

well as his greatness, his prejudices, superstitions, and even the details of his personal appearance :

There is the gigantic body, the huge face seamed with the scars of disease, the brown coat, the black worsted stockings, the gray wig with the scorched foretop, the dirty hands, the nails bitten and pared to the quick. We see the eyes and mouth moving with convulsive twitches; we see the heavy form rolling; we hear it puffing; and then comes the "Why, sir!" and the "What then, sir?" and the "No, sir!" and the "You don't see your way through the question, sir!"¹

To Boswell's record we are indebted also for our knowledge of those famous conversations, those wordy, knockdown battles, which made Johnson famous in his time and which still move us to wonder. Here is a specimen conversation, taken almost at random from a hundred such in Boswell's incomparable biography. After listening to Johnson's prejudice against Scotland, and his dogmatic utterances on Voltaire, Robertson, and twenty others, an unfortunate theorist brings up a recent essay on the possible future life of brutes, quoting some possible authority from the sacred scriptures :

Johnson, who did not like to hear anything concerning a future state which was not authorized by the regular canons of orthodoxy, discouraged this talk; and being offended at its continuation, he watched an opportunity to give the gentleman a blow of reprehension. So when the poor speculatist, with a serious, metaphysical, pensive face, addressed him, "But really, sir, when we see a very sensible dog, we don't know what to think of him"; Johnson, rolling with joy at the thought which beamed in his eye, turned quickly round and replied, "True, sir; and when we see a very foolish *fellow*, we don't know what to think of *him*." He then rose up, strided to the fire, and stood for some time laughing and exulting.

Then the oracle proceeds to talk of scorpions and natural history, denying facts, and demanding proofs which nobody could possibly furnish :

He seemed pleased to talk of natural philosophy. "That woodcocks," said he, "fly over the northern countries is proved, because they have been observed at sea. Swallows certainly sleep all the winter. A num-

¹ From Macaulay's review of Boswell's *Life of Johnson*.

ber of them conglobulate together by flying round and round, and then all in a heap throw themselves under water and lie in the bed of a river." He told us one of his first essays was a Latin poem upon the glowworm: I am sorry I did not ask where it was to be found.

Then follows an astonishing array of subjects and opinions. He catalogues libraries, settles affairs in China, pronounces judgment on men who marry women superior to themselves, flouts popular liberty, hammers Swift unmercifully, and adds a few miscellaneous oracles, most of which are about as reliable as his knowledge of the hibernation of swallows.

When I called upon Dr. Johnson next morning I found him highly satisfied with his colloquial prowess the preceding evening. "Well," said he, "we had good talk." "Yes, sir" [says I], "you tossed and gored several persons."

Far from resenting this curious mental dictatorship, his auditors never seem to weary. They hang upon his words, praise him, flatter him, repeat his judgments all over London the next day, and return in the evening hungry for more. Whenever the conversation begins to flag, Boswell is like a woman with a parrot, or like a man with a dancing bear. He must excite the creature, make him talk or dance for the edification of the company. He sidles obsequiously towards his hero and, with utter irrelevancy, propounds a question of theology, a social theory, a fashion of dress or marriage, a philosophical conundrum: "Do you think, sir, that natural affections are born with us?" or, "Sir, if you were shut up in a castle and a newborn babe with you, what would you do?" Then follow more Johnsonian laws, judgments, oracles; the insatiable audience clusters around him and applauds; while Boswell listens, with shining face, and presently goes home to write the wonder down. It is an astonishing spectacle; one does not know whether to laugh or grieve over it. But we know the man, and the audience, almost as well as if we had been there; and that, unconsciously, is the superb art of this matchless biographer.

