

**THE POETICAL WORKS OF
GEORGE
CRABBE, COMPLETE IN
ONE VOLUME**

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The Poetical Works of George Crabbe, Complete in One Volume by George Crabbe

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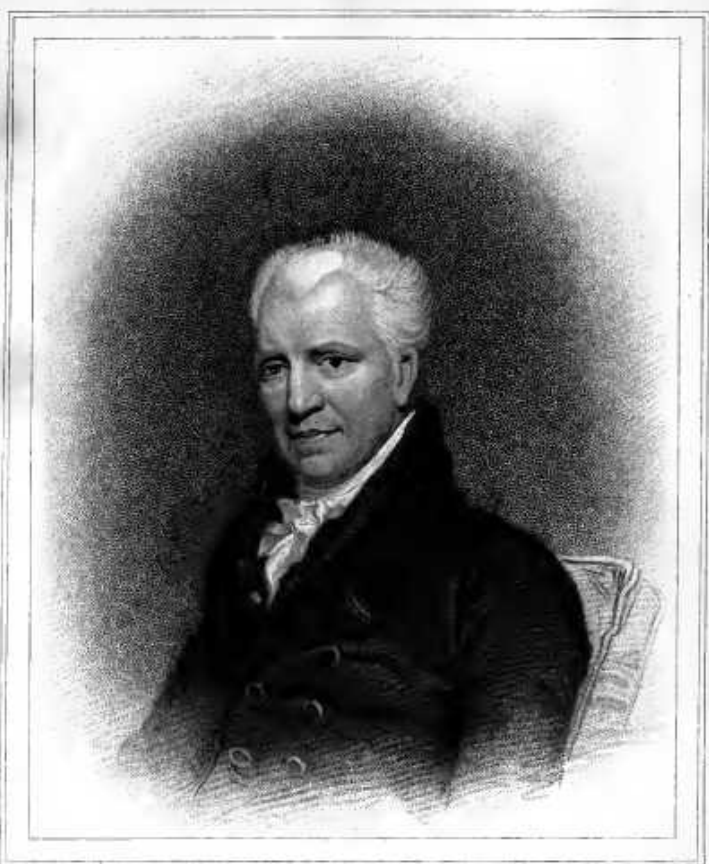
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PARIS

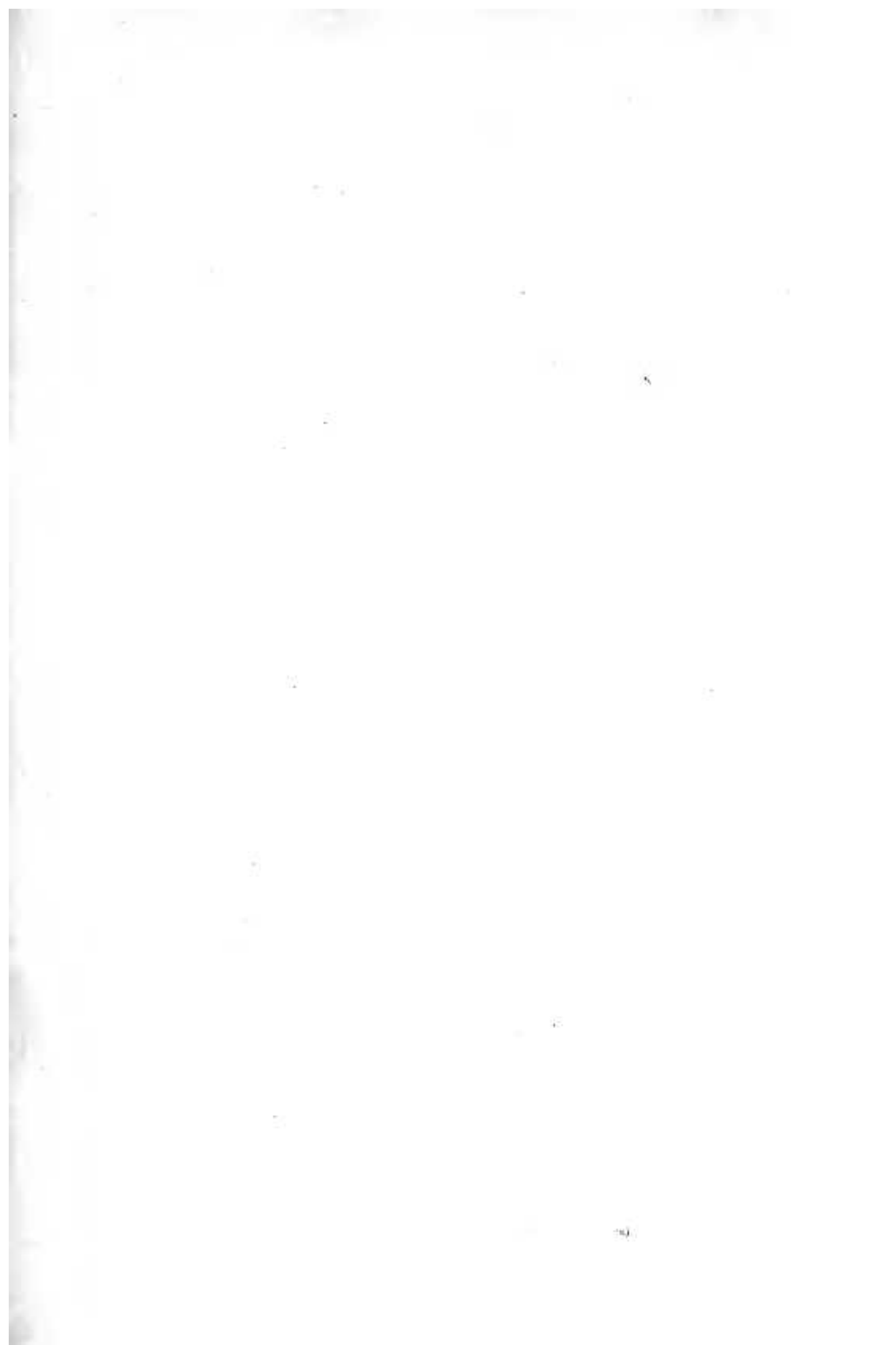
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Memoir of the Rev. George Crabbe.

