

Nicholas Nickleby by Charles Dickens

With an Introduction by
Edgar Johnson

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NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

A Bantam Book

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Charles Dickens

was born in a little house in Landport, Portsea, England, on February 7, 1812. The second of eight children, he grew up in a family frequently beset by financial insecurity. At the age of eleven, Dickens was taken out of school and sent to work in a London blacking warehouse, where his job was to paste labels on bottles for six shillings a week. His father, John Dickens, was a warmhearted but improvident man. When he was condemned to Marshalsea Prison for unpaid debts, he unwisely agreed that Charles should stay in lodgings and continue working while the rest of the family joined him in the jail. This three-month separation caused Charles much pain; his experiences as a child alone in a huge city—cold, isolated, with barely enough to eat—haunted him for the rest of his life.

When the family fortunes improved, Charles went back to school, after which he became an office boy, a freelance reporter and finally an author. With *Pickwick Papers* (1836–7) he achieved immediate fame; in a few years he was easily the most popular and respected writer of his time. It has been estimated that one out of every ten persons in Victorian England was a Dickens reader. *Oliver Twist* (1837), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–9) and *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840–41) were huge successes. *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843–4) was less so, but Dickens followed it with his unforgettable *A Christmas Carol* (1843). *David Copperfield* (1850), *Bleak House* (1852–3), *Hard Times* (1854), and *Little Dorrit* (1855–7) reveal his deepening concern for the injustices of British society. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860–1), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) complete his major works.

Dicken's marriage to Catherine Hogarth produced ten children but ended in separation in 1858. In that year he began a series of exhausting public readings; his health gradually declined. After putting in a full day's work at his home in Gads Hill, Kent, on June 8, 1870, Dickens suffered a stroke and he died on the following day.

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by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

INTRODUCTION

Of all Dickens's novels, *Nicholas Nickleby*, his third, is the most gorgeously theatrical. Not only because of the Vincent Crummles theatrical troupe, although that hilarious company is certainly one of the story's brilliant high spots. But, beyond that, almost every character is acting a role, trying to live up to a romantic picture of what he wants and imagines himself to be. Surrounded by fact, the characters are not living in a world of fact at all. They are in an idealized world of their own hopes and desires. The Yorkshire schoolmaster Wackford Squeers and his family, the Mantalins, the Kenwigses, Sir Mulberry Hawk, the Witterlys, the Crummleses, Miss Snevellicci, Mr. Folair, Mr. Lenville, Ralph Nickleby, are all, with furiously bouncing vitality, acting out their private egoistic visions of their own selves.

No less theatrical is the main plot in which they successively appear. That plot is in large part derived from the endless flood of melodramas and farces Dickens had been drinking in since the days when he had been an office boy in the law firm of Ellis and Blackmore. The dashing hero, the virtuous heroine, the evil stepfather or stepmother or, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, the wicked uncle, were staples of such stage performances; and although Dickens had, even then, a sharp and sometimes mischievous awareness of how absurd they could be at their worst, he also shared in the excitement they generated at their best.

This is one of the reasons for the recent spectacular success of the Royal Shakespeare Company's dramatization of *Nicholas Nickleby* both in London and on Broadway. Marching in a rapid series of almost comic-strip episodes of hilarity and Grand Guignol, with characters born for the stage, the play needed only the talents of such an assemblage of actors for its inherent stage-worthiness to burst out like a fireworks display. And the technique employed, swift scenes, the barest settings—the method of the Elizabethan stage, the method of Dickens himself in his

narrative—were ideally calculated to bring out its mingling of tongue-in-cheek farce and colorful operatics.

But *Nicholas Nickleby* is even more deeply indebted to the eighteenth-century picaresque novels of Smollett and Fielding, which Dickens had ecstatically discovered as a child of ten. In a small attic room next to his own bedroom he had come upon a collection of cheap reprints his father had acquired. "From that blessed room," he recalled years later, "*Roderick Random*, *Peregrine Pickle*, *Tom Jones*, *The Vicar of Wakefield*, *Don Quixote* [probably in the Motteux translation], *Gil Blas*, and *Robinson Crusoe*, came out, a glorious host . . . I have been Tom Jones (a child's Tom Jones, a harmless creature) for a week together. I have sustained my own idea of Roderick Random for a month at a stretch, I verily believe. . . . I have seen Tom Pipes go climbing up the church steeple; I have watched Strap, with his knapsack on his back, stopping to rest himself upon the wicket-gate; and I *know* that Commodore Trunnion held the club with Mr. Pickle in our little village alehouse."

