

**GOLDSMITH, THE TRAVELLER
AND THE DESERTED VILLAGE.
EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION
AND NOTES BY ARTHUR BARRETT,
PP. 1-125**

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OLIVER GOLDSMITH

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GOLDSMITH, Oliver

THE TRAVELLER
AND 118669
THE DESERTED VILLAGE.

EDITED WITH INTRODUCTION AND NOTES

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

OLIVER, second son of the Rev. Charles Goldsmith, was born in the year 1728, in the village of Pallasmore, in the county of Longford, Ireland, of which village his father was the clergyman. About two years after Oliver's birth his father was promoted to a better living in the next county, but at no great distance from Pallasmore. At Lissoy, a village in Mr. Goldsmith's new parish where the family removed on his promotion, Oliver lived till his seventeenth year.

Of his extreme fondness for this village and its inhabitants there is ample proof in his writings, but care must be taken in identifying the "Deserted Village" with Lissoy. The following extract from H. Crabb Robinson's *Diary* illustrates the uncertainty which exists on this subject. "April 16th, 1821, (on a visit to the Pattisons at Witham)—I walked to Hatfield Cross with William. Looked into the church. The vicar, Bennet, was our cicerone. He spoke of Goldsmith as a man he had seen. Goldsmith had lodged at Springfield with some farmers. He spent his forenoon in his room, writing, and breakfasted off water gruel without bread. In his manners he was a bear. 'A tame one,'

I observed, and it was assented to. He dressed shabbily and was an odd man. No further particulars could I get, except that while Goldsmith was there a gentleman took down some cottages, which Bennet supposes gave rise to the *Deserted Village*."—Vol. ii., p. 204. The yearning after his early home which is expressed in the *Deserted Village*, ll. 83-96, finds utterance also in his prose works. In the *Citizen of the World*, letter ciii., we read: "Whatever vicissitudes we experience in life, however we toil, or wheresoever we wander, our fatigued wishes still recur to home for tranquillity: we long to die in that spot which gave us birth, and in that pleasing expectation find an opiate for every calamity." Lissoy, it is true, had not exactly given birth to Goldsmith, but it was his home, the only home he could remember, and the sentiment is the same in both the poetical and prose passages.

It is, however, precisely this evidence of genuine love for his early home which should make us distrust the accuracy of the poet's description. All people do not agree, nor will they be likely to agree, with Lord Macaulay that Goldsmith "has produced something which never was, and never will be, seen in any part of the world," i.e. a combination of the rural beauties of an English village with the miseries of an Irish eviction; still, a mind, sensitive and affectionate as his, looking back through the mist of years on the "playplace of his early days," would be inclined to exaggerate all its charms, supply its defects, and gift it with a beauty which to an impartial eye it never possessed. Leigh Hunt, in his autobiography, says there were never any cranberries equal to those he used to get in Austin

Friars in his youth ; and it must be in the experience of most grown people that those scenes of their boyhood, which remembered at a distance of time and place appear so lovely, lose much of their beauty when revisited in maturer years. The same feeling which made Leigh Hunt exaggerate the delicacy of the cranberries may have made Goldsmith describe Lissoy, not the straggling, ill-kept village which it probably was, but the Lissoy which his loving partiality painted.

The question of Lissoy being the original of the "Deserted Village" has been introduced somewhat out of its due place, being suggested by the mention of Goldsmith's birth-place and early home. The facts of his life, what is known of them at least, have been so often written and re-written that it is unnecessary to give more than a slight outline of them. His earliest instruction was obtained at the village school, whose master, Paddy Byrne, he has celebrated in the *Deserted Village*, ll. 193-216. After this he seems to have been removed to more than one boarding school in succession, and at the age of seventeen he was sent to Trinity College, Dublin, as a sizar or poor scholar, whose duty it would be to perform certain offices about the college in return for his board and tuition. At Trinity, Goldsmith did little good. The sense of his inferior position probably paralyzed what energy and intellect he possessed, which so far as concerned the power of mastering the subjects prescribed by the University was by no means of the highest order. Instead of working hard at his studies, Goldsmith wrote ballads, sold them to procure pocket money, and used to slip out at night to hear them sung in the streets. After many irregularities and much

hardship, including a *thrashing* from his tutor, Goldsmith left Trinity, and after wandering about for some days was with difficulty re-admitted on promise of amendment. Finally, in the year 1749, he took his B.A. degree; but though he had been intended by his father for the clerical profession, to which his college education was a preliminary, he never entered the church, the bishop to whom he applied having, it is said, refused to ordain him. After various failures, and a life of questionable respectability, he was provided with money by his uncle Contarine and sent to Dublin with the intention of his becoming a lawyer, but his incurable recklessness of consequences and vagabond habits were again too strong, and he returned to his mother's house. His uncle forgave him, and, again providing him with funds, started him off to Edinburgh, *this* time to learn medicine. After a year and a half spent at Edinburgh, he induced his uncle to give him twenty pounds to take him to the Continent for the furtherance, as he put it, of his studies. He seems to have really learnt something during his stay in Edinburgh, and the reason alleged for visiting the Continent was probably in part the true one, but a still stronger incentive was his restless spirit and desire of seeing the world. He reached Leyden, only to stay about twelve months, and then started in the early part of 1755 on a tour through Europe. How he maintained himself during his travels is uncertain, as the story of his playing on the flute for food and lodging, alluded to in the *Traveller*, ll. 243-253, cannot be received as literally true; and though the "History of a Philosophic Vagabond," in the 20th chapter of the *Vicar of Wakefield*, gives a detailed account of how George Primrose sup-

ported himself, there is no proof that George Primrose's adventures were written from a recollection of Goldsmith's own experiences. About all that is really known of his travels is that he passed through Flanders, portions of France, staying some time at Paris, Switzerland, and Italy. He returned through France, and crossed over to England in the beginning of 1756.

As there is a good deal of difference of opinion as to the condition and prospects of a literary man at the time when Goldsmith began his London life, and as authorities like De Quincey and Forster are to some extent at variance on this point, it may, perhaps, be well to hear what Goldsmith himself has to say on the matter. The following extract from the *Citizen of the World*, though supposed to be written by a Chinaman, probably represents mainly his own views.

"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 a 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. A man of letters at present, whose works are valuable, is perfectly sensible of their value. Every polite member of the community, by buying what he