

**THE TRAVELLER, THE
DESERTED VILLAGE,
AND OTHER POEMS**

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The Traveller, the Deserted Village, and Other Poems by Oliver Goldsmith

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OLIVER GOLDSMITH

**THE TRAVELLER, THE
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GOLDSMITH'S POEMS.

Chas. C. Emerson
from George Otis
THE *Cambridge, Oct. 1825.*

TRAVELLER,
THE
DESERTED VILLAGE,

AND
Other Poems.

BY
OLIVER GOLDSMITH, M. B.

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M DCCC XXII.

CRITICAL OBSERVATIONS.

DR. JOHNSON pronounced *THE TRAVELLER* to be the finest poem that had appeared since the time of Pope; and this measured encomium, dictated by the great *Aristarch* of British Poets, was probably sufficient to content the ambition of the author. The Poem exhibits all the terseness, the polished versification, and the smartness of the author of the *Essay on Man*, whose style was the model of the poetasters of the day: but there is an originality in Goldsmith, which entitles him to rank higher than the highest form in the school of Pope. In his style, he may perhaps be considered as an imitator: his thoughts are always his own, and are impressed with the genuine simplicity of his character.

THE TRAVELLER is one of the few didactic poems, in which the poet and the moralist never part company. The sentiments appeal to the imagination, as strongly as the descriptions by which they are illustrated. The author himself engages our interest in the person of the Traveller, and his observations and remarks acquire a picturesque effect, from being associated with the scenery which suggested them. On this production Goldsmith rested his hope of establishing his fame, and he bestowed his choicest hours on its composition. It was first printed in 1765, and it completely succeeded in procuring for the author celebrity and patronage. Patronage however

—at least the patronage of the great—was not the object of his solicitude. He dedicated his TRAVELLER to his brother, the Rev. Henry Goldsmith, to whom part of the poem was originally addressed from Switzerland: “a man who, despising fame and fortune, had retired early to happiness and obscurity, with an income of forty pounds a year.” “The only dedication I ever made,” says Goldsmith in addressing the DESERTED VILLAGE to Sir Joshua Reynolds, “was to my brother, because I loved him better than most men.” A circumstance is narrated by his biographer, which affords additional proof, that a native spirit of independence and of careless disinterestedness formed a conspicuous trait of the poet’s character. The poem had procured for Goldsmith the unsolicited friendship of Lord Nugent, afterwards Earl of Clare; and in consequence of his Lordship’s favourable mention of the author, he received an invitation to wait on the Earl of Northumberland. The Earl was on the eve of departing as Lord Lieutenant for Ireland, and hearing that Goldsmith was a native of that country, he expressed his willingness to do him a kindness. The account which the poet himself gives of his answer to the gracious offer is, that he “could say nothing but that he had a brother there, a clergyman, that stood in need of help. As for myself,” he adds, “I have no dependence on the promises of great men; I look to the booksellers for support; they are my best friends, and I am not inclined to forsake them for others.”

The DESERTED VILLAGE was published in 1769. Like his other great ethic poem, it received the severest correction and the highest finishing he could bestow upon it; and cost him, both in time and labour, far more than many of those compilations by which he earned a subsistence. He was an author from necessity; he was a poet from feeling and from choice: but the spontaneous exercise of his imagination was a relaxation in which he rarely permitted

himself to indulge. "Of all kinds of ambition," he remarks in the Dedication to the TRAVELLER, "what from the refinement of the times, from different systems of criticism, and from the division of party, that which pursues poetical fame is the wildest." These two great poems are the only fruits of that native ambition: his other works were written for the booksellers.

Both THE TRAVELLER and THE DESERTED VILLAGE were the result of the inspiration of genuine feeling. The characteristic sketches of the several nations visited by the TRAVELLER, derived from actual observation the philosophical accuracy with which they are drawn: and it is remarkable how, in many instances, the more romantic estimate of the poet is corrected by the nearer view which the TRAVELLER takes of the scenes that delight the imagination; we need only refer to that exquisite passage, in which he points out the evils which counterbalance the advantages of an inferior degree of civilisation.

