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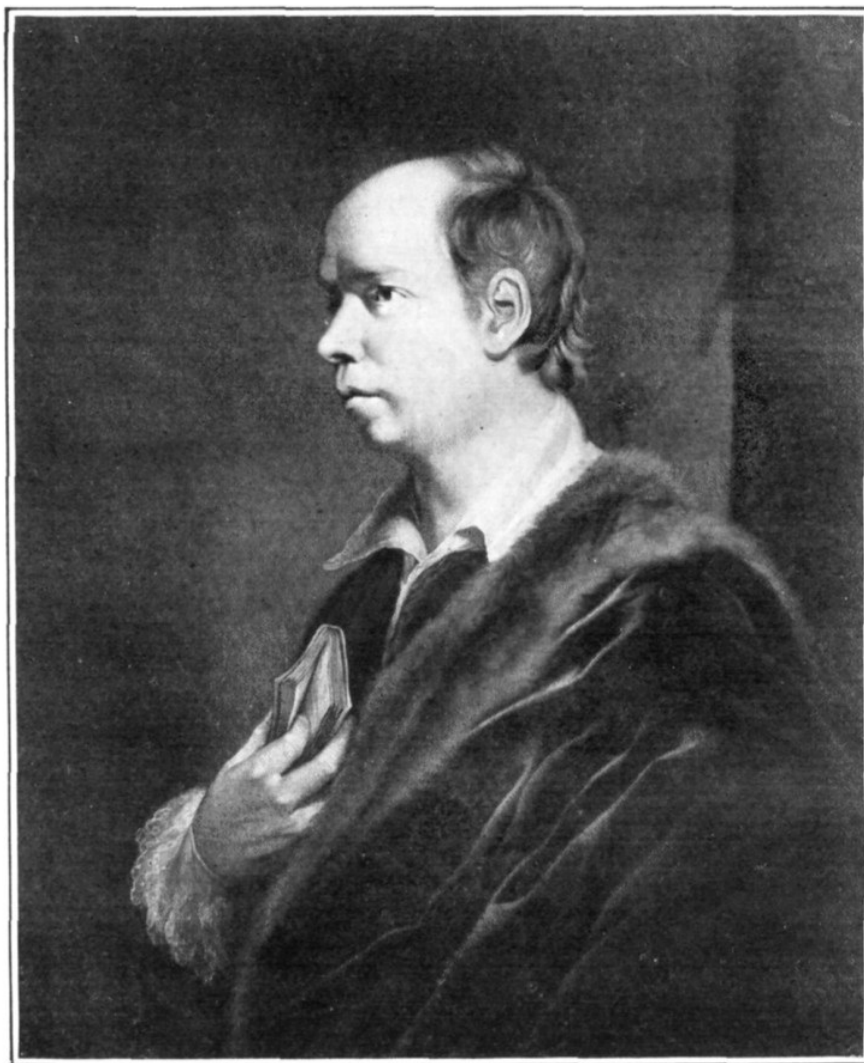
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# OLIVER GOLDSMITH



*Rischgitz Collection.]*

**OLIVER GOLDSMITH.**  
(From the painting by Reynolds.)

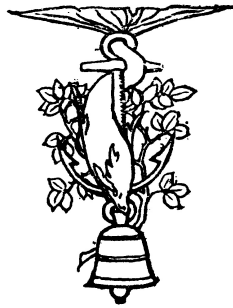
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**Bell's Miniature Series of Great Writers**

# Oliver Goldsmith

BY

E. S. LANG BUCKLAND



LONDON  
GEORGE BELL & SONS  
1909

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## PREFACE

[Pg vi]

It is only right to acknowledge my indebtedness in the compilation of this volume to John Forster, to whom as one of the most courageous, industrious, and sympathetic of the writers of biography, all students of Goldsmith must be profoundly grateful. To several other writers I must also express my thanks, and to save the time of my kind readers and to preserve a proper sense of obligation, it would perhaps be best to admit at once that if this little book has any merits, they are due to others, while its errors are all my own.

E. S. L. B.

[Pg vi]

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

[Pg vii]

CHAPTER	PAGE
<a href="#">I.</a> "THE BEST BELOVED OF ENGLISH WRITERS"	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">II.</a> "THE DESERTED VILLAGE"	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">III.</a> "THE TRAVELLER"	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">IV.</a> LONDON	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">V.</a> "THE CITIZEN OF THE WORLD"	<a href="#">45</a>
<a href="#">VI.</a> THE LITERARY CLUB	<a href="#">50</a>
<a href="#">VII.</a> DEBTS AND DIGNITIES	<a href="#">59</a>
<a href="#">VIII.</a> CONSUMMATE COMEDY	<a href="#">66</a>
<a href="#">IX.</a> THE POET AND THE ESSAYIST	<a href="#">75</a>
<a href="#">X.</a> THE LIGHT OF LOVE	<a href="#">84</a>
<a href="#">LIST OF THE WORKS OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH</a>	<a href="#">88</a>
<a href="#">SOME WORKS OF REFERENCE</a>	<a href="#">89</a>

---

## LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

[Pg viii]

	PAGE
OLIVER GOLDSMITH, FROM A PAINTING BY REYNOLDS	<a href="#">Frontispiece</a>
GOLDSMITH AS A YOUNG MAN	<a href="#">28</a>
DR. JOHNSON, BOSWELL, AND GOLDSMITH AT THE MITRE TAVERN	<a href="#">46</a>
THE ORIGINAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN GOLDSMITH AND DODSLEY, 1763	<a href="#">52</a>
GOLDSMITH IN MIDDLE AGE	<a href="#">56</a>
NO. 2, BRICK COURT, TEMPLE (WHERE GOLDSMITH DIED)	<a href="#">63</a>
STATUE OF GOLDSMITH	<a href="#">80</a>

## "THE BEST BELOVED OF ENGLISH WRITERS"

The Goldsmith family sprang originally from Crayford, a nestling village in Kent. This southern county, in all its loveliness, can thus add this high honour to its other though not greater glories. "To be the best beloved of English writers," said Thackeray, "what a title that is for a man!" This he gave to Goldsmith. It is a title that none will dispute. Here is a love that will never pass away from our hearts. Of Oliver Goldsmith, as poet and novelist, essay-writer, wit and playwright, it may be said that his distinction and celebrity are essentially English. Erin, sweet sister island, that land of loving hearts, gave this child of sun and shade, his birthplace, his home and many dear delightful days, never to be forgotten. Across the separating years, to the very end and through all, the grateful heart of the poet looked back very fondly upon the gentle and pathetic land of his nativity. On November 10, 1728, Oliver Goldsmith first saw the light of that world which, to the last, he loved, and greeted that suffering heart and seeking aspiration of humanity, that above and beyond almost all other men he could, and did, unfailingly compassionate. It is needless to trace and recall, the ancestral traditions of the Goldsmith family. Of its early history in England and later settlement in Ireland, it will suffice that its annals are as honourable as they are obscure. It had its men of light and learning, but their power attained neither fame nor rank, and their virtues were rather domestic than distinguished.

[Pg 2]

The family, which flowers in the delightful novelist and playwright, was ever famed for goodness of heart and the possession of the very smallest possible sum total of worldly prudence. Goldsmith was named Oliver, after Oliver Jones, his grandfather. Noll held that Miss Ann Jones, his mother, was descended from a Huntingdon stock, and that the name Oliver came from no ancestor less celebrated than the Great Protector. Whilst this may be felicitously fanciful, and quite in character with dear Noll, who, doting upon every form of finery, whether it came from illustrious ancestry or coloured clothes, certainly had a face not unlike in contour and feature, the rugged countenance of Cromwell.

Goldsmith was born in the remote village of Pallasmore, in the county of Longford, Ireland. This district has been called the very midmost solitude. Oliver's father was the Vicar of the parish. Three daughters and one son preceded the appearance of little Noll in the parsonage at Pallasmore. He was followed by three more brothers, making in all a happy family of eight, of whom two died in childhood.

[Pg 3]

In 1730 the Rev. Charles Goldsmith was preferred from Pallas to the living of Kilkenny West. The parsonage connected with this better benefice was situated at Lissoy, the Immortal Village. Here Oliver's childhood was passed. Unlike Pallasmore, this was a picturesque place in the centre of a fair and goodly land. No poem opens more sweetly than that which heralds its message:

"Sweet Auburn, loveliest village."

The Vicar's meagre income as a country pastor was increased by farming, and vastly diminished by his open-hearted, swift responsiveness to every sudden or permanent appeal to his purse, the family wardrobe, or the larder. In this excellent and honoured man, whose very piety was as sublime as it was confused, rambling, and paradoxical, we have the quaint original of Dr. Primrose, one of the most lovable characters that has ever lived to charm the page of lasting literature.

In the family life at Lissoy one little child strikes us all with deepest interest and love, and yet he was an oddity to those who knew him, not as we do now, but as he was—a dull boy, and quite a "blockhead in book-learning."

The master at the village school had been a soldier under the Duke of Marlborough ere he returned to what had been his earlier vocation, that of a pedagogue. He was a rough diamond, yet most revered, with great kindness in his heart. His love of poetry inspired his pupils as much as his stories of campaigns. He had an excellent literary taste. If Goldsmith even when a boy valued this old friend, Paddy Byrne not less saw the goodness, the hidden power, and the brightness of the child. Noll was soon taken away from the village school. Just at the moment when the heart of the master had greeted the hope of his little scholar, Oliver caught confluent smallpox, with the pathetic result that a face plain to begin with, grew a whimsical and winsome ugliness all its own. Goldsmith has given us more than one friend, and not the least of these old Paddy Byrne:

[Pg 4]

"Beside yon straggling fence that skirts the way,  
With blossom'd furze unprofitably gay,  
There, in his noisy mansion, skilled to rule,  
The village master taught his little school.  
A man severe he was, and stern to view;  
I knew him well, and every truant knew."

Then we are told:

"Full well they laughed with counterfeited glee  
At all his jokes—for many a joke had he—

Full well the busy whisper circling round  
Conveyed the dismal tidings when he frowned."

As the piece proceeds, the delicately chiding satire is delightful, ringing at last with the laughing lines:

"And still they gazed, and still their wonder grew,  
That one small head could carry all he knew."

Seven years had elapsed between the birth of Oliver and the child that preceded him. His elder brother Henry had superior qualities which were early marked. To these his father gave great attention, lavishing his means upon this boy's education. Oliver was destined for commercial life in the paternal projection of those affairs and eventualities of which men imagine they are masters. The force of impressions that fall upon the mind in childhood must be strongest in those children whose imaginations are most vivid. Listening to Paddy Byrne made Oliver in heart and mind a wayward rover all his life. Something of the imprudence of the little man came, it might be said, from this dash of the recklessness of the old soldier and adventurer infused into imaginative infant hopefulness. From this same instructor he also gathered his devotion to books and poetry, which proved a revelation that changed his father's purpose of fitting him for a commercial calling.

[Pg 5]

Henry Goldsmith is known and remembered now through the poetic expressions of honour and affection bestowed upon him by his brother. One cannot tell at this hour whether the deeper sense of reverence should fall upon his character or upon that gratitude through which alone it lives.

In the childhood of Oliver Goldsmith, his brightness and the foreshadowings of future force were not alone among the elements within the little heart which lay neglected by those he loved and whose lives he lighted, though they knew it not. In due course he was despatched to another school, thirty miles away. He lived with his uncle, Mr. John Goldsmith, a landed gentleman, and attended the school at Elphin; and at eleven years of age was sent to another and a more reputed Academy nearer home, at Athlone. Two years here and four at Edgeworthstown completed his schooling at the age of seventeen.

[Pg 6]

Of the Vicar of Wakefield, and thence of the father of little Oliver, it was said that all his adventures were by his own fireside, and all his travels from one room to another. He was in all likelihood a delicate man, and certainly deeply religious, with a high sense of honour and common moral obligation. The *Vicar of Wakefield*, his best portrait, stands an honourable and an imperishable filial tribute, the fairest ever paid by son to sire.

One day, when this young Master Goldsmith was in his teens, he left home for Edgeworthstown, riding a good horse, borrowed from a friend, and in high glee, if money braces the manly heart. With a golden guinea in his purse, he was as proud as wealth untold can make a buoyant spirit, in the days when life is very bright and happiness is everywhere. He loitered on the journey. The horse nigh slept, whilst the rider mooned on in meditative peace, and a lad's romantic building up of airy castellations. Instead of achieving his actual destination by nightfall, he was still miles away from the appointed place. Nothing daunted, with a proud and mighty air, he paused in the streets of Ardagh to ask a wayfarer where he could find the best house of entertainment. This question, it happened, was addressed to the greatest wag in the vicinity.

