

tory. It is the resolution implicit in the pastoral ideal. Eighty years after the appearance of Beverley's book his contribution was acknowledged by the foremost celebrant of the pastoral theory of America.¹⁰

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By 1785, when Jefferson first printed his *Notes on Virginia*, the pastoral idea of America had developed from the dim, semi-articulate compromise hinted toward the end of Beverley's *History* into something like an all-embracing ideology. But then, too, the whole tenor of Western thought had changed. During the eighty years between the two books a whole series of ideas we identify with the Enlightenment helped to create a climate conducive to Jeffersonian pastoral. I am thinking of the widespread tendency to invoke Nature as a universal norm; the continuing dialogue of the political philosophers about the condition of man in a "state of nature"; and the simultaneous upsurge of radical primitivism (as expressed, for example, in the cult of the Noble Savage) on the one hand, and the doctrines of perfectibility and progress on the other. A full discussion of the English background would require a volume in itself. Yet we can get some sense of the way the over-all shift in thought and taste contributed to the pastoral idea of America by noting three closely related preoccupations of the age: the landscape, agriculture, and the general notion of the "middle state" as the desirable, or at any rate the best attainable, human condition.

In the record of Western culture there is nothing to compare with the vogue for landscape that arose in this

period. Today it is difficult to realize that Europeans have not always looked upon the landscape as an object of aesthetic interest and delight. But the fact is that landscape painting emerged as a distinct genre only during the Renaissance, and it did not achieve real popularity until the eighteenth century, when aesthetic interest in natural scenery reached something of a climax. One writer has suggested, in fact, that the arts of travel, poetry, painting, architecture, and gardening might be regarded as having been fused, in this era, into a single art of landscape. Moreover, the problem of judging the relative merits of landscapes produced a large body of aesthetic theory; complex distinctions were made between beautiful, picturesque, and sublime scenery. Nor was the landscape merely the concern of theoreticians. On both sides of the Atlantic ladies and gentlemen traveled great distances to gaze at inspiring vistas. Often they carried Claude glasses, pieces of tinted, framed glass with handles named after Claude Lorrain, who after his death in 1682 had become the most popular landscape painter of the age. When a viewer used the Claude glass the landscape was transformed into a provisional work of art, framed and suffused by a golden tone like that of the master's paintings. The significant fact is that the glass helped to create a pastoral illusion. No painter, with the possible exception of Poussin, has tried harder to depict the Virgilian ideal than Claude. His favorite subject, as described by Kenneth Clark, was a vision "of a Golden Age, of grazing flocks, unruffled waters and a calm, luminous sky, images of perfect harmony between man and nature, but touched . . . with Mozartian wistfulness, as if he knew that this perfection could last no longer than the moment in which it takes possession of our minds." Although their themes may not

be as explicitly Virgilian as Claude's, a similar mood colors the work of many other popular painters of the period.¹¹

Everyone knows that in the eighteenth century English poets also turned their attention as never before to the natural landscape. In the handbooks the work of men like Gay, Thomson, Akenside, Young, Gray, Goldsmith, Burns, and Cowper is often designated as "pre-romantic nature poetry." But we do not think of this school as having anything to do with the pastoral tradition, that is, with the pastoral poem defined as a distinct formal entity. Actually, reams of such poems were being turned out by English poets — in all likelihood more than in any century before or since — but they are largely unreadable: imitative, overstylized, cold, and, in a word, dead. Without question the sorry reputation of the pastoral as the dullest, most artificial of forms stems chiefly from this period. Thus Alexander Pope, who began his career in this vein:

First in these Fields I try the Sylvan Strains,
Nor blush to sport on Windsor's blissful Plains:
Fair *Thames* flow gently from thy sacred Spring,
While on thy Banks *Sicilian* Muses sing;
Let Vernal Airs thro' trembling Osiers play,
And *Albion's* Cliffs resound the Rural Lay.

Pope, it is said, was only sixteen when he wrote his pastorals, but the sad truth is that, dull as they seem, they are more accomplished and engaging than most of their kind written after 1700. Later he called them his most labored verses. What is curious, at least at first glance, is that so brilliant a technician was unable to breathe life into the pastoral at a time when the impulse toward

nature manifestly was vigorous and growing in vigor.*¹²

A major difficulty lay in the very notion of provoking Sicilian Muses to song on the banks of the Thames. Even at the time poets and critics had begun to re-examine the whole conception of pastoral. By 1709, when Pope started publishing, a complicated critical debate on the subject had arisen. The neo-classicists, Pope's party, favored close imitation of the ancients; their opponents, the rationalists, wanted to modernize the mode. Starting with the reasonable assumption that the constant element in pastoral is psychological rather than formal, the rationalists (or moderns) argued for the inclusion of native materials. What they wanted was an idyllic poem after the manner of Theocritus and Virgil, but about *English* shepherds set in the *English* landscape. No doubt Spenser's work was the nearest thing to an ideal model. In the vast collection of arid theorizing on the subject, however, there is no recognition of the gulf that was opening between the convention and the feelings that people now had in the presence of nature. Accordingly the pastorals written under the banner of the moderns are on the whole indistinguishable in tone and spirit from the work of their opponents. Here, for example, are a few lines by Ambrose Philips, then generally regarded as the leading practitioner of the new style and Pope's most formidable rival:

HOBBINOL. Full fain, O blest Eliza! would I praise
Thy maiden rule, and Albion's golden days.
Then gentle Sidney liv'd, the shepherds' friend:
Eternal blessings on his shade attend!

* According to Joseph Spence, at one point Pope considered writing "American pastorals." "It might be a very pretty subject for any good genius . . . to write American pastorals; or rather pastorals adapted to several of the ruder nations, as well as the Americans. I once had a thought of writing such and talked it over with Gay"

LANQUET. Thrice happy shepherds now: for Dorset loves
The country Muse, and our delightful groves;
While Anna reigns. Oh ever may she reign!
And bring on earth a Golden Age again.¹³

In retrospect it is not difficult to see what was happening. While the debate about the character of pastoral poetry went on and on, generating endless speculation, and while Pope and Philips and others were writing their stiff, bookish poems, the old form actually was dying. At the very same time enthusiasm for the landscape was rising on all sides and Addison was laying a theoretical groundwork for a new visual literature. In his 1712 *Spectator* papers on the "Pleasures of the Imagination" he expounds what is in effect an aesthetic corollary to Locke's system. Arguing that sight is the most perfect of the senses and the true source of the pleasure we get from the exercise of the imagination, Addison prepares the way for the modern (romantic) notion of the imagination as a way of knowing. On the spectrum of modes of perception, with the gross sensual pleasures such as touch at one pole, and the refinements of the pure intellect (understanding) at the other, he locates the imagination in the middle position. It mediates between the brutish senses and the abstract intelligence. Although he grants to the powers of the understanding the highest place, he also notes certain ways in which the imagination is more effective and, by implication, more important: it offers obvious, easily acquired pleasures. "It is but opening the eye," he says, "and the scene enters."¹⁴

What kind of scene? What objects are likely to provide the greatest pleasure? If Addison had to choose, he would choose works of nature over works of art. No mere art, he says, can provide that sense of "vastness and immensity"

that we get from nature itself. Yet he does not identify the natural with the wild. In fact, he says, "we find the works of nature still more pleasant, the more they resemble those of art." It is the mingling of mind with brute matter that is most affecting. "Hence it is that we take delight in a prospect which is well laid out, and diversified with fields and meadows; woods and rivers; . . . in any thing that hath such a variety or regularity as may seem the effect of design, in what we call the works of chance." Applying this principle to taste in gardens, Addison rejects the formal English style, with its geometrically sculptured trees, in favor of the more "natural" style prevailing in France and Italy. In those countries, he says, "we see a large extent of ground covered over with an agreeable mixture of garden and forest, which represent every where an artificial rudeness, much more charming than that neatness and elegancy which we meet with in . . . our own country."¹⁵

In effect Addison is building a theoretical bridge between the ideal of the old pastoral, the imaginary landscape of reconciliation, and a new attitude toward the environment more congenial to a scientific and commercial age. Indeed, the "mixture of garden and forest" with its "artificial rudeness" points toward the pastoral image of America. Addison extends the notion of the garden to larger and larger tracts of land until he seems to be talking about the whole rural scene as if it were one vast garden. The formal style of garden which he rejects embodies a purely aristocratic, leisure-class ideal of conspicuous waste. It separates beauty from utility and work. "It might, indeed, be of ill consequence to the public," he notes, "as well as unprofitable to private persons, to alienate so much ground from pasturage, and

the plow. . . ." Instead, he proposes a garden landscape that is in fact a farmland:

But why may not a whole estate be thrown into a kind of garden by frequent plantations, that may turn as much to the profit, as the pleasure of the owner? A marsh overgrown with willows, or a mountain shaded with oaks, are not only more beautiful, but more beneficial, than when they lie bare and unadorned. Fields of corn make a pleasant prospect, and if the walks were a little taken care of that lie between them, if the natural embroidery of the meadows were helpt and improved by some small additions of art, and the several rows of hedges set off by trees and flowers, that the soil was capable of receiving, a man might make a pretty landscape of his own possessions.¹⁶

Within a few years James Thomson was following Addison's lead. Although his work cannot be described as pastoral in the old, strict meaning of the term, there is a more important sense in which it is continuous with the Virgilian tradition. To Pope, or, for that matter, to Philips, pastoral was a name for a fixed body of poetic conventions, and they had presided over its death. But if we take the vital element in pastoral to be the design, the ordering of meaning and value around the contrast between two styles of life, one identified with a rural and the other with an urban setting, then the pastoral was by no means dead. On the contrary, Thomson was helping to save the mode by fashioning a new idiom, a language closer to the actual feelings that men had about nature. Although strongly influenced by Virgil, Thomson had the wit to dispense with many of the formal devices of traditional pastoral and address himself to experience.

At once, array'd
In all the colours of the flushing year

By Nature's swift and secret-working hand,
The garden glows, and fills the liberal air
With lavish fragrance; while the promis'd fruit
Lies yet a little embryo, unperceiv'd,
Within its crimson folds. Now from the town,
Buried in smoke, and sleep, and noisome damps,
Oft let me wander o'er the dewy fields,
Where freshness breathes, and dash the trembling drops
From the bent bush, as through the verdant maze
Of sweetbriar hedges I pursue my walk;
Or taste the smell of dairy . . .

To our taste the language of "The Seasons" (1730) may seem excessively literary, but we can hardly fail to recognize a new resonance, an awareness of topography actually perceived that rarely, if ever, gets into the stock pastorals of the age. It seems "something strange," said Joseph Warton in 1756, speaking of Pope, "that in the pastorals of a young poet there should not be found a single rural image that is new." The crucial difference lies in the particularity of Thomson's imagery: the town buried in smoke, the walk through a maze of sweetbriar hedges, the smell of cattle strong enough to taste. Gone are the "flowery meads," "verdant vales," "mossy banks," and "shady woods" of the standard poetic landscape of the age. Although we recognize a stock pastoral contrast here, most of Thomson's contemporaries would have denied that "The Seasons" was a pastoral poem. Actually, the poem epitomizes an early stage in the revitalizing of the pastoral design that would culminate in Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. In these lines Thomson prefigures a characteristic Wordsworthian topography: a town of "noisome damps" set against a country landscape. What adds to the significance the passage holds for us is the fact that young

Thomas Jefferson copied most of it into his commonplace book.¹⁷

In recent years scholars have clarified the relation between the vogue for landscape as an aesthetic object and the great scientific revolution that began in the seventeenth century. In the first place, as knowledge of the physical universe rapidly increased, a new sort of environmentalism was encouraged in every department of thought and expression. The psychology of Locke demonstrated how meaning was derived, through sense perception, from the surrounding world of objects. Yet the scene "out there" no longer was conceived as it had been in Shakespeare's time. Telescopes and microscopes were uncovering a vast, orderly cosmos behind the visible mask of nature. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that a new mode of feeling, a heightened responsiveness to the environment now developed. In a sense the change in aesthetic attitudes toward nature was as revolutionary as the change in science. For now a well-composed landscape, whether depicted in words or paint, might arouse some of the feelings that men had when they contemplated the grand design of the Newtonian universe.

Although scientific knowledge seemed to drain certain traditional religious myths of their cogency and power, so that it no longer was quite possible to read Genesis as it once had been read, the same knowledge enabled artists to invest the natural world with fresh mythopoetic value. The movements of the heavenly bodies, space (an awesome, unimaginable infinity of space), and the landscape itself all were to become repositories of emotions formerly reserved for a majestic God. It was not enough to call this newly discovered world beautiful; it was sublime.

But the conventions of the old pastoral provided a totally inadequate vehicle for such ideas and emotions. The pastoral, said Dr. Johnson, is an "easy, vulgar, . . . disgusting" mode; whatever images it supplied were "long ago exhausted." Meanwhile, a large audience was being instructed in the appreciation of the landscape as a great religious metaphor, an expositor (in Emerson's fine phrase) of the divine mind.¹⁸

In the same period the importance of landscape was enhanced by a new veneration for certain of its sociological or economic meanings. There was nothing new, to be sure, about the expression of agrarian pieties. In England, much earlier, the general renaissance of classical learning had helped to intensify native respect for agriculture. Any number of Greek and Latin authors besides Virgil provided models of praise for husbandry: Hesiod, Xenophon, Cato, Cicero, Varro, and Horace among them. Then, too, the glamorous prospect of settling new lands, remote from centers of civilization, added to the appeal of rural as against urban life. The stock literary contrast between the happiness and innocence of a bucolic golden age and the corrupt, self-seeking, and disorderly life of the city (or court) had been a ruling motif of Elizabethan literature. Often it was invoked with high seriousness, as an apparent affirmation of a pastoral ethic that Sidney had compressed into a tidy couplet:

Greater was that shepheards treasure,
Then this false, fine, Courtly pleasure.

