

**"GREAT WRITERS". LIFE
OF TOBIAS GEORGE
SMOLLETT, PP. 18-163**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649635467

"Great Writers". Life of Tobias George Smollett, pp. 18-163 by David Hannay & Eric S. Robertson

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

DAVID HANNAY & ERIC S. ROBERTSON

**"GREAT WRITERS". LIFE
OF TOBIAS GEORGE
SMOLLETT, PP. 18-163**

"Great Writers."

EDITED BY

PROFESSOR ERIC S. ROBERTSON, M.A.

LIFE OF SMOLLETT.

LIFE
OF
TOBIAS GEORGE SMOLLETT

BY
DAVID HANNAY

LONDON
WALTER SCOTT &
24 WARWICK LANE, PATERNOSTER ROW
1887

(All rights reserved.)



Smollett's interpretation of life is to be accepted as the work of the cool observer, how far it is consciously and deliberately exaggerated for artistic purposes, and how far it was coloured by his own temperament. This work will be more appropriately attempted when we come to "Roderick Random."

The few stories—indeed the two stories—of Smollett's youth which are reported on tolerable evidence are neither very instructive nor very edifying. It is said in a general way that he was fond of satire. This rather stately phrase may be taken to mean that he had a boyish habit of saying things which he knew would be disagreeable to other people, and some skill in pointing his ill-nature at the obvious defects of those he chose to attack. Smollett, in common with many of the eighteenth-century writers even less qualified for the place of censor of morals, began early to lash the vices of the age. It was a common practice during a great part of the eighteenth century; and it is probable enough that the first sinners whom Smollett thought fit to reprove were his cousins, his masters and pastors, and all such persons as thought they were set in authority over him by birth or age. No specimen of this juvenile domestic satire is preserved. The two stories actually recorded are unhappily a little dull. Sir Walter Scott had heard that his master, Mr. John Gordon, expressed a preference for "my ain bubbly-nosed callant with the stane in his pouch," over the more orderly apprentices of his friends. As Sir Walter interprets this unpleasant description, it means that Smollett was a somewhat dirty boy of spirit and resource. An ill-natured commentator might say that the

description continued to be true of him till the end, but Smollett must have had kindness enough to secure the good opinion of his master. The other story is preserved by Dr. John Moore, commonly described as the ingenious author of "Zeluco." It is as follows:—

"On a winter evening, when the streets were covered with snow, Smollett happened to be engaged in a snow-ball fight with a few boys of his own age. Among his associates was the apprentice of that surgeon who is supposed to have been delineated under the name of Crab in 'Roderick Random.' He entered his shop while his apprentice was in the heat of the engagement. On the return of the latter the master remonstrated severely with him for his negligence in quitting the shop. The youth excused himself by saying that while he was employed in making up a prescription a fellow had hit him with a snow-ball, and that he had been in pursuit of the delinquent.

"'A mighty probable story, truly,' said the master, in an ironical tone. 'I wonder how long I should stand here before it would enter into any mortal's head to throw a snowball at me?' While he was holding his head erect, with a most scornful air, he received a very severe blow in the face by a snowball.

"Smollett, who stood concealed behind the pillar at the shop-door, had heard the dialogue, and perceiving that his companion was puzzled for an answer, he extricated him by a repartee equally smart and *apropos*."

The story might be and probably has been told of

many idle apprentices, but, such as it is, it may be accepted as the most characteristic thing known of Smollett's youth. It fits in fairly well with the tradition reported by Campbell, "that Smollett was a restive apprentice and a mischievous stripling." Doubtless he was ill enough at home in the small money-hunting business world of Glasgow. He wanted something better, or at least larger and different, and it is nowise incredible that he revenged himself for the inconveniences of his position by that "continued string of epigrammatic sarcasm" against neighbouring bores which, according to Mr. Colquhoun of Camstraddan, adorned his conversation, and for which, in that gentleman's opinion, "no talents could compensate." The victims would unquestionably agree with Mr. Colquhoun, but, unfortunately, we have no means of knowing whether these sarcasms were endowed with that amount of talent which, in the opinion of Prince Posterity, compensates for any degree of ill-nature by supplying him with amusement.

CHAPTER II.

IN 1739 Smollett was free from any family ties which could have kept him in Scotland. His brother was in the army, his sister was married, and his mother appears to have been left in possession of the house of Dalquhurn for her life, with some money allowance from her husband's family. Smollett could in any case do little towards her support by staying in Glasgow. In the natural course of things for a young Scotchman, he went to seek his fortune in England. He was not ill provided with the means of getting on. His family had still a parliamentary connection. They no longer supplied members to the House, but they were influential constituents. A letter from the head of the family to his member was a good recommendation, and Tobias was supplied with the necessary introduction to a gentleman who would be able to help him, and no doubt willing to do so when the applicant was both member of a family which could be useful at a general election, and a brother Scot. Probably the poor relation of the laird of Bonhill considered the member of Parliament as a second string to his bow. The first was the great tragedy he carried in his pocket. This work of literature was destined to

cause him much ill-temper, and much of the suffering which ill-temper entails. In his "Travels through France and Italy" Smollett devotes two long pages to a Latin diagnosis of his state of health, addressed to a certain Professor F——, at Montpellier, to whom he applied in vain for medical help. In the course of this very astounding account of his sufferings, he observes in Latin, "*Systema nervosum maxime irritabile*," and the description was applicable long before his later years of chronic ill-health. In 1739 he was already very irritable, and he put himself to a very severe test when he launched on the career of unsuccessful dramatist.

The dishonesty of patrons, the unwisdom of friendly critics, the mendacity of managers, were all revealed to Smollett by this unhappy play, and he told them all to the public in the prefaces to the tragedy, and in a long episode of "Roderick Random." The proud author of "The Regicide"—this is the name of the great tragedy—obtained an introduction to Lyttelton, a known patron of literature, probably by the help of Mallet his secretary, the "beggarly Scotchman" to whom Bolingbroke left the blunderbuss he had loaded and primed against the Christian religion. We have Smollett's own evidence that he conceived great hopes of the good things he was to receive through Lyttelton's patronage. But, alas! no patron of letters can induce the hard-hearted manager to take plays which will not act. The patron seems to have put in a good word for Smollett with Garrick and other great men in the theatrical world. It was to no effect. The play never struggled onto the stage. The utmost success Smollett ever attained in connection with this