fair favours and a fruitful bed.

Not so his Friend;—on widow fair and staid
He fix'd his eye; but he was much afraid,
Yet woo'd; while she his hair of silver hue
Demurely noticed, and her eye withdrew.

GEORGE CRABLE

Doubtful he paused—‘Ah! were I sure,’ he cried,
‘No craving children would my gains divide:
‘Fair as she is, I would my widow take,
‘And live more largely for my partner’s sake’.

With such their views, some thoughtful years they pass’d,
And hoping, dreading, they were bound at last.
And what their fate? Observe them as they go,
Comparing fear with fear and wo with wo.
‘Humphrey!’ said Dawkins, ‘envy in my breast
‘Sickens to see thee in thy children bless’d;
‘They are thy joys, while I go grieving home
‘To a sad spouse, and our eternal gloom. ’
‘We look despondency; no infant near,
‘To bless the eye or win the parent’s ear;
‘Our sudden heats and quarrels to allay,
‘And soothe the petty sufferings of the day.
‘Alike our want, yet both the want reprove;
‘Where are, I cry, these pledges of our love?
‘When she, like Jacob’s wife, makes fierce reply,
‘Yet fond—“Oh! give me children, or I die”;
‘And I return—still childless doom’d to live,
‘Like the vex’d patriarch—“Are they mine to give?”
‘Ah! much I envy thee thy boys, who ride
‘On poplar branch, and canter at thy side;
‘And girls, whose cheeks thy chin’s fierce fondness know,
‘And with fresh beauty at the contact glow.’

‘Oh! simple friend,’ said Ditchem, ‘would’st thou gain
‘A father’s pleasure by a husband’s pain?
‘Alas! what pleasure—when some vig’rous boy
‘Should swell thy pride, some rosy girl thy joy—
‘Is it to doubt who grafted this sweet flower,
‘Or whence arose that spirit and that power?

‘Four years I’ve wed; not one has pass’d in vain:
‘Behold the fifth! behold, a babe again!

THE PARISH REGISTER

'My wife's gay friends th' unwelcome imp admire,
 'And fill the room with gratulation dire.
 'While I in silence sate, revolving all
 'That influence ancient men, or that befall,
 'A gay pert guest—Heav'n knows his business—came;
 '“A glorious boy,” he cried, “and what the name?”
 'Angry, I growl'd, “My spirit cease to tease,
 '“Name it yourselves,—Cain, Judas, if you please;
 '“His father's give him—should you that explore,
 '“The devil's or yours”, I said, and sought the door.
 'My tender partner not a word or sigh
 'Gives to my wrath, nor to my speech reply;
 'But takes her comforts, triumphs in my pain,
 'And looks undaunted for a birth again.'

Heirs thus denied afflict the pining heart,
 And, thus afforded, jealous pangs impart;
 Let, therefore, none avoid, and none demand
 These arrows number'd for the giant's hand.

Then with their infants three, the parents came,
 And each assign'd—'twas all they had—a name:
 Names of no mark or price; of them not one
 Shall court our view on the sepulchral stone,
 Or stop the clerk, th' engraven scrolls to spell,
 Or keep the sexton from the sermon bell.

An orphan-girl succeeds; ere she was born
 Her father died, her mother on that morn;
 The pious mistress of the school sustains,
 Her parents' part, nor their affection feigns,
 But pitying feels; with due respect and joy,
 I trace the matron at her loved employ.
 What time the striplings, wearied e'en with play,
 Part at the closing of the summer's day,

And each by different path returns the well-known way—
 Then I behold her at her cottage-door,
 Frugal of light, her Bible laid before,
 When on her double duty she proceeds,
 Of time as frugal, knitting as she reads.
 Her idle neighbours, who approach to tell
 Some trifling tale, her serious looks compel,
 To hear reluctant—while the lads who pass,
 In pure respect walk silent on the grass.
 Then sinks the day; but not to rest she goes,
 Till solemn prayers the daily duties close.

But I digress, and lo! an infant train
 Appear, and call me to my task again.

‘Why *Lonicera* wilt thou name thy child?’
 I ask’d the Gardener’s wife, in accents mild.
 ‘We have a right,’ replied the sturdy dame—
 And *Lonicera* was the infant’s name.
 If next a son shall yield our Gardener joy,
 Then *Hyacinthus* shall be that fair boy;
 And if a girl, they will at length agree,
 That *Belladonna* that fair maid shall be.

High-sounding words our worthy Gardener gets,
 And at his club to wondering swains repeats;
 He then of *Rhus* and *Rhododendron* speaks,
 And *Allium* calls his onions and his leeks;
 Nor weeds are now, for whence arose the weed,
 Scarce plants, fair herbs, and curious flowers proceed;
 Where Cuckoo-pints and Dandelions sprung,
 (Gross names had they our plainer sires among),
 There *Arums*, there *Leontodons* we view,
 And *Artemisia* grows, where *Wormwood* grew.

But though no weed exists his garden round,
 From *Rumex* strong our Gardener frees his ground;
 Take soft *Senicio* from the yielding land,

THE PARISH REGISTER

And grasps the arm'd *Urtica* in his hand.

Not Darwin's¹⁰ self had more delight to sing
Of floral courtship, in th' awaken'd Spring,
Than Peter Pratt, who, simpering, loves to tell
How rise the Stamens, as the Pistils swell;
How bend and curl the moist-top to the spouse,
And give and take the vegetable vows;
How those esteem'd of old but tips and chives,
Are tender husbands and obedient wives;
Who live and love within the sacred bower—
That bridal bed the vulgar term a flower.

Hear Peter proudly, to some humble friend,
A wondrous secret in his science lend:—
'Would you advance the nuptial hour, and bring
'The fruit of Autumn with the flowers of Spring:
'View that light frame where *Cucumis* lies spread,
'And trace the husbands in their golden bed,
'Three powder'd Anthers;—then no more delay,
'But to the Stigma's tip their dust convey;
'Then by thyself, from prying glance secure,
'Twirl the full tip and make your purpose sure;
'A long-abiding race the deed shall pay,
'Nor one unblest'd abortion pine away.'

T' admire their friend's discourse our swains agree,
And call it science and philosophy.

'Tis good, 'tis pleasant, through th' advancing year,
To see unnumber'd growing forms appear.
What leafy-life from Earth's broad bosom rise!
What insect-myriads seek the summer skies!
What scaly tribes in every streamlet move!
What plummy people sing in every grove!
All with the year awaked to life, delight, and love.
Then names are good; for how, without their aid,
Is knowledge, gain'd by man, to man convey'd?

But from that source shall all our pleasures flow?
 Shall all our knowledge be those names to know?
 Then he, with memory bless'd, shall bear away
 The palm from Grew, and Middleton, and Ray.¹¹
 No! let us rather seek, in grove and field,
 What food for wonder, what for use they yield;
 Some just remark from Nature's people bring,
 And some new source of homage for her King.

Pride lives with all; strange names our rustics give
 To helpless infants, that their own may live;
 Pleased to be known, they'll some attention claim,
 And find some by-way to the house of fame.

The straightest furrow lifts the ploughman's art;
 The hat he gain'd has warmth for head and heart;
 The bowl that beats the greater number down
 Of tottering nine-pins, gives to fame the clown;
 Or, foil'd in these, he opes his ample jaws,
 And lets a frog leap down, to gain applause;
 Or grins for hours, or tipples for a week;
 Or challenges a well-pinch'd pig to squeak.
 Some idle deed, some child's preposterous name,
 Shall make him known, and give his folly fame.

To name an infant meet our village-sires,
 Assembled all, as such event requires;
 Frequent and full, the rural sages sate,
 And speakers many urged the long debate.
 Some harden'd knaves, who roved the country round,
 Had left a babe within the parish-bound.—
 First, of the fact they question'd—'Was it true?'
 The child was brought—'What then remain'd to do?
 'Was't dead or living?' This was fairly proved:
 'Twas pinch'd, it roar'd, and every doubt removed.
 Then by what name th' unwelcome guest to call

THE PARISH REGISTER

Was long a question, and it posed them all;
For he who lent it to a babe unknown,
Censorious men might take it for his own:
They look'd about, they gravely spoke to all,
And not one Richard answer'd to the call.
Next they inquired the day, when, passing by,
Th' unlucky peasant heard the stranger's cry:
This known, how food and raiment they might give,
Was next debated—for the rogue would live;
At last, with all their words and work content,
Back to their homes the prudent vestry went,
And Richard Monday to the workhouse sent.
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's 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.
Yet, though disgraced, he watch'd his time so well,
He rose in favour, when in fame he fell;

Base was his usage, vile his whole employ,
 And all despised and fed the pliant boy.
 At length, 'tis time he should abroad be sent',
 Was whisper'd near him—and abroad he went.
 One morn they call'd him, Richard answer'd not;
 They deem'd him hanging, and in time forgot;
 Yet miss'd him long, as each, throughout the clan,
 Found he 'had better spared a better man'.

Now Richard's talents for the world were fit,
 He'd no small cunning, and had some small wit;
 Had that calm look which seem'd to all assent,
 And that complacent speech which nothing meant;
 He'd but one care, and that he strove to hide,
 How best for Richard Monday to provide.
 Steel, through opposing plates, the magnet draws,
 And steely atoms culls from dust and straws;
 And thus our hero, to his interest true,
 Gold through all bars and from each trifle drew;
 But, still more surely round the world to go,
 This fortune's child had neither friend nor foe.

Long lost to us, at last our man we trace—
 Sir Richard Monday died at Monday-place.
 His lady's worth, his daughter's, we peruse,
 And find his grandsons all as rich as Jews;
 He gave reforming charities a sum,
 And bought the blessings of the blind and dumb;
 Bequeathed to missions money from the stocks,
 And Bibles issued from his private box;
 But, to his native place severely just,
 He left a pittance bound in rigid trust—
 Two paltry pounds, on every quarter's-day,
 (At church produced) for forty loaves should pay:
 A stinted gift, that to the parish shows
 He kept in mind their bounty and their blows!

THE PARISH REGISTER

To farmers three, the year has given a son :
Finch on the Moor, and French, and Middleton.
Twice in this year a female Giles I see :
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.

Last in my list, five untaught lads appear ;
Their father dead, compassion sent them here—
For still that rustic infidel denied
To have their names with solemn rite applied.
His, a lone house, by Deadman's Dyke-way stood ;
And his, a nightly haunt, in Lonely-wood.
Each village inn has heard the ruffian boast,
That he believed in neither God nor ghost ;
That, when the sod upon the sinner press'd,
He, like the saint, had everlasting rest ;
That never priest believed his doctrines true,
But would, for profit, own himself a Jew,
Or worship wood and stone, as honest heathen do ;

GEORGE CRABBÆ

That fools alone on future worlds rely,
And all who die for faith, deserve to die.

These maxims, part th' attorney's clerk profess'd;
His own transcendent genius found the rest.
Our pious matrons heard, and, much amazed,
Gazed on the man, and trembled as they gazed;
And now his face explored, and now his feet,
Man's dreaded foe, in this bad man, to meet.
But him our drunkards as their champion raised,
Their bishop call'd, and as their hero praised;
Though most, when sober, and the rest, when sick,
Had little question whence his bishopric.

But he, triumphant spirit! all things dared,
He poach'd the wood, and on the warren snared;
'Twas his, at cards, each novice to trepan,
And call the wants of rogues the rights of man;
Wild as the winds, he let his offspring rove,
And deem'd the marriage-bond the bane of love.

What age and sickness, for a man so bold,
Had done, we know not—none beheld him old.
By night, as business urged, he sought the wood—
The ditch was deep—the rain had caused a flood—
The foot-bridge fail'd—he plunged beneath the deep,
And slept, if truth were his, th' eternal sleep.¹²

These have we named; on life's rough sea they sail,
With many a prosperous, many an adverse gale!
Where passion soon, like powerful winds, will rage,
And prudence, wearied, with their strength engage.
Then each, in aid, shall some companion ask,
For help or comfort in the tedious task;
And what that help—what joys from union flow,
What good or ill, we next prepare to show;
And row, meantime, our weary bark ashore,
As Spenser his—but not with Spenser's oar.

THE BOROUGH

LETTER I

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

'DESCRIBE the Borough.'—Though our idle tribe
May love description, can we so describe,
That you shall fairly streets and buildings trace,
And all that gives distinction to a place?
This cannot be; yet, moved by your request,
A part I paint—let fancy form the rest.

Cities and towns, the various haunts of men,
Require the pencil; they defy the pen.
Could he, who sang so well the Grecian fleet,
So well have sung of alley, lane, or street?
Can measured lines these various buildings show,
The Town-Hall Turning, or the Prospect Row?
Can I the seats of wealth and want explore,
And lengthen out my lays from door to door?

Then, let thy fancy aid me.—I repair
From this tall mansion of our last-year's mayor,
Till we the outskirts of the Borough reach,
And these half-buried buildings next the beach;
Where hang at open doors the net and cork,
While squalid sea-dames mend the meshy work;
Till comes the hour, when, fishing through the tide,
The weary husband throws his freight aside—
A living mass, which now demands the wife,
Th' alternate labours of their humble life.

Can scenes like these withdraw thee from thy wood,
Thy upland forest or thy valley's flood?
Seek, then, thy garden's shrubby bound, and look,
As it steals by, upon the bordering brook:

GEORGE CRABBE

That winding streamlet, limpid, lingering, slow,
Where the reeds whisper when the zephyrs blow;
Where in the midst, upon her throne of green,
Sits the large lily as the water's queen;
And makes the current, forced awhile to stay,
Murmur and bubble as it shoots away;
Draw then the strongest contrast to that stream,
And our broad river will before thee seem.

With ceaseless motion comes and goes the tide,
Flowing, it fills the channel vast and wide;
Then back to sea, with strong majestic sweep
It rolls, in ebb yet terrible and deep;
Here sampire-banks and salt-wort bound the flood;
There stakes and sea-weeds, withering on the mud;
And, higher up, a ridge of all things base,
Which some strong tide has roll'd upon the place.

Thy gentle river boasts its pigmy boat,
Urged on by pains, half grounded, half afloat;
While at her stern an angler takes his stand,
And marks the fish he purposes to land;
From that clear space, where, in the cheerful ray
Of the warm sun, the scaly people play.

Far other craft our prouder river shows,
Hoys, pinks and sloops; brigs, brigantines and snows:
Nor angler we on our wide stream descry,
But one poor dredger where his oysters lie:
He, cold and wet, and driving with the tide,
Beats his weak arms against his tarry side,
Then drains the remnant of diluted gin,
To aid the warmth that languishes within;
Renewing oft his poor attempts to beat
His tingling fingers into gathering heat.

He shall again be seen when evening comes,
And social parties crowd their favourite rooms;

THE BOROUGH

Where on the table pipes and papers lie,
The steaming bowl or foaming tankard by.
'Tis then, with all these comforts spread around,
They hear the painful dredger's welcome sound;
And few themselves the savoury boon deny,
The food that feeds, the living luxury.

Yon is our quay!¹³ those smaller hoys from town,
Its various wares, for country-use, bring down;
Those laden waggons, in return, impart
The country-produce to the city mart;
Hark to the clamour in that miry road,
Bounded and narrow'd by yon vessels' load;
The lumbering wealth she empties round the place,
Package, and parcel, hogshead, chest and case;
While the loud seamen and the angry hind,
Mingling in business, bellow to the wind.

Near these a crew amphibious, in the docks,
Rear, for the sea, those castles on the stocks:
See the long keel, which soon the waves must hide;
See the strong ribs which form the roomy side;
Bolts yielding slowly to the sturdiest stroke,
And planks which curve and crackle in the smoke.
Around the whole rise cloudy wreaths, and far
Bear the warm pungence of o'er-boiling tar.

Dabbling on shore half-naked sea-boys crowd,
Swim round a ship, or swing upon the shroud;
Or, in a boat purloin'd, with paddles play,
And grow familiar with the watery way.
Young though they be, they feel whose sons they are;
They know what British seamen do and dare;
Proud of that fame, they raise and they enjoy
The rustic wonder of the village-boy.

Before you bid these busy scenes adieu,
Behold the wealth that lies in public view,

GEORGE CRABBE

Those far-extended heaps of coal and coke,
Where fresh-fill'd lime-kilns breathe their stifling smoke
This shall pass off, and you behold, instead,
The night-fire gleaming on its chalky bed;
When from the light-house brighter beams will rise,
To show the shipman where the shallow lies.

Thy walks are ever pleasant; every scene
Is rich in beauty, lively, or serene:
Rich—is that varied view with woods around,
Seen from the seat, within the shrubb'ry bound;
Where shines the distant lake, and where appear
From ruins bolting, unmolested deer;¹⁴
Lively—the village-green, the inn, the place
Where the good widow schools her infant race;
Shops, whence are heard the hammer and the saw,
And village-pleasures unreproved by law.
Then, how serene—when in your favourite room,
Gales from your jasmines soothe the evening gloom;
When from your upland paddock you look down,
And just perceive the smoke which hides the town;
When weary peasants at the close of day
Walk to their cots, and part upon the way;
When cattle slowly cross the shallow brook,
And shepherds pen their folds, and rest upon their crook.

