

Eclogue 9

Lycidas

Whither afoot, Moeris? Is it, where the path leads, to town?

Moeris

O Lycidas, we have lived to see the day—an evil never dreamed—when a stranger, holder of our little farm, could say: “This is mine; begone, old tenants!” Now, beaten and cowed, since Chance rules all, we send him these kids—our curse go with them!

Lycidas

Yet surely I had heard that, from where the hills begin to rise, then sink their ridge in a gentle slope, down to the water and the old beeches with their now shattered tops, your Menalcas had with his songs saved all.

Moeris

You had heard, and so the story ran. But amid the weapons of war, Lycidas, our songs avail as much as, they say, Dodona’s doves when the eagle comes. So, had not a raven on the left first warned me from the hollow oak to cut short, as best I might, this new dispute, neither your Moeris here nor Menalcas himself would be alive.

Lycidas

Alas! can any man be guilty of such a crime? Alas! was the solace of your songs, Menalcas, almost torn from us, along with yourself? Who would sing the Nymphs? Who would strew the turf with flowery herbage, or curtain the springs with green shade? Or those songs I slyly caught from you the other day, when you were off to our darling Amaryllis? “Tityrus, till I return—the way is short—feed my goats; and when fed, drive them, Tityrus, to water, and in driving, have a care not to get in the he-goat’s way—he butts with his horn.”

Moeris

Why not these lines, still unfinished, which he sang to Varus: “Varus, your name, let but Mantua be spared us—Mantua, alas! too near ill-fated Cremona—singing swans shall bear aloft to the stars.”

Lycidas

As you would have your swarms shun the yews of Corsica, and your heifers browse on clover and swell their udders, begin, if you have aught to sing. Me, too, the Pierian maids have made a poet; I, too, have songs; me also the shepherds call a bard, but I trust them not. For as yet, methinks, I sing nothing worthy of a Varius or a Cinna, but cackle as a goose among melodious swans.

Moeris

That’s what I’m about, Lycidas, silently turning it over in my mind, in case I can recall it. And no mean song it is. “Come to me, Galatea! What pleasure lives in waves? Here is rosy spring; here, by the streams, Earth scatters her flowers of a thousand hues; here the white poplar bends over the cave, and the clinging vines weave shady bowers. Come to me; leave the wild waves to lash the shore.”

Lycidas

What of the lines I heard you singing alone beneath the cloudless night? The tune I remember, could I but keep the words. “Daphnis, why are you gazing at the old constellations rising? See! the star of Caesar, seed of Dione, has gone forth—the star to make the fields glad with corn, and the grape deepen its hue on the sunny hills. Graft your pears, Daphnis; your children’s children shall gather the fruits you have sown.”

Moeris

Time robs us of all, even of memory; oft as a boy I recall that with song I would lay the long summer days to rest. Now I have forgotten all my songs. Even voice itself now fails Moeris; the wolves have seen Moeris first. Still Menalcas will repeat you your songs, often as you will.

Lycidas

Your pleas merely increase my longing. Now the whole sea plain lies hushed to hear you, and lo! every breath of the murmuring breeze is dead. Just from here lies half our journey, for Bianor's tomb is coming into view. Here, where the farmers are lopping the thick leaves—here, Moeris, let us sing. Here put down the kids—we shall reach the town all the same. Or if we fear that night may first bring on rain, we may yet go singing on our way—it makes the road less irksome. So that we may go singing on our way, I will relieve you of this burden.

Moeris

Say no more, lad; let us to the task in hand. Our songs we shall sing the better, when the master himself has come.