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978-1-107-49758-0 - The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith
Edited by Katharine C. Balderston
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THE LETTERS

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I

To DANIEL HODSON¹[Edinburgh, the winter of 1752–3]²

. . . .ance, This country has little or nothin[g which I can] give an account of so instead of a D[escription of the] country you must be contented with [an account of the] manner in which I spend my Time, [during the] day I am obligd to attend the Publick L[ectures. At night] I am in my Lodging. I have hardly an[y other s]ociety but a Folio book a skeleton my cat and my meagre landlady. I pay 22 Lb³ per am for Diet washing and Lodging being the cheapest that is to be got in Edinburgh all things here being much dearer than in Ireland as money is made more Plenty by the Last Rebellion⁴. I read hard which is a thing I never could do when the study was displeasing. I have.to three Professors, and bought som[e].value of about three more which I w[as].obligd to

1 From the original in the Huntington Library, never before published entire. The MS. is a fragment, badly torn. Missing passages have been conjecturally supplied in brackets whenever the context suggested them.

2 Goldsmith entered the medical school at Edinburgh in October, 1752. This is evidently his first letter to his brother-in-law.

3 A large amount. Dr Johnson points out, in the *Journey to the Western Islands*, 1775, that board and room for seven months at St Andrews cost from £10 to £15.

4 The Jacobite Rebellion of 1745.

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To DANIEL HODSON [1752–3]

buy, besides some cloath[s]¹. . . . My Dr Dan my Freinds sent four guin[eas]. . . . but as I have been promis'd fifteen. . . . by my Freinds Exclusive of my Un[cle]². . . . drawn on Mr Constable for ten poun[ds]. . . . [genero]usly contributed to make mine happy.
 . . . My Dr Broth^{er} your aff^t Freind

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

P.S. . . . [e]very Freind as . . . particularly mention'd Each, there is one³ on whom I never think without affliction but conceal it from him.

Direct to me at Surgeon Sinclairs in the Trunk Close⁴ Edinburgh.

- 1 A tailor's account, beginning on January 24, 1753, is still preserved in the library of the University of Edinburgh. It reads, "Two and one half yards of rich sky Blew sattin, one and one-half yards of white Allapeen," etc.
- 2 His uncle Contarine, as the next letter shows, furnished him with £10 a year. He seems to have relied, then, on receiving £25 a year for his expenses. According to Mrs Hodson's statement (Prior, *Life*, I, 133), she and Henry Goldsmith shared his support with Mr Contarine.
- 3 Probably Jack Goldsmith, his youngest brother, born in 1740, who, according to a story told by Prior (*Life*, I, 9, note), received an injury on a long horse-back ride with his mother which "cost her the life of her son." Goldsmith himself told Percy, in the Memorandum of his life which he dictated in 1773, that this brother died at about the age of twelve. He was still alive at the close of 1753 (see Letter V), but must have died shortly after that.
- 4 A short street in the heart of old Edinburgh, running between High Street and the open place surrounding the old Physic Garden.

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II

To the Reverend THOMAS CONTARINE¹

My Dr Uncle [Edinburgh] May 8th 1753²

In your letter (the only one I receivd from Kilmore) you call me the Philosopher who carries all his goods about him yet how can Such a character fit me who have left behind in Ireland Every thing I think worth posessing freinds that I love and a society that pleasd while it instructed, who but must regret the Loss of such Enjoyments who but must regret his absence from Kilmore that Ever knew it as I did, here as recluse as the Turkish Spy at Parris³ I am almost unknown to Every body Except some few who attend the Proffessors of Physick as I do, apropos I shall give you the Proffessors names and as far as occurs to me their characters and first as most Deserving Mr Monro⁴ Professor of anatomy. This man has brought the

¹ From the original in the collection of Mr Oliver R. Barrett. It is addressed, "To the Revd. Mr. Thos. Contarine at Kilmore near Carick on Shannon in Ireland. Via London." It was first published by Prior, in his *Life*, in 1837.

² This date, with the class books of Monro, fixes the beginning of Goldsmith's Edinburgh days at the opening of the autumn term in 1752.

³ Marana's *L'Espion Turc*, 1684, was translated into English by Bradshaw in 1687–93, as *The Turkish Spy*. It probably furnished the first hint for *The Citizen of the World*.

⁴ Alexander Monro, *primus* (1697–1767), first professor of anatomy at Edinburgh, and the founder of the medical school. His annual lectures lasted from October to May.

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science he Teaches to as much perfection as it is capable of and not content with barely Teaching anatomy he launches out into all the branches of Physick where all his remarks are new and usefull. Tis he I may venture to say that draws hither such a number of stu[dents] from most parts of the world Even from Russia, he is [not]¹ only a skilfull Physician but an able Orator and delivers things in the[ir] nature abstruse in so Easy a ma[n]ner that the most unlearn'd may, must understand him, Plumer² Professor of chymistry understands his busines well but delivers himself so ill that He is but little regarded, Alston³ Professor of Materia medica speaks much but little to the purpose, the Professors of Theory and Practice say nothing but what we may find in the books laid before us and speak that in so droneing and heavy a manner that their hearers are not many degrees in a better state than their Patients. You see then D^r S^r that monro is the only great man among them so that I intend to hear him another winter and go then to hear Albinus⁴ the great Professor at

1 The bracketed portions are worn away in the MS. and are supplied from Prior's text.

2 Andrew Plummer (1726–55), lecturer in chemical pharmacy.

3 Charles Alston (1683–1760), first professor of botany and materia medica at Edinburgh.

4 Bernard-Siegfried Albinus (1697–1770), son of the equally famous Bernard Albinus, and professor of anatomy at Leyden. He was a pioneer in the study of the mechanical structure of the skeletal and muscular systems.

