



THE VICAR OF WAKEFIELD AND ITS ILLUSTRATORS.

By AUSTIN DOBSON.

NOT many months since, *à propos* of a certain book of epistolary parodies, the paragraphists were busily discussing the different aspects which the characters of fiction present to different readers. It was shown that, not only as regards the fainter and less strongly drawn figures—the Frank Osbaldistones, the Clive Newcomes, the David Copperfields—but even as regards what Gautier would have called “the grotesques”—the Costigans, the Swivellers, the Gamps,—each admirer, in his separate “study of imagination,” had his own idea, which was not that of another. What is true of the intellectual conception is equally true of the pictorial. Nothing is more notable than the diversities presented by the same book when illustrated by different artists. Contrast for a moment the Don Quixotes of Smirke, of Tony Johannot, of Gustave Doré; contrast the Falstaffs of Kenny Meadows, of Sir John Gilbert, of Mr. E. A. Abbey. Or, to take another instance, compare the contemporary illustrations of Dickens with the modern designs of (say) Mr. Charles Green or Mr. Frederick Barnard. The variations, it will at once be manifest, are not the mere variations arising from



THE VICAR AND THE LITTLE BOYS, FROM “WHITTINGHAM’S EDITION” OF 1815.



THE PROCESSION TO CHURCH. FROM A WOODCUT BY THOMAS BEWICK, 1798.

amplifier resource or from fuller academic skill on the part of the younger men. It is not alone that they have conquered the inner secret of Mr. du Maurier’s artistic

stumbling-blocks—the irreconcilable chimney-pot hat, the “terrible trousers,” the unspeakable evening clothes of the Victorian era: it is that their point of view is different. Nay, in the case of Mr. Barnard, one of the first, if not the first, of modern humorous designers, although he is studiously loyal to the Dickens tradition as revealed by “Phiz” and Cruikshank, he is at the same time as unlike them as it is well possible to be. To this individual attitude of the artist must be added, among other things, the further fact that each age has a habit of investing the book it decorates with something of its own temperament and atmosphere. It may faithfully endeavour to revive costume; it may reproduce detail with the utmost accuracy; but it can never look with the old eyes, or see exactly in the old way. Of these positions the *Vicar of Wakefield* is as good an example as any. Between its earlier illustrated editions and those of the last fifty years the gulf is wide; while the portraits of Dr. Primrose as presented by Rowlandson on the one hand and Stothard on the other are as strikingly in contrast as any of the cases above indicated. It will add what is practically a fresh chapter to a hackneyed history if for a page or two we essay to give some account of Goldsmith’s masterpiece considered exclusively in its aspect as an illustrated book.

There were no illustrations to the first edition of 1766. The two *duodecimo* volumes “on grey paper with blunt type,” printed at Salisbury in that year “by B. Collins for F. Newbery,” were without embellishments of any kind; and the sixth issue of 1779 had been reached before we come to the earliest native attempt at pictorial realization of the characters. Then appeared the first English edition with illustrations, being two tiny booklets bearing the imprint of one J. Wenman, of 144 Fleet Street, and containing a couple of poorly-executed frontispieces by the miniaturist, Daniel Dodd. They represent the Vicar taking leave of George, and Olivia



SCENE FROM THE “VICAR OF WAKEFIELD.” ENGRAVED FROM A WASHED DRAWING BY THOMAS STOTHARD, R.A., IN SOUTH KENSINGTON MUSEUM.

and the Landlady—a choice of subjects in which the artist had many subsequent imitators. The designs have little distinction but that of priority, and can claim no higher merit than attaches to the cheap adornments of a cheap book. Dodd is seen to greater advantage in one of the plates which, about the same date, appeared in Harrison’s *Novelist’s Magazine*, and also in the octavo edition of the *Vicar* printed for the same publisher in 1781. These plates have the pretty, old-fashioned ornamental frame-work which the elder Heath and his colleagues had borrowed from the French vignettists. Dodd illustrates the episode of the pocket-book, while his companion Walker, at once engraver and designer, selects the rescue of Sophia at the precise moment when Burchell’s great “stick” has shivered the small sword of Mr. Timothy Baxter. Walker’s design is the better of the two; but in both the story is told by gesture rather than by expression, and their main interest is that of costume-pieces.

