

A life of flawed virtue in the vicar of wakefield



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In *The Vicar of Wakefield*, although Charles Primrose portrays almost flawless virtue, he retains two major flaws, pride and obstinacy, which lead to many complications in his family's life. The Primrose family suffers from the retribution of these flaws until they are finally purged when Charles gains humility in prison. Many times in the novel, Charles's immense sense of pride creates problems within the Primrose family, primarily leading to their suffering. He exhibits pride in two areas: his family and his virtue. In the first pages of the novel, Charles gives an account of his pride in his offspring, noting " my sons hardy and active, my daughters beautiful and blooming" (10). Charles values his family next to God, but, consequently, this pride in them leads him to hold very high expectations for his children. Charles's expectations of his children produce many obstacles for them to overcome. His pride affects Olivia the most, being perhaps his greatest " treasure" (120). His hopes for her marriage to Mr. Williams incite her to run away with the Squire, which in turn leads to " the honour of [the] family [being] contaminated" (88). At this point, the Vicar is more worried about the blemish on his family's reputation than the safety of his child, never once realizing that Olivia might have fled from his oppressive pride in her. The Vicar's pride in his virtue can also be remarked upon in this incident. When he finally finds Olivia, he welcomes her back home, but he is even more enthusiastic about her return when he discovers she was married to the Squire, exclaiming, " now you are a thousand times more welcome than before" (122). Even in light of all of his daughter's suffering, Charles Primrose still concentrates on the reputation of his family and his virtue, rather than on his daughter as a person. After bringing Olivia home, he proceeds to look out for his pride before his family's well being when he is

obstinate with the Squire. Upon this meeting with the Squire, Charles's pride and inflexibility place his entire family in debtor's prison. Charles's stubbornness not only causes his family to end up in prison but also helps to spark many other difficulties. When George is about to be happily married, the Vicar is ready to call the whole thing off because he and Mr. Wilmot disagree on the subject of monogamy. His obstinacy here threatens to "interrupt [their] intended alliance" (15). Again, his stubbornness as well as pride is obstructing the wishes of one of his children, showing his selfishness. Another instance where his wishes take precedence over his child's is the arranged marriage between Mr. Williams and Olivia. Even though Olivia makes it clear to her father that she does not want to marry Mr. Williams, he insists that the "honest Mr. Williams will be rewarded for his fidelity" (83). Charles disregards Olivia's wishes, claiming, "my tenderness, as a parent, shall never influence my integrity as a man" (83). Due to the Vicar's obstinacy in this situation, Olivia runs away with the Squire to avoid her marriage to Mr. Williams. When the Squire comes to the Vicar for consent to marry Ms. Wilmot, the Vicar's stubbornness gets the best of him. The Vicar proclaims to him, "as to your marriage with any but my daughter, that I will never consent to; and though your friendship could raise me to a throne, or your resentment sink me to the grave, yet I would despise both" (135). This proclamation seals the fate of the Primrose family with the Vicar again putting himself and his pride before his family. Although his pride and obstinacy lead the Primrose family to prison, this predicament turns into a pilgrimage toward redemption. Though his pride and tenacity lead him to a squalid prison, it becomes a place where Charles can finally be purged of his flaws. Although Jenkinson suggests that the Vicar should appeal to the Squire

for forgiveness to save his family, the Vicar still refuses, saying, “ though my submission and approbation could transfer me from hence . . . I would not grant neither, as something whispers me that it would be giving sanction to adultery” (152). Again, the pride of virtue and his stubbornness stand in the way of the lives of his family. Not until after Olivia’s supposed death does Charles purge his pride and implacability, saying, “ there is no pride left me now” (154). The other prisoners also become a stop in Charles’s pilgrimage to redemption. When he first comes to the prison, he looks down upon them as miscreants, who need to be reformed. He also tries to reform them to help “ mend” (147) himself, retaining his selfish qualities. When the Vicar hears of the death of Olivia and the misfortunes of George, he finally sees through the eyes of the other prisoners. He begins to relate to them on a level of humanity instead of levels of social status. In the face of death, Charles goes to preach one last time to the prisoners, addressing them as “ my friends, my children, and fellow sufferers” (161). This sermon marks the end of his pilgrimage, bringing him to an understanding of humanity and a spiritual rejuvenation. The Vicar finally realizes that there is something bigger outside of himself, other people. Soon after Charles purges his character flaws, his life begins to be restored to normal. Throughout *The Vicar of Wakefield*, Charles Primrose’s major character flaws, pride and stubbornness, lead to the suffering of his family. It is only after he quiets these flaws that the Primrose family may reclaim their former status.