When Johnson died the opportunity came for which Boswell had been watching and waiting some twenty years. He would shine in the world now, not by reflection, but by his own luminosity. He gathered together his endless notes and records, and began to write his biography; but he did not hurry. Several biographies of Johnson appeared, in the four years after his death, without disturbing Boswell's perfect complacency. After seven years' labor he gave the world his *Life of Johnson*. It is an immortal work; praise is superfluous; it must be read to be appreciated. Like the Greek sculptors, the little slave produced a more enduring work than the great master. The man who reads it will know Johnson as he knows no other man who dwells across the border; and he will lack sensitiveness, indeed, if he lay down the work without a greater love and appreciation of all good literature.

Later Augustan Writers. With Johnson, who succeeded Dryden and Pope in the chief place of English letters, the classic movement had largely spent its force; and the latter half of the eighteenth century gives us an imposing array of writers who differ so widely that it is almost impossible to classify them. In general, three schools of writers are noticeable: first, the classicists, who, under Johnson's lead, insisted upon elegance and regularity of style; second, the romantic poets, like Collins, Gray, Thomson, and Burns, who revolted from Pope's artificial couplets and wrote of nature and the human heart¹; third, the early novelists, like Defoe and Fielding, who introduced a new type of literature. The romantic poets and the novelists are reserved for special chapters; and of the other writers — Berkeley and Hume in philosophy; Robertson, Hume, and Gibbon in history; Chesterfield and Lady Montagu in letter writing; Adam Smith

¹ Many of the writers show a mingling of the classic and the romantic tendencies. Thus Goldsmith followed Johnson and opposed the romanticists; but his *Deserted Village* is romantic in spirit, though its classic couplets are almost as mechanical as Pope's. So Burke's orations are "elegantly classic" in style, but are illumined by bursts of emotion and romantic feeling.

in economics; Pitt, Burke, Fox, and a score of lesser writers in politics — we select only two, Burke and Gibbon, whose works are most typical of the Augustan, i.e. the elegant, classic style of prose writing.

EDMUND BURKE (1729-1797)

To read all of Burke's collected works, and so to understand him thoroughly, is something of a task. Few are equal to it. On the other hand, to read selections here and there, as most of us do, is to get a wrong idea of the man and to join either in fulsome praise of his brilliant oratory, or in honest confession that his periods are ponderous and his ideas often buried under Johnsonian verbiage. Such are the contrasts to be found on successive pages of Burke's twelve volumes, which cover the enormous range of the political and economic thought of the age, and which mingle fact and fancy, philosophy, statistics, and brilliant flights of the imagination, to a degree never before seen in English literature. For Burke belongs in spirit to the new romantic school, while in style he is a model for the formal classicists. We can only glance at the life of this marvelous Irishman, and then consider his place in our literature.

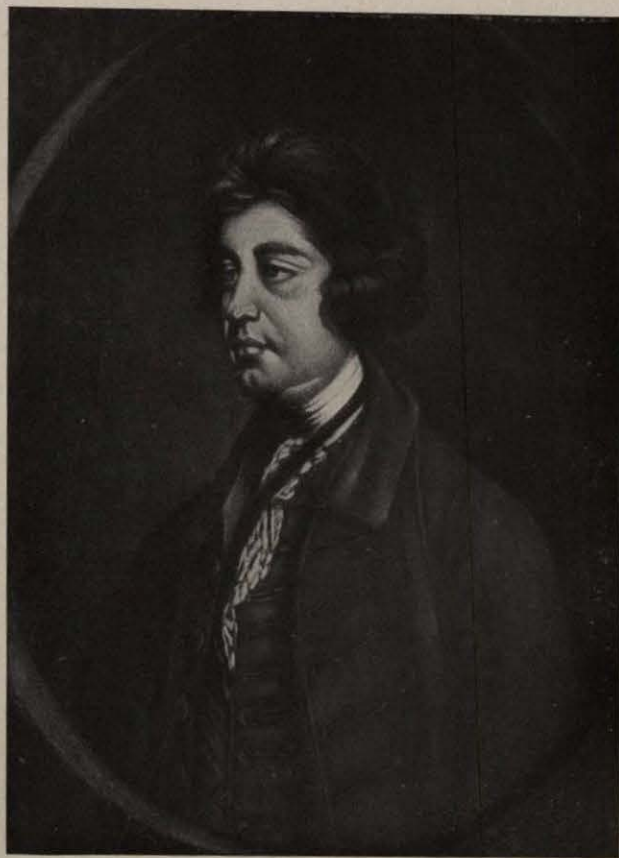
Life. Burke was born in Dublin, the son of an Irish barrister, in 1729. After his university course in Trinity College he came to London to study law, but soon gave up the idea to follow literature, which in turn led him to politics. He had the soul, the imagination of a poet, and the law was only a clog to his progress. His two first works, *A Vindication of Natural Society* and *The Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful*, brought him political as well as literary recognition, and several small offices were in turn given to him. When thirty-six years old he was elected to Parliament as member from Wendover; and for the next thirty years he was the foremost figure in the House of Commons and the most eloquent orator which that body has ever known. Pure and incorruptible in his politics as in his personal life, no more learned or devoted servant of the Commonwealth ever pleaded for justice and human

