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SOCIAL CRITICISM IN CHARLES

DICKENS' HARD TIMES

by

Carrol L. Fry

A Thesis

Presented to

the Graduate Faculty of the Department of English

University of Omaha

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

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Chapter I

THE INTELLECTUAL BACKGROUND

Charles Dickens might well have been speaking of his own nineteenth-century England instead of revolutionary France of the late eighteenth century when he wrote:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.¹

It can truly be said that England was being wracked by every sort of revolution that wracks a nation except the physical sort that France experienced. Agriculture had been revolutionized by the Enclosure Laws, and the growth of industry had fed on the mammoth displacement of farm labor. The church was under fire from several sides, with Puseyism on the one hand and the new evangelical faiths on the other. Reform of government was demanded by the militant Whiggism of the early part of the century, and later the Chartists

¹Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities (Bloomsbury, 1937), Ch. I.

and Young England demanded reform of the reformers. England's faith was jolted by the discoveries of natural science in the early part of the century, and even more thoroughly wrenched by Darwin in the latter part. It was truly an age of extremes, an age of darkness and an age of light. It was an age of "isms," with the great men of the time choosing a system or founding one.

In this last respect, Dickens differs from most of the great men of the nineteenth century. He had very little use for "isms" and even less confidence in their healing power. It is quite impossible to place Dickens in any camp or school of thought peculiar to or prevalent in the nineteenth century. As G. K. Chesterton, the most enthusiastic of Dickens' critics, puts it:

He saw that economic systems are not things like the stars, but things like the lamp-posts, manifestations of the human mind, and things to be judged by the human heart.²

This is not to say that Dickens was not influenced by the thoughts of others, but one cannot find a totality of acceptance in Dickens of any school of thought. He was more likely to accept what was good and kind in any system and reject that which caused human misery. Oliver Twist is the only one of his early novels that has any sustained criticism of English society. Mr. Pickwick has some difficulty with the law, the prison and mobs of Barnaby Rudge are

²G. K. Chesterton, Charles Dickens: A Critical Study (New York, 1926), p. 164.

terrible things, and the industrial town of The Old Curiosity Shop seems quite sinister; but so much fun is interspersed with these details that one would have difficulty in calling them novels of reform. Mr. Pickwick seems too ridiculous as a philanderer, and Dick Swivler makes the reader forget about the industrial town. The good spirits and joie de vivre of the early novels are best expressed by Mr. Pickwick in his conversation with the "dismal man" on the bridge.

"Did it ever strike you on such a morning as this that drowning would be a happiness and peace?"

"God bless me, no!" replied Mr. Pickwick.³

The early Dickens characters are too full of life to ever consider its voluntary termination. As Mr. T. A. Jackson, one of that school of critics whose favorite words include proletariat, bourgeois, revolution, and Marx, rather disappointedly puts it,

It is not possible to escape from the conclusion that at this stage Dickens believed, as did most of his humanitarian-Radical contemporaries, that the whole social question would be solved if only every employer of every degree modeled himself upon the Cheeryble-Pickwick-Garland example.⁴

In spite of some of Mr. Jackson's ideas about the later Dickens, it is questionable whether the great novelist ever

³Charles Dickens, The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (New York, 1914), Ch. V.

⁴T. A. Jackson, The Progress of a Radical (London, 1937), pp. 110-111.

escaped this idea.

But Dickens changed as time went on, and the strain of criticism of society in his novels grew deeper and more comprehensive. Critics, ever the classifiers, see the end of what they call Dickens' early period with the publication of Dombey and Son. They feel that from this time on there is something essentially different about Dickens' novels. Reformism is present to an ever increasing degree until it becomes the raison d'etre of the novel. This criticism of Victorian society increases through Bleak House and, to a lesser extent, David Copperfield and hits its peak in Hard Times. Hard Times, though fundamentally a criticism of the narrow utilitarianism of the industrial barons and their enrichment at the expense of their employees, is the most thoroughgoing criticism of English life that Dickens wrote, and can be regarded as the climax of his novels of reform. Little Dorrit, the next novel after Hard Times, is a rather rambling criticism of the Civil Service and the debtor's prison system, and has neither the unity of statement nor the comprehensive criticism of Hard Times. A Tale of Two Cities and Great Expectations are not directly concerned with the condition of England question. Our Mutual Friend shows a great deal of pessimism about the possibility of improvement of conditions in England, a pessimism that most critics feel that Dickens' novels show after 1860, and actually has little to do with the plight of the common

people in England. Hard Times, both in form and content, seems to be Dickens' most thorough and unified statement of what was wrong with England. Hard Times is Dickens' finest statement of anti-Podenappery, "that there must be something appallingly wrong somewhere."⁵

As was previously mentioned, Dickens was certainly influenced by the great men of his time, and the nineteenth century was particularly well-stocked with great literary figures. Perhaps an examination of the ideas of the nineteenth century will show how Dickens was influenced by those great men.

Whiggism of the nineteenth century is directly traceable to the Philosophical Radicals, who in turn derived most of their ideas from Jeremy Bentham. Bentham was more or less the symbol for utilitarianism, but was by no means the only driving force among its advocates. The ideas of Malthus, Ricardo, Spencer, and the two Mills are equally important.

Bentham was the son of a prominent barrister, and was himself trained for the law. He decided against the profession, however, and devoted his life to the reform of English society. He invested most of his personal fortune in the construction of a model prison with the tacit understanding that the government would repay his investment,

⁵Charles Dickens, Our Mutual Friend (London, 1957), Book I, Ch. iv.

but he was disappointed. Reduced to actual want, he embarked on a series of pamphlets and books. The ideas expressed in his writings would, he felt, reform the government and heal the national economy. Bentham's moral philosophy might be summarized as follows:

- (i) that nothing is in itself desirable except pleasure and relief of pain; (ii) that one man's pleasure is in itself as desirable as any other man's; (iii) that the right action is always the one which the prospective agent believes to be, under the circumstances, productive of the greatest happiness; (iv) that man is predominantly selfish but is capable of benevolence; (v) that laws and punishments ought, in every political society, to be so adjusted that, with the least possible restraint of liberty or infliction of pain, they insure that men will, from selfish motives, act in ways that will promote other men's happiness as well as their own.⁶

Bentham came under the guidance of James Mill, the Scottish-born journalist, during his time of trouble, and Mill furnished the drive that Bentham needed. Mill came to London in 1809, and immediately allied himself with Bentham. They were inseparable thereafter, and Mill became Bentham's guiding genius. Bentham's Plan for Parliamentary Reform, Introduction to Principles of Morals and Legislation, and Constitutional Code were produced after Mill procured Bentham's pen for the reform movement. Prior to meeting Mill, Bentham had been a true Tory at heart, and one who disapproved of universal suffrage. But through Mill's persuasion Bentham came to believe that universal

⁶John Petrov Flamenatz, The English Utilitarians (Oxford, 1949), p. 73.

suffrage would be desirable and the answer to government by oligarchy. It would be necessary, however, to educate the public in preparation for suffrage.

Thomas Malthus' contribution to Whig philosophy was a rather negative one in some respects. Malthus was not a man with ideas to stir action, but he stirred considerable uneasiness in the nineteenth century and influenced public sentiment and legislation.

Malthus brought up an idea that seemed inevitable to many people in the nineteenth century. He stated that "the power of population is infinitely greater than the power in the earth to produce subsistence for man," and that "Population, when unchecked, increases in geometrical ratio. Subsistence only increases in an arithmetical ratio."⁷ Malthus could see only a few checks to the probable increase in population. One was that the poor might not marry because of the inability to support themselves, and the rich might not marry for fear of lowering their station in life. Other possibilities for checking population growth were disease and war. None of the alternatives appeared particularly palatable to his readers. The only answer Malthus was capable of giving to the problem of population growth

⁷Thomas Robert Malthus, An Essay on the Principle of Population (New York, 1895), p. 7.

was that the poor should be educated to limit the size of their families.

Malthus also wrote a treatise on rent⁸ in which he strayed somewhat from the Whig battle lines. Malthus originated the term "differential rent," which might be described as the difference in income between the lowest producing land and the highest. Malthus felt that the increase in population would increase the demand for food, and the less fertile land would be brought into production. This would increase the price of food, because food prices are determined by the produce of the least fertile ground under cultivation. The result of this situation would be that the rent to the owner would rise, which Malthus felt to be just. The owner of the land, or his family, had originally worked hard to obtain the better land.

David Ricardo took issue with Malthus on the principle of differential rent. Ricardo felt that the capitalist, who supplied the brains and initiative, was at a considerable disadvantage to the landlord. The landlord took differential rent without doing anything to deserve it and at the expense of the capitalist. The increase in population would certainly increase the cost of labor, because "The natural price of labour is that price which is necessary to enable the labourers, one with another, to subsist

⁸Thomas Robert Malthus, An Inquiry into the Nature and Progress of Rent (London, 1815).

and perpetuate their race, without either increase or diminution."⁹ It is interesting to note that Ricardo speaks only of subsistence for the laborer, not betterment.

To Ricardo, then, the capitalist was "like the steward of an estate, who exerts himself to increase its produce only to find that his shiftless master takes an always greater share of it."¹⁰ The capitalist tries to take a greater share from the laborer, who resists, and the capitalist eventually makes the estate just hold its own. This state of affairs, with the landowner taking an ever greater share, the capitalist held to an ever decreasing share, and the laborer living on the subsistence level, makes economics a "dismal science."

Ricardo disagreed with the principle of the poor laws of his day, and his writings, along with those of Malthus, had a great deal to do with Whig theory along these lines. As Ricardo put it,

The clear and direct tendency of the poor laws . . . is not, as the legislature benevolently intended, to amend the condition of the poor, but to deteriorate the condition of both poor and rich. . . . It is a truth which admits not a doubt, that the comforts and well-being of the poor cannot be permanently secured without some regard on their part, or some effort on the part of the legislature, to regulate the increase of their numbers,

⁹David Ricardo, Principles of Political Economy (New York, 1895), p. 80.

¹⁰Plamenatz, p. 121.

and to render less frequent among them early and improvident marriages. The operation of the system of poor laws . . . has invited imprudence by offering ~~it~~ a portion of the wages of prudence and industry.¹¹

This excerpt certainly shows a great deal of what Dickens objected to in the Poor Law of 1834.

Ricardo, like many of the Philosophical Radicals, was an avid proponent of the principles of laissez faire. To Ricardo, as to most of the liberals of his time, that government was best which governed least. "Like all other contracts, wages should be left to the fair and free competition of the market, and should never be controlled by the legislature."¹²

Many of the ideas and ideals of the Philosophical Radicals seem quite sound and well-intentioned. The law reforms and universal suffrage proposed by Mill and Bentham are twentieth-century ideals. Malthus' sympathy for the poor and his ideal of educating them are admirable. The disgust of Ricardo for the idleness of the landed gentry would find few objections in the twentieth century. But many people, including Dickens, had serious objections to the theories of the Philosophical Radicals.

¹¹Ricardo, pp. 94-95.

¹²Ricardo, p. 94.

Many of Dickens' contemporaries felt that some of the principles of the Philosophical Radicals were questionable. The pleasure-pain ideal would have it that penny ballads were as valuable as Shakespeare. The value of art was thus more or less negated. The greatest happiness for the greatest number, as John Stuart Mill pointed out, could easily mean the suppression of a minority. The "fair and free competition of the market" did not exist so far as contracts between employer and employed were concerned.

