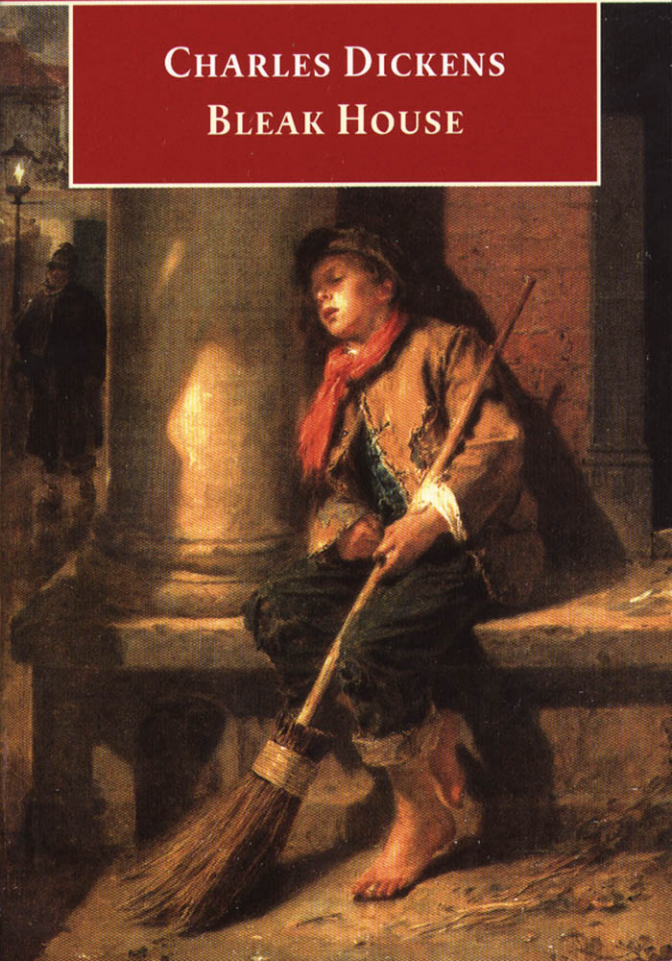


OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

CHARLES DICKENS  
BLEAK HOUSE



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### BLEAK HOUSE

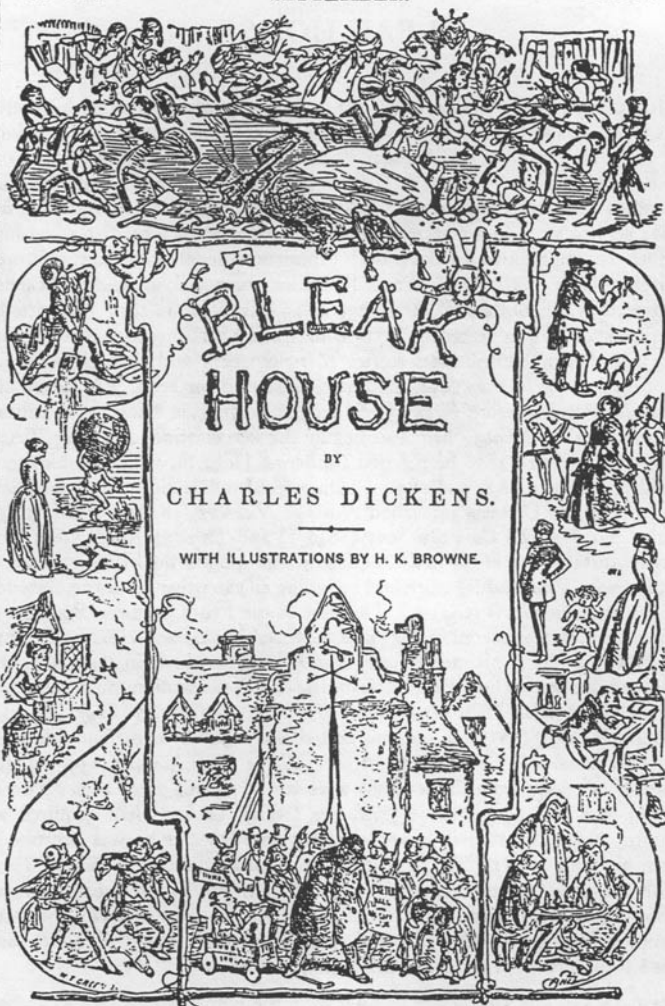
CHARLES DICKENS was born in 1812 at Landport near Portsmouth, where his father was a clerk in the navy pay office. The family removed to London in 1815, and in 1817 to Chatham. It was here that the happiest years of Dickens's childhood were spent. They returned to London in 1823, but their fortunes were severely impaired. Dickens was withdrawn from school, and in 1824 sent to work in a blacking-warehouse managed by a relative when his father was imprisoned for debt. Both experiences deeply affected the future novelist. Once his father's financial position improved, however, Dickens returned to school, leaving at the age of 15 to become in turn a solicitor's clerk, a shorthand reporter in the law courts, and a parliamentary reporter. In 1833 he began contributing stories to newspapers and magazines, later reprinted as *Sketches by 'Boz'*, and in 1836 started the serial publication of *Pickwick Papers*. Before *Pickwick* had completed its run, Dickens, as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, had also begun the serialization of *Oliver Twist* (1837-8). In April 1836 he married Catherine Hogarth, who bore him ten children between 1837 and 1852. Finding serial publication both congenial and profitable, Dickens published *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9) in monthly parts, and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) in weekly instalments. He visited America in 1842, publishing his observations as *American Notes* on his return and including an extensive American episode in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4). The first of the five 'Christmas Books', *A Christmas Carol*, appeared in 1843 and the travel-book, *Pictures from Italy*, in 1846. The carefully planned *Dombey and Son* was serialized in 1846-8, to be followed in 1849-50 by Dickens's 'favourite child', the semi-autobiographical *David Copperfield*. Then came *Bleak House* (1852-3), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorrit* (1855-7). Dickens edited and regularly contributed to the journals *Household Words* (1850-9) and *All the Year Round* (1859-70). A number of essays from the journals were later collected as *Reprinted Pieces* (1858) and *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1861). Dickens had acquired a country house, Gad's Hill near Rochester, in 1856 and he was separated from his wife in 1858. He returned to historical fiction in *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and to the use of a first-person narrator in *Great Expectations* (1860-1), both of which were serialized in *All the Year Round*. The last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, was published in 1864-5. *Edwin Drood* was left unfinished at Dickens's death on 9 June 1870.

STEPHEN GILL is a Professor of English in the University of Oxford and a Fellow of Lincoln College, Oxford. His first publication was on Dickens, and he has since edited novels by Trollope, Gaskell, Gissing, and George Eliot and *Oliver Twist* for Oxford World's Classics. He has written *William Wordsworth: A Life* (1989) and *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (1998).

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The cover of the monthly parts of *Bleak House*, by 'Phiz' (Hablôt Knight Browne)

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



CHARLES DICKENS

*Bleak House*



*Edited with an Introduction and Notes by*  
STEPHEN GILL

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## EXTRA ILLUSTRATIONS

The cover of the monthly parts of *Bleak House*, by 'Phiz'  
(Hablôt Knight Browne) *frontispiece*

Title-page of the first edition I

## INTRODUCTION

*As the plot of Bleak House turns on mysteries it is impossible to discuss it without giving some of them away. Readers new to the novel are advised to skip this introduction until they have finished the story, so that they can enjoy it at least once as its first readers did.*

### (1)

At the end of March 1850 Charles Dickens addressed his public in a new guise, as 'conductor' of a weekly journal called *Household Words*. It was a significant moment in his life generally and in his development as a novelist. Dickens was world-famous, confident of his hold on the audience captivated in the late 1830s with *Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* and nurtured through the 1840s with the novels from *The Old Curiosity Shop* to *David Copperfield*. He was confident too of his national standing. Dickens himself was identified with the humanitarian and generous thrust of *A Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes* and philanthropists were turning to him for support in a variety of ameliorative projects. Now Dickens sought to enlarge the scope of his intervention in public life. His was to be a journal with a mission and its remit was wide. Week by week Dickens and his team (all of whose contributions the chief vetted and often rewrote) discoursed on contemporary life, sometimes presenting with a sharpened edge topics of the day for readers who did not habitually read *The Times* or government blue-books, sometimes presenting new material, the result of first-hand investigation. And everything served the journal's declared aims—to entertain, to enliven, above all to foster imagination in the service of 'the raising up of those that are down, and the general improvement of our social condition' (letter to Elizabeth Gaskell, 31 January 1850).

The intensified sense of purpose that inspired the foundation of *Household Words*, and the work Dickens did for it, also fuelled the series of extraordinarily powerful and original novels beginning with *Bleak House* on which his current reputation largely rests. Articles coming across the editor's desk on contemporary topics were, in Susan Shatto's apt analogy, 'for the novels of Dickens what Holinshed's *Chronicles* and North's Plutarch were for the plays of



Shakespeare' (*The Companion to Bleak House* (1988), 5). Slum houses, without sanitation or pure water, the breeding grounds for disease; the lack of even basic medical provision for the poor; the noisome, pestilential state of many city graveyards; the inhuman treatment of pauper children, the unwanted offspring of a rapidly growing but unknown underclass—such topics, so rebarbative in themselves, struck Dickens as full of meaning, portentous signs of the times. Above all he was seized by the campaign for the reform of the Court of Chancery. Himself a recent victim of Chancery 'justice', Dickens had declared in 1846 that 'it is better to suffer a great wrong than to have recourse to the much greater wrong of the law' (letter to John Forster), and public revelations since then of how Chancery's hallowed practices actually bore on given individuals had only intensified his anger.

*Bleak House*, however, would be as unread as *Household Words* itself is were it no more than an assemblage of mid-century topicalities. What made and still makes it so compelling is the imaginative intensity of this novel. Apparently unconnected topics, from the small, such as the treatment of an ignorant little boy at an inquest, to the great, such as a governmental crisis, are fused in a densely specific representation of contemporary society that is also a diagnosis of its values and morals. Never before had Dickens worked on such a large scale, to such an ambitious end, in an aesthetic structure of such demanding complexity.

Ambition is of little value, of course, if readers find the complexity too much to take—*Finnegans Wake* is a case in point. No one knew this better than Dickens, and when he remarked in the 1853 preface to the first book edition of *Bleak House*, 'I believe I have never had so many readers as in this book', relief must have mingled with delight. Difficult and demanding though the new novel was in many ways, his readers, it seemed, were still with him. The first monthly part was issued in March 1852 and over the next three months 38,500 copies of it were printed. Sales remained buoyant and were soon 'markedly greater than [those] of any of the monthly serials written during the 1840s' (Robert L. Patten, *Charles Dickens and his Publishers* (1978), 216).

Sales are not the only measure of success, however, and a few reviews were straws in the wind that was to blow more coldly on Dickens over the next two decades. Many critics, as was usual in the period, picked over *Bleak House* as if it were a box of assorted

sweets, savouring what they had always enjoyed—the humorous characters, for example—and passing over what was not to their taste. And though as Philip Collins has noted, ‘special-interest groups were offended by particular elements in the story: low-churchmen by Chadband’, for example, and enthusiasts for foreign missions by Mrs Jellyby (*Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (1971), 272), the critical reception of the novel was generally positive. A few reviewers, however, voiced more substantial reservations about the new offering. Because Dickens was so popular it was all the more irresponsible, thought G. H. Lewes, that he should have propagated scientific error: ‘according to all known chemical and physiological laws, Spontaneous Combustion is an *impossibility*’ (ibid. 275). Henry Chorley in the *Athenaeum* regretted that Dickens’s ‘resolution to startle’ was betraying him into an ever more exaggerated representation of ‘the world we live in’ (ibid. 276–7). George Brimley picked up on that point in the *Spectator*, deprecating Dickens’s ‘habit of seizing peculiarities and presenting them instead of characters’, and added the extra charge that the novel suffered from ‘absolute want of construction’ (ibid. 283–5). When fully developed later by Lewes, George Eliot, Henry James, Anthony Trollope, and other lesser fry, these criticisms formed the charge against the most popular serious novelist of the age—that his vision was unreal, that he was a literary conjuror, that he could not present character. But Dickens’s faithful readers cared not a jot for the disdain of a handful of intellectuals, and for once the later twentieth-century critical consensus concurs without embarrassment with the earlier popular one. *Bleak House* has attracted a great deal of criticism from across the range of contemporary critical perspectives, all of which agree on one thing, that it is one of the finest Victorian novels.

## (2)

To a considerable extent the immediate popular success of *Bleak House* was due to the fact that, having learnt what his readers liked, Dickens provided it, relishing to the utmost what George Brimley pompously called ‘the noisy and profitable applause of crowded pit and gallery’ (*Spectator*, 24 September 1853). Dickens was too restless an artist ever just to mark time, and not one of his novels is simply a *réchauffé* of the usual ingredients. But he always built on strength and *Bleak House* offered his readers many familiar pleasures. Two in particular are worth dwelling on.

First and foremost of these pleasures is the language. In the course of solemn animadversions on *Our Mutual Friend* in 1865 the young Henry James (of all people) commented on how 'intensely *written*' that novel is, linking the intensity to a perceptible decline in truth and imaginative realization. But Dickens's novels had always been intensely *written*. Not without reason did he style himself 'the inimitable Boz'. From *Pickwick Papers* onwards he had been exploiting his prodigious power over words and in *Bleak House* it is the language that seizes the attention from the very first page. The set-piece evocation of 'implacable November weather' is too famous to need quotation, but what must be stressed is how many other passages throughout the novel exhibit the same linguistic flexibility and make the same unremitting demand on the reader's attentiveness.

Consider the opening to Chapter seven, for example. Sir Leicester and Lady Dedlock have escaped from the boredom of the country to Paris, and over Chesney Wold, which never at any time enjoys 'any superabundant life of imagination', solitude 'with dusky wings, sits brooding'. What follows evokes the rain, the deadly monotony, the *nothingness* of life at the great house, while at the same time calling up their opposites with imaginative gaiety:

There may be some motions of fancy among the lower animals at Chesney Wold. The horses in the stables—the long stables in a barren, red-brick courtyard, where there is a great bell in a turret, and a clock with a large face, which the pigeons who live near it, and who love to perch upon its shoulders, seem to be always consulting—they may contemplate some mental pictures of fine weather on occasions, and may be better artists at them than the grooms. The old roan, so famous for cross-country work, turning his large eyeball to the grated window near his rack, may remember the fresh leaves that glisten there at other times, and the scents that stream in, and may have a fine run with the hounds, while the human helper, clearing out the next stall, never stirs beyond his pitchfork and birch-broom. The grey, whose place is opposite the door, and who, with an impatient rattle of his halter, pricks his ears and turns his head when it is opened, and to whom the opener says, 'Woa, grey, then, steady! Noabody wants you to-day!' may know it quite as well as the man. The whole seemingly monotonous and uncompanionable half-dozen, stabled together, may pass the long wet hours, when the door is shut, in livelier communication than is held in the servants' hall, or at the Dedlock Arms;—or may even beguile the time by improving (perhaps corrupting) the pony in the loose-box in the corner.

Two more fanciful paragraphs on the imaginative life of the mastiff in his kennel, the hunting dogs in their quarters across the park, the turkey, and the goose, further develop the observation that 'there is not much fancy otherwise stirring at Chesney Wold'. Apparently incidentally, too, the passage gives a lot of factual detail which brings Chesney Wold into realization, the kind of information which a novel must give yet which can too easily remain inert and difficult to assimilate.

There are many such examples of wonderfully inventive writing, which are not 'fine writing' in the discredited sense of that term—the series of conceits at the beginning of Chapter nineteen which fantasticates the Inns of Court, lifeless in the long vacation; the opening paragraphs of Chapter thirty-two; the descent into the hell of Tom-all-alone's in Chapter twenty-two; the masterly amplification of the paragraphs locating Cook's Court in Chapter ten; the poignant and beautifully cadenced vignette of Jo at the end of Chapter nineteen, 'munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke'—all these are passages of amazing complexity and depth, allusive, syntactically agile, multi-faceted, whose exploitation of the poetic resources of the language and the devices of rhetoric offer pleasures as rewarding as any in English fiction.

*Bleak House* offers too, with as much brio as ever, the pleasure of dramatic variety. The generic flexibility Dickens learnt from Fielding, Smollett, and Hogarth is deployed to the full. There is *opera buffa*, as in Chapter twenty-five, 'Mrs Snagsby sees it all', one of the funniest scenes Dickens ever wrote, where Mr Chadband discourses on 'Terewth' to such effect on Mrs Snagsby that, 'becoming cataleptic, she has to be carried up the narrow staircase like a grand piano'. There is melodrama, as in the confrontation in Chapter forty-one between Mr Tulkinghorn and Lady Dedlock, when these two as yet unacknowledged adversaries gaze at each other silently through a pane of glass before each steps into the chamber, knowing that the first words spoken will begin the destruction of the woman who has 'for years, now, . . . been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence, and at the top of the fashionable tree'. There is mystery and suspense—why, the reader wonders, cannot the sagacious Mr Bucket see that it is impossible that trooper George should have committed the crime for which he is certain to hang? And pathos:

the scene in which Jo dies mumbling after Allan Woodcourt the words of the Lord's Prayer, whose efficacy remains even though the ignorant and illiterate waif has no idea of their meaning, is none the less moving because the linguistic devices are so evident in their claim. Dickens was always committed to the big effect and his means of achieving it developed in subtlety of execution. It was once considered sophisticated to sneer at Victorian lachrymosity, but a generation which has yielded so unreservedly to films such as *Love Story* or *Kramer vs. Kramer* may have rediscovered one un-failing source of Dickens's power.

I have stressed two areas of continuity between *Bleak House* and Dickens's earlier work, partly because they are the hallmarks of his art and partly because they have not, in my view, received in much recent criticism quite the kind of attention they deserve. One might mention other aspects of the novel, such as the ingenious plotting or the large cast of idiosyncratic characters, to make the point that in many respects *Bleak House* offered anew what his readers had come to recognize and love as Dickensian. When George Brimley made the point in his *Spectator* review, however, his drift was that like any tired old performer, Dickens was now going through the stale routines that none the less always got applause, and in this he could not have been more mistaken. When asked whether one of his works was not his greatest, Beethoven replied, 'Each in its own way. Art demands of us that we shall not stand still.' Dickens never stood still.

### (3)

What impression might a reader form who comes to *Bleak House* for the first, or even the umpteenth, time, after reading the earlier novels in sequence? The first might well be that this one is controlled more magisterially, with a greater intensity, than any previous novel. This suggestion certainly does not mean that *Bleak House* discloses what it is 'about' in a more unified fashion than earlier work. Observing that 'one must not read Dickens . . . expecting to find any extractable, unificatory overview of [his] society', Kate Flint wisely counsels against the temptation to 'impose unificatory lines of interpretation' on any of the novels (*Dickens* (1986), 17, 60), and Peter K. Garrett has stressed in similar vein that one must expect differing 'principles of coherence' to be in play (*The Victorian Multiplot Novel: Studies in Dialogical Form* (1980), 8). Both

critics are right to caution against the desire to unify at all costs, but what the reader of *Bleak House* soon realizes is that strenuous acts of authorial unification are the dynamic energy of the novel, that Dickens is orchestrating the whole to disclose, little by little and in most unexpected ways, connection.

As the story gets under way with elements that seem more than usually disparate, the dense fog of the opening chapter spreads itself across the text. Two narratives coexist but in different time planes, and what they set out is all mystery—what is the secret of the Dedlock marriage; who is Esther Summerson; how is it that Richard and Ada are enmeshed in a Chancery suit; who is their mysterious benefactor; how can a man be called Nemo (No One); and who is it lying in the ‘foul and filthy’ room, never to be awakened, not even by the sinister Mr Tulkinghorn? As it proceeds, however, this impression that all is confused, random, inchoate, yields to the conviction that everything is involved with, or connected to, or somehow has a bearing on, everything else, a conviction created not simply by plot resolution but by the interweaving of every aspect of the novel—seemingly disparate episodes, structures of imagery and allusion, repetition of thematic keynotes, and the counterpoint of the two narratives.

Fundamental to the success of these and all other aspects of the novel is Dickens’s use of coincidence or the unexpected mishap. This sounds little enough to claim about one of the greatest novelists in the language, but what needs to be emphasized is that he is one of the greatest novelists precisely because he developed such a strong sense of the possibilities of narrative itself. Once we have yielded to the initial scene-setting of one of his later novels, Dickens can make us believe anything. Yielding usually involves the plunge into such extraordinary circumstances that some readers can never do it. Those who do and who are alert to every detail discover that this world has its own laws of probability.

