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ART. III.—OLIVER GOLDSMITH.[1]

"WHETHER, indeed, we take him as a poet, as a comic writer, or as an historian, he stands in the first class." Such was Johnson's verdict on the power and versatility of Oliver Goldsmith, whose genius he had been amongst the first to recognise, and to whom he had extended a wise and benevolent friendship. A sketch of the life and writings of a man whose works have taken their place as classics in our language, and whose poems are read with ever fresh delight, and are remarkable for their naturalness and grace, may, it is hoped, be acceptable to the readers of THE CHURCHMAN.

Goldsmith has been fortunate in his biographers. His life has been written by Mr. Prior, by Washington Irving, and John Forster. Macaulay has added a sketch of the poet to his other brilliant essays. And very lately a biography by Mr. William Black has appeared in the series entitled "English Men of Letters." But while we are indebted to the diligence of Prior, to the pleasing pen of Washington Irving, to the eminently copious Life by Forster, and to the interesting monograph by Mr. Black, it is a subject of general regret that Dr. Samuel Johnson did not bequeath to posterity a biography of his friend. Lord Macaulay says, and all must agree with him, that "a Life of Goldsmith would have been an inestimable addition to the 'Lives of the Poets.' No man appreciated Goldsmith's writings more fully than Johnson; no man was better acquainted with Goldsmith's character and habits; and no man was more competent to delineate with truth and spirit the peculiarities of a mind in which great powers were found in company with great weaknesses." Still we must be thankful for what we possess; and there is material enough to trace his history from its earliest period onwards through the battle of life, till he was brought by his follies and imprudence to an untimely grave.

Oliver Goldsmith was born at Pallas, in the county of Longford, November 11, 1728. He was of a Protestant and Saxon family, which had been long settled in Ireland. In after-life he was wont to say that he was connected with no less celebrated a personage than Oliver Cromwell, from whom his Christian name was derived. By his father's side, he also claimed kinship with Wolfe, the conqueror of Quebec, whose mother

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[1] "The Life and Times of Oliver Goldsmith." By JOHN FORSTER. London: Chapman & Hall.

"English Men of Letters." Edited by John Morley.—"Goldsmith." By WILLIAM BLACK. Macmillan & Co.

was a Goldsmith. His father, Charles Goldsmith, studied in the reign of Queen Anne at the Diocesan School at Elphin, became attached to the daughter of the schoolmaster, married her, took orders, and settled at Pallas. There he, with difficulty, supported his wife and children on what he could earn—partly as a curate, and partly as a farmer. While Oliver was still a child, his father was presented to the rectory of Kilkenny West, in the county of Westmeath, worth about £200 a year. The family accordingly quitted their cottage for a spacious house near the village of Lissoy. It was here the poet fixed his "Auburn;" here the eye of the child gazed upon the scenes which the mind of the man has clothed with imperishable beauty.

We have from Goldsmith what may be accepted as a sketch of his father's character, and of those elements of it which produced, no doubt, a remarkable effect on his susceptible son. In "The Citizen of the World" there is given, in Letter XXVII., "The History of the Man in Black," whose benevolence, writes Oliver, "seemed to be rather the effect of appetite than of reason." The Rev. Charles Goldsmith is believed to be truly described in these words:—

"My father, the younger son of a good family, was possessed of a small living in the Church. His education was almost his fortune, and his generosity greater than his education. Poor as he was, he had his flatterers—still poorer than himself; for every dinner he gave them, they returned an equivalent in praise, and this was all he wanted. . . . . He told the story of the ivy tree, and that was laughed at; he repeated the jest of the two scholars and one pair of breeches, and the company laughed at that; but the story of Taffy in the sedan-chair was sure to set the table in a roar. Thus his pleasure increased in proportion to the pleasure he gave; he loved all the world, and he fancied all the world loved him. . . . . We were told that universal benevolence was what first cemented society. We were taught to consider all the wants of mankind as our own, to regard the human face divine with affection and esteem. He wound us up to be mere machines of pity, and rendered us incapable of withstanding the slightest impulse, made either by real or fictitious distress; in a word, we were frequently instructed in the art of giving away thousands before we were taught the more necessary qualifications of getting a farthing."

Oliver was taught his letters by a maid-servant, and was sent in his seventh year to a village school, kept by an old quartermaster on half-pay, who professed to teach nothing but "the three R's"—reading, writing, and arithmetic; but who had an inexhaustible fund of stories about ghosts, banshees, and fairies—about the great Rapparee Chief, Baldeary O'Donnell, and galloping Hogan. This man was a true Milesian, and not only spoke the Irish language, but could

pour forth unpremeditated Irish verses. Oliver early became, and through life continued to be, a passionate admirer of Irish music, and especially of the compositions of Carolan, a blind harper, some of the last notes of whose harp he heard.

