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LETTERS OF
OLIVER GOLDSMITH

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THE
COLLECTED LETTERS
OF
OLIVER GOLDSMITH

Edited by
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*Assistant Professor of English Literature
at Wellesley College*

CAMBRIDGE
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS
1928

Cambridge University Press
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TO

Professor Chauncey Brewster Tinker

CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107497580

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First published 1928

First paperback edition 2015

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

ISBN 978-1-107-49758-0 Paperback

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PREFACE

AUSTIN DOBSON, that wise and seasoned critic, said long ago that a new fact about Goldsmith had become a rarity, and all students who have examined the scanty biographical data concerning Goldsmith's life know this to be true. For this reason I have felt constrained, in assembling Goldsmith's correspondence, to include even fragmentary letters, and notes of negligible literary value, since all of them shed some light on the obscure history of his life. The bulk of the correspondence, however, needs no historical justification for its publication. It is singularly of a piece with the best of Goldsmith's prose.

The plan of this volume requires a word of explanation. Instead of beginning with the usual critical or biographical commentary, I have grouped in the Introduction a number of topics illustrating the letters, which seemed either too long for insertion in the footnotes, or too important (because of the new material which they embody) to be reduced to the limits of mere annotation. The topics thus treated are Goldsmith's relations with his family, the authenticity of his Fiddleback adventure, the abandonment of his East India voyage, the writing of *Threnodia Augustalis*, and the production of *She Stoops to Conquer*. The text

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of Mrs Hodson's memoir of her brother's early life, which forms one of the appendices, is here printed in its original state for the first time. It is included both because of its bearing on the authenticity of the letter to Mrs Goldsmith, and because of its intrinsic importance. The forged letters in the second appendix are included merely to safeguard future students of the letters from imposition.

I am indebted, in the preparation of this volume, to all the owners of Goldsmith's letters who generously permitted me to reproduce their MSS., and particularly to Miss Constance Meade, for placing at my disposal her unique Goldsmith collection. I wish also to thank the American Association of University Women, which aided me materially with a fellowship while the work on this book was in progress. My greatest debt of gratitude is to Professor Chauncey B. Tinker for his illuminating help and generous encouragement. His contribution to this volume is too diverse to be described.

K. C. B.

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§ 1. GOLDSMITH AND HIS FAMILY

GOLDSMITH'S letters, after he left Ireland in 1752, were filled with reminiscent tenderness. He complained of being forgotten, he begged for news, he recalled Lishoy fireside with fond regret, and laid plans for a happy return when his fortunes should permit. His works, too, are full of tributes to what seems a family relationship of the most ideal order—the dedication of the *Traveller* to his brother Henry, the portrait of his father as the Village Preacher, the implied reminiscences in the chronicles of the unforgettable Primroses. It is small wonder that all these have so charmed Goldsmith's biographers, and his readers, that they have allowed the more prosaic realities of his family history to pass for the most part unregarded. It seems only an act of belated biographical justice to piece together here as many of the less familiar facts of that history as can be gained from the surviving correspondence.

His father, his brother Henry, his uncle Conarine, and his brother-in-law Hodson, who were men of education and independent character, commanded his unquestioned love and esteem, and of them I have little to say here, since the

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representation of Goldsmith's feeling for them seems to be faithful enough in the biographies. One must not suppose, however, that Dr Primrose or the Village Preacher is in every detail a faithful portrait of the elder Goldsmith. If one turns to the story¹ told by Mrs Hodson of Oliver's boyhood, in which her father is represented as supplying the encouragement for the little boy's writing his indecorous verses, one feels at once the difference between the coarse Irish reality of the 1730's, and Goldsmith's refined and idealized memories, shadowed forth in his literary creations. But for his mother, his sisters, and his two younger brothers, between whom and the other members of the family there seems to have been considerable disparity in intellect and character, he apparently felt only a nominal family affection which weakened with separation.