[Pg 7]

The wit, a jocose fencing-master, Mr. Cornelius Kelly, now fenced with words, and in all his life never did defter work. He pointed to the house of old Squire Featherston, rightly averring no better entertainment or hospitality could be found anywhere in all the world than in that generous and hearty home. Thus mistaking this private house and family mansion for an inn, the youth approached the place, and the wag went on his way. Oliver gave the bell a good ring, told the man to take his horse, and sauntered into the commodious parlour of the Squire as if it had been the public room in some well-supplied hotel. The Squire soon detected the mistake that had been made, and knowing the father of the boy, seized upon the diverting situation, entering with all his heart into the possibilities the joke might yield. He turned landlord for the nonce, brought in the supper piping hot, and then was ordered to bring a bottle of good wine. This the lad cordially, yet with some condescension, shared with the supposed master of the hostelry. More than this, at last putting all pride of place aside, he told the good man to bring his wife and daughter to the table. Oliver gave minute and particular orders for a good breakfast on the morrow, and then went to bed.

[Pg 8]

We can picture the sweetly smiling daughter of the Squire, rippling with laughter and every moment more bewitching.

We wonder what this prototype of Miss Hardcastle was like to look upon, and whether her heart was as tender, and her wit and grace as charming, as that of the character she at least did something to inspire.

In the morning when master Oliver expected to part for ever with that guinea in his pocket, he learned the actual state of things and left no poorer than he came, but all the richer for the laughter and the merriment and the good wishes of the friends, who, to divert and amuse both him and themselves, had treated their guest so well.

In Trinity College, at the time when Goldsmith studied there as a sizar, menial offices were involved in this dubious position. Amongst these were sweeping the courts in the morning,

carrying up the dishes from the kitchen to the Fellows' table, waiting for dinner until all the rest had finished, and wearing a garb to signalise inferiority and degradation. Common manliness cannot suffer indignities of this sort. Johnson at Oxford and Goldsmith in Dublin rebelled. The agonised sense of decent justice could not be stifled. In such contexts, only cowards can wish dishonour borne and indignation unrevealed. Oliver himself had none of those conventional prejudices that raise Universities to fetishes. Like the man he was, he would have been content to enter some true trade.

[Pg 9]

His relatives had other thoughts. That faithful clergyman, his uncle Contarine, persuaded his nephew into those paths of decorous ignorance in which the ranks of the respectable tread their gentle way, and are not rude enough to question custom. He in his time had been a sizar, and had not found the duties devolving lowering or an impediment, as he said, to intimacy and association with the great and good. The reason why Goldsmith's career at Dublin was not radiant was dogging poverty. In the midst of penury no sooner was money in his pockets than silver and copper sped in response to any petition made upon his unflinching if not unerring charity.

The poor fellow gave the very clothing from his bed. In the anguish of pity, giving blankets, and sleeping cold and being laughed at and scorned, involved the warranty of self-suffering upon the eager deed. The lad lived in utter misery through the brutal tyranny of his tutor, Wilder, a dissolute drunkard, a disgrace to his own times and incomprehensible to ours. Death overtook this man in a drunken brawl. His crimes were not without attenuating circumstances. College tutors have trials enough to crush their characters, when they have characters to crush.

Living in actual need as far as money was concerned, and a destitution of interest more to be pitied, Oliver passed in obscurity through the University. The Rev. Charles Goldsmith, dying in 1747, made the position of his son even more precarious and pathetic, and a career of mishap and misunderstanding still harder to endure. We find dear Noll failing in scholarships, or losing through mere negligence the prizes he had gained, and, lastly, with a philosophic indifference to the transitory nature of mortal learning, pawning the books he ought to have studied. It was a doleful business. He had, as he said, "a knack of hoping." It must have been a clever trick, for it never quite failed. He wrote ballads that were bought up eagerly, and merrily sung, cheering the poor in the common streets of Dublin. He made a shilling or two now and then upon these transactions. These, we can imagine, brought him more pride and pleasure than academic prowess could have afforded. One night he gave a supper to his friends, who were all of a lively and hilarious order, and was for this, before his assembled guests, thrashed by his tutor for his breach of college discipline. Selling his remaining books and his clothes, he fled from this scene of many sorrows. At Dublin, Goldsmith's diligence, however faulty, was enough to gain for him commendation from time to time, but no distinction worth mentioning. His worst crime is seen in a riot in which he was not a ringleader. He scraped into his scrapes as he scraped through his examinations.

[Pg 10]

These days were most desolate. His flight was not final. Reconciled to his condition, he graduated in 1749, his name as usual the last upon the list. When, later in life, he penned his *Inquiry into the State of Polite Learning*, he wrote from bitter experience. Allied with Johnson in the feeling of humiliation at the position of a sizar in a College, Goldsmith went further, and questioned the whole policy of education at our schools and Universities. It is hardly too much to hold him one of the pioneers of modern methods, and those new, slowly-growing principles, which mark our present somewhat broader enlightenment.

[Pg 11]

Leaving the University, and returning to his mother's house at Ballymahon, Goldsmith loafed about lazily, good-humouredly, and merrily, taking things just as they came. To bear with him in patience was hard for the members of his family. Our young, dreaming, and delightful poet may not have been a blessing at home. Another hearth saw this minstrel in his happiest vein. Passing his evenings at an inn, he gleaned there a knowledge of mankind of which in later years he made capital use. In time a finer audience than that he cheered at this village ale-house, greeted a fairer humour when this tavern, immortalised in happy memory, was seen in *She Stoops to Conquer*. At this village hostelry, merriment, and not indulgence, ruled delighted hours. In this haven of hilarity Oliver sang ditties and told stories that blessed his boon companions. One recalls Shenstone's words:

"Whoe'er has travelled life's dull round,  
Where'er his stages may have been,  
May sigh to think he still has found  
The warmest welcome at an inn."

[Pg 12]

It may seem difficult to discover a hero rejoicing in comrades discovered in a village ale-house. Still less should we expect to find in a heart pleased so easily a man of refined and exquisite sensibility. Oliver Goldsmith, revelling in friends coarse and crass to superficial vision, must have found in them gleams of holiness that lives less loving could not discern.

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## CHAPTER II

[Pg 13]

### "THE DESERTED VILLAGE"

The wandering boy, stricken with grief at the pain and the poverty he sees, alike in town and village in Ireland, foreshadows and unveils the coming man, who, knowing his own anxieties, was ever more distressed by the cares and afflictions he beheld than by those through which he was at any time himself the sufferer.

In all the careers of the essentially great, there are times when laughter will mingle with the honour we bestow, and compassion oust our adoration from its throne. Laughter may grow derisive and compassion scornful. Contempt has one virtue—it recoils. Derision can find no room within the fathoming comprehension that does not forget the ceaseless pressure of those ruthless surroundings in which often noblest lives are framed.

Pope's line on Gay pictures Goldsmith:

"In wit, a man—simplicity, a child."

In these early days no path seemed chosen save that of the road following the loitering line of least resistance. [Pg 14]

After his University career was over, Goldsmith for a while made his home with his sister and her husband near Lissoy, enjoying fishing and otter-hunting. Principally he passed his days idling, as people say, or seeing visions, as the poets and the prophets plead. He was often with his brother Henry, sharing in the pastor's work. Precious these fraternal communions must have been. Abiding was Oliver's love for Henry, to the last, deep, devoted, and revering. During this wayward era, splendidly attired, and gaily wearing a pair of red riding-breeches, he called upon the Bishop, having at the moment a hazy view of being ordained. Noll's radiant apparel, laughing eyes, and merry face, made the bewildered prelate diffident. Contarine procured his nephew a tutorship, which was held for twelve months, until one night, playing cards, Noll called his employer a scoundrel and a cheat. With thirty pounds in his leaking pockets, later he set out from home for Cork, and thence, according to his magnificent plans, for America. He was not destined to become an Empire-builder in the Colonies. Six weeks saw him home again as happy as ever, and quite penniless. Neither he himself nor anyone else ever knew, or ever will know now, what in the meantime had happened to the good fellow. He had exchanged a capital horse for a lank and bony creature of which he appeared very fond, called Fiddle-back. According to his story, he had put his kit on board, and the captain of the ship had sailed without him. No one was too glad to see him back again so soon. His mother and his brother Henry knew that neither of them had means to support him as a man of fantastic leisure. His indolence dishonoured the family. Perplexing eccentricities had grown intolerable. Only old Uncle Contarine stood by the boy. He still believed in and loved dear Noll, incorrigible as the good fellow was, and inexplicable from every vantage. When he returned poor Oliver had said, with his happy though here unconscious humour: "And now, my dear mother, after having struggled so hard to come home to you, I wonder that you are not more rejoiced to see me."

[Pg 15]

Even his poor mother could not welcome his return with warmth. A certain coldness crept into the heart of Henry, the beloved brother. They had been greatly tried. Perhaps Uncle Contarine continued clement merely because in the nature of things his responsibilities for the vagrancies of his kinsman were inevitably less intimate. As he was not willing to enter the Church, his uncle now thought that Goldsmith should go to London and study law at the Temple. He gave the prodigal fifty pounds, and bade him God-speed. Goldsmith made his way as far as Dublin. There, passing a merry and philanthropic time with new and old familiars, he gambled away, and gave away, and lost his money, and all too soon had none for further travels. He returned with shame upon his brow, completely contrite. The kindly Contarine possessed that fine courage, the fortitude of forgiveness. It was springtime in the poet's heart. This was his era of heroic hope, immortal dreaming, and Divine revelation.

[Pg 16]

Following the traditions of his family, he would have become a clergyman. It was not want of religious sentiment that precluded his feeling sincerely called to this Divine office, but the unutterable profoundness of his reverence. With all his laughter he ever had the pure spirit of the pastor. For the faithful fulfilment of the ministry, in that marvellous picture of a parson's life given in *The Deserted Village* he has revealed a living and an enlightening ideal. Here the hearts of priest and poet beat as one. There is a universal ministry, higher than divided priesthoods. Oliver Goldsmith, poet, playwright, and humorist, was a veritable minister of God. Poetry has one eternal test. The poem must ever be a very part of the very life of the poet, his very soul, the breathing hope and the vital blood of his whole being. This is true of Goldsmith's two great poems. They are in themselves a sufficing and beautiful biography. We know the heart of the man from these sublime outpourings of the soul. For every word and every line we love and honour Goldsmith. *The Deserted Village* reveals the singer's sense of sorrow, reverence for the reverend in life, his compassion and outpouring sympathy, not for single hearts merely, but that wider love involved and proclaimed in the understanding pity for a race—and not for one place alone, but for a whole land, lain desolate.

[Pg 17]

Whatever may be the ultimate verdict upon Goldsmith's greatest poem, one thing is as significant as it is certain. These poetic yearnings were long in his heart ere he gave them utterance. A wayward, careless lad, heedless of all responsibility, he seems purposeless and perplexing to the last degree, yet the profoundest meditations of his life moved his soul. The very spell of poetry was upon him. This Divine revealing may have accounted for that outward want of earnestness of the character, and the career that troubled others if it did not trouble him. The hold upon the inward and the hidden spirit absorbed and stagnated the outward movements and the conventional plans of common existence. It is right to be implicitly imbued with the honour due to

honour, and that tribute which must in every issue be humbly paid to elemental guiding and essential greatness. Amid the inconsequent and eccentric variations of evolving genius, the Uncle Contarine possessed inexhaustible patience. If he had very possibly not a complete confidence in his wayward nephew, he had an affection for the lad, and a devotion to his welfare that nothing could diminish.

This good old man often thought of the poor widow and her boy. He saw that the provision for a grown lad, ripening into manhood, with no visible means of independent subsistence, and no ostensible desire for any conceivable occupation, was a burden too great for the fondest of mothers to bear when she was very poor. Contarine had been deeply moved when Oliver came home again that last time thoroughly ashamed and broken-hearted. This contrition touched the very depths of all the old man's sympathy. He must have been a man of few words—so few that he had none to spare for reproaches. He saw to the full the embarrassments of the situation, and came once more swiftly to the rescue. His manner was at all times persuasive rather than peremptory. His plans were practical and immediate. Sudden action stayed the possibility of growing bitterness. Forthwith Goldsmith was despatched to Edinburgh to qualify for the medical profession. He was twenty-four years of age. Although he loved his family dearly, and cherished the land of his birth with all its pathos and its poetry, he never saw Ireland again, nor the kinsmen and kinswomen to whom, in his heart, he lived his days mid fault and failure, sorrow and success, joy and pain, endlessly devoted.

