



***THOMAS  
GRAY***

***SELECT  
POEMS  
OF THOMAS  
GRAY***

**Thomas Gray**

# **Select Poems of Thomas Gray**

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## PREFACE.

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Many editions of Gray have been published in the last fifty years, some of them very elegant, and some showing considerable editorial labor, but not one, so far as I am aware, critically exact either in text or in notes. No editor since Mathias (A.D. 1814) has given the 2d line of the *Elegy* as Gray wrote and printed it; while Mathias's mispunctuation of the 123d line has been copied by his successors, almost without exception. Other variations from the early editions are mentioned in the notes.

It is a curious fact that the most accurate edition of Gray's collected poems is the *editio princeps* of 1768, printed under his own supervision. The first edition of the two Pindaric odes, *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard* (Strawberry-Hill, 1757), was printed with equal care, and the proofs were probably read by the poet. The text of the present edition has been collated, line by line, with that of these early editions, and in no instance have I adopted a later reading. All the MS. variations, and the various readings I have noted in the modern editions, are given in the notes.

Pickering's edition of 1835, edited by Mitford, has been followed blindly in nearly all the more recent editions, and its many errors (see foot-note [below](#) and [also](#)) have been faithfully reproduced. Even its blunders in the "indenting" of the lines in the corresponding stanzas of the two Pindaric odes, which any careful proof-reader ought to have

corrected, have been copied again and again—as in the Boston (1853) reprint of Pickering, the pretty little edition of Bickers & Son (London, n. d.), the fac-simile of the latter printed at our University Press, Cambridge (1866), etc.

Of former editions of Gray, the only one very fully annotated is Mitford's (Pickering, 1835), already mentioned. I have drawn freely from that, correcting many errors, and also from Wakefield's and Mason's editions, and from Hales's notes (*Longer English Poems*, London, 1872) on the *Elegy* and the Pindaric odes. To all this material many original notes and illustrations have been added.

The facts concerning the first publication of the *Elegy* are not given correctly by any of the editors, and even the "experts" of *Notes and Queries* have not been able to disentangle the snarl of conflicting evidence. I am not sure that I have settled the question myself (see [below](#) and footnote), but I have at least shown that Gray is a more credible witness in the case than any of his critics. Their testimony is obviously inconsistent and inconclusive; he may have confounded the names of two magazines, but that remains to be proved.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since writing the above to-day, I have found by the merest chance in my own library another bit of evidence in the case, which fully confirms my surmise that the *Elegy* was printed in *The Magazine of Magazines* before it appeared in the *Grand Magazine of Magazines*. *Chambers's Book of Days* (vol. ii. p. 146), in an article on "Gray and his Elegy," says:

"It first saw the light in *The Magazine of Magazines*, February, 1751. Some imaginary literary wag is made to rise in a convivial assembly, and thus announce it: 'Gentlemen, give me leave to soothe my own melancholy, and amuse you in a most noble manner, with a full copy of verses by the very ingenious Mr. Gray, of Peterhouse, Cambridge. They are stanzas written in a country churchyard.' Then follow the verses. A few days afterwards, Dodsley's edition appeared," etc.

The same authority gives the four stanzas omitted after the 18th (see [below](#)) as they appear in the *North American Review*, except that the first

line of the third is "Hark how the sacred calm that *reigns* around," a reading which I have found nowhere else. The stanza "There scattered oft," etc. (see [below](#)), is given as in the review. The reading further [below](#) must be a later one.

I have retained most of the "parallel passages" from the poets given by the editors, and have added others, without regard to the critics who have sneered at this kind of annotations. Whether Gray borrowed from the others, or the others from him, matters little; very likely, in most instances, neither party was consciously the borrower. Gray, in his own notes, has acknowledged certain debts to other poets, and probably these were all that he was aware of. Some of these he contracted unwittingly (see what he says of one of them in a letter to Walpole, quoted in the note on the *Ode on the Spring*, [31](#)), and the same may have been true of some apparently similar cases pointed out by modern editors. To me, however, the chief interest of these coincidences and resemblances of thought or expression is as studies in the "comparative anatomy" of poetry. The teacher will find them useful as pegs to hang questions upon, or texts for oral instruction. The pupil, or the young reader, who finds out who all these poets were, when they lived, what they wrote, etc., will have learned no small amount of English literary history. If he studies the quotations merely as illustrations of style and expression, or as examples of the poetic diction of various periods, he will have learned some lessons in the history and the use of his mother-tongue.

