

All the rest of the poem is but an amplification of the thought in this stanza. Truly, Gray has built of the "Elegy" a monument more lasting than a niche in Westminster Abbey, for the thought so delicately and sincerely enshrined in this beautiful poem will outlive the most cunning or artistic touch of sculptor when embodying his dream in Carrara marble. By this elegy Gray becomes laureate of the poor. It is their round of toil — their simple annals — their narrow cells that mould, fashion, and give purpose to the "Elegy." The whole poem leads up to the central idea — the informing idea — that man is great, not by virtue of the magnitude of his achievements, but by virtue of the performance of his duties. The "rude forefathers of the hamlet," though denied by fortune to sway the rod of empire, are, nevertheless, not to be mocked or contemned, for within their narrow spheres they performed each pressing and incumbent duty. If they became not real Hampdens or voiceful Miltons it was because —

"Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenor of their way."

Now, what is the peculiar charm of the "Elegy"? James Russell Lowell says: "It is to be found in