From Lissoy school and Paddy Byrne Goldsmith was removed in his ninth year. He went to several grammar-schools, where, though he showed a distaste for the exact sciences, he acquired a fair knowledge of the ancient languages. His life at this time seems to have been far from happy. His school experiences were bitter. The shy, ill-favoured, backward boy was early and sadly taught what tyrannies in the large, as in that little world, the strong have to inflict, and what suffering the meek must be prepared to endure. "He was considered by his contemporaries and schoolfellows to be a stupid heavy blockhead, little better than a fool, whom everyone made fun of." His appearance made him a good mark for the ridicule of his companions. His features were harsh even to ugliness. The small-pox, which scourged all Europe at that time, had set its mark on him with more than usual severity. His stature was small, and his limbs ill-put together. Among boys little tenderness is shown to personal defects; and the ridicule excited by poor Oliver's appearance was heightened by a peculiar simplicity, and a disposition to blunder, which he retained to the last. He became the common butt of boys and masters; was pointed out as a fright in the playground, and flogged as a dunce in the schoolroom. Even amongst his friends he was made the subject of derision. "Why, Noll," exclaimed a visitor at Uncle John's, "you are become a fright! When do you mean to get handsome again?" Oliver moved in silence to the window. The speaker, a thoughtless and notorious scapegrace of the Goldsmith family, repeated the question with a worse sneer. "I mean to get better, sir, when you do!" was the boy's retort; and it has delighted his biographer for its quickness of repartee. There was a company one day at a little dance, and the fiddler, being a fiddler who reckoned himself a wit, used Oliver as a subject for his jests. During a pause between two country-dances, the party had been greatly surprised by little Noll quickly jumping up and dancing a *pas seul* impromptu about the room, whereupon, seizing the opportunity of the lad's ungainly look and grotesque figure, the jocose fiddler promptly exclaimed, "Æsop!" A burst of laughter rewarded him, which, however, was rapidly turned the other way by Noll stopping his hornpipe, looking round at his assailant, and giving forth in audible voice, and without hesitation, this couplet, which was thought worth preserving as the first formal effort of his genius:—

"Heralds, proclaim aloud this saying:
See Æsop dancing, and his monkey playing."

Everybody knows the story of that famous "Mistake of a Night," when the young schoolboy, provided with a guinea and a nag, rode up to "the best house" in Ardagh, called for the landlord's company over a bottle of wine at supper, and for a hot cake for breakfast the next morning; and found, when he asked for the bill, that the "best house" was Squire Featherstone's, and not the inn for which he mistook it.

In his seventeenth year, Oliver went up to Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar. The sizars paid nothing for food and tuition, and very little for lodging; but they had to perform some menial offices from which they have long been happily relieved. It was but a poor return for having proved themselves good classical scholars, that they should be compelled to sweep the court, to carry up the dinner to the fellows' table, to change the plates, and pour out the ale of the rulers of the Society.

Goldsmith was quartered in a garret, on the window of which his name, scratched by himself, is still read with interest. The pane of glass has now become an historical relic, and is preserved with care in the college library. His college life was irregular and unhappy. He neglected the studies of the place, stood low at the examinations, was turned down to the bottom of the class for playing the buffoon in the lecture-room, was severely reprimanded for pumping on a constable in the Quadrangle. On one occasion he was caned by a tutor for giving a ball in the attic-story of the college to some gay youths and maidens from the city. When his pocket was empty he composed ballads, for which he received a few shillings, and enjoyed the luxury of fame by listening to the singers in the streets, and the applause of the crowd. On his way home he would bestow the price of his poetic effusions on the first beggar who whined for an alms.

The following anecdote is related by Washington Irving: A friend having gone to call on him one morning, meaning to furnish him with a breakfast, knocked at the door, and was bidden to enter. To his surprise he heard Goldsmith's voice from within his room, proclaiming himself a prisoner, and saying that they must force the door to help him out. His friend did this, and found him so fastened in the ticking of the bed, into which he had taken refuge from the cold, that he could not escape unassisted. Late on the preceding night, unable otherwise to relieve a woman and her five children who implored his charity, and seemed perishing for want of warmth, he had brought out his blankets to the college gate, and given them to her; and to keep himself from the cold he had cut open his bed, and buried himself among the feathers. Attractive as is, at first sight, such an instance of prompt sym-

pathy with distress, we must not unthinkingly be led away by it. "Sensibility," it has been observed, "is not benevolence." It is possible to relieve want from a simply selfish feeling—the desire to escape from pain. There is a benevolence which is unthinking, having nothing to do with either conscience or reflection, and flowing from an inconsiderate impulse. The sight of sorrow may distress the feelings; and the first rising wish may be to get rid of that which so unpleasantly affects us. But have we, in all honesty, a right to give? Have we earned the title to the luxury of supplying the wants of others? Should we not be just before we are generous? Judged by this standard, it is to be feared that poor Oliver had little right to give away even the blankets from his bed to cover the woman and her five little children, though her tale of distress was too much for his kind heart. For while he was so liberal to beggars, he had nothing to satisfy his tailor's importunity, or to pay his butcher's bill. It may sound harsh to point such a moral as this; but is it not well to interpose when anecdotes of this description are told of one in whose character there was much to love, more to compassionate, but less, it is to be feared, to respect?

While Goldsmith was leading at Dublin a life divided between squalid distress and squalid dissipation, his father died, leaving him a mere pittance. The youth obtained his bachelor's degree, and left the university. For two years he dwelt among his friends, and shared the humble dwelling to which his widowed mother had retired. She had removed in her straitened circumstances to a cottage at Ballymahon. He was now in his twenty-first year. It was necessary that he should do something; but he seems to have spent this interval in idleness, playing at cards, singing Irish airs, studying the flute, fishing, otter-hunting in the summer among the rocks and wooded islands of the Inny; and telling ghost-stories by the fire in the winter. He tried five or six professions in turn without success. At the earnest solicitations of his uncle Contarine, he presented himself to the Bishop of Elphin for ordination, when he had reached the age of twenty-three; but he was rejected, some say because he appeared before his lordship in scarlet breeches. His love of personal finery was extreme: he delighted to show himself in the most gay and gaudy colours.