From these novels Dickens derived the loose episodic structure of *Nicholas Nickleby*, its brilliantly colored scenes, its throng of strange characters. But he refined away all Smollett's brutality, the attempted rapes, the coarse language, and kept Nicholas free from any of Tom Jones's sexual adventures—his sordid liaison with Lady Bellaston and his lusty exploits with Molly Seagrim—making his own story fit for fireside readings to be enjoyed by a whole family group.

Dickens's scheme makes the people Nicholas and Kate encounter the real source of vitality in the story. Nobody but a child reads the book to find out if they will foil the plots of Ralph Nickleby; Nicholas and Kate are the hero and heroine and they are born to succeed. We may be fascinated by the number, variety, and villainy of the machinations they overcome, but we are in no real trepidation about their triumph. We feel no desperate need for Nicholas to rush back to London and rescue Kate from the scoundrelism of Sir Mulberry Hawk. But we are enthralled by Mr. Crummles saying farewell to Nicholas with a stage embrace, laying his chin on Nicholas's shoulder and looking fixedly over it into vacancy. The cluster of betrothals in the last chapter is a fairy-tale ending; Mrs. Nickleby gabbling about the Prince Regent's legs and Miss Biffin's toes no fairy tale but addle-brained reality. Everywhere the individual scenes vibrate with this anarchistic vitality.

And this vitality is the vitality of obsession. Each character is

acting out, not what he is, but his overriding conception of what he is. The apelike and sadistic Squeers more than makes himself believe that he is a scholar bestowing both his learning and the bounty of his table on his boy-victims. "A horse is a quadruped, and quadruped's Latin for beast," he says in his schoolroom, "as every body that's gone through the grammar knows, or else where's the use of having grammars at all?" And, smacking his lips over the watered-down milk he provides his pupils, "Ah!" he exclaims, "here's richness!" And at first Nicholas is even taken in by this self-dramatization. "He is an odd-looking man," Nicholas reflects. "What of that? Porson was an odd-looking man, and so was Doctor Johnson; all these bookworms are."

In the same way Fanny Squeers, when she looks into her mirror, sees not herself but an idealized image of what she wants to see: an infinitely desirable creature of irresistible allure. She is unable to conceive the least doubt that Nicholas has already fallen in love with her or that he will not feel honored to wed her when she is gracious enough to bestow her hand.

The enticement Fanny believes herself to have for Nicholas, Mr. Mantalini imagines himself to have for the entire world of women. He lounges in his gorgeous Turkish dressing gown over his morning coffee as he cajoles his wife with the most improbable endearments ever invented by the mind of man: "My essential juice of pine-apple"; "She who coils her fascinations round me like a pure and angelic rattlesnake." In his own eyes he is a charmer, a gallant, a Lord Byron without bitterness, a Count D'Orsay glittering with rings and watch charms. It entirely escapes his notice that Kate Nickleby fails to experience this bewitchment. He is too busy praising his wife's "graceful outline" and contrasting her with the society ladies he has enthralled: "The two countesses had no outlines at all, and the dowager's was a demd outline."

Mrs. Wititterly sees herself—and her husband shares her vision—as a spiritual being whose quivering sensibility is almost too much for her frail form, attenuated all day on her chaise longue like a celestial Madame Récamier. She lives upon her imagined elevation of soul; her husband is enraptured to have a mate of such transcendent superiority. Only rarely does reality intrude upon her dreamworld. When it does, as on her sudden realization that Sir Mulberry Hawk is drawn not by her ethereal-ity but by Kate's youthful beauty, she abruptly becomes a shrill and raucous fishwife, screaming indignant fury.

