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SMOLLETT'S "ODE TO INDEPENDENCE"

By Luella F. Norwood

The Colby College Library recently acquired, through purchase by the Colby Library Associates, a copy of the excessively rare first edition of a poem entitled Ode to Independence by Tobias Smollett, published in Glasgow in 1773, two years after Smollett's death. This poem and this particular edition of it are of considerable interest in a number of respects, some of which I wish to present here.

On the title-page of this first edition the authorship is ascribed to "the late T. Smollett, M.D." and on a leaf between the title-page and the first leaf of text appears the following note: "The Public may depend upon the authenticity of the following ode. It is printed from the author's manuscript, which was communicated to the editors by a Gentleman with whom Dr. SMOLLETT was much connected." No authority for this note is given, and no information to identify either the "editors" or the "Gentleman with whom Dr. Smollett was much connected" who "communicated" the manuscript to the editors. When the Ode was reprinted in London in 1774, an "Advertisement" on the recto of a leaf between the title-page and the text repeated, on "the best Authority," the assertion of authenticity, but gave no further information on the authorship of the poem or on the nature or weight of the "authority."

On the basis of these assertions in the Glasgow and London editions of the Ode, supported by the fact that it was first printed and published by the reputable firm of the Foulis Brothers, the poem came to be regarded as Smollett's and was regularly accorded a place in the early editions of
his works. It was included in the first collected edition of Smollett's *Plays and Poems*, published anonymously in London in 1777, though no authority is given there for ascribing the poem to him. The editor, again anonymous, of the first collected edition of Smollett's works (Edinburgh, 1790), though he too included the *Ode*, is likewise silent on the subject of its authorship.

Explicit information on this question might be expected from Dr. John Moore, who met Smollett some time before 1750 and continued his connection and correspondence with him from that time until Smollett's death in 1771; but Dr. Moore, for all this, adds nothing explicit to our knowledge about the *Ode* in the memoir prefixed to his edition of *The Works of Tobias Smollett* (London, 1797). Similarly, Dr. Robert Anderson, whose memoir of Smollett appeared first in a very brief form in his edition of the *Works of the British Poets* in 1795 and a year later appeared in an enlarged form in the first edition of his *Miscellaneous Works of Tobias Smollett*, he too leaves the question of authorship unsolved.

In the enlarged memoir in the second edition (1800) of the *Miscellaneous Works*, Anderson provides the information that the "Observations" on the *Ode* which appear at the end of the poem in the Glasgow edition of 1773 "proceeded from the pen of Professor Richardson." This was William Richardson (1743-1814), Professor of Humanity in the University of Glasgow. He knew Robert Anderson personally and was also intimately acquainted for a period of twenty years with the eminent printers, Robert and Andrew Foulis, who had been established in the precincts of the University of Glasgow since 1741 as booksellers, printers and publishers.*

* I have given further information about them and their bookshop—which is described as "a pleasant lounge and meeting place" for students and scholars—in my article on "The Authenticity of Smollett's *Ode to Independence*" in *The Review of English Studies* (17:55-64), London, January 1941. There also may be found bibliographical references for all the statements made in this brief report.
Anderson’s memoir of Smollett was again revised and enlarged as *The Life of Tobias Smollett* and was printed separately in 1803. In this, which was again improved and enlarged in the third edition of the *Miscellaneous Works* in 1806, fourth edition in 1811, Dr. Robert Anderson supplied explicit information about the *Ode*; and from the fifth edition of his memoir, published in 1817, I quote the statement that gives the new information: “The *Observations* [on the *Ode*]... proceeded from the classical pen of Professor Richardson, under whose inspection it was printed from the original MS. of Smollett’s handwriting, left, with other papers, to Mr. Graham of Gartmore, who communicated it to him for publication.”

For the authority behind this statement the reader is directed to “Richardson’s *Poems and Plays*, vol. I, p. 124, edit. 1805.” There, in a note to a line in one of his own poems, where he mentions the name of Smollett, Professor Richardson tells the story of the publication of Smollett’s poem: “His *Ode to Independence* was left in his own hand-writing, with some other papers, to the late Robert Graham, Esq. of Gàrtmore, who was one of his trustees, and who gave it to the author of the present publication, under whose inspection the first edition was elegantly printed, by the celebrated Messrs. Foulis, printers to the University of Glasgow.”

