HARD TIMES BY CHARLES DICKENS

EVERY MAN I WILL GO WITH THEE BE THY GVIDE

IN THY MOST NEED TO GO BY THY SIDE

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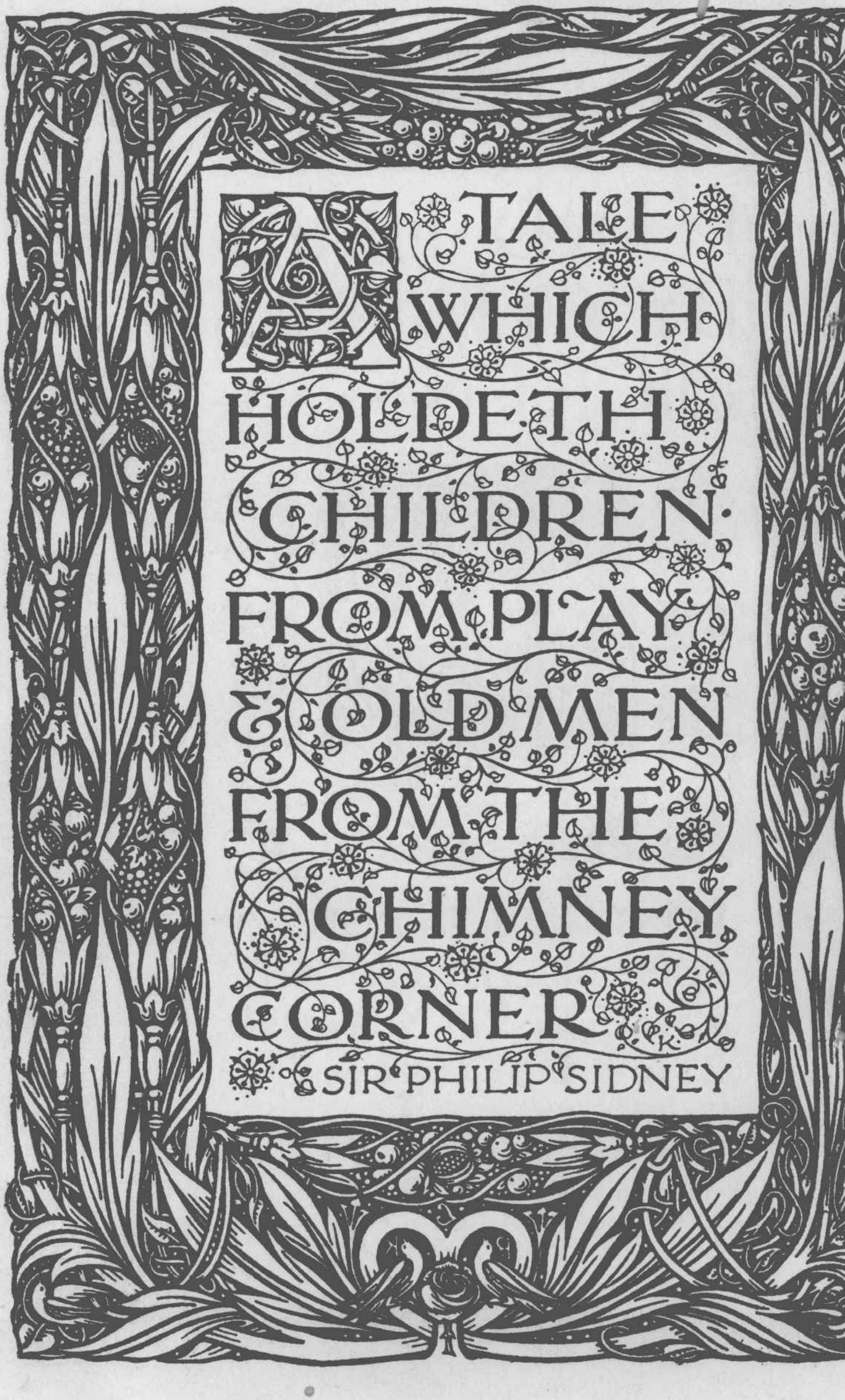
A TALE
WHICH
HOLDETH
CHILDREN
FROM PLAY
& OLD MEN
FROM THE
CHIMNEY
CORNER
SIR PHILIP SIDNEY

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HARD TIMES

CHARACTERS

BITZER, a well-crammed pupil in Mr. Gradgrind's model school.

STEPHEN BLACKPOOL, a honest, hard-working power-loom weaver in Mr. Bounderby's factory.