We prune our hedges, prime our slender trees,
And nothing looks untutor'd and at ease;
On the wide heath, or in the flow'ry vale,
We scent the vapours of the sea-born gale;
Broad-beaten paths lead on from stile to stile,
And sewers from streets the road-side banks defile;
Our guarded fields a sense of danger show,
Where garden-crops with corn and clover grow;
Fences are form'd of wreck and placed around
(With tenters tipp'd), a strong repulsive bound;

THE BOROUGH

Wide and deep ditches by the gardens run,
And there in ambush lie the trap and gun;
Or yon broad board, which guards each tempting prize,
'Like a tall bully, lifts its head and lies'.¹⁵

There stands a cottage with an open door,
Its garden undefended blooms before;
Her wheel is still, and overturn'd her stool,
While the lone widow seeks the neighb'ring pool.
This gives us hope all views of town to shun—
No! here are tokens of the sailor-son:
That old blue jacket, and that shirt of check,
And silken kerchief for the seaman's neck;
Sea-spoils and shells from many a distant shore,
And furry robe from frozen Labrador.

Our busy streets and sylvan-walks between,
Fen, marshes, bog and heath all intervene;
Here pits of crag, with spongy, plashy base,
To some enrich th' uncultivated space:
For there are blossoms rare, and curious rush,
The gale's rich balm, and sun-dew's crimson blush,
Whose velvet leaf, with radiant beauty dress'd,
Forms a gay pillow for the plover's breast.

Not distant far, a house, commodious made,
Lonely yet public stands, for Sunday-trade;
Thither, for this day free, gay parties go,
Their tea-house walk, their tipping rendezvous;
There humble couples sit in corner-bowers,
Or gaily ramble for th' allotted hours;
Sailors and lasses from the town attend,
The servant-lover, the apprentice-friend;
With all the idle social tribes who seek
And find their humble pleasures once a week.

Turn to the watery world!—but who to thee
(A wonder yet unview'd) shall paint—the sea?

GEORGE CRABBE

Various and vast, sublime in all its forms,
When lull'd by zephyrs, or when roused by storms;
Its colours changing, when from clouds and sun
Shades after shades upon the surface run;
Embrown'd and horrid now, and now serene,
In limpid blue, and evanescent green;
And oft the foggy banks on ocean lie,
Lift the fair sail, and cheat th' experienced eye.

Be it the summer-noon: a sandy space
The ebbing tide has left upon its place;
Then, just the hot and stony beach above,
Light twinkling streams in bright confusion move
(For heated thus, the warmer air ascends,
And with the cooler in its fall contends);
Then the broad bosom of the ocean keeps
An equal motion, swelling as it sleeps,
Then slowly sinking; curling to the strand,
Faint, lazy waves o'ercreep the ridgy sand,
Or tap the tarry boat with gentle blow,
And back return in silence, smooth and slow.
Ships in the calm seem anchor'd; for they glide
On the still sea, urged solely by the tide;
Art thou not present, this calm scene before,
Where all beside is pebbly length of shore,
And far as eye can reach, it can discern no more?

Yet sometimes comes a ruffling cloud, to make
The quiet surface of the ocean shake;
As an awaken'd giant with a frown
Might show his wrath, and then to sleep sink down.

View now the winter-storm, above, one cloud,
Black and unbroken, all the skies o'ershroud.
Th' unwieldy porpoise through the day before
Had roll'd in view of boding men on shore;
And sometimes hid, and sometimes show'd, his form,

THE BOROUGH

Dark as the cloud, and furious as the storm.

All where the eye delights, yet dreads, to roam,
The breaking billows cast the flying foam
Upon the billows rising—all the deep
Is restless change; the waves so swell'd and steep,
Breaking and sinking, and the sunken swells,
Nor one, one moment, in its station dwells.
But, nearer land, you may the billows trace,
As if contending in their watery chase;
May watch the mightiest till the shoal they reach,
Then break and hurry to their utmost stretch;
Curl'd as they come, they strike with furious force,
And then, re-flowing, take their grating course,
Raking the rounded flints, which ages past
Roll'd by their rage, and shall to ages last.

Far off, the petrel in the troubled way
Swims with her brood, or flutters in the spray;
She rises often, often drops again,
And sports at ease on the tempestuous main.

High o'er the restless deep, above the reach
Of gunner's hope, vast flights of wild-ducks stretch;
Far as the eye can glance on either side,
In a broad space and level line they glide;
All in their wedge-like figures from the north,
Day after day, flight after flight, go forth.

In shore their passage tribes of sea-gulls urge,
And drop for prey within the sweeping surge;
Oft in the rough opposing blast they fly
Far back, then turn, and all their force apply,
While to the storm they give their weak complaining cry;
Or clap the sleek white pinion to the breast,
And in the restless ocean dip for rest.

Darkness begins to reign; the louder wind
Appals the weak and awes the firmer mind;

GEORGE CRABBE

But frights not him, whom evening and the spray
In part conceal—yon prowler on his way.
Lo! he has something seen; he runs apace,
As if he fear'd companion in the chase;
He sees his prize, and now he turns again,
Slowly and sorrowing—'Was your search in vain?'
Gruffly he answers, 'Tis a sorry sight!
'A seaman's body; there'll be more to-night!'

Hark to those sounds! they're from distress at sea:
How quick they come! What terrors may there be!
Yes, 'tis a driven vessel: I discern
Lights, signs of terror, gleaming from the stern;
Others behold them too, and from the town
In various parties seamen hurry down;
Their wives pursue, and damsels urged by dread,
Lest men so dear be into danger led;
Their head the gown has hooded, and their call
In this sad night is piercing like the squall;
They feel their kinds of power, and when they meet,
Chide, fondle, weep, dare, threaten, or entreat.

See one poor girl, all terror and alarm,
Has fondly seized upon her lover's arm;
'Thou shalt not venture'; and he answers 'No!
'I will not'—still she cries, 'Thou shalt not go'.

No need of this; not here the stoutest boat
Can through such breakers, o'er such billows float;
Yet may they view these lights upon the beach,
Which yield them hope, whom help can never reach.

From parted clouds the moon her radiance throws
On the wild waves, and all the danger shows;
But shows them beaming in her shining vest,
Terrific splendour! gloom in glory dress'd!

THE BOROUGH

This for a moment, and then clouds again
Hide every beam, and fear and darkness reign.

But hear we now those sounds? Do lights appear?
I see them not! the storm alone I hear:
And lo! the sailors homeward take their way;
Man must endure—let us submit and pray.

Such are our winter-views; but night comes on—
Now business sleeps, and daily cares are gone;
Now parties form, and some their friends assist
To waste the idle hours at sober whist;
The tavern's pleasure or the concert's charm
Unnumber'd moments of their sting disarm;
Play-bills and open doors a crowd invite,
To pass off one dread portion of the night;
And show and song and luxury combined
Lift off from man this burthen of mankind.

Others advent'rous walk abroad and meet
Returning parties pacing through the street;
When various voices, in the dying day,
Hum in our walks, and greet us in our way;
When tavern-lights flit on from room to room,
And guide the tipsing sailor, staggering home:
There as we pass, the jingling bells betray
How business rises with the closing day:
Now walking silent, by the river's side,
The ear perceives the rippling of the tide;
Or measured cadence of the lads who tow
Some enter'd hoy, to fix her in her row;
Or hollow sound, which from the parish-bell
To some departed spirit bids farewell!

Thus shall you something of our BOROUGH know,
Far as a verse, with Fancy's aid, can show;

GEORGE CRABBE

Of sea or river, of a quay or street,
The best description must be incomplete;
But when a happier theme succeeds, and when
Men are our subjects and the deeds of men;
Then may we find the Muse in happier style,
And we may sometimes sigh and sometimes smile.¹⁶

THE BOROUGH

LETTER II

THE CHURCH

'WHAT is a Church?'—Let Truth and Reason speak,
They would reply, 'The faithful, pure, and meek;
'From Christian folds the one selected race,
'Of all professions, and in every place'.

'What is a Church?'—'A flock', our vicar cries,
'Whom bishops govern and whom priests advise;
'Wherein are various states and due degrees,
'The bench for honour, and the stall for ease;
'That ease be mine, which, after all his cares,
'The pious, peaceful prebendary shares.'

'What is a Church?'—Our honest sexton tells,
' 'Tis a tall building, with a tower and bells;
'Where priest and clerk with joint exertion strive
'To keep the ardour of their flock alive:
'That, by his periods eloquent and grave;
'This, by responses, and a well-set stave.
'These for the living; but, when life be fled,
'I toll myself the requiem for the dead.'

'Tis to this Church I call thee, and that place
Where slept our fathers, when they'd run their race.
We too shall rest, and then our children keep
Their road in life, and then, forgotten, sleep;
Meanwhile the building slowly falls away,
And, like the builders, will in time decay.

The old foundation—but it is not clear
When it was laid—you care not for the year:
On this, as parts decay'd by time and storms,
Arose these various disproportion'd forms;

GEORGE CRABBE

Yet Gothic, all the learn'd who visit us
(And our small wonders) have decided thus :
'Yon noble Gothic arch'; 'That Gothic door';
So have they said; of proof you'll need no more.

Here large plain columns rise in solemn style :
You'd love the gloom they make in either aisle,
When the sun's rays, enfeebled as they pass
(And shorn of splendour) through the storied glass,
Faintly display the figures on the floor,
Which pleased distinctly in their place before.

But, ere you enter, yon bold tower survey,
Tall and entire, and venerably gray;
For time has soften'd what was harsh when new,
And now the stains are all of sober hue—
The living stains which Nature's hand alone,
Profuse of life, pours forth upon the stone,
For ever growing; where the common eye
Can but the bare and rocky bed descry,
There Science loves to trace her tribes minute,
The juiceless foliage, and the tasteless fruit;
There she perceives them round the surface creep,
And, while they meet, their due distinction keep,
Mix'd but not blended; each its name retains,
And these are Nature's ever-during stains.

And would'st thou, artist, with thy tints and brush,
Form shades like these? Pretender, where thy blush?¹⁷
In three short hours shall thy presuming hand
Th' effect of three slow centuries command?¹⁸
Thou may'st thy various greens and grays contrive :
They are not lichens, nor like aught alive.—
But yet proceed, and when thy tints are lost,
Fled in the shower, or crumbled by the frost;
When all thy work is done away as clean
As if thou never spread'st thy gray and green :

THE BOROUGH

Then may'st thou see how Nature's work is done,
How slowly true she lays her colours on;
When her least speck upon the hardest flint
Has mark and form and is a living tint,
And so embodied with the rock, that few
Can the small germ upon the substance view.¹⁹

Seeds, to our eye invisible, will find
On the rude rock the bed that fits their kind;
There, in the rugged soil, they safely dwell,
Till showers and snows the subtle atoms swell,
And spread th' enduring foliage;—then we trace
The freckled flower upon the flinty base;
These all increase, till in unnoticed years
The stony tower as gray with age appears;
With coats of vegetation, thinly spread,
Coat above coat, the living on the dead.
These then dissolve to dust, and make a way
For bolder foliage, nursed by their decay;
The long-enduring ferns in time will all
Die and depose their dust upon the wall,
Where the wing'd seed may rest, till many a flower
Show Flora's triumph o'er the falling tower.

But ours yet stands, and has its bells renown'd
For size magnificent and solemn sound.
Each has its motto: some contrived to tell,
In monkish rhyme, the uses of a bell—²⁰
Such wond'rous good, as few conceive could spring
From ten loud coppers when their clappers swing.
Enter'd the Church, we to a tomb proceed,
Whose names and titles few attempt to read;
Old English letters, and those half pick'd out,
Leave us, unskilful readers, much in doubt.
Our sons shall see its more degraded state;
The tomb of grandeur hastens to its fate;

GEORGE CRABBE

That marble arch, our sexton's favourite show,
With all those ruff'd and painted pairs below—
The noble lady and the lord who rest
Supine, as courtly dame and warrior dress'd—
All are departed from their state sublime,
Mangled and wounded in their war with time,
Collegued with mischief; here a leg is fled,
And lo! the baron with but half a head;
Midway is cleft the arch; the very base
Is batter'd round and shifted from its place.

Wonder not, mortal, at thy quick decay—
See! men of marble piece-meal melt away;
When whose the image we no longer read,
But monuments themselves memorials need.

With few such stately proofs of grief or pride,
By wealth erected, is our Church supplied;
But we have mural tablets, every size,
That wo could wish, or vanity devise.

Death levels man,—the wicked and the just,
The wise, the weak, lie blended in the dust;
And by the honours dealt to every name,
The king of terrors seems to level fame.

—See here lamented wives, and every wife
The pride and comfort of her husband's life;
Here to her spouse, with every virtue graced,
His mournful widow has a trophy placed;
And here 'tis doubtful if the duteous son,
Or the good father, be in praise outdone.

This may be nature; when our friends we lose,
Our alter'd feelings alter too our views;
What in their tempers teased us or distress'd,
Is, with our anger and the dead, at rest;
And much we grieve, no longer trial made,
For that impatience which we then display'd;

THE BOROUGH

Now to their love and worth of every kind
A soft compunction turns th' afflicted mind;
Virtues, neglected then, adored become,
And graces slighted blossom on the tomb.

'Tis well; but let not love nor grief believe
That we assent (who neither loved nor grieve)
To all that praise which on the tomb is read,
To all that passion dictates for the dead;
But, more indignant, we the tomb deride,
Whose bold inscription flattery sells to pride.

Read of this Burgess—on the stone appear,
How worthy he! how virtuous! and how dear!
What wailing was there when his spirit fled,
How mourn'd his lady for her lord when dead,
And tears abundant through the town were shed;
See! he was liberal, kind, religious, wise,
And free from all disgrace and all disguise;
His sterling worth, which words cannot express,
Lives with his friends, their pride and their distress.

All this of Jacob Holmes? for his the name;
He thus kind, liberal, just, religious?—shame!
What is the truth? Old Jacob married thrice;
He dealt in coals, and av'rice was his vice;
He ruled the Borough when his year came on,
And some forget, and some are glad he's gone;
For never yet with shilling could he part,
But when it left his hand, it struck his heart.

Yet, here will love its last attentions pay,
And place memorials on these beds of clay.
Large level stones lie flat upon the grave,
And half a century's sun and tempest brave;
But many an honest tear and heartfelt sigh
Have follow'd those who now unnoticed lie;
Of these what numbers rest on every side!

GEORGE CRABBE

Without one token left by grief or pride;
Their graves soon levell'd to the earth, and then
Will other hillocks rise o'er other men;
Daily the dead on the decay'd are thrust,
And generations follow, 'dust to dust'.

Yes! there are real mourners—I have seen
A fair, sad girl, mild, suffering, and serene;
Attention (through the day) her duties claim'd;
And to be useful as resign'd she aim'd;
Neatly she dress'd, nor vainly seem'd t' expect
Pity for grief, or pardon for neglect.
But, when her wearied parents sunk to sleep,
She sought her place to meditate and weep:
Then to her mind was all the past display'd,
That faithful memory brings to sorrow's aid:
For then she thought on one regretted youth,
Her tender trust, and his unquestion'd truth;
In ev'ry place she wander'd where they'd been,
And sadly-sacred held the parting-scene,
Where last for sea he took his leave—that place
With double interest would she nightly trace;
For long the courtship was, and he would say,
Each time he sail'd,—'This once, and then the day'.
Yet prudence tarried; but, when last he went,
He drew from pitying love a full consent.

Happy he sail'd, and great the care she took,
That he should softly sleep, and smartly look;
White was his better linen, and his check
Was made more trim than any on the deck;
And every comfort men at sea can know
Was hers to buy, to make, and to bestow:
For he to Greenland sail'd, and much she told,
How he should guard against the climate's cold;
Yet saw not danger; dangers he'd withstood,

THE BOROUGH

Nor could she trace the fever in his blood.
His messmates smiled at flushings in his cheek,
And he too smiled, but seldom would he speak;
For now he found the danger, felt the pain,
With grievous symptoms he could not explain;
Hope was awaken'd, as for home he sail'd,
But quickly sank, and never more prevail'd.

He call'd his friend, and prefaced with a sigh
A lover's message—'Thomas, I must die.
'Would I could see my Sally, and could rest
'My throbbing temples on her faithful breast,
'And gazing go!—if not, this trifle take,
'And say, till death I wore it for her sake.
'Yes! I must die—blow on, sweet breeze, blow on!
'Give me one look, before my life be gone,
'Oh! give me that, and let me not despair,
'One last fond look—and now repeat the prayer.'

He had his wish, had more; I will not paint
The lovers' meeting: she beheld him faint—
With tender fears she took a nearer view,
Her terrors doubling as her hopes withdrew;
He tried to smile, and, half succeeding, said,
'Yes! I must die'; and hope for ever fled.

Still long she nursed him: tender thoughts meantime
Were interchanged, and hopes and views sublime.
To her he came to die, and every day
She took some portion of the dread away;
With him she pray'd, to him his Bible read,
Soothed the faint heart, and held the aching head.
She came with smiles the hour of pain to cheer;
Apart, she sigh'd; alone, she shed the tear;
Then, as if breaking from a cloud, she gave
Fresh light, and gilt the prospect of the grave.

One day he lighter seem'd, and they forgot

GEORGE CRABBE

The care, the dread, the anguish of their lot;
They spoke with cheerfulness, and seem'd to think,
Yet said not so—'Perhaps he will not sink'.
A sudden brightness in his look appear'd,
A sudden vigour in his voice was heard;—
She had been reading in the Book of Prayer,
And led him forth, and placed him in his chair;
Lively he seem'd, and spoke of all he knew,
The friendly many, and the favourite few;
Nor one that day did he to mind recall
But she has treasured, and she loves them all;
When in her way she meets them, they appear
Peculiar people—death has made them dear.
He named his friend, but then his hand she press'd,
'And fondly whisper'd, 'Thou must go to rest';
'I go', he said; but, as he spoke, she found
His hand more cold, and fluttering was the sound!
Then gazed affrighten'd; but she caught a last,
A dying look of love—and all was past!

