WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

Little Dorrit

CHARLES DICKENS

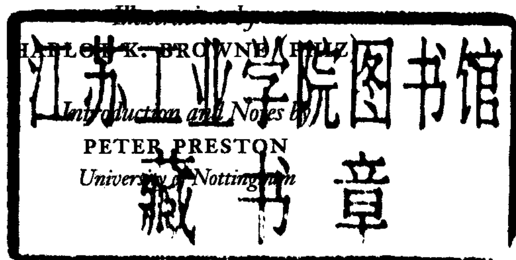
COMPLETE AND UNABRIDGED

LITTLE DORRIT

Charles Dickens

Illustrated by
HABLOT K. BROWNE (PHIZ)

Introduction and Notes by
PETER PRESTON
University of Nottingham


江苏工业学院图书馆
藏书章

WORDSWORTH CLASSICS

Readers who are interested in other titles from
Wordsworth Editions are invited to visit our website at
www.wordsworth-editions.com

For our latest list and a full mail-order service contact
Bibliophile Books, 5 Thomas Road, London E14 7BN
TEL: +44 (0)20 7515 9222 FAX: +44 (0)20 7538 4115
E-MAIL: orders@bibliophilebooks.com

This edition published 1996 by Wordsworth Editions Limited
8B East Street, Ware, Hertfordshire SG12 9HJ
Introduction and Notes added 2002

ISBN 1 85326 182 3

Text © Wordsworth Editions Limited 1996
Introduction and Notes © Peter Preston 2002

Wordsworth® is a registered trademark of
Wordsworth Editions Ltd

All rights reserved. This publication may not be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or
transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of the publishers.

Typeset in Great Britain by Antony Gray
Printed and bound by Clays Ltd, St Ives plc

LITTLE DORRIT

Fanny and Little Dorrit call on Mrs Merdle

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.co

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Wordsworth Classics are inexpensive editions designed to appeal to the general reader and students. We commissioned teachers and specialists to write wide ranging, jargon-free introductions and to provide notes that would assist the understanding of our readers rather than interpret the stories for them. In the same spirit, because the pleasures of reading are inseparable from the surprises, secrets and revelations that all narratives contain, we strongly advise you to enjoy this book before turning to the Introduction.

General Adviser
KEITH CARABINE
Rutherford College
University of Kent at Canterbury

INTRODUCTION

In 1908 Bernard Shaw wrote of *Little Dorrit* that 'when the English nation realises that it is a great book and a true book, there will be a revolution in this country' (*Shaw on Dickens*, p. 111).[1] While it is unlikely that many readers, in the 1850s or today, would regard Dickens's eleventh novel as an inspiration to insurrection, Shaw's assertion usefully draws attention to the disenchanted and politically subversive dimension of the novel. The presence of this dimension informed many contemporary reviews of *Little Dorrit*, in which two notes predominate: the disappointed and the defensive-aggressive. To many readers, devoted to the fluent inventiveness of the early fiction, this pre-eminent example of Dickens's later and graver manner appeared laboured, as if its author were tired and lacking in inspiration. Representatives of the English political and administrative system,

1 For full details of this and other references see the Bibliography at the end of this Introduction.

which is mercilessly satirised in the book, accused Dickens of exaggeration and an inability to understand the real problems of governing a country.[2] Neither of these reactions necessarily says anything about the real qualities of *Little Dorrit*: it is a strikingly innovative novel, and Dickens was hardly the first author to be criticised for not continuing to write in the style that made him famous; while the victims of satire are notable for accusing their attackers of ignorance and exaggeration. As many of the quotations used in the following pages readily demonstrate, the novel is packed with examples of Dickens's wit, humour and the kind of linguistic virtuosity found throughout his work. But the local pleasures afforded by Flora Finching's monologues, her aunt-in-law's threatening demands or Mrs Plornish's skill as an interpreter for Cavalletto are at the service of a larger purpose. In this sense, it is certainly true that *Little Dorrit* is a dark novel, in which Dickens can barely control his anger or find relief for his despair in the good nature and high spirits that had attracted readers to his early books.[3]