MR. JOSIAH BOUNDERBY, a boastful and wealthy manufacturer.

MR. E. W. B. CHILDERS, a member of Sleary's Circus Troupe.

MR. THOMAS GRADGRIND, a retired wholesale hardware merchant.

THOMAS GRADGRIND, his youngest son; a selfish, ill-natured whelp.

MR. JAMES HARTHOUSE, a friend of Mr. Gradgrind's.

SIGNOR JUPE, a clown in Sleary's Circus Troupe.

MR. M'CHOAKUMCHILD, a teacher in Mr. Gradgrind's model school.

SLACKBRIDGE, a trades-union agitator.

MR. SLEARY, a stout, flabby man; the proprietor of a circus.

MRS. BLACKPOOL, the wife of Stephen Blackpool; a dissolute, drunken woman.

EMMA GORDON, a member of Sleary's Circus Troupe.

MRS. GRADGRIND, the feeble-minded wife of Mr. Thomas Gradgrind.

JANE GRADGRIND, younger daughter of the preceding.

LOUISA GRADGRIND, the eldest child of Mr. and Mrs. Gradgrind; afterwards the wife of Mr. Josiah Bounderby.

CECILIA JUPE (" Sissy "), the daughter of Signor Jupe, a circus clown.

MRS. PEGLER, a mysterious old woman, withered, but tall and shapely.

RACHAEL, a factory hand; a friend of Stephen Blackpool's.

LADY SCADGERS, a fat old woman; great-aunt to Mrs. Sparsit.

JOSEPHINE SLEARY, a fair-haired young woman; the daughter of Mr. Sleary, the circus proprietor.

MRS. SPARSIT, an elderly lady; Mr. Bounderby's housekeeper.

INTRODUCTION

I HAVE heard that in some debating clubs there is a rule that the members may discuss anything except religion and politics. I cannot imagine what they do discuss; but it is quite evident that they have ruled out the only two subjects which are either important or amusing. The thing is a part of a certain modern tendency to avoid things because they lead to warmth; whereas, obviously, we ought, even in a social sense, to seek those things specially. The warmth of the discussion is as much a part of hospitality as the warmth of the fire. And it is singularly suggestive that in English literature the two things have died together. The very people who would blame Dickens for his sentimental hospitality are the very people who would also blame him for his narrow political conviction. The very people who would blame him for his narrow radicalism are those who would blame him for his broad fireside. Real conviction and real charity are much nearer than people suppose. Dickens was capable of loving all men; but he refused to love all opinions. The modern humanitarian can love all opinions, but he cannot love all men; he seems, sometimes, in the ecstasy of his humanitarianism, even to hate them all. He can love all opinions, including the opinion that men are unlovable.

In feeling Dickens as a lover we must never forget him as a fighter, and a fighter for a creed: but indeed there is no other kind of fighter. The geniality which he spread over all his creations was geniality spread from one centre, from one flaming peak. He was willing to excuse Mr. Micawber for being extravagant; but Dickens and Dickens's doctrine were strictly to decide how far he was to be excused. He was willing to like Mr. Twemlow in spite of his snobbishness, but Dickens and Dickens's doctrine were alone to be judges of how far he was snobbish. There was never a more didactic writer: hence there was never one more amusing. He had no mean modern notion of keeping the moral

doubtful. He would have regarded this as a mere piece of slovenliness, like leaving the last page illegible.

Everywhere in Dickens's work these angles of his absolute opinion stood up out of the confusion of his general kindness, just as sharp and splintered peaks stand up out of the soft confusion of the forests. Dickens is always generous, he is generally kind-hearted, he is often sentimental, he is sometimes intolerably maudlin; but you never know when you will not come upon one of the convictions of Dickens; and when you do come upon it you do know it. It is as hard and as high as any precipice or peak of the mountains. The highest and hardest of these peaks is "Hard Times."

It is here more than anywhere else that the sternness of Dickens emerges as separate from his softness; it is here, most obviously, so to speak, that his bones stick out. There are indeed many other books of his which are written better and written in a sadder tone. "Great Expectations" is melancholy in a sense; but it is doubtful of everything, even of its own melancholy. "The Tale of Two Cities" is a great tragedy, but it is still a sentimental tragedy. It is a great drama, but it is still a melodrama. But this tale of "Hard Times" is in some way harsher than all these. For it is the expression of a righteous indignation which cannot condescend to humour and which cannot even condescend to pathos. Twenty times we have taken Dickens's hand and it has been sometimes hot with revelry and sometimes weak with weariness; but this time we start a little, for it is inhumanly cold; and then we realise that we have touched his gauntlet of steel.