Although we generally assume that this simple moral scheme is offered ironically, many readers then and now have taken it straight. According to Hallett Smith, for ex-

ample, most Elizabethan writers of pastoral were seriously committed to the whole system of value which turns on the "rejection of the aspiring mind." Whether they were or not, the fact remains that they provided a paradigm for the agrarian celebration. By substituting the husbandman for the shepherd in Smith's account of the pastoral ethic, it was easy to transform the farmer into a cult figure. Instead of striving for wealth, status, and power, he may be said to live a good life in a rural retreat; he rests content with a few simple possessions, enjoys freedom from envying others, feels little or no anxiety about his property, and, above all, he does what he likes to do.¹⁹

To this traditional literary motif the eighteenth century added a new set of theoretical arguments. Political economists and agricultural reformers now dwelled as never before upon the primacy of agriculture in creating the wealth of nations. While the physiocrats, extremists of the movement, insisted that husbandry was the *only* true source of economic value, most of the experts, including the incomparable Adam Smith, agreed that agriculture was the primary and indispensable foundation of national prosperity. All of these ideas contributed to the steadily rising prestige of farmers and farming, often reaching the public by way of agricultural reformers and popularizers such as Arthur Young.

But there also was a curious strain of extravagance running through the cult, a seemingly neurotic tendency that these rational theories cannot explain. After the middle of the century, among the upper classes, the taste for the bucolic rose to an extraordinary pitch of faddish excitement. A passion for gardening and playing farmer cropped up in remote villages of England as well as at the court of Louis XVI. Some of the fever seems to have been pro-

voked by a recognition, however inchoate, of the impending threat to the supremacy of rural values. The early encroachment of what we would call industrialization becomes obvious, for instance, in Oliver Goldsmith's popular poem, "The Deserted Village." Published about the time the craze reached its peak, in 1770, the poem is a lament for the charms of rural life which the Enclosure Acts apparently were destroying. The whole situation is remarkably like that of Virgil's first eclogue. Here again the idyllic mood is intensified by the hostile policies of the state; like Virgil, Goldsmith dwells upon the eviction of the "laboring swain" from "lovely bowers of innocence and ease." Part of the effect is achieved by glossing over the distinction between the countryman who actually does the work and the gentleman (or poet) who enjoys rural ease. But the point, after all, is to idealize a rural way of life. By having the swain, like a traditional literary shepherd, enjoy both the ease of the rich and the simple honesty of the poor, Goldsmith is able to suggest (as William Empson has put it) a "beautiful relation" between the two classes. What is important about the rural world, in any event, is not merely the agricultural economy but its alleged moral, aesthetic, and, in a sense, metaphysical superiority to the urban, commercial forces that threaten it. Both the tone and the thematic design of "The Deserted Village" will reappear in American responses to industrialization. As a matter of fact, Goldsmith foresees the migration of the rural muse:

Ev'n now, methinks, as pond'ring here I stand,
I see the rural virtues leave the land.
Down where yon anch'ring vessel spreads the sail . . .

The vessel, needless to say, is bound for America, and when it sails "sweet Poetry" (that "charming nymph")

will be aboard. In the New World Englishmen will have another chance to realize the village ideal, a social order represented neither by the hideous wilderness:

Those pois'nous fields with rank luxuriance crown'd,
Where the dark scorpion gathers death around;
Where at each step the stranger fears to wake
The rattling terrors of the vengeful snake;

nor by the European city where the swain flees only

To see profusion that he must not share;
To see ten thousand baneful arts combin'd
To pamper luxury, and thin mankind . . .²⁰

A belief in the superiority of rural life was a sociological corollary, for Goldsmith's generation, to the widely accepted ethical doctrine that the "middle state" was the best of all possible human conditions. According to this venerable idea, man is the creature who occupies the middle link in the "great chain of being," the point of transition between the lower and higher, animal and intellectual forms of being. A grand, compelling metaphor, it figures a moral scheme which Arthur Lovejoy calls the "ethic of the middle link." Men, in this view, must accept an unsatisfactory but nonetheless unavoidable compromise between their animal nature and their rational ideals. Whether we like it or not, the theory goes, we will always find ourselves mediating between these contraries, and so we had best learn to live in the uncomfortable middle.*

* It is worth noting that the unavoidable relativism implicit in this "middle state ethic" probably contributes to the pragmatic bent of American thought in the nineteenth century. By definition this is a scheme that admits of no absolute solutions, and looks to an endless series of *ad hoc* decisions, compromises, and adjustments in resolving problems.

It is a moral position perfectly represented by the image of a rural order, neither wild nor urban, as the setting of man's best hope.²¹

Although it stems from classical antiquity, the "middle state" theory enjoyed its greatest diffusion and acceptance during the eighteenth century. One thing that made it so popular was the need to reconcile increasingly strong claims by extremists at either pole of the debate about the nature of man. The two schools may be called progressivist and primitivist. At the same time that electrifying advances in learning and the arts seemed to sanction a belief, or at least a new degree of confidence, in the perfectibility of civilized man, books like Beverley's *History* were supplying Europe with apparent testimony in favor of primitive life. In effect, they called into question the whole value of civilization. After all, the Virginia Indian did seem happier and better-natured than the average Londoner. In many ways the stock figure of the Noble Savage, which now became immensely popular, resembles the good shepherd of the old pastorals. At least they share certain negative virtues: neither displays the undignified restlessness, ambition, or distrust so common in advanced societies; neither, above all, is consumed by a yearning for approval and praise.²²

Yet, as we have seen in the case of Beverley, it was not easy for intelligent men to maintain a primitivist position. In his *History* Beverley anticipates (in a crude and half-articulate fashion, to be sure) the dialectic that was to be worked out again and again during the next few generations. On a higher plane of sophistication, Jean-Jacques Rousseau was drawn to the spontaneity and freedom he associated with primitive life; but he too had to face the undeniable fact that "natural man" was, by Eu-

ropean standards, amoral, uncreative, and mindless. Unable finally to endorse either the savage or the civilized model, Rousseau was compelled to endorse the view that mankind must depart from the state of nature — but not too far.* He came to believe, as Lovejoy says, that “‘perfectionability’ up to a certain point was desirable, though beyond that point an evil.”²³

The desirability of a similar reconciliation between the animal and rational, natural and civilized, conditions of man always had been implied by the pastoral ideal. In his influential lectures on rhetoric (published in 1783), Hugh Blair, the Scottish divine, made the connection between pastoral and the “middle state” theory explicit. Discussing the nature of pastoral, Blair follows the line taken by Pope in his “Discourse on Pastoral Poetry” (written in 1704), distinguishing between the two ways of depicting bucolic life. One might be called realistic: shepherd life described as it actually is, which is to say, “mean, servile, and laborious.” The second way is to impute the polished taste and cultivated manners of high civilization to the swain. But if the first is repellent, the ideas of real shepherds being what they are (“gross and low”), the second is implausibly idealistic; hence Blair rejects them both.

Either of these extremes is a rock upon which the Poet will split, if he approach too near it. We shall be disgusted if he give us too much of the servile employments

* Curiously enough, Rousseau thought that mankind had passed through the ideal state during the pastoral phase of cultural evolution, by which he meant a pastoral situation in a literal, anthropological sense: a society of herdsmen.

and low ideas of actual peasants . . . and if . . . he makes his Shepherds discourse as if they were courtiers and scholars, he then retains the name only, but wants the spirit of Pastoral Poetry.

He must, therefore, keep in the middle station between these. He must form to himself the idea of a rural state, such as in certain periods of Society may have actually taken place, where there was ease, equality, and innocence; where Shepherds were gay and agreeable, without being learned or refined; and plain and artless, without being gross and wretched. The great charm of Pastoral Poetry arises from the view which it exhibits of the tranquillity and happiness of a rural life. This pleasing illusion, therefore, the Poet must carefully maintain.

Although Blair is talking about the best setting for a pastoral poem, not about social actualities, he does leave the way open for readers who might be tempted to confuse the two. At certain times, he says, such ideal societies of the “middle landscape” actually may have existed. And if they existed once, why not again? The conjecture is worth mentioning because of the great prestige that Blair’s work was to enjoy in America. “I shall take care to get Blair’s lectures for you as soon as published,” wrote Thomas Jefferson to James Madison in 1784. The *Lectures* were used as a textbook in American colleges down to the middle of the next century.²⁴

Attractive as it was, the idea of a society of the middle landscape was becoming less easy to believe in during the 1780’s. In England the process of “improvement,” or what we should call economic development, already seemed to have gone too far. By then the enclosures were destroying the vestiges of the old, rural culture, and the countryside

was cluttered with semi-industrial cities and dark, satanic mills. At this juncture the next thought was obvious and irresistible. For three centuries Englishmen had been in the habit of projecting their dreams upon the unspoiled terrain of the New World. Long before the 1780's George Herbert had got the prevailing attitude into a couplet:

Religion stands on tip-toe in our land,
Ready to passe to the *American* strand.

Andrew Marvell, who probably was indebted to Captain John Smith's account in *The Generall Historie of Virginia*, put it this way in his "Bermudas":

What should we do but sing his Praise
That led us through the watry Maze,
Unto an Isle so long unknown,
And yet far kinder than our own?

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He lands us on a grassy Stage;
Safe from the Storms, and Prelat's rage.
He gave us this eternal Spring,
Which here enamells every thing;
And sends the Fowl's to us in care,
On daily Visits through the Air.
He hangs in shades the Orange bright,
Like golden Lamps in a green Night.

In America it still was not too late (or so one might imagine) to establish a home for rural virtue. In the period of the Revolution, accordingly, the pastoral idea of America caught on everywhere in England. To take one of many examples, here is Richard Price, the outspoken Unitarian minister, friend of Franklin and Jefferson, and a leading British champion of the American cause:

The happiest state of man is the middle state between the *savage* and the *refined*, or between the wild and the luxurious state. Such is the state of society in CONNECTICUT, and some others of the *American* provinces; where the inhabitants consist, if I am rightly informed, of an independent and hardy YEOMANRY, all nearly on a level — trained to arms . . . clothed in homespun — of simple manners — strangers to luxury — drawing plenty from the ground — and that plenty, gathered easily by the hand of industry; and giving rise to early marriages, a numerous progeny, length of days, and a rapid increase — the rich and the poor, the haughty grandee and the creeping sycophant, equally unknown — protected by laws, which (being their own will) cannot oppress . . . O distinguished people! May you continue long thus happy; and may the happiness you enjoy spread over the face of the whole earth. . . .

During the winter of 1785, when he received his copy of Price's *Observations on the . . . American Revolution* containing this apostrophe, Jefferson was getting the manuscript of *Notes on Virginia* ready for a Paris printer. "I have read it with . . . pleasure," he wrote to Price, "as have done many others to whom I have communicated it. The spirit which it breathes is as affectionate as the observations . . . are wise and just." Needless to say, there is no question here of Jefferson's having been influenced by Price's version of the pastoral ideal; by this time it was in the air on both sides of the Atlantic.²⁵

In 1785, for example, a pamphlet entitled *The Golden Age* was published. Although it does not reveal either the author or the place of publication, the title page itself is a nice exhibit of the affinities between America and the pastoral ideal:

THE
GOLDEN AGE:
OR,
Future Glory of North-America
Discovered
By An Angel to Celadon,
in
Several Entertaining Visions.

VISION I.

— Ferrea

Definet, ac toto surget gens Mundo

Virgil Eclog iv.

Thus Englished,

The iron past, a golden Age shall rise,
And make the whole World happy, free, and wise.

B Y C E L A D O N

Printed in the Year, M, DCC, LXXXV.

The sixteen-page pamphlet begins with a description of Celadon, a "man strictly honest, and a real lover of the country," who lives in "one of the American States." He had fought gloriously against England during the war and now he is "anxious to know the future condition of his people." One day, while musing on this subject, he is at last blessed with an agreeable vision. At this point, the writer shifts to the first person, Celadon describing his experience in his own words.²⁶

On a summer evening Celadon is tired, and he walks out and sits on the bank of a stream where he is "delighted with the music of the groves." With murmuring waters below and sighing winds above he falls into a trance. An

angel appears and all "nature seemed to smile at his approach." Describing himself as America's "guardian," the angel announces that he has come to dissolve Celadon's doubts about the future. The rest of the pamphlet consists of a dialogue between Celadon and his celestial confidant, who provides a graphic description of the American millennium. At the climax the angel takes Celadon in his arms and carries him to a high mountain in the center of the land. From the great summit the entire continent is visible. To the east he sees "spacious cities . . . thriving towns . . . a thick conjunction of farms, plantations, gardens . . . laden with every kind of fruit"; it is a countryside "charmingly diversified . . . plentifully watered" and filled with "elegant buildings adapted to all the purposes of life." Then the angel orders Celadon to turn his face westward, and he is "equally surprised at the wide extended landscape. This western part of America," he says, "is as yet but an uncultivated desert; the haunt of savages; and range of wild beasts.—But the soil in general is much richer than that of the eastern division. . . ." Into this great land the "poor, the oppressed, and the persecuted will fly . . . as doves to their windows." The pamphlet ends with a vision of "a beauteous world rising out of a dreary wilderness," unlimited progress (England's decline having begun with the American Revolution), the taming of the Indians, the conversion of the Jews, and the American way spreading over the face of the earth. Although more extravagant than most versions, *The Golden Age* is in essence another statement of the pastoral idea of America.