"If few their wants, their pleasures are but few;
Unknown to them, when sensual pleasures cloy,
To fill the languid pause with finer joy."

Goldsmith has introduced himself into one of his landscapes, in which he alludes to the manner in which he made "the grand tour,"—on foot, and "trusting to Providence for his resources." The lines are these:

"How often have I led thy sportive choir
With tuneless pipe, beside the murmuring Loire!
Where shading elms along the margin grew,
And freshen'd from the wave the zephyr flew:
And haply, though my harsh touch, faltering still,
But mock'd all tune, and marr'd the dancer's skill;
Yet would the village praise my wondrous power,
And dance, forgetful of the noontide hour."

The account which he was accustomed to give of his own travels, so nearly resembled those of the wanderer in the VICAR of WAKEFIELD, that the following particulars are, not without good reason, con-

jectured by his biographer to refer to himself. "I had some knowledge of music, and now turned what was once my amusement into a present means of subsistence. Whenever I approached a peasant's house towards night-fall, I played one of my most merry tunes, and that procured me not only a lodging, but subsistence for the next day. I once or twice attempted to play to people of fashion, but they still thought my performance odious, and never rewarded me even with a trifle." His classical learning also procured him a hospitable reception, and sometimes a gratuity, at the monasteries. "Thus" says he, "I fought my way from convent to convent, walked from city to city, examined mankind more nearly, and, if I may so express it, saw both sides of the picture."

The professed design of *THE TRAVELLER*, is to establish as an axiom, "that every state has a particular principle of happiness, and that this principle in each may be carried to a mischievous excess." The reader, however, concerns himself little with our author's position; but as scene after scene is presented to his imagination in all the force of contrast, and all the warmth and vividness of a poet's colouring, his admiration grows into sympathy, he realizes the feelings of the Traveller, and is at length pleased to find himself conducted so pleasantly to the gratifying conclusion, that

"where'er we roam,
His first, best country ever is at home."

THE DESERTED VILLAGE is the favourite poem of the two; and perhaps no poem in the language, of equal length, has been more generally or repeatedly read by all classes, or has more frequently supplied extracts, to be spontaneously committed to memory. It abounds with couplets and single lines, so simply beautiful in point of sentiment, and so perfect in expression, that the ear is delighted to retain them for their melody, and the memory is unwilling to lose them for their truth. A person who has never

perused this poem, or who having once perused it has suffered it to lay by him for a series of years, is surprised, on taking it up, to recognise at every paragraph, lines with which he has long been familiarized, although not aware of their author. Pope himself, with all his sparkling antitheses, which serve admirably to point a sentence, is not referred to with that fondness with which a quotation is made from *THE DESERTED VILLAGE*, because Pope rarely, if ever, comes home to the feelings like Goldsmith, or appeals to those best affections of our nature which consecrate the names of country and of home. Milton, especially in his *Comus*, Shakspeare, and in an inferior degree Thomson, and Young, and Cowper, may be enumerated as the only poets, besides Pope and Goldsmith, whose works have come into general use as *text books* of expression, and which have thus become in a measure identified with the language. It is unnecessary to point out how widely these all differ in style and character. Goldsmith's characteristic is a prevailing simplicity, which conceals the artifices of versification. His delineations of rural scenery, and his village portraits, are marked by singular fidelity and chasteness: they are delicately finished, without being overwrought; and there is a mixture of pleasantry and tender melancholy throughout the poem, which adds much to its interest.

There can be no doubt that *AUBURN* was employed to designate the scene of Goldsmith's earliest local attachment. The landscape, the characters, and the circumstances of the tale, all appear to have had a real existence in the eye and in the heart of the poet. It is no objection, that the scene is purely English: the poem was designed for English readers; but the feelings and the remembrances which it embodies, were drawn from his native soil. It is supposed that the village of Lisboy, in the county of Westmeath, Ireland, where his early years were passed, is the