

Thomas Gray (1716 - 1771)

"The curfew tolls the knell of parting day;
The lowing herd wind slowly o'er the sea,
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 romantic poetry. It should be read entire, as a perfect model of its kind. 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 followed 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

then 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 can not 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 trouble some 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.

The end: //

Munir Bhushan Sinha
Deptt. of English
S.S. College, Jhansi