Two years earlier the same idea had provided the controlling theme of a full-scale, on-the-spot interpretation of American experience. In his popular *Letters from an*

American Farmer, J. Hector St. John de Crèvecoeur (another of Jefferson's correspondents) weaves all of the thematic strands just discussed into a delightful, evocative, though finally simple-minded, book. It projects the old pastoral ideal, now translated into a wholly new vocabulary, on to the American scene. At the outset Crèvecoeur sets up a typical pastoral situation. Writing as a "humble American Planter, a simple cultivator of the earth," he deferentially addresses a learned Englishman who has invited the rustic American to become his correspondent. Here the writer is no mere observer or dreamer; he is the American husbandman—a fact which underscores the literalness of the pastoral ideal in a New World setting. "Who would have thought," the first letter begins, "that because I received you with hospitality and kindness, you should imagine me capable of writing with propriety and perspicuity?" Incredulity is the dominant note of the opening pages. At first, says the epistolary narrator, he was overwhelmed by the invitation: is it possible, he had asked, that a man who has lived in that "big house called Cambridge" where "worldly learning is so abundant," actually wants to receive letters from a plain farmer? The problem had troubled him. He had consulted his wife and his minister. She laughed at him, said the "great European man" obviously was not in earnest; on the other hand, the minister reassured him, arguing that he need only write in his everyday, spoken language. If the letters be not "elegant," he said, at least they "will smell of the woods, and be a little wild." Besides, might the American rustic not "improve" the sophisticated Englishman by acquainting him with the "causes which render so many people happy?" At last the farmer was persuaded; but even then, he exclaims, "on recollecting the difference

between your sphere of life and mine, a new fit of astonishment seized us all!"²⁷

Anyone who knows American writing, incidentally, will be reminded of all the later fictional narrators who begin in the same way, impulsively dissociating themselves from the world of sophistication, Europe, ideas, learning, in a word, *the world*, and speaking in accents of rural ignorance. "I was young and ignorant," says Mark Twain's narrator at the beginning of *Roughing It*, compressing the gist of innumerable American literary beginnings. But Crèvecoeur, alas, makes no use of the potentially complex framework he establishes at the outset. Although he might have provided a counterpoise to the farmer's innocence, the Englishman virtually drops out of sight, and Crèvecoeur loses control of the initial contrast between the farmer and his learned friend. The *Letters* exhibit one of the great hazards awaiting American writers who attempt to work in this convention. To put it much too simply for the moment, the trouble is that under the singularly beneficent circumstances of native experience, the barrier between art and reality is likely to break down. Crèvecoeur, as one critic notes, "lived a kind of pastoral poetry." Having adopted the point of view of the self-derogating, uneducated American swain, he seems to forget that it is a literary device. (Actually, his family belonged to the lesser nobility of France, and he had been educated in a Jesuit school.) After the sophisticated Englishman drops out of sight the farmer's simple definition of reality is allowed to govern the entire work.²⁸

To account for the peculiarly "modern, peaceful and benign" qualities of his rural life, the farmer introduces all of the familiar environmentalist assumptions of the age. He believes that men everywhere are like plants, de-

riving their "flavor" from the soil in which they grow. In America, with its paucity of established institutions, however, the relation between mankind and the physical environment is more than usually decisive. Geography pushes men into farming, which is of course the noblest vocation. But the land is significant not only for the material and political benefits it confers; at bottom it determines everything about the new kind of man being formed in the New World. "What should we American farmers be," he asks, "without the distinct possession of that soil? It feeds, it clothes us, from it we draw even a great exuberancy. . . ." ²⁹

The delightfully graphic notion of man drawing exuberancy from the soil exhibits Crèvecoeur's imagination at its best; back of it lies his absolute confidence in the power of imagery. Skeptical of abstract ideas, he is a kind of homespun Lockian who thinks of the land, or rather the landscape, as an object that penetrates the mind, filling it with irresistible pictures of human possibilities. To paraphrase Addison, he has but to open his eyes and the American ethos enters. Just to see this virgin terrain is to absorb the rudiments of a new consciousness, the American "philosophy," as he calls it. Without the sense of the landscape as a cardinal metaphor of value, the *Letters* could not have been written. Indeed, for the farmer it is the metaphoric even more than the physical properties of land which regenerate tired Europeans by filling them to overflowing with exuberancy. We are reminded of Robert Beverley's exuberant style, not to mention Melville's and Whitman's — Whitman, whose hero will move from the contemplation of a single spear of grass to his barbaric yawp. It is not surprising that Crèvecoeur was one of the writers who convinced D. H. Lawrence that only the

"spirit of place" really can account for the singular voice we hear in American books. In the *Letters*, as elsewhere in our literature, the voice we hear is that of a man who has discovered the possibility of changing his life. Landscape means regeneration to the farmer. In sociological terms, it means the chance for a simple man, who does actual work, to labor on his own property in his own behalf. It gives him a hope for the leisure and economic sufficiency formerly — which is to say, in Europe — reserved for another class. It therefore represents the possibility of a secular, egalitarian, naturalistic "resurrection" (as Crèvecoeur calls it at one point), the religious content of which is now deeply embedded in a new pastoral idiom. "These images I must confess," says the farmer of rural scenes, "I always behold with pleasure, and extend them as far as my imagination can reach: for this is what may be called the true and the only philosophy of an American farmer." ³⁰

The farmer's imagination, as it turns out, has a long reach. With his pleasant farm at the center, he expands the topographical image endlessly, until it achieves mythic magnitude. Eastward it reaches to Europe, encompassing *l'ancien régime*, an oppressive social order of "great lords who possess everything, and of a herd of people who have nothing." Westward he extends it to the dark forest frontier where something "very singular" happens to Europeans. Their lives being "regulated by the wildness of the neighbourhood," they become "ferocious, gloomy and unsociable." As he describes the frontiersmen, they are "no better than carnivorous animals of a superior rank, living on the flesh of wild animals" — native American Calibans. Like the Europeans rebuked by Beverley, they show what happens to those who trust too much in

the "natural fecundity of the earth, and therefore do little." Like lazy Virginians, they do not work, do not improve the natural environment. But now, when the typical immigrant arrives in America, he no longer beholds the raw wilderness. On the contrary, he sees "fair cities, substantial villages, extensive fields, an immense country filled with decent houses, good roads, orchards, meadows, and bridges, where an hundred years ago all was wild, woody, and uncultivated!" This ideal landscape obviously has little in common with the "plantation" dream of Shakespeare's Gonzalo or the Edenic Virginia of Beverley's *History*. The point needs to be made because Crèvecoeur, like many another American writer, often is mistaken (in Lawrence's derisive phrase) for a "littératur-Child-of-Nature-sweet-and-pure." But he is nothing of the sort. He does not believe, as Lawrence says he does, that Nature is sweet and pure. He admires improved nature, a landscape that is a made thing, a fusion of work and spontaneous process. "This formerly rude soil," he explains, "has been converted by my father into a pleasant farm, and in return it has established all our rights."³¹

Taken as a whole, the moral geography of the *Letters* forms a neat spatial pattern, a compelling triptych that figures an implied judgment upon all the conditions of man which may be thought to exist between the savagery of the frontier on one side and the court of Versailles on the other. It is in this sense a potentially mythic idea, an all-encompassing vision that converts the ethic of the middle link into "the true and the only" philosophy for Americans. No one possibly could miss the main point; nevertheless, the farmer dramatizes it in the final letter, called "Distresses of a Frontier Man." By now the rev-

olutionary war has begun, and he writes in a mood of great agitation. Exposed to imminent Indian attack, desperately anxious for the safety of his family, torn between loyalty to the homeland and to his neighbors, depressed about the need to abandon his farm with all its improvements, he reluctantly has decided to move further west to a peaceful Indian village. But the decision is a painful one. Perhaps, he says, "I may never revisit those fields which I have cleared, those trees which I have planted, those meadows which, in my youth, were a hideous wilderness, now converted by my industry into rich pastures and pleasant lawns." After weighing the relative advantages of moving east and moving west, he chooses west. Like many exponents of the pastoral theory of America, he veers toward the primitive. But even as he makes his choice, he reaffirms the ideal of the middle landscape:

I will revert into a state approaching nearer to that of nature, unencumbered either with voluminous laws, or contradictory codes, often galling the very necks of those whom they protect; and at the same time sufficiently remote from the brutality of unconnected savage nature. Do you, my friend, perceive the path I have found out? it is that which leads to . . . the . . . village of ——, where, far removed from the accursed neighbourhood of Europeans, its inhabitants live with more ease, decency, and peace, than you imagine: where, though governed by no laws, yet find, in uncontaminated simple manners all that laws can afford. Their system is sufficiently complete to answer all the primary wants of man, and to constitute him a social being, such as he ought to be in the great forest of nature.

In the *Letters from an American Farmer* there is no mention of Arcadia, no good shepherd, no stock of poeti-

cisms derived from Virgil, no trite antithesis of country and town, no abstract discord between Nature and Art. And yet all of these traditional features of the pastoral mode are present in new forms supplied by American experience. Instead of Arcadia, we have the wild yet potentially bucolic terrain of the North American continent; instead of the shepherd, the independent, democratic husbandman with his plausible "rural scheme"; instead of the language of a decadent pastoral poetry, the exuberant idiom, verging toward the colloquial, of the farmer; and instead of generalized allusions to the contrast between country and town, Crèvecoeur begins to explore the difference between American and European cultures, a complex variation of the grand Nature-Art antithesis which informs all pastoral literature. As for the dream of reconciliation, it is now reinforced by the agrarian philosophy and the "middle state" theory of the age, and it thereby takes on a credibility it never before had possessed.

Today, looking back across the great gulf created by industrialism, we can easily see what was wrong with the pastoral theory of America. We say that it embodied a naïve and ultimately static view of history, and so it did. But to project this judgment into the past is to miss the compelling power of the ideal in its eighteenth-century context. That is why we so often mistake it for a primitivist fantasy. From our perspective they may look equally regressive, but the distinction between them was once a vital element in the American consciousness, and to ignore it is to blur our sense of the past. Crèvecoeur was no primitivist; he had no illusions about the condition of man in a state of nature, nor did he repudiate change or economic development. But how, then, we may well ask, did he reconcile his admiration for roads, bridges, fair cities and

improvements of all sorts with the bucolic ideal? What did he think would happen when the new society approached that delicate point of equilibrium beyond which further change, which is to say, further departure from "nature," would be dangerous?

Part of the answer lies in the way he conceived of America's immediate situation. Here, as he saw it, was a fringe of settlements on the edge of an immense, undeveloped, and largely unexplored continent. At the time nine out of ten Americans were farmers living in a virtually classless society, and all of the best informed statesmen and political economists agreed that agriculture would remain the dominant enterprise of the young nation for centuries to come. To be sure, in retrospect we can see that industrialization already had begun in England, but no one at the time conceived of the process even remotely as we do. (It would be roughly fifty years before the word "industrialism" came into use.) Thus when Crèvecoeur's farmer makes one of the unavoidable inventories of feudal institutions missing in the new world — "no aristocratical families, no courts, no kings, no bishops" and so on — he includes "no great manufacturers employing thousands." This sentence could only have been written on the other side of the gulf created by industrialization. Obviously Crèvecoeur is unaware of any necessary relation between large-scale manufacturing and changing social institutions; the connections between technology, economic development, and the thrust of deprived people for a higher living standard, which we take for granted, did not exist for him; as he thinks about America's future, it involves nothing of that irreversible and accelerating process of change now regarded as the very powerhouse of history. As a result, he is able to imagine a society which will embrace

both the pastoral ideal and the full application of the arts, of power. His farmer is enlisted in a campaign to dominate the environment by every possible means. "Sometimes," he says, "I delight in inventing and executing machines, which simplify my wife's labour." If there is a time ahead when the natural bent of Americans for improvement will have to be curbed, it is too remote to think about. "Here," says the farmer, ". . . human industry has acquired a boundless field to exert itself in—a field which will not be fully cultivated in many ages!"³²

But the unimproved landscape is only part of the answer. Granted that native conditions lent a remarkable degree of credibility to his idea of America's future, there is a more important reason for Crèvecoeur's failure to recognize the obvious dilemma of pastoral politics. Indeed, his desire to avoid such problems is precisely what made the rural scheme so attractive in the first place. Throughout the *Letters* the farmer describes America as the "great asylum," a "refuge" from Europe, from power struggles, politics, or, in our sense of the word, from history itself. In spite of all the deceptive local details, it is still possible to identify the main features of the idyllic Virgilian landscape in this idealized picture of America. It is a place apart, secluded from the world—a peaceful, lovely, classless, bountiful pasture.

3

With the appearance of Crèvecoeur's *Letters* in 1782 the assimilation of the ancient European fantasy to conditions in the New World was virtually complete. None of the obvious devices of the old pastoral could be detected in the farmer's plausible argument for an American rural

scheme. And yet, essentially the same impulse was at work beneath the surface; it manifested itself in the static, anti-historical quality of the whole conception, and by 1785 Jefferson said as much. Even as he endorsed the same goals he recognized the problems Crèvecoeur had glossed over. How could a rural America possibly hold off the forces already transforming the economy of Europe? What policies would a government have to adopt to preserve a simple society of the middle landscape? Even if they were adopted, what chance of success would they have when, minor distinctions aside, the same sort of men who were coming to power in England already were busy in America?

To appreciate the quality of Jefferson's answers it is first necessary to be clear about his own preferences. If he had been a mere practical politician, a man never tempted by utopian impulses, his criticism of the goals endorsed by Crèvecoeur would not be of much interest. But Jefferson was an ardent exponent of much the same theory; he argued for it with a poetic intensity rare in the writings of American statesmen. A man of immeasurably larger mind than Crèvecoeur, Jefferson also located the weak spot—the place where the theory and the facts were likely to come apart. This did not cause him to repudiate either; rather he kept his hold upon both, using the facts of power to check a proclivity toward wishful thinking, and avoiding the shallows of simple pragmatism by an insistence upon the need for theory—for long-range ideals. In fact, the "doubleness" of Jefferson's approach toward the pastoral ideal is akin to the basic design of the literary mode. Not being an artist, however, he never had to get all of his feelings down in a single place. As a result, we have to piece together his "version of pas-

toral," a way of ordering values which carries us far beyond Crèvecoeur's unqualified affirmation — beyond it in the direction of the complex attitudes at work in the writings of, say, Henry Thoreau and Robert Frost.

Still, Jefferson's initial commitment is unambiguous. Nowhere in our literature is there a more appealing, vivid, or thorough statement of the case for the pastoral ideal than in *Notes on Virginia*. Although it is his only original, full-length work, it has never been widely read. One need only turn the pages to see the reason: at first glance it looks like a cross between a geography textbook and a statistical abstract. Written in answer to a series of questions from François Marbois, a French diplomat, the book has a dense, dry, fact-laden surface. This should not be allowed to obscure its enduring qualities: it is in its way a minor classic, rising effortlessly from topographical fact to social analysis and utopian speculation. In 1780, when Jefferson began writing, the Revolution was not yet over and the ultimate goals of the new Republic were very much on his mind. Hence, he not only describes the way things are in Virginia, but he allows himself to reflect upon the way they might be.

