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The Literary Versatility of Oliver Goldsmith

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THE LITERARY VERSATILITY
OF
OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Francis Kinkel, S.M.

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requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in

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PREFACE

In his revision of the epitaph, Dr. Johnson had inscribed it to Oliver Goldsmith, "who left scarcely any kind of writing untouched, and touched nothing that he did not adorn." This tribute is the basis of the present study. The title, The Literary Versatility of Oliver Goldsmith, signifies: 1. that Goldsmith wrote the most varied types of literature; 2. that he contributed to each type a distinctive quality.

No attempt is made to determine his position in the various fields of literary work into which he entered. The definition of the term "versatility" as offered hardly includes such ranking.

Goldsmith is considered under five aspects: as compiler, as essayist, as poet, as novelist, and as dramatist. These aspects are not arranged haphazardly. In agreement with an opinion of Austin Dobson, they are listed in the order of climax, leading from the least important to the most worthy contributions of Goldsmith to English literature.

CHAPTER I

THE VERSATILITY OF GOLDSMITH

Shortly after Samuel Johnson had submitted an epitaph for his friend Goldsmith to the members of the Club, he received the following answer.

We, the circumscribers, having read with great pleasure, an intended epitaph for the monument of Dr. Goldsmith, which considered abstractly, appears to be for elegant composition and masterly style, in every respect worthy of the pen of its learned author; are yet of the opinion that the character of the deceased as a writer, particularly as a poet, is perhaps not delineated with all the exactness which Dr. Johnson is capable of giving it. We therefore, with deference to his superior judgment, humbly request that he would at least take the trouble of revising it, and of making such additions and alterations as he shall think proper on a further perusal. But if we might venture to express our wishes, they would lead us to request that he would write the epitaph in English, rather than in Latin; as we think the memory of so eminent an English writer ought to be perpetuated in the language to which his words are likely to be so lasting an ornament which we also know to have been the opinion of the late Doctor himself. 1

This very polite letter bore the names of twelve members of the famous organization, among which were those of Edmund Burke, Joseph Warton, Edward Gibbon, Joshua Reynolds, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Dr. Johnson must

1. Temple Scott, Oliver Goldsmith Bibliographically and Biographically Considered, pp. 335-336.

have chuckled when he read the signatures for they were arranged in a round robin. The club members had remembered that they were criticizing the work of the Ursa Major who could growl savagely. He took the trouble though of revising the substance of his original effort, but he would not compromise on its remaining in Latin. So it stands on the memorial to Goldsmith in Westminster Abbey. The translation given by Temple Scott, however, will be more readily serviceable.

The Epitaph
Of Oliver Goldsmith
Poet, Naturalist, Historian,
who left scarcely any kind of writing
untouched,
and touched nothing that he did not adorn:
Whether smiles were to be stirred
or tears,
Commanding our emotions, yet a gentle master:
In genius lofty, lively, versatile,
in style weighty, clear, engaging---
The memory in this monument is cherished
By the love of Companions
the faithfulness of Friends
the reverence of Readers.
He was born in Ireland,
at a place called Pallas,
(in the parish) of Forney, (and county) of Longford
on the 29th Nov. 1731.
Trained in letters at Dublin.
Died in London
4th April, 1774

2

The epitaph is a climax to the scattered tributes of high praise which Johnson paid to his friends. All of these, recorded by Boswell, are variations of the theme that whatever Goldsmith wrote, he wrote better than any other man.³ The mention of Boswell is a reminder of his own tribute to Goldsmith. The Scotchman was unable to understand the Irishman as the early pages of his famous biography show. Only in the fifth volume, years after the death of Goldsmith, does he regard him with a healthy eye. During the course of a conversation with Johnson, Boswell mildly protested that Goldsmith had acquired more fame than all the sub-officers of the last war. His companion met the attack instantly. "Why, Sir, you will find ten thousand fit to do what they did, before you find one who does what Goldsmith has done. You must consider that a thing is valued according to its rarity. A pebble that paves the street is in itself more useful than the diamond upon a lady's finger." Boswell was magnanimous enough to wish that "our friend Goldsmith had heard this."⁴

Austin Dobson relates an instance that shows Johnson again in the role of defender. A group, gathered at

3. Boswell's Life of Johnson, Vol. III, p. 253.

4. Ibid., p. 137.

Joshua Reynolds', were belittling the work of Goldsmith. Johnson rose with great dignity, looked at them squarely, and, with the satire of which he was capable, remarked, "If nobody was suffered to abuse poor Goldy but those who could write as well, he would have few censors!"⁵

The noble estimates of Johnson were not the result solely of the intimate friendship between the two men. Critics who followed him proved this by praising similarly. Such important students of Goldsmith as Stephen Gwynn, Temple Scott, Alfred Edward Newton, Augustine Birrell, and Austin Dobson express a firm belief in his versatility. With the benefit of a perspective of more than a hundred years, they have been enabled to analyze the Goldsmith writing disinterestedly. They have read his compilations, his essays, his poetry, his novel, and his dramas, and have all come to the conclusion which Dobson adopted that Goldsmith was definitely a great writer, one who had attained an unassailable position in English literature.

Apart from mere hack work and compilation---hack work and compilation which, in most cases, he all but lifted to the level of a fine art---he wrote some of the best familiar verse in the language. In an age barren of poetry, he wrote two didactic

5. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 200-201.

poems, which are still among the memories of the old, as they are among the first lessons of the young. He wrote a series of essays, which, for style and individuality, fairly hold their own between the best work of Addison and Steele on the one hand, and the best work of Charles Lamb on the other. He wrote a domestic novel, unique in kind, and as cosmopolitan as "Robinson Crusoe." Finally, he wrote two excellent plays, one of which, "She Stoops to Conquer," still stands in the front rank of the few popular masterpieces of English comedy. 6

All this, as Stephen Gwynn points out, was done within
7
some fifteen years.

On the other hand, there have been critical opinions that have accepted Goldsmith's versatility with greater reserve. Of these, the judgments of Macaulay and Leslie Stephen were the most skeptical. Leigh Hunt would not grant eminence to Goldsmith in the field of poetry, but he recognized his prose as of the highest quality. 8 These latter men hardly deserve to be called students of Goldsmith in the same sense as the term is applied to Austin Dobson. As is well known, Macaulay's criticism frequently is under suspicion. In confirming his opinion of Goldsmith therefore, Stephen incurs the same blame. Leigh Hunt, moreover, would hardly be accepted as the highest type of critic.

To this discussion of versatility, Goldsmith unwittingly contributed by reason of a letter which he wrote to

6. Ibid., pp. 201-202.

7. Oliver Goldsmith, p. 2.

8. Classic Tales, Serious and Lively, p. 80.

his cousin Bob Bryanton in 1758. Bob evidently had not written to him for some time, and Goldsmith twits him for this neglect.

' . . . Do you know whom you have offended? . . . There will come a day, no doubt it will---I beg you may live a couple of hundred years longer only to see the day---when the Scaligers and Daciers will vindicate my character, give learned editions of my labours, and bless the times with copious comments on the text. You shall see how they will fish up the heavy scoundrels who disregard me now, or will then offer to cavil at my productions. How will they bewail the times that suffered so much genius to lie neglected . . . ' 9

Those words were a literary prophecy which has been fulfilled to the letter.

Johnson's epitaph contains two lines which immediately concern the problem of the versatility of Goldsmith. These lines will make convenient headings under which to place the remainder of the present discussion.

The first of these reads "who left scarcely any kind of writing untouched." If that were the sole meaning of versatility, little discussion would be necessary.

As hack-writer, Goldsmith produced most varied material. There were, first of all, translations, the Memoirs of a Protestant, condemned to the Galleys of France for

9. Katharine Balderston, The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 38-40.

his Religion and Formey's Concise History of Philosophy. He edited two books of poetry, Poems for Young Ladies in 1766 and Beauties of English Poesy a year later. In the field of biography, he produced lives of Voltaire, Beau Nash, Parnell, and Lord Viscount Bolingbroke. He attempted two branches of history, political and natural. In the former he compiled a History of Mecklenburgh, two histories of England, one a History of England in a series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son, the other a History of England, a Roman history, an abridgment of this same work, a Grecian history, and seven volumes of Plutarch's Lives. His nature study is the eight volume content of An History of the Earth and Animated Nature. Criticism was one of his principal duties as hack for Griffiths of the Monthly Review. Preface writing too was another task which he frequently performed.

To the field of the essay, Goldsmith contributed handsomely. First of all, there were the articles that eventually constituted The Bee, The Citizen of the World, and the Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe. Then there must be added the scattered essays which were published in the various periodicals of the time. In the unearthing of these, incidentally, there appears to be further work, as the research of Ronald

10 Crane and Arthur Friedman 11 would indicate.

The Deserted Village and The Traveller were the chief efforts of Goldsmith in poetry. The Haunch of Venison, Retaliation, and The Hermit as well as shorter pieces of occasional verse merit inclusion, however, in a list of his poetical offerings.

Novel writing has gained by The Vicar of Wakefield.

To the history of the drama, Goldsmith has added principally by The Good-Natured Man and She Stoops to Conquer. Minor efforts of his in this field are not worth noting other than as the indications which they give of his lively dramatic interest.

The history of letter-writing would be enhanced by an inclusion of the notes sent by Goldsmith. Katharine Balderston's collection of his letters is an engaging book.

Such an itemized list of writings is quite formidable. Without a doubt, it supports admirably the first part of Johnson's tribute. The term "versatility," however, includes the second half of that tribute also, and a necessary analysis of the statement that Goldsmith "touched nothing that he did not adorn" follows.

10. New Essays by Oliver Goldsmith.

11. Studies in The Canon and Sources of Goldsmith.

Most critics identify this adornment with the style of Goldsmith. It can be analyzed into component parts, each of which is clearly understandable. To appreciate its elegance, its simplicity, its pathos and sentiment, its humor, and its purity is not at all difficult. The combination of these elements, however, possesses a distinct charm and genius that is difficult of comprehension. That charm is of course peculiarly Goldsmith. So individual is it that, in the opinion of Saintsbury, it defies synthetic imitation. "Even Thackeray, who could write, if not like Addison, like Steele, and also like a contemporary of Goldsmith, Horace Walpole, so as to deceive the very elect if he had attempted the trick, never attempted to imitate Goldsmith, and merely resembles him in perfect naturalness."¹² The limited field of incidents, characters, and feelings about which Goldsmith wrote, most of them wholly personal, lends naturally to this charm.

His style suggests that of other writers of whom he imitated the good and avoided the evil. Leigh Hunt sets up three comparisons. Like Addison, Goldsmith writes easily; unlike him, he wrote strongly and decisively. He is similar to Swift in perspicuity of writing, but he adds elegance to this perspicuity. He had been influenced by the sonority

12. The Peace of the Augustans, p. 211.

of Johnson, yet he never made it his business to study
 grandness or loftiness.¹³

A helpful study of the mechanical elements of the style of Goldsmith has been made. It is remarked that his sentences and paragraphs evidently owe a debt to Johnson. Probably too he observed the rules of grammar more strictly as a result of the doctor's insistence on this matter. The balanced sentence is a third unmistakable Johnsonian influence. On the other hand, Goldsmith is full of the short, pointed saying which is possibly a result of his intimacy with French literature. Such lines as "Our greatest glory is, not in never falling, but in rising every time we fall," and "Were angels to write books, they would never write folios" are typical. His vocabulary shows a wide command of the language, the outcome largely of his work in so many different fields of literature. This copiousness, however, does not admit of polite slang. A combination of simplicity and purity always marks his
¹⁴
 diction.

Previously, mention was made of the component parts of the Goldsmith style. They deserve thorough treatment. Accordingly, they will be discussed in the following order:

13. Op. cit., p. 56.

14. William Minto, A Manual of English Prose Literature, pp. 465-468.

1) ease or elegance; 2) individuality or personality; 3) simplicity; 4) sentiment and sympathy; 5) purity or innocence; 6) humor. Most of these will be touched upon again in an analysis of the tone of The Vicar of Wakefield. It is necessary, however, for the sake of completeness, to include this more general study here since all of the writings, not solely the novel of Goldsmith, partake of the above qualities.

Boswell recorded that on a certain occasion General Paoli, one of the Johnsonian group, remarked admiringly: "Monsieur Goldsmith est comme la mer, qui jette des perles et beaucoup d'autres belles choses sans s'en appercevoir" which "Goldy" accepted with a "Tres bien dit at tres elegamment."¹⁵ All critics witness to these pearls which Goldsmith cast about so unconsciously. The fact that they were cast unconsciously is, incidentally, the source of their charm. Garrick, with whom Goldsmith had a number of heated arguments, had to confess to his elegant writing in his satirical epitaph.

Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
Who wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll.

Temple Scott recalls an instance in which Johnson offered his usual defense of Goldsmith to a group who spoke

15. Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 224.

slightingly of his literary style. "Is there a man now living who can pen an essay with such ease and elegance as he?"¹⁶

This matter of elegance and ease raises the old question of whether the artist is born or made. Goldsmith was born and made. His verses underwent a continual polishing until he produced precisely the effect that he wanted. Necessity forced him to be less careful with his prose, but there is little doubt that, if he had had the time, he would never have done slipshod work in this field. An ideal of elegant writing existed within him which he owed to a rebuke written him by his brother Henry in answer to a slovenly schoolboy's letter. "Dear Oliver, the less you have to say, there is the more reason that you should try to say it well."¹⁷

An interesting clue to the elegance of Goldsmith is suggested by a critic in the Edinburgh Review. He recalls Oliver's desire to be considered a gentleman at all times, and one immediately remembers those magnificent suits ordered from Mr. Filby, the tailor, as supporting evidence. The yearning for respect which would naturally accompany this opinion of himself led Goldsmith to refine his taste

16. Op. cit., p. xlii.

17. "Oliver Goldsmith," Museum of Foreign Literature, Vol. 31 (February, 1837), pp. 141-142.

to that elegance that is the high point in his work.

Decidedly contributing to the charm of his work is a personal quality. In himself he was a lovable individual. He had faults, many of them, but his amiability hid all of these and gave him an honored place in the hearts of his friends. When he wrote he gave public expression to this lovable-ness. It colored those first-hand experiences which he related. His characters, for instance, are individuals whose merits and demerits can be traced back to the successes and failures whom Goldsmith personally knew. As the critic in the Edinburgh Review indicates, the Philosophic Vagabond and Mr. Burchell of The Vicar of Wakefield, Young Marlow and Tony Lumpkin of She Stoops to Conquer, Honeywood in The Good-Natured Man and the Gentleman in Black and Lien Chi Altangi of the Chinese letters are all likenesses of their creator in different poses. It will be recalled, moreover, that the basic incident in the plot of She Stoops to Conquer is selected from a similar experience in Goldsmith's life when as a schoolboy he mistook Squire Featherston's house for an inn. The "sweet Auburn" of The Deserted Village, whether an Irish village or an English village it

18. "Oliver Goldsmith," Vol. 88 (July, 1848), pp. 207-208.

19. Ibid., pp. 202-203.

does not matter here, is a picture of village life as Goldsmith was acquainted with it. The scenic background of The Traveller is the result of the year's vagabondage through Holland, France, Switzerland, and Italy. What Goldsmith had seen, what he had felt, that he reproduced. John Forster, one of his earliest biographers, had written of him, "No man ever put so much of himself into his books. . ." This thought is confirmed by Austin Dobson who maintains that the life and works of Goldsmith are intimately connected. "They accompany and interpret each other in such a way as to make them practically inseparable."²⁰

In a chapter of the Enquiry into Polite Learning, Goldsmith had written

It were to be wished, therefore, that we no longer found pleasure with the inflated style that has for some years been looked upon as fine writing, and which every young writer is now obliged to adopt, if he chooses to be read. We should now dispense with loaded epithet, and dressing up trifles with dignity. For, to use an obvious instance, it is not those who make the greatest noise with their wares in the streets that have most to sell. Let us, instead of writing finely, try to write naturally; not hunt after lofty expressions to deliver mean ideas, nor be for ever gaping, when we only mean to deliver

20. The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. X, p. 195.

a whisper. 21

This declaration of his in behalf of simple style showed itself unmistakably in his writing. Now and then, it is true, sonority burst into his pages, but this happened rarely. Simplicity characterized the greater number of his lines. He discovered that the foe of simplicity was the "loaded epithet," and consequently he discouraged its use. On one occasion in an attempt to put into practice this critical theory of his, he began to mutilate Gray's Elegy by removing the adjective from each line.

The curfew tolls the knell of day,
 The herd winds slowly o'er the lea,
 The ploughman homeward plods his way,

Fortunately he was stopped at the fourth line.

Because of his disregard for affectation in writing, he never wrote confusingly. Cumberland's tribute in this regard is worth noting inasmuch as it comes from one who was not one of Goldsmith's most devoted friends. "There is something in Goldsmith's prose, that, to my ear, is uncommonly sweet and harmonious; it is clear, simple, easy to be understood; we never want to read his period twice

21. J. W. M. Gibbs, The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, Vol. III, p. 516.

over, except for the pleasure it bestows; obscurity never
 calls us back to a repetition of it."²²

Sentiment, the fourth element, is naturally allied to the mark of personality already considered. Goldsmith possessed a kind heart, and if his writings contain himself, they must necessarily reflect his kindness. The manifest evidence for this is seen in an analysis of any one of his original works. Both of his better poems are built upon tender feeling. The Vicar of Wakefield will be considered later as a novel of sentiment. The two plays are directed against false sentiment. At one time he wrote to his brother, "Believe me, my head has no share in all I write; my heart dictates the whole." This insertion of his heart into his work accounts greatly for the popularity of a poem like The Deserted Village and a novel like The Vicar of Wakefield. Neither of them is remarkable for anything grand and is not the supreme example in its field. Yet each appeals to the reader precisely for the heart-to-heart contact which it establishes.

