

The Victorian Age is the modern period of progress, social change, industrial revolution and the conflict between science and religion. It is somewhat customary to speak of this age as an age of doubt and pessimism, following the new conception of man and of the universe which was formulated by science under the name of evolution. If Tennyson and Browning strove to voice the victory of faith over doubt in the Victorian Age, Matthew Arnold may be said to have voiced the victory of doubt over faith. A doleful melancholy broods over his work as a poet. 'The Scholar Gipsy', one of his most popular poems, best expresses the elegiac mood of Arnold. It is an imaginative pastoral elegy about an Oxford scholar, still believed to be roaming throughout the countryside around, seen by rare glimpses, pensive and tongue-tied.

Arnold resurrects a seventeenth century legend of a scholar

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whom poverty forced to leave Oxford University. He had heard that the wandering gypsies possessed some mysterious knowledge which they never shared with the aliens. So to know the secret knowledge of the gypsies, he joined their band and started wandering with them. In course of time they revealed to him the treasures of their knowledge and wisdom. Having acquired this wealth of knowledge and wisdom, he never returned to the material world which was so full of struggle, stress, fever and fret. He discovered the basic cause of human sorrow and suffering in greed, rivalry, lust and discontentment. The life of scholar gypsy is an example of the pursuit of knowledge, wisdom and contentment.

In the first part of the poem the poet exhorts the ~~shepherd~~ 'shepherd' who is none other than Clough, his friend, to seeen the guest of the scholar. Here we find Arnold, just like William Wordsworth of 'The World is too Much with

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us' contrasting nature's calm with our turmoil, her quiet change of action day by day, her rest after action, with our confusion, our noise, the strange disease of modern life, with its sick hurry, its divided aims'. He is a true worshipper of the quiet landscape of Hinsley and Cumber - the haunts of his youth. He is refreshed by all objects of nature. He paints nature beautifully-

VII Or in my boat I lie
Moored to the cool bank in the summer heat

X

X

X

XXV = As some grave Tyrian trader, from the sea, Descried at sunrise an emerging prow Lifting the cool-hair'd creepers stealthily, The poet's love of peace urges him to describe some of his best things as drenched in moonlight. Phraseology like 'moon-blanch'd green', 'moonlit stream' and 'moonlit pales' is very appealing. His feeling for nature is rich with suggestions, refined by the influence of sober Greek landscape, it is always associated with the emotion of the past, the keen intuitive sense of flight of time..."

contd.