Here again in *Notes on Virginia* the land — geography — has a decisive function. Nothing could be more remote from the never-never land of the old pastoral than the setting Jefferson establishes at the outset. This is the opening sentence of the book:

Virginia is bounded on the East by the Atlantic: on the North by a line of latitude, crossing the Eastern Shore through Watkins Point, being about $37^{\circ} . 57'$. North latitude; from thence . . .

Nor is this matter-of-fact tone confined to the first few sentences or even pages. Of the twenty-three "queries" into

which the book is divided, the first seven are devoted to the natural environment:

- Query I Boundaries of Virginia
- Query II Rivers
- Query III Sea-Ports
- Query IV Mountains
- Query V Cascades
- Query VI Productions Mineral, Vegetable and Animal
- Query VII Climate

In choosing to begin the *Notes* in this fashion, Jefferson almost certainly had no complicated literary theory in mind. Marbois had sent him twenty-two questions. He simply rearranged them in a logical order, expanding their number to twenty-three, and now he was answering them one by one. Nevertheless, the sequence embodies the "Lockian" presuppositions, already discussed, about the relations between nature, man, and society. Because they are part of the book's structure, moreover, these ideas do some of their most effective literary work indirectly. Thus the wealth and specificity of the geographical detail in the first part of the book conditions our response to what comes later, much as the whaling lore in *Moby-Dick* affects our feelings about the metaphysical quest. Before we get to Query XIX, with its passionate defense of a rural society, the image of the rich, rugged, but largely undeveloped, terrain of Virginia has been firmly embedded in our minds. It helps to make credible, as no abstract argument could, Jefferson's feeling for the singular plasticity of the American situation.

The book contains repeated movements from fact to feeling. Thus the fissure beneath the Natural Bridge is first described in mathematical terms, "45 feet wide at

the bottom, and 90 feet at the top. . . . Its breadth in the middle, is about 60 feet, but more at the ends . . ." and so on. And then, with hardly a break: "It is impossible for the emotions, arising from the sublime, to be felt beyond what they are here: so beautiful an arch, so elevated, so light, and springing, as it were, up to heaven, the rapture of the Spectator is really indescribable!" The treatment of landscape in the *Notes* recalls a phrase from John Locke's second treatise on government, a book which influenced Jefferson as much as any other single work: "in the beginning," said Locke, "all the world was America. . . ." A great hope makes itself felt almost wordlessly in the texture of *Notes on Virginia*. The topographical details, like the opening scenes of *The Tempest*, establish a firm naturalistic base for utopian revery.³³

Like Shakespeare's Gonzalo, moreover, Jefferson at times seems to be carried away by the promise of a fresh start. Were it made a question, he says at one point, speaking of the rarity of crime among the Indians,

. . . were it made a question, whether no law, as among the savage Americans, or too much law, as among the civilized Europeans, submits man to the greatest evil, one who has seen both conditions of existence would pronounce it to be the last: and that the sheep are happier of themselves, than under the care of the wolves.

It is true that this statement, taken out of context, does sound as if Jefferson had joined a simple-minded cult of Nature. But as so often in American writing, what first strikes us as the merest vagary of a primitivist proves, on closer inspection, to be something quite different. (Admittedly, there is a charming absurdity in the very prospect of the Virginia *philosophe* casting his lot with the In-

dians.) Jefferson is not endorsing the Indian style of life here. What appears as a preference for the primitive actually is a rhetorical device: *were* it made a question, he says, he would prefer the Indian way, the whole point being that in the New World such questions need not arise.³⁴

Jefferson's syntax, in other words, is aimed at a pastoral, not a primitivist, affirmation. (Depicting the people as sheep is a stock device of pastoral poetry.) We might call it the "syntax of the middle landscape," a conditional statement which has the effect of stressing a range of social possibilities unavailable to Europeans. Jefferson remained fond of this sentence structure all his life. As late as 1812, for instance, he is still telling John Adams (speaking of the depravity of France and England) that "if science produces no better fruits than tyranny, murder, rapine and destitution of national morality, I would rather wish our country to be ignorant, honest and estimable as our neighboring savages are." Adams, incidentally, missed or pretended to have missed the point; in his reply he refers, as if Jefferson had made an unconditional statement, to his friend's "Preference to Savage over civilized life." But that is not what Jefferson meant. True, this syntax leads the mind toward an affirmation of primitive values, cutting it loose from an easy acceptance of established ideas and institutions, but behind it there is no serious intention of going all the way. It is a perfect expression of the American pastoral ethos. Actually, Jefferson had few illusions about the felicities of primitive life, as he makes clear elsewhere in *Notes on Virginia*:

The women are submitted to unjust drudgery. This I believe is the case with every barbarous people. With such, force is law. The stronger sex . . . imposes on the

weaker. It is civilization alone which replaces women in the enjoyment of their natural equality. That first teaches us to subdue the selfish passions, and to respect those rights in others which we value in ourselves.

The symbolic setting favored by Jefferson, needless to say, resembles the Virgilian landscape of reconciliation, but it now is a real place located somewhere between *l'ancien régime* and the western tribes.³⁵

Moreover, it is a landscape with figures, or at least one figure: the independent, rational, democratic husbandman. The eloquent passage in Query XIX in which he makes his appearance is the *locus classicus* of the pastoral ideal as applied to America. For a century afterwards, politicians, orators, journalists, and spokesmen for the agricultural interest cherished Jefferson's words and, above all, the ringing declaration: "Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for substantial and genuine virtue." Sentences lifted from Query XIX are among the most frequently quoted but least understood of Jefferson's words. Taken out of context, for one thing, the picture of the husbandman loses a good deal of the charm and meaning it owes to the force of its opposite. It is significant that Jefferson creates this ideal figure not while discussing agriculture, but rather when he is considering the place of manufactures in the new nation. Although the process of industrialization, in our sense of the word (the use of machine power in large-scale manufacturing) had not begun, the states had stepped up the productivity of domestic manufactures during the war. When it was over there were some who believed that the foundation for a permanent

system of manufactures had been laid. This is the prospect that alarms Jefferson and that sets off the well-known tribute to rural virtue as the moral center of a democratic society.

At the outset, it is true, Jefferson asserts that his countrymen "will certainly return as soon as they can" to their former dependence upon European manufactures. But it is unlikely that he was so confident as he pretends. By 1785, as we shall see, he was making quite another prediction. Besides, the vehemence of this attack upon the idea of native manufactures would seem, in itself, to belie his words. A close look at the structure and style of his answer to Query XIX (*The present state of manufactures, commerce, interior and exterior trade?*) is revealing. This short chapter falls neatly into two parts, each written in a distinct style, each exemplifying one of Jefferson's attitudes toward America's future. It is important enough and, fortunately, brief enough to cite in its entirety. Here is the first part:

We never had an interior trade of any importance. Our exterior commerce has suffered very much from the beginning of the present contest. During this time we have manufactured within our families the most necessary articles of cloathing. Those of cotton will bear some comparison with the same kinds of manufacture in Europe; but those of wool, flax and hemp are very coarse, unsightly, and unpleasant: and such is our attachment to agriculture, and such our preference for foreign manufactures, that be it wise or unwise, our people will certainly return as soon as they can, to the raising raw materials, and exchanging them for finer manufactures than they are able to execute themselves.

The political economists of Europe have established it as a principle that every state should endeavour to

manufacture for itself: and this principle, like many others, we transfer to America, without calculating the difference of circumstance which should often produce a difference of result. In Europe the lands are either cultivated, or locked up against the cultivator. Manufacture must therefore be resorted to of necessity not of choice, to support the surplus of their people. But we have an immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman. *Is it best then that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement, or that one half should be called off from that to exercise manufactures and handicraft arts for the other?* [Italics added.]

So far Jefferson is speaking in the voice of a scientific rationalist. In arguing that America is an exception to the general rule that nations should aim at economic self-sufficiency, he merely endorses the commonplace views of the political economists — notably Adam Smith. The argument has the incidental appeal, for Jefferson, of underscoring the geographic basis of American politics: abundance of land is what makes America a special case. But is it best for America to remain an exclusively rural nation? It is just at this point that he betrays the "soft center" of the pastoral theory. Having worked his way up to the great question in the spare, dispassionate idiom of political economy, he suddenly changes voices. Between two sentences, a rhetorical question and an "answer," he abandons discursive reasoning. Here is the question, once again, and the rest of Query XIX:

Is it best then that all our citizens should be employed in its improvement, or that one half should be called off from that to exercise manufactures and handicraft arts for the other? Those who labour in the earth are the chosen people of God, if ever he had a chosen people, whose breasts he has made his peculiar deposit for sub-

stantial and genuine virtue. It is the focus in which he keeps alive that sacred fire, which otherwise might escape from the face of the earth. Corruption of morals in the mass of cultivators is a phenomenon of which no age nor nation has furnished an example. It is the mark set on those, who not looking up to heaven, to their own soil and industry, as does the husbandman, for their subsistence, depend for it on the casualties and caprice of customers. Dependence begets subservience and venality, suffocates the germ of virtue, and prepares fit tools for the designs of ambition. This, the natural progress and consequence of the arts, has sometimes perhaps been retarded by accidental circumstances: but, generally speaking, the proportion which the aggregate of the other classes of citizens bears in any state to that of its husbandmen, is the proportion of its unsound to its healthy parts, and is a good-enough barometer whereby to measure its degree of corruption. While we have land to labour then, let us never wish to see our citizens occupied at a work-bench, or twirling a distaff. Carpenters, masons, smiths, are wanting in husbandry: but, for the general operations of manufacture, let our work-shops remain in Europe. It is better to carry provisions and materials to workmen there, than bring them to the provisions and materials, and with them their manners and principles. The loss by the transportation of commodities across the Atlantic will be made up in happiness and permanence of government. The mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body. It is the manners and spirit of a people which preserve a republic in vigour. A degeneracy in these is a canker which soon eats to the heart of its laws and constitution.

Although the term *agrarian* ordinarily is used to describe the social ideal that Jefferson is endorsing here, to call it *pastoral* would be more accurate and illuminating.

This is not a quibble: a serious distinction is involved. To begin with, the astonishing shift from the spare language of political economics to a highly figurative, mythopoeic language indicates that Jefferson is adopting a literary point of view; or, to be more exact, he is adopting a point of view for which an accepted literary convention is available. Notice the conventional character of the second half of this passage. There can be no doubt about the influence of literary pastoral upon Jefferson. We have touched on his youthful reading of James Thomson, and his love of Virgil and the classical poets is well known. In 1813 he still was quoting Theocritus in Greek to John Adams. But quite apart from his direct response to pastoral poetry, we are more likely to get a precise idea of Jefferson's meaning here if we interpret it as the expression of a pastoral rather than an agrarian ideal.³⁶

What, then, is the difference? The chief difference is the relative importance of economic factors implied by each term. To call Jefferson an agrarian is to imply that his argument rests, at bottom, upon a commitment to an agricultural economy. But in Query XIX he manifestly is repudiating the importance of economic criteria in evaluating the relative merits of various forms of society. Although the true agrarians of his day, the physiocrats, had demonstrated the superior efficiency of large-scale agriculture, Jefferson continues to advocate the small, family-sized farm. Ordinarily, he does not think about farms as productive units, a fact which may help to account for his own dismal financial record as a farmer. He is devoted to agriculture largely as a means of preserving rural manners, that is, "rural virtue." Therefore, he would continue shipping raw materials to European factories (and back across the Atlantic in finished form) no

matter what the monetary cost. Unlike the fully committed agrarians, he admits that an agricultural economy may be economically disadvantageous. But that does not trouble him, because he rejects productivity and, for that matter, material living standards, as tests of a good society. The loss of what nowadays would be called "national income," he explains, "will be made up in happiness and permanence of government."

All of this makes more sense once we recognize the noble husbandman's true identity: he is the good shepherd of the old pastoral dressed in American homespun. One of that traditional figure's greatest charms always had been his lack of the usual economic appetites. As Renato Poggioli observed, in the literary mode the shepherd appears everywhere as the "opposite of the *homo oeconomicus*." To find an almost perfect model of the Jeffersonian economy we need only recall the situation of the happy rustic in Virgil's first eclogue. There too the economy makes possible the contained self-sufficiency of the pastoral community. Like the swain in his bucolic retreat, the Virginia farmer on his family-sized farm would produce everything that his family needs and at most a little more. The goal is sufficiency, not economic growth — a virtual stasis that is a counterpart of the desired psychic balance or peace. (Notice that here "permanence of government" is one of Jefferson's chief concerns.) By equating desires with needs, turning his back on industry and trade, the husbandman would be free of the tyranny of the market. Here the absence of economic complexities makes credible the absence of their usual concomitant, a class structure. Jefferson grounds this happy classless state in the farmer's actual possession of land; in such a society all men would adopt an aloof patrician attitude toward ac-

quisitive behavior. (At this point the Lockian right of private property is woven into the pattern of these "natural" principles.) But the physical attributes of the land are less important than its metaphoric powers. What finally matters most is its function *as a landscape* — an image in the mind that represents aesthetic, moral, political, and even religious values. Standing on his farm, "looking up to heaven" and down to his "own soil and industry," Jefferson's rustic is in a position to act out all of the imperatives of the "middle link" ethic. Moreover, he derives these principles in much the same way that Crèvecoeur's farmer drew exuberancy from the landscape. Jefferson invokes the familiar botanical metaphor when he describes the "germ of virtue" being "deposited" in the husbandman's breast. It is this moral seed which enables him to renounce nascent industrial capitalism, that is, a market-regulated society in which men must submit to the "casualties and caprice of customers."³⁷

In developing the contrast between the American farmer and the European workman, Jefferson also follows the Virgilian pattern. He sets the joy of independence against the misery of dependence. As in the first eclogue, the crux here is the relation that each man enjoys with the natural environment — the land. Like Tityrus, the husbandman's life is attuned to the rhythms of nature; but the European worker's access to the land, like Melibœus', has been blocked. As a result he becomes economically dependent, a condition which "begets subservience and venality" and so "suffocates the germ of virtue." That is what will happen, Jefferson is warning, if America develops its own system of manufactures. The fresh, health-giving, sunlit atmosphere of Virginia will be replaced by the dark, foul air of European cities. At a time when the idea of the market economy as the "natural" regulator of

economic behavior enjoys great prestige, Jefferson associates it with oppressive institutions. So far from being part of benign nature, it is a kind of malformation or disease. It generates "mobs" of bestialized men who will eat, like a "canker," at the heart of the republic. At this point the intensity of Jefferson's feeling, a welling up of physical revulsion, makes itself felt in the imagery of suffocation, degeneracy, and disease ("sores on the body") with which he depicts this awful prospect. What concerns him is not agriculture for its own sake, but rather small-scale yeoman farming as the economic basis for what may be called a desirable general culture. It is the "happiness," "manners and spirit" of the people — the over-all quality of life — that rules out manufactures. These concerns have more in common with Virgil's poetry than with *The Wealth of Nations*.