He next became tutor in a gentleman's family; but after a few months he quarrelled with his host, while at cards, and receiving his stipend of £30, he mounted a horse and rode off to Cork with the intention of emigrating to America. He secured his passage, but the wind proving unfavourable, he went on a party of pleasure, whereupon the captain sailed with-

out him; and then, having sold his horse and spent his money, he returned to his widowed mother, hungry and penniless.

He now resolved to study the law; and his generous uncle advanced fifty pounds. With this sum Goldsmith went to Dublin, on his way to London; and there being tempted to enter a gaming-house, lost every shilling. He now thought of medicine. The good uncle again came forward. A small purse was made up, and in his twenty-fourth year he was sent to Edinburgh. This was in the autumn of 1752. At Edinburgh he spent two winters in nominal attendance on lectures, and picked up some superficial knowledge about chemistry and natural history. Thence he went to Leyden (still a pensioner on the bounty of kind Uncle Contarine), with the professed object of studying physic. The generosity of his uncle called forth a characteristic letter of thanks:—

"As I shall not have another opportunity of receiving money from your bounty till my return to Ireland; so I have drawn for the last sum which I hope I shall ever trouble you for—it is twenty pounds: and now, dear Sir, let me here acknowledge the humility of the station in which you found me; let me tell you that I was despised by men, and hateful to myself; poverty, hopeless poverty was my lot, and melancholy was beginning to make me her own—when you—but I stop to inquire how your health goes on."

Goldsmith's career at Leyden was much the same as it had been elsewhere. He studied men and letters more than physic, and contrived to live by teaching English, by borrowing money, and by other expedients. At the end of a year he left the celebrated university without a degree, with the merest smattering of medical knowledge, and with no property but his clothes and his flute. His flute, however, proved a useful friend. He rambled on foot through Flanders, France, and Switzerland, playing tunes which everywhere set the peasantry dancing, and which often procured for him a supper and a bed. He wandered as far as Italy, and he tells us he obtained from the University of Padua, a courtesy "doctor's" degree (M.B.).

So travelled on the truant from place to place, gathering that experience of men and things and foreign lands which his "Traveller" has made immortal. Few have turned their experience of varied lands to so good an account. As he passed from scene to scene, an education was going on; his sympathies were widening, his knowledge being enlarged, and his genius was acquiring a fuller power and more subtle force. To his vagabond life we are indebted for the poem which at once raised him to the rank of a legitimate English classic, and to which Macaulay awards this high praise: "No philosophical poem, ancient or modern, has a plan so noble, and at the same time so simple, as 'The Traveller.'"

In 1756, when twenty-seven years of age, he landed at Dover, without a shilling, and without a friend. In England his flute was not in request, and he was compelled to have recourse to a series of desperate expedients. He turned strolling-player; he went among the London apothecaries, and asked them to let him pound their drugs and spread their plasters; he joined a swarm of beggars which made its nest in Axe Yard; he was for a time usher of a school; became a bookseller's hack; and obtained a medical appointment in the East India Company, but this being speedily revoked, he presented himself at Surgeons' Hall for examination as a mate to a Naval Hospital; and being pronounced unequal even to so humble a post, he found himself a wanderer, without an acquaintance, without the knowledge or comfort of even one kind face, in the lonely, terrible London streets.

So ends what we may term the first period of Goldsmith's life.

Poor Oliver! He lacked strength of purpose, steadiness of principle, and self-control. "That strong, steady disposition which alone makes men great," he avowed himself deficient in. What more he might have achieved early in life, what more he might have accomplished in the future than he did, it is impossible to say. One thing, however, we must all bear in mind: the dowry of genius must not blind us to the weaknesses to which it is too often allied. A worthless, a purposeless life, ought never to be exalted simply because it is associated with talent. The rarer the endowments, the deeper the obligation to consecrate them to noble ends and lofty aims, and the greater the responsibility of abusing or misapplying such Divine gifts. The man of genius is under a greater responsibility than other men to reverence and obey all the laws of God and man. While we frankly acknowledge our debt of gratitude to those who, from the gift and use of "the faculty divine," have offorded us many an hour of innocent pleasure and amusement; have enriched our minds with beautiful thoughts and noble ideas; have charmed us by their humour, or touched us by their pathos; let us, alive to the common rules of morality by which all must be tested, never attempt to gloss over the errors which they committed, or condone the faults of which they were guilty. Genius must be judged by the same rules as dulness: what is folly and imprudence in the one, is equally folly and imprudence in the other. In either case, he that sows to the wind shall reap the whirlwind. There is great truth in the solemn words with which Dr. Johnson concludes his biography of Savage:—

Those who, in confidence of superior capacities or attainments, disregard the common maxims of life, must be reminded that nothing will

supply the want of prudence; that negligence and irregularity long continued, will make knowledge useless, wit ridiculous, and genius contemptible.

We now enter upon Goldsmith's London life, that life which, after many hardships and bitter struggles and depressing difficulties, ended in brilliant fame. Something of his sufferings in the great human wilderness of London, when a stranger and penniless he wandered through its streets, and lodged in its garrets, may be gathered from the following extract from a letter to his brother-in-law:—

You may easily imagine what difficulties I had to encounter, left, as I was, without friends, recommendation, money or impudence, and that in a country where being born an Irishman was sufficient to keep me unemployed. Many in such circumstances would have had recourse to the Friar's cord, or the suicide's halter; but, with all my follies, I had principle to resist the one and resolution to combat the other.

