

The Deserted Village.

Oliver Goldsmith.

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The Text of this edition is that of the latest revised edition published in Goldsmith's lifetime, the fifth.

Sweet Auburn ! loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the labouring swain,
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed.
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please,
How often have I loltered o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene !
How often have I paused on every charm,
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm,
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topt the neighbouring hill,
The hawthorn bush, with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made !
How often have I blest the coming day,
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train, from labour free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree,
While many a pastime circled in the shade,
The young contending as the old surveyed ;
And many a gambol frolicked o'er the ground,
And sleights of art and feats of strength went round ;
And still, as each repeated pleasure tired,
Succeeding sports the mirthful band inspired ;
The dancing pair that simply sought renown
By holding out to tire each other down ;
The swain mistrustless of his smutted face,
While secret laughter tittered round the place ;
The bashful virgin's sidelong looks of love,
The matron's glance that would those looks reprove.
These were thy charms, sweet village ! sports like these,
With sweet succession, taught e'en toil to please :
These round thy bowers their cheerful influence shed :
These were thy charms—but all these charms are fled.

Sweet smiling village, loveliest of the lawn,
Thy sports are fled, and all thy charms withdrawn ;
Amidst thy bowers the tyrant's hand is seen.
And desolation saddens all thy green :
One only master grasps the whole domain.
And half a tillage stints thy smiling plain :
No more thy glassy brook reflects the day,
But choked with sedges works its weedy way ;

Along thy glades a solitary guest,
The hollow-sounding bittern guards its nest ;
Amidst thy desert walks the lapwing flies,
And tires their echoes with unvaried cries ;
Sunk are thy bowers in shapeless ruin all,
And the long grass o'ertops the mouldering wall ;
And trembling, shrinking from the spoiler's hand,
Far, far away thy children leave the land.

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay :
Princes and lords may flourish, or may fade ;
A breath can make them, as a breath has made :
But a bold peasantry, their country's pride,
When once destroy'd, can never be supplied.

A time there was, ere England's griefs began.
When every rood of ground maintain'd its man ;
For him light labour spread her wholesome store,
Just gave what life required, but gave no more :
His best companions, innocence and health ;
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth.

But times are altered ; trade's unfeeling train
Usurp the land, and dispossess the swain ;
Along the lawn, where scattered hamlets rose.
Unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp repose ;
And every want to luxury allied,
And every pang that folly pays to pride.
Those gentle hours that plenty bade to bloom,
Those calm desires that asked but little room.
Those healthful sports that graced the peaceful scene,
Lived in each look, and brightened all the green ;
These, far departing, seek a kinder shore,
And rural mirth and manners are no more.

Sweet Auburn ! parent of the blissful hour,
Thy glades forlorn confess the tyrant's power.
Here, as I take my solitary rounds
Amidst thy tangling walks and ruined grounds,
And, many a year elapsed, return to view
Where once the cottage stood, the hawthorn grew.
Remembrance wakes with all her busy train.
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain.

In all my wanderings round this world of care,
In all my griefs—and God has given my share—
I still had hopes, my latest hours to crown.
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down ;
To husband out life's taper at the close,
And keep the flame from wasting by repose :
I still had hopes, for pride attends us still,

Amidst the swains to show my book-learn'd skill,
Around my fire an evening group to draw,
And tell of all I felt, and all I saw ;
And, as a hare, whom hounds and horns pursue,
Pants to the place from whence at first he flew.
I still had hopes, my long vexations past,
Here to return—and die at home at last.

O blest retirement, friend to life's decline.
Retreats from care, that never must be mine,
How blest is he who crowns, in shades like these,
A youth of labour with an age of ease ;
Who quits a world where strong temptations try,
And since 't is hard to combat, learns to fly !
For him no wretches, born to work and weep,
Explore the mine, or tempt the dangerous deep ;
No surly porter stands, in guilty state,
To spurn imploring famine from the gate ;
But on he moves to meet his latter end,
Angels around befriending virtue's friend ;
Bends to the grave with unperceived decay,
While resignation gently slopes the way ;
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,
His heaven commences ere the world be past.

