



Life, Literature and Education.



Oliver Goldsmith.

If Ireland had given to the world no other writers than Thomas Moore and Oliver Goldsmith, she would still have added very much to the annals of British literature and to her own particular glory, for in Moore we have voiced the tenderness, the fertile imagination and the love of country which are so characteristic of the inhabitants of the Emerald Isle, while Goldsmith exhibits the geniality, the optimism and the cheerful courage of his fellow-countrymen.

Goldsmith's birthplace was at Pallas, a little town in Ireland, where his father was a clergyman. Oliver was born, Nov. 29th, 1728, in a fairy-haunted, tumble-down old farmhouse overlooking the river Inny. The family was large (there were seven children); the income was small, and our author's early youth was far from being a luxurious one. Life for the Goldsmiths became somewhat easier when the father became rector of Kilkenny West, and moved with his family to Lissoy. At the age of fifteen, Oliver, now an ungainly, awkward youth, his face deeply marked by smallpox, and with a reputation for stupidity, was sent to Trinity College, Dublin; but his position here was a humble one, as he acted as servant to the richer students, and was forced to receive much abuse and hardship at their hands. His tutor, too, who could not perceive any sign of brains in Goldsmith, because he was not a mathematician, treated the lad cruelly. However, this ill-treatment was not allowed to depress his spirits, and the truth must be told that more of his time was spent in reading, singing and entertaining his friends than in study; but in spite of this indifference, he managed to take his degree, and left the college in 1749.

Urged by his friends, and particularly by his Uncle Contarine, who advanced him money, Goldsmith began a course of theology in company with his brother, Henry. But he never qualified for the ministry, for so little was given to his books and so much to low companions that when

he eventually presented himself before the Bishop of Elphin for ordination, he was promptly rejected. The next recourse was to the law. His uncle gave him £50 to take him to London to pursue his legal studies, but on his way he met two boon companions in Dublin and the fifty pounds melted away. A little more money was given him, and he arrived at Edinburgh to study, not law, but medicine. Here he stayed for two years, and then went abroad to wander from one city to another, returning in 1756 to Dover, with but a few halfpence in his pocket, and was forced to earn money in strange ways. He was a strolling actor, an apothecary's clerk, an usher in a school, a proof-reader; in fact, anything that was required at the moment.

While all this wandering, uncertain life which he had led almost from his birth failed to increase his worldly prosperity at the time, yet now, in 1758, when he turned to his pen, he found the material in all these personal experiences for the works which have rendered him famous. His first book was the high-titled, *Enquiry into the Present State of Polite Learning in Europe*, and here the reading and observation of his wanderings on the continent proved valuable. This book was fairly well received; it attracted some attention, and brought him other work, and, consequently, money became a little more plentiful with him. But his extravagant habits increased in a greater proportion than his income, and the number of his friends, who made claims upon his well-known generosity, also grew rapidly greater, until he was no better off than before.

In this same year, however, he met the great Dr. Johnson, and a close friendship sprang up between these two widely-different characters, which lasted until Goldsmith's death. Johnson, one morning, received word from Goldsmith that his landlady had arrested him for debt, and that he should require his friend's assistance. Johnson sent a guinea by the messenger, and followed as soon as possible. Arrived at the house, he found that Oliver had used part of the guinea to buy a bottle of wine. In the endeavor to find some way to get money, Johnson discovered that Goldsmith had the manuscript of a completed novel in his desk. He at once seized upon it, and carried it off to a bookseller, who gave him sixty pounds for it. The debt was paid, and Goldsmith was released. This novel with which he purchased his liberty was *The Vicar of Wakefield*, the popularity of which has increased year by year, since it was published in 1761. Three years later, the readers of the novel were eager to read more from the same pen, and his first poem, *The Traveller*, received a welcome in which surprise was mingled with pleasure. His friends were astonished that "Nonsensical Noll Goldsmith" could write such graceful and thoughtful poetry. His circumstances had now so greatly improved that he moved to the Temple, that famous place which sheltered so many famous literary men. He received the notice of the Earl of Northumberland, and might have obtained still more practical favors, but he declared that he needed