Under the pressure of absolute want, he betook himself to the lowest drudgery of literature. He hired a garret in a miserable court, to which he had to climb from the brink of Fleet Ditch by a dizzy ladder of flagstones called Break-neck Steps. Here, at thirty, he toiled incessantly; and in the six succeeding years he sent to the press articles for reviews, magazines and newspapers, produced children's books, wrote a "History of England," and gave to the world some amusing "Sketches of London Society," in a series of letters purporting to be addressed by a Chinese Traveller to his friends. Stern was the discipline of sorrow to which he was subjected while slowly mounting the ladder of fame.

One result of his distress may be seen in that sympathy with misfortune which was a peculiar characteristic of the grief-taught man. He published in the *Bee*, with the title of "The City Night Piece," an account of a lonely journey through the London streets, where he would wander at night, to console and reassure the misery he could not otherwise give help to. And there he saw many a sad sight, looked on many a sorrow which might well bring tears from eyes "albeit unused to weep," and came into contact with the wretched outcasts of a great and wicked city. "Strangers, wanderers and orphans," cast upon the cold charity of the world; "poor shivering girls," possessed of the fatal gift of beauty, and who lent too ready an ear to the voice which flattered only to betray, thrown by seducers on the cruel streets; and poor homeless creatures, to whom no door was open:—

"Mad from life's history,
Glad to death's mystery,
Swift to be hurled
Anywhere—anywhere out of the world."

Seeing such piteous sights as these, the poor and the suffering were regarded as his clients, and their cause became his own for ever.

His acquaintance with man, and with the sorrows, the passions, the foibles of humanity, his large experience of the world and its ways, give the charm of reality to his delightful volumes. Macaulay thus speaks of Goldsmith as a writer of prose:—

> There have been many greater writers; but perhaps no writer was ever more uniformly agreeable. His style was always pure and easy, and on proper occasions pointed and energetic. His narratives were always amusing, his descriptions always picturesque, his humour rich and joyous, yet not without an occasional touch of amiable sadness. About everything that he wrote, serious or sportive, there was a certain natural grace and decorum hardly to be expected from a man a great part of whose life had been passed among thieves and beggars, street-walkers, and merry-andrews, in those squalid dens which are the reproach of great capitals.

Goldsmith's name gradually became known and the circle of his acquaintance widened. In his new apartments[1] (May, 1761), he gave a supper; and amongst his guests was Dr. Percy, afterwards Bishop of Dromore, who introduced him to Samuel Johnson, then considered the first of living writers. Shortly afterwards he formed a friendship with Reynolds, the first of English painters; and with other men eminent in the walks of literature and art. In 1763 he was one of the nine original members of that celebrated brotherhood which still glories in the name of "The Club," and became the welcome companion of the brightest wits and deepest scholars of the day. The place of meeting was the Turk's Head Tavern, in Gerrard Street, Soho, where, the chair being taken every Monday night by a member in rotation, all were expected to attend and sup together.

Let us look in upon these master-spirits of their age on a winter's evening in the year 1764. Take notice of the company, for men of mark are here.

Who is that strange-looking man with the gigantic body, the huge massy face, seamed with the scars of disease, wearing a brown coat, and black worsted stockings, and a grey wig with scorched foretop, whose hands are dirty, the nails bitten and pared to the quick? See how his eyes and mouth move with convulsive twitches, and the heavy form rolls, as with puffs and snorts the words come forth: "Why, sir!" "What then, sir?"

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[1] He removed from his garret in Green Arbour Court, to more decent lodgings in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, where he occupied two rooms for nearly two years.

"You don't see your way through the question, sir." That is Dr. Samuel Johnson, the author of the *Tatler*, the *Rambler*, and "Rasselas," and of a Dictionary which testifies to inexhaustible patience and diligence, and reveals the treasures of a well-stored mind. He is a man who never writes a line save on the side of virtue and truth, and who has passed through many bitter struggles on his way to fortune and to fame. He is a great and a wise man, a Christian man, moreover; and one who in a time when Hume, Gibbon, and Voltaire are endeavouring to introduce an universal scepticism, stands forth as the champion of religion, and contends earnestly for the truth of the Christian faith.

That young Scotch lawyer, whose silly egotism and impertinent curiosity makes him at once the bore and the laughing-stock of the whole of that brilliant club; who is weak, vain, pushing, and garrulous, who can he be? Now he flatters Johnson; now he catechizes him; anon he puts to him such a question as this: "What would you do, sir, if you were locked up in a tower with a baby?" This is no other than James Boswell, the first of biographers, who has written one of the best books in the world; a book in which the great Johnson eats, drinks, walks and talks before us, and yet who was himself weak, foolish, and contemptible.

That curiously gentleman-like man, with a speaking-trumpet at his ear, who talks well, and with a gracious and diffused good-humour smiles blandly upon all, that is Sir Joshua Reynolds, the celebrated painter, and who now in his fortieth year is already in the receipt of nearly £6,000 per annum.

Yonder small, agile, restless man, with a dark eye full of genius and expression; whose ready wit is rewarded by peals of laughter, and whose consummate knowledge of stage effect gives a zest to his anecdotes, is David Garrick, the great tragic actor, who melts his audience to tears as he depicts the sorrows of Othello, and who makes them shrink as the white-haired Lear curses his ungrateful daughters.