Of his sisters we know little. Jane married beneath her, and was merely "poor Jenny." Catherine had a fair wit, and a turn for sprightly storytelling, as her account of her brother's boyhood shows; but although they were, as Maurice wrote to Bishop Percy, "both inseparable Companions in their youth," there was nothing strong enough in her to bind her brother's affections, and his

¹ See Appendix III. Mrs Hodson's narrative also makes clear that the Man in Black's father was intended for the elder Goldsmith, not the Man in Black himself, as Percy mistakenly reported in the Memoir. The Man in Black is presumably Goldsmith himself.

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letters are addressed to her husband, not to her. The mother was frugal and hard, and apparently quite unable to understand the improvident genius she had borne. There was an honest downright-ness about her, however, which commands respect. According to Mrs Hodson's narrative¹, when Oliver came home with his fine tale about his adventures at Cork, she gave him "many cool reprimands," and, when he confessed that he had not written to thank the good counsellor, she called him "an ungrateful savage, a monster in short." Her exasperation hardened into an estrangement which even Goldsmith's biographers have not been able to overlook, and which apparently lasted through her life. His allusions to her in the surviving letters show at first a tone of jaunty bitterness. Writing to his cousin, Bob Bryanton², more than a year after he had left home, he attributed his previous neglect of writing to "an hereditary indolence" which, he said, he had from his mother's side—a veiled allusion, perhaps, to his mother's failure to write to him. He added in a flippant postscript: "Give My service to My Mother if you [see her] for as you express it in Ireland I have a sneaking kindness for her still." A second allusion to his mother, in a letter to his brother Hodson³, written five years later, confirms the suspicion that she refused to write to him—"Pray let me hear from my Mother since she will not gratify me herself

¹ See p. 171.

² See p. 9.

³ See p. 55.

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and tell me if in anything I can be immediately servicable to her.” His tone in these later letters became dutiful, and even solicitous, but never affectionate, and when he received news of his mother’s near-blindness, he used it capriciously as a reason for not coming home. “To behold her in distress,” he said, “without a capacity of relieving her from it would be too much to add to my present splenetic habit.”¹ He had earlier mentioned² his distress at the loss of her Pallas property and his inability to give her financial aid, and this, with one more request for news of her, in his letter to Maurice³, in 1770, is the sum of the allusions to her. Miss Frances Reynolds told a story, which has been indignantly repudiated by Forster, that at his mother’s death, in the summer of 1770, Goldsmith wore half-mourning only, and said it was for a distant relative. In the light of the circumstances the story does not seem impossible. “A distant relative” is no bad description of a mother from whom one has been separated and estranged for nearly twenty years.

After he left Ireland another estrangement occurred, between him and his cousin, Jane Con-tarine Lawder⁴, although she had been, in Mrs

¹ See p. 62.

² See p. 32.

³ See p. 87.

⁴ Goldsmith’s biographers have cherished a sentimental tradition that he had loved his cousin Jenny in his youth, but according to Michael F. Cox (*National Literary Society of Ireland’s Journal*, 1, pt 2, p. 81) Jane was married in 1735, when Goldsmith was

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Hodson's phrase, "verry fond of him and a particular Friend." The reason for it is not altogether plain, but it evidently arose at the time when Jane's father, Goldsmith's generous benefactor, lapsed into imbecility. This event, which Goldsmith wrongly recorded as his uncle's death¹ in the Memorandum of his life which he dictated to Percy, occurred while Goldsmith was in Padua, and obliged him, as he said, "to return back thro France &c on Foot." The indication is clear that he was still depending on his uncle for funds, in spite of his having told him² that he drew on him for his last twenty pounds before he left Edinburgh. After the event, Goldsmith did not write to his cousin Jane because, as he later told her, he was afraid his letters "might be regarded as the petitions of a beggar and not the offerings of a friend."³ In other words, he did not write because he feared that the Lawders would interpret his letter as a request that they continue his uncle's bounty toward him. This silence of his, misinterpreted by the Lawders as a token of indifference, may well have been the cause of the coolness which they ever afterwards displayed toward him. Gold-

probably only four or five years old. The attachment could hardly have been of a romantic character.

¹ His uncle was still alive in August, 1758, when Goldsmith mentioned him in a letter to Jane Lawder. Cox, in the article quoted, says that the uncle died in 1758, in his seventy-fourth year.