The wood-cuts, illustrations [1](#), [4](#), [5](#), [6](#), [7](#), [9](#), [12](#), [14](#), [17](#), [18](#), [19](#), [20](#), [21](#), [24](#), and [29](#) are from Birket Foster's designs; illustrations [8](#), [10](#), [11](#), [13](#), [15](#), and [16](#) are from the graceful drawings of "E. V. B." (the Hon. Mrs. Boyle); the rest are from various sources.

*Cambridge*, Feb. 29, 1876.

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STOKE-POGIS CHURCH.

## THE LIFE OF THOMAS GRAY.

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BY ROBERT CARRUTHERS.

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Thomas Gray, the author of the celebrated *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*, was born in Cornhill, London, December 26, 1716. His father, Philip Gray, an exchange broker and scrivener, was a wealthy and nominally respectable citizen, but he treated his family with brutal severity and neglect, and the poet was altogether indebted for the advantages of a learned education to the affectionate care and industry of his mother, whose maiden name was Antrobus, and who, in conjunction with a maiden



sister, kept a millinery shop. A brother of Mrs. Gray was assistant to the Master of Eton, and was also a fellow of Pembroke College, Cambridge. Under his protection the poet was educated at Eton, and from thence went to Peterhouse, attending college from 1734 to September, 1738. At Eton he had as contemporaries Richard West, son of the Lord Chancellor of Ireland, and Horace Walpole, son of the triumphant Whig minister, Sir Robert Walpole. West died early in his 26th year, but his genius and virtues and his sorrows will forever live in the correspondence of his friend. In the spring of 1739, Gray was invited by Horace Walpole to accompany him as travelling companion in a tour through France and Italy. They made the usual route, and Gray wrote remarks on all he saw in Florence, Rome, Naples, etc. His observations on arts and antiquities, and his sketches of foreign manners, evince his admirable taste, learning, and discrimination. Since Milton, no such accomplished English traveller had visited those classic shores. In their journey through Dauphiny, Gray's attention was strongly arrested by the wild and picturesque site of the Grande Chartreuse, surrounded by its dense forest of beech and fir, its enormous precipices, cliffs, and cascades. He visited it a second time on his return, and in the album of the mountain convent he wrote his famous Alcaic Ode. At Reggio the travellers quarrelled and parted. Walpole took the whole blame on himself. He was fond of pleasure and amusements, "intoxicated by vanity, indulgence, and the insolence of his situation as a prime minister's son"—his own confession—while Gray was studious, of a serious disposition, and independent spirit. The immediate cause of the rupture is said to have been Walpole's clandestinely opening, reading, and resealing a letter addressed to Gray, in which he expected to find a confirmation of his suspicions that Gray had been writing unfavourably of him to some friends in England. A partial reconciliation was effected about three years afterwards by the intervention of a lady,

and Walpole redeemed his youthful error by a life-long sincere admiration and respect for his friend. From Reggio Gray proceeded to Venice, and thence travelled homewards, attended by a *laquais de voyage*. He arrived in England in September, 1741, having been absent about two years and a half. His father died in November, and it was found that the poet's fortune would not enable him to prosecute the study of the law. He therefore retired to Cambridge, and fixed his residence at the university. There he continued for the remainder of his life, with the exception of about two years spent in London, when the treasures of the British Museum were thrown open. At Cambridge he had the range of noble libraries. His happiness consisted in study, and he perused with critical attention the Greek and Roman poets, philosophers, historians, and orators. Plato and the Anthologia he read and annotated with great care, as if for publication. He compiled tables of Greek chronology, added notes to Linnæus and other naturalists, wrote geographical disquisitions on Strabo; and, besides being familiar with French and Italian literature, was a zealous archæological student, and profoundly versed in architecture, botany, painting, and music. In all departments of human learning, except mathematics, he was a master. But it follows that one so studious, so critical, and so fastidious, could not be a voluminous writer. A few poems include all the original compositions of Gray—the quintessence, as it were, of thirty years of ceaseless study and contemplation, irradiated by bright and fitful gleams of inspiration. In 1742 Gray composed his *Ode to Spring*, his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, and his *Ode to Adversity*—productions which most readers of poetry can repeat from memory. He commenced a didactic poem, *On the Alliance of Education and Government*, but wrote only about a hundred lines. Every reader must regret that this philosophical poem is but a fragment. It is in the style and measure of Dryden, of whom Gray was an ardent admirer and close student. His