Sweet was the sound, when oft, at evening's close,
Up yonder hill the village murmur rose.
There, as I past with careless steps and slow,
The mingling notes came softened from below ;
The swain responsive as the milk-maid sung,
The sober herd that lowed to meet their young,
The noisy geese that gabbled o'er the pool.
The playful children just let loose from school,
The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,
And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind ;—
These all in sweet confusion sought the shade,
And filled each pause the nightingale had made.
But now the sounds of population fail ;
No cheerful murmurs fluctuate in the gale.
No busy steps the grass-grown footway tread.
But all the bloomy flush of life is fled ;
All but yon widowed solitary thing.
That feebly bends beside the plashy spring :
She, wretched matron, forced in age, for bread,
To strip the brook with mantling cresses spread,
To pick her wintry faggot from the thorn,
To seek her nightly shed and weep till morn ;
She only left of all the harmless train,
The sad historian of the pensive plain.

Near yonder copse, where once the garden smiled,
And still where many a garden flower grows wild ;

There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
A man he was to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year ;
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,
Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change his place ;
Unpractised he to fawn, or seek for power,
By doctrines fashioned to the varying hour ;
Far other aims his heart had learned to prize.
More silled to raise the wretched than to rise.
His house was known to all the vagrant train ;
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain :
The long remember'd beggar was his guest,
Whose beard descending swept his aged breast ;
The ruined spendthrift, now no longer proud,
Claimed kindred there, and had his claims allowed ;
The broken soldier, kindly bade to stay,
Sate by his fire, and talked the night away ;
Wept o'er his wounds, or, tales of sorrow done,
Shouldered his crutch, and showed how fields were won.
Pleased with his guests, the good man learned to glow.
And quite forgot their vices in their woe ;
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
His pity gave ere charity began.

Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And even his failings leaned to virtue's side ;
But in his duty prompt, at every call,
He watched and wept, he prayed and felt for all ;
And, as a bird each fond endearment tries
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,
He tried each art, reproved each dull delay,
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way.

Beside the bed where parting life was laid,
And sorrow, guilt, and pain, by turns dismayed,
The reverend champion stood. At his control
Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul ;
Comfort came down the trembling wretch to raise,
And his last faltering accents whispered praise.

At church, with meek and unaffected grace,
His looks adorned the venerable place ;
Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray.
The service past, around the pious man.
With ready zeal each honest rustic ran ;
Even children followed with endearing wile,
And plucked his gown, to share the good man's smile.
His ready smile a parent's warmth exprest,
Their welfare pleased him, and their cares distrest ;
To them his heart, his love, his griefs, were given,

But all his serious thoughts had rest in heaven..
As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,
Tho' round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,
Eternal sunshine settles on its head.

Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way
With blossomed furze, unprofitably gay,
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule.
The village master taught his little school.
A man severe he was, and stern to view;
I knew him well, and every truant knew :
Well had the boding tremblers learned to trace
The day's disasters in his morning face ;
Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee
At all his jokes, for many a joke had he ;
Full well the busy whisper, circling round,
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned;
Yet he was kind, or if severe in aught,
The love he bore to learning was in fault :
The village all declared how much he knew ;
'T was certain he could write and cipher too :
Lands he could measure, terms and tides presage,
And even the story ran that he could gauge :
In arguing too the parson owned his skill.
For even though vanquished, he could argue still ;
While words of learned length, and thundering sound,
Amazed the gazing rustics ranged around ;
And still they gazed, and still the wonder grew
That one small head could carry all he knew.

But past is all his fame. the very spot,
Where many a time he triumphed, is forgot.
Near yonder thorn that lifts its head on high,
Where once the sign-post caught the passing eye.
Low lies that house where nut-brown draughts inspired,
Where grey-beard mirth and smiling toil retired.
Where village statesmen talked with looks profound,
And news much older than their ale went round.
Imagination fondly stoops to trace
The parlour splendours of that festive place ;
The white-washed wall, the nicely-sanded floor,
The varnished clock that clicked behind the door ;
The chest contrived a double debt to pay,
A bed by night, a chest of drawers by day;
The pictures placed for ornament and use.
The twelve good rules, the royal game of goose ;
The hearth, except when winter chilled the day.
With aspen boughs, and flowers, and fennel gay ;
While broken tea-cups, wisely kept for show,
Ranged over the chimney, glistened in a row.