liberty. He was at the summit of his influence at the time when the colonies were struggling for independence; and the fact that he championed their cause in one of his greatest speeches, "On Conciliation with America," gives him an added interest in the eyes of American readers. His championship of America is all the more remarkable from the fact that, in other matters, Burke was far from liberal. He set himself squarely against the teachings of the romantic writers, who were enthusiastic over the French Revolution; he denounced the principles of the Revolutionists, broke with the liberal Whig party to join the Tories, and was largely instrumental in bringing on the terrible war with France, which resulted in the downfall of Napoleon.

It is good to remember that, in all the strife and bitterness of party politics, Burke held steadily to the noblest personal ideals of truth and honesty; and that in all his work, whether opposing the slave trade, or pleading for justice for America, or protecting the poor natives of India from the greed of corporations, or setting himself against the popular sympathy for France in her desperate struggle, he aimed solely at the welfare of humanity. When he retired on a pension in 1794, he had won, and he deserved, the gratitude and affection of the whole nation.

Works. There are three distinctly marked periods in Burke's career, and these correspond closely to the years in which he was busied with the affairs of America, India, and France successively. The first period was one of prophecy. He had studied the history and temper of the American colonies, and he warned England of the disaster which must follow her persistence in ignoring the American demands, and especially the American spirit. His great speeches, "On American Taxation" and "On Conciliation with America," were delivered in 1774 and 1775, preceding the Declaration of Independence. In this period Burke's labor seemed all in vain; he lost his cause, and England her greatest colony.

The second period is one of denunciation rather than of prophecy. England had won India; but when Burke studied the methods of her victory and understood the soulless way in which millions of poor natives were made to serve the



EDMUND BURKE

From an old print

interests of an English monopoly, his soul rose in revolt, and again he was the champion of an oppressed people. His two greatest speeches of this period are "The Nabob of Arcot's Debts" and his tremendous "Impeachment of Warren Hastings." Again he apparently lost his cause, though he was still fighting on the side of right. Hastings was acquitted, and the spoliation of India went on; but the seeds of reform were sown, and grew and bore fruit long after Burke's labors were ended.

The third period is, curiously enough, one of reaction. Whether because the horrors of the French Revolution had frightened him with the danger of popular liberty, or because his own advance in office and power had made him side unconsciously with the upper classes, is unknown. That he was as sincere and noble now as in all his previous life is not questioned. He broke with the liberal Whigs and joined forces with the reactionary Tories. He opposed the romantic writers, who were on fire with enthusiasm over the French Revolution, and thundered against the dangers which the revolutionary spirit must breed, forgetting that it was a revolution which had made modern England possible. Here, where we must judge him to have been mistaken in his cause, he succeeded for the first time. It was due largely to Burke's influence that the growing sympathy for the French people was checked in England, and war was declared, which ended in the frightful victories of Trafalgar and Waterloo.