² See p. 16.

³ See pp. 42-3.

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smith was genuinely distressed by it, and made repeated unsuccessful efforts at reconciliation. He commissioned Charles, who paid him a visit in 1757, to send him the particulars of their feelings for him¹. Again, in 1758, he made inquiries of his sister Catherine about them, and, apparently at his sister's suggestion², wrote a conciliatory letter to Jane in August of that year. The Lawders did not respond, nor did they trouble to notify him of a legacy left him by Mr Contarine at his death. Goldsmith learned of it twelve years later, through his brother Maurice; and the last mention of the Lawders occurs in his reply to Maurice, in which he expresses his gratitude to them for their kindness "to our poor shattered family"³ and mentions the fact that he is sending to Jane a miniature of himself—"tho' they have almost forgot me." Though he remained forgotten to the last, the honours for kindness and right feeling were his.

Although Goldsmith preferred not to inform the Lawders of his destitution at Padua, he did make known the fact to his own family, and Dan Hodson levied a contribution on all his friends to help him. The money failed to reach him, nor did he know of the attempt until Charles told him of it in London. He wrote to Dan Hodson⁴ that his not receiving that sum was responsible for his settling in London; its miscarriage thus formed an important turning-point in his career.

¹ See p. 53. ² See p. 53. ³ See p. 85. ⁴ See p. 27.

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Goldsmith did not, as a matter of fact, ever again return to Ireland, although he reiterated his intention of doing so even as late as 1771, in the last surviving family letter¹. The sincerity of his professions may be questioned here, although Goldsmith himself probably hardly realized that the successive postponements of his visit to Ireland were good-natured but specious disguises of a waning interest. After his prosperity began, he certainly often commanded both time and money sufficient to make the journey, if he had wished. In the summer of his mother's death, he was abroad on a journey to France with the Hornecks, which might well have been, had he desired, a journey to Ireland.

After his establishment in London he kept, however, in closer touch with his family than has generally been supposed, through the visits which his two younger brothers paid to him. Charles and Maurice, as yet unsettled in the world, and not having ambition or education enough to rise by their own efforts, turned to their gifted brother with hopes of advancement as soon as they heard of his first small success in London. Charles, being the more enterprising, actually sought his brother out in London, late in 1757, arriving penniless and without prospects. Goldsmith himself was not much better off at the time. He had given up his "thralldom" under Griffiths as reviewer for the

¹ See p. 102.

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Monthly Review in August, and had no regular employment, but was living precariously by hack-work, such as translating *The Memoirs of a Protestant*. Under the circumstances, he did not welcome the arrival of Charles, and as soon as he could he packed him back again to Ireland. Goldsmith's letter to Dan Hodson¹ on December 27 speaks of Charles' visit, and of his impending return, provided with "everything necessary," and he adds a hope that he will be "improved...against his return." The worn passages in the text of the letter unfortunately leave tantalizing gaps in our understanding of what improvements Oliver desired in his brother, or of the connection in which the "stranger" assisted him. In another letter² to the Hodsons eight months later Goldsmith alludes a second time to Charles, again in a badly worn passage. The legible portion makes clear that he either had settled at home to some business or was being urged to do so by his family. The business he took up was probably the trade of cabinet making³.

We know nothing more of Charles until twelve years later, when his restless mood again overtook him, and he departed to Jamaica to seek his fortune, some time in the latter part of 1769, probably without telling his family of his destination. In an

¹ See p. 31.

² See p. 54.

³ That was the trade he followed later in Jamaica. See p. xviii.

