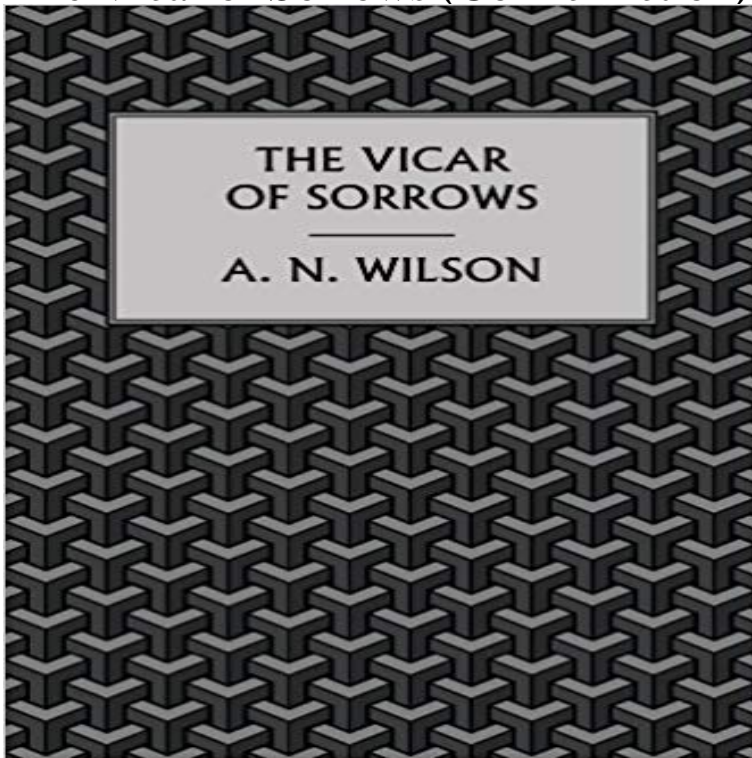


The Vicar of Sorrows (Comic Fiction)



In this powerful novel that will confirm his reputation as one of Britain's brightest literary lights, A. N. Wilson proposes an experiment in alchemy: to the sadness of people living out their lives in the safety of sterile relationships, he adds the crazy wine of illicit passion. Francis Kreer is a clergyman who does not believe in God, and a married man who does not love his wife. Neither of these things seems to matter very much until a series of emotional crises turns his life upside down. His mother dies and he is shocked by the intensity of his grief. He is further shocked to discover that his mother had a lover for many years whose existence was entirely unknown to him, and that he, Francis, must share his inheritance with this man. Finally, and most humbling of all, Francis falls in love - painfully, absolutely - with an irresistible but most unsuitable young woman. These are outlines of a story that traces the descent of Francis Kreer through various circles of the English establishment to a cruel purgatory all his own. It is in many respects a comic journey, enlivened by eccentric characters that Ronald Searle might have drawn, and by Wilson's delicious satire of social snobbery and ecclesiastical pretension. But there is no mistaking the deeper seriousness of this compelling, affecting story, and Francis Kreer himself, in his flight towards madness and despair, might have been imagined by Dostoevsky.

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