

Goldsmith

The Vicar of Wakefield

Everyman's Library

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

The Vicar of Wakefield

INTRODUCTION BY
J. M. DENT



DENT : LONDON
EVERYMAN'S LIBRARY
DUTTON : NEW YORK

All rights reserved
Made in Great Britain
at the
Aldine Press • Letchworth • Herts
for
J. M. DENT & SONS LTD
Aldine House • Albemarle Street • London
This edition was first published in
Everyman's Library in 1908
Reprinted 1973

Published in the U.S.A. by arrangement
with J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd

This book if bound as a paperback is
subject to the condition that it may
not be issued on loan or otherwise
except in its original binding.

No. 295 Hardback ISBN 0 460 00295 3
No. 1295 Paperback ISBN 0 460 01295 9

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Born at Pallasmore, Co. Longford, Ireland, in 1728. After a varied and financially unsuccessful life in England and Ireland, tramped through Europe, 1754-6. Arriving penniless in London, he took to journalism. Died in poverty on 4th April 1774.

INTRODUCTION

OF all those pieces of fine literature which depend for their charm on the presentment of the simpler life and emotion amid the sweet country scenes around our old English homes, there is no book that has so perennial a hold upon the affection of all conditions of men the world over as Goldsmith's "Vicar of Wakefield." "We read it in youth and age," says Walter Scott, "we return to it again and again, and bless the memory of an author who contrives so well to reconcile us to human nature."

The history of this book is one long steady growth in popular favour. The first editions were by no means successful ventures to their publishers, for even the comparatively small sum paid to its author (£60, part of which went immediately to pay the rent for which he was being dunned by his landlady) was more than its market value during the lives of those first interested in it. We find indeed that the fourth edition, published by Collins of Salisbury, started with a loss. It was first published in 1766, and although twenty editions appeared in this country up to the end of the eighteenth century, they did not represent any large circulation, as it is unlikely that any edition exceeded one thousand, and some of them were perhaps not more than five hundred copies. Twenty-four more editions were published in Great Britain up to 1850, but since then no fewer than eighty separate editions have appeared in addition to those published as part of his collected works. It has been translated also

into almost all civilised languages, including Greek, Danish, Dutch, Finnish, Polish, Roumanian, Hungarian, Russian, Bohemian, and Hebrew, not to speak, we believe, of some oriental languages.

We venture to think that not even "Robinson Crusoe" could show such a record of increasing affection among the people.

Goldsmith, in one of his essays in "The Citizen of the World," says:—

"At present the few poets of England no longer depend on the Great for subsistence, they have now no other patrons but the public, and the public, collectively considered, is a good and generous master. It is indeed too frequently mistaken as to the merits of every candidate for favour; but to make amends, it is never mistaken long. A performance, indeed, may be forced for a time into reputation, but destitute of real merit it soon sinks; time, the touchstone of what is truly valuable, will soon discover the fraud, and an author should never arrogate to himself any share of success till his works have been read at least ten years with satisfaction."

The sanity and truth of these words have been proved at least in the ever-increasing appreciation of the great public for this one *chef-d'œuvre* of Goldsmith's. But alas, how much they have neglected his other work. A poem—a comedy—a story—is all that they remember or bring within their daily life and conversation. That wonderful series of essays, of as high a quality and with as much right to be written on the nation's heart as those of Charles Lamb himself, are, alas, relegated to dusty shelves, only now and then to be taken down by "the student" who has to "pass in English literature" in order to get his degree in arts. All their fine wisdom and philosophy, their keen but always genial satire, their

pictures of character and manners, and above all, that broad and fine humanity so indulgent and yet so enamoured of sweet goodness, are lost upon us of this generation, only, we hope, to be re-discovered by our children to their increasing delight.

To return to the Vicar. One naturally asks what is the charm that holds us and makes us return to it again and again as a source of such consolation and delight—remember it is not only over the simple that it holds such sway—with Bunyan's allegory it lies constantly on the table of even the illiterate. It was the book Charles Dickens took to bed with him every night, they say. Goethe claimed that it was the greatest novel of his day, and finely acknowledged his debt to it at the critical period of his life.