If the humorous observation of Addison¹ were founded in fact, that a reader seldom peruses a book with pleasure * till he knows whether the writer of it be a black or fair man—of a mild or choleric disposition,—with other particulars of the like nature,*—we should be in a state of some apprehension, since the Rev. George Crabbe, the celebrated author of the poems a new edition of which we here present to the public, has, from the modesty and reticeness of his life, furnished but few biographical particulars to be developed to an admiring world. Unlike so many others of his *genus*, he has never inter-meddled in the turmoils of politics, or mingled in the intrigues of fashion. He is, in his manners and feelings, a *child of nature*; though a *savant* in her dispositions and her laws. Contented with keeping the * noiseless tenor of his way,* with the approbation of his conscience and the approval of his God,—he is willing to allow some to be the idol of the factious, and others to fawn at the footstool of power;—satisfied himself with being admired as a poet,—revered as a divine,—and respected as a man.

Our Poet was born at Aldborough, in Suffolk, in the year 1754, where his father was an officer of the customs. As his income was scanty and his family large, he early destined his son for the medical profession. Young Crabbe served consequently an apprenticeship to a provincial surgeon, man-midwife and apothecary. It appears, however, that he soon quitted a profession for which probably he had no taste; and, as Hume confesses in his autographic life * that while his family fancied he was poring upon Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the authors he was secretly devouring,* we can easily imagine that Crabbe, instead of wasting his meditations upon Hippocrates and Galen, was offering his early devotions to the poets of antiquity, and the master-hards of England.

He early elicited sparks of poetical genius, and sent some of the first effusions of his Muse to the *Lady's Magazine*,—a periodical publication, at that time, of considerable respectability. Such was the encouragement he received, that at the age of 24 years, he repaired to London; where

he had the good fortune to find a friend in the illustrious Edmund Burke. Encouraged by the favourable opinion, and honoured with the advice of that eminent man of taste and genius (in whose presence, in fact, part of the poems was written, and to whose judgment the whole was submitted), he published, in 1781, his poem of the * *Library* ;* which met, as might be expected from such auspices, a very favourable reception. He soon afterwards published a poem called * *the Village*,* which stamped his character as a great Poet. It was recommended to the notice of Doctor Johnson, and procured him the warm approbation of that consummate but fastidious critic. Such approbation was alone a triumph: for the author of the * *Vanity of Human Wishes* * strongly evinced the *genus irritabile vatum*; he was jealous of rivalry and niggard of praise; and, although the simple in style, and minute in description (the characteristics of Crabbe) were adverse to his taste and foreign to his example, he was pleased with the work, and gave his *fat* of approbation.

To have obtained the praise and favour of two men who may justly be characterized as the great contemporary representatives of the *mind* of Great Britain, must alone be considered a high proof of superior intellect; and might well have warranted a hope that his further appearance, as a Poet, would not long be delayed to an anxious public. Such, however, was the indolence or the unambitiousness of his disposition, that he seems, for a time, to have deserted the Muses, and to have betaken himself to the more solemn duties of the clerical character.—He took holy orders, was admitted at Cambridge, and, at the age of 25, entered the church, at the instigation and by the patronage of the celebrated Doctor Watson, then Bishop of Llandaff—*clarum et venerabile nomen*; a prelate who may justly be considered as one of the most powerful and successful champions of the Protestant church, when her principles were vigorously assailed by no common adversaries,—Gibbon and Paine: and one whose favourable notice and active friendship were, from the discernment of his masculine understanding, alone sufficient to confer honour, and, in some degree, to establish reputation. Mr Crabbe soon afterwards obtained from his fame as a poet, and

¹ Spectator, N° 1.

from the recommendation of Mr Burke, the patronage of the late Duke of Rutland; on whom he attended as chaplain, upon his appointment to the vicaroyalty of Ireland, and whose funeral sermon he preached in the chapel in Belvoir. The friendship of that nobleman's family procured him, through the influence of Lord Chancellor Thurlow, first, — the living of Frome St Quintin, in Dorsetshire, and afterwards the rectories of Muston, in Leicestershire, and West Allington, in Lincolnshire; which he held during many years. But as the poetic muse (unless she debase the purity of her nature by serving as the instrument of politics) has rarely been known to conduct her high-minded votaries to suitable elevation in the church, Mr Crabbe has been doomed to see less enlightened men advance to high station; whilst he reposes in the humble situation of rector of Trowbridge in Wiltshire, to which he was presented by the present Duke of Rutland.