The dual illusion within which the Wititterlys exist broadens

in the Kenwigses to include the entire family. They are barely a notch above the lower class (Mr. Kenwigs is an ivory-turner), but they see themselves as upwardly mobile members of the middle class, with connections even in the government, for is not Mrs. Kenwigs's uncle, Mr. Lillyvick, a collector of water rates, a position that makes him in their eyes, and in his, a "public figure." Morleena, their eldest daughter, and all the others, take dancing lessons, and when the opportunity presents itself to do so cheaply, in the form of Nicholas, lessons in French. Mr. Lillyvick disapproves of this: on learning that "l'eau" means "water," he says, "Lo, eh? I don't think anything of that language—nothing at all."

All the Kenwigses play a delightful little drama of devotion to their rich uncle. The children are constantly being exhorted to kiss him, and Mr. Kenwigs repeatedly expresses his sense of the honor of the relationship. Only when Mr. Lillyvick so far forgets himself as to marry the actress Henrietta Petowker "of Drury Lane" does the shell crack and the true reason for their attachment come through. But when Mrs. Lillyvick elopes with an actor, and Mr. Lillyvick returns home humiliated and repentant, announcing that he intends to make a will naming his grand-nieces and grandnephews as his heirs, love is restored and the sentimental round of kissing and hugging resumed as if it had never faltered.

The range of society surveyed in *Nicholas Nickleby* extends little above the middle class, and it can hardly be said that when Dickens ventures higher, he enhances our knowledge of the aristocracy. Lord Frederick Verisopht is only a crude sketch of a vacuity that, a hundred years later, P. G. Wodehouse was to portray brilliantly in Bertie Wooster and the Honorable Freddie Threepwood. Dickens is substituting theatrical caricature for observation—indeed, so far, he had had little experience to draw on—and the stage-figure reveals the ignorance behind it.

But the wellborn blackguard Sir Mulberry Hawk is a triumph, not as a baronet, but as still another example of grandiose self-dramatization. (He must be a baronet, not a knight; no regime, not even "in mistake for somebody else," would have bestowed a knighthood on him.) Sir Mulberry does not see himself as the sullen and boorish debauchee he really is but instead makes a flattering image of himself as picturesquely satanic. Sneering at Ralph Nickleby and yet deep in his financial toils, accepting Ralph's hospitality and at the same time striving furiously to seduce his niece, he envisions himself not as nasty

and vulgar but as a prince of evil. For himself he is a Mephistopheles, "glorying," as Meredith says of another self-deceiver, "in the black flames demoniacal wherewith he crowned himself."

The rendering of Ralph Nickleby mirrors even more complex depths of self-dramatization. Ralph thinks of himself as a practical businessman, a cynical and disillusioned man of the world, and in a sense he is both of these. But he is not being practical in hiring the alcoholic Newman Noggs as his clerk. For a pittance more he could have a tool twice as useful. What Ralph really wants, though, is someone he can bully and despise. Unlike Arthur Gride, the real miser of the novel, Ralph does not live in squalor; his drawing room dazzles with gold mirrors and glittering chandeliers and his dining table with gleaming silver. He is grasping, not scrimping. He is not primarily a speculator, although he is involved in the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. He does not deeply desire even hundreds of merely anonymous dupes, no matter how profitable. What he does want is victims he can humiliate. He is therefore a usurer, because thus he can sneer at his clients to their faces, be hard, cutting, and sarcastic, have them beg and be refused.

Ralph is not, then, merely a sharp moneygrubber. If he were, it would be ridiculous of him to pursue his nephew with schemes that leave him pounds out of pocket and from which he cannot make a farthing. He hates Nicholas because his nephew awakens his buried hatred of himself and threatens the image of himself around which he has built his life. For Kate Nickleby, a helpless girl who cannot challenge his pride, he even feels a faint pity, together with a hatred of the libertines to whom he himself has subjected her. But Nicholas's haughty contempt—without even a bank account to stand on—fills him with vindictive fury. These facts inflame his need to humble Nicholas into a maniacal obsession. It is not only that Nicholas defeats Ralph; he shows him up to his world and to himself. This is a frustration that drives Ralph beyond the edge of sanity.

Despite the crude machinery of forced marriages and stolen wills through which his rage is conveyed, and despite the melodramatic language—"My curse upon you, boy, my solemn deadly curse!"—Ralph is no falsification, but a revelation of self-hatred forced to confront itself when its disguises are torn away. His suicide is not despair, but a last act of rage at that confrontation.