The veiled note on authenticity in the first edition is here fully explained and corroborated. The steps in the progress of the *Ode* from Smollett’s hand to the public attention are now clear: Smollett committed it into the hands of his friend and trustee, Robert Graham, who naturally asked his learned friend, Professor Richardson, to be its editor, who quite as naturally chose his friends, the distinguished Foulis Brothers, to print it.

Why Professor Richardson considered it necessary to conceal this information in the veiled statement of the note in the original edition is not clear, nor why he found it “not improper;” as he says, twenty-eight years later, to give it
finally to the world. As he proceeds in his note, however, with a further revelation regarding Smollett’s Ode, he seems clearly to be disburdening his conscience:

It is also proper to mention, that in the fifth line of the third antistrophe [Where insolence his wrinkled front uprears], the editor took the liberty of substituting one word in place of another. The line in Smollett’s MS. was,

Where insolence his wrinkled snout uprears.

No doubt the word snout presents a more complete image, and conveys, therefore, a more impressive meaning than the word front, which was introduced in its place; but it did not seem so suitable to the dignity of lyric poetry, or the peculiar loftiness of the Ode to Independence. If, however, the more distinct imagery, and consequent vigour, obtained by retaining the original expression, are capable of counterbalancing the considerations that urged the editor to its exclusion, it is proper that future editors may have it in their power to restore to the poet what certainly belongs to him.

Altogether proper. And the line how eminently Smollettian!

Hidden thus in a note in an obscure work of 1801 (the date of the first edition of Richardson’s poems) and in a brief reference in the later editions of Anderson’s memoir, this evidence of the authenticity of Smollett’s poem soon dropped out of sight and memory, and was unknown to Smollett scholars until it was unearthed during my work on Smollett’s bibliography and published in the article in the Review of English Studies to which I have already referred. It is a copy of the “elegantly printed” edition “by the celebrated Messrs. Foulis” that has now come into the possession of the Colby College Library.

Besides the obvious interest and value of this poem by an eminent eighteenth-century novelist, the Ode has a further claim to the attention of anyone interested in Smollett in that it represents so accurately and vividly the spirit of the man. Never in all the work from his pen did he produce anything more completely characteristic. Independence was the pervasive spirit of his life and work. Indeed, it was because the spirit of the poem was recognized to be the spirit of Tobias Smollett that it was so confidently ascribed
to him by those who apparently had no knowledge of Professor Richardson's revealing note on its authorship. In this poem, written late in his life, in a time of financial stress and illness, he pays fervent tribute to that "free-born spirit" which, he says in a letter to Dr. Moore, he hopes no misfortune will ever be able to tame in him. Let his tribute be represented here by these four lines from the poem:

*Thy spirit, Independence, let me share!*
*Lord oj the lion-heart and eagle-eye,*
*Thy steps I jollow with my bosom bare,*
*Nor heed the storm that howls along the sky.*

The special claim of this book to a place in the Colby Library has been suggested by the incidental encomiums in the course of this account on the typographical work of the press of the Foulis Brothers in Glasgow. These printers were famous for the excellence and beauty of the books from their press, not only in Scotland and England, but also on the Continent. It is very fitting that an example of the work of these distinguished printers should find a place in the library that has the good fortune to own the Book Arts Collection with its numerous other examples of fine printing.

According to the records of the Union Catalog in the Library of Congress, the Colby copy of the Glasgow edition of the *Ode to Independence* is one of only three copies now in American libraries. The other two copies are recorded as being in The New York Public Library (the Owen D. Young collection) and in the University of Texas Library in Austin. In the libraries of Great Britain I have found only six copies on record. The Glasgow edition of 1773 is indeed a rarity.

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**HIS SOUL GOES MARCHING ON**

**JOHN BROWN,** with the aid of twenty-one other men, raided the arsenal at Harper's Ferry on the night of October 16, 1859. The next day Brown was captured. Two