nothing for himself but the patronage of the bookseller, and said that he would prefer that the Earl's help be given to his brother, who was a poor clergyman in Ireland. The publication of another poem, "Edwin and Angelina," or "The Hermit," brought him still more into favor with the aristocracy. His rise to favor among those of high rank was so sudden that it gave him no opportunity to rid himself of his awkwardness and want of polish. He was rarely at ease, and the consciousness of his physical defects added to his blundering. His lack of a thorough education made defeat certain in any argument with such men as Burke and Johnson, and he was continually being worsted. Johnson says of him, "No man is more foolish than Goldsmith when he has not a pen in his hand, or more wise when he has." In the company of those with whom he felt at ease, his conversation was much more worthy of the man's mind. It was marked by an artless simplicity and true humor, by geniality and joyousness, and by occasional but brilliant "swallow flights" of wit.

"The Good-natured Man," his first attempt at writing for the stage, brought him £500, the largest sum he had ever possessed at one time, but alas! it speedily went the way of the smaller amounts which were its predecessors. Reduced to penury once more, he was driven again to writing, and began "The Deserted Village," which for finish, for beauty of cadence and fineness of thought, stands easily first among his works. The village depicted there is his childhood's home of Lissoy, and the "village preacher," so well portrayed, is his brother, Henry, who had died just before the poem was written. In 1772, his second play, "She Stoops to Conquer," was produced and fairly well received, and its proceeds paid off part of the large debt which he owed. The chief incident in this play, the mistaking of a private house for a hotel, was one that Goldsmith took from his own experience, a similar fate having befallen him when he first left the parental home.

Under a guise of gaiety he was hiding great anxiety for the future, for he was hopelessly in debt, and his health was rapidly failing. But even more suddenly than was expected, the end came, and he died on the fourth of April, 1774. He was buried in Temple church, and some years later his friends had a monument to his memory placed in Westminster Abbey.

"It cannot be denied that he was self-important and consequential, little gifted with physical attractions, morbidly anxious to disguise his personal shortcomings. Improvident by temperament, and poor in his youth, when money came to him in middle life he was careless and extravagant."

"He was his own greatest enemy, but no other man's. He was beloved by all who knew him as a companion, or who shared in his bounty, and no writer is more beloved by the general reader, who cannot avoid detecting the personality of the poor author on every page. He was generous; he was sympathetic; he had the kindest heart in the world. He was a gentle, amiable satirist, a humorous farce writer, a philosophic poet, and a graceful essayist."

Sweet Auburn! loveliest village of the plain,
Where health and plenty cheered the laboring swain;
Where smiling spring its earliest visit paid,
And parting summer's lingering blooms delayed;
Dear lovely bowers of innocence and ease,
Seats of my youth, when every sport could please;
How often have I loitered o'er thy green,
Where humble happiness endeared each scene!
How often have I paused on every charm;
The sheltered cot, the cultivated farm;
The never-failing brook, the busy mill,
The decent church that topped the neighboring hill;
The hawthorn-bush, with seats beneath the shade,
For talking age and whispering lovers made!
How often have I blessed the coming day,
When toil remitting lent its turn to play,
And all the village train from labor free,
Led up their sports beneath the spreading tree!

Near yonder copse, where once the garden smiled,
And still where many a garden flower grows wild;
There, where a few torn shrubs the place disclose,
The village preacher's modest mansion rose.
A man he was to all the country dear,
And passing rich with forty pounds a year;
Remove from towns he ran his godly race,
Nor e'er had changed, nor wished to change his place;
His house was known to all the vagrant train,
He chid their wanderings, but relieved their pain;
The long-remembered beggar was his guest,
Whose beard descending swept his aged breast;
The ruined spendthrift, now no longer proud,
Claimed kindred there, and had his claims allowed.
Pleased with his guests, the good man learned to glow,
And quite forgot their vices in their woe;
Careless their merits or their faults to scan,
His pity gave ere charity began.
Thus to relieve the wretched was his pride,
And e'en his failings leaned to virtue's side.

—From "The Deserted Village."

A Public-school Exhibit.

The school teachers of Ontario in general, when nature study and water-coloring were added to the school-curriculum, were rather dubious as to the results, but the majority of them were delightfully surprised at the ready way in which the children "took to" the new subjects and the rapid progress they could make. Those teachers, who hold public examinations, might take example from the London, Ontario, public schools. The schools of London, Ont., recently combined to give