The sensibility of Goldsmith stands forth prominently in every single page of his life, and, uncontrollable as it is, it easily develops into humanitarianism. Naturally the writings again reflect this development. His concern for

22. Memoirs of Richard Cumberland, p. 258.

the poor produced The Deserted Village and advocated social reforms in The Vicar. Granted that some of his theories, particularly his economic views, were wrong, nevertheless he suggested possible causes of poverty and distress, and he indicated to the land-holders, to the clergy, and to the government the means of prevention and of cure.

In one of his lectures a Goldsmith enthusiast recalled that his hero always hoped to be a great man, to win fame, and he maintained that that goal was achieved in the way in which it would most have been desired. The fame of Goldsmith today is that of a writer who can reach the reason through the heart.²³

The charm of the writings of Goldsmith is enhanced by their purity. Exceptions to the times, they always possess a sound moral tone. Goldsmith showed himself manifestly the lover of innocence.

The sixth and final element is a pleasant sense of humor. This mark, like all the others, is most characteristic of the man. A sense of humor saved him from despair, a disaster into which he could have fallen easily. His attitude toward humor was that it could counteract evil and even conquer it. An optimistic view of life could teach man to laugh at his own faults or those of others by

23. James Whiteside, Essays and Lectures, p. 317.

seeing them or having them shown in all their ridiculousness. Such certainly is his theory in the writing of true comedy. The same idea is evident in The Vicar of Wakefield. In the earlier Citizen of the World, the Chinese philosopher would mend English foibles by directing playful and good-natured satire at them. Some of the lesser pieces of poetry, Retaliation, The Haunch of Venison, the letters in verse, one in answer to a dinner invitation, the other to Mrs. Bunbury, have most of their merit in their humorous touches. The characteristic that must be noted in regard to Goldsmith's humor is that it is never bitter. He poked his fun, but he poked it intelligently so as not to hurt anyone's feelings. Had his laughs been produced by means of harsh ridicule, the charm that is admired would not have been attainable. Seccombe believes, moreover, that because Goldsmith belonged to no school of writing but was his own system, he could be indifferent to the literary ideal of the time which still followed the formalism of Pope. There was no check to the natural, easy flow of humor that was his.²⁴

These six characteristics then compose that charm of writing for which Goldsmith is noted. That charm in its turn is the adornment which was given to everything which he touched. No one would be rash enough to claim blue

24. The Age of Johnson, pp. 24-25.

ribbons for his products in the various fields of literature. As this work develops, each of those contributions will be set into its proper background in an attempt to show its position in the general field. It will be noticed then that each in its turn is so adorned as to call distinct attention to itself.

In a presentation of the quality of Goldsmith's style, it is useful to indicate minor defects. Carelessness in his work is one failing, but one must remember that most frequently he had no time to be careful. Necessity demanded that he turn out a four volume history on a settled date if he wanted to earn sufficient to keep himself alive. Under such a proviso, care had to be dispensed with; a consequent lack of polish marred his work.

Lack of scholarliness is another shortcoming attributed to him. Undoubtedly, it is fair to blame him with this fault inasmuch as he contracted to write such formidable things as an eight volume history of nature study and political histories of several countries of several volumes each. As one of his critics points out, however, to him continuous thought and prolonged investigation were not natural. Abstract thinking and severe reasoning were not his vocation. 25

There is a third characteristic that fits into the

25. "Oliver Goldsmith," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. 67 (March, 1850), p. 297.

present discussion because superficially it would be regarded defective. It is Goldsmith's habit of repetition. As repetition solely, it is a minor fault because it betrays narrowness of range. As repetition in the Goldsmith manner, however, it is not faulty since it wears always the adornment with which he so capably clothed it. He had good things and he used them economically by repeating them. It is interesting to note that his parallelism of phrase has led to an attempt to show that he wrote at one time for the Weekly Magazine, a contemporary periodical.²⁶

Professor Ronald S. Crane has discussed this matter of repetition quite thoroughly. He maintains that it is due to a fundamental poverty of ideas aided by haste in composition. In a long introduction he traced four or five of the more striking favorites of Goldsmith. For instance, lines seven to ten of The Traveller

Where'er I roam, whatever realms to see,
My heart untravell'd fondly turns to thee;
Still to my brother turns, with ceaseless pain,
And drags at each remove a lengthening chain.

simply repeat the lament of Lien Chi Altangi in the third letter of The Citizen of the World: "The farther I travel, I feel the pain of separation with stronger force; those

26. Arthur Friedman, Op. cit., pp. 281-289.

ties that bind me to my native country and you are still unbroken. By every remove, I only drag a greater length of chain."²⁷

In one of his letters to his brother-in-law, Daniel Hodson, Goldsmith had written ". . . If I go to the opera where Signora Colomba pours out all the mazes of melody; I sit and sigh for Lishoy fireside, and Johnny armstrong's last good night from Peggy Golden."²⁸ That he liked the idea is apparent when one finds it in the second and fourth numbers of The Bee and in the fourth chapter of The Vicar.

On five separate occasions, Goldsmith made use of a simile of fermentation. In the Memoirs of Voltaire, published in 1759, he wrote, "These youthful follies, like the fermentation of liquors, often disturb the mind only in order to its future refinement: a life spent in phlegmatic apathy resembles those liquors which never ferment and are consequently always muddy."²⁹ In 1770, his Life of Lord Bolingbroke contained, "This period might have been compared to that of fermentation in liquors, which grow muddy before they brighten; but it must also be confessed that those liquors which never ferment are seldom clear."³⁰

27. Op. cit., pp. xxi-xxix.

28. Katharine Balderston, Op. cit., pp. 29-30.

29. Works, Vol. IV, p. 8.

30. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 183.

The limited range of ideas, indicated by this habit of repetition, shows in its turn Goldsmith's command over them. He can make them perform for him in a poem, an essay, a novel, or a comedy. This power gives him a claim to versatility certainly.

A final point in this chapter is a survey of the qualifications of Goldsmith as a writer. Austin Dobson has made this study, and it is of sufficient substance to show that Goldsmith had at the least fair background for his life work. He was a tolerable classical scholar. In English poetry, he had read much of Dryden, Swift, Prior, Johnson, Pope, and Gay; he had a commendable knowledge of Shakespeare. In the field of English drama, he was familiar with the comic writers, especially Farquhar. He had studied French and had read Moliere, La Fontaine, and various collections. He admired Voltaire greatly, and possibly his clear native style was perfected by the example of this man who himself had little use for "loaded epithet." Incidentally, Arthur L. Sells's Les Sources Francaises de Goldsmith is a helpful piece of work in this matter. Moreover, there was Goldsmith's wide experience of humankind, gathered very consciously.

Finally his individual genius was, perhaps

of all, his greatest qualification.³¹ The combination of them accounted for what we admire at the present as the Goldsmith style.

31. The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. X, pp. 201-202.

CHAPTER II

GOLDSMITH AS COMPILER

Oliver Goldsmith began hack work at the age of twenty-nine and continued it until the end of his life. Necessity forced him to remain in this field as he himself confessed in a letter to Bennet Langton, ". . . The natural History is about half finished and I will shortly finish the rest. God knows I'm tired of this kind of finishing, which is but bungling work, and that not so much my fault as the fault of my scurvy circumstances."¹

This "bungling work" had to be quite various according to the demands of the bookseller for whom he was working at the particular time. When in the employ of Griffiths, the publisher of the Monthly Review, he worked chiefly in the field of criticism. Volume after volume was placed on his table for consumption so that critical reviews of Burke's Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful, of Odes by Mr. Gray, of Voltaire's Universal History, and other like originals found their way into the pages of Griffiths' periodical. These criticisms forced Goldsmith into such widely different fields of literature and of political history that careful work was impossible to

1. Katharine Balderston, The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 105.

him. Writing only literary criticism would have given him sufficiently difficult work.

Critical work occupied him also while he worked for the Critical Review, edited at the time by Tobias Smollett. It was undertaken again in his editing of two books of poetry, Poems for Young Ladies and The Beauties of English Poesy.

Two translations, one in 1758, the other in 1766, show that such work appeared too if funds were needed.

In 1761 and 1762 Goldsmith was a busy hack for John Newbery. His principal work was in the field of political history. He revised a History of Mecklenburgh and produced the first seven volumes of A Compendium of Biography, an abridgment of Plutarch's Lives. In the field of biography, he wrote the Life of Richard Nash. His other efforts in this type of work, the lives of Voltaire, Thomas Parnell, and Lord Bolingbroke, were made for other publishers.

Most of his historical compilations were done for Thomas Davies, the one time actor and close friend of Johnson and David Garrick.

Some have believed that Goldsmith composed books

2. Temple Scott, Oliver Goldsmith Bibliographically and Biographically Considered, p. 36.

for the entertainment of juveniles and have associated his name with Little Goody Two Shoes and Tommy Trip. Such work, however, was hardly attempted by him. Most probably the association is made because Newbery, the employer of Goldsmith at this time, was well known for his publications of children's tales.

A general appreciation of this hack work of Goldsmith is worth consideration. Johnson said of him, "Sir, he has the art of compiling." This rather general tribute needs analysis. That Goldsmith was not equipped for the tasks which he undertook as hack is undeniable. Whitwell Elwin wrote of him

He had never been a student, and he had not that aptitude for facts, and that tenacity of memory, which enables many desultory readers to furnish their minds without steady toil. The materials for his hasty compilations were hastily gathered for the occasion, and being merely transplanted, as Johnson said, from one place to another without settling in his mind, he was ignorant of the contents of his own books. 3

Other critics, among whom was the thorough student of Goldsmith, Austin Dobson, have admitted the same.⁴ The regrettable fact, in Dobson's belief, was that necessity forced hack work on Goldsmith. Although he was no

3. Some Eighteenth Century Men of Letters, Vol. II, p. 174.
 4. "Oliver Goldsmith," Times Literary Supplement, Vol. 27 (November 8, 1928), p. 814.

naturalist or historian, yet he was able to write successful original drama, poetry, and novel which undoubtedly would have been more abundant had it not been for the funds ever in demand by him. Hack work⁵ was always ready to supply these funds.

The second important item to remember in an appreciation of the compilations of Goldsmith is that this work is always readable. One may look questioningly at the facts he relates, but one may not deny that they are told interestingly. Oliver Elton maintains that ". . . in the art of dexterously boiling down and elegantly⁶ serving up he has not been surpassed." The adornment of which Johnson had spoken in the epitaph is present eminently in the compilations or abridgments as Goldsmith preferred to call them. In fact, it is the charming style of Goldsmith that gives these masterpieces of drudgery their quality. Temple Scott wrote strongly on this matter. In speaking of Goldsmith's time of servitude under Griffiths, he relates, "It was Mrs. Griffiths who was not only director of the home, but director of the Review also, and it was this 'antiquated female critic,' as Smollett in the rival Review (the Critical

5. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 145-146.

6. A Survey of English Literature, 1730-1780, Vol. I, p. 119.

Review) called her, who took it upon herself to correct the English of Oliver Goldsmith, and to substitute her dead ignorance in place of his living wisdom."⁷

For the sake of clear presentation, the remainder of this chapter is best outlined in a consideration of Goldsmith as a writer of: 1. political history; 2. natural history; 3. biography; 4. translations; 5. critical reviews; 6. prefaces.

It will be recalled that Dr. Johnson inscribed the epitaph to "Oliver Goldsmith, Poet, Naturalist, Historian." The epithet "Poet," moreover, received its first place only after a remonstrance from the members of the Club. No praise is given to Goldsmith the essayist, Goldsmith the novelist, or Goldsmith the dramatist. To understand this peculiar direction of Johnson's tribute is merely a matter of a hasty glance at his theories of the writing of history. Boswell records that at one time he remarked:

Great abilities are not requisite in an Historian; for in historical composition, all the greatest powers of the human mind are quiescent. He has facts ready to his hand; so there is no exercise of invention. Imagination is not required in any high degree; only about as much as is used in the lower kinds of poetry. Some penetration, accuracy, and colouring will fit a man for the task, if he can give the application which is necessary. 8

7. Op. cit., pp. 25-27.

8. Life of Johnson, Vol. I, pp. 424-425.

A modern history student will immediately indicate the superficiality of this view. Such an appreciation accounts for the present day historian's indifference to the efforts of Goldsmith in this field. After having read Johnson's inadequate estimate, one understands his ranking Goldsmith as the best historian of the age, an age that possessed William Robertson and David Hume, the eminent Scotch historians. All that Goldsmith had to do to be considered a first-rate historian was to gather what records held and apply the proper moral. The fact that he wrote these gatherings so engagingly enhanced his position.

A rather lengthy conversation about the relative merits of the various contemporary historians was led by Johnson during the course of a dinner at Topham Beauclerc's. It is worthy of note in the present discussion because it reports Johnson's appraisal of Goldsmith the man of letters, and, more especially, of Goldsmith the historian. Boswell was amazed to learn that Johnson thought more highly of Goldsmith than of Hume or Robertson or Lord Lyttelton. Johnson with his usual dogmatic manner left no room for doubt, however. He admitted that he had never read Hume, possibly because of the latter's infidelity. Robertson was no historian; he used his imagination

and produced romance, not history; besides, he was badly verbose and wrote cumbrous detail. The work of Lyttelton was dismissed as foppery.

Goldsmith too had his views on the writing of history. They deserve attention inasmuch as they offer the only basis upon which to criticize his work. In the preface to the History of England written in 1771, he remarked

It will be sufficient, therefore, to satisfy the writer's wishes, if the present work be found a plain, unaffected narrative of facts with just ornament enough to keep attention awake, and with reflection barely sufficient to set the reader upon thinking. Very moderate abilities were equal to such an undertaking, and it is hoped the performance will satisfy such as take up books to be informed or amused, without much considering who the writer is, or envying him any success he may have had in a former compilation. 10

It is plain that the object in the writing of history as far as Goldsmith was concerned was to write a narrative of facts which would keep the reader sufficiently interested to read to the end. His plan not to provoke too much thought is amusing. He achieved his purpose, however. He wrote readable abridgments without too great difficulty. His method of composition was related by Conversation Cooke in the European Magazine for August,

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9. Temple Scott, Op. cit., pp. 221-223.
 10. J. W. M. Gibbs, The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, Vol. IV, p. 167.

1793.

He first read in a morning from Hume, Rapin, and sometimes Kennet, as much as he designed for one letter, marking down the passages referred to on a sheet of paper, with remarks. He then rode or walked out with a friend or two who he constantly had with him, returned to dinner, spent the day generally convivially, without much drinking (which he was never in the habit of), and when he went up to bed he took up his books and papers with him where he generally wrote the chapter, or the best part of it, before he went to rest. This latter exercise cost him very little trouble, he said; for having all his material ready for him, he wrote it with as much facility as a common letter. 11

In the interesting narrative that history should be, Goldsmith desired certain essentials. First of all, the historian must pursue truth; elegance in writing was to be considered only a secondary aim. To attain this goal the historian ought to be an eye-witness of what he records, or, if that is impossible, he ought to adhere to eye-witnesses for his sources. The latter point is important because the work of the original historians of a country is the fundamental material for the history of that country. As to the historian himself, Goldsmith simply adopted another's formula. His historian's learning must be greater than his genius; his judgment ought to be stronger than his imagination; he must be a lover of truth; he must have no party prejudices;

11. Temple Scott, Op. cit., pp. 123-124.

his style should be clear and elegant; and lastly, that he write convincingly, he must realize that he possesses the capabilities of a good historian.¹²

The first historical work of Goldsmith was the revision of a History of Mecklenburgh. This was done in 1762 and deserves no other notice than just the mere listing. In 1764 he wrote a History of England, in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son. This work proved quite popular, though for some time its rightful authorship was never suspected; some readers believed it the work of Lord Chesterfield, others that of Lord Orrery.

Thomas Davies signed Goldsmith to a contract to compile a history of Rome after the same manner as the epistolary English narrative, and this contract was fulfilled in May, 1761, with the publication of a two-volume Roman history. It sold well, if one is to judge from the remark of Temple Scott that the "publishers could have told a surprising tale of what generations of readers thought of it by citing profits realized from its sales."¹³ The same critic calls it a vademecum for the people who were interested in acquiring a general acquaintance with the subject, previously unknown because

12. Works, Vol. IV, pp. 254-257.

13. Op. cit., p. 223.

of the forbidding forms into which it was cast. The work appeared in an abridged form in 1772.

A four-volume history of England appeared in 1771. Its scope was broad as the complete title reveals: The History of England, From the Earliest Times to the Death of George II. Rapin, Carte, Smollett, and Hume served as the source materials, and of these Goldsmith made an abridgment that was on the whole well received. Other writers at the time, however, criticized it for an over-insistence on the power of the monarchy and for a consequent lack of sympathy with the principles of liberty then so much in the air. This work was also abridged later.

