



THE
VILLAGE:

A
POEM.

[Price 2s. 6d.]

THE
VILLAGE:

A
POEM.

IN TWO BOOKS.

BY
THE REV^d GEORGE CRABBE,
CHAPLAIN TO HIS GRACE THE DUKE OF RUTLAND, &c.

L O N D O N :
PRINTED FOR J. DODSLEY, PALL-MALL.

M.DCC.LXXXIII.

T H E
V I L L A G E.

B O O K 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 forms the real picture of the poor,
Demands a song——The Muse can give no more.

Fled are those times, if e'er such times were seen,
 When rustic poets prais'd their native green;
 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 echo's of the Mantuan song?
 From truth and nature shall we widely stray,
 Where VIRGIL, not where fancy leads the way?

Yes, thus the Muses sing of happy swains,
 Because the Muses never knew their pains:

They

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, 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?

From one chief cause these idle praises spring,
 That, themes so easy, few forbear to sing;
 They ask no thought, require no deep design,
 But swell the song and liquefy the line;
 The gentle lover takes the rural 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 gazes 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 feeble hands 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 can no groves nor happy vallies 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 head?
 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;
 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

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 filky leaf;
 O'er the young shoot the charlock throws a shade,
 And the wild tare clings round the sickly blade;
 With mingled tints the rocky coasts abound,
 And a sad splendor 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 splendor is but Folly's dress,
 Exposing most, when most it gilds distress.

Here joyless roam a wild amphibious race,
 With sullen woe display'd in every face;

Who,

Who, far from civil arts and social fly,
And scowl at strangers with suspicious eye.

Here too the lawless vagrant 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,
Engag'd some artful stripling of the throng,
And foil'd beneath the young Ulysses fell ;
When peals of praise the merry mischief tell ?

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 (when equal knaves contest)
 To gain a lawless passport for the rest.

Here wand'ring long amid these frowning fields,
 I fought the simple life that Nature yields ;
 Rapine and Wrong and Fear usurp'd her place,
 And a bold, artful, furly, 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

Which to their coast directs its vent'rous way,
 Their's, 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 cry'd, 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 ;

Her's 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 ;
 Like him to make the plenteous harvest grow,
 And yet not share the plenty they bestow ;
 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 funs and showers engage,
 And hoard up aches and anguish for their age;
 Thro' 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 luxury 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 urg'd 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 urge their homely, plenteous fare,
 Healthy and plain and still the poor man's 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 envy would disdain to touch.

Ye gentle souls who dream of rural ease,
 Whom the smooth stream and smothered 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 fire,
 Or their's, that offspring round their feeble fire,
 Or her's, that matron pale, whose trembling hand
 Turns on the wretched hearth th' expiring brand.

Nor

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 its own engage ;
 Who, propt 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

Alternate masters now their slave command,
 And urge the efforts of his feeble hand ;
 Who, 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,
 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 rous'd 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,
 “ Nipt by the frost and shivering in the wind ;

“ There

“ There it abides till younger buds come on,

“ As I, now all my fellow fwains are gone ;

“ Then, from the rising generation thrust,

“ It falls, like me, unnotic'd 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,

“ Slow in their gifts but hafty 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 woe ;

“ 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 woe, and then they rest.

Their's

Their's 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,
 Forfaken 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.

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,
 Mixt with the clamours of the croud below;

Here

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,
 Despis'd, neglected, left alone to die?

D

How

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 flogging sides ;
Where the vile bands that bind the thatch are seen,
And lath and mud is 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 drooping wretch reclines his languid head ;
For him no hand the cordial cup applies,
Nor wipes the tear that stagnates in his eyes ;
No friends with soft discourse his pain beguile,
Nor 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,

Anon, a figure enters, quaintly neat,
 All pride and business, bustle and conceit ;
 With looks unalter'd by these scenes of woe,
 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 vers'd 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 inur'd to pain,
 And long unheeded, knows remonstrance vain ;
 He ceases now the feeble help to crave
 Of man, and mutely hastens to 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,
 He, “passing rich with forty pounds a year ?”
 Ah ! no, a shepherd of a different flock,
 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 chace, to cheer them or to chide ;
 Sure in his shot, his game he seldom mist,
 And seldom fail'd to win his game at whist ;
 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 ev'n 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 flow
 The bier moves winding from the vale below ;

There

There lie the happy dead, from trouble free,
 And the glad parish pays the frugal fee ;
 No more, oh ! Death, thy victim starts to hear
 Churchwarden stern, or kingly overseer ;
 No more the farmer gets 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 antient friend ;
 For he was one in all their idle sport,
 And like a monarch rul'd their little court ;
 The pliant bow he form'd, the flying ball,
 The bat, the wicket, were his labours all ;
 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 relicks 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 distressed,
To think a poor man's bones should lie unblest.