She placed a decent stone his grave above,
Neatly engraved—an offering of her love;
For that she wrought, for that forsook her bed,
Awake alike to duty and the dead;
She would have grieved, had friends presumed to spare
The least assistance—'twas her proper care.

Here will she come, and on the grave will sit,
Folding her arms, in long abstracted fit;
But if observer pass, will take her round,
And careless seem, for she would not be found;
Then go again, and thus her hour employ,
While visions please her, and while woes destroy.

Forbear, sweet maid! nor be by fancy led
To hold mysterious converse with the dead;

THE BOROUGH

For sure at length thy thoughts', thy spirit's pain
In this sad conflict will disturb thy brain.
All have their tasks and trials; thine are hard,
But short the time, and glorious the reward:
Thy patient spirit to thy duties give;
Regard the dead, but to the living live.

THE BOROUGH

LETTER III

THE VICAR

WHERE ends our chancel in a vaulted space,
Sleep the departed vicars of the place;
Of most, all mention, memory, thought are past—
But take a slight memorial of the last.

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;
It was a kind of supplicating smile,
But nothing hopeless of applause, the while;
And when he finish'd, 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:
Fear was his ruling passion; yet was love,
Of timid kind, once known his heart to move;
It led his patient spirit where it paid
Its languid offerings to a listening maid;
She, with her widow'd mother, heard him speak,
And sought awhile to find what he would seek.
Smiling he came, he smiled when he withdrew,
And paid the same attention to the two;
Meeting and parting without joy or pain,

THE BOROUGH

He seem'd to come that he might go again.
The wondering girl, no prude, but something nice,
At length was chill'd by his unmelting ice;
She found her tortoise held such sluggish pace,
That she must turn and meet him in the chase.
This not approving, she withdrew till one
Came who appear'd with livelier hope to run;
Who sought a readier way the heart to move,
Than by faint dalliance of unfixing love.

Accuse me not that I approving paint
Impatient hope or love without restraint;
Or think the passions, a tumultuous throng,
Strong as they are, ungovernably strong:
But is the laurel to the soldier due,
Who cautious comes not into danger's view?
What worth has virtue by desire untried,
When Nature's self enlists on duty's side?

The married dame in vain assail'd the truth
And guarded bosom of the Hebrew youth;
But with the daughter of the Priest of On
The love was lawful, and the guard was gone;
But Joseph's fame had lessen'd in our view,
Had he, refusing, fled the maiden too.

Yet our good priest to Joseph's praise aspired,
As once rejecting what his heart desired;
'I am escaped', he said, when none pursued;
When none attack'd him, 'I am unsubdued';
'Oh pleasing pangs of love', he sang again,
Cold to the joy, and stranger to the pain.
Ev'n in his age would he address the young,
'I too have felt these fires, and they are strong';
But from the time he left his favourite maid,
To ancient females his devoirs were paid;
And still they miss him after morning prayer;

Nor yet successor fills the Vicar's chair,
 Where kindred spirits in his praise agree,
 A happy few, as mild and cool as he—
 The easy followers in the female train,
 Led without love, and captives without chain.

Ye lilies male! think (as your tea you sip,
 While the town small-talk flows from lip to lip;
 Intrigues half-gather'd, conversation-scrap,
 Kitchen-cabals, and nursery-mishaps)
 If the vast world may not some scene produce,
 Some state, where your small talents might have use.
 Within seraglios you might harmless move,
 'Mid ranks of beauty, and in haunts of love;
 There from too daring man the treasures guard,
 An easy duty, and its own reward;
 Nature's soft substitutes, you there might save
 From crime the tyrant, and from wrong the slave.

But let applause be dealt in all we may:
 Our priest was cheerful, and in season gay;
 His frequent visits seldom fail'd to please;
 Easy himself, he sought his neighbour's ease.
 To a small garden with delight he came,
 And gave successive flowers a summer's fame;
 These he presented with a grace his own
 To his fair friends, and made their beauties known,
 Not without moral compliment: how they
 'Like flowers were sweet, and must like flowers decay'.

Simple he was, and loved the simple truth,
 Yet had some useful cunning from his youth;
 A cunning never to dishonour lent,
 And rather for defence than conquest meant;
 'Twas fear of power, with some desire to rise,
 But not enough to make him enemies;
 He ever aim'd to please; and to offend

THE BOROUGH

Was ever cautious; for he sought a friend;
Yet for the friendship never much would pay,
Content to bow, be silent, and obey,
And by a soothing suff'rance find his way.

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 small
'Have all mankind; yea, sinners are we all'.

If ever fretful thought disturb'd his breast,
If aught of gloom that cheerful mind oppress'd,
It sprang from innovation; it was then
He spake of mischief made by restless men,
Not by new doctrines: never in his life
Would he attend to controversial strife;
For sects he cared not; 'They are not of us,
'Nor need we, brethren, their concerns discuss;
'But 'tis the change, the schism at home I feel;
'Ills few perceive, and none have skill to heal:
'Not at the altar our young brethren read
'(Facing their flock) the decalogue and creed;
'But at their duty, in their desks they stand,
'With naked surplice, lacking hood and band:
'Churches are now of holy song bereft;
'And half our ancient customs changed or left;
'Few sprigs of ivy are at Christmas seen,
'Nor crimson berry tips the holly's green;
'Mistaken choirs refuse the solemn strain
'Of ancient Sternhold, which from ours amain

'Comes flying forth, from aile to aile about,
'Sweet links of harmony and long drawn out'.

These were to him essentials; all things new
He deem'd superfluous, useless, or untrue;
To all beside indifferent, easy, cold,
Here the fire kindled, and the wo was told.

Habit with him was all the test of truth,
'It must be right: I've done it from my youth'.
Questions he answer'd in as brief a way,
'It must be wrong—it was of yesterday'.

Though mild benevolence our priest possess'd,
'Twas but by wishes or by words express'd:
Circles in water, as they wider flow,
The less conspicuous in their progress grow;
And when at last they touch upon the shore,
Distinction ceases, and they're view'd no more.
His love, like that last circle, all embraced,
But with effect that never could be traced.

Now rests our Vicar. They who knew him best
Proclaim his life t' have been entirely rest—
Free from all evils which disturb his mind
Whom studies vex and controversies blind.

The rich approved—of them in awe he stood;
The poor admired—they all believed him good;
The old and serious of his habits spoke;
The frank and youthful loved his pleasant joke;
Mothers approved a safe contented guest,
And daughters one who back'd each small request:
In him his flock found nothing to condemn;
Him sectaries liked—he never troubled them;
No trifles fail'd his yielding mind to please,
And all his passions sunk in early ease;
Nor one so old has left this world of sin,
More like the being that he enter'd in.

THE BOROUGH

LETTER V

THE ELECTION

YES, our Election's past, and we've been free,
Somewhat as madmen without keepers be;
And such desire of freedom has been shown,
That both the parties wish'd her all their own:
All our free smiths and cobblers in the town
Were loth to lay such pleasant freedom down—
To put the bludgeon and cockade aside,
And let us pass unhurt and undefied.

True! you might then your party's sign produce,
And so escape with only half th' abuse—
With half the danger as you walk'd along,
With rage and threat'ning but from half the throng.
This you might do, and not your fortune mend;
For where you lost a foe, you gain'd a friend;
And, to distress you, vex you, and expose,
Election-friends are worse than any foes;
The party-curse is with the canvass past,
But party-friendship, for your grief, will last.

Friends of all kinds, the civil and the rude,
Who humbly wish, or boldly dare t' intrude:
These beg or take a liberty to come
(Friends should be free), and make your house their home;
They know that warmly you their cause espouse,
And come to make their boastings and their bows.
You scorn their manners, you their words mistrust;
But you must hear them, and they know you must.

One plainly sees a friendship firm and true
Between the noble candidate and you;

GEORGE CRABBE

So humbly begs (and states at large the case),
'You'll think of Bobby and the little place'.

Stifling his shame by drink, a wretch will come,
And prate your wife and daughter from the room:
In pain you hear him, and at heart despise,
Yet with heroic mind your pangs disguise;
And still in patience to the sot attend,
To show what man can bear to serve a friend.

One enters hungry—not to be denied,
And takes his place and jokes—'We're of a side'.
Yet worse, the proser who, upon the strength
Of his one vote, has tales of three hours' length—
This sorry rogue you bear, yet with surprise
Start at his oaths, and sicken at his lies.

Then comes there one, and tells in friendly way,
What the opponents in their anger say;
All that through life has vex'd you, all abuse,
Will this kind friend in pure regard produce;
And, having through your own offences run,
Adds (as appendage) what your friends have done.

Has any female cousin made a trip
To Gretna-Green, or more vexatious slip?
Has your wife's brother, or your uncle's son,
Done aught amiss, or is he thought t' have done?
Is there of all your kindred some who lack
Vision direct, or have a gibbous back?
From your unlucky name may quips and puns
Be made by these upbraiding Goths and Huns?
To some great public character have you
Assign'd the fame to worth and talents due,
Proud of your praise?—In this, in any case,
Where the brute-spirit may affix disgrace,
These friends will smiling bring it, and the while
You silent sit, and practise for a smile.

THE BOROUGH

Vain of their power, and of their value sure,
They nearly guess the tortures you endure;
Nor spare one pang—for they perceive your heart
Goes with the cause; you'd die before you'd start;
Do what they may, they're sure you'll not offend
Men who have pledged their honours to your friend.

Those friends indeed, who start as in a race,
May love the sport, and laugh at this disgrace;
They have in view the glory and the prize,
Nor heed the dirty steps by which they rise:
But we, their poor associates, lose the fame,
Though more than partners in the toil and shame.

Were this the whole, and did the time produce
But shame and toil, but riot and abuse:
We might be then from serious griefs exempt,
And view the whole with pity and contempt.
Alas! but here the vilest passions rule;
It is Seduction's, is Temptation's school:
Where vices mingle in the oddest ways,
The grossest slander and the dirtiest praise;
Flattery enough to make the vainest sick,
And clumsy stratagem, and scoundrel trick.
Nay more, your anger and contempt to cause,
These, while they fish for profit, claim applause;
Bribed, bought and bound, they banish shame and fear;
Tell you they're stanch, and have a soul sincere;
Then talk of honour, and, if doubt's express'd,
Show where it lies, and smite upon the breast.

Among these worthies, some at first declare
For whom they vote; he then has most to spare.
Others hang off—when coming to the post
Is spurring time, and then he'll spare the most;
While some, demurring, wait, and find at last
The bidding languish, and the market pass'd;

GEORGE CRABBE

These will affect all bribery to condemn,
And, be it Satan laughs, he laughs at them.
Some too are pious—one desired the Lord
To teach him where 'to drop his little word;
'To lend his vote, where it will profit best;
'Promotion came not from the east or west;
'But as their freedom had promoted some,
'He should be glad to know which way 'twould come.
'It was a naughty world, and, where to sell
'His precious charge, was more than he could tell.'

'But you succeeded?'—true, at mighty cost;
And our good friend, I fear, will think he's lost.
Inns, horses, chaises, dinners, balls and notes;
What fill'd their purses, and what drench'd their throats;
The private pension, and indulgent lease,
Have all been granted to these friends who fleece—
Friends who will hang like burs upon his coat,
And boundless judge the value of a vote.

And, though the terrors of the time be pass'd,
There still remain the scatterings of the blast.
The boughs are parted that entwined before,
And ancient harmony exists no more;
The gusts of wrath our peaceful seats deform,
And sadly flows the sighing of the storm:
Those who have gain'd are sorry for the gloom,
But they who lost unwilling peace should come;
There open envy, here suppress'd delight,
Yet live till time shall better thoughts excite,
And so prepare us, by a six-years' truce,
Again for riot, insult, and abuse.

Our worthy mayor, on the victorious part,
Cries out for peace, and cries with all his heart;
He, civil creature! ever does his best,
To banish wrath from every voter's breast;

THE BOROUGH

‘For where,’ says he, with reason strong and plain,
‘Where is the profit? what will anger gain?’
His short stout person he is wont to brace
In good brown broad-cloth, edged with two-inch lace,
When in his seat; and still the coat seems new,
Preserved by common use of seaman’s blue.

He was a fisher from his earliest day,
And placed his nets within the Borough’s bay;
Where by his skates, his herrings, and his soles,
He lived, nor dream’d of corporation-doles;
But, toiling, saved and, saving, never ceased
Till he had box’d up twelve score pounds at least.
He knew not money’s power, but judged it best
Safe in his trunk to let his treasure rest;
Yet to a friend complain’d: ‘Sad charge, to keep
‘So many pounds, and then I cannot sleep’.
‘Then put it out’, replied the friend.—‘What, give
‘My money up? why, then I could not live.’—
‘Nay, but for interest place it in his hands,
‘Who’ll give you mortgage on his house or lands.’—
‘Oh but’, said Daniel, ‘that’s a dangerous plan;
‘He may be robb’d like any other man.’—
‘Still he is bound, and you may be at rest,
‘More safe the money than within your chest;
‘And you’ll receive, from all deductions clear,
Five pounds for every hundred, every year.’—
‘What good in that?’ quoth Daniel, ‘for ’tis plain,
‘If part I take, there can but part remain.’—
‘What! you, my friend, so skill’d in gainful things,
‘Have you to learn what interest money brings?’—
‘Not so,’ said Daniel, ‘perfectly I know,
‘He’s the most interest who has most to show.’—
‘True! and he’ll show the more, the more he lends;
‘Thus he his weight and consequence extends;

GEORGE CRABBE

'For they who borrow must restore each sum,
'And pay for use—What, Daniel, art thou dumb?'
For much amazed was that good man—'Indeed!'
Said he, with glad'ning eye, 'will money breed?
'How have I lived? I grieve, with all my heart,
'For my late knowledge in this precious art:—
'Five pounds for every hundred will he give?
'And then the hundred?—I begin to live.'—
So he began, and other means he found,
As he went on, to multiply a pound:
Though blind so long to interest, all allow
That no man better understands it now.
Him in our body-corporate we chose,
And, once among us, he above us rose;
Stepping from post to post, he reach'd the chair,
And there he now reposes—that's the mayor.

But 'tis not he, 'tis not the kinder few,
The mild, the good, who can our peace renew;
A peevish humour swells in every eye,
The warm are angry, and the cool are shy;
There is no more the social board at whist,
The good old partners are with scorn dismiss'd;
No more with dog and lantern comes the maid,
To guide the mistress when the rubber's play'd;
Sad shifts are made, lest ribbons blue and green
Should at one table, at one time be seen.
On care and merit none will now rely,
'Tis party sells what party-friends must buy;
The warmest burgess wears a bodger's coat,
And fashion gains less int'rest than a vote;
Uncheck'd, the vintner still his poison vends;
For he too votes, and can command his friends.

But, this admitted, be it still agreed,
These ill effects from noble cause proceed;

THE BOROUGH

Though like some vile excrescences they be,
The tree they spring from is a sacred tree,
And its true produce, strength and liberty.

Yet if we could th' attendant ills suppress;
If we could make the sum of mischief less;
If we could warm and angry men persuade
No more man's common comforts to invade;
And that old ease and harmony re-seat
In all our meetings, so in joy to meet:
Much would of glory to the Muse ensue,
And our good vicar would have less to do.

THE BOROUGH

LETTER IX

AMUSEMENTS

OF our amusements ask you?—We amuse
Ourselves and friends with sea-side walks and views,
Or take a morning ride, a novel, or the news;
Or, seeking nothing, glide about the street,
And, so engaged, with various parties meet;
Awhile we stop, discourse of wind and tide,
Bathing and books, the raffle, and the ride:
Thus, with the aid which shops and sailing give,
Life passes on; 'tis labour, but we live.

When evening comes, our invalids awake,
Nerves cease to tremble, heads forbear to ache;
Then cheerful meals the sunken spirits raise,
Cards or the dance, wine, visiting, or plays.

Soon as the season comes, and crowds arrive,
To their superior rooms the wealthy drive;
Others look round for lodging snug and small,
Such is their taste—they've hatred to a hall;
Hence one his fav'rite habitation gets,
The brick-floor'd parlour which the butcher lets;
Where, through his single light, he may regard
The various business of a common yard,
Bounded by backs of buildings form'd of clay,
By stable, sties, and coops, et-cætera.

The needy-vain, themselves awhile to shun,
For dissipation to these dog-holes run;
Where each (assuming petty pomp) appears,
And quite forgets the shopboard and the shears.

For them are cheap amusements: they may slip

THE BOROUGH

Beyond the town and take a private dip;
When they may urge that to be safe they mean:
They've heard there's danger in a light machine;
They too can gratis move the quays about,
And gather kind replies to every doubt;
There they a pacing, lounging tribe may view,
The stranger's guides, who've little else to do;
The Borough's placemen, where no more they gain
Than keeps them idle, civil, poor, and vain.
Then may the poorest with the wealthy look
On ocean, glorious page of Nature's book!
May see its varying views in every hour,
All softness now, then rising with all power,
As sleeping to invite, or threat'ning to devour:
'Tis this which gives us all our choicest views;
Its waters heal us, and its shores amuse.

See those fair nymphs upon that rising strand,
Yon long salt lake has parted from the land;
Well pleased to press that path, so clean, so pure,
To seem in danger, yet to feel secure;
Trifling with terror, while they strive to shun
The curling billows; laughing as they run;
They know the neck that joins the shore and sea,
Or, ah! how changed that fearless laugh would be.