Also, the Philosophical Radicals were generally misunderstood.

Factory owners, shop keepers, wholesale merchants, and bankers translated the gospel of utility into 'efficiency,' and the creed of progress into 'push.' Empiricism encouraged their insistence on 'hard facts.' The economic man, selfishly intent on material gain, was the object of their emulation. . . . Self-made men, jealous of aristocratic privilege, they were the backbone of the movement for parliamentary reform.¹⁴

When reform was achieved by this class, the reform was entirely for their own benefit. Malthus had said that political economy was no exact science, but the new middle class paid no attention to this. The factory owner ignored the cry of Bentham and Mill for the education of the masses. They paid no attention to the ideal of universal suffrage. But pleasure and pain, laissez faire, and efficiency were eagerly taken up and brandished as inevitable facts of life. As Neff puts it,

¹⁴Emery Edward Neff, Carlyle and Mill (New York, 1926), p. 120.

The propertied classes chose to accept the point of view of the popularisers. They found it pleasant to be absolved of responsibility for the unlucky; to be told that higher wages would not raise the standard of living among the workers, but would only encourage the reproduction of children who would soon eat away the margin of comfort. . . . Their fears were stilled by the assurance that a man had a right to do what he liked with his own, and that there was a wage-fund law which made impossible the raising of wages by strikes.¹⁵

This, then, was what Political Economy degenerated to-- to the so-called Manchester school: buy cheap, sell dear, and make a profit at any cost. Political Economy became a means of rationalization to many people, mere Podsnappery and Bounderbyism. It was this grasping selfishness and perversion of ideals that inspired the harsh criticism in Hard Times.

The reaction against this perverted utilitarianism gained in strength during the 1840's--the "hungry 40's." The Reform Bill of 1832 had been a Whig inspired measure which was the result of years of agitation for reform in government. When reform did come, it was felt by many that what really needed reforming was left as it had been before the measures were adopted. The Reform Bill merely took the whip hand away from the landholding classes and handed it to the middle class. The voting franchise was extended to persons who paid ten pounds or more rent per year for their houses, or farmers paying fifty pounds rent.¹⁶ Owners of

¹⁵Neff, p. 297.

¹⁶John William Cunliffe, Leaders of the Victorian Revolution (New York, 1934), p. 18.

property with equivalent value also held the franchise. There was also some redistricting done so that the manufacturing districts and newly emerged population centers were more equitably represented. The New Poor Law of 1834 was a continuation of the reform movement. It changed the old system of outdoor relief and forced those who needed relief to live wholly in a state sponsored workhouse, which was intended to give just enough sustenance to keep its inhabitants alive. One can see Malthusian and Ricardian theory in the practice of isolating the sexes, including husbands and wives, and the change from relief based on the size of the family. It was this workhouse system that Dickens criticized in Oliver Twist and Our Mutual Friend. This series of legislation was intended by its formulators to make England the most prosperous nation in the world. England did become the most prosperous nation in the world, but it was a prosperity limited to manufacturing, commercial, and landowning interests. In becoming prosperous this class lost sight of those who made their prosperity possible--the "hands."

The liberal victory of 1832 was not won without considerable opposition on the part of the landowning interests, and the Tories saw an excellent point for retaliation in the plight of the industrial worker. The Tories pushed such legislation as the Ten Hours Act,¹⁷ which had the effect of

¹⁷Cunliffe, p. 10.

limiting all workers to a ten hour day in certain manufacturing pursuits, and limited the shocking use of child labor prevalent in England. The manufacturing interests fought such measures to the last gasp and generally refused to comply with the laws once they were passed.

Thomas Carlyle had seen the cruelty of the manufacturing system at first-hand while attending the University of Edinburgh. He was strongly opposed to any system that inflicted such a hopeless life on fellow humans and early became a spokesman against the prevalent laissez faire doctrines. Such works as "Signs of the Times" in his early career show the repugnance he felt for any system so inhumanly enforced. Chartism, written in 1839, shows a continuation of Carlyle's social ideals, and in Past and Present one may see the final crystallization.

In Past and Present Carlyle joins forces with the Toryism of Young England in urging a return to past values. In Abbot Sampson, Abbot of a twelfth-century English monastery, Carlyle finds the perfect "hero." Carlyle shows no faith in liberty. He says that,

Man's true liberty were that a wiser man, that any and every wiser man, could, by brass collars, or in whatever milder or sharper way, lay hold of him when he was going wrong, and order and compel him to go a little righter.¹⁸

Carlyle sees a need for a benevolent and enlightened despot who would rule the state and relieve the suffering of the

¹⁸Thomas Carlyle, Past and Present, Carlyle's Works, X (New York, 1890), 205.

tolling millions. His sympathy for the laborer is shown in such passages as the following:

It is not to die, or even to die of hunger, that makes men wretched . . . But it is to live miserably - we know not why; to work sore and yet gain nothing; to be heart-worn, weary, yet isolated, unrelated, girt-in with a cold, universal Laissez-faire: it is to die slowly all our life long, imprisoned by a deaf, dead, Infinite Injustice, as in the accursed iron belly of a Phlaris Bull.¹⁹

Others took up the cry, although Carlyle had not been the first. In the field of the novel, the proper study of this paper, there were several writers of the 1840's and 1850's who preached the same gospel of humanity, as opposed to supposed natural economic laws, that is found in Carlyle. Disraeli was the first to criticize the manufacturing interests in a novel.

It is almost impossible to separate Disraeli the novelist from Disraeli the politician. His novels, especially the trilogy Coningsby, Sybil, and Tancred, are primarily expressions of his political beliefs. These beliefs are rather hazily presented in the novels, but they might be briefly expressed as follows:

In the government of England a sound aristocracy is an absolute essential, but the existence of the aristocracy can be justified only by the vigor of its moral qualities and only when the people are able to see in it their natural leaders and champions.²⁰

¹⁹Carlyle, Past and Present, 203.

²⁰Moris Edmond Speare, The Political Novel (New York, 1924), p. 57.

Disraeli felt that this aristocracy, represented by the Tory Party, must lead England back to the time when the peasant stock of England was sturdy and healthy. As Disraeli puts it in Sybil,

Were there any rick-burners in the times of the Lord Abbot? And if not, why not? And why should the stacks of the Earl of Marney be destroyed and those of the Lord Abbots of Marney spared?²¹

Disraeli comes very near to Carlyle's views in his feeling for the need of a strong, responsible leader.

But Disraeli has more than political propaganda in his novels. In Sybil he shows the true humanitarian's concern with the plight of the poor. The alternate title of the novel, The Two Nations, shows how the author feels about the wide disparity between the two classes.

"TWO NATIONS; between whom there is no intercourse and no sympathy; who are as ignorant of each other's habits, thoughts, and feelings, as if they were dwellers in different zones, or inhabitants of different planets; who are formed by a different breeding, are fed by a different food, are ordered by different manners, and are not governed by the same laws."

"You speak of--" said Egremont, hesitatingly.

"THE RICH AND THE POOR."²²

Disraeli has been accused of writing about the poor only to discredit the Whigs, but regardless of purpose he was the first writer to use prose fiction to sympathize with the industrial and agrarian poor.

²¹Benjamin Disraeli, Sybil (London, 1939), Bk. II, Ch. vi.

²²Disraeli, Bk. II, Ch. vi.

Elizabeth Gaskell's Mary Barton is considered a predecessor of Hard Times. North and South, another novel about the life of industrial workers, is a later work by Mrs. Gaskell that follows Hard Times. Mrs. Gaskell is probably more truthful in her portrayal of the plight of the industrial laborer than Dickens. She was able to speak from experience about the life of the laborers in the manufacturing districts. Her husband, William Gaskell, was a Unitarian minister in Manchester during the "hungry forties" when Chartism was at its fiery climax and labor relations were at their worst. She aided her husband in working among the poor in Manchester, and knew at first-hand what Disraeli and Dickens described from second-hand information. As Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch expresses it,

Mrs. Gaskell knew these people as Disraeli did not. She had lived among them, and to all the angry protests evoked by Mary Barton she returned, of her knowledge, gentle, but gently firm answers which could not be refuted.²³

But in spite of her deep sympathy for the industrial worker, Mrs. Gaskell disliked labor organizations. It is the union in Mary Barton that causes John Barton, Mary's father, to kill Mr. Carson's son. Mrs. Gaskell shows the union official from London in an unfavorable light, and it is a presentation that will be echoed in Hard Times. Mrs. Gaskell describes her labor leader as follows:

²³Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, Charles Dickens and Other Victorians (Cambridge, 1925), p. 208.

You would have been puzzled to define his exact position or what was the state of his mind as regarded education. He looked so self-conscious, so far from earnest, among the group of eager, fierce, absorbed men among whom he now stood. He might have been a disgraced medical student of the Bob Sawyer class, or an unsuccessful actor, or a flashy shopman.²⁴

Mrs. Gaskell's labor leader seems no more sincere than the union leader in Hard Times. Neither of them can communicate with the men they lead.

Mrs. Gaskell attributes the whole of the difficulty between master and laborer to misunderstanding. There is no communication between the laborers and their employers. When the masters offer lower wages to meet a competitive situation they do not explain themselves; they insist that the laborers must take what they are offered and have no moral right to do otherwise.

So class mistrusted class and their want of mutual confidence wrought sorrow to both. The masters would not be balked, and compelled to reveal why they felt it wisest and best to offer only such low wages; . . . And the workmen sat silent and stern with folded hands refusing to work for such pay. There was a strike in Manchester.²⁵

The lot of the industrial workers as shown in Mary Barton is hard, and it is generally supposed to be an accurate depiction. The pathetic scene showing the death of Ben Davenport by starvation and fever was probably no novelty

²⁴Elizabeth Gaskell, Mary Barton (London, 1924), Ch. XIII.

²⁵Gaskell, Ch. XV.

in Manchester, and Ben's dying words of "Oh Lord God! I thank thee that the hard struggle of living is over!"²⁶ shows the hopelessness that gripped his class.

Charles Kingsley continued the condition of England question in the English novel. Kingsley was a true disciple of Carlyle, as Mrs. Gaskell was to a lesser extent, and has as much difficulty in keeping Carlylian sentiments out of his narrative as Mr. Dick does in keeping King Charles' head out of his.

In his first novel, Yeast, Kingsley tries to give his opinions of the ferment of ideas raging in England in 1850. The hero of the novel, Launcelot Smith, is exposed to the religious, political, and sociological problems of his day, and through Smith, Tregarva, the game keeper, and the mysterious Barnakill from the land of Prester John, we are given a goodly section of Kingsley's ideas.

Alton Locke, a much more artistically satisfactory novel, appeared in 1851. Alton Locke, the hero, moves from revolutionary Chartism to a type of philosophical Chartism after the failure of the Chartist movement of the 1840's. Kingsley condemns the revolutionary principles of the movement in favor of moral persuasion. Perhaps the most interesting character of the novel is old Sandy Mackaye, who expounds on the value of Carlyle's doctrine of the hero.

²⁶Gaskell, Ch. VI.