Vain, transitory splendours ! could not all
Reprieve the tottering mansion from its fall ?
Obscure it sinks, nor shall it more impart
An hour's importance to the poor man's heart.
Thither no more the peasant shall repair
To sweet oblivion of his daily care :
No more the farmer's news, the barber's tale.
No more the woodman's ballad shall prevail ;
No more the smith his dusky brow shall clear.
Relax his ponderous strength, and lean to hear ;
The host himself no longer shall be found
Careful to see the mantling bliss go round ;
Nor the coy maid, half willing to be prest.
Shall kiss the cup to pass it to the rest.

Yes ! let the rich deride, the proud disdain,
These simple blessings of the lowly train ;
To me more dear, congenial to my heart,
One native charm, than all the gloss of art ;
Spontaneous joys, where nature has its play,
The soul adopts, and owns their first-born sway ;
Lightly they frolic over the vacant mind,
Unenvied, unmolested, unconfined.
But the long pomp, the midnight masquerade.
With all the freaks of wanton wealth arrayed,—
In these, ere triflers half their wish obtain,
The toilsome pleasure sickens into pain ;
And, even while fashion's brightest arts decoy,
The heart distrusting asks, if this be joy.

Ye friends to truth, ye statesmen, who survey
The rich man's joys increase, the poor's decay,
'T is yours to judge how wide the limits stand
Between a splendid and a happy land.
Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore.
And shouting folly hails them from her shore ;
Hoards even beyond the miser's wish abound,
And rich men flock from all the world around.
Yet count our gains. This wealth is but a name
That leaves our useful product still the same.
Not so the loss. The man of wealth and pride
Takes up a space that many poor supplied ;
Space for his lake, his park's extended bounds,
Space for his horses, equipage, and hounds ;
The robe that wraps his limbs in silken sloth
Has robbed the neighbouring fields of half their growth ;
His seat, where solitary sports are seen.
Indignant spurns the cottage from the green :
Around the world each needful product flies.
For all the luxuries the world supplies :
While thus the land, adorned for pleasure all,
In barren splendour feebly waits the fall.

As some fair female, unadorned and plain.
Secure to please while youth confirms her reign,
Slights every borrowed charm that dress supplies,
Nor shares with art the triumph of her eyes ;
But when those charms are past, for charms are frail,
When time advances, and when lovers fail,
She then shines forth, solicitous to bless,
In all the glaring impotence of dress ;
Thus fares the land, by luxury betrayed.
In nature's simplest charms at first arrayed ;
But verging to decline, its splendours rise,
Its vistas strike, its palaces surprise ;
While, scourged by famine, from the smiling land
The mournful peasant leads his humble band,
And while he sinks, without one arm to save.
The country blooms—a garden and a grave.

Where then, ah ! where shall poverty reside.
To 'scape the pressure of contiguous pride ?
If to some common's fenceless limits strayed,
He drives his flock to pick the scanty blade,
Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,
And even the bare-worn common is denied.

If to the city sped—What waits him there ?
To see profusion, that he must not share ;
To see ten thousand baneful arts combined
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind ;
To see each joy the sons of pleasure know.
Extorted from his fellow-creature's woe.
Here, while the courtier glitters in brocade.
There the pale artist plies the sickly trade ;
Here, while the proud their long-drawn pomp display,
There the black gibbet glooms beside the way ;
The dome where pleasure holds her midnight reign,
Here, richly deckt, admits the gorgeous train :
Tumultuous grandeur crowds the blazing square,
The rattling chariots clash, the torches glare.
Sure scenes like these no troubles e'er annoy !
Sure these denote one universal joy !
Are these thy serious thoughts ?—Ah, turn thine eyes
Where the poor houseless shivering female lies :
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,
Has wept at tales of innocence distress ;
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn :
Now lost to all ; her friends, her virtue fled,
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head,
And, pinched with cold, and shrinking from the shower,
With heavy heart deploras that luckless hour,
When idly first, ambitious of the town.
She left her wheel and robes of country brown.