There is a certain cruelty in the portrayal of Ralph Nickleby.

There is cruelty, too, but a benign cruelty, in the rendering of another of the book's great characters, Mrs. Nickleby. Her delusion is that she is a person of the broadest worldly experience and the shrewdest worldly wisdom. No matter what happens to her children in the metropolis, she has known something almost exactly like it in the small Devonshire village where she has spent her entire life. Like Miss Bates in Jane Austen's *Emma* she will gabble on forever while Nicholas and Kate stare at each other helplessly over her head; unlike Emma Woodhouse she will never suffer any loss to her self-complacency. It is part of Dickens's fun that in the wildest of her daydreams she even turns out to be right: Nicholas *does* marry the heiress and does become a partner in Cheeryble Brothers and Kate does marry their nephew.

Mrs. Nickleby is drawn from observation. She was Dickens's mother, Elizabeth Dickens, and, of course, she never recognized the portrait. "Mrs. Nickleby herself, sitting bodily before me in a solid chair," Dickens noted later, "once asked me whether I believed there ever was such a woman."

The other characters in the book, conveyed mainly through farce, are similarly impervious to experience. At most their images of themselves have only now and then been flicked, never destroyed. When Mr. Lillyvick returns to the Kenwigses, they all happily resume their picture of themselves as a family of superior dignity devoted to their highly placed relative. Even Mr. Mantalini, reduced to turning a mangle for a termagant, still sees himself as a gallant figure, a ruined aristocrat, a Beau Brummell at Calais, "gone to the demnition bow-wows."

The entire wondrous Crummles theatrical company, though, cannot ever be defeated. They are invulnerably armored in their vision of themselves as actors; they are so enjoyably playing the roles of being actors that they can act only themselves. This is why, of course, they are all ham actors. They can never throw themselves into a part, only submerge the part in themselves. Mr. Crummles in his own mind's eye is the Admirable Crichton of the boards; Mrs. Crummles the stage queen, majestic, lofty, noble, and stately, the somewhat withered Infant Phenomenon forever young and forever fair. Miss Snevellicci, with her delightful skipping gait and her delicious flirtatious confusions, can only envision herself as charming, various, vivacious, enthralling.

All these actors are so steeped in the clichés of the stage that it never occurs to them that life not only can be but is vastly different. The jealous Mr. Lenville, who until the arrival of

Nicholas has been the Juvenile Lead, behaves like a juvenile lead when he summons Nicholas to have his nose pulled before the whole troupe. Mr. Folair, who brings his challenge, also takes the situation for granted, and only lamely escapes Nicholas's indignation by pretending that he regarded it as a joke. Mr. Lenville is very much surprised when Nicholas knocks him down and breaks his cane. On the stage the young hero always triumphs.

Almost alone among all the characters in the novel, Nicholas and his sister Kate are not playing parts, because they are dramatic roles—the hero and the heroine. (I ignore that pale and tedious martyr Madeline Bray, whom the reader will have forgotten within a week after closing the book. It is enough to say of her that even at his most theatrical Nicholas hardly deserves her.)

Vincent Crummles, that old pro of the stage, immediately hits the nail on the head about Nicholas: "There's genteel comedy in your walk and manner, juvenile tragedy in your eye, and touch-and-go farce in your laugh." So it proves to be, and not only on the stage at Portsmouth. Nicholas is the hero of a melodrama, and that melodrama is the novel of which he is the hero.

Our preconceptions may make that description sound patronizing. It is not. Melodrama at its best is in reality an emotional enhancement of the feelings that move our hearts, just as the melodies and harmonies of opera give depth and vibrancy to its words. When, in *La Bohème*, Rodolfo, taking Mimi's hand, sings "Che gelida manina," the words are bare enough, but the music gives them depth, cajolery, and tenderness. So, in the most effective melodrama, the highly colored phraseology and the heightened action are not false to the inmost reality; they sharpen and intensify it.

