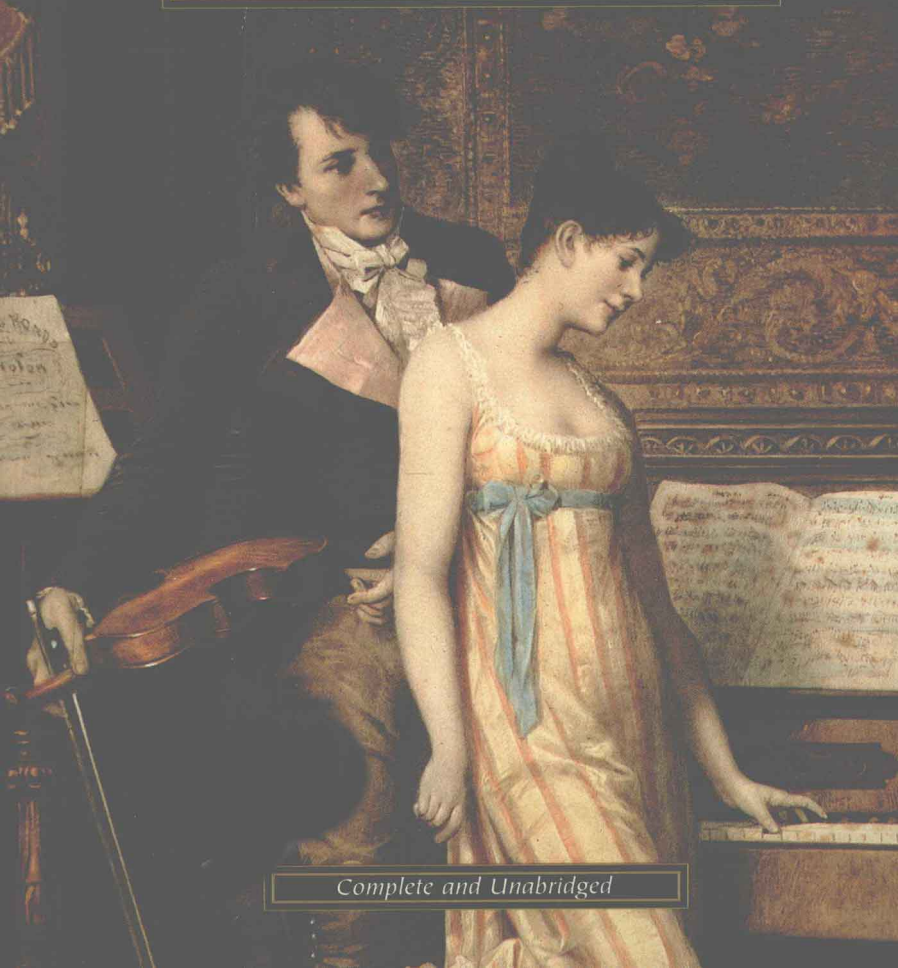


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DICKENS

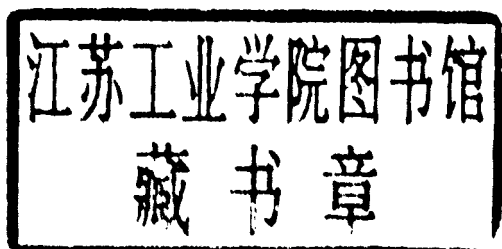
Barnaby Rudge



Complete and Unabridged

BARNABY RUDGE

Charles Dickens



WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

BARNABY RUDGE

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INTRODUCTION

Barnaby Rudge was Dickens's first historical novel, the second and only other being *A Tale of Two Cities* of 1859. Originally intended for publication as a single volume, circumstances forced Dickens to produce it serially between February and November of 1841 in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, the weekly miscellany he had started the previous year. It was not immediately as popular as its predecessors, yet it comprises some magnificent writing and is significant in terms of Dickens's artistic development. A new discipline is felt throughout *Barnaby Rudge*, and Dickens displays mastery in the integration of fiction and historical fact. He introduces characters from all social strata, successfully relating even his most extreme eccentrics to real historical figures and events in the story. Focusing on individuals who are swept into the collective action of the mob, Dickens exposes its power and its horror.