It is so natural to associate the grace of Stothard with the grace of Goldsmith, that one almost resents the fact that, in the collection for which he did so much, the task of illustrating the *Vicar* fell into other hands. But as his first relations with Harrison’s *Magazine* originated in an application made to him to correct a drawing by Dodd for *Joseph Andrews*, it is probable that, before he began to work regularly for the

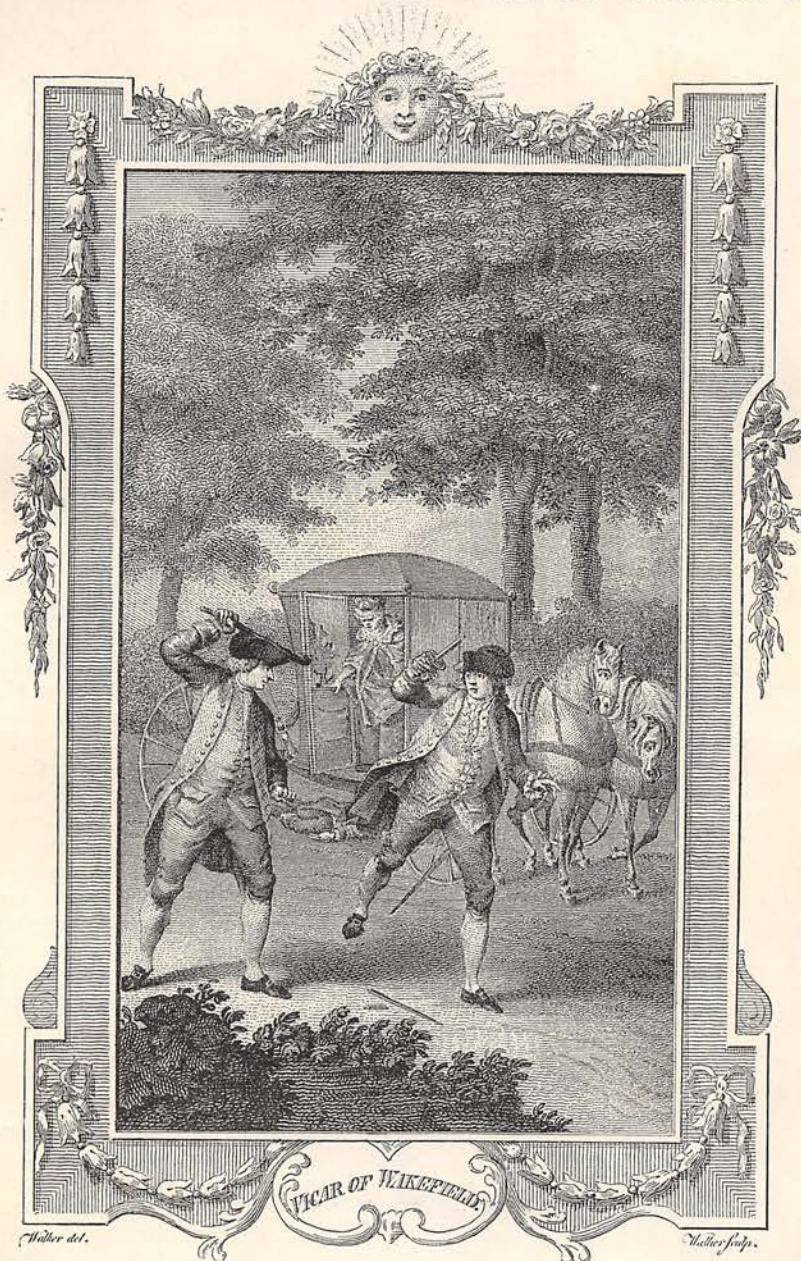
publisher, the plates for the *Vicar* had already been arranged for. It was not long, however, before he was engaged upon the book. In 1792 was published an *octavo* edition, with six plates beautifully engraved by Basire's pupil and Blake's partner, James Parker. The designs, which are by Stothard, illustrate the Vicar taking leave



