THE SCHOLAR GIPSY

Introduction

The poem *The Scholar Gipsy* first appeared in a volume entitled *Poems* in 1853. It contained a few poems included in the two earlier volumes.

Arnold's original idea was to entitle the poem, *The First Mesmerist*. He read Glanvill's *Vanity of Dogmatising* in 1845, and since then had been seriously thinking of writing a poem on *The Scholar Gipsy*, the materials of which were drawn on Glanvill. *The Scholar Gipsy* is certainly the most memorable poem of Arnold. And yet he did not rank it extravagantly high. In a letter to Clough he wrote : "I am glad you like the Gipsy-Scholar—but what does it do for you ? Homer *animates*—Shakespeare *animates*—in its poor way I think *Sohrab and Rustum animates*—the Gipsy-Scholar at best awakens a pleasing melancholy. But this is not what we want.

> The complaining millions of men
> Darken in labour and pain.

What they want is something to *animate* or *ennoble* them—not merely to add zest to their melancholy or grace to their dreams."

In a letter to his brother Tom, Arnold wrote : "You alone of my brothers are associated with that life at Oxford, the freest and most delightful past, perhaps of my life, when with you and Clough and Walrond I shook off all the bonds and formalities of the place, and enjoyed the spring of life and that unforgotten Oxfordshire and Berkshire country. Do you remember a poem of mine called *The Gipsy-Scholar* ? It was meant to fix the remembrance of those delightful wanderings of ours in the Cumner Hills ?"

Arnold is weary of the materialism and scepticism of the Victorian age. His reflections centre round a character known as the Scholar Gipsy. He has drawn all the relevant materials on Joseph Glanvill's (1636-80) book entitled *The Vanity of Dogmatising* (1661). Glanvill was a stern moralist of the seventeenth century. A moralist himself, Arnold felt irresistibly drawn to the story of the Scholar Gipsy and made a severe criticism of the Victorian life. In a sense the Scholar Gipsy became Arnold's 'objective correlative'. Arnold attributed to the scholar his personal feelings, since he was a classical poet, and therefore, sought to avoid writing about himself.

Joseph Glanvill, a moralist a he was, did not seek to inculcate a moral in his story. He simply wanted to illustrate 'concentration of will power', which is known as hypnotism or mesmerism. Arnold cited the story : "There was very lately a lad in the University of Oxford, who being of very pregnant and ready parts, and yet wanting the encouragement of preferment, was by poverty forced to leave his studies there, and to cast himself upon the world for a

livelihood. Now, his necessities growing daily on him, he was at last forced to join himself to a company of vagabond gipsies, whom he occasionally met with, and to follow their trade for a maintenance. Among these extravagant people, he quickly got so much of their love and esteem, that they discovered to him their mystery, in the practice of which by the pregnancy of his wit and parts he soon grew so good and proficient as to be able to outdo his instructors. After he had been a pretty while well instructed in the trade, there chanced to ride by a couple of scholars who had formerly been of his acquaintance. The scholars had quickly spied out their old friend among the gipsies, and their amazement to see him among such society had well-nigh discovered him; but by a sign prevented them from owning him before the crew and taking one of them privately aside, desired him with his friend to go to an inn not far from thence, promising to come there to them. They accordingly went thither and he followed. . . The Scholar Gipsy, having given them an account of the necessity which drove him to that kind of life, told them that the people he went with were not such impostors as they were taken for; but that they had a traditional kind of learning among them, and would do wonders by the power of imagination and that he himself had learnt much of their art and improved it further than themselves could. To evince truth of what he told them, he said that he would remove into another room, leaving them to discourse together, and upon his return tell them the sum of what they had talked of; which accordingly he performed, giving them a full account of what had passed between them in his absence. The scholars being amazed at so unexpected a discovery, earnestly desired him to unriddle the mystery. In this he gave them satisfaction by telling them that what he did was by the power of imagination, his fancy finding theirs, and that himself had dictated to them the discourse they held together while he was away from them; that there were warrantable ways of heightening the imagination to that pitch so as to bind another's, and that when he had compassed the whole secret, some parts of which he said he was yet ignorant of, he intended to leave their company and give the world an account of what he had learned."

Arnold's Treatment of Glanvill's Story

Despite the fact that Arnold has drawn upon Glanvill, we must remember that the real subject of the poem is not the mesmeric powers of the Scholar Gipsy, but the materialistic Victorian age—the age of sick hurry and divided aims, doubts, distractions and perplexed questionings. The Scholar Gipsy of Glanvill has been invested with a new character. He becomes the symbol of idealism and quest for truth.