The novel is set against the infamous 'No Popery' riots that were instigated by Lord George Gordon and terrorised London for days during the early summer of 1780. It falls easily into two parts. The first, which opens in 1775, concerns romance and independence blighted by paternal authority. False or inadequate parents are a recurring feature in Dickens's *oeuvre*, and in *Barnaby Rudge* there are plenty of these in various guises. John Willet, keeper of the Maypole Inn, is a tyrannical father to Joe Willet, one of the romantic heroes of the plot. Sir John Chester, a heartless, manipulative aristocrat and a Protestant, is father of Edward Chester, the other hero. The Catholic Geoffrey Haredale doesn't quite match these two for stupidity or villainy, but he is prepared to sacrifice the happiness of his niece Emma to the demands of a personal feud. The corrupt parents are superbly drawn. Interwoven with their story is the mysterious tale of the unsolved murder

of Ruben Haredale, committed twenty years earlier. This centres around the shadowy, fugitive figure of Mr Rudge, absent father of the half-witted Barnaby Rudge. Barnaby's mother is contrastingly an excellent parent, whose honest goodness ranks with that of Gabriel Varden, the locksmith who is the true hero of the piece. Varden is a devoted if indulgent father to his daughter Dolly, but his household is dominated by the whims and tantrums of his wife and her bitter, self-deluding servant, Miggs, who have both fallen prey to the Protestant Organization.

The disorder in the Varden house, and in the Chester, Haredale and Rudge homes too, symbolises a greater disorder. This feeling is bolstered by a sub-plot that provides some of the best comedy in the novel, and revolves around Simon Tappertit, apprentice to the good locksmith, and the operations of his secret society of apprentices who plot the destruction of their masters. Dickens's descriptions of the apprentices meetings are hilarious but laced with sinister overtones, and the satire here is unforgiving. Dickens was a supreme believer in social order, and saw such revolutionary antics as a real evil. Through the activities of these fictional characters he suggests an underlying social unrest.

The second part of the novel treats the riots themselves, and their culmination in the sacking of Newgate Prison, which draws an obvious parallel with the French Revolution. Dickens moves seamlessly from private to public concerns. We are introduced to Lord George Gordon and his menacing assistant, Gashford, but the main players in the riots all have a role in the romantic plot of the novel. Dickens's evocation of mob violence is remarkably vivid and constitutes some of his very best writing. He describes his intention: 'My object has been to convey an idea of multitudes, violence and fury, even to lose my own *dramatis personae* in the throng.'

Many of the characters in *Barnaby Rudge* have a symbolic significance or representative function to encompass themes wider than their own stories, and issues that were of topical interest at the time of its publication. Dickens's well-documented personal feelings concerning capital punishment and public executions are felt in the action of the novel and in the character of Dennis the hangman, who stands as a potent symbol of the brutality and mindlessness engendered by these practices. His sensitive and clearly sympathetic portrait of the charismatic but deranged zealot, Lord George Gordon, conveys his views on the currently debated subject of madness as excusable grounds for crime. His attack against the Protestants was equally timely (though in reality

Dickens did not have much time for Catholics), as the newly founded Protestant Association of 1839 was publicly criticised for its hypocrisy and intolerance. The influence of such institutions is effectively realised in the characters of Mrs Varden and Miggs.

Dickens's equivocal feelings towards the Romantic movement are also manifest. The title character, Barnaby Rudge, derives from diverse Romantic sources. He has admirable qualities in common with simple-minded characters from Scott's novels and with the 'natural' heroes from Wordsworth's *Lyrical Ballads*, and he shares touches of the 'noble savage' with the more complex figure of the apprentice Hugh. Yet Barnaby's imagination, unrestrained by reason, ultimately undoes him. Dickens more directly attacks what he perceives as the anti-social side of Romanticism in his portrayal of Simon Tappertit, whose presumptions are shown to be dangerous and misplaced.

Ambivalence is a striking feature in *Barnaby Rudge*. It is expressed most visibly in the character of Hugh, the natural-born anarchist, and in Dickens's own clearly divided sympathies on so many of the central preoccupations of the novel. Set against Dickens's repeated use of prisons as symbols of suffering in his work, the wild animation of his account of the riots which carries a hint of celebration and his partial sympathy with at least two of the principal rioters, is his real dread of anarchy and genuine respect for structure in society. And to counter his abhorrence of capital punishment is his clear belief in the need for the forces of law and order as instruments of justice and retribution. Authority is seen as an essential that is all too easily abused.