Do thine, sweet Auburn,—thine, the loveliest train,—
Do thy fair tribes participate her pain ?
Even now, perhaps, by cold and hunger led,
At proud men's doors they ask a little bread !

Ah, no. To distant climes, a dreary scene.
Where half the convex world intrudes between,
Through torrid tracts with fainting steps they go,
Where wild Altama murmurs to their woe.
Far different there from all that charmed before,
The various terrors of that horrid shore ;
Those blazing suns that dart a downward ray,
And fiercely shed intolerable day ;
Those matted woods where birds forget to sing,
But silent bats in drowsy clusters cling ;
Those poisonous fields with rank luxuriance crowned,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around ;
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake ;
Where crouching tigers wait their hapless prey,
And savage men more murderous still than they ;
While oft in whirls the mad tornado flies,
Mingling the ravaged landscape with the skies.
Far different these from every former scene,
The cooling brook, the grassy-vested green,
The breezy covert of the warbling grove,
That only sheltered thefts of harmless love.

Good Heaven ! what sorrows gloomed that parting day,
That called them from their native walks away ;
When the poor exiles, every pleasure past,
Hung round the bowers, and fondly looked their last,
And took a long farewell, and wished in vain
For seats like these beyond the western main,
And shuddering still to face the distant deep,
Returned and wept, and still returned to weep.
The good old sire the first prepared to go
To new-found worlds, and wept for others' woe ;
But for himself, in conscious virtue brave,
He only wish'd for worlds beyond the grave.
His lovely daughter, lovelier in her tears.
The fond companion of his helpless years.
Silent went next, neglectful of her charms.
And left a lover's for her father's arms.
With louder plaints the mother spoke her woes.
And bless'd the cot where every pleasure rose ;
And kiss'd her thoughtless babes with many a tear,
And clasp'd them close, in sorrow doubly dear ;
Whilst her fond husband strove to lend relief,
In all the silent manliness of grief.

O luxury ! thou curst by Heaven's decree,

How ill exchanged are things like these for thee !
How do thy potions, with insidious joy,
Diffuse their pleasures only to destroy !
Kingdoms by thee, to sickly greatness grown,
Boast of a florid vigour not their own.
At every draught more large and large they grow,
A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe ;
Till, sapped their strength, and every part unsound,
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round.

Even now the devastation is begun.
And half the business of destruction done ;
Even now, methinks, as pondering here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.
Down where yon anchoring vessel spreads the sail.
That idly waiting flaps with every gale,
Downward they move, a melancholy band.
Pass from the shore, and darken all the strand.
Contented toil, and hospitable care,
And kind connubial tenderness, are there ;
And piety with wishes placed above.
And steady loyalty, and faithful love.
And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,
Still first to fly where sensual joys invade,
Unfit, in these degenerate times of shame
To catch the heart, or strike for honest fame ;
Dear charming nymph, neglected and decried,
My shame in crowds, my solitary pride ;
Thou source of all my bliss, and all my woe.
That found'st me poor at first, and keep'st me so ;
Thou guide, by which the nobler arts excel,
Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well !
Farewell ! and O ! where'er thy voice be tried,
On Torno's cliffs, or Pambamarca's side,
Whether where equinoctial fervors glow,
Or winter wraps the polar world in snow,
Still let thy voice, prevailing over time,
Redress the rigours of the inclement clime ;
Aid slighted Truth with thy persuasive strain :
Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain ;
Teach him, that states of native strength possest,
Though very poor, may still be very blest ;
That trade's proud empire hastes to swift decay,
As ocean sweeps the labour'd mole away ;
While self-dependent power can time defy.
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.