Through Sandy, "Alton Locke teaches the value of an aristocracy of morals, manners, and culture."²⁷

The most moving portions of the novel, and the most Dickensian in their protest, are the portions describing the condition of the sweated laborers of the tailoring industry in London, and the cutthroat competition that causes the evil. One of the central questions seems to be whether the common people can be blamed for rising against the "landlords and millionaires who refused to confess the duties of property, while they raved about its rights."²⁸ The plight of the starving agricultural laborers is discussed to a lesser extent, and Kingsley certainly seems concerned with the problem. But the scenes showing laborers confined in tailoring sweatshops, often without food and forced to drink water from the same sewer into which they dump their slops, is one of the harshest pieces of criticism of English society to be written in the nineteenth century.

There were many others who criticized the attitude of the industrial and commercial entrepreneurs of the nineteenth century. John Ruskin's Unto This Last was published after Hard Times, but Ruskin gave one of the most thorough indictments of nineteenth-century capitalism to be given

²⁷ Earnest H. Baker, The History of the English Novel, VIII (London, 1937), 170.

²⁸ Charles Kingsley, Alton Locke (New York, 1961), Ch. X.

in the century. In poetry, Thomas Hood's "The Song of the Shirt," Elizabeth Barret Browning's "The Cry of the Children," and Tennyson's "Maud" show sympathy for the oppressed laborer of the time. Charles Dickens was the most vocal critic of the nineteenth century. His voice was a rising cry against the follies of the law, the negative nature of the churches of England, the debtor's prisons and a host of other evils of English society; and that voice hit its crescendo in Hard Times.

Chapter II

HARD TIMES AND THE DICKENS CANON

The Pickwick Papers was Dickens' first novel, and it is also perhaps the most typical of his early period. Although the picture becomes more somber during Mr. Pickwick's legal troubles, there is even hilarity in that. The novel is probably best summarized by the following:

"Sam," said Mr. Pickwick, as he got into bed, "I have made one of the most extraordinary mistakes tonight that ever were heard of."

"Wery likely, sir," replied Mr. Weller, dryly.¹

The novel is a series of "extraordinary mistakes" presented in the most rambling fashion possible. There is little trouble taken with the plot. The narrative merely wanders, and for all the reader knows, Mr. Pickwick and Sam Weller are still making expeditions, despite Pickwick's statement to the contrary. The only real foreshadowing of the Dickens to come is in the chapters concerning the debtor's prison. The trial itself is a slapstick affair, and Dodson and Fogg are too comic for the reader to take seriously as villains. But the Fleet is quite another thing.

¹The Pickwick Papers, Ch. XXII.

He [Pickwick] can escape the Fleet himself; he cannot destroy it or the evils for which it stands Only by slow degrees did he come to see clearly the shadowy powers behind the Fleet and to realize that they were what needed to be destroyed.²

Oliver Twist presents a much darker picture than The Pickwick Papers. In Oliver Twist Dickens "plunges into a confined world of darkness, an oppressive, lurid intensity from the workhouse to the criminal slum and jail."³ A premature but pertinent slash at the New Poor Law,⁴ Oliver Twist presents an exaggerated but essentially truthful picture of workhouse life. Fagin and his thieves' school continues the dark picture presented by the novel. Oliver Twist seems rather out of place among Dickens' early novels because of this tone of darkness. With the exception of Hard Times, none of Dickens' novels presents so critical a picture of English life. The scenes of workhouse life, though relieved somewhat by the buffoonish Bumble, are some of the most powerful criticisms to be found in Dickens' fiction. Nancy and the Artful Dodger come close to pathos as characters caught up in a life of crime from which there

²Edgar Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, I (New York, 1952), 175.

³Johnson, I, 273.

⁴The New Poor Law was passed in 1834. Oliver Twist was started in 1837 before the defects of the law were generally known.

appears to be no extrication. Oliver Twist is the earliest indication of the criticism of Victorian society that we see in Hard Times.

After the thieves den of Oliver Twist we are brought into the sunnier Dickens world with Nicholas Nickleby. The novel is not all sunshine, but the gloom that is in Nicholas Nickleby is considerably less obsessive. Dotheboys Hall and the mistreatment of children are equated much in the same manner that Fagin's thieves' school is equated with this subject. The business greed of Sir Mulberry Hawk, Ralph Nickleby, and Greysbury also furnishes a somber backdrop for the novel. But the sheer Pickwickian good humor, of Mrs. Nickleby, the Vincent Crummies theatrical group, and Fanny Squeers provides plenty of relief and makes the novel one of Dickens' most jovial. After the relatively compact form of Oliver Twist Dickens returns to the loose-knit plot that is typical of his novels. He puts his characters on the roads of England in the novel, and they wander in Tom Jones fashion all over the countryside. The social criticism of the novel is relegated primarily to the background.

The Old Curiosity Shop is another of the rambling, loose-structured novels of Dickens' early period. In Little Nell Dickens created a portrayal of his ideal woman, Mary Hogarth, but his portrayal is loaded with such an excess of sentimentality that it ruins the novel for most

readers. The long, drawn out death of Little Nell is almost too absurd for the modern reader to bear. Quilp, one of those fantastic monsters that Dickens seems to have been able to conjure up at will, and Dick Swivler almost run away with the novel, but Dickens manages to hold them at least partially in check. He gives an early impression of industrialization in the manufacturing town that Nell passes through in her travels, and his condemnation of the English legal system, in the person of Mr. Brass, is continued. But we can scarcely call this novel a vehicle for criticism of English society in the same sense that Hard Times is.

Barnaby Rudge is not considered one of the better Dickens novels. It is one of his two attempts at historical fiction. In it he portrays the Gordon Riots of the preceding century. The plot of the novel is clumsily constructed, and only rarely do the characters achieve anything more than mechanical comedy. The novel is chiefly noteworthy for Dickens' rather frightened view of the mob. These scenes have been presented as evidence of Dickens' conservative attitude toward Chartism in the 1840's.

Martin Chuzzlewit is often regarded as the transition novel between the predominantly happy novels of Dickens' early period and the sharply critical novels of the later period. Martin Chuzzlewit certainly has a more somber tone through a great deal of its length than most of

the preceding novels, with the machinations of Jonas Chuzzlewit, Montague Tigg, and the disreputable Anglo-Bengalee Disinterested Loan and Life Assurance Company providing subjects for criticism of attitudes and institutions. The novel also marks the beginning of the end of Dickens' practice of dividing characters into the predominantly good and the predominantly bad, without showing the shades of character between the extremes. But Martin Chuzzlewit is still a comic novel, with the incomparable "Sairey" Gamp, with her awful grammatical blunders and inspired mispronunciations, carrying the bulk of the comedy. When young Martin is packed off to America, Dickens manages to take a comic and satirical look at the self-satisfied Americans of the 1840's. General Choke is typical of Dickens' Americans when he says, "When you say, sir, that your Queen does not reside in the Tower of London, you fall into an error not uncommon to your countrymen."⁵ The United States was unable to appreciate Dickens' humor, and Dickens was somewhat unpopular in this country for a time.

Dombey and Son is generally conceded to be the first novel of Dickens' so-called maturity. This novel is said to give the "first clear picture of the workings of a monetary society"⁶ in Dickens' novels. The money-born pride of

⁵Charles Dickens, Martin Chuzzlewit (London, 1937), Ch. XXI.

⁶Johnson, II, 801.

Dombey and the downfall to which his pride brings him furnish the theme of the novel. There are side glances at education, as seen in Dr. Blimber's school, the Grinders, and that "excellent egress" Mrs. Pipchin. Dickens also gives a short description of an industrial scene as seen by Dombey from his train window. The railroad, always an object of awe to Dickens, seems to be a manifestation of the industrial age in this novel. The train itself seems to be some sort of all-devouring monster to Dickens. He even uses it to kill Carker, the villain of the novel. Mr. Dombey is the first example of the new bourgeois society to be fully portrayed in Dickens' fiction. The Cheeryble Brothers, Pickwick, and old Fezziwig were "good" businessmen, and there had been "bad" businessmen like Scrooge. But those who were good were too good to be true, and those who were bad were equally unconvincing. Dombey is Dickens' first attempt to shade in the nuances of regeneratable pride and avarice in a convincing manner. In many ways Mr. Dombey resembles Gradgrind of Hard Times.

David Copperfield, the next novel, is full of significant criticisms of Victorian iniquities, but there is no dominant strain of criticism. The novel is too autobiographical to specialize in criticism of any one fault. There are, of course, the matters of the abuses of Chancery, the debtor's prison, and child labor; and the Calvinist religions are taken to task, that religion of which Mr.

Chillip says, "I don't find authority for Mr. and Miss Murdstone in the New Testament."⁷ That most convivial of all the Dickens monsters, Mr. Micawber, quite runs away with the story, but in doing so gives the reader a bleak picture of the debtor's prison. Characterization takes the novel over, with the digressions caused by such characters as Dora, Betsy Trotwood, and Mr. Dick destroying what slim plot Dickens apparently conceived for the novel. David Copperfield has been the most popular of Dickens' novels with the reading public, and Dickens himself said, "Like all fathers I have a favourite child, and his name is David Copperfield."⁸

Bleak House takes the reader back to Chancery, and Dickens' criticism of the corrupt old court is the most comprehensive to be found in his novels to this point. In presenting the troubles caused by Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce, Dickens takes the reader from the fogs of Chancery to the human misery of Tom-All-alone's, and everywhere he sees the need for reform. The coldness of Sir Leicester Dedlock, symbolic of the aristocracy, will improve nothing. The law is a fog, and not a benevolent fog, which needs reformation itself. Mrs. Jellyby's "telescopic philanthropy" can see

⁷Charles Dickens, David Copperfield (New York, 1914), Ch. LI.

⁸Johnson, II, 689-690. Johnson takes the quotation from the Preface of the 1869 Charles Dickens Edition of David Copperfield.

nothing nearer than Africa, and is consequently of little use to England. The condition of England seems rather hopeless in Bleak House, and at the end of the novel it seems that Jo and his brethren must continue to die unnoticed. Perhaps violence lurks in the fog. "By this time in the fifties, revolution seemed a dreadful and present possibility to Dickens. It is surely this possibility that lurks in the fog and mire of Bleak House."⁹

Little Dorrit follows the publication of Hard Times. In Little Dorrit Dickens' main purpose is a condemnation of the Circumlocution Office, or Patent Bureau. The Barnacle family, the hereditary lords of the Circumlocution Office and the progenitors of "how not to do it," are seen as another phase of the condition of England question. Dickens always condemns institutions in his novels, and the Circumlocution Office apparently represents the worst sort of institution to him. It is not just worthless and wasteful, it is harmful. It is the Circumlocution Office that ruins the Dorrit family. The Circumlocution Office will give no satisfaction in the matter of the rather mysterious but undoubtedly worthwhile invention of Daniel Doyce. There are some sidelights on the evils of the Marshalsea, but it is the Circumlocution Office and the Barnacle family that

⁹Monroe Engel, The Maturity of Dickens (Cambridge, Mass., 1959), p. 121.

permeate the entire novel.