MR. BURCHELL AND THE POCKET-BOOK. FROM HARRISON'S "MAGAZINE."

of George, the Rescue of Sophia from Drowning, the Honeysuckle Arbour, the Vicar and Olivia, the Prison Sermon, and the Family Party at the end. The best of them, perhaps, is that in which Olivia's father, with an inexpressible tenderness of gesture, lifts the half-sinking, half-kneeling form of his penitent daughter. But though none can be said to be wanting in that grace which is the unfailing characteristic of the artist, upon the whole they are not *chefs-d'œuvre*. Certainly they are not as good

as the best of the *Clarissa* series in Harrison; they are not even better than the illustrations to Sterne, the originals of which are at South Kensington. Indeed, there is at South Kensington a circular composition by Stothard from the *Vicar*—a lightly-washed sketch in Indian ink—which surpasses them all. The moment selected is



THE RESCUE OF SOPHIA. FROM HARRISON'S "MAGAZINE."

obscure; but the persons represented are plainly the Wakefield family, Sir William Thornhill, and the Squire. The Squire is speaking, Olivia hides her face in her mother's lap, while Dr. Primrose listens with bent head, and the *ci-devant* Mr. Burchell looks sternly at his nephew. The entire group, which is admirable in refinement and expression, has all the serene gravity of a drawing by Flaxman. Besides the above, and a pair of plates to be mentioned presently, Stothard did a set of twenty-four minute head-



HUNT THE SLIPPER. FROM A COLOURED PLATE BY THOMAS ROWLANDSON, 1817.

pieces to a Memorandum Book for 1805 (or thereabouts), all of which were derived from Goldsmith's masterpiece, and these probably do not exhaust his efforts in this direction.



THE RETURN OF MOSES. FROM AN ETCHING BY GEORGE CRUIKSHANK, 1832.

After the *Stothard* of 1792 come a succession of editions more or less illustrated. In 1793 Cooke published the *Vicar* in his *Select Novels*, with a vignette and plate by R. Corbould, and a plate by Anker Smith. The last, which depicts "Olivia rejecting with disdain the offer of a Purse of Money from Squire Thornhill," is not only a dainty little picture, but serves to exemplify some of the remarks at the outset of this paper. Seven and twenty years later, the same design was re-engraved as the frontispiece to an edition published by Dean and Munday, and the costumes were modernized to date. The Squire Thornhill of 1793 has a three-cornered hat and ruffles; in 1820 he wears whiskers, a stiff cravat with a little collar, and a cocked hat set athwartships. Olivia, who disdained him in 1793 in a cap and sash, disdains him in 1820 in her own hair and a high waist. Corbould's illustrations to these volumes are mediocre. But he does better in the five plates which he supplied to

Whittingham's edition of 1800, three of which, the *Honeysuckle Arbour*, *Moses starting on his Journey*, and *Olivia and the Landlady*, are pleasant enough. In 1808

followed an edition with a charming frontispiece by Stothard, in which the Vicar with his arm in a sling is endeavouring to reconcile Mrs. Primrose to Olivia. There is also a vignette by the same hand. These, engraved at first by Heath, were repeated in 1813 by J. Romney. In the same year the book appeared in the *Mirror of Amusement* with three plates by that artistic Jack-of-all-trades, William Marshall Craig, sometime drawing-master to the Princess Charlotte of Wales. There are also editions in 1812, 1823, and 1824 with frontispieces by Thomas Uwins. But, as an interpreter of Goldsmith, the painter of the once-popular *Chapeau de Brigand* is not inspiring.

