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## The Social and Economic Background of Goldsmith's Deserted Village

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by James R. Gray entitled "The Social and Economic Background of Goldsmith's Deserted Village." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Dr. Albert Lyles, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Dr. Kenneth Curry, Dr. Eric Stockton

Accepted for the Council:

Carolyn R. Hodges

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

March 11, 1961

To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by James R. Gray entitled "The Social and Economic Background of Goldsmith's Deserted Village." I recommend that it be accepted for nine quarter hours of credit in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Robert M. Tyler  
Major Professor

We have read this thesis  
and recommend its acceptance;

Kenneth Curry  
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Accepted for the Council:

H. E. Siver  
Acting Dean of the Graduate School

THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF  
GOLDSMITH'S DESERTED VILLAGE

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A Thesis  
Presented to  
The Graduate Council of  
The University of Tennessee

---

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Arts

---

by  
James R. Gray  
March 1961



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James R. Gray

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

On May 26, 1770, Oliver Goldsmith's Deserted Village was published.<sup>1</sup> This poem, which has been subjected to repeated attacks by those who claim that it contains more sentimentality than sense, is Goldsmith's best known, most often quoted, and most highly regarded work. Even when the poem is considered alongside such other familiar Goldsmith works as The Traveller (1764),<sup>2</sup> The Vicar of Wakefield (1766), and She Stoops to Conquer (1773), it remains the single achievement that did more to enhance Goldsmith's reputation than all his other works combined. The poem's central argument is that the accumulation of wealth in England's middle and noble classes has caused the depopulation and impending destruction of English villages. Goldsmith claimed that The Deserted Village is a factual account of the eviction, pauperization, debasement, and dishonor that accompanied depopulation.

Goldsmith's dedication of the poem to Sir Joshua Reynolds anticipated much of the controversy that would arise upon

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Cunningham, ed., The Works of Oliver Goldsmith (London, 1854), I, 36. See also James Prior, Ed., The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith (Philadelphia, 1875), IV, 57-60. Prior cites several examples from the favorable critical reception of the poem.

<sup>2</sup>It is generally acknowledged that The Traveller, while lacking the universality and timelessness of The Deserted Village, ably foretold the genius found in Goldsmith's later work.

publication. He had described before in various works and at various times the opinions and feelings expressed in The Deserted Village. But never before had he presented them with the force and eloquence of his tribute to Sweet Auburn. This poem represents the summation and strongest expression of his long displeasure at the speed with which English villagers were being destroyed. He was determined that his disapproval would receive lasting expression in a single work. Inviting the criticism of economists, politicians, and friends, Goldsmith wrote to Reynolds:

I know you will object (and indeed several of our best and wisest friends concur in the opinion), that the depopulation it deploras is no where to be seen, and the disorders it laments are only to be found in the poet's own imagination. To this I can scarce make any other answer than that I sincerely believe what I have written; that I have taken all possible pains, in my country excursions, for these four or five years past, to be certain of what I allege, and that all my views and enquiries have led me to believe those miseries real, which I here attempt to display.

Thus he cites depopulation and social disorders as the evils he will deplore. But the poem contains, he says, more than the mere display of village disorders. The dedication continues:

In regretting the depopulation of the country, I inveigh against the increase of our luxuries; and here also I expect the shout of modern politicians against me. For twenty or thirty years past, it has been the fashion to consider luxury as one of the greatest national advantages; and all the wisdom of antiquity in that particular, as erroneous. Still, however, I

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<sup>3</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, The Poetical Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Austin Dobson (London, 1927), pp. 21-22. The text of "The Deserted Village" is found on pages 23-37.

must remain a professed ancient on that head, and continue to think those luxuries prejudicial to states, by which so many vices are introduced, and so many kingdoms have been undone.<sup>4</sup>

Perhaps to Goldsmith's surprise, the shout of politicians was not immediately raised against him when The Deserted Village was published. The poem was an instant success; six editions appeared before the end of 1770. The critics and public were enthusiastic. Several reviewers objected to his theories about depopulation and luxury, but they did not allow their objections to dim their praise. Numerous readers, in letters to journals and periodicals, urged Goldsmith to reconsider his intention, announced in The Deserted Village (ll. 416-417), to abandon poetry.<sup>5</sup>

The question to be resolved by this thesis is whether Goldsmith had sufficient cause to claim that depopulation and village destruction were national evils and, moreover, to attribute the country's evils to an increase in luxuries. In resolving the question, the thesis will test Goldsmith's accusations and his evidence against the evidence of eighteenth-century England's social and economic background. The thesis will prove that Goldsmith's single destroyed village inadequately symbolizes the reorganization of English society underway in 1770.

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>5</sup>Ralph M. Wardle, Oliver Goldsmith (Lawrence, Kansas, 1957), pp. 204-205.

The poem's dedication contains the only explanation Goldsmith ever made of the extensiveness of his efforts to prove his claims. How widespread were his attempts to gather information has never been made clear. His other writings do not state what inquiries he made, nor do they reveal the "pains" he exercised to authenticate his facts. His few letters contain virtually no references to country excursions.<sup>6</sup> Ralph Wardle, his latest biographer, bypasses the problem of supporting these alleged inquiries. In the years immediately preceding publication of the poem, Wardle says, Goldsmith did make numerous trips out of London;<sup>7</sup> usually, however, he went to the country for dinner with friends and returned the same evening. In the summer of 1768 Goldsmith rented a cottage eight miles from the city.<sup>8</sup> Living there with his friend Edward Bott, he devoted most of his time to merriment but did work fitfully on the Roman history he was compiling. He spent the summer of 1771, just after The Deserted Village was published, in the cottage of a farmer named Selby six miles from London.<sup>9</sup> While there he worked on his history of England.

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<sup>6</sup>Katharine C. Balderston edited the standard edition of Goldsmith's letters, The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith (Cambridge, 1928). Though Goldsmith was a prolific writer, his personal correspondence was not extensive. The small volume of collected letters indicates also that few of the letters he did write have been preserved.

<sup>7</sup>Wardle, p. 187.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 188.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 216.

Aside from these supporting references, there are simply no facts in Goldsmith's biography to affirm his statement that he had taken "all possible pains" to be certain of what he alleged.

In addition to the description of depopulation and destruction in a single village and of the pernicious effects of luxury on English society, The Deserted Village predicts the collapse of one of Europe's strongest nations (ll. 285-286). It acquires political overtones with an appeal to statesmen to correct abuses (ll. 265-268). It describes America in terms incomprehensible to twentieth-century residents (ll. 341-358). It contains passages that are unquestionably autobiographical (ll. 83-84 and 411-414). And in two of the best-known passages in literature, it characterizes the village preacher (ll. 141-192) and the village teacher (ll. 195-216) so well that they have become legendary figures.

Structurally, The Deserted Village can be divided into ten sections, each containing significant points in Goldsmith's over-all attack on luxuries and village destruction. In order to single out some of Goldsmith's most important arguments, it is helpful to summarize the chief points in each of the ten sections.

Section I (ll. 1-34) introduces the reader to the Auburn that has become a deserted village. The speaker, presumably Goldsmith,<sup>10</sup> describes the small groups of buildings, plots of

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<sup>10</sup>For a different opinion, see Earl Miner, "The Making of The Deserted Village," Huntington Library Quarterly, XXII

land, brooks and trees as he remembers them from his childhood. The general description shifts from the physical appearance of the village to activity on the village green during a holiday. This section, incidentally, provides the principal argument of those scholars who adhere to the Auburn-Lisoy theory. In attempting to identify Auburn, they have developed the theory that Auburn is the small Irish village of Lisoy, where Goldsmith was reared. Chapter III of this thesis will discuss the Auburn-Lisoy theory, rejecting the notion that Auburn could be an Irish village.

Section II (ll. 35-50) describes the deserted Auburn that the speaker views. The once-beautiful village is marred by desolation-- the choked brook, the wall overgrown with grass, and the ruined bowers. Significantly, this section first mentions (l. 50) that the villagers have emigrated. It also contains Goldsmith's favorite charge that the villagers are forced to emigrate because a single owner "grasps the whole domain" (l.39) for his own selfish use.

The familiar central idea of The Deserted Village is found in Section III (ll. 51-74). Goldsmith succinctly states his argument in the lines:

Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay;  
. . . . .

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(February 1959), 136. Miner believes that Goldsmith disassociated himself from the speaker of the poem and substituted a fictional character as the observer of deserted Auburn to provide "particularity and detachment."



. . . a bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
 When once destroyed can never be supplied.  
 (ll. 51-52 and 55-56)

Section III, one of the poem's most important, contains not only the central idea but also a significant contrast between the traditional communal organization of English society that has been swept away and the pleasure-seeking, self-centered society that has replaced it. The speaker laments the destruction of simple, harmless village pleasures and suggests again that the villagers have left England to seek a kinder shore (l. 73).

Section IV (ll. 75-136) expresses the poet's long-held desire to retire to the village someday. In this section a touch of vanity, somewhat restrained by a reverential tone, appears when the poet states that he had wanted to display in retirement his "book-learned skill" (l. 90) and to "tell of all I felt, and all I saw" (l. 92). He speaks movingly of closing out his life in "unperceived decay" (l. 109) in a quiet place where "Heaven commences ere the world be past" (l. 112). The evening sounds coming from the Auburn he remembers are directly associated with the village to which he had hoped to retire. The section concludes with the pathetic description of the old woman, the last inhabitant of deserted Auburn, silently picking the cross from the brook (ll. 129-136).

The next three sections are probably the most familiar in the entire poem. Section V (ll. 137-192) characterizes the village preacher and painstakingly lists his daily duties. The

characterization of the village teacher (Section VI, ll. 193-216) is marked with the same attention to detail found in Section V, but differs from it in the gently satiric tone Goldsmith used to describe the teacher and the awed villagers. Section VII (ll. 217-250) recalls the pleasures of the village alehouse, where the villagers gathered in the evening to rest from a busy day.

The memory of the happiness of rustic life causes the speaker again to voice bitterly his principal objection-- that the vain, superficial joys of the wealthy landowners have displaced the simple, unsophisticated pleasures of the villagers. His objection constitutes a portion of Section VIII (ll. 251-302). The section also contains his appeal to statesmen to put an end to the abuses, to recognize that the country's new wealth is unreliable, and to stop the trade that allows "needful product" (l. 283) to be exchanged for all the world's luxuries. With an epic simile he compares England to a fair female who scorned the gloss of artificial beauty while nature made her beautiful, but who, now that natural charms have fled, "shines forth . . . in the glaring impotence of dress" (ll. 293-294). Three times in the section the speaker protests the eviction of the villagers (l. 276, l. 282, and ll. 299-300). The injustices viewed in all quarters cause him to predict the collapse of the country (ll. 285-286).

Section IX (ll. 303-384) faces squarely the issue of emigration. The speaker has already concluded that the village

is depopulated; the only person remaining is the pitiful old woman found in Section IV. Even the use of the village commons has been denied the villagers (l. 308), and this final insult leaves them no choice but to emigrate. Perhaps they have fled to the city, the poet suggests. But he promptly rejects the notion when he realizes that there the poor villagers would constantly view pleasures and riches they could not share while they ignominiously beg for bread. The idea of his proud villagers begging is repugnant to him, and the poet insists that they have fled the country, "to distant climes . . . where half the convex world intrudes between" (ll. 341-342). Their new home is in America, which the speaker describes as a land filled with "matted woods" (l. 349), "silent bats" (l. 350), "poisonous fields" (l. 351), "vengeful snakes" (l. 354), and "crouching tigers" (l. 355). The section concludes with a description that appeared often in Goldsmith's works. The poet tells of the sorrowful departure of a family-- mother, father, and daughter-- from their humble cottage to the ship that will carry them to the new world.<sup>11</sup>

The pathos of the family's desperate situation directs the speaker again to the evils he abhors. The concluding Section X (ll. 385-430) assails the luxuries that England has exchanged for her villagers. In the strongest outburst of the

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 137. Miner regards this familiar tableau as a device to unify the elements of the poem and to provide the climax.

poem, the speaker compares England to a kingdom grown great with the insidious joys of luxury, "A bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe" (l. 392). He states that the destruction of the country is already half-completed. Regretfully, he announces that with the emigrating villagers, the splendid rural virtues are leaving the land. Toil, Care, Tenderness, Piety, Loyalty, and Love move sadly down to the ships and "pass from the shore" (l. 402). And most important to Goldsmith's readers, the speaker states that he must quit poetry because it is too noble to serve the degenerate times. But he urges poetry to continue from distant places "to aid slighted truth with thy persuasive strain" (l. 423). Poetry is thus challenged to accomplish precisely what Goldsmith has tried to do in The Deserted Village:

Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain;  
Teach him, that states of native strength possessed,  
Though very poor, may still be very blessed.  
(ll. 424-426)

Johnson wrote the four concluding lines of the poem.<sup>12</sup> The two terminating lines seem incongruous with the rest of the poem. Speaking of the peasant class, Johnson writes:

While self-dependent power can time defy,  
As rocks resist the billows and the sky.  
(ll. 429-430)

This couplet suggests that the peasantry is capable, through its own strength, of resisting indefinitely the destructive forces. Goldsmith, in 426 lines, had argued that the poor

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<sup>12</sup> James Boswell, Boswell's Life of Johnson, ed. George B. Hill, revised and enlarged by L. F. Powell (Oxford, 1934), II, 7.

villagers were powerless to resist the forces destroying them.<sup>13</sup>

Thirteen years after the publication of The Deserted Village, Johnson was asked to contribute to another poem about village life. Obliginglly, Johnson read "The Village" by the Reverend George Crabbe, pronounced it "original, vigorous, and elegant," and added complimentarily as he contributed his lines, "I do not doubt of Mr. Crabbe's success."<sup>14</sup> Readers can only speculate as to why Johnson contributed to such fundamentally different poems as Goldsmith's Deserted Village and Crabbe's "Village." Boswell said that Johnson wrote for Crabbe because the sentiments in "The Village" regarding the false notion of ease and contentment of rustic life were quite congenial with his own thinking.<sup>15</sup> He was not sympathetic with Goldsmith's argument that the increase in luxuries had caused the destruction of the villagers. During one of his frequent conversations with Goldsmith concerning the evil effects of luxury,

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<sup>13</sup>This interpretation of Johnson's closing lines differs considerably from the customary analysis, which views them as a generalization supporting Goldsmith's argument that England is weakened because of her new reliance on trade and commercialism. I maintain, however, that Johnson's reference to "self-dependent power" is synonymous with Goldsmith's "bold peasantry" and "lowly train." The import of Johnson's total reference does not sustain that of the rest of the poem.