But the literary ancestry of the husbandman, like that of Crèvecoeur's farmer, is obscured by the peculiar credibility imparted to the pastoral hope under American conditions. In this environment the political implications of the convention are subtly changed. William Empson has shown that the old pastoral, "which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor," served as a mask of political purposes. By the "trick" of having a simple shepherd express strong feelings in a sophisticated language, the poet managed to combine the best of both worlds. The reader in turn was put in a position to enjoy the vicarious resolution of one of his culture's deepest conflicts.* The result was a kind of conservative quietism. In a sense, Jefferson's idealized portrait of the husband-

* I am paraphrasing Empson's argument, but I feel that Empson fails to clarify the distinction between those versions of pastoral which enable the reader to enjoy an easy resolution of the conflict and those which enforce the poet's ironic distance from the pastoral dream, that is, between sentimental and complex pastoralism.

man, a simple yet educated man, a noble democrat, performs the same service. But with this vital difference: Jefferson is supposed to be talking about an actual social type in an actual society; at no point is the reader warned, as he inevitably is when he picks up a poem, that he is crossing the boundary between life and art. Jefferson's enemies, who liked to denounce him as a dreamer, might have underscored their abuse by noting the resemblance between his husbandman and the literary shepherd. Later this "mythical cult-figure" (Empson's term) of the old pastoral will reappear as the Jacksonian "common man." If this democratic Everyman strikes us as a credible figure, it is partly because the pastoral ideal has been so well assimilated into an American ideology. He achieves the political results outside literature formerly achieved by the shepherd. In the age of Jackson there no longer will be any need to insinuate a beautiful relation between the rich and the poor. By his mere presence the "common man" threatens—or promises—to supplant them both.³⁸

In the egalitarian social climate of America the pastoral ideal, instead of being contained by the literary design, spills over into thinking about real life. Jefferson extends the root contrast between simplicity and sophistication to opinions on every imaginable subject. "State a moral case," he says, "to a ploughman and a professor. The former will decide it as well, and often better than the latter, because he has not been led astray by artificial rules." The pastoral element in this famous anti-intellectual homily is apparent. The true American is the ploughman, whose values are derived from his relations to the land, not from "artificial rules." To be sure, it may be said that the shepherd's moral superiority always had been based upon a some-

what obscure metaphysical link with "nature." But the conviction with which Jefferson makes this kind of assertion stems from his belief in the unspoiled American landscape as peculiarly conducive to the nurture of the "moral sense." It disseminates germs of virtue.³⁹

All of these feelings are at work in Jefferson's warning against sending an American youth to Europe, far from the benign influences of his native ground:

He acquires a fondness for European luxury and dissipation and a contempt for the simplicity of his own country; he is fascinated with the privileges of the European aristocrats, and sees with abhorrence the lovely equality which the poor enjoy with the rich in his own country: he contracts a partiality for aristocracy or monarchy; he forms foreign friendships which will never be useful to him, and loses the season of life for forming in his own country those friendships which of all others are the most faithful and permanent: he is led by the strongest of all the human passions into a spirit for female intrigue destructive of his own and others happiness, or a passion for whores, destructive of his health, and in both cases learns to consider fidelity to the marriage bed as an ungentlemanly practice and inconsistent with happiness: he recollects the voluntary dress and arts of the European women, and pities and despises the chaste affections and simplicity of those of his own country. . . .

It would be difficult to find a more comprehensive statement of the pastoral ethic in American terms. Away from his own country the chain that links the young man's manners to his vocation and his vocation to the soil is broken. A little further on, Jefferson extends the argument to literary style. An American educated abroad, he warns, is likely to return

. . . speaking and writing his native tongue as a foreigner, and therefore unqualified to obtain those distinctions which eloquence of the pen and tongue ensures in a free country; for I would observe to you that what is called style in writing or speaking is formed very early in life while the imagination is warm, and impressions are permanent. I am of opinion that there never was an instance of man's writing or speaking his native tongue with elegance who passed from 15. to 20. years of age out of the country where it was spoken.

Implying that the peculiar "simplicity" of American manners will be embodied in a native language and therefore a distinct style, Jefferson points toward the work of Henry Thoreau, Mark Twain, Ernest Hemingway, and Robert Frost—all of whom would write "versions of pastoral" in a distinctively American idiom.⁴⁰

In Jefferson's time this way of thinking about American differences reflected the popular mood of post-Revolutionary patriotism. It was fashionable, during the 1780's, to take a pious tone toward Europe, sophistication, aristocracy, luxury, elegant language, etc. "Buy American!" was a slogan that arose from the premises of pastoral economic theory. It meant that crude local products were preferable (on moral grounds, of course) to European finery. Years ago Constance Rourke named these attitudes, which appear everywhere in native lore, the fable of the contrast. She borrowed the name from Royall Tyler's play, *The Contrast*, first produced in 1787. Setting a forthright, plain-spoken American (named Manly) against a foolish, foppish, and sinister Anglicized type (named Dimple), Tyler fashioned a trite, melodramatic action. But the character who really took hold of the popular imagination, and who ultimately was to reappear in the guise of Uncle Sam,

was a Yankee rustic named Jonathan. His great charm is an intriguing blend of astuteness and rural simplicity. Beyond question he is a comic cousin of Jefferson's noble husbandman. Combining country manners with a wit capable of undoing city types, he too embodies the values of the middle landscape. As a matter of fact, Constance Rourke's seminal book, *American Humor* (1931), is a study of the pastoral impulse in its most nearly pure indigenous form. It suggests the degree to which the cultural situation in Jefferson's America, with its rare juxtaposition of crudity and polish, may have approximated the environment from which the pastoral convention had arisen centuries before. Perhaps that explains D. H. Lawrence's impression—see the epigraph to this chapter—that American writers somehow had by-passed English literature, had reached behind it for their inspiration, thereby producing work that seems "older" than English writing.⁴¹

Almost immediately after the first printing of *Notes on Virginia*, however, Jefferson referred to the idea of a permanently undeveloped, rural America as "theory only, and a theory which the servants of America are not at liberty to follow." He made the statement in answering some questions from G. K. van Hogendorp, who had been reading the *Notes*. Possibly Jefferson's skepticism was encouraged by Hogendorp's shrewd characterization of Dr. Price in the same letter as an "enthusiast" who was "little informed of local circumstances" and who was "forming a judgement on America rather from what . . . [he wished] mankind to be, than from what it is." In any event, Hogendorp asked Jefferson to elaborate upon his ideas about the new nation's future economic development.

Here is Jefferson's reply:

You ask what I think on the expediency of encouraging our states to be commercial? Were I to indulge my own theory, I should wish them to practice neither commerce nor navigation, but to stand with respect to Europe precisely on the footing of China. We should thus avoid wars, and all our citizens would be husbandmen.

He admitted that under certain conditions America might some day be forced to engage in commerce and manufactures.

But that day would, I think be distant, and we should long keep our workmen in Europe, while Europe should be drawing rough materials and even subsistence from America. But this is theory only, and a theory which the servants of America are not at liberty to follow. Our people have a decided taste for navigation and commerce. They take this from their mother country: and their servants are in duty bound to calculate all their measures on this datum . . .⁴²

Right here the reason for the strange break in the middle of Jefferson's reply to Query XIX becomes apparent. In this letter he reverts to the political economist's language, tone, and point of view. Once again the scientific empiricist is speaking. He tells Hogendorp that much as he would like to calculate measures according to his own theory, there is a datum which the theory cannot encompass. What could be further from the high-flown rhetoric of the apostrophe to "those who labor in the earth"? It is as if Jefferson had taken that leap into rhetoric because he knew where the discursive style led. To put the pastoral theory of America into effect it would be necessary at some point, in fact almost immediately, to legislate against the creation of a native system of manufactures. But to

curb economic development in turn would require precisely the kind of governmental power Jefferson detested. Moreover, he admits that the American people already have a "decided taste" for business enterprise. The seeds of a dynamic, individualistic economic system had been imported from Europe. Hence the noble husbandman inhabits a land of "theory only," an imaginary land where desire rules fact and government is dedicated to the pursuit of happiness.

What are we to make of this apparent contradiction? Ever since Jefferson's death scholars have been trying to discover order in — or to impose it upon — his elusive, unsystematic thought, but without much success. It simply does not lend itself to ordinary standards of consistency. There is no way, finally, to cancel out either his ardent devotion to the rural ideal or the cool, analytic, pragmatic tone in which he dismisses it. All of his commitments embrace similar polarities. He praises the noble husbandman's renunciation of worldly concerns, but he himself wins and holds the highest political office in the land; he is drawn to a simple life in a remote place, but he cherishes the fruits of high civilization — architecture, music, literature, fine wines, and the rest; he wants to preserve a provincial, rural society, but he is devoted to the advance of science, technology, and the arts. How, then, can we evaluate Jefferson's conflicting statements about the pastoral ideal?

The first step in understanding Jefferson, as Richard Hofstadter suggests, is to dispense with shallow notions of consistency. Observing that he "wanted with all his heart to hold to the values of agrarian society, and yet . . . believed in progress," Hofstadter concludes that such deep ambiguities lie at the very center of his temperament. To charge him with inconsistency, after all, is to imply that

a firm grasp of the facts or the rigorous imposition of logic might have improved the quality of his thought. But that is a mistake. The "inconsistencies" just mentioned are not the sort that can be swept aside by a tidying-up of his reasoning. They are not mere opinions. They stem from a profound ambivalence — a complex response to the conflicting demands of the self and society.⁴³

It is striking to see how closely Jefferson's attitude toward his own role conforms to the pattern of contradiction displayed in Query XIX. What he most wanted, or so he always maintained, was to live quietly in his rural retreat at Monticello. As Roland Van Zandt has shown, Jefferson thought of the whole realm of power politics, war, and conflict as something Americans might have ignored but for the evil pressures of the great (European) world. Invariably he regards his political activity as a temporary departure from the natural and proper pattern of his life. It is always a concession to an emergency.⁴⁴

At the beginning of the Revolution, in 1775, he writes to John Randolph to explain how much he hates "this unnatural contest." Even at the age of thirty-two he is contemplating a permanent retirement from active life.

My first wish is a restoration of our just rights; my second a return of the happy period when, consistently with duty, I may withdraw myself totally from the public stage and pass the rest of my days in domestic ease and tranquillity, banishing every desire of afterwards even hearing what passes in the world.

In 1793, after serving as governor of Virginia, minister to France, and Secretary of State, he still regards political life as a diversion.

When I first entered on the stage of public life (now twenty-four years ago), I came to a resolution never to

engage while in public office in any kind of enterprise for the improvement of my fortune, nor to wear any other character than that of a farmer.

And, again, in 1795:

It is now more than a year that I have withdrawn myself from public affairs, which I never liked in my life, but was drawn into by emergencies which threatened our country with slavery, but ended in establishing it free. I have returned, with infinite appetite, to the enjoyment of my farm, my family and my books, and . . . determined to meddle in nothing beyond their limits.

A year later he was a candidate for the Presidency; twelve years of public service ensued, and it was not until 1809 that Jefferson finally retired to his rural seat at Monticello. Calls to public duty followed by withdrawals to the country comprise the very rhythm of his life. Beyond question Jefferson's contradictory attitudes toward the pastoral ideal are analogous to these conflicting private motives.⁴⁵

When he expresses a yearning for country peace and pleasure he sometimes veers toward sentimental pastoralism. Then he insists that his true vocation is farming: that a rural life is the proper and the "natural" life for an American, and that he only emerges from his sylvan retreat when a nefarious "other" threatens the peace. Seen from this vantage the forces which make politics necessary are not truly American; they always originate somewhere else. Projected upon the larger scene, this attitude implies that all America is — or should be — a kind of pastoral oasis. There is the implication that the young Republic, if it only could remain undisturbed, would not have to confront any serious problems of power. This way of conceiving reality is buttressed by Lockian environmentalism, a theory of knowledge and behavior which on the whole

neglects individual or psychic sources of aggression. It is the feudal past, perpetuated by corrupt, repressive institutions, that accounts for the evil economic and military degradations of Europe. If the pristine landscape of Virginia is conducive to the nurture of democratic values, think of what happens to men in the European terrain, with its dark, crowded cities, its gothic ruins, and crowded workshops!