In following the line of engravers on copper, soon to be superseded by steel, we have neglected the sister art of engraving upon wood, of which the revival is practically synchronous with Harrison's *Magazine*. The first edition of the *Vicar*, decorated with what Horace Walpole contemptuously called "wooden cuts," is dated 1798. It has seven designs, three of which are by an unknown person called



OLIVIA AND THE SQUIRE. AFTER WILLIAM MULREADY, R.A., 1843.



Conversation brillante des Dames de la Ville.



George sur la Théâtre.

FROM ETCHINGS BY CHODOWIECKI, 1777.

Eginton, and the remainder by Thomas Bewick, by whom all of them are engraved. Eginton may be at once dismissed; but Bewick's own work, notwithstanding his

genuine admiration for Goldsmith, arouses no particular enthusiasm. He was too original to be the illustrator of other men's work, and his designs, though good specimens of his *technique* as a xylographer, are poor as artistic conceptions. The most successful is the "Procession to Church," the stubbornness of Blackberry, as may be imagined, being effectively rendered. Frontispieces by Bewick also appear in editions of 1810 and 1812; and between 1807 and 1809 the records speak of three American issues with woodcuts by Bewick's trans-Atlantic imitator, Alexander Anderson.



MR. BURCHELL AND THE POCKET-BOOK. FROM AN ETCHING BY CHODOWIECKI, 1776.

Whether these were merely copies of Bewick, like much of Anderson's work, it is impossible to say without inspection. Nor is it possible to speak with certainty of the edition illustrated by Thurston and engraved by Bewick's pupil, Luke Clennell, of which Mr. W. J. Linton speaks in his *Masters of Wood Engraving* as containing a "Mr. Burchell in the hayfield reading to the two Primrose girls," full of drawing and daylight," which should be worth seeing. But the triumph of wood-cut copies at this date is undoubtedly the so-called "Whittingham's edition" of 1815. This is illustrated by thirty-seven woodcuts and tailpieces engraved by the prince of modern wood-engravers, John Thompson. The artist's name has been modestly withheld, and the designs are sometimes attributed to Thurston, but they are not entirely in his manner, and we are inclined to attribute them to Samuel Williams. In any case, they are unpretending little pieces, simple in treatment, and sympathetic in character. The Vicar Consoled by his little Boys, and the Two Girls and the Fortune-teller, may be cited as favourable examples. But the scale is too small for much play of expression. "Whittingham's edition" was very popular, and copies are by no means rare. It was certainly republished in 1822 and 1825, and probably there are other issues. And so we come to that most extraordinary of contributions by a popular designer to the embellishment of a popular author, the *Vicar* of Rowlandson.

Rowlandson was a caricaturist, and his *Vicar* is a caricature. He was not without artistic power; he could, if he liked, draw a beautiful woman (it is true that his ideal generally deserves those epithets of "*plantureux, abondant, exuberant*" which the painter in *Gerfaut* gives to the charms of Mlle. Reine Gobillot); but he did not care to modify his ordinary style. Consequently he has illustrated Goldsmith's masterpiece as he illustrated Combe's *Doctor Syntax*, and the result is a pictorial outrage. The unhappy Primrose family romp through his pages, vulgarized by all sorts of indignities, and the reader reaches the last of the "twenty-four coloured plates" which Ackermann put forth in 1817, and again in 1823, as one escaping from a nightmare. It is only necessary to glance at Stothard's charming little plate of "Hunt the Slipper" in Rogers's *Pleasures of Memory* of 1802 to see how far from the Goldsmith manner is Rowlandson's treatment of the same pastime. Where he is most endurable, is where his

designs have the least relation to the personages of the book, as, for example, in "A Connoisseur Mellowing the Tone of a Picture," which is a humorous print no better nor worse than the other humorous prints with which he was wont to fill the windows of the Repository of Arts in Piccadilly.