Arnold has closely followed Glanvill's account only to an extent. A scholar at Oxford left the University and kept the company of the Gipsies and led a nomadic life. Accidentally he met two of his pals whom he told that he would leave the company of the wild brotherhood as soon as he could learn hypnotism or mesmerism from them.

Had Arnold verified only this account, his poem would have been a dull and monotonous story indeed! But Arnold has completely recreated the story of Glanvill. The Scholar Gipsy, who actually belonged to the seventeenth century is, to Arnold, a shadowy figure, who has transcended the limitations of time and space. He has not felt the lapse of hours. He is steadfastly pursuing his ideal. The drab and colourless personality of Glanvill's Scholar Gipsy assumes new dimensions. He becomes a lone spiritualised figure, who has no home, no ties, no calling. He holds aloft a torch, which hungry generations cannot quench.

Here is a Gipsy who does not behave like one. He avoids the distracting company of his wild brotherhood. "He may", observe Tinker and Lowry, "be faithfully associated with in mind with Empedocles, Obermann and the abbey children of *The Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*". In *Thyrsis* the Scholar Gipsy appears again, though for a fleeting moment, where he does not run away from the strange disease of modern life. He does not despair. He becomes a symbol of hope and faith. Glanvill's scholar is completely lost in *Thyrsis*.

Arnold is least interested in telling a story. The Scholar Gipsy, as represented in the poem, speaks in "the voice of a spirit almost crushed beneath the burden of life". The poem is a criticism of the Victorian life—the life of sordid materialism, scepticism, doubts, despair and distractions. The story of the Scholar Gipsy, as told by Glanvill, enables Arnold to indulge in moral reflections. Arnold has not deviated from the original source when he says that the scholar had 'pregnant parts and quick inventive brain', that he got 'tired of knocking at preferment's door', that he 'roamed the world with that wild brotherhood', and that he told his two old friends of Oxford that he would leave the company of the Gipsies as soon as he could learn 'the secret of their art'. On a close scrutiny it will appear even to a superficial observer that Arnold has borrowed these materials from Glanvill.

But Arnold is strikingly original when he mentions the meetings of the Scholar Gipsy with shepherds and maidens in the Oxford countryside. His quest for the Scholar Gipsy is also his invention. Arnold fully realises that the Scholar Gipsy, a man of the seventeenth century, cannot be expected to live in flesh and blood in the Victorian age. But there will be no sceptical lifting of the eyebrow and an ironical grin if the Scholar Gipsy is represented as a dream figure, a grand vision of idealism and faith. It is this conviction that compels Arnold to conclude: "No, no, thou hast not felt the lapse of hours". He is optimistic enough to say: "Thou hast not lived, why shouldst thou perish so?"

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A man, who had once renounced the world only to be a hypnotist, has been recreated in Arnold's alembic of fancy. The man has been romanticised and idealised. In order to add verisimilitude, Arnold goes so far as to suggest that the Scholar Gipsy, who is "long since, and in some quiet churchyard laid", has been seen by the rustics, the shepherds, maidens, and the rook-scaring boys.

Paraphrase

Lines 1-10. The poet asks a shepherd to look after his bleating sheep, and let them loose from their folds, so that they may feed on grass in the fields. The watchdogs are impatiently barking. It is only after the performance of his daily duties that he should come to the poet in the evening. The fields there will be calm and quiet. Tired farmers and their dogs have gone home to have their well-earned rest. Some stray sheep are nibbling grass, which looks dark in moonlight. It is then that the poet and his companion, the shepherd, engaged throughout the day, will be in quest of the Scholar Gipsy. Arnold writes a pastoral elegy against a pastoral setting. But he does not represent himself as a shepherd. Some critics have identified the companion of the poet as Arnold's friend, Arthur Hugh Clough, who is represented as a shepherd, in *Thyrsis*, and he and Arnold were engaged in the same pursuit.

Lines 11-20. The poet, who is not a shepherd, waits for his companion in a shady corner of a field. He watches with interest a reaper who has left there his jacket, his basket of food and an earthen drinking vessel. He is presumably engaged in reaping the crops. He binds the sheaves of corn when the sun is shining in the morning. He comes back at noon to eat and drink what he has brought with him. It is where the poet will sit and listen to the bleating of the flocks of sheep in their folds. The voices of the reapers will also be heard in different parts of the fields. The poet will also be delighted to hear the sweet musical sounds of the spring.