Barnaby Rudge has been unduly neglected. It is a rewarding novel, beautifully constructed and rich with historical interest, passion, comedy and serious issues. It illustrates Dickens's artistry in many areas and marks an important point in his achievement. If this sounds dry, high entertainment is ensured by the comics in the cast, from the snivelling Miss Miggs and the posturing Simon Tappertit to the half-witted Barnaby Rudge of the title.

Charles Dickens was born at Landport (Portsea), near Portsmouth, Hampshire, on 7 February 1812. He was the second of eight children. His father, John, was a clerk in the Naval Pay Office at Portsmouth. The Dickens family, although not poor by the standards of the time, lived through a series of financial crises and the accompanying social insecurity. Dickens's childhood was spent in Portsmouth, London and Chatham in Kent, where there was a large naval dockyard. In 1822, facing financial

ruin, the family moved to London and, on 5 February 1824, Charles began work in a blacking warehouse at Hungerford Stairs where he was employed to label bottles for six shillings a week. A short time previously Charles's father had been arrested for debt and the family, except for Charles, had joined their father in Marshalsea Debtors' Prison. The combination of this family trauma and his own menial job profoundly affected Charles's life and view of the world and was to haunt him for the rest of his days. John Dickens was released after three months in prison by having himself declared an Insolvent Debtor. Charles was sent to school at the age of twelve, where he did well, and at the age of fifteen he began work in the office of a legal firm in Gray's Inn. Here he taught himself shorthand, and eighteen months later started as a freelance reporter in the court of Doctors' Commons. In 1829 Dickens fell deeply in love with Maria Beadnell and the affair dragged on inconclusively until the summer of 1833. Meanwhile, Dickens's career was prospering, with his rapid and accurate reporting of debates in the House of Commons for the *Morning Chronicle* and good reviews for his literary work, which led to his being commissioned by the publishers, Chapman & Hall, to provide text in monthly instalments to accompany sporting plates by the artist Seymour. It was in this way that the hugely successful *Pickwick Papers* was published in 1836/7. In 1858 Dickens separated from his wife, by whom he had had ten children, and developed his friendship with a young actress called Ellen Ternan. Dickens's health, adversely affected by the strain of his very popular readings, which he instituted in 1858, and a demanding tour of America in 1867/8, began to fail in the late 1860s. He suffered a stroke at his home at Gad's Hill, near Rochester, Kent, on 8 June 1870, and died the next day.

FURTHER READING

Other works of Charles Dickens, published individually by
Wordsworth Editions

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My Early Times, Charles Dickens, ed. Peter Rowland, London 1988

The Making of Charles Dickens, Christopher Hibbert, London 1967

The Works of Charles Dickens, Angus Wilson, London 1970

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BARNABY RUDGE

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

As it is Mr Waterton's opinion that ravens are gradually becoming extinct in England, I offer a few words here about mine.

The raven in this story is a compound of two great originals, of whom I was, at different times, the proud possessor. The first was in the bloom of his youth when he was discovered in a modest retirement in London by a friend of mine and given to me. He had from the first, as Sir Hugh Evans says of Anne Page, 'good gifts', which he improved by study and attention in a most exemplary manner. He slept in a stable – generally on horseback – and so terrified a Newfoundland dog by his preternatural sagacity that he has been known, by the mere superiority of his genius, to walk off unmolested with the dog's dinner, from before his face. He was rapidly rising in acquirements and virtues when, in an evil hour, his stable was newly painted. He observed the workmen closely, saw that they were careful of the paint, and immediately burned to possess it. On their going to dinner, he ate up all they had left behind, consisting of a pound or two of white lead, and this youthful indiscretion terminated in death.

