

NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION

Oliver Goldsmith

The Vicar of Wakefield

Read by **Christopher Robbie**



NA338612D

1	An honest man, a good-natured woman	5:15
2	A happy life, simple pleasures	5:20
3	Our misfortune is confirmed	10:36
4	The place of our retreat	9:14
5	Mr Burchell – a poor Gentleman	3:32
6	The merits of our landlord, Mr Thornhill	5:50
7	The Squire – and a crowd of company	10:28
8	Michaelmas-Eve at neighbour Flamborough's	7:02
9	Acquaintances of taste?	9:19
10	Mr Burchell warns of the dangers of town	4:55
11	An easy method of raising money	7:51
12	A further deception	12:58
13	Our landlord is a familiar visitor	9:32
14	A rival for Mr Thornhill	14:59
15	Entertainment in a magnificent mansion – a surprise	9:17
16	My son returns home	5:28
17	Another surprise in an inn, just twenty miles from home	8:48

18	I bring my daughter home – a further disaster	15:52
19	On the road to gaol	2:30
20	'Sanchoniathon, Manetho' – an old acquaintance	13:01
21	Olivia – a fatal paleness on her cheeks	11:13
22	A letter from George	8:53
23	Visits from Sophy and Mr Burchell and a revelation	14:20
24	Mr Thornhill defends his actions	5:28
25	The butler tells all	7:20
26	The Squire and Miss Wilmot's fortune	7:17
27	Happiness was expanded upon every face	6:47
28	A further stroke of good fortune	5:05

Total time: 3:58:25

Oliver Goldsmith

The Vicar of Wakefield

The Vicar of Wakefield, first published in 1766, was at first scarcely noticed by critics or the public, but its popularity gradually increased as its qualities of charm, simplicity of style and easily-digested morality began to be appreciated. Goldsmith himself says in one of his essays that 'time, the touchstone of what is truly valuable' is the best test of artistic worth, and that 'an author should never arrogate to himself any share of success till his works have been read at least ten years with satisfaction'. In fact, Goldsmith's novel might never have been published had not his friend, the influential Dr Johnson, sold the manuscript to Newbery when the author was in a particularly parlous financial state.

Reviewers of the day found it 'difficult to characterize'. Goldsmith's great predecessors as 18th century novelists were Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne, and *The Vicar of Wakefield* does

not pretend to (say) the startling originality of Sterne, or the robust range and insight of Fielding: instead, Goldsmith has written what is really a fairy-tale picture of rural domestic life threatened by scheming, sophisticated and immoral forces. He has excluded from his tale the bluff, often coarse directness of 18th century comedy, so that, although the plot involves the conventional abductions, mistaken identities and convenient coincidences, the novel could with no impropriety be read by young ladies of the time, for whom it would combine pleasure and instruction.

Our reading of it today may be a little more sophisticated, but (as Walter Allen points out), what we remember is 'the comic idyll of family life', with the lovable, innocent figure of Dr Primrose at its centre, surrounded by his foolish, socially ambitious wife, his marriageable daughters and honest sons. Two further important characters influence the

fortunes of this family group: Mr Burchell, who embodies wisdom and benevolence, and his nephew, who represents villainous, exploitative deception – although both at first appear in a very different light.

The entertainment of the novel derives essentially from the absurd naïvety of Dr Primrose and his sons, who between them can make little of worldly affairs – Moses (for instance) sells the family horse for a ‘gross of green spectacles’ – yet Goldsmith intends the moral to spring from the same source: ‘none but the guilty can be long and completely miserable’, so the Vicar’s inflexible virtue and patience in adversity must be rewarded eventually. Simple values – good neighbourliness, loyalty and affection – are seen to triumph over the arbitrary misuse of wealth and power.

Oliver Goldsmith was born in 1730 into an Anglo-Irish family. Educated at Trinity College, Dublin, he graduated in 1750 and spent the following years studying medicine in various institutions in Europe, arriving in London in 1756. Here he took various jobs as physician, teacher, and

eventually hack-writer. In 1761 he met Dr Johnson and later became a member of The Club, where he met distinguished men such as Burke, Garrick and Sir Joshua Reynolds. His poems *The Traveller* and *The Deserted Village* gained the admiration of Johnson, while his second play *She Stoops to Conquer* (1773) achieved an instant popularity which it has never lost. Goldsmith was, as a man, an odd mixture of the absurd and the charming: Garrick claimed that he ‘wrote like an angel, but talked like poor Poll’ – and he never married, although he is known to have admired Mary Horneck, who seems not to have returned his feelings. He died in 1774.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

HAYDN SYMPHONIES NOS. 64, 84, & 90 Nicolaus Esterházy Sinfonia/Béla Drahos	8.550770
HAYDN SYMPHONIES NOS. 45, 48 & 102 Capella Istropolitana/Barry Wordsworth	8.550382
C.P.E. BACH OBOE CONCERTOS József Kiss, Oboe/Ferenc Ekel Chamber Orchestra	8.550556

Music programmed by Nicolas Soames

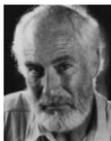
Cover picture: Hunt the Slipper at Neighbour Flamborough's
by Daniel Maclise (1806-1870)
Courtesy of The Bridgeman Art Library, London.

Oliver Goldsmith

The Vicar of Wakefield

Read by **Christopher Robbie**

First published in 1766 and a perennial favourite since then, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is built around the naïve but loveable figure of Dr Primrose. He and his family live in rural bliss until disaster threatens to destroy their happiness: abduction, impoverishment and betrayal combine to lay them low, but a surprising figure brings hope when all seems lost.



Christopher Robbie trained at RADA and played many leading roles around the country before becoming a television presenter for twenty years. Since his return to the stage he has appeared at the Regents Park Open Air Theatre, The Young Vic, the Bristol Old Vic and Scarborough's Theatre in the Round.

'Christopher Robbie conveys Dr Primrose's innocent eagerness, his wife's breathless foolishness and Mr Thornton's lazy hauteur brilliantly, and makes it easy to understand why this little classic has been in print for two and a half centuries.'

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Total time
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