Take, for example, Chapter nineteen, ‘Moving on’. It is early evening in the long vacation of the legal year and Mr and Mrs Chadband are taking tea at the home of Mr and Mrs Snagsby, Cook’s Court, Cursitor Street. The reverend gentleman’s discourse after the anchovies and new-laid eggs is interrupted by the arrival of a policeman clutching a ragged boy. Harassed to ‘move on’, the urchin, Jo, has claimed to know Mr Snagsby, and Mr Guppy, who happened to be strolling by, has vouched for the latter’s existence,

and tagged along. Jo is, as always, telling the truth. He met Mr Snagsby at the inquest on Nemo. But how can he explain the fact that he has a lot of money on him? Again Jo tells the truth—that it is what remains of a sovereign given him by a lady in a veil, who asked him to guide her to where Nemo was buried. The policeman does not believe a word of this cock-and-bull story, but since Mr Snagsby agrees to make himself responsible for Jo's moving on, he leaves.

So far coincidence has furnished a carefully achieved 'realistic' scene-setting. Given that it is the hottest long vacation in years, it is plausible that Mr Guppy should be sauntering in the evening and so witness Jo's arrest. As he is a lawyer's clerk he is aware of Mr Snagsby's respectability, and so on. But once the policeman has left, coincidence and chance, still within the wholly plausible setting created, begin to push open doors which will lead, equally plausibly, into the farthest reaches of the implausible, the grotesque, and the macabre.

Mr Guppy, 'who has an inquiring mind in matters of evidence', cross-examines Jo and is impressed by how tenaciously he sticks to his 'improbable story'. He tucks the details away, where they lie next to the other disturbance in Mr Guppy's mind, the conviction that the portrait of Lady Dedlock seen at Chesney Wold means something to him. Reporting to the company on his grilling of Jo he mentions his firm, Kenge & Carboy, at which Mrs Chadband perks up and recalls that she once looked after a client of that firm—one Esther Summerson. Mr Guppy is intrigued, not least because he is smitten by Esther. And so begins the trail that is going to lead him so near to the heart of the mystery which draws together an ignorant crossing-sweeper, an illiterate and drink-sodden rag-and-bone man, a dead man with no name, the most elegant lady in the land, and the mysterious Miss Summerson who has captured his affections.

But Mr Guppy is not the only one who ends the evening with something on his mind. Mr Snagsby attended the inquest on Nemo, since the deceased, who was scratching a living as a copyist of legal documents, had been taking in work from him. There the law-stationer hears the evidence of the crossing-sweeper and compassionately gives him half-a-crown, prudently warning Jo not to mention it to Mrs Snagsby should they ever cross at his spot. When Jo is brought into his drawing-room Mr Snagsby is on tenterhooks lest Jo should blurt out something about the money, especially

when the policeman reveals that he has found a suspicious amount of cash in the boy's pockets. Mr Snagsby has other reasons for feeling troubled. Why did the great Mr Tulkinghorn enlist his aid in tracking down a poor copyist to his lodgings? Who was this Nemo he had employed? But uppermost is his fear of his wife—and rightly so. As Mr Snagsby is drawn further into Mr Tulkinghorn's enquiries, never knowing what it is he is involved in, his mind reels: 'Something is wrong, somewhere; but what something, what may come of it, to whom, when, and from which unthought-of and unheard-of quarter, is the puzzle of his life' (p. 374). Seeing her husband's discomfiture, especially whenever he comes into contact with the crossing-sweeper, Mrs Snagsby begins to weigh the evidence and quite soon comes to her own satisfactory (and crazy) verdict: her husband is that boy's father. Mrs Snagsby sees it all.

No one in *Bleak House* sees it all, but many of the characters try to, and this is another reason why the novel is so tightly knit. Although the raw material—the contingencies of lives as they are lived by a baronet and his wife or a brickmaker and his—is presented with all the apparent randomness of the quotidian, it is subject to constant interpretation by those determined to perceive the pattern, who are themselves under scrutiny by other figures. Jo possesses vital evidence but knows nothing. So does Mr Krook, but he cannot read it. While Mr Tulkinghorn methodically works to trap his victim, Mr Guppy blunders with almost as good effect. Trooper George and Mr Snagsby are both enmeshed in other people's contrivings. Only Inspector Bucket eventually sees it all and when he does, it is too late. What is the evidence and what is to be made of it? These are the questions which resonate throughout the novel.

They are questions which preoccupy the reader, too. Why does Lady Dedlock swoon, something, it is pointedly observed, her husband has never known her do before (Chapter two)? Why does the narrator dwell on the fact that Mr Tulkinghorn seems not to have noticed Nemo's portmanteau, even though he is standing next to it in a practically bare room (Chapter eleven)? Why does the usually courteous Trooper George deliberately ignore the old lady who emerges from Mr Tulkinghorn's chambers (Chapter thirty-four)? Dickens always made heavy demands on his readers' skills as readers, but never before so insistently as in *Bleak House*, which demands that we be as alert as Inspector Bucket, watching, assessing, interpreting.



In a sense, however, plucking out particularly delightful and challenging moments such as these misrepresents—or rather, underrepresents—the novel as a whole. For what is so striking about *Bleak House* is that its highly unusual narrative structure in itself constantly and insistently foregrounds interpretative activity. The story is opened by an anonymous voice, whom it is customary to call ‘the omniscient narrator’. But he is not quite omniscient. Dazzling linguistic virtuosity, the ability to create a world from nothing, which seems to revel in the exploitation of its power—these and many other characteristics of the Dickensian omniscient narrator are on display, but this anonymous narrator is unique in Dickens’s corpus in that he discloses events in the present tense. Hovering as it were above the scene observed, he points out, brings forward, allows to unfold, not from the secure position of one who knows the outcome before the first word of the sentence is uttered, but from the position of the commentator who articulates the scene as it unfolds moment by moment before him.

With such a narrative form the story begins seemingly at an arbitrary point of insertion into the flow of life and it ends with the emphasis not on finality but on continuance: ‘War rages yet with the audacious Boythorn . . .’ (p. 907). Throughout the story in between the focus has switched from low life to high, from country to town, from a roof-top survey to penetration of the recesses of lawyers’ chambers, but the effect of the present tense—used continuously, not just, as is common, to render a moment of heightened tension—is to convey a sense of the multitudinous, ever-moving, confusingly varied life going on, and still going on, every moment of every day.

Counterpointed with this narrative is Esther’s. First-person narrative looks simple enough, but it is in practice very difficult. Henry James lamented the ‘terrible fluidity of self-revelation’, and shapelessness is only one of the formal problems inherent to the genre. Dickens had experimented with it most recently in *David Copperfield*, and the presentation of Esther through her own voice is a further exploration of the form he was later to perfect in *Great Expectations*. It is handled much more skilfully than is sometimes allowed.

Unlike the other narrative, Esther’s is not a presentation of ‘life’, but an act of recollection, a sequential disclosure of how one particular life developed and took its present form. Two time-scales are in play, which the readers have constantly to bear in mind as

they assess not only the facts as Esther presents them but also the language she habitually uses to do so. Within the time-frame of the events of *Bleak House* Esther's story climaxes in the discovery of her mother's identity and ends in her marriage to the right man. Within the sequence of events as they happened the former event was grossly improbable and the latter not a foregone conclusion, since Esther would certainly have honoured her pledge to Mr Jarndyce, had he required her to do so. The narrative rightly allows both of these events full weight to alarm and discomfit the reader, but we understand their place in a romantic narrative in which true love wins out in the end. But there is a richer narrative in a wider time-frame. Esther's story only really closes when she completes her narrative, writing as a married woman, the mother of two children, seven years after the events which 'the story' strictly comprises. Through the act of writing out her memories of being unwanted and unloved, through the revealing disclosures of her craving for affection and a place in the lives of others, she has come to understand in large part a story whose providential design has led her from being the irritatingly busy-bee housekeeper of one Bleak House plagued by the east wind, to being the happy mistress of another, irradiated by the mutual love and dependence of the family she longed for.

Working together, these two very different sorts of narrative continually challenge the reader's comprehension and assessment of the fictional world taking shape. Consider Chapter fourteen. Having confided to her new friend, Esther, that she is in love, Caddy Jellyby has taken her to meet her beloved's father, Mr Turveydrop. Now the two young women are walking to Lincoln's Inn: 'By this time we were come to Mr Krook's, whose private door stood open. There was a bill, pasted on the door-post, announcing a room to let on the second floor. It reminded Caddy to tell me as we proceeded up-stairs, that there had been a sudden death there, and an inquest . . .'. This passing reference to the 'sudden death' comes as a shock, since Chapters ten and eleven have consisted of nothing but the discovery of Nemo's corpse and the inquest, presented by the other narrator with such dramatic exuberance that it seems as if the whole of London is pressing through the door of the Sol's Arms to get into the inquest and learn the grisly details. Or take Chapter sixteen: 'In his chambers, Mr Tulkinghorn sits meditating an application to the nearest magistrate to-morrow morning for a warrant.

Gridley, a disappointed suitor, has been here to-day, and has been alarming. We are not to be put in bodily fear, and that ill-conditioned fellow shall be held to bail again.' In the previous chapter of *Esther's* narrative Mrs Blinder has wisely observed that 'A person is never known till a person is proved', and in her world of poverty and struggle Gridley has proved a kindly man, whose succour of the orphans contrasts him starkly with the noisy Christians, Mrs Pardiggle and Mr Chadband. In Mr Tulkinghorn's world, however, he is just an impediment to the smooth running of 'the system'. Just a few pages on there is a similar effect as Esther and Ada gaze down on Chesney Wold. They delight in the 'picturesque old house' and the 'fine park richly wooded', and are struck by the 'serene and peaceful hush', speaking of 'undisturbed repose', that seems to harmonize the whole. But we have already heard of the repose of Chesney Wold from the anonymous narrator in Chapter two. It so depresses Lady Dedlock that, 'bored to death', she flees to London and then to Paris—anywhere to get away from the monotony of the "place" in Lincolnshire'.

Such interaction of the two narratives, what W. J. Harvey in a classic essay defined as 'the effect of *pulsation*, of constant expansion and contraction, radiation and convergence' (*Character and the Novel* (1965), 95), presents on the one hand a teeming world whose inhabitants are mostly adrift and confused, and on the other the world as negotiated by one individual, who becomes increasingly strong as she recognizes—by instinct rather than reflection—that what matters is not the size of one's world, or its power or wealth, but whether one is securely bonded to others in it by the power of love. And perhaps one might add—at the risk of sounding sentimental and old-fashioned—that one of the reasons why *Bleak House* is so satisfying is that in creating this impression it endorses what readers feel is true for their own lives.

What anyone reading through Dickens's work chronologically might also sense is that the magisterial control exercised through the remarkable narrative structure in *Bleak House* serves a darker vision than in any previous novel. As it opens, 'Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes' forms a canopy over the city, noxious to all but certain forms of parasite. These flourish: lawyers in and around the Chancery suit of Jarndyce and Jarndyce; the 'respectable' Mr Vholes, whose desk as he raps it makes 'a

sound as if ashes were falling on ashes, and dust on dust', if only his doomed client could hear it; Grandfather Smallweed, whose distorted body could be crushed by a blow from athletic Trooper George, but who has him in his toils none the less; Mr Krook, who lives off refuse and sees a lovely head of hair as a cash commodity; Mr Chadband and Mrs Pardiggle, cancerous growths on the tree of Christian faith; and Mrs Jellyby, whose zeal for fertilizing far places prevents her from seeing the waste she is creating near at hand.

Against such figures as these, who roam with predatory confidence in their own territories, are ranged the innocents, victims, and wanderers—Neckett's orphaned children; the neglected Jellyby offspring; the Bagnet family and Trooper George; the wards in Chancery; crazy Miss Flite; the maidservant Guster; and the little boy she is kind to, Jo, at home in the worst of London's rookeries but without a home. A child vagrant, 'moved on' by mighty powers beyond his comprehension, the illiterate waif dies wasted by disease, having uttered his own epitaph: 'I never knowd what it was all about' (p. 676).

The modern reader cannot sense with the sharpness of Dickens's contemporaries the topicality that intensifies this dark imaginative coloration. As John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson established in their ground-breaking study of *Dickens at Work* (1957), *Bleak House* was 'a fable for 1852, related to a large extent in terms of the events, the types, and the social groups which the previous year had thrown into prominence' (p. 179). Not all events and types, but those which indicated decay or entropy, the obverse face of the image of national prosperity presented by the Great Exhibition of 1851—the Court of Chancery; the sanitary condition of the city; the housing of the poor; governmental inertia; vainglorious philanthropy and religious bigotry. Other scholars have piled up evidence that *Bleak House* bristles with topical references. A throw-away remark about Guster's 'amiable benefactor . . . resident at Tooting' takes us to the long-forgotten scandal of a baby farm in which 150 pauper infants died. A wonderfully funny passage on one of Mrs Pardiggle's children who has 'voluntarily enrolled himself in the Infant Bonds of Joy, and is pledged never, through life, to use tobacco in any form', turns out not to be Dickensian baroque but sober reporting of the extremes of the temperance movement. The account of the vile place where Nemo is given Christian burial is likewise barely exaggerated from what Dickens had learnt about the state of metropolitan graveyards.

But if even the most historically informed reader cannot respond today to the urgent topicality without scholarly help—and the notes aim to be as full as space permits—no one could fail to sense that if this was a ‘fable’ for the 1850s, it was not only a very sombre one, but one which insisted on its diagnostic structure being recognized. From the fetid air of Tom-all-alone’s, a property blighted by Chancery, Jo contracts disease. He dies, chivvied on, but not before he has infected Esther. The significance of this story (essentially a reworking of one from Carlyle’s *Past and Present*) is clear enough, but the third-person narrator insists on spelling it out:

There is not a drop of Tom’s corrupted blood but propagates infection and contagion somewhere. . . . There is not an atom of Tom’s slime, not a cubic inch of any pestilential gas in which he lives, not one obscenity or degradation about him, not an ignorance, not a wickedness, not a brutality of his committing, but shall work its retribution, through every order of society, up to the proudest of the proud, and to the highest of the high. Verily, what with tainting, plundering, and spoiling, Tom has his revenge (p. 654).

Such a crescendo may conjure up an Old Testament prophet foretelling destruction, but the language is wholly contemporary, one that penetrates most readily into the darker recesses of the mid-Victorian reader’s psyche. As Stallybrass and White have suggested in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (1986), there were few greater fears than that the invisible underclass breeding in the slums would reach out with its particular grasp: ‘fear . . . was encoded above all in terms of the fear of being touched. “Contagion” and “contamination” became the tropes through which city life was apprehended’ (p. 135).

The darkness of *Bleak House* must not be exaggerated. ‘I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things’—in the Preface Dickens reminds us that in some sense this novel is a Romance. The abandoned child, born in shame and brought up to believe that it would have been better if she had never been born, marries the dark, handsome doctor. Her capacity for making order and decency in a home, whether it be the chaotic dwelling of the Jellyby family or the grander house of John Jarndyce; her unobtrusive tendernesses to Charley or Caddy Jellyby; her loyalty to Ada and Richard—all of these personal virtues, circumscribed though their action might be by the possibilities determined by Esther’s gender, are not so much counterpointed with as opposed to all

the evidence of cruelty, neglect, chicanery, self-seeking, corruption, and self-righteousness that characterizes the world, and it is she who pens the novel's closing words.

In previous novels, however, vice has been punished and individual virtue has triumphed in energetic and cathartically satisfying ways. In *Dombey and Son* the treacherous Mr Carker is not just thwarted: he is cut to pieces by a train. As Mr Micawber unmasks Uriah Heep in *David Copperfield* he smashes him across the knuckles with a heavy ruler, recalling the highly gratifying thrashing administered by Nicholas Nickleby to Mr Squeers. All the tension that has built up as evil has consolidated its hold over the innocent and unwary is released in physical action and a dramatic expulsion of the wicked. Not in *Bleak House*. Here the climactic moments that release the strain and tension engendered by the story consist of the reader's gaze at the wasted body of Jo, or at the corpse of Lady Dedlock crouched near the grave of her lover, or in the knot of lawyers guffawing at the joke that costs have absorbed the whole substance of the Chancery suit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce. Yes, Esther Woodcourt, formerly Summerson, lives in the new Bleak House with her husband and children, but outside its walls nothing has changed or is likely to change. Each morning 'the great tee-totum is set up for its daily spin and whirl' (p. 237).

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## NOTE ON THE COMPOSITION AND TEXT

Between March 1852 and September 1853 *Bleak House* appeared in nineteen monthly numbers, the final one being a double number, each number costing one shilling. The ending of each part is marked in the present text by a row of asterisks. The publication breakdown is as follows:

<i>Date</i>	<i>Number of Part</i>	<i>Chapters</i>
<b>1852</b>		
March	1	1-4
April	2	5-7
May	3	8-10
June	4	11-13
July	5	14-16
August	6	17-19
September	7	20-2
October	8	23-5
November	9	26-9
December	10	30-2
<b>1853</b>		
January	11	33-5
February	12	36-8
March	13	39-42
April	14	43-6
May	15	47-9
June	16	50-3
July	17	54-6
August	18	57-9
September	19-20	60-7

At the conclusion of the parts in 1853 the novel was issued in book form with the usual dress of full volume publication: dedication, preface, contents page, list of plates and of errata. This, the first edition, provides the basis for this World's Classics text.

There is at present no authoritative text of *Bleak House*. The nearest to it is the Norton Critical Edition by George Ford and



Sylvère Monod (New York: W. W. Norton, 1977), to whose substantial and detailed exposition of textual problems I am much indebted. In preparing the present text I have been very conservative, making changes to the 1853 text only when the case for emendation is compelling or obvious. The errata noticed by Dickens have, of course, been corrected. Evident typographical slips—e.g. ‘setted’ instead of ‘settled’, or ‘thing’ instead of ‘think’—have been corrected. With less confidence, ‘villanous’ has been regarded as a slip and corrected. On a very few occasions manuscript readings have been used as a check when emendation seemed called for to eliminate unsatisfactory sense—e.g. on p. 524 where the 1853 text reads, ‘reaching another hand to put it on mine’ instead of ‘reaching out her hand . . .’. On two occasions Matthew Bagnet is referred to in the 1853 text as ‘Joseph’. This error has been made good. Verbs in the present tense narrative are twice put in the past tense in 1853. Consistency of course dictated that ‘remonstrated’ and ‘returned’ be restored to the present tense in this text. The spelling of the 1853 text has been retained. Dickens positively favoured the ‘-or’ spelling for words like ‘favored’, ‘parlor’, ‘humor’, and so on, but it is not clear yet what his views were on other details of orthography. That being so, a conservative policy has been followed here too. Spellings which will seem odd to the modern reader—e.g. ‘secrecy’, ‘gypsy’, ‘chimnies’—have been retained on the grounds that they are the spellings Dickens authorized in 1853 (no matter how much compositorial input there was in this matter), and that they will not in practice present the reader with any difficulty of comprehension.

#### THE NUMBER PLANS

Evidence of Dickens’s care over the construction of all his novels from *Dombey and Son* onwards survives in his plans for each monthly number. On the left hand of each of the nineteen sheets for *Bleak House* are found brief memoranda about incidents, significant phrases, and so on, and Dickens’s queries to himself about possible developments of characters and narrative incident. Opposite on the right hand, key elements in this material are ordered into chapter form. H. P. Sucksmith presented an edition of these working plans, together with an analysis of their significance, in ‘Dickens at Work on *Bleak House*: A Critical Examination of his Memoranda and Number Plans’, in *Renaissance and Modern Studies*, 9 (1965), 47–85. Susan Shatto also reproduces them in *The Companion to ‘Bleak House’*

(1988). The fullest presentation is that in Harry Stone, *Dickens' Working Notes for his Novels* (1987), where the text is printed opposite photo-facsimiles of the manuscript.

#### THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Each monthly number was enclosed within a pictorial wrapper, whose details (which remained the same over the nineteen months of publication) picked out elements of the novel's overall design. A specimen is reproduced before the 1853 title-page in this volume. The monthly numbers also contained two illustration plates, with instructions as to where they were to be placed if the numbers were eventually to be bound as a single volume. These plates, of course, appeared in their appropriate places in the 1853 single-volume edition. All the illustrations were the work of Hablot Knight Browne (1815-82), who worked under the name of 'Phiz'. At their best Browne's designs were much more than decorative top-dressing. Guided by the novelist, but working within the iconographic tradition of graphic satire which he, as a professional artist, knew well, 'Phiz' sought to interpret and to complement the text. For detailed discussions of Dickens's long and fruitful partnership with Browne, see Michael Steig, *Dickens and Phiz* (1978), and Jane R. Cohen, *Charles Dickens and his Original Illustrators* (1980). Though ranging more widely, J. R. Harvey, *Victorian Novelists and their Illustrators* (1970) also deals well with Dickens and Browne.