Burke's best known work of this period is his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, which he polished and revised again and again before it was finally printed. This ambitious literary essay, though it met with remarkable success, is a disappointment to the reader. Though of Celtic blood, Burke did not understand the French, or the principles for which the common people were fighting in their own way¹; and his denunciations and apostrophes to France

¹ A much more interesting work is Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man*, which was written in answer to Burke's essay, and which had enormous influence in England and America.

suggest a preacher without humor, hammering away at sinners who are not present in his congregation. The essay has few illuminating ideas, but a great deal of Johnsonian rhetoric, which make its periods tiresome, notwithstanding our admiration for the brilliancy of its author. More significant is one of Burke's first essays, *A Philosophical Inquiry Into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, which is sometimes read in order to show the contrast in style with Addison's *Spectator* essays on the "Pleasures of the Imagination."

Burke's best known speeches, "On Conciliation with America," "American Taxation," and the "Impeachment of Warren Hastings," are still much studied in our schools as models of English prose; and this fact tends to give them an exaggerated literary importance. Viewed purely as literature, they have faults enough; and the first of these, so characteristic of the Classic Age, is that they abound in fine rhetoric but lack simplicity.¹ In a strict sense, these eloquent speeches are not literature, to delight the reader and to suggest ideas, but studies in rhetoric and in mental concentration. All this, however, is on the surface. A careful study of any of these three famous speeches reveals certain admirable qualities which account for the important place they are given in the study of English. First, as showing the stateliness and the rhetorical power of our language, these speeches are almost unrivaled. Second, though Burke speaks in prose, he is essentially a poet, whose imagery, like that of Milton's prose works, is more remarkable than that of many of our writers of verse. He speaks in figures, images, symbols; and the musical cadence of his sentences reflects

¹ In the same year, 1775, in which Burke's magnificent "Conciliation" oration was delivered, Patrick Henry made a remarkable little speech before a gathering of delegates in Virginia. Both men were pleading the same cause of justice, and were actuated by the same high ideals. A very interesting contrast, however, may be drawn between the methods and the effects of Henry's speech and of Burke's more brilliant oration. Burke makes us wonder at his learning, his brilliancy, his eloquence; but he does not move us to action. Patrick Henry calls us, and we spring to follow him. That suggests the essential difference between the two orators.

the influence of his wide reading of poetry. Not only in figurative expression, but much more in spirit, he belongs with the poets of the revival. At times his language is pseudo-classic, reflecting the influence of Johnson and his school; but his thought is always romantic; he is governed by ideal rather than by practical interests, and a profound sympathy for humanity is perhaps his most marked characteristic.

Third, the supreme object of these orations, so different from the majority of political speeches, is not to win approval or to gain votes, but to establish the truth. Like our own Lincoln, Burke had a superb faith in the compelling power of the truth, a faith in men also, who, if the history of our race means anything, will not willingly follow a lie. The methods of these two great leaders are strikingly similar in this respect, that each repeats his idea in many ways, presenting the truth from different view points, so that it will appeal to men of widely different experiences. Otherwise the two men are in marked contrast. The uneducated Lincoln speaks in simple, homely words, draws his illustrations from the farm, and often adds a humorous story, so apt and "telling" that his hearers can never forget the point of his argument. The scholarly Burke speaks in ornate, majestic periods, and searches all history and all literature for his illustrations. His wealth of imagery and allusions, together with his rare combination of poetic and logical reasoning, make these orations remarkable, entirely apart from their subject and purpose.

Fourth (and perhaps most significant of the man and his work), Burke takes his stand squarely upon the principle of justice. He has studied history, and he finds that to establish justice, between man and man and between nation and nation, has been the supreme object of every reformer since the world began. No small or merely temporary success attracts him; only the truth will suffice for an argument; and nothing less than justice will ever settle a question permanently. Such is his platform, simple as the Golden Rule, unshakable

as the moral law. Hence, though he apparently fails of his immediate desire in each of these three orations, the principle for which he contends cannot fail. As a modern writer says of Lincoln, "The full, rich flood of his life through the nation's pulse is yet beating"; and his words are still potent in shaping the course of English politics in the way of justice.