[Pg 18]

From the earliest days to the last, throughout the whole career of Oliver Goldsmith, there were deep emotions in the mind and high motives in the life and character of this great man that few in his own times even dimly perceived. Impenetrable love was hidden in that laughter-laden heart, with its outward concealing and dissimulating vanities.

[Pg 19]

When the time came, and he might have left his work in London and gone home to Ireland for a while, it was too late, for his dear and gentle mother, old Uncle Contarine, and brother Henry had passed away. It may be hard to think that an indolent boy who squanders without scruple the money you have with great embarrassment raised for his benefit loves you devotedly, and has dedicated his whole heart, and life, and love to yours. It is difficult, too, to think that a vain little man is, in his soul, an earnest great one. Yet all this must be achieved if the heart would know Oliver Goldsmith rightly, and give at least one faithful life its due.

There is no period in which the moving mind of genius is not receptive. In those days of wayward adolescence, Goldsmith found books somewhere, and many, and read them to the depths. Some men have left lists of the works they studied—even Burns and Byron did. Noll was never at any time systematic enough to have done this. Often the spirit is more influenced by the things that are read and not greatly heeded, than by those that become the subject of fixed study. Goldsmith was always a lover of Latin poetry and classic models. In this perplexing youthful time of transition, he had imbued his mind with romance and with those higher aspirations of the poets of all ages and eras in which their utterances, growing religious, pertain to life in its love and light and lofty purity. Literature yields nothing more enthralling than those passages in which sublimity is seized, and the mind of man is commanded to rise above the pressing issue and the material care.

[Pg 20]

Prudence has many advantages. It makes men rich and respectable, but it is the death of poetry. Prudence has no genius. It cannot perceive its own deplorable delimitations. It may not fathom the vagaries of high minds. Goldsmith was not meant to make his own fortune. He was intended to make what is far dearer and better than prosperity—hope and happiness for many and many a heart, and many and many a home. Burns was not prudent, Byron was not; Johnson was not industrious for the pure sake and love of labour. He preferred ease, and never, he acknowledged, worked when he had a guinea to preclude the unpleasant necessity of toil. Of Goldsmith Thackeray said: "The poor fellow was never so friendless but he could befriend someone." Sincere and sublime tributes of love, honour, and affection are offerings doubly blessed, blessing those who give and those who do receive. Nobly Oliver Goldsmith revered his brother Henry. The sudden separation from this heart was the greatest pain for Goldsmith when at last the day came.

The best idea of the life of Goldsmith at this period is gleaned from his great poem *The Deserted Village*. These were his words as he looked back:

"How often have I loitered o'er thy green,  
Where humble happiness endeared each scene!"

[Pg 21]

With what delight he shares the rustic revelry. There falls the light of lingering love on each and every line and word:

"These were thy charms, but all these charms are fled,"

he cries,

"And desolation saddens all thy green."

He depicts emigration and its devastating and enforced exile, so widely diverse from the healthful, free, and willing spirit of true and liberal colonisation:

"Far, far away thy children leave the land.  
Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates, and men decay."

Years later the man wrote these lines, but the thoughts, the burning sense of burning wrong, the pain and anguish, were hidden in the heart of the youth, outwardly so careless:

"A bold peasantry, their country's pride,  
When once destroyed, can never be supplied."

There is a majesty in the lines—

"His best companions, innocence and health;  
And his best riches, ignorance of wealth."

A little later he speaks of

"Every pang that folly pays to pride."

There is a depth in the man who could write:

"Remembrance wakes with all her busy train,  
Swells at my breast, and turns the past to pain;  
In all my wanderings round this world of care,  
In all my grief—and God has given my share—  
I still had hopes my latest hours to crown,  
Amidst these humble bowers to lay me down."

[Pg 22]

How pretty and how pathetic is the picture in this poem of the end that he had fancied for his days! A thousand and a thousand times the ceaseless humanity, seeking only love, endears the man. Mark the sweet, true, and sublime ideal:

"Angels around befriending Virtue's friend:  
Bends to the grave with unperceived decay,  
While resignation gently slopes the way;  
And, all his prospects brightening to the last,  
His Heaven commences ere the world be past!"

In simplicity Goldsmith equals Gray. There is a Miltonic dignity truly classical in the line—

"The sad historian of the pensive plain."

Failures have been indicated in the literary construction of the finest poems. Critics have held that Burns, in "The Cotter's Saturday Night," lost the Scottish and gave the piece an English colour.

Macaulay contended that the deserted hamlet pictured by Goldsmith was neither one thing nor the other, but first Irish and then English. Criticism purely æsthetic cannot destroy the poignancy and profoundness of the theme and throughout the touch of a master power.

From beginning to end the piece proceeds in a picturesque progress which in its steady advancement and maintained dignity is splendidly processional. [Pg 23]

At last we come to the village pastor, and line after line, love leads the light:

"A man he was to all the country dear,  
And passing rich with forty pounds a year;  
Remote from towns he ran his godly race,  
Nor ere had changed, nor wished to change, his place."

"Far other aims his heart had learned to prize,  
More skilled to raise the wretched than to rise."

"Pleased with his guests, the good man learned to glow,  
And quite forgot their vices in their woe;  
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,  
His pity gave ere charity began."

"Truth from his lips prevailed with double sway,  
And fools, who came to scoff, remained to pray."

This passage concludes in a fine strain, the finest in the poem:

"To them his heart, his love, his griefs, were given,  
But all his serious thoughts had rest in Heaven.  
As some tall cliff, that lifts its awful form,  
Swells from the vale, and midway leaves the storm,  
Though round its breast the rolling clouds are spread,  
Eternal sunshine settles on its head."

Here is a transcendent radiance that has been held the most sublime simile that language yields. Then, following with a most delicate transition, we have the genial and gentle humour in the picture of the pedagogue and his pupils, and then the village inn and the rustics discussing news "much older than their ale."

[Pg 24]

Well may the sweetly chiding and chastening poet reflect,



"How wide the limits stand,  
Between a splendid and a happy land."

It may be surprising to hear dear Noll, the dandy of the Literary Club, deride

"The glaring impotence of dress."

There is a grace—nay, more, there is a genius in transition. The exile and the emigration of the Irish were not, and are not now, exclusively territorial, nor is the spiritual pang of leaving loved homes and cherished hearts entirely sentimental. Of the Irish it may be said that, of all the races, their pure love of home is the deepest, and the most faithful and devoted. Often the enforced exile that must be endured had no solace save death and the grave for peace—and a home. Of all the fair, and the gentle and pure, fairest and gentlest and purest, now and ever, is the Irish girl. Swift the passage in this tender poem from the village in its sunshine to the town and the streets in their darkness, and the clouds about the life of outcast humanity, suffering a more fearful exile:

"Where the poor houseless shivering female lies:  
She once, perhaps, in village plenty blest,  
Has wept at tales of innocence distressed.  
Her modest looks the cottage might adorn,  
Sweet as the primrose peeps beneath the thorn;  
Now lost to all, her friends, her virtue, fled,  
Near her betrayer's door she lays her head."

[Pg 25]

The wonders of the poem are first its pathos, and then its picturesqueness and its charm. With all these glidings from light to grave and gladness into gloom, and then again to gaiety, it is a moving and a magic intermingling. There is a very thunder in the phrase,

"Pamper luxury, and thin mankind."

And then later:

"Oh, luxury! thou curst by Heaven's decree,  
How ill-exchanged are things like these for thee!  
How do thy potions, with insidious joy,  
Diffuse their pleasures, only to destroy.  
Kingdoms by thee, to sickly greatness grown,  
Boast of a florid vigour not their own.  
At every draught more large and large they grow,  
A bloated mass of rank, unwieldy woe;  
Till sapped their strength, and every part unsound,  
Down, down they sink, and spread a ruin round."

In this poem we find the sympathy and the grace of Gray and Wordsworth with a greater warmth and a glow that is enkindling. The man who is a master in transition is also and perforce powerful in contrast. In this graceful gift the whole piece is a striking study. Whether the strain be didactic or dramatic, emotional or vivacious, melody is never lost. With many poets frequently the whole melodiousness of poetry disappears in the prose of a too palpably proclaimed philosophy. This poem from a pure heart, and these lines from a loving life, enlighten, but do not tease the mind. There is a prayer in the words,

[Pg 26]

"Teach erring man to spurn the rage of gain,  
Teach him that states of native strength possess,  
Though very poor, may still be very blest."

This poem, and also and not less *The Traveller*, although it is a tale of wandering, beyond all else, reveal the light and the love of the home.

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## CHAPTER III

[Pg 27]

### "THE TRAVELLER"

At the University of Edinburgh, Goldsmith became a more earnest student. He was certainly not without the higher aspirations of the sublime profession to which circumstance and necessity rather than aptitude or inclination had called him. Whilst it may be questioned whether he ever had the poetic imagination of the physician, he never allowed the honour in which he held the vocation to lessen, and never lost the satisfaction he himself cherished through his association with this calling. To the last he was proud of being—or as his cynical critic might say, of counting himself—a doctor. In Scotland he worked harder, studied chemistry with intelligence, and evinced considerable ability. He viewed with ardour his prospective work in life, and was keenly interested in the medical system and the surgical processes of that period. As a student he was respected. He became a conspicuous member of the Medical Society. It is needless, however, to add that his studies were not so strenuous as to make his mood at any time monastic, compelling him to live heedless of passing pleasures and delightful days, or forgetful of his fellow-men.

[Pg 28]

Goldsmith had been very poor in Dublin. He was not rich in Edinburgh, but he was welcomed in the refined circles of both University and civic society. He discovered his place amongst graceful and gracious women and high-minded and cultured men, and then, all at once, amid all his new-found success and happiness, he unexpectedly closed his medical career at the University and left not less suddenly than he had come. Nothing could be more abrupt than his departure. Rumour has it that, with chaotic benevolence, he had become security for one of his fellow-students for a considerable sum of money on account of a tailor's bill. Here we have the prototype of "the good-natured man."



*Rischgitz Collection.]*

#### **GOLDSMITH AS A YOUNG MAN.**

**(From the rare etching by Bretherton after Bunbury's drawing.)**

Goldsmith could make nothing of mathematics, and held this science fit only for mean intellects. Later in his life this delightful philosopher confided to Malone that he still held the study in a kind of scorn, seeing that he could himself turn an ode of Horace into English better than any of the mathematicians. There is scarcely an infinitesimal sign of the principle of mathematical precision about the career of Oliver Goldsmith. Yet in Scotland, possibly because the virtue of prudence is infectious, during this period, for some time and by some miracle, Noll cultivated a habit to which he was throughout his career very slightly addicted—he paid his way. Yet when he was leaving this centre of learning we find Uncle Contarine once more besought, and this time for twenty rapidly forthcoming sterling pounds, to carry Mr. Oliver to the Continent for the completion of his medical education. The wandering spirit had seized him. Paris and Leyden, with their learned lecturers, were but pretexts for travelling and fulfilling the long-cherished hope of seeing foreign lands. He thirsted for deep draughts of experience flowing from the hidden springs of unknown climes. Professor Masson wittily tells us that as Goldsmith had planned to go to Paris, of course he arrived in the end at Leyden. Having secured those necessary munitions of war which to the full extent of his means Uncle Contarine unflinchingly provided, Goldsmith set sail in a ship bound for Bordeaux. At Newcastle he was, by mistake, arrested as a political prisoner and retained in durance as a Jacobite. The ship sailed without him. It sank; every life was lost. Soon after reaching Leyden, Goldsmith left that seat of learning for his wanderings through

Europe, his only aids to this majestic design being a fine voice and an instrument of music—some sort of flute, we must presume. It was a queer pilgrimage. The peasantry gave the minstrel food by day and a bed at night. Village after village welcomed him. He left Leyden penniless. He might have had a useful coin or two to help him, but that, espying some lovely flowers, he could not resist buying all his poor purse permitted and sending them to Uncle Contarine. No long-suffering uncle, in all the chronicles and all the untold trials of uncles, deserved better of a nephew than this good old man.

[Pg 30]

Goldsmith's ramble through Europe was one of the maddest escapades in the records of the eccentricities of adolescent genius. The enterprise was attended with ceaseless difficulty, danger, and deprivation. Not seldom the hedgeside yielded him his nightly rest. Places of learning from time to time gave the wanderer a dinner. He could make the monasteries havens of repose. For a little while he acted as guide and tutor to the son of some wealthy manufacturer. This youth cared nothing for architecture or antiquity, the histories of cities, or natural scenery. His sole purpose seemed to be to save money on his travels. The liberal and lively tutor left a pupil as dull as he was mean. The love of wandering lay deep in Goldsmith's heart. This early pilgrimage through much of Europe inspired his pen to write *The Traveller*. In later years he had throughout this eager longing for a roving life.