Perhaps Browne's most striking contribution to *Bleak House* is the ten so-called 'dark plates', produced by ruling the entire etched plate with a series of fine parallel lines. These illustrations complement the sombre tone of the novel superbly, but they present the editor with a problem. While it is not possible to reproduce the fineness of the originals without use of sophisticated reproduction techniques, nevertheless they are included in this edition, within the limitations of paperback printing processes. Readers who cannot consult a first edition of *Bleak House* are invited to look at the books mentioned above, all of which have some good reproductions of Browne's plates.

# A CHRONOLOGY OF CHARLES DICKENS

Dickens's major fictions are indicated by **bold type**.

<i>Life</i>	<i>Historical and Cultural Background</i>
1809 (13 June) John Dickens, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office, marries Elizabeth Barrow.	
1810 (28 Oct.) Frances Dickens ('Fanny') born.	
1811	Prince of Wales becomes Prince Regent. W. M. Thackeray born. Jane Austen, <i>Sense and Sensibility</i>
1812 (7 Feb.) Charles Dickens born at Mile End Terrace, Landport, Portsea (now 393 Old Commercial Road, Portsmouth).	Luddite riots. War between Britain and the United States. Napoleon's retreat from Moscow. Robert Browning and Edward Lear born. Lord Byron, <i>Childe Harold's Pilgrimage</i> , i and ii (completed 1818)
1813	Robert Southey becomes Poet Laureate. Napoleon defeated at Leipzig. Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> ; Byron, <i>The Bride of Abydos</i> , <i>The Giaour</i> ; P. B. Shelley, <i>Queen Mab</i>
1814 Birth (Mar.) and death (Sept.) of Alfred Allen Dickens.	Napoleon exiled to Elba. Austen, <i>Mansfield Park</i> ; Sir Walter Scott, <i>Waverley</i> ; William Wordsworth, <i>The Excursion</i>
1815 (1 Jan.) Dickens family moves to London.	Escape of Napoleon; Battle of Waterloo. Anthony Trollope born. Thomas Robert Malthus, <i>An Inquiry into Rent</i> ; Scott, <i>Guy Mannering</i>
1816 (Apr.) Letitia Dickens born.	Charlotte Brontë born. Austen, <i>Emma</i> ; S. T. Coleridge, <i>Christabel and Other Poems</i> ; Thomas Love Peacock, <i>Headlong Hall</i> ; Scott, <i>The Antiquary</i> , <i>Old Mortality</i>
1817 (Apr.) Dickens family settles in Chatham.	Jane Austen dies. Byron, <i>Manfred</i> ; Coleridge, <i>Biographia Literaria</i> ; John Keats, <i>Poems</i> ; Robert Owen, <i>Report to the Committee on the Poor Law</i> ; Scott, <i>Rob Roy</i>

- 1818 Emily Brontë born.  
Austen, *Northanger Abbey*, *Persuasion* (posth.); Keats, *Endymion*; Peacock, *Nightmare Abbey*; Scott, *The Heart of Midlothian*; Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*
- 1819 (Sept.) Harriet Dickens born. Princess Victoria born. Peterloo 'Massacre' (11 deaths). A. H. Clough, Mary Anne Evans (George Eliot), Charles Kingsley, John Ruskin born.  
Byron, *Don Juan*, i-ii (continued till 1824); Scott, *The Bride of Lammermoor*; Wordsworth, *Peter Bell*, *The Waggoner*
- 1820 Frederick Dickens ('Fred') born. Death of George III; accession of Prince Regent as George IV. Trial of Queen Caroline. Anne Brontë born.  
John Clare, *Poems, Descriptive of Rural Life*; Keats, *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St Agnes and Other Poems*; Malthus, *Principles of Political Economy*; Charles Robert Maturin, *Melmoth the Wanderer*; P. B. Shelley, *The Cenci*, *Prometheus Unbound*; Scott, *Ivanhoe*
- 1821 CD goes to school run by William Giles. Greek War of Independence starts. Napoleon dies. Keats dies.  
Clare, *The Village Minstrel and Other Poems*; Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*; Pierce Egan, *Life in London*; Thomas Moore, *Irish Melodies*; Scott, *Kenilworth*; P. B. Shelley, *Adonais*; Southey, *A Vision of Judgement*
- 1822 (Mar.) Alfred Lamert Dickens born; Harriet Dickens dies. CD stays in Chatham when family moves to Camden Town, London; rejoins them later, but his education is discontinued. Shelley dies. Matthew Arnold born.  
Byron, *The Vision of Judgement*
- 1823 (Dec.) Family moves to 4 Gower Street North, where Mrs Dickens fails in her attempt to run a school. Building of present British Museum begins. Coventry Patmore born.  
Charles Lamb, *Essays of Elia*; Scott, *Quentin Durward*

- 1824 (late Jan. or early Feb.) CD sent to work at Jonathan Warren's blacking-warehouse, Hungerford Stairs; (20 Feb.) John Dickens arrested and imprisoned for debt in the Marshalsea till 28 May; CD in lodgings; family moves to Somers Town.
- 1825 (9 Mar.) John Dickens retires from Navy Pay Office with a pension; (Mar./Apr.) CD leaves Warren's and recommences his schooling at Wellington House Academy.
- 1826 John Dickens works as Parliamentary correspondent for *The British Press*.
- 1827 (Mar.) Family evicted for non-payment of rates; CD becomes a solicitor's clerk; (Nov.) Augustus Dickens born.
- 1828 John Dickens works as reporter for *The Morning Herald*.
- 1829 CD works at Doctors' Commons as a shorthand reporter.
- 1830 (8 Feb.) Admitted as reader to British Museum; (May) falls in love with Maria Beadnell.
- National Gallery founded in London. Repeal of acts forbidding formation of trades unions. Byron dies. Wilkie Collins born.
- James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*; Walter Savage Landor, *Imaginary Conversations* (completed 1829); Scott, *Redgauntlet*
- Stockton–Darlington railway opens. Hazlitt, *Table-Talk*, *The Spirit of the Age*; Alessandro Manzoni, *I promessi sposi*
- University College London and Royal Zoological Society founded. J. Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*; Benjamin Disraeli, *Vivian Grey* (completed 1827); Mary Shelley, *The Last Man*
- Battle of Navarino. William Blake dies. Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar*; De Quincey, 'On Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts'
- Duke of Wellington PM. George Meredith, D. G. Rossetti, Leo Tolstoy born. Pierce Egan, *Finish to the Adventures of Tom, Jerry and Logic*
- Catholic Emancipation Act; Robert Peel establishes Metropolitan Police.
- George IV dies; William IV succeeds. Opening of Manchester–Liverpool Railway. July revolution in France; accession of Louis-Philippe as emperor. Greece independent. Hazlitt dies. Christina Rossetti born. William Cobbett, *Rural Rides*; Sir Charles Lyell, *Principles of Geology* (completed 1832); Alfred Tennyson, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical*

- 1831 Composes poem 'The Bill of Fare'; starts work as reporter for *The Mirror of Parliament*. Reform Bill. Major cholera epidemic. Michael Faraday's electro-magnetic current. Peacock, *Crotchet Castle*; Edgar Allan Poe, *Poems*; Stendhal, *Le Rouge et le noir*
- 1832 Becomes Parliamentary reporter on the *True Sun*. Lord Grey PM. First Reform Act. Jeremy Bentham, Crabbe, Goethe, and Scott die. Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (Lewis Carroll) born. Goethe, *Faust*, ii; Mary Russell Mitford, *Our Village*; Tennyson, *Poems*; Frances Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*
- 1833 Concludes relationship with Maria Beadnell; first story, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk' (later called 'Mr Minns and his Cousin') published in *Monthly Magazine*. First steamship crosses the Atlantic. Abolition of slavery in all British colonies (from Aug. 1834). Factory Act forbids employment of children under 9. First government grant for schools. Oxford Movement starts. Robert Browning, *Pauline*; John Henry Newman, 'Lead, Kindly Light' and (with others) the first *Tracts for the Times*
- 1834 (Jan.-Feb.) Six more stories appear in *Monthly Magazine*; (Aug.) meets Catherine Hogarth; becomes reporter on *The Morning Chronicle*, which publishes (Sept.-Dec.) first five 'Street Sketches'; (Dec.) moves to Furnival's Inn, Holborn. Robert Owen's Grand National Trades Union. 'Tolpuddle Martyrs' transported to Australia. Lord Melbourne PM; then Peel. Workhouses set up under Poor Law Amendment Act. Coleridge, Lamb, and Malthus die. William Morris born. Balzac, *Eugénie Grandet*; Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*; Harriet Martineau, *Illustrations of Political Economy*
- 1835 (?May) Engaged to Catherine Hogarth ('Kate'); publishes stories, sketches, and scenes in *Monthly Magazine*, *Evening Chronicle*, and *Bell's Life in London*. Lord Melbourne PM. Municipal Corporations Act reforms local government. Cobbett and James Hogg die. Browning, *Paracelsus*; Alexis de Tocqueville, *La Démocratie en Amérique*

- 1836 (Feb.) Takes larger chambers in Furnival's Inn; (8 Feb.) *Sketches by Boz, First Series* published; (31 Mar.) first monthly number of *Pickwick Papers* issued; (2 Apr.) marries Catherine Hogarth; (June) publishes *Sunday Under Three Heads*; leaves the *Morning Chronicle* (Nov.); (17 Dec.) *Sketches by Boz, Second Series*; (?Dec.) meets John Forster.
- 1837 (1 Jan.) First monthly number of *Bentley's Miscellany*, edited by CD, published; (6 Jan.) birth of first child, Charles ('Charley'); (31 Jan.) serialization of *Oliver Twist* begins in *Bentley's*; (3 Mar.) *Is She His Wife?* produced at the St James's; (Apr.) family moves to 48 Doughty Street; (7 May) sudden death of his sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, at 17; CD suspends publication of *Pickwick Papers* and *Oliver Twist* for a month; (Aug.–Sept.) first family holiday in Broadstairs; (17 Nov.) *Pickwick Papers* published in one volume.
- 1838 (Jan.–Feb.) Visits Yorkshire schools with Hablot Browne ('Phiz'); (6 Mar.) second child, Mary ('Mamie'), born; (31 Mar.) monthly serialization of *Nicholas Nickleby* begins; (9 Nov.) *Oliver Twist* published in three volumes.
- Beginning of Chartism. First London train (to Greenwich). Forms of telegraph used in England and America. Augustus Pugin's *Contrasts* advocates Gothic style of architecture.
- Browning, 'Porphyria's Lover'; Nicolai Gogol, *The Government Inspector*; Frederick Marryat, *Mr Midshipman Easy*
- William IV dies; Queen Victoria succeeds. Carlyle, *The French Revolution*; Isaac Pitman, *Stenographic Short-Hand*; J. G. Lockhart, *Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter Scott*
- Isambard Kingdom Brunel's *Great Western* inaugurates regular steamship service between England and USA. London–Birmingham railway completed. Irish Poor Law. Anti-Corn Law League founded by Richard Cobden. People's Charter advocates universal suffrage.
- Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*; John Ruskin, *The Poetry of Architecture*; R. S. Surtees, *Jorrocks's Jaunts and Jollities*; Wordsworth, *Sonnets*

- 1839 (31 Jan.) Resigns editorship of *Bentley's*; (23 Oct.) *Nicholas Nickleby* published in one volume; (29 Oct.) third child, Kate ("Katey"), born; (Dec.) family moves to 1 Devonshire Terrace, Regent's Park.
- 1840 (4 Apr.) First weekly issue of *Master Humphrey's Clock* (also published monthly) in which *The Old Curiosity Shop* is serialized from 25 Apr.; (1 June) moves family to Broadstairs; (11 Oct.) returns to London; (15 Oct.) *Master Humphrey's Clock*, Vol. I published.
- 1841 (8 Feb.) Fourth child, Walter, born; *The Old Curiosity Shop* concluded and *Barnaby Rudge* commenced in *Master Humphrey's Clock* (6 and 13 Feb.); operated on for fistula (without anaesthetic). *Master Humphrey's Clock*, Vols. II and III published (Apr. and Dec.); one-volume editions of *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* published (15 Dec.).
- 1842 (Jan.–June) CD and Catherine visit North America; (Aug.–Sept.) with family in Broadstairs; (Oct.–Nov.) visits Cornwall with Forster and others; (19 Oct.) *American Notes* published; (31 Dec.) first monthly number of *Martin Chuzzlewit* published.
- Opium War between Britain and China. Chartist riots. Louis Daguerre and W. H. Fox Talbot independently develop photography. Carlyle, *Chartism*; Darwin, *Journal of Researches into the Geology and Natural History of . . . Countries Visited by HMS Beagle*; Harriet Martineau, *Deerbrook*.
- Queen Victoria marries Prince Albert. Maoris yield sovereignty of New Zealand to Queen Victoria by Treaty of Waitangi. Rowland Hill introduces penny postage. Fanny Burney dies.
- Peel PM. Hong Kong and New Zealand proclaimed British. *Punch* founded. W. H. Ainsworth, *Old St Paul's*; Browning, *Pippa Passes*; Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*; R. W. Emerson, *Essays*. Dion Boucicault's *London Assurance* acted.
- End of wars with China and Afghanistan. Mines Act: no underground work by women or by children under 10. Chadwick report on sanitary condition of the working classes. Chartist riots. Copyright Act. Stendhal dies. Browning, *Dramatic Lyrics*; Gogol, *Dead Souls*; Thomas Babington Macaulay, *Lays of Ancient Rome*; Tennyson *Poems*.



- 1843 (19 Dec.) *A Christmas Carol* published.
- 1844 (15 Jan.) Fifth child, Francis, born; (16 July) takes family to Genoa; one-volume edition of *Martin Chuzzlewit* published; (30 Nov.–8 Dec.) returns to London to read *The Chimes* (published 16 Dec.) to his friends.
- 1845 Travels in Italy with Catherine before returning to London from Genoa; (20 Sept.) directs and acts in first performance of the Amateur Players, Ben Jonson's *Every Man In His Humour*; (28 Oct.) sixth child, Alfred, born; (20 Dec.) *The Cricket on the Hearth* published.
- 1846 (21 Jan.–9 Feb.) Edits *The Daily News*; (May) *Pictures from Italy* published; (31 May) leaves with family for Switzerland via the Rhine; (11 June) settles in Lausanne; (30 Sept.) monthly serialization of *Dombey and Son* commences; (16 Nov.) family moves to Paris; (Dec.) *The Battle of Life* published.
- British annexation of Sind and Natal.  
I. K. Brunel's *Great Britain*, the first ocean screw-steamer, launched. Southey dies; Wordsworth becomes Poet Laureate.  
Carlyle, *Past and Present*; Thomas Hood, 'Song of the Shirt'; Macaulay *Essays*; J. S. Mill, *System of Logic*; Ruskin, *Modern Painters*, i (completed 1860)
- Factory Act restricts working hours of women and children. 'Rochdale Pioneers' found first co-operative society. Ragged School Union.  
William Barnes, *Poems of Rural Life in the Dorset Dialect*; E. B. Barrett, *Poems*; Disraeli, *Coningsby*; Dumas, *Les Trois Mousquetaires*; A. W. Kinglake, *Eöthen*
- Disappearance of Sir John Franklin's expedition to find a North-West Passage from the Atlantic to the Pacific. War with Sikhs. 1845–9: potato famine in Ireland: 1 million die; 8 million emigrate. Thomas Hood and Sydney Smith die.  
Browning, *Dramatic Romances and Lyrics*; Disraeli, *Sybil*; Engels, *Condition of the Working Class in England*; Poe, *The Raven and other Poems, Tales of Mystery and Imagination*
- Corn Laws repealed; Peel resigns; Lord John Russell PM. Ether first used as a general anaesthetic. Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett marry secretly and leave for Italy.  
Balzac, *La Cousine Bette*; *Poems by Currer, Ellis and Acton Bell* (i.e. Charlotte, Emily, and Anne Brontë); Edward Lear, *Book of Nonsense*

- 1847 (28 Feb.) Returns from Paris; (18 Apr.) seventh child, Sydney, is born; (June–Sept.) with family at Broadstairs; (27–8 July) performs in Manchester and Liverpool with the Amateurs; (Nov.) Urania Cottage, Miss Coutts's 'Home for Homeless Women', in whose administration CD is involved, opened in Shepherd's Bush.
- 1848 (12 Apr.) One-volume edition of *Dombey and Son* published; (May–July) the Amateurs perform in London, Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Glasgow; (2 Sept.) sister Fanny dies; (19 Dec.) *The Haunted Man* published.
- 1849 (16 Jan.) Eighth child, Henry ('Harry'), born; (30 Apr.) monthly serialization of *David Copperfield* begins; (July–Oct.) with family at Bonchurch, Isle of Wight.
- 1850 (30 Mar.) First issue of *Household Words*, a weekly journal edited and contributed to by CD; (16 Aug.) ninth child, Dora, born; (Aug.–Oct.) at Broadstairs; (15 Nov.) one-volume edition of *David Copperfield* published.
- Factory Act limits working day for women and young persons to 10 hours. James Simpson discovers anaesthetic properties of chloroform. Louis Napoleon escapes to England from prison. A. Brontë, *Agnes Grey*; C. Brontë, *Jane Eyre*; E. Brontë, *Wuthering Heights*; Tennyson, *The Princess*. J. M. Morton's *Box and Cox* acted
- Outbreak of cholera in London. Public Health Act. End of Chartist Movement. Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood founded. 'The Year of Revolutions' in Europe. Louis Napoleon becomes President of France. Emily Brontë, Branwell Brontë die. A. Brontë, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; Elizabeth Gaskell, *Mary Barton*; Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*; J. S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*; Thackeray, *Vanity Fair*
- Revolt against the British in Montreal. Punjab annexed. Rome proclaimed a republic; later taken by the French. Suppression of Communist riots in Paris. Californian gold rush. Anne Brontë, E. A. Poe die. C. Brontë, *Shirley*; Sir John Herschel, *Outlines of Astronomy*; Macaulay, *History of England*, i–ii (unfinished at his death, in 1859); Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*
- Restoration of Roman Catholic hierarchy in England. Factory Act: 60-hour week for women and young persons. Public Libraries Act. Dover–Calais telegraph cable laid. Balzac and Wordsworth die. Tennyson becomes Poet Laureate. E. B. Browning, 'Sonnets from the Portuguese', in *Poems*; Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter*; Tennyson, *In Memoriam A.H.H.*; Thackeray, *The History of Pendennis*; Wordsworth, *The Prelude* (posth.)

- 1851 (25 Jan.) *A Child's History of England* starts serialization in *Household Words*; (31 Mar.) John Dickens dies; (14 Apr.) Dora dies suddenly, aged 8 months; (May) directs and acts in Bulwer-Lytton's *Not So Bad as We Seem* before the Queen, in aid of the Guild of Literature and Art; (May–Oct.) last family holiday at Broadstairs; (Nov.) moves to Tavistock House.
- 1852 (28 Feb.) Monthly serialization of *Bleak House* begins; (14 Apr.) birth of tenth child, Edward ('Plorn'); (Feb.–Sept.) provincial performances of *Not So Bad As We Seem*; (July–Oct.) family stays in Dover.
- 1853 (June–Oct.) Family stays in Boulogne; (12 Sept.) one-volume edition of *Bleak House* published; (Oct.–Dec.) in Switzerland and Italy with Wilkie Collins and Augustus Egg; (10 Dec.) *A Child's History of England* concluded in *Household Words*; (27–30 Dec.) gives public readings of *A Christmas Carol* and *The Cricket on the Hearth* in Birmingham.
- 1854 (28–30 Jan.) Visits Preston; (1 Apr.–12 Aug.) weekly serialization of *Hard Times* in *Household Words*; (June–Oct.) family stays in Boulogne; (7 Aug.) *Hard Times* published in one volume; (Dec.) reads *A Christmas Carol* in Reading, Sherborne, and Bradford.
- Great Exhibition in the Crystal Palace, Hyde Park. Fall of French Second Republic. Gold found in Australia. George Borrow, *Lavengro*; Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor*; Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*; George Meredith, *Poems*; Ruskin, *The King of the Golden River*, *The Stones of Venice*, i (completed 1853)
- Lord Derby becomes PM; then Lord Aberdeen. Louis Napoleon proclaimed Emperor Napoleon III. 1852–6: David Livingstone crosses Africa. Tom Moore and the Duke of Wellington die. M. P. Roget, *Roget's Thesaurus of English Words and Phrases*; Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; Thackeray, *Henry Esmond*
- Arnold, *Poems*; C. Brontë, *Villette*; Gaskell, *Ruth*, *Cranford*; Surtees, *Mr Sponge's Sporting Career*
- Reform of the Civil Service. France and Britain join Turkey against Russia in the Crimean War; battles of Alma, Balaclava, Inkerman and siege of Sebastopol; Florence Nightingale goes to Scutari. Patmore, *The Angel in the House*, i (completed 1862); Tennyson, 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'; H. D. Thoreau, *Walden*

1855 (Feb.) Meets Maria Winter (née Beadnell) again; (27 Mar.) reads *A Christmas Carol* in Ashford, Kent; (June) directs and acts in Collins's *The Lighthouse* at Tavistock House; family stays in Folkestone, where CD reads *A Christmas Carol* on 5 Oct.; (15 Oct.) settles family in Paris; (1 Dec.) monthly serialization of *Little Dorrit* begins; (Dec.) reads *A Christmas Carol* at Peterborough and Sheffield.