A Tale of Two Cities was Dickens' second venture into historical fiction. The novel shows the influence of Carlyle's The French Revolution. Humphrey House sums up the significance of the novel as follows:

A plain thesis can be extracted from the book: the aristocrats deserved all they got, but the passions engendered in the people by misery and starvation replaced one set of oppressors by another. One aristocrat can be rescued to repent and live in the decent quietude of England; one individual can assert goodness against the double evil of the rest. But the concentration of emotion is never on Charles Darnay; it is all on the wild frenzy of people who have committed everything to violence.¹⁰

The novel has been described as wish fulfillment on the part of the author for such an event in England.¹¹ But the horror with which Dickens sees the rise and fall of Madame Guillotine, the frightened and innocent seamstress being led to her death, and the revulsion present in the portrayal of Madame De Farge belie such a thesis. House's idea of one oppressor replacing another seems more acceptable.

Great Expectations "is a statement to be taken as it stands; of what money can do, good and bad; of how it can change and make distinctions of class; how it can pervert virtue, sweeten manners, open up new fields of enjoyment

¹⁰Humphrey House, The Dickens World (London, 1950), p. 214.

¹¹T. A. Jackson feels that this novel is a hymn to the cleansing power of physical revolution, and that Dickens was oppressed because he could not see revolution in sight for England.

and suspicion."¹² The tale of Pip's change into a little snob after his experience with Estella and the acquisition of his expectations, his revulsion when he learns the identity of his benefactor, and his final reclamation, is thought by some to be the most artistically acceptable of Dickens' novels. There is no particular axe to grind as there has been in many of the preceding novels, and Great Expectations has a unity and coherence to be found only in Hard Times and A Tale of Two Cities in the Dickens canon. No magnificent flat character manages to run away with the plot as so often happens in Dickensland. But perhaps all this only goes to illustrate what was earlier said in regard to Hard Times being the summit of Dickens' social criticism. A Tale of Two Cities has no direct reference to the condition of England question. Little Dorrit is a violent attack on the Circumlocution Office, but contains little else in the way of criticism of English society. In the so-called mature novels up to Little Dorrit, a certain reforming impatience seems inseparable from the work. But this impatience is lacking in Little Dorrit and Great Expectations.

This impatience is also lacking in Our Mutual Friend, the last of Dickens' completed novels. Engel states that in this novel "money and dust are correlatives."¹³ The dust

¹²House, p. 159.

¹³Engel, p. 132.

heaps of London were rather valuable. Every particle of them, from discarded clothing to animal and human excrement, was convertible to some use. Engel sees the dust heaps as symbolic of money, and sees the characters of the novel as willing to subvert their lives for money--er, in this case, dust. Old Harmon, the dustman, has been made a miser by money. Bella Wilfer, though eventually saved, is corrupted by money. Mr. Dolls betrays Lizzie Hexam for money. The Laamles ruin each other's life for money. And the money is dust. It should not be thought that Dickens hated money, however. Young John Harmon knows that there are good uses for money. Dickens' characters never hate money as such; only its bad use. As Cruikshank says, the chief complaint of the "good" Dickens characters in respect to money is that they have not more of it. "They would never have any trouble to know what to do with a fortune. The chief thing they would do would be to live happily ever after on it."¹⁴

Dickens criticizes a whole host of evils in Our Mutual Friend, but this novel, like Little Dorrit and Great Expectations, does not have the same sort of reforming zeal that Dickens' work beginning with Dombey and Son and climaxing in Hard Times shows. Many critics feel that Dickens was disappointed by England's failure to take heed of his

¹⁴R. J. Cruikshank, Charles Dickens and Early Victorian England (London, 1949), p. 17.

criticisms, and that he lapsed into a cynical outlook toward the possibility of improvement. This is the view expressed by T. A. Jackson and George Bernard Shaw. Other critics, such as Edmond Wilson and Edgar Johnson, blame the failure of his "organ of outrage" on his personal problems, which became intense in the 1860's. But whatever the cause, it is certain that after Hard Times Dickens' protest against the host of vices portrayed in his earlier novels becomes a great deal less intense, and his attitude toward eventual correction seems quite cynical.

There is no convenient peg to hang Dickens on by way of comparison with his contemporaries. He certainly did not espouse the narrow Benthamite liberalism, which would be called extreme conservatism in the twentieth century. Nor can Dickens be seen as a devoted disciple of Carlyle, though he was an admirer of the man. The Toryism of Carlyle, more like modern liberalism, had its appeal to Dickens, but one can hardly see him embracing the doctrine of the hero. One can see elements of both the philosophy of Carlyle and the philosophy of the Humanitarian Radicals in Dickens' work: the desire for legal and governmental reform and the hatred of what Carlyle called "a cold universal Laissez-faire" and reliance on empirical facts. Perhaps an examination of Hard Times will make Dickens' position more clear and will show why it is the most thoroughgoing criticism of English society that he wrote.

Chapter III

THE CONCEPTION OF THE NOVEL

By 1854 Charles Dickens had reached almost every pinnacle that a former victim of child labor and the son of an imprisoned debtor could wish for. It had not been an easy climb. By the most assiduous effort he was able to teach himself the art of shorthand. Through his knowledge of shorthand he became a first-rate journalist. His Sketches by Boz, first introduced without reimbursement to the author, had sharpened his writing skills. With his first novel, The Pickwick Papers, he literally burst into public esteem. In the succeeding years Dickens climbed higher and higher up the ladder of success. He was able to turn out novels with apparent ease and was eminently well paid for his work. He married on the strength of the sale of The Pickwick Papers, which before its end rose to 40,000 copies per number and gave its publishers a profit of 20,000 pounds.¹ His wife, the former Catherine Hogarth, daughter of a fellow journalist, was prolific in children

¹Stephen Leacock, Charles Dickens (New York, 1934), p. 33.

if not in understanding. Dickens edited such magazines as Bentley's Miscellany, engaged in dramatic presentations both as writer and actor, participated in numerous charities, and helped raise nine children in the eighteen years between his marriage and the publication of Hard Times; not to mention the serial publication of nine novels, sometimes with two being underway at once, and numerous short stories and articles. During most of this period he had unrivaled success with his novels. Discounting such novelists as G. W. M. Reynolds, who adorned a serial novel about a working girl with an elaborately prolonged strip tease in which "each number closed with the prospect of another item of the young woman's wardrobe removed in the next number,"² Dickens was the most popular English novelist until competition arose in the 1850's. Dickens, in short, had every reason to be a happy and contented man. But he was, in spite of his success, not a happy man.

Dickens' wife was apparently distasteful to him, Kate Dickens was one of those people who seem to be unable to come up to the ordinary demands of life. She could do nothing very complex with her hands, and was constantly embroiling herself in embarrassments. Dickens was able to laugh at her physical inabilities, but "Dickens' laughter sounds like the hilarity with which we hide a secret

²George A. Ford, Dickens and His Readers (Princeton, 1955), p. 79.

irritation from ourselves."³ Dickens was one of those highly efficient individuals who become somewhat annoyed with inefficiency in others. Kate's clumsiness, plus her naturally querulous disposition, caused Dickens to be less than contented with his home life. This discontent, helped along by Dickens' infatuation with Ellen Ternan,⁴ caused a separation between Kate and Charles Dickens.

Another facet of Dickens' discontent was the lack of any relief for the English laboring classes, and the continuation of the abuses he had written of in his novels. Dickens seemed to have a deep and abiding interest in the condition of the people of England. His attacks on Chancery, the disease breeding slums, the false pride of the propertied classes, and the Poor Law are not sensationalism; they are attacks against faults and abuses in English society that troubled Dickens.

Dickens' letters certainly bear out his discontent with the condition of England. We find him penning the following lines to Charles Knight under the date of March 17, 1854, during the publication of Hard Times:

The English people are, so far as I know, the hardest worked people on whom the sun shines. Be content if, in their wretched intervals of pleasure, they read for amusement and do no

³Johnson, II, 721.

⁴Edmond Wilson, The Wound and the Bow (Cambridge, 1941), p. 69.

worse. They are born at the oar and they die at it. Good God, what would we have of them?⁵

Not long after the completion of Hard Times he wrote the following note to Miss Coutts regarding the visitation of the cholera:

Let it come twice again, severely--the people advancing all the while in the knowledge that, humanly speaking, it is, like the typhus fever, in the mass, a preventable disease--and you will see such a shake in this country as never was seen on Earth since Sampson pulled the Temple down about his head.⁶

The very flurry of activity in which Dickens lived might suggest the attempt of a man to forget his troubles by running away from them. At any rate, Dickens was not a completely happy man, and his discontent certainly comes out in the writing of Hard Times to a greater extent than is observable in any of his novels.

In 1850 Dickens was the prime mover in the formation of the periodical Household Words. The magazine was to be under Dickens' almost exclusive control, probably due to the memory of some difficulties with Bentley's Miscellany and The Daily News regarding editorial policy. The aim of the periodical, as stated in the first issue, was "No mere utilitarian spirit, no iron binding of the mind to grim

⁵Percy Whipple and others (eds.), Life, Letters and Speeches of Charles Dickens (Boston and New York, 1894), p. 374.

⁶Edgar Johnson, The Heart of Charles Dickens (New York, 1952), p. 250.

realities," instead it would "cherish the light of Fancy that is inherent in the human breast."⁷ After a few years of profitable operation the sales of Household Words began to lag. Dickens' partners in the venture felt that if he would contribute a novel "some unheard of effect"⁸ would result. Dickens agreed to write a novel that would require five months to complete in weekly numbers.

Dickens decided to write on the industrial workers and the utilitarian theory that justified their abuse by their employers. As long before as 1838 Dickens had visited the cotton mills at Manchester, and he hated what he saw. In a letter dated December 29, 1838, he tells Edward Fitzgerald,

I went, some weeks ago to Manchester, and saw the worst cotton mill. And then I saw the best There was no great difference between them So far as seeing goes, I have seen enough for my purpose, and what I have seen astonished me beyond all measure. I mean to strike the heaviest blow in my power for those unfortunate creatures, but whether I shall do so in the 'Nickelby,' or wait some other opportunity, I have not yet determined.⁹

Obviously, he did not do so in "the Nickelby." He did show his readers a rather unfavorable view of an

⁷Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, II, 703.

⁸Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, II, 703.

⁹Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, II, 225.

industrial town in The Old Curiosity Shop in which he describes a factory as

. . . a large and lofty building, supported by pillars of iron, with great black apertures in the upper walls, open to the external air--echoing to the roof with the hissing of red hot metal plunged in water, and a hundred strange unearthly noises never heard elsewhere,--in this gloomy place, moving like demons among the flame and smoke, dimly and fitfully seen, flushed and tormented by the burning fires, and wielding great weapons, a faulty blow from any one of which must have crushed some workman's skull, a number of men laboured like giants.¹⁰

Dickens speaks of Dombey's impression of an industrial area seen from the window of a train in Dombey and Son, but these two instances are fragmentary. Dickens waited sixteen years to strike the blow he tells Fitzgerald of in 1838. Edgar Johnson suggests that "although horror and indignation sank deep into his heart, Dickens could not deal with things still so strange to his imagination as those dust-laden mills and their thunderous machinery."¹¹ He could strike out at the injustice of English justice, the misery caused by the Poor Law, or the ineptness of England's government; these abuses he was familiar with. But it took some time to bring him to the sustained slash at utilitarian theory and Manchester school practice that is represented in Hard Times.

¹⁰Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (New York, n.d.), Ch. XLIV.