Lines 21-30. As arranged, Arnold's companion, the shepherd comes at sunset. The poet reclines on the soft grass under the shady trees, which protects him from glaring rays of the sun. He listens to the bleatings of the sheep and the cries of the reapers. He feasts his eye on the beauty of the poppies blooming in the corn field. He is delighted to inhale the perfume of the lime trees, which are shaken by the wind. He is seated in the high field's dark corner and looks wishfully at the towers of Oxford.

Lines 31-40. A book entitled *Vanity of Dogmatizing* is lying by the side of the poet. There is the story of the Scholar Gipsy in that book, which the poet read with interest. He likes to read the story again, which deals with a scholar at Oxford, who had talents and creative imagination, but unable to find any scope, left his Oxford friends one summer morning. He kept the company of

the Gipsies and sought to learn from them the art of thought-reading, known technically as hypnotism. As people found him in the company of the wild brotherhood, they jumped to the conclusion that with all his abilities he had spoiled his career. Whatever might be the strictures, he did not return to his friends and the University.

Lines 41-50. One day the Scholar Gipsy, while roaming about in the Oxford countryside, came across two of his Oxford friends. In answer to their anxious enquiry he replied that he was in company of the Gipsies. Explaining the reason he said that he could learn the art of thought-reading from them. Once he could master the art, he would very much like to tell the world about his great intellectual achievement. But in order to be a thorough master of the subject he needed moments of divine illumination.

Lines 51-60. The Scholar Gipsy satisfied the curiosity of his Oxford friends and left. There were, however, rumours that he was occasionally seen in that area, always moving about, thoughtful, silent and melancholy. He wore the outlandish garments of the Gipsies. Shepherds claim to have seen him on the Hurst, near Oxford. He was also seen in a lone alehouse. The uneducated rustic folk saw him with his long and outlandish garments on, seated by the fireside of the alehouse.

Lines 61-70. The Scholar Gipsy, not used to noise, suddenly left the alehouse. He was not happy in human company, and the poet seems to recall the distressed looks of the Scholar Gipsy as he slipped away from the company of the revellers. The poet, who has engaged a number of shepherds to search for the Scholar Gipsy, gives them an account of his facial features, so that they may recognise him. He occasionally asks the village boys, who are engaged in scaring away the rooks in the wheat fields, if they have by any chance met the Scholar Gipsy. At times the poet lies in a boat anchored to the bank of the river. He wishfully looks at the Cumner hills amidst the lush and green vegetation and reasonably expects that he may find the Scholar Gipsy.

Lines 71-80. The Scholar Gipsy avoids human company and likes the secluded spots. Once some Oxford people went out in a boat on a summer night and, on their way home, saw the Scholar Gipsy crossing the Thames at Bablock-hithe. He at times dragged his fingers in the river. He was looking pensive and thoughtful and had a store of flowers on his lap, which he might have plucked from the fields in Wychwood bowers. He feasted his eyes on the beauty of Nature, but did not speak to anybody.

Lines 81-90. The riders of Oxford crossed the river, but were astonished to find that the Scholar Gipsy had been spirited away. Girls who dance at the Fyfield elm in May claimed to have seen the Scholar Gipsy. He was often seen in the dark fields of the evening. He was also seen crossing a stile. Often did he give flowers to the girls, but he never spoke to anybody.

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Lines 91-100. In June during hay-time, when many a scythe flashes in the bright sun, bathers passing above Godstow Bridge on their way to the river for a bath have seen the Scholar Gipsy sitting upon the river bank overspread with all kinds of plants. The Scholar, a man of delicate health, wears the strange dress of a gipsy. He has dreamy eyes and the manners of one who seems to be withdrawn from all things. But when the bathers came back from bathing, the Scholar had disappeared.

Lines 101-110. The Scholar Gipsy was seen in the farmhouses in the Cumner hills. Housewives, while repairing clothes at their doors, saw him watching the threshing of corn. Children, who collected water-plants, also saw him in April, keenly observing the grazing cows. They saw him in the pastures even in the evening.