Dickens wrote *Little Dorrit* between May 1855 and May 1857, and several commentators have remarked on Dickens's restlessness as he started work on his new novel. 'Don't know at all what to do with myself,' he told Angela Burdett-Coutts on 10 May, as he was preparing to start the first number, adding comically, 'Wish I had a Balloon' (*Letters*, vii, p. 615). Dickens often displayed this kind of restlessness as he began a new book, but in the case of *Little Dorrit* there were particular reasons why this should have been so. The first has to do with the shape and direction of the novel. In Dickens's book of memoranda, begun in January 1855, where he jotted down ideas for themes, titles and names of characters, one entry reads, 'The people who lay all their sins and ignorances, on Providence' (*Little Dorrit*, ed. Sucksmith, p. 804). It follows a list of possible titles, the last of which is 'Nobody's Fault', Dickens's working title for the novel. The idea of a man who refuses to take responsibility for his own actions possessed Dickens during the writing of the first three numbers. Yet in spite of the novel's brilliant opening, which so confidently establishes the prison motif, Dickens continued to be peculiarly unsure of both the drift of the narrative and its thematic core.

2 A good selection of the early reviews of the novel can be found in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Collins.

3 In spite of its mixed reception from the critics, *Little Dorrit* was popular with readers. Between 30,000 and 35,000 copies of each of the eighteen monthly numbers (December 1855–June 1857) were sold. Later volume editions of the novel also sold well.

As he completed the third number, however, Dickens's vision sharpened: the title changed first to 'Dorrit', and then to *Little Dorrit*, and Dickens began to see that the blame for the condition of England lay not with any individual but with the system. This change of view derives partly from Dickens's maturity as a writer, and his sense of what made for a shapely, compelling and organic narrative, and partly from his response to contemporary events. The book is set 'thirty years ago' (p. 5), but *Little Dorrit* is one of Dickens's most topical novels, in which references to recent events constantly disturb the historical framework.[4] Scandals of mismanagement and neglect revealed first by newspaper reports and then confirmed by an enquiry into the conduct of the Crimean War; governmental attempts to deny or suppress the outcome of that enquiry; concerns about methods of recruitment and advancement in the Civil Service; the suicide of a crooked financier and the collapse of his bank; riots in Hyde Park over a Sunday Trading Bill – these were matters of parliamentary, public and press debate in the 1850s.[5] Indeed, Dickens's journal, *Household Words*, energetically participated in that debate, with many of the more significant contributions being written by Dickens himself. Before and during the composition of *Little Dorrit*, articles such as 'That other Public' (3 February 1855), 'Ruined by Railways' (3 March 1855), 'The Toady Tree' (26 May 1855), 'The Great Baby' (4 August 1855), 'Our Commission' (11 August 1855) and 'Nobody, Somebody, and Everybody' (30 August 1856) repeatedly attacked muddle, incompetence, jobbery, nepotism, patronage, public complacency and governmental inaction.[6] Dickens and his contributors excoriated both the rulers and the ruled: the former because they arrogantly claimed an historical right to govern the country without reference to the link between rights and responsibilities, and the latter because they were inexcusably blind, indifferent or deferential.

Furthermore, during the period of *Little Dorrit*'s composition and serialisation, Dickens himself became involved in direct political activity. His letters show a strong interest in the workings of the Roebuck Committee and its failures in examining witnesses with sufficient persistence and thoroughness (*Letters*, vii, pp. 576–7). As early as April 1855, he was writing to Austin Layard MP, supporting his opposition to the government's conduct of the war, and he was an early member of

4 Evidence for dating the action to 1826–7 is given in Note 133.
5 See Notes 2, 21, 180 and 201.
6 With the exception of 'Ruined by Railways', all these articles were written by Dickens and can be found in *'Gone Astray'*, ed. Slater, pp. 269–76, 299–304, 310–8, 318–24 and 391–6.

Layard's Administrative Reform Association, formed later that month. He disapproved of some of Layard's attacks on the Whig oligarchy, yet on 11 May he told Angela Burdett-Coutts that he remained 'a Reformer heart and soul. I have nothing to gain – everything to lose (for public quiet is my bread) – but I am in desperate earnest, because I know it is a desperate case' (*Letters*, vii, p. 617). At about this time Dickens even became sceptical about the efficacy of English democracy, remarking to John Forster on 20 September 1855 that 'representative government is become altogether a failure with us' (*Letters*, vii, p. 713). On 24 June 1855, meanwhile, the issue of 'public quiet' had become a reality, with the first Hyde Park demonstration against a new Sunday Trading Bill. Dickens was due to address the Administrative Reform Association on the evening of 27 June, and writing to Angela Burdett-Coutts earlier that day, he took the events of the previous Sunday as an example of a point he wished to make in his speech: 'the extraordinary ignorance on the part of those who make the laws, of what is behind us, and what is ready to break in if it be too long despised' (*Letters*, vii, p. 659).[7]