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ordinary family one would expect a prompt report of such a momentous event to go at once to distant members of the family circle. But not so with the Goldsmiths. No one troubled to inform Oliver in London that Charles had gone. He did not know of it until Maurice alluded indirectly to it in his letter of January, 1770, in calling himself Goldsmith's "only brother."¹ This puzzled the recipient completely, and when he answered Maurice's letter he asked him to explain—"You talk of being my only Brother. I don't understand you. Where is Charles?"² We do not know if Maurice answered his brother's inquiry, but we do know that reassurance about his brother's whereabouts and safety came shortly from a more satisfactory source, Charles himself. He wrote to Goldsmith some time before April or May of that year, telling him of his settlement in Jamaica, and Goldsmith passed the information on to Dan Hodson, without comment, as a postscript to more important matters: "I had a letter from Charles who is as he tells me possessed of a competency and settled in Jamaica."³ The last surviving mention which Oliver made of Charles was in the Memorandum of his life which he dictated to Percy in April, 1773, in which he

¹ Maurice must of course have made clear that he meant "the only brother *left at home*," for Goldsmith so understood it. If he had supposed that Maurice was reporting his brother's death, he could not have added, "A sheet of paper occasionally filled with news of this kind would make me very happy."

² See p. 87.

³ See p. 91.

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duly mentions his brother as having gone to Jamaica as a cabinet maker “where he now lives possessed of a good fortune.”¹

This sums up all that we know of Goldsmith’s connection with his youngest brother. It is a very slight basis on which to determine the nature of Goldsmith’s feelings for this brother, but the very slightness and coldness of the allusions show clearly that there was no close bond of affection between them. There is a decent brotherly interest in his welfare, and no more. The historical Charles, we feel certain, could have been only a remote original of either little Bill or little Dick, whose portraits Goldsmith drew with such indulgent tenderness in *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

Besides helping to discredit the autobiographical significance which readers have persisted in seeing in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, this account of Charles’ movements serves also to bury a tradition about him which has been preserved by all Goldsmith’s biographers. This tradition reported that Charles ran away to Jamaica in 1757, after Goldsmith received him coldly in London, and that he never afterwards communicated with his family, so that they did not know where he was, and came to look upon him as dead. This myth began with Northcote’s doubtful second-hand account² of Charles’

¹ See the writer’s *History and Sources of Percy’s Memoir of Goldsmith*, p. 14.

² *Life of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, 1, 331.

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return to England in 1791, in which he is represented as saying that he had been “for many years supposed to be no longer in the land of the living.” Northcote, who had seen the passage in Goldsmith’s letter to Maurice, asking about Charles, inferred that he was at that time supposed dead by his family, and Forster, carrying the misinterpretation still further, drew the conclusion that he had left for Jamaica in 1757, after being repulsed by Oliver in London, and was not heard from after that time. The inference that Charles could have disappeared in 1757 and could have been supposed dead by his family in Ireland for thirteen years without their communicating the fact to Goldsmith, who had been the last to see him, seems too absurd to have gained credence under any circumstances; and with the evidence afforded by the recovered portions of the correspondence it becomes definitely discredited.

Goldsmith’s relations with his next younger brother, Maurice, were no more satisfactory than those with Charles. Two passages¹ in Goldsmith’s early letters to his family, from London, which Maurice carefully crossed out before sending the letters to Bishop Percy, in 1776, show that he, too, contemplated a visit to his brother in London in 1757, and that he even suggested going on the proposed voyage to India with him. Goldsmith firmly discouraged this latter proposal, because of

¹ See p. 54, note 2, and p. 61, note 4.

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its cost, but he offered, with kind brotherliness, to secure him a position, evidently of a clerical sort, if Maurice would only improve in his writing and spelling. He warmly urged his coming, as a step to his ultimate betterment, and arranged to have his passage money sent him, to share his chamber in the Temple with him, and to give him some of his own clothes, if those necessities were lacking. He even promised to send back for his brother from India, if he prospered there. But apparently the conditions were too severe for Maurice to meet. Goldsmith made the proposal at the end of August, and by January Maurice had as yet sent him no "specimen of his performance" to show to prospective employers. Judging by the one specimen of Maurice's letter-writing which survives among Bishop Percy's papers, he failed throughout his life to master the difficulties of spelling and grammar. This unwillingness, or inability, of Maurice's to help himself evidently alienated his brother's sympathy and interest. There is no record of their further connection until 1770, when Goldsmith wrote a kind letter¹, expressing his willingness, but inability, to help the yet unsettled fellow, and signing over to him, in response to an evident hint, a legacy of fifteen pounds left him by his uncle. Maurice used the money to take a journey to London, which Goldsmith mentioned with wry brevity in a letter to

¹ See p. 83.