A cluster of natural images—the rural landscape, plants, organic growth, gardens, and gardening—connects Jefferson's political theories with his physical tastes. Like a great poet, he often achieves a striking fusion of intellectual and sensual experience. "I have often thought," he writes to Charles Wilson Peale in 1811, "that if heaven had given me choice of my position and calling, it should have been on a rich spot of earth, well watered, and near a good market for the productions of the garden. No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth, and no culture comparable to that of the garden." A garden is a miniature middle landscape. It is a place as attractive for what it excludes as for what it contains. Working in his garden he is free of the anxieties and responsibilities of political office. By the same token, if all America somehow could be transformed into a garden, a permanently rural republic, then its citizens might escape from the terrible sequence of power struggles, wars, and cruel repressions suffered by Europe. This is the "logic" back of what is known as the Jeffersonian dream—a native version of an ancient hope.⁴⁶

But, again, the impulse to withdraw from the world represents only one side of Jefferson. The other side, represented by his active political role, his empirical estimate of social forces, emerges clearly in his gradual accommo-

dation to the idea of American manufactures. In a brilliant letter to Benjamin Austin, in 1816, he retraces his thinking on the subject. "You tell me I am quoted," he writes, "by those who wish to continue our dependence on England for manufactures. There was a time when I might have been so quoted with more candor, but within the thirty years which have since elapsed, how are circumstances changed!" He then recounts the history of the Napoleonic era, the wars, the exclusion of American shipping from the seas, and, all in all, the experience of what, in 1785, "we did not then believe, that there exist both profligacy and power enough to exclude us from the field of interchange with other nations: that to be independent for the comforts of life we must fabricate them ourselves. We must now place the manufacturer by the side of the agriculturist." But what about the question he had raised in Query XIX? Did not the immensity of unimproved land in America argue the more or less permanent supremacy of agriculture?

The former question is suppressed, or rather assumes a new form. Shall we make our own comforts, or go without them, at the will of a foreign nation? He, therefore, who is now against domestic manufacture, must be for reducing us either to dependence on that foreign nation, or to be clothed in skins, and to live like wild beasts in dens and caverns. I am not one of these . . .⁴⁷

The controlling principle of Jefferson's politics is not to be found in any fixed image of society. Rather it is dialectical. It lies in his recognition of the constant need to redefine the "middle landscape" ideal, pushing it ahead, so to speak, into an unknown future to adjust it to ever-changing circumstances. (The ideal, in fact, is an abstract embodiment of the concept of mediation between the

extremes of primitivism and what may be called "over-civilization.") In 1816, accordingly, the momentous question he had raised in 1785 — in our language: shall America industrialize? — necessarily "assumes a new form." Why? Because circumstances have changed. A quarter of a century earlier it had been possible to imagine, at least when the wishful side of his temperament was in charge, that the choice was still open: America might still have elected "to stand, with respect to Europe, precisely on the footing of China." But this is no longer feasible. In 1816 the choice for America is continuing economic development or one of two unacceptable alternatives: becoming a satellite of Europe or regressing to the life of cavemen.

To accept the need for manufactures in 1816, therefore, does not mean abandoning his basic principles. But it does mean that he must accommodate himself, however reluctantly, to the factory system he detests. It is important to stress his reluctance: one cannot read the long sequence of Jefferson's letters on the subject without recognizing the painful anxiety that this accommodation arouses in him. But then it may be said that his acceptance of the need for manufactures hardly constitutes mediation between ideal and reality — mediation, that is, in the literal sense of establishing a compromise; with this decision, after all, the distance between the two seems to be opening rather than closing. So it is. That is why the feasible policy in 1816 includes what had seemed avoidable in 1785. To admit this is only to underline the irony with which Henry Adams portrays the career of Jefferson: during his eight-year term as President of the United States, Jefferson's policies had the effect of creating precisely the kind of society he did not want. But then, even in 1785, Jefferson had acknowledged in his wistful letter to Hogen-

dorp that America was not headed in the direction he preferred. By the time he put it in words, Jefferson already had begun to shift his vision of a pastoral utopia from the future to the past.⁴⁸

In his greatest moments, Jefferson was clear about the difference between his preferences and what he called "circumstances." Similarly, he defined many of the important decisions of his life as choices between private pleasures and public responsibilities — between the garden and the world. So thoroughgoing was the doubleness of his outlook that he virtually had a separate language for each side. Far from being a handicap, it seems, this inconsistency was a source of his political strength. Tracing the history of the Jeffersonian image since 1826, Merrill Peterson attributes his continuing fascination for us largely to the fact that he expresses decisive contradictions in our culture and in ourselves.⁴⁹

Beginning in Jefferson's time, the cardinal image of American aspirations was a rural landscape, a well-ordered green garden magnified to continental size. Although it probably shows a farmhouse or a neat white village, the scene usually is dominated by natural objects: in the foreground a pasture, a twisting brook with cattle grazing nearby, then a clump of elms on a rise in the middle distance and beyond that, way off on the western horizon, a line of dark hills. This is the countryside of the old Republic, a chaste, uncomplicated land of rural virtue. In his remarkable book, *Virgin Land*, Henry Nash Smith shows that down to the twentieth century the imagination of Americans was dominated by the idea of transforming the wild heartland into such a new "Garden of the World." On the whole, Americans were unsentimental

about unmodified nature. Attempts to idealize the wilderness, moreover, finally produced only a sterile, formula-ridden art — the "western story." As Tocqueville noted, the wilderness was precious to most Americans chiefly for what could be made of it — a terrain of rural peace and happiness.

This symbolic landscape did not exist only on canvas or in books, or, for that matter, in the minds of those who were familiar with art and literature. What makes *Virgin Land* so illuminating is that Smith demonstrates in detail how the goals embodied in this image governed behavior on many planes of consciousness. It activated the stubborn settlers who struggled for years to raise crops in what was literally a desert; it led congressmen to insist upon certain impractical provisions of the Homestead Act; it lay back of the peculiarly bitter frustration of western farmers beginning in the 1870's; it kept alive the memory of Thomas Jefferson; it caused artists and writers both popular and serious to lose touch, as time went on, with social realities; it excited the imagination of Frederick Jackson Turner, not to mention all the historians who so eagerly endorsed the "frontier hypothesis" as the most plausible explanation for the Americanness of various attitudes and institutions — and one could go on. "The image of this vast and constantly growing agricultural society," says Smith, ". . . became . . . a collective representation, a poetic idea . . . that defined the promise of American life. The master symbol of the garden embraced a cluster of metaphors expressing fecundity, growth, increase, and blissful labor in the earth. . ."⁵⁰

For more than a century, then, the American people held on to a version of the pastoral ideal not unlike the one that Jefferson had set forth in 1785, investing it with

a quality of thought and feeling that can only be called mythic. The "master symbol" described by Smith is not a static emblem of private felicity; it is the aim of a grand collective enterprise. Accordingly, when he calls it the *myth* of the garden, Smith is not using the term as it is used either in ordinary discourse, meaning an illusory idea, or in contemporary literary criticism, as applied for example to the poetry of Yeats, meaning a manifestly fictitious, sophisticated invention designed to place a cosmological frame around one poet's vision of life. As he uses the term, myth is a mode of belief. He is saying that Americans, so far as they shared an idea of what they were doing as a people, actually saw themselves creating a society in the image of a garden. The quality of their feeling was not unlike that of the Greeks in the Homeric poems, for whom myth presumably expressed a believable definition of reality.

Yet Jefferson, as we have seen, could not give full credence to the myth. Although he never entirely repudiated it, he knew perfectly well that it did not encompass all of the essential truth about American experience. In detached moods, he recognized the restless striving of his countrymen, their get-ahead, get-rich, rise-in-the-world ambitions. Whatever it was that they wanted, or, rather, that they *thought* they wanted, it was not the domestic peace and joy of the self-sufficient farm. Hence Jefferson's attitude is not to be confused with a naïve trust in the fulfillment of the pastoral hope. Recognizing that the ideal society of the middle landscape was unattainable, he kept it in view as a kind of model, a guide to long-range policies as indispensable to intelligent political thought or action as the recognition of present necessities. Like certain great poets who have written in the pastoral mode, Jefferson's

genius lay in his capacity to respond to the dream yet to disengage himself from it. To a degree, he exemplifies the kind of intelligence which Keats thought characteristic of men of achievement, especially in literature, and which Shakespeare possessed above all others, that is, "negative capability": the capacity "of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. . . ." Though Jefferson certainly did reach after fact and reason, he was able to function brilliantly under stress of doubt, and his superb mind maintained its poise as it moved ceaselessly between real and imagined worlds. As indicated by the example of Shakespeare, creator of *The Tempest* and *King Lear*, an exultant pastoral wish-image may well emanate from a mind susceptible to the darkest forebodings. Looking to America's future, Jefferson anticipates the tragic ambivalence that is the hallmark of our most resonant pastoral fables. "Our enemy," he writes during the War of 1812, "has indeed the consolation of Satan on removing our first parents from Paradise: from a peaceable and agricultural nation, he makes us a military and manufacturing one."⁵¹

IV

The Machine

Locke sank into a swoon;
The Garden died;
God took the spinning-jenny
Out of his side.

W. B. Yeats, *The Tower*, 1928 *

. . . the most idealist nations invent most machines. America simply teems with mechanical inventions, because nobody in America ever wants to do anything. They are idealists. Let a machine do the thing.

D. H. Lawrence, *Studies in Classic American Literature*, 1923

In his *Life of Johnson* Boswell describes the moment when he first recognized the significance of the new technology. In March 1776, he visited Matthew Boulton's great Soho works where a steam engine was in production. The "very ingenious proprietor" himself was his guide. "I wish," Boswell writes, "that Johnson had been with us: for it was a scene which I should have been glad to contemplate by his light. The vastness and the contrivance of some of the machinery would have 'matched his mighty mind.'" In Johnson's absence, however, Boswell quotes the "*iron chieftain's*" own account of his work. "I shall never forget Mr. Bolton's [sic] expression to me: 'I sell here, Sir, what all the world desires to have—POWER.'"

As Boswell tells the story, there is no trace in it of that

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contempt for the machine later to become a stock literary attitude. In many ways, in fact, he anticipates the dominant American response. He finds the spectacle exhilarating, and his notion that the growing power of technology somehow is a "match" for the power of intellect implies a progressive idea of history. At the time most Americans no doubt shared this view. On the other hand, they surely did not assume, as Boulton does, that machine power entails manufacturing on a large scale. According to Boswell, there were seven hundred workers on the job at Soho when he paid his visit — a prospect that would have appalled Thomas Jefferson.¹

1

It did not occur to Jefferson that the factory system was a necessary feature of technological progress. In 1786, the year after the first printing of *Notes on Virginia*, with its plea that America let its workshops remain in Europe, Jefferson was in England. This was a moment, as Boulton put it in a letter to his collaborator, James Watt, when the population seemed to have gone "steam-mill mad." At Blackfriar's Bridge, near London, there was a new mill powered by Boulton and Watt engines which was generally considered one of the mechanical wonders of the age, and Jefferson went to see it. He was delighted. "I could write you volumes," he said in a letter to Charles Thomson afterward, "on the improvements . . . made and making here in the arts." Of course Jefferson's passion for utilitarian improvement, gadgets, and labor-saving devices of all kinds is familiar to anyone who has read his letters or visited Monticello. But in England at this time the new technology was visibly related to the new factory

system, and one therefore might have expected to hear Jefferson sound another, less enthusiastic, note. But not so. He singles out the steam mill as deserving of particular notice because, he says, it is "simple, great, and likely to have extensive consequences." And he is not thinking about consequences only in England.

I hear you are applying this same agent in America to navigate boats, and I have little doubt but that it will be applied generally to machines, so as to supercede the use of water ponds, and of course to lay open all the streams for navigation. We know that steam is one of the most powerful engines we can employ; and in America fuel is abundant.²

Today Jefferson's attitude is bound to seem curious. Why, we cannot help asking, does he fail to connect the new machinery with Soho and the transformation of England into a vast workshop? Why does he want the latest, most powerful machines imported to America if he would have factories and cities kept in Europe?

Part of the answer is that Jefferson's attitude reflects American economic realities. At the time industrialization scarcely had begun in America. Native manufactures were primitive. The war had stimulated production, to be sure, but chiefly in the form of household industry. In America there was nothing comparable to Soho, nor would there be for a long time. True, ritual gestures toward the "promotion" of manufactures often had been made, notably by Benjamin Franklin, but even he assumed that industry, as compared with agriculture, would be of trivial significance. All reliable opinion supported this view. In *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the work of political economy to which the age deferred beyond all others, Adam

Smith had warned Americans that it would be folly to direct capital into manufactures. Everyone repeated his sensible argument. During the war, especially, the British delighted in reminding their difficult cousins that, even if they won political independence, they could count upon protracted economic subservience. Edmund Burke popularized this idea, and the Earl of Sheffield summarized it with an incontrovertible body of facts and figures in his *Observations on the Commerce of the United States* (1783). An advocate of a tough policy toward America, Sheffield demonstrated the Republic's helplessness. No matter how oppressive a policy the British followed, he said, there was no danger of provoking serious competition from America. The book was widely read, going through six editions by 1791, and it helped to establish the idea that America's economic development would be unusual, if not unique. Not that many people were disposed to quarrel with Sheffield. Most American statesmen accepted his seemingly flawless case. "I say," John Adams had written to Franklin in 1780, "that America will not make manufactures enough for her own consumption these thousand years."³

Under the circumstances, there was nothing farfetched about the prophecy. What made it plausible was not so much the absence of factories and machines, it was the geo-political situation of the country. One has only to recall how small an area had been occupied by 1786; most of the continent was unsettled and, for that matter, unexplored; nine out of ten Americans lived on farms; land was cheap, if not free, and capital was scarce. To be sure, political independence had removed Parliament's legal prohibitions against colonial manufactures, but it is doubtful whether they had made much difference. Geography had been more effective than any laws could have been

in blocking manufactures, and it still seemed to present overwhelming obstacles. The most formidable was simply the presence of the land itself — that "immensity of land courting the industry of the husbandman" which encouraged Jefferson in the hope that (the war being over) his countrymen would gladly revert to their former dependence on England. The availability of land worked against manufactures in two ways: it provided an inducement to agriculture, and it dispersed the people over an area too large to be a satisfactory market for manufactures. It is not enough, therefore, to think of the landscape at this time merely as an emblem of agrarian sentiments; it is a perpetual reminder of American differences, a visual token of circumstances which guarantee that the nation's workshops will remain in Europe. But workshops, to Jefferson, are one thing and machines another. It is no accident that his enthusiasm is aroused by a mechanized grist mill — a piece of machinery peculiarly suited to a rural society.*⁴

Quite apart from the state of the American economy, however, there are compelling reasons for Jefferson's failure to see the new machines as a threat to his rural ideal. For one thing, the very notion of "technology" as an agent of change scarcely existed. (It was not until 1829 that Jacob Bigelow, a Harvard professor, coined the word itself.) Although many features of what we now call indus-

* Ironically, the American inventor, Oliver Evans, already was perfecting a more impressive version back in the United States. Indeed, his water-powered mill, which was in operation by 1787, is now considered the world's first automatic production line. By using both horizontal and vertical conveyor belts, Evans was able to eliminate all human labor between loading the grain at one end of the continuous process and covering the barrels filled with flour at the other. Later he included even the final packing in the automated process.

trialism already were visible, neither the word nor the concept of a totally new way of life was available. Today our view of history is so deeply colored by an appreciation, if not awe, of technology as an agent of change that it is not easy to imagine Jefferson's state of mind as he inspects the powerful engines at Blackfriar's Bridge. Curiously enough, his very devotion to the principles of the Enlightenment obscures his perception of causal relations we now take for granted. Assuming that knowledge inescapably is power for good, he cannot imagine that a genuine advance in science or the arts, such as the new steam engine, could entail consequences as deplorable as factory cities.⁵

From Jefferson's perspective, the machine is a token of that liberation of the human spirit to be realized by the young American Republic; the factory system, on the other hand, is but feudal oppression in a slightly modified form. Once the machine is removed from the dark, crowded, grimy cities of Europe, he assumes that it will blend harmoniously into the open countryside of his native land. He envisages it turning millwheels, moving ships up rivers, and, all in all, helping to transform a wilderness into a society of the middle landscape. At bottom it is the intensity of his belief in the land, as a locus of both economic and moral value, which prevents him from seeing what the machine portends for America.

