

DELPHI  
CLASSICS

George Crabbe

Complete Poetical Works

DELPHI POETS SERIES

D E L P H I   P O E T S   S E R I E S

**George Crabbe**

(1754-1832)



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*George Crabbe*

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Version 1

DELPHI POETS SERIES

**George Crabbe**



*By Delphi Classics, 2021*

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## NOTE



When reading poetry on an eReader, it is advisable to use a small font size and landscape mode, which will allow the lines of poetry to display correctly.

## The Life and Poetry of George Crabbe



*Aldborough, Suffolk by J. M. W. Turner, c. 1826 — Crabbe was born in Aldeburgh in 1754.*



*Aldeburgh, today*



## Brief Introduction: George Crabbe by Clement King Shorter



*From '1911 Encyclopædia Britannica', Volume 7*

GEORGE CRABBE, (1754–1832), English poet, was born at Aldeburgh in Suffolk on the 24th of December 1754. His family was partly of Norfolk, partly of Suffolk origin, and the name was doubtless originally derived from “crab.” His grandfather, Robert Crabbe, was the first of the family to settle at Aldeburgh, where he held the appointment of collector of customs. He died in 1734, leaving one son, George, who practised many occupations, including that of a schoolmaster, in the adjoining village of Orford. Finally the poet’s father obtained a small post in the customs of Aldeburgh, married Mary Lodwick, the widow of a publican, and had six children, of whom George was the eldest.

The sea has swept away the small cottage that was George Crabbe’s birthplace, but one may still visit the quay at Slaughden, some half-mile from the town, where the father worked and the son was at a later date to work with him. At first attending a dame’s school in Aldeburgh, when nine or ten years of age he was sent to a boarding-school at Bungay, and at twelve to a school at Stowmarket, where he remained two years. His father dreamt of the medical profession for his clever boy, and so in 1768 he went to Wickham Brook near Newmarket as an apothecary’s assistant. In 1771 we find him assisting a surgeon at Woodbridge, and it was while here that he met Sarah Elmy. Crabbe was now only eighteen years of age, but he became “engaged” to this lady in 1772. It was not until 1783 that the pair were married. The intervening years were made up of painful struggle, in which, however, not only the affection but the purse of his betrothed assisted him. About the time of Crabbe’s return from Woodbridge to Aldeburgh he published at Ipswich his first work, a poem entitled *Inebriety* (1775). He found his father fallen on evil days. There was no money to assist him to a partnership, and surgery for the moment seemed out of the question. For a few weeks Crabbe worked as a common labourer, rolling butter casks on Slaughden quay. Before the year was out, however, the young man bought on credit “the shattered furniture of an apothecary’s shop and the drugs that stocked it.” This was at Aldeburgh. A year later Crabbe installed a deputy in the surgery and paid his first visit to London. He lodged in Whitechapel, took lessons in midwifery and walked the hospitals. Returning to Aldeburgh after nine months — in 1777 — he found his practice gone. Even as a doctor for the poor he was an utter failure, poetry having probably taken too firm a hold upon his mind. At times he suffered hunger, so utterly unable was he to earn a livelihood. After three years of this, in 1780 Crabbe paid his second visit to London, enabled thereto by the loan of five pounds from Dudley Lang, a local magnate. This visit to London, which was undertaken by sea on board the “Unity” smack, made for Crabbe a successful career. His poem *The Candidate*, issued soon after his arrival, helped not at all. For a time he almost starved, and was only saved, it is clear, by gifts of money from his sweetheart Sarah Elmy. He importuned the great, and the publishers also. Everywhere he was refused, but at length a letter which reached Edmund Burke in March 1781 led to the careful consideration on the part of that great man of Crabbe’s many manuscripts. Burke advised the publication of *The Library*, which appeared in 1781. He invited him to Beaconsfield, and made interest in the right quarters to secure Crabbe’s entry into the

church. He was ordained in December 1781 and was appointed curate to the rector of Aldeburgh.