The history of Greece appeared two months after the death of Goldsmith. It was a two-volume work. An interesting incident which illustrates the fact that Goldsmith was not a careful student of history is related by Dobson who received the story from a Dawson Turner. While he was compiling this work, he was visited one day by Edward Gibbon. "What was the name of the Indian king who gave Alexander the Great so much trouble?" Goldsmith asked. "Montezuma," Gibbon answered in jest. Goldsmith was ready to record the suggestion, but his friend hurriedly offered
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the correct name of Porus.

14. Op. cit., p. 178.

The position of Goldsmith as a writer of political history is neatly summed up in the following remark, "Neither in his historical nor in his scientific production did Goldsmith make any profession of original research; what he aimed to do, and what he succeeded in doing, was to give a clear, concise, and readable account of his subject."¹⁵ It is not fair to judge his work according to the rules of historical science because he never intended anything more than a presentation of events in a clear and interesting form which admittedly does not constitute history. As A. L. Irvine points out, Goldsmith knew nothing of history but what he found in books and abridged.¹⁶ He did know how to select so as to produce readable matter, however, and evidently that is what Johnson meant when he asserted, "Sir, he has the art of compiling."

In the epitaph tribute was specifically paid to Goldsmith the naturalist. Johnson did not mean that Goldsmith was a student of natural history. That fact is evident from a remark that he made at an earlier time, ". . . if he (Goldsmith) can distinguish a cow from a

15. Henry James Nicoll, Landmarks of English Literature, p. 253.

16. "Oliver Goldsmith," London Mercury, Vol. 19 (December, 1928), pp. 173-174.

horse, that, I believe, may be the extent of his knowledge of natural history." ¹⁷ What he meant was that Goldsmith would assemble some data on nature study and impart to the compilation the charm that was distinctive of him. "He is now writing a Natural History, and ¹⁸ will make it as entertaining as a Persian tale."

The History of the Earth and Animated Nature was published posthumously. It appeared in June, 1774, in eight volumes, Goldsmith's chief source in the abridgment being the extensive work of Buffon, the famous French naturalist.

There is no better commentary on the fitness of Goldsmith to compile a history of nature than a conversation in which Johnson, Goldsmith, and Mr. Thrale, a close friend of Johnson, figured. The men happened to speak of the eating of dogs and Goldsmith remarked that the custom was observed in China. He added that a dog-butcher was a common tradesman there, and that when he walked abroad all dogs attacked him.

Johnson: That is not owing to his killing dogs, Sir. I remember a butcher at Lichfield, whom a dog that was in the house where I lived, always attacked. It is the smell of carnage which provokes this, let the animals he has killed be what they may.

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17. Boswell's Life of Johnson, Vol. III, p. 84, footnote.
 18. John Forster, Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 503-504.

Goldsmith: Yes, there is a general abhorrence in animals at the sign of massacre. If you put a tub full of blood in a stable, the horses are like to go mad. Johnson: I doubt that. Goldsmith: Nay, Sir, it is a fact well authenticated. Thrale: You had better prove it before you put it into your book on natural history. You may do it in my stable if you will. Johnson: Nay, Sir, I would not have him prove it. If he is content to take his information from others, he may get through his book with little trouble, and without much endangering his reputation. But if he makes experiments for so comprehensive a book as his, there would be no end to them; his erroneous assertions would then fall upon himself, and he might be blamed for not having made experiments as to every particular. 19

These last remarks of Johnson must have been unpleasant to Goldsmith's personal pride, but they were true. He knew as little about nature study as he did about Roman history, and accordingly his work in the field is no more than entertaining compilation.

There is then nothing scientific in the makeup of the eight-volume work of Goldsmith. It does not suggest any depth of research; in fact, it frequently is inaccurate in the information which it presents. Davies maintained that he was "entirely unacquainted with the world of animals,"²⁰ and Cumberland was even bitter, "Poor fellow, he hardly knows an ass from a mule, nor a turkey from a goose, but when he sees it on the table."²¹ In all

19. Boswell's Life of Johnson, Vol. II, pp. 232-233.

20. Memoirs of the Life of David Garrick, Vol. II, p. 160.

21. Washington Irving, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 275-276.

fairness to Goldsmith, however, his work must be criticized according to his purpose. Probably no one realized better than he his lack of background for the study of nature. His aim was to assemble the facts reported by Buffon, by Ray, by Willoughby, by Swammerdam, and by Reaumur into an interesting relation, and this goal he achieved. The fact that his work contains inaccuracies is not wholly his fault. He relied upon his sources for the truth of their records, and not too much blame must be placed on him when he maintains that cows shed their horns every two years or that tigers inhabit the forests of Canada. Oliver Elton tells neatly the truth about Goldsmith in discussing his approach in writing the History of Animated Nature. His methods, although a horror to the scientific mind, nevertheless are a source of continual entertainment. He borrows the notes of his authorities frequently without due acknowledgment. He cuts down, expands, or decorates his sources as seem best to him. His confessed aim is not exact knowledge, but instructive amusement.

In the field of biography, Goldsmith surprises one by the rather advanced theories which he held in regard

22. Op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 120-121.

to the writing of that form. Frances M. Haydon, who has made a detailed study of his biographical work, analyzes it in the following way: 1. it was wisely written in sketches rather than in volumes; 2. it was built on the principles of truth. (In both the lives of Voltaire²³ and of Nash²⁴ Goldsmith insisted upon this basis.); 3. each character studied was made to be a personality by carefulness in detailing the trifles of his life. (In the Memoirs of Voltaire, Goldsmith wrote, "I am not insensible, that by recounting these trifling particulars of a great man's life, I may be accused of myself being a trifler; but such circumstances as these generally best mark a character."²⁵); 4. it reflects the view of Goldsmith that man's follies may serve for ethical instruction, an attitude infrequently held before this time; 5. it reveals another theory of his that any man might be made the subject of an interesting and amusing record; 6. it shows a modern technique in the interpretation of his subjects; 7. it attempts to be as scholarly as hurriedly done hack work would permit it. Goldsmith used original sources whenever possible; 8. Goldsmith believed that the writing of biography was

23. Works, Vol. IV, p. 9.

24. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 52.

25. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 8.

worthy of artistic effort, and he did much as a disciple of Johnson and a forerunner of Boswell to help give a status in literature to this form of writing; 9. the modern approach of Goldsmith in his writing is best seen in his use of the tools of biography, such as, letters, incidents, jasts, memoirs, diaries, gossip, conversation, etc.²⁶ The discipleship to Johnson that Frances Haydon indicates is noted by another critic. He maintains that Goldsmith learned three principles of biographical writing from Johnson: 1. that the life should be a true relation, not a panegyric; 2. that the subject of the biography must be studied so that he appears as a real man; 3. that trivialities of a man's life are just as important as the highlights in the writing of the biography.²⁷ This last point was scored by Haydon also.

The first entrance of Goldsmith into biographical writing was the sketch of Voltaire. Goldsmith needed money to pay for a suit of clothes, and Griffiths, his employer at the time, desired a life of Voltaire as an introduction to a translation of the Henriade. A contract was thereupon made. Goldsmith wrote of the finished

26. "Oliver Goldsmith As a Biographer," South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol. 39 (January, 1940), pp. 52-54.

27. Joseph E. Brown, "Goldsmith and Johnson on Biography," Modern Language Notes, Vol. 42 (March, 1927), p. 171.

work to his brother Henry in January, 1759:

I know not whether I should tell you, yet why should I conceal those trifles, or indeed anything from you, there is a book of mine will be publish'd in a few days. The life a very extraordinary man. No less than the great Mr. Voltaire. You know already by the title that it is no more than a catchpenny. However, I spent but four weeks on the whole performance, for which I receiv'd twenty pound. 28

The unusual fact about the work was its expression of admiration for Voltaire who at that time was not so well seen in England.

With his life of Beau Nash, Goldsmith accomplished his best work in biography. Possibly it was so because of his strong feeling of comradeship for the Beau who was in reality another Goldsmith in his good nature, his carelessness with money, and his naivete in making of himself a clotheshorse. After having abridged the Plutarch's Lives, Goldsmith went to Bath to recuperate a waning strength and while there derived the inspiration for the life of Nash. He dug up source material by making personal inquiries and merited as a result the distinction of being recognized as an "authority" on the subject.

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The next venture in the field was in 1770 when Goldsmith

28. Katharine Balderston, Op. cit., p. 63.

29. Oliver Elton, Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 118.

wrote a life of Thomas Parnell to serve as an introduction to an edition of his poems. A month later Davies the bookseller published it as a separate work. Boswell wrote of it, "Goldsmith's Life of Parnell is poor; not that it is poorly written, but that he had poor materials; for nobody can write the life of a man but those who have eat and drunk and lived in social intercourse with him."³⁰ Johnson, on the other hand, when preparing to write the life of Parnell for his Lives of the Poets, referred to Goldsmith's work as being of such caliber that an effort by him was really unnecessary.

As far as quality in biography is concerned, the life of Lord Bolingbroke is the poorest. Four-fifths of it was borrowed from the Biographia Britannica,³¹ and the whole is more a panegyric than an interpretation of the life of its subject. It was originally written as an introduction to a new edition of Bolingbroke's "Dissertation on Parties," but Davies published it separately in December, 1771.

Considered as a whole, these four works are certainly not the masterpieces of Goldsmith. They were done as hack work. Yet in their unrefined state, they

30. Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 166.

31. Arthur Friedman, Studies in The Canon and Sources of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 25.

are an indication of the versatility of their author, and like everything else that he did, they were written in the elegance of style that was peculiar to him.

Part of the hack work done by Goldsmith was translation. His first published work in fact was a translation made for Griffiths in 1758. It appeared as the Memoirs of a Protestant, condemned to the Galleys of France, For His Religion. Even as an early writing, it wore the style of Goldsmith. Griffiths, who himself reviewed it, says that the "ingenious Translator really deserves this epithet, on account of the spirit of the performance, tho' we have little to say in commendation of his accuracy."³² Another Translation, that of Formey's Concise History of Philosophy and Philosophers, appeared in 1766.

Some of the earliest writing done by Goldsmith was literary criticism. There is an apparent inconsistency in the man in this connection inasmuch as he, a bitter critic of criticism, wrote it himself. When it is remembered that he entered the field for no other serious purpose than to earn sufficient money to keep alive, the inconsistency disappears. The essays in The Bee and in the Enquiry were definite attacks on criticism as an obstacle to the progress of literature.

32. Austin Dobson, A Paladin of Philanthropy, p. 328.

Ronald Crane summarizes this anti-criticism campaign thus: Goldsmith insisted that writers be estimated according to the abundance of their beauties rather than for the fewness of their faults, he belittled the imitation of ancient models, he urged modern poets to be original and to give their readers firsthand pictures of the manners of their own time.³³

As a critic, Goldsmith was not profound. His nature did not qualify him for that kind of work. Saintsbury discovers this in him when he says that he was "now too good-natured and now too much under the influence of half-innocent and wholly childish fits of jealousy to possess the critical ethos." Moreover, his carelessness and general ignorance indicated further his lack of necessary critical tools.³⁴

For many long works, either of his own compilation or that of others, Goldsmith wrote prefaces that deserve special notice. Their chief merit lies in their reflection of the personality of their author. Reading a preface of his is an inducement to continue with the work that follows.

Possibly it is not quite fair to include a consideration

33. "Neglected Mid-Eighteenth Century Plea For Originality and Its Author," Philological Quarterly, Vol. 13 (January, 1934), p. 23.

34. The Peace of The Augustans, p. 208.

of the letters of Goldsmith in a survey of his
hack work. Since there is no other possible chapter into
which such a discussion might be placed and since it
deserves some attention, however, a comment at this point
ought not to be amiss. His letters are the most direct
expression of his personality, and as such, they are most
interesting and instructive to read. Goldsmith knew how
to make a letter readable just as he knew how to abridge
matter-of-fact historical records into readable volumes.

CHAPTER III

GOLDSMITH AS ESSAYIST

In the eighteenth century, the essay started off on a different tack. Previously, it had been marked as a form of writing noted for the expression of the personality of its author and for its naturalness. Montaigne, of course, had bequeathed to it these characteristics. When Steele and Addison wrote page after page of the type in the Spectator and the Tatler, however, they proposed to cure their time of its evils. In their hands, the essay became largely a criticism of contemporary political and social life. Its tone was basically didactic, the element of personality disappearing into the background.

Other periodical writers at this time (and there were many since some two hundred little papers lived brief lives throughout the eighteenth century) imitated the technique of Addison and Steele. Among all these successors with whom the essay is associated, Lord Chesterfield, Dr. Johnson, and Oliver Goldsmith stand in the first rank.

With the publication of An Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe on April 2, 1759, Goldsmith formally entered the field of the essay. This

formidable sounding piece of work is divided into fourteen chapters, each of which can very creditably be termed an essay. The book attempts to study the condition of letters principally in Italy, Germany, France, and England. Goldsmith had just completed his year's walking tour and probably was bursting with grievances against things in general. His title promised too much, however, even to hope for fulfillment; the book, accordingly, is a superficial survey of the state of learning in Europe.

It is really important for the opinions against critics and criticism that it contains. Goldsmith was an extremist in this matter and accused criticism as the deadly enemy of art and literature. His dissatisfaction with the contemporary system of book publication, the combination of needy author cramped by the dictates of a none-too-wise bookseller, is a second important¹ element.

As can be expected, Goldsmith was earnestly interested in the Enquiry. It was his first lengthy piece of work, and it surely convinced him of his calling to authorship. Before the publication of the book, he wrote letters to his friends in Ireland soliciting their cooperation in

1. Temple Scott, Oliver Goldsmith Bibliographically and Biographically Considered, p. 52.

the sale of the book. He was particularly eager to protect his income from the sales because in those days of no copyright laws, booksellers of other countries would republish volumes without any respect for the rights of the author. Accordingly, Goldsmith sent a series of letters to his friends. It seems that they did not take his writing efforts too seriously since nothing is known of their response to his plea.

Without question, the Enquiry is a presumptuous book. In its first edition of two hundred pages of widely separated print, it could not hope to keep the promise of its title. It was chastised in its own time by a hack of the Monthly Review, a certain Kenrick, who continued to bark at the heels of Goldsmith throughout the rest of the latter's life, principally for its failure to give information and its bearing the mark of plagiarism.² Although modern critics have not been so vindictive as Kenrick, they have agreed with him in his criticism of the superficiality of the work. Austin Dobson thinks that its most interesting features are: 1. the fact that it is Goldsmith's first original piece of writing; 2. that, as a work of criticism in particular and as writing in

2. "Oliver Goldsmith," Vol. 21 (November, 1759), pp. 382-383.

general, it avoided a "didactic stiffness of wisdom," then a predominant defect of English writers.³ Another critic believes that Goldsmith derived his opinions on criticism and booksellers not so much from his traveling through Europe as from his recent vexing experiences with Griffiths,⁴ publisher of the Monthly Review.

There is present in the work the signs that are characteristic of the style of Goldsmith. One will not take the book seriously, but he will enjoy reading these early views of its author expressed in such an engaging manner.

Later in the year 1759, a Mr. J. Wilkie offered Goldsmith the editorship of a magazine which he proposed to publish. Not only was "Goldy" to be editor; he was designated sole contributor. He accepted, and on September 29, an advertisement in the London Chronicle promised the appearance of a new periodical called The Bee, to consist "of a variety of essays on the amusements, follies, and vices in fashion, particularly the most recent topics of conversation, remarks on theatrical exhibitions, memoirs of modern literature, etc." The first issue of some thirty-two pages began to sell on October 6

3. The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. X, p. 204.

4. Whitwell Elwin, Some Eighteenth Century Men of Letters, Vol. II, pp. 176-177.

and The Bee thereafter continued through eight numbers after which, probably because of the lack of public support, it ceased to exist.

The "Introduction" in the first number and the "Uncertainty of Literary Success" in the fourth are charming for their chattiness. If Goldsmith had written all of his papers in the same tone, he probably would have caught the full interest of his readers. He was certainly more familiar with graceful informality than with the solemn lecture voice which he assumed in other numbers of the periodical.⁵

Dobson believes that the distinctive feature of The Bee is the ability of the critical and social pieces. All of the theatrical papers (a number of which are referred to in the sixth chapter of this study) are still worth while reading. The character sketches of "my cousin Hannah" in the essay "On Dress" and of Jack Spindle in "On The Use of Language" are capital.⁶

When Goldsmith was working for Newbery, he contributed to a periodical published by the bookseller, the Public Ledger. In the issue of January 24, 1760, a short letter supposedly written by a Chinese visitor in London to a friend of his in China appeared as the first of a

5. William Black, Goldsmith, pp. 35-38.

6. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 69-70.

series of one hundred and twenty-three. The visitor, Lien Chi Altangi, was a much-discussed figure of the paper and a mask behind which Goldsmith could tell the people of London and of England some truths about themselves. That he understood what he was about is evident from an earlier criticism of his concerning precisely this type of writing.

The writer who would inform, or improve, his countrymen under the assumed character of an Eastern traveller should be careful to let nothing escape him which might betray the imposture. If his aim be satirical, his remarks should be collected from the more striking follies abounding in the country he describes, and from those prevailing absurdities which commonly usurp the softer name of passions. His accounts should be of such a nature as we may fancy his Asiatic friend would wish to know,--- such as we ourselves would expect from a correspondent in Asia. 7

The idea of using these disguised letters as a means of social satire was not original with him. It is a fairly well established fact that he imitated and even borrowed from such previous series as the Lettres Chinoises of Marquis d'Argens and the Lettres Persannes of Montesquieu. Incidentally, Oliver Elton excuses him in his thefts from the latter on the score that he "shortens,

7. J. W. M. Gibbs, The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, Vol. IV, p. 285.

lightens, and brightens whatever he takes."⁸

In 1762 John Newbery collected the one hundred and twenty-three letters into two volumes and published them under the title: The Citizen of the World; or, Letters from a Chinese Philosopher Residing In London to his Friends in the East.