Lines 111-120. In autumn the Scholar Gipsy was seen near the Bagley wood, usually frequented by the Gipsies pitching their smoky tents. The Gipsies spread their ragged clothes on the trees and plants for drying them. Their multi-coloured clothes looked bright. Since the Scholar-Gipsy was a part of Nature, the black birds, flying around to get their crumbs of food, were not frightened at his presence. The Scholar Gipsy sometimes moved about with a withered twig. Whatever he was doing, he was all the while waiting for divine illumination.

Lines 121-130. The poet seems to have seen the Scholar Gipsy on the causeway in the winter. While on a wooden bridge the Scholar Gipsy wrapped himself with his old cloak and battled against the snow to negotiate his journey to Hinksey. He climbed the top of the hill and looked at the Christ Church Hall, looking luminous on a festive occasion. Afterwards he made his straw-bed and retired to an isolated granary.

Lines 131-140. The poet is suddenly disillusioned. He thinks that he must have dreamt about the Scholar Gipsy, who died two hundred years ago. There was a rumour that the Scholar Gipsy, a student of Oxford, left the University. Glanvill wrote about him in his *Vanity of Dogmatizing*. It is impossible for a man to live so long. The Scholar Gipsy must have died years ago and been buried in a secluded country churchyard, where his grave must have been overgrown with tall grasses and wild flowers.

Lines 141-150. The Scholar Gipsy may not be living flesh and blood. But as a dream-figure, as an idealist he knows no death. Contrasting the Scholar Gipsy with the typical Victorians, Arnold says that his contemporaries are essentially materialistic. They have no fixed ideal to pursue. They are engaged in various experiments, and have not the patience to stick to anything. They fail in their experiments and feel weak and miserable as a result of a series of shocks. They lose their vitality and elasticity of spirit. They feel that they have frittered away their time and energy in idle and useless pursuits. We surrender ourselves to the Guardian

Angel, who pauses and wonders what he should bestow on us at the time of death.

Lines 151-160. The poet says that our life has been a prolonged exercise in futility. The Scholar Gipsy, on the other hand, lived a far more fruitful and useful life. He had *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire, which was a spiritual quest. He is, therefore, immortal. Had he lived like the Victorians, he would have died long ago. The Scholar Gipsy did not waste his powers and energy in idle experiments. The Victorians are destined to die physically as well as spiritually. The Scholar Gipsy, on the other hand, was not born to die. He is not subject to death and decay. Old age cannot wither him. He remains as fresh and powerful as ever. It is all because of his steadfastness in his ideal.

Lines 161-170. The Scholar Gipsy left the world in his youth, when his powers and idealism were not affected. He turned his back upon materialism and scepticism. He did not waste his powers and energy in idle occupations. While the Victorians were caught in the mesh of fatigue and languid doubt, the Scholar Gipsy had a serene mind. While the Victorians suffered from all kinds of distractions, despair and frustration, the Scholar Gipsy was always cheerful and gay. While the Victorians ran after diverse objects, the Scholar Gipsy never deviated from his *one* aim. The Scholar Gipsy had integrity of purpose and a steady vision. The Victorians also waited for the divine spark, but they lacked the vision and the faith of the Scholar Gipsy. That is why the Victorians were always feeling diffident about the success of their quest.

Line 171-180. The Scholar Gipsy had singleness of purpose, and waited for the divine spark. The religious faith of the Victorians is casual. They have never seriously thought about religion. They have no honesty of conviction. They run after many hares, and catch none. They launch an experiment today, and abandon it tomorrow. They, therefore, suffer from a series of shocks of disappointment. They advance one step today and go two steps backward tomorrow.

Lines 181-190. The Victorians wait for the divine spark, but that always eludes their grasp. That is why they suffer intensely, and suffer long. Even the wisest among the Victorians has suffered very much. He is the king of the intellectual throne of England. But even he, presumably Tennyson, suffered unbearable agony and laid bare his bleeding soul. He traced in one of his works the origin and growth of the misery of his soul. He also mentioned how the dim hope was sustaining him amidst the encircling gloom.

Lines 191-200. If this be the fate of the king of the intellectual throne of England, the plight of the common Victorians may be easily imagined. To the typical Victorians, life is a veritable nightmare. Happiness and serenity are completely absent from

their life. Their sensibilities are deadened, and they do not know the meaning and purpose of life. They cannot even face the baffling problems of life with stoical forbearance. Depression and despair are their destiny. They can never hope to attain the serenity and bliss of the Scholar Gipsy, who has the gaiety of a boy, wandering about in fields, woods and the countryside. His mind is serene and carefree, and buoyed up with the hope of achieving his spiritual goal.

