

preciated so much as their productions. Goldsmith is usually said to have been a very poor conversationalist, a defect which, perhaps, has been somewhat exaggerated, and struck by the contrast between his blundering and insipid prattle, and the excellence of his literary work. Walpole professed to regard Goldsmith as an inspired idiot.

As an essayist, Goldsmith first rose into public favor, and in this department he proved himself a worthy follower of Addison, though, without reaching the eminence of that master. His chief works are *the Enquiry into the State of Polite Learning in Europe*, published in 1789, and the *Citizen of the World*, composed of letters written in the character of a Chinese Mandarin, who had come to investigate European manners and customs; the charm of these letters is found in the subtle satire with which certain phases of civilization, that appear incongruous even to a European, are treated, and the disguise is therefore very apparent. Goldsmith has been hastily identified with the man in black, mentioned in these letters, but this is an unsafe conclusion, as a writer of fiction has necessarily to utilize much of his own personal experience, and Goldsmith's experience was not the most extensive, as evidenced by the frequent recurrence in his prose and verse of the same thoughts and images. Prof. Masson writes in his *memoir of Goldsmith*, "That of these simple elements he made so many charming combinations really differing from each other, and all, though suggested by fact, yet hung so sweetly in an ideal air, proved what an artist he was, and was better than much that is commonly called invention. In short, if there is a sameness of effect in Goldsmith's writings, it is because they consist of poetry and truth, humour and pathos from his own life, and the supply from such a life as his was not inexhaustible."

As a novelist, Goldsmith can scarcely

be assigned a high rank, yet to him is due the credit of having produced the first genuine novel of domestic life, the *Vicar of Wakefield*, published in 1776, though written some five years previously. The interest which this tale excites is certainly not to be attributed to the plot or the skill with which the mere story has been constructed. We have already seen that Goldsmith has been credited with being a blunderer in conversation, and this appears to cling to him to a certain extent when he takes up the pen. We meet with incongruities upon almost every page of this work. The most extraordinary coincidences and improbabilities take place without a word of explanation. A few of these may be pointed out. The very title of the work appears to be a misnomer; the vicar leaves Wakefield shortly after the story opens, and it is never afterwards mentioned. The surprise of the vicar on learning that his old friend Wilmot is not a monogamist, although he was then courting his fourth wife, and the fact that Sir William Thornhill, well-known to his tenants and highly esteemed by them, is made to spend months in familiar intercourse with them under the assumed name of Burchell, without being recognized, all these are circumstances that detract from the story considered merely as such. Our delight in the work arises from the delineation of character and of that quiet domestic life from which so large a proportion of their happiness is derived by the inhabitants of the British Isles. The secret of its peculiar charm is somewhat difficult to state. No one who has read the work can fail to appreciate the characters of the good Vicar and his family, who are all hit off to the life. The air of truthfulness and simplicity which Goldsmith threw over the work is, no doubt, one of the sources of its power. No inconsiderable share of the pleasure it affords is to be attributed to Goldsmith's own