One cannot express the real value of this book without being irrelevant. It is true that one cannot express the real value of anything without being irrelevant. If we take a thing frivolously we can take it separately, but the moment we take a thing seriously, if it were only an old umbrella, it is obvious that that umbrella opens above us into the immensity of the whole universe. But there are rather particular reasons why the value of the book called "Hard Times" should be referred back to great historic and theoretic matters with which it may appear superficially to have little or nothing to do. The chief reason can perhaps be stated thus—that English politics had for

more than a hundred years been getting into more and more of a hopeless tangle (a tangle which, of course, has since become even worse), and that Dickens did in some extraordinary way see what was wrong, even if he did not see what was right.

The Liberalism which Dickens and nearly all of his contemporaries professed had begun in the American and the French Revolutions. Almost all modern English criticism upon those revolutions has been vitiated by the assumption that those revolutions burst upon a world which was unprepared for their ideas—a world ignorant of the possibility of such ideas. Somewhat the same mistake is made by those who suggest that Christianity was adopted by a world incapable of criticising it; whereas obviously it was adopted by a world that was tired of criticising everything. The vital mistake that is made about the French Revolution is merely this—that every one talks about it as the introduction of a new idea. It was not the introduction of a new idea; there are no new ideas. Or if there are new ideas, they would not cause the least irritation if they were introduced into political society; because the world having never got used to them there would be no mass of men ready to fight for them at a moment's notice. That which was irritating about the French Revolution was this—that it was not the introduction of a new ideal, but the practical fulfilment of an old one. From the time of the first fairy tales men had always believed ideally in equality; they had always thought that something ought to be done, if anything could be done to redress the balance between Cinderella and the ugly sisters. The irritating thing about the French was not that they said this ought to be done; everybody said that. The irritating thing about the French was that they did it. They proposed to carry out into a positive scheme what had been the vision of humanity; and humanity was naturally annoyed. The kings of Europe did not make war upon the Revolution because it was a blasphemy, but because it was a copy-book maxim which had been just too accurately copied. It was a platitude which they had always held in theory unexpectedly put into practice. The tyrants did not hate democracy because it was a paradox; they hated it because it was a truism which seemed in some danger of coming true.

Now it happens to be hugely important to have this right view of the Revolution in considering its political effects upon England. For the English, being a deeply and indeed excessively romantic people, could never be quite content with this quality of cold and bald obviousness about the republican formula. The republican formula was merely this—that the State must consist of its citizens ruling equally, however unequally they may do anything else. In their capacity of members of the State they are all equally interested in its preservation. But the English soon began to be romantically restless about this eternal truism; they were perpetually trying to turn it into something else, into something more picturesque—progress perhaps, or anarchy. At last they turned it into the highly exciting and highly unsound system of politics, which was known as the Manchester School, and which was expressed with a sort of logical flightiness, more excusable in literature, by Mr. Herbert Spencer. Of course Danton or Washington or any of the original republicans would have thought these people were mad; they would never have admitted for a moment that the State must not interfere with commerce or competition; they would merely have insisted that if the State did interfere, it must really be the State—that is, the whole people. But the distance between the common sense of Danton and the mere ecstasy of Herbert Spencer marks the English way of colouring and altering the revolutionary idea. The English people as a body went blind, as the saying is, for interpreting democracy entirely in terms of liberty. They said in substance that if they had more and more liberty it did not matter whether they had any equality or any fraternity. But this was violating the sacred trinity of true politics; they confounded the persons and they divided the substance.

Now the really odd thing about England in the nineteenth century is this—that there was one Englishman who happened to keep his head. The men who lost their heads lost highly scientific and philosophical heads; they were great cosmic systematisers like Spencer, great social philosophers like Bentham, great practical politicians like Bright, great political economists like Mill. The man who kept his head kept a head full of fantastic nonsense; he

was a writer of rowdy farces, a demagogue of fiction, a man without education in any serious sense whatever, a man whose whole business was to turn ordinary cockneys into extraordinary caricatures. Yet when all these other children of the Revolution went wrong he, by a mystical something in his bones, went right. He knew nothing of the Revolution; yet he struck the note of it. He returned to the original sentimental commonplace upon which it is forever founded, as the Church is founded on a rock. In an England gone mad about a minor theory he reasserted the original idea—the idea that no one in the State must be too weak to influence the State.