Notwithstanding his roaming, in some inexplicable manner, Goldsmith, the pilgrim of improvidence and knight errant from the Order of Chivalrous Carelessness, still pursued his medical studies, and carried this training for the vocation of a doctor to some kind of completion. Italy is supposed to have conferred his diploma as a physician upon Goldsmith, and either Padua or Louvain has the honour. *The Traveller* must, indeed, long have been in all its grace and beauty treasured in his heart, for he actually penned lines for this fine poem during these boyish wanderings through Europe.

[Pg 31]

This sojourn on the Continent occupied two years or more. He reached England in the year 1756, landing at Dover. This penniless pilgrim made his way on foot, bravely trudging the highroad, with few hopes of coming fame, but many pangs of very present poverty. Our minstrel gathered a little money here and there by singing ditties and ballads, spontaneous compositions, delightfully original, to cheer him and the laughing rustic hearts he met and loved, lads and maids, old men and children, and all, forthwith and henceforth and for ever, his friends. Tramping from Dover, receiving a warm English welcome at many a wayside farm, and the hearty hospitality of the cottage hearth and home; anon sleeping in barns, or, if need be, making the hedgerow his haven and shelter for the night, passing village after village—the days went by, and then he sighted the great town of great trial. He entered London, the city of cities, with its innumerable multitudes and its untold loneliness.

No one can read the opening line in *The Traveller*—

"Remote, unfriended, melancholy, slow"—

without feeling that the words could only have sprung from very genius. We have here that uniqueness that signalises and divides. Throughout there is that sincerity of sentiment which separates and guides those deeper natures who amid all joys know the vein of sorrow prevailing in the human heart. From yearning aspiration comes that exaltation which connotes the higher character. It is this element that we are apt to forget in our humorists. Lamb, Hood, Thackeray, and Goldsmith, had strains of reflection which went more into the very heart of being and not being, fulfilling and failing, living and dying, than we can ever discover in those who decorate their days with a clamant seriousness. That semblance of earnestness accepted by the populace often lacks poetic force and sublime sanction. *The Traveller* attains the heights and depths of the Divine communion that unites poetry with prayer. The speeding pen, the quivering lips, the moving mind, and beating heart, are slight contrasted with this prayerful yearning of the unseen and spiritual. Poetry is the unutterable, yet sweetly and strangely uttered voicing of the soul ineffable.

[Pg 32]

*She Stoops to Conquer* inspired Sheridan with his inimitable dramatic conceptions. *The Traveller* roused Byron to the heights he attained in "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage." *The Traveller* heralds an era and proclaims the true imperial note, clear and triumphant. If poetry be the prophetic vein, calling an age to realise its aspirations, foreseeing, forewarning, and foremaking coming time, then here the poet, the maker, and the creator, speaks. Nor kings nor warriors rule, but thinkers, and amongst these rulers in the high realm of thought and spiritual power, highest of all in every age and clime—the poet! Hidden in the soul's depths we discover an earnestness which in the outward light-hearted man we fail to recognise. That one we thought we knew so well, we find, too late, we knew, if not altogether ill, at least too slightly. The poem is doubtless too didactic at times to always move consummate delight. There is a ring more Latin than English in the line,

[Pg 33]

"Wealth, commerce, honour, liberty, content."

Yet even in this we see how words can weigh with meaning, and not one prove wasted, but each contributes to the fulfilling of the complete intention. This line has that poetic power which in one single flash can show what volumes men might write and not reveal. Pope crippled meaning and weakened force to procure a rhyme—nay, since he actually planned the rhymes to make his couplets before he penned his poetry, to him not infrequently it was far more to rhyme than realise. In Goldsmith's couplet,

"Till carried to excess in each domain,

"This favourite good begets peculiar pain,"

we have a dissertation upon both individual and national ethics, and the sole secret of the failures of men and States. There appear passages where Goldsmith held Virgil much in view. To some extent this poem, and also *The Deserted Village*, remind one of Volney. In this light the style in places is more French than English. There is full force in the phrase,

[Pg 34]

"And e'en in penance, planning sins anew."

While the poem is always graceful, readers are not at their happiest when pleasing poets turn philosophers. Throughout the piece there is a manly courage, a purity of motive, a magnanimous ideality, and an unexpected and almost muscular robustness. What gaiety there is in this phrase

"Sport and flutter in a kinder sky."

We have, when he comes to France, upon which country he writes delightfully, a couplet happily autobiographical:

"Yet would the village praise my wondrous power,  
And dance forgetful of the noontide hour."

Radiant must have been the moments when later the little man in Fleet Street could look back on scenes like these. We wish that his own graceful pen had granted us a full and vivid record of his roamings.

It cannot be said that from the higher standpoint Goldsmith owed much to Dublin, Edinburgh, Leyden, or Louvain. His class-rooms for the study of life were provided in rustic inns, his studious chambers village greens in the land where he was born, French riversides, Swiss mountains, Italian lakes, the blue skies of many climes, and later the crowded streets of the London he loved. His books were the hearts of women, the smiles of children, and the lives of men.

[Pg 35]

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## CHAPTER IV

[Pg 36]

### LONDON

Young Oliver Goldsmith, diffident and with no adroitness of address, was not one of those authors who can take publishers by storm, and fame with a wave of the hand. He was a nervous man. Although one of the most collected of writers, he had to be fully at his ease before, in conversation or the common intercourse of society, he could be himself and reveal that force of mind and invincibility of personality that mark his influence and creates his charm. He knew and felt his weakness. When Johnson narrated his adventures in a close and friendly gossip with the King, Goldsmith said:

"Well, you acquitted yourself in this conversation better than I should have done, for I should have bowed and stammered through the whole of it."

Goldsmith's face must have shone in moments of animation, its very ugliness gaining a beauty all its own, more lovable for that transformation one smile creates. He may have had an uncouth appearance and an awkward bearing. The charm and gentleness of such a spirit as his must have outweighed accidents of form. Now we associate an inevitable purity and tenderness with him and with all he ever did. If he had a poor outward mien and fashion, men must have thought nothing of this compared to the inward grace of the heart and love-illumined soul of the man.

[Pg 37]

Alone in London, he had come to his fierce fight: not for fame, but for bread. Through all his squalid wanderings in the hard times, and all his sordid trials, he sustained his cheerfulness, and in a selfless supremacy ever strove to bestow on other lives the faith and courage his own bright heart never wholly lost. How he lived in these early days in London no one knows, and the tale of want, care, and humiliation incident to gnawing peril and privation made a story too agonising for him, open as he was, ever to fully reveal. He said one day very quietly: "When I lived among the beggars in Axe Lane."

He may have laughed as he said the words. He must have shuddered. The laugh was a selfless sacrifice. The shudder was real and to the very last too true, for painful memory was vivid. We cannot tell whether, like Shakespeare, he held the reins of horses, standing outside taverns and theatres; or whether he carried bags for pence, ran errands, gambled for his bread, or begged for shelter. Here was a sweet, weak, pure, and gentle, sympathetic lad, only a boy in heart and strength, and not even a child in that hardness life demands, stepping he knew not whither, meeting the world in an actual and visible solitude, and a loneliness of soul beyond the force of words to tell. There are those who, having passed their twentieth year, are already men of mark and power. Not such a one was poor Noll. Through ceaseless dependence and uncertainty in both his purpose and his position in life, he tardily gained that dignity and validity that attends the realisation of man's estate.

[Pg 38]

With Goldsmith now one eager and despairing quest for work followed hard upon another, and disappointments in rapid and relentless succession. After wandering on from door to door, and

hope to its scattering, and chance to its dispelling, he obtained his first situation as a dispenser in a chemist's shop. He lost opportunities and failed to create confidence, more than anything through the forlornness of his appearance, and the too obvious simplicity of his bearing. Then he heard of an old friend, a warm-hearted Edinburgh student, a certain Dr. Sleigh. To this generous man he bent his steps. As soon as he was recognized, he was received into the home of his former companion, and welcomed with all that brotherliness of which sterling friendship is capable.

The old apothecary, with whom Goldsmith worked as a dispenser for a time, deserves the grateful honour that we now can pay his kindly heart. His name was Jacobs. He appears to have been an old man of benign mien and inclination. He recognized the superior learning and credentials of his young assistant. He thought that a qualified doctor should not be serving drugs in a shop, but in greater dignity visiting his patients. Largely through this man's kindly exertions, and also with a little help from Dr. Sleigh, who soon left London and was lost to his former friend, and with the sympathy and good wishes of more than one old Edinburgh comrade, remembered and met again, Goldsmith was set up in a mean and meagre manner as a physician, in a very poor and dingy neighbourhood—Bank Side, Southwark. The whole prospect was neither pleasant nor propitious. Hidden in his desolate obscurity, friends lost, for a time at all events, all thought of Goldsmith. The poor doctor soon seemed quite alone, and, what was worse, forgotten.

[Pg 39]

From the moment that Oliver Goldsmith entered London, penury and meanness had dogged his steps. It is piteous to dwell upon these squalid scenes. We need not recall the second-hand wardrobe that decked him out as a physician in this practice, unimaginably poor and dark and dingy. Fancy cannot conceive a greater dreariness or deeper destitution. He was so poor that his poorest patients felt compassion for his even greater poverty. Seeing one day his doctor's pockets bulging with papers, so that he looked like the man of letters in a then clever and popular caricature, an invalid, a journeyman printer, who had sought this physician's aid and advice, now feelingly commended him to Samuel Richardson, his own master and employer, with at first, at all events, apparently auspicious results. Leaving his dubious practice, Goldsmith became proof reader to the printer, publisher, and novelist who had also in his own good time befriended the great Dr. Johnson. No ultimate advantage, however, accrued to Goldsmith from this distinguished association with and employment by one of the most successful authors of the day.

[Pg 40]

He met the poet Young, and other men. He never wrote for Richardson, and soon left this place of books and business. His position can have been neither dignified nor lucrative. The wanderer bent his weary feet, neither knowing whither his steps might tend nor with the wherewithal to meet the journey. He was almost starving in the streets, when one day he met young Milner, another Edinburgh student, who carried Noll off to his father, a learned Presbyterian divine, who kept a school. Goldsmith then had, it seems, some vague dream about being sent to the East to decipher ancient inscriptions, but in the end he found occupation in Peckham, and not Palestine.

There is no particular reason, however wayward his studies, to question that Goldsmith was, in the lighter order of that day, a qualified physician. When he landed in England from the Continent in all probability he had secreted in some loose pocket a foreign medical diploma. Besides this certificate, granting him the right to practise, but not the power to succeed, as a doctor, he carried other papers—parts of poems, essays, notes for plays, and perhaps even then the opening of a novel. He set great store on these precious papers. He may have lost his diploma. He became an usher in Dr. Milner's school at Peckham. He hated this work. In *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in a few striking sentences, he shows the humiliations of the position. Wherever we find him, he is always the same in the matter of worldly prudence, and in his fondness for making those about him bright. He spent his salary in giving treats to his pupils. The kindly schoolmaster's wife said that she ought to keep Mr. Goldsmith's money as well as the young gentlemen's. Dear Noll was full of fun and fine humour for the boys about him, doing all he could for their delight, and loving some like a brother. When years had passed and he had attained his fame, he met one of his old scholars, knew him in an instant, and although the lad had become a married man, was anxious, as in the old days, to treat him at an apple-stall. Then suddenly he said:

[Pg 41]

"Sam, have you seen my picture by Sir Joshua Reynolds? Have you seen it, Sam? Have you got an engraving?"

Sam had not yet procured the picture.

"Sam," said Goldsmith, "if your picture had been published, I should not have waited an hour without having it."

Despite his pranks with his pupils, this time was no happy period. The unpleasantness of the office and the severities of the scorned and profitless labours weighed sorely on him. Every collection of schoolboys has its share of ineffaceable snobs. These were a trial to the teacher. Amid his practical jokes with William the footboy, and one merry-maker and another, there is still an underlying earnestness in all and a reverence for the pure sentiment of the heart. At this time, when asked whom he held the best commentator on the Scriptures, Goldsmith replied very simply, "Common Sense."