1856 (Mar.) Buys Gad's Hill Place, Kent; (29 Apr.) family returns from Paris; (June–Sept.) family stays in Boulogne.

1857 (Jan.) Directs and acts in Collins's *The Frozen Deep* at Tavistock House; (13 Feb.) moves to Gad's Hill Place; (30 May) *Little Dorrit* published in one volume; Walter leaves for service with the East India Company; (June–July) visited by Hans Andersen; gives three public readings of *A Christmas Carol* (July–Aug.) performances of *The Frozen Deep* in London and, with Ellen Ternan, her sister and mother in the cast, in Manchester.

Lord Palmerston PM. Newspaper tax abolished. *Daily Telegraph*, first London penny newspaper, founded. Fall of Sebastopol. 1855–6: G. J. Mendel discovers laws of heredity. Charlotte Brontë and Mary Russell Mitford die. R. Browning, *Men and Women*; Gaskell, *North and South*; Longfellow, *Hiawatha*; Tennyson, *Maud and other Poems*; Thackeray, *The Newcomes*, *The Rose and the Ring*; A. Trollope *The Warden*; Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

End of Crimean War. Britain annexes Oudh; Sir Henry Bessemer patents his steel-making process. Synthetic colours invented. Henry Irving's first stage appearance. National Gallery founded in London.

Mrs Craik (Dinah Maria Mulock), *John Halifax, Gentleman*; Flaubert, *Madame Bovary*

Divorce courts established in England. Arnold becomes Professor of Poetry at Oxford. Museum—later, the Victoria and Albert Museum—opened in South Kensington. Beginning of Indian mutiny; siege and relief of Lucknow. Baudelaire, *Les Fleurs du mal*; C. Brontë, *The Professor* (posth.); E. B. Browning, *Aurora Leigh*; Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*; Hughes, *Tom Brown's Schooldays*; Livingstone, *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa*; A. Trollope, *Barchester Towers*

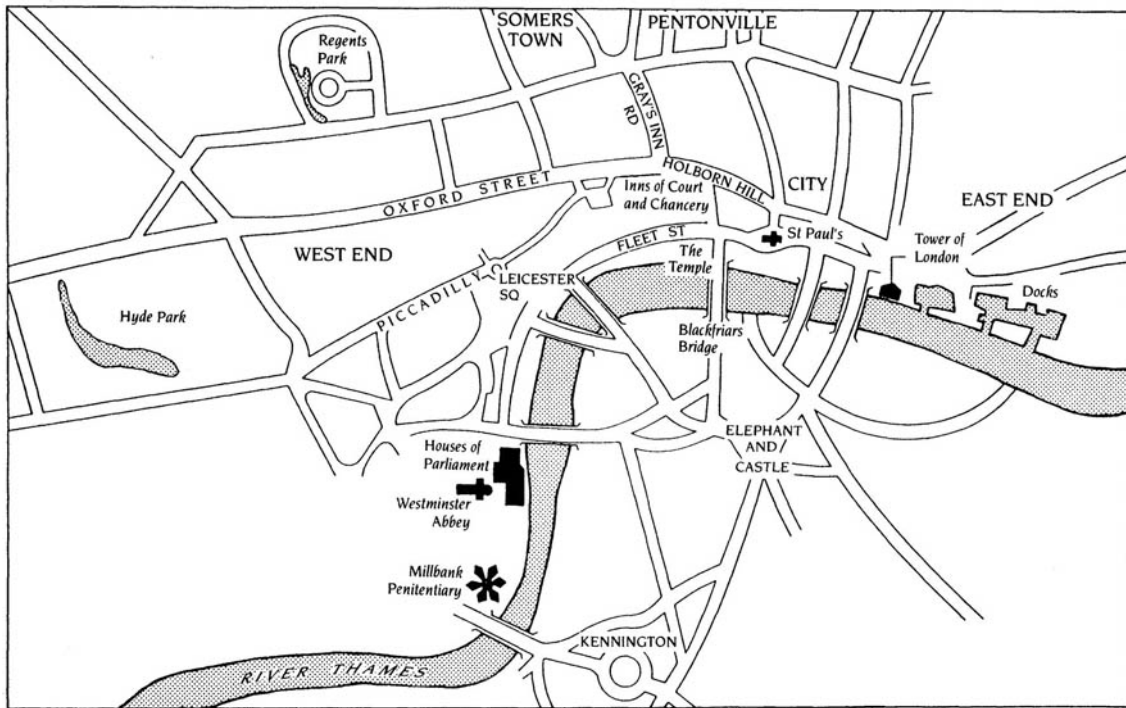
- 1858 (19 Jan.; 26 Mar; 15 Apr.) Reads *A Christmas Carol* for charity; (29 Apr.–22 July) series of 17 public readings; (May) separation from Catherine; (7 and 12 June) publishes 'personal' statement about it in *The Times* and *Household Words*; (Aug.) *Reprinted Pieces* published; (Aug.–Nov.) first provincial reading tour, extending to Ireland and Scotland (85 readings); (24 Dec.) first series of London Christmas readings begins.
- 1859 (30 Apr.) Begins to edit *All the Year Round* in which *A Tale of Two Cities* appears weekly till 26 November; (28 May) final number of *Household Words*; (Oct.) gives 14 readings on second provincial tour; (21 Nov.) *A Tale of Two Cities* published in one volume; (24 Dec.) begins series of three London Christmas readings.
- 1860 (17 July) Katey marries Charles Collins; (27 July) CD's brother Alfred dies, at 38; (21 Aug.) sells Tavistock House; (Oct.) settles permanently at Gad's Hill; (1 Dec.) weekly serialization of *Great Expectations* begins in *All the Year Round*, continuing till 3 Aug. 1861.
- 1861 (Mar.–Apr.) Series of 6 London readings; (6 July) *Great Expectations* published in three volumes; (Oct.–Jan. 1862) gives 46 readings on third provincial tour; (19 Nov.) Charley marries Elizabeth ('Bessie') Evans; CD refuses to be present.
- Derby PM. Indian Mutiny suppressed; powers of East India Company transferred to the Crown. Queen Victoria proclaimed Empress of India. Launch of I. K. Brunel's *Great Eastern*. Darwin and A. R. Wallace give joint paper on evolution. R. M. Ballantyne, *The Coral Island*; Clough, *Amours de Voyage*; Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*; A. Trollope, *Doctor Thorne*.
- Palmerston PM. Franco-Austrian War: Austrians defeated at Solferino. War of Italian Liberation. The abolitionist John Brown hanged for treason at Charlestown, Virginia. Thomas de Quincey, Leigh Hunt, and Lord Macaulay die. Darwin, *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection*; Eliot, *Adam Bede*; Edward Fitzgerald, *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám*; J. S. Mill, *On Liberty*; Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help*; Tennyson, *Idylls of the King*.
- Abraham Lincoln elected US president; Carolina secedes from the Union. Collins, *The Woman in White*; Eliot, *The Mill on the Floss*; Faraday, *Various Forces of Matter*. Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn* acted.
- Abolition of Paper Tax. Prince Albert dies. Victor Emmanuel becomes King of Italy. Serfdom abolished in Russia. Outbreak of American Civil War. E. B. Browning and A. H. Clough die. Mrs Isabella Mary Beeton, *Book of Household Management*; Eliot, *Silas Marner*; J. S. Mill, *Utilitarianism*; F. T. Palgrave, *The Golden Treasury*; Reade, *The Cloister and the Hearth*; A. Trollope, *Framley Parsonage*; Mrs Henry Wood, *East Lynne*.

- 1862 (Feb.–May) Exchanges Gad's Hill Place for a house in London but also uses rooms at the office of *All the Year Round*; (Mar.–June) London readings; (June–Oct.) makes several visits to France; (Oct.) settles Mamie and her aunt, Georgina Hogarth, in Paris; (Dec.) returns to Gad's Hill for Christmas.
- 1863 (Jan.) Gives 3 readings for charity at British Embassy in Paris; (Feb. and Aug.) makes further visits to France; (Mar.–May) London readings; (13 Sept.) Elizabeth Dickens dies; (31 Dec.) Walter dies in Calcutta, India, aged 22.
- 1864 (1 May) Monthly serialization of *Our Mutual Friend* begins; (27 June–6 July) probably in France; (Nov.) in France.
- 1865 (Feb.–June) Three trips to France; (Feb.–Apr.) first attack of lameness from swollen left foot; (29 May) sees Alfred off to Australia; (9 June) returning from France with Ellen Ternan and her mother, is in fatal railway accident at Staplehurst, Kent; (Sept.) visit to France; (20 Oct.) *Our Mutual Friend* published in two volumes.
- Famine among Lancashire cotton workers. Bismarck becomes Chancellor of Prussia. Thoreau dies. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*; Hugo, *Les Misérables*; Meredith, *Modern Love*; Christina Rossetti, *Goblin Market and Other Poems*; Herbert Spencer, *First Principles*; Turgenev, *Fathers and Sons*.
- Beginning of work on London underground railway. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address; emancipation of US slaves. Thackeray and Frances Trollope die. Eliot, *Romola*; Margaret Oliphant, *Salem Chapel*.
- Karl Marx organizes first Socialist International in London. Louis Pasteur publishes his theory of germs as the cause of disease. International Red Cross founded. John Clare, W. S. Landor, R. S. Surtees, and Hawthorne die. Sheridan Le Fanu, *Uncle Silas*; Newman, *Apologia pro Vita Sua*; Tennyson, *Enoch Arden and Other Poems*; Trollope, *The Small House at Allington, Can You Forgive Her?*
- Russell PM. William Booth founds Christian Mission in Whitechapel, known from 1878 as the Salvation Army. Completion of transatlantic cable. End of American Civil War. Abraham Lincoln assassinated. Elizabeth Gaskell dies. Arnold, *Essays in Criticism, First Series*; Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*.

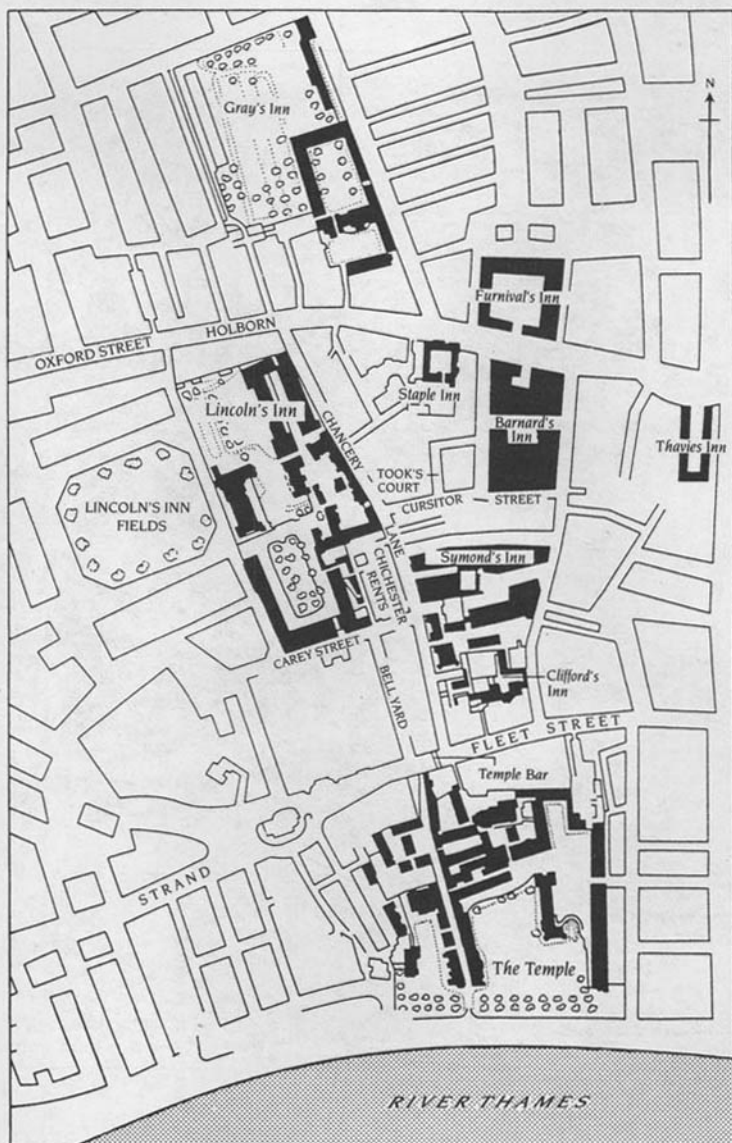
- 1866 (Apr.–June) Readings in London and the provinces; (June) CD's brother Augustus Dickens dies in Chicago, aged 38.
- 1867 (Jan.–May) Readings in England and Ireland; (Nov.) begins American reading tour in Boston; (Dec.) *No Thoroughfare*, written jointly with Collins, published in *All the Year Round*.
- 1868 (22 Apr.) Sails home from New York, having cancelled planned readings in the USA and Canada; (26 Sept.) Plorn sails to Australia to join Alfred; (Oct.) Harry enters Trinity College, Cambridge; CD begins Farewell Reading Tour; CD's brother Fred dies, aged 48.
- 1869 (5 Jan.) Introduces 'Sikes and Nancy' into his repertoire; (22 Apr.) serious illness forces CD to break off reading tour after 74 readings.
- 1870 (Jan.–Mar.) Farewell readings in London; (9 Mar.) received by Queen Victoria; (1 Apr.) first of six completed numbers of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* issued; (9 June) dies, aged 58, following a cerebral haemorrhage, at Gad's Hill; (14 June) buried in Westminster Abbey.
- Derby PM. Second Reform Bill. Fenians active in Ireland: Habeas Corpus suspended. Elizabeth Garrett opens dispensary for women. Dr T. J. Barnardo opens home for destitute children in London's East End. Peacock and John Keble die.
- Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*; Eliot, *Felix Holt, the Radical*; Gaskell, *Wives and Daughters* (posth., unfinished); Swinburne, *Poems and Ballads*, First Series
- Fenian outrages in England. Second Reform Act. Factory Act. Joseph Lister practises antiseptic surgery. Building of Royal Albert Hall commenced.
- Arnold, 'Dover Beach', 'Thyrsis', in *New Poems*; Walter Bagehot, *The English Constitution*; Henrik Ibsen, *Peer Gynt*; Karl Marx, *Das Kapital*, i; A. Trollope, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*; Emile Zola, *Thérèse Raquin*
- Disraeli PM; Gladstone PM. Trades' Union Congress founded. Basutoland annexed.
- Louisa May Alcott, *Little Women*; Collins, *The Moonstone*; Queen Victoria, *Leaves from a Journal of Our Life in the Highlands*
- Girton College for Women founded. Suez Canal opened.
- Arnold, *Culture and Anarchy*; R. D. Blackmore, *Lorna Doone*; R. Browning, *The Ring and the Book*; J. S. Mill, *On the Subjection of Women*; Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*; A. Trollope, *Phineas Finn*, *He Knew He Was Right*; Paul Verlaine, *Fêtes galantes*
- Gladstone's Irish Land Act. Married Women's Property Act gives wives the right to their own earnings. Elementary Education Act for England and Wales. Outbreak of Franco-Prussian War: Napoleon III defeated and exiled; siege of Paris (till 1871).
- E. C. Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*; D. G. Rossetti, *Poems*

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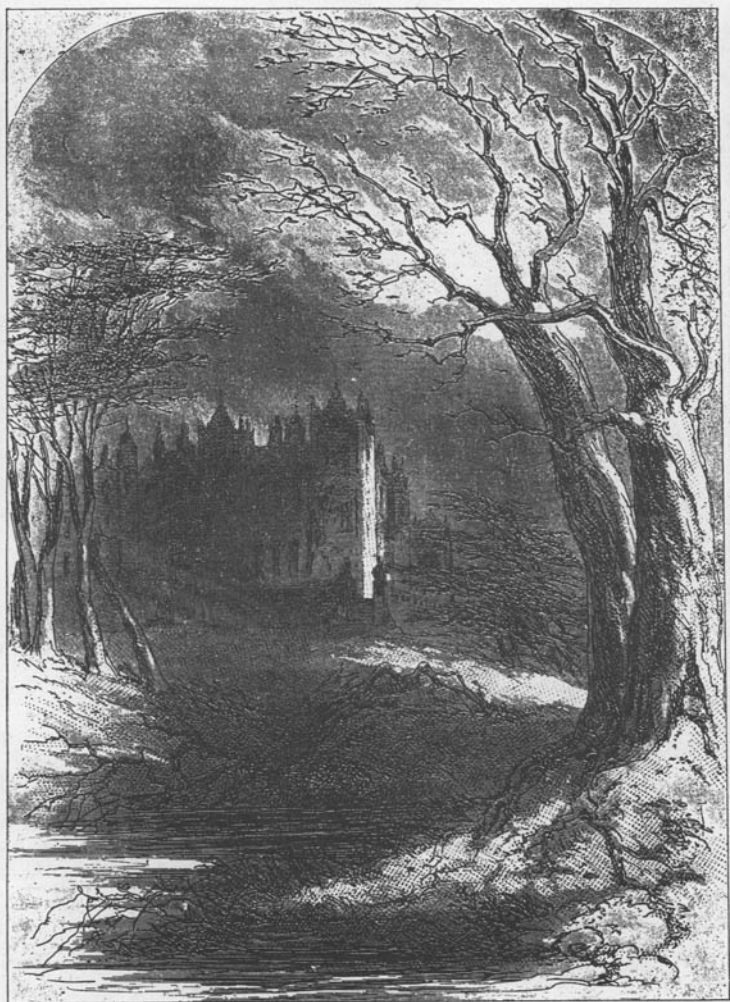




A Map of London in the 1850s



A Map of the Inns of Court and Inns of Chancery in the 1850s



Frontispiece

# BLEEK HOUSE

BY

CHARLES DICKENS.



LONDON:

BRADBURY & EVANS, BOUVERIE STREET.

1853.

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DEDICATED,  
AS A REMEMBRANCE OF OUR FRIENDLY UNION,  
TO MY COMPANIONS  
IN THE  
GUILD OF LITERATURE AND ART.\*

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## PREFACE

A FEW months ago, on a public occasion, a Chancery Judge\* had the kindness to inform me, as one of a company of some hundred and fifty men and women not laboring under any suspicions of lunacy, that the Court of Chancery, though the shining subject of much popular prejudice (at which point I thought the Judge's eye had a cast in my direction), was almost immaculate. There had been, he admitted, a trivial blemish or so in its rate of progress, but this was exaggerated, and had been entirely owing to the 'parsimony of the public;' which guilty public, it appeared, had been until lately bent in the most determined manner on by no means enlarging the number of Chancery Judges appointed—I believe by Richard the Second, but any other King will do as well.

This seemed to me too profound a joke to be inserted in the body of this book, or I should have restored it to Conversation Kenge or to Mr Vholes, with one or other of whom I think it must have originated. In such mouths I might have coupled it with an apt quotation from one of SHAKESPEARE'S Sonnets:\*

My nature is subdued  
To what it works in, like the dyer's hand:  
Pity me then, and wish I were renew'd!

But as it is wholesome that the parsimonious public should know what has been doing, and still is doing, in this connexion, I mention here that everything set forth in these pages concerning the Court of Chancery is substantially true, and within the truth. The case of Gridley is in no essential altered from one of actual occurrence, made public by a disinterested person\* who was professionally acquainted with the whole of the monstrous wrong from beginning to end. At the present moment there is a suit before the Court which was commenced nearly twenty years ago; in which from thirty to forty counsel have been known to appear at one time; in which costs have been incurred to the amount of seventy thousand pounds; which is a *friendly suit*; and which is (I am assured) no nearer to its termination now than when it was begun. There is another well-known suit in Chancery, not yet decided, which was commenced before the close of the last century, and in which more



than double the amount of seventy thousand pounds has been swallowed up in costs.\* If I wanted other authorities for JARNDYCE AND JARNDYCE, I could rain them on these pages, to the shame of—a parsimonious public.