And who is that dressed in the gaudiest of colours, claret coat, sky-blue vest, black velvet pantaloons, and with a silver-laced hat under his arm; whose face is plain, the features harsh and pitted with small-pox, and whose figure is low and ungainly? That is Oliver Goldsmith himself, whose conversation, a strange contrast to his writings, is silly, empty, and noisy. Horace Walpole described him as an inspired idiot. At a club meeting held at the St. James's Coffee House, a party of his acquaintance wrote epitaphs on his imaginary death. Amongst others, Garrick wrote the following couplet:—

> "Here lies poor Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
> Who wrote like an angel, and talk'd like poor Poll."

There, too, is the cold, polished, and sceptical Gibbon, the greatest historian, and Jones, the greatest linguist of the age. And there is Bennet Langton, distinguished by his skill in Greek literature, and by the sanctity of his life; and there is Topham Beauclerc, renowned for his knowledge of the gay world, his fastidious taste, and his sarcastic wit.

But who is that, greater than all, dividing at the early age of thirty-three the supremacy over such a society with Johnson? Listen to him as he pours forth in one constant strain the stores of argument and eloquence he is thinking to employ on a wider stage. Hear and be amazed at the variety of his knowledge and its practical application; the fund of astonishing imagery; the ease of philosophic illustration, the overpowering copiousness of words, in which he has never had a rival. That is Edmund Burke, one of the wisest and greatest men Ireland has produced; before whom lies a grand political career, and who will shortly earn a name as an eloquent and brilliant statesman of imperishable fame.

Such were the men who, as members of "The Club," gradually became a formidable power in the commonwealth of letters; whose verdicts pronounced on new books were sufficient to sell off a whole edition in a day, or to condemn the sheets to the service of the trunk-maker and the pastry-cook.

It has been already said that Goldsmith's conversation was a great contrast to his writings. "Sir," said Johnson, "rather than not speak he will talk of what he knows himself to be ignorant, which can only end in exposing him." "He could not conceal what was uppermost in his mind," says Davies. "He blurted it out," says Johnson, "to see what became of it." And yet Boswell himself admits that he was often very fortunate in his witty contests, even when he entered the lists with Johnson.[1]

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[1] An instance was remembered by Reynolds. He, Johnson, and Goldsmith were together one day, when the latter said he could write a very good fable: mentioned the simplicity which that kind of composition requires; and observed that in most fables the animals introduced seldom talked in character. "For instance," said he, "the fable of the little fishes, who saw birds fly over their heads, and envying them, petitioned Jupiter to be changed into birds." "The skill," he continued, "consists in making them talk like little fishes." At this point he observed Johnson shaking his sides and laughing, whereupon he made this home-thrust: "Why, Mr. Johnson, this is not so easy as you seem to think; for if you were to make little fishes talk, they would talk like whales." On one occasion they had at supper, rumps and kidneys. Dr. Johnson expresses his satisfaction with "the pretty little things," but observes that one must eat a good many of them before being satisfied." "Aye, but how many of them," asks Goldsmith, "would reach to the moon?" Johnson expresses his ignorance, and indeed remarks that that would exceed even Gold-

We now behold Goldsmith slowly mounting from obscurity to fame. He removed from the apartments in Wine Office Court to a new lodging on the library staircase of the Temple. This change took place in an early month of 1764.

Still all was not bright with Goldsmith yet. He had to struggle on with the ills of poverty. Towards the close of 1764, his rent was so long in arrear, that his landlady pressed him for payment within doors, while the bailiffs beset him without. The debtor in his distress sent a messenger to Johnson, and Johnson sent back the messenger with a guinea, and promised to follow speedily. He came, and found that Goldsmith had changed the guinea, and had got a bottle of madeira and a glass before him. Johnson put the cork into the bottle, and began to talk to him on the means of procuring money. Goldsmith said that he had a novel ready for the press. Johnson looked into it, saw its merit, and taking it to a bookseller sold it for £60. He brought the money to Goldsmith, who discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for using him so ill. The novel which was thus ushered into the world was the charming "Vicar of Wakefield."

But before the "Vicar of Wakefield" appeared in print, came the great crisis of Goldsmith's literary life. In Christmas week, 1764, he published a poem entitled "The Traveller." It was the first work to which he put his name, and "it at once," to use Macaulay's words, "raised him to the rank of a legitimate English classic." The opinion of the most skilful critics was that nothing finer had appeared in verse since the fourth book of "The Dunciad." Johnson pronounced it a poem to which it would not be easy to find anything equal since the death of Pope. The verse has a sweet and mellow flow, while the diction, rich and choice as it is, is at the same time exquisitely plain. The whole poem with its appropriate imagery, its deep harmony of colouring, its happy and playful tenderness, and its philosophic tone, appeals at once and directly to the heart. Macaulay thus describes its plan:—

> An English wanderer, seated on a crag among the Alps, near the point where the great countries meet, looks down on the boundless prospect, reviews his long pilgrimage, recalls the variety of scenery, of climate, of government, of religion, of national character, which he has observed, and comes to the conclusion, just or unjust, that our happiness depends little on political institutions, and much on the temper and regulation of our minds.

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smith's calculation; when the ready humourist observes, "Why, one, sir, if it were long enough." Johnson confessed himself beaten: "Well, sir, I have deserved it—I should not have provoked so foolish an answer by so foolish a question."