T H E
V I L L A G E.



B O O K II.

NO longer truth, though shown in verse, disdain,
But own the village life a life of pain ;
I too must yield, that oft amid these woes
Are gleams of transient mirth and hours of sweet repose.

Such as you find on yonder sportive Green,
 The 'Squire's tall gate and churchway-walk between ;
 Where loitering stray a little tribe of friends,
 On a fair Sunday when the sermon ends :
 Then rural beaux their best attire put on,
 To win their nymphs, as other nymphs are won ;
 While those long wed go plain, and by degrees,
 Like other husbands, quit their care to please.
 Some of the sermon talk, a sober crowd,
 And loudly praise, if it were preach'd aloud ;
 Some on the labours of the week look round,
 Feel their own worth, and think their toil renown'd ;
 While some, whose hopes to no renown extend,
 Are only pleas'd to find their labours end.

Thus, as their hours glide on with pleasure fraught,
 Their careful masters brood the painful thought ;

Much

Much in their mind they murmur and lament,
 That one fair day should be so idly spent ;
 And think that Heaven deals hard, to tythe their store
 And tax their time for preachers and the poor.

Yet still, ye humbler friends, enjoy your hour,
 This is your portion, yet unclaim'd of power ;
 This is Heaven's gift to weary men oppress'd,
 And seems the type of their expected rest :
 But yours, alas ! are joys that soon decay ;
 Frail joys, began and ended with the day ;
 Or yet, while day permits those joys to reign,
 The village vices drive them from the plain.

See the stout churl, in drunken fury great,
 Strike the bare bosom of his teeming mate !
 His naked vices, rude and unrefin'd,
 Exert their open empire o'er the mind ;

But can we less the senseless rage despise,
Because the savage acts without disguise?

Yet here Disguise, the city's vice, is seen,
And Slander steals along and taints the Green ;
At her approach domestic peace is gone,
Domestic broils at her approach come on ;
She to the wife the husband's crime conveys,
She tells the husband when his comfort strays ;
Her busy tongue, through all the little state,
Diffuses doubt, suspicion, and debate ;
Peace, tim'rous goddess ! quits her old domain,
In sentiment and song content to reign.

Nor are the nymphs that breathe the rural air
So fair as Cynthia's, nor so chaste as fair ;
These to the town afford each fresher face,
And the Clown's trull receives the Lord's embrace ;

From

From whom, should chance again convey her down,
The Peer's disease in turn attacks the Clown.

Hear too the 'Squire, or 'squire-like farmer, talk,
How round their regions nightly pilferers walk ;
How from their ponds the fish are borne, and all
The rip'ning treasures from their lofty wall ;
How their maids languish, while their men run loose,
And leave them scarce a damsel to seduce.

And hark ! the riots of the Green begin,
That sprang at first from yonder noisy inn ;
What time the weekly pay was vanish'd all,
And the slow hostess scor'd the threat'ning wall ;
What time they ask'd, their friendly feast to close,
One cup, and that just serves to make them foes ;
When blows ensue that break the arm of Toil,
And batter'd faces end the boobies' broil.

Save when to yonder hall they bend their way,
 Where the grave Justice ends the grievous fray ;
 He who recites, to keep the poor in awe,
 The law's vast volume—for he knows the law.—
 To him with anger or with shame repair
 The injur'd peasant and deluded fair.

Lo! at his throne the silent nymph appears,
 Frail by her shape, but modest in her tears ;
 And while she stands abash'd, with conscious eye,
 Some favourite female of her judge glides by ;
 Who views with scornful glance the strumpet's fate,
 And thanks the stars that made her keeper great :
 Near her the swain, about to bear for life
 One certain evil, doubts 'twixt war and wife ;
 But, while the faltering damsel takes her oath,
 Consents to wed, and so secures them both.

Yet why, you ask, these humble crimes relate,

Why make the poor as guilty as the great ?

To show the great, those mightier sons of Pride,

How near in vice the lowest are allied ;

Such are their natures, and their passions such,

But these disguise too little, those too much :

So shall the man of power and pleasure see

In his own slave as vile a wretch as he ;

In his luxurious lord the servant find

His own low pleasures and degenerate mind ;

And each in all the kindred vices trace

Of a poor, blind, bewilder'd, erring race ;

Who, a short time in varied fortune past,

Die, and are equal in the dust at last.