Observe how various parties take their way,
By sea-side walks, or make the sand-hills gay;
There group'd are laughing maids and sighing swains,
And some apart who feel unpitied pains:
Pains from diseases, pains which those who feel
To the physician, not the fair, reveal;
For nymphs (propitious to the lover's sigh)
Leave these poor patients to complain and die.

Lo! where on that huge anchor sadly leans
That sick tall figure, lost in other scenes;

GEORGE CRABBE

He late from India's clime impatient sail'd,
There, as his fortune grew, his spirits fail'd;
For each delight, in search of wealth he went,
For ease alone, the wealth acquired is spent—
And spent in vain; enrich'd, aggriev'd, he sees
The envied poor possess'd of joy and ease;
And now he flies from place to place, to gain
Strength for enjoyment, and still flies in vain.
Mark, with what sadness, of that pleasant crew,
Boist'rous in mirth, he takes a transient view,
And, fixing then his eye upon the sea,
Thinks what has been and what must shortly be:
Is it not strange that man should health destroy,
For joys that come when he is dead to joy?

Now is it pleasant in the summer-eve,
When a broad shore retiring waters leave,
Awhile to wait upon the firm fair sand,
When all is calm at sea, all still at land;
And there the ocean's produce to explore,
As floating by, or rolling on the shore;
Those living jellies which the flesh inflame,
Fierce as a nettle, and from that its name;
Some in huge masses, some that you may bring
In the small compass of a lady's ring;
Figured by hand divine—there's not a gem
Wrought by man's art to be compared to them;
Soft, brilliant, tender, through the wave they glow,
And make the moonbeam brighter where they flow.
Involved in sea-wrack, here you find a race,
Which science, doubting, knows not where to place;
On shell or stone is dropp'd the embryo-seed,
And quickly vegetates a vital breed.

While thus with pleasing wonder you inspect
Treasures the vulgar in their scorn reject,

THE BOROUGH

See as they float along th' entangled weeds
Slowly approach, upborne on bladdery beads;
Wait till they land, and you shall then behold
The fiery sparks those tangled frons' infold,
Myriads of living points; th' unaided eye
Can but the fire and not the form descry.
And now your view upon the ocean turn,
And there the splendour of the waves discern;
Cast but a stone, or strike them with an oar,
And you shall flames within the deep explore;
Or scoop the stream phosphoric as you stand,
And the cold flames shall flash along your hand;
When, lost in wonder, you shall walk and gaze
On weeds that sparkle, and on waves that blaze.

The ocean too has winter-views serene,
When all you see through densest fog is seen;
When you can hear the fishers near at hand
Distinctly speak, yet see not where they stand;
Or sometimes them and not their boat discern,
Or half-conceal'd some figure at the stern;
The view's all bounded, and from side to side
Your utmost prospect but a few ells wide;
Boys who, on shore, to sea the pebble cast,
Will hear it strike against the viewless mast;
While the stern boatman growls his fierce disdain,
At whom he knows not, whom he threats in vain.

'Tis pleasant then to view the nets float past,
Net after net till you have seen the last;
And as you wait till all beyond you slip,
A boat comes gliding from an anchor'd ship,
Breaking the silence with the dipping oar
And their own tones, as labouring for the shore—
Those measured tones which with the scene agree,
And give a sadness to serenity.

GEORGE CRABBE

All scenes like these the tender maid should shun,
Nor to a misty beach in autumn run;
Much should she guard against the evening cold,
And her slight shape with fleecy warmth infold;
This she admits, but not with so much ease
Gives up the night-walk when th' attendants please.
Her have I seen, pale, vapour'd through the day,
With crowded parties at the midnight play;
Faint in the morn, no powers could she exert;
At night with Pam delighted and alert;
In a small shop she's ruffled with a crowd,
Breathed the thick air, and cough'd and laugh'd aloud;
She, who will tremble if her eye explore
'The smallest monstrous mouse that creeps on floor';
Whom the kind doctor charged, with shaking head,
At early hour to quit the beaux for bed:
She has, contemning fear, gone down the dance,
Till she perceived the rosy morn advance;
Then has she wonder'd, fainting o'er her tea,
Her drops and juleps should so useless be:
Ah! sure her joys must ravish every sense,
Who buys a portion at so vast expense.

Among those joys, 'tis one at eve to sail
On the broad river with a favourite gale;
When no rough waves upon the bosom ride,
But the keel cuts, nor rises on the tide;
Safe from the stream the nearer gunwale stands,
Where playful children trail their idle hands,
Or strive to catch long grassy leaves that float
On either side of the impeded boat:
What time the moon, arising, shows the mud
A shining border to the silver flood;
When, by her dubious light, the meanest views,
Chalk, stones, and stakes, obtain the richest hues;

THE BOROUGH

And when the cattle, as they gazing stand,
Seem nobler objects than when view'd from land.
Then anchor'd vessels in the way appear,
And sea-boys greet them as they pass—'What cheer?'
The sleeping shell-ducks at the sound arise,
And utter loud their unharmonious cries;
Fluttering, they move their weedy beds among,
Or, instant diving, hide their plumeless young.

Along the wall, returning from the town,
The weary rustic homeward wanders down;
Who stops and gazes at such joyous crew,
And feels his envy rising at the view;
He the light speech and laugh indignant hears,
And feels more press'd by want, more vex'd by fears.

Ah! go in peace, good fellow, to thine home,
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;
Couldst 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,
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.

There are, 'tis true, who lay their cares aside,
And bid some hours in calm enjoyment glide;
Perchance some fair-one to the sober night
Adds (by the sweetness of her song) delight;
And, as the music on the water floats,
Some bolder shore returns the soften'd notes;

GEORGE CRABBE

Then, youth, beware, for all around conspire
To banish caution and to wake desire;
The day's amusement, feasting, beauty, wine,
These accents sweet and this soft hour combine,
When most unguarded, then to win that heart of thine:
But see, they land! the fond enchantment flies,
And in its place life's common views arise.

Sometimes a party, row'd from town, will land
On a small islet form'd of shelly sand,
Left by the water when the tides are low,
But which the floods in their return o'erflow:
There will they anchor, pleased awhile to view
The watery waste, a prospect wild and new;
The now receding billows give them space
On either side the growing shores to pace;
And then, returning, they contract the scene,
Till small and smaller grows the walk between,
As sea to sea approaches, shore to shores,
Till the next ebb the sandy isle restores.

Then what alarm! what danger and dismay,
If all their trust, their boat should drift away;
And once it happen'd—gay the friends advanced;
They walk'd, they ran, they play'd, they sang, they danced;
The urns were boiling, and the cups went round,
And not a grave or thoughtful face was found;
On the bright sand they trod with nimble feet,
Dry shelly sand that made the summer-seat;
The wondering mews flew fluttering o'er the head,
And waves ran softly up their shining bed.

Some form'd a party from the rest to stray,
Pleased to collect the trifles in their way;
These to behold, they call their friends around—
No friends can hear, or hear another sound;
Alarm'd, they hasten, yet perceive not why,

THE BOROUGH

But catch the fear that quickens as they fly.

For lo! a lady sage, who paced the sand
With her fair children, one in either hand,
Intent on home, had turn'd, and saw the boat
Slipp'd from her moorings, and now far afloat;
She gazed, she trembled, and though faint her call,
It seem'd, like thunder, to confound them all.
Their sailor-guides, the boatman and his mate,
Had drank, and slept regardless of their state;
'Awake!' they cried aloud; 'Alarm the shore!
'Shout all, or never shall we reach it more!'
Alas! no sound the distant land can reach,
Nor eye behold them from the foggy beach.
Again they join in one loud, powerful cry,
Then cease, and eager listen for reply;
None came—the rising wind blew sadly by.
They shout once more, and then they turn aside,
To see how quickly flow'd the coming tide;
Between each cry they find the waters steal
On their strange prison, and new horrors feel;
Foot after foot on the contracted ground
The billows fall, and dreadful is the sound;
Less and yet less the sinking isle became,
And there was wailing, weeping, wrath, and blame.

Had one been there, with spirit strong and high,
Who could observe, as he prepared to die:
He might have seen of hearts the varying kind,
And traced the movement of each different mind;
He might have seen, that not the gentle maid
Was more than stern and haughty man afraid;
Such calmly grieving, will their fears suppress,
And silent prayers to Mercy's throne address;
While fiercer minds, impatient, angry, loud,
Force their vain grief on the reluctant crowd.

GEORGE CRABBE

The party's patron, sorely sighing, cried,
'Why would you urge me? I at first denied.'
Fiercely they answer'd, 'Why will you complain,
'Who saw no danger, or was warn'd in vain?'
A few essay'd the troubled soul to calm;
But dread prevail'd, and anguish and alarm.

Now rose the water through the lessening sand,
And they seem'd sinking while they yet could stand;
The sun went down, they look'd from side to side,
Nor aught except the gathering sea descried;
Dark and more dark, more wet, more cold it grew,
And the most lively bade to hope adieu;
Children, by love then lifted from the seas,
Felt not the waters at the parents' knees,
But wept aloud; the wind increased the sound,
And the cold billows as they broke around.

'Once more, yet once again, with all our strength,
'Cry to the land—we may be heard at length.'
Vain hope, if yet unseen! but hark! an oar,
That sound of bliss! comes dashing to their shore;
Still, still the water rises; 'Haste!' they cry,
'Oh! hurry, seamen; in delay we die';
(Seamen were these, who in their ship perceived
The drifted boat, and thus her crew relieved).
And now the keel just cuts the cover'd sand,
Now to the gunwale stretches every hand;
With trembling pleasure all confused embark,
And kiss the tackling of their welcome ark;
While the most giddy, as they reach the shore,
Think of their danger, and their GOD adore.

THE BOROUGH

LETTER X

CLUBS AND SOCIAL MEETINGS

YOU say you envy in your calm retreat
Our social meetings;—'tis with joy we meet.
In these our parties you are pleased to find
Good sense and wit, with intercourse of mind;
Composed of men, who read, reflect, and write;
Who, when they meet, must yield and share delight.
To you our Book-club has peculiar charm,
For which you sicken in your quiet farm;
Here you suppose us at our leisure placed,
Enjoying freedom, and displaying taste;
With wisdom cheerful, temperately gay,
Pleased to enjoy, and willing to display.

If thus your envy gives your ease its gloom,
Give wings to fancy, and among us come.
We're now assembled; you may soon attend—
I'll introduce you—'Gentlemen, my friend.'—

'Now are you happy? you have pass'd a night
'In gay discourse, and rational delight.'—

'Alas! not so; for how can mortals think,
'Or thoughts exchange, if thus they eat and drink?
'No! I confess, when we had fairly dined,
'That was no time for intercourse of mind;
'There was each dish prepared with skill t' invite,
'And to detain the struggling appetite;
'On such occasions minds with one consent
'Are to the comforts of the body lent;
'There was no pause—the wine went quickly round,
'Till struggling Fancy was by Bacchus bound;

GEORGE CRABBE

'Wine is to wit as water thrown on fire:
'By duly sprinkling, both are raised the higher;
'Thus largely dealt, the vivid blaze they choke,
'And all the genial flame goes off in smoke.'—

'But when no more your boards these loads contain,
'When wine no more o'erwhelms the labouring brain,
'But serves, a gentle stimulus: we know
'How wit must sparkle, and how fancy flow.'—

It might be so, but no such club-days come;
We always find these dampers in the room.
If to converse were all that brought us here,
A few odd members would in turn appear;
Who, dwelling nigh, would saunter in and out,
O'erlook the list, and toss the books about;
Or, yawning, read them, walking up and down,
Just as the loungers in the shops in town;
Till, fancying nothing would their minds amuse,
They'd push them by, and go in search of news.

But our attractions are a stronger sort,
The earliest dainties and the oldest port;
All enter then with glee in every look,
And not a member thinks about a book.

Still let me own, there are some vacant hours,
When minds might work, and men exert their powers:
Ere wine to folly spurs the giddy guest,
But gives to wit its vigour and its zest;
Then might we reason, might in turn display
Our several talents, and be wisely gay;
We might—but who a tame discourse regards,
When whist is named, and we behold the cards?

We from that time are neither grave nor gay;
Our thought, our care, our business is to play:
Fix'd on these spots and figures, each attends
Much to his partners, nothing to his friends.

THE BOROUGH

Our public cares, the long, the warm debate,
That kept our patriots from their beds so late;
War, peace, invasion, all we hope or dread,
Vanish like dreams when men forsake their bed;
And groaning nations and contending kings
Are all forgotten for these painted things:
Paper and paste, vile figures and poor spots,
Level all minds, philosophers and sots;
And give an equal spirit, pause, and force,
Join'd with peculiar diction, to discourse:
'Who deals?—you led—we're three by cards—had you
'Honour in hand?'—'Upon my honour, two.'
Hour after hour, men thus contending sit,
Grave without sense, and pointed without wit.

Thus it appears these envied clubs possess
No certain means of social happiness;
Yet there's a good that flows from scenes like these—
Man meets with man at leisure and at ease;
We to our neighbours and our equals come,
And rub off pride that man contracts at home;
For there, admitted master, he is prone
To claim attention and to talk alone:
But here he meets with neither son nor spouse;
No humble cousin to his bidding bows;
To his raised voice his neighbours' voices rise;
To his high look as lofty look replies;
When much he speaks, he finds that ears are closed,
And certain signs inform him when he's prosed;
Here all the value of a listener know,
And claim, in turn, the favour they bestow.

No pleasure gives the speech, when all would speak,
And all in vain a civil hearer seek.
To chance alone we owe the free discourse,
In vain you purpose what you cannot force;

GEORGE CRABBE

'Tis when the favourite themes unbidden spring,
That fancy soars with such unwearied wing;
Then may you call in aid the moderate glass,
But let it slowly and unprompted pass;
So shall there all things for the end unite,
And give that hour of rational delight.

Men to their clubs repair, themselves to please,
To care for nothing, and to take their ease;
In fact, for play, for wine, for news they come;
Discourse is shared with friends, or found at home.

But cards with books are incidental things;
We've nights devoted to these queens and kings.
Then, if we choose the social game, we may;
Now, 'tis a duty, and we're bound to play;
Nor ever meeting of the social kind
Was more engaging, yet had less of mind.

Our eager parties, when the lunar light
Throws its full radiance on the festive night,
Of either sex, with punctual hurry come,
And fill, with one accord, an ample room.
Pleased, the fresh packs on cloth of green they see,
And, seizing, handle with prelude glee;
They draw, they sit, they shuffle, cut and deal;
Like friends assembled, but like foes to feel:
But yet not all—a happier few have joys
Of mere amusement, and their cards are toys;
No skill nor art, nor fretful hopes have they,
But while their friends are gaming, laugh and play.

Others there are, the veterans of the game,
Who owe their pleasure to their envied fame;
Through many a year, with hard-contested strife,
Have they attain'd this glory of their life.
Such is that ancient burghess, whom in vain
Would gout and fever on his couch detain;

THE BOROUGH

And that large lady, who resolves to come,
Though a first fit has warn'd her of her doom !
These are as oracles: in every cause
They settle doubts, and their decrees are laws;
But all are troubled, when, with dubious look,
Diana questions what Apollo spoke.

Here avarice first, the keen desire of gain,
Rules in each heart, and works in every brain;
Alike the veteran-dames and virgins feel,
Nor care what gray-beards or what striplings deal;
Sex, age, and station, vanish from their view,
And gold, their sov'reign good, the mingled crowd pursu

Hence they are jealous, and as rivals, keep
A watchful eye on the beloved heap;
Meantime discretion bids the tongue be still,
And mild good-humour strives with strong ill-will;
Till prudence fails; when, all impatient grown,
They make their grief, by their suspicions, known.

'Sir, I protest, were Job himself at play,
'He'd rave to see you throw your cards away;
'Not that I care a button—not a pin
'For what I lose; but we had cards to win:
'A saint in heaven would grieve to see such hand
'Cut up by one who will not understand.'—

'Complain of me! and so you might indeed,
'If I had ventured on that foolish lead,
'That fatal heart—but I forgot your play—
'Some folk have ever thrown their hearts away.'—

'Yes, and their diamonds; I have heard of one
'Who made a beggar of an only son.'—

'Better a beggar, than to see him tied
'To art and spite, to insolence and pride.'—

'Sir, were I you, I'd strive to be polite,
'Against my nature, for a single night.'—

GEORGE CRABBE

‘So did you strive, and, madam! with success;
‘I knew no being we could censure less!’—

Is this too much? alas! my peaceful muse
Cannot with half their virulence abuse.²¹
And hark! at other tables discord reigns
With feign’d contempt for losses and for gains;
Passions awhile are bridled; then they rage,
In waspish youth, and in resentful age;
With scraps of insult—‘Sir, when next you play,
‘Reflect whose money ’tis you throw away.
‘No one on earth can less such things regard,
‘But when one’s partner doesn’t know a card——’

‘I scorn suspicion, ma’am, but while you stand
‘Behind that lady, pray keep down your hand.’—
‘Good heav’n, revoke! remember, if the set
‘Be lost, in honour you should pay the debt.’—
‘There, there’s your money; but, while I have life,
‘I’ll never more sit down with man and wife;
‘They snap and snarl indeed, but in the heat
‘Of all their spleen, their understandings meet;
‘They are Freemasons, and have many a sign,
‘That we, poor devils! never can divine:
May it be told, do ye divide th’ amount,
‘Or goes it all to family account?’