EDWARD GIBBON (1737-1794)

To understand Burke or Johnson, one must read a multitude of books and be wary in his judgment; but with Gibbon the task is comparatively easy, for one has only to consider two books, his *Memoirs* and the first volume of his *History*, to understand the author. In his *Memoirs* we have an interesting reflection of Gibbon's own personality, — a man who looks with satisfaction on the material side of things, who seeks always the easiest path for himself, and avoids life's difficulties and responsibilities. "I sighed as a lover; but I obeyed as a son," he says, when, to save his inheritance, he gave up the woman he loved and came home to enjoy the paternal loaves and fishes. That is suggestive of the man's whole life. His *History*, on the other hand, is a remarkable work. It was the first in our language to be written on scientific principles, and with a solid basis of fact; and the style is the very climax of that classicism which had ruled England for an entire century. Its combination of historical fact and literary style makes *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* the one thing of Gibbon's life that is "worthy to be remembered."

Gibbon's History. For many years Gibbon had meditated, like Milton, upon an immortal work, and had tried several historical subjects, only to give them up idly. In his *Journal* he tells us how his vague resolutions were brought to a focus:

It was at Rome, on the fifteenth of October, 1764, as I sat musing amidst the ruins of the Capitol, while the barefooted friars were singing vespers in the Temple of Jupiter, that the idea of writing the decline and fall of the city first started to my mind.

Twelve years later, in 1776, Gibbon published the first volume of *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*; and the enormous success of the work encouraged him to go on with the other five volumes, which were published at intervals during the next twelve years. The History begins with the reign of Trajan, in A.D. 98, and "builds a straight Roman road" through the confused histories of thirteen centuries, ending with the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. The scope of the History is enormous. It includes not only the decline of the Roman Empire, but such movements as the descent of the northern barbarians, the spread of Christianity, the reorganization of the European nations, the establishment of the great Eastern Empire, the rise of Mohammedanism, and the splendor of the Crusades. On the one hand it lacks philosophical insight, being satisfied with facts without comprehending the causes; and, as Gibbon seems lacking in ability to understand spiritual and religious movements, it is utterly inadequate in its treatment of the tremendous influence of Christianity. On the other hand, Gibbon's scholarship leaves little to criticise; he read enormously, sifted his facts out of multitudes of books and records, and then marshaled them in the imposing array with which we have grown familiar. Moreover, he is singularly just and discriminating in the use of all documents and authorities at his command. Hence he has given us the first history in English that has borne successfully the test of modern research and scholarship.

The style of the work is as imposing as his great subject. Indeed, with almost any other subject the sonorous roll of his majestic sentences would be out of place. While it deserves all the adjectives that have been applied to it by enthusiastic admirers, — finished, elegant, splendid, rounded, massive, sonorous, copious, elaborate, ornate, exhaustive, — it must be confessed, though one whispers the confession, that the style sometimes obscures our interest in the narrative. As he sifted his facts from a multitude of sources, so he often hides

them again in endless periods, and one must often sift them out again in order to be quite sure of even the simple facts. Another drawback is that Gibbon is hopelessly worldly in his point of view; he loves pageants and crowds rather than individuals, and he is lacking in enthusiasm and in spiritual insight. The result is so frankly material at times that one wonders if he is not reading of forces or machines, rather than of human beings. A little reading of his History here and there is an excellent thing, leaving one impressed with the elegant classical style and the scholarship; but a continued reading is very apt to leave us longing for simplicity, for naturalness, and, above all, for the glow of enthusiasm which makes the dead heroes live once more in the written pages.

This judgment, however, must not obscure the fact that the book had a remarkably large sale; and that this, of itself, is an evidence that multitudes of readers found it not only erudite, but readable and interesting.