These statements reveal some of the contradictions in Dickens's political position: he wishes to help the people, yet he fears the mass of the people in its manifestation as the mob. Such fear was characteristic of nineteenth-century middle-class reformers, who found it difficult to accept that action taken by the people on their own behalf could lead to anything but unrest and anarchy: so much is evident from such 'condition of England' novels as Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845), Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848) and Dickens's own *Hard Times* (1854).[8] In Dickens's case, there is a distinct difference between his privately voiced opinions and the play of sympathy and hostility in his novel. When Arthur accompanies Henry Gowan to visit his mother, he is shocked by the tone of the conversation as the Hampton Court 'Bohemians' criticise present and earlier politicians for their habit of ' "conciliating the mob" '. He is taken aback because he realises that these people believe that apart from themselves (as represented by Barnacles and Stiltstalkings) there is 'nobody else but mob', and he wonders whether it is right that 'a great nation' should be 'narrowed to such little bounds'. 'Mob' in this context includes Arthur, together with the representatives of all the class gradations between the aristocracy and the working class who populate the

7 The text of Dickens's speech can be found in *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*, ed. Fielding, pp. 197–208. Fewer than ten years earlier, the Chartist campaigns of the 1840s had drawn attention to the ways in which the government of England was *not* representative, as well as demonstrating what was 'ready to break in'.

8 See Guy, *The Victorian Social-Problem Novel*, for a useful discussion of the issues.

novel. But although mob may be downtrodden and disregarded, Arthur, 'bethinking himself that mob was used to it' (p. 297), says nothing in its defence and makes no attempt to rouse it to action.[9]

In a scene like this it is possible to see both the rightness of Shaw's view, and its wrongheadedness. Arthur, who bears the name of a British hero, goes further than many in his assaults on the monolithic and indifferent Circumlocution Office. He attempts to dislodge some of the Tite Barnacles and to bring the Stiltstalkings down to the level of the mass of the people, but even his steady, persistent and selfless determination is defeated by the system. By the end of the novel that system has been exposed and discredited – at least to the reader and a small group of characters – but it remains intact, and the conclusion of *Little Dorrit* confirms only the usefulness of action on a modest and limited scale. Shaw was right to point to the radicalism of Dickens's analysis, but the call to action would have to be heard elsewhere.

* * *

Much of the action of *Little Dorrit* revolves around money: Dorrit's imprisonment for debt and his shameless importuning for financial tributes; Pancks's grubbing on behalf of the rapacious and speciously benevolent Casby; Arthur's imprisonment in the Marshalsea; the discovery of the Dorrit inheritance; the exposure of Merdle's fraudulent dealings and the financial ruin of most of the novel's central characters; the suppressed codicil to Gilbert Clennam's will. Beyond this, for characters such as Little Dorrit or Plornish, there is the continuing struggle, familiar in Dickens's work, to scrape a living, to obtain the pennies, sixpences, shillings, small sums that make the difference between destitution and sufficiency. Characters like Gowan, the Barnacles and Blandois, on the other hand, seek to acquire wealth by fortune-hunting, nepotism or criminality.

The two books of the novel are called 'Poverty' and 'Riches', words freighted with both literal and metaphorical meaning. By the end of the first book Merdle's wealth has, apparently, been firmly established, while William Dorrit has come into his fortune and leaves the Marshalsea in triumph. Bar describes Merdle as 'one of the greatest converters of the root of all evil into the root of all good' (p. 238), and this allusion to 1 Timothy 6:10 – 'For the love of money is the root of all evil' – demonstrates the extent to which English society has turned to the worship of false gods. Merdle's name, with its reference to *merde*,

9 See Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow*, for a discussion of nineteenth-century views of the mob.

the French word for 'shit', indicates that what he represents is not the glitter of gold but the colour and smell of waste matter, a truth brutally exposed by his suicide.