¹¹Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, I, 225.

Forster tells us of Dickens' letter asking for help in choosing a title for the Household Words serialization.

He gives Dickens' list of possible titles as:

1. According to Cocker. 2. Prove It. 3. Stubborn Things. 4. Mr. Gradgrind's Facts. 5. The Grindstone. 6. Hard Times. 7. Two and Two Are Four. 8. Something Tangible. 9. Our Hardheaded Friend. 10. Rust and Dust. 11. Simple Arithmetic. 12. A Matter of Calculation. 13. A Mere Question of Figures. 14. The Gradgrind Philosophy.

Forster selected numbers "2, 6, and 11; the three that were Dickens' favourites were 6, 13, and 14; and as 6 had been chosen by both, that title was taken."¹²

This list of possible titles is illustrative of what Dickens intended to do with the novel. As he said in a letter dated January 30, 1854, to Charles Knight,

My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else--the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time--the men who--through long years to come, will do more damage to the really useful truths of political economy than I could (if I tried) in my whole life; the addled heads who would take the average of cold in the Crimea during twelve months as the reason for clothing a soldier in nankeens on a night when he would be frozen to death in fur, and who comfort the laborer in travelling twelve miles a day to and from his work by telling him that the average distance of one inhabited place from another in the whole area of England is not more than four miles.¹³

¹²John Forster, The Life of Charles Dickens, II (New York, 1904), 145.

¹³Whipple and others, p. 372.

Dickens had a difficult adjustment to make in changing from monthly publication to a weekly schedule. In February of 1854 Dickens inscribed the following lines to Forster:

The difficulty of the space is CRUSHING. Nobody can have an idea of it who has not had an experience of patient fiction-writing with some elbow room always, and open places in perspective. In this form, with any kind of regard to the current number, there is absolutely no such thing.¹⁴

The comparatively short space of the weekly numbers form forced Dickens to practise an economy of description and detail that some critics feel to have been beneficial. A comparison of the initial description of Gradgrind's square figure, which is completed in one paragraph, to the more rambling descriptions of Sir Leicester Dedlock or Tulkinghorn in Bleak House would give the reader an adequate conception of the changes in style Dickens found to be necessary in Hard Times. The description of Gradgrind's school, which is held to "a plain, bare, monotonous vault of a schoolroom,"¹⁵ is another example.

In his notes on the novel Dickens wrote "Write and calculate the story in the old monthly Nos."¹⁶ The old

¹⁴Forster, II, 145.

¹⁵Charles Dickens, Hard Times (London and New York, 1907), Bk. I, Ch. i. Future references to Hard Times will be indicated by a large roman numeral for the book number and a small roman numeral for the chapter number.

¹⁶John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, Dickens at Work (London, 1957), p. 202.

monthly number of thirty-two pages (of Dickens' writing) had been convenient for two or three episodes. In Hard Times one or two episodes had to be presented in one-fourth of the space previously used. This fact explains the lack of "elbow room" that Dickens felt in Hard Times.

Dickens was usually quite thorough in preparing himself to write a novel. When he needed a model for Mr. Fang in Oliver Twist, he wrote the following note to one of his journalist friends:

In my next number of Oliver Twist, I must have a magistrate; and casting about for a magistrate whose harshness and insolence would render him a fit subject to be 'shewn up' I have as a necessary consequence stumbled upon Mr. Laing of Hatton Garden celebrity.¹⁷

Dickens requested that his friend smuggle him into the courtroom. He was admitted to the magistrate's presence, and Mr. Laing was transformed into Mr. Fang in the next number of Oliver Twist.

In order to get some information regarding contemporary labor relations for Hard Times, Dickens decided to visit a strike that was in progress at Preston. He was apparently somewhat disappointed in his experience. Forster quotes Dickens as having said in a letter, "I am afraid I shall not be able to get much here. I am told that the people 'sit at home and mope.'¹⁸ Dickens seemed to be

¹⁷Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, I, 207.

¹⁸Forster, 147-148.

impressed by the quiet attitude of the people. To M. De Cerjat he wrote in January of 1854, "Provisions very dear, but the people very temperate and quiet in general."¹⁹ But when he wrote an article for Household Words regarding his observation of the strike he seemed repelled by the waste of manpower and resources that the strike entailed. On the whole, however, Dickens was in favor of the right of the people to strike, although he deplored the necessity. He decided, either because of the paucity of the material he had obtained at Preston, or for fear of angering his middle-class audience, not to portray a strike. As he says in a letter to Mrs. Gaskell on June 21, 1854,

I have no intention of striking. The monstrous claims at domination made by a certain class of manufacturers, and the extent to which the way is made easy for working men to slide down into discontent under such hands, are within my scheme; but I am not going to strike, so don't be afraid of me.²⁰

Dickens' preparations for Hard Times were fairly thorough. From the letter to Mrs. Gaskell it is apparent that he had talked to the lady novelist from Manchester, who had a great deal more practical experience with industrial problems than he had. Humphrey House calls Hard Times Dickens' most thought out novel.

All his journalism shows too that he was thinking much more about social problems, whereas earlier

¹⁹Whipple and others, p. 372.

²⁰Whipple and others, p. 377.

he had been content to feel mainly, and to record a thought, when it occurred, in emotional dress.²¹

But it should be remembered that Dickens was very much out of his field when he created Coketown. He was far from being an expert in the problems of the industrial laborer, or, for that matter, in political economy. As always, Dickens spoke from the heart. He thought the problem out more thoroughly, but his voice still came from the heart.

²¹Stephen Leacock, Charles Dickens (New York, 1934), p. 33.

Chapter IV

EDUCATING THE EDUCATORS

Dickens stated that his purpose in writing Hard Times was to satirize those who "see figures and averages and nothing else," although the overall statement of the novel embraces much more than this. In his criticism of utilitarian philosophy he treats the matter as a type of education. Gradgrind is presented as an educator, not just of his own children and the children of his school, but one who would educate England to his system. Dickens shows in the novel that it is this educator who must be educated in another way of thinking.

Dickens shows little love for English education or educators in his novels. The idealized mother-son relationship of David Copperfield and his mother seems to correspond to the author's ideal educational system. The amiable schoolmaster that Little Nell meets in her travels seems to be a human being. Charles Darnay's profession does not make him an ogre. But these are unusual examples. Most of Dickens' schoolmen are cruel tyrants who are unkind, and, worst of all, are unkind to children.

Miss Monoflathers of The Old Curiosity Shop is an early example of the educational tyrant in Dickens' writing, and she is even a Benthamite tyrant when she says,

"Don't you feel how naughty it is to be a waxwork child, when you might have the proud consciousness of assisting, to the extent of your infant powers, the manufactures of your country: of improving your mind by the constant contemplation of the steam-engine?"¹

The schools in David Copperfield are little better. The Charitable Grinders of Dombey and Son is an example of what happens when a rich man controls a school.

"I am far from being friendly," pursued Mr. Dombey, "to what is called by persons of levelling sentiment, general education. But it is necessary that the inferior classes should continue to be taught to know their position, and to conduct themselves properly. So far I approve of schools." . . . "The number of her son, I believe," said Mr. Dombey, turning to his sister and speaking of the child as if he were a hackney-coach, "is one hundred and forty-seven."²

Equally bad is the Blimber School in Dombey and Son.

Under the forcing system, a young gentleman usually took leave of his spirits in three weeks. He had all the cares in the world on his head in three months. He conceived bitter sentiments against his parents or guardian in four; he was an old misanthrope in five . . . and at the end of the first twelvemonth had arrived at the conclusion, from which he never afterward departed, that all the fancies of the poets, and the lessons of the sages, were a mere collection of words and grammar, and had no other meaning in the world.³

¹Charles Dickens, The Old Curiosity Shop (New York, 1914), Ch. XXX.

²Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son (New York, 1950), Ch. V.

³Dombey and Son, Ch. XI.

This was the system, the forcing system, that deprived poor Mr. Toots of his reason.

Thus, one sees two general attitudes in education which Dickens detests. On the one hand is seen the strictly classical education, with its forcing of unrelated facts into unwilling young minds, while on the other hand is seen the poor schools that teach the poor to stay in their places.

In Hard Times one can see a school closely related to the latter type and a direct antithesis to the former. As Mr. Jackson puts it,

The Blimber system, in short, is a perfect pendant to the Gradgrind system. The grim utilitarianism of the latter is an exact balance of the conventionalized disutilitarianism of the former. Both alike treat the child as a purely passive subject matter on whom it would be folly and worse than folly to predicate any such thing as "rights."⁴

Gradgrind's utilitarian philosophy is exemplified by his school. Dickens' criticism of the philosophy on which the school is based represents a large part of the overall statement of the novel.

In the opening scene of Hard Times, the reader finds the school's eminent patron, Thomas Gradgrind, a man who is "ready to weigh and measure any parcel of human nature and tell you exactly what it comes to,"⁵ apprising the

⁴Jackson, p. 73.

⁵I, ii.

schoolmaster of the following:

"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 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."⁶

As the lesson progresses, Mr. Gradgrind asks "girl number twenty"⁷ for her definition of a horse. Girl number twenty being unable to answer, Gradgrind turns to a young man named Bitzer, who answers,

"Quadruped, Gramivorous. Forty teeth, namely, twenty-four grinders, four eye teeth, and twelve incisive. Sheds coat in the spring; in marshy country sheds hoofs, too. Hoofs hard, but requiring to be shod with iron. Age known by marks in mouth."⁸

This is a Gradgrindian horse. Any illusions as to the sentimental quality of any particular horse, the beauty of the animal, or any other such romantic nonsense is effectively purged. Flowers and butterflies are disposed of in the same manner. It would be ridiculous to have a rug with a flower design. Flowers just do not grow in rugs. That is fancy, and Gradgrind's school is a school of fact. "You never meet with quadrupeds going up and down walls; you must not have quadrupeds represented upon walls."⁹

⁶I, 11.

⁷I, 11.

⁸I, 11.

⁹I, 11.

Gradgrind's children, Louisa and Thomas, are educated in exactly the same manner. The cardinal principle of their education has been "never wonder." Louisa is described as follows:

There was an air of jaded sullenness in them both, and particularly in the girl: yet, struggling through the dissatisfaction of her face, there was a light with nothing to rest upon, a fire with nothing to burn, a starved imagination keeping life in itself somehow, which brightened its expression. Not with the brightness natural to cheerful youth, but with uncertain, eager, doubtful flashes, which had something painful in them, analogous to the changes on a blind face groping its way.¹⁰

Louisa suffers from a starved imagination. Her condition is remarkably similar to that which John Stuart Mill describes in his autobiography.