Next is the club, where to their friends in town
Our country neighbours once a month come down;
We term it Free-and-easy, and yet we
Find it no easy matter to be free:
Ev’n in our small assembly, friends among,
Are minds perverse, there’s something will be wrong;
Men are not equal; some will claim a right
To be the kings and heroes of the night;
Will their own favourite themes and notions start,
And you must hear, offend them, or depart.

THE BOROUGH

There comes Sir Thomas from his village-seat,
Happy, he tells us, all his friends to meet;
He brings the ruin'd brother of his wife,
Whom he supports, and makes him sick of life:
A ready witness whom he can produce
Of all his deeds—a butt for his abuse.
Soon as he enters, has the guests espied,
Drawn to the fire, and to the glass applied—
'Well, what's the subject?—what are you about?
'The news, I take it—come, I'll help you out';—
And then, without one answer, he bestows
Freely upon us all he hears and knows;
Gives us opinions, tells us how he votes,
Recites the speeches, adds to them his notes,
And gives old ill-told tales for new-born anecdotes;
Yet cares he nothing what we judge or think,
Our only duty's to attend and drink.
At length, admonish'd by his gout, he ends
The various speech, and leaves at peace his friends;
But now, alas! we've lost the pleasant hour,
And wisdom flies from wine's superior power.

Wine, like the rising sun, possession gains,
And drives the mist of dulness from the brains;
The gloomy vapour from the spirit flies,
And views of gaiety and gladness rise.
Still it proceeds; till from the glowing heat,
The prudent calmly to their shades retreat;—
Then is the mind o'ercast—in wordy rage
And loud contention angry men engage;
Then spleen and pique, like fire-works thrown in spite,
To mischief turn the pleasures of the night;
Anger abuses, Malice loudly rails,
Revenge awakes, and Anarchy prevails:
Till wine, that raised the tempest, makes it cease,

GEORGE CRABBE

And maudlin Love insists on instant peace;
He noisy mirth and roaring song commands,
Gives idle toasts, and joins unfriendly hands;
Till fuddled Friendship vows esteem and weeps,
And jovial Folly drinks and sings and sleeps.

A club there is of Smokers.—Dare you come
To that close, clouded, hot, narcotic room?
When, midnight past, the very candles seem
Dying for air, and give a ghastly gleam;
When curling fumes in lazy wreaths arise,
And prosing toppers rub their winking eyes;
When the long tale, renew'd when last they met,
Is spliced anew, and is unfinish'd yet;
When but a few are left the house to tire,
And they half-sleeping by the sleepy fire;
Ev'n the poor ventilating vane, that flew
Of late so fast, is now grown drowsy too;
When sweet, cold, clammy punch its aid bestows,
Then thus the midnight conversation flows:—

‘Then, as I said, and—mind me—as I say,
‘At our last meeting—you remember’—‘Ay’;
‘Well, very well—then freely as I drink
‘I spoke my thought—you take me—what I think:
‘And sir, said I, if I a freeman be,
‘It is my bounden duty to be free.’—

‘Ay, there you posed him; I respect the chair,
‘But man is man, although the man’s a mayor.
‘If Muggins live—no, no!—if Muggins die,
‘He’ll quit his office—neighbour, shall I try?’—

‘I’ll speak my mind, for here are none but friends:
‘They’re all contending for their private ends;
‘No public spirit, once a vote would bring;
‘I say a vote was then a pretty thing;
‘It made a man to serve his country and his king.

THE BOROUGH

'But for that place, that Muggins must resign,
'You've my advice—'tis no affair of mine.'

The poor man has his club; he comes and spends
His hoarded pittance with his chosen friends;
Nor this alone—a monthly dole he pays,
To be assisted when his health decays;
Some part his prudence, from the day's supply,
For cares and troubles in his age, lays by;
The printed rules he guards with painted frame,
And shows his children where to read his name:
Those simple words his honest nature move,
That bond of union tied by laws of love.
This is his pride, it gives to his employ
New value, to his home another joy;
While a religious hope its balm applies
For all his fate inflicts and all his state denies.

Much would it please you, sometimes to explore
The peaceful dwellings of our borough poor;
To view a sailor just return'd from sea;
His wife beside; a child on either knee,
And others crowding near, that none may lose
The smallest portion of the welcome news:
What dangers pass'd, 'when seas ran mountains high,
'When tempests raved, and horrors veil'd the sky;
'When prudence fail'd, when courage grew dismay'd
'When the strong fainted, and the wicked pray'd,—
'Then in the yawning gulf far down we drove,
'And gazed upon the billowy mount above;
'Till up that mountain, swinging with the gale,
'We view'd the horrors of the watery vale'.

The trembling children look with stedfast eyes,
And panting, sob involuntary sighs:
Soft sleep awhile his torpid touch delays,
And all is joy and piety and praise.

GEORGE CRABBE

Masons are ours, Freemasons—but, alas!
To their own bards I leave the mystic class;
In vain shall one, and not a gifted man,
Attempt to sing of this enlighten'd clan:
I know no word, boast no directing sign,
And not one token of the race is mine;
Whether with Hiram, that wise widow's son,
They came from Tyre to royal Solomon,
Two pillars raising by their skill profound,
Boaz and Jachin through the East renown'd:
Whether the sacred books their rise express,
Or books profane, 'tis vain for me to guess.
It may be, lost in date remote and high,
They know not what their own antiquity;
It may be too, derived from cause so low,
They have no wish their origin to show.
If, as crusaders, they combined to wrest
From heathen lords the land they long possess'd,
Or were at first some harmless club, who made
Their idle meetings solemn by parade,
Is but conjecture—for the task unfit,
Awe-struck and mute, the puzzling theme I quit.
Yet, if such blessings from their order flow,
We should be glad their moral code to know;
Trowels of silver are but simple things,
And aprons worthless as their apron-strings;
But, if indeed you have the skill to teach
A social spirit, now beyond our reach;
If man's warm passions you can guide and bind,
And plant the virtues in the wayward mind;
If you can wake to christian-love the heart—
In mercy, something of your powers impart.

But, as it seems, we Masons must become
To know the secret, and must then be dumb;

THE BOROUGH

And, as we venture for uncertain gains,
Perhaps the profit is not worth the pains.

When Bruce, the dauntless traveller, thought he stood
On Nile's first rise, the fountain of the flood,
And drank exulting in the sacred spring,
The critics told him it was no such thing;
That springs unnumber'd round the country ran,
But none could show him where they first began:
So might we feel, should we our time bestow
To gain these secrets and these signs to know;
Might question still if all the truth we found,
And firmly stood upon the certain ground;
We might our title to the mystery dread,
And fear we drank not at the river-head.

Griggs and Gregorians here their meetings hold,
Convivial sects, and Bucks alert and bold:
A kind of Masons, but without their sign;
The bonds of union—pleasure, song, and wine.
Man, a gregarious creature, loves to fly
Where he the trackings of the herd can spy;
Still to be one with many he desires,
Although it leads him through the thorns and briers.

A few—but few—there are, who in the mind
Perpetual source of consolation find;
The weaker many to the world will come,
For comforts seldom to be found from home.

When the faint hands no more a brimmer hold;
When flannel-wreaths the useless limbs infold,
The breath impeded, and the bosom cold;
When half the pillow'd man the palsy chains,
And the blood falters in the bloated veins—
Then, as our friends no further aid supply
Than hope's cold phrase and courtesy's soft sigh,
We should that comfort for ourselves ensure,

GEORGE CRABBE

Which friends could not, if we could friends procure.

Early in life, when we can laugh aloud,
There's something pleasant in a social crowd,
Who laugh with us—but will such joy remain,
When we lie struggling on the bed of pain?
When our physician tells us with a sigh,
No more on hope and science to rely,
Life's staff is useless then; with labouring breath
We pray for hope divine—the staff of death.
This is a scene which few companions grace,
And where the heart's first favourites yield their place.

Here all the aid of man to man must end,
Here mounts the soul to her eternal Friend;
The tenderest love must here its tie resign,
And give th' aspiring heart to love divine.

Men feel their weakness, and to numbers run,
Themselves to strengthen, or themselves to shun;
But though to this our weakness may be prone,
Let's learn to live, for we must die, alone.

THE BOROUGH

LETTER XI

INNS

MUCH do I need, and therefore will I ask,
A Muse to aid me in my present task;
For then with special cause we beg for aid,
When of our subject we are most afraid:
Inns are this subject—'tis an ill-drawn lot;
So, thou who gravely triflest, fail me not.
Fail not, but haste, and to my memory bring
Scenes yet unsung, which few would choose to sing:
Thou mad'st a Shilling splendid;²² thou hast thrown
On humble themes the graces all thine own;
By thee the Mistress of a village-school
Became a queen, enthroned upon her stool;²³
And far beyond the rest thou gav'st to shine
Belinda's Lock—that deathless work was thine.²⁴

Come, lend thy cheerful light, and give to please
These seats of revelry, these scenes of ease;
Who sings of Inns much danger has to dread,
And needs assistance from the fountain-head.

High in the street, o'erlooking all the place,
The rampant Lion shows his kingly face;²⁵
His ample jaws extend from side to side,
His eyes are glaring, and his nostrils wide;
In silver shag the sovereign form is dress'd;
A mane horrific sweeps his ample chest;
Elate with pride, he seems t' assert his reign,
And stands, the glory of his wide domain.

Yet nothing dreadful to his friends the sight,
But sign and pledge of welcome and delight:

GEORGE CRABBE

To him the noblest guest the town detains
Flies for repast, and in his court remains;
Him too the crowd with longing looks admire,
Sigh for his joys, and modestly retire;
Here not a comfort shall to them be lost
Who never ask or never feel the cost.

The ample yards on either side contain
Buildings where order and distinction reign;—
The splendid carriage of the wealthier guest,
The ready chaise and driver smartly dress'd;
Whiskeys and gigs and curricles are there,
And high-fed prancers, many a raw-boned pair.
On all without a lordly host sustains
The care of empire, and observant reigns;
The parting guest beholds him at his side,
With pomp obsequious, bending in his pride;
Round all the place his eyes all objects meet,
Attentive, silent, civil, and discreet.
O'er all within the lady-hostess rules,
Her bar she governs, and her kitchen schools;
To every guest th' appropriate speech is made,
And every duty with distinction paid:
Respectful, easy, pleasant, or polite—
'Your honour's servant—Mister Smith, good night.'

Next, but not near, yet honour'd through the town,
There swing, incongruous pair! the Bear and Crown;
That Crown suspended gems and ribands deck,
A golden chain hangs o'er that furry neck.
Unlike the nobler beast, the Bear is bound,
And with the Crown so near him, scowls uncrown'd;
Less his dominion, but alert are all
Without, within, and ready for the call;
Smart lads and light run nimbly here and there,
Nor for neglected duties mourns the Bear.

THE BOROUGH

To his retreats, on the election-day,
The losing party found their silent way;
There they partook of each consoling good,
Like him uncrown'd, like him in sullen mood—
Threat'ning, but bound.—Here meet a social kind,
Our various clubs, for various cause combined;
Nor has he pride, but thankful takes as gain
The dew-drops shaken from the Lion's mane:
A thriving couple here their skill display,
And share the profits of no vulgar sway.

Third in our Borough's list appears the sign
Of a fair' queen—the gracious Caroline;
But in decay—each feature in the face
Has stain of Time, and token of disgrace.
The storm of winter, and the summer-sun,
Have on that form their equal mischief done;
The features now are all disfigured seen,
And not one charm adorns th' insulted queen:
To this poor face was never paint applied,
Th' unseemly work of cruel Time to hide;
Here we may rightly such neglect upbraid;
Paint on such faces is by prudence laid.
Large the domain, but all within combine
To correspond with the dishonour'd sign;
And all around dilapidates; you call—
But none replies—they're inattentive all.
At length a ruin'd stable holds your steed,
While you through large and dirty rooms proceed,
Spacious and cold; a proof they once had been
In honour—now magnificently mean;
Till in some small half-furnish'd room you rest,
Whose dying fire denotes it had a guest.
In those you pass'd where former splendour reign'd,
You saw the carpets torn, the paper stain'd;

GEORGE CRABBE

Squares of discordant glass in windows fix'd,
And paper oil'd in many a space betwixt;
A soil'd and broken sconce; a mirror crack'd,
With table underpropp'd, and chairs new-back'd;
A marble side-slab with ten thousand stains,
And all an ancient tavern's poor remains.

With much entreaty, they your food prepare,
And acid wine afford, with meagre fare;
Heartless you sup; and when a dozen times
You've read the fractured window's senseless rhymes;
Have been assured that Phoebe Green was fair,
And Peter Jackson took his supper there : '
You reach a chilling chamber, where you dread
Damps, hot or cold, from a tremendous bed;
Late comes your sleep, and you are waken'd soon
By rustling tatters of the old festoon.

O'er this large building, thus by time defaced,
A servile couple has its owner placed,
Who, not unmindful that its style is large,
To lost magnificence adapt their charge.
Thus an old beauty, who has long declined,
Keeps former dues and dignity in mind;
And wills that all attention should be paid
For graces vanish'd and for charms decay'd.

Few years have pass'd, since brightly 'cross the way
Lights from each window shot the lengthen'd ray,
And busy looks in every face were seen,
Through the warm precincts of the reigning Queen.
There fires inviting blazed, and all around
Was heard the tinkling bells' seducing sound;
The nimble waiters to that sound from far
Sprang to the call, then hasten'd to the bar;
Where a glad priestess of the temple sway'd,
The most obedient, and the most obey'd;

THE BOROUGH

Rosy and round, adorn'd in crimson vest,
And flaming ribands at her ample breast,
She, skill'd like Circe, tried her guests to move
With looks of welcome and with words of love;
And such her potent charms, that men unwise
Were soon transform'd and fitted for the sties.

Her port in bottles stood, a well-stain'd row,
Drawn for the evening from the pipe below;
Three powerful spirits fill'd a parted case;
Some cordial-bottles stood in secret place;
Fair acid fruits in nets above were seen;
Her plate was splendid, and her glasses clean;
Basins and bowls were ready on the stand,
And measures clatter'd in her powerful hand.

Inferior houses now our notice claim,
But who shall deal them their appropriate fame?
Who shall the nice, yet known distinction, tell,
Between the peal complete and single bell?

Determine, ye, who on your shining nags
Wear oil-skin beavers and bear seal-skin bags;
Or ye, grave toppers, who with coy delight
Snugly enjoy the sweetness of the night;
Ye travellers all, superior inns denied
By moderate purse, the low by decent pride:
Come and determine,—will ye take your place
At the *full* orb, or *half* the lunar face?
With the Black-Boy or Angel will ye dine?
Will ye approve the Fountain or the Vine?
Horses the *white* or *black* will ye prefer?
The Silver-Swan, or swan opposed to her—
Rare bird! whose form the raven-plumage decks,
And graceful curve her three alluring necks?

All these a decent entertainment give,
And by their comforts comfortably live.

GEORGE CRABBE

Shall I pass by the Boar?²⁶—there are who cry,
‘Beware the Boar’, and pass determined by:
Those dreadful tusks, those little peering eyes
And churning chaps, are tokens to the wise.
There dwells a kind old aunt, and there you see
Some kind young nieces in her company—
Poor village nieces, whom the tender dame
Invites to town, and gives their beauty fame;
The grateful sisters feel th’ important aid,
And the good aunt is flatter’d and repaid.

What though it may some cool observers strike,
That such fair sisters should be so unlike;
That still another and another comes,
And at the matron’s table smiles and blooms;
That all appear as if they meant to stay
Time undefined, nor name a parting day;
And yet, though all are valued, all are dear,
Causeless, they go, and seldom more appear:
Yet—let Suspicion hide her odious head,
And Scandal vengeance from a burgess dread—
A pious friend, who with the ancient dame
At sober cribbage takes an evening game;
His cup beside him, through their play he quaffs,
And oft renews, and innocently laughs;
Or, growing serious, to the text resorts,
And from the Sunday-sermon makes reports;
While all, with grateful glee, his wish attend,
A grave protector and a powerful friend.
But Slander says, who indistinctly sees,
Once he was caught with Silvia on his knees—
A cautious burgess with a careful wife
To be so caught!—’tis false, upon my life.

Next are a lower kind, yet not so low
But they, among them, their distinctions know;

THE BOROUGH

And, when a thriving landlord aims so high
As to exchange the Chequer for the Pye,
Or from Duke William to the Dog repairs,
He takes a finer coat and fiercer airs.

Pleased with his power, the poor man loves to say
What favourite inn shall share his evening's pay;
Where he shall sit the social hour, and lose
His past day's labours and his next day's views.
Our seamen too have choice: one takes a trip
In the warm cabin of his favourite ship;
And on the morrow in the humbler boat
He rows, till fancy feels herself afloat;
Can he the sign—Three Jolly Sailors pass,
Who hears a fiddle and who sees a lass?
The Anchor too affords the seaman joys,
In small smoked room, all clamour, crowd, and noise;
Where a curved settle half surrounds the fire,
Where fifty voices purl and punch require.
They come for pleasure in their leisure hour,
And they enjoy it to their utmost power;
Standing they drink, they swearing smoke, while all
Call or make ready for a second call:
There is no time for trifling—'Do ye see?
'We drink and drub the French extempore.'

See! round the room, on every beam and balk,
Are mingled scrolls of hieroglyphic chalk;
Yet nothing heeded—would one stroke suffice
To blot out all, here honour is too nice—
'Let knavish landmen think such dirty things,
'We're British tars, and British tars are kings'.