It is a relief to turn from the coarse rotundities of Rowlandson to the edition which immediately followed—that known to collectors as Sharpe's. It contains six illustrations by Richard Westall, engraved on copper by Warren, Romney, and others. Westall's designs are of the school of Stothard—that is to say, they are graceful and elegant rather than humorous; but they are most beautifully rendered by their engravers. The Honeysuckle Arbour, where the girls lean across the table to watch the passing stag, is one of the most brilliant little pictures we ever remember to have seen. In 1829, William Finden re-engraved the whole of these designs on steel, slightly reducing them in size, and the merit of the two methods may be compared. It is hard to adjudge the palm. Finden's fifth plate especially, depicting Sophy's return to the Vicar in prison, is a miracle of minute excellence.

Goldsmith's next illustrators of importance are Cruikshank and Mulready. The contributions of the former are limited to two plates for Vol. X. (1832) of Roscoe's *Novelist's Library*. They are not successes. The kindly Genius of Broadgrin is scarcely as vulgar as Rowlandson, but his efforts to make his subject "comic" are not the less unfortunate, and there is little of the Vicar, or Mrs. Primrose, or even Moses, in the sketch with which he illustrates the tragedy of the gross of green spectacles. Mulready's designs, excellently interpreted by John Thompson, have a far greater reputation,—a reputation heightened not a little by the familiar group of



THE VICAR FINDS OLIVIA. AFTER TONY JOHANNOT, 1838.

pictures which he elaborated from three of the sketches. Choosing the Wedding Gown, the Whistonian Controversy and Sophia and Burchell Haymaking, with their wonderful rendering of texture and material, are among the painter's most successful works in oil; and it is the fashion to speak of his illustrated *Vicar* as if all of its designs were at the same artistic level. This, however, is hardly the case. Some of them, e.g. Olivia measuring herself with the Squire, have playfulness and charm, but not a few of them are, to our thinking, not only crowded in composition, but heavy and unattractive. Mulready's paintings, however, and the generally diffused feeling that the domestic note in his work should make him a born illustrator of Goldsmith, have given him a reputation which it is not now easy to gainsay. Only a critic of the authority of Mr. Linton may dare to call him "weak."

After Mulready come a number of illustrators whom it would be impossible to particularize in detail. One of the most successful of these was the clever artist George Thomas; one of the most disappointing, since his gifts were of the highest

order, was the late G. J. Pinwell. Of Absolon, Anelay, Gilbert, and the rest, it is impossible to say more here, and we must close this rapid summary with brief reference to some of the foreign editions.

At the beginning of this paper, in enumerating some of the causes for the diversities, pleasing or the reverse, which prevail in illustrated copies of the classics, we purposely reserved one which it is more convenient to treat in connection with those books when "embellished" by foreign artists. If, even in the country of birth, each age (as has been well said of translations) "*a eu de ce côté son belvédère différent*," it follows that every other country will have its point of view, which will be at variance with that of a native. To say that no book dealing with human nature in the abstract is capable of being illustrated adequately except in the country of its origin, would be to state a proposition in imminent danger of contradiction by example. But it may be safely affirmed, that, except by an artist who, by long residence or otherwise, has enjoyed unusual facilities for assimilating the national atmosphere, no novel of manners (to which class the *Vicar* undoubtedly belongs) can be illustrated with complete success by a foreigner. For this reason, it will not be necessary here to do more than refer briefly to the principal German and French editions. In either country the *Vicar* has had the advantage of being artistically interpreted by draughtsmen of marked ability; but in both cases the solecisms are thicker than the beauties.