The Times

Political Events and History. The chief political events of the years of the eighteenth century in which Goldsmith lived and wrote need little comment. The House of Hanover was newly on the English throne, George II becoming king in 1727, and George III in 1760. The

policies of the nation were determined largely by her statesmen, notably Robert Walpole, prime minister from 1721 till 1742, and William Pitt, who became prime minister in 1757. Walpole's policy was to keep peace abroad and to conciliate party and religious differences at home, that the new line of kings might be firmly established and the internal resources of the country be developed. His methods involved much bribery and corruption, in reaction against which a new spirit of patriotism was awakened by Pitt ; but under his peaceful guidance the country grew in material wealth as never before. Toward the end of the reign of George II, and in the reign of George III, came more stirring events, and there was still greater national expansion. A vast colonial trade was built up, and commerce and the wealth based upon it became of more and more importance. By the victory of Lord Clive in 1757, firmly establishing the British power in India, and by the capture of Quebec from the French in the same year, establishing British power in Canada, England gained complete control of the vast domains of India and North America, and took the place as a world power which she has since retained among the nations. Under George III the country was less contented than under his predecessor. The borrowing of vast sums of money to carry on her wars increased the national debt of England to alarming proportions, and in many ways public affairs were mismanaged.

Industrial England. *The Deserted Village* is in unusual degree the product of the age in which it was written, especially of contemporary industrial conditions. The marked growth in commerce, during the eighteenth century, had made it the serious rival of agriculture. Manufacturing also was growing rapidly, the two constituting what Goldsmith calls "trade." The so-called industrial revolution, consequent upon the invention of new machinery, the utilization of steam and water power, and improved methods of transportation and communication, was beginning, although it was to come mainly after Goldsmith's day. The year 1770, when the poem was written, was a period of strong depression with regard to the national future. England was thought to be on the verge of bankruptcy, because of the vast proportions of the national debt ; the frequent emigration, really a sign of growing population, was thought ominous ; and in particular the country was erroneously believed to be depopulating. Arthur Young, the traveler, wrote in this same year :

It is asserted by those writers who affect to run down our affairs, that, rich as we are, our population has suffered ; that we have lost a million and a half people since the Revolution ; and that we are at present declining in numbers. [1]

Another characteristic feature of the time was the inclosure of the old public lands. [2] Innumerable inclosure acts were passed by Parliament between 1760 and 1774 ; and though the inclosure system was beneficial in the long run, the change caused at the time much suffering. Working classes that had pastured their cattle on the old common fields lost their privilege when the land was inclosed. Many who had been small farmers were forced to become laborers on the lands of others, to go to factory towns, or to emigrate. Thus a large class of small farmers disappeared. The historian Lecky, citing a contemporary document in proof, writes that " whole villages which had depended on free pasture land and fuel dwindled and perished, and a stream of emigrants passed to America." [3] Others think the conditions sketched in Goldsmith's poem less typical ; but there was undoubtedly much suffering.

Literary Conditions. Goldsmith lived and wrote in the transitional period linking the age of Pope, generally called the classical age, with the romantic reaction to be ushered in by Burns, Cowper, and Wordsworth. Literary historians often call this period the " Age of Dr. Johnson," from Goldsmith's friend, Samuel Johnson, the dictionary maker and essayist, who was its literary lawgiver. The social and intellectual ideas of the time were on the whole much

the same as in the age preceding, that is, critical rather than creative, showing respect for convention, the centering of interest on form, and the exaltation of “ reason” and “ common sense” at the expense of individuality and spontaneity. It was not an especially productive period for letters. Among prose writers Goldsmith’s leading contemporaries were Dr. Johnson, Gibbon the historian, Burke the orator and essayist, and Sheridan the dramatist. In poetry were Collins, Gray, Young, and Chatterton ; thus the showing was even slenderer for poetry than for prose.

Professional writers of this period were likely to encounter many hardships, and much in their lot was sordid and unenviable. They were breaking away from the patronage system previously prevailing, and were now dependent on booksellers, the better modern system of allowing authors a percentage of the profits on their books being not yet evolved. In the Restoration period literature had been close to politics. The author was dependent, not on the sale of his books to a bookseller, or to the public, but on the munificence of some patron. He sought to attach himself to some distinguished man or to some party. Dryden, Swift, Addison, and Steele all had patronage bestowed upon them in return for some political service. In the time of Dr. Johnson, men of letters became less subservient to patrons or to parties ; hence they could be freer and more sincere ; but prices were low and uncertain, and an income that was derived from literary drudgery, hack writing on assigned themes regardless of equipment, was likely to be as precarious as it was hard-earned.