[Pg 42]

The principal of the school, Dr. Milner, was one of the most sincere of Goldsmith's friends. At the house of this good man, Griffiths, the publisher, meeting Goldsmith, detected his abilities at once, and found him the first opening for his literary labours. He gave him mere hack-work on the *Monthly Review*. This was the Whig journal of the day, and opposed later by its Tory rival, the *Critical Review*, edited by Smollet, also physician, novelist, and historian. Leaving Peckham,

Goldsmith now lived for a while over the shop of his employer in Paternoster Row, gaining shelter of a sort and board and lodging.

Poor as may have been the fare, and mean as must have been the livelihood under the roof of Mr. and Mrs. Griffiths, Oliver Goldsmith, escaping from these conditions of life, entered others that were for a time, at all events, far worse. One cannot tell what he did, or where he went, or how he lived. Near Salisbury Square some squalid garret sheltered him. He tried to shun the common gaze and hide his very whereabouts. He turned to translating, chance criticisms, and any drudgery that came his way, and all to little purpose. He lived in wretchedness and obscurity, bearing the weight of an increasing poverty, until at last the very hope of bare subsistence perished.

[Pg 43]

On one dark and misty day, as Goldsmith, in his tattered and threadbare clothes, sat pensive and dejected in his dingy, miserable garret, rich in fancies and very poor in food, a merry rap upon the door aroused the poet from his meditations. A young countryman, all hope and health, had briskly announced his advent. This comer was not one to wait without and need a bidding for his entrance. Oliver could not hide himself completely. He was tracked down at last, and by none other than his younger brother Charles. To the youth the emaciated apparition of poor Oliver was indeed astounding. Charles had pictured him already a prosperous and influential man of letters, who had but to raise and wave his hand to confer work, wealth, and position, and the possibilities of fame upon anyone whom he might lovingly patronise and befriend. Imagine the disappointment.

"All in good time, my dear boy," said Oliver. "I shall be richer by-and-by. Besides, you see, I am not in positive want. Addison, let me tell you, wrote his poem of 'The Campaign' in a garret in the Haymarket, three storeys high, and you see I am not come to that yet, for I have only reached the second storey."

[Pg 44]

Some days later, just as suddenly as he had come, the younger brother vanished. He had brought Oliver a breath of the old home. Charles made his way to Jamaica, in all likelihood as a common sailor, and proved a rover to the last. Darker shadows were to fall upon poor Noll through still deeper experience of deprivation, misadventure and despair. The days of doubt were passed at last, and in the end successes were achieved in every sphere, unrivalled alike in their sublime heights and vast variety.

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## CHAPTER V

[Pg 45]

### "THE CITIZEN OF THE WORLD"

Goldsmith's first victory was the *Inquiry into the State of Polite Learning*.

The *Inquiry* was written at a time when its author had suffered from the tyranny and the mercilessness of booksellers. This explains his onslaught upon this then ungenerous craft. Injury had been heaped on insult. Disappointment and despair were tearing and gnawing at the poor man's heart. The demon imp of petty poverty first starved him and then laughed at his insufficient fare, reduced him to rags and ridiculed his wretchedness.

The *Inquiry* was published by Dodsley. Upon this work the poor author placed all his hopes, and was not disappointed. He had sailed his little boat to the sea at last. The hardships, however, that he had passed through held to the end their sway upon his heart.

The *Inquiry* was for its author the first triumphant advance. Its consequences had their obverse aspect. The criticism of actor-managers drew forth Garrick's indignation. The results of this were to be realised later in Goldsmith's career. The judicial severities levelled against the tribe of publishers gathered black clouds. Griffiths took the onslaught on his craft as personal, and thundered out a libellous retort, that, wanting much, was lacking nothing in spite, which failing in taste found its fruition in malice. Griffiths was one of those mean men who can never forgive, and whose deeds in sober truth do test the force of our own capacity to pardon and forget. Even when Goldsmith was dead, Griffiths still tried to cast vituperations on the poor man's memory.

[Pg 46]



*Rischgitz Collection.]*

**DR. JOHNSON, BOSWELL AND GOLDSMITH, AT THE MITRE  
TAVERN.**

**(From the painting by Eyre Crowe.)**

At this time Noll engaged to furnish two brightly written articles each week for the *Public Ledger*, of which paper Newbery was the proprietor. These serial articles appeared under the title of *The Citizen of the World*. A large concourse of readers looked forward to the welcome advents of the cheerful and clever Citizen. The character became a household word. This was Goldsmith's first really great popular hit. Apart, however, from the appreciation of the general public, it must be considered that, more than anything hitherto, these articles brought their author to the knowledge and gained the admiration of the men of letters of his day. The *Citizen* figures in a popular and lively light, yet still with a charming and a moving manner. Here we see the writer in his fairest freedom and delight, ruling a little philosophic realm and social world all his own. Up to that time nothing quite like it had been done before. There is, as the name implies, a world of difference between Addison, the Spectator; Steele, the Tatler; Johnson, the Rambler; and Goldsmith, the Citizen.

[Pg 47]

*The Citizen of the World* is a capital collection of essays, possessed of an imperishable interest and significance, and a charm as faultless and unflinching as that compassion and consuming charity which never pass from the page, and never deserted the heart of their gentle author. Still, this spirit touches and moves the heart. He saw the wrongs and the goodness, the truth and the untruth, and he knew the minds of men. This cosmopolitan saw Russia, the enemy of the peace of Europe, and foresaw its vast advancing, aggressive power. He warned the English how insecure was their then faulty hold upon the American colonies. In these essays we find vigorous and thrilling protests against cruelty to animals. These appeals then were rare indeed, and even now are only revealed in any earnestness through a slowly dawning purer spirit. The greatest men of that age, and the best, loved Goldsmith like a brother. Very soon we see Dr. Johnson marching down Fleet Street arm-in-arm with Percy to take supper with Dr. Goldsmith. The lexicographer has on a new suit of clothes and a wig finely powdered, and looks uncommon through this unexpected scrupulosity of costume. Percy is impertinent enough to inquire the cause of this finery.

"Why, sir," said Johnson, "I hear that Goldsmith, who is a very great sloven, justifies his disregard of cleanliness and decency by quoting my practice, and I am desirous this night to show him a better example."

[Pg 48]

This amusing incident marks the foundation of a great friendship. If ever Goldsmith had a friend, that friend was Johnson; if Johnson ever had a friend, that friend was Goldsmith. The story does not proclaim dear Noll a dandy this time. Doubtless his care or carelessness in garment kept pace, step by step, with varying moods. There is evidence enough to tell us how much he doted on finery and fashionable raiment in those bills from his tailor, which to the very last remained unpaid. Filby could afford the loss. It will be gathered from all this that with a change in fortune there had also been a departure from those scanty quarters in Green Arbour Court. His new apartments in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, were not elaborately furnished, nor dignified in themselves or their situation, but they were the sign of better days. For all Fame brings its rich rewards. For Goldsmith the greatest of these was Johnson's friendship and esteem. The bond that bound these two was this, that they were always the last to abandon the poor and the worthless. Tired out with failure or importunity, other men of kindly heart might leave the incorrigible to their fate, but not Samuel Johnson nor Oliver Goldsmith. A better basis for friendship could not

be.

No sooner was Goldsmith known, than a bright devoted band of loving spirits clustered round, loving the life of the man and feeling the help and the hope that it gave. Simplicity sways its sceptre. Purity of heart is a Divine power. Not through his position and achievements, but for himself, men and women loved and honoured him. Burke and Reynolds became his devoted friends and constant allies. Fairest of all the bonds was that dreamy sympathy with the sweet little Jessamy Bride. He loved the poor. In this affection it might be said that his very life was dedicated to all who bore the burden of sad necessity, and needed help or solace in their suffering. For the most part his intimacies were with men, but noble women whose names have passed away must have honoured him and found that hour a happy one that brought the comforting and kindly and enkindling soul within the circle of the home. He loved children and understood them. He longed to have them for his readers. In a picturesque succession the old lady who taught Charles Lamb his letters was patted on her curly head by Goldsmith when she was a little child.

[Pg 49]

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## CHAPTER VI

[Pg 50]

### THE LITERARY CLUB

Goldsmith's income accrued, not through royalties upon his few great and immortal works, but from arduous and endless ephemeral tasks. This ceaseless taxation of the mental faculties probably represents the most exhausting of all the processes of gaining a decent livelihood. Never the strongest of men, these relentless intellectual exactions gave the brain no rest, and kept the physical frame in a condition of constant nervous weakness. Writing from a bed of sickness, he tells his employer almost pitifully, amid the strain of things, that he cannot complete his translations from Plutarch. Without a pension or a sinecure in some office of the State, literary life at that time was fraught with such incalculable difficulties that it demanded the maximum of prudence to achieve the minimum of subsistence. Men of letters lived, and by some miracle enjoyed themselves. The commercial basis of their being, and their professional and economic relationship with both the booksellers and the public, were as unsatisfactory as can be imagined. The sum received by Milton for "Paradise Lost" indicates the usage of an earlier day. Things had not much improved. Newbery gave five guineas for the copyright of *The Citizen of the World* and fourteen guineas for *The Life of Beau Nash*. A struggle consequent upon the combination of very little means, and still less practical prudence, soon began in Goldsmith's case. His mode of life, if not luxurious, was easier than it had been. It bore the semblance of secure prosperity. He left his chambers in Wine Office Court for a more commodious set of apartments in Canonbury, then a delightful village. Newbery made all the arrangements. From him Goldsmith's landlady received her quarterly due for the board and lodging of this celebrated author. However precautious this plan of payment may have been, it probably led to Noll spending more on incidental outlays than he otherwise would have done with a weekly reckoning to meet. His cares never came from personal profusion or self-indulgence, but from the warmth and impulse of his too generous heart and lavish love of giving. With him the purpose of money was not its preservation for a rainy day, but its distribution on a fine one. He never found much fun in making guineas come, or hilarity in keeping them. It was a vast delight to make them fly. At this feat no one was ever more accomplished. Here we have the man and his mistakes, and the troubles that came, and came to stay. Some might have grown rich from his financial opportunities. Whilst making the most and the worst of his prudential incompetence, it is easy to estimate too highly his rewards. It is an exaggeration to speak of his having made in his time thousands of pounds.

[Pg 51]

[Pg 52]

All he earned very hardly he squandered most carelessly. This foreshadows that fierce stream of fatality in which he proved powerless to the end. Underlying currents of embarrassments were as constant as the grace and purity and beauty of his heart, and more close to him than that they could not be. Those men of business who never had their dues met, were better able to bear the losses than would have been the poor pensioners whom Goldsmith's compassion enriched. His was never the philanthropy of reasoned prudence, but that of impotent prodigality. He scattered guineas as heedless of himself as he was careless of his creditors. He was at this time most industrious. In 1763 and 1764 he produced countless miscellaneous articles and essays. He composed a *History of England* in a series of letters written after the manner of a nobleman to his son, and through this mistakenly attributed to Lord Chesterfield. He may have penned "Goody Two-Shoes"—it is too late to tell. Subsequently came another and more responsible *History of England*, used until recently in many of our public schools. Oliver Goldsmith had become one of the men of his time.



It is agreed between Oliver Goldsmith M. B. on one hand  
and James Dodsley on the other that Oliver Goldsmith shall  
write for James Dodsley a book called a Chronological  
history of the lives of eminent persons of Great Britain and  
Ireland or to that effect, consisting of about two volumes  
8vo about the same size and letter with the universal  
history published in 8vo for the writing of which and com-  
piling the same James Dodsley shall pay Oliver Goldsmith  
three guineas for every printed sheet, so that the whole shall  
be delivered complete in the space of two years at farthest James  
Dodsley however shall print the above book in whatever manner  
or size he shall think fit only the universal history above  
mentioned shall be the standard by which Oliver Goldsmith  
shall be judged.

... of the whole copy complete, and one  
other moiety one half of it at the conclusion of six months  
and the other half at the expiration of twelve months next  
after the publication of the work, ~~giving~~ ~~has~~ James Dodsley giving  
however upon the delivery of the whole copy two notes for the  
money left unpaid. Each volume of the above intended work  
shall not contain more than five and thirty sheets and if they  
should contain more the surplus shall not be paid for by  
James Dodsley. ~~Oliver Goldsmith shall~~ Oliver Goldsmith shall  
print his name to the said work.

Mar. 31. 1763

Oliver Goldsmith  
James Dodsley

[Rischgitz Collection.]

[British Museum.]