Lines 201-210. The Scholar Gipsy fortunately belonged to an age, which was free from doubts, distractions and scepticism. The Victorian age may be said to suffer from a strange disease called modern life, which has brought in its wake sordid materialism and maddening scepticism. The Victorians have no time to stand and stare. They are madly pursuing wealth like the willo-the-wisp. Their sensibilities are deadened, and they are indifferent to the the sufferings of the fellow-beings. The poet, therefore, exhorts the Scholar Gipsy to avoid the company of the Victorians, suffering from the infectious diseases of materialism and scepticism. The Scholar Gipsy must run away exactly like Dido, the queen of Carthage, who had run away from her treacherous lover Aeneas in the underworld. He should live a life of seclusion, far from the madding crowd and pursue his noble ideal as steadfastly as ever.

Lines 211-220. The Scholar Gipsy should, in the fitness of things, live a secluded life. His inspiration will guide him. He should draw strength and sustenance from the lovely objects of Nature. He should move about in moonlight, when no one can disturb him. At times he may come out of the pastoral slope or recline on the moonlit fence and listen to the warblings of the nightingale from the garden full of fresh and perfumed flowers or the dark croft.

Lines 221-230. The poet re-iterates his request to the Scholar Gipsy to avoid the company of the Victorians, who are suffering from the incurable diseases of materialism and scepticism. The religious controversy of the age, particularly manifest in the Oxford Movement, could not give any happiness to the Victorians. They have all lost their mental equilibrium. They are distraught with confusion and perplexed questionings. Their vision is obscured. If the Scholar Gipsy comes in contact with these cursed people, he will lose his vision, hope and buoyancy of spirit. He will also be destined to become weak and die like the Victorians.

Lines 231-240. The poet advises the Scholar Gipsy to ignore the greetings and smiles of the Victorians, which are all deceptive. He introduces a Homeric simile to emphasise his point. The grave Phonecian trader was the undisputed leader of the mercantile world. He once, while passing in his merchant vessel across the Mediterranean Sea, discovered at sunrise the prow of ship approaching him, brushing aside the wet and cold creepers. The new ship

belonged to the merry Greek, and his merchandise consisted of the articles of luxury rather than of necessity. The Phonecian trader was hostile to the Greek, and did not stop to welcome him.

Lines 241-250. The Phonecian merchant grew impatient. He seized their rudders, spread out the sails, and hurriedly sailed away. He sailed on and on without rest to avoid the company of the merry Greek merchant. He sailed on the Mediterranean Sea between the Syrtes and Sicily and reached the Atlantic Ocean just outside the straits of Gibraltar. He, on his arrival at the Coast of Spain, adjoining the dark cliffs, dropped his sails. He unloaded his bales of cloth and merchandise before the dark Spaniards.

Critical Appreciation

A representative poem of Arnold, *The Scholar Gipsy* deserves to be studied seriously as a pastoral elegy, as a poet of deep melancholy, as a vivid account of Arnold's attitude to Nature, as a poem with the Oxford background, as a classical poem, and, above all, as a criticism of life.

Arnold has borrowed his materials from Joseph Glanvill's *Vanity of Dogmatising.* But he has recreated the scholar beyond recognition. The scholar becomes in his hand a symbol of spiritual quest and idealism. He is made a dream-figure, an embodiment of the aspiration for truth. He becomes a vision of infinite faith, and, therefore, becomes immortal.

W.L. Jones rightly comments : "*The Scholar Gipsy* is one of the happiest in conception and execution of all Arnold's poems. Its charm lies partly in the subject, naturally congenial to the poet, and partly in the scene, which stimulates one of Oxford's poetic children to lavish all his powers of description upon the landscape which he dearly loved. He was to return to the same natural scenery in *Thyrsis*, but, although in the latter poem, there may be one descriptive passage, which surpasses anything to be found in the earlier, *Thyrsis* fails to give the impression of eager freshness and ease which are felt throughout *The Scholar Gipsy*. The two poems are pastoral in form, but there is much less concession to artificial conventions in *The Scholar Gipsy* than in its more consciously elegiac successor. What, however, gives their abiding charm to both is the vividness and beauty of their pictures of Nature, and the magic spell cast by their haunting lives over Oxford and its adjacent fields and hills. In *The Scholar Gipsy*, the subtle glamour of all that Oxford and its neighbourhood suggest to the eye and to the memory is felt in glimpses of 'the line of festal light in Christ-Church Hall', of the Oxford riders 'crossing the stripling Thames at Bab-lock-hithe', of 'the warm green-muffled Cumner hills', etc. In the latter part of the poem, Arnold finds a natural opening for his characteristic pensive moralisings upon 'this strange disease of modern life/with its sick hurry, its divided aims', when men are but 'half-believers in their casual creeds'—