*Elegy written in a Country Churchyard* was completed and published in 1751. In the form of a sixpenny *brochure* it circulated rapidly, four editions being exhausted the first year. This popularity surprised the poet. He said sarcastically that it was owing entirely to the subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose. The solemn and affecting nature of the poem, applicable to all ranks and classes, no doubt aided its sale; it required high poetic sensibility and a cultivated taste to appreciate the rapid transitions, the figurative language, and lyrical magnificence of the odes; but the elegy went home to all hearts; while its musical harmony, originality, and pathetic train of sentiment and feeling render it one of the most perfect of English poems. No vicissitudes of taste or fashion have affected its popularity. When the original manuscript of the poem was lately (1854) offered for sale, it brought the almost incredible sum of £131. The two great odes of Gray, *The Progress of Poetry* and *The Bard*, were published in 1757, and were but coldly received. His name, however, stood high, and on the death of Cibber, the same year, he was offered the laureateship, which he wisely declined. He was ambitious, however, of obtaining the more congenial and dignified appointment of Professor of Modern History in the University of Cambridge, which fell vacant in 1762, and, by the advice of his friends, he made application to Lord Bute, but was unsuccessful. Lord Bute had designed it for the tutor of his son-in-law, Sir James Lowther. No one had heard of the tutor, but the Bute influence was all-prevailing. In 1765 Gray took a journey into Scotland, penetrating as far north as Dunkeld and the Pass of Killiecrankie; and his account of his tour, in letters to his friends, is replete with interest and with touches of his peculiar humour and graphic description. One other poem proceeded from his pen. In 1768 the Professorship of Modern History was again vacant, and the Duke of Grafton bestowed it upon Gray. A sum of £400 per annum was thus

added to his income; but his health was precarious—he had lost it, he said, just when he began to be easy in his circumstances. The nomination of the Duke of Grafton to the office of Chancellor of the University enabled Gray to acknowledge the favour conferred on himself. He thought it better that gratitude should sing than expectation, and he honoured his grace's installation with an ode. Such occasional productions are seldom happy; but Gray preserved his poetic dignity and select beauty of expression. He made the founders of Cambridge, as Mr. Hallam has remarked, "pass before our eyes like shadows over a magic glass." When the ceremony of the installation was over, the poet-professor went on a tour to the lakes of Cumberland and Westmoreland, and few of the beauties of the lake-country, since so famous, escaped his observation. This was to be his last excursion. While at dinner one day in the college-hall he was seized with an attack of gout in his stomach, which resisted all the powers of medicine, and proved fatal in less than a week. He died on the 30th of July, 1771, and was buried, according to his own desire, beside the remains of his mother at Stoke-Pogis, near Slough, in Buckinghamshire, in a beautiful sequestered village churchyard that is supposed to have furnished the scene of his elegy.<sup>1</sup> The literary habits and personal peculiarities of Gray are familiar to us from the numerous representations and allusions of his friends. It is easy to fancy the recluse-poet sitting in his college-chambers in the old quadrangle of Pembroke Hall. His windows are ornamented with mignonette and choice flowers in China vases, but outside may be discerned some iron-work intended to be serviceable as a fire-escape, for he has a horror of fire. His furniture is neat and select; his books, rather for use than show, are disposed around him. He has a harpsichord in the room. In the corner of one of the apartments is a trunk containing his deceased mother's dresses, carefully folded up and preserved. His

fastidiousness, bordering upon effeminacy, is visible in his gait and manner—in his handsome features and small, well-dressed person, especially when he walks abroad and sinks the author and hard student in "the gentleman who sometimes writes for his amusement." He writes always with a crow-quill, speaks slowly and sententiously, and shuns the crew of dissonant college revellers, who call him "a prig," and seek to annoy him. Long mornings of study, and nights feverish from ill-health, are spent in those chambers; he is often listless and in low spirits; yet his natural temper is not desponding, and he delights in employment. He has always something to learn or to communicate—some sally of humour or quiet stroke of satire for his friends and correspondents—some note on natural history to enter in his journal—some passage of Plato to unfold and illustrate—some golden thought of classic inspiration to inlay on his page—some bold image to tone down—some verse to retouch and harmonize. His life is on the whole innocent and happy, and a feeling of thankfulness to the Great Giver is breathed over all.