There is only one other point on which I offer a word of remark. The possibility of what is called Spontaneous Combustion has been denied since the death of Mr Krook; and my good friend MR LEWES (quite mistaken, as he soon found, in supposing the thing to have been abandoned by all authorities) published some ingenious letters to me at the time when that event was chronicled, arguing that Spontaneous Combustion could not possibly be.\* I have no need to observe that I do not wilfully or negligently mislead my readers, and that before I wrote that description I took pains to investigate the subject. There are about thirty cases on record,\* of which the most famous, that of the Countess Cornelia de Bandi Cesenate was minutely investigated and described by Giuseppe Bianchini, a prebendary of Verona, otherwise distinguished in letters, who published an account of it at Verona, in 1731, which he afterwards republished at Rome. The appearances beyond all rational doubt observed in that case, are the appearances observed in Mr Krook's case. The next most famous instance happened at Rheims, six years earlier; and the historian in that case is LE CAT, one of the most renowned surgeons produced by France. The subject was a woman, whose husband was ignorantly convicted of having murdered her; but, on solemn appeal to a higher court, he was acquitted, because it was shown upon the evidence that she had died the death to which this name of Spontaneous Combustion is given. I do not think it necessary to add to these notable facts, and that general reference to the authorities which will be found at page 490, the recorded opinions and experiences of distinguished medical professors, French, English, and Scotch, in more modern days; contenting myself with observing, that I shall not abandon the facts until there shall have been a considerable Spontaneous Combustion of the testimony on which human occurrences are usually received.

In *Bleak House*, I have purposely dwelt upon the romantic side of familiar things.\* I believe I have never had so many readers as in this book. May we meet again!

LONDON,  
*August, 1853*

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# BLEAK HOUSE

## CHAPTER ONE

### IN CHANCERY

LONDON. Michaelmas Term lately over, and the Lord Chancellor sitting in Lincoln's Inn Hall. Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets, as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a *Megalosaurus*,\* forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn-hill. Smoke\* lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes—gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers. Foot passengers, jostling one another's umbrellas, in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest.

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled among the tiers of shipping, and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses of collier-brigs; fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich pensioners,\* wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper, down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little 'prentice boy on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongey fields, be seen to loom by

husbandman and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time—as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest, near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation: Temple Bar.\* And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln's Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery, most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds, this day, in the sight of heaven and earth.

On such an afternoon, if ever, the Lord High Chancellor ought to be sitting here—as here he is—with a foggy glory round his head, softly fenced in with crimson cloth and curtains, addressed by a large advocate with great whiskers, a little voice, and an interminable brief, and outwardly directing his contemplation to the lantern\* in the roof, where he can see nothing but fog. On such an afternoon, some score of members of the High Court of Chancery bar ought to be—as here they are—mistily engaged in one of the ten thousand stages of an endless cause, tripping one another up on slippery precedents, groping knee-deep in technicalities, running their goat-hair and horse-hair\* warded heads against walls of words, and making a pretence of equity with serious faces, as players might. On such an afternoon, the various solicitors in the cause, some two or three of whom have inherited it from their fathers, who made a fortune by it, ought to be—as are they not?—ranged in a line, in a long matted well (but you might look in vain for Truth at the bottom of it), between the registrar's red table and the silk gowns, with bills, cross-bills, answers, rejoinders, injunctions, affidavits, issues, references to masters, masters' reports, mountains of costly nonsense, piled before them. Well may the court be dim, with wasting candles here and there; well may the fog hang heavy in it, as if it would never get out; well may the stained glass windows lose their color, and admit no light of day into the place; well may the uninitiated from the streets, who peep in through the glass panes in the door, be deterred from entrance by its owl's aspect, and by the drawl languidly echoing to the roof from the padded dais where the Lord High Chancellor looks into the lantern that has no light in it,

and where the attendant wigs are all stuck in a fog-bank! This is the Court of Chancery; which has its decaying houses and its blighted lands in every shire; which has its worn-out lunatic in every mad-house, and its dead in every churchyard; which has its ruined suitor, with his slipshod heels and threadbare dress, borrowing and begging through the round of every man's acquaintance; which gives to monied might the means abundantly of wearying out the right; which so exhausts finances, patience, courage, hope; so overthrows the brain and breaks the heart; that there is not an honorable man among its practitioners who would not give—who does not often give—the warning, 'Suffer any wrong that can be done you, rather than come here!'

Who happen to be in the Lord Chancellor's court this murky afternoon besides the Lord Chancellor, the counsel in the cause, two or three counsel who are never in any cause, and the well of solicitors before mentioned? There is the registrar below the Judge, in wig and gown; and there are two or three maces, or petty-bags, or privy-purses, or whatever they may be, in legal court suits. These are all yawning; for no crumb of amusement ever falls from JARNDYCE AND JARNDYCE (the cause in hand), which was squeezed dry years upon years ago. The short-hand writers, the reporters of the court, and the reporters of the newspapers, invariably decamp with the rest of the regulars when Jarndyce and Jarndyce comes on. Their places are a blank. Standing on a seat at the side of the hall, the better to peer into the curtained sanctuary, is a little mad old woman in a squeezed bonnet, who is always in court, from its sitting to its rising, and always expecting some incomprehensible judgment to be given in her favor. Some say she really is, or was, a party to a suit; but no one knows for certain, because no one cares. She carries some small litter in a reticule which she calls her documents; principally consisting of paper matches and dry lavender. A sallow prisoner has come up, in custody, for the half-dozen time, to make a personal application 'to purge himself of his contempt;' which, being a solitary surviving executor who has fallen into a state of conglomeration about accounts of which it is not pretended that he had ever any knowledge, he is not at all likely ever to do. In the meantime his prospects in life are ended. Another ruined suitor, who periodically appears from Shropshire, and breaks out into efforts to address the Chancellor at the close of the day's business, and who can by no means be made to understand that the Chancellor is



legally ignorant of his existence after making it desolate for a quarter of a century, plants himself in a good place and keeps an eye on the Judge, ready to call out 'My lord!' in a voice of sonorous complaint, on the instant of his rising. A few lawyers' clerks and others who know this suitor by sight, linger, on the chance of his furnishing some fun, and enlivening the dismal weather a little.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce drones on. This scarecrow of a suit has, in course of time, become so complicated, that no man alive knows what it means. The parties to it understand it least; but it has been observed that no two Chancery lawyers can talk about it for five minutes, without coming to a total disagreement as to all the premises. Innumerable children have been born into the cause; innumerable young people have married into it; innumerable old people have died out of it. Scores of persons have deliriously found themselves made parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, without knowing how or why; whole families have inherited legendary hatreds with the suit. The little plaintiff or defendant, who was promised a new rocking-horse when Jarndyce and Jarndyce should be settled, has grown up, possessed himself of a real horse, and trotted away into the other world. Fair wards of court have faded into mothers and grandmothers; a long procession of Chancellors has come in and gone out; the legion of bills in the suit have been transformed into mere bills of mortality;\* there are not three Jarndyces left upon the earth perhaps, since old Tom Jarndyce in despair blew his brains out at a coffee-house in Chancery-lane; but Jarndyce and Jarndyce still drags its dreary length before the Court, perennially hopeless.

Jarndyce and Jarndyce has passed into a joke. That is the only good that has ever come of it. It has been death to many, but it is a joke in the profession. Every master in Chancery has had a reference out of it. Every Chancellor was 'in it,' for somebody or other, when he was counsel at the bar. Good things have been said about it by blue-nosed, bulbous-shoed old benchers, in select port-wine committee after dinner in hall. Articled clerks have been in the habit of fleshing their legal wit upon it. The last Lord Chancellor handled it neatly, when, correcting Mr Blowers the eminent silk gown who said that such a thing might happen when the sky rained potatoes, he observed, 'or when we get through Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Mr Blowers;'—a pleasantry that particularly tickled the maces, bags, and purses.

How many people out of the suit, Jarndyce and Jarndyce has

stretched forth its unwholesome hand to spoil and corrupt, would be a very wide question. From the master, upon whose impaling files reams of dusty warrants in Jarndyce and Jarndyce have grimly writhed into many shapes; down to the copying clerk in the Six Clerks' Office, who has copied his tens of thousands of Chancery-folio-pages under that eternal heading; no man's nature has been made the better by it. In trickery, evasion, procrastination, spoliation, botheration, under false pretences of all sorts, there are influences that can never come to good. The very solicitors' boys who have kept the wretched suitors at bay, by protesting time out of mind that Mr Chizzle, Mizzle, or otherwise, was particularly engaged and had appointments until dinner, may have got an extra moral twist and shuffle into themselves out of Jarndyce and Jarndyce. The receiver in the cause has acquired a goodly sum of money by it, but has acquired too a distrust of his own mother, and a contempt for his own kind. Chizzle, Mizzle, and otherwise, have lapsed into a habit of vaguely promising themselves that they will look into that outstanding little matter, and see what can be done for Drizzle—who was not well used—when Jarndyce and Jarndyce shall be got out of the office. Shirking and sharking, in all their many varieties, have been sown broadcast by the ill-fated cause; and even those who have contemplated its history from the outermost circle of such evil, have been insensibly tempted into a loose way of letting bad things alone to take their own bad course, and a loose belief that if the world go wrong, it was, in some off-hand manner, never meant to go right.

Thus, in the midst of the mud and at the heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

'Mr Tangle,' says the Lord High Chancellor, latterly something restless under the eloquence of that learned gentleman.

'Mlud,' says Mr Tangle. Mr Tangle knows more of Jarndyce and Jarndyce than anybody. He is famous for it—supposed never to have read anything else since he left school.

'Have you nearly concluded your argument?'

'Mlud, no—variety of points—feel it my duty tsubmit—ludship,' is the reply that slides out of Mr Tangle.

'Several members of the bar are still to be heard, I believe?' says the Chancellor, with a slight smile.

Eighteen of Mr Tangle's learned friends, each armed with a little summary of eighteen hundred sheets, bob up like eighteen hammers

in a piano-forte, make eighteen bows, and drop into their eighteen places of obscurity.

'We will proceed with the hearing on Wednesday fortnight,' says the Chancellor. For, the question at issue is only a question of costs, a mere bud on the forest tree of the parent suit, and really will come to a settlement one of these days.

The Chancellor rises; the bar rises; the prisoner is brought forward in a hurry; the man from Shropshire cries, 'My lord!' Maces, bags, and purses, indignantly proclaim silence, and frown at the man from Shropshire.

'In reference,' proceeds the Chancellor, still on Jarndyce and Jarndyce, 'to the young girl——'

'Begludship's pardon—boy,' says Mr Tangle, prematurely.

'In reference,' proceeds the Chancellor, with extra distinctness, 'to the young girl and boy, the two young people,'

(Mr Tangle crushed.)

'Whom I directed to be in attendance to-day, and who are now in my private room, I will see them and satisfy myself as to the expediency of making the order for their residing with their uncle.'

Mr Tangle on his legs again.

'Begludship's pardon—dead.'

'With their,' Chancellor looking through his double eye-glass at the papers on his desk, 'grandfather.'

'Begludship's pardon—victim of rash action—brains.'

Suddenly a very little counsel, with a terrific bass voice, arises, fully inflated, in the back settlements of the fog, and says, 'Will your lordship allow me? I appear for him. He is a cousin, several times removed. I am not at the moment prepared to inform the Court in what exact remove he is a cousin; but he *is* a cousin.'

Leaving this address (delivered like a sepulchral message) ringing in the rafters of the roof, the very little counsel drops, and the fog knows him no more. Everybody looks for him. Nobody can see him.

'I will speak with both the young people,' says the Chancellor anew, 'and satisfy myself on the subject of their residing with their cousin. I will mention the matter to-morrow morning when I take my seat.'

The Chancellor is about to bow to the bar, when the prisoner is presented. Nothing can possibly come of the prisoner's conglomeration, but his being sent back to prison; which is soon done. The

man from Shropshire ventures another remonstrative 'My lord!' but the Chancellor, being aware of him, has dexterously vanished. Everybody else quickly vanishes too. A battery of blue bags is loaded with heavy charges of papers and carried off by clerks; the little mad old woman marches off with her documents; the empty court is locked up. If all the injustice it has committed, and all the misery it has caused, could only be locked up with it, and the whole burnt away in a great funeral pyre,—why, so much the better for other parties than the parties in Jarndyce and Jarndyce!

## CHAPTER TWO

### IN FASHION

IT is but a glimpse of the world of fashion that we want on this same miry afternoon. It is not so unlike the Court of Chancery, but that we may pass from the one scene to the other, as the crow flies. Both the world of fashion and the Court of Chancery are things of precedent and usage; over-sleeping Rip Van Winkles,\* who have played at strange games through a deal of thundery weather; sleeping beauties, whom the Knight will wake one day, when all the stopped spits in the kitchen shall begin to turn prodigiously!

It is not a large world. Relatively even to this world of ours, which has its limits too (as your Highness shall find when you have made the tour of it, and are come to the brink of the void beyond), it is a very little speck. There is much good in it; there are many good and true people in it; it has its appointed place. But the evil of it is, that it is a world wrapped up in too much jeweller's cotton and fine wool, and cannot hear the rushing of the larger worlds, and cannot see them as they circle round the sun. It is a deadened world, and its growth is sometimes unhealthy for want of air.

My Lady Dedlock has returned to her house in town for a few days previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks; after which her movements are uncertain. The fashionable intelligence\* says so, for the comfort of the Parisians, and it knows all fashionable things. To know things otherwise, were to be unfashionable. My Lady Dedlock has been down at what she calls, in familiar conversation, her 'place' in Lincolnshire. The waters are out in Lincolnshire. An arch of the bridge in the park has been

sapped and sopped away. The adjacent low-lying ground, for half a mile in breadth, is a stagnant river, with melancholy trees for islands in it, and a surface punctured all over, all day long, with falling rain. My Lady Dedlock's 'place' has been extremely dreary. The weather, for many a day and night, has been so wet that the trees seem wet through, and the soft loppings and prunings of the woodman's axe can make no crash or crackle as they fall. The deer, looking soaked, leave quagmires, where they pass. The shot of a rifle loses its sharpness in the moist air, and its smoke moves in a tardy little cloud towards the green rise, coppice-topped, that makes a background for the falling rain. The view from my Lady Dedlock's own windows is alternately a lead-colored view, and a view in Indian ink. The vases on the stone terrace in the foreground catch the rain all day; and the heavy drops fall, drip, drip, drip, upon the broad flagged pavement, called, from old time, the Ghost's Walk, all night. On Sundays, the little church in the park is mouldy; the oaken pulpit breaks out into a cold sweat; and there is a general smell and taste as of the ancient Dedlocks in their graves. My Lady Dedlock (who is childless), looking out in the early twilight from her boudoir at a keeper's lodge, and seeing the light of a fire upon the latticed panes, and smoke rising from the chimney, and a child, chased by a woman, running out into the rain to meet the shining figure of a wrapped-up man coming through the gate, has been put quite out of temper. My Lady Dedlock says she has been 'bored to death.'

Therefore my Lady Dedlock has come away from the place in Lincolnshire, and has left it to the rain, and the crows, and the rabbits, and the deer, and the partridges and pheasants. The pictures of the Dedlocks past and gone have seemed to vanish into the damp walls in mere lowness of spirits, as the housekeeper has passed along the old rooms, shutting up the shutters. And when they will next come forth again, the fashionable intelligence—which, like the fiend, is omniscient of the past and present, but not the future—cannot yet undertake to say.

Sir Leicester Dedlock is only a baronet,\* but there is no mightier baronet than he. His family is as old as the hills, and infinitely more respectable. He has a general opinion that the world might get on without hills, but would be done up without Dedlocks. He would on the whole admit Nature to be a good idea (a little low, perhaps, when not enclosed with a park-fence), but an idea dependent for its

execution on your great county families. He is a gentleman of strict conscience, disdainful of all littleness and meanness, and ready, on the shortest notice, to die any death you may please to mention rather than give occasion for the least impeachment of his integrity. He is an honorable, obstinate, truthful, high-spirited, intensely prejudiced, perfectly unreasonable man.

Sir Leicester is twenty years, full measure, older than my Lady. He will never see sixty-five again, nor perhaps sixty-six, nor yet sixty-seven. He has a twist of the gout now and then, and walks a little stiffly. He is of a worthy presence, with his light grey hair and whiskers, his fine shirt-frill, his pure white waistcoat, and his blue coat with bright buttons always buttoned. He is ceremonious, stately, most polite on every occasion to my Lady, and holds her personal attractions in the highest estimation. His gallantry to my Lady, which has never changed since he courted her, is the one little touch of romantic fancy in him.

Indeed, he married her for love. A whisper still goes about, that she had not even family; howbeit, Sir Leicester had so much family that perhaps he had enough, and could dispense with any more. But she had beauty, pride, ambition, insolent resolve, and sense enough to portion out a legion of fine ladies. Wealth and station, added to these, soon floated her upward; and for years, now, my Lady Dedlock has been at the centre of the fashionable intelligence, and at the top of the fashionable tree.

How Alexander wept when he had no more worlds to conquer, everybody knows—or has some reason to know by this time, the matter having been rather frequently mentioned. My Lady Dedlock, having conquered *her* world, fell, not into the melting but rather into the freezing mood. An exhausted composure, a worn-out placidity, an equanimity of fatigue not to be ruffled by interest or satisfaction, are the trophies of her victory. She is perfectly well bred. If she could be translated to Heaven to-morrow, she might be expected to ascend without any rapture.

She has beauty still, and, if it be not in its heyday, it is not yet in its autumn. She has a fine face—originally of a character that would be rather called very pretty than handsome, but improved into classicality by the acquired expression of her fashionable state. Her figure is elegant, and has the effect of being tall. Not that she is so, but that ‘the most is made,’ as the Honorable Bob Stables has frequently asserted upon oath, ‘of all her points.’ The same authority

observes, that she is perfectly got up; and remarks, in commendation of her hair especially, that she is the best-groomed woman in the whole stud.

With all her perfections on her head,\* my Lady Dedlock has come up from her place in Lincolnshire (hotly pursued by the fashionable intelligence), to pass a few days at her house in town previous to her departure for Paris, where her ladyship intends to stay some weeks, after which her movements are uncertain. And at her house in town, upon this muddy, murky afternoon, presents himself an old-fashioned old gentleman, attorney-at-law, and eke solicitor of the High Court of Chancery, who has the honor of acting as legal adviser of the Dedlocks, and has as many cast-iron boxes in his office with that name outside, as if the present baronet were the coin of the conjuror's trick, and were constantly being juggled through the whole set.\* Across the hall, and up the stairs, and along the passages, and through the rooms, which are very brilliant in the season\* and very dismal out of it—Fairy-land to visit, but a desert to live in—the old gentleman is conducted, by a Mercury in powder, to my Lady's presence.

The old gentleman is rusty to look at, but is reputed to have made good thrift out of aristocratic marriage settlements and aristocratic wills, and to be very rich. He is surrounded by a mysterious halo of family confidences; of which he is known to be the silent depository. There are noble Mausoleums rooted for centuries in retired glades of parks, among the growing timber and the fern, which perhaps hold fewer noble secrets than walk abroad among men, shut up in the breast of Mr Tulkinghorn. He is of what is called the old school—a phrase generally meaning any school that seems never to have been young—and wears knee breeches tied with ribbons, and gaiters or stockings. One peculiarity of his black clothes, and of his black stockings, be they silk or worsted, is, that they never shine. Mute, close, irresponsible to any glancing light, his dress is like himself. He never converses, when not professionally consulted. He is found sometimes, speechless but quite at home, at corners of dinner-tables in great country houses, and near doors of drawing-rooms, concerning which the fashionable intelligence is eloquent: where everybody knows him, and where half the Peerage stops to say 'How do you do, Mr Tulkinghorn?' He receives these salutations with gravity, and buries them along with the rest of his knowledge.

Sir Leicester Dedlock is with my Lady, and is happy to see Mr Tulkinghorn. There is an air of prescription about him which is always agreeable to Sir Leicester; he receives it as a kind of tribute. He likes Mr Tulkinghorn's dress; there is a kind of tribute in that too. It is eminently respectable, and likewise, in a general way, retainer-like. It expresses, as it were, the steward of the legal mysteries, the butler of the legal cellar, of the Dedlocks.

Has Mr Tulkinghorn any idea of this himself? It may be so, or it may not; but there is this remarkable circumstance to be noted in everything associated with my Lady Dedlock as one of a class—as one of the leaders and representatives of her little world. She supposes herself to be an inscrutable Being, quite out of the reach and ken of ordinary mortals—seeing herself in her glass, where indeed she looks so. Yet, every dim little star revolving about her, from her maid to the manager of the Italian Opera, knows her weaknesses, prejudices, follies, haughtinesses, and caprices; and lives upon as accurate a calculation and as nice a measure of her moral nature, as her dress-maker takes of her physical proportions. Is a new dress, a new custom, a new singer, a new dancer, a new form of jewellery, a new dwarf or giant, a new chapel, a new anything, to be set up? There are deferential people, in a dozen callings, whom my Lady Dedlock suspects of nothing but prostration before her, who can tell you how to manage her as if she were a baby; who do nothing but nurse her all their lives; who, humbly affecting to follow with profound subservience, lead her and her whole troop after them; who, in hooking one, hook all and bear them off, as Lemuel Gulliver bore away the stately fleet of the majestic Lilliput. 'If you want to address our people, sir,' say Blaze and Sparkle the jewellers—meaning by our people, Lady Dedlock and the rest—'you must remember that you are not dealing with the general public; you must hit our people in their weakest place, and their weakest place is such a place.' 'To make this article go down, gentlemen,' say Sheen and Gloss the mercers, to their friends the manufacturers, 'you must come to us, because we know where to have the fashionable people, and we can make it fashionable.' 'If you want to get this print upon the tables of my high connexion, sir,' says Mr Sladdery the librarian, 'or if you want to get this dwarf or giant into the houses of my high connexion, sir, or if you want to secure to this entertainment the patronage of my high connexion, sir, you must leave it, if you please, to me; for I have been accustomed to study the leaders of my



high connexion, sir; and I may tell you, without vanity, that I can turn them round my finger,'—in which Mr Sladdery, who is an honest man, does not exaggerate at all.