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as contrasted with the days when 'life ran gaily as the sparkling Thames', and when it was still possible for an 'Oxford scholar poor' to pass through them nursing 'the unconquerable hope' and 'clutching the inviolable shade'."

In *The Scholar Gipsy* as in *Thyrsis* Oxford looms large in our vision. Oxford is, in a sense, not exactly the hero, but certainly a chief protagonist in both the poems. In one of his essays Arnold pays glowing tribute to Oxford : "No, we are all seekers still ! seekers often make mistakes, and I wish mine to redound to my discredit only, and not to touch Oxford. Beautiful city ! so venerable, so lovely, so unravaged by the fierce intellectual life of our century, so serene !"

'These are young barbarians all at play !' And yet steeped in sentiment as she lies, spreading her gardens to the moonlight, and whispering from her towers the last enchantments of the Middle Age, who will deny that Oxford, by her ineffable charm keeps ever calling us nearer to the true goal of all of us, to the ideal, to perfection, —to beauty, in a word, which is only truth seen from another side ? . . . Adorable dreamer, whose heart has been so romantic ! who hast given thyself so prodigally, given thyself to sides and to heroes not mine, only never to the philistines ! home of lost causes, and forsaken beliefs, and unpopular names and impossible loyalties !"

Arnold and Clough followed in the footsteps of the Scholar Gipsy and 'are all seekers still'.

Arnold wrote in *Culture and Anarchy* : "We in Oxford, brought up amidst the beauty and sweetness of that beautiful place, have not failed to seize one truth, —the truth that beauty and sweetness are essential characters of a complete human perfection. When I insist on this, I am all in the faith and tradition of Oxford."

What applies to Arnold and Clough, applies, all the more to the Scholar Gipsy, for whom Oxford had an irresistible appeal. That is why the Scholar Gipsy would always be found wandering about in the Oxford countryside. Arnold, the classicist, becomes a romantic in the celebration of Oxford and her surroundings. And it is in this romantic description that he has the mantle of Keats upon him. "To lovers of Oxford this poem and its sequel [*Thyrsis*] are specially dear as having caught and handed on so much of the *genius loci* —the colleges, the studies, sports, festivities, the rivers, the flowers and peasant folk and place names of the surrounding country."*

The Scholar Gipsy is a pastoral elegy. A *pastoral* is a poem dealing with life of the shepherds, their joys and sorrows, their

*The Scholar Gipsy is notable for its topography. "No one quarrels with Burns", says Herbert Paul, "for describing Ayrshire, and the scenery of the poem is as familiar as their own homes to thousands of educated Englishman."

simple life and love in the heart of Nature. Theocritus, Bion, Moschus, and Virgil initiated a pattern of verse known as Pastoral Poetry, and Arnold is one of their successors. Nature in pastoral poetry is idealised and serves as a background of the human drama. *The Scholar Gipsy* is not a carbon copy of the traditional pastoral poems. Here Arnold has no doubt, a pastoral setting. But it is related to urbanised Oxford and her countryside, where one does not expect an idyllic atmosphere. Arnold has, therefore, hardly any scope to invest Nature with the light that never was on sea or land. The poet has, of course, introduced a shepherd in the poem, whom he dismisses at the earliest opportunity. But he himself is not a shepherd. He is only a person in quest of the Scholar Gipsy. And hence our conclusion is that in point of structure *The Scholar Gipsy* is a pastoral poem, but the spirit breathed into it is typically Victorian—the spirit of unrest.

The shepherd, who is the poet's companion in his quest for the Scholar Gipsy, is a real shepherd. He is not an allegorical figure representing as a learned friend of the poet. No readers will ever mistake the semi-urban civilised life of Oxford as rustic life. Arnold has no occasion to idealise the setting of his poem. They are scenes, all seen by him. The charm of the scenery of Oxford is so exquisite that it needs no idealisation. The poet has not used the convention of pastoral poetry, which would have made it rather artificial. It deals, on the other hand, with scenes of Nature as known and seen by an educated Englishman.