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Dan Hodson a few months later—"My brother Maurice was with me in London but it was not in my power to serve him effectually then; indeed in a letter I wrote him I desired him by no means to come up but he was probably fond of the journey."¹ It was presumably on this occasion that Goldsmith gave his brother the advice which Maurice reported later to Percy, to learn the trade of cabinet making, and to give up the idea of being a gentleman—advice which it may be said to his credit that he followed.

Goldsmith's statement that he was unable to help his brother at this period must be taken with reservations, and probably means that he did not consider it expedient to encourage Maurice's parasitical bent, and his shallow aspirations to gentility. Certainly Goldsmith's literary fame was at its height after the publication of *The Deserted Village*, on May 26 of that year, and the income from his writing in the months just preceding had been great. His power of securing patronage, if he had desired it, must have been considerable, especially from his intimate friend and patron, Lord Clare, of the old Westmeath Nugent family, who was a lord of the treasury and vice-treasurer of Ireland. Goldsmith carefully guarded knowledge of this friendship from his Irish connections, knowing probably by experience what an effect the glitter of that name would have upon them.

¹ See p. 91.

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When he wrote to Dan Hodson in 1771¹ about his son William's situation, he had to allude to the circumstances which had called him out of London in April, but he refrained from saying that the dying friend with whom he had travelled to Bath was Lord Clare's only son, Colonel Nugent. What Goldsmith could do in the way of securing patronage and bestowing favours, when he thought them deserved, and when his own affections prompted, is seen in his treatment of his nephew William Hodson, who came to London shortly after Maurice, in the late spring or early summer of 1770², with an ambition to become an actor. Goldsmith energetically intervened, persuaded him to abandon the stage and instead to continue a medical training begun at Dublin, wrote to the great Dr Hunter³ in his behalf, provided him with clothes and money, and wrote to his father urging him to help in the young man's support. In the next year, after Dan Hodson had refused to continue his son's support, Goldsmith secured for him, through the influence of a friend, probably Reynolds, "a place as full surgeon to India." At Goldsmith's death, the largest item on his unpaid

1 See p. 99.

2 The fact that William Hodson witnessed the legal transfer of the legacy money, which Maurice spent for his journey to London, suggests that they came together. (See p. 85, note 1.) Prior mistakenly placed this visit in 1766, and Forster supposed that there were two visits.

3 See p. 88.

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tailor's bill was thirty-five pounds and three shillings, charged to Mr Hodson's order.

This is the end of Maurice's story. At Goldsmith's unexpected death, in April, 1774, he hurried to London to administer his brother's estate, but, finding nothing but debts, was obliged to return empty-handed as he came. From that time until 1801 various members of the family lived in vain expectation of returns from Bishop Percy's benefit edition of the poet's works. The Goldsmiths were fated to gain no more profit or worldly consequence from their brother's fame after his death than they had during his life. Their only reward has been an immortality, which some of them did not deserve, as the originals of the idyllic family circle of the Primroses.

§ 2. THE ADVENTURE UPON FIDDLEBACK

The recovery of the original text¹ of Mrs Hodson's account of Goldsmith's early life makes possible a clearing up of some of the mystery attending upon Goldsmith's curious story of his adventure upon Fiddleback. The story, which was first published by Percy, is important, not only because it furnishes an early and striking example of Goldsmith's improvidence and his affinity for curious experiences, but more particularly, because it contains prophetic suggestions of the character of the Man

¹ See Appendix III.