This man was Dickens. He did this work much more genuinely than it was done by Carlyle or Ruskin; for they were simply Tories making out a romantic case for the return of Toryism. But Dickens was a real Liberal demanding the return of real Liberalism. Dickens was there to remind people that England had rubbed out two words of the revolutionary motto, had left only Liberty and destroyed Equality and Fraternity. In this book, "Hard Times," he specially champions equality. In all his books he champions fraternity.

The atmosphere of this book and what it stands for can be very adequately conveyed in the note on the book by Lord Macaulay, who may stand as a very good example of the spirit of England in those years of eager emancipation and expanding wealth—the years in which Liberalism was turned from an omnipotent truth to a weak scientific system. Macaulay's private comment on "Hard Times" runs, "One or two passages of exquisite pathos and the rest sullen Socialism." That is not an unfair and certainly not a specially hostile criticism, but it exactly shows how the book struck those people who were mad on political liberty and dead about everything else. Macaulay mistook for a new formula called Socialism what was, in truth, only the old formula called political democracy. He and his Whigs had so thoroughly mauled and modified the original idea of Rousseau or Jefferson that when they saw it again they positively thought that it was something quite new and eccentric. But the truth was that Dickens was not a Socialist, but an unspoilt Liberal; he was not sullen; nay, rather, he had remained strangely hopeful. They called

him a sullen Socialist only to disguise their astonishment at finding still loose about the London streets a happy republican.

Dickens is the one living link between the old kindness and the new, between the goodwill of the past and the good works of the future. He links May Day with Bank Holiday, and he does it almost alone. All the men around him, great and good as they were, were in comparison puritanical, and never so puritanical as when they were also atheistic. He is a sort of solitary pipe down which pours to the twentieth century the original river of Merry England. And although this "Hard Times" is, as its name implies, the hardest of his works, although there is less in it perhaps than in any of the others of the *abandon* and the buffoonery of Dickens, this only emphasises the more clearly the fact that he stood almost alone for a more humane and hilarious view of democracy. None of his great and much more highly-educated contemporaries could help him in this. Carlyle was as gloomy on the one side as Herbert Spencer on the other. He protested against the commercial oppression simply and solely because it was not only an oppression but a depression. And this protest of his was made specially in the case of the book before us. It may be bitter, but it was a protest against bitterness. It may be dark, but it is the darkness of the subject and not of the author. He is by his own account dealing with hard times, but not with a hard eternity, not with a hard philosophy of the universe. Nevertheless, this is the one place in his work where he does not make us remember human happiness by example as well as by precept. This is, as I have said, not the saddest, but certainly the harshest of his stories. It is perhaps the only place where Dickens, in defending happiness, for a moment forgets to be happy.

He describes Bounderby and Gradgrind with a degree of grimness and sombre hatred very different from the half-affectionate derision which he directed against the old tyrants or humbugs of the earlier nineteenth century—the pompous Dedlock or the fatuous Nupkins, the grotesque Bumble or the inane Tigg. In those old books his very abuse was benignant; in "Hard Times" even his sympathy is hard. And the reason is again to be found in the political facts of the century. Dickens could be half genial

with the older generation of oppressors because it was a dying generation. It was evident, or at least it seemed evident then, that Nupkins could not go on much longer making up the law of England to suit himself; that Sir Leicester Dedlock could not go on much longer being kind to his tenants as if they were dogs and cats. And some of these evils the nineteenth century did really eliminate or improve. For the first half of the century Dickens and all his friends were justified in feeling that the chains were falling from mankind. At any rate, the chains did fall from Mr. Rouncewell the Iron-master. And when they fell from him he picked them up and put them upon the poor.

G. K. CHESTERTON.

December 1907.