But the Green-Man shall I pass by unsung,
Which mine own James upon his sign-post hung?
His sign, his image,—for he once was seen
A squire's attendant, clad in keeper's green;

GEORGE CRABBE

Ere yet, with wages more, and honour less,
He stood behind me in a graver dress.

James in an evil hour went forth to woo
Young Juliet Hart, and was her Romeo :
They'd seen the play, and thought it vastly sweet
For two young lovers by the moon to meet ;
The nymph was gentle, of her favours free,
Ev'n at a word—no Rosalind was she ;
Nor, like that other Juliet, tried his truth
With—'Be thy purpose marriage, gentle youth?'
But him received, and heard his tender tale,
When sang the lark, and when the nightingale :
So in few months the generous lass was seen
I^t the way that all the Capulets had been.

Then first repentance seized the amorous man,
And—shame on love—he reason'd and he ran ;
The thoughtful Romeo trembled for his purse,
And the sad sounds, 'for better and for worse'.

Yet could the lover not so far withdraw,
But he was haunted both by love and law :
Now law dismay'd him as he view'd its fangs,
Now pity seized him for his Juliet's pangs ;
Then thoughts of justice and some dread of jail,
Where all would blame him and where none might bail ;
These drew him back, till Juliet's hut appear'd,
Where love had drawn him when he should have fear'd.

There sat the father in his wicker throne,
Uttering his curses in tremendous tone ;
With foulest names his daughter he reviled,
And look'd a very Herod at the child :
Nor was she patient, but with equal scorn,
Bade him remember when his Joe was born :
Then rose the mother, eager to begin
Her plea for frailty, when the swain came in.

THE BOROUGH

To him she turn'd, and other theme began,
Show'd him his boy, and bade him be a man—
'An honest man, who, when he breaks the laws,
'Will make a woman honest if there's cause'.
With lengthen'd speech she proved what came to pass
Was no reflection on a loving lass :

'If she your love as wife and mother claim,
'What can it matter which was first the name?
'But 'tis most base, 'tis perjury and theft,
'When a lost girl is like a widow left;
'The rogue who ruins'—here the father found
His spouse was treading on forbidden ground.

'That's not the point,' quoth he,—'I don't suppose
'My good friend Fletcher to be one of those;
'What's done amiss he'll mend in proper time—
'I hate to hear of villany and crime.
' 'Twas my misfortune, in the days of youth,
'To find two lasses pleading for my truth;
'The case was hard, I would with all my soul
'Have wedded both, but law is our control;
'So one I took, and when we gain'd a home,
'Her friend agreed—what could she more?—to come;
And when she found that I'd a widow'd bed,
'Me she desired—what could I less?—to wed.
'An easier case is yours: you've not the smart
'That two fond pleaders cause in one man's heart;
'You've not to wait from year to year distress'd,
'Before your conscience can be laid at rest;
'There smiles your bride, there sprawls your new-born son,
'—A ring, a licence, and the thing is done.'

'My loving James,'—the lass began her plea,
'I'll make thy reason take a part with me.
'Had I been froward, skittish, or unkind,
'Or to thy person or thy passion blind;

'Had I refused, when 'twas thy part to pray,
 'Or put thee off with promise and delay;
 'Thou might'st in justice and in conscience fly,
 'Denying her who taught thee to deny:
 'But, James, with me thou hadst an easier task,
 'Bonds and conditions I forbore to ask;
 'I laid no traps for thee, no plots or plans,
 'Nor marriage named by licence or by banns;
 'Nor would I now the parson's aid employ,
 'But for this cause'—and up she held her boy.

Motives like these could heart of flesh resist?
 James took the infant and in triumph kiss'd;
 Then to his mother's arms the child restored,
 Made his proud speech, and pledged his worthy word.

'Three times at church our banns shall publish'd be,
 'Thy health be drunk in bumpers three times three;
 'And thou shalt grace (bedeck'd in garments gay)
 'The christening-dinner on the wedding day.'

James at my door then made his parting bow,
 Took the Green-Man, and is a master now.

THE BOROUGH

LETTER XIX

THE PARISH-CLERK

WITH our late vicar, and his age the same,
His clerk, hight Jachin, to his office came :
The like slow speech was his, the like tall slender frame.
But Jachin was the gravest man on ground,
And heard his master's jokes with look profound ;
For worldly wealth this man of letters sigh'd,
And had a sprinkling of the spirit's pride ;
But he was sober, chaste, devout, and just,
One whom his neighbours could believe and trust :
Of none suspected, neither man nor maid
By him were wrong'd, or were of him afraid.

There was indeed a frown, a trick of state
In Jachin ;—formal was his air and gait ;
But if he seem'd more solemn and less kind
Than some light men to light affairs confined,
Still 'twas allow'd that he should so behave
As in high seat, and be severely grave.

This book-taught man to man's first foe profess'd
Defiance stern, and hate that knew not rest ;
He held that Satan, since the world began,
In every act had strife with every man ;
That never evil deed on earth was done,
But of the acting parties he was one :
The flattering guide to make ill prospects clear ;
To smooth rough ways the constant pioneer ;
The ever-tempting, soothing, softening power,
Ready to cheat, seduce, deceive, devour.

'Me has the sly seducer oft withstood,'

GEORGE CRABBE

Said pious Jachin,—‘but he gets no good;
‘I pass the house where swings the tempting sign,
‘And, pointing, tell him, “Satan, that is thine”;
‘I pass the damsels pacing down the street,
‘And look more grave and solemn when we meet;
‘Nor doth it irk me to rebuke their smiles,
‘Their wanton ambling and their watchful wiles.
‘Nay, like the good John Bunyan, when I view
‘Those forms, I’m angry at the ills they do;
‘That I could pinch and spoil, in sin’s despite,
‘Beauties, which frail and evil thoughts excite!
‘At feasts and banquets seldom am I found,
‘And (save at church) abhor a tuneful sound;
‘To plays and shows I run not to and fro,
‘And where my master goes forbear to go.’

No wonder Satan took the thing amiss,
To be opposed by such a man as this—
A man so grave, important, cautious, wise,
Who dared not trust his feeling or his eyes;
No wonder he should lurk and lie in wait,
Should fit his hooks and ponder on his bait;
Should on his movements keep a watchful eye;
For he pursued a fish who led the fry.

With his own peace our clerk was not content;
He tried, good man! to make his friends repent.

‘Nay, nay, my friends, from inns and taverns fly;
‘You may suppress your thirst, but not supply.
‘A foolish proverb says, “the devil’s at home”;
‘But he is there, and tempts in every room:
‘Men feel, they know not why, such places please;
‘His are the spells—they’re idleness and ease;
‘Magic of fatal kind he throws around,
‘Where care is banish’d but the heart is bound.

‘Think not of beauty; when a maid you meet,

THE BOROUGH

'Turn from her view, and step across the street;
'Dread all the sex: their looks create a charm,
'A smile should fright you and a word alarm.
'E'en I myself, with all my watchful care,
'Have for an instant felt th' insidious snare,
'And caught my sinful eyes at th' endangering stare;
'Till I was forced to smite my bounding breast
'With forceful blow and bid the bold-one rest.

'Go not with crowds when they to pleasure run,
'But public joy in private safety shun.
'When bells, diverted from their true intent,
'Ring loud for some deluded mortal sent
'To hear or make long speech in parliament;
'What time the many, that unruly beast,
'Roars its rough joy and shares the final feast:
'Then heed my counsel, shut thine ears and eyes;
'A few will hear me—for the few are wise.'

Not Satan's friends, nor Satan's self could bear
The cautious man who took of souls such care:
An interloper—one who, out of place,
Had volunteer'd upon the side of grace.
There was his master ready once a week
To give advice; what further need he seek?
'Amen, so be it':—what had he to do
With more than this?—'twas insolent and new;
And some determined on a way to see
How frail he was, that so it might not be.

First they essay'd to tempt our saint to sin,
By points of doctrine argued at an inn;
Where he might warmly reason, deeply drink,
Then lose all power to argue and to think.

In vain they tried; he took the question up,
Clear'd every doubt, and barely touch'd the cup;
By many a text he proved his doctrine sound,

And look'd in triumph on the tempters round.

Next 'twas their care an artful lass to find,
 Who might consult him, as perplex'd in mind;
 She, they conceived, might put her case with fears,
 With tender tremblings and seducing tears;
 She might such charms of various kind display,
 That he would feel their force and melt away:
 For why of nymphs such caution and such dread,
 Unless he felt and fear'd to be misled?

She came, she spake: he calmly heard her case,
 And plainly told her 'twas a want of grace;
 Bade her 'such fancies and affections check,
 'And wear a thicker muslin on her neck'.
 Abased, his human foes the combat fled,
 And the stern clerk yet higher held his head.
 They were indeed a weak, impatient set;
 But their shrewd prompter had his engines yet;
 Had various means to make a mortal trip,
 Who shunn'd a flowing bowl and rosy lip;
 And knew a thousand ways his heart to move,
 Who flies from banquets and who laughs at love.

Thus far the playful Muse has lent her aid,
 But now departs, of graver theme afraid;
 Her may we seek in more appropriate time—
 There is no jesting with distress and crime.

Our worthy clerk had now arrived at fame,
 Such as but few in his degree might claim;
 But he was poor, and wanted not the sense
 That lowly rates the praise without the pence:
 He saw the common herd with reverence treat
 The weakest burgess whom they chanced to meet;
 While few respected his exalted views,
 And all beheld his doublet and his shoes;
 None, when they meet, would to his parts allow

THE BOROUGH

(Save his poor boys) a hearing or a bow.
To this false judgment of the vulgar mind
He was not fully, as a saint, resign'd;
He found it much his jealous soul affect,
To fear derision and to find neglect.

The year was bad, the christening-fees were small,
The weddings few, the parties paupers all:
Desire of gain, with fear of want combined,
Raised sad commotion in his wounded mind;
Wealth was in all his thoughts, his views, his dreams,
And prompted base desires and baseless schemes.

Alas! how often erring mortals keep
The strongest watch against the foes who sleep;
While the more wakeful, bold and artful foe
Is suffer'd guardless and unmark'd to go.

Once in a month the sacramental bread
Our clerk with wine upon the table spread;
The custom this, that, as the vicar reads,
He for our off'rings round the church proceeds.
Tall, spacious seats the wealthier people hid,
And none had view of what his neighbour did;
Laid on the box and mingled when they fell,
Who should the worth of each oblation tell?
Now as poor Jachin took the usual round,
And saw the alms and heard the metal sound,
He had a thought;—at first it was no more
Than—'these have cash and give it to the poor'.
A second thought from this to work began—
'And can they give it to a poorer man?'
Proceeding thus—'My merit could they know,
'And knew my need, how freely they'd bestow;
'But though they know not, these remain the same;
'And are a strong, although a secret claim:
'To me, alas! the want and worth are known;—

'Why then, in fact, 'tis but to take my own.'

Thought after thought pour'd in, a tempting train—

'Suppose it done, who is it could complain?

'How could the poor? for they such trifles share

'As add no comfort, as suppress no care;

'But many a pittance makes a worthy heap—

'What says the law? that silence puts to sleep;—

'Nought then forbids, the danger could we shun;

'And sure the business may be safely done.

'But am I earnest?—earnest? No.—I say,

'If such my mind, that I could plan a way;

'Let me reflect;—I've not allow'd me timè

'To purse the pieces, and if dropp'd they'd chime.'

Fertile is evil in the soul of man—

He paused—said Jachin, 'They may drop on bran.

'Why then 'tis safe and (all consider'd) just;

'The poor receive it—'tis no breach of trust;

'The old and widows may their trifles miss,

'There must be evil in a good like this.

'But I'll be kind—the sick I'll visit twice,

'When now but once, and freely give advice.

'Yet let me think again.'—Again he tried

For stronger reasons on his passion's side;

And quickly these were found, yet slowly he complied.

The morning came: the common service done—

Shut every door—the solemn rite begun;

And, as the priest the sacred sayings read,

The clerk went forward, trembling as he tread;

O'er the tall pew he held the box, and heard

The offer'd piece, rejoicing as he fear'd.

Just by the pillar, as he cautious tripp'd,

And turn'd the aile, he then a portion slipp'd

From the full store, and to the pocket sent,

But held a moment—and then down it went.

THE BOROUGH

The priest read on; on walk'd the man afraid,
Till a gold offering in the plate was laid;
Trembling he took it, for a moment stopp'd,
Then down it fell, and sounded as it dropp'd;
Amazed he started, for th' affrighted man,
Lost and bewilder'd, thought not of the bran;
But all were silent, all on things intent
Of high concern; none ear to money lent;
So on he walk'd, more cautious than before,
And gain'd the purposed sum, and one piece more.

Practice makes perfect;—when the month came round,
He dropp'd the cash, nor listen'd for a sound;
But yet, when, last of all th' assembled flock,
He ate and drank—it gave th' electric shock.
Oft was he forced his reasons to repeat,
Ere he could kneel in quiet at his seat;
But custom soothed him.—Ere a single year
All this was done without restraint or fear:
Cool and collected, easy and composed,
He was correct till all the service closed;
Then to his home, without a groan or sigh,
Gravely he went, and laid his treasure by.

Want will complain: some widows had express'd
A doubt if they were favour'd like the rest;
The rest described with like regret their dole,
And thus from parts they reason'd to the whole;
When all agreed some evil must be done,
Or rich men's hearts grew harder than a stone.

Our easy vicar cut the matter short;
He would not listen to such vile report.

All were not thus—there govern'd in that year
A stern stout churl, an angry overseer;
A tyrant fond of power, loud, lewd, and most severe.
Him the mild vicar, him the graver clerk,

GEORGE CRABBE

Advised, reprov'd, but nothing would he mark,
Save the disgrace; 'and that, my friends,' said he,
'Will I avenge, whenever time may be'.

And now, alas! 'twas time;—from man to man
Doubt and alarm and shrewd suspicions ran.

With angry spirit and with sly intent,
This parish ruler to the altar went;
A private mark he fix'd on shillings three,
And but one mark could in the money see;
Besides, in peering round, he chanced to note
A sprinkling slight on Jachin's Sunday-coat.
All doubt was over:—when the flock werè bless'd,
In wrath he rose, and thus his mind express'd.

'Foul deeds are here!' and, saying this, he took
The clerk, whose conscience, in her cold-fit, shook.
His pocket then was emptied on the place;
All saw his guilt; all witness'd his disgrace:
He fell, he fainted; not a groan, a look,
Escaped the culprit; 'twas a final stroke—
A death-wound never to be heal'd—a fall
That all had witness'd, and amazed were all.

As he recover'd, to his mind it came,
'I owe to Satan this disgrace and shame'.
All the seduction now appear'd in view;
'Let me withdraw,' he said, and he withdrew;
No one withheld him, all in union cried,
E'en the avenger—'We are satisfied';
For what has death in any form to give,
Equal to that man's terrors, if he live?

He lived in freedom, but he hourly saw
How much more fatal justice is than law;
He saw another in his office reign,
And his mild master treat him with disdain;
He saw that all men shunn'd him, some reviled;

THE BOROUGH

The harsh pass'd frowning, and the simple smiled;
The town maintain'd him, but with some reproof;
'And clerks and scholars proudly kept aloof'.

In each lone place, dejected and dismay'd,
Shrinking from view, his wasting form he laid;
Or to the restless sea and roaring wind
Gave the strong yearnings of a ruin'd mind.
On the broad beach, the silent summer-day,
Stretch'd on some wreck, he wore his life away;
Or where the river mingles with the sea,
Or on the mud-bank by the elder-tree,
Or by the bounding marsh-dyke, there was he;
And when unable to forsake the town,
In the blind courts he sate desponding down—
Always alone; then feebly would he crawl
The church-way walk, and lean upon the wall.
Too ill for this, he lay beside the door,
Compell'd to hear the reasoning of the poor:
He look'd so pale, so weak, the pitying crowd
Their firm belief of his repentance vow'd;
They saw him then so ghastly and so thin,
That they exclaim'd, 'Is this the work of sin?'

'Yes,' in his better moments, he replied,
'Of sinful avarice and the spirit's pride;—
'While yet untempted, I was safe and well;
'Temptation came; I reason'd, and I fell.
'To be man's guide and glory I design'd,
'A rare example for our sinful kind;
'But now my weakness and my guilt I see,
'And am a warning—man, be warn'd by me!'

He said, and saw no more the human face;
To a lone loft he went, his dying place,
And, as the vicar of his state inquired,
Turn'd to the wall and silently expired!

THE BOROUGH

LETTER XXII

PETER GRIMES

OLD Peter Grimes made fishing his employ;
His wife he cabin'd with him and his boy,
And seem'd that life laborious to enjoy.
To town came quiet Peter with his fish,
And had of all a civil word and wish.
He left his trade upon the sabbath-day,
And took young Peter in his hand to pray;
But soon the stubborn boy from care broke loose,
At first refused, then added his abuse;
His father's love he scorn'd, his power defied,
But, being drunk, wept sorely when he died.

Yes! then he wept, and to his mind there came
Much of his conduct, and he felt the shame:—
How he had oft the good old man reviled,
And never paid the duty of a child;
How, when the father in his Bible read,
He in contempt and anger left the shed;
'It is the word of life', the parent cried;
—'This is the life itself', the boy replied;
And while old Peter in amazement stood,
Gave the hot spirit to his boiling blood;—
How he, with oath and furious speech, began
To prove his freedom and assert the man;
And when the parent check'd his impious rage,
How he had cursed the tyranny of age;—
Nay, once had dealt the sacrilegious blow
On his bare head, and laid his parent low;
The father groan'd—'If thou art old', said he,

THE BOROUGH

'And hast a son—thou wilt remember me;
'Thy mother left me in a happy time,
'Thou kill'dst not her—Heav'n spares the double crime.'