The Scholar Gipsy is an elegy, but does not lament the death of an individual. Milton's *Lycidas* does ; Shelley's *Adonais* does ; so does Tennyson's *In Memoriam*. Each of them is a record of grief over the death of an individual. In *The Scholar Gipsy* the poet laments the death of an age, of religious faith, of the treasured values of life. He looks at the past in a nostalgic haze. Faith is dying ; people are between two worlds, one dead, and the other powerless to be born. There is feverish excitement everywhere. People are in the darkling plain. The tone of the poem is elegiac ; for "it is the natural tone of an agnostic", says Hugh Walker, "who is not jubilant, but regretful of the vanished faith—regretful of its beauty, and regretful of the lost promise."

It must be borne in mind that Arnold in this elegy does not lament the fate of the Oxford scholar. He, in fact, laments the diseased modern life—its 'sick hurry', its 'divided aim', 'its heads o'er-taxed, its palsied hearts'.

Arnold is a great poet of Nature, as will be evident from *The Scholar Gipsy*. In this poem as elsewhere Arnold has an eye for the details of the charm of Nature. True, Arnold the classicist has an austere outlook. That is why he cannot have an eye for the delicate shades, the colour, the movements, the minute subtle beauties of Nature which meant so much to Tennyson. But there is no denying the fact that in respect of truthfulness in observation

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and accuracy of description Arnold excels even Tennyson. The rich description of the topography of Oxford—the graphic and truthful delineation of the landscape of the scenes as they change from season to season, from spring to winter, are rare artistic feats.

In the description of the varied beauty of Nature Arnold is remarkably romantic. The Scholar Gipsy offers a store of flowers to the girls, who have gathered together to dance around the Fyfield elm :

> "Oft thou hast given them store
> Of flowers—the frail-leafed, white anemone,
> Dark blue-bells drenched with dews of summer eves,
> And purple orchises with spotted leaves."

Here Arnold presents a perfumed morning, which is Keatsian in sensuousness. Arnold is also an excellent pictorial artist. We visualise the sheep crossing and recrossing the strips of the moon-blanch'd green. We cannot but smell the scent of air-swept lindens, which 'rustle down their perfumed showers/of bloom'. The lovely pictures of the Hurst in spring, 'the green-muffled Cumner hills', the boat moored by the cool river-bank, the harvesting above Godstow bridge, 'all the murmur of summer's day', the store of flowers the Scholar Gipsy, 'plucked in shy fields and distant Wychwood bowers', 'the line of festal lights in Christ Church Hall', the sparkling river haunted by the black-winged swallows, the scythes flaming in sunshine, the nightingales singing in the dark dingles, 'the scarlet poppies', 'the dark blue-bells', 'the cool bank in the summer-heats', the 'purple orchises' delight our senses. It is, in fact, the familiar world of eyes and ears. Unconsciously Arnold has become a Pre-Raphaelite poet.

Swinburne, the romantic, finds in *The Scholar Gipsy* "the beauty, the delicacy and affluence of colour, the fragrance and the freedom as of wide wings of winds in summer over meadow and moor, the freshness and expansion of light and the lucid air, the spring and the stream as of flowing and welling water, enlarge and exalt the pleasure and power of the whole poem. Shakespeare, who chooses his field-flowers and hedge-row blossoms with the same sure loving hand, binds them in as simple and sweet an order."

The Scholar Gipsy is a criticism of life. By criticism of life Arnold means interpretation of life—life as it is, as compared with life as it should be, what Arnold means is that "Poetry is always referring the actual life to the ideal and illustrating the one by the other." Like Sophocles, Arnold seeks to "see life steadily and see it whole". And that sort of life he does not find in Victorian England. The Victorians, by and large, have no aims or ideals in life. They fight, but they do not know whom they are fighting for. They are half-believers of their casual creeds, who never deeply felt nor clearly willed. They have brought upon themselves "the sick fatigue, the languid doubt, which much to have tried, in much been baffled, brings."

The Scholar Gipsy, on the other hand, has "*one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire". He is "nursing his project in unclouded joy, and every doubt long blown by time away". Arnold seeks to inculcate the truth that one cannot hope to attain good for himself or for mankind by mere external aids. Creeds and dogmas, philosophics and preachings are weighed in the balance and found wanting. The Scholar Gipsy has not sought aids from philosophers. For he has been "waiting for the spark from heaven to fall." The secret of noble life is within ourselves.