The Chinese Letters are noteworthy for their fine observation, frequently served with kindly satire. In them Goldsmith finds the opportunity to express the views gathered over some thirty years on the most varied topics. English manners, literature, laws, and institutions each are discussed. Nicoll believes that the weakest parts of the work are those treating of moral subjects somewhat in the fashion of Johnson's Rambler. He attributes this defectiveness to the mediocre powers of reasoning of Goldsmith.⁹ However, with other critics, among whom are included Austin Dobson and Temple Scott, Nicoll testifies to the delightful character sketches in the work. Dobson writes very forcefully on this point. In referring to the papers on Beau Tibbs, he says, "If Goldsmith had written nothing but this miniature trilogy of Beau Tibbs,--- if Dr. Primrose were uninvented and Tony Lumpkin non-existent,---he would still have earned a perpetual place among

8. A Survey of English Literature, 1730-1780, Vol. I, p. 103.

9. Landmarks of English Literature, p. 252.

English humorists." ¹⁰ Previously in his Life of Goldsmith he had declared somewhat similarly that the Citizen of the World was more interesting for the promise it gave of the future creator of Tony Lumpkin and Dr. Primrose. The "pinched and tarnished little beau is a character-sketch to take its place in the immortal gallery of full-lengths of Parson Adams, Squire Western, Matthew Bramble, and ¹¹ 'my uncle Toby'."

Besides the Micawberish beau, there is also the Man in Black, who is certainly a direct ancestor of the vicar of Wakefield. Lien Chi Altangi himself, the writer of the letters, is quite an engaging personality, constituted as he is of a fund of playful satire and natural humor and sound common sense. All in all, the lament of Dobson that The Citizen of the World is "now too-much-neglected" ¹² is certainly true.

When Newbery noticed the selling success of The Traveller in 1764, he engaged Goldsmith to republish with his name those writings that had previously appeared without it. Many things had been contributed to The Bee, The Busy Body, The Lady's Magazine, The British Magazine,

10. Eighteenth Century Vignettes, p. 123.

11. pp. 83-84.

12. Eighteenth Century Vignettes, p. 116.

and the Public Ledger, and from them Goldsmith made a collection of twenty-seven essays. This appeared in 1765 as Essays by Mr. Goldsmith and carried the motto "Collecta Revirescunt." The publication is one of the numerous instances illustrating the dependence of Goldsmith on the bookseller in whose employ he may have been at a particular time.

Modern research is busy at work in unearthing essays heretofore unassociated with the name of Goldsmith. In 1927, Professor Ronald S. Crane of the University of Chicago published a scholarly piece of work called New Essays by Oliver Goldsmith. He had studied thoroughly periodicals that were issued between January, 1760, and June, 1762, and by means of both internal and external evidence identified writings which are unquestionably those of Goldsmith. In 1938, Professor Arthur Friedman, also of the University of Chicago, reprinted parts of his dissertation which was a work similar to that of Professor Crane.¹³ It is not at all rash to venture that further research will add new matter to the existing contribution of Goldsmith in the field of the essay.

At one time Johnson had asked, "Is there a man, Sir, now, who can pen an essay with such ease and elegance as

13. Studies in the Canon and Sources of Oliver Goldsmith.

Goldsmith?" Goldsmith was well equipped for this kind of writing and produced it when it was most popular. Edmund Blunden indicates that the public was "versed in the Spectator and Tatler and (was) now sitting over the coffee with "Ramblers" and "Adventurers," "Idlers," and "Connoisseurs".¹⁴ Addison had written the essay ably, but Goldsmith was no mean writer himself. Ronald Crane calls his "Asem" and the "Reverie at the Boar's-Head Tavern" masterpieces. The chief characteristics of the work of Goldsmith are a natural freshness of expression tinted in some places by delightful satire and in others by equally pleasurable comedy. Padraic Colum's opinion in this regard merits quotation because it helps at the same time to fix somewhat definitely the position of Goldsmith as essayist.

What is the preservative that has kept them (the essays) fresh for us? Naturalness going with vivacity and finding an unlaborious and unaffected way of making clear sentences; the power too of taking possession of a scene or a character. It is by this power that Goldsmith, in his best essays, separated himself from the essayists of Queen Anne's time. For them the scene or the character exists for the comment they make on the one or the other. But Goldsmith can present a scene or a character in a way that makes his comment superfluous. 15

14. "Goldsmith's Bicentenary," in Votive Tablets, pp. 156-157.
 15. "Goldsmith the Essayist," Commonweal, Vol. 13
 (November 19, 1930), p. 71.

CHAPTER IV

GOLDSMITH AS POET

In the discussion of the versatility of Goldsmith in chapter one of this study, reference was made to the corrections suggested for the original epitaph by the members of the famous Club. One of the chief animadversions offered to Dr. Johnson was "We. . . are yet of the opinion that the character of the deceased as a writer, particularly as a poet, is perhaps not delineated with all the exactness which Dr. Johnson is capable of giving it." That this criticism was just may explain the fact of the dedication of the present epitaph in Westminster Abbey to Oliver Goldsmith, Poet, Naturalist, Historian.

In order that a just study of the position of Goldsmith as a poet may be made, a glance at the main trends in the writing of contemporary poetry must be taken. The following opinion probably presents the picture most concisely.

. . . there was perhaps no point in the century when the British Muse, such as she had come to be, was doing less, or had so nearly ceased to do anything, or to have any good opinion of herself, as precisely about the year 1764. Young was dying; Gray was recluse and indolent; Johnson had long given over his metrical experimentations on any

except the most inconsiderable scale; Akenside, Armstrong, Smollett, and others less known, had pretty well revealed the amount of their worth in poetry; and Churchill after his ferocious blaze of what was really rage and declamation in metre, though conventionally it was called poetry, was prematurely dead and defunct. 1

The influence of Pope had made fashionable a type of poetry that was decidedly more intellectual than emotional. Inspiration in poetry during the Johnsonian age was lacking. In its place were to be found brilliant and pointed wit, satire, attempts at philosophy, smooth metres, and perfect rhymes. On the whole, the poetry of this time was not the result of an emotional impulse as it was rather the means by which technically correct lines might be written. Much of it, moreover, is identifiable because of its didactic bent.

When Goldsmith published The Traveller, he attracted attention then. He used the rhymed iambic pentameter, the metrical vogue of the time, to express simplicity and truth of feeling, ends not at all sought after by contemporary poets. That he proposed a departure from affectation as his goal is indirectly evident in the dedication to the poem in which he belittled blank

1. The Miscellaneous Works of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. xxxvii-xxxviii.

verse, Pindaric odes, anapests, alliterative care, and party poetry. Since such were the defects of the age, the conclusion of Henry Nicoll that the time was singularly deficient in poetry of any great merit is to the point. Goldsmith was almost the only one deserving the name "poet" in any elevated sense of the word, and even he was limited.²

Passing reference was made to the views of Goldsmith on poetry. A thorough discussion of this matter will help to a better appreciation of his works.

In an early critical writing, he recognized the very essential, but not always realized, fact that all men are not born to be poets.

. . . we could sincerely wish that those, whose greatest sin, is perhaps the venial one of writing bad verses, would regard their failure in this respect as we do, not as faults, but foibles; they may be good and useful members of society without being poets. The regions of taste can be travelled only by a few, and even those often find indifferent accomodation by the way. Let such as have not got a passport from nature be content with happiness and leave the poet the unrivalled possession of his misery, his garret, and his fame. 3

A second general opinion of Goldsmith involves

2. Landmarks of English Literature, p. 253.

3. J. W. M. Gibbs, The Collected Works of Oliver Goldsmith, Vol. IV, p. 331.

him in a contradiction. In a letter to his brother Henry, written sometime in January, 1759, he stated, "Poetry is much an easier and more agreeable species of composition than prose, and could a man live by it, it were no unpleasant employment to be a Poet."⁴ Yet Bishop White of Pennsylvania, in recording a conversation which he held with Goldsmith on the subject of poetry in 1770, recalls that he had asked the poet why he did not publish his economic opinions of The Deserted Village in a pamphlet. Goldsmith should have answered, "It is not worth my while. A good poem will bring me a hundred guineas, but the pamphlet would bring me nothing."⁵

More precise articles of Goldsmith's poetical creed are listed by Austin Dobson.⁶ This critic's summary is merely a gathering of views written in the Enquiry, in other critical essays, and even in The Vicar of Wakefield. There was, first of all, the objection of Goldsmith to blank verse. It brought into poetry "a disgusting solemnity of manner" with which, of all things, he could hardly have wished to deal. Blank verse had its place only in the treatment of the sublimest themes.

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4. Katharine Balderston, The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 65-66.
 5. Ibid., p. 65, footnote.
 6. A Paladin of Philanthropy and Other Papers, pp. 37-39.

Disciple of the classical tradition that he was, he proposed a positive argument for rhyme. The necessity of rhyme stimulated the fancy and accordingly forced better expression from the poet. This was true in the same way that a fountain played highest when the aperture was diminished. Thomas Gray received rather rough handling from Goldsmith. In the first chapter of this study, mention was made of Goldsmith's plan to improve the Elegy by deleting from each line the modifying adjective. Dobson is fair-minded critic enough to indicate in another of his books that Goldsmith's ballad The Hermit is not free from those decorative superfluities.⁷ There is then the accusation of Gray's being an imitator, arising most probably as a result of his experimentation with the Pindaric ode. ". . . we cannot behold this rising poet," Goldsmith wrote in a review of Gray's Odes, "seeking fame among the learned, without hinting to him the same advice that Isocrates used to give his scholars, 'study the people'."⁸ Another contemporary was an abomination to Goldsmith. He detested both Churchill and his satire. On the other hand, he admired Dryden, Pope, and Gay, but especially Addison, Prior,

7. Old Kensington Palace and Other Papers, p. 74.

8. Works, Vol. IV, p. 296.

and Swift. He differed with these classicists on a point previously mentioned that poetry should be simple and directed at many rather than at few.

Goldsmith's method of composition may be placed in no more appropriate part of this discussion than the present, and fortunately the source for this information is first-hand. It comes from an actor friend, Conversation Cooke. According to him, Goldsmith was

rather slow in his poetry---not from the tardiness of fancy, but the time he took in pointing the sentiment, and polishing the versification. . . His manner of writing poetry was this; he first sketched a part of his design in prose in which he threw out his ideas as they occurred to him; he then sat carefully down to versify them, correct them and add such other ideas as he thought better fitted to the subject. He sometimes would exceed his prose design by writing several verses impromptu, but these he would take uncommon pains afterwards to revise, but they should be found unconnected with his main design. 9

Such fastidiousness concerning his work would have starved him to death, and it was the realization of this fact that forced him to do hack work.

Before making a detailed study of the individual poems, a general criticism of Goldsmith's work as a poet is fitting. He regarded the field as sacred and brought to it his best efforts. The fact that he wrote didactic

9. European Magazine, Vol. 24 (September, 1793), p. 172.

poetry in accord with the traditions of his age puts him automatically out of consideration for exalted rank as a poet. That matter, however, really has no place in this study, and for that reason, Gosse's criticism that the verse of Goldsmith "marks no progress in the art of poetry" is out of place.¹⁰ Goldsmith never entertained the idea of starting a new thought in the poetical field. This much must be said, however, that of its kind, the work of Goldsmith ranks high. There is no question of the popularity of The Deserted Village, even though Sir Egerton Brydges many years ago did not believe that such¹¹ was a true test.

Previous mention has been made of Goldsmith's return to simplicity. Even though he followed other traditions such as the didactic coloring embodied in the rhymed couplet, he shied away from all affectation. His simplicity, of course, is greatly responsible for the consequent charm and appeal of his work. A critical review of the early nineteenth century regards this simplicity along with an accuracy in delineation as the distinguishing¹² characteristics of Goldsmith's work.

10. A History of Eighteenth Century Literature, 1660-1780, p. 322.

11. Censura Literaria, Vol. VII, pp. 348-349.

12. "Comments on the Character and Writings of Oliver Goldsmith," Portfolio, Vol. VI (September, 1811), N. S., p. 221.

"This day is published," said the Public Advertiser of December 19, 1764, "price one shilling and sixpence, The Traveller; or, a Prospect of Society, A Poem. By ¹³ Oliver Goldsmith, M. B." It was the first work of Goldsmith to bear his name, and as such, it elevated him from the class of literary drudge to that of author. In dedicating it to his brother Henry, he acted most properly since he had already associated part of the poem with him during the early stages of his walk through Europe.

Most of the club members would not believe that the poem was the work of Goldsmith because they did not consider him capable of producing such writing. They settled its authorship on Dr. Johnson, It is a quite well-established fact, however, that the work is definitely Goldsmith's and that Johnson contributed only nine lines to it.

Professor Crane's recent discovery of the essays written by Goldsmith between 1760 and 1762 shows that they contain the themes of The Traveller in a process of crystallization. Essays III and VI in Crane's numbering foreshadow clearly the general idea of the comparative study of nations that gave unity to the poem, and the fourteenth and eighteenth essays reveal the import of the political

13. John Forster, Life and Adventures of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 312.

and social pessimism in the closing lines of it.¹⁴

That Goldsmith modelled himself on Johnson is surely true. In this regard, Dobson mentions that the meter of The Traveler is very much like that of Johnson's "London" and "Vanity of Human Wishes."¹⁵

Temple Scott furnishes three or four contemporary opinions of the poem. When Bennet Langton was told by Reynolds that Charles James Fox had declared it one of the finest poems in the English language, he asserted, "Surely, there was no doubt of this before." Johnson, in his usual dogmatic manner, added, "No, the merit of The Traveller is so well established that Mr. Fox's opinion cannot augment it, nor his censure diminish it." At another time, he maintained that it was "a production to which, since the death of Pope, it would not be easy to find anything equal." The sister of Joshua Reynolds, who had had slight respect for Goldsmith, frankly stated after her first reading the poem, "Well, I never more shall think Dr. Goldsmith ugly."¹⁶

Several items add to the general interest of the poem. There is, first of all, its occasion and purpose. The author places himself on a height of the Alps from

14. New Essays by Oliver Goldsmith, p. xxxix.

15. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 93.

16. Oliver Goldsmith, Bibliographically and Biographically Considered, p. 148.

which he muses and moralizes on the countries lying about him. His object is to discuss man, his government, and his happiness. The very first line that Goldsmith wrote became the center of a club discussion at one time. Chamier asked him whether he meant "tardiness of locomotion" by the last word in the line. Goldsmith answered "Yes." Johnson, however, who was sitting by, rebuked him, "No, Sir, you do not mean tardiness of locomotion; you mean that sluggishness of mind which comes upon a man in solitude." Chamier, naturally, jumped to the conclusion that the poem was Johnson's and not that of Goldsmith. ¹⁷ Bishop Percy of Reliques fame has also contributed a bit concerning the lines:

By sports like these are all their cares beguiled,
The sports of children satisfy the child.

On a surprise visit he found Goldsmith teaching his pet dog to sit up on its haunches while those very lines ¹⁸ were still wet in his original manuscript.

In the attempt to regard the poem disinterestedly, several conclusions present themselves. The lessons presented for the reader's consideration that one government

17. Boswell's Life of Johnson, Vol. III, pp. 252-253.

18. Austin Dobson, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 95-96.

is as good as another and that the happiness of the governed is independent of the actions of the governing power must be looked at with suspicion. For a modern reader the original purpose for which Goldsmith wrote the poem is meaningless. Today the descriptive passages and finish¹⁹ of the style are the most interesting features. Concerning the last, Elton is careful to indicate the improvements which Goldsmith effects in the heroic verse established so strongly by Pope. The line and the couplet with him never become indistinct. There is also much more enjambement²⁰ than Pope permitted to himself.

The next published poem of Goldsmith's was his Ballad, Edwin and Angelina, sometimes called The Hermit. It appeared in 1765, although it was written in 1764 and printed privately for the Countess of Northumberland. In The Vicar of Wakefield, it is introduced into the eighth chapter as A Ballad. This slight piece of work is of interest largely because of its association with the Reliques, then in the process of being gathered by Bishop Percy. The bishop from time to time submitted his manuscript to Goldsmith for criticism. Among the poems there was one which

19. Ibid., The Complete Works of Oliver Goldsmith, p. xx.
 20. A Survey of English Literature, 1730-1780, Vol. I,
 p. 105.

Percy himself had modernized, the original bearing the title: Gentle Herdsman, Tell To Me: A Dialogue between a Pilgrim and a Herdsman. Goldsmith approved of the revision, but maintained that he could write a better original ballad, and Edwin and Angelina resulted.

The work was always a pet of Goldsmith. At one time he wrote to Joseph Cradock, a friend, "As to my 'Hermit,' that poem cannot be amended." Dobson slyly comments, however, that Goldsmith was always amending it, as the various versions give evidence.²¹ In his preface to a collection of Poems for Young Ladies into which he had inserted the ballad, Goldsmith wrote a guileless line, ". . . every poem in the following collection would singly have procured an author great reputation."²²

At the present time, Edwin and Angelina has little importance. The most that can be granted to it is its easy style. "Its sweetness has grown a little insipid, and its simplicity to eyes unanointed with eighteenth century sympathy, borders perilously upon the ridiculous."²³

On May 26, 1770, there was published the best known of the poems of Goldsmith, The Deserted Village. It was

21. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 108.