Crabbe was not happy in his new post. The Aldeburgh folk could not reverence as priest a man they had known as a day labourer. Crabbe again appealed to Burke, who persuaded the Duke of Rutland to make him his chaplain (1782), and Crabbe took up his residence in Belvoir Castle, accompanying his new patron to London, when Lord Chancellor Thurlow (who told him he was “as like Parson Adams as twelve to the dozen”) gave him the two livings of Frome St Quentin and Evershot in Dorsetshire, worth together about £200 a year. In May 1783 Crabbe’s poem *The Village* was published by Dodsley, and in December of this year he married Sarah Elmy. Crabbe continued his duties as ducal chaplain, being in the main a non-resident priest so far as his Dorsetshire parishes were concerned. In 1785 he published *The Newspaper*. Shortly after this he moved with his wife from Belvoir Castle to the parsonage of Stathern, where he took the duties of the non-resident vicar Thomas Parke, archdeacon of Stamford. Crabbe was at Stathern for four years. In 1789, through the persuasion of the duchess of Rutland (now a widow, the duke having died in Dublin as lord-lieutenant of Ireland in 1787), Thurlow gave Crabbe the two livings of Muston in Leicestershire and West Allington in Lincolnshire. At Muston parsonage Crabbe resided for twelve years, divided by a long interval. He had been four years at Muston when his wife inherited certain interests in a property of her uncle’s that placed her and her husband in possession of Ducking Hall, Parham, Suffolk. Here he took up his residence from 1793 to 1796, leaving curates in charge of his two livings. In 1796 the loss of their son Edmund led the Crabbes to remove from Parham to Great Glemham Hall, Suffolk, where they lived until 1801. In that year Crabbe went to live at Rendham, a village in the same neighbourhood. In 1805 he returned to Muston. In 1807 he broke a silence of more than twenty years by the publication of *The Parish Register*, in 1810 of *The Borough*, and in 1812 of *Tales in Verse*. In 1813 Crabbe’s wife died, and in 1814 he was given the living of Trowbridge, Wiltshire, by the duke of Rutland, a son of his early patron, who, it is interesting to recall, wanted the living of Muston for a cousin of Lord Byron. From 1814 to his death in 1832 Crabbe resided at Trowbridge.