While the fourth edition of "The Traveller" was on the counters of the booksellers, "The Vicar of Wakefield" appeared, and rapidly obtained a popularity which it maintains to the present day. No doubt the story has some faults of construction—that it contains some improbabilities; but, nevertheless, the charm of the book is such, that in reading it we remember the beauties, while we overlook the faults. Its pages glow with mingled humour, wit, and pathos; a tender, and true, and wise vein of thought runs freshly through the narrative; and, underlying the incidents of the story, there is a vein of reflection fitted to make us patient in suffering—to give us an undoubting reliance on the providence of God, while it renders us charitable to the faults and infirmities of others. Who that has ever read the book can forget the hero of the fable, Dr. Primrose, the pastor, parent, and husband; his helpmate, with her motherly cunning and housewifely prudence, triumphing in her lamb's-wool and gooseberry-wine; Olivia, preparing herself for the arduous task of converting a rakish lover by studying the controversy between Robinson Crusoe and Friday; Moses, his hat and white feather, his sale of Dobbin the colt, and his purchase of the gross of green spectacles? There, too, was the Squire, proving from Aristotle that relatives are related; the rosy Flamborough girls, with their red top-knots; the sharper, and his knowledge of the world; Mr. Burchall, with his plain common sense; and Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs, whose pretensions are summed up in that expressive monosyllable—"Fudge."[1]

The success which had attended Goldsmith as a novelist emboldened him to try his fortune as a dramatist. He wrote "The Good-natured Man"—a piece which had a worse fate than it deserved. Garrick refused to produce it at Drury Lane. It was acted at Covent Garden, but coldly received. The author, however, cleared by his benefit-nights, and by the sale of the copyright, no less than £500—five times as much as he had made by "The Traveller" and "The Vicar of Wakefield" together.

In 1770 appeared "The Deserted Village." Its success was

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[1] Sir Walter Scott says: "We read 'The Vicar of Wakefield' in youth and age; we return to it again and again, and bless the memory of an author who contrives so well to reconcile us to human nature." Goethe, the great German poet and philosopher, declared in his eighty-first year that it had been his delight at twenty; that it had formed part of his education, and influenced his tastes and feelings throughout life; that he had recently read it over again with renewed delight; and Schlegel, the celebrated German critic and scholar, recorded his opinion that the gem of European works of fiction is "The Vicar of Wakefield."

instant and decisive. It ran through several editions in a few months. It was published on May 26, and on August 16 a fifth edition appeared. When it was read to Gray, he listened to it with fixed attention, and soon exclaimed, "This man is a poet!" "What true and pretty pastoral images!" exclaimed Burke, years after the poet's death, "has Goldsmith in his 'Deserted Village!' They beat all: Pope, and Phillips, and Spenser too, in my opinion." Goethe tells us the transport with which the circle he now lived in hailed it, when they found themselves once more in another beloved Wakefield; and with what zeal he at once set to work to translate it into German! We are reminded by Forster, in his "Biography of Goldsmith," that it is beautifully said by Campbell, that "fiction in poetry is not the reverse of truth, but her soft and enchanted resemblance;" and this ideal beauty of nature has seldom been united with so much sober fidelity as in the groups and scenery of "The Deserted Village."

Macaulay finds fault with this poem for two reasons. In the first place the theory is false, and is opposed to true political economy. But is this judgment just? Goldsmith only decries the inroads of that monopolizing wealth which drives the peasant to emigration, and traces much of the sorrows of the poor to "trade's proud empire," which has so often proved a transient glory and an enervating good. He laments the state of society, "where wealth accumulates, and men decay." But though the accumulation of wealth has not brought about man's diminution, nor is "trade's proud empire" threatened with decay; yet the lesson Goldsmith seeks to teach can never be thrown away. He rebukes that selfish spirit of luxury and pride which, imitating the pomp and solitude of feudal abodes, without their hospitality and protection, has surrounded itself with parks and pleasure-grounds, and indignantly "spurned the cottage from the green." "It is a melancholy thing to stand alone in one's own country," said the Lord Leicester who built Holkham, when complimented on the completion of that princely dwelling. "I look round—not a house is to be seen but mine; I am the giant of Giant Castle, and have eat up all my neighbours."

The second fault with which Macaulay charges this poem is, that it is made up of incongruous parts:—

> The village in its happy days is a true English village. The village in its decay is an Irish village. The felicity and the misery, which Goldsmith has brought close together, belong to two different countries, and to two different stages in the progress of society. He had surely never seen in his native island such a moral paradise—such a seat of plenty, content, and tranquillity, as his Auburn. He had assuredly never seen in England all the inhabitants of such a paradise turned out of

their homes in one day, and forced to emigrate in a body to America. The hamlet he had probably seen in Kent; the ejectment he had probably seen in Munster; but by joining the two he has produced something which never was, and never will be, seen in any part of the world.

It is with great diffidence that one ventures to differ from so masterly a critic as Macaulay, yet must a lance be broken with him here.

On the broad question of poetry we would ask, is the poet obliged to observe all the unities of time, place, and action? Was Shakespeare himself so bound? In "As You Like It," for instance, the persons of the play, if names go for anything, are French, the scene is laid in France; and yet what can be more English than the scene: the forest of Arden—and yet not the Warwickshire Arden—with its green boughs and shimmering leaves, its grassy knolls, and murmuring streams where the

> "Poor sequestered stag,
> That from the hunter's aim had ta'en a hurt,
> Did come to languish: augmenting the swift brook
> With its big round tears"?

Is the poet to describe nothing but what is seen in real life? Must his poems be literal transcripts of what passes before the eye; or selecting his own incidents and scenery, may he not leave this dull region of earth for the sunny realms of fancy and imagination? But narrowing the question to matter-of-fact, and granting, as must be granted, that everything in the poem is English, the feelings, incidents, descriptions and allusions, have there been in England no improvements made at the expense of the population, no dismantled cottages, no ruined hearths, as in Ireland and in Scotland?