22. Works, Vol. IV, p. 151.

23. Austin Dobson, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 108-109.

nearly two years in the making, but its popularity then and now excuses this deliberate composition. After Thomas Gray had listened to a friend read it, he exclaimed, "That man is a poet,"²⁴ and that praise came from one who had sufficient reason perhaps to withhold it.

The matter in the poem causing most serious argument among critics has always been the significance of the village and the economic theories concerning it. Most Irish enthusiasts had looked upon Auburn as a reincarnation of Lissoy, the birthplace of Goldsmith, and had glorified it naturally. Loyalty and commercialism encouraged such a view, and regarded the suggestion of Auburn's being an English village as heretical. The accepted scholarly opinion tends to accept this latter suggestion. Austin Dobson was one of the first to give it credence, basing his conclusion on the following: 1. there is no evidence that Goldsmith ever visited Ireland after 1752, which was fifteen years prior to the time of the writing of The Deserted Village; 2. since Goldsmith wrote the poem in England from a desire to prove depopulation there, he²⁵ evidently wanted to have the scene in England. Ronald Crane holds the same opinion, regarding the lament over

24. Temple Scott, Op. cit., p. 240.

25. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 150-151.

the ruins of Auburn as simply the most memorable of a long series of pamphlets called forth in the 1760's and 1770's by the English agricultural revolution.²⁶

The strong feeling of sympathy in Goldsmith led him into errors in his economic theories. The Deserted Village was a protest against the enclosure of common lands which drove out the small farmer in order to give the wealthy man room for his private luxuries. This accumulation of wealth would bring about the degradation of the majority of men, the dispersal of the peasantry, and the decay of trade. These forebodings were, of course, not entirely true. Crane's study reveals that problems of the small farmer were a concern of Goldsmith years before the actual writing of the poem. He really was convinced that his theories of political economy were sound. At the present, however, they are of little concern either to the critic or to the average reader.

"What we remember in the Deserted Village is the school, the schoolmaster, and the dancers, and the parson. They belong to the National Galler, and we say 'This is a Goldsmith' as we say 'This is a Reynolds'."²⁷ That statement is very true. It is precisely in his vignettes

26. Op. cit., p. xl.

27. Oliver Elton, Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 107.

of the village life that Goldsmith has his appeal.

In its own time, much had been expected of the Deserted Village after the success of The Traveller, and and Judge Day, an Irish lawyer and intimate friend of the members of the Club, assures us that the "public expectation and impatience were not disappointed."²⁸ Johnson did not regard it as highly as he had praised Goldsmith's first poetic success, probably because it did not contain a sufficient amount of moralizing.

It will be recalled that the poem contains the farewell of Goldsmith to the field of poetry in the lines

And thou, sweet Poetry, thou loveliest maid,

 Thou nurse of every virtue, fare thee well.

There was immediate indignation registered at this leave-taking. "We hope that, for the honour of the Art, and the pleasure of the Public, Dr. Goldsmith will retract his farewell to poetry, and give us other opportunities of doing justice to his merit."²⁹ A writer to the St. James's Chronicle protested:

. . . What! shall the author of the Traveler, and

28. Temple Scott, Op. cit., p. 276.

28. "The Deserted Village," Monthly Review, Vol. 42, (June, 1770), p. 445.

the Deserted Village, poems which not only do honour to the nation, but are the only living proofs that true poetry is not dead amongst us; shall he . . . be obliged to drudge for booksellers, and write, because he must write, lives of poets much inferior to himself, Roman History, Natural History, or any history, and be forced to curb his imagination, lest it should run him into distresses? 30

Among the occasional verse that Goldsmith wrote, the incomplete Retaliation is perhaps most deserving. The poem had its origin in a gathering at St. James's Coffee-House. A suggestion for an impromptu composing of epitaphs reached its climax with Garrick's

Here lies Nolly Goldsmith, for shortness called Noll,
Who wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll.

When Goldsmith heard of it, he prepared his answer. Before it was completed, however, he passed parts of it to friends for criticism, and the original group of merry fellows at the coffee-house began to fear for the satire which they sensed coming toward them. Goldsmith's death caused the poem to remain unfinished, but his characterization of some nine or ten associates is clever. Elton maintains that he determined the popular pictures of both Burke and Garrick far better than most of their biographers had done. 31

Another of the occasional verses was The Haunch of

30. Temple Scott, Op. cit., p. 241.

31. Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 109.

Venison published posthumously but written sometime between 1770 and 1771. It was sent to Lord Clare in acknowledgement of a gift of meat. Its most remarkable quality is its sparkling humor.

There are many other minor bits that Goldsmith wrote, but they are listed in the collection of his works principally to provide a complete canon. They possess little value as poetry.

In glancing back at the contribution of Goldsmith to the field of poetry, one must admit that even The Traveller and The Deserted Village, his most representative pieces, are not great poetry.³² On the other hand, both poems, especially the latter, have always been read. The only answer for such a puzzling circumstance lies in the fact that they, like the other types of writing which he attempted, were suffused with the elegance and charm that were his peculiar gift.

32. "College English: Goldsmith's Traveller and The Deserted Villate," Journal of Education, Vol. 77 (January, 1913), p. 97.

CHAPTER V

GOLDSMITH AS NOVELIST

That Goldsmith should ever have turned to novel writing is a bit astonishing in view of his generally low estimate of that field of writing. There are such a number of surprising events in his life, however, that the amazement evoked in the present instance possibly is unfounded.

As against the drama, so against the novel of his time, Goldsmith had protests to make. His severest complaint was what he termed bawdry. Incidentally, it is of interest to know that Goldsmith always renounced moral laxity. This sanity was doubtless part of the loveliness that was his. His novel and his dramas could easily have been obscene if he had been inclined to follow the spirit of his contemporaries. In one of the Chinese Letters entitled, "The Absurd Taste for Obscene and Pert Novels, Such as Tristram Shandy, Ridiculed" his attitude on this matter was definitely set forth.

Sterne was producing his novel in separate books between 1760-1767, and by the time Goldsmith published The Citizen of the World in 1762, he had evidently seen parts of the former's work. In his opinion, Sterne was "a bawdy blockhead." Just that, but he insisted upon it for in the letter referred to above, he wrote "yet by the assistance

of the figure bawdry . . . a bawdy blockhead often passes for a fellow of smart parts and pretensions" and again "they (the figures of bawdry and pertness) are of such a nature, that the merest blockhead, by a proper use of them, shall have the reputation of a wit . . ."¹ Two such broadsides

would seem to have been sufficiently destructive, but the Goldsmith love for repeating a pet idea led to a third attack sometime later. "In England, if a bawdy blockhead thus breaks in on the community, he sets his whole fraternity in a roar . . . The element in bawdry that pained Goldsmith was its easily-won success; so little imagination was necessary to evince a prurient snigger.

Possibly Sterne's popularity as a wit, gained undeservedly in Goldsmith's estimation, provoked another bit of satire in The Citizen about the style of the author of Tristram. Lien Chi Altangi in a visit to a bookseller had asked to see some of the materials intended for publication.

'Bless me!' cries the man of industry, 'now you speak of an epic poem, you shall see an excellent farce. Here it is; dip into it where you will, it will be found replete with true modern humour. Strokes, Sir; it is filled with strokes of wit and satire in every line.' 'Do you call these dashes of the pen strokes,' replied I, 'for I must confess

1. J. W. M. Gibbs, The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, Vol. III, pp. 199-200.

I can see no other?' --- 'And pray, Sir,' returned he, 'what do you call them? Do you see any thing good now-a-days, that is not filled with strokes--- and dashes? --- Sir, a well placed dash makes half the wit of our writers of modrn humour.' 3

It will be recalled that not only dashes and strokes are to be found in Tristram Shandy but likewise dots and asterisks and even blank pages. Those were the symbols in the Sterne code of contempt for rules and accepted forms.

In the novel of his time Goldsmith always found the same substance. He detailed it briefly in his life of Beau Nash. "The gentleman begins at timid distance, grows more bold, becomes rude, till the lady is married or un-⁴done." In a vivid realism he detected a way to licentiousness, especially for the young, and he objected to it accordingly. To those who defended it on the score that vice was represented for the purpose of punishing it, he answered that such punishment was always of less interest to the reader than the portrayal of the vice itself. That morbid curiosity he thought quite natural in human beings. Yet he was grieved to find it in the ladies of his time who read Sterne most approvingly, lipping the "double meanings with so much grace . . ."

3. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 192-193.

4. Ibid., Vol. IV, p. 88.

Goldsmith's second major criticism of the contemporary novels was their falseness. To his mind, they stood for something other than life offered. This opinion was expressed in a letter which he wrote to his brother Henry concerning the education of the latter's son. "Above all things, let him never touch a romance, or novel, those painted beauty in colours more charming than nature, and describe happiness that man never tastes."⁵ Other lines in his writing repeat much the same idea.

Minor items in his critical estimate are worth noting. He ranked the talent necessary for the production of a novel as equal to that required for the turning out of sentimental drama. For that reason, he prophesied for novel writing a long life. He ridiculed the writer of the novel or romance for his natural use of blank verse, a style for which he had little sympathy because of its lack of harmony. The contemporary novel, moreover, was too bulky to suit him. So much was written about matter of so little moment.

It is of interest to know what Goldsmith desired in a novel inasmuch as a possible contradiction in his nature suggests itself. Bitterly though he fought against sentimentalism in drama, yet his proposal of the true novel is

5. Katharine Balderston, The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 60.

tagged definitely with that mark. It is as a novel of sentiment that Ernest Baker discusses The Vicar of Wakefield,⁶ and from sentiment sentimentalism is no great jump. In place of the young hero who dashed through life adventurously, no sooner out of one intrigue than in another, Goldsmith suggested a protagonist who should be praised for resisting dissipated living. The novel should relate "how he, at last, became Lord Mayor of London --- how he was married to a lady of great sense, fortune, and beauty; to be as explicit as possible, the old story of Whittington, were his cat left out . . ."⁷ That kind of hero really indicates the power that sentiment had in the 1700's rather than contradiction in Goldsmith.

Novel writing up to 1760 was the history of the "Big Four," Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne. Each of these men had contributed handsomely to the field. Richardson had offered the sentimental young lady, the villain, and the abduction, the necessary substance of a true novel of character. Fielding had added intrigue, adventure, and the kindhearted gentleman. From Smollett the form had acquired the background of the sea detailed in all exactness. From

6. The History of the English Novel, Vol. V, pp. 78-85.

7. Works, Vol. II, p. 405.

sterne it had gained variation in treatment, the result principally of the capricious personality of its contributor. As far as his work was concerned, Goldsmith was most closely allied to Richardson and Fielding. The former had begun the sentimental novel, and Goldsmith continued the tradition.

The nature of the sentimental novel is best seen perhaps in the critical word of Jeaffreson. The conventional incidents were such as expected "young ladies to be snatched hold of by licentious admirers, and carried away to evil houses in carriages and four, in the style of Richardson's heroines." The villain eventually had to be formally exposed and that "in the presence of a rich parent or uncle who disowns him, the virtuous girl who has eluded his arts, and the triumphant rival who walks over his shoulders into a honeymoon and four thousand a year."⁸ In practically all of those details The Vicar of Wakefield matches in harmony with the general type.

Cazamian has analyzed the novel of sentiment philosophically. According to him, the middle classes at this time were making the moral transformation in society. In their dominant instincts he discovers a close relationship to the novel. This form of literature lends itself more

8. Novels and Novelists from Elizabeth to Victoria, Vol. I, p. 253.

favorably than any other type of writing to ethics and sentiment, the dominant instincts previously mentioned. Its tendency to become a picture of life must, for the middle classes, develop into a realistic picture. Realism, arousing the same reactions as life itself, will inspire good behavior. Moralizing intentions will set in, but that such moralizing may be effected, a real picture of life will have recourse to the feelings.⁹ It is hardly probable that Goldsmith laid plans with such careful analysis for the sentiment in The Vicar. He was part of a sentimentalist movement, and he fitted himself into it unprotestingly. In reality, it was the only school of the novel left to him for enrollment since he had rejected the risqué realism of Fiedling and Sterne.

While placing Goldsmith's work into the history of the novel at this time, it is safe to note that his contribution does not help to shape this form of writing in any but a minor way. Goldsmith was a novelist by accident only. He wrote merely because the style was popular.¹⁰ Henry James believes that he would never have stuck to one thing long enough to write according to the more recent formula

9. A History of English Literature, Vol. II, p. 164.

10. George Saintsbury, The English Novel, p. 148.

demanded in the construction of the novel.¹¹ The Vicar of Wakefield will hardly guarantee him a rank among the great novelists. Of its kind, however, it is fair to add that it is among the best.

The history of The Vicar of Wakefield has always been a confused one. Boswell maintained that his account was authentic as he had it from Dr. Johnson himself, the chief figure in the story. Then there were the separate records of Mrs. Piozzi, Richard Cumberland, Conversation Cooke, and Sir John Hawkins, one of the original members of the famous Club. All of these agreed in their general contour, but details of one contradicted those of another. The account now accepted by students of Goldsmith is that given by Temple Scott who presents the recent findings most concisely. His narration, however, scarcely differs from that of Austin Dobson.¹²

When The Vicar of Wakefield appeared, it bore the imprint "Salisbury: Printed by B. Collins; for F. Newbery, in Pater-Noster-Row." Newbery had agreed to buy Goldsmith's manuscript for sixty pounds but for some uncertain reason had sold a third interest in it to Benjamin Collins whose money was paid immediately to the author. Goldsmith at

11. "The Vicar of Wakefield," A Book of Modern Essays, edited by McCullough and Burugm, p. 365.

12. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, pp. 110-116.

this time was living at No. 6 Wine Office Court. His landlady, who had heard of his intentions to move to Islington, feared for an unpaid rent bill and threatened him with the debtor's prison. He sent an urgent S O S. to Johnson which received an immediate answer. As the two men attempted to find a way out of the difficulty, the manuscript for the novel was referred to. Its author revealed the full details of the arrangement with the publisher, not forgetting Collins's interest in the procedure. Johnson looked into the work and "saw its merits." He took it to Newbery and received from him the forty pounds still due by way of the agreement. This sum rescued Goldsmith from the landlady's prosecution.
13

Newbery shelved the manuscript then and published it only on March 27, 1766, practically four years after its writing. Even at this time his motive for publication did not lay in the innate value of the work; he relied on the success of The Traveller, published in 1764, to bring similar glory to the new Goldsmith effort. It was no "best-seller" however; nine years had to elapse before 2000 copies found buyers. This immediate ill-success was due partly to the indifferent promotion of the publishers and partly to the attitude of the author himself. That Goldsmith was

13. Oliver Goldsmith Bibliographically and Biographically Considered, pp. 169-170.

not vitally interested in the novel was evident in the criticism which followed the first appearance of The Vicar of Wakefield. Its many errors were pointed out to him, which faults incidentally he could easily have corrected. Speaking of Newbery's purchase of the manuscript, he remarked to a friend, "He gave me 60 pounds for the copy, and had I made it ever so perfect or correct, I should not have had a shilling more."¹⁴ Such indifference practically betrays Goldsmith's regard for the writing of the novel as similar to hack-writing.

The later history of the work has brought it success. Country after country has taken hold of it, turned it into the native tongue, and watched it become a household book, as necessary to the home library as the Bible and Shakespeare. A fair number of critics point to this popularity as a mark of the book's greatness. Augustine Birrell called it a "consecrated novel."¹⁵ Another observation in the same vein came from Pelham Edgar. ". . . The Vicar of Wakefield still remains one of the most popular novels in the language written by the creator of the most popular play and one of the most popular poems of its century. Such a combination is beyond the reach of accident, and to lay impious hands

14. Ibid., p. 176.

15. "Consecrated Novels," Nation and Athenaeum, Vol. 40 (October 30, 1926), p. 143.

upon such an author would be the height of folly."¹⁶

The risk of committing sacrilege must be run, however, in a detailed criticism of Goldsmith's work later. For the present, to remark that he earned a reputation in the field of the novel despite himself is apropos. Dobson believes that in spite of the book's many inconsistencies, it will continue to be regarded among the first of our English classics.¹⁷

It is interesting to know how various people, living contemporaneously with Goldsmith or some years after, regarded his book. Sir Walter Scott in his memoir said, "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."¹⁸ Goethe maintained that it was his delight at twenty, and that when he reread the book at eighty-one this delight was renewed. Of more significance yet was the work to him during the critical moments of his mental development.

That lofty and benevolent irony, that fair and indulgent view of all infirmities and faults, that meekness under all calamities, that equanimity under all changes and chances, and the whole train of kindred virtues,

16. The Art of the Novel, pp. 77-78.

17. Op. cit., p. 118.

18. The Novels of Sterne, Goldsmith, Dr. Johnson, Mackenzie, Horace Walpole, and Clara Reeve, pp. xxxviii-xxxix.

whatever name they bear, proved my best education; and in the end, there are the thoughts and feelings which have reclaimed us from all the errors of life. 19

Garrick saw nothing to be learned from it.