In *Nicholas Nickleby*, to be sure, Dickens is still using the conventional idioms he had heard in countless stage performances, full of routine imagery and clichés; he had not yet devised the more individual, though still theatrical, rhetoric he was to give Edith in *Dombey and Son* or Louisa Gradgrind in *Hard Times*. We sometimes smile at the familiar turns of phrase in *Nicholas Nickleby*, but only at the hackneyed words, not at any falsity of feeling. The soliloquy in which Nicholas tells himself why he may not in honor confess his love to Madeline Bray is entirely true to a lover's feelings however stilted it is in language. If Nicholas and Kate are not as fully realized as they might be, it is not because they violate belief but because they never expand it; they never surprise us by saying anything we have not anticipated but realize to be true.

Dickens does display, however, a striking skill in differentiating between the kinds and degrees of theatricality in his characters. Though everyone in the book moves in a stage atmosphere, the acting troupe are fundamentally stagy and artificial. They *see* life as sentimental melodrama. Not so Squeers and the Kenwigses and Mr. Lillyvick, the Witterlys and the Mantalins, Sir Mulberry Hawk and Ralph Nickleby. The illusions with which they bolster up their egos, the little dramas they enact on the private stage of their imaginations are such as we all believe in about ourselves. How many can bear to see their lives as drab and commonplace, themselves as selfish, cruel, or mercenary?

In thus making *Nicholas Nickleby* a thronging panorama of playacting and self-deception, Dickens startlingly anticipates Ibsen's analysis of what he calls the "life-lie" in *The Wild Duck*. Hjalmar Ekdal believes himself to be a sensitive and high-souled spirit, not the lazy and selfish idler he is in reality; the daughter, Hedwig, intensely believes in him; his father is happy in the simulated attic forest in which he hunts imaginary bears; their lodger Molvik, a boozing unfrocked clergyman, maintains his self-respect with the fiction (invented for him by another lodger, Dr. Relling) that he is not a drunkard but "daimonic." All these happy illusions are shattered by the mischief-making idealist Gregers Werle, who forces them to confront the truth and then fatuously asks them if they do not feel much better.

Dickens was not a dissective thinker like Ibsen; his was a receptive and perceptive intelligence, not an analytic one. Dickens saw, he felt, he realized, he portrayed. It was not that he could not think analytically; on occasion he did so sharply and wittily. But mainly he was content to observe and describe, and let us laugh our way to the implied conclusion. And, a kinder man than Ibsen, Dickens lets all the characters, except Ralph Nickleby, retain their illusions.

The angry Dickens whose heart flamed at undeserved suffering emerges only now and then in *Nicholas Nickleby*, though he is fiercely present in the schoolroom scenes at Dotheboys Hall and in the melancholy figure of Smike. That Dickens would reappear again and again in the later novels. But *Nicholas*, through all its threats to happiness, is a happy book moving cheerfully to its ending. "The discovery is made," he wrote his friend John Forster as he was completing it, "Ralph is dead, the loves have come all right, Tim Linkinwater has proposed, and I have only to break up Dotheboys Hall and the book together."

Nicholas Nickleby is not one of Dickens's greatest novels,

though, like them all, it is touched with greatness. It mingles the sunlit high spirits of *Pickwick Papers* with some of the darkness of *Oliver Twist*. In its attack on the Yorkshire schools, and on greed and cruelty, *Nicholas* foreshadows some of the powerful crusades that were to come and their fusion of laughter, drama, and furious exposure of social evils. He is announcing in clarion peals that in Charles Dickens the forgotten and rejected and misused of the world have found a champion. He sweeps, with what is already more than a tyro's hand, all those strings of pathos, hilarity, indignation, and pity he was to strike for another third of a century. They are sounding still.

EDGAR JOHNSON

*Distinguished Professor Emeritus
The City University of New York*

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

This story was begun, within a few months after the publication of the completed "Pickwick Papers." There were, then, a good many cheap Yorkshire schools in existence. There are very few now.

Of the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, private schools long afforded a notable example. Although any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life, was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere; although preparation for the functions he undertook, was required in the surgeon who assisted to bring a boy into the world, or might one day assist, perhaps, to send him out of it; in the chemist, the attorney, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker; the whole round of crafts and trades, the schoolmaster excepted; and although schoolmasters, as a race, were the block-heads and impostors who might naturally be expected to spring from such a state of things, and to flourish in it; these Yorkshire schoolmasters were the lowest and most rotten round in the whole ladder. Traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog; they formed the worthy cornerstone of a structure, which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-minded *laissez-aller* neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world.