II. THE REVIVAL OF ROMANTIC POETRY

The old order changeth, yielding place to new;
And God fulfills Himself in many ways,
Lest one good custom should corrupt the world.

Tennyson's "The Passing of Arthur."

The Meaning of Romanticism. While Dryden, Pope, and Johnson were successively the dictators of English letters, and while, under their leadership, the heroic couplet became the fashion of poetry, and literature in general became satiric or critical in spirit, and formal in expression, a new romantic movement quietly made its appearance. Thomson's *The Seasons* (1730) was the first noteworthy poem of the romantic revival; and the poems and the poets increased steadily in number and importance till, in the age of Wordsworth and Scott, the spirit of Romanticism dominated our literature more completely than Classicism had ever done. This romantic

movement — which Victor Hugo calls "liberalism in literature" — is simply the expression of life as seen by imagination, rather than by prosaic "common sense," which was the central doctrine of English philosophy in the eighteenth century. It has six prominent characteristics which distinguish it from the so-called classic literature which we have just studied:

1. The romantic movement was marked, and is always marked, by a strong reaction and protest against the bondage of rule and custom, which, in science and theology, as well as in literature, generally tend to fetter the free human spirit.
2. Romanticism returned to nature and to plain humanity for its material, and so is in marked contrast to Classicism, which had confined itself largely to the clubs and drawing-rooms, and to the social and political life of London. Thomson's *Seasons*, whatever its defects, was a revelation of the natural wealth and beauty which, for nearly a century, had been hardly noticed by the great writers of England.
3. It brought again the dream of a golden age¹ in which the stern realities of life were forgotten and the ideals of youth were established as the only permanent realities. "For the dreamer lives forever, but the toiler dies in a day," expresses, perhaps, only the wild fancy of a modern poet; but, when we think of it seriously, the dreams and ideals of a people are cherished possessions long after their stone monuments have crumbled away and their battles are forgotten. The romantic movement emphasized these eternal ideals of youth, and appealed to the human heart as the classic elegance of Dryden and Pope could never do.
4. Romanticism was marked by intense human sympathy, and by a consequent understanding of the human heart. Not to intellect or to science does the heart unlock its treasures, but rather to the touch of a sympathetic nature; and things that are hidden from the wise and prudent are revealed unto

¹ The romantic revival is marked by renewed interest in mediæval ideals and literature; and to this interest is due the success of Walpole's romance, *The Castle of Otranto*, and of Chatterton's forgeries known as the *Rowley Papers*.

children. Pope had no appreciable humanity; Swift's work is a frightful satire; Addison delighted polite society, but had no message for plain people; while even Johnson, with all his kindness, had no feeling for men in the mass, but supported Sir Robert Walpole in his policy of letting evils alone until forced by a revolution to take notice of humanity's appeal. With the romantic revival all this was changed. While Howard was working heroically for prison reform, and Wilberforce for the liberation of the slaves, Gray wrote his "short and simple annals of the poor," and Goldsmith his *Deserted Village*, and Cowper sang,

My ear is pained,
My soul is sick with every day's report
Of wrong and outrage with which earth is filled.
There is no flesh in man's obdurate heart,
It does not feel for man.¹

This sympathy for the poor, and this cry against oppression, grew stronger and stronger till it culminated in "Bobby" Burns, who, more than any other writer in any language, is the poet of the unlettered human heart.

5. The romantic movement was the expression of individual genius rather than of established rules. In consequence, the literature of the revival is as varied as the characters and moods of the different writers. When we read Pope, for instance, we have a general impression of sameness, as if all his polished poems were made in the same machine; but in the work of the best romanticists there is endless variety. To read them is like passing through a new village, meeting a score of different human types, and finding in each one something to love or to remember. Nature and the heart of man are as new as if we had never studied them. Hence, in reading the romanticists, who went to these sources for their material, we are seldom wearied but often surprised; and the surprise is like that of the sunrise, or the sea, which always

¹ From *The Task*, Book II.

offers some new beauty and stirs us deeply, as if we had never seen it before.