2

By this time, however, there were some Americans — not many — whose predilections enabled them to foresee what Jefferson could not. The most astute was Tench Coxe, an ambitious, young Philadelphia merchant who was disturbed by the unhappy state into which American

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affairs had fallen by the end of the Revolutionary War. Although only thirty-one, Coxe already had made a name for himself as a capable spokesman for the nascent manufacturing interest. Later he was to be Alexander Hamilton's assistant in the Treasury, where he would play an important part in drawing up the *Report on Manufactures* of 1791. If Coxe has been slighted by historians, it is partly because he is an unattractive figure. After the Revolution he was accused of collaboration with the enemy, though he was never brought to trial. Hard-pressed financially, he later maneuvered endlessly for government posts. John Quincy Adams called him a "wily, winding, subtle, and insidious character." This judgment may be somewhat extreme, but it seems clear that Coxe was a careerist and political trimmer whose views seldom were far removed from the interests of his class. Except on the subject of economic development, where he was far ahead of his time, Coxe did not display intellectual distinction. His values were pragmatic in the limited material sense. Yet it was precisely the narrow, prudential quality of his mind that made him responsive to the forces which were to determine the main line of national development. In this sense at least he is entitled to the tribute of Joseph Dorfman, who considers him "closest to being the Defoe of America." At any rate, his claim to our attention rests on two talents: first, a rare empirical bent which led him to make predictions based chiefly upon economic data collected and interpreted by himself, and, second, a master publicist's knack of casting his own aims in the idiom of the dominant ideology. With a sure sense that machine technology would make a decisive difference in the nation's development, Coxe proceeded to make a place for it in the myth of the garden.⁶

In September 1786, just a few months after Jefferson's visit to the mill at Blackfriar's Bridge, Coxe attended the Annapolis meeting on commercial regulations which in turn led to the calling of the Constitutional Convention of 1787. By the following summer his anxiety about the deterioration of the economy of the young Republic had deepened. He was convinced that nothing less than the "salvation of the country" rested upon the delegates who were assembling to write, as it turned out, the Constitution of the United States. Although not a delegate himself, Coxe made his ideas known to the Convention. On May 11, three days before the scheduled meeting, he addressed the Society for Political Enquiries at the home of Benjamin Franklin. Some fifty leading citizens belonged to the organization, which met every two weeks to discuss topics of general interest. Later Coxe saw to it that his speech (*An Enquiry into the principles, on which a commercial system for the United States of America should be founded . . . [and] some political observations connected with the subject*) was published and "inscribed to the members of the convention." Then again, on August 9th, while the Convention still was in session, he elaborated upon his theme. At the request of Dr. Benjamin Rush, the president, he gave the inaugural address at the organizing meeting of the Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts. Taken together, these two speeches outline the case for industrialization as a means of realizing the ideal of the middle landscape.⁷

Like most of the official delegates to the Convention, Coxe argues for a stronger, more centralized government with power to enforce uniform economic policies. On the political side, accordingly, he expounds the standard doc-

trine of the capitalist and nationalist groups. But Coxe is more interested than most in long-range economic goals. Convinced that political independence ultimately will require greater economic self-sufficiency, he insists upon the need for a "balanced economy" and thus, above all, for native manufactures. Without them the young nation's prosperity and its security always will be precarious. At the outset, then, he runs head on into the whole body of respectable economic theory that denies the feasibility of American manufactures. His problem, he admits, is to "disencumber" the case for manufactures of the usual objections: "*the high rate of labour, . . . the want of a sufficient number of hands . . . , — the scarcity and dearness of raw materials — want of skill in the business itself and its unfavorable effects on the health of the people.*" Impressive as they are, all of these objections may be disposed of, according to Coxe, by one new fact under the sun. It is so new that he does not even have a name for it, but he is certain that it will make all the difference, and so he says:

Factories which can be carried on by water-mills, wind-mills, fire, horses and machines ingeniously contrived, are not burdened with any heavy expense of boarding, lodging, clothing and paying workmen, and they supply the force of hands to a great extent without taking our people from agriculture. By wind and water machines we can make pig and bar iron, nail rods, tire, sheet-iron, sheet-copper, sheet-brass, anchors, meal of all kinds, gunpowder . . .

And so on. Describing the incredible productive power of machines and factories, Coxe becomes excited; a note of wonder and prophecy gets into his sober discourse:

Strange as it may appear they also card, spin and even weave, it is said, by water in the European factories.

Steam mills have not yet been adopted in America, but we shall probably see them after a short time. . . .

Machines ingeniously constructed, will give us immense assistance. — The cotton and silk manufacturers in Europe are possessed of some, that are invaluable to them. Several instances have been ascertained, in which a few hundreds of women and children perform the work of thousands of carders, spinners and winders.

The cumulative effect of all this is to undermine most prevailing expectations about the future American economy. Once the new technology is brought into the picture, Coxe is saying, the prospect changes completely. Indeed — and this is the crux no one else seems to have recognized — the very factors usually cited as inhibiting to the nation's growth, such as the scarcity of labor, then will become stimulants. Paradoxically, the extraordinary abundance of land in America is what lends a unique significance to the machine. Coxe knows that the practical, conservative men in his audience will suspect him of being a "visionary enthusiast," but he cannot restrain himself. So inspired is he by the changes to be wrought by machines that he is not satisfied merely to reject the idea of the young Republic's subservience to Europe:

. . . combinations of machines with fire and water have already accomplished much more than was formerly expected from them by the most visionary enthusiast on the subject. Perhaps I may be too sanguine, but they appear to me fraught with immense advantages to us, and not a little dangerous to the manufacturing nations of Europe; for should they continue to use and improve

them, as they have heretofore done, their people may be driven to us for want of employment, and if, on the other hand, they should return to manual labour, we may underwork them by these invaluable engines.⁸

To appreciate Coxe's prescience it is necessary to recall how conjectural these ideas were in the summer of 1787. Although machine production was becoming an accepted fact of life in England, it was little more than an idea in America. But this is not to suggest that Coxe was the only American drawn to the possibility. In the small but influential group of "friends of American manufactures" who made up the new Philadelphia society there were a number of men who had expressed one or the other of Coxe's thoughts on the subject. In 1787, moreover, Matthew Carey had founded a new journal, *The American Museum*, which took the same general line. Besides, it is misleading to stress the backwardness of native manufactures. Beneath the surface of economic life the colonies had accumulated a rich fund of technical knowledge and skill, soon to be revealed in the achievements of inventors like Evans, Fitch, Whitney, and Fulton. When all of these allowances have been made, however, the fact remains that it was Coxe who first gathered these scattered impulses and ideas into a prophetic vision of machine technology as the fulcrum of national power.⁹

But for Coxe the machine is the instrument and not in itself the true source of America's future power. If anything, he exaggerates its European identity, and he frankly advocates certain devious methods of wresting the secrets of technological power from the Old World. At the time the British were attempting, by strict regulations, to prevent any plans or new engines of production or skilled mechanics from leaving the country. As countermeasures,

Coxe and his colleagues advertised for technicians; they offered special bonuses to those who would emigrate—a policy notably successful in the well-known case of Samuel Slater; they also attempted to smuggle machines packed in false crates out of England, and the British foreign service was alerted to intercept these illicit cargoes; for a time, in fact, the Americans and the British played an elaborate game of technological espionage and counterespionage. Although Coxe led the campaign to import the new methods, he was intelligent enough not to conceive of American power as emerging from technology *per se*, but rather from the peculiar affinities between the machine and the New World setting in its entirety: geographical, political, social, and, in our sense of the word, cultural.¹⁰

In his 1787 speeches Coxe displays a striking sensitivity to the prevalence of rural pieties. He tactfully defers to agriculture as the "great leading interest" and repeatedly insists upon the subordinate rôle of manufactures. By employing workers unsuited to farming and thereby helping to develop a home market, he argues, the factory system will benefit agriculture. He anticipates all of the stock protectionist arguments of the next century. Farmers and planters, he says, are the "bulwark of the nation," and their pre-eminence will grow with the "settlement of our waste lands." In his references to the wilderness, incidentally, there is not a trace of primitivism or literary sentimentality. Unimproved land, he says, is "vacant"—a "waste." When discussing the middle landscape, moreover, he adopts the familiar pastoral attitudes. Of course, he says, "rural life promotes health and morality by its active nature, and by keeping our people from the luxuries and vices of the towns." To allay the fears of Jeffersonians, he relies chiefly upon the "safety valve" argument. After

all, "the states are possessed of millions of vacant acres . . . that court the cultivator's hand," so how can anyone question the "great superiority of agriculture over all the rest [of the economic interests] combined"? It is impossible to tell how much of this is the calculated strategy of a "gladiator of the quill"—as William Maclay referred to Coxe—and how much he really believed.¹¹

At any rate, instead of denying that the economic supremacy of agriculture ultimately inheres in the close relation between farmers and the soil (as Hamilton is tempted to do in the *Report on Manufactures* four years later), Coxe ingeniously contrives an equivalent argument for manufacturing. Building factories, he claims, is necessary to fulfill imperatives embedded in the terrain. "Unless business of this kind is carried on," he says, "certain great *natural powers* of the country will remain inactive and useless. Our numerous mill seats . . . would be given by Providence in vain." (Throughout Coxe is at pains to break down the association of manufactures with the "artificial" as against the alleged "naturalness" of a rural life.) Describing the policy to be inferred from the presence of numerous mill seats, he continues:

If properly improved, they will save us an immense expense for the wages, provisions, cloathing and lodging of workmen, without diverting the people from their farms—Fire, as well as water, affords . . . a fund of assistance, that cannot lie unused without an evident neglect of our best interests. Breweries, . . . distilleries, . . . casting and steel furnaces . . . are carried on by this powerful element. . . . 'Tis probable also that a frequent use of steam engines will add greatly to this class of factories.

Nowhere is Coxe's genius as a propagandist more evident than in the way he depicts the aims of American

society as emanating from geography. He presents his program of economic development as part of a grand topographical design. Not only the abundance of resources but the breadth of the ocean supports his case for developing native manufactures. In fact, America is better suited to the purpose than Europe. With the aplomb of a public relations expert, he turns the standard symbols of the pastoral myth to his own uses. The "clear air and powerful sun of America" will give producers of linens and cottons a distinct advantage over their overseas competitors when it comes to bleaching because, he says, the "European process by drugs and machines impairs the strength." (Although this apparent slur on machines may seem inconsistent, it fits the Coxean formula — the notion that machines merely bring out powers latent in the environment. Thus textile production is more "naturally" suited to America than to Europe.) As for the alleged immorality and ill-health of factory workers, Americans need not be concerned about that. He says that the objection to manufactures as "unfavourable to the health" is urged principally against the production of textiles which "formerly were entirely manual and sedentary occupations." The use of machine power erases that old objection.

At this point Coxe anticipates what was to become a central theme in the ideology of American industrialism: the capacity of the New World environment to "purify" the system. Just as the American sun is a more potent bleaching agent, so the entire social climate of the new Republic will cleanse the factory system of its unfortunate feudal residues. Later this idea also would ease Jefferson's mind: in 1805, recalling his diatribe against manufactures in *Query XIX*, he explains to a correspondent that in the 1780's he had been thinking about workers "of the great

cities in the old countries . . . with whom the want of food and clothing . . . [had] begotten a depravity of morals, a dependence and corruption" he had no wish to see repeated in America. But now, he observes, American "manufacturers are as much at their ease, as independent and moral as our agricultural inhabitants, and they will continue so as long as there are vacant lands for them to resort to. . ." Later variants of this refrain would be heard from European visitors, many of whom would develop the contrast between the pure, apple-cheeked farm girls in American mills (the "nuns of Lowell" in Chevalier's resonant phrase) and their pathetic European counterparts. Ironically, the sentiment rests at bottom upon the idea that the factory system, when transferred to America, is redeemed by contact with "nature" and the rural way of life it is destined to supplant.¹²

But to return to Tench Coxe in 1787. In addition to his foresight and the subtlety with which he adapts his program to rural values, what is most impressive about his thought is his responsiveness to the topographical and, indeed, "mythic" quality of the dominant ethos. He fully appreciates the function of the landscape as a master image embodying American hopes. At a decisive point in his first speech, accordingly, he offers by way of summary "to draw a picture of our country, as it would really exist under the operation of a system of national laws formed upon these principles." What follows is a geo-political landscape painting:

In the foreground we should find the mass of our citizens — the cultivators (and what is happily for us in most instances the same thing) the independent proprietors of the soil. Every wheel would appear in motion that could carry forward the interests of this great body

of our people, and bring into action the inherent powers of the country. . . . *On one side* we should see our manufactures encouraging the tillers of the earth. . . . Commerce, *on the other hand* . . . would come forward with offers to range through foreign climates in search of . . . supplies . . . which nature has not given us at home. . . .