Dr. Johnson's attitude is amusing. It will be recalled that when he sold Goldsmith's manuscript he had looked at it and had seen its merits. Later, on speaking to Mrs. Thrale about Fanny Burney's fondness for the book, he was asked if he liked it. "No, madam," he replied, "it is very faulty; there is nothing of real life in it, and very little of nature. It is a mere fanciful performance."²⁰ A similar idea is recorded by Boswell. Johnson told him on one occasion as they were speaking of Goldsmith, "His Vicar of Wakefield I myself did not think would have much success."²¹ After having read these opinions, one wonders what those merits were which he originally saw.

A recent criticism of the book is a safe one to express as it is that of Henry James. ". . . Goldsmith's story still fails, somehow, on its face, to account for its great position and its remarkable career. Read as one of the masterpieces by a person not acquainted with our literature, it might easily give an impression that this literature is

19. Austin Dobson, Op. cit., pp. 120-121.

20. Ernest Baker, Op. cit., Vol. V, p. 81, footnote.

21. Boswell's Life of Johnson, Vol. III, p. 321.

not immense."²² In the analysis to follow, this thought of James will serve as a framework upon which to hang remarks on the tone, the characterization, the plot, and the style of Goldsmith's novel.

The Vicar of Wakefield is a short tale, a work to which the name "idyll" might be aptly applied. There is a pleasant homeliness about it which has led some critics to consider it an example of domestic fiction. Goldsmith attempted to paint a little picture of family life. His success appealed quite positively to the English home-lover. Regarding this fact, Cazamian notes, "For their national sentiment, The Vicar is a picture of normal, real habits. There is no intellectuality; the concern is for behavior."²³ Goldsmith's approach, however, would please not only an Englishman. It would attract the home-loving readers of other countries as well.

He gave the public something different from what the other novelists had contributed. With Sterne and Smollett he had hardly anything in common. The realism of Fielding he avoided. Even Richardson, whom he most closely followed, did not find him a slavish imitator. He moralized after the manner of his predecessor, it is true, but the

22. Op. cit., p. 367.

23. Op. cit., Vol. II, p. 170.

moralizing was secondary. His principal offering to the field was a picture of home and family life.

Henry James has remarked in his critical essay on The Vicar

It is the spoiled child of our literature . . . the book converts everything in it into a happy case of exemption and fascination---a case of imperturbable and inscrutable classicism. It is a question of tone. The tone is exquisite, and that's the end of it. The tone does not make the little gaps and slips live for I think it scarce does that at all, but leaves them to linger on as spiced, dead rose-leaves in a bowl, inanimate, fragrant, intensely present. 24

This matter of tone is an important one in a discussion of The Vicar of Wakefield. In previous passages, indirect remarks concerning it have been made, but it definitely needs thorough treatment because it is that which gives the book its quality.

The constituents of the Goldsmith tone are: humor, satire, sympathy, simplicity, and purity. Those characteristics, occurring singly or blended in twos and threes, give the reader something to remember after he has criticized the amateur workmanship of the plot and the weaknesses of the characterization.

Delicious bits of humor are offered throughout the book. The return of Moses from the fair with a gross of

24. Op. cit., p. 370.

green spectacles which he had acquired in trade for the family colt is one of the first invitations to pleasant laughter. There is the instance of the Vicar slyly upsetting the pan of homemade face-wash which the girls were preparing in an attempt to keep themselves looking their prettiest. The portrait of the family ordered in envy of that made of the neighboring Flamboroughs causes a hearty laugh when one learns that in their eagerness to outdo their friends, the Primroses had forgotten the dimensions of their parlor, and the magnificent portrait is condemned to lean ignominiously against the kitchen wall. The master stroke, however, would appear to lie in the punishment of the villain. Young Thornhill is notorious for his debauched life. To discover then in the final distribution of rewards and penalties that this young rake is sentenced to caring for a melancholy relative and learning to blow a French horn is a tidbit. Sir Walter Raleigh maintains that this comedy is the highest merit of the work. ²⁵ Whether this statement is too strong or not is of no great concern here. The fact is that humor contributes largely to the tone of the work. One of those blends referred to previously is a combination of this humor and a deep interest for the

25. The English Novel, p. 206.

character. The sympathetic ridicule that results is noteworthy for its refinement.

In the motto or text for the story is additional evidence of this sympathy. Goldsmith had written on his title page Sperate miseri, cavete felices. If anybody had reason to write a melancholy novel, it was he. James has noted that there was hardly a difficulty, a disappointment, or a humiliation with which he did not have a firsthand acquaintance. ²⁶ Some chastening process must have worked inside him for there is nothing but the brightest optimism in his pages. There are disappointments certainly; the Vicar and his family step into ceaseless misfortune, but the author urges them to hope. That they do is evident from the lines of heroic courage constantly in the mouth of the noble Vicar. He is Job modernized.

Sympathy developed soon into humanitarianism, and some critics recognize in Goldsmith a forerunner of Dickens and Thackeray. The preachments of the Vicar against duelling, against the severity of the penal code, and for the reform of prison life would seem to confirm this observation.

Simplicity is another element in the general tone. The substance of the novel is most simple. The technique in the management of the plot is so artless that it calls

26. Op. Cit., pp. 371-372.

for condemnation. A more important kind of simplicity, which is one of the basic elements under consideration, is that guilelessness, that lack of sophistication that weaves together the story of the Vicar and his troubles. This characteristic, more than any other, accounts for the appeal of Goldsmith's work. His simplicity has led his story directly into the field of sentiment. Those events and circumstances which other authors had neglected, he encircled with a halo, and since those events concerned home and family, he did not find it difficult to secure a responsive audience.

The tone of Goldsmith's work includes a fourth element, purity. He is a realist, but there is nothing in his work that will lead a reader into unwholesome fancyings. Leigh Hunt, among others, has remarked this fact.²⁷

These elements of a kindly humor, an understanding satire, simplicity, and purity constitute the tone of The Vicar of Wakefield. Sometimes a page reflects only one of them, or at most a blend of two, but throughout the short tale there is a suffusion of them all that produces an irresistible attractiveness.

As a novel of sentiment, The Vicar of Wakefield is concerned primarily with the Primrose family, with the

27. Classic Tales, Serious and Lively, pp. 79-80.

circumstances of its happinesses and misfortunes. In this family lies the charm of the book. It is responsible for the tone discussed above. Sir Walter Scott wrote of it, "The principal character, that of the simple Pastor himself, . . . is one of the best and most pleasing pictures ever designed. His excellent help-mate . . . forms an excellent counterpart. Both with their children about them . . . compose a fireside picture of such a perfect kind as perhaps is nowhere else equalled."²⁸

There is first of all the Vicar himself, Dr. Charles Primrose. In his Advertisement to the work, Goldsmith had written, "The hero of this piece unites in himself the three greatest characters upon earth; he is a priest, an husbandman, and the father of a family. He is drawn as ready to teach, and ready to obey; as simple in affluence, and majestic in adversity." Little is written of him as "an husbandman," but his position as priest and father is insisted upon. There is constant moralizing as a result of the former. When one recalls, however, that he had taken the spiritual concerns of the family into his hands, leaving the temporal to his wife, the resultant didacticism is not surprising. Henry James identifies the success of the story with the Vicar. ". . . he is always kept true,

28. Op. cit., p. xxxviii.

is what we call today 'sustained,' without becoming pompous or hollow."²⁹ It is not at all odd to find him fighting strenuously, although not diplomatically, in defense of his views on monogamy. Even his long-winded harangue to the prisoners is consistent with the picture given to us. Both these instances affirm definitely the love of the ministry in the Vicar.

Nor does he ever forget his position as father. His wife treats Olivia somewhat shabbily after her disgrace, but he continues to love her. This one instance places the priest and father in the Vicar side by side with the Good Shepherd and the father of the prodigal son.

One critic finds the Vicar inconsistent. He points out that, since the story rests chiefly in Dr. Primrose, he must charm us. His simplicity, while amusing, must teach us to love him. Yet the stupidity, the impossible mixture of folly and wisdom in him hardly makes him a³⁰ lovable individual. In comparing Grabo's opinion with that of other critics, it would seem that he has misinterpreted the Vicar. The first few chapters of the novel reveal the Vicar as a simple soul, simple to the point of gullibility. One in that condition can be expected to do anything, stupid and foolish however it may appear. The

29. Op. cit., p. 371.

30. Carl Grabo, The Technique of The Novel, p. 36.

folly of Dr. Primrose, however, does not detract from his loveliness in the least because it is the result of the simplicity that is his.

Deborah Primrose pairs well with her husband. Her foolish vanity combined with his simplicity is a promise of certain misfortune. She has had many successors in fiction, most notably perhaps Mrs. Nickleby in Dickens's book. As the mother of this family she does not inspire sympathy. Her reception of Olivia, after she herself had promoted the coquetry of her daughter, is shameful. In view of the fact that the story is a picture of the sentiment of family life, it is expected that this group cling to each other lovingly. Possibly though, Goldsmith committed the inconsistency in characterization because, as some critics indicate, he was using Mrs. Primrose as the figure to impersonate his mother of whom he was not the best beloved son.

Of the two boys, George and Moses, there are only sketches. The principal entrance of the former is the story of his vagabondage, and it yields scarcely anything in the way of portraiture. Moses, on the other hand, stands out every so often in the traits which were part of the inheritance from his father. Simplicity is his main characteristic.

Neither of the girls is a very substantial individual.

Either of them could step into each other's costume, and the change would be hardly noticeable. William Dean Howells has pointed out that the misfortune of Olivia imparts to her a kind of dignity which is not innate. She becomes a woman only after her fall.³¹

There is a common note among the remaining important figures, Mr. Burchell, the young Squire, and Ephraim Jenkinson, which has already been written concerning the children of Dr. Primrose. They are hardly characters inasmuch as they do not tingle with sufficient life-blood. They are merely sketched into a portrait of the life of the family. For that matter, the Vicar himself is not so thoroughly characterized as the hero of the novel should be. It is the opinion of one critic that Goldsmith's lack of power in seizing character was the principal cause of the low estimate that Johnson had of The Vicar of Wakefield.³² The thought that suggests itself in the consideration of Goldsmith's handling of character in his novel is the similarity with his technique in the drama. Just as in the latter he singled out foibles in his men and women for satirical exposure, so he seems to deal in like manner

31. "Heroines of Nineteenth-Century Fiction," Harper's Bazar, Vol. 33 (May 5, 1900), p. 6.

32. Whitwell Elwin, Some Eighteenth Century Men of Letters, Vol. II, p. 197.

with the figure in The Vicar.

The plot of the novel must not be dealt with too seriously. Most of the "hundred faults in this Thing" are plot inconsistencies and imperfections. Every critic and every reader realizes them. Such being the set-up, it is of little purpose to criticize the work in counting those plot defects. Of more importance is a study of the reasons for these failures. Both Henry James³³ and Walter Raleigh³⁴ point to the nature of Goldsmith himself as one reason. His technique in plot construction was merely the flinging together of the materials provided by convention for the novelist. Careful interweaving of plot and sub-plot, the neglect of no detail to build all events into a strong conclusion were impossible to the Irish inconsequence and the tendency to ramble afield that were his. In order to illustrate the second half of his text, cavete felices, Goldsmith must visit afflictions upon the Vicar and his family. These trials multiply too rapidly for him, however, and soon the plot is beyond his control. Fortunately, there is a deus ex machina, a device which he remembered to use in his dramatic work, which organizes tolerably well the chaotic circumstances.

A second reason for the ill-luck of the plot was

33. Op. cit., p. 365.

34. Op. cit., p. 208.

Goldsmith's telling the story from the point of view of the
 35
 Vicar. This method made the hero record the events and yet he had to remain ignorant of them himself until they were revealed to him as they were to the other people in the story. With such an arrangement, inconsistencies did not fail to hurry into the action.

. Redeeming but not excusing the faults of plot are the individual pictures scattered throughout the work. Some of these have already been referred to, such as Moses's purchase of the green spectacles and the family portrait whose excessive dimensions were discovered too late. There are others as pleasing, notably, the preaching of the Vicar to his fellow-prisoners.

In 1890, Frederic Balfour expressed an opinion about the genius of Goldsmith as a novelist which Austin Dobson³⁶ reaffirms in 1913. The former's criticism of The Vicar as immoral is a misfit notion, but it does not impair his final recognition of Goldsmith's genius.

Did Goldsmith 'write like an angel?' Was he, in sober truth, a man of transcendent genius? He must have been, and that of the highest order. No inferior intellect could have achieved so wonderful a triumph as to win, for a work instinct with such ignoble import, grotesque

35. Carl Grabo, Op. cit., pp. 34-35.

36. The Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. X, pp. 209-210.

improbability, and inverted morals, the enthusiastic admiration of Goethe, and the suffrage of the entire reading world. 37

In the field of the novel, Goldsmith succeeded in spite of himself. The Vicar of Wakefield stands next to the works of Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne as the representative productions of the time. Goldsmith had not regarded this type of writing as a serious field in which to work. He had entered it only because it was popular at the time. Not possessing the mental equipment of a novelist, he wrote two hundred pages of character and plot defects. Despite such personally inflicted handicaps, he saved what would superficially appear hopeless by suffusing those two hundred pages with a tone of carefully and unconsciously blended humor, pathos, simplicity, and purity that earned for him recognition as a genius in the writing of the novel.

37. "Angelic Immorality," National Review, Vol. 15 (1890), p. 696.

CHAPTER VI

GOLDSMITH AS DRAMATIST

The obvious questions that demand answering in a discussion of Goldsmith as dramatist are: 1. Was Goldsmith really a playwright? 2. If so, how capable a playwright was he? It would be well in the very beginning to set the theatrical background of the time. His place on the eighteenth century stage would then be better understood.

Before 1700, as the Restoration drama rotted away, Colley Cibber conceived an embryonic sentimental comedy. Often it is referred to as "genteel" comedy. Goldsmith's own definition of it in his essay on the "Comparison between Sentimental and Laughing Comedy" is a clearly written exposition.

. . . a new species of dramatic exposition has been introduced, under the name of sentimental comdy, in which the virtues of private life are exhibited, rather than the vices exposed; and the distresses rather than the faults of mankind make our interest in the piece. These comedies have had of late great success, perhaps from their novelty, and also from their flattering every man in his favourite foible. In these plays almost all the characters are good, and exceedingly generous; they are lavish enough of their tin money on the stage; and though they want humour, have abundance of sentiment and feeling. If they happen to have faults or foibles, the spectator is taught, not only to pardon, but to applaud them, in consideration of the goodness of their hearts; so that, folly, instead of being ridiculed, is commended, and the comedy

aims at touching our passions without the power of being truly pathetic. In this manner we are likely to lose one great source of entertainment on the stage; for while the comic poet is invading the province of the tragic muse, he leaves his lovely sister quite neglected. Of this, however, he is no way solicitous, as he measures his fame by his profits. 1

In this definition, Goldsmith lamented particularly the displacement by inferior substitutes of two elements of comedy that are fundamental in his dramatic creed, namely, nature and humor. The former had had to yield to artificiality, the latter to sentiment. As a result, English plays at this time ceased to reflect the manners of real life, and, according to Hazlitt, developed into "do-me-good, lack-a-daisical, whining, makebelieve comedies."²

This new trend may be traced to French influence. Over there it was the *comédie sérieuse* or *comédie larmoyante* begun by Pierre Claude de la Chaussée in 1741. He had established a school in the French drama which proposed not so much to satirize vice as to glorify the virtues of private and domestic life. It was this school which now enrolled new students in England.

Rivalry sprang up. All through the classical age sentimentalism fought the traditional comedy, but only

1. J. W. M. Gibbs, The Works of Oliver Goldsmith, Vol. I, p. 400.

2. Calvin S. Brown, The Later English Drama, pp. xiii-xv.

with the death of Sheridan did it receive an opportunity to rest unmolested. So it continued until Thomas Robertson's Caste in 1867. Despite the attacks by Goldsmith and Sheridan upon it, during the third quarter of the eighteenth century sentimental comedy was the prevailing form, its chief producers being Richard Cumberland, Hugh Kelly, Isaac Bickerstaff, and George Colman. Its precise strength can be estimated, as one critic indicates, in considering that sentimentalism tinctured even She Stoops To Conquer, a purposeful effort on Goldsmith's part to attack the breed.³

Reference has been made to the fact that Goldsmith found fault with sentimental drama because it was not composed of the life-principles of true comedy, nature and humor. In one of his essays, he predicted of it, "It will continue a kind of mulish production, with all the defects of its opposite parents, and marked with sterility."⁴

This remark and others somewhat similar make it evident that Goldsmith did not believe the new form deserving the name of comedy.

Fittingly enough in this age of appeal to the ancients, he pleaded before the same tribunal to justify his stand. Tragedy, he maintained, originally represented the praises

3. Allardyce Nicoll, A History of Late Eighteenth Century Drama, 1750-1800, p. 167.

4. Works, Vol. I, p. 401.

of the gods, whereas comedy dwelt upon the follies of mankind. By means of satire, these follies were exposed on public occasions of worship and festivity.⁵ If such was the origin of comedy, the sentimental school with its commendation of man's foibles was studying something other than the true form.