John Stuart Mill was brought up on just such a diet of facts as Louisa Gradgrind was. He studied classical Political Economy, Psychology, History, and other favorite utilitarian subject matters with astonishing intensity in his early childhood. Poetry or any other form of the arts was not included in his studies. Mill had consciously set out, or had been set out, to be a reformer. But one day, when he was a young man, he asked himself,

Suppose that all your objects in life were realized; that all the changes in institutions and opinions which you are looking forward to, could be completely

effected at this very instant; would this be a great joy and comfort to you?¹¹

And he was shattered at the negative answer that he was forced to give. He found that what he had been living for was not enough: that "the habit of analysis has a tendency to wear away the feelings."¹²

After suffering through a rather extended period of extreme mental distress, made more extreme by the necessity to conceal it, Mill found relief in poetry. He tried Byron first, but found no comfort because "the poet's state of mind was too like my own."¹³ When he came to Wordsworth he found his remedy. What made Wordsworth's poems the proper medicine for his state of mind

was that they expressed, not mere outward beauty, but states of feeling, and of thought coloured by feeling under the excitement of beauty In them I seemed to draw from a source of inward joy, of sympathetic and imaginative pleasure, which could be shared in by all human beings.¹⁴

Although Mill's analysis of his own problem is far more complete and scientific than Dickens' analysis of Louisa, the argument is essentially the same. Louisa is the victim of a starved imagination as a consequence of an unaltered diet of fact.

¹¹John Stuart Mill, The Autobiography of John Stuart Mill (New York, 1924), p. 94.

¹²Mill, p. 96.

¹³Mill, p. 103.

¹⁴Mill, p. 104.

Louisa is pushed into an unfortunate marriage with Mr. Bounderby, "the bully of humility," through the persuasion of her father and brother. Tom Gradgrind is particularly anxious for Louisa to marry Bounderby, so that his own position at Bounderby's bank might be enhanced. Gradgrind is anxious for the match because statistics indicate that Louisa and Bounderby would have a good marriage. As to Louisa's question of whether he thinks she loves Bounderby or whether Bounderby asks her to love him, Gradgrind finds that the question "may be a little misplaced."¹⁵ When Louisa asks her father if he thinks she should marry Bounderby, he can only answer,

Confining yourself rigidly to Fact, the question of Fact you state to yourself is: Does Mr. Bounderby ask me to marry him? Yes, he does. The sole remaining question then is: Shall I marry him? I think nothing can be plainer than that?¹⁶

Louisa does marry Bounderby, and becomes susceptible to the advances of James Harthouse, who, she thinks, again at the instigation of Tom, has benefited by everything she has missed. Louisa starts to run away with Harthouse, but at the last moment does not join him. She returns to her father's house, and in the ensuing scene with her father, Dickens displays the fallacy in Gradgrind's education of his children. Louisa says to her father,

¹⁵I, xv.

¹⁶I, xv.

"How could you give me life, and take from me all the inappreciable things that raise it from the state of conscious death? Where are the graces of my soul? Where are the sentiments of my heart? What have you done, O father, what have you done, with the garden that should have bloomed once, in this great wilderness here?¹⁷

But Louisa is not the only failure of the Gradgrind system. Young Tom is turned into a hypocrite, a thief, and a traitor to his own sister. As Dickens puts it,

It was very remarkable that a young gentleman who had been brought up under one continuous system of unnatural restraint, should be a hypocrite; but it was certainly the case with Tom. It was very strange that a young gentleman who had never been left to his own guidance for five consecutive minutes, should be incapable at last of governing himself; but so it was with Tom. It was altogether unaccountable that a young gentleman whose imagination had been strangled in his cradle, should still be inconvenienced by its ghost in the form of grovelling sensualities; but such a monster, beyond all doubt, was Tom.¹⁸

Not only does Tom become a thief, but he puts the blame for his crime on Stephen Blackpool. It is Tom who pushes Louisa toward Bounderby and then toward James Hart-house. But Tom's long training in Political Economy enables him to answer his father's query as to why he has become a thief. Tom answers,

"So many people, out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you talk, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself."¹⁹

¹⁷II, xii.

¹⁸II, iii.

¹⁹III, vii.

Tom and Louisa Gradgrind represent the failure of the system. This is what happens to children who have been "coursed, like little hares" with the imagination-starved Gradgrind doctrines. There must be an outbreak of the need for something other than dry, hard facts. As Louisa symbolically puts it as she watches the chimneys of Coketown, "There seems to be nothing but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, father!"²⁰ For Tom, the fire bursts out when he is able to get away from Stone Lodge and his father's direct supervision. For Louisa, the breaking point comes when she meets a man for whom she feels some emotion; but she is so inexperienced in matters of emotion that she cannot determine whether or not the emotion is genuine. The Gradgrind system is a total failure at home; and the system fails just as completely away from Gradgrind's home.

Bitzer is the triumph of the system--he of the rapidly blinking eyes. He knows the definition of a horse, and is well aware that horses are out of place on wallpaper. In his position as general spy and informer at the bank, he is in a position to rise in the world. His application of the principles of fact and political economy to his life is admirable. His one frailty is his mother, whose life in the workhouse he brightens to the extent of one-half pound of tea per year.

which was weak in him--first, because all gifts have an inevitable tendency to pauperize the recipient, and secondly, because his only reasonable transaction in that commodity would have been to buy it for as little as he could possibly give, and sell it for as much as he could possibly get; it having been ascertained by philosophers that in this is comprised the whole duty of man--not a part of man's duty, but the whole.²¹

Bitzer further shows his admirable absorption of Gradgrind's factual curriculum when he interrupts his benefactor's effort to smuggle Tom out of Coketown after the theft. To Gradgrind's query as to whether he has a heart, Bitzer answers that he has paid for his schooling, though it was a bargain; and after all, "it was a fundamental principle of the Grandgrind philosophy that everything was to be paid for."²² Therefore, there is no such thing as gratitude.

If Tom and Louisa represent the failure of the Gradgrind philosophy of education and Bitzer represents its final culmination, Sissy Jupe can be said to represent the antidote to the system. The authors of Dickens at Work point out that in his notes on Hard Times Dickens terms Sissy the "power of affection."²³ This is truly her position in the novel. Sissy represents the world of art and affection that is quite unable to grasp the harsh world of the Gradgrind philosophy. She is a complete failure in

²¹II, 4.

²²III, viii.

²³Butt and Tillotson, p. 210.

Mr. M'Choakumchild's school. Sissy is the "girl number twenty" who is unable to give a proper definition of a horse. Furthermore,

After eight weeks of induction into the elements of Political Economy, she had only yesterday been set right by a prattler of three feet high, for returning to the question, "What is the first principle of this science?" the absurd answer, "to do unto others as I would that they should do unto me."²⁴

Sissy cannot understand the fundamental Gradgrind principle that "the Good Samaritan was a bad economist."²⁵ She has the background of love and affection which Louisa does not have. Gradgrind feels that Sissy is foolish for thinking that her father will come back to her. She is so incapable of the philosophy of facts that

when asked for her remarks on the fact that in a city of one million only twenty-five are starved to death in the course of a year, Sissy can only say that "it must be just as hard upon those who were starved, whether the others were a million or a million million."²⁶

It is Sissy who rescues little Jane Gradgrind from the world of fact that Louisa was unable to escape. Sissy is able, in her innocence, to cope with the ultra-worldly James Harthouse. Not only can she cope with him, she completely drives him from Coketown and politics. Her innocence and

²⁴I, ix.

²⁵I, ix.

²⁶I, ix.

lack of art enable her to deal with him in the same way that he had been able to deal with young Tom Gradgrind.

Sissy and the circus folk are that something that Thomas Gradgrind's educational system has missed. Even poor Mrs. Gradgrind realizes that "there is something-- not an Ology at all--that your father has missed, or forgotten, Louisa. I don't know what it is. I have often sat with Sissy near me, and thought about it."²⁷ The generosity which prompts the troupe to save the worthless Tom, and their subsequent refusal of a reward greater than a "collar for the dog, or a thot of bellth for the barthe" and "a little thpread for the company at about three and thixth a head"²⁸ are quite outside Gradgrind's pale of experience. He finally learns from Sleary that dogs and horses are more than Latin terminology and statistics; that "there ith a love in the world, not all Thelf-intereth after all, but thomething very different," and that "it hath a way of ith own of calculating, or not calculating, whith thomehow or another ith at leatht ath hard to give a name to, ath the wayth of the dog ith."²⁹

Gradgrind is, in short, reformed. The misfortunes of his children and the teaching of Sleary and Sissy have

²⁷II, ix.

²⁸III, viii.

²⁹III, viii.

educated the educator. Dickens has never portrayed him as a real villain--at least not in the same way that Bounderby is a villain. The utilitarian sternness of Gradgrind's educational theory, a theory which he applies to his own life and to all under his control, is his only unsympathetic quality. Gradgrind has his social arithmetic mixed-up and must have it straightened out for him. Butt and Tillotson are quite correct when they say,

It is some measure of the man's inherent goodness that he receives her [Sissy Jupe] as an inmate. He is redeemable, and the course of the novel shows that he will be redeemed by Sissy. He fails to educate her head, but she succeeds in educating his heart.³⁰

Gradgrind's conversion is infinitely better prepared for than Dombey's, and the conversion is done with more purpose. Most of Dickens' villains are hard-hearted scoundrels like Tulkinghorn, to cite an example of his mature work, or Dodson and Fogg from the earlier work. But Gradgrind represents something rare in Dickens, or in any author for that matter--a man converted on stage. And the process of change is made believable. Dombey merely retires to his chamber and, like Romeo, becomes a different man in absentia. Gradgrind changes before the reader's eyes; a difficult project for any author.

It should be evident that Dickens wishes to portray the fact that "those who use figures and averages, and

³⁰Butt and Tillotson, p. 209.

nothing else" are redeemable. At least those who are sincere, as Gradgrind seems to be, can be converted from error by the force of love and kindness, as represented by Sleary's troupe and Sissy Jupe. Gradgrind is not a vicious man. He has allowed an erroneous system to dominate his life, and has tried, through his school, to make it dominate the lives of others. It takes another kind of education to reform him.

It is interesting to note that when Dickens began the novel he apparently intended to leave Gradgrind unregenerate. In the notes he made on beginning the novel he wrote the following memorandum:

To show Louisa, how alike in their creeds her father and Harthouse are?--How the two heartless things come to the same in the end?

Yes, but almost imperceptibly.

Louisa:

"You have brought me to this, Father. Now, save me!"³¹

Apparently Dickens changed his mind as he proceeded in the writing of the novel, a not infrequent happening with him, and decided that his aim would be furthered if he reformed Gradgrind. If this novel was intended by the author to be a vehicle for criticism of a type of thinking and a certain class of people, as it is generally accepted to be, the purpose of the novel would be better fulfilled by showing

³¹Butt and Tillotson, p. 215.

a reformed utilitarian than an unregenerate hypocrite.
The quasi-sympathetic treatment of Gradgrind, showing him
led step by step away from his arithmetical world of facts,
is much more convincing than merely leaving him stranded
with what has been shown by Dickens to be an inhuman
doctrine.

Chapter V

CRITICISM BY COMPARISON AND CONTRAST

Of equal importance in Hard Times to the condemnation of the school of Political Economy that treats fact as the only thing worthy of study or attention in life is the comparison of Gradgrind, Bounderby, and Stephen Blackpool. The comparison and contrast between Stephen Blackpool and Josiah Bounderby is a fascinating one, and Dickens wastes no time, as Mrs. Gaskell frequently does, in making the reader wonder which the author favors. Gradgrind and Bounderby also are compared and contrasted, with Bounderby shown as the practitioner of Gradgrind's philosophy. Bounderby is just what his name implies, a thorough bounder-- "the bully of Humility." Blackpool, the martyred workman, is perhaps too good to be true, but the excess of sentiment involved in his characterization seems to be standard procedure for the Victorian novel. Still another comparison and contrast is seen in the conflict between Stephen Blackpool and Slackbridge, the union leader.