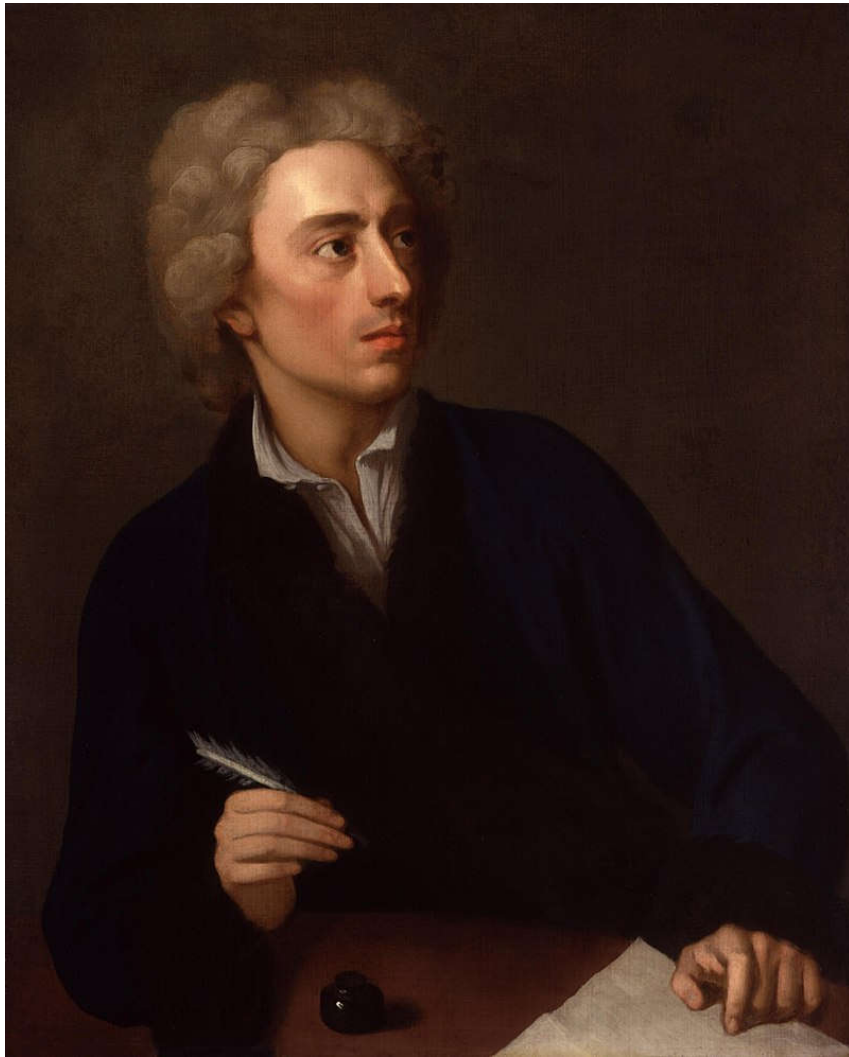
These last years were the most prosperous of his life. He was a constant visitor to London, and in friendship with all the literary celebrities of the time. “Crabbe seemed to grow young again,” remarks his biographer, M. René Huchon. He certainly carried on a succession of mild flirtations, and one of his parishioners, Charlotte Ridout, would have married him. The elderly widower had proposed to her and had been accepted in 1814, but he drew out of the engagement in 1816. He proposed to yet another friend, Elizabeth Charter, somewhat later. In his visits to London Crabbe was the guest of Samuel Rogers, in St James’s Place, and was a frequent visitor to Holland House, where he met his brother poets Moore and Campbell. In 1817 his *Tales of the Hall* were completed, and John Murray offered £3000 for the copyright, Crabbe’s previous works being included. The offer after much negotiation was accepted, but Crabbe’s popularity was now on the wane.

In 1822 Crabbe went to Edinburgh on a visit to Sir Walter Scott. The adventure, complicated as it was by the visit of George IV about the same time, is most amusingly described in Lockhart’s biography of Scott, although one episode — that of the broken wine-glass — is discredited by Crabbe’s biographer, M. Huchon. Crabbe died at Trowbridge on the 3rd of February 1832, and was buried in Trowbridge church, where an ornate monument was placed over his tomb in August 1833.

Never was any poet at the same time so great and continuous a favourite with the critics, and yet so conspicuously allowed to fall into oblivion by the public. All the poets of his earlier and his later years, Cowper, Scott, Byron, Shelley in particular, have been reprinted again and again. With Crabbe it was long quite otherwise. His works were collected into eight volumes, the first containing his life by his son, in 1832. The edition was intended to continue with some of his prose writings, but the reception of the eight volumes was not sufficiently encouraging. A reprint, however, in one volume was made in 1847, and it has been reproduced since in 1854, 1867 and 1901. The exhaustion of the copyright, however, did no good for Crabbe's reputation, and it was not until the end of the century that sundry volumes of "selections" from his poems appeared; Edward FitzGerald, of Omar Khayyám fame, always a loyal admirer, made a "Selection," privately printed by Quaritch, in 1879. A "Selection" by Bernard Holland appeared in 1899, another by C. H. Herford in 1902 and a third by Deane in 1903. The *Complete Works* were published by the Cambridge University Press in three volumes, edited by A. W. Ward, in 1906.