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in Black, the adventures of Jack Spindle, and the incident of the oak staff in *The Vicar of Wakefield*. It raises the nice question whether Goldsmith actually based his fictions on his experiences, or whether the experiences were not themselves fictions—the products of an already active imagination. Because of these singularities, the story, although accepted by all the biographers, roused doubt in many a reader from the first. Malone thought that Mrs Hodson had made it up, and told Percy so¹. Scepticism seemed to be silenced, at least concerning Mrs Hodson's veracity, when Prior published the actual text of a letter² from Goldsmith to his mother, which he believed him to have written after his verbal account, in an attempt to convince his mother of the truth of his tale. "The original of this letter," Prior said, "is not to be found; but a copy seems to have been in the possession of Mrs Hodson, who communicated the material facts in the memoranda furnished of the early portion of her brother's life. It [the copy] is now in the possession of the gentleman who holds the original MS. memoir, and was probably sent by her at a subsequent period."³ In view of the facts that neither Percy nor Malone

¹ "Have you any faith in the story that his sister tells of...his excursion to the county of Cork, where we have a long story furnished by this lady without a single *name* or *date*?" (Prior, I, 126).

² See p. 148.

³ Prior, I, 119.

THE ADVENTURE UPON FIDDLEBACK

was aware in 1802 of the existence of such a letter¹, and that Mrs Hodson had died before that date, the copy could only have reached Percy through one of Mrs Hodson's children; and the motive for sending it after that date, when the Memoir had already appeared, is hard to imagine. Other circumstances, which an examination of Mrs Hodson's original manuscript brings to light, make Prior's theory even more difficult to accept.

Mrs Hodson's account of the Fiddleback episode, from which Percy drew his own, but which no subsequent biographer has examined, corresponds so exactly with the account in Prior's letter that it is clear either that the letter was based on her narrative, or her narrative on the letter. Prior, of course, believed the latter. But in Mrs Hodson's account, the circumstances of the telling of the story are not ambiguous. She reports the story as from Goldsmith's own mouth, with a vivid description of the family scene which took place afterwards. Mrs Hodson knew very well the value of her brother's letters, and if there had actually been a letter to draw upon here, she would certainly have quoted it explicitly. One would have to suppose, in order to believe Prior, not only that she deliberately concealed the existence of the letter, but that she actually falsified the account to make it appear a verbal one. Furthermore, the conclusion of the story, which Percy omitted, and

¹ See Malone's and Percy's letters on the subject, Prior, I, 125-8.

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which the letter, for obvious reasons, likewise omitted, makes the writing of any letter at all a patent absurdity. It reads:

And now Dr Mother says he since I have struggeld so hard to come home to you why are you not better pleas'd to see me, and pray says the Mother have you ever wrote a letter of thanks to that dear good man since you came home, no says the Dr I have not then says the Mother you are an ungratefull Savage a Monster in short the whole boddy of his Freinds which ware present up braid'd him for which he for a full half houre sat listning to with grate composure and after they had vented their Passion he beg'd they wod sit down and compos themselv's for what he told them was only to amuse them and that there was not one word in it; how ever he afterward assur'd me of its veracity.

The absurdity of supposing that Goldsmith went off and wrote a minute account of the adventure which he had already told at length, and which he had later declared before the whole family to be an invention of his own to amuse them, is obvious. Furthermore, the style of Mrs Hodson's narrative shows no evidence of being derived from the letter. Rather, the letter shows every evidence of being a polished and reconstructed version of her narrative. Mrs Hodson writes in a rambling, discursive fashion, with irrelevant, but natural intrusions, such as the sick friend's inquiry whether Goldsmith had then come from Dublin or his mother's; while the sentences in the letter are compressed, show a careful rearrangement and elimination,

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 978-1-107-49758-0 - The Collected Letters of Oliver Goldsmith
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and are phrased with a jaunty sophistication which is not only entirely foreign to the style of Mrs Hodson's account but also to Goldsmith's own way of writing¹. Phrases appear also which are stiff with a false kind of elegance of which Goldsmith was never guilty, and of which the narrative of Mrs Hodson is likewise entirely innocent, phrases such as "the city and its environs," "circumstances of vicinity," "abundance without profusion and elegance without affectation." In Mrs Hodson's narrative numbers are given exactly, i.e. the distance from Cork to Ballymahon was a hundred and twenty miles, Oliver borrowed three half guineas from his host, while in the supposed source the distance was "above an hundred," and Oliver saw fit to borrow only a guinea. The natural deduction, of course, from these facts, is that the version with the blurred details and round numbers is the derived version.