<sup>1</sup> A claim has been put up for the churchyard of Granchester, about two miles from Cambridge, the great bell of St. Mary's serving for the "curfew." But Stoke-Pogis is more likely to have been the spot, if any individual locality were indicated. The poet often visited the village, his aunt and mother residing there, and his aunt was interred in the churchyard of the place. Gray's epitaph on his mother is characterized not only by the tenderness with which he always regarded her memory, but by his style and cast of thought. It runs thus: "Beside her friend and sister here sleep the remains of Dorothy Gray, widow, the careful, tender mother of many children, one of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her. She died March 11, 1753, aged 72." She had lived to read the *Elegy*, which was perhaps an ample recompense for her maternal cares and affection. Mrs. Gray's will commences in a similar touching strain: "In the name of God, amen. This is the last will and desire of Dorothy Gray to her son Thomas Gray." [Cunningham's edit. of *Johnson's Lives*.] They were all in all to each other. The father's cruelty and neglect, their straitened circumstances, the sacrifices made by the mother to maintain her son at the university, her pride in the talents and conduct of that son, and the increasing gratitude and affection of the latter, nursed in his scholastic and

cloistered solitude—these form an affecting but noble record in the history of genius.

[One would infer from the above that Mrs. Gray was *not* "interred in the churchyard of the place," though the epitaph given immediately after shows that she *was*. Gray in his will directed that he should be laid beside her there. The passage in the will reads thus: "First, I do desire that my body may be deposited in the vault, made by my dear mother in the churchyard of Stoke-Pogeis, near Slough in Buckinghamshire, by her remains, in a coffin of seasoned oak, neither lined nor covered, and (unless it be inconvenient) I could wish that one of my executors may see me laid in the grave, and distribute among such honest and industrious poor persons in said parish as he thinks fit, the sum of ten pounds in charity."—*Ed.*]

Various editions of the collected works of Gray have been published. The first, including memoirs of his life and his correspondence, edited by his friend, the Rev. W. Mason, appeared in 1775. It has been often reprinted, and forms the groundwork of the editions by Mathias (1814) and Mitford (1816). Mr. Mitford, in 1843, published Gray's correspondence with the Rev. Norton Nicholls; and in 1854 another collection of Gray's letters was published, edited also by Mr. Mitford. Every scrap of the poet's MSS. is eagerly sought after, and every year seems to add to his popularity as a poet and letter-writer.

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In 1778 a monument to Gray was erected in Westminster Abbey by Mason, with the following inscription:

No more the Grecian muse unrivall'd reigns,  
To Britain let the nations homage pay;  
She felt a Homer's fire in Milton's strains,  
A Pindar's rapture in the lyre of Gray.

The cenotaph afterwards erected in Stoke Park by Mr. Penn is described [below](#).



WEST-END HOUSE.

## STOKE-POGIS.

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FROM HOWITT'S "HOMES AND HAUNTS OF THE BRITISH POETS."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Harper's edition, vol. i. p. 314 foll.



It is at Stoke-Pogis that we seek the most attractive vestiges of Gray. Here he used to spend his vacations, not only when a youth at Eton, but during the whole of his future life, while his mother and his aunts lived. Here it was that his *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, his celebrated *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*, and his *Long Story* were not only written, but were mingled with the circumstances and all the tenderest feelings of his own life.

His mother and aunts lived at an old-fashioned house in a very retired spot at Stoke, called West-End. This house stood in a hollow, much screened by trees. A small stream ran through the garden, and it is said that Gray used to employ himself when here much in this garden, and that many of the trees still remaining are of his planting. On one side of the house extended an upland field, which was planted round so as to give a charming retired walk; and at the summit of the field was raised an artificial mound, and upon it was built a sort of arcade or summer-house, which gave full prospect of Windsor and Eton. Here Gray used to delight to sit; here he was accustomed to read and write much; and it is just the place to inspire the *Ode on Eton College*, which lay in the midst of its fine landscape, beautifully in view. The old house inhabited by Gray and his mother has just been pulled down, and replaced by an Elizabethan mansion by the present proprietor, Mr. Penn, of Stoke Park, just by.<sup>2</sup> The garden, of course, has shared in the change, and now stands gay with its fountain and its modern greenhouse, and, excepting for some fine trees, no longer reminds you of Gray. The woodland walk still remains round the adjoining field, and the summer-house on its summit, though now much cracked by time, and only held together by iron cramps. The trees are now so lofty that they completely obstruct the view, and shut out both Eton and Windsor.