<sup>14</sup>Quoted from The Poetical Works of the Reverend George Crabbe, ed. George Crabbe (London, 1834), I, 118-119.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

Johnson vigorously insisted that too few people feel the effects of luxury for it to have extended influence.<sup>16</sup>

Crabbe's poem attacks pastoral poetry,<sup>17</sup> singling out for special disparagement the basic hypocrisy of its claims that life in the villages could hardly be improved.<sup>18</sup> He sharply rebukes poets who suggest that rustic awains in their humble cottages and well-tended fields are in some mysterious fashion guaranteed a happy life. These poets, he says, fail to acknowledge that village conditions are seldom comfortable, never blissful; that villagers are thoroughly familiar with hardships and deprivations of the worst kind.

Crabbe's own village is remarkably unlike Goldsmith's idyllic Auburn. The villagers whom Crabbe remembers are a miserable group. They labor pitifully under a scorching sun, trying to eke out the barest sustenance from the sterile land. Struggling against the sin of despair, they are overcome by "weakness, weariness, and shame" (I, 157). Their traits-- "bold, artful, surly, savage" (I, 112)-- are irreconcilable with the gentle virtues that Goldsmith found in Auburn.

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<sup>16</sup>Wardle, p. 247.

<sup>17</sup>Miner, p. 140, places The Deserted Village in the pastoral tradition. Goldsmith has produced what Miner terms a "quasi-pastoral elegy" by redefining the pastoral image. To achieve this effect, Goldsmith mingled a realistic view of rural England with the traditional pastoral image.

<sup>18</sup>The text of "The Village" is found in The Poetical Works of the Reverend George Crabbe, II, 73-99.

In a few respects, Crabbe and Goldsmith agree in their argument, particularly with regard to the inequities between large landowners and peasants. The following lines from "The Village" remind one of Goldsmith's remark that the villager who goes to the city can never enjoy the luxuries that "the sons of pleasure know" (The Deserted Village, l. 313), but will always "see profusion that he must not share" (l. 310):

When Plenty smiles-- alas! she smiles for few--  
And those who taste not, yet behold her store,  
Are as slaves that dig the golden ore--  
The wealth around them makes them doubly poor.  
(I, 136-139)

Crabbe's reprimand of the rich landlords for their "excesses" (I, 153) is reminiscent of Goldsmith's indictment of them for expropriating the villagers' land and most needed products.

In most of their descriptions, however, Crabbe and Goldsmith are worlds apart. Crabbe depicts the normal daily life as a ceaseless struggle against the scarcity of food, the dangers of poor health, the rigors of strenuous work, and the lack of even the simplest comforts. He describes the smugglers who inhabit the village, bringing violence, lawlessness, and avarice to all the villagers. He tells of the ruinous effects of frequent high tides on cottages and land. He vividly pictures the wretched interior of the village poor house-- a place Goldsmith never mentioned. Goldsmith's delineation of gracious retirement to Auburn contrasts sharply with the prospect Crabbe promises to his aging residents. The pitiful soliloquy of Crabbe's old gentleman begins:

Why do I live when I desire to be  
 At once from life and life's long labour free?  
 (I, 206-207)

Crabbe's characterization of the village priest offers the principal evidence that he was specifically repudiating Goldsmith's idealism when he composed "The Village." The parish priest enters the poem when he is summoned by a dying poor house occupant, who wishes only to have the priest prove "his title certain to the joys above" (I, 301). The priest is thus characterized:

And doth not he, the pious man, appear,  
 He, "passing rich of forty pounds a year?"  
 Ah! no; a shepherd of a different stock,  
 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.  
 (I, 302-307)

By arguing that evils which must not be concealed exist in both the rich and the poor, Crabbe concludes "The Village" with a defense for describing the low, unhappy life of English villagers. The kindred vices, he claims, can be found in the entire "erring race" (II, 98). His sympathy for the villagers' difficult life does not become an excuse for overlooking the wickedness within their ranks.

Goldsmith's idyllic Auburn and Crabbe's wretched coastal village could not both have been swept away by the enormous changes in eighteenth-century England. The fundamentally different descriptions signify that either or both poems are erroneous representations of the villages that received the impact of the enclosure movement and industrial revolution. The



following chapters will examine significant aspects of these and other eighteenth-century social and economic mutations, establishing patterns of development that will disprove the existence both of Goldsmith's idealistic Auburn and his depopulated village and of Crabbe's relentlessly distressed village. Goldsmith's poem continues to receive attention from general readers and scholars, while Crabbe's lies in obscurity in eighteenth-century textbooks. The unrepresentative claims of The Deserted Village, therefore, will be studied.

## CHAPTER II

### THE BACKGROUND OF GOLDSMITH'S VIEWS AND THE CRITICAL REACTION TO THEM

Earl Miner has remarked that Goldsmith spent years polishing the images he later used in The Deserted Village to attack England's social and economic policies.<sup>1</sup> The images that were being developed for ultimate expression in The Deserted Village reveal much of the background of Goldsmith's thinking. The poem can be more readily seen as his final expression of disapproval if this background is studied.

Throughout the eleven years beginning in 1759, with his essays in The Bee, and ending with his forceful assertions in The Deserted Village, he included significant remarks, some contradictory, about luxury in many of his works. It was not, however, simply the increase of luxuries to which he objected. The luxuries were merely a manifestation of the social and economic climate which he strongly disliked.

This chapter will analyze various materials which help to bring The Deserted Village into focus. First, it will examine the inconsistency between what Goldsmith wrote about luxury and his pursuit of it. Second, it will trace the development of his ideas on luxury as they appeared in various works. Third, it will analyze the reactions of Goldsmith's biographers and

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<sup>1</sup>Miner, p. 131.

critics to the ideas that were expressed in The Deserted Village. Fourth, it will summarize a few of the confusing, often erroneous, accounts of the poem that appear in textbooks, which have helped to disseminate general misunderstanding about The Deserted Village. To consider properly the poem in the light of its social and economic background, the mass of contradictions encompassing Goldsmith's views on luxury must first be studied.

#### GOLDSMITH'S PERSONAL LIFE

Only in the works of a writer whose personality was as eccentric as Goldsmith's is one likely to find as many varied opinions, often within the same publication, regarding the true merits of wealth, luxuries, and opulence. His personal life was filled with similar discrepancies. Goldsmith's love of rich clothes, comfortable lodgings, sumptuous dinners-- of all the material things which he would have considered luxuries-- shows the inconsistency between what he wrote and how he lived. His admiration of the villagers who subsisted on the bare necessities cannot be accorded to himself. Dobson tells the revealing story of how Goldsmith, heavily in debt in 1768, spent four hundred of the five hundred pounds he received for The Good Natured Man to lease large quarters in the Middle Temple, his old room in King's Bench Walks having become too unimposing for a man of his distinction. He promptly furnished his new apartment with elaborate and expensive draperies, carpets, and other furnishings.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Austin Dobson, Life of Oliver Goldsmith (London, 1888), p. 137.

Another story tells of how Johnson refused on one occasion to eat a large second course of a lavish dinner that Goldsmith served to friends in his apartment. Johnson was appalled that Goldsmith, in financial distress as usual, should waste money on a banquet such as that.<sup>3</sup> These incidents were not exceptional; his biography is filled with accounts of his efforts to live like his richest friends even when his creditors were hounding him. Goldsmith surrounded himself with all the luxuries he could accumulate while he praised the poor for their frugality and inveighed against luxury. Wardle sympathetically suggests that Goldsmith displayed this inconsistency not because he disbelieved what he wrote about luxury and wealth but because his expensive clothes and lavishly furnished apartment helped to conceal his sense of inferiority. If Wardle is correct, one might also conclude that Goldsmith's sympathy for English villagers originated in his sense of inferiority.

#### GOLDSMITH'S PUBLISHED OPINIONS ABOUT LUXURY

Goldsmith's first published opinion on luxury appeared in The Bee on November 3, 1759. His essay closely identified luxuries with imports and distinguished between permissible and forbidden luxuries. "The true interest of every government," he wrote, "is to cultivate the necessaries, by which is always

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<sup>3</sup>Wardle, p. 267.

meant, every happiness our own country can produce; and suppress all the luxuries, by which is meant . . . every happiness imported from abroad."<sup>4</sup> In his definition, luxury seems to equal imported happiness. English-produced happiness is a necessity and therefore permissible; imported happiness is evil and therefore suppressed. But he urged moderate use of even English-produced happiness and blamed both the rich and the poor for having too much "taste for vain pleasures and foolish expense."<sup>5</sup> He called their excessive taste "madness."<sup>6</sup>

It is interesting to note that Goldsmith's association of luxuries with imports never changed from the time he first related them in The Bee through his final comments on them in The Deserted Village. In 1770 he still regarded luxuries as items from abroad for which "needful products" were exchanged. He did, however, eventually abandon his association, reflected in The Bee, of the poor with luxuries. No villager in Auburn was ever guilty of having a taste for "vain pleasures."

Goldsmith's next published opinion on the subject, a strong defense of luxury, appeared in Letter XI of The Citizen of the World, only a year after his statements in The Bee. As

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<sup>4</sup>Oliver Goldsmith, The Citizen of the World and The Bee, ed. Austin Dobson (London, 1934), p. 385.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 381.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

his central figure and personal spokesman in The Citizen of the World, Goldsmith contrived the imaginary Lien Chi Altangi, a Chinese from Honan, who ostensibly was visiting in London and writing accounts of the city and the English to a friend in China. To his friend, Lien writes:

The greater the luxuries of every country, the more closely, politically speaking, is that country united. Luxury is the child of society alone, the luxurious man stands in need of a thousand different artists to furnish out his happiness; it is more likely, therefore, that he should be a good citizen who is connected by motives of self interest with so many, than the abstemious man who is united to none. . . .

In whatever light we regard [luxury], we shall have reason to stand up in its defense.

In direct opposition to the description of England in The Deserted Village as a "bloated mass of rank unwieldy woe," Lien further states that "any country remarkable for opulence and wisdom . . . would never have been wise had they not first been luxurious."<sup>8</sup> Never again did Goldsmith praise luxury with the same fervor displayed in Lien's Letter XI.

To explain the inconsistency of opinion apparent as early as Goldsmith's first two published statements about luxury, aside from the change in speakers, we can surmise that the comfortable situation in which he found himself in 1760 contributed to his glowing defense. He was a regular employee of John

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

Newbery, one of London's better-known publishers, and for the first time in his life was enjoying the advantages of a regular, though modest, income. He had recently met Dr. Johnson and Smollett, and had been commissioned by the Dodsleys to write his essay "An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe." He was, no doubt, beginning to envision himself a literary lion, permanently capable of providing himself with a few luxuries.

In Letter XXV of The Citizen of the World, written only a few weeks after Letter XI, Lien discloses an already changing attitude from his earlier defense of luxury. His cautious attack tempers his ultimate claim that the mere presence of luxuries will ruin a nation. Letter XXV, a description of the "rise and declension" of the kingdom of Lao, alleges that the country became rich, filled with luxuries, and ambitious for more.<sup>9</sup> Not prepared to condemn luxuries absolutely, Lien conceded that Lao fell "by indulging ambition."<sup>10</sup> Without firmly establishing his position, he suggests that an unspecified number of luxuries in Lao would have been acceptable but that unbridled ambition to augment them was fatal. And in this letter we find for the first time a simile Goldsmith later used in The Deserted Village to describe England. Lao resembled, Lien said, "one of those bodies bloated with disease, whose bulk is only a symptom of its

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 64-65.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

wretchedness."<sup>11</sup> Then came the theme which Goldsmith was to expound again and again before he gave it its most powerful and enduring form ten years later in The Deserter Village. The rulers of Lao should have known, he wrote, that "extending empire is often diminishing power, that countries are ever strongest which are internally powerful; that colonies by draining away the brave and enterprising, leave the country in the hands of the timid, and the avaricious . . . ; that too much commerce may injure a nation as well as too little; and that there is a wide difference between a conquering and a flourishing empire."<sup>12</sup> We are reminded of his references in The Deserter Village to a "bold peasantry, their country's pride" (l. 55), and of "how wide the limits stand/ Between a splendid and a happy land" (ll. 267-268).

