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19. THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD,  
TOGETHER WITH "SHE STOOPS TO  
CONQUER" AND "THE DESERTED  
VILLAGE"**

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EDITED BY PERCY L. PARKER

THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD  
ETC., ETC

H.L., No. 19

# THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD

TOGETHER WITH  
"She Stoops to Conquer"  
AND  
"The Deserted Village"

By  
OLIVER GOLDSMITH

LONDON  
THE AMALGAMATED PRESS LTD

1905

## OLIVER GOLDSMITH

OLIVER GOLDSMITH, the author of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, was the son of an Irish curate, and was born at Pallas in Longford, November 10, 1728.

His youth was distinctly erratic, and governed largely by a passion for gambling. He patronised three universities—Dublin, Edinburgh, and Leyden—and then wandered through France, Germany and Italy on foot. He became a doctor, a proof reader, and a publisher's hack. His life was a very precarious one, and he died £2,000 in debt.

"Goldsmith," says William Black, "resorted to the hack work of literature when everything else had failed him; and he was fairly paid for it. When he did better work, when he 'struck for honest fame,' the nation gave him all the honour that he could have desired. With an assured reputation, and with ample means of subsistence, he obtained entrance into the most distinguished society then in England."

He belonged to the peerage of genius which obtains entry everywhere. "If you wish to have the honour of his company you may choose a day; and then . . . he will present himself in due course. Dr. Goldsmith is announced, and makes his grave bow; this is the man of genius about whom all the town is talking; the friend of Burke, of Reynolds, of Johnson, of Hogarth; this is not the ragged Irishman who was some time ago earning a crust by running errands for an apothecary."

Leslie Stephen says that Goldsmith "was clearly vain, acutely sensitive to neglect, and hostile to criticism; fond of spendid garments, as appears from the testimony of his tailors' bills. . . . His charity seems to have been pushed

beyond the limits of prudence, and all who knew him testify to the singular kindness of his nature."

Goldsmith's writings are very numerous. Those published in this volume constitute his passport to fame. But in addition he wrote *The Citizen of the World*, a *History of England*, a poem called *The Traveller*, and a comedy, *The Good Natur'd Man*. He also started and wrote much for *The Bee*, and contributed to the *British Magazine*.

Sir Walter Scott wrote an enthusiastic review of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, in which he declared that "the wreath of Goldsmith is unsullied; he wrote to exalt virtue and expose vice; and he accomplished his task in a manner which raises him to the highest rank among British authors."

Washington Irving, too, bears witness to his great charm. "There are," he says, "few writers for whom the reader feels such personal kindness as for Oliver Goldsmith. The fascinating ease and simplicity of his style, the benevolence that beams through every page, the whimsical yet amiable views of human life and human nature . . . win their way irresistibly to the affections and carry the author with them."

Lord Byron also vastly appreciated Goldsmith's work. In his Diary for 1821, writing of Schlegel's remark—"Of all romances in miniature (and perhaps this is the best shape in which romance can appear), *The Vicar of Wakefield* is, I think, the most exquisite"—Lord Byron exclaims: "I have found out where the German is right—it is about *The Vicar of Wakefield*. He thinks!—he might be sure."

Goldsmith died on April 4, 1774, at the age of 46. "Burke, it is said, burst into tears and Reynolds put aside his work for the day" when the news was carried to them. He was buried in the grounds of the Temple Church, London, but the exact spot is not known.



## "THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD"

"*The Vicar of Wakefield*," says Mr. Austen Dobson, "remains and will continue to be one of the finest of our English classics. Its sweet humanity, its happy mingling of character and Christianity, will keep it sweet long after more ambitious and, in many respects abler, works have found their level with the great democracy of the forgotten."

"Dr. Primrose and his wife, Olivia and Sophia, Moses with his white stockings and black ribbon, Mr. Burchell and his immortal 'Fudge,' My Lady Blarney and Miss Carolina Wilhelmina Amelia Skeggs," he says, "have all become household words."

The "Vicar" was published on March 12, 1766—"6s. bound, or 5s. sewed"—and the name was probably suggested by a tour in Yorkshire. It was written in Wine Office Court, Fleet Street, London, and came into the publisher's hands through the good offices of Dr. Johnson.

"I received one morning," says Johnson, "a message from poor Goldsmith that he was in great distress, and as it was not in his power to come to me, begging that I would come to him as soon as possible. I sent him a guinea, and promised to come to him directly. I accordingly went as soon as I was drest, and found that his landlady had arrested him for his rent, at which he was in a violent passion. I perceived that he had already changed my guinea, and had got a bottle of Madeira and a glass

before him. I put the cork in the bottle, desired he would be calm, and began to talk to him of the means by which he might be extricated.

"He then told me that he had a novel ready for the press, which he produced to me. I looked over it and saw its merit; told the landlady I should soon return; and, having gone to a bookseller, sold it for sixty pounds. I brought Goldsmith the money, and he discharged his rent, not without rating his landlady in a high tone for having used him so ill."

Mr. Dobson suggests that it took nearly nine years to sell 2,000 copies of the "Vicar." But "translations into French and German, to be followed in due time by translations into almost every European language, were laying the foundation of its cosmopolitan reputation."

Goethe wrote in 1830: "It is not to be described, the effect which Goldsmith's 'Vicar' had upon me just at the critical moment of mental development."

Of the comedy, *She Stoops to Conquer*, Dr. Johnson wrote: "I know of no play that has answered so much the great end of comedy—making an audience merry." It was first presented at Covent Garden Theatre, March 15, 1773.

*The Deserted Village* appeared in May, 1770, and was dedicated to Sir Joshua Reynolds. "It would be difficult," says Scott, "to point out one among the English poets less likely to be excelled in his own style than the author of the *Vicar of Wakefield*."

## GOLDSMITH'S PREFACE

THERE are a hundred faults in this thing, and a hundred things might be said to prove them beauties. But it is needless. A book may be amusing with numerous errors, or it may be very dull without a single absurdity. The hero of this piece unites in himself the three greatest characters upon earth : he is a priest, a husbandman, and the father of a family. He is drawn as ready to teach, and ready to obey ; as simple in affluence, and majestic in adversity. In this age of opulence and refinement, whom can such a character please ? Such as are fond of high life, will turn with disdain from the simplicity of his country fireside. Such as mistake ribaldry for humour, will find no wit in his harmless conversation ; and such as have been taught to deride religion, will laugh at one, whose chief stores of comfort are drawn from futurity.

OLIVER GOLDSMITH.