In a note to the first chapter of Unto This Last, John Ruskin makes the following comments regarding Dickens'

characterization of Bounderby and Stephen Blackpool:

I wish that he could think it right to limit his brilliant exaggeration to works written only for public amusement; and when he takes up a subject of high national importance, such as that which he handled in Hard Times, that he would use severer and more accurate analysis. The usefulness of that work (to my mind, in many respects, the greatest he has written) is with many persons seriously diminished because Mr. Bounderby is a dramatic monster, instead of a characteristic example of an honest workman. But let us not lose sight of Dickens' wit and insight, because he chooses to speak in a circle of stage fire. He is entirely right in his main drift and purpose in every book he has written; and all of them, but especially Hard Times, should be studied with close and earnest care by persons interested in social questions.¹

Ruskin, then, feels that Hard Times is a valuable addition to the condition of England question, but that the purpose of the novel would be furthered by less exaggeration of the characters of Bounderby and Blackpool. But is this exaggeration characteristic of the sort that Dickens is often accused of?

Dickens has been constantly accused of overstatement both in his own day and after. He even felt it necessary on occasion to defend himself in his prefaces against charges of this sort made against the novels. He defends the suit of Jarndyce vs. Jarndyce in the Preface of Bleak House by saying,

But as it is wholesome that . . . I mention that everything set forth in these pages concerning the

¹John Ruskin, Unto This Last, The Works of John Ruskin, XVII (London, 1905), 31.

Court of Chancery is substantially true, and within the truth. . . . At the present moment there is a suit before the Court which was commenced nearly twenty years ago; in which thirty to forty counsel have been known to appear at one time; in which costs have been occurred to the amount of seventy thousand pounds.

A few lines later in this Preface, Dickens even defends the death of Mr. Krook by spontaneous combustion. Dickens claims that there are about thirty cases of this sort on record, the most famous being that of Countess Cornelia de Bandi Cesenate, in 1731.²

Of course Dickens does exaggerate. The spontaneous combustion theme, the physical attributes of Quilp, and the caricaturization of Micawber are obvious exaggerations. Santayana attempts to show that Dickens does not really exaggerate by saying that he has a quality of observation that most people do not have. When one sees a person fall down in the street, Santayana says,

It is good manners to look away quickly, to suppress a smile, and to say to ourselves that the ludicrous figure in the street is not at all comic . . . and that it is foolish to give any importance to the fact that its hat has blown off, that it has slipped on an orange peel, and unintentionally sat on the pavement. . . . Dickens wallows in this aspect of life and his novels wallow in it.³

²While the spontaneous combustion theme seems rather absurd to the modern reader, such well-known authors as Charles Brockden Brown, Captain Marryat, and Herman Melville used it in their fiction in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

³George Santayana, Essays in Literary Criticism (New York, 1958), p. 215.

Santayana is no doubt correct in saying that Dickens sees the comic aspects of life that most people miss, but there can be little doubt that the great novelist enlarged the picture that he saw in life when he transformed it into fiction; and this enlargement of life is an integral part of what is best in Dickens. It is this ability to enlarge on his observations that enabled him to transform a John Dickens into a Mr. Micawber and a Mr. Laing into a Mr. Fang.

But Bounderby is not an exaggeration of the same type as Micawber or Mr. Fang: characters who are essentially comic in conception, though they may have some bearing on criticism of certain aspects of English society. There are comic elements in his characterization, but the man and what he stands for are too sinister to be truly comic. Some have said that no one could have the power that Bounderby exercises in Coketown, but if one assumes that Coketown is a small industrial town,⁴ Bounderby's position of power would not be unusual. One can hardly call Bounderby's avaricious philosophy exaggerated. The manufacturers of the north who refused to comply with the Ten Hours Act and the meagre child labor legislation of the day could have been little less cruel than Bounderby.

⁴Shaw, in his Preface to Hard Times, says that Coketown was modeled from Hanley, in Staffordshire. See George H. Ford and Lauriat Lane, Jr. (eds.), The Dickens Critics (Ithaca, 1961), p. 127.

Bounderby represents a different type of exaggeration in Dickens' fiction. Dickens exaggerates with a purpose other than entertainment in creating Bounderby. He makes a character somewhat larger than life, but not a complete caricaturization in the sense that Dodson and Fog or Uriah Heep are. Uriah Heep is a stock sinister villain, and Dodson and Fog are transferable to any of Dickens' novels. Bounderby is something more than another Dickens flat character. He is a character with symbolic importance. He represents something seriously wrong with the morality of English society. Stephen Blackpool and Thomas Gradgrind have the same sort of symbolic importance in the novel, just, in fact, as do all of the characters of the novel. These characters are relevant to the situation that Dickens criticizes, and cannot stand apart from the novel, as Dickens' characters sometimes can. Bounderby symbolizes the perversion of the well-intentioned philosophy symbolized by Gradgrind, and Stephen Blackpool symbolizes the class that must suffer for the selfishness of the former and the oversight of the latter.

Who was Mr. Bounderby?

He was a rich man: banker, merchant, manufacturer, and what not. A big, loud man, with a stare, and a metallic laugh. A man made out of a coarse material, which seemed to have been stretched to make so much of him . . . a man who could never sufficiently vaunt himself a self-made man. A man who was always proclaiming, through that brassy speaking-trumpet of a voice of his, his

ignorance, and his old poverty. A man who was
the Bully of humility.⁵

He claims to have been deserted by his mother, brought up by a drunken grandmother, and to have fought his own way up the ladder on his merits, with no help. Little else is needed by way of a description. Dickens lets the reader know Bounderby as well with two or three description-packed paragraphs as one usually knows about his characters in as many chapters; and this is not because there is little to know about Bounderby. He is one of those characters that cause Taine to say of Dickens, "When he has entertained the public through five acts, he still offers to the psychologist and the physician more than one subject of study."⁶

There are elements of caricature in Bounderby's "braggart humility." He cannot say enough about his precarious youth. But the troubles he says he has known have given him no sympathy with the "hands" of his mills or the clerks of his bank. Bounderby presents a perfect example of the grown-up Bitzer. When he hears that there is a circus child in the Gradgrind school, his first advice is, "Turn this girl to right about, and there's an end to it."⁷

⁵I, iv.

⁶H. A. Taine, The History of English Literature (New York, 1871), p. 358.

⁷I, iv.

His humility is flattered by his payment of a "certain annual stipend" to his housekeeper, Mrs. Sparsit. Mrs. Sparsit has the claim to fame of having married a Fowler, which personage promptly died, "the scene of his decease Calais, and the cause, brandy."⁸ In the same measure that he will give no favorable circumstances to his own youth,

he brightened Mrs. Sparsit's juvenile career with every possible advantage, and showered waggonloads of early roses all over that lady's path. "And yet, Sir," he would say, "how does it turn out after all? Why, here she is at a hundred a year (I give her a hundred, which she is pleased to term handsome), keeping the house of Josiah Bounderby of Coketown!"⁹

Bounderby protests that he cares nothing about the refinements of life, and that he is unable to appreciate them due to the gutter existence of his youth. But he cares enough about them to take over a sumptuous mansion on the outskirts of Coketown on a mortgage foreclosure from "one of the Coketown magnates who, in his determination to make a shorter cut than usual to an enormous fortune, overspeculated himself by about two hundred thousand pounds."¹⁰ Dickens notes that this sort of calamity will happen in the best of well-regulated Coketown families, but "the bankrupts had no connexion whatever with

⁸I, vii.

⁹I, vii.

¹⁰II, vii.

the improvident hands."¹¹ Bounderby, being risen from the gutter, cares nothing whatever for the beautiful paintings in the house, and delights in raising cabbages in the flower garden.

Dickens gives the reader strong hints that Bounderby's background was not so terrible as he seeks to paint it. The little old lady who comes to Coketown once each year to spy on and inquire about Mr. Bounderby is a fairly obvious preparation for Bounderby's eventual exposure. Mrs. Sparsit, hoping to please Bounderby, drags the old lady forward as a suspected bank robber. In doing so she puts Bounderby where the reader wishes to see him. He is

detected as the Bully of humility, who had built his windy reputation upon lies, and in his boastfulness had put the honest truth as far away from him as if he had advanced the mean claim (there is no meaner) to tack himself on to a pedigree; he cut a most ridiculous figure.¹²

One can certainly see the traditional Dickensian elements of exaggeration in Bounderby, and there are comic aspects in the characterization of the man. But on the whole the characterization is relevant to Dickens' purpose in the novel, and the comic elements do not detract or stand apart from that purpose. Ruskin forgets what comic writers since the ancient Greeks have known: that the best

¹¹II, vii.

¹²III, v.

way to destroy an attitude or an idea is to laugh at it. This seems to be Dickens' purpose in his creation of Bounderby.

Bounderby's philosophy is best seen as the result of the selfish application of Gradgrindery. F. R. Leavis describes their relationship as follows:

In Gradgrind and Bounderby we have, in significant relation, two aspects of Victorian Utilitarianism. In Gradgrind it is a serious creed, devoutly held, and so, if repellent (as the name conveys), not wholly unrespectable; but we are shown Gradgrind as on the most intimate and uncritical terms with Josiah Bounderby, in whom we have the grossest and crassest, the most utterly unspiritual egotism, and the most blatant thrusting and bullying, to which a period of "rugged individualism" gave scope.¹³

Gradgrind, then, can be seen as representative of the theory of utilitarianism, and Bounderby is its application. What Gradgrind stands for, though repellent, is, none the less, sincere. "His Utilitarianism is a theory sincerely held, and there is intellectual disinterestedness in its application."¹⁴ There are just two things wrong with this philosophy: first, it is wrong to strangle the feelings; and second, in its application it gives an excuse for the Bounderbys of the world to be even more rapacious than nature prompts them to be.

¹³F. R. Leavis, The Great Tradition (New York, 1948), p. 20.

¹⁴Leavis, p. 228.

George Bernard Shaw, in his Preface to Hard Times, states that in this novel Dickens finally achieves social awareness. Shaw feels that in the ironmaster of Bleak House Dickens draws an idealized picture of an industrialist that would have satisfied even Macaulay. In Hard Times this situation is changed. "Mr. Rouncewell, the pillar of society who snubs Sir Leicester with such dignity, has become Mr. Bounderby, the self-made humbug."¹⁵ Through Bounderby, Dickens criticizes the sort of application that rugged individualism of the nineteenth century chose to give to the theories of the Gradgrinds.

The evil represented by Bounderby is best seen in the situation of Stephen Blackpool. Gissing notes of Dickens that "a favourite device with him (often employed with picturesque effect) was to bring into contact several persons representing widely severed social ranks."¹⁶ Dickens certainly does this in Hard Times. The contrast made between Stephen Blackpool and Bounderby is the prime example.

Stephen adequately serves Dickens' purpose by showing that the only real goal of Bounderby's philosophy is self-aggrandizement. His protestations of Gradgrindery are the same protestations of Ricardian or Malthusian

¹⁵Ford and Lane, p. 127.