While I was yet inconsolable for his loss, another friend of mine in Yorkshire discovered an older and more gifted raven at a village public house, which he prevailed upon the landlord to part with for a consideration and sent up to me. The first act of this sage was to administer to the effects of his predecessor by disinterring all the cheese and halfpence he had buried in the garden – a work of immense labour and research, to which he devoted all the energies of his mind. When he had achieved this task, he applied himself to the acquisition of stable language, in which he soon became such an adept that he would perch outside my window and drive imaginary horses with great skill all day. Perhaps even I never saw him at his best, for his former master sent his duty with him, 'and if I wished the bird to

come out very strong, would I be so good as to show him a drunken man' – which I never did, having (unfortunately) none but sober people at hand. But I could hardly have respected him more, whatever the stimulating influences of this sight might have been. He had not the least respect, I am sorry to say, for me in return, or for anybody but the cook, to whom he was attached – but only, I fear, as a policeman might have been. Once I met him unexpectedly, about half a mile from my house, walking down the middle of a public street, attended by a pretty large crowd, and spontaneously exhibiting the whole of his accomplishments. His gravity under those trying circumstances, I can never forget, nor the extraordinary gallantry with which, refusing to be brought home, he defended himself behind a pump, until overpowered by numbers. It may have been that he was too bright a genius to live long or it may have been that he took some pernicious substance into his bill and thence into his maw – which is not improbable, seeing that he new-pointed the greater part of the garden wall by digging out the mortar, broke countless squares of glass by scraping away the putty all round the frames and tore up and swallowed, in splinters, the greater part of a wooden staircase of six steps and a landing – but after some three years he too was taken ill, and died before the kitchen fire. He kept his eye to the last upon the meat as it roasted, and suddenly turned over on his back with a sepulchral cry of 'Cuckoo!' Since then I have been ravenless.

Of the story of *Barnaby Rudge* itself I do not think I can say anything here more to the purpose than the following passages from the original preface.

No account of the Gordon Riots having been to my knowledge introduced into any work of fiction, and the subject presenting very extraordinary and remarkable features, I was led to project this tale.

It is unnecessary to say that those shameful tumults, while they reflect indelible disgrace upon the time in which they occurred and all who had act or part in them, teach a good lesson. That what we falsely call a religious cry is easily raised by men who have no religion and who in their daily practice set at nought the commonest principles of right and wrong; that it is begotten of intolerance and persecution, that it is senseless, besotted, inveterate and unmerciful, all history teaches us. But perhaps we do not know it in our hearts too well to profit by even so humble an example as the 'No Popery' riots of 1780.

However imperfectly those disturbances are set forth in the

following pages, they are impartially painted by one who has no sympathy with the Romish Church, though he acknowledges, as most men do, some esteemed friends among the followers of its creed.

It may be observed that in the description of the principal outrages reference has been had to the best authorities of that time, such as they are, and that the account given in this tale of all the main features of the riots is substantially correct.

It may be further remarked that Mr Dennis's allusions to the flourishing condition of his trade in those days have their foundation in truth and not in the author's fancy. Any file of old newspapers or odd volume of the *Annual Register* will prove this with terrible ease.

Even the case of Mary Jones, dwelt upon with so much pleasure by the same character, is no effort of invention. The facts were stated, exactly as they are stated here, in the House of Commons. Whether they afforded as much entertainment to the merry gentlemen assembled there as some other most affecting circumstances of a similar nature mentioned by Sir Samuel Romilly is not recorded.

That the case of Mary Jones may speak the more emphatically for itself, I subjoin it, as related by Sir William Meredith in a speech in Parliament, 'On Frequent Executions', made in 1777.

Under this act [the Shoplifting Act], 'one Mary Jones was executed, whose case I shall just mention; it was at the time when press-warrants were issued on the alarm about Falkland Islands. The woman's husband was pressed, their goods seized for some debts of his, and she, with two small children, turned into the streets a-begging. It is a circumstance not to be forgotten that she was very young (under nineteen) and most remarkably handsome. She went to a linen-draper's shop, took some coarse linen off the counter and slipped it under her cloak; the shopman saw her, and she laid it down: for this she was hanged. Her defence was (I have the trial in my pocket), 'that she had lived in credit, and wanted for nothing, till a press-gang came and stole her husband from her; but since then, she had no bed to lie on; nothing to give her children to eat; and they were almost naked; and perhaps she might have done something wrong, for she hardly knew what she did'. The parish officers testified to the truth of this story; but it seems, there had been a good deal of shoplifting about Ludgate; an example was thought