**FACSIMILE OF THE ORIGINAL AGREEMENT BETWEEN  
GOLDSMITH AND DODSLEY, MARCH 31, 1763.**

Nothing can be more interesting in every period in the history of literature, art, science, and philosophy than the manner in which, thrown together by the mysterious magnetism of mutually alluring greatness and power, the first and highest minds of all epochs grow inevitably associated. We find this now in the formation of the Literary Club, of which many of the most moving minds of that day in which Goldsmith lived were members. The Club met on Monday evenings in the Turk's Head Tavern, Soho. It was in working order in 1764. Sir Joshua Reynolds was its founder. Goldsmith's membership of the Literary Club, happy as it was, marks great misunderstandings involved in that misguided judgment passed upon the man by his contemporaries, which posterity has been content too easily to accept. It was thought that Oliver Goldsmith had no learning to substantiate his position, and that he had no wit for conversation, but only for writing. There is so little to support these ideas that it is surprising that they should have arisen, and for any period, or in any mind, have persisted. Horace Walpole, in his graceful way, called Goldsmith an inspired idiot. Garrick told us that "Dear Noll wrote like an angel and talked like poor Poll." Johnson said: "No man was more foolish when he had not a pen in his hand." The charge that Goldsmith was incapable of collected thought in conversation falls to the ground if we recall one gentle utterance: "It must be much from you, sir, that I take ill." These words from one who had suffered an indescribably teasing impertinence at the hands of Johnson are the most collected conceivable. They are not less chivalrous. In *The Retaliation* Johnson alone is spared. To this friend nothing could shake Goldsmith's admiring and unalterable faithfulness and affection. There is a certain spirit in expression that must stand inevitably associated with the collected mind. When it was wondered why Johnson cared for some unhappy mortal who had no charm or talent, Goldsmith said, in his quiet and reflective way: "The man is poor and honest, which is recommendation enough for Johnson." Concerning one who was undeserving, according to the manner of the world, who had no honour, and had forfeited all claim to character, yet still retained Johnson's compassion, Goldsmith rejoined: "This man has become miserable, and that

[Pg 53]

[Pg 54]

ensures the protection of Johnson." Goldsmith, who could so readily reply to protests with answers at once as felicitous and as reflective as these, could not have been an uncollected conversationalist. Not merely the words, but also the manner that one must associate with their utterance preclude the possibility. Goldsmith is supposed to have had no learning because one day he called upon Gibbon, who gulled him. He questioned the author of "The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire" upon some historic issue, and the historian led him grotesquely astray. Who would not have accepted anything Gibbon said without criticism? Who would have expected this great personage capable of indulging in a school-boy prank? Goldsmith's writings prove him well instructed and widely read, and show his mind as curiously stored and equipped as its whole genius was charming and gracious. If he could not talk, but could only write, then the pen in his hand is taken as an instrument capable of exerting hypnotic force, and converting by magic a fool into a wit.

[Pg 55]

In his own time, from some unaccountable cause, it became a habit to treat Goldsmith with a form of moral and intellectual patronage. This has never entirely passed away. Carlyle, following Horace Walpole's idea, writing of Johnson, thus speaks of Goldsmith: "An inspired idiot hangs strangely about him. Yet on the whole there is no evil in the gooseberry fool, but rather much good—of a fine, if of a weaker sort than Johnson's—and all the more genuine that he himself could never become conscious of it."

In the sphere of the high-minded of that period, with the possible but not the clear and certain exception of Johnson himself, not one in all that circle, illustrious as it was, so impressed the kindred spirits of that time and age as Oliver Goldsmith did. His impressiveness swayed its force and influence over all. This was due first to the winning grace, but partly to the greatness of the man. "Dr. Goldsmith," said Johnson, "is one of the first men we now have as an author, and he is a very worthy man, too." At another time he said: "As a writer he was of the most distinguished abilities. Whatever he composed he did it better than any other man could, and whether we consider him as a poet, as a comic writer, or as a historian, so far as regards his power of composition he was one of the finest writers of his time, and will ever stand in the foremost class." These words were uttered shortly after Goldsmith's death. One can imagine the looking back with love upon the companionship and the conversation of one friend at least who would never be forgotten. All natures in some sphere, touch the infinite. In the silence of his great heart, the radiance of his intellect, and in his uttered word, the very soul of Goldsmith's genius lies in a loving understanding. In this man there flows and shines the very grace of the very Christ. Unfailing gentleness lives lighted by divinity.

[Pg 56]



*Rischgitz Collection.]*

**GOLDSMITH IN MIDDLE AGE.  
(From an engraving by Ridley.)**

Those were happy days passed in heart-to-heart friendships and affections, and they were merry hours that sped so swiftly at the Literary Club. The great are never greater than in the hearts of their homes and the simplicities of their friendships. At this club the gods forgot their power and high beings laid aside their loftiness. In the midst we find the man they teased the man most welcome; that one that all affected to despise, each in his inmost heart unfeignedly respected. The man most laughed at was most loved. Oliver Goldsmith made the mirth of things. He was always forbearing, and to this passive pleasingness he added that finest of activities, unfailing kindness. If it is no wonder that they loved him, it is no marvel that they laughed at him as well.

[Pg 57]

It is commonly said that Goldsmith had a thick-set figure. This does not mean that he was a sturdy, muscular man. Weakness of constitution, a habit of stooping as he strolled in his meditative manner, and constantly bending as he wrote at desk or table, and early deprivations both of soul and body, had huddled up the low stature and given the compressed frame a semblance of solidity. His cheeks were sunken, and there were dark rims about the eyes, and the minimum of fleshly and substantial covering clad these limbs. Goldsmith had a queer little manner of bobbing. This bob he fondly imagined a bow. That it was meant to be dignified there is no doubt. It came a little from that personal vanity from which no one will ever wish to deem him entirely exempt, and a little, too, from great nervousness. It flowed also from an innate good breeding and cultured and natural chivalry. This bobbing as he entered or left a room was finely caricatured by Garrick. No doubt the actor's own bowing was the perfection of formal grace. Yet if the motive of politeness and personal ceremonial condone its outward and practical shortcomings, then we shall discover more true soul in Goldsmith's bob than Garrick's bow. Noll bobbed timidly when compliments were paid him, and gratefully and affirmatively when in his presence he heard others praised. If anything noble or beautiful was told of anyone, then came the revering little bob, this time intended as a tribute to human honour and the virtue of the heart and the valour of the race.

[Pg 58]

## DEBTS AND DIGNITIES

All through his life Goldsmith was greatly given to grand clothes. It is a pity that grand clothes were not always greatly given to him, for he never appeared quite able to pay for them. Although he became deeply involved in debt, he never cultivated luxurious or unworthy delights. His pleasures were of the simplest. His insolvent condition was due, true enough, to pleasure and his foremost luxury—the luxury of ceaseless charities that he could as ill afford as a coach-and-four. He was one of the hearts not meant to draw near the gates of heaven alone, and could not accept a pleasure without someone sharing it with him and having more than half.

When he gave his suppers, we find the measure of the man who always gave more than he received, for the viands were for his friends, and a basin of boiled milk satisfied his own demands. There is a sad message in the milk. It showed the concealed weakness of the little man, and the growing disease, not now ever to be wholly known, from which he died so young. Too likely all through his life some constant, growing pain, stealing his pleasures, stole his prudence too. He was always frank and as open with his creditors, as he was candid with his friends. When Newbery's account with him had become complicated, he had no means of liquidating the reckoning save by offering the copyright of his play, then advancing towards production under many disadvantages.

[Pg 60]

"To tell the truth, Frank," he said, in his lofty and affable manner, "there are very small hopes of its success."

It is almost diverting to find Goldsmith himself baffled, if not beaten, in seeking prosperity from literature, majestically introducing others into the sacred sphere. His name was sufficient to lead others to those rewards that he himself needed even more than they did. Like Johnson, Goldsmith wrote many introductions to books and various dedications for authors, who availed themselves both of the influence and of the ability of these distinguished leaders in the realm of letters. When Goldsmith had become known in the world and life of literature, and was already respected by a select circle of the authors of the time, although his place and power were by no means established, it was through the pressure of debt and its distresses that the greatest work of his genius came to light.

"One morning in the year 1764," said Dr. Johnson to the faithful Boswell, "I received a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was dressed."

[Pg 61]

It is impossible to pass and not pause here in grateful admiration for the true heart of Dr. Johnson, who never failed a friend or any man. He proceeded with his confidences.

"I found," he went on, concerning Goldsmith, "that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass before him."

The coming passage is beautifully characteristic:

"I put the cork into the bottle," said Johnson, and then goes on with the narrative.

"I desired he would be calm," he proceeded, "and I began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated. He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced. I looked into it and saw its merits, told the landlady I should soon return, and having gone to a bookseller, sold it for sixty pounds. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in high tone for having used him so ill."

Amid all his distresses, Goldsmith had been quietly and diligently perfecting his beautiful novel, *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Simultaneously he had been engaged upon *The Traveller*. At that very instant it lay completed in his desk.

[Pg 62]

The pure delights of life he knew faithfully, and lovingly bestowed. This man possessed not merely in an unusual, but in an absolutely unique, degree the grace of sympathetic affectionateness. He fulfilled the Pauline mandate, "Be kindly affectionate one to another." In Goldsmith this was nothing less than very genius. His graceful letters to his Irish friends, and, indeed, to all to whom he ever wrote, evince the kindest and most caressing feelings imaginable. They are about the home, the children, the pet animals, and trivial ties, and pleasing, pleading memories and hopes. As you read, Divinity hedges about the lowly hearths that he pictured so lovingly. It is a curious power. When Goldsmith was at Bath, from the way that Johnson mentions him in his letters to Langton we note how much the little doctor was missed by his friend when he left town. It was a bright moment when Goldsmith moved into his chambers in the Temple. Here he lived his last years, and his literary life will always be associated more with this place than with any other. In these rooms, amongst his friends might have been seen old General Oglethorpe, that courageous veteran Paoli, and the young and dauntless Grattan. Here the *Roman History* was written. This work was greatly applauded by the critics. Its production made Johnson burst forth into that splendour of laudation in which he said that whatever Goldsmith did, he did better than all others, and he counted him as an historian superior to Hume, Smollett, and Lyttelton. Goldsmith had a fine faculty in histories for presenting vital facts concisely, and

[Pg 63]

making his pages compendious. The grace he had by instinct others strove to create by vast elaboration. It has been said that Robertson's ornamentations hid what is essential in his records. No one can ever discover Goldsmith in anything striving for effect. It is not possible now to enumerate, or even ascertain, all the friends that came to those chambers in the Temple. Among them may be mentioned young Craddock, with an estate in the country, æsthetic tendencies, and literary talents. With him, in a few light musical works that came to little, Goldsmith collaborated. This man had that respect for the poet and the humorist his life and character and genius deserved. When once this cultured squire exhibited for criticism an elaborate manuscript, which in all the peace of leisured wealth and ease, and such talent as he possessed, he had composed with exquisite care, well might poor Goldsmith say:

"Ah, Mr. Craddock, think of me, that must write a volume every month."



*Rischgitz Collection.]*

## **2, BRICK COURT, TEMPLE, WHERE GOLDSMITH DIED.**

In his rooms in Brick Court, Temple, Goldsmith used to sit at his window, his eyes lingering lovingly upon the flowers and the foliage in the gardens beneath, and his heart drinking in the sweet peacefulness of the scene. He watched the Thames gliding on silently, serenely faithful to and fulfilling its great imperishable mission. Rivers are the signs and the symbols of immortality. The poet saw the rooks upon the lawns, and made new friends of these black-winged, busy birds, and found angels' voices in the whispers of the rustling leaves sweetly pleading. The flowers smiled up at him, as, gazing gently down, he wreathed with welcomes all passing hearts amid many known and unknown wanderers. There are those that have wondered, in the inscrutable ordering of events, and feeling that strange chances take their unexpected, often fulfilling, and often failing, part in these, what had happened for letters and for humanity had Goldsmith met Chatterton, who may have wearily paced the Temple Gardens, and even have glanced up and seen Goldsmith looking down in all his tenderness. In the literary history of this period the death of Chatterton darkens the most painful page. At the time when this poor boy took his life Goldsmith was not in London, and not even in England. He was in Paris. The idea that had he encountered Chatterton it could hardly have failed to be to the advantage, and possibly the redemption, and the whole rescue of that young spirit, is not a charming conjecture that has only flattery for its foundation. Oliver Goldsmith was one who must perforce befriend the destitute. He could not let any hopeless heart still keep its despair unmarked and not alleviated, if soothing

could prove possible. In the year 1772, a youth named Macdonald, of Irish lineage, through the sudden death of his elder brother, found himself friendless and alone in London, and wandering, dejected and despairing, in the Temple Gardens. Thus, too, Chatterton might have strayed in an even greater loneliness. The ages of these youths were the same.