The Deserted Village

Composition and Publication. Some account of Goldsmith’s manner of writing verse has been left to us by a contemporary, a young law student and friend named Cook. Goldsmith wrote verse slowly, according to Cook, “ not from the tardiness of fancy, but the time he took in pointing the sentiment, and polishing the versification.” Of the composition of *The Deserted Village* in particular we are told the following :

... he first sketched a part of his design in prose, in which he threw out his ideas as they occurred to him ; he then sat down carefully to versify them, correct them, and add such other ideas as he thought better fitted to the subject ; and if sometimes he would exceed his prose design by writing several verses impromptu, these he would take singular pains afterwards to revise, lest they should be found unconnected with his main design. Ten lines, from the fifth to the fifteenth, had been his second morning's work ; and when Cook entered his chamber he read them to him aloud. . . . “ Come,” he added, “ let me tell you this is no bad morning's work.” [4]

The date of this visit was May, 1768, exactly two years before the poem appeared. Thus the whole process of its composition and revision would seem to have extended over two years.

The Deserted Village was published May 26, 1770, in quarto form. “ This day at twelve,” announced *The Public Advertiser* of that date, “ will be published, price two shillings, *The Deserted Village*, a Poem. By Dr. Goldsmith. Printed for W. Griffin, at Garrick’s Head in Catherine Street, Strand.” The poem met with immediate success. Five editions were published during the year, most of them containing careful revisions : a second June 7, a third June 14, a fourth June 28, and a fifth August 16. What Goldsmith was paid for the poem by the bookseller who published it is not known. The sum was probably small, however ; compare 1. 414 of his apostrophe to poetry at the close of *The Deserted Village* ; also his words to Lord Lisburn , “ I cannot afford to court the draggle-tail muses, my Lord, they would let me starve ; but by my other labors I can make shift to eat, drink, and have good clothes.” [5]

Goldsmith's Purpose in the Poem. The germ of *The Deserted Village*, is to be found in 11. 397-412 of *The Traveller*, written a number of years earlier. Many of its leading ideas are to be found here and there in the essays printed in *The Citizen of the World*. As made clear by his introductory dedication, Goldsmith intended *The Deserted Village* to be an elegy over the decay of the peasantry, and an invective against the increase of luxury. He held that undue national opulence brings national corruption and national decay. In some of his economic theories the poet is not to be followed. There was no real depopulation of the country going on, as he and many others believed ; rather was the contrary true ; and, had there been such depopulation, it would have been erroneous to ascribe it to the increase of material prosperity, really a healthful sign, accompanying the rapid national expansion. In other respects Goldsmith is better borne out by the economic history of the time ; for example, when he deplures the accumulation of land under one owner as inimical to the small farmer, or pictures the breaking up of homes consequent upon the inclosure of the commons, and the distress of the evicted wanderers. A number of such evictions he himself witnessed. The result was not, however, unless in isolated cases, the wholesale emigration of the evicted, and in several features Goldsmith's picture is probably overcolored.

Auburn and Lissoy. In many respects Goldsmith draws on memories of his early life for his poem, [6] and for this reason Auburn and Lissoy were early identified by critics. Lord Macaulay, on the other hand, took the ground that Auburn is an inconsistent village, assuredly not to be identified too closely with Lissoy or with any other spot. Goldsmith confuses, Macaulay says, the rural life of two countries, blending his Irish recollections and his English experiences ; the village in its prosperity and happiness is English, in its unhappiness and desolation Irish. It seems now that the poet's picture of Auburn in its decline is probably truer and more English than Macaulay admits, [7] although allowances are to be made for exaggeration, especially of contrast. Goldsmith undoubtedly makes use both of his early recollections of Lissoy and of his English observations ; but he exaggerates or idealizes to suit his general purpose, and to point his moral, and very definite localizing should not be attempted.