¹⁶George Gissing, Critical Studies of the Works of Charles Dickens (New York, 1924), p. 145.

principles that the Manchester manufacturers used to justify their actions. These are the excuses for chaining children to machines, the excuses for a Wage Fund Law, the excuses for buying for the smallest possible price and selling for the dearest to the exclusion of conscience and humanity. These are the excuses of nineteenth-century capitalists for enriching themselves on the bones of their fellow men; it was natural law that forced them to do so.

Dickens first opposes Stephen and Bounderby in the scene in which Stephen asks for the name of the law that will free him from his drunken wife. The only satisfaction that Stephen is able to get from Bounderby is that "There's a sanctity in this relation of life . . . and--it must be kept up."¹⁷ When Stephen implies that there may possibly be something wrong with a legal system that allows relief for the rich but not for the poor, Bounderby calls Stephen a malcontent and professes to see "traces of the turtle soup, and venison, and gold spoon in this."¹⁸

Bounderby, like Sir Leicester Dedlock, has no use for "people who do nothing but turn out by torchlight."¹⁹ His answer to any form of discontent is that the discontented

¹⁷I, xi.

¹⁸I, xi.

¹⁹Bleak House, Ch. XXVIII.

aspire to "turtle soup, and venison, and a gold spoon."

He describes mill work to Harthouse as

the pleasantest work there is, and it's the lightest work there is, and it's the best-paid work there is. More than that, we couldn't improve the mills themselves, unless we laid down Turkey carpets on the floors. Which we're not agoing to do. . . . There's not a Hand in this town, Sir, man, woman, or child, but has one ultimate object in life. That object is, to be fed on turtle soup and venison, with a gold spoon.²⁰

When Bounderby brings Stephen into his house to show to Harthouse as an example of a dissident hand, Bounderby comes off a distinct second-best. When Bounderby accuses the union of being full of malcontents and rascals, Stephen answers, "I canna think the fault is aw we' us."²¹ When Stephen is asked just what the workers' complaint is, he replies,

Look how we live, an' wheer we live, an' in what numbers, an' by what chances, and wi' what same-ness; and look how the mills is awlus a goin, and how they never works us no nigher to enny dis'ant object--ceptin awlus Death. Look how you considers of us, and writes of us, and talks of us, and goes up wi yor deputations to Secretaries of State bout us, and how yo' are awlus right, and how we are awlus wrong, and never had'n no reason in us sin ever we were born.²²

When Bounderby suggests the probability of making an example of "half-a-dozen Slackbridges," Stephen says that force will never do it.

²⁰II, ii.

²¹II, v.

²²II, v.

Not draw'in nigh to fok, wi' kindness, and patience an' chury ways, that so draws nigh to one another in their monny troubles, and so cherishes one another in their distres wi' what they need themself--like, I humbly believe, as no people this genelman ha' seen in aw his travels can beat--will never do't till the sun turns 't ice. Most o'aw, rating 'em as so much power, and reg'latin 'em as if they was figures in a soom, or machines: wi'out loves and likens, wi'out memories and inclination, wi'out souls to weary and souls to hope.²³

Stephen is fired for his trouble.

Stephen's answer to the problem of the hands is continued in his death scene. After being fired by Bounderby, Stephen leaves Coketown in search of work. He is accused of the robbery of Bounderby's bank, and is returning, at Rachael's request, to clear himself when he falls into a deserted mine shaft. He is mortally injured, but before he dies he says,

I ha' seen more clear, and ha' made it my dyin' prayer that aw th' world may on'y coom together more, an' get a better unnerstan'in o'one another, than when I were in't my own weak sehn.²⁴

This, coupled with Sissy's and Sleary's pronouncements regarding the value of love and kindness as opposed to self-interest, gives Dickens' answer to Bounderby's application of Gradgrind's philosophy.

The conflict between Stephen Blackpool and the labor union furnishes another example of criticism by comparison and contrast in Hard Times. The conflict shows what happens

²³II, v.

²⁴III, vi.

to the individual, as represented by Stephen, when he goes against the will of the union. Dickens puts the blame for Stephen's fate on Slackbridge, the union leader, but the fact that the union is portrayed unsympathetically may say a good deal about Dickens' ideas on labor organizations.

Dickens had written favorable articles on unionism in Household Words. In one piece he tells of a conversation he had with a man on the way to the strike at Preston. He names this man Mr. Snapper. Mr. Snapper

told him sharply that the men on strike "wanted to be ground," "to bring 'em to their senses." If that was all they wanted, replied Dickens, they must be very unreasonable, for surely they had had a little grinding already. Mr. Snapper glared, asked if he was a friend to the strike, a friend to the lockout, denied that he might be a friend to both masters and hands; there was nothing, he firmly said, "in the relations of Capital and Labor, but Political Economy." Dickens suggested that there might be understanding and consideration; Mr. Snapper laughed at him. Did Dickens, he demanded aggressively, think the hands had a right to combine? Surely, said Dickens, as perfect a right to combine as the combined Preston masters.²⁵

In his journalistic writing, Dickens professed to feel that labor had a right to unite and demand what Parliament would never otherwise give it. But in Hard Times he cannot approve of the trade union led by Slackbridge. Slackbridge is the same sort of demagogue as the labor leader in Mary Barton: one who throws out fine phrases, draws examples from classical writers, and generally talks

²⁵Johnson, II, 795-796.

over the heads of his hearers in order to impress them. Stephen sums up Dickens' attitude toward the labor leader when he says,

"I'm as soary as yo, Sir, when the people's leaders is bad," said Stephen, shaking his head. "they take such as offers. Haply 'tis na' the sma'est o' their misfortunes when they can get no better."²⁶

Dickens further shows his dislike for Slackbridge when the labor organizer is made to extend his oratorical arm and say,

"Had not the Roman Brutus, oh my British countrymen, condemned his son to death; and had not the Spartan mothers, oh my soon to be virtuous friends, driven their flying children on the points of their enemies' swords? Then was it not the sacred duty of the men of Coketown with forefathers before them, an admiring world in company with them, and a posterity to come after them, to hurl out traitors from the tents they had pitched in a sacred and Godlike cause?"²⁷

Slackbridge has the power to sway the mob, and, as Dickens points out in A Tale of Two Cities, a mob can be a cruel thing. This mob is cruel to Stephen. It ostracizes him from the company of his fellow workers because he will not become a part of it.

But it is only the mob that Dickens dislikes. When it is returned to its component parts it is satisfactory. Dickens excuses these men as individuals when Stephen says,

²⁶II, v.

²⁷II, iv.

"But there's not a dozen among 'em, ma'am--a dozen? not six--but what believes as he has doon his duty by the rest and by himself. . . . They're true to one another, e'en to death. Be poor among 'em for onny o' th' causes that carries grief to the poor man's door, and they'll be tender wi' yo, gentle wi' yo, comfortable wi' yo, Crisen wi' yo."²⁸

It is only when these people are misled by a demagogue like Slackbridge that they are a danger. It is only when they are a mob that they can do damage, and Dickens does not like them as a mob. He professes elsewhere to be sympathetic with at least the principle of unionization, but when he shows it in a novel he cannot help being a little afraid of it.

As was previously mentioned, it is quite likely that Dickens was greatly indebted to the lady novelist from Manchester for his portrayal of Slackbridge. Dickens and Mrs. Gaskell were great friends, and it is known that they talked about the novel and corresponded during the writing of it. Slackbridge certainly has many of the same characteristics that may be seen in the union leader in Mary Barton. Both are rubble rousers, and neither really cares about the men he is supposed to serve.

Though Mrs. Gaskell no doubt had a hand in forming Dickens' opinions on the subject of unionization, his attitude toward the trade union coincides with other attitudes expressed in his writings. In all of his fiction Dickens

²⁸II, v.

shows himself to be an individualist and against institutions. He shows no favorable pictures of institutionalized religion. The only genuine religious sentiments expressed by his characters are those of an individual to his God. He dislikes government for the same reason: because it is cold and impersonal, and it does not help the individual. Institutionalized charity, like that of Mrs. Jellyby, does not please him; he shows that charity should be on an individual basis. The reaction to a labor union that suppresses an individual seems almost predictable.

Both Jackson and Shaw deplore Dickens' treatment of the trade union in Hard Times. Jackson tries to overlook Dickens' inability to see the value of the organization by saying,

Faulty though his description of his trade union is, it is well to remember that to this day, adequate descriptions of the nature and purposes of trade unions . . . are as rare as white blackbirds.²⁹

After generally praising the book Shaw writes,

There is, however, one real failure in the book. Slackbridge, the trade union organizer, is a mere figment of the middle-class imagination. No such man would be listened to by a meeting of English factory hands. . . . Even at their worst trade union organizers are not a bit like Slackbridge.³⁰

Neither writer, as socialists trying to show Dickens to be either a socialist or a radical, can understand Dickens'

²⁹Jackson, pp. 35-36.

³⁰Ford and Lane, pp. 132-133.

attitude toward the union. Jackson tries to justify the portrayal by saying that it was the fault of the times, and Shaw explains it by saying that Dickens did not know enough about unions to criticize them justly. Shaw is no doubt correct. Dickens would have had no way of knowing much about industrial life. He was a Londoner through and through, and London was not an industrial city. But Dickens' attitude toward unionism, as shown in the comparison and contrast between Slackbridge and the union and Stephen Blackpool, goes deeper than either Shaw's or Jackson's explanation. His sympathy for the individual would not allow him to favor an organization that might replace one sort of oppressor with another.

Chapter VI

DICKENS AND THE NATIONAL DUSTMEN

The Manchester school of Political Economy absorbs most of Dickens' wrath in Hard Times, but it is not the only aspect of English life that he finds to criticize in the novel. One other aspect of English life criticized in Hard Times is English parliamentary government. 60 78 84

Criticism of government was nothing new in Dickens' novels. In The Pickwick Papers, his earliest novel, he had taken a good-natured slap at parliamentary elections during Mr. Pickwick's stay at Eatanswill. While Mr. Pickwick is at Eatanswill, an election pits the Blues against the Buffs. Mr. Snodgrass asks Pickwick for whom he is cheering, and Pickwick answers,

"I don't know," replied Mr. Pickwick in the same tone. "Hush. Don't ask any questions. It's always best on these occasions to do what the mob does."

"But suppose there are two mobs?" suggests Mr. Snodgrass.

"Shout with the largest," replied Mr. Pickwick.

Volumes could not have said more.¹

¹Ch. XIII

This description of the election at Eatanswill, along with other examples, prompts Professor House to declare that "he [Dickens] saw from his boyhood that the imperfections of Parliament were largely caused by the initial corruption of its members through the very process of election. Influence, whether financial or social, counted for more than merit."² The truth of this remark is amplified by the fact that The Pickwick Papers was recommended reading for Red Army staff officers for several years as an example of the corruption of English democracy.³

Another example of this disgust with the process of election is seen in Dickens' last completed novel, Our Mutual Friend, in the election at Pocket-Breaches. For the trifling sum of five thousand pounds, Mr. Veneering is "brought in" to Parliament. It is no more complicated than driving to Pocket-Breaches from London, making a speech, "and then there are in due succession nomination and declaration,"⁴ well regulated by a legal gentleman who pulls all of the strings. Dickens' whole attitude to Parliament is summed up by Mr. Twemlow, who, when asked what he thinks of Veneering standing for Parliament answers, "I think,"

²House