The following is a list of the works of Charles Dickens:—

Sketches by Boz, 1835, 2nd series, 1836 (from "Monthly Magazine," "Morning Chronicle," "Evening Chronicle," "Bell's Life in London," and "The Library of Fiction"); Sunday under Three Heads, etc., 1836; The Strange Gentleman, comic burletta, 1837; The Village Coquettes, comic opera, 1836; Is she his Wife? or Something Singular? comic burletta, acted 1837; Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club, monthly numbers, 1836–7; Mudfog Papers (Bentley's "Miscellany"), 1837–9; Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi, edited by Boz, 1838; Oliver Twist, or the Parish Boy's Progress, 1838 (from Bentley's "Miscellany"); Sketches of Young Gentlemen, 1838; Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby, monthly numbers, 1838–9; Sketches of Young Couples, etc., 1840; Master Humphrey's Clock, weekly numbers, 1840–1; volume form, 1840, 1841 (Old Curiosity Shop, Barnaby Rudge); the Pic-nic Papers (preface and first story), 1841; American Notes for general circulation, 1842; A Christmas Carol in Prose, 1843; The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit, monthly numbers, 1843–4; The Chimes: a Goblin Story of some Bells, etc., 1844; The Cricket on the Hearth: a Fairy Tale of Home, 1845; Pictures from Italy, 1846 (from "Daily News"); The Battle of Life: a Love Story, 1846; Dealings with the Firm of Dombey and Son, etc., monthly numbers, 1846–8; The Haunted Man, and the Ghost's Bargain, 1848; The Personal History of David Copperfield, monthly numbers, 1849–50; Christmas Stories in "Household Words" and "All the Year Round," 1850–67; Bleak House, monthly numbers, 1852–3; A Child's History of England, 1854 (from "Household Words"); Hard Times for these Times, 1854 (from "Household Words"); Little Dorrit, monthly numbers, 1855–7; A Tale of Two Cities, 1859 (from "All the Year Round"); Great Expectations, 1861 (from "All the Year Round"); Our Mutual Friend, monthly numbers,

1864–5; Religious Opinions of the late Rev. Chauncey Hare Townhend, ed. C. D., 1869; "Landor's Life," last contribution to "All the Year Round"; The Mystery of Edwin Drood (unfinished), in monthly numbers, April to September, 1870.

Other papers were contributed to "Household Words" and "All the Year Round."

First Collective Ed., 1847–74; Library Ed., 1857, etc.; "Charles Dickens" Ed., 1868–70; Letters, ed. Miss Hogarth and Miss Dickens, 1886; Life, by Forster, 1872–74; "Men of Letters" Series, 1882; "Great Writers" Series, 1887.

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HARD TIMES

BOOK THE FIRST. SOWING

CHAPTER I

THE ONE THING NEEDFUL

"Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can only form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them. This is the principle on which I bring up my own children, and this is the principle on which I bring up these children. Stick to Facts, Sir!"

The scene was a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom, and the speaker's square forefinger emphasized his observations by underscoring every sentence with a line on the schoolmaster's sleeve. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's square wall of a forehead, which had his eyebrows for its base, while his eyes found commodious cellarage in two dark caves, overshadowed by the wall. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's mouth, which was wide, thin, and hard set. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's voice, which was inflexible, dry, and dictatorial. The emphasis was helped by the speaker's hair, which bristled on the skirts of his bald head, a plantation of firs to keep the wind from its shining surface, all covered with knobs, like the crust of a plum pie, as if the head had scarcely warehouse-room for the hard facts stored inside. The speaker's obstinate carriage, square coat, square legs, square shoulders,—nay, his very neckcloth, trained to take him by the throat with an unaccommodating grasp, like a stubborn fact, as it was,—all helped the emphasis.

"In this life, we want nothing but Facts, Sir; nothing but Facts!"

The speaker, and the schoolmaster, and the third grown person present, all backed a little, and swept with their eyes the inclined plane of little vessels then and there arranged in order, ready to have imperial gallons of facts poured into them until they were full to the brim.

CHAPTER II

MURDERING THE INNOCENTS

THOMAS GRADGRIND, Sir. A man of realities. A man of facts and calculations. A man who proceeds upon the principle that two and two are four, and nothing over, and who is not to be talked into allowing for anything over. Thomas Gradgrind, Sir—peremptorily Thomas—Thomas Gradgrind. With a rule and a pair of scales, and the multiplication table always in his pocket, Sir, ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature, and tell you exactly what it comes to. It is a mere question of figures, a case of simple arithmetic. You might hope to get some other nonsensical belief into the head of George Gradgrind, or Augustus Gradgrind, or John Gradgrind, or Joseph Gradgrind (all supposititious, non-existent persons), but into the head of Thomas Gradgrind—no, Sir!

In such terms Mr. Gradgrind always mentally introduced himself, whether to his private circle of acquaintance, or to the public in general. In such terms, no doubt, substituting the words "boys and girls," for "Sir," Thomas Gradgrind now presented Thomas Gradgrind to the little pitchers before him, who were to be filled so full of facts.

Indeed, as he eagerly sparkled at them from the cellarage before mentioned, he seemed a kind of cannon loaded to the muzzle with facts, and prepared to blow them clean out of the regions of childhood at one discharge. He seemed a galvanizing apparatus, too, charged with a grim mechanical substitute for the tender young imaginations that were to be stormed away.

"Girl number twenty," said Mr. Gradgrind, squarely point-