Coxe has no difficulty blending factories and machines into the rural scene. Combining the best of art with the best of nature, the picture matches the pastoral ideal of the middle landscape.

As a frame for his whole program, Coxe begins his second speech of 1787 by invoking the American moral geography:

Providence has bestowed upon the United States of America means of happiness, as great and numerous, as are enjoyed by any country in the world. A soil fruitful and diversified — a healthful climate — mighty rivers and adjacent seas abounding with fish are the great advantages for which we are indebted to a beneficent creator. Agriculture, manufactures and commerce, naturally arising from these sources, afford to our industrious citizens certain subsistence and innumerable opportunities of acquiring wealth.

In arguing for the development of machine power, Coxe depicts it as "naturally arising," like agriculture, from the divine purpose invested in the New World landscape. To Matthew Boulton steam engines represented simple, stark power, but Coxe understands that it is wise to represent the machine to Americans as another natural "means of happiness" decreed by the Creator in his design of the continent. So far from conceding that there might be anything alien or "artificial" about mechanization, he insists

that it is inherent in "nature," both geographic and human. On the "subject of mechanism," he says, "America may justly pride herself. Every combination of machinery may be expected from a country, A NATIVE SON of which, reaching this inestimable object at its highest point, has epitomized the motions of the spheres, that roll throughout the universe."

With this deft allusion to David Rittenhouse and his orrery, Coxe brings his celebration of the machine in its New World setting to a climax. By reminding his audience of the famous orrery, a miniature planetarium which had won the Pennsylvania scientist international fame, he enlists the immense prestige of Newtonian mechanics in support of his economic program. The orrery is an ingenious replica of the universe: when the clockwork machinery turns, the heavenly bodies revolve in their orbits, music plays, and dials move indicating the hour, the day of the month, and the year. Here, Coxe implies, is a visual and auditory display of the same harmonious plan which has provided America with endless resources for manufactures. If a colonial farmer's son can "epitomize" the ultimate laws of nature — the very music of the spheres — then imagine what Americans will accomplish when they apply the same principles to their entire national enterprise! * At this point the impressive, Miltonic reach and grandeur of Coxe's rhetoric imparts a metaphysical sanction to his vision of American economic development. As he describes the situation in 1787, the momentous achievements of science, the political movement to establish the new American Republic and the forthcoming use of

* As if sharing Coxe's sentiments, incidentally, the new Society for the Encouragement of Manufactures and the Useful Arts proceeded to elect Rittenhouse to its vice-presidency.

machine power in production all belong to the same encouraging flow of history. They are all signs of a progressive unfolding of the structural principles of the universe — the laws of "mechanism."

There are few words whose shifting connotations register the revolution in thought and feeling we call the "romantic movement" more clearly than "mechanism." Once the influence of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Carlyle had been felt in America, no writer (whether sympathetic with them or not) would find it possible to use "mechanism" in the unself-conscious, honorific sense in which Coxe uses it. His entire argument for what we would call industrialization rests on the assumption that celestial mechanics, the orrery, the new engines of production, even the factory system — all embody the same ultimate laws of nature. What is more, and this is perhaps the most difficult attitude to grasp in retrospect, it is the same "mechanism" to which we respond, aesthetically, in the presence of the natural landscape. The identification of visual nature with the celestial "machine" is difficult to grasp because of our own feeling, learned from the romantics, that "organic" nature is the opposite of things "mechanical." But it is impossible to appreciate the dominant American attitude toward technology if we project this sense of contradiction too far back into the past. In other words, Coxe, who anticipates the popular view, is writing in the tradition of James Thomson, whose feeling for the beauty of the countryside was inseparable from his reverence for the Newtonian world machine. On the occasion of Sir Isaac's death, Thomson had described the great man in these terms:

All intellectual eye, our solar round
First gazing through, he by the blended power

Of gravitation and projection, saw
The whole in silent harmony revolve.

And when Newton studied the stars they

. . . Blazed into suns, the living center each
Of an harmonious system: all combin'd
And rul'd unerring by that single power,
Which draws the stone projected to the ground.

Thomson's version of the Newtonian system is one of innumerable examples, a variant of the metaphor which George Berkeley had used in his *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710):

Such is the artificial contrivance of this mighty machine
of nature that, whilst its motions and various phenomena
strike on our senses, the hand which actuates the whole
is itself unperceivable to men of flesh and blood. . . .

True, the "mighty machine" can be described with most precision in the language of mathematics; but this does not prevent the poets of the age, particularly those who celebrate the glories of the rural scene, from communicating a sense of Newton's universe in metaphor. Thus William Somerville toward the end of "The Chase" (1735):

. . . grand machine,
Worlds above worlds; subservient to his voice,
Who, veil'd in clouded majesty, alone
Gives light to all; bids the great system move,
And changeful seasons in their turns advance,
Unmov'd, unchang'd, himself . . .¹³

The speeches of Tench Coxe in the summer of 1787 prefigure the emergence of the machine as an American cultural symbol, that is, a token of meaning and value recognized by a large part of the population. By 1851,

when Walt Whitman tells the Brooklyn Art Union that the United States has become a nation "of whom the steam engine is no bad symbol," he assumes that his audience knows what he is talking about. Needless to say, a collective image of this kind gathers meanings gradually, over a long period, and it is impossible to fix upon any single moment when it comes into being. Besides, it invariably combines a traditional meaning and a new, specific, local or topical reference. The garden image brings together a universal Edenic myth and a particular set of American goals and aspirations. So with the machine. What is most fascinating about the speeches of Tench Coxe is that in them we witness the virtual discovery of the symbolic properties of the machine image — its capacity to embrace a whole spectrum of meanings ranging from a specific class of objects at one end to an abstract metaphor of value at the other.¹⁴

To Coxe the new and most exciting implication of "machine" is technological. In the summer of 1787 the possibilities of the latest technological innovations were just beginning to take hold of the American imagination. While the Constitutional Convention was in session, as it happens, "Mad" John Fitch managed, after inconceivable trials and tribulations, to propel a steam-powered vessel against the current of the Delaware River. When some of the delegates went down to the waterfront to inspect this remarkable invention, what they saw was another instance of, in Coxe's language, the power of mechanism. The existence of this kind of machine leads him to an optimistic view of the Republic's future, and there can be no doubt that in his mind the development of steam power and the business of the Constitutional Convention are aspects of the same grand enterprise. They

both represent a release of power through seizure of the underlying principles of nature. The universe is a "mechanism." At the abstract end of the spectrum, then, the symbol of the machine incorporates a whole metaphysical system. It often has been noted that the dominant structural metaphor of the Constitution is that of a self-regulating machine, like the orrery or the steam engine; it establishes a system of "checks and balances" among three distinct, yet delicately synchronized, branches of government.¹⁵

Between the two extremes, the machine as concrete object and the machine as root metaphor of being, Coxe identifies the power of "mechanism" with a specific economic faction. He is an avowed spokesman for the manufacturing interest. He and his associates in the Pennsylvania delegation are chiefly concerned about the kind of power to be generated by the national government's authority to enforce uniform economic laws, protect patents, and establish tariffs. Running through much of what they had to say is an inchoate sense of the vast transformation of life to be accomplished through what we should call economic development or industrialization. "The time is not distant," said Gouverneur Morris at one point in the debates, "when this Country will abound with mechanics & manufacturers who will receive their bread from their employers." But this is a rare example; the vocabulary at the command of Coxe, Morris, and their friends was inadequate to express their full sense of the power to be released through the combined agencies of commerce, science, technology, and republican institutions. To speak of it as "manufacturing" power hardly sufficed, particularly in view of the fact that the word still carried much of its pre-industrial meaning, as in handicraft or

household manufactures. Their vision had got ahead of their language.*¹⁶

Still, we can be sure about the widespread identification of the manufacturing interest, the new Republic, and the new technology. On July 4, 1788, after the Constitution had been approved by the electorate, there were parades and pageants in many cities, and several featured displays of recent industrial progress. In Philadelphia, the new "manufacturing society" entered a float in the grand Federal Procession. It was thirty feet long and thirteen feet wide, and drawn by ten large bay horses. On board eleven men and women demonstrated the operation of the latest machinery used in textile manufacture—a spinning jenny, a carding machine, and a loom. A new American flag flew above the float, and to it was attached the motto: "May the Union Government Protect the Manufacturers of America." One hundred weavers marched behind the float carrying a banner inscribed, "May Government Protect Us." Half a century later, when industrialization was well under way, the notion that 1789 marked the beginning of the process became something of a commonplace. The chief evil of the colonial situation, said Edward Everett in 1831, had been the "restraint" upon "the

* Actually, a whole new vocabulary of "industrialism" was just emerging at this time. In the 1780's and '90's words like "engine," "machine," "manufacture" and "industry," all of which had been in use long before the advent of power machinery, were beginning to take on new meanings. At one point Coxe refers to "handicraft manufactures," indicating that for him at least the word now had become ambiguous. (*A View of the United States*, p. 38n.) On the other hand, David Humphreys published "A Poem on the Industry of the United States of America" in 1802, in which he still used "industry" in its traditional sense as a character trait (diligence) rather than as an economic institution. A careful study of this shift in language would be invaluable for a detailed understanding of the impact of industrialization upon consciousness.

by Cambridge School

labor of the country," and "the first thought and effort of our fathers . . . [was to] encourage and protect the mechanical arts and manufactures. . . ."¹⁷

Among other things, Everett had in mind the *Report on the Subject of Manufactures* which Alexander Hamilton, assisted by Tench Coxe, prepared for the Congress in 1791. This deservedly famous state paper reflects the unmistakable shift in attitudes toward manufactures that coincided with the formation of the new government. Only four years had passed since Coxe had expounded his ideas in Philadelphia, but Hamilton assumed that they had been widely accepted. "The expediency of encouraging manufactures in the United States," he says in the first sentence, "which was not long since deemed very questionable, appears at this time to be pretty generally admitted."¹⁸

In many ways the *Report* goes far beyond Coxe's speeches; it is composed with a systematic rigor and comprehensiveness that makes his thought seem crude and impressionistic. But there is one respect in which Coxe's argument had been more subtle: it took into account, as the *Report* does not, the hold of the pastoral ideal upon the national consciousness. Although Hamilton begins with a routine effort to placate the agricultural interest, he is an undisguised advocate of continuing economic development. He offers no equivalent of Coxe's symbolic landscape, or his vague implication that, somehow, technology would help America reach a kind of pastoral stasis. In fact, he finally makes no rhetorical concessions to Jeffersonian hopes and fears. To support his argument for machine production, he describes the advantages of the "cotton-mill, invented in England, within the last twenty years . . ." in this blunt language:

. . . all the different processes for spinning cotton, are performed by . . . machines, which are put in motion by water, and attended chiefly by women and children; and by a smaller number of persons, in the whole, than are requisite in the ordinary mode of spinning. And it is an advantage of great moment, that the operations of this mill continue with convenience, during the night as well as the day. The prodigious effect of such a machine is easily conceived. To this invention is to be attributed, essentially, the immense progress which has been so suddenly made in Great Britain, in the various fabrics of cotton.¹⁹

Whether he fully intends to endorse it or not, Hamilton makes no effort to disclaim the chilling idea of putting women and children on the night shift in cotton mills. The passage exemplifies the tough, hard-boiled tone of the *Report*. Throughout Hamilton is forthright, unsentimental, logical, and clear. Taken as a whole, in fact, the *Report* is a blueprint for a society aimed at maximum productivity, not as an end in itself, but as the key to national wealth, self-sufficiency, and power. The power of the United States as a corporate entity is the ultimate goal; what Hamilton wants is the economy best suited to the establishment of America's supremacy among nations. There can be little doubt that Tench Coxe wanted much the same sort of society. Unlike Hamilton, however, Coxe saw the need to couch this aim in the language of the prevailing ideology. No matter what the economic behavior of his countrymen might seem to indicate, Coxe understood that they preferred not to acknowledge wealth and power as their goals. In this sense he was a subtler and more farsighted — if less candid — advocate of industrialization than Hamilton. He foresaw that Americans

would be more likely to endorse the Hamiltonian program with enthusiasm if permitted to conceive of it as a means of fulfilling the pastoral ideal.

3

By 1830 a contrasting image of the machine had begun to attract the attention of American intellectuals. It came out of Germany by way of England. Friedrich Schiller, in his *Letters upon the Aesthetical Education of Man* (1795), had brought in a "complicated machine," "the monotonous sound of the perpetually revolving wheel," to figure the "degeneration" of contemporary culture. What was then happening in Europe, according to Schiller, resembled the decline of classical Greek culture. A "common and coarse mechanism" was setting in, society changing from one in which the individual enjoyed — or at least might have enjoyed — an "independent life" enabling him to become "a separate whole and unit in himself," into one dominated by "an ingenious mechanism." The state itself was "splitting up into numberless parts" and so was mankind:

Man himself, eternally chained down to a little fragment of the whole, only forms a kind of fragment; having nothing in his ears but the monotonous sound of the perpetually revolving wheel, he never develops the harmony of his being; and instead of imprinting the seal of humanity on his being, he ends by being nothing more than the living impress of the craft to which he devotes himself, of the science that he cultivates. This very partial and paltry relation, linking the isolated members to the whole, does not depend on forms that are given spontaneously; for how could a complicated