It must be admitted, notwithstanding, for Germany, that it was earlier in the field than England. Wenman's edition is dated 1780; but it was in 1776 that August Mylius, of Berlin, issued the first frontispiece of the *Vicar*. It is an etching by the Berlin Hogarth, Daniel Chodowiecki, prefixed to an English reprint of the second edition, and represents the popular episode of Mr. Burchell and the pocket-book. The poor *Vicar* is transformed into a heavy-visaged German pastor in a dressing-gown and slippers, while Mr. Burchell becomes a slim personage in a huntsman's cap such as stage tradition assigns to Tony Lumpkin. In the *Almanac Généalogique* for 1777 Chodowiecki returned to this subject, and produced a series of twelve (as designs) charming plates—little marvels of delicate execution—upon the same theme. Some of these, e.g. the *Conversation brillant des Dames de la Ville* and *George sur la Théâtre* (*sic*) *reconnait son Père*—are delightfully quaint. But they are not illustrations of the text—and there is no more to say. The same fundamental objection applies to the illustrations, full of fancy, ingenuity and playfulness as they are, of another German, Ludwig Richter. His edition has often been reprinted. But it is sufficient to glance at his barefooted, thick-ankled Sophia, making hay, with her straw hat at her back, to decide against it. One crosses out "Sophia" and writes in "Dorothea." She may have lived at Sesenheim, but never at Wakefield.

In France, to judge by certain entries in Cohen's invaluable *Guide de l'Amateur de Livres à Vignettes*, the book seems to have been illustrated as early as the end of the last century. Huet and Texier are mentioned as artists, but their works have escaped us. The chief French edition, however, is that which belongs to the famous series of books "*aux images incrustées en plein texte*" (as Jules Janin says), inaugurated in 1835 by the *Gil Blas* of Jean Gigoux. The *Vicaire de Wakefield* (Bourgueleret, 1838), admirably paraphrased by Charles Nodier, was accompanied by ten engravings on steel by William Finden after Tony Johannot, and a number of small woodcuts, *en-têtes* and *culs de lampe* by Janet Lange, Charles Jacque, and C. Marville. As compositions, Johannot's contributions are effective, but highly theatric, while his types are French. Of the woodcuts it may be sufficient to note that when the *Vicar* and Mrs. Primrose discuss the prospects of the family in the seclusion of their own chamber, they do so (in the picture) from two separate four posters with twisted up-rights, and a crucifix between them. The same eccentricities, though scarcely so naïvely ignorant, are not absent in the work of two much more modern artists, M. V. A. Poirson and M. Adolphe Lalauze. M. Poirson (Quantin, 1885) who, in his own domain has extraordinary gifts as a decorative artist, depicts Squire Thornhill as a gay young French *chasseur* with many-buttoned gaiters and a *fusil en bandoulière*, while the butcher of the *Elegy on a Mad Dog* appears in those "wooden shoes" (with straw in them) which for years have been to English cobblers the chief terror of a French invasion. M. Lalauze again (Jouaust, 1888), for whose distinguished gifts (in their place) we have the keenest admiration, promotes the whole Primrose family into the *haute noblesse*. An elegant Dr. Primrose blesses an elegant George with the air of a Rochefoucauld, while Mrs. Primrose, in the background, with the Bible and cane, is a

grande dame de par le monde. In the same way, the scene in the hayfield becomes a *fête galante* after the manner of Lancret or Watteau.

Upon the whole, omitting foreign artists for the reasons given above, one is forced to the conclusion that Goldsmith has not yet found his fitting pictorial interpreter. Stothard and Mulready have accentuated his graver side; Cruikshank and Rowlandson have exaggerated his humour. But no single artist, as far as we are aware, has, in any just proportion, combined them both. By the delicate quality of his art, by the alliance in his work of a grace and playfulness which has a kind of parallel in Goldsmith's literary style, the late Mr. Caldecott seemed always to suggest that he could, if he would, supply this want. But (apart from the play-book of the *Mad Dog*) Mr. Caldecott only executed one design from this source.



THE HONEYSUCKLE HEDGE. DRAWN BY RANDOLPH CALDECOTT
(PARCHMENT LIBRARY, 1883).