Since the letter's history is so obscure and difficult of acceptance, and since all the internal evidence militates against it, the only conclusion to be drawn is that Prior was deceived about the letter's authenticity, either by deliberate hoax, or by accident. The most plausible reconstruction of

¹ One of these phrases, "If you will *sit down* and calmly listen to what I say," corresponds to Mrs Hodson's, "he then told his mother if she cd. coolly sit down," but the remark, besides becoming more impudent when transferred to a letter, becomes pointless as well.

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the circumstances which led to this deception would seem to be that some one who had access to the manuscript of Mrs Hodson's narrative deliberately constructed the letter on the basis of her account, from what motive of course is unascertainable, but probably as a *jeu d'esprit*. The most probable agent is Henry Boyd, Percy's last collaborator in the Memoir, who must certainly have had access to Percy's MSS. Boyd died in 1832, five years before Prior's *Life* appeared, and it is perfectly possible that when Prior saw the "copy" it had fallen into the hands of Boyd's heir, or some purchaser who really did not understand the nature of the document, and supposed in good faith that it was a genuine transcript of an early letter. Prior's own statement that the copy belonged to "the gentleman who holds the original MS. memoir" strengthens this theory, since the "original MS. memoir" to which he refers is the early version of Percy's Memoir written by Campbell, and corrected by Percy¹, which Percy later turned over to Boyd for re-writing, and which could easily, in the natural course of events, have remained in his hands, and been transferred with his other papers after his death.

On the more important aspect of the riddle of the Fiddleback story, the question of Goldsmith's veracity in the telling of it, the only new light which can be thrown is Goldsmith's own confession,

¹ Prior, I, p. xiii.

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reported in his sister's account, that "what he told them was only to amuse them and that there was not one word [of truth] in it." This is followed, to be sure, by the teasing contradiction that he "afterward assur^d me of its veracity," but the whole incident bears the aspect of a tale of a tub, which, ironically enough, overshot its mark, and brought down as much abuse upon him for his ingratitude as he had feared to incur for his improvidence, so that he had to repudiate his own fine tale. His later assurance to his sister may have been an attempt to save his face, or, possibly, may indicate that there was a kernel of truth mixed in with the fiction. Probably Mrs Hodson herself was responsible for many details in the story, relying as she did on a twenty-five-year-old memory of the events, and supplied, as she indubitably was, with a lively imagination of her own. But the central structure was clearly Goldsmith's own. It seems safe to conclude that the surprising story of Fiddleback was Goldsmith's first fiction, and that the character of the Man in Black, the adventures of Jack Spindle, and the unforgettable incident of the oak staff, adapted from Bishop Jewell, had been already partially conceived by him before he left Ireland. If this be true, it serves as a forceful illustration of the slow germination of Goldsmith's ideas, and of his singularly frugal husbanding of his imaginative resources.

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§ 3. GOLDSMITH'S EAST INDIA PLAN

Goldsmith's unexplained abandonment of his plan to go to the coast of Coromandel as a physician, which he formed in 1757, and actively cherished for nearly two years, has always been a mystery. The last mention of the plan in his correspondence is in his letter to Henry Goldsmith, written in the middle of January, 1759—"I have met with no disappointment with respect to my East India Voyage nor are my resolutions altered." But he did not go, nor has any later allusion to the plan survived. Prior, who discovered the record of Goldsmith's rejection as hospital mate to a man-of-war on December 21, 1758, supposed that lack of funds, or irresolution, had made him shift his ambition from a civil post to a military one, and that his rejection automatically disqualified him for the civil appointment he already held. In other words, he thought that Goldsmith was lying to Henry about his situation.

The real cause for the failure of the plan seems, however, not to have been under Goldsmith's control. A significant series of historical events which took place in India at this time, and which have been overlooked by Goldsmith's biographers, decided the matter for him. In April, 1758, French forces under Count Lally landed unexpectedly at Pondicherry on the coast of Coromandel with the declared intention of clearing the English from