Form. The verse form of Goldsmith's poem is the heroic couplet, consisting of two iambic pentameter lines linked by rhyme, which in the eighteenth century was the ruling poetic form. Gray departed from the couplet form in his *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, printed in 1750, as had Thomson earlier ; and Wordsworth and Coleridge were soon to complete the overthrow of its sovereignty, at least as written in the manner of Pope. Goldsmith was more conservative, and adhered to the classical tradition. In the handling of Chaucer, in the fourteenth century, with whom the verse form first appears, the thought is allowed to run on from line to line or from couplet to couplet, stopping somewhere within the line if the author wish ; and such was the handling of the Elizabethans, or of nineteenth century poets like Keats and Browning. With Pope, the autocrat of the classical school, the handling was more inflexible, and his couplets and Chaucer's would hardly be recognized as written in the same form. Pope's verse exhibits almost invariably end-stopped couplets and unit lines, and he composed with a point and finish, with a correctness and with a concise and lucid phraseology that for a long time were held to be standard-giving. In Goldsmith's day emancipation was in the air ; but Dr. Johnson was a firm classicist, his own verse being exclusively in Pope's manner, and Goldsmith was too good a disciple to dream of departing from the conservative vein of the artificial-conventional school. Yet in a comparison of the couplets of Goldsmith and Pope some differences may be noted. Goldsmith's lines are not less elaborated and conventional, and his diction makes no nearer approach to the fresh or the individual. Yet the glitter and point of Pope's work is more subdued with Goldsmith ; and with the latter the paragraph, not the couplet, is the unit. Goldsmith's lines show, unlike Pope's, the influence of blank verse. It is, however, in the spirit of the poem, in the personal touches and descriptive passages, rather

than in the form, that *The Deserted Village* is transitional, foreboding the departure of didactic poetry and the coming of another and freer school.

Popularity of the Poem. At the time when it was written the moralizing tone of Goldsmith's poem no doubt assisted its popularity. The fashion of the age tended towards sentimental reflection ; note poems like Young's *Night Thoughts* (1742-1744), Akenside's *The Pleasures of the Imagination* (1744), Johnson's *The Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), Gray's *Elegy in a Country Churchyard* (1750), and many others. The contrast between the luxury of the rich and the innocent and simple pleasures of country folk is a theme which may still be counted upon to enlist the sympathies ; moreover the subject fitted Goldsmith personally, and his experiences equipped him admirably to handle it. Others of his generation would probably have made the poem purely didactic, a sort of homily on the dangers of increasing wealth ; but he chose to handle his material in a simpler and more personal way, anticipating the next generation of poets in his interest in humanity and in his return to genuine feeling, if he did not anticipate them in verse form. He is most perfunctory in the didactic passages, most natural in the feeling passages. The majority of readers soon forget the moralizing purpose of the poem and its economic theme, and remember it only as a picture of a village in its prosperity and in its desolation. Goldsmith cared much for simple rustic life ; he had himself been close to it ; and the poem as he wrote it springs from sincere interest and genuine sorrow. On the whole it is the sympathy and grace of *The Deserted Village*, the real humanity of its characterizations and of the descriptions of village scenes, not qualities of originality or power, not the finish of the couplets or the didactic tone, that give the poem its permanent significance and account for the place which it has won in the popular heart.

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[1] *Tour of the North of England*, Letter XL.

[2] Gibbins, *Industry in England*, 274, 335.

[3] *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1903), VII, 260.

[4] *European Magazine*, 1793.

[5] Forster's *Life*, II, 209.

[6] Cf. notes on 11, 12, 37, 131, 196, and others.

[7] Lecky's *History of England in the Eighteenth Century* (1903), VII, 260.

Goldsmith's *The deserted village* (1907)

Author : Goldsmith, Oliver, 1730?-1774 ; Pound, Louise, 1872-1958 ed

Publisher : Boston, New York [etc.] Ginn & company

Language : English

Digitizing sponsor : Google

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Collection : americana

Source : Internet Archive

<http://archive.org/details/goldsmithsdeser00poungoog>

Edited and uploaded to www.aughty.org

August 2 2013