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1753] *To* THE REV. THOMAS CONTARINE

Leyden¹. I read a science the most Pleasing in nature so that my labours are but a relaxation and I may Truly say the only thing here that gives me Pleasure. How I enjoy the Pleasing hope of returning with skill and to find my Freinds stand in no need of my assistance. How many happy years do I wish you, and nothing but want of health can take from your happynes since you so well Pursue the paths that conduct to Virtue. I am My D^r Uncle your most oblig^d

most affectionate Nephew

OLIVER GOLDSMITH

P S I draw this time for Six pounds and will draw next october but for four as I was obligd to buy Every thing since I came to Scotland Shirts not Even Excepted. I am a little more early the first year than I shall be for the future for I absolutely will not Trouble you before the Time hereafter.

My Best love attend M^r and M^{rs} Lawder² and heaven preserve them. I am again your Dutifull nephew OG

I have been a month in the Higlands³. I set out the first day on foot but an ill naturd corn

¹ All Goldsmith's professors had been educated at Leyden under Boërhaave, during whose regime it rose to be the first medical centre of Europe. It had declined in importance since his death in 1732.

² His cousin, Jane Contarine, and her husband. For a discussion of his relations with the Lawders see § 1 of the Introduction.

³ *Sic*.

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To THE REV. THOMAS CONTARINE [1753

I have got on my Toe has for the future prevented that cheap method of Travelling so the second day I hired a horse of about the size of a ram and he walkd away (Trot he could not) as pensive as his master. In 3 days we reachd the Highlands. This letter wod be too long if it containd the description I intend giving of that country so shall make it the subject of my next¹.

III

To ROBERT BRYANTON²

Edinburgh, Sepr. ye 26th 1753

My dear Bob

How many good excuses (and you know I was ever good at an excuse) might I call up to vindicate my past shamefull silence. I might tell how I wrote

- ¹ The second postscript is added on a separate sheet of paper, of coarser quality than the first. Apparently he had taken his Highland holiday after writing the first part of the letter, and this was added as explanation of the delay. The winter term ended on May 1, and work in the summer term was optional.
- ² From a contemporary copy of the original letter, sent to Percy by Maurice Goldsmith, used in the *Memoir*, in 1801, and still remaining in the possession of Percy's descendant, Miss Constance Meade. Prior also printed from a copy of the original, then in the possession of the Rev. Thos. Handcock, of Dublin. This version was chosen in preference to Prior's because the latter is obviously carefully corrected, while this, though full of mistakes evidently attributable to the copyist, such as the

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1753]

To ROBERT BRYANTON

a long letter at my first comeing hither, and seem vastly angry at not receiveing an answer; or I might alledge that business, (with business, you know I was always pester'd) had never given me time to finger a pen; but I supress these and twenty more, equally plausible & as easily invented, since they might all be attended with a slight inconvenience of being known to be lies; let me then speak truth; An hereditary indolence (I have it from the Mothers side)¹ has hitherto prevented my writing to you, and still prevents my writing at least twenty five letters more, due to my friends in Ireland—no turnspit gets up into his wheel with more reluctance, than I sit down to write, yet no dog ever loved the roast meat he turns, better than I do him I now address; yet what shall I say now I am enter'd? Shall I tire you with a description of this unfruitfull country? where I must lead you over their hills all brown with heath, or their valleys scarce able to feed a rabbet? Man alone seems to be the only creature who has arived to

use of the possessive form for plurals, is clearly an attempt at a literal transcript.

The letter was much admired and copied. Wm Shaw Mason, in his *Statistical Survey of Ireland* (III, 360), mentions a copy, believed to be the original, "preserved by the late Mrs. M'Dermott of Ballymahon." It was published for the first time in the *Anthologia Hibernica* in 1793.

Bryanton was Goldsmith's cousin, and they had attended Trinity College at the same time.

¹ An obvious sarcasm. See § 1 of the Introduction for an account of Goldsmith's relations with his mother.

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the naturall size in this poor soil; every part of the country presents the same dismall landscape, no grove nor brook lend their musick to cheer the stranger, or make the inhabitants forget their poverty; yet with all these disadvantages to call him down to humility, a scotchman is one of the proudest things alive. The poor have pride ever ready to releive them; if mankind shou'd happen to despise them, they are masters of their own admiration; and that they can plentifully bestow on themselves: from their pride and poverty as I take it results one advantage this country enjoys, namely the Gentlemen here are much better bred then among us; no such character here as our Fox-hunter; and they have expressed great surprize when I informed them that some men of a thousand pound a year in Ireland spend their whole lives in runing after a hare, drinking to be drunk, and geting every Girl with Child, that will let them; and truly if such a being, equiped in his hunting dress, came among a circle of scots Gentlemen, they wou'd behold him with the same astonishment that a Country man does King George on horseback; the men here have Generally high cheek bones, and are lean, and swarthy; fond of action; Danceing in particular: tho' now I have mention'd danceing, let me say something of their balls¹ which are very frequent here; when

¹ This description of the Assembly ball has been used by Graham (*Social Life in Scotland in the Eighteenth Century*), and by Chambers