However, the popularity of the poem is a sufficient vindication of its truth to nature, as well as of its feeling, its tenderness, its pathos, and harmonious versification. The village inn; the busy mill; the fence; the furze; the hawthorn shade; the decent church; the simple pastor; the schoolmaster; the innocent joys of the country, rise up before us as we read.

And here it may be well to say a few words on Goldsmith's claims as a poet. A poet he was, and a true one. In the power of expression; in melody; in a polished versification, he is hardly surpassed by any singer. Though he was an Irishman, all regard him as an English poet; and no poem, whether Auburn was in reality Lissoy or not, could be more thoroughly English in form and feeling than "The Deserted Village." As we read it we seem to see

> "The blossom'd furze unprofitably gay;"

to catch the smell of the hawthorn bush, white with may,

under whose shade the rustic lovers sit, to hear the village murmur, the milk-maid's song, and the voices of

> "The playful children just let loose from school."

Nor these sounds alone do we hear, but also

> "The watch-dog's voice that bayed the whispering wind,
> And the loud laugh that spoke the vacant mind."

We turn with pleasure from much of our modern poetry, with its artifice and obscurity, and straining after effect, to a poem so simple and so natural, so graceful and tender, so melodious and so pathetic, as "The Deserted Village." It is like leaving a heated room and the glare of the gas for the cool morning air, with the scent of flowers and the song of birds, the full-leaved trees, and the blue sky.

While Goldsmith was writing "The Deserted Village" and "She Stoops to Conquer,"[1] he was employed on works of a very different kind—works from which he derived little reputation, but much profit. He compiled for the use of schools a "History of Rome," by which he made £300; a "History of England," by which he made £600; a "History of Greece," for which he received £250; a "Natural History," for which the bookseller covenanted to pay him 800 guineas. Though Goldsmith's knowledge was not very accurate, and he committed some strange blunders, yet he was, as Macaulay acknowledges, "an unequalled master of the arts of selection and condensation;" and it is well said that, "few writers have done more to make the first steps in the laborious road to knowledge easy and pleasant."

Goldsmith was at this time a prosperous man; his fame was great, and continually rising. He changed his abode, and purchased chambers in Brick Court, Middle Temple, for which he gave £400. He furnished the rooms handsomely, and we hear of Wilton carpets; blue morine-covered mahogany sofas, chimney-glasses, Pembroke and card tables, and tasteful book-shelves. Exactly below Goldsmith's were the chambers of Blackstone: and the rising lawyer, at this time finishing the fourth volume of his "Commentaries," is reported to have made frequent complaint of the distracting social noises that went on above. Very likely while Blackstone was deep in the mysteries of the feudal system, his investigations were interrupted by the merry companions of our poet singing lustily, "The Three Jolly Pigeons."

[1] In 1773 Goldsmith produced his second play at Covent Garden, "She Stoops to Conquer." On this occasion his genius triumphed. The broad humour of this comedy, or rather farce, in five acts, kept the audience in a constant roar of laughter.

Poor Goldsmith soon exhausted the profits of his writings, and began a system of waste which involved him in difficulties he never surmounted. "He spent twice as much as he had," says Macaulay. "He wore fine clothes, gave dinners of several courses, paid court to venal beauties. He had also, it should be remembered to the honour of his heart, though not of his head, a guinea, or five, or ten, according to the state of his purse, for any tale of distress, true or false." Macaulay also accuses him of being from boyhood a gambler, and "at once the most sanguine and the most unskilful of gamblers." This charge Forster declares to be founded on a trifling indiscretion; and let us fain hope that the friend and companion of Johnson, Burke, and Reynolds, was not guilty of this fatal vice.

It may be well to record, in this place, the charm thrown over poor Goldsmith's life by his friendship with Mrs. Horneck, Captain Keene Horneck's widow, and her two charming daughters—at the time of his introduction to them, girls of nineteen and seventeen. The eldest, Catherine, "Little Comedy" as she was called, was engaged to a Mr. Bunbury, second son of a baronet of an old family in Suffolk, and one of the cleverest amateur artists of his day. The youngest, Mary, to whom was given the loving nickname of the "Jessamy Bride," exerted strange fascination over Goldsmith. "Heaven knows," says Forster, "what impossible dreams may at times have visited the awkward, unattractive man of letters!" He bought his finest clothes to figure at their country house at Burton; he wrote them droll verses, and had in their society many a pleasant holiday. The sisters heartily liked him: cheered him and pitied him; loved him and laughed at him; and the happiest hours of the later years of his life were passed in their presence. In the kind and friendly company of Mrs. Horneck and her fair daughters, he made a visit to Paris, which he has described in a letter of most pleasant humour written to Sir Joshua Reynolds.

His later years were clouded by sorrow, and difficulties, and distress. His improvidence involved him in embarrassments from which he sought to extricate himself by temporary expedients to meet his debts, to escape from bailiffs and reproachful creditors. He obtained advances from booksellers, by promising to execute works which he never began. But at length this source of supply failed. He owed more than £2,000, and he saw no hope of being able to pay it. His spirits and health gave way. He was attacked by a nervous fever, which he thought himself competent to treat. Rejecting the advice of medical men, he prescribed for himself. The remedies he took aggravated the malady. He was induced to call in physicians of skill, but still his weakness and restlessness con-