If one were to attempt to analyse its power over us, one would be inclined to use an almost unforgivable paradox and say—that it lay in the “art of perfect artlessness,” the power so to break down the dam of self-consciousness that the stream of pure feeling and fine humanity might flow freely from the heart into the course prepared for it of perfect style. The paradox will *seem* even more evident as we look at the outward life of the author in all its wayward pomp and vanity and self-consciousness. But the truth contained therein, we venture to think, will be still more clear when we know intimately all there is to know of Oliver Goldsmith. In other words, to feel all the charm of the “Vicar of Wakefield,” we must know fully the life of him who wrote it, for then we shall find the story is but thinly disguised biography, the biography of a man—whatever the outward show might be—of as true gentleness and pure feeling, and of as fine a humanity as ever lived.

.
Of illustrated editions there has been a constant output almost from the very beginning, though the first four or five editions appeared without pictures. Since these, however, a large number of artists have followed one another in attempting to delineate the creations of Goldsmith, some of them as curiously opposed in feeling as Stothard and Rowlandson, Cruikshank and Mulready.

J. M. DENT.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

SEPARATE WORKS. *Memoirs of a Protestant condemned to the Gallies of France for his Religion* (translation), 2 vols., 1758; *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, 1759; *The Bee*, being *Essays on the Most Interesting Subjects* (eight numbers of a weekly periodical), 1759; *History of Mecklenburgh*, 1762; *The Mystery Revealed*, containing a *Series of Transactions and Authentic Testimonials* respecting the supposed Cock-Lane Ghost, 1762; *The Citizen of the World*, or *Letters from a Chinese Philosopher residing in London to his Friends in the East* (from the *Public Ledger*, 1760, 1761), 2 vols., 1762; *Life of Richard Nash*, of Bath, Esquire, 1762; *A History of England in a Series of Letters from a Nobleman to his Son*, 2 vols., 1764; *The Traveller*, 1765; *Essays*, 1765; *The Vicar of Wakefield*, a tale supposed to be written by himself, 2 vols., 1766; *The Good-Natured Man*, a Comedy, 1768; *The Roman History*, from the foundation of the City of Rome to the destruction of the Western Empire, 2 vols., 1769; Abridgment by the Author, 1772; *The Deserted Village*, 1770; *The Life of Thomas Parnell*, compiled from original papers and memoirs, 1770; *Life of Henry St John*, Lord Viscount Bolingbroke, 1770; *The History of England, from the Earliest Times to the Death of George II*, 4 vols., 1771; Abridged Edition, 1774; *Threnodia Augustatis*, sacred to the memory of Her Royal Highness the Princess Dowager of Wales, 1772; *She Stoops to Conquer*, or *the Mistakes of a Night*, 1773; *Retaliation*, a Poem, including Epitaphs on the most distinguished Wits of this Metropolis, 1774 (five editions were published this year; the fifth edition contains the postscript and epitaph on Caleb Whitefoord); *The Grecian History, from the Earliest State to the Death of Alexander the Great*, 2 vols., 1774; *An History of the Earth and Animated Nature*, 8 vols., 1774; *The Haunch of Venison*, a Poetical Epistle to Lord Clare, 1776; another edition, with additions and corrections, appeared this same year; *A Survey of Experimental Philosophy considered in its Present State of Improvement*, 2 vols., 1776; *The Captivity*, an Oratorio, 1836 (first printed in the Trade edition of Goldsmith's works, 1820. See Anderson's Bibl.).

Goldsmith contributed to the *Monthly Review*, *Critical Review*, *Literary Magazine*, *Busy Body*, *Public Ledger*, *British Magazine*, *Lady's Magazine*, *Westminster Magazine*, and *Universal Magazine*; he edited *Poems for Young Ladies*, 1766; *Beauties of English Poesy*, 1767; to him is attributed *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*, published by Newbery, 3rd ed., 1766; and also *A Pretty Book of Pictures for Little Masters and Misses*, etc., 1767; and his translations include Formey's *Concise History of Philosophy*, 1766; Scarron's *Comic Romance*, 1780. An abridged edition of Plutarch's *Lives* was undertaken by him in collaboration with Joseph Collyer, 1762; *The Grumbler*, an adaptation of Brueys and Palaprat's *Le Grondeur*, was performed once at Covent Garden in 1773, but not printed by the author.