[Pg 65]

"Providence," writes Macdonald, "directed me to the Temple Gardens. I threw myself on a seat, and willing to forget my miseries for a moment, drew out a book. I had not been there long when a gentleman strolling about passed near me, and observing, addressed me: 'Sir, you seem studious. I hope you find this a favourable place.' Conversation ensued. I told him my history. He gave me his address, and desired me to call soon."

Goldsmith received him in the kindest manner. Macdonald became his amanuensis. Goldsmith treated the young man throughout with unfailing tenderness and sympathy and almost fatherly kindness and solicitude.

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## CHAPTER VIII

[Pg 66]

### CONSUMMATE COMEDY

In 1771 Goldsmith was full of hope for that capital essay in comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*. Two years passed before he could obtain its definite acceptance. He found his manager not in Garrick, as one might have anticipated, but again in Colman. The pretty piece appeared at Covent Garden. Tried as Goldsmith had been ere *The Good-natured Man* was produced, the negotiations and delays about *She Stoops to Conquer* were not less torturing. Colman kept the manuscript in his hands for months and months without coming to any decision. The playwright's letters to the manager are absolute supplications. Humiliation appears the very discipline of genius. At one time the manuscript was actually recalled by its author and despatched to Garrick. Before it had really come under his consideration, which very likely might have been just as obtuse, Johnson intervened. To send it to Garrick, in his opinion, would be tantamount to an acknowledgment of its refusal by Colman. This had not taken place. The manager would neither accept the piece nor produce it. He said he would keep his faith, but whatever that might mean in his mind, he did nothing. Johnson finally and very firmly brought the man to book. When Colman had accepted the piece, through his gloomy forebodings he biassed the actors against the play before they had even seen it, but no sooner had the rehearsals begun in earnest than they warmed to their assigned parts, and in due time admired and revelled in the comedy. Colman, niggard, would risk nothing in the production of the piece, neither in new costumes nor theatrical fittings. He actually held forth disparagingly in his own box-office to those who sent to purchase tickets for the play.

[Pg 67]

In the Republic of Letters rumours of wrong run like riot through the realm. Indignant at Goldsmith's sufferings through Colman's insults, and still more from their love of the playwright, his friends determined that if popular support and applause on the first night could make his comedy succeed, then no effort in this direction should be spared upon his behalf. An illustrious and a memorable house greeted the rising curtain. This assemblage of celebrities and the men and women who loved and admired and were resolved to stand by and support Oliver Goldsmith was moving in itself, and one of the greatest possible evidences of the honour and popularity in which the man was held. The people rallied to the rescue of their favourite—the best beloved of all the authors. This is one of the finest demonstrations of public sympathy and regard the history of literature affords. It was enough for Oliver Goldsmith to have lived for that night, and, if need be, for that alone. The whole affair proved an unequivocal success. Those friends, bent on conquest, applauded everything, and led the streams of welcoming mirth and merriment. The fact that the comedy did not require this protection could not make the personal kindness less pleasing. Johnson, Burke, Reynolds, Stevens, Fitzherbert, and a rallying host, dined together before proceeding to the theatre. Johnson led them like a commander-in-chief. The hearty meal at the Shakespeare Tavern was one of the most jovial imaginable. The party mustered on the battlefield. It was Goldsmith's Waterloo. That great victory, like the triumph of *She Stoops to Conquer*, was assured ere it was fought. Goldsmith, very nervous at the dinner, did not go at once to the theatre, but strolled away, and rambled alone in St. James's Park. He crept back, or, rather, was persuaded by Stevens to come, and arrived at the opening of the fifth act. Strangely enough, as he entered he caught the only sign of disapproval heard that night.

[Pg 68]

*She Stoops to Conquer*, owing much to its capital central motive, is as graceful as it is diverting. Its humour is unfailing. The delightful force of Goldsmith's dialogue lies in entire naturalness. The author of "The School for Scandal" creates for his comedies an atmosphere of superheated wit and intellectualism, which, whilst inevitably pleasing, is beyond probability. Certain novelists vaunt and revel in the creation of impossibly vivacious wits. Nature has a finer grace; its faithful reflection is purer art. Those true to natural humour and the spontaneous rather than the fabricated repartee represent a small minority. Amongst the novelists Goldsmith and Jane Austen have few to follow them, and with the dramatists Molière and Pinero are almost his solitary associates. Perfectly natural are the arguments, 'mid trips and assaults, between Mr. Burchell and Mrs. Primrose in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, and Hastings and Mrs. Hardcastle in *She Stoops to Conquer*. This play achieved a revolution in dramatic presentation. It changed the course of comedy, heightened humour, and rang like laughter round the town. It was performed as long as

[Pg 69]

there were nights to spare. In book-form it proved a great success. In this we have the beautiful words of the dedication to Dr. Johnson. The town was disgusted to the depths with Colman. No one will ever pity him for the private contempt and the public derision he brought upon himself through his mean discernment and his want of appreciation of the very best play of the period. The press so teemed with caustic and sarcastic epigrams at his expense that he fled for refuge to Bath during the run of the piece, and at last begged Goldsmith to intercede and rescue him from the scorn of the critics. After all the worries and vexations, it is not surprising that poor Noll should write: "I am sick of the stage!"

[Pg 70]

When it was known that the King would visit the theatre to see *She Stoops to Conquer*, he said: "I wish he would;" and then added, carried away by the undercurrent of pressing trials: "Not that it would do me the least good." "Then," said Johnson, "let us hope that it will do him good."

The interval in time was not wide that divided the last triumph from the last day of Goldsmith's life. He was still toiling amid many monetary perplexities, that he had not bettered by accepting payment for works before they were completed. It was now all pouring out and nothing coming in, and there was no hope. He projected a *Dictionary of Arts and Sciences* upon a comprehensive system, at once practical and ambitious. Failing health had made him sadly dilatory. The booksellers, who had lost confidence in his schemes, did not hold him the man for this encyclopædic labour or suited for long and strenuous strain. Friends ineffectually tried to procure him a pension. He had made many notes and written sundry essays, intended for a treatise in two volumes, to be entitled *A Survey of Experimental Philosophy*. In the midst of vain strivings he died. The knack of hoping could not do all. The heart was broken and the soul passing. It is a tragedy to remember that his one chance lay now in writing another comedy. In these distressed days Garrick came to his aid, helping him over one stile, at least, by paying liberally, and probably from charity, for the promise of a play. The poet's physical strength was poorer even than his empty purse. In this sad state he pursued his labours, toiling like a slave almost to the last, looking back and recovering nothing, forward and seeing nothing, pressing on with all the poor power he had left, and making no headway. He gave one last extravagant dinner to his old friends, which in his poverty, and for very shame and pity, and a little even in rebuke, they would not take at his expense. Then for a time he sought once again the fresh, sweet country air. He returned to town. The old talent was not yet fled. He wrote that fine *Retaliation* at this time. It is pathetically possible that the weakening appearance of the poet induced his lively friends to pen epitaphs upon the little man. Many jests have their serious motives, not wholly known to those who perpetrate the jokes. If unconscious of the forces really leading to the episode, little did they dream that its results would live till now, and to all intents for ever. Each wrote an epitaph on Noll, and he in turn an epitaph on all. The *Retaliation* shows his power in compressed expression, and his fine discernment of men and character. The little poem lives, a veritable, and, in its way, a wholesale contribution to national biography. It is a candid commentary upon some of the best men of that day. Garrick is treated more elaborately than the rest. He had been the prime offender, and naturally came foremost for the fire of the reply. The poem was never finished. The kind words about Sir Joshua were practically the last the poet penned. Reynolds, to the very end trying to cheer Goldsmith and be with him whenever he could, proved now, as he had ever been, the sweetest of friends—a true and loving, tender man.

[Pg 71]

[Pg 72]

Home at the Temple, and in the dear London he loved, Goldsmith grew ill very rapidly, and in his illness fell into a deep sleep. He slept to wake; he stooped to conquer. This, instead of being the sleep of restoring strength, was that in which disease takes its last, firm grasp. One struggle with the feeble frame, and the wrestle for life was over for ever. His biographers write of this sleep, that was watched with so much anxiety by his physicians: "It was hoped that a favourable crisis had arrived." It had. It marked the advent of the last reprieve, that release that can never be recalled. The clouds have passed away for ever, and in the sunshine came the solace of all cares, the finality of pain, and the soothing and the solution of all sorrow. Heaven had sent its last call and its greatest message to the heart. In all, only forty-seven years had been given, and all that may have been ill in the time is forgotten and forgiven, and the fairest part of all that was well and high and true is with us even now, and the radiance must last for long, cheering many hearts, brightening souls that are failing, and blessing homes that are and will be. The night of passing death has led on to the day of unpassing life.

[Pg 73]

On April 4, 1774, the spirit of Oliver Goldsmith conquered that which men call death. Burke burst into tears at the news of the passing of the man and the friend he cherished and revered. Reynolds laid his work aside and rose, shaken in his great sorrow, and trembling with the sense of an untold loss. Looking back upon the fading figure, so dear to so many, and a light for years to come, shining still in many homes and many hearts and many lands, Johnson, in his sacred solemnity, said: "Poor Goldsmith! He was a very great man."

The body of Oliver Goldsmith was buried in the quiet Temple churchyard. There is a tablet to his memory in the church itself, but no one now knows exactly where the mortal remnant was laid, for no memorial marked that last resting-place. The epitaph on Goldsmith in Westminster Abbey runs: "He left no spheres of writing untouched or unadorned by his pen. Noble, pure, and delicate, his memory will last as long as society retains affection, friendship is not devoid of honour, and reading wants not her admirers." Intimately we are guided most of all by those whom most we love. The eyes may close, but not the life. There is the knowledge of loving power wielded on the heart by those whom men call dead. There is a soul in men rising beyond visible activities; its story is not told in the recognised deeds of a career and their outward record. Beyond the acknowledged actions and admitted attainments, there stays the prevailing essence.

[Pg 74]



The glory of Christianity is seen in its illuminating stars, living everlastingly. Through grace and gentleness, Goldsmith was one in that long train in which shine Sister Dora and St. Francis of Assisi.

Oliver Goldsmith was the most pure and suasive spirit of his age. To this day his gentle touch and soothing spell, by that magnetic power that flows through purity of sympathy, still sway the heart. His charming radiance and pure, divine delight move and master those who admire and honour this all-loving soul and most graceful writer. In reading his works, there is for all, and there must ever be, that sense of compassion and that absolving perception which must have moved the finer feelings of those who lived in his own time, and actually knew the man himself. Not less does his purifying power, with its elevating inspiration, survive. It is a silent and unseen, but still a lofty, a lasting, and an impressive influence. Lovers of Goldsmith feel friendship and affection for the moving and immortal spirit of the man. His works need no learned commentary. The common heart is their sufficing commentary.

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## CHAPTER IX

[Pg 75]

### THE POET AND THE ESSAYIST

Successful in every sphere, it is as an essayist that, amongst the immortals, Goldsmith sways signal and supreme distinction. As a poet, not less than as a playwright, he triumphed in his own, and inspired and influenced the coming age. As a biographer, he readily gained contemporary celebrity, both through the sympathetic understanding of his heart and the delightful facility of his literary style. In his own time, he occupied, through the high and undoubted merits of his works, an eminent position amongst the historians. The appealing force of his power in this field has lasted practically until the present day. That his histories have been superseded is due far more to changes in attitude and criticism and the revolutionary results of modern research than to intrinsic failures in the works themselves. They still stand monuments in pure English and models in patriotic perception, the due balance between the general and the particular, and also in vividness, compression, and an unflinching clearness, both in sound views, and also in their unflinching explicit expression. Whilst it has appeared the unhappy destiny of this author to have been at times too lightly regarded, high praise has almost always been accorded to his labours.