We hear sometimes of an action for damages against the unqualified medical practitioner, who has deformed a broken limb in pretending to heal it. But, what of the hundreds of thousands of minds that have been deformed for ever by the incapable pettifoggers who have pretended to form them!

I make mention of the race, as of the Yorkshire schoolmasters, in the past tense. Though it has not yet finally disappeared, it is

dwindling daily. A long day's work remains to be done about us in the way of education, Heaven knows; but great improvements and facilities towards the attainment of a good one, have been furnished, of late years.

I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I was a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places near Rochester Castle, with a head full of PARTRIDGE, STRAP, TOM PIPES, and SANCHE PANZA; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time, and that they were somehow or other connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his Yorkshire guide, philosopher, and friend, having ripped it open with an inky pen-knife. The impression made upon me, however made, never left me. I was always curious about Yorkshire schools—fell, long afterwards and at sundry times, into the way of hearing more about them—at last, having an audience, resolved to write about them.

With that intent I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and was forewarned that those gentlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of the "Pickwick Papers," I consulted with a professional friend who had a Yorkshire connexion, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud. He gave me some letters of introduction, in the name, I think, of my travelling companion; they bore reference to a supposititious little boy who had been left with a widowed mother who didn't know what to do with him; the poor lady had thought, as a means of thawing the tardy compassion of her relations in his behalf, of sending him to a Yorkshire school; I was the poor lady's friend, travelling that way; and if the recipient of the letter could inform me of a school in his neighbourhood, the writer would be very much obliged.

I went to several places in that part of the country where I understood the schools to be most plentifully sprinkled, and had no occasion to deliver a letter until I came to a certain town which shall be nameless. The person to whom it was addressed, was not at home; but he came down at night, through the snow, to the inn where I was staying. It was after dinner; and he needed little persuasion to sit down by the fire in a warm corner, and take his share of the wine that was on the table.

I am afraid he is dead now. I recollect he was a jovial, ruddy, broad-faced man; that we got acquainted directly; and that we

talked on all kinds of subjects, except the school, which he showed a great anxiety to avoid. "Was there any large school near?" I asked him, in reference to the letter. "Oh yes," he said; "there was a pratty big 'un." "Was it a good one?" I asked. "Ey!" he said, "it was as good as anoother; that was a' a matther of opinion"; and fell to looking at the fire, staring round the room, and whistling a little. On my reverting to some other topic that we had been discussing, he recovered immediately; but, though I tried him again and again, I never approached the question of the school, even if he were in the middle of a laugh, without observing that his countenance fell, and that he became uncomfortable. At last, when we had passed a couple of hours or so, very agreeably, he suddenly took up his hat, and leaning over the table and looking me full in the face, said, in a low voice: "Weel, Mистер, we've been vara pleasant toogather, and ar'll spak' my moind tiv'ee. Dinnot let the weedur send her lattle boy to yan o' our school-measthers, while there's a harse to hooold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in. Ar wouldn't mak' ill words amang my neeburs, and ar speak tiv'ee quiet loike. But I'm dom'd if ar can gang to bed and not tellee, for weedur's sak', to keep the lattle boy from a' sike scoondrels while there's a harse to hooold in a' Lunnun, or a gootther to lie asleep in!" Repeating these words with great heartiness, and with a solemnity on his jolly face that made it look twice as large as before, he shook hands and went away. I never saw him afterwards, but I sometimes imagine that I descry a faint reflection of him in John Browdie.

In reference to these gentry, I may here quote a few words from the original preface to this book.

"It has afforded the Author great amusement and satisfaction, during the progress of this work, to learn, from country friends and from a variety of ludicrous statements concerning himself in provincial newspapers, that more than one Yorkshire schoolmaster lays claim to being the original of Mr. Squeers. One worthy, he has reason to believe, has actually consulted authorities learned in the law, as to his having good grounds on which to rest an action for libel; another, has meditated a journey to London, for the express purpose of committing an assault and battery on his traducer; a third, perfectly remembers being waited on, last January twelve-month, by two gentlemen, one of whom held him in conversation while the other took his likeness; and, although Mr. Squeers has but one eye, and he has two, and the published sketch does not resemble him (whoever he may be) in