On an inn-settle, in his maudlin grief,
This he revolved, and drank for his relief.

Now lived the youth in freedom, but debarr'd
From constant pleasure, and he thought it hard;
Hard that he could not every wish obey,
But must awhile relinquish ale and play;
Hard! that he could not to his cards attend,
But must acquire the money he would spend.

With greedy eye he look'd on all he saw;
He knew not justice, and he laugh'd at law;
On all he mark'd he stretch'd his ready hand;
He fish'd by water, and he filch'd by land.
Oft in the night has Peter dropp'd his oar,
Fled from his boat and sought for prey on shore;
Oft up the hedge-row glided, on his back
Bearing the orchard's produce in a sack,
Or farm-yard load, tugg'd fiercely from the stack;
And as these wrongs to greater numbers rose,
The more he look'd on all men as his foes.

He built a mud-wall'd hovel, where he kept
His various wealth, and there he oft-times slept;
But no success could please his cruel soul,
He wish'd for one to trouble and control;
He wanted some obedient boy to stand
And bear the blow of his outrageous hand;
And hoped to find in some propitious hour
A feeling creature subject to his power.

Peter had heard there were in London then—
Still have they being!—workhouse-clearing men,
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 woollen 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 shiv'ring 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'.
None reason'd thus—and some, on hearing cries,
Said calmly, 'Grimes is at his exercise'.

Pinn'd, beaten, cold, pinch'd, threaten'd, and abused—
His efforts punish'd and his food refused—
Awake tormented—soon aroused from sleep—
Struck if he wept, and yet compell'd to weep:
The trembling boy dropp'd down and strove to pray,
Received a blow, and trembling turn'd away,
Or sobb'd and hid his piteous face;—while he,
The savage master, grinn'd in horrid glee:
He'd now the power he ever loved to show,
A feeling being subject to his blow.

Thus lived the lad, in hunger, peril, pain,
His tears despised, his supplications vain.
Compell'd by fear to lie, by need to steal,
His bed uneasy and unblest his meal,
For three sad years the boy his tortures bore;
And then his pains and trials were no more.

'How died he, Peter?' when the people said,
He growl'd—'I found him lifeless in his bed';

THE BOROUGH

Then tried for softer tone, and sigh'd, 'Poor Sam is dead'.
Yet murmurs were there, and some questions ask'd—
How he was fed, how punish'd, and how task'd?
Much they suspected, but they little proved,
And Peter pass'd untroubled and unmoved.

Another boy with equal ease was found,
The money granted, and the victim bound;
And what his fate?—One night, it chanced he fell
From the boat's mast and perish'd in her well,
Where fish were living kept, and where the boy
(So reason'd men) could not himself destroy.—

'Yes! so it was,' said Peter; 'in his play,
'(For he was idle both by night and day,)
'He climb'd the main-mast and then fell below';—
Then show'd his corpse and pointed to the blow;—
'What said the jury?'—They were long in doubt;
But sturdy Peter faced the matter out:
So they dismiss'd him, saying at the time,
'Keep fast your hatchway, when you've boys who climb'.
This hit the conscience, and he colour'd more
Than for the closest questions put before.

Thus all his fears the verdict set aside,
And at the slave-shop Peter still applied.

Then came a boy, of manners soft and mild—
Our seamen's wives with grief beheld the child;
All thought (the poor themselves) that he was one
Of gentle blood, some noble sinner's son,
Who had, belike, deceived some humble maid,
Whom he had first seduced and then betray'd.—
However this, he seem'd a gracious lad,
In grief submissive and with patience sad.

Passive he labour'd, till his slender frame
Bent with his loads, and he at length was lame;—
Strange that a frame so weak could bear so long

GEORGE CRABBE

The grossest insult and the foulest wrong;
But there were causes—in the town they gave
Fire, food, and comfort, to the gentle slave;
And though stern Peter, with a cruel hand,
And knotted rope, enforced the rude command,
Yet he consider'd what he'd lately felt,
And his vile blows with selfish pity dealt.

One day such draughts the cruel fisher made
He could not vend them in his borough-trade,
But sail'd for London-mart; the boy was ill,
But ever humbled to his master's will;
And on the river, where they smoothly sail'd,
He strove with terror and awhile prevail'd;
But, new to danger on the angry sea,
He clung affrighten'd to his master's knee.
The boat grew leaky and the wind was strong,
Rough was the passage and the time was long;
His liquor fail'd, and Peter's wrath arose—
No more is known—the rest we must suppose,
Or learn of Peter;—Peter says, he 'spied
'The stripling's danger and for harbour tried;
'Meantime the fish, and then th' apprentice died'.

The pitying women raised a clamour round,
And weeping said, 'Thou hast thy 'prentice drown'd'.

Now the stern man was summon'd to the hall,
To tell his tale before the burghers all.
He gave th' account; profess'd the lad he loved,
And kept his brazen features all unmoved.

The mayor himself with tone severe replied,—
'Henceforth with thee shall never boy abide;
'Hire thee a freeman, whom thou durst not beat,
'But who, in thy despite, will sleep and eat.
'Free thou art now!—again shouldst thou appear,
'Thou'lt find thy sentence, like thy soul, severe.'

THE BOROUGH

Alas! for Peter not a helping hand,
So was he hated, could he now command;
Alone he row'd his boat; alone he cast
His nets beside, or made his anchor fast;
To hold a rope or hear a curse was none—
He toil'd and rail'd; he groan'd and swore alone.

Thus by himself compell'd to live each day,
To wait for certain hours the tide's delay;
At the same times the same dull views to see,
The bounding marsh-bank and the blighted tree;
The water only when the tides were high;
When low, the mud half-cover'd and half-dry;
The sun-burnt tar that blisters on the planks,
And bank-side stakes in their uneven ranks;
Heaps of entangled weeds that slowly float,
As the tide rolls by the impeded boat.

When tides were neap, and, in the sultry day,
Through the tall bounding mud-banks made their way,
Which on each side rose swelling, and below
The dark warm flood ran silently and slow:
There anchoring, Peter chose from man to hide,
There hang his head, and view the lazy tide
In its hot slimy channel slowly glide;
Where the small eels that left the deeper way
For the warm shore, within the shallows play;
Where gaping muscles, left upon the mud,
Slope their slow passage to the fallen flood:—
Here dull and hopeless he'd lie down and trace
How sidelong crabs had scrawl'd their crooked race;
Or sadly listen to the tuneless cry
Of fishing gull or clanging golden-eye;
What time the sea-birds to the marsh would come,
And the loud bittern, from the bull-rush home,
Gave from the salt-ditch side the bellowing boom.

GEORGE CRABBE

He nursed the feelings these dull scenes produce,
And loved to stop beside the opening sluice;
Where the small stream, confined in narrow bound,
Ran with a dull, unvaried, sadd'ning sound;
Where all presented to the eye or ear
Oppress'd the soul with misery, grief, and fear.

Besides these objects, there were places three,
Which Peter seem'd with certain dread to see;
When he drew near them he would turn from each,
And loudly whistle till he pass'd the reach.

A change of scene to him brought no relief;
In town, 'twas plain, men took him for a thief:
The sailors' wives would stop him in the street,
And say, 'Now, Peter, thou'st no boy to beat';
Infants at play, when they perceived him, ran,
Warning each other—'That's the wicked man';
He growl'd an oath, and in an angry tone
Cursed the whole place and wish'd to be alone.

Alone he was, the same dull scenes in view,
And still more gloomy in his sight they grew.
Though man he hated, yet employ'd alone
At bootless labour, he would swear and groan,
Cursing the shoals that glided by the spot,
And gulls that caught them when his arts could not.
Cold nervous tremblings shook his sturdy frame,
And strange disease—he couldn't say the name;
Wild were his dreams, and oft he rose in fright,
Waked by his view of horrors in the night—
Horrors that would the sternest minds amaze,
Horrors that demons might be proud to raise;
And, though he felt forsaken, grieved at heart,
To think he lived from all mankind apart;
Yet, if a man approach'd, in terrors he would start.

A winter pass'd since Peter saw the town,

THE BOROUGH

And summer-lodgers were again come down;
These, idly curious, with their glasses spied
The ships in bay as anchor'd for the tide—
The river's craft—the bustle of the quay—
And sea-port views, which landmen love to see.

One, up the river, had a man and boat
Seen day by day, now anchor'd, now afloat;
Fisher he seem'd, yet used no net nor hook;
Of sea-fowl swimming by no heed he took,
But on the gliding waves still fix'd his lazy look;
At certain stations he would view the stream,
As if he stood bewilder'd in a dream,
Or that some power had chain'd him for a time,
To feel a curse or meditate on crime.

This known, some curious, some in pity went,
And others question'd—'Wretch, dost thou repent?'
He heard, he trembled, and in fear resign'd
His boat; new terror fill'd his restless mind;
Furious he grew, and up the country ran,
And there they seized him—a distemper'd man.—
Him we received; and to a parish-bed,
Follow'd and cursed, the groaning man was led.

Here when they saw him, whom they used to shun,
A lost, lone man, so harass'd and undone,
Our gentle females, ever prompt to feel,
Perceived compassion on their anger steal;
His crimes they could not from their memories blot;
But they were grieved, and trembled at his lot.

A priest too came, to whom his words are told;
And all the signs they shudder'd to behold.

'Look! look!' they cried; 'his limbs with horror shake,
'And as he grinds his teeth, what noise they make!
'How glare his angry eyes, and yet he's not awake.
'See! what cold drops upon his forehead stand,

GEORGE CRABBE

And how he clenches that broad bony hand.'

The priest, attending, found he spoke at times
As one alluding to his fears and crimes :

'It was the fall,' he mutter'd, 'I can show
'The manner how—I never struck a blow';—
And then aloud—'Unhand me, free my chain;
'On oath, he fell—it struck him to the brain;—
'Why ask my father?—that old man will swear
'Against my life; besides, he wasn't there;—
'What, all agreed?—Am I to die to-day?—
'My Lord, in mercy, give me time to pray.'

Then, as they watch'd him, calmer he became,
And grew so weak he couldn't move his frame,
But murmuring spake—while they could see and hear
The start of terror and the groan of fear;
See the large dew-beads on his forehead rise,
And the cold death-drop glaze his sunken eyes;
Nor yet he died, but with unwonted force
Seem'd with some fancied being to discourse.
He knew not us, or with accustom'd art
He hid the knowledge, yet exposed his heart;
'Twas part confession and the rest defence,
A madman's tale, with gleams of waking sense.

'I'll tell you all,' he said; 'the very day
'When the old man first placed them in my way:
'My father's spirit—he who always tried
'To give me trouble, when he lived and died—
'When he was gone, he could not be content
'To see my days in painful labour spent,
'But would appoint his meetings, and he made
'Me watch at these, and so neglect my trade.

''Twas one hot noon, all silent, still, serene;
'No living being had I lately seen;
'I paddled up and down and dipp'd my net,

THE BOROUGH

'But (such his pleasure) I could nothing get—
'A father's pleasure, when his toil was done,
'To plague and torture thus an only son!
'And so I sat and look'd upon the stream,
'How it ran on, and felt as in a dream—
'But dream it was not; no!—I fix'd my eyes
'On the mid stream and saw the spirits rise;
'I saw my father on the water stand,
'And hold a thin pale boy in either hand;
'And there they glided ghastly on the top
'Of the salt flood, and never touch'd a drop.
'I would have struck them, but they knew th' intent,
'And smiled upon the oar, and down they went.
'Now, from that day, whenever I began
'To dip my net, there stood the hard old man—
'He and those boys; I humbled me and pray'd
'They would be gone;—they heeded not, but stay'd.
'Nor could I turn, nor would the boat go by,
'But gazing on the spirits, there was I;
'They bade me leap to death, but I was loth to die.
'And every day, as sure as day arose,
'Would these three spirits meet me ere the close;
'To hear and mark them daily was my doom,
'And "Come", they said, with weak, sad voices, "come".
'To row away with all my strength I try'd;
'But there were they, hard by me in the tide,
'The three unbodied forms—and "Come", still "come",
they cried.
'Fathers should pity—but this old man shook
'His hoary locks, and froze me by a look.
'Thrice, when I struck them, through the water came
'A hollow groan that weaken'd all my frame;
'"Father!" said I, "have mercy!"—He replied,
'I know not what—the angry spirit lied,—

GEORGE CRABBE

“Didst thou not draw thy knife?” said he;—’Twas true,
‘But I had pity and my arm withdrew;
‘He cried for mercy which I kindly gave,
‘But he has no compassion in his grave.

‘There were three places, where they ever rose;—
‘The whole long river has not such as those—
‘Places accursed, where, if a man remain,
‘He’ll see the things which strike him to the brain;
‘And there they made me on my paddle lean,
‘And look at them for hours—accursed scene!
‘When they would glide to that smooth eddy-space,
‘Then bid me leap and join them in the place;
‘And at my groans each little villain sprite
‘Enjoy’d my pains and vanish’d in delight.

‘In one fierce summer-day, when my poor brain
‘Was burning hot and cruel was my pain,
‘Then came this father-foe; and there he stood
‘With his two boys again upon the flood;
‘There was more mischief in their eyes, more glee
‘In their pale faces when they glared at me.
‘Still did they force me on the oar to rest,
‘And when they saw me fainting and oppress’d,
‘He, with his hand, the old man, scoop’d the flood,
‘And there came flame about him, mix’d with blood;
‘He bade me stoop and look upon the place,
‘Then flung the hot-red liquor in my face;
‘Burning it blazed, and then I roar’d for pain,
‘I thought the demons would have turn’d my brain.

‘Still there they stood, and forced me to behold
‘A place of horrors—they cannot be told—
‘Where the flood open’d, there I heard the shriek
‘Of tortured guilt no earthly tongue can speak:
‘“All days alike! for ever!” did they say,
‘“And unremitted torments every day!”—

THE BOROUGH

'Yes, so they said';—but here he ceased and gazed
On all around, affrighten'd and amazed;
And still he tried to speak, and look'd in dread
Of frighten'd females gathering round his bed;
Then dropp'd exhausted and appear'd at rest,
Till the strong foe the vital powers possess'd;
Then with an inward, broken voice he cried,
'Again they come', and mutter'd as he died.²⁷

THE BOROUGH

LETTER XXIII

PRISONS²⁸

'TIS well that man to all the varying states
Of good and ill his mind accommodates;
He not alone progressive grief sustains,
But soon submits to unexperienced pains.
Change after change, all climes his body bears,
His mind repeated shocks of changing cares;
Faith and fair virtue arm the nobler breast;
Hope and mere want of feeling aid the rest.

Or who could bear to lose the balmy air
Of summer's breath, from all things fresh and fair,
With all that man admires or loves below;
All earth and water, wood and vale bestow,
Where rosy pleasures smile, whence real blessings flow;
With sight and sound of every kind that lives,
And crowning all with joy that freedom gives?

Who could from these, in some unhappy day,
Bear to be drawn by ruthless arms away
To the vile nuisance of a noisome room,
Where only insolence and misery come?
(Save that the curious will by chance appear,
Or some in pity drop a fruitless tear,
To a damp prison, where the very sight
Of the warm sun is favour and not right;
Where all we hear or see the feelings shock,
The oath and groan, the fetter and the lock?

Who could bear this and live?—Oh! many a year
All this is borne, and miseries more severe;
And some there are, familiar with the scene,

THE BOROUGH

Who live in mirth, though few become serene.

Far as I might the inward man perceive,
There was a constant effort—not to grieve;
Not to despair, for better days would come,
And the freed debtor smile again at home;
Subdued his habits, he may peace regain,
And bless the woes that were not sent in vain.

Thus might we class the debtors here confined,
The more deceived, the more deceitful kind;
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 as the public spoilers we regard;
No dun so harsh, no creditor so hard.

A second kind are they, who truly strive
To keep their sinking credit long alive;
Success, nay prudence, they may want, but yet
They would be solvent, and deplore a debt;
All means they use, to all expedients run,
And are by slow, sad steps, at last undone.
Justly, perhaps, you blame their want of skill,
But mourn their feelings and absolve their will.

There is a debtor, who his trifling *all*
Spreads in a shop; it would not fill a stall:
There at one window his temptation lays,
And in new modes disposes and displays.
Above the door you shall his name behold,
And what he vends in ample letters told,
The words *repository*, *warehouse*, all
He uses to enlarge concerns so small.
He to his goods assigns some beauty's name,

Then in her reign, and hopes they'll share her fame;
 And talks of credit, commerce, traffic, trade,
 As one important by their profit made;
 But who can paint the vacancy, the gloom,
 And spare dimensions of one backward room?
 Wherein he dines, if so 'tis fit to speak,
 Of one day's herring and the morrow's steak;
 An anchorite in diet, all his care
 Is to display his stock and vend his ware.

Long waiting hopeless, then he tries to meet
 A kinder fortune in a distant street;
 There he again displays, increasing yet
 Corroding sorrow and consuming debt:
 Alas! he wants the requisites to rise—
 The true connexions, the availing ties;
 They who proceed on certainties advance;
 These are not times when men prevail by chance.
 But still he tries, till, after years of pain,
 He finds, 'with anguish, he has tried in vain.
 Debtors are these on whom 'tis hard to press,
 'Tis base, impolitic, and merciless.

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,
 Of every passion, humour, whim, and vice.

See that sad merchant, who but yesterday
 Had a vast household in command and pay;
 He now entreats permission to employ
 A boy he needs, and then entreats the boy.