[Pg 76]

Sir Walter Scott writes: "The wreath of Goldsmith is unsullied; he wrote to exalt virtue and expose vice; and he accomplished his task in a manner that raises him to the highest rank among British authors. We close his volumes with a sigh that such an author should have written so little from the stores of his own genius, and that he should have been so prematurely removed from the sphere of literature which he adorned." Johnson writes: "The Life of Dr. Parnell is a task which I should very willingly decline, since it has been lately written by Goldsmith—a man of such variety of powers, and such felicity of performance, that he always seemed to do best that which he was doing. What such an author has told, who would wish to tell again?" The same generous soul exclaimed: "Is there a man, sir, now, who can pen an essay with such ease and elegance as Goldsmith?" All can see how true this is when they compare Goldsmith's style with that of his contemporaries—that hostile essay, for example, published from Richardson's firm, in which, time after time, sneers must cease and praise prevail, despite the intention to decry. If reluctant laudation is most sincere, then Boswell himself said of Goldsmith that there was nothing that he touched that he did not adorn. Goldsmith adorned, but not with mere polish or veneer. He threw a curious felicity on things, and made them fair. The very beauty of his touch allures us to take his work too lightly. If his essays had been in his own time translated into pompous terms, he could have passed for a sage. As convention makes religion something of which little children grow afraid, so older minds think beauty must be frivolous, and that moral worth must live in rapt association with outward ugliness. A most graceful literary style may be as true and earnest and inspiring as a very pretty woman. It teaches as it smiles. On everything Goldsmith ever cast a fairer and more hallowed light. The very inmost essence of his genius was purity in its compassionate perfection. It must, indeed, have been difficult under the conditions of distress amidst which almost throughout his whole life he wrote, for him to preserve an ease of style, and with the ease a dignity. Yet through all, not even once he faltered. He never failed. Following Fielding's happy epigram—if it ought not to be rather called most unhappy—in these days the lot of a literary man who was a hackney writer was hardly better, nay, scarce as good, as the lot of a hackney coachman. Yet even in those writings which must have been rushed off most rapidly, and amidst the fires of scorching distress, Goldsmith maintained his grace of style, and did not forget the reverence due to writing and the honour of literature. Without any trace or taint of self-consciousness or self-conceit, he held the pen a sacred trust. As a critic Goldsmith had a high ideal, and more than this. And, what is finer, an entirely new conception. No poet could read his criticism of Gray and not feel inspired. No one could peruse the article and not feel that henceforth poetry was something more to him and to all life than it had ever been before. Criticism is itself among the evolving sciences. Depreciation was rife. Goldsmith touched a new chord in inspiring and chastening appreciation, a spirit which even now, more and more, in life and letters, men must realize. Unlike Brougham, Goldsmith could chide without unkindness, and prove severe without proving cruel. He threw such a light of love on merit that could and did soften and condone the deserved censure of the strictures that not envy, but mercy, made him utter. Criticism in its true sense was hardly known. In enlarging the message of poetry, the

[Pg 77]

[Pg 78]



motive of the drama and the functions of fiction, Goldsmith fulfilled the responsibilities of higher criticism, and that power of inspiration and heightening of expression and perceptivity which are its first duty and its highest honour. Whilst in the elevation of criticism and the higher interpretation of poetry much is due to the inspiring guidance of Gray, a great deal, and more than is commonly admitted, is due to Goldsmith. If he did not force, he influenced the splendid expansion of spiritual perception. It is as a writer of essays that on Goldsmith falls the light of pure pre-eminence. Some hold Charles Lamb supreme amongst the essayists, and others Goldsmith, The last men who would ever have fought for the vanity of recognised supremacy would have been these two gentle rival claimants for the crown. There is a peculiar felicity in much of the writing of Laurence Sterne. His demerits preclude him from a sacred place. It is strange how rare grace is in every sphere of art. In that of gracious writing, Oliver Goldsmith, Charles Lamb, and Nathaniel Hawthorne are alone in pure and isolated splendour. We speak of grace, and not here of power of mind or informative force. How greatly Froude and Emerson would be enhanced gifted with graciousness. Goldsmith, even in his own day, was acknowledged the best of the essay writers. This is the realm in which he was, and is to this day, king. From his love of poetry and happiness in his art, and that shining in the power of deft and delightful expression, there is another sphere in which it would be expected that his power would prevail, but in which he had either no actual talent or very little. However we may admire *The Haunch of Venison* and other stray pieces, Goldsmith was really not a writer of what is now called "Society verse." In that delightful sphere Austin Dobson has no rival. In the higher realms of poetry there are many who will regret that necessity forced Goldsmith to turn almost exclusively to prose. Poetry loves genius, and starves it; whilst prose, hating, feeds and clothes its child. Clearly genius, so much at ease in the essay, would prosper in the poem. No one can imagine when men will live and not love Gray's "Elegy"; and if this be so, then for as long, at least, there will be a place within the heart for Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. Of *The Traveller*, Dr. Johnson said: "There has not been so fine a poem since Pope's time." This may seem poor praise. It was not so at that time; Pope reigned supreme, and was esteemed by Johnson at home, and Voltaire abroad, as pre-eminent. Worshipping admirers held Pope and Dryden very gods. Dryden and Pope have passed away more easily than Gray and Goldsmith will. In Dryden, Pope, and Johnson himself we have mere imitators of Latinity. They have no style or fashion that can be wholly held their own, and without Virgil, Juvenal, Horace, and Ovid they could not have spoken. Goldsmith strikes a purer strain, and one peculiarly his own and ours. He is as English as Wordsworth. This makes the comparison with Pope and Dryden now most imperfect. Admitting so much, it almost follows of necessity that Goldsmith was the first poet of the rich and enriching school that still sways the common heart, that gave us Tennyson, Keats, Shelley, and an unrivalled host in the history of poetic inspiration and expression. It must, of course, be recognised that Goldsmith was not the first to herald the purely homely and an entirely indigenous note, since Gray was with him, and far earlier, Philip Sydney had poured forth his fair and felicitous melodies. Beyond, above, and greater far than these, Milton, attuning his hallowed and harmonious strains, through the classic chords of Rome, had so faithfully fulfilled their inspiration with moving majesty, that rising and transcendently surpassing all his models, he was, and is, in very deed unique, original, unsupported, and supreme. *The Deserted Village* was given to the world, but one cannot say how long it lay hidden in the yearning heart of that genius who gave it light and life. It substantiated the fame of Goldsmith for ever and unalterably. In the last year of his life, Gray welcomed the piece, and was most moved and grateful as he greeted it. It is as much a part of our life as his own "Elegy," and though each poem is distinct and could only have been bestowed by the one heart of the poet, who blessed himself and blessed the lives of men in writing it, still there is a sweet similitude.

[Pg 79]

[Pg 80]

[Pg 81]



*Rischgitz Collection.]*

**GOLDSMITH.**  
**(From an engraving of the statue at**  
**Trinity College, Dublin.)**

The highest praise that one could give Gray and Goldsmith is to hold their genius and their influence kindred. There is, however, a glistening and Chaucerian brightness and vitality in Goldsmith not discernible in Gray. Their kindredness is thus that of the vernal unto the autumnal light. In *The Deserted Village*, from its whole reflective vein, at a glance we must perceive that long these loved and loving thoughts had lingered in the mind and the heart of the poet. Sparks from Heaven fell upon the tinder of the yearnings of the lowly heart. At last the glow was seen, and grew a light distinct. There is a moulding, moving music of the mind. Swiftly, in time, line after line found its place within the common heart and life. Again, as in earlier days, we see the spiritual spell, and with the force, the form and understanding, fathoming stretch and reach and power and grasp of genius.

[Pg 82]

The sublimity of the spirit of Shakespeare and the aloofness of the mind of Milton divide their influence, through an infinite universality, from the current of evolving expression. Goldsmith was one in the great succession of the dynasty of poetry that must outlast the nation and the race. In the line of this successive sovereignty the name of Chaucer is first inscribed, and that of the towering Browning is now seen the last upon the glorious list of the kings of poetry. If Gray's "Elegy" came close to the outward beauty and the inmost heart of nature, the same must be said of Goldsmith's *Deserted Village*. From the heart and life of nature, poetry has now passed to the heart and life of man. That first natural interpretation that gained its meridian glory through Wordsworth, and its bright, vivid, yet evening radiance in the sweet spirit of the dulcet Tennyson, knew its dawn through the love-lit lines of Gray and Goldsmith.

*The Deserted Village* appeared soon after the production of *The Good-natured Man* in the moving and marvellous procession of Oliver Goldsmith's great and successive achievements. The poem was dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds, who was as rejoiced and grateful as only a true friend could be. The artist could admire the piece profoundly, but still not more sincerely than Edmund Burke, the statesman and the orator. As Tennyson had a lilt and Byron a sentiment, swiftly and

[Pg 83]

easily appealing, consciously or unconsciously caught, and sincerely felt or insincerely imitated, so Goldsmith possessed a teaching charm and a guiding grace that can be traced in many later poets and amongst the works of greatest minds, in the poetry of Robert Burns. Poets, like priests, teach the hearts and lives of men, the means and power of their expression. One may cull from Goldsmith his own sublime simile:

"And, as a bird, each fond endearment tries  
To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,  
He tried each art, reprov'd each dull delay,  
Allured to brighter worlds, and led the way."

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## CHAPTER X

[Pg 84]

### THE LIGHT OF LOVE

To think of Oliver Goldsmith is to feel him near—a friend, and the brightest of friends. This is the spell that still he sways. His words are semblant to moving memories. His genius purifies the clouds of life, and cheers and inspires the heavy-laden heart. One cannot tell what was, and is, the hidden charm that gave and gives for ever this appealing influence. It may be touching simplicity. It may have been his sacrifice and deep devotion, or that kindly affectionateness which is itself sublime. It might be that pretty gift, the joyousness of innocence. It is radiant to remember Goldsmith's love of life, and its pleasures and adventures. He loved the town. He loved the country. He loved the rich. He loved the poor, the crude, the cultured, the pious, and the base. He was a philanthropist. It kept him poor. He was, in all his struggles, ever a patron of literature. No striving aspirant pleaded for his munificence in vain. If his old friends in Ireland came to London, he housed, fed, and clothed them. No beggar in the street could pass without recognition. It was all one to this pure benevolence whether the gift was rendered in gold or copper. The beggar who sought a penny could, no doubt, find room for a guinea, if need be, just as easily in some poor pocket hidden in his deserved rags and tatters. Goldsmith taught that great lesson that, after all, the undeserving most deserve compassion. So completely is Goldsmith bound up in his works, that as you fondly press the cherished volume of all that he gave that was best, the heart of the man beats with yours, and in an immortal friendship his life and hope and spirit are your own. His many and most varied intimacies reveal a genius for companionability, whilst his higher and deeper unions show equally his force in friendship, that great grace which few attain.

[Pg 85]

Everyone became swiftly fond of him and he as fond of everyone. Unlike Socrates and Dr. Johnson, Goldsmith loved the fields and the countryside. He roamed and rambled everywhere. Hardly a county seemed to him quite unknown, from Surrey to Yorkshire. He wandered West: Bath lives hallowed through his visits to the place. With the bright and beautiful Misses Horneck and their widowed mother he went again to France, doubtless often laughingly recalling his earlier travels and their troubles, telling much and hiding more, with the very poverty of the past now proving the rich treasures of the present. All hardships were melted to deep delights in merry reminiscence, Oliver Goldsmith, loving the Horneck girls much as Horace Walpole cherished in his heart the beautiful Misses Berry, had nicknames for these daughters of his gentle hostess, the elder being Little Comedy, and the younger the Jessamy Bride. If ever Goldsmith loved anyone, he loved the Jessamy Bride. The sweet girl was bewitching, gentle, and innocent, bright, and very young, and that chivalrous and tender soul that honoured her with his devotion a prematurely bent and aged man of more than forty summers. Her wifely affections were early destined for another heart. From the beginning, come what may, she could never be Oliver Goldsmith's wife. The Jessamy Bride was a pure and lovely spirit. No poet was ever moved in reverence for a fairer personification of a pure ideal.

[Pg 86]

It was a most stately, graceful, gracious, and fascinating very old lady whom, when years, and many years, had come and gone, Hazlitt met and greeted. Still she remembered and still she revered the loved and moving heart of Oliver Goldsmith. It is his greatness, and it is his glory that his soul could and did appeal to the sublime spirit of pure womanhood. Of none could greater, or more than this be said. Man need not crave for more, or aspire on earth to purer heights. It was beautiful to know, and to be the friend of, and it was divine to be remembered by, the Jessamy Bride. These two made merry when they met. Laughing eyes danced. All was pure, spontaneous revelry. These two were the source and centre of mirth and cheerfulness. Partly he amused, and partly enticed reverence and respect. The outward laughter moved, but depth of life and love drew heart to heart. This sunshine was most fair. As it was, Goldsmith knew the last loneliness of things, and lived a single life and died in solitude. In Oliver Goldsmith, Washington Irving says: "Eminent ability was allied with spotless virtue." He sympathetically suggests how home, wife, and children would have softened those ills that came from solitude and enriched what was at once an abundant, and yet still, in some respects, an impoverished nature.

[Pg 87]

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## LIST OF THE WORKS OF OLIVER GOLDSMITH

[Pg 88]

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[Pg 90]

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[16]

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