Select Bibliography

The miscellaneous works of Goldsmith (containing all his Essays and Poems) were published in 1775, 1792, and in 1801 with the Percy Memoir; *Poems and Plays*, 1777; *Poetical and Dramatic Works*, 1780.

Among later editions are those by Prior, 4 vols., 1837; Cunningham, 4 vols., 1854; J. F. Waller, 1864, etc.; the Globe Edition, 1869; Bohn's Standard Library has also included Goldsmith's miscellaneous works. Many smaller collections have been published.

COLLECTED WORKS. *The Works of Oliver Goldsmith. A New Edition, containing pieces hitherto uncollected*, edited by J. W. M. Gibbs, 5 vols., 1884-6; *Complete Works* (Oxford Edition), edited by Austin Dobson.

BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM. Austin Dobson, *Life of Goldsmith* (containing Bibliography by J. P. Anderson), 1888; S. Gwynn, *Oliver Goldsmith*, 1935; W. Freeman, *Oliver Goldsmith*, 1952; R. M. Wardle, *Oliver Goldsmith*, 1958; M. Emslie, *Goldsmith's 'The Vicar of Wakefield'*, 1963; R. Quintana, *Oliver Goldsmith*, 1969.

CONTENTS

<i>Introduction</i> by J. M. Dent	PAGE V
CHAPTER I.—The description of the Family of Wakefield, in which a kindred Likeness prevails, as well of Minds as of Persons	I
CHAPTER II.—Family Misfortunes. The Loss of Fortune only serves to increase the Pride of the Worthy	6
CHAPTER III.—A Migration. The fortunate Circumstances of our Lives are generally found at last to be of our own procuring	II
CHAPTER IV.—A Proof that even the humblest Fortune may grant Happiness, which depends, not on Circumstance, but Constitution	19
CHAPTER V.—A new and great Acquaintance introduced. What we place most hopes upon generally proves most fatal	23
CHAPTER VI.—The Happiness of a Country Fireside	28
CHAPTER VII.—A Town Wit described. The dullest Fellows may learn to be comical for a Night or two	32

	PAGE
CHAPTER VIII.—An Amour, which promises little good Fortune, yet may be productive of much	37
CHAPTER IX.—Two Ladies of great Distinction introduced. Superior Finery ever seems to confer superior Breeding	45
CHAPTER X.—The Family endeavour to cope with their Betters. The Miseries of the Poor when they attempt to appear above their Circumstances	49
CHAPTER XI.—The Family still resolve to hold up their Heads.	54
CHAPTER XII.—Fortune seems resolved to humble the Family of Wakefield. Mortifications are often more painful than real Calamities .	60
CHAPTER XIII.—Mr Burchell is found to be an Enemy, for he has the confidence to give disagreeable Advice	66
CHAPTER XIV.—Fresh Mortifications, or a Demonstration that seeming Calamities may be real Blessings	70
CHAPTER XV.—All Mr Burchell's Villainy at once detected. The Folly of being overwise .	77
CHAPTER XVI.—The Family use Art, which is opposed with still greater	83
CHAPTER XVII.—Scarcely any Virtue found to resist the Power of long and pleasing Temptation	90

Contents

xiii

PAGE

CHAPTER XVIII.—The Pursuit of a Father to reclaim a Lost Child to Virtue	99
CHAPTER XIX.—The Description of a person discontented with the present Government, and apprehensive of the loss of our liberties .	105
CHAPTER XX.—The History of a philosophic Vagabond, pursuing Novelty, but losing Content .	115
CHAPTER XXI.—The short continuance of friendship amongst the vicious, which is coeval only with mutual satisfaction	132
CHAPTER XXII.—Offences are easily pardoned, where there is Love at bottom	142
CHAPTER XXIII.—None but the Guilty can be long and completely miserable	147
CHAPTER XXIV.—Fresh Calamities	153
CHAPTER XXV.—No situation, however wretched it seems, but has some sort of comfort attending it	159
CHAPTER XXVI.—A Reformation in the Gaol: to make laws complete, they should reward as well as punish	165
CHAPTER XXVII.—The same subject continued .	171
CHAPTER XXVIII.—Happiness and Misery rather the result of Prudence than of Virtue in this life; temporal evils or felicities being regarded by Heaven as things merely in themselves trifling, and unworthy its care in the distribution	176