Moreover, in its presentation of all characters as good, the new school rejected an Aristotelian definition quoted by Goldsmith in the essay on the "Comparison between Sentimental and Laughing Comedy." "Comedy is defined by Aristotle to be a picture of the frailties of the lower part of mankind to distinguish it from tragedy, which is an exhibition of the virtues of the great."⁶ Further on in the essay, Goldsmith strengthened his appeal to Aristotle by a more inclusive reference. "If we apply to authorities, all the great masters in the dramatic art have but one opinion. Their rule is, that as tragedy displays the calamities of the great, so comedy should excite our laughter by ridiculously exhibiting the follies of the lower part of mankind."⁷

The term "low" was cant in this heyday of the sentimental drama. Many a time Goldsmith used it emphatically

5. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 349.

6. Ibid., Vol. I, p. 399.

7. Ibid.

to stress his point as in the last references. Just as often he wrote the word bitterly in an effort to force it back into the mouths of sentimentalists like Horace Walpole whose false elevated taste caused them to spit it out at the least sensation of potential laughter in a scene. The word must have annoyed Goldsmith considerably; it frightened the bailiff scene in his The Good-Natured Man off the stage. To prove that true comedy must be "low," he discussed the nature of wit and humor in a chapter of the Enquiry into Polite Learning. Wit raised human nature above its level; humor, on the contrary, lowered it. The sentimentalist, because of his inability to distinguish carefully between these functions, was led then to demand the impossible from the comic writer when he asked for an exalted humor. Such an expression was a contradiction in terms. Since the same sentimentalist built his production on such a nonentity, his "genteel" comedy was not comedy at all. After having thus knocked the legs from underneath his adversary, Goldsmith piled a convincing conclusion upon him. The pleasure, he said, that we receive from wit is due to our admiration of another; that which we receive from humor results from the admiration of ourselves, that we are not so stupid at the individual at whom we laugh. The playwright,

therefore, must place the object of humor in a state of inferiority . . . "the subject of humor must be low."⁸

Goldsmith's satire on sentimental drama is scattered plentifully throughout his works. The preface to The Good-Natured Man contains it. Lofty, the pretentious "windbag," in the second act of the same play, tells Miss Richland: ". . . the man was dull, dull as the last new comedy." There are smart lines in the mouth of Lien Chi Altangi in The Citizen of the World. In his epitaph for Cumberland in Retaliation, Goldsmith hammers hard on one of the principal exponents of sentimental drama. Garrick's prologue to She Stoops To Conquer is a well written bit of ridicule on the "mawkish drab of spurious breed." Possibly, though, Goldsmith's best hit is his scene in the alehouse towards the close of the first act of She Stoops To Conquer. Tony Lumpkin has just sung a song composed in honor of the alehouse itself. Dick Muggins the exciseman, the horse doctor Jack Slang, little Aminadag, the man with the dancing bear, and Tom Twist that spins the pewter platter, all exclusive members of his audience, pass about their criticisms.

8. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 515-516.

First Fellow: The 'Squire has got spunk in him.
 Second Fellow: I loves to hear him sing, bekeays he
 ow: never gives us nothing that's low.
 Third Fellow: O, damn any thing that's low, I can't
 bear it.
 Fourth Fellow: The genteel thing is the genteel thing
 ow: any time; if so be that a gentleman
 bees in a concatenation accordingly.
 Third Fellow: I like the maxum of it, Master Muggins.
 What though I am obbligated to dance
 a bear, a man may be a gentle-
 man for all that. May this be my
 poison, if my bear ever dances but
 to the very genteelest of tunes,
 "Water Parted," or "The Minuet in
 Ariadne." 9

Another trend on the eighteenth century stage vexed Goldsmith. It was the adaptation of Shakespeare to the classical formulae, which alteration was then paraded across the boards of both the theaters in London.

Among other possible reasons for such production, two certainly might be assigned: 1. the opportunity for the audience to see not a revamped Shakesperean play, but a favorite actor or actress in a Shakesperean role; 2. the opportunity for the theater management to make more money. Playgoers who admired Garrick went to see him fret and storm as King Lear. Shakespeare was secondary; it was David Garrick who was honored. With regard to the management's income, there again Shakespeare proved

9. Ibid., Vol. II, p. 227.

advantageous inasmuch as his tragedies did not oblige the producers to observe author's nights. These author's nights occurred every third performance after which the playwright would gather all receipts over the evening's expenses.

Goldsmith objected to this pseudo-Shakespearian revival in his Enquiry, but his protests brought him only additional trouble later in his life. His attitude is nowhere better expressed perhaps than in The Vicar of Wakefield. The Vicar, while searching for the lost Olivia, falls in with a group of strolling players and being "pretty much unacquainted with the present state of the stage. . . demanded who were the present theatrical writers in vogue. . ." One of them replied, ". . . our taste has gone back a whole century; Fletcher, Ben Jonson, and all the plays of Shakespeare, are the only things that go down." "How," cried the Vicar, "is it possible that the present age can be pleased with that antiquated dialect, that obsolete humour, those overcharged characters which¹⁰ abound in the works you mention?"

Goldsmith did recognize, however, the pre-eminence of Shakespeare as a dramatist, even though his criticism

10. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 146-147.

of Hamlet's soliloquy "To be, or not to be" was rather
an egregious blunder.¹¹

A third growth in the history of the classical stage was the introduction between the acts of a play of stunt performers who afforded the audience much delight. Jugglers and dancers there were who bore no relation whatever to the presentation being offered. This was sheer nonsense in Goldsmith's view, and he said as much when his Chinese philosopher's theatrical sense was jarred by the appearance of a mountebank juggling a straw upon his nose. At his entrance the audience clapped furiously because as the Man in Black observed ". . . nothing pleases the people more than seeing a straw balanced."¹²

Gay's The Beggar's Opera was likewise discountenanced by Goldsmith, and his criticism of it would indicate his reception of any similar representations.

After having heard Goldsmith criticize all that the eighteenth century stage offered, one wonders what he wanted the theater to give him. A recollection of his two principles--nature and humor--is sufficient. A comedy must be built with them. It must reflect the manners

11. Ibid., Vol. I, pp. 364-370.

12. Ibid., Vol. III, pp. 79-80.

of the people and provoke laughter at their foibles. His test for She Stoops To Conquer was set in a simple question asked of Lord Northcote after the first performance: "Did it make you laugh?"

In the preface to The Good-Natured Man, he wrote that his models were "the poets of the last age." This "last age" has been given two interpretations. Most critics seem to think that Goldsmith is thinking of Congreve, Farquhar, and Vanbrugh. Certain it is that he regarded Farquhar highly and thought "he possessed the spirit of genuine comedy in a superior degree to any other modern

writer."¹³ Again in The Vicar of Wakefield, the strolling player complains to the Vicar, "No, Sir, the works of Congreve and Farquhar have too much wit in them for the present taste; our modern dialect is much more natural."¹⁴

On the other hand, Nicoll, in speaking of the preface to The Good-Natured Man, maintains:

This preface must be considered very carefully because it indicated not only the point of departure between Goldsmith and Sheridan, but also the differences in their comic aims. By the "last age" Goldsmith means the age of Shakespeare; to Shakespeare he looked when Sheridan sported with Congreve. Goldsmith's real objection to the sentimental comedy is that it is

13. Temple Scott, Oliver Goldsmith Bibliographically and Biographically Considered, p. 201.

14. Works, Vol. I, pp. 146-147.

too "genteel" and does not admit of "nature" and "humor." Sheridan preferred to see wit on the boards of the theatre. Goldsmith endeavots to revive the spirit of As You Like It where sheridan strives to create another Way of the World. 15

To determine precisely whom Goldsmith did mean by "the poets of the last age" when he spoke of them as his models could probably be done by establishing bits of internal evidence upon comparative readings of Shakespeare, Congreve, Farquhar, and Goldsmith. In the present study there is no attempt made to solve the problem, but it might be useful to indicate that Nicoll's opinion is a rara avis. Furthermore, Goldsmith maintained that he was "prepossessed in favour of the poets of the last age." Why has Nicoll failed to mention the other model or models in the Shakesperean age?

Goldsmith's interest in the drama was quite active. He liked to attend plays. He was an intimate of actors. It is a none too certain remark that he himself once played Scrub in The Beaux' Stratagem. He turned playwright, and at present his works include The Good-Natured Man, She Stoops To Conquer, and an adaptatton of Sedley's The Grumbler which Goldsmith did for Quick, one of his

15. Allardyce Nicoll, Op. cit., p. 158.

actor friends. Besides, rumor toasts of a tragedy which he had submitted to Samuel Richardson while he worked as proof-reader for the novelist. Goldsmith himself supplies the evidence for a promised fifth effort in a letter which he wrote to Garrick on December 25, 1773: "I shall have a comedy for you in a season or two at farthest that I believe will be worth your acceptance, for I fancy I will make it a fine thing."¹⁶

Garrick and Goldsmith, incidentally, had not always been fast friends. Early in his writing career, the latter had offended the manager of Drury Lane by his criticism of the English stage in his Enquiry. Even at that time he was fighting the battle for traditional comedy, and his views on theater management hit Garrick forcibly. Goldsmith simply did not see how the aspiring dramatist had any opportunity of achieving success. The "process truly chemical" which his play must undergo would guarantee its being a "caput mortuum" by the time it appeared before the public.

There were shortcomings in the English theater which Goldsmith indicated. He found fault with ugly heroines.

16. Katharine Balderston, The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 127.

Moreover, proper casting in his opinion required that the figures of actresses be taken into account in order that the audience might not be forced to accept a female "unwieldy with fat, endeavouring to convince the audience that she is dying with hunger." The acknowledgment of applause at their entrances by actors and actresses simply lowered them in the eyes of the spectators. Spreading a carpet on the floor before a death scene so that the victim would not soil his clothes detracted from the strength of the play.¹⁷

It is odd of Goldsmith, but in keeping with his age, that despite his necessarily intimate associations with the theater and actors, he should hold the acting profession in low esteem. His nephew, William Hodson, came to London and leaned quite heavily on him for support. Goldsmith tried to place the young man as best he could and tells his brother-in-law of his efforts in a letter dated June, 1770: "He had when he came here some thought of going upon the stage; I don't know where he could have contracted so ¹⁸beggarly an affection, but I have turned him from it. . ."

A letter of a year later expresses a similar thought.

"The stage was an abominable resource which neither became a man of honour nor a man of sense. I therefore dissuaded

17. Works, Vol. II, pp. 309-312.

18. Katharine Balderston, Op. cit., p. 89.

him from this design. . ."¹⁹

Before an analysis of Goldsmith the playwright is made by a study of The Good-Natured Man and She Stoops To Conquer, it may be helpful to summarize the subjects which have been discussed. There were first the trends of the eighteenth century stage and Goldsmith's attitudes towards them. His criticism of sentimental drama was epitomized in an epithet, "misnomer"; he objected to the adapted Shakespeare because it barred new works from the stage; his attitude toward trick performances was one of ridicule; and The Beggar's Opera and its kind he could not even excuse as comedy. What Goldsmith did expect of the theater followed naturally. Then his general interest in the theater, his criticism of its management, its actors and actresses, and his opinion of the acting profession completed the background of the eighteenth century stage promised at the outset.

On January 29, 1768, George Colman presented at the Covent Garden Theatre The Good-Natured Man, the first theatrical effort of Oliver Goldsmith.²⁰ It was snubbed

19. Ibid., p. 100.

20. Synopsis of the play: Young Honeywood is the victim of an uncontrollable benevolence. His uncle, Sir William, plans to cure him by showing him the fickleness of his supposed friends. To accomplish this, he provides for the arrest and imprisonment of his nephew. Miss Richland loves Young Honeywood. She is a ward of the pessimistic

with an angry contempt. Conversation Cooke, an actor of the time, relates that "the predominant cry of the prejudiced and illiterate part of the pit was, 'it was low---it was d-mn'd vulgar,' and this barbarous judgment had very nearly damned the comedy the very first night."²¹ The bailiff scene in the third act, one of the few sprightly scenes in the play, was revolting to the taste of the audience, and it had to be omitted in the future presentations.

Goldsmith had talked comic theory in the Enquiry, in The Bee, and in scattered essays. He proposed to show his practice in The Good-Natured Man. The lovers of the sentimental drama, however, would have none of his practice, and in crying down his effort, literally tore the

Croaker who wishes to marry her to his son, Leontine, in order to secure her fortune to his own wealth. Leontine, however, loves Olivia and plans to elope with her to Scotland. Croaker employs Lofty, a pretender, to make arrangements for the safe seizure of Miss Richland's money; this Lofty, however, has an eye on both the money and Miss Richland. After further entanglements, among which is the bailing out of prison of Young Honeywood by Miss Richland, Sir William unravels the complications. He exposes the pretensions of Lofty, indicates the suitability of the union between Leonine and Olivia, and opens the eyes of his nephew to the love of Miss Richland.

21. The European Magazine, Vo. 24, pp. 94-95.

heart out of the man. He had gone to the theater that night in a magnificent suit purchased for the occasion, with all intentions of leaving as a successful dramatist. Certainly he was disillusioned, but he did attend the dinner at the Club in Gerrard Street after the performance and seemed fairly merry. His actual feelings were revealed some years later as he himself told a company of friends that "when all were gone except Johnson here, I burst out a-crying, and even swore by --- that I would never write²² agains."

It is not difficult to understand his bitterness. This play was to have been his blow at sentimental comedy. Prior to its first presentation, it had cost him unending grief. Upon its completion in 1767, he had carried it to Garrick for acceptance and production at Drury Lane, but that individual dillydallied sufficiently long to provoke Goldsmith's taking his manuscript to the rival producer, Colman. He accepted it. Garrick, hearing of this, engaged Hugh Kelly to turn out something sentimental, and the spineless False Delicacy resulted. At the same time the wily David, wanting to steal a march on Goldsmith, induced Colman not to produce The Good-Natured Man until

22. Austin Dobson, Life of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 134.

False Delicacy had begun its run. After such vexing preliminaries, to have Kelly's work, one of those "mawkish drabs" that the opportunist Garrick later satirized, enjoy a longer run than his attempt at true comedy was gall to Goldsmith.

Other particulars of the premiere are of interest. Cooke in his Memoirs believed that Ned Shuter, playing Croaker that night, really saved the play. His reading of the incendiary letter in the fourth act was admirable.

To be composed at so truly comic an exhibition must have exceeded all power of face; even the rigid moral-mongers of the pit forgot their usual severity on this occasion, and their nature, truer than their judgment, joined in the full-toned roar of approbation. Goldsmith himself was so charmed with this performance of Shuter's that he followed him into the green room after the play was over, and thanked him in his honest, sincere manner before all the performers; telling him he had exceeded his own idea of the character, and that the fine comic richness of his colouring made it almost appear as new to him as to any other person in the house. 23

As to Shuter's saving the play, Cooke was probably not far from the truth. The leading actor, Powell, was unconvincing. Moreover, the prologue, written by Johnson, which should have started the play aright, was not of his best, and it trudged heavily across the stage.

23. Op. cit., Vol. 24, pp. 94-95.

The Good-Natured Man is a comedy in five acts proposing to ridicule the foible of an overdone benevolence on the part of the hero. It is hardly exaggerating to say that this foible was one of Goldsmith's own. When one remembers, among other similar incidents in his life, the instance of his inability to hear a visitor knocking at his door one morning because he was buried within the ticking of his mattress after having given away his blankets, one understands immediately who the original Honeywood was. The foible was well defined in part of Goldsmith's characterization of Beau Nash. "He had pity for every creature's distress, but wanted prudence in the application of his benefits. He had generosity for the wretched in the highest degree at a time when his creditors complained of his justice."²⁴

The exposing of the vanities of the characters, it must be recalled, was Goldsmith's idea of the purpose of comedy. In the revelation the audience were to be given abundant opportunities of laughter because they would be shown the stupidity of such vanities. The theme of The Good-Natured Man then was a suitable instrument with which to strike at sentimental comedy.

Goldsmith's purpose in the writing of this play

24. Works, Vol. IV, p. 59.

thus defined, the question arises, did he achieve his purpose? It is by answering this question that his position as a dramatist must be determined. Trying to establish his position as a playwright does not mean that an attempt is made to rank him next to Shakespeare. In fact, there is to be no ranking at all. The point is simply to show that he was a dramatist. Whether he was better than Congreve or inferior to Sheridan are idle matters in the present task.

To the question, did Goldsmith achieve his purpose in The Good-Natured Man, a guarded "Yes" can be offered. Admittedly, the first performances of the play could not be called successes. They did not condemn the play, however, nor did they indicate that Goldsmith failed in his purpose of writing. As Temple Scott points out, the play's failure was due to the fact that it was ahead of its time. The sentimental playgoer went to the theater to see life as he liked it to be, not as it was. Because Goldsmith gave him life as it was, he hissed such presentation into box office failure.²⁵

Would The Good-Natured Man play successfully if it were presented on Broadway today? That question is

25. Op. cit., pp. 209-219.

practically answered by another. Why isn't The Good-Natured Man revived for presentation on Broadway? In that suggestion is the answer to the quality of Goldsmith's first serious dramatic effort.

Johnson's opinion of the play was: "Sir, it is the best comedy that has appeared since the Provoked Husband. There has not been of late any such character exhibited on the stage as that of Croaker."²⁶ Such criticism is not any too precise, and though it does establish Goldsmith's dramatic ability, its generality will hardly pass as authoritatively as it should.