Crabbe's poems have been praised by many competent pens, by Edward FitzGerald in his *Letters*, by Cardinal Newman in his *Apologia*, and by Sir Leslie Stephen in his *Hours in a Library*, most notably. His verses comforted the last hours of Charles James Fox and of Sir Walter Scott, while Thomas Hardy has acknowledged their influence on the realism of his novels. But his works have ceased to command a wide public interest. He just failed of being the artist in words who is able to make the same appeal in all ages. Yet to-day his poems will well repay perusal. His stories are profoundly poignant and when once read are never forgotten. He is one of the great realists of English fiction, for even considered as a novelist he makes fascinating reading. He is more than this: for there is true poetry in Crabbe, although his most distinctively lyric note was attained when he wrote under the influence of opium, to which he became much addicted in his later years.

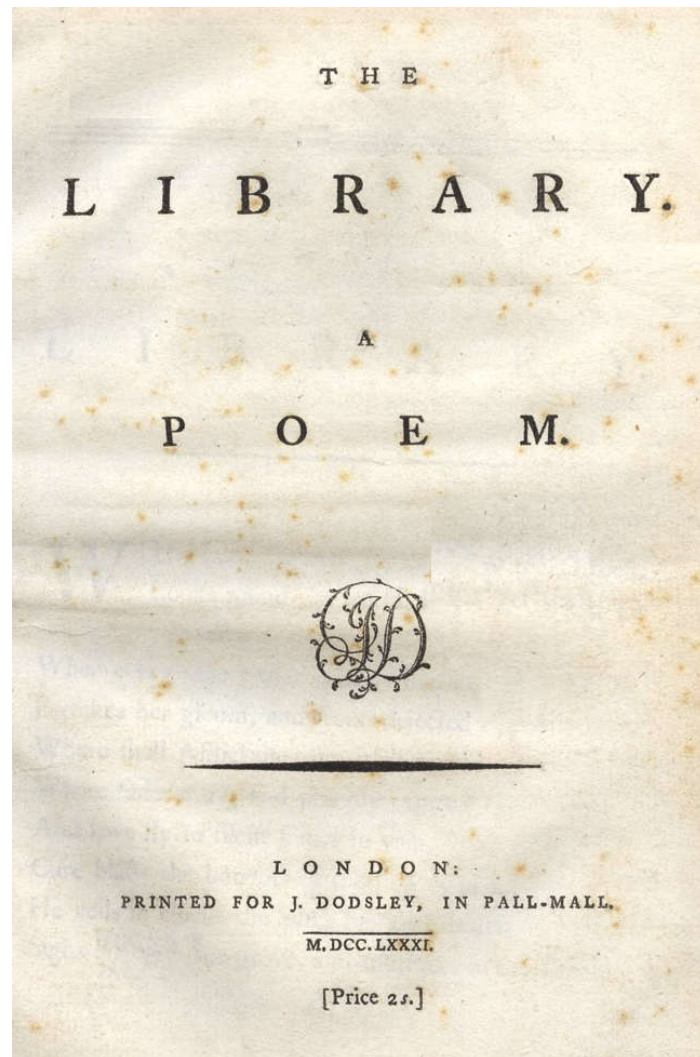
Bibliography. — *The Works of Crabbe* (8 vols., Murray, 1834; 1 vol., Murray, 1901), and the *Works* in the Cambridge Press Classics, edited by A. W. Ward (1906), have already been referred to. The life by Crabbe's son in one volume, *The Life of the Rev. George Crabbe, LL.B., by his son the Rev. George Crabbe, A.M.* (1834), has not been separately reprinted as it deserves to be. A recent biography is *George Crabbe and His Times, 1754–1832; A Critical and Biographical Study*, by René Huchon, translated from the French by Frederick Clarke (1907). Brief biographies by T. H. Kebbel ("Great Writers" series) and by Canon Ainger ("English Men of Letters" series) also deserve attention.