	PAGE
CHAPTER XXIX.—The equal dealings of Providence demonstrated with regard to the Happy and the Miserable here below. That, from the nature of Pleasure and Pain, the wretched must be repaid the balance of their sufferings in the life hereafter	188
CHAPTER XXX.—Happier Prospects begin to appear. Let us be inflexible, and Fortune will at last change in our favour	193
CHAPTER XXXI.—Former Benevolence now repaid with unexpected Interest	202
CHAPTER XXXII.—The Conclusion	219

CHAPTER I

I WAS ever of opinion, that the honest man who married and brought up a large family, did more service than he who continued single and only talked of population. From this motive, I had scarce taken orders a year, before I began to think seriously of matrimony, and chose my wife, as she did her wedding-gown, not for a fine glossy surface, but such qualities as would wear well. To do her justice, she was a good-natured, notable woman; and as for breeding, there were few country ladies who could show more. She could read any English book without much spelling; but for pickling, preserving, and cookery, none could excel her. She prided herself also upon being an excellent contriver in housekeeping; though I could never find that we grew richer with all her contrivances.

However, we loved each other tenderly, and our fondness increased as we grew old. There was, in fact, nothing that could make us angry with the world or each other. We had an elegant house, situated in a fine country, and a good neighbourhood. The year was spent in a moral or rural amusement; in visiting our rich neighbours, and relieving such as were poor. We

had no revolutions to fear, nor fatigues to undergo; all our adventures were by the fireside, and all our migrations from the blue bed to the brown.

As we lived near the road, we often had the traveller or stranger visit us to taste our gooseberry-wine, for which we had great reputation; and I profess, with the veracity of an historian, that I never knew one of them find fault with it. Our cousins, too, even to the fortieth remove, all remembered their affinity, without any help from the herald's office, and came very frequently to see us. Some of them did us no great honour by these claims of kindred, as we had the blind, the maimed, and the halt amongst the number. However, my wife always insisted that, as they were the same *flesh and blood*, they should sit with us at the same table. So that, if we had not very rich, we generally had very happy friends about us; for this remark will hold good through life, that the poorer the guest, the better pleased he ever is with being treated; and as some men gaze with admiration at the colours of a tulip or the wing of a butterfly, so I was, by nature, an admirer of happy human faces. However, when any one of our relations was found to be a person of very bad character, a troublesome guest, or one we desired to get rid of, upon his leaving my house I ever took care to lend him a riding-coat or a pair of boots, or sometimes an horse of small value, and I always had the satisfaction of finding he never came back to return them. By this the house was cleared of such as we did not like; but never was the family of Wakefield known to turn the traveller or the poor dependant out of doors.

Thus we lived several years in a state of much happiness, not but that we sometimes had those little rubs

which Providence sends to enhance the value of its favours. My orchard was often robbed by schoolboys, and my wife's custards plundered by the cats or the children. The 'Squire would sometimes fall asleep in the most pathetic parts of my sermon, or his lady return my wife's civilities at church with a mutilated curtsy. But we soon got over the uneasiness caused by such accidents, and usually in three or four days began to wonder how they vexed us.

My children, the offspring of temperance, as they were educated without softness, so they were at once well formed and healthy; my sons hardy and active, my daughters beautiful and blooming. When I stood in the midst of the little circle, which promised to be the supports of my declining age, I could not avoid repeating the famous story of Count Abensberg, who, in Henry the Second's progress through Germany, while other courtiers came with their treasures, brought his thirty-two children, and presented them to his sovereign as the most valuable offering he had to bestow. In this manner, though I had but six, I considered them as a very valuable present made to my country, and consequently looked upon it as my debtor. Our eldest son was named George, after his uncle, who left us ten thousand pounds. Our second child, a girl, I intended to call after her aunt Grissel; but my wife, who during her pregnancy had been reading romances, insisted on her being called Olivia. In less than another year we had another daughter, and now I was determined that Grissel should be her name; but a rich relation taking a fancy to stand godmother, the girl was, by her directions, called Sophia; so that we had two romantic names in the family; but I solemnly protest I had no hand in