It is not unfair to say that The Good-Natured Man cannot be accounted a great play. The fact that it is not revived today except by groups engaged in the study of the history of the drama is strong evidence that it is not a good play. Perhaps Nicoll's criticism is severe, but it surely does include much just comment. He maintains

Elements of sentimentalism mar its general tone so that the conclusion is forced and vapid. Many of the characters seem to be hastily sketched in, and the plot is frankly impossible. Nor does a true vis comica breathe from the dialogue. There is indeed less of the laughter-compelling utterance here than there is in many of the sentimental comedies. Perhaps, were the Good-Natured Man to frankly and honestly, if we could dissociate it

26. Temple Scott, Op. cit., p. 209.

from its author, we should not place it in that niche of fame to which fortune, often inexplicable in its judgments, has exalted it. 27

Goldsmith had written The Good-Natured Man with the express purpose of attacking sentimentalism. Yet that trend was so powerful that it turned the weapon of attack back upon itself. Honeywood, for instance, is ever the moralizer, tossing off the pious thought after the manner of a preacher. In the sub-plot, there is a pair of sentimental love-birds, a worshipping Leontine bowing before his "life's treasure," and a responsive Olivia urging her subject ever upward, ever onward. The deus ex machina, Sir William Honeywood, maneuvers the plot into a settled conclusion by his promotion of the act of contrition and firm purpose of amendment on the part of the sentimental hero. Such examples are not the "nature" that Goldsmith had set down as an essential of true comedy.

In his preface to the play he had written of himself "and therefore to delineate character has been his principal aim."²⁸ Delineation for him meant the portrayal of a character by exposing his striking folly. Seemingly his absorption in the folly to be satirized made him

27. Allardyce Nicoll, Op. cit., pp. 158-159.

28. Works, Vol. II, p. 146.

forget the characterization to be made. Honeywood is the resultant of such an absorption. Arthur Mendt has classified him aptly as "a somewhat bloodless dummy."²⁹ There is too much good nature, a term that Goldsmith is fond of incidentally, and not enough Honeywood. As a fault in characterization this is rather serious inasmuch as Honeywood is the hero of the play, the individual who should stand shoulders above the rest. He is hardly a comic character. One may laugh now and then at the results of his overflowing benevolence, but very soon his excesses become insipid.

Much has been made of Croaker whom Davies, in his Memoirs of Garrick, says was a character absolutely un-³⁰known before to the English stage. His foible is a chronic pessimism. Croaker is more of a "humor" character, but even in him the foible sometimes crowds out the man. In the attempt to ridicule the folly, Goldsmith forces his character; particularly does this seem true in the letter scene concerning the incendiary. Croaker's fears appear groundless, and his ravings across the stage can hardly be regarded as natural. Certainly he is a better character than Honeywood; yet this fact admits

29. Arthur Mendt, Goldsmith als Dramatiker, pp. 25-28.
 30. Vol. II, pp. 152-153.

another fault. To have a secondary male figure of greater importance than the protagonist is really a serious error of judgment.³¹

Lofty who is also one of the highlights of the play, becomes too a stock figure after a time. His ostentation is his foible, and its insistent prominence wearies a reader. Many critics see in Lofty an improved Beau Tibbs, the pretentious ne'er-do-well of the Chinese Letters. He is that, but his foible, strained to the breaking-point, actually makes Honeywood and Miss Richland appear more stupid because of their inability to penetrate his too patent falsehood. Goldsmith himself was not satisfied with Lofty as is evident in a letter he wrote to Garrick in December, 1773, in which he proposes a revival of The Good-Natured Man. ". . . I will give you a new character in my comedy and knock out Lofty which will not do . . ." ³²

Miss Richland is not much of a heroine, and in her negativeness fits properly with Honeywood to make a helpless pair. Her liveliest lines fall in the bailiff scene in which she helps to keep the situation humorous.

Sir William Honeywood, as has been said before, is a deus, not a character. He supervises the plot, and

31. Austin Dobson, A Paladin of Philanthropy, pp. 51-52.
32. Katharine Balderston, Op. cit., p. 126.

when it demands his omniscience, he advances to patch any little holes of inconsistency that may have been made by the weaknesses of the men and women playing the roles.

Olivia and Leontine are the sentimental lovers, but at least they are strong enough to love. Their vitality in this regard is a distinct contrast to that of Miss Richland and Honeywood. Olivia is unquestionably the strongest woman in the play.

So much for the characterization. Concerning the plot, Nicoll's observation as to its being "frankly impossible" has already been noted.³³ Charles Gayley Mills maintains "that the premises of the plot are absurd. . . the complication is not much more natural than that of a Punch-and-Judy show, and the denouement is but one shade less improbable than that of The Vicar of Wakefield."³⁴ Goldsmith surely does permit loose ends to hang. There is Miss Richland's asking Honeywood surprisedly in the fifth act whether he is leaving England after he had told her quite definitely in the fourth that he was going away. In his English Drama of the Restoration, George Nettleton points out other neglected strings, particularly the scene in which Leontine explains to Olivia, his sweetheart,

33. Vide supra.

34. A Library of the World's Best Literature, Vol. XVI, p. 6506.

the circumstances concerning Olivia, his sister.

With these defects of sentimentality, weak characterization, and plot improbability, what is the status of The Good-Natured Man as a dramatic composition? Despite the elements of sentimentality that it contains, the play is yet an attack on sentimental comedy. The bailiff scene in the third act is sure proof of this statement. In addition, there occur every now and then those uncontrollable flashes of Goldsmith humor. To Leontine's "An only son, Sir, might expect more indulgence," Croaker returns an apt "An only father, Sir, might expect more obedience." The proposal scene in the second act is also good laughing matter.

Admittedly, the characterization is weak. Goldsmith knew what he wanted to do to produce laughable comedy; his preface tells that. His knowlege, however, failed to develop into successful practice. One can find in nature the foibles which he chooses, but it is practically impossible to find his characters possessing those foibles. His major figures are faulty, but he succeeds moderately well in such beings as Croaker, Lofty, Olivia, and Jarvis.

Both Austin Dobson³⁶ and Ashley Thorndike³⁷ call

35. Pp. 279-280.

36. A Paladin of Philanthropy, pp. 51-52.

37. English Comedy, pp. 425-426.

attention to the fact that The Good-Natured Man is in the true Goldsmithian style. The former finds matter in the many epigrams of the piece, and both indicate the presence of that grace which was peculiarly Goldsmith's.

A fair and concise statement might be that the historical value of the play is greater than its aesthetic quality.

On September 4, 1771, Goldsmith wrote to Bennet Langton,

Since I had the pleasure of seeing you last I have been almost wholly in the country at a farmer's house quite alone trying to write a comedy. It is now finished but when or how it will be acted, or whether it will be acted at all are questions I cannot resolve. . . And that is hard too as I have been trying these three months to do something to make people laugh. There have I been strolling about the hedges studying jests with a most tragical countenance. 38

Despite his oath not to write anymore for the stage after the disappointment of The Good-Natured Man, he had to have another blow at sentimental drama. Cumberland, the leader of that school, had just written the West Indian, and it along with others of its type was enjoying appreciative patronage. In 1771, Goldsmith's second drama was completed and sent to George Colman. Immediate

38. Katharine Balderston, Op. cit., pp. 102-104.

trouble began. The manager feared for the new comedy; probably he remembered the previous one, and this new piece was yet more "low." Delays took place; Goldsmith fought for production; Colman wrangled; Garrick was given the manuscript; Johnson finally settled all by using a "kind of force" on Colman, and production was promised. The manager, however, never did become enthusiastic about the play. His pessimism lent itself to the chosen actors, and one by one, they refused to play their roles. A harlequin had to be chosen as the hero, and Quick, who had been strangled as the post-boy in The Good-Natured Man, was cast as Tony Lumpkin. At this point Goldsmith was quite vexed but was equally determined that the production take place as he remarked, "I'd rather my play were damned by bad playing than merely succeed as good acting." ³⁹ To within a few days before the first performance, the piece was without a name. Sir Joshua Reynolds, generally Goldsmith's defender when all others condemned him, suggested The Belle's Stratagém, but threatened to damn the play if his name was not chosen. Goldsmith himself finally determined the title, and on the fifteenth

39. Temple Scott, Op. cit., p. 296.

of March 1773, Covent Garden played the premiere of She
⁴⁰
Stoops To Conquer.

The play was a decided success even though Cumberland gives the impression that its quality was established by the presence of a group of pre-selected handclappers and laughers among whom was a certain Adam Drummond in Comparison to whose laugh "the neighing of the horse of the son of Hystaspes was a whisper."⁴¹ Even Horace Walpole, with the sentimental tilt to his nose, could not deny that the play "succeeded prodigiously." Goldsmith himself admitted

40. Synopsis of the play: Marlow and Hastings, two young fellows, are on their way to visit a friend of Marlow's father, a Mr. Hardcastle. They lose their way, and upon inquiry at an inn, are deceived by Tom Lumpkin, the stepson of Hardcastle. They take Hardcastle's home for an inn. Ludicrous mistakes happen promoted by the maneuvers of Tony. Hastings who had come to see a Miss Neville with whom he was in love, plans an elopement. Kate, the daughter of the Hardcastles, has set her fancy on Young Marlow who will not respond to her advances as the daughter of the house. In her disguise as a maid, however, she is more successful because this fellow is free with servants and reserved with ladies. Marlow's father finally comes to the Hardcastles' and helps to solve all problems that have arisen. Marlow learns of his original error; he and Kate are successfully paired as are Hastings and Miss Neville; and Tony, for whom the latter young lady had been intended, is left for his friends at The Three Pigeons.

41. Richard Cumberland, Memoirs of Richard Cumberland, pp. 269-270.

in a letter to Joseph Cradock, a friend who had composed an epilogue for the production, that it "has met with a success much beyond your expectations or mine."⁴²

What is there in this second drama about which W. J. Turner says, "There are not many comedies more than 150 years old which the theatrical manager may fall back on to fill the bill and attract an audience whom the work of the most brilliant dramatist of the day had failed to please."⁴³

There is, first of all, in She Stoops To Conquer, a definite achievement of purpose. The purpose had been stated in the preface to the first play, and even though that piece had proved a failure, the reason for its being brought into existence was never abandoned. After seeing the second play, Johnson maintained: "I know of no comedy for many years that has so much exhilarated an audience; that has answered so much the great end of comedy, making an audience merry."⁴⁴ That is simply an assurance that Goldsmith had attained to his idea of comedy. He had struck the right tone and had produced true comedy. Slight bits of sentimentalism, it is true, are in the work but are forgotten in the laughing scenes that occur constantly.

42. Katharine Balderston, Op. cit., p. 177.

43. "She Stoops To Conquer," Spectator, Vol. 127 (1921), p. 859.

44. Temple Scott, Op. cit., p. 298.

Goldsmith had really gone back to the "poets of the last age." The Farquhar and Vanbrugh comedy is achieved without the inclusion of the Farquhar and Vanbrugh moral looseness. Nor is there any of the bitter satire of the Restoration comedy. Goldsmith did not deride the faults of his characters; he smiled at them.⁴⁵ It is surely true that because of its ability to provoke hearty laughter, She Stoops To Conquer is a decisive blow at "genteel" drama.

Some critics have referred to the improbability of the beginning of the action. This view is puzzling to understand in the consideration of two facts: 1. Goldsmith's mistaking of Squire Featherston's house for an inn in his school days, a story all his biographers tell; 2. Goldsmith's using experiences from his life as matter for his writings. Defects in the plot do certainly exist. Possibly the most serious is his using Sir Charles Marlow to bind the story in a presentable package; this procedure approaches the employment of an overseeing deus.

The scenes develop naturally from each other. There is no forcing a new circumstance on the stage by the dialogue of those already present as seems to be the case in The Good-Natured Man. Nor is a scene introduced merely for the sake of drawing laughter. The passages in which

45. Ernest Bernbaum, The Drama of Sensibility, pp. 245-246.

Tony Lumpkin plays are not written to show him off; they are integral parts of an ever-busily moving play and when Tony draws laughs, he does so because his lines fit naturally into the sequence. In this capable interweaving of scenes lies much of the dramatic effectiveness of the play. The various transfers of the jewel box of Miss Neville are instances of this fact.

With regard to the characterization of the play, Austin Dobson has summarized all possible comment in a comparison between The Good-Natured Man and She Stoops To Conquer. In his opinion, Tony Lumpkin is to Croaker⁴⁶ as a character is to a characteristic. A similar remark may be made about the other characters, and it reveals that Goldsmith has learned to make people rather than dummies.

Tony Lumpkin surely is an individual if there ever was one. A study of the dramatis personae of both plays indicates that he is Goldsmith's most effective character. Oliver Elton believes that Shakespeare would have applauded him and maintains that he is the most real personage in eighteenth century drama.⁴⁷ He is always just Tony Lumpkin, never straining for something

46. Life of Oliver Goldsmith, p. 172.

47. Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature, 1730-1780, Vol. I, p. 117.

he is not. He controls the movement of the play quite capably, and his manipulation of the action, so productive of wholesome laughter, helps Goldsmith to "make the audience merry."

The two pairs of lovers are also healthy characters. They shy away from the lush sentimentalism so easily affected by heroes and heroines of the stage at this time. Nettleton points out that Goldsmith's pro-⁴⁸traiture of women is inadequate, and probably he is correct. Certainly though Kate Hardcastle is not the usual sentimental heroine. One merely has to recall a few scenes to realize this fact. She is delighted to hear that her prospective lover is handsome; she is chagrined when she hears of his bashfulness and reserve. She is not shocked at his scandalous reputation. Her⁴⁹ trick on him is a definite mark of mischievous girlhood.

Marlow and Hastings are not strong characters, but they are improvements over Honeywood.

Mr. Hardcastles's servant, Diggory, is a good creation. Mr. Hardcastle himself is an advance on the usual father set in the pieces of the time.

Throughout the play the customary Goldsmith style is present, and it is definitely of quality. The dialogue

48. Op. cit., pp. 287-288.

49. Ernest Baernbaum, Op. cit., p. 245.

is the best evidence for this statement.

Dr. Johnson had said that the play bordered upon farce, and a number of other critics have thought likewise. That it contains farcical elements cannot be denied. The prolongation of the mistake made in confusing a house for an inn seems excessive. So does Marlow's extreme bashfulness that would hardly excuse him for not recognizing the maid as Kate. Moreover, the hero's portrayal as bold among maids and meek before ladies is pushed far. Then too, Tony's inability to read more than his own name is inconsistent with his cleverness in composing the song of "The Three Pigeons."⁵⁰ Whether or not She Stoops To Conquer is farce rather than comedy is beside the point here. What comedy though does not border on farce? Certain it is that the farcical elements present in Goldsmith's work are not an appeal to the ridiculous; the humor provoked seems thoroughly natural.

By way of summary, Goldsmith as a dramatist has contributed two works to the field, The Good-Natured Man and She Stoops To Conquer. Both plays are attacks on sentimental comedy, a bastard form in Goldsmith's

50. George Nettleton, Op. cit., pp. 284-285.

opinion. The first of the plays is important chiefly as a date in the history of the drama, failing dramatically because of its improbable plot and inadequate characterization. The latter is one of the best known English comedies since those of Shakespeare, being revived on the boards of present-day stages.

It is Elton's opinion ⁵¹ and Dobson's too ⁵² that Goldsmith's dramatic work is his best. Certain restrictions demanded by the theater would have eliminated some of the faults, notably tendencies to moralize and to wander, common in his writings in other fields. Goldsmith's future, had he lived longer, probably would have been that of a dramatist. He had twice renounced the stage because of the headaches and heartaches it inflicted, but he had, it will be remembered, promised a new comedy to Garrick just a few months before his death.

51. Op. cit., Vol. I, p. 113.

52. A Paladin of Philanthropy, p. 267.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

A few words of summary concerning the findings reported in this thesis should bring this discussion to a close.

The thesis grew out of three lines in the epitaph which Samuel Johnson wrote for Goldsmith. These lines read, "who left scarcely any kind of writing untouched, and touched nothing that he did not adorn." To support the claim for the versatility of Goldsmith then, evidence was sought in his writings which have been left to us.

That he "left scarcely any kind of writing untouched" was easy to prove. As hack writer, he made translations; he edited books of poetry; he wrote several biographies; he attempted two kinds of historical writing, political and natural; he acted as literary critic, and he produced prefaces for several volumes. His letters are an interesting contribution to that field of writing. The essay profited by his experimentations. His two poems, The Deserted Village and The Traveller, are distinct gains for poetical work. To the novel, just recently begun by Richardson, Fielding, Smollett, and Sterne, he contributed The Vicar of Wakefield. To satisfy his lively interest in the drama, he wrote two plays, one of which, She Stoops

To Conquer, is a classic.

That Goldsmith "touched nothing that he did not adorn" lacked no evidence either. His claim to literary reputation depends outstandingly upon the quality of his work in the drama. In order then follow his novel, his poetry, his essays, and his compilations. To all of his work, however, there is given a charming style which is peculiarly Goldsmith. This is the adornment of which Johnson referred in the epitaph.

Of the quantity of matter which Goldsmith wrote, that which is a distinct offering to English literature may be listed as follows: She Stoops To Conquer, read, studied, and played on the stage today; in the field of the novel, The Vicar of Wakefield, part of the development begun by Richardson and Fielding, even though it advanced nothing new; both The Traveller and The Deserted Village, poems with a name, and among the essays, those set in The Citizen of the World, which ought to be more frequently read because of their quality.

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The thesis, "The Literary Versatility of Oliver Goldsmith", written by Francis Kinkel, S.M., has been accepted by the Graduate School with reference to form, and by the readers whose names appear below, with reference to content. It is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Dr. Zabel

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