6. The romantic movement, while it followed its own genius, was not altogether unguided. Strictly speaking, there is no new movement either in history or in literature; each grows out of some good thing which has preceded it, and looks back with reverence to past masters. Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton were the inspiration of the romantic revival; and we can hardly read a poem of the early romanticists without finding a suggestion of the influence of one of these great leaders.¹

There are various other characteristics of Romanticism, but these six—the protest against the bondage of rules, the return to nature and the human heart, the interest in old sagas and mediæval romances as suggestive of a heroic age, the sympathy for the toilers of the world, the emphasis upon individual genius, and the return to Milton and the Elizabethans, instead of to Pope and Dryden, for literary models—are the most noticeable and the most interesting. Remembering them, we shall better appreciate the work of the following writers who, in varying degree, illustrate the revival of romantic poetry in the eighteenth century.

THOMAS GRAY (1716–1771)

The curfew tolls the knell of parting day;
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the lea;
The plowman homeward plods his weary way,
And leaves the world to darkness and to me.

Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight,
And all the air a solemn stillness holds,
Save where the beetle wheels his droning flight,
And drowsy tinklings lull the distant folds.

So begins "the best, known poem in the English language," a poem full of the gentle melancholy which marks all early

¹ See, for instance, Phelps, *Beginnings of the Romantic Movement*, for a list of Spenserian imitators from 1700 to 1775.

romantic poetry. It should be read entire, as a perfect model of its kind. Not even Milton's "Il Penseroso," which it strongly suggests, excels it in beauty and suggestiveness.

Life of Gray. The author of the famous "Elegy" is the most scholarly and well-balanced of all the early romantic poets. In his youth he was a weakling, the only one of twelve children who survived infancy; and his unhappy childhood, the tyranny of his father, and the separation from his loved mother, gave to his whole life the stamp of melancholy which is noticeable in all his poems. At the famous Eton school, and again at Cambridge, he seems to have fol-



THOMAS GRAY

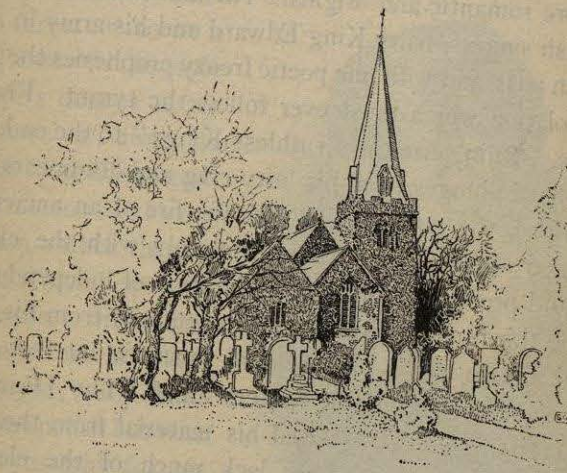
lowed his own scholarly tastes rather than the curriculum, and was shocked, like Gibbon, at the general idleness and aimlessness of university life. One happy result of his school life was his friendship for Horace Walpole, who took him abroad for a three years' tour of the Continent.

No better index of the essential difference between the classical and the new romantic school can be imagined than that which is revealed in the letters of Gray and Addison, as they record their impressions of foreign travel. Thus, when Addison crossed the Alps, some twenty-five years before, in good weather, he wrote: "A very troublesome journey. . . . You cannot imagine how I am pleased with the sight of a plain." Gray crossed the Alps in the beginning of winter, "wrapped in muffs, hoods and masks of beaver, fur boots, and bearskins," but wrote ecstatically, "Not a precipice, not a torrent, not a cliff but is pregnant with religion and poetry."