<sup>2</sup> This was written (or published, at least) in 1846; but Mitford, in the *Life of Gray* prefixed to the "Eton edition" of his *Poems*, published in 1847, says: "The house, which is now called *West-End*, lies in a secluded part of the parish, on the road to Fulmer. It has lately been much enlarged and adorned by its present proprietor [Mr. Penn], but the room called 'Gray's' (distinguished by a small balcony) is still preserved; and a shady walk round an adjoining meadow, with a summer-house on the rising land, are still remembered as favourite places frequented by the poet."—*Ed.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Stoke Park is about a couple of miles from Slough. The country is flat, but its monotony is broken up by the noble character and disposition of its woods. Near the house is a fine expanse of water, across which the eye falls on fine views, particularly to the south, of Windsor Castle, Cooper's Hill, and the Forest Woods. About three hundred yards from the north front of the house stands a column, sixty-eight feet high, bearing on the top a colossal statue of Sir Edward Coke, by Rosa. The woods of the park shut out the view of West-End House, Gray's occasional residence, but the space is open from the mansion across the park, so as to take in the view both of the church and of a monument erected by the late Mr. Penn to Gray. Alighting from the carriage at a lodge, we enter the park just at the monument. This is composed of fine freestone, and consists of a large sarcophagus, supported on a square pedestal, with inscriptions on each side. Three of them are selected from the *Ode on Eton College* and the *Elegy*. They are:

Hard by yon wood, now smiling as in scorn,  
Muttering his wayward fancies he would rove;  
Now drooping, woeful-wan, like one forlorn,  
Or craz'd with care, or cross'd in hopeless love.

One morn I miss'd him on the custom'd hill,  
Along the heath, and near his fav'rite tree;  
Another came; nor yet beside the rill,  
Nor up the lawn, nor at the wood was he.

The second is from the *Ode*:

Ye distant spires! ye antique towers!  
That crown the watery glade,  
Where grateful Science still adores  
Her Henry's holy shade;  
And ye, that from the stately brow  
Of Windsor's heights th' expanse below  
Of grove, of lawn, of mead survey,  
Whose turf, whose shade, whose flowers among  
Wanders the hoary Thames along  
His silver-winding way.

Ah, happy hills! ah, pleasing shade!  
Ah, fields belov'd in vain!  
Where once my careless childhood stray'd,  
A stranger yet to pain!  
I feel the gales that from ye blow,  
A momentary bliss bestow.

The third is again from the *Elegy*:

Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep.

The breezy call of incense-breathing morn,  
The swallow twittering from the straw-built shed,  
The cock's shrill clarion or the echoing horn,  
No more shall rouse them from their lowly bed.

The fourth bears this inscription:

This Monument, in honour of  
THOMAS GRAY,  
Was erected A.D. 1799,  
Among the scenery  
Celebrated by that great Lyric and Elegiac Poet.  
He died in 1771,  
And lies unnoted in the adjoining Church-yard,  
Under the Tomb-stone on which he piously  
And pathetically recorded the interment  
Of his Aunt and lamented Mother.

This monument is in a neatly kept garden-like enclosure, with a winding walk approaching from the shade of the neighbouring trees. To the right, across the park, at some little distance, backed by fine trees, stands the rural little church and churchyard where Gray wrote his *Elegy*, and where he lies. As you walk on to this, the mansion closes the distant view between the woods with fine effect. The church has often been engraved, and is therefore tolerably familiar to the general reader. It consists of two barn-like structures, with tall roofs, set side by side, and the tower and finely tapered spire rising above them at the northwest corner. The church is thickly hung with ivy, where

"The moping owl may to the moon complain  
Of such as, wandering near her secret bower,  
Molest her ancient, solitary reign."

The structure is as simple and old-fashioned, both without and within, as any village church can well be. No village, however, is to be seen. Stoke consists chiefly of scattered houses, and this is now in the midst of the park. In the churchyard,

"Beneath those rugged elms, that yew-tree's shade,  
Where heaves the turf in many a mouldering heap,  
Each in his narrow cell forever laid,  
The rude forefathers of the hamlet sleep."

All this is quite literal; and the tomb of the poet himself, near the southeast window, completes the impression of the scene. It is a plain brick altar tomb, covered with a blue slate slab, and, besides his own ashes, contains those of his mother and aunt. On the slab are inscribed the following lines by Gray himself: "In the vault beneath are deposited, in hope of a joyful resurrection, the remains of *Mary Antrobus*. She died unmarried, Nov. 5, 1749, aged sixty-six. In the same pious confidence, beside her friend and sister, here

sleep the remains of *Dorothy Gray*, widow; the careful, tender mother of many children, ONE of whom alone had the misfortune to survive her. She died, March 11, 1753, aged LXXII."

No testimony of the interment of Gray in the same tomb was inscribed anywhere till Mr. Penn, in 1799, erected the monument already mentioned, and placed a small slab in the wall, under the window, opposite to the tomb itself, recording the fact of Gray's burial there. The whole scene is well worthy of a summer day's stroll, especially for such as, pent in the metropolis, know how to enjoy the quiet freshness of the country and the associations of poetry and the past.



GRAY'S MONUMENT, STOKE PARK.