And you, ye poor, who still lament your fate,

Forbear to envy those you reckon great ;

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

Oh! if in life one noble chief appears,
Great in his name, while blooming in his years;
Born to enjoy whate'er delights mankind,
And yet to all you feel or fear resign'd;
Who gave up pleasures you could never share,
For pain which you are seldom doom'd to bear;
If such there be, then let your murmurs cease,
Think, think of him, and take your lot in peace.

And such there was: — Oh! grief, that checks our pride,
Weeping we say there was, for MANNERS died; —
Belov'd of Heav'n! these humble lines forgive,
That sing of thee, and thus aspire to live.

As the tall oak, whose vigorous branches form
 An ample shade and brave the wildest storm,
 High o'er the subject wood is seen to grow,
 The guard and glory of the trees below ;
 Till on its head the fiery bolt descends,
 And o'er the plain the shatter'd trunk extends ;
 Yet then it lies, all wond'rous as before,
 And still the glory, though the guard no more.

So THOU, when every virtue, every grace,
 Rose in thy soul, or shone within thy face ;
 When, though the Son of GRANBY, thou wert known
 Less by thy father's glory than thy own ;
 When Honour lov'd, and gave thee every charm,
 Fire to thy eye and vigour to thy arm ;
 Then from our lofty hopes and longing eyes
 Fate and thy virtues call'd thee to the skies ;

Yet still we wonder at thy tow'ring fame,
And losing thee, still dwell upon thy name.

Oh ! ever honour'd, ever valued ! say
What verse can praise thee, or what work repay ?
Yet Verse (in all we can) thy worth repays,
Nor trusts the tardy zeal of future days ; —
Honours for thee thy Country shall prepare,
Thee in their hearts, the Good, the Brave shall bear ;
To deeds like thine shall noblest chiefs aspire,
The Muse shall mourn thee, and the world admire.

In future times, when smit with glory's charms,
The untry'd youth first quits a father's arms ;
“ Oh be like him,” the weeping sire shall say,
“ Like MANNERS walk, who walk'd in honour's way ;
“ In danger foremost, yet in death sedate,
“ Oh ! be like him in all things, but his fate !”

If for that fate such public tears be shed,
 That victory seems to die now THOU art dead;
 How shall a friend his nearer hope resign,
 That friend a brother, and whose soul was thine ?
 By what bold lines shall we his grief express,
 Or by what soothing numbers make it less ?

'Tis not, I know, the chiming of a song,
 Nor all the powers that to the Muse belong ;
 Words aptly cull'd, and meanings well express'd,
 Can calm the sorrows of a wounded breast :
 But RUTLAND'S virtues shall his griefs restrain,
 And join to heal the bosom where they reign.

Yet hard the task to heal the bleeding heart,
 To bid the still-recurring thoughts depart ;
 Hush the loud grief, and stem the rising sigh,
 And curb rebellious passion with reply ;

Calmly to dwell on all that pleas'd before,
 And yet to know that all can please no more —
 Oh ! glorious labour of the soul, to save
 Her captive powers, and bravely mourn the brave !

To such, these thoughts will lasting comfort give : —
 Life is not valu'd by the time we live ;
 'Tis not an even course of threescore years,
 A life of narrow views and paltry fears ;
 Grey hairs and wrinkles, and the cares they bring,
 That take from death the terror or the sting :
 But 'tis the spirit that is mounting high
 Above the world ; a native of the sky ;
 The noble spirit, that, in dangers brave,
 Calmly looks on, or looks beyond the grave.
 Such MANNERS was, so he resign'd his breath !
 If in a glorious, then a timely death.

Cease then that grief, and let those tears subside :
 If Passion rule us, be that passion Pride ;
 If Reason, Reason bids us strive to raise
 Our sinking hearts, and be like him we praise ;
 Or if Affection still the soul subdue,
 Bring all his virtues, all his worth in view,
 And let Affection find its comfort too ;
 For how can grief so deeply wound the heart,
 Where admiration claims so large a part ?

}

Grief is a foe, expel him then thy soul ;
 Let nobler thoughts the nearer woes controul ;
 Oh ! make the age to come thy better care,
 See other RUTLANDS, other GRANBYS there ;
 And as thy thoughts through streaming ages glide,
 See other heroes die as MANNERS died ;
 Victims victorious, who with him shall stand
 In Fame's fair book the guardians of the land ;

And from their fate thy race shall nobler grow,
As trees shoot upward that are prun'd below :
Or, as old Thames, borne down with decent pride,
Sees his young streams go murmuring by his side ;
Though some, by art cut off, no longer run,
And some are lost beneath the summer's fun ;
Yet the strong stream moves on, and as it moves,
Its power increases, and its use improves ;
While plenty round its spacious waves bestow,
Still it flows on, and shall for ever flow.

F I N I S.