*Alexander Pope (1688-1744) was the greatest artistic exponent of the Augustan period. His works would leave a lasting impression on Crabbe's poetry.*



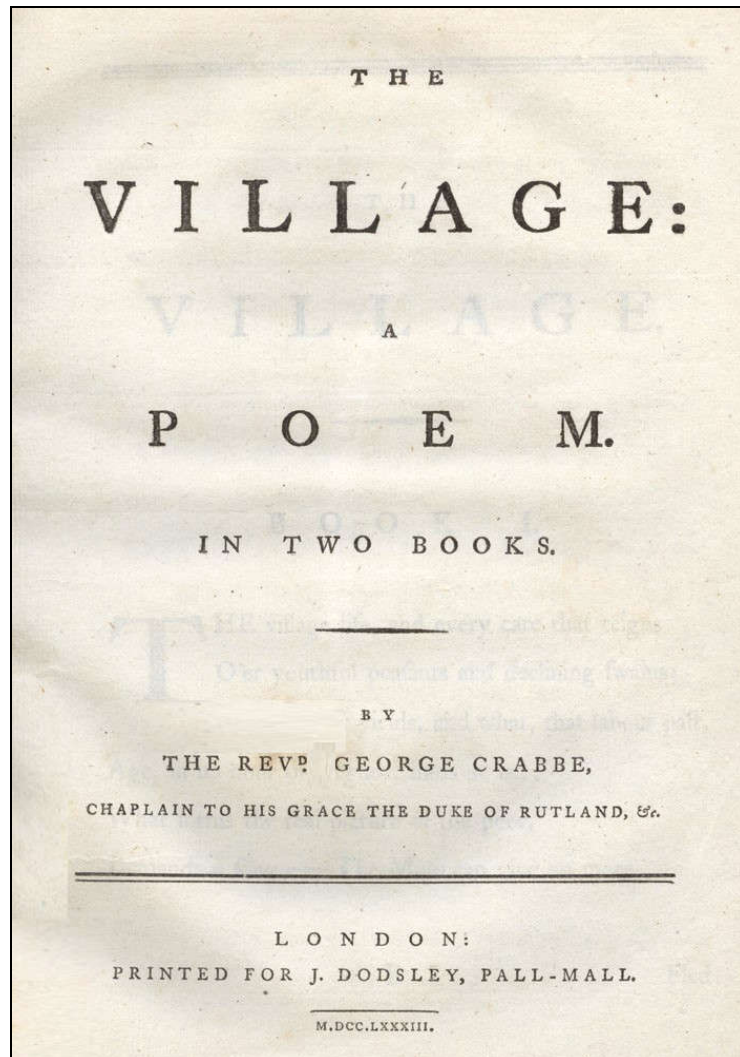
*Edmund Burke by the studio of Joshua Reynolds, c. 1767. Burke (1729-1797) was an Irish statesman, economist, and philosopher. After years of poverty as a struggling surgeon and poet, Crabbe managed to show his manuscripts to Burke in March 1781, who advised the publication of 'The Library', which appeared later that year. Burke also enabled interest in the right quarters to secure Crabbe's entry into the church.*



*The first edition's title page of 'The Library'*



*Charles Manners, 4th Duke of Rutland by Joshua Reynolds, c. 1775 — Crabbe served as the Duke's chaplain during the publication of his famous poem, 'The Village'.*



*The first edition of Crabbe's most celebrated poem, 'The Village', 1783*



THE BOROUGH:

A

POEM,

IN

Twenty-four Letters.

BY

THE REV. G. CRABBE, LL.B.

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PAULO MAJORE CANAMUS.—VIRGIL.

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London :

PRINTED FOR J. HATCHARD,  
BOOKSELLER TO HER MAJESTY, 190, OPPOSITE ALBANY,  
PICCADILLY.

1810.

*The first edition title page of 'The Borough', 1810*



*George Crabbe after Thomas Phillips, stipple and line engraving, 1819*

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