On his return to England, Gray lived for a short time at Stoke Poges, where he wrote his "Ode on Eton," and probably sketched his "Elegy," which, however, was not finished till 1750, eight years later. During the latter years of his shy and scholarly life he was Professor of Modern History and Languages at Cambridge, without any troublesome work of lecturing to students. Here he gave himself up to study and to poetry, varying his work by "prowlings" among the manuscripts of the new British Museum, and by his

"Lilliputian" travels in England and Scotland. He died in his rooms at Pembroke College in 1771, and was buried in the little churchyard of Stoke Poges.

Works of Gray. Gray's *Letters*, published in 1775, are excellent reading, and his *Journal* is still a model of natural description; but it is to a single small volume of poems that he owes his fame and his place in literature. These poems divide themselves naturally into three periods, in which we may trace the progress of Gray's emancipation from the



CHURCH AT STOKE POGES

classic rules which had so long governed English literature. In the first period he wrote several minor poems, of which the best are his "Hymn to Adversity" and the odes "To Spring" and "On a Distant Prospect of Eton College." These early poems reveal two suggestive things: first, the appearance of that melancholy which characterizes all the poetry of the period; and second, the study of nature, not for its own beauty or truth, but rather as a suitable background for the play of human emotions.

The second period shows the same tendencies more strongly developed. The "Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard"

(1750), the most perfect poem of the age, belongs to this period. To read Milton's "Il Penseroso" and Gray's "Elegy" is to see the beginning and the perfection of that "literature of melancholy" which largely occupied English poets for more than a century. Two other well-known poems of this second period are the Pindaric odes, "The Progress of Poesy" and "The Bard." The first is strongly suggestive of Dryden's "Alexander's Feast," but shows Milton's influence in a greater melody and variety of expression. "The Bard" is, in every way, more romantic and original. An old minstrel, the last of the Welsh singers, halts King Edward and his army in a wild mountain pass, and with fine poetic frenzy prophesies the terror and desolation which must ever follow the tyrant. From its first line, "Ruin seize thee, ruthless King!" to the end, when the old bard plunges from his lofty crag and disappears in the river's flood, the poem thrills with the fire of an ancient and noble race of men. It breaks absolutely with the classical school and proclaims a literary declaration of independence.

In the third period Gray turns momentarily from his Welsh material and reveals a new field of romantic interest in two Norse poems, "The Fatal Sisters" and "The Descent of Odin" (1761). Gray translated his material from the Latin, and though these two poems lack much of the elemental strength and grandeur of the Norse sagas, they are remarkable for calling attention to the unused wealth of literary material that was hidden in Northern mythology. To Gray and to Percy (who published his *Northern Antiquities* in 1770) is due in large measure the profound interest in the old Norse sagas which has continued to our own day.

Taken together, Gray's works form a most interesting commentary on the varied life of the eighteenth century. He was a scholar, familiar with all the intellectual interests of his age, and his work has much of the precision and polish of the classical school; but he shares also the reawakened interest in nature, in common man, and in mediæval culture, and his

work is generally romantic both in style and in spirit. The same conflict between the classic and romantic schools, and the triumph of Romanticism, is shown clearly in the most versatile of Gray's contemporaries, Oliver Goldsmith.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH (1728-1774)

Because *The Deserted Village* is one of the most familiar poems in our language, Goldsmith is generally given a high place among the poets of the romantic dawn. But the *Village*, when we read it carefully, turns out to be a rimed essay in the style of Pope's famous *Essay on Man*; it owes its popularity to the sympathetic memories which it awakens, rather than to its poetic excellence. It is as a prose writer that Goldsmith excels. He is an essayist, with Addison's fine polish but with more sympathy for human life; he is a dramatist, one of the very few who have ever written a comedy that can keep its popularity unchanged



OLIVER GOLDSMITH

while a century rolls over its head; but greater, perhaps, than the poet and essayist and dramatist is Goldsmith the novelist, who set himself to the important work of purifying the early novel of its brutal and indecent tendencies, and who has given us, in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, one of the most enduring characters in English fiction. In his manner, especially in his poetry, Goldsmith was too much influenced by his friend