Therefore, while Mr Tulkinghorn may not know what is passing in the Dedlock mind at present, it is very possible that he may.

'My Lady's cause has been again before the Chancellor, has it, Mr Tulkinghorn?' says Sir Leicester, giving him his hand.

'Yes. It has been on again to-day,' Mr Tulkinghorn replies; making one of his quiet bows to my Lady who is on a sofa near the fire, shading her face with a hand-screen.

'It would be useless to ask,' says my Lady, with the dreariness of the place in Lincolnshire still upon her, 'whether anything has been done.'

'Nothing that *you* would call anything, has been done to-day,' replies Mr Tulkinghorn.

'Nor ever will be,' says my Lady.

Sir Leicester has no objection to an interminable Chancery suit. It is a slow, expensive, British, constitutional kind of thing. To be sure, he has not a vital interest in the suit in question, her part in which was the only property my Lady brought him; and he has a shadowy impression that for his name—the name of Dedlock—to be in a cause, and not in the title of that cause, is a most ridiculous accident. But he regards the Court of Chancery, even if it should involve an occasional delay of justice and a trifling amount of confusion, as a something, devised in conjunction with a variety of other somethings, by the perfection of human wisdom, for the eternal settlement (humanly speaking) of every thing. And he is upon the whole of a fixed opinion, that to give the sanction of his countenance to any complaints respecting it, would be to encourage some person in the lower classes to rise up somewhere—like Wat Tyler.\*

'As a few fresh affidavits have been put upon the file,' says Mr Tulkinghorn, 'and as they are short, and as I proceed upon the troublesome principle of begging leave to possess my clients with any new proceedings in a cause;' cautious man, Mr Tulkinghorn, taking no more responsibility than necessary; 'and further, as I see you are going to Paris; I have brought them in my pocket.'

(Sir Leicester was going to Paris too, by-the-bye, but the delight of the fashionable intelligence was in his Lady.)

Mr Tulkinghorn takes out his papers, asks permission to place

them on a golden talisman of a table at my Lady's elbow, puts on his spectacles, and begins to read by the light of a shaded lamp.

“In Chancery. Between John Jarndyce——”

My Lady interrupts, requesting him to miss as many of the formal horrors as he can.

Mr Tulkinghorn glances over his spectacles, and begins again lower down. My Lady carelessly and scornfully abstracts her attention. Sir Leicester in a great chair looks at the fire, and appears to have a stately liking for the legal repetitions and prolixities, as ranging among the national bulwarks. It happens that the fire is hot, where my Lady sits; and that the hand-screen is more beautiful than useful, being priceless, but small. My Lady, changing her position, sees the papers on the table—looks at them nearer—looks at them nearer still—asks impulsively:

‘Who copied that?’

Mr Tulkinghorn stops short, surprised by my Lady's animation and her unusual tone.

‘Is it what you people call law-hand?’ she asks, looking full at him in her careless way again, and toying with her screen.

‘Not quite. Probably’—Mr Tulkinghorn examines it as he speaks—‘the legal character it has, was acquired after the original hand was formed. Why do you ask?’

‘Anything to vary this detestable monotony. O, go on, do!’

Mr Tulkinghorn reads again. The heat is greater, my Lady screens her face. Sir Leicester doses, starts up suddenly, and cries ‘Eh? what do you say?’

‘I say I am afraid,’ says Mr Tulkinghorn, who has risen hastily, ‘that Lady Dedlock is ill.’

‘Faint,’ my Lady murmurs, with white lips, ‘only that; but it is like the faintness of death. Don't speak to me. Ring, and take me to my room!’

Mr Tulkinghorn retires into another chamber; bells ring, feet shuffle and patter, silence ensues. Mercury at last begs Mr Tulkinghorn to return.

‘Better now,’ quoth Sir Leicester, motioning the lawyer to sit down and read to him alone. ‘I have been quite alarmed. I never knew my Lady swoon before. But the weather is extremely trying—and she really has been bored to death down at our place in Lincolnshire.’

## CHAPTER THREE

## A PROGRESS

I HAVE a great deal of difficulty in beginning to write my portion of these pages, for I know I am not clever. I always knew that. I can remember, when I was a very little girl indeed, I used to say to my doll, when we were alone together, 'Now, Dolly, I am not clever, you know very well, and you must be patient with me, like a dear!' And so she used to sit propped up in a great arm-chair, with her beautiful complexion and rosy lips, staring at me—or not so much at me, I think, as at nothing—while I busily stitched away, and told her every one of my secrets.

My dear old doll! I was such a shy little thing that I seldom dared to open my lips, and never dared to open my heart, to anybody else. It almost makes me cry to think what a relief it used to be to me, when I came home from school of a day, to run upstairs to my room, and say, 'O you dear faithful Dolly, I knew you would be expecting me!' and then to sit down on the floor, leaning on the elbow of her great chair, and tell her all I had noticed since we parted. I had always rather a noticing way—not a quick way, O no!—a silent way of noticing what passed before me, and thinking I should like to understand it better. I have not by any means a quick understanding. When I love a person very tenderly indeed, it seems to brighten. But even that may be my vanity.

I was brought up, from my earliest remembrance—like some of the princesses in the fairy stories, only I was not charming—by my godmother. At least I only knew her as such. She was a good, good woman! She went to church three times every Sunday, and to morning prayers on Wednesdays and Fridays, and to lectures whenever there were lectures; and never missed. She was handsome; and if she had ever smiled, would have been (I used to think) like an angel—but she never smiled. She was always grave, and strict. She was so very good herself, I thought, that the badness of other people made her frown all her life. I felt so different from her, even making every allowance for the differences between a child and a woman; I felt so poor, so trifling, and so far off; that I never could be unrestrained with her—no, could never even love her as I wished. It made me very sorry to consider how good she was, and how

unworthy of her I was; and I used ardently to hope that I might have a better heart; and I talked it over very often with the dear old doll; but I never loved my godmother as I ought to have loved her, and as I felt I must have loved her if I had been a better girl.

This made me, I dare say, more timid and retiring than I naturally was, and cast me upon Dolly as the only friend with whom I felt at ease. But something happened when I was still quite a little thing, that helped it very much.

I had never heard my mama spoken of. I had never heard of my papa either, but I felt more interested about my mama. I had never worn a black frock, that I could recollect. I had never been shown my mama's grave. I had never been told where it was. Yet I had never been taught to pray for any relation but my godmother. I had more than once approached this subject of my thoughts with Mrs Rachael, our only servant, who took my light away when I was in bed (another very good woman, but austere to me), and she had only said, 'Esther, good night!' and gone away and left me.

Although there were seven girls at the neighbouring school where I was a day boarder, and although they called me little Esther Summerson, I knew none of them at home. All of them were older than I, to be sure (I was the youngest there by a good deal), but there seemed to be some other separation between us besides that, and besides their being far more clever than I was, and knowing much more than I did. One of them, in the first week of my going to the school (I remember it very well), invited me home to a little party, to my great joy. But my godmother wrote a stiff letter declining for me, and I never went. I never went out at all.

It was my birthday. There were holidays at school on other birthdays—none on mine. There were rejoicings at home on other birthdays, as I knew from what I heard the girls relate to one another—there were none on mine. My birthday was the most melancholy day at home, in the whole year.

I have mentioned, that, unless my vanity should deceive me (as I know it may, for I may be very vain, without suspecting it—though indeed I don't), my comprehension is quickened when my affection is. My disposition is very affectionate; and perhaps I might still feel such a wound, if such a wound could be received more than once, with the quickness of that birthday.

Dinner was over, and my godmother and I were sitting at the table before the fire. The clock ticked, the fire clicked; not another

sound had been heard in the room, or in the house, for I don't know how long. I happened to look timidly up from my stitching, across the table, at my godmother, and I saw in her face, looking gloomily at me, 'It would have been far better, little Esther, that you had had no birthday; that you had never been born!'

I broke out crying and sobbing, and I said, 'O, dear godmother, tell me, pray do tell me, did mama die on my birthday?'

'No,' she returned. 'Ask me no more, child!'

'O, do pray tell me something of her. Do now, at last, dear godmother, if you please! What did I do to her? How did I lose her? Why am I so different from other children, and why is it my fault, dear godmother? No, no, no, don't go away. O, speak to me!'

I was in a kind of fright beyond my grief; and I had caught hold of her dress, and was kneeling to her. She had been saying all the while, 'Let me go!' But now she stood still.

Her darkened face had such power over me, that it stopped me in the midst of my vehemence. I put up my trembling little hand to clasp hers, or to beg her pardon with what earnestness I might, but withdrew it as she looked at me, and laid it on my fluttering heart. She raised me, sat in her chair, and standing me before her, said, slowly, in a cold, low voice—I see her knitted brow, and pointed finger:

'Your mother, Esther, is your disgrace, and you were hers. The time will come—and soon enough—when you will understand this better, and will feel it too, as no one save a woman can. I have forgiven her;' but her face did not relent; 'the wrong she did to me, and I say no more of it, though it was greater than you will ever know—than any one will ever know, but I, the sufferer. For yourself, unfortunate girl, orphaned and degraded from the first of these evil anniversaries, pray daily that the sins of others be not visited upon your head, according to what is written.\* Forget your mother, and leave all other people to forget her who will do her unhappy child that greatest kindness. Now, go!'

She checked me, however, as I was about to depart from her—so frozen as I was!—and added this:

'Submission, self-denial, diligent work, are the preparations for a life begun with such a shadow on it. You are different from other children, Esther, because you were not born, like them, in common sinfulness and wrath. You are set apart.'

I went up to my room, and crept to bed, and laid my doll's cheek

against mine wet with tears; and holding that solitary friend upon my bosom, cried myself to sleep. Imperfect as my understanding of my sorrow was, I knew that I had brought no joy, at any time, to anybody's heart, and that I was to no one upon earth what Dolly was to me.

Dear, dear, to think how much time we passed alone together afterwards, and how often I repeated to the doll the story of my birthday, and confided to her that I would try, as hard as ever I could, to repair the fault I had been born with (of which I confusedly felt guilty and yet innocent), and would strive as I grew up to be industrious, contented and kind-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love to myself if I could. I hope it is not self-indulgent to shed these tears as I think of it. I am very thankful, I am very cheerful, but I cannot quite help their coming to my eyes.

There! I have wiped them away now, and can go on again properly.

I felt the distance between my godmother and myself so much more after the birthday, and felt so sensible of filling a place in her house which ought to have been empty, that I found her more difficult of approach, though I was fervently grateful to her in my heart, than ever. I felt in the same way towards my school companions; I felt in the same way towards Mrs Rachael, who was a widow; and O, towards her daughter, of whom she was proud, who came to see her once a fortnight! I was very retired and quiet, and tried to be very diligent.

One sunny afternoon, when I had come home from school with my books and portfolio, watching my long shadow at my side, and as I was gliding up stairs to my room as usual, my godmother looked out of the parlor door, and called me back. Sitting with her, I found—which was very unusual indeed—a stranger. A portly important-looking gentleman, dressed all in black, with a white cravat, large gold watch seals, a pair of gold eye-glasses, and a large seal-ring upon his little finger.

'This,' said my godmother in an under tone, 'is the child.' Then she said, in her naturally stern way of speaking, 'This is Esther, sir.'

The gentleman put up his eye-glasses to look at me, and said, 'Come here, my dear!' He shook hands with me, and asked me to take off my bonnet—looking at me all the while. When I had complied, he said, 'Ah!' and afterwards 'Yes!' And then, taking off his eye-glasses and folding them in a red case, and leaning back in his arm-chair, turning the case about in his two hands he gave my

godmother a nod. Upon that, my godmother said, 'You may go upstairs, Esther!' and I made him my curtsy and left him.

It must have been two years afterwards, and I was almost fourteen, when one dreadful night my godmother and I sat at the fireside. I was reading aloud, and she was listening. I had come down at nine o'clock, as I always did, to read the Bible to her; and was reading, from St John, how our Saviour stooped down, writing with his finger in the dust, when they brought the sinful woman to him.\*

"So when they continued asking him, he lifted up himself and said unto them. He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her!"

I was stopped by my godmother's rising, putting her hand to her head, and crying out, in an awful voice, from quite another part of the book:

"Watch ye therefore! lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch!"\*

In an instant, while she stood before me repeating these words, she fell down on the floor. I had no need to cry out; her voice had sounded through the house, and been heard in the street.

She was laid upon her bed. For more than a week she lay there, little altered outwardly; with her old handsome resolute frown that I so well knew, carved upon her face. Many and many a time, in the day and in the night, with my head upon the pillow by her that my whispers might be plainer to her, I kissed her, thanked her, prayed for her, asked her for her blessing and forgiveness, entreated her to give me the least sign that she knew or heard me. No, no, no. Her face was immoveable. To the very last, and even afterwards, her frown remained unsoftened.

On the day after my poor good godmother was buried, the gentleman in black with the white neckcloth reappeared. I was sent for by Mrs Rachael, and found him in the same place, as if he had never gone away.

'My name is Kenge,' he said; 'you may remember it, my child; Kenge and Carboy, Lincoln's Inn.'

I replied, that I remembered to have seen him once before.

'Pray be seated—here, near me. Don't distress yourself; it's of no use. Mrs Rachael, I needn't inform you who were acquainted with the late Miss Barbary's affairs, that her means die with her; and that this young lady, now her aunt is dead——'

'My aunt, sir!'

'It really is of no use carrying on a deception when no object is to be gained by it,' said Mr Kenge, smoothly. 'Aunt in fact, though not in law. Don't distress yourself! Don't weep! Don't tremble! Mrs Rachael, our young friend has no doubt heard of—the—a—Jarndyce and Jarndyce.'

'Never,' said Mrs Rachael.

'Is it possible,' pursued Mr Kenge, putting up his eye-glasses, 'that our young friend—I *beg* you won't distress yourself!—never heard of Jarndyce and Jarndyce!'

I shook my head, wondering even what it was.

'Not of Jarndyce and Jarndyce?' said Mr Kenge, looking over his glasses at me, and softly turning the case about and about, as if he were petting something. 'Not of one of the greatest Chancery suits known? Not of Jarndyce and Jarndyce—the—a—in itself a monument of Chancery practice? In which (I would say) every difficulty, every contingency, every masterly fiction, every form of procedure known in that court, is represented over and over again? It is a cause that could not exist, out of this free and great country. I should say that the aggregate of costs in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, Mrs Rachael;' I was afraid he addressed himself to her, because I appeared inattentive; 'amounts at the present hour to from SIX-ty to SEVEN-ty THOUSAND POUNDS!' said Mr Kenge, leaning back in his chair.

I felt very ignorant, but what could I do? I was so entirely unacquainted with the subject, that I understood nothing about it even then.

'And she really never heard of the cause!' said Mr Kenge. 'Surprising!'

'Miss Barbary, sir,' returned Mrs Rachael, 'who is now among the Seraphim——'

('I hope so, I am sure,' said Mr Kenge, politely.)

'—Wished Esther only to know what would be serviceable to her. And she knows, from any teaching she has had here, nothing more.'

'Well!' said Mr Kenge. 'Upon the whole, very proper. Now to the point,' addressing me. 'Miss Barbary, your sole relation (in fact, that is; for I am bound to observe that in law you had none), being deceased, and it naturally not being to be expected that Mrs Rachael——'



'O dear no!' said Mrs Rachael, quickly.

'Quite so,' assented Mr Kenge;—'that Mrs Rachael should charge herself with your maintenance and support (I beg you won't distress yourself), you are in a position to receive the renewal of an offer which I was instructed to make to Miss Barbary some two years ago, and which, though rejected then, was understood to be renewable under the lamentable circumstances that have since occurred. Now, if I avow that I represent, in Jarndyce and Jarndyce, and otherwise, a highly humane, but at the same time singular man, shall I compromise myself by any stretch of my professional caution?' said Mr Kenge, leaning back in his chair again, and looking calmly at us both.

He appeared to enjoy beyond everything the sound of his own voice. I couldn't wonder at that, for it was mellow and full, and gave great importance to every word he uttered. He listened to himself with obvious satisfaction, and sometimes gently beat time to his own music with his head, or rounded a sentence with his hand. I was very much impressed by him—even then, before I knew that he formed himself on the model of a great lord who was his client, and that he was generally called Conversation Kenge.

'Mr Jarndyce,' he pursued, 'being aware of the—I would say, desolate—position of our young friend, offers to place her at a first-rate establishment; where her education shall be completed, where her comfort shall be secured, where her reasonable wants shall be anticipated, where she shall be eminently qualified to discharge her duty in that station of life unto which it has pleased—shall I say Providence?—to call her.'

My heart was filled so full, both by what he said, and by his affecting manner of saying it, that I was not able to speak, though I tried.

'Mr Jarndyce,' he went on, 'makes no condition, beyond expressing his expectation, that our young friend will not at any time remove herself from the establishment in question without his knowledge and concurrence. That she will faithfully apply herself to the acquisition of those accomplishments, upon the exercise of which she will be ultimately dependent. That she will tread in the paths of virtue and honor, and—the—a——so forth.'

I was still less able to speak, than before.

'Now, what does our young friend say?' proceeded Mr Kenge. 'Take time, take time! I pause for her reply. But take time!'

What the destitute subject of such an offer tried to say, I need not repeat. What she did say, I could more easily tell, if it were worth the telling. What she felt, and will feel to her dying hour, I could never relate.

This interview took place at Windsor, where I had passed (as far as I knew) my whole life. On that day week, amply provided with all necessities, I left it, inside the stage-coach, for Reading.

Mrs Rachael was too good to feel any emotion at parting, but I was not so good, and wept bitterly. I thought that I ought to have known her better after so many years, and ought to have made myself enough of a favorite with her to make her sorry then. When she gave me one cold parting kiss upon my forehead, like a thaw-drop from the stone porch—it was a very frosty day—I felt so miserable and self-reproachful, that I clung to her and told her it was my fault, I knew, that she could say good bye so easily!

‘No, Esther!’ she returned. ‘It is your misfortune!’

The coach was at the little lawn gate—we had not come out until we heard the wheels—and thus I left her, with a sorrowful heart. She went in before my boxes were lifted to the coach-roof, and shut the door. As long as I could see the house, I looked back at it from the window, through my tears. My godmother had left Mrs Rachael all the little property she possessed; and there was to be a sale; and an old hearth-rug with roses on it, which always seemed to me the first thing in the world I had ever seen, was hanging outside in the frost and snow. A day or two before, I had wrapped the dear old doll in her own shawl, and quietly laid her—I am half ashamed to tell it—in the garden-earth, under the tree that shaded my old window. I had no companion left but my bird, and him I carried with me in his cage.

When the house was out of sight, I sat, with my bird-cage in the straw at my feet, forward on the low seat, to look out of the high window; watching the frosty trees, that were like beautiful pieces of spar; and the fields all smooth and white with last night’s snow; and the sun, so red but yielding so little heat; and the ice, dark like metal, where the skaters and sliders had brushed the snow away. There was a gentleman in the coach who sat on the opposite seat, and looked very large in a quantity of wrappings; but he sat gazing out of the other window, and took no notice of me.

I thought of my dead godmother; of the night when I read to her; of her frowning so fixedly and sternly in her bed; of the strange

place I was going to; of the people I should find there, and what they would be like, and what they would say to me; when a voice in the coach gave me a terrible start.

It said, 'What the de-vil are you crying for?'

I was so frightened that I lost my voice, and could only answer in a whisper. 'Me, sir?' For of course I knew it must have been the gentleman in the quantity of wrappings, though he was still looking out of his window.

'Yes, you,' he said, turning round.

'I didn't know I was crying, sir,' I faltered.

'But you are!' said the gentleman. 'Look here!' He came quite opposite to me from the other corner of the coach, brushed one of his large furry cuffs across my eyes (but without hurting me), and showed me that it was wet.

'There! Now you know you are,' he said. 'Don't you?'

'Yes, sir,' I said.