T.S. Eliot complains that Arnold's definition of poetry as the 'criticism of life' appears "frigid to anyone who has felt the full surprise and elevation of a new experience of poetry." Eliot has, perhaps, missed Arnold's point. By criticism of life, Arnold means the attempt to realise an ideal life. There may be a moral tinge in it. And Arnold is a moralist. Eliot, however, refuses to be convinced :

"We cannot fly the company of men. We all have social duties to perform, social obligations to discharge. Life is complex, and man's activities and interests must be manifold. It is impossible to have only *one* aim, *one* business, *one* desire as the poet bids us here. We must all be up and doing, 'toiling, rejoicing, sorrowing', and like the mariners of Ulysses, taking with a frolic welcome, the thunder and the sunshine. If there are frivolous men in the world who fritter away their energies, who do nothing but eat and drink and make merry, there are, as Arnold well knew, heroic souls also, who are helpers and friends of mankind. The ideal life is not, of course, the frivolous life, or the restless life of feverish excitement, of vain hopes and fond delusions ; but neither is it the calm and tranquil life of ease and indolent waiting which attempts nothing and achieves nothing. The life pictured in *The Scholar Gipsy*, however pleasing and attractive it may be made to look in poetry, can hardly be recommended as the ideal life, for there is nothing in it inspiring and encouraging, nothing in it heroic."

Stopford Brooke makes a similar complaint : "He [Arnold] had insight into the evils, the dullness, follies, the decay and death of the time which he wrote ; but he had little insight into its good, into the hopes and ideas which were arising in its darkness ; or the life which was collecting itself together under its decay. His temper, therefore, was not joyous, nor was it in sympathy with the temper of the whirling but formative time in which he began and continued poetry."

The Scholar Gipsy may not be acceptable to readers and critics like T.S. Eliot and Stopford Brooke. But there is no denying the fact that the poem has abiding charm as reflected in the vividness and beauty of its pictures of Nature and the magic spell cast by its haunting lines over Oxford and its adjacent fields and hills. The proper names that Arnold has used in the poem

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sound like an incantation, and remind us of the use of proper names in *Paradise Lost.*

The metrical skill and versification of the poem deserve special mention. It is written in stanzas of ten lines, each line being an iambic pentameter except the sixth which is trimeter. "Of all our poets", says Lamborn, "He [Arnold] seems most to have needed the advantage of a highly organised stanza-form ; this one, devised for *The Scholar Gipsy*, is more elaborate than any that had been used since Spenser ; it challenged Arnold's powers where they were strongest, and enabled him to supply by poetic craftsmanship his deficiency in natural magic." The compound words used in *The Scholar Gipsy* are Keatesian, and have heightened its beauty, e.g., 'close-lipped patience', 'green-muffled hills', 'air-swept lindens', 'heaven-sent movements' etc.

The Homeric simile in which Arnold has drawn an elaborate comparison between the Phoenician trader and the Grecian trader has also heightened the classical grace and dignity of the poem. The consensus of opinion, however, is that it is rather forced and somewhat out of place. Duffin remarks : "The great and glorious simile that ends the poem has come in for much abuse from high authorities, but it seems allright to me. They say that the motives that prompted the trader's flight were not those which Arnold thought should urge the scholar to 'fly our greetings, fly our speech and smiles'. But Milton's prototypes show that irrelevance of detail is one of the characteristics of the extended simile. All Arnold required was the analogy of someone getting away in a hurry from someone he does not approve of, and this he gives us in vivid colours, throwing in for good measure a piece of illustrated history."

Annotations

Line 1. *Shepherd*—the introduction of the shepherd gives it a pastoral setting.

2. *Untie*—unfasten.

Wattled cotes—sheep-fold made of sticks.

3. *Wistful*—eager to come out to graze in the field. For it is morning.

4. *Bawling fellows*—the companions of the shepherd who are shouting. According to Fowler, the 'fellows' are the watch-dogs.

Rack—straining their throats as a result of shouting.

5. *Cropped grasses*—grasses nibbled by the sheep.

Shoot . . . head—sprout forth new blades.

7. *Men and dogs*—shepherds and their sheep-dogs.

8. *White sheep*—as the ...

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