The ill-effects of money are also experienced at a psychological level. Arthur's second meeting with his mother, when he tries to convey his feelings of unease, is shot through with the language of business. He tells his mother that he ' "cannot say that I believe my forty years have been pleasant or profitable to myself, or anyone" ' and he speaks eloquently of the possible damage inflicted by ' "grasping at money and ... driving hard bargains" ', for which he wishes to make ' "reparation" ' (p. 48–50). He is aware that money has brought little happiness or peace to his family and tells his mother that ' "it is worth less to me than to another ... [and] ... can buy me nothing that will not be a reproach and misery to me" '(p. 50. Mrs Clennam's vocabulary mingles the accumulation and payment of debt with her self-condemnatory sense of sinfulness and her inexorable judgement of others. As Arthur tries to explain his feelings, the narrative voice intervenes to convey Mrs Clennam's response: 'Woe to the defaulter whose appeal lay to the tribunal where those severe eyes presided! ... Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors, was a prayer too poor in spirit for her. Smite Thou my debtors, Lord, wither them, crush them ... this was the impious tower of stone she built up to scale Heaven' (p. 48). For her, the restitution that Arthur seeks can only be found in her frequently calculated profit and loss account of sin and atonement, symbolised in her physical disability and long incarceration: 'Thus was she always balancing her bargain with the Majesty of heaven, posting up the entries to her credit, strictly keeping her set-off, and claiming her due' (p. 50).

In this novel, however, riches can be measured neither by money nor by the accumulation of supposed virtue, and the forms of worship implied by either practice offer no guarantee of happiness. As Arthur and Little Dorrit lose their money, and as both free themselves from the harsh or demanding duties exacted by their parents, they discover each other and the infinite riches of love. The 'modest life of usefulness and happiness' into which they step on the last page of the novel finds them offering each other and those close to them the securities of companionship, love, parenthood and care. Only those characters who are free of the worship of money, who undertake work out of belief in the value of the job itself, who deny themselves in order to benefit others, and who do not seek or expect gratitude for their sacrifice, can enjoy such limited redemption as the novel offers.

* * *

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.co

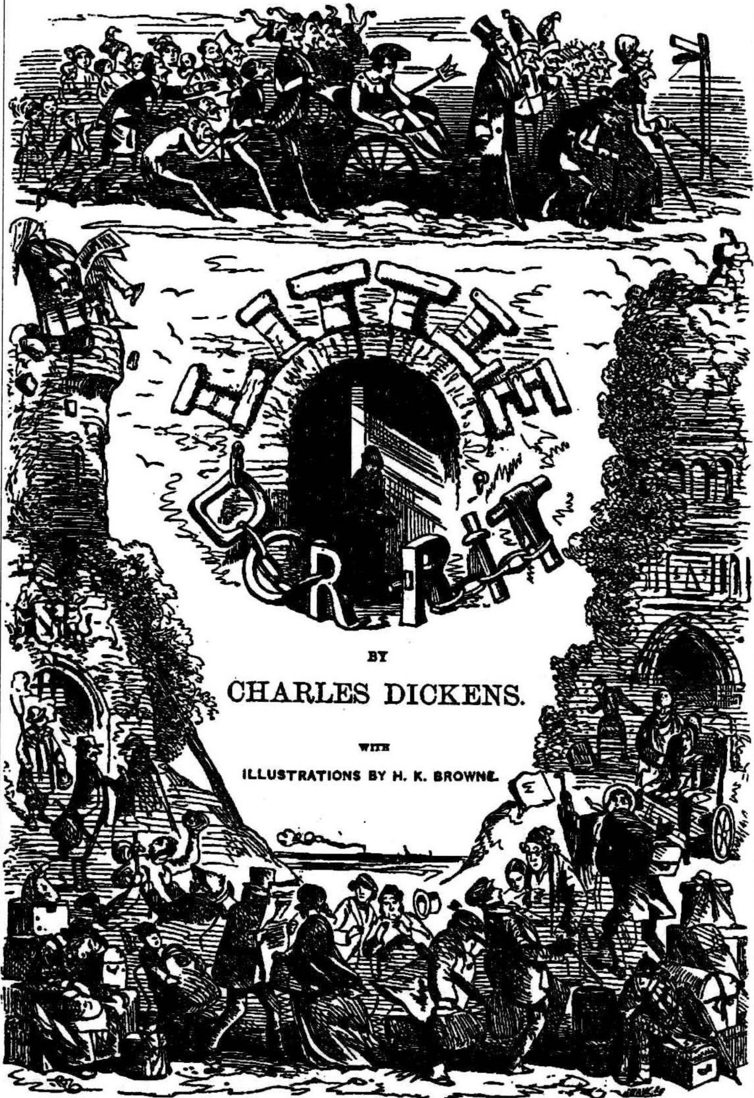
Along the top of Hablot K. Browne's design for the cover to the monthly parts of *Little Dorrit* (see p. xiii), the figure of Britannia is seen in procession. The head of the procession, which is led by an old man and woman, apparently blind and walking with the aid of sticks, has just reached a signpost pointing in directions other than that the procession is taking. Behind them is a line of men, one smartly dressed, two in dunce's caps and three with sparse hair and idiotic or stunned expressions. Britannia follows, and immediately behind her are a group of gentlemen correctly dressed but with fool's hats and inane self-satisfied smiles; on the coat-tails of one of them hangs a smaller man, and on *his* coat-tails hang two more men, crouched so low as to look almost like animals (one of them has large, ape-like ears). Others are trying to grasp the same man's coat, and at the rear of the procession are a group of nurses and children, presumably representing the next generation. In the midst of these dotards, fools and place-seeking toadies, on a chariot which looks like a bath-chair, sits the dejected figure of Britannia, her head on her hand, her arm resting on her shield which lies across her knees, along with her trident, which is only a few degrees above the horizontal. This is no Britannia to rule the waves, but one hemmed in by those who will neither lend lustre to her name nor allow her to fulfil her symbolic potential.