'And what are you crying for?' said the gentleman. 'Don't you want to go there?'

'Where, sir?'

'Where? Why, wherever you are going,' said the gentleman.

'I am very glad to go there, sir,' I answered.

'Well, then! Look glad!' said the gentleman.

I thought he was very strange; or at least that what I could see of him was very strange, for he was wrapped up to the chin, and his face was almost hidden in a fur cap, with broad fur straps at the side of his head, fastened under his chin; but I was composed again, and not afraid of him. So I told him that I thought I must have been crying, because of my godmother's death, and because of Mrs Rachael's not being sorry to part with me.

'Con-found Mrs Rachael!' said the gentleman. 'Let her fly away in a high wind on a broomstick!'

I began to be really afraid of him now, and looked at him with the greatest astonishment. But I thought that he had pleasant eyes, although he kept on muttering to himself in an angry manner, and calling Mrs Rachael names.

After a little while, he opened his outer wrapper, which appeared to me large enough to wrap up the whole coach, and put his arm down into a deep pocket in the side.

'Now, look here!' he said. 'In this paper,' which was nicely folded, 'is a piece of the best plum-cake that can be got for money—sugar

on the outside an inch thick, like fat on mutton chops. Here's a little pie (a gem this is, both for size and quality), made in France. And what do you suppose it's made of? Livers of fat geese. There's a pie! Now let's see you eat 'em.'

'Thank you, sir,' I replied, 'thank you very much indeed, but I hope you won't be offended; they are too rich for me.'

'Floored again!' said the gentleman, which I didn't at all understand; and threw them both out of the window.

He did not speak to me any more, until he got out of the coach a little way short of Reading, when he advised me to be a good girl, and to be studious; and shook hands with me. I must say I was relieved by his departure. We left him at a milestone. I often walked past it afterwards, and never, for a long time, without thinking of him, and half expecting to meet him. But I never did; and so, as time went on, he passed out of my mind.

When the coach stopped, a very neat lady looked up at the window, and said:

'Miss Donny.'

'No, ma'am, Esther Summerson.'

'That is quite right,' said the lady, 'Miss Donny.'

I now understood that she introduced herself by that name, and begged Miss Donny's pardon for my mistake, and pointed out my boxes at her request. Under the direction of a very neat maid, they were put outside a very small green carriage; and then Miss Donny, the maid, and I, got inside, and were driven away.

'Everything is ready for you, Esther,' said Miss Donny; 'and the scheme of your pursuits has been arranged in exact accordance with the wishes of your guardian, Mr Jarndyce.'

'Of —— did you say, ma'am?'

'Of your guardian, Mr Jarndyce,' said Miss Donny.

I was so bewildered that Miss Donny thought the cold had been too severe for me, and lent me her smelling-bottle.

'Do you know my—guardian, Mr Jarndyce, ma'am?' I asked after a good deal of hesitation.

'Not personally, Esther,' said Miss Donny; 'merely through his solicitors, Messrs Kenge and Carboy, of London. A very superior gentleman, Mr Kenge. Truly eloquent indeed. Some of his periods\* quite majestic!'

I felt this to be very true, but was too confused to attend to it. Our speedy arrival at our destination, before I had time to recover

myself, increased my confusion; and I never shall forget the uncertain and unreal air of every thing at Greenleaf (Miss Donny's house), that afternoon!

But I soon became used to it. I was so adapted to the routine of Greenleaf before long, that I seemed to have been there a great while; and almost to have dreamed, rather than to have really lived, my old life at my godmother's. Nothing could be more precise, exact, and orderly, than Greenleaf. There was a time for everything all round the dial of the clock, and everything was done at its appointed moment.

We were twelve boarders, and there were two Miss Donnys, twins. It was understood that I would have to depend, by-and-by, on my qualifications as a governess; and I was not only instructed in everything that was taught at Greenleaf, but was very soon engaged in helping to instruct others. Although I was treated in every other respect like the rest of the school, this single difference was made in my case from the first. As I began to know more, I taught more, and so in course of time I had plenty to do, which I was very fond of doing, because it made the dear girls fond of me. At last, whenever a new pupil came who was a little downcast and unhappy, she was so sure—indeed I don't know why—to make a friend of me, that all new comers were confided to my care. They said I was so gentle; but I am sure *they* were! I often thought of the resolution I had made on my birthday, to try to be industrious, contented, and true-hearted, and to do some good to some one, and win some love if I could; and indeed, indeed, I felt almost ashamed to have done so little and have won so much.

I passed at Greenleaf six happy, quiet years. I never saw in any face there, thank Heaven, on my birthday, that it would have been better if I had never been born. When the day came round, it brought me so many tokens of affectionate remembrance that my room was beautiful with them from New Year's Day to Christmas.

In those six years I had never been away, except on visits at holiday time in the neighbourhood. After the first six months or so, I had taken Miss Donny's advice in reference to the propriety of writing to Mr Kenge, to say that I was happy and grateful; and with her approval I had written such a letter. I had received a formal answer acknowledging its receipt, and saying, 'We note the contents thereof, which shall be duly communicated to our client.' After that, I sometimes heard Miss Donny and her sister mention how

regularly my accounts were paid; and about twice a year I ventured to write a similar letter. I always received by return of post exactly the same answer, in the same round hand; with the signature of Kenge and Carboy in another writing, which I supposed to be Mr Kenge's.

It seems so curious to me to be obliged to write all this about myself! As if this narrative were the narrative of *my* life! But my little body will soon fall into the back-ground now.

Six quiet years (I find I am saying it for the second time) I had passed at Greenleaf, seeing in those around me, as it might be in a looking-glass, every stage of my own growth and change there, when, one November morning, I received this letter. I omit the date.

*Old Square, Lincoln's Inn.*

*Madam,*

*Jarndyce and Jarndyce.*

*Our clt Mr Jarndyce being abt to rece into his house, under an Order of the Ct of Chy, a Ward of the Ct in this cause, for whom he wishes to secure an elgble compn, directs us to inform you that he will be glad of your serces in the afsd capacity.*

*We have arrngd for your being forded, carriage free, p' eight o'clock coach from Reading, on Monday morning next, to White Horse Cellar, Piccadilly, London, where one of our clk's will be in waiting to convey you to our offe as above.*

*We are, Madam,*

*Your obed<sup>t</sup> Serv<sup>ts</sup>,*

*Kenge and Carboy.*

*Miss Esther Summerson.*

O, never, never, never shall I forget the emotion this letter caused in the house! It was so tender in them to care so much for me; it was so gracious in that Father who had not forgotten me, to have made my orphan way so smooth and easy, and to have inclined so many youthful natures towards me; that I could hardly bear it. Not that I would have had them less sorry—I am afraid not; but the pleasure

of it, and the pain of it, and the pride and joy of it, and the humble regret of it, were so blended, that my heart seemed almost breaking while it was full of rapture.

The letter gave me only five days' notice of my removal. When every minute added to the proofs of love and kindness that were given me in those five days; and when at last the morning came, and when they took me through all the rooms that I might see them for the last time; and when some cried, 'Esther, dear, say good-bye to me here, at my bedside, where you first spoke so kindly to me!' and when others asked me only to write their names, 'With Esther's love;' and when they all surrounded me with their parting presents, and clung to me weeping, and cried, 'What shall we do when dear, dear Esther's gone!' and when I tried to tell them how forbearing, and how good they had all been to me, and how I blessed, and thanked them every one; what a heart I had!

And when the two Miss Donnys grieved as much to part with me, as the least among them; and when the maids said, 'Bless you, miss, wherever you go!' and when the ugly lame old gardener, who I thought had hardly noticed me in all those years, came panting after the coach to give me a little nosegay of geraniums, and told me I had been the light of his eyes—indeed the old man said so!—what a heart I had then!

And could I help it, if with all this, and the coming to the little school, and the unexpected sight of the poor children outside waving their hats and bonnets to me, and of a grey-haired gentleman and lady, whose daughter I had helped to teach and at whose house I had visited (who were said to be the proudest people in all that country), caring for nothing but calling out, 'Good bye, Esther. May you be very happy!'—could I help it if I was quite bowed down in the coach by myself, and said 'O, I am so thankful, I am so thankful!' many times over!

But of course I soon considered that I must not take tears where I was going, after all that had been done for me. Therefore, of course, I made myself sob less, and persuaded myself to be quiet by saying very often, 'Esther, now, you really must! This *will not* do!' I cheered myself up pretty well at last, though I am afraid I was longer about it than I ought to have been; and when I had cooled my eyes with lavender water, it was time to watch for London.

I was quite persuaded that we were there, when we were ten miles off; and when we really were there, that we should never get

there. However, when we began to jolt upon a stone pavement, and particularly when every other conveyance seemed to be running into us and we seemed to be running into every other conveyance, I began to believe that we really were approaching the end of our journey. Very soon afterwards we stopped.

A young gentleman who had inked himself by accident, addressed me from the pavement, and said 'I am from Kenge and Carboy's, miss, of Lincoln's Inn.'

'If you please, sir,' said I.

He was very obliging; and as he handed me into a fly, after superintending the removal of my boxes, I asked him whether there was a great fire anywhere? For the streets were so full of dense brown smoke that scarcely anything was to be seen.

'O dear no, miss,' he said. 'This is a London particular.'

I had never heard of such a thing.

'A fog, miss,' said the young gentleman.

'O indeed!' said I.

We drove slowly through the dirtiest and darkest streets that ever were seen in the world (I thought), and in such a distracting state of confusion that I wondered how the people kept their senses, until we passed into sudden quietude under an old gateway, and drove on through a silent square until we came to an odd nook in a corner, where there was an entrance up a steep broad flight of stairs, like an entrance to a church. And there really was a churchyard, outside under some cloisters, for I saw the gravestones from the staircase window.

This was Kenge and Carboy's. The young gentleman showed me through an outer office into Mr Kenge's room—there was no one in it—and politely put an arm-chair for me by the fire. He then called my attention to a little looking-glass, hanging from a nail on one side of the chimney-piece.

'In case you should wish to look at yourself, miss, after the journey, as you're going before the Chancellor. Not that it's requisite, I am sure,' said the young gentleman civilly.

'Going before the Chancellor?' I said, startled for a moment.

'Only a matter of form, miss,' returned the young gentleman. 'Mr Kenge is in court now. He left his compliments, and would you partake of some refreshment;' there were biscuits and a decanter of wine on a small table; 'and look over the paper;' which the young gentleman gave me as he spoke. He then stirred the fire, and left me.



Everything was so strange—the stranger for its being night in the day-time, and the candles burning with a white flame, and looking raw and cold—that I read the words in the newspaper without knowing what they meant, and found myself reading the same words repeatedly. As it was of no use going on in that way, I put the paper down, took a peep at my bonnet in the glass to see if it was neat, and looked at the room which was not half lighted, and at the shabby dusty tables, and at the piles of writings, and at a bookcase full of the most inexpressive-looking books that ever had anything to say for themselves. Then I went on, thinking, thinking, thinking; and the fire went on, burning, burning, burning; and the candles went on flickering and guttering, and there were no snuffers\*—until the young gentleman by-and-by brought a very dirty pair; for two hours.

At last Mr Kenge came. *He* was not altered; but he was surprised to see how altered I was, and appeared quite pleased. ‘As you are going to be the companion of the young lady who is now in the Chancellor’s private room, Miss Summerson,’ he said, ‘we thought it well that you should be in attendance also. You will not be discomposed by the Lord Chancellor, I dare say?’

‘No, sir,’ I said, ‘I don’t think I shall.’ Really not seeing, on consideration, why I should be.

So Mr Kenge gave me his arm, and we went round the corner, under a colonnade, and in at a side door. And so we came, along a passage, into a comfortable sort of room, where a young lady and a young gentleman were standing near a great, loud-roaring fire. A screen was interposed between them and it, and they were leaning on the screen, talking.

They both looked up when I came in, and I saw in the young lady, with the fire shining upon her, such a beautiful girl! With such rich golden hair, such soft blue eyes, and such a bright, innocent, trusting face!

‘Miss Ada,’ said Mr Kenge, ‘this is Miss Summerson.’

She came to meet me with a smile of welcome and her hand extended, but seemed to change her mind in a moment, and kissed me. In short, she had such a natural, captivating, winning manner, that in a few minutes we were sitting in the window-seat, with the light of the fire upon us, talking together, as free and happy as could be.

What a load off my mind! It was so delightful to know that she could confide in me, and like me! It was so good of her, and so encouraging to me!

The young gentleman was her distant cousin, she told me, and his name Richard Carstone. He was a handsome youth, with an ingenuous face, and a most engaging laugh; and after she had called him up to where we sat, he stood by us, in the light of the fire too, talking gaily, like a light-hearted boy. He was very young; not more than nineteen then, if quite so much, but nearly two years older than she was. They were both orphans, and (what was very unexpected and curious to me) had never met before that day. Our all three coming together for the first time, in such an unusual place, was a thing to talk about; and we talked about it; and the fire, which had left off roaring, winked its red eyes at us—as Richard said—like a drowsy old Chancery lion.

We conversed in a low tone, because a full-dressed gentleman in a bag wig\* frequently came in and out, and when he did so, we could hear a drawling sound in the distance, which he said was one of the counsel in our case addressing the Lord Chancellor. He told Mr Kenge that the Chancellor would be up in five minutes; and presently we heard a bustle, and a tread of feet, and Mr Kenge said that the Court had risen, and his lordship was in the next room.

The gentleman in the bag wig opened the door almost directly, and requested Mr Kenge to come in. Upon that, we all went into the next room; Mr Kenge first, with my darling—it is so natural to me now, that I can't help writing it; and there, plainly dressed in black, and sitting in an arm-chair at a table near the fire, was his lordship, whose robe, trimmed with beautiful gold lace, was thrown upon another chair. He gave us a searching look as we entered, but his manner was both courtly and kind.

The gentleman in the bag wig laid bundles of papers on his lordship's table, and his lordship silently selected one, and turned over the leaves.

'Miss Clare,' said the Lord Chancellor. 'Miss Ada Clare?'

Mr Kenge presented her, and his lordship begged her to sit down near him. That he admired her, and was interested by her, even *I* could see in a moment. It touched me, that the home of such a beautiful young creature should be represented by that dry official place. The Lord High Chancellor, at his best, appeared so poor a substitute for the love and pride of parents.

'The Jarndyce in question,' said the Lord Chancellor, still turning over leaves, 'is Jarndyce of Bleak House.'

'Jarndyce of Bleak House, my lord,' said Mr Kenge.

'A dreary name,' said the Lord Chancellor.

'But not a dreary place at present, my lord,' said Mr Kenge.

'And Bleak House,' said his lordship, 'is in——'

'Hertfordshire, my lord.'

'Mr Jarndyce of Bleak House is not married?' said his lordship.

'He is not, my lord,' said Mr Kenge.

A pause.

'Young Mr Richard Carstone is present?' said the Lord Chancellor, glancing towards him.

Richard bowed and stepped forward.

'Hum!' said the Lord Chancellor, turning over more leaves.

'Mr Jarndyce of Bleak House, my lord,' Mr Kenge observed, in a low voice, 'if I may venture to remind your lordship, provides a suitable companion for——'

'For Mr Richard Carstone?' I thought (but I am not quite sure) I heard his lordship say, in an equally low voice, and with a smile.

'For Miss Ada Clare. This is the young lady. Miss Summerson.'

His lordship gave me an indulgent look, and acknowledged my curtsy very graciously.

'Miss Summerson is not related to any party in the cause, I think?'

'No, my lord.'

Mr Kenge leant over before it was quite said, and whispered. His lordship, with his eyes upon his papers, listened, nodded twice or thrice, turned over more leaves, and did not look towards me again, until we were going away.

Mr Kenge now retired, and Richard with him, to where I was, near the door, leaving my pet (it is so natural to me that again I can't help it!) sitting near the Lord Chancellor; with whom his lordship spoke a little apart; asking her, as she told me afterwards, whether she had well reflected on the proposed arrangement, and if she thought she would be happy under the roof of Mr Jarndyce of Bleak House, and why she thought so? Presently he rose courteously, and released her, and then he spoke for a minute or two with Richard Carstone; not seated, but standing, and altogether with more ease and less ceremony—as if he still knew, though he *was* Lord Chancellor, how to go straight to the candor of a boy.

'Very well!' said his lordship aloud. 'I shall make the order. Mr Jarndyce of Bleak House has chosen, so far as I may judge,' and this was when he looked at me, 'a very good companion for the young



The little old Lady

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lady, and the arrangement altogether seems the best of which the circumstances admit.'

He dismissed us pleasantly, and we all went out, very much obliged to him for being so affable and polite; by which he had certainly lost no dignity, but seemed to us to have gained some.

When we got under the colonnade, Mr Kenge remembered that he must go back for a moment to ask a question; and left us in the fog, with the Lord Chancellor's carriage and servants waiting for him to come out.

'Well!' said Richard Carstone, '*that's* over! And where do we go next, Miss Summerson?'

'Don't you know?' I said.

'Not in the least,' said he.

'And don't *you* know, my love?' I asked Ada.

'No!' said she. 'Don't you?'

'Not at all!' said I.

We looked at one another, half laughing at our being like the children in the wood, when a curious little old woman in a squeezed bonnet, and carrying a reticule, came curtsying and smiling up to us, with an air of great ceremony.

'O!' said she. 'The wards in Jarndyce! Ve-ry happy, I am sure, to have the honor! It is a good omen for youth, and hope, and beauty, when they find themselves in this place, and don't know what's to come of it.'

'Mad!' whispered Richard, not thinking she could hear him.

'Right! Mad, young gentleman,' she returned so quickly that he was quite abashed. 'I was a ward myself. I was not mad at that time,' curtsying low, and smiling between every little sentence. 'I had youth, and hope. I believe, beauty. It matters very little now. Neither of the three served, or saved me. I have the honor to attend court regularly. With my documents. I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. I have discovered that the sixth seal mentioned in the Revelations\* is the Great Seal. It has been open a long time! Pray accept my blessing.'

As Ada was a little frightened, I said, to humor the poor old lady that we were much obliged to her.

'Ye-es!' she said mincingly. 'I imagine so. And here is Conversation Kenge. With *his* documents! How does your honorable worship do?'

'Quite well, quite well! Now don't be troublesome, that's a good soul!' said Mr Kenge, leading the way back.

'By no means,' said the poor old lady, keeping up with Ada and me. 'Anything but troublesome. I shall confer estates on both,—which is not being troublesome, I trust? I expect a judgment. Shortly. On the Day of Judgment. This is a good omen for you. Accept my blessing!'

She stopped at the bottom of the steep, broad flight of stairs; but we looked back as we went up, and she was still there, saying, still with a curtsy and a smile between every little sentence, 'Youth. And hope. And beauty. And Chancery. And Conversation Kenge! Ha! Pray accept my blessing!'

## CHAPTER FOUR

### TELESCOPIC PHILANTHROPY

WE were to pass the night, Mr Kenge told us when we arrived in his room, at Mrs Jellyby's; and then he turned to me, and said he took it for granted I knew who Mrs Jellyby was?

'I really don't, sir,' I returned. 'Perhaps Mr Carstone—or Miss Clare——'

But no, they knew nothing whatever about Mrs Jellyby.

'In-deed! Mrs Jellyby,' said Mr Kenge, standing with his back to the fire, and casting his eyes over the dusty hearth-rug as if it were Mrs Jellyby's biography, 'is a lady of very remarkable strength of character, who devotes herself entirely to the public. She has devoted herself to an extensive variety of public subjects, at various times, and is at present (until something else attracts her) devoted to the subject of Africa; with a view to the general cultivation of the coffee berry—and the natives—and the happy settlement, on the banks of the African rivers, of our superabundant home population.\* Mr Jarndyce, who is desirous to aid in any work that is considered likely to be a good work, and who is much sought after by philanthropists, has, I believe, a very high opinion of Mrs Jellyby.'

Mr Kenge, adjusting his cravat, then looked at us.

'And Mr Jellyby, sir?' suggested Richard.

'Ah! Mr Jellyby,' said Mr Kenge, 'is—a—I don't know that I can describe him to you better than by saying that he is the husband of Mrs Jellyby.'

'A nonentity, sir?' said Richard with a droll look.

'I don't say that,' returned Mr Kenge, gravely. 'I can't say that, indeed, for I know nothing whatever of Mr Jellyby. I never, to my knowledge, had the pleasure of seeing Mr Jellyby. He may be a very superior man; but he is, so to speak, merged—Merged—in the more shining qualities of his wife.' Mr Kenge proceeded to tell us that as the road to Bleak House would have been very long, dark, and tedious, on such an evening, and as we had been travelling already, Mr Jarndyce had himself proposed this arrangement. A carriage would be at Mrs Jellyby's to convey us out of town, early in the forenoon of to-morrow.