And there sits one, improvident but kind,

THE BOROUGH

Bound for a friend, whom honour could not bind;
Sighing, he speaks to any who appear,
'A treach'rous friend—'twas that which sent me here:
'I was too kind—I thought I could depend
'On his bare word—he was a treach'rous friend'.

A female too!—it is to her a home;
She came before—and she again will come.
Her friends have pity; when their anger drops,
They take her home;—she's tried her schools and shops—
Plan after plan;—but fortune would not mend,
She to herself was still the treach'rous friend;
And wheresoe'er began, all here was sure to end.
And there she sits as thoughtless and as gay,
As if she'd means, or not a debt to pay—
Or knew to-morrow she'd be call'd away—
Or felt a shilling and could dine to-day.

While thus observing, I began to trace
The sober'd features of a well-known face—
Looks once familiar, manners form'd to please,
And all illumined by a heart at ease.
But fraud and flattery ever claim'd a part
(Still unresisted) of that easy heart;
But he at length beholds me—'Ah! my friend!
'And have thy pleasures this unlucky end?'

'Too sure', he said, and, smiling as he sigh'd:
'I went astray, though prudence seem'd my guide;
'All she proposed I in my heart approved,
'And she was honour'd, but my pleasure loved—
'Pleasure, the mistress to whose arms I fled,
'From wife-like lectures angry prudence read.

'Why speak the madness of a life like mine,
'The powers of beauty, novelty, and wine?
'Why paint the wanton smile, the venal vow,
'Or friends whose worth I can appreciate now?

GEORGE CRABBE

‘Oft I perceived my fate, and then would say,
‘ “I’ll think to-morrow, I must live to-day” :
‘So am I here—I own the laws are just—
‘And here, where thought is painful, think I must.
‘But speech is pleasant; this discourse with thee
‘Brings to my mind the sweets of liberty;
‘Breaks on the sameness of the place, and gives
‘The doubtful heart conviction that it lives.

‘Let me describe my anguish in the hour
‘When law detain’d me and I felt its power.

‘When in that shipwreck, this I found my shore,
‘And join’d the wretched, who were wreck’d before;
‘When I perceived each feature in the face
‘Pinch’d through neglect or turbid by disgrace;
‘When in these wasting forms affliction stood
‘In my afflicted view, it chill’d my blood;—
‘And forth I rush’d, a quick retreat to make,
‘Till a loud laugh proclaim’d the dire mistake.
‘But when the groan had settled to a sigh;
‘When gloom became familiar to the eye;
‘When I perceive how others seem to rest,
‘With every evil rankling in my breast—
‘Led by example, I put on the man,
‘Sing off my sighs, and trifle as I can.

‘Homer! nay, Pope! (for never will I seek
‘Applause for learning—nought have I with Greek—)
‘Gives us the secrets of his pagan hell,
‘Where ghost with ghost in sad communion dwell;
‘Where shade meets shade, and round the gloomy meads
‘They glide and speak of old heroic deeds—
‘What fields they conquer’d, and what foes they slew
‘And sent to join the melancholy crew.

‘When a new spirit in that world was found,
‘A thousand shadowy forms came flitting round;

THE BOROUGH

‘Those who had known him, fond inquiries made:—

“‘Of all we left, inform us, gentle shade,

“‘Now as we lead thee in our realms to dwell,

“‘Our twilight groves, and meads of asphodel’”.

‘What paints the poet, is our station here,

‘Where we like ghosts and flitting shades appear:

‘This is the hell he sings, and here we meet,

‘And former deeds to new-made friends repeat;

‘Heroic deeds, which here obtain us fame,

‘And are in fact the causes why we came.

‘Yes! this dim region is old Homer’s hell,

‘Abate but groves and meads of asphodel.

‘Here, when a stranger from your world we spy,

‘We gather round him and for news apply;

‘He hears unheeding, nor can speech endure,

‘But shivering gazes on the vast obscure.

‘We, smiling, pity, and by kindness show

‘We felt his feelings and his terrors know;

‘Then speak of comfort—time will give him sight,

‘Where now ’tis dark; where now ’tis wo, delight.

“‘Have hope”, we say, “and soon the place to thee

“‘Shall not a prison but a castle be;

“‘When to the wretch whom care and guilt confound,

“‘The world’s a prison, with a wider bound;

“‘Go where he may, he feels himself confined,

“‘And wears the fetters of an abject mind.’”

‘But now adieu! those giant keys appear,

‘Thou are not worthy to be inmate here;

‘Go to thy world, and to the young declare

‘What we, our spirits and employments, are;

‘Tell them how we the ills of life endure,

‘Our empire stable, and our state secure;

‘Our dress, our diet, for their use describe,

‘And bid them haste to join the gen’rous tribe:

‘Go to thy world, and leave us here to dwell,
 ‘Who to its joys and comforts bid farewell.’

Farewell to these; but other scenes I view,
 And other griefs, and guilt of deeper hue;
 Where conscience gives to outward ills her pain,
 Gloom to the night, and pressure to the chain.
 Here separate cells awhile in misery keep
 Two doom’d to suffer; there they strive for sleep;
 By day indulged, in larger space they range,
 Their bondage certain, but their bounds have change.

One was a female, who had grievous ill
 Wrought in revenge, and she enjoy’d it still
 With death before her, and her fate in view,
 Unsated vengeance in her bosom grew;
 Sullen she was and threat’ning; in her eye
 Glared the stern triumph that she dared to die;
 But first a being in the world must leave—
 ’Twas once reproach; ’twas now a short reprieve.

She was a pauper bound, who early gave
 Her mind to vice, and doubly was a slave;
 Upbraided, beaten, held by rough control,
 Revenge sustain’d, inspired, and fill’d her soul.
 She fired a full-stored barn, confess’d the fact,
 And laugh’d at law and justified the act.
 Our gentle vicar tried his powers in vain,
 She answer’d not, or answer’d with disdain;
 Th’ approaching fate she heard without a sigh,
 And neither cared to live nor fear’d to die.

Not so he felt, who with her was to pay
 The forfeit, life—with dread he view’d the day,
 And that short space which yet for him remain’d,
 Till with his limbs his faculties were chain’d.
 He paced his narrow bounds some ease to find,
 But found it not,—no comfort reach’d his mind.

THE BOROUGH

Each sense was palsied; when he tasted food,
He sigh'd and said, 'Enough—'tis very good'.
Since his dread sentence, nothing seem'd to be
As once it was—he seeing could not see,
Nor hearing, hear aright;—when first I came
Within his view, I fancied there was shame,
I judged, resentment; I mistook the air—
These fainter passions live not with despair,
Or but exist and die:—Hope, fear, and love,
Joy, doubt, and hate, may other spirits move,
But touch not his, who every waking hour
Has one fix'd dread, and always feels its power.

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

Still I behold him, every thought employ'd
On one dire view!—all others are destroy'd;
This makes his features ghastly, gives the tone
Of his few words resemblance to a groan.
He takes his tasteless food, and, when 'tis done,
Counts up his meals, now lessen'd by that one;
For expectation is on time intent,
Whether he brings us joy or punishment.

Yes! e'en in sleep the impressions all remain;
He hears the sentence and he feels the chain;
He sees the judge and jury, when he shakes,
And loudly cries, 'Not guilty', and awakes.
Then chilling tremblings o'er his body creep,
Till worn-out nature is compell'd to sleep.

Now comes the dream again; it shows each scene,
With each small circumstance that comes between—

GEORGE CRABBE

The call to suffering and the very deed—
There crowds go with him, follow, and precede;
Some heartless shout, some pity, all condemn,
While he in fancied envy looks at them.

He seems the place for that sad act to see,
And dreams the very thirst which then will be;
A priest attends—it seems, the one he knew
In his best days, beneath whose care he grew.

At this his terrors take a sudden flight,
He sees his native village with delight;
The house, the chamber, where he once array'd
His youthful person; where he knelt and pray'd.
Then too the comforts he enjoy'd at home,
The days of joy; the joys themselves are come—
The hours of innocence—the timid look
Of his loved maid, when first her hand he took
And told his hope; her trembling joy appears,
Her forced reserve and his retreating fears.

All now is present;—'tis a moment's gleam
Of former sunshine—stay, delightful dream!
Let him within his pleasant garden walk,
Give him her arm, of blessings let them talk.

Yes! all are with him now, and all the while
Life's early prospects and his Fanny's smile:
Then come his sister and his village-friend,
And he will now the sweetest moments spend
Life has to yield;—no! never will he find
Again on earth such pleasure in his mind:
He goes through shrubby walks these friends among,
Love in their looks and honour on the tongue;
Nay, there's a charm beyond what nature shows,
The bloom is softer and more sweetly grows;—
Pierced by no crime, and urged by no desire
For more than true and honest hearts require,

THE BOROUGH

They feel the calm delight, and thus proceed
Through the green lane—then linger in the mead—
Stray o'er the heath in all its purple bloom—
And pluck the blossom where the wild bees hum;
Then through the broomy bound with ease they pass,
And press the sandy sheep-walk's slender grass,
Where dwarfish flowers among the gorse are spread,
And the lamb browses by the linnet's bed;
Then 'cross the bounding brook they make their way
O'er its rough bridge—and there behold the bay!—
The ocean smiling to the fervid sun—
The waves that faintly fall and slowly run—
The ships at distance and the boats at hand;
And now they walk upon the sea-side sand,
Counting the number and what kind they be,
Ships softly sinking in the sleepy sea;
Now arm in arm, now parted, they behold
The glitt'ring waters on the shingles roll'd;
The timid girls, half dreading their design,
Dip the small foot in the retarded brine,
And search for crimson weeds, which spreading flow,
Or lie like pictures on the sand below;
With all those bright red pebbles that the sun
Through the small waves so softly shines upon;
And those live lucid jellies which the eye
Delights to trace as they swim glitt'ring by:
Pearl-shells and rubied star-fish they admire,
And will arrange above the parlour-fire,—
Tokens of bliss!—'Oh! horrible! a wave
'Roars as it rises—save me, Edward! save!'
She cries—Alas! the watchman on his way
Calls and lets in—truth, terror, and the day!

NOTES

1. Wheat rose from 43s. a quarter in 1792, the year before the war broke out, to 126s. in 1812, the year Napoleon went to Moscow. The poor, both in town and country, suffered terribly from the price of bread, though it put money into the pockets of tenant farmers, freehold yeomen, and receivers of tithe and rent. Trevelyan, *English Social History*, p. 465. The fact that 'the poor' did not die out altogether was due to the demoralizing system of parish doles.
2. In *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*. Byron also said, in a letter to John Murray of 15 September 1817: 'With regard to poetry in general, I am convinced, the more I think of it, that he (Moore) and all of us—Scott, Southey, Wordsworth, Moore, Campbell, I,—are all in the wrong, one as much as another; that we are upon a wrong revolutionary poetical system, or systems, not worth a damn in itself, and from which none but Rogers and Crabbe are free; and that the present and the next generations will finally be of this opinion . . . Crabbe's the man, but he has got a course and impracticable subject. . . .'
3. Crabbe had originally written:

In fairer scenes, where peaceful pleasures spring,
Tityrus the pride of Mantuan swains might sing:
But, charmed by him, or smitten with his views,
Shall modern poets court the Mantuan muse?
From Truth and Nature, shall we widely stray,
Where Fancy leads, or Virgil led the way?

It will be seen that Johnson here altered the sense of the original, though Boswell says that Johnson thought he was giving the writer's meaning 'better than in the words of the manuscript'. Crabbe had written that the modern poet should not follow either Virgil or Fancy, but Truth and Nature. He nevertheless accepted Johnson's corrections. Johnson was quite in agreement with him about 'the false notions of rustic happiness and rustic virtue', according to Boswell.

4. Stephen Duck, the thresher, whose wife, when he turned poet, thought he had gone out of his mind. Queen Caroline allowed him 12s. a week and made him keeper of her library at Richmond. Gay, in a letter to Swift, refers to him as 'the favorite poet at court'.

NOTES

5. Wordsworth first read this description of the Parish Poor-house in Vicesimus Knox's *Elegant Extracts*, remarking, in a letter to the poet's son of February 1834: 'Any testimony from me to the merit of your revered father's works would, I feel, be superfluous, if not impertinent. They will last, from their combined merits as Poetry and Truth, full as long as anything that has been expressed in verse since they first made their appearance.'
6. 'Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain', Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*.
7. The Battle of Trafalgar, in 1805, in which Nelson was killed.
8. The sport of cock-fighting, prevalent in England at this time among all classes of society.
9. Burn's *Justice of the Peace and Parish Officer*, 1755. A reference to the poor rate instituted at this time to save the peasantry from starving to death.
10. Erasmus Darwin, author of *The Botanic Garden* (1789), a much underrated poem which attempts an ambitious marriage of poetry and science.
11. Neremiah Grew, *Anatomy of Plants*, 1682. William Middleton, *The Properties of Herbs*, John Ray (or Wray), *Historia Generalis Plantarum*, 3 vols., 1686-1704.
12. This character was taken from an infidel blacksmith of Leiston whom Crabbe visited in his capacity of surgeon. Losing his hand by amputation, he exclaimed: 'I suppose, Dr. Crabbe, that I shall get it again at the resurrection!'
13. That is, Slaughden Quay, Aldborough.
14. Crabbe is here describing the view from his parsonage window at Muston of the grounds of Belvoir Castle.
15. An allusion to Pope's lines in his *Moral Essays* on the Monument erected in Fish Street after the Great Fire of London, on which it is stated that the outbreak of the fire was due to the English Catholics.
16. Crabbe notes: 'This promise to the reader, that he should both smile and sigh in the perusal of the following lines may appear vain, and more than an author ought to promise; but let it be considered that the character assumed is that of a friend, who gives an account of objects, persons, and events to his correspondent, and who was therefore at liberty, without any imputation of this kind, to suppose in what manner he would be affected by such descriptions'.

NOTES

17. Crabbe notes: 'Nothing, I trust, in this and the preceding paragraph, which relates to the initiation of what are called weather-stains on buildings, will seem to any invidious or offensive. I wished to make a comparison between those minute and curious bodies which cover the surface of some edifices, and those kinds of stains which are formed of boles and ochres, and laid on with a brush. Now, as the work of time cannot be anticipated in such cases, it may be very judicious to have recourse to such expedients as will give to a recent structure the venerable appearance of antiquity; and in this case, though I might still observe the vast difference between the living varieties of nature, and the distant imitation of the artist, yet I could not forbear to make use of his dexterity, because he could not clothe my freestone with *mucor*, *lichen*, and *byssus*.'
18. Crabbe notes: 'If it should be objected that centuries are not slower than hours, because the speed of time must be uniform, I would answer, that I understand as much, and mean that they are slower in no other sense than because they are not finished so soon'.
19. Crabbe notes: 'This kind of vegetation, as it begins upon siliceous stones, is very thin, and frequently not to be distinguished from the surface of the flint. The *byssus jolithus* of Linnæus (*lepraria jolithus* of the present system), an adhesive carmine crust on rocks and old buildings, was, even by scientific persons, taken for the substance on which it spread. A great variety of these minute vegetables are to be found in some parts of the coast, where the beach, formed by stones of various kinds, is undisturbed, and exposed to every change of weather; in this situation, the different species of lichen, in their different stages of growth, have an appearance interesting and agreeable even to those who are ignorant of and indifferent to the cause.'
20. 'The uses' of church bells were formerly six in number:
 1. *Funera plango*; 2. *Fulmina frango*; 3. *Sabbata pango*;
 4. *Excito lentos*; 5. *Dissipo ventos*; 6. *Paco cruentos*.
21. Crabbe notes: 'It is probable, that really polite people, with cultivated minds and harmonious tempers, may judge this description of a Card-club conversation to be highly exaggerated, if not totally fictitious; and I acknowledge that the club must admit a particular kind of members to afford such specimens of acrimony and oburgation; yet that such language is spoken, and such manners exhibited, is most certain, chiefly

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among those who, being successful in life, without previous education, not very nice in their feelings, or very attentive to proprieties, sit down to game with no other view than that of adding the gain of the evening to the profits of the day; whom, therefore, disappointment itself makes angry, and, when caused by another, resentful and vindictive.'

22. A reference to John Philips's *The Splendid Shilling*.
23. i.e., Shenstone's *Schoolmistress*, 1742.
24. Pope's *Rape of the Lock*.
25. The White Lion still stands on the sea-front at Aldborough, a fine Georgian hostelry.
26. The Boar Tavern, immortalized by Benjamin Britten in his opera *Peter Grimes*.
27. It will be seen that Crabbe did not intend Grimes as a sort of working-class Byron, as in Montague Slater's libretto to Benjamin Britten's opera. There is, in fact, nothing romantic about his character at all—unless we take the poem as a gothic horror piece. But as it stands, of course, it would hardly have made an opera.
28. Crabbe notes: 'That a Letter on Prisons should follow the narratives of such characters as Keene and Grimes is unfortunate, but not to be easily avoided. I confess it is not pleasant to be detained so long by subjects so repulsive to the feelings of many, as the sufferings of mankind . . . Alas! sufferings, real, evident, continually before us, have not effects very serious or lasting, even in the minds of the more reflecting and compassionate; nor, indeed, does it seem right that the pain caused by sympathy should serve for more than a stimulus to benevolence. If, then, the strength and solidity of truth placed before our eyes have effects so feeble and transitory, I need not be apprehensive that my representations of Poor-houses and Prisons, of wants and sufferings, however faithfully taken, will excite any feelings which can be seriously lamented.'

