

Gray was born in London, the son of a money-scrivener, a kind of lawyer, who was in affluent circumstances. Gray however owed his education largely to the self denial of his mother, he was educated at Eton and Cambridge, at the former of which he places he met Horace Walpole. With Walpole he toured Italy and France then returning to the University, he took his degree finally settling down to a life that was little more than an elegant frivility. He was offered the laureateship, but refused it. He obtained a professorship at Cambridge but he never lectured. He wrote a little, travelled a little, but he was a man of

(2)

of shrinking and fastidious tastes, unapt for the rough shocks of the world and fortunately for him self, able to withdraw beyond them. His first poem was the ode on a distant Prospect of Eton College which contained gloomy moralizing on the approaching fate of those little victims, the schoolboys. Then after years of revision and success appeared the famous Elegy written in the Country Churchyard. This poem was smooth and graceful, it contained familiar sentiments transformed into admirable, quotable phrases. And so, while it was agreeably familiar, it was fresh enough to be attractive. Its popularity has been maintained to the present day. His Pindaric Odes were unsuccessful being criticized for their obscurity. The Bard and the Progress of Poesy the two Pindaric odes in the book, certainly require some education and elucidation, especially to readers not familiar with literature and history. At the first glance Gray's odes are seen to

(3)

have all the odic splendor of diction, in fact the adornment is so thickly applied that it can almost stand alone, like a robe stiff with gems and gold lace. Yet the poems have dignity and energy. Johnson who has a distaste for both the character and work of Gray, cautions at the work saying that it has strutting dignity. He is tall by walking on tip-toe. His art and his struggle is too visible. The prose work of Gray is notable. It consists partly of letters written during his travels describing the scenes he visits. In them he shows a force of style and a sharp eye and a generous admiration for the real beauties of nature. His descriptions such as those of the Lake District, are quite admirable and well in advance of the general taste of his age. In spite of his slender bulk, Gray's achievement both in prose and verse is of great importance. He explored the origins of romance in the early Norse and Celtic legends his sympathies with the poor

and oppressed were genuine and emphatically expressed and his treatment of nature was a great improvement upon that of predecessors. Dr. Johnson's first estimate of Gray is not unfair and we can leave the poet with it. His mind had a large grasp, his curiosity was unlimited and his judgement cultivated, he was a man likely to love much where he loved at all but he was fastidious and hard to please.