He then rang a little bell, and the young gentleman came in. Addressing him by the name of Guppy, Mr Kenge inquired whether Miss Summerson's boxes and the rest of the baggage had been 'sent round.' Mr Guppy said yes, they had been sent round, and a coach was waiting to take us round too, as soon as we pleased.

'Then it only remains,' said Mr Kenge, shaking hands with us, 'for me to express my lively satisfaction in (good day, Miss Clare!) the arrangement this day concluded, and my (*good* bye to you, Miss Summerson!) lively hope that it will conduce to the happiness, the (glad to have had the honor of making your acquaintance, Mr Carstone!) welfare, the advantage in all points of view, of all concerned! Guppy, see the party safely there.'

'Where is "there," Mr Guppy?' said Richard, as we went down stairs.

'No distance,' said Mr Guppy; 'round in Thavies' Inn, you know.'

'I can't say I know where it is, for I come from Winchester, and am strange in London.'

'Only round the corner,' said Mr Guppy. 'We just twist up Chancery-lane, and cut along Holborn, and there we are in four minutes time, as near as a touch.\* This is about a London particular *now*, ain't it, miss?' He seemed quite delighted with it on my account.

'The fog is very dense indeed!' said I.

'Not that it affects you, though, I am sure,' said Mr Guppy, putting up the steps. 'On the contrary, it seems to do you good, miss, judging from your appearance.'

I knew he meant well in paying me this compliment, so I laughed at myself for blushing at it, when he had shut the door and got upon the box; and we all three laughed, and chatted about our inexperience, and the strangeness of London, until we turned up under an



archway, to our destination: a narrow street of high houses, like an oblong cistern to hold the fog. There was a confused little crowd of people, principally children, gathered about the house at which we stopped, which had a tarnished brass plate on the door, with the inscription, JELLYBY.

'Don't be frightened!' said Mr Guppy, looking in at the coach-window. 'One of the young Jellybys been and got his head through the area railings!'

'O poor child,' said I, 'let me out, if you please!'

'Pray be careful of yourself, miss. The young Jellybys are always up to something,' said Mr Guppy.

I made my way to the poor child, who was one of the dirtiest little unfortunates I ever saw, and found him very hot and frightened, and crying loudly, fixed by the neck between two iron railings, while a milkman and a beadle, with the kindest intentions possible, were endeavouring to drag him back by the legs, under a general impression that his skull was compressible by those means. As I found (after pacifying him), that he was a little boy, with a naturally large head, I thought that, perhaps, where his head could go, his body could follow, and mentioned that the best mode of extrication might be to push him forward. This was so favorably received by the milkman and beadle, that he would immediately have been pushed into the area,\* if I had not held his pinafore, while Richard and Mr Guppy ran down through the kitchen, to catch him when he should be released. At last he was happily got down without any accident, and then he began to beat Mr Guppy with a hoop-stick in quite a frantic manner.

Nobody had appeared belonging to the house, except a person in pattens,\* who had been poking at the child from below with a broom; I don't know with what object, and I don't think she did. I therefore supposed that Mrs Jellyby was not at home; and was quite surprised when the person appeared in the passage without the pattens, and going up to the back room on the first floor, before Ada and me, announced us as, 'Them two young ladies, Missis Jellyby!' We passed several more children on the way up, whom it was difficult to avoid treading on in the dark; and as we came into Mrs Jellyby's presence, one of the poor little things fell down stairs—down a whole flight (as it sounded to me), with a great noise.

Mrs Jellyby, whose face reflected none of the uneasiness which we could not help showing in our own faces, as the dear child's

head recorded its passage with a bump on every stair—Richard afterwards said he counted seven, besides one for the landing—received us with perfect equanimity. She was a pretty, very diminutive, plump woman, of from forty to fifty, with handsome eyes, though they had a curious habit of seeming to look a long way off. As if—I am quoting Richard again—they could see nothing nearer than Africa!

‘I am very glad indeed,’ said Mrs Jellyby, in an agreeable voice, ‘to have the pleasure of receiving you. I have a great respect for Mr Jarndyce; and no one in whom he is interested can be an object of indifference to me.’

We expressed our acknowledgments, and sat down behind the door where there was a lame invalid of a sofa. Mrs Jellyby had very good hair, but was too much occupied with her African duties to brush it. The shawl in which she had been loosely muffled, dropped on to her chair when she advanced to us; and as she turned to resume her seat, we could not help noticing that her dress didn’t nearly meet up the back, and that the open space was railed across with a lattice-work of stay-lace—like a summer-house.

The room, which was strewn with papers and nearly filled by a great writing-table covered with similar litter, was, I must say, not only very untidy, but very dirty. We were obliged to take notice of that with our sense of sight, even while, with our sense of hearing, we followed the poor child who had tumbled down stairs: I think into the back kitchen, where somebody seemed to stifle him.

But what principally struck us was a jaded, and unhealthy-looking, though by no means plain girl, at the writing-table, who sat biting the feather of her pen, and staring at us. I suppose nobody ever was in such a state of ink. And, from her tumbled hair to her pretty feet, which were disfigured with frayed and broken satin slippers trodden down at heel, she really seemed to have no article of dress upon her, from a pin upwards, that was in its proper condition or its right place.

‘You find me, my dears,’ said Mrs Jellyby, snuffing the two great office candles in tin candlesticks which made the room taste strongly of hot tallow (the fire had gone out, and there was nothing in the grate but ashes, a bundle of wood, and a poker), ‘you find me, my dears, as usual, very busy; but that you will excuse. The African project at present employs my whole time. It involves me in correspondence with public bodies, and with private individuals anxious

for the welfare of their species all over the country. I am happy to say it is advancing. We hope by this time next year to have from a hundred and fifty to two hundred healthy families cultivating coffee and educating the natives of Borrioboola-Gha, on the left bank of the Niger.'

As Ada said nothing, but looked at me, I said it must be very gratifying.

'It is gratifying,' said Mrs Jellyby. 'It involves the devotion of all my energies, such as they are; but that is nothing, so that it succeeds; and I am more confident of success every day. Do you know, Miss Summerson, I almost wonder that *you* never turned your thoughts to Africa?'

This application of the subject was really so unexpected to me, that I was quite at a loss how to receive it. I hinted that the climate——

'The finest climate in the world!' said Mrs Jellyby.

'Indeed, ma'am?'

'Certainly. With precaution,' said Mrs Jellyby. 'You may go into Holborn, without precaution, and be run over. You may go into Holborn, with precaution, and never be run over. Just so with Africa.'

I said, 'No doubt.'—I meant as to Holborn.

'If you would like,' said Mrs Jellyby, putting a number of papers towards us, 'to look over some remarks on that head, and on the general subject (which have been extensively circulated), while I finish a letter I am now dictating—to my eldest daughter, who is my amanuensis——'

The girl at the table left off biting her pen, and made a return to our recognition, which was half bashful and half sulky.

'—I shall then have finished for the present,' proceeded Mrs Jellyby, with a sweet smile; 'though my work is never done. Where are you, Caddy?'

"Presents her compliments to Mr Swallow, and begs——"' said Caddy.

"—And begs," said Mrs Jellyby, dictating, "to inform him, in reference to his letter of inquiry on the African project."—No, Peepy! Not on any account!"

Peepy (so self-named) was the unfortunate child who had fallen down stairs, who now interrupted the correspondence by presenting himself, with a strip of plaister on his forehead, to exhibit his

wounded knees, in which Ada and I did not know which to pity most—the bruises or the dirt. Mrs Jellyby merely added, with the serene composure with which she said everything, ‘Go along, you naughty Peepy!’ and fixed her fine eyes on Africa again.

However, as she at once proceeded with her dictation, and as I interrupted nothing by doing it, I ventured quietly to stop poor Peepy as he was going out, and to take him up to nurse. He looked very much astonished at it, and at Ada’s kissing him; but soon fell fast asleep in my arms, sobbing at longer and longer intervals, until he was quiet. I was so occupied with Peepy that I lost the letter in detail, though I derived such a general impression from it of the momentous importance of Africa, and the utter insignificance of all other places and things, that I felt quite ashamed to have thought so little about it.

‘Six o’clock!’ said Mrs Jellyby. ‘And our dinner hour is nominally (for we dine at all hours) five! Caddy, show Miss Clare and Miss Summerson their rooms. You will like to make some change, perhaps? You will excuse me, I know, being so much occupied. O, that very bad child! Pray put him down, Miss Summerson!’

I begged permission to retain him, truly saying that he was not at all troublesome; and carried him upstairs and laid him on my bed. Ada and I had two upper rooms, with a door of communication between. They were excessively bare and disorderly, and the curtain to my window was fastened up with a fork.

‘You would like some hot water, wouldn’t you?’ said Miss Jellyby, looking round for a jug with a handle to it, but looking in vain.

‘If it is not being troublesome,’ said we.

‘O, it’s not the trouble,’ returned Miss Jellyby; ‘the question is, if there *is* any.’

The evening was so very cold, and the rooms had such a marshy smell, that I must confess it was a little miserable; and Ada was half crying. We soon laughed, however, and were busily unpacking, when Miss Jellyby came back to say, that she was sorry there was no hot water; but they couldn’t find the kettle, and the boiler was out of order.

We begged her not to mention it, and made all the haste we could to get down to the fire again. But all the little children had come up to the landing outside, to look at the phenomenon of Peepy lying on my bed; and our attention was distracted by the constant apparition of noses and fingers, in situations of danger between the hinges of

the doors. It was impossible to shut the door of either room; for my lock, with no knob to it, looked as if it wanted to be wound up; and though the handle of Ada's went round and round with the greatest smoothness, it was attended with no effect whatever on the door. Therefore I proposed to the children that they should come in and be very good at my table, and I would tell them the story of little Red Riding Hood while I dressed; which they did, and were as quiet as mice, including Peëpy, who awoke opportunely before the appearance of the wolf.

When we went downstairs we found a mug, with 'A Present from Tunbridge Wells' on it, lighted up in the staircase window with a floating wick; and a young woman, with a swelled face bound up in a flannel bandage, blowing the fire of the drawing-room (now connected by an open door with Mrs Jellyby's room), and choaking dreadfully. It smoked to that degree in short, that we all sat coughing and crying with the windows open for half an hour; during which Mrs Jellyby, with the same sweetness of temper, directed letters about Africa. Her being so employed was, I must say, a great relief to me; for Richard told us that he had washed his hands in a pie-dish, and that they had found the kettle on his dressing-table; and he made Ada laugh so, that they made me laugh in the most ridiculous manner.

Soon after seven o'clock we went down to dinner; carefully, by Mrs Jellyby's advice; for the stair-carpet, besides being very deficient in stair-wires, were so torn as to be absolute traps. We had a fine cod-fish, a piece of roast beef, a dish of cutlets, and a pudding; an excellent dinner, if it had had any cooking to speak of, but it was almost raw. The young woman with the flannel bandage waited, and dropped everything on the table wherever it happened to go, and never moved it again until she put it on the stairs. The person I had seen in pattens (who I suppose to have been the cook), frequently came and skirmished with her at the door, and there appeared to be ill-will between them.

All through dinner; which was long, in consequence of such accidents as the dish of potatoes being mislaid in the coal skuttle, and the handle of the corkscrew coming off, and striking the young woman in the chin; Mrs Jellyby preserved the evenness of her disposition. She told us a great deal that was interesting about Borrioboola-Gha and the natives; and received so many letters that Richard, who sat by her, saw four envelopes in the gravy at once.

Some of the letters were proceedings of ladies' committees, or resolutions of ladies' meetings, which she read to us; others were applications from people excited in various ways about the cultivation of coffee, and natives; others required answers, and these she sent her eldest daughter from the table three or four times to write. She was full of business, and undoubtedly was, as she had told us, devoted to the cause.

I was a little curious to know who a mild bald gentleman in spectacles was, who dropped into a vacant chair (there was no top or bottom in particular) after the fish was taken away, and seemed passively to submit himself to Borrioboola-Gha, but not to be actively interested in that settlement. As he never spoke a word, he might have been a native, but for his complexion. It was not until we left the table, and he remained alone with Richard, that the possibility of his being Mr Jellyby ever entered my head. But he *was* Mr Jellyby; and a loquacious young man called Mr Quale, with large shining knobs for temples, and his hair all brushed to the back of his head, who came in the evening, and told Ada he was a philanthropist, also informed her that he called the matrimonial alliance of Mrs Jellyby with Mr Jellyby the union of mind and matter.

This young man, besides having a great deal to say for himself about Africa, and a project of his for teaching the coffee colonists to teach the natives to turn piano-forte legs and establish an export trade, delighted in drawing Mrs Jellyby out by saying, 'I believe now, Mrs Jellyby, you have received as many as from one hundred and fifty to two hundred letters respecting Africa in a single day, have you not?' or, 'If my memory does not deceive me, Mrs Jellyby, you once mentioned that you had sent off five thousand circulars from one post-office at one time?'—always repeating Mrs Jellyby's answer to us like an interpreter. During the whole evening, Mr Jellyby sat in a corner with his head against the wall, as if he were subject to low spirits. It seemed that he had several times opened his mouth when alone with Richard, after dinner, as if he had something on his mind; but had always shut it again, to Richard's extreme confusion, without saying anything.

Mrs Jellyby, sitting in quite a nest of waste paper, drank coffee all the evening, and dictated at intervals to her eldest daughter. She also held a discussion with Mr Quale; of which the subject seemed to be—if I understood it—the Brotherhood of Humanity; and gave utterance to some beautiful sentiments. I was not so attentive an

auditor as I might have wished to be, however, for Peepy and the other children came flocking about Ada and me in a corner of the drawing-room to ask for another story: so we sat down among them, and told them in whispers Puss in Boots and I don't know what else, until Mrs Jellyby, accidentally remembering them, sent them to bed. As Peepy cried for me to take him to bed, I carried him upstairs; where the young woman with the flannel bandage charged into the midst of the little family like a dragoon, and overturned them into cribs.

After that, I occupied myself in making our room a little tidy, and in coaxing a very cross fire that had been lighted, to burn; which at last it did, quite brightly. On my return downstairs, I felt that Mrs Jellyby looked down upon me rather, for being so frivolous; and I was sorry for it; though at the same time I knew that I had no higher pretensions.

It was nearly midnight before we found an opportunity of going to bed; and even then we left Mrs Jellyby among her papers drinking coffee, and Miss Jellyby biting the feather of her pen.

'What a strange house!' said Ada, when we got upstairs. 'How curious of my cousin Jarndyce to send us here!'

'My love,' said I, 'it quite confuses me. I want to understand it, and I can't understand it at all.'

'What?' asked Ada, with her pretty smile.

'All this, my dear,' said I. 'It *must* be very good of Mrs Jellyby to take such pains about a scheme for the benefit of Natives—and yet—Peepy and the housekeeping!'

Ada laughed; and put her arm about my neck, as I stood looking at the fire; and told me I was a quiet, dear, good creature, and had won her heart. 'You are so thoughtful, Esther,' she said, 'and yet so cheerful! and you do so much, so unpretendingly! You would make a home out of even this house.'

My simple darling! She was quite unconscious that she only praised herself, and that it was in the goodness of her own heart that she made so much of me!

'May I ask you a question?' said I, when we had sat before the fire a little while.

'Five hundred,' said Ada.

'Your cousin, Mr Jarndyce. I owe so much to him. Would you mind describing him to me?'

Shaking back her golden hair, Ada turned her eyes upon me with



Miss Jellyby



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such laughing wonder, that I was full of wonder too—partly at her beauty, partly at her surprise.

‘Esther!’ she cried.

‘My dear!’

‘You want a description of my cousin Jarndyce?’

‘My dear, I never saw him.’

‘And I never saw him!’ returned Ada.

Well, to be sure!

No, she had never seen him. Young as she was when her mama died, she remembered how the tears would come into her eyes when she spoke of him, and of the noble generosity of his character, which she had said was to be trusted above all earthly things; and Ada trusted it. Her cousin Jarndyce had written to her a few months ago,—‘a plain, honest letter,’ Ada said—proposing the arrangement we were now to enter on, and telling her that, ‘in time it might heal some of the wounds made by the miserable Chancery suit.’ She had replied, gratefully accepting his proposal. Richard had received a similar letter, and had made a similar response. He *had* seen Mr Jarndyce once, but only once, five years ago, at Winchester school. He had told Ada, when they were leaning on the screen before the fire where I found them, that he recollected him as ‘a bluff, rosy fellow.’ This was the utmost description Ada could give me.

It set me thinking so, that when Ada was asleep, I still remained before the fire, wondering and wondering about Bleak House, and wondering and wondering that yesterday morning should seem so long ago. I don’t know where my thoughts had wandered, when they were recalled by a tap at the door.

I opened it softly, and found Miss Jellyby shivering there, with a broken candle in a broken candlestick in one hand, and an egg-cup in the other.

‘Good night!’ she said, very sulkily.

‘Good night!’ said I.

‘May I come in?’ she shortly and unexpectedly asked me in the same sulky way.

‘Certainly,’ said I. ‘Don’t wake Miss Clare.’

She would not sit down, but stood by the fire, dipping her inky middle finger in the egg-cup, which contained vinegar, and smearing it over the ink stains on her face; frowning, the whole time, and looking very gloomy.

‘I wish Africa was dead!’ she said, on a sudden.

I was going to remonstrate.

'I do!' she said. 'Don't talk to me, Miss Summerson. I hate it and detest it. It's a beast!'

I told her she was tired, and I was sorry. I put my hand upon her head, and touched her forehead, and said it was hot now, but would be cool to-morrow. She still stood, pouting and frowning at me; but presently put down her egg-cup, and turned softly towards the bed where Ada lay.

'She is very pretty!' she said, with the same knitted brow, and in the same uncivil manner.

I assented with a smile.

'An orphan. Ain't she?'

'Yes.'

'But knows a quantity, I suppose? Can dance, and play music, and sing? She can talk French, I suppose, and do geography, and globes, and needlework, and every thing?'

'No doubt,' said I.

'I can't,' she returned. 'I can't do anything hardly, except write. I'm always writing for Ma. I wonder you two were not ashamed of yourselves to come in this afternoon, and see me able to do nothing else. It was like your ill-nature. Yet you think yourselves very fine, I dare say!'

I could see that the poor girl was near crying, and I resumed my chair without speaking, and looked at her (I hope), as mildly as I felt towards her.

'It's disgraceful,' she said. 'You know it is. The whole house is disgraceful. The children are disgraceful. *I'm* disgraceful. Pa's miserable, and no wonder! Priscilla drinks—she's always drinking. It's a great shame and a great story, of you, if you say you didn't smell her to-day. It was as bad as a public-house, waiting at dinner; you know it was!'

'My dear, I don't know it,' said I.

'You do,' she said, very shortly. 'You sha'n't say you don't. You do!'

'O, my dear!' said I, 'if you won't let me speak——'

'You're speaking now. You know you are. Don't tell stories, Miss Summerson.'

'My dear,' said I, 'as long as you won't hear me out——'

'I don't want to hear you out.'

'O yes, I think you do,' said I, 'because that would be so very

unreasonable. I did not know what you tell me, because the servant did not come near me at dinner; but I don't doubt what you tell me, and I am sorry to hear it.'

'You needn't make a merit of that,' said she.

'No, my dear,' said I. 'That would be very foolish.'

She was still standing by the bed, and now stooped down (but still with the same discontented face) and kissed Ada. That done, she came softly back, and stood by the side of my chair. Her bosom was heaving in a distressful manner that I greatly pitied; but I thought it better not to speak.

'I wish I was dead!' she broke out. 'I wish we were all dead. It would be a great deal better for us.'

In a moment afterwards, she knelt on the ground at my side, hid her face in my dress, passionately begged my pardon, and wept. I comforted her, and would have raised her, but she cried, No, no; she wanted to stay there!

'You used to teach girls,' she said. 'If you could only have taught me, I could have learnt from you! I am so very miserable, and I like you so much!'

I could not persuade her to sit by me, or to do anything but move a ragged stool to where she was kneeling, and take that, and still hold my dress in the same manner. By degrees, the poor tired girl fell asleep; and then I contrived to raise her head so that it should rest on my lap, and to cover us both with shawls. The fire went out, and all night long she slumbered thus before the ashy grate. At first I was painfully awake, and vainly tried to lose myself, with my eyes closed, among the scenes of the day. At length, by slow degrees, they became indistinct and mingled. I began to lose the identity of the sleeper resting on me. Now, it was Ada; now, one of my old Reading friends from whom I could not believe I had so recently parted. Now, it was the little mad woman worn out with curtseying and smiling; now, some one in authority at Bleak House. Lastly, it was no one, and I was no one.

The purblind day was feebly struggling with the fog, when I opened my eyes to encounter those of a dirty-faced little spectre fixed upon me. Peepy had scaled his crib, and crept down in his bedgown and cap, and was so cold that his teeth were chattering as if he had cut them all.