tinued. He could get no sleep: he could take no food. It now occurred to Dr. Turton, who attended him, to put a pregnant question to his patient. "Your pulse," he said, "is in greater disorder than it should be from the degree of fever which you have. Is your mind at ease?" "No, it is not," was Goldsmith's melancholy answer. They were the last words of the dying man. None sadder could be spoken in that hour when heart and flesh fail. He died on the 4th of April, 1774, having then lived five months beyond his forty-fifth year. When Burke was told, he burst into tears. Reynolds was so moved by the news that he left his painting-room, and did not re-enter it that day. The staircase in Brick Court is said to have been filled with mourners: women without a home, with no friend but him they had come to weep for; outcasts of that great, solitary, wicked city, to whom he had never forgotten to be kind and charitable. Other mourners he had, two. His coffin was re-opened at the request of Miss Horneck and her sister—the "Jessamy Bride"—that a lock might be cut off from his hair. It was in the possession of the latter when she died, after nearly seventy years. She lived quite into our time. Hazlitt saw her an old lady, but beautiful still, in Northcote's painting-room, and she told the eager critic how proud she always was that Goldsmith had admired her.

Goldsmith was laid in the churchyard of the Temple; but the spot was not marked by any inscription, and is now forgotten.

Reynolds suggested that Goldsmith should be honoured by a monument in Westminster Abbey; and the spot selected was over the south door in Poets' Corner. It consisted of a medallion portrait and tablet. Nollikens was the sculptor, and, two years after Goldsmith's death, the inscription was written by Johnson. His great friend inscribed a touching and beautiful epitaph in Latin upon the stone which bears his name. It contains the famous line:

Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit.[1]

Such was the life, and such the death, of a poet whom the world regards with gentle love and pity, with admiration for his sportive humour, the grace of his diction, and the beauty of his style; well disposed, if it could, to forget the errors and faults of such a man. The story of his life and of his death is very sad.

There can be no doubt that the great want in his character—that which lay at the root of all that we must deplore in his life—that which clouded the death-bed from which to the

[1] He left no species of writing untouched by his pen, nor touched any that he did not embellish.

question, "Is your mind at ease?" came the melancholy response, "No, it is not!" was the want of a deep and solid religious faith. True, he could paint, and that beautifully, the Christian pastor, all whose "serious thoughts had rest in heaven"—at whose control

> "Despair and anguish fled the struggling soul;"

but, alas! like many a preacher, "he recked not his own read"; and was like the sign-post on a road, which points, not leads the way.

But I would not "draw his frailties from their dread abode." It is unwillingly and with regret that they are touched on at all. "Let not the frailties of Oliver Goldsmith be remembered," said Johnson: "he was a very great man."

When we think of him let it be kindly, as of the gentle moralist, the consummate poet, the genial-hearted Irishman, full of affection and pity, of guileless simplicity, and of the most romantic if not impulsive and thoughtless benevolence. Nor let us forget his many struggles; his years of unremitting drudgery and desolate toil; his life that had never known the aids and pleasures of a home, or those sweet domestic influences which might have saved him from temptations in which he was ensnared. It should be remembered, too, that in an age of general sycophancy, when authors fawned upon the great, Goldsmith dedicated his three principal works to no lordly or courtly patron, but the one to his brother, the other two to Reynolds and Johnson; that in a time when literary men thought it no shame to write for hire, Goldsmith scorned to prostitute his pen to party ends, and refused the proffered bribes; that in a period when wit often took the form of coarseness and ribaldry, Goldsmith wrote nothing to offend the purest or most delicate mind.

Before leaving him, let us give a glance at his cenotaph within the grand walls of the solemn Abbey. Not far from his medallion portrait in "Poets' Corner," are the monuments which commemorate Rowe, and Thomson, and Garrick. Here, too, is a monument to Gay, the author of the famous "Beggars' Opera," the fables written for the education of the Duke of Cumberland, and the popular ballad of "Black-Eyed Susan." It is painful to think that it was at his own desire that Pope placed these words beneath his bust:—

> "Life is a jest, and all things show it:
> I thought it once, but now I know it."

The lines are surely out of harmony with the place.

The ashes of the great Samuel Johnson, and of the witty and eloquent Sheridan, rest near; and the wise and eloquent Isaac Barrow sleeps not far away. There, from his pedestal,

the grave and thoughtful Addison looks down; and there is the fine statue of Thomas Campbell, the poet of the "Pleasures of Hope," the pedestal bearing the lines from "The Lost Man":

"This spirit shall return to Him
Who gave its heavenly spark;
Yet think not, Sun, it shall be dim
When thou thyself art dark!
No! it shall live again and shine
In bliss unknown to beams of thine
By Him recallèd to breath
Who captive led captivity,
Who robb'd the grave of victory,
And took the sting from death!"

And there, last but not least, nay, first and greatest of all, the bard of Avon, the immortal William Shakespeare, who opens before our eyes a scroll with the sublime words:—

"The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like the baseless fabric of a vision,
Leave not a wreck behind."

These are earth's mighty ones—illustrious names on the beadroll of fame—men to be remembered so long as England is a nation, and the English language is spoken. And when wandering through the long-drawn aisles of the old Abbey, and gazing on the monuments of poets, and statesmen, and orators, and historians, we can thank God who has given such gifts unto men. Who can estimate the influence that they have exercised over the moral and intellectual life of the country; or how much their genius has contributed to the English language its majesty, its beauty, and its force? Truly, of the poets, amongst whom Goldsmith occupies a high rank, we may say in the words of Wordsworth:—

"Blessings be with these, and eternal praise,
Who gave us nobler lives, and nobler cares—
The poets, who on earth have made us heirs
Of truth and pure delight by heavenly lays!"

CHARLES D. BELL.