A circumstance occurred, some years after the entrance of Mr Crabbe upon his clerical duties, of which we are unwilling to omit the mention; as it strongly proves that our poet's mind was always attentive to the studies to which it chanced to be directed. Being on a visit to a gentleman, the lady of the house was suddenly taken in labour; the midwife not arriving in time, Mr Crabbe was obliged to return to the duties of his first profession, and delivered the lady of a son. The boy, whose birth was attended with so singular a circumstance, received the equally singular name of *Lemuel*.¹ He became an officer in the army, and was slain on the field of Waterloo.

As a divine, Mr Crabbe appears always to have fulfilled the character of a pure and pious pastor. Kind and friendly to his neighbours of every class and condition, his active benevolence has ever induced him to benefit, with his advice in worldly affairs, those over whose more important, because eternal concerns, he is appointed to be director; and he encourages and enforces, by his example, the mild and just principles which he inculcates in his precepts; — allures to brighter worlds, and leads the way.*

In this tranquil course of life, attending to the care of his flock, and to the instruction of his numerous family, Mr Crabbe long concealed himself from the gaze of the world (with the solitary exception of having published a poem, called the *«Newspaper»*, in 1785) until the year 1807; when, after an absence of about twenty years, he at length produced a collection of *«Poems.»* — *«Lau-*

¹ The name is Hebrew, and signifies literally *belonging to God*; an obvious allusion to his being brought into the world through the obstetrical agency of a minister of God.

dari a laudato viro has ever been deemed a stamp of merit; and, such has been the invariable proof of Mr Crabbe's excellence as a Poet, that, he has ever been distinguished by the discerning few, as he will always be admired by the reading public.

The *«Poems»* were honoured with a perusal in manuscript by the present Lord Holland, and his late illustrious uncle; and may naturally be supposed to have derived considerable advantage from their critical acumen.

In addition to their intrinsic merit, they will be deemed, by kindred minds, to possess an additional value, when it is considered that they tended to cheer the death-bed of the highly-gifted Charles Fox. This collection has passed through several editions.

Three years afterwards (1810) he produced the Poem of the *«Borough»*; the scene of which is his native place: in 1812 he published his *Tales*; and, in the year 1819, his last work (we hope, however, it will not be the last lay of the minstrel) appeared under the name of *«Tales of the Hall.»*¹

The only performance, in prose, known to be from the pen of the subject of this sketch, is a communication of *«The Natural History of the Vale of Belvoir»*, written in the year 1790, incorporated by Mr Nicholls in his History of Leicestershire.

It is not our intention to enter into an elaborate criticism of Mr Crabbe's qualities as a poet. We shall content ourselves with observing merely — that the characteristics of his style are, originality of thought, force, precision, truth, depth, and pathos of description; clothed frequently in the happy diction and polished versification which we so much admire in Goldsmith.

It must not, however, be supposed, from this remark, that Mr Crabbe is a copyist of any former author. He is a bard *sui generis*; he has formed himself upon no model, and is consequently unlike other writers. He is a poet who examines man as he is; there is, therefore, no *illusion* in his poetry.

He is, in fact, the *Portrait-Painter* of humble life—in all its variety and detail. His portraits are exact likenesses; and are equally to be praised for the correctness of the outline, and the propriety of the colouring. His descriptions are, not like those of Thomson, of imaginary, but of *real* nature. The delineations of his rustics are, consequently, different from those which we meet with in the *Georgics* of Virgil, or the *Idylls* of Gesner: but they are such as *may be seen every day in the country*. He sees with

¹ These Tales are all founded on facts.

a keen, correct, and perhaps too microscopic an eye, and all his scenes of common life are portrayed with minuteness, but with a fidelity true to nature. He is naturally and deservedly a popular poet; since all his delineations come home closely to the « business and bosoms of men.» He is certainly one of the most original, and pathetic poets that England has, in modern times, produced; and is a bright star in that splendid constellation of British genius that has illumined and adorned the present age.

We subjoin the following curious *confession* made by Mr Crabbe (in a very different spirit, we believe, from those of Rousseau) to a gentleman from whom we received it—that « if at that

moment, or any other, he should be offered a large sum of money to repeat any two lines of any poem he had ever written,—he would not be able to do it.» The avowal itself is curious, and is a striking instance of the simplicity and modesty of mind for which, we believe, our poet is remarkable. We sincerely hope that this extraordinary *untenciousness* of memory does not arise from any organic defect; and we shrewdly suspect that of Mr Crabbe it may with truth be said—

To him the wits of Greece and Rome are known,
And ev'ry author's merit—but *his own*.

C. T.