Other images of a compromised, powerless Britannia can be found in the novel. In Chapter 23 of the second book, Arthur goes to visit his mother and comes upon Affery Flintwinch, 'who, with the kitchen toasting-fork still in her hand, looked like a sort of allegorical personage; except that she had a considerable advantage over the general run of such personages, in point of significant emblematical purpose' (p. 644). This image, in which Britannia's trident is comically transformed into a toasting-fork, reminds us that it is Affery, seemingly one of the least perceptive characters of the novel, and certainly one of the least privileged, who holds the key to the mystery of the Clennam household, having witnessed Flintwinch's meetings with his twin brother; the difficulty is that for much of the novel she is either ignored or too intimidated to speak. Affery is servant to another mock-Britannia, Mrs Clennam, who also appears on Browne's cover design, sitting forbiddingly in her wheeled chair, ' "like Fate in a go-cart" ' (p. 269), as Flora Finching puts it. Mrs Clennam's is one of the houses that come to represent England, and its collapse is also prefigured on Browne's cover, by the figure of a sleeping Dorrit atop a crumbling castle – his 'Castle in the Air' (p. 595).

To Meagles, who has recently returned from witnessing Doyce's considerable success overseas, Britannia is ' "a Britannia in the Manger –

won't give her children such distinctions herself, and won't allow them to be seen, when they are given by other countries" ' (p. 775). For the patriotic and xenophobic Meagles, who will have nothing to do with ' "allonging and marshonging" ' (p. 18), either politically or linguistically, this a difficult admission to make, and may reflect something of Dickens's own despair and outrage at the failure of his country to live up to its best conception of itself. For Meagles to find Doyce ' "among a lot of those dirty brown dogs in women's nightcaps a great deal too big for 'em, calling themselves Arabs and all sorts of incoherent races"' (p. 775) is a sad comment on the nation.