By 1762, when Goldsmith wrote Letter LXXII, his conviction was fixed that "an equal diffusion of riches through any country ever constitutes its happiness. . . . How impolitic therefore are those laws which promote the accumulation of wealth among the rich, more impolitic still in attempting to increase the depression on poverty."<sup>13</sup> Goldsmith temporarily abandoned direct attacks on luxury. But Letter LXXII

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 203.



introduced Goldsmith's dual-purpose plan that enabled him to attack luxuries by implication, and more important, to deplore what he now recognized as the broader problem, the accumulation of wealth.

Also in 1762, Goldsmith's essay "The Revolution in Low Life" adopted as its theme the evil effects of the accumulation of wealth. This essay describes an eviction which Goldsmith claims to have witnessed, a situation with an exact parallel in The Deserted Village. Both the essay and the poem describe the modest matron who reluctantly says goodbye to her humble cottage, the lovely daughter who tearfully leaves her fiancé, and the brave father who manfully conceals his sadness. Like the poem, the essay singles out the increase of foreign commerce and the resulting increase of wealth for the privileged classes as the cause of the destruction of village life. Goldsmith observes in the essay that riches are not equitably distributed in an economy which depends on foreign trade, since "foreign commerce, as it can be managed only by a few, tends proportionately to enrich only a few."<sup>14</sup> He feels that a part of a country's population can become enormously wealthy only at the expense of the poor. The essay concludes with a prediction of utter ruin for England just as Italy was ruined when wealth became unbalanced and the peasantry were driven from their homes.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Oliver Goldsmith, New Essays by Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Ronald S. Crane (Chicago, 1927), p. 121.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-124.

Even so inoffensive a work as The Vicar of Wakefield, written in 1762, was not free of passages protesting injustices in the distribution of wealth. Again Goldsmith berates the accumulation of wealth that results from external commerce instead of internal industry. His argument is not so much that wealth should be equally distributed as that the poor have no way of increasing their income even slightly when the nation begins to increase its wealth by imports. The nearest the novel comes to advocating equal distribution is the statement that the rich gain the advantages of commerce and have "at the same time all the emoluments arising from internal industry; so that the rich, with us, have two sources of wealth, whereas the poor have but one."<sup>16</sup> Defending the monarchy with his accustomed vigor, Goldsmith asserts that it is the only form of government that can prevent matters getting worse.<sup>17</sup>

The Traveller, published in 1764, again voices Goldsmith's antipathy toward commerce and luxury and their concomitant evils, depopulation and emigration. The section of The Traveller (ll. 393-412) that deals with depopulation and village destruction contains much the same message as The Deserted Village: England's noblest sons are being exchanged for useless ore imported

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<sup>16</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, The Plays of Oliver Goldsmith Together with The Vicar of Wakefield, ed. C. E. Doble (London, 1928), p. 301.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

from abroad; and while the country glitters brightly from superficial wealth, her historic villages are destroyed and their residents impelled "to traverse climes beyond the western main."<sup>18</sup> We even have the same characters-- the modest matron, the blushing maid, and the "sire decayed"-- who are found frequently in Goldsmith's social protests. Luxuries are blamed less in The Traveller than in The Deserted Village for England's troubles. In the latter poem, luxuries appear as the chief villain; in The Traveller, they are the by-product of ambition. And ambition which demands increasing numbers of luxuries weakens men's moral strength, causes economic chaos, and brings about the downfall of countries. This opinion is virtually identical to Goldsmith's earlier pronouncement in Letter XXV of The Citizen of the World which declared that ambition for luxury is the greatest evil. It is related also to the plan introduced in Letter LXXII which denounced the accumulation of wealth directly and luxuries circuitously.

The foregoing examples of Goldsmith's opinions, from several of his works, make apparent the methodical development of his thinking over a period of years: the germ of an idea here; its recurrence there; a shift of emphasis elsewhere. His concern for the effect of economic policies on England's social condition became one of his major themes. For a brief period, he considered luxuries a great national advantage; they unite

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<sup>18</sup> Oliver Goldsmith, "The Traveller," The Poetical Works of Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Austin Dobson, pp. 5-19. The quotation is from line 410, p. 18.

a country politically, he said, give it wisdom, and provide employment. Not for long, however, did he remain so favorably disposed to them. His thinking about the problem slowly developed into a kind of equation in which luxury equaled imports and foreign commerce, which in turn equaled the accumulation of wealth among the rich. To his equation, ambition acted as a common denominator. He could at will separate from the equation any one of the factors and use it to prove that inequitable distribution of wealth was destroying England. But he waited eleven years after his first cautious expression in 1759 to voice in The Deserted Village his bitterest protest:

O luxury! thou cursed by Heaven's decree,  
How ill exchanged are things like these for thee!  
(ll. 385-386)

As a loyal Tory, Goldsmith's ideas about the effects of luxury and other economic matters were not inconsistent with eighteenth-century thinking.<sup>19</sup> The Tories firmly believed their aristocratic, republican way of life to represent the best of all possible worlds. It was a world in which culture, class distinctions, gentlemanly virtues, and traditions were fundamental. Miner remarks that it was also a world which easily produced a dual attitude toward luxury: on the one hand, luxury was a presupposed condition of aristocratic society; on the other, it was inimical to the make-up of rural England.<sup>20</sup> The Tories axiomatically resisted change,

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<sup>19</sup>Miner, pp. 129-130.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 129.

particularly that which threatened to disrupt the entire system. Goldsmith, Johnson, Burke, and their fellow Tories therefore instinctively resisted the encroaching commercialism and all its attendant evils.

Of all the eighteenth-century opinions for and against luxuries, none was more controversial or influential than the strong defense found in Mandeville's Fable of the Bees.<sup>21</sup> Goldsmith could hardly have failed to be aware of and to resent Mandeville's emphatic definition of luxury as "every thing . . . that is not immediately necessary to make Man subsist as he is a living Creature. . . ." <sup>22</sup> Mandeville directly related the welfare of individuals to the extent of their nation's participation in the search for material comforts.<sup>23</sup> He dissented to the argument that luxury enervates a nation, one of Goldsmith's favorite charges. Recognizing no evil effects of luxury, Mandeville wrote: "What is laid to the charge of Luxury besides, is, that it increases Avarice and Rapine. . . . These are indeed terrible Things; but what is put to the account of Luxury belongs to Male [sic] Administration, and is the Fault of bad Politicks."<sup>24</sup> Because Johnson readily admitted

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<sup>21</sup>F. B. Kaye, ed., The Fable of the Bees (Oxford, 1924), I, cxxxvi.

<sup>22</sup>Mandeville, I, 107.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 115.

Mandeville's influence on his thinking about luxury,<sup>25</sup> The Fable of the Bees proved doubly disconcerting to Goldsmith.

#### CRITICS' REACTIONS TO CERTAIN IDEAS OF THE POEM

Goldsmith's critics have had a good deal to say about his analyses of England's social and economic problems, particularly the one found in The Deserted Village. Most of them are sympathetic to Goldsmith's goal of saving English villages but feel that he carried his poetic magnification of events further than his evidence properly allowed.

William Black, a Goldsmith biographer, especially objects to Goldsmith's description of England's depopulation. Black does not deny that some evictions occurred; he cites a contemporary example of persons being driven from their land "within the last twenty years" (circa 1880) when a wealthy gentleman expanded his estate.<sup>26</sup> But similar instances are rare, Black claims, because an area "naturally discharges its surplus population as families increase."<sup>27</sup> And even if Goldsmith had witnessed one or two evictions, Black argues that solitary examples are not enough to justify ascribing the evil

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<sup>25</sup>Kaye, I, cxix.

<sup>26</sup>William Black, Goldsmith, English Men of Letters Series, ed. John Morley (London, 1900), p. 127.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

to the entire country. He concludes that it was "poetical exigency rather than political economy" that decreed the destruction of Auburn.<sup>28</sup>

Like Black, Professor Dobson rejects Goldsmith's views about depopulation and suggests that Goldsmith himself doubted that the problem was as widespread as he intimated. "In such anxiety to show cause," Dobson says, "there is an accent of doubt."<sup>29</sup> Dobson finds further reason to doubt Goldsmith's charges in the fact that none of his biographers has produced supporting evidence. The only factual basis for the poem that Dobson accepts is the Napier incident. According to this oft-repeated story, Goldsmith witnessed in Ireland an eviction similar to the one he described in The Deserted Village. Dobson agrees with most critics, however, that one such incident is hardly enough to provoke the pervasive bitterness of the poem.

Professor Wardle, Goldsmith's latest biographer, dismisses as "relatively unimportant" whether enclosure laws or the creation of country estates caused the depopulation Goldsmith deplored.<sup>30</sup> More important than the social or economic background of the poem is Goldsmith's enduring expression of his opposition to forces that caused "personal tragedy and

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Dobson, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 150.

<sup>30</sup>Wardle, p. 202.

weakened the fiber of the nation."<sup>31</sup> Wardle remarks that Johnson and most reviewers questioned the validity of Goldsmith's theories regarding depopulation but that "none of them denied the beauty and power of his verse."<sup>32</sup> Wardle neither accepts nor rejects Goldsmith's economic theories. Instead he discusses the "virtual universality" that the poem has achieved. It does so, Wardle says, by appealing to both the emotions and the eyes; "it blends the characteristics of eighteenth-century poetry with those of Romantic poetry."<sup>33</sup> Like other modern critics who proclaim, "The poem's the thing," Wardle pays little attention to the soundness of the ideas on which the poem is based.

To some, an analysis like Wardle's of The Deserted Village may seem more valid and appropriate than one like Black's or Dobson's which questions the truthfulness of the poem's charges. Some might argue against any criticism that fails to acknowledge principally that the poem is a work of art. Undeniably, The Deserted Village is a superb, beautifully constructed work of art that has for two centuries achieved what Wardle calls "virtual universality," has transcended any regional limitations that Goldsmith may have

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 204.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 203.



intended, and has become what one critic called the least read and the most often quoted poem in the English language. But the poem has conventionally been read as a protest against social and economic injustices. Testing the poem, therefore, against its background is as much in order as giving it the praise it deserves.

At least one of Goldsmith's modern critics, Chauncey B. Tinker, fully approves of the way he handled his primary issues. Tinker sees in the poem the results of Goldsmith's long meditation about the changes in England brought on by the industrial revolution and his observation of vast country estates on land once occupied by villagers and tenants. Tinker thinks that such estates were built in sufficient numbers to alarm someone like Goldsmith who was disturbed about England's changing economic climate.<sup>34</sup> The fact that his fears were not well grounded, Tinker feels, is less important than his success in idealizing a way of life passing slowly into oblivion. This tendency is shared by all individuals, and the poem has appealed to readers for centuries because it succeeds so well in effecting the idealization everyone would like for his former home.<sup>35</sup>

Desmond Pacey claims that an abundance of passion makes convincing, if unrealistic, Goldsmith's belief that

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<sup>34</sup> Chauncey B. Tinker, "Figures in a Dream," Yale Review, XVII (July 1928), 671.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 672-673.

the industrial revolution spelled the doom of English rural life. According to Pacey, Goldsmith exaggerated both the village as it had been and the village as it was when he was an adult.<sup>36</sup> But the exaggeration was deliberate, because stopping the impending destruction of the villages was a cause to which Goldsmith had dedicated himself. His old-style Toryism objected to the triumphs of a new commercial class which held the traditional English way of life in low esteem. Though the destruction of the villages had not become so extensive as the poem implies, a succession of Whig ministries, which Goldsmith found intolerable, had permitted expanding commercialism at the expense of the poorer tenants and landowners.<sup>37</sup>

Howard Bell, who analyzes Goldsmith's social doctrines in relation to The Deserted Village, believes that his "fancy ran free-reined because he was superimposing the experience of Rome upon his observation of a single, or at most several, incidents of his own time and upon what he had heard about agricultural enclosures."<sup>38</sup> Bell is unable to discover a factual basis for the poem; he rejects as untrue the supposed visit in 1761 to the unnamed village cited in "The Revolution in Low Life." He does, however, believe that Goldsmith witnessed the Napier eviction but feels that this incident alone,

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<sup>36</sup> Desmond Pacey, "The Goldsmiths and Their Villages," University of Toronto Quarterly, XXI (October 1951), 32.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>38</sup> Howard J. Bell, Jr., "The Deserted Village and Goldsmith's Social Doctrines," PMLA, LIX (September 1944), 772.

having occurred many years before The Deserted Village was written, could hardly have precipitated the attack since the intensity of feeling in the poem needs more explanation than a single experience could afford.<sup>39</sup> The most interesting aspect of Bell's argument is his insistence that Goldsmith's views on luxury given in Letter XI of The Citizen of the World and in The Deserted Village are consistent. The letter defends luxury per se but warns against the excesses of luxury which jeopardize the safety and prosperity of others. According to Bell, the poem does exactly the same thing. He cites Goldsmith's definition of a luxury as any item that pleasantly appeals to our senses and acts to make our lives more comfortable; Goldsmith's descriptions of the former inhabitants of Auburn, Bell argues, intended to show that their daily activities were nothing more or less than an attempt to make their lives more comfortable. The people who carried their desire for luxury to excess were in error.<sup>40</sup> Bell agrees that Goldsmith detested the politically powerful new middle class whose desire for luxury had been excessive and that he lamented the lack of protection the poor received from the country's laws.<sup>41</sup> Goldsmith was not advocating the extinction of all luxuries; he was merely appealing to an enlightened parliament to curb

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 767.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 753.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 759-761.

the evils of excess.<sup>42</sup> Bell has taken considerable liberty in forcing Goldsmith's definition in The Citizen of the World to conform to the thesis of The Deserted Village.

#### TEXTBOOK COMMENTS ON THE POEM

Textbook editors have been some of the staunchest defenders of the social and economic theories which Goldsmith expounded in The Deserted Village. A few have dissented, but most have approvingly noted the poem's references to enclosures, luxury, trade, depopulation, and tyrants. Generally these notes support J. L. and Barbara Hammond's summation of the period "when cottages were pulled down as if by an invader's hand, and families that had lived for centuries in their dales or on their small farms and commons were driven before the torrent."<sup>43</sup> A typical erroneous textbook comment states that the millhands required by the industrial revolution were "to a large extent" recruited from the unhappy class of dispossessed tenants. It will be shown that more factory workers voluntarily migrated to the cities to seek work than were forced by eviction to go there. The editor who made the above assertion lamely concludes that "whether or not Goldsmith's economic views were sound, the poem is serious, didactic, and

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 762.

<sup>43</sup> J. P. and Barbara Hammond, The Village Labourer: 1760-1832, fourth edition [new impression] (London, 1932), p. 80.

humanitarian."<sup>44</sup>

Another textbook observes that The Deserted Village "was inspired by Goldsmith's conviction that Ireland was being steadily depopulated."<sup>45</sup> The editors ignore references to England in the poem and have apparently allowed their own identification of Auburn with Lissoy to cloud their judgment. The firm evidence which establishes Auburn as an English village will be given in a later section.<sup>46</sup>

Out of the eight representative textbooks studied for their analysis of The Deserted Village, only one stated flatly that Goldsmith's economic theories are incorrect. The Literature of England, edited by George Woods, et al., comments that "Goldsmith's attacks on trade as a usurper and

<sup>44</sup>British Literature from Beowulf to Sheridan, ed. Hazelton Spencer (Boston, 1951), I, 900.

<sup>45</sup>Twelve Centuries of English Poetry and Prose, ed. A. G. Newcomer, et al., revised edition (New York, 1928), p. 405, n. 1.

<sup>46</sup>See also The College Survey of English Literature, ed. B. J. Whiting, et al. (New York, 1947), I, 1012, whose questionable opinion is that one of the most important aspects of the poem is the knowledge it gives of contemporary conditions in English villages. Louis Bredvold, et al., ed. Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose, second edition (New York, 1956), p. 798, in a different vein, suggest that the views on luxury presented in The Deserted Village are not what Goldsmith actually believed. They cite The Traveller and Letter XI of The Citizen of the World as examples of Goldsmith's belief that luxury had its attendant benefits. See also Ernest Bernbaum, ed. Anthology of Romanticism, third edition (New York, 1948), p. 1075, who tested the poem's economic theories with the help of later scholarship and found "some intensification both of the light and of the shade."

dispossessor and on wealth, however they might appeal to reader emotions, were nonetheless false economics."<sup>47</sup> Their evaluation of the background is more nearly true to the facts than most others; they point to the English villages like Auburn that were doomed in the eighteenth century to ruin or stagnation unless their natural resources attracted or supported one of the growing industries.

We must now turn to the social and economic background of The Deserted Village to determine whether Goldsmith was justified in describing English villages as he did and in predicting ruin if England's economic policies were not amended. One may agree with the editors of Eighteenth Century Poetry and Prose who said that Goldsmith's attacks on luxury in The Deserted Village are not his genuine beliefs or with Bell that the poem is a subtle defense of luxury. Or one may conclude that Goldsmith's opinion changed considerably throughout his mature years and caused him to disapprove on some occasions of ideas that he had approved on others. Regardless of one's conclusions about Goldsmith's opinion of luxury, an analysis of the social and economic background of the poem will reveal whether the situations it describes and the attacks it makes on England's economic policies are fair or unfair.

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<sup>47</sup> The Literature of England, ed. George B. Woods, et al., fourth edition (Chicago, 1958), I, 1114.

## CHAPTER III

### THE SOCIAL BACKGROUND

Goldsmith has long been praised for his marvelous use of irony in such works as The Traveller, The Vicar of Wakefield, She Stoops to Conquer, and The Deserted Village. How he arrived at his consummate sense of the ironic is not known. Much of it possibly came from his skill as a historian and biographer. Certainly his voluminous histories of England, Rome, Mecklenburgh, and biographies of Nash, Parnell, and Bolingbroke offered numerous opportunities to view diverse sets of circumstances that produced ironic situations. Goldsmith became a victim of his own skill, however, with his failure in The Deserted Village to show better understanding of the causes and effects of the changes he described.

The enclosure movement that was steadily progressing was of utmost concern to Goldsmith's villagers; yet he seems to have had only the vaguest understanding of it. Even though the movement was not an entirely smooth transition from individual to centralized farm operations, neither was it wholly disorderly, as Goldsmith implied. The present chapter will discuss the movement's development through the eighteenth century and reveal his unfamiliarity with actual conditions.

As introduction, the chapter will establish that Auburn is an English village. The Lissay theorists would invalidate a discussion of England's social conditions as the background

of The Deserted Village unless supporting evidence were offered.

Misrepresentation of actual conditions is also apparent in Goldsmith's descriptions of village entertainment, the village preacher, and the village teacher, as they had formerly existed. In these descriptions, Bernbaum's reference to "some intensification of the light" has its best examples. The distortion of both past and present resulted partially from Goldsmith's need for vivid contrast; the mellowing influence of passing years accounted for the rest. The concluding portion of this chapter will discuss the discrepancies between the described and real conditions of the segments of village life.

#### THE AUBURN-LISSOY THEORY

With virtually all the evidence from all sources showing that Auburn is an English village, it is difficult to understand why some scholars continue to argue that Auburn is Irish. Perhaps the strongest evidence for placing Auburn in England is that the poem itself refers to England in the line "A time there was, ere England's griefs began . . ." (l.57). Other internal evidence is equally firm. The basis of the poem is an appeal to preserve "a bold peasantry, their country's pride." It is inconceivable that this phrase refers to the Irish peasants, who had historically been the scourge rather than the pride of their country. From the earliest Irish settlement



down to the Act of Union in 1800, they were embroiled in one futile rebellion after another against their English rulers.<sup>1</sup> They were hardly a group to cause the poetic evocation in The Deserted Village of an attractive, rustic peasant class, the very foundation of the nation's growth and solidity. England, not Ireland, revered the classic traditions of rural life. Other less obvious internal evidence is the line "Proud swells the tide with loads of freighted ore" (l. 269), which must refer to England since imports and exports from Ireland were prohibited throughout the eighteenth century. English parliamentary acts of 1665 and 1680 prohibited the export of all cattle, sheep, pork, and butter from Ireland.<sup>2</sup> And when, to foster a wool trade, the Irish turned their arable land into pasture, thus offsetting the prohibitions, an act of 1699 prohibited the export of all Irish wool, a measure that impoverished the Irish until trade barriers were made less stringent in 1791 and removed in 1800.<sup>3</sup>

Goldsmith claimed in his dedicatory letter to Reynolds that he had been observing for "the four or five years past" the situations he described. His descriptions are inaccurate to the extent that they cannot be generally applied to rural

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<sup>1</sup>See Robert Dunlop, Ireland from the Earliest Times to the Present Day (Oxford, 1922).

<sup>2</sup>Ricardo Quintana, The Mind and Art of Jonathan Swift (New York, 1936), p. 250.

<sup>3</sup>Dunlop, p. 134, and Quintana, p. 250.

England, but his specific time references help to discredit the Lissoy theory. From the time he left home in 1752 to study medicine in Leyden, he never once returned to Ireland. Consequently, any knowledge he had in the four or five years before publication of The Deserted Village had to be of English, not Irish, villages. Besides his reference to fairly recent observations, several lines from the poem bolster the argument against the Lissoy theory. The lines "Here, as I take my solitary rounds/ Amidst thy tangling walks and ruined grounds" (ll. 77-78) make it clear that he was describing a village recently observed, not one he observed eighteen years earlier when he had last seen Ireland. This kind of evidence fills the poem. All descriptions of the destruction of Auburn are written in the present tense, indicating that the destruction was occurring when Goldsmith wrote the poem. Thus, the destruction of any villages that he witnessed, if indeed he witnessed any, could not have been those he knew as a child in Ireland. To claim that the deserted village he saw sometime after 1760 is the Lissoy he knew as a child is unreasonable and contrary to fact.

The line in the poem that refers to Goldsmith's desire "Here to return-- and die at home at last" (l.96) has fortified the argument that Auburn is in fact Lissoy. Why the Lissoy theorists feel that citing this line makes their position secure is not clear. It seems probable that Goldsmith would, as part of his idealization, state somewhere in his poem that he

had hoped to retire to his favorite village. Unquestionably this expressed desire strengthens the pathos of the poem and makes the village's destruction all the more pitiable. But in spite of the temptation to conclude that his reference to village retirement means that it was to Lissoy that he wished to retire, there is very little evidence that he did desire to return to Ireland in retirement. To a remark that Goldsmith made in a letter to his brother-in-law Daniel Hodson, that he was "frequently tempted, particularly when low spirited, to return home and leave my fortune," Ralph Wardle replies, "The truth was that he had outgrown Ireland and the sort of society he had known there. He had outgrown even the desire to return as a successful man and to savor his triumph."<sup>4</sup> This appraisal of Goldsmith's attitude seems valid in view of the fact that he had numerous occasions on which he could have returned to Ireland for a visit; yet he never took advantage of one of them.

The Lissoy theorists also point to the lines that describe the mother daughter, and father saying a sad farewell to their beloved cottage as they prepare to emigrate (ll. 363-384).<sup>5</sup> These lines, say the theorists, are obviously derived

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<sup>4</sup>Wardle, p. 87.

<sup>5</sup>See Robert Seitz, "The Irish Background of Goldsmith's Social and Political Thought," PMLA, LII (June 1937), 408, who says that Professor Crane's discovery of "The Revolution in Low Life" (Goldsmith's Deserted Village "in prose") irrevocably establishes Auburn as an English village.

from General Napier's eviction of cottagers in Lissoy that Goldsmith presumably witnessed. These same characters first appeared, however, in Goldsmith's essay "The Revolution in Low Life" (1762), and Goldsmith stated in the essay that he had observed them during the summer of 1761 when he visited a small village approximately fifty miles from London.<sup>6</sup>

Macaulay in his article on Goldsmith for the Encyclopaedia Britannica not only refused to accept the notion that Auburn is Lissoy but severely criticized Goldsmith for describing in his poem two societies which were out of place and out of time.<sup>7</sup> Macaulay stated that Goldsmith had joined them together to imply that they represented the same village, when actually, the ideal village was in England, observed by Goldsmith as an adult, and the deserted village was in Ireland, observed when he was a child. Macaulay wrote:

A poet may easily be pardoned for reasoning ill; but he cannot be pardoned for describing ill, for observing the world in which he lives so carelessly that his portraits bear no resemblance to the originals, for exhibiting as copies from real life monstrous combinations of things which never were and never could be found together.<sup>8</sup>

The often confusing mixture of memory, fact, fancy, experience, and idealization that Goldsmith used to construct his deserted

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<sup>6</sup> Goldsmith, New Essays by Oliver Goldsmith, ed. Ronald S. Crane, pp. 116-117.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas Macaulay, "Goldsmith, Oliver," Encyclopaedia Britannica, 11th ed., 1910, XII, 214-218.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p. 217.

village causes one to conclude that Macaulay was basically justified for reproving him. Macaulay's Whig sympathies, however, perhaps made his attack severer than necessary. Much of the confusion surrounding the identification of the deserted village is caused by Goldsmith's insistence on mixing together the details of villages he observed as an adult with those he knew as a child. The passage, for example, in which he mentions taking solitary walks around deserted Auburn (ll. 77-82) contains also the statement that many years had elapsed since he last viewed the scene. The solitary walk presumably describes a recent experience, while the reference to the passage of many years indicates that he was referring to a scene viewed in Ireland.

The contradictions within the poem, however, are more apparent than real. To give the poem balance and to increase the vividness of the contrasted villages, Goldsmith had to use observations that were separated in time. To make his descriptions more believable, he also had to recall certain details from his experiences. The finished poem reflects Goldsmith's problem in pushing half of his images back in time while maintaining a strict sense of continuity for the whole. But his use of descriptions in the past tense should not be construed as allusions to deserted Irish villages. The fact remains that his disinterest in Irish matters and his long absence from Ireland refute the notion that Auburn is Irish.

## THE ENCLOSURE MOVEMENT

The most striking transformation in eighteenth-century English social history occurred when the few enclosures that began with the late fifteenth century became numerous during the reign of George III. The English agricultural system centered on the commons, common fields, and waste land.<sup>9</sup> Fundamental to this system were the communal rights shared by all villagers to use designated portions of the common fields and waste lands. The commons was an area of the village jointly owned by all villagers. Enclosure was the process whereby a single owner claimed ownership of communally owned land and erected ditches or fences to mark the boundaries of his private property. These disruptions to land ownership and the communal rights of villagers were the origins of Goldsmith's objections to the man of wealth and pride who took up the "space that many poor supplied." Goldsmith's most pointed reference, "Those fenceless fields the sons of wealth divide,/ And even the bare-worn common is denied," (ll. 307-308) contains the essence of his belief that villagers

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<sup>9</sup> Information on the open-fields system and the enclosure movement, except where otherwise cited, is obtained from G. M. Trevelyan, Illustrated English Social History, second edition (London, 1951), III, and from Julia Patton, The English Village: A Literary Study 1750-1850 (New York, 1919). The use of these authors' works does not necessarily extend to their interpretations. See also G. E. Fussell, Village Life in the Eighteenth Century (Worcester, England, [1947]), for an excellent, though relatively brief, description of village life.

were being overrun by men whose commercial interests permitted them to acquire vast landholdings.

In 1700 England had primarily a rural society; by far the greater part of the population lived in scattered villages whose social and economic system had remained relatively unchanged since the end of the Middle Ages. As Goldsmith pointed out, the villagers existed off the land, which provided the barest essentials for living and no more. Standards of comfort were low, and luxuries were unknown.

The open-fields system, as the sharing of village acreage was known, was administered by a commission elected at a village meeting. It was the commission's task to decide which crops each villager would be allowed to grow on his strips of land. Permission to deviate from the established crop schedule could be granted only by the commission and was seldom obtained. Rigid adherence to the schedule provided the best estimate of the amount of food available during the following year. The villagers operated on a rotational system. The three-year cycle required that a grain crop be raised the first year, a leguminous crop the second, and that the land be fallowed the third year. It was a thoroughly cooperative system, with each property holder farming according to the commission's schedule. The meadow lands were marked with pegs which indicated grazing boundaries for each villager's cattle. In order to prevent one man's cattle from grazing on another man's plot, the village commission appointed a common

herder to patrol the meadows, keeping the cattle within proper boundaries. Additional grazing land became available after harvest, when all arable property was converted into pasture and the cattle were allowed to graze on the stubble of harvested crops. The end-of-harvest grazing practice prevented a villager from raising a winter crop on his property, if he wished, since the commission would not sanction a herder for the winter months, and there was thus nothing to stop the cattle from destroying anything planted on arable land while it was being used for grazing. The waste lands consisted of all acreage, except forests, which lay between the cultivated land of adjoining villages. Until the eighteenth century the seizure of waste lands for conversion into arable land was carefully regulated by the village commission. The forests were owned by the village's largest and most powerful property owner, the lord of the manor. The position of the lord in village society was similar to that of a feudal baron in medieval days. A villager's common rights entitled him to obtain fuel from the forests, the right of pasture, and the right of turbary (i.e., to dig turf or peat). These privileges were granted by the lord of the manor.

The open-fields system was vulnerable to dangers which threatened to destroy it as early as the fifteenth century, when the first enclosures gave some property holders additional land and the freedom to farm it as they desired. The disadvantages of such a system were numerous and eighteenth-century



farmers were anxious to be rid of it. First, the initiative of progressive landlords and farmers was hampered by plans which forced them to conform to the lazy, dull, and self-satisfied. Some farmers were better able to care for the land than others, but in the rigid system there was little incentive to excel. Second, the wealthier farmers could afford to invest in new, improved equipment which greatly increased the number of acres that one could tend and decreased the time needed to harvest the crops. But in order for their investment to be worthwhile, they needed large holdings which, in addition to providing food for one year, would yield sufficient harvest to permit the profitable shipping of food into the large market centers in exchange for the products of England's growing mercantilism. Third, the system prevented the development of outstanding cattle breeds or the retention of a herd from one year to the next. Scarcely any crops to be used as winter feed for cattle were produced; consequently, the cattle were slaughtered each fall and preserved by the ancient method of salting.

Enclosure became the means of destroying the stifling system. The practice produced the most profound change in English social and economic history up to the industrial revolution. The enclosure movement began slowly, and early enclosures were accomplished with the approval of other village property owners. As agricultural methods were improved, however, and the advantages of acquiring large holdings became

apparent, the frequency of enclosures accelerated. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, the growth of the enclosure movement was still no cause for alarm, since there were extensive waste lands which would be enclosed to satisfy an ambitious farmer or to provide sustenance for the increasing population. But two conditions that developed in the eighteenth century made the effects of enclosures more pervasive than they had been earlier. First, the supply of unenclosed land was not limitless, and continued enclosure after the waste lands had been claimed necessitated the acquisition of the property of other owners. Second, the number of enclosures greatly increased after the mid-eighteenth century. The enclosure process was harmless as long as all parties agreed to the action and the dispossessed owners were either given jobs by the new owner or could find other work. Enclosures were usually effected slowly and fairly, but occasionally, particularly as the practice grew, an injudicious enclosure proved abusive. As early as 1589, however, during the reign of Elizabeth, a parliamentary act designed to prevent the harsh effects of enclosures decreed that no more than one family occupy a house and that each house be surrounded by no less than four acres of land. This act, obviously unrealistic for a growing population, remained a law until 1775, but its restrictions had been ignored for almost a century.

An eighteenth-century innovation to the system required that every enclosure be officially sanctioned by a special act

of parliament.<sup>10</sup> The person who desired to enclose land presented a petition to parliament stating the advantages to be gained by the enclosure. After two readings in parliament, the petition was referred to a committee comprised of the petitioner and two others whom he appointed. When the petition had passed the committee, it was again read in parliament and acted upon. Counter-petitions were permitted when supporting evidence disclosed that a proposed enclosure was detrimental to another landowner's interest. The difficulty of seeing a counter-petition through parliament proved to be the most harmful feature of the new procedure to the small landowners. The time and expense involved in getting to London were more than most of them could afford. Defenders of the innovation which required parliamentary approval have since maintained that the change provided urgently needed protection for the small landowner. They insist that the eighteenth-century Whig parliaments supplied the only hope for the small farmer who otherwise would have been at the mercy of land-hungry noblemen. Opponents argue that the new system became the ruin of small landowners and point accusingly to the feature of the changed system which allowed an enclosure to be effected without the consent of the dispossessed owner. A parliamentary hearing, they say, was far more accessible to a wealthy

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<sup>10</sup> See G. N. Clark, The Wealth of England from 1496 to 1760 (London, 1947), pp. 154-155.

nobleman than to a small farmer whose property lay hundreds of miles from London. It was probably because of the new control exercised by parliament over the movement that Goldsmith dramatically appealed to England's statesmen to halt the damaging effects of the system. "Ye friends to truth," he addressed them, ". . . judge, how wide the limits stand/ Between a splendid, and an happy land" (ll.267-268).

Some comparative statistics demonstrate the rapid growth of the enclosure movement under the new procedures. Between 1702 and 1760 there were 246 Enclosure Acts affecting 400,000 acres; between 1760 and 1810 there were 200 Acts affecting 4,500,000 acres.<sup>11</sup> In spite of Goldsmith's implication in The Deserted Village, however, that Enclosure Acts per se were evil, the evidence shows that not all Acts were harmful. For example, the number of yeomen in England's agricultural society increased between 1760 and 1810-- a fact which disproves the argument that small landowners were wiped out. The yeomen were one of four groups of free men below the lord of the manor in the system's social scale. And even though the other classes of independent farmers-- the copyholders, freeholders, and leaseholders-- decreased slightly in number during the period, England's rural population increased. Clearly, then, the number of tenant farmers must have increased to offset the general decrease of small landowners. But Goldsmith ignored

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<sup>11</sup>Patton, p. 27.

the large number of villagers who remained on their land and worked as tenants for the new owners. He strongly and erroneously implied that all enclosures were accomplished solely to build pleasure estates for the wealthy.

Some villagers were mistreated under the new system. Not every unjust enclosure could be guarded against. And numerous opportunities existed for large property holders to cooperate and drive out small landowners. But two facts remain that bear significantly on the eighteenth-century enclosure movement. First, an analysis of the enclosures reveals that a good deal of the enclosed property changed from the hands of small inefficient owners who were financially unable to improve their methods or output to competent, ambitious owners able to improve both. Second, every eighteenth-century enclosure was accomplished under the watchful, if sometimes careless, eye of parliament. Although a few villagers were harmed by enclosures, evidence that describes the fate of small landowners does not support the claims of widespread poverty, dissolution of families, and destruction of villages. The extent of injustice in the enclosure process seems quite small when one considers the enormous number of enclosures in the fifty-year period from 1760 to 1810. Though of no consolation to opponents of enclosure, some ill effects were a sacrifice to what R. B. Mowat describes as the "absolutely inevitable . . . abolition of the open-fields" to allow progress in agriculture.<sup>12</sup> Much of the progress made during the century

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<sup>12</sup>Robert B. Mowat, England in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1932), p. 136.

was contingent on agricultural reform. Food for the rapidly increasing population; wool for the textile industry; exports for expanding foreign markets; these improvements would have been impossible under the highly restrictive open-fields system. Goldsmith's complaint that England's "needful product" was being exchanged around the world for luxuries was out of touch with reality.

Because the enclosure movement and the industrial revolution overlapped, students of eighteenth-century history do not agree on when the greatest upheaval in social conditions occurred; nor do they agree on which movement produced the greater changes. Trevelyan says that England paid a heavy social price for the decline in the number of independent cultivators and the rise in the number of landless laborers.<sup>13</sup> He adds that the increasing wealth of the country was not equitably distributed, and that while the squires, clergy, and middlemen prospered, the field laborer had his common rights, his land, and his secondary employment taken away. He cites unemployment in the cities as one of the heavy social prices of England's reformed agricultural system and commercialism. Trevelyan admits, however, that utter ruin did not result from every Enclosure Act. Many of those villagers who had been forced or had chosen to leave their homes succeeded at new occupations. Those who prospered freed themselves of class

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<sup>13</sup>  
Trevelyan, III, 83.

distinctions from which they could never escape had they remained masters of their own parcels of land. Some remained in the villages to work for the new owners. Those who depict mass expulsions from English villages are guilty of ignoring circumstances that demanded approximately the same number of farmers after enclosure as before. Whether the enclosed land was used as arable or pasture land, men were still needed to till the soil or care for the livestock. Goldsmith's misleading implication that all enclosed land became game preserves for the entertainment of the wealthy cannot be made to conform with the fact that England, both before and after enclosure, produced her own food and cattle and exported both in great quantities. Not all men who left the land were forced to go. Thousands were attracted to the cities by industry; others forsook farm work for a job in local industry. T. S. Ashton tells of the prosperous landowner who complained in 1750 that farmers were deserting their occupation. Those who were available, he charged, demanded excessive wages, and often there were not enough workers to be had at any price.<sup>14</sup>

R. B. Mowat blames neither the enclosure movement nor the industrial revolution for England's eighteenth-century social and economic problems. Instead, in a carefully documented study that minimizes the dire aspects of changing social conditions after 1750, he finds that the most serious

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<sup>14</sup> T. S. Ashton, An Economic History of England: The Eighteenth Century (London, 1955), p. 128.

problems occurred after the beginning of the great wars, half-way through the French Revolution.<sup>15</sup> He claims that the decline of the small farmers and laborers was not apparent until this time. To support his argument, Mowat analyzes the effect of the Seven Years' War and shows that its adverse effects were repeated on a larger scale in the last decade of the century. It was not the effect of enclosure or the industrial revolution that caused depopulation and poverty. Changes resulting from these forces developed slowly enough throughout the century to enable laborers to adjust and to find suitable employment. Furthermore, Mowat argues, until the late-eighteenth century, a good balance of trade had been established between supply and demand of consumer goods. The favorable level of internal trade, supported by a strong export business, was maintained until the outbreak of war disrupted foreign commerce and broke the system. Before the disrupting effect of war upset the economy, Mowat claims, by far the greater number of available laborers were employed and able to maintain a decent standard of living.<sup>16</sup>

Julia Patton, student of English village life, is of the Trevelyan and Hammond school of social thought.<sup>17</sup> While

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<sup>15</sup> Mowat, p. 141.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., pp. 275-276.

<sup>17</sup> J. L. and Barbara Hammonds, The Village Labourer: 1760-1832. See Chapter II of this thesis for some of the Hammonds's thinking.



she agrees that enclosures and depopulation had not destroyed English villages by the time The Deserted Village was published, she feels, nevertheless, that the poem is justified in its bleak descriptions of English social conditions. With Goldsmith, Miss Patton deplores the substitution of fiercely competitive individualism for the placid, cooperative spirit of English village life before enclosure. She offers no firm evidence but writes of the widespread pulling down of cottages,<sup>18</sup> and of the "sudden dissolution of the old order which meant catastrophe for thousands and thousands of helpless and bewildered villagers."<sup>19</sup> In another passage, however, Miss Patton asserts that the loss of pride and self-confidence which accompanied the small landowner's severance from his land was probably the greatest evil.<sup>20</sup> But her final position seems to be that more than pride was lost, because The Deserted Village has an "immediate and essential [relation]" to actual conditions.<sup>21</sup> The justification of her position and Goldsmith's poem becomes somewhat questionable, however, when she blandly states: "An occurrence represented as involving typically the experience of a whole class . . . , and used as the basis of judgment passed upon national policies and . . . character, must be

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<sup>18</sup>Patton, p. 37.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-86.

true, not merely to the larger laws of human nature, . . . but to immediate and external facts."<sup>22</sup> Miss Patton is no more exempt than others from the responsibility to produce supporting external facts.

#### VILLAGE ENTERTAINMENT

Goldsmith's description of the entertainment in which idyllic Auburn's inhabitants engaged is basically accurate. It is difficult to take issue with the general picture of games on the village green during holidays or of the disapproving glances of the elders cast at the young people who discreetly exchange gestures of love. And Goldsmith's imagination which "fondly stooped to trace" the activity in the village alehouse brought forth no discrepancies with which one could quarrel. There is, however, one interesting sidelight in eighteenth-century English social history which deserves attention if only for the contrast it provides to the harmless pleasures of Auburn. That sidelight is the inordinate drinking of cheap gin which, by poisoning thousands of people, became a serious social problem throughout the country during the first half of the century. The country had experienced a gradual decline in the rate of persons dying from natural causes, but gin poisoning kept the death rate deceptively high. The problem became so great in both rural and urban areas that

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

reformers clamored for action to stop the evil. During the height of the gin craze, from 1740-1742, twice as many persons in London, where the practice was most widespread, died as were born.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, the manufacture of the product was encouraged because it required vast amounts of grain and helped to maintain corn prices at high levels.<sup>24</sup> The gin craze received attention as early as 1704. In that year Defoe attacked it in an essay, Giving Alms and Charity. Englishmen, he said, live in dire poverty on wages that would support the Dutch quite comfortably and even permit some savings. The reason for this, Defoe claimed, was that the English were slothful, lazy drunkards. The drinking habit was so widespread that Defoe wrote " . . . this distemper's so general, so epidemic, and so deep rooted in the nature and genius of the English, that I much doubt its being easily redressed. . . ."<sup>25</sup> The practice was partially halted by a Parliamentary Act of 1751, which placed a heavy tax on the product, making it less available to the poorer classes.<sup>26</sup> Goldsmith's willful omission of a phenomenon important enough to attract attention from social historians both late and early significantly

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<sup>23</sup>Trevelyn, III, 50.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Quoted from Dorothy George, ed., England in Johnson's Day, second edition (London, 1942), p. 110.

<sup>26</sup>Trevelyan, III, 50.

points out his coloring of life in Auburn to suit his own needs.

### THE VILLAGE PREACHER

Goldsmith's description of the village preacher seems more ideal than real when one considers the lot of most eighteenth-century village clergymen. Obviously reluctant to admit that anything about pre-enclosed Auburn was less than ideal, Goldsmith had to embellish the story a bit, particularly since it was to play a dominant part in convincing his readers. Goldsmith had another, and more important, reason for singling out the clergyman for special favored attention: he used his brother Henry as the model. Of all his family, Goldsmith admired and respected Henry the most and had demonstrated his affection earlier by dedicating The Traveller to him.

In spite of his good deeds and noble aims, the living of an eighteenth-century clergyman was not, for the most part, a happy one. If he was fortunate enough to obtain a church that could afford his full-time services and did not have to share him with an adjoining village, he was far more comfortable than some of his fellow-ministers and could at least devote all his attention to the problems of a single parish.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> See Rosamond Bayne-Powell, English Country Life in the Eighteenth Century, "cheap edition" (London, 1937), pp. 75-95, for a discussion of the English clergy; see also, Trevelyan, III, 64-66; see also George, pp. 19-37, especially pp. 24-26.

His marginal earnings were mostly responsible for his trying circumstances. His likely income was thirty or forty pounds annually, never more than sixty pounds. But the man whom Goldsmith classified "passing rich" on forty pounds a year had definite obligations in performing his duties that used up a good deal of his earnings. There were always transients and beggars who had to be fed and clothed. Goldsmith's description of the preacher refers to these obligations when he writes:

His house was known to all the vagrant train;  
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain.  
(ll. 149-150)

Repairs which had to be made on the church were often paid for from the clergyman's personal funds. As a result of the demands on his income over and above those for rearing his own family, the priest was often forced to accept other employment to supplement his earnings. He became a journeyman, a teacher, or perhaps a weaver using the church itself as his shop.<sup>28</sup> Not all clergymen, however, found it necessary to accept other work. Those who did not could dutifully carry out their primary responsibilities of conducting services, winning converts, visiting the sick, and caring for the poor.<sup>29</sup>

The clergy indirectly benefited from the enclosure

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<sup>28</sup> Bayne-Powell, pp. 79-80.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

movement. Influential landlords, made wealthy by enclosures, often hired clergymen as their personal chaplains. As an increasing number of divines were retained in this capacity, the clergy rose both socially and culturally.<sup>30</sup> The practice created new problems, however, because the priest was also the religious leader of people who had suffered perhaps at the hands of the landlord and were dependent on him for their subsistence. In contrast to the dependent parishioners, the priest was more comfortable materially than he had ever been. But he paid for his improved welfare by becoming removed in spirit from his parishioners, who became bitter and disillusioned.<sup>31</sup>

A change in the public attitude toward the clergy also helped to improve the priest's position somewhat. Before 1760 few wealthy merchants would consent to their sons entering the ministry. Instead they trained their heirs to take their place or to pursue a career in some other business. After 1760 the sons of many wealthy families became clergymen, and the position of parish priest became socially acceptable.<sup>32</sup> The prestige of the clergy was increased by men who became private chaplains to wealthy squires and by the presence of the sons of wealthy squires. These changes made the clergy more

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<sup>30</sup> Trevelyan, III, 64.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

respectable than before but did little to make their life more comfortable. Goldsmith's entrancing description of the priest's life successfully disguised the many discomforts which made their life quite tedious.

### THE VILLAGE TEACHER

Goldsmith's description of the village teacher, while less idealistic than that of the preacher, is nevertheless written in the same engaging style which obscures much of the unpleasantness of the teacher's life.<sup>33</sup> In his desire to make every aspect of English village life seem as attractive as possible, he failed to mention any of the problems of eighteenth-century educators. From reading the poem, the process of obtaining an education in Auburn seems a most pleasant task. Perhaps in Auburn it was, but generally the educational process did not operate so harmoniously and efficiently as Goldsmith would have us believe.

Obtaining an education was at best a haphazard experience for the average village child. Many villages had no school at all, and the children from such villages were permitted, but not really encouraged, to attend the school in a

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<sup>33</sup>As with the preacher, Goldsmith included the teacher in The Deserted Village because he had two favorite models on which to base the description. Patrick Hughes, a presumed model, gave what Goldsmith considered memorable instruction between 1741 and 1745. See Wardle, pp. 22-23. Thomas Byrne, another of Goldsmith's favorite teachers, is said by some critics to have been the model. See Peter Cunningham, ed., The Works of Oliver Goldsmith (London, 1854), I, 46, and Austin Dobson, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 14.

neighboring village.<sup>34</sup> Some progress was made during the century to make schools readily accessible to all children, but as in other social matters, the villages lagged behind the cities in providing adequate facilities.

Another problem faced by eighteenth-century educators was the skepticism of parents about the desirability of education.<sup>35</sup> Particularly before the industrial revolution usurped the work of many "home" industrialists, children were kept at home to assist with the work. During the planting and harvest seasons, teachers wisely dismissed school rather than face empty classrooms. Parents engaged in a small industry taught their children the trade and encouraged them to make their living in that manner rather than by some skill acquired through formal education. Some parents who could afford to send their children to school refused to do so simply because they distrusted the results of educating them.

Village schools were forced to plan their operation for the convenience of the villagers and were unable to impose their will in matters of attendance and curriculum. In deference to the needs of the village, the school often became in practice little more than a trade school where the children were taught arts and crafts considered more valuable

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<sup>34</sup>

The information on village schools is taken from Bayne-Powell, pp. 181-197.

<sup>35</sup>

Ibid., p. 189.



than the humanities.<sup>36</sup> Since most children had no opportunity to continue past the elementary grades, the trades learned at the village school were later quite valuable to them.

In villages, teachers were most often chosen by the parish priest.<sup>37</sup> Presumably the persons selected knew reading, writing, and arithmetic tolerably well. In addition, they were expected to display sound character and humble behavior. Goldsmith's teacher seems to have met easily the qualifications. The villagers were amazed at his knowledge, and a favorite village pastime was the passing from one interested listener to another a new discovery about the breadth of the teacher's knowledge. He was also kind, stern, and-- to the person's delight-- argumentative to the point of distraction. Such men, however, were not always available. When they were not, the village settled for the person it could get who seemed best qualified. Wages were low. The ten to twelve pounds a year paid to most teachers made Goldsmith's village preacher rich by comparison. The low wages made it impossible always to induce the best qualified persons to become teachers. Too frequently, those who became teachers were clergymen's widows, bankrupt shopkeepers, or dissatisfied journeymen. These taught not because they especially wanted to but because they needed the small income.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 191.

After the teacher had been selected, he taught the boys and girls separately. Consequently much time and energy were wasted in a system that could not afford to lose either.

It is true that not all village schools were badly equipped to teach. Some had adequate facilities, qualified teachers, and sound curriculums. But schools which could be considered wholly adequate were the exception rather than the rule.<sup>38</sup>

The village schools were not a great deal less effective than the eighteenth-century schools which catered to families of some means. In spite of well-intentioned reformers who zealously promised improvements in public and grammar school curriculums, educators in the better schools found it difficult to free instruction from its classical moorings.<sup>39</sup> "Teaching," says Sir Charles Mallet, "probably had not altered substantially in 200 years."<sup>40</sup> The freedom of thought that had come with the scientific breakthroughs of the sixteenth century was restrained again by seventeenth-century puritanical influences, which remained pervasive for some time.

The failure of the better-known schools to modernize their teaching methods and to add such subjects as writing, arithmetic, and English created great opportunities for the

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 184 and p. 190.

<sup>39</sup>See Sir Charles Mallet, "Education, Schools and Universities," Johnson's England, ed. A. S. Turberville (Oxford, 1933), II, 209 and 212.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 213.

growth of charity and private schools to fill the void. The charity schools, however, suffered from their great reliance on the church;<sup>41</sup> and the private schools, of which Dr. Johnson's is probably typical, though perfectly free to experiment with new subjects, nevertheless retained a predominantly classical background.<sup>42</sup> But the private schools, especially in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century were generally considered free from the defects (including poor living conditions, lack of recreation, and notorious mistreatment) of the public and grammar schools.<sup>43</sup>

Eighteenth-century schools were greatly criticized by many of their contemporaries, but forceful and learned headmasters sometimes achieved solid results at schools whose reputations ebbed and flowed. All the various kinds of schools-- public, grammar, charity, and private-- gradually modernized their instruction and made real contributions to the education of the English.<sup>44</sup>

Another famous description of an eighteenth-century village schoolmaster which belies the teacher in The Deserted Village or perhaps points up the fact that both men are fictional is found in Goldsmith's Vicar of Wakefield. This

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 223.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 224.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 218.

teacher says that he would rather be thrown into Newgate than return to teaching. Unless one is willing to grovel for a living under the most frustrating and humiliating conditions, he says, he should "avoid a school by any means."<sup>45</sup>

It is a distinctly unpleasant task to disagree with virtually the entire social background of Goldsmith's Deserted Village. The sentimentalist in us would much prefer to believe that there once existed a pleasant village like Auburn. The sympathizer in us prefers to shrink in horror from devastating occurrences, such as enclosures, which wipe out delightful Auburns. And the humanitarian in us is heartened when he mentally trails behind the preacher and teacher as they cheerfully perform their daily tasks. Unfortunately, we are not allowed the luxury of accepting unchallenged the pleasures or the calamities of Auburn. We must weigh them against available evidence, and in doing so, find that the pleasures were neither as great before enclosure as we have been told nor were the calamities as frightening afterwards. Village life remained much the same-- not very comfortable and devoted principally to earning an adequate living. Much of the land changed owners, and many of the old residents left to seek a living elsewhere. Those who stayed learned with the rest of England that they had been caught in a series of social and economic changes that would permanently alter the makeup of their country. The next chapter will investigate more of these changes.

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<sup>45</sup> George, p. 50.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE ECONOMIC BACKGROUND

"The age is running mad after innovation; all the business of the world is to be done in a new way; men are to be changed in a new way; Tyburn itself is not safe from the fury of innovation." Thus Dr. Johnson commented on the profound changes that swept over Britain during the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> His colorful hyperbole wonderfully characterizes the period when a vast increase in population, a conversion from a domestic to a centralized industrial system, and a revolution in the distribution of land effected marked alterations in the physical makeup of Britain. Goldsmith's attacks in The Deserted Village on the causes of the presumed destruction of English village life are evidence that he was not as fully aware as Johnson of the madness for innovation. Moreover, Goldsmith's singling out the destruction of village life as the most pressing problem facing the country places in jeopardy the argument that he was a perceptive spokesman for his age. Much of Goldsmith's analysis of the changes that occurred in his lifetime is incorrect; yet he chose, on the basis of his opinion, to predict ruin for Britain unless the trend toward destruction of village life was halted.

During the eighteenth century the living and working conditions of the whole society changed. The factory system came

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<sup>1</sup>Quoted by T. S. Ashton, The Industrial Revolution 1760-1830 (London, 1950), p. 11.

into its own and reshaped the lives of people whose entire personal history was rooted in the traditions of an agrarian society. A new middle class, rising to challenge the historic authority of Britain's aristocracy, made its presence keenly felt in the circles of finance, manufacturing, and government. Under the concepts of mercantilism, the country engaged in commercial activity unequalled in variety since the age of Elizabeth. Directing much of this activity, and supplying much of the force to push it forward, was the wealthy entrepreneur, who became a powerful spokesman in eighteenth-century British life.<sup>2</sup> Above all else, the incipient industrial revolution was most conspicuous. From its inception, the British were unable to look gratefully backward and rely on past experience to solve contemporary problems. Virtually everything was new; and the problems that were met required new solutions. It was the completeness and inexorableness of these changes that Goldsmith misinterpreted. As a man who had spent a good deal of his writing life looking backward and extolling the glories of the simple, unadorned rustic life, it is not surprising that he failed to grasp the full significance of the social and economic changes that he witnessed.

It is not, however, the whole of British society with which we are concerned. Our immediate interest lies in those

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<sup>2</sup>See W. H. B. Court, A Concise Economic History of Britain from 1750 to Recent Times (Cambridge, 1954), pp. 87-88.

transformations in the structure of society which directly affected the lives of cottagers in villages like the one described by Goldsmith. We must, nevertheless, remain conscious of the scope of the changes that completely enveloped the country if an analysis of one segment is to be meaningful. In studying the economic background of The Deserted Village, we must consider both changes of which Goldsmith was apparently aware-- such as the agrarian revolution-- and changes of which he was apparently unaware-- such as the population increase and the industrial revolution.

#### THE POPULATION INCREASE

In The Deserted Village Goldsmith describes the depopulation that occurred when one man gained control of the land occupied by the inhabitants of Auburn, dispossessed the villagers, and used the land for his own purposes (l. 39).<sup>3</sup> In another passage (ll. 63-68), he writes that other villages had been similarly destroyed and replaced by "unwieldy wealth and cumbrous pomp." After making several rather vague allusions to the force that has destroyed the villages, Goldsmith finally charges specifically that the villagers have been replaced by men of wealth who have converted large areas of land into

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<sup>3</sup>See Robert Seitz, pp. 406-407. In his effort to find Irish roots for all of Goldsmith's ideas, including those in The Deserted Village, Professor Seitz claims that the depopulation described by Goldsmith was that which he had witnessed in Ireland.

pleasure estates where they entertain themselves and their friends (ll. 275-282). Goldsmith denies that the dispossessed villagers have moved on to other places in England, e. g., the cities; he insists that they have emigrated, leaving England's rural areas largely depopulated (l. 50, ll. 73-74, l. 341).

No major study of population movements in eighteenth-century England supports Goldsmith's claim that any part of the country was becoming depopulated. On the contrary, the rapidly increasing population in all sections of the country is shown to be of paramount importance to the economic upheaval of that century. In 1700 England and Wales had an estimated 5,500,000 people. By 1750 this number had grown to 6,500,000<sup>4</sup> and in 1801, when the first official census was taken, to nine million.<sup>5</sup> The Scots, during the same period, had increased from one to two million.<sup>6</sup> Such a vast increase makes it plain that, even though the population of some villages might have decreased slightly, there could have been no widespread depopulation in any large area. Population statistics for English counties support this generalization. Studies reveal that from 1700 to 1750 only four counties out of fifty-two decreased in population and that from 1750 to 1800 all increased. Six

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<sup>4</sup>John Clapham, A Concise Economic History of Britain from the Earliest Times to 1750 (Cambridge, 1949), p. 186.

<sup>5</sup>Ashton, p. 3.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.



counties during the latter period registered gains of more than one hundred per cent, and Lancashire County, which became the center of the rapidly expanding cotton industry, experienced a remarkable 318 per cent gain in population.<sup>7</sup>

Doubtless some depopulation occurred as a result of the Enclosure Acts. But the various factors that affected England's eighteenth-century population make it difficult to determine how much depopulation in the villages was caused by eviction or enclosure and how much was caused by the villagers' willful abandonment of rural life. According to Lecky, depopulation occurred most frequently when an entire village depended on free pasture land that was enclosed or when new owners turned large acreages into game preserves.<sup>8</sup> Though there is no exact way to determine how many villages were thus affected, Lecky apparently feels that they were few because he states that, on the whole, progress in agriculture stimulated rural population.<sup>9</sup> The fact that England at the height of the enclosure movement was able to feed a burgeoning population and continue to export food further suggests that the number was rather small. On the other hand, Julia Patton feels that depopulation was serious, not so much in the early part of the century as later. She

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<sup>7</sup>G. E. Russell, "English Countryside and Population in the Eighteenth Century," Economic Geography, XII (October 1936), 426.

<sup>8</sup>William E. Lecky, A History of England in the Eighteenth Century (New York, 1887), VI, 202.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

tells of one John Cowper who, as early as 1732, wrote that he had seen within thirty years more than twenty parishes disappear as the result of enclosure and depopulation.<sup>10</sup>

Modern economists and social historians are skeptical of the claim that depopulation was a significant force in eighteenth-century history. G. N. Clark says that although the deserted villages of poetical tradition existed, they were not typical.<sup>11</sup> While conceding that the population of various areas shifted when acreage was converted from tillage to pasture in order to increase the output of wool, Sir John Clapham insists that "deserted villages are singularly rare in England."<sup>12</sup> Clapham claims that in all of England, there is only one example of a village that became completely deserted because of a decline in the need for agricultural workers. His example, a village southeast of Cambridge, was shown in Domesday Book to have had eighteen tenants at its peak.<sup>13</sup> Clapham has perhaps underestimated the extent of depopulation. But his argument receives support from W. H. Court, who feels that, instead of a decline in the need for workers, the expansion and diversification of agriculture created previously unneeded employment.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup>Patton, p. 35.

<sup>11</sup>Clark, p. 155.

<sup>12</sup>Clapham, p. 197.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Court, p. 39.

And T. S. Ashton terms "untenable" the belief that large numbers of villagers were driven off the land.<sup>15</sup> The lack of irrefutable evidence about the extent of eighteenth-century depopulation makes absolute proof difficult. The majority of economists, however, discredit the notion that depopulation was widespread. In view of England's population almost doubling in the eighteenth century, it is evident that any depopulation which may have occurred was highly localized and never became a general problem.

The country's rapidly increasing population also belies Goldsmith's inference that all villagers who were driven from their homes emigrated to America. The number of eighteenth-century emigrants was obviously never great enough to have any appreciable effect on England's population. Although historians agree that miscellaneous records dated earlier than 1800 are not wholly reliable, the sparse evidence indicates that Goldsmith would have been correct to charge that emigration had a greater effect on England's population than did depopulation. Goldsmith chose instead to imply that the residents of depopulated villages formed the bulk of England's emigrants. Lecky, while discrediting the depopulation theory, concedes that Englishmen emigrated probably in "large numbers."<sup>16</sup> T. S. Ashton estimates that "perhaps one million" people left

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<sup>15</sup> Ashton, An Economic History of England: The Eighteenth Century, p. 15.

<sup>16</sup> Lecky, loc. cit.

England during the century to seek a living overseas, "mainly in the colonies."<sup>17</sup> This number is significant for a country whose population varied from six to nine millions. The statement by Ashton, however, discloses another fallacy in Goldsmith's thinking. In The Deserted Village he implied that all Englishmen who emigrated did so, not because they wished to, but because they had no place in England where they might reside and work. In reality, a large number of persons who thought they saw greater opportunity elsewhere elected to leave England. Others left to direct or work for the overseas interests of various British concerns.<sup>18</sup>

Goldsmith categorically rejected the notion that his villagers could migrate to the cities. But his rejection attests to a phenomenon peculiar to the eighteenth century-- the rise and development of new towns-- which should be mentioned. These towns were created from the migration of an overabundant rural population, not from evicted tenants and dismissed laborers.<sup>19</sup> They became a haven from the isolation, social depression, and surplus labor in the villages.<sup>20</sup> But the emergence of new towns sometimes had an invidious effect on the villages, especially when an industry that had flourished near a village

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<sup>17</sup> Ashton, The Industrial Revolution, pp. 3-4.

<sup>18</sup> Ashton, An Economic History of England: The Eighteenth Century, p. 11.

<sup>19</sup> Court, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

relocated in a new town, or when industrial centralization caused the loss of domestic occupation and income.<sup>21</sup> It was primarily from the towns and cities that the great economic force of the century-- the industrial revolution-- affected the villagers of Auburn.

### THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

With the exception of the enclosure movement and the subsequent agrarian revolution, the industrial revolution produced the greatest changes in eighteenth-century English society. The enclosure movement can be said to have had the greatest immediate effect on the country, while the industrial revolution had the most enduring effect. In order to understand fully the impact of industrialization on England, a much more thorough study of the background of the industrial movement and of the factors that contributed to it than can be covered by this thesis would be necessary. Yet to explain the effect of the industrial revolution on English villages and villagers, several contributing influences must be mentioned. While reviewing the circumstances that resulted in an industrial revolution, one fact remains eminently clear: the villagers were powerless to oppose successfully the changes that were developing around them. It is less clear whether these changes were the cause or the effect, or both, of the industrial

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<sup>21</sup> Ephraim Lipson, The Growth of English Society (New York, 1950), p. 226.

revolution.

The industrial revolution was the product of an age that contained many ideas and attitudes conducive to a development of such magnitude. In government, the country's political stability certainly had its effect on industrialization.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the preceding century, with all its harsh changes of government, eighteenth-century England enjoyed the security that came with the uninterrupted reigns of her monarchs. In finance, the century witnessed the development of a money and banking system better equipped to use and control capital than were the antiquated procedures of earlier centuries.<sup>23</sup> The highly developed improvements in finance included the establishment of a national bank, the placement of the pound on a fixed gold standard, the use of bills of credit and other money substitutes, and the growth of stock, investment, trading, and insurance companies.

The tremendous population increase discussed above certainly influenced industrialization. New sources of food were required; additional jobs had to be provided; residences had to be built; and a wide range of solutions had to be found for providing goods and services to a larger number of people.

In agriculture and commerce, the increased productivity of the soil and the constant growth of profitable markets, both foreign and domestic, affected the progress of the

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<sup>22</sup>Court, p. 86.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 82.

century.<sup>24</sup> Not only was England able to feed and clothe her growing population, but also to export great quantities of foodstuffs and raw materials for textiles.<sup>25</sup> New methods for agriculture, manufacturing, and commerce resulted from the need to transport goods and supply markets.

Finally, in manpower, England had an abundance of men with courage and determination, who were not awed by the opportunities surrounding them. Conspicuously, the wealthy entrepreneur emerged, using imagination and complete involvement in business affairs to create opportunity where none had previously existed.<sup>26</sup> And there was the manifest inventiveness of Englishmen such as Abraham Darby in metals, Richard Arkwright in textiles, and James Watt in power development, whose mechanical devices transformed England into the acknowledged leader of industrial progress.

All of these complex interrelated forces produced (or were an integral part of) the industrial revolution that changed the face and character of England. All of them Goldsmith ignored-- through choice or through ignorance of their existence. His charge that English villages were being destroyed will not bear scrutiny. His oversimplified explanation-- emigration-- fails to explain the fate of villagers whose lives were

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 30-31 and Clark, pp. 141-142.

<sup>25</sup> Court, p. 32 and Clark, p. 151 and p. 165.

<sup>26</sup> Court, p. 87.

disrupted. His villain-- the increase in luxuries-- hardly accounts for the numerous influences that affected his villagers. And his solution appears wholly inadequate for coping with an evolution in which the entire country was involved.

The Deserted Village very ably conveys the sense of utter loss felt by a few people whose lives were perhaps ruined by forces they knew not existed; it infuses a feeling of guilt into all who were responsible for the fate of those in Auburn; it succeeds in describing a fabled existence which Goldsmith's readers had idealized; it provides a kind of catharsis for everyone who fears oblivion or oppression; and it warns all nations that greatness is not measured simply by "loads of freighted ore." But it does not accurately reflect the problems of eighteenth-century England.

Because of the textile industry's close ties with cottage life and village economies, its transformation under the industrial revolution to centralized operations in giant factories produced a greater effect on villagers than any other part of the revolution. The story of its eighteenth-century development tells much of how the entire revolution affected village life. It is a story that Goldsmith might have used as the background for The Deserted Village. For most of his villagers, alterations in the organization of the textile industry were probably second in importance only to those in agriculture. If Auburn was the representative village that he claimed it to be, a good many of its inhabitants



were connected to some degree with textile manufacturing.

Traditionally the textile industry had been the most important segment of what has become known as the domestic system, so-called because all or a large part of the manufacturing process was conducted by a villager and his family in their own cottage.<sup>27</sup> The cottager owned his tools and equipment, and the man who conducted the business supplied him with raw materials and a contract to process and manufacture some article. The finished goods were picked up and carted away to be sold somewhere else. The cottager set his own pace and was paid at rates he negotiated according to the number of pieces he and his family produced. Many cottages were equipped to handle the entire process of cloth-making from combing and carding to spinning and looming; others engaged in perhaps one or more of the processes. The extent to which cottagers were involved in textiles depended on the amount of spare time they had, the amount of money they needed as a supplement to their farm income, and the amount of money they could afford to invest in equipment. All over England, thousands of families depended on textiles for their earnings, either entirely or as supplemental income. The system had worked well for hundreds of years, producing sufficient quantities of goods to supply domestic and foreign markets. Yet there were warnings as early as the fourteenth century that the domestic system

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<sup>27</sup> See Court, pp. 60-61.

would ultimately give way to centralized operations in the textile industry. Lipson tells of a large woolen factory that existed before 1600.<sup>28</sup> Not until the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, does the evidence of large-scale production become a marked feature of industrial activity.<sup>29</sup>

The inventiveness mentioned earlier as one of the prominent features of eighteenth-century England was pronounced in textiles. So many inventions, in fact, were applied to textiles that the industrial revolution is generally considered to have begun there.

Because of the far-reaching effects of his water-frame, patented in 1769, Richard Arkwright has been called "the father of the modern factory system."<sup>30</sup> Although the water-frame, used to lengthen textile fibers, was not an original invention in the sense that the principle had never been used before, it accomplished more to improve material handling than any other textile invention of the century. Arkwright's invention was merely a refinement of the carding machine invented by Lewis Paul in the 1740's, but he had the genius to develop the devices of others and to adapt them to various situations.<sup>31</sup> John Kay's flying-shuttle (1730's), James Hargreaves's spinning jenny (1767), and Samuel Crompton's mule (a combination of the

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<sup>28</sup>Lipson, p. 78.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

spinning jenny and water-frame, 1779) all helped to revolutionize the textile industry and cause its move from cottage to factory.<sup>32</sup>

It was the patent granted in 1769 to James Watt for his steam engine, however, that decided the fate of the domestic system.<sup>33</sup> The development of this cheap source of power, combined with the various machines that were appearing, made the centralization of power and machine under one roof inescapable. Thus the modern factory system was firmly launched. Men who invested heavily in industry saw immediately that it was no longer practical to maintain widely scattered laborers who produced small quantities of finished goods. The evils, both actual and presumed, and the benefits that accompanied the changeover to the factory system constitute much of the economic history for the remainder of the eighteenth century.

Textile manufacturers had been forced for years to content themselves with the domestic system even though they knew that centralization would be preferable for handling raw materials, increasing the efficiency of manufacture, serving the markets, and obtaining capital for new operations. The introduction of Arkwright's and Watt's inventions made centralization and the disruption to village life necessary. The small cottage producer had to be subordinated to the larger

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<sup>32</sup> ibid., pp. 196-202.

<sup>33</sup> Ashton, The Industrial Revolution, p. 70.

system in which technical knowledge and greater capital could better serve Britain's demanding internal and export needs.<sup>34</sup> Bolstered by new inventions, the industry that had been the most decentralized of any was converted into a system of giant factories, employing hundreds of persons under one roof. Thus the textile industry first proved that mass production could be used successfully in an entire manufacturing process.<sup>35</sup>

The cottager operated under distinct disadvantages in competition with large investors. He was unable to purchase the expensive new machines, including power equipment, that were requisite to efficient operations. Moreover, he was in no position to extend credit indiscriminately or to wait long periods for payment, as the large investor could do. Since the widespread use of credit was a significant feature of the intricate new financial system, the large investor found an advantage in being able to use credit rather incautiously. When the regular markets became temporarily depressed or were interrupted due to war, boycotts, or for other reasons, the industrialist with extensive operations could rely on his savings or income from other interests. On the other hand, the slightest interruption of the markets could prove disastrous for the cottager. He might have no other income, and if he were indebted for his

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<sup>34</sup> Court, p. 60.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

equipment, he could lose it.<sup>36</sup>

In spite of the inevitableness of its collapse, the domestic system contained definite advantages both for the capitalist and the laborer. The capitalist could conceal the extent of his operations and thus avoid taxes and irksome government control. During depressed periods, he could simply reduce the scope of his operations and transfer much of the oppressive effect of the depression to the cottagers who worked for him. Even more important, his invested capital did not work against him during depressions as it did when much of his money was invested in a monstrous, idle factory containing valuable equipment. Under the domestic system, the laborer enjoyed the superior working conditions that existed in his own home. He decided for himself when and for how long he wished to work. He had a personal opportunity to demonstrate superior workmanship and efficiency and to use them in setting his rates. And as long as he lived in the country, he could engage in some side employment (usually agriculture) which might be relied on for income.<sup>37</sup>

Even for the cottager, however, the domestic system was never as idyllic as it has been described by Goldsmith and other defenders of the system. First, the cottager's equipment might sometimes lie idle for weeks because of delays in

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp. 60-61.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 62-63.

his materials reaching him. Second, the cottager was not a part of a working group that could collectively analyze problems of mutual interest and correct them rather than become embroiled in incessant disputes over rates, delivery dates, and other matters. Third, the cottager was continually subjected to the malpractice of receiving incorrect weights and measures of materials from his supplier. In the hassle that followed, the cottager likely lost the argument and his money. Fourth, the cottager had to work long hours in order to profit from his small operation; he also had to require his children to assist with the work. These undesirable conditions were inherent in the domestic system; they were not introduced by the industrial revolution. And fifth, the cottager was assured of less continuous employment than the factory worker because a centralized industry could stock inventory when the market was depressed whereas the cottager had orders for a specific number of finished goods and no more.<sup>38</sup>

When confronted with the threat of losing his part-time occupation to a factory worker, the cottager had to decide whether to abandon his work in textiles or to pursue it on a full-time basis. Those who accepted employment in a textile factory became deeply resentful of a system which they considered an infringement on personal liberty. They were no longer responsible solely to themselves for their personal conduct;

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<sup>38</sup> Lipson, pp. 104-106.

they no longer owned the equipment they used. They lost control of the rates for which they worked and were rather suddenly faced with reliance on wages dictated to them by an employer. Many of them left the relative security of the soil and traveled to unfamiliar towns to join hundreds of other people in working for a single employer. They naturally felt that they had lost all individualism to the machines, which dictated a new set of work practices and rules. They no longer had any control over periods of unemployment; and they had no way to support themselves and their families when unemployment came. Instead of selling a product which they alone had manufactured, they sold their labor and their skill. To the employer, labor was a commodity to be purchased just as one would purchase tools or machines; to the laborer, it was his only means of subsistence. The different estimates of the value of labor produced a schism between labor and management which continues to the present.<sup>39</sup> The villagers who chose permanent employment in textiles faced no more striking alterations in their lives, however, than did those who abandoned textiles and decided to remain farmers. The agrarian revolution had also begun, and the trend in agriculture was to tenant farming managed by large investors. Thus the farmers too, were confronted by many of the same dilemmas facing the factory workers; they were no longer masters of their own occupations but employees in a wider scheme of activity.

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<sup>39</sup>

Ibid., p. 93.

"And it was the old village of a happy community life to which Goldsmith, in indignation and distress at a devastation wrought by forces which he only dimly understood, gave imperishable expression."<sup>40</sup> So remarks Julia Patton about The Deserted Village. That the expression is imperishable is undoubted, but Goldsmith's dim understanding of the changes that were sweeping the country is quite unflattering. His poem contains a single vague allusion (l. 336) to the industry which played a considerable part in the affairs of his villagers. And his proclivity to misjudge the real cause of the upheaval in village life accentuates the distortion in his poem. He failed to realize that no appeal to statesmen was capable of curbing the natural forces at work around him. The "happy community life" whose passing he deplored was replaced by a vastly different and far more complicated, but equally happy, community.

The tragic destruction predicted by Goldsmith had failed to materialize at the close of the eighteenth century. G. N. Clark says that, with minor exceptions, every group in England was better off economically in the late-eighteenth century than it had been at the accession of Charles II.<sup>41</sup> The country's standard of living steadily rose through the century says Ashton.<sup>42</sup> In spite of men, and Goldsmith must be included

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<sup>40</sup>Patton, p. 84.

<sup>41</sup>Clark, p. 185.

<sup>42</sup>Ashton, The Industrial Revolution, pp. 157-158.



among them, who advocated, perhaps through misunderstanding, the status quo or a reversion to the policies and practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the country moved dynamically, and the move proved ultimately beneficial to all men.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

The final appraisal of The Deserted Village as a work of social protest must be that Goldsmith was not justified in claiming that the accumulation of wealth, manifested by an increase in luxuries, destroyed English villages and caused the residents to emigrate. So broad are his implications of consummate damage that the social and economic history of eighteenth-century England would have to display an almost complete breakdown in the execution of fundamental processes to support his position. This it fails to do. For Goldsmith to have said that all was not right in England would be acceptable. He erred in saying by implication that little was right about England's treatment of her villagers.

Criticism of Goldsmith for carrying his attack further than his evidence supported him may be resented by some. It is not unreasonable, however, to criticize a poem that goes beyond the mere display of grievances and predicts absolute ruin for a major nation. Surely the poet can be required to produce a firm basis for his argument and prophecy. Goldsmith is rightfully praised for his remarkable success in getting his readers to identify themselves with the plight of the villagers of Auburn. But he needed to have a firmer position before pushing the identification further than that. A poem with political overtones, such as The Deserted Village, is obliged

to represent honestly the situations it describes; it cannot be excused from the responsibility for honest representation on the grounds that it is "art for art's sake."

The strongest objections are reserved for his claim that Auburn was representative and that the evils he deplored were wreaking similar destruction in villages all over England. The consequences of allowing such pervasive destructive forces to operate without restraint are all too obvious. But to believe that the forces could develop unchecked is unrealistic and contrary to the established order of things. Pursuing Goldsmith's charges to their natural conclusion, one sees that England would ultimately have no rural or laboring class. This inference obviously violates basic principles of economics. Goldsmith might have limited his subject to a factual instance of an eviction caused by a gentleman who converted land into a country estate. Further than that, unless he was equipped with sufficient evidence, he should not have gone. His only evidence was a sincere belief in his allegations. This is hardly enough to justify converting a limited experience into a national evil.

The association of Auburn with all English villages undoubtedly increased the effectiveness of the poem simply by making the problems assume vast proportions. The far-reaching association that Goldsmith imagined for his village is probably related to the eighteenth-century concept of universality in virtually all matters. But would the poem necessarily have been

less effective if it had described a single incident for which Goldsmith could offer specific, irrefutable evidence? One such incident is ample cause for poetry. The tragedy would have been no less sublime by having affected only one family. The inclusiveness that was intimated, however, borders on the ridiculous, and perhaps lessens the poem's potential effectiveness. But the fact that the poem is so effective makes the comprehensive implications no less dishonest.

One is tempted to call The Deserted Village a superb expression of regret for a way of life that was passing into oblivion and be done with it. But the more one reads and contemplates the poem, the more he realizes that Goldsmith was perfectly serious in his belief that English villages were being wholly destroyed. Consequently, a thorough refutation of his charges is required. Compared to any reasonable survey of actual conditions, Goldsmith's descriptions are plainly excessive. Both the evils he ascribed to England's commercialism and the destruction he observed are magnified. Depopulation was far less serious than the problem he made of it. The scattered depopulation that did occur was purely local and not widespread enough to cause general alarm. The emigration scene that provides the climax of the poem is more the result of poetic imagination than observed fact. Although evidence indicates that emigration was substantial, it never prevented a steady increase in England's population. And emigration was not fully caused by the influences that Goldsmith described.

More erroneous than his statements about either depopulation or emigration is his implication that all enclosures resulted in the formation of country estates for wealthy men. But his accusations seem to contain just enough truth to be dangerous when distorted to fit his beliefs. The patent intensification pervading the poem, the invidious comparisons of England with dying objects-- these commingled with the most provoking sincerity, make refutation of Goldsmith's thesis necessary but difficult.

Of the two very prominent forces that transformed eighteenth-century England, Goldsmith displayed only the dimmest understanding of one and total unawareness of the other. His poem reveals knowledge of the enclosure movement but misinterpretation of its effects. He failed to understand that diverse types of Englishmen participated in the movement, not just wealthy gentlemen looking for a country home. The comprehensive changes producing (or produced by) the industrial revolution seem to have bypassed Goldsmith completely. It appears impossible that he could fail to be impressed by the striking developments in all aspects of society. Yet, unless his naivete was manifested solely for poetic effect, the simple disposition he made of his evicted villagers indicates that he was unaware that industrialism had reached England. He was obviously not unaware of the profusion of wealth; he related it, however, not to an incipient force, but to increased commerce. He should have known that more than "needful product"

was being transported from England and that goods other than luxuries were being brought in. The exchange necessarily attended the industrialization he missed. It would be unsuitable indeed to think that nothing except the destruction of Auburn was derived from the alterations in England.

The economic solutions that Goldsmith was apparently proposing would have had, if effected, a more devastating effect on England than the evils he observed. It is not only impractical but also impossible to think that England could have suppressed imports and exports, altered the distribution of wealth, or preserved the open-fields system. Then, as now, she relied on overseas markets for economic progress-- even more, for her very existence. The application of any of his proposed solutions would, in truth, have bankrupted and destroyed England. Ironically, his proposals were potentially more destructive than the developments which he condemned as evil.

It would be useless to claim that eighteenth-century England was utopian. Certainly Goldsmith could have found specific instances of villagers who were dispossessed and harmed by the enclosure movement; not every worker was justly treated in the changeover to factories. Those who were wronged deserved the great sympathy and tribute paid them by Goldsmith. To be as fair to society, however, as he expected society to be to his villagers, the tribute should have dealt with specific grievances rather than disperse guilt to

undeserving places. Numerous problems existed; problems in housing, sanitation, law enforcement, working conditions, schools, public roads, and others badly needed attention. But the country made progress in adapting to a system that would provide the resources to cope with these problems.

Goldsmith, presumably a perceptive observer of his age, displays unfortunate ignorance of the wonders of his society and, consequently, inability to evaluate them objectively. The social and economic history of the eighteenth century, considered in total, establishes Goldsmith's deserted village as a romantic misconception rather than an economic fact.

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