'Incoherent' is a striking choice of word in the context of *Little Dorrit*, because the novel shows that England itself can hardly produce a coherent version of nationhood. The novel asks with great persistence, What does it mean to be English? In some ways, it is easier to say what it means to be French (a psychopathic demonic villain like Blandois), or Italian (a loveable rascal like Cavalletto). Arthur himself is very unsure of his national identity: he sees himself on his return to England after twenty years in China as ' "a waif and a stray everywhere" ' (p. 23); at the Circumlocution Office he describes himself as ' "a stranger in England" ' (p. 111; and when he first meets the injured Cavalletto he tells the Italian that he is ' "[a]lmost as much a stranger here as you, though born here" ' (pp. 155). Almost all the novel's uses of the words 'English', 'British' or 'national' occur in an ironic or questioning context. In the Marshalsea, for instance, there are 'certain constitutional moments when somebody came from some Office, to go through some form of overlooking something'. These are 'truly British occasions' when 'this somebody pretended to do his something; and made a reality of walking out again as soon as he hadn't done it – neatly epitomising the administration of most of the public affairs in our right little, tight little island' (pp. 58–9). Similarly, Daniel Doyce, in his attempts to make something of his inventions, '[has] been enrolled in the Great British Legion of Honour, the Legion of the Rebuffed of the Circumlocution Office, and [has] been decorated with the Great British Order of Merit, the Order of the Disorder of the Barnacles and Stiltstalkings' (p. 181). The Palace Court is 'one of a considerable list of everlasting bulwarks to the dignity and safety of Albion' (p. 75), and the crooked Merdle is described as that 'illustrious man, and great national ornament' (p. 654). One apparent exception to this sardonic vision of Englishness occurs when Doyce's employees see him off: 'In truth, no men on earth can cheer like Englishmen, who do so rally one another's blood and spirit when they cheer in earnest, that the stir is like the rush of their whole history, with all its standards waving at once, from Saxon Alfred's



Hablot K. Browne's design for the cover to the monthly parts of Little Dorrit

downwards' (p. 638). Dickens was no idealiser of the past, but here a note of nostalgic regret creeps in, for Doyce's men are cheering him off as he leaves to work overseas, where his achievements are more valued than in England.[10]

The England of *Little Dorrit* is a very shabby and dirty place, and words like 'close', 'stale', 'dingy' and 'grimy' are often used to describe buildings, rooms and people. As Clennam returns to London he finds the city 'gloomy, close, and stale' (p. 31), its rain has 'foul, stale smells' (p. 31) and the exterior of his mother's house is 'dingy' (p. 34). Frederick Dorrit is 'begrimed . . . dirt-worn . . . and decayed' (p. 91), while Pancks has 'a complexion that was very dingy by nature, or very dirty by art' (p. 141). The door-keeper at Fanny's theatre is 'so much in want of airing that he had a blue mould upon him' (p. 222), and the old woman who answers the door at Miss Wade's 'dingy house' is 'very dirty' and dusts her hands on her apron, 'which she might have done for ever without cleaning them' (pp. 308–9). Nor is this dinginess confined to the poorer and less fortunate characters: 'To the sense of smell the [Barnacle] house was like a sort of bottle filled with a strong distillation of mews; and, when the footman opened the door, he seemed to take the stopper out.' Of the footman itself, it is said that '[h]is gorgeousness was not unmixed with dirt; and both in complexion and consistency he had suffered from the closeness of his pantry' (p. 106). After their marriage, Fanny Dorrit and Edmund Sparkler live in a similarly inconvenient house, 'with a perpetual smell in it of the day before yesterday's soup and coach horses' which is 'at all times stuffed and close as if it had an uncurable cold in its head' (p. 655). In this respect there is little distinction between a house in the fashionable area of central London and the Marshalsea, for when he is confined in the prison, Arthur is constantly aware of its stale and stifling oppressiveness. The difference is that whereas Arthur, Frederick Dorrit, Pancks or the Plornishes, in their 'close parlour' (p. 131), have little choice about their shabby appearance or cramped homes, the Barnacles and the Sparklers choose to live in unsuitable houses in order to occupy an address in keeping with their social status.

Dirt's opposites in the novel are the glitter of false wealth and the cleanliness of false innocence. Mrs Merdle mostly appears in the novel metonymically, as 'the Bosom' on which Merdle lays out the visible evidence of his wealth. Her bosom's status as a display cushion for

10 The mock book-backs in Dickens's study included a set called 'The Wisdom of Our Ancestors – I. Ignorance, II. Superstition, III. The Block, IV. The Stake, V. The Rock, VI. Dirt, VII. Disease'. See House, *The Dickens World*, p. 35.

jewellery signifies its removal from the realm of nature to that of culture: she is not 'young and fresh from the hand of nature, but . . . young and fresh from the hand of her maid' (p. 227). Mrs Merdle's artificiality is further emphasised by her assertions to the contrary. Society, she tells Fanny and Little Dorrit, ' "is hollow and conventional and worldly and very shocking, but, unless we are savages in the tropical seas (I should have been charmed to be one myself – most delightful life and perfect climate I am told), we must consult it" ' (p. 228). She goes on to say that she is ' "a child of nature, if I could but show it" ' (p. 229), and later informs Mrs Gowan that ' "I am pastoral to a degree, by nature" ' (p. 371). The irony is stark and is underscored by her parrot's commentative shrieks. Casby is a similarly false construction, composed of his past and present selves. As an elderly man, he retains some of the features of his portrait as a boy; and he has seized upon and cultivated his image as a wise and benevolent Patriarch, suggested by his shining head and long fine hair. Yet the narrative voice is quick to point out his hollowness: he is 'a mere Inn sign-post without any Inn – an invitation to rest and be thankful, when there was no place to put up at, and nothing whatever to be thankful for . . . a heavy, selfish, drifting Booby, who, having stumbled . . . on the discovery that, to get through life with ease and credit, he had but to hold his tongue, keep the bald part of his head well polished and leave his hair alone, had had just cunning enough to seize the idea and stick to it' (p. 142).

It is in relation to Casby's cultivation of his image that one of the novel's key narrative generalisations occurs: 'so, in the great social Exhibition, accessories are often accepted in lieu of the internal character' (p. 142). Casby, like Mrs Merdle, lives by his accessories, but both are stripped of them by the end of the novel; and just as some of the novel's cleanest characters (Merdle actually dies in a bath) turn out to be the most morally tainted, so the reverse is true. Doyce's clothes may be 'a little rusty' (p. 114) but he is made of true metal; Pancks and Frederick Dorrit are the novel's most consistently dirty characters, but the former displays persistence, determination and fidelity in adversity, while the latter delivers a passionate denunciation of his brother's excessive deference to social form. Pancks's release from his image as Casby's grubber takes place slowly over the second part of the novel, as he accepts that man is not for business alone. Significantly, his new-found freedom is achieved through his relationship with Little Dorrit: even when she first meets him she perceives, momentarily, that he is 'a brighter and gentler-looking man than she had supposed' (p. 273). In much the same way Flora Finching is portrayed more sympathetically once she meets Little Dorrit, whose life story she responds to 'with a

natural tenderness that quite understood it, and in which there was no incoherence' (p. 272). Indeed, the news of Little Dorrit's fortune inspires in Flora a moment of genuine self-knowledge: ' "everybody will congratulate you some in earnest and some not and many will congratulate you with all their hearts but none more so I do assure you than from the bottom of my own I do myself though sensible of blundering and being stupid" ' (p. 392). Many readers may prefer the inspired nonsense of Flora's associative monologues, but the shift in the way she is presented is important for the novel's sense of closure, which makes careful distinctions between the redeemable and the unredeemable.[11] This is less to do with a change of heart than with finding the courage and the will to be who you really are, to reveal your heart, without caution, deceit or artifice, and without taking cover behind an image, or allowing yourself to be trapped in a role as part of someone else's image. And it is for this reason that the end of the novel is ruthless in the opposite kind of revelation. In death, Merdle is revealed as 'a heavily-made man, with an obtuse head, and coarse, mean, common features' (p. 668); Blandois-Rigaud is merely 'adirty heap of rubbish that had been the foreigner' (p. 751); while Casby, shorn by Pancks of his Patriarchal hair and hat, becomes '[a] bare-polled, goggle-eyed, big-headed, lumbering personage . . . not in the least impressive, not in the least venerable' (p. 758). In one gesture, Pancks exposes Casby and releases himself from his surrogate role as his grubber.

Central to the ways in which people are permitted to present themselves and act in 'the great social Exhibition' are failures of perception and true moral judgement. Meagles, for instance, is presented as a sound businesslike Englishman; he is one of the few characters who does not experience financial ruin; he knows Arthur's worth, and Doyce's; and he is as frustrated as anyone by the indifference and incomprehension of the Circumlocution Office. But he suffers from a disabling condition, which the novel detects in English society as a whole: an excess of servility and deference to rank. He knows that Gowan is wrong for Pet; he knows too that Clennam is in love with Pet, and he would prefer Arthur as a son-in-law. But quite apart from being unable to counter Pet's desires, he is dazzled by Henry's family connections and the glamour of rank enables him to overcome his doubts about Gowan. Meagles's judgement remains sound in one important

11 The change in Flora Finching is also affected by Dickens's softened feelings towards the original of the character, Maria (Beadnell) Winter, his former love, whom he met again in February 1855 and found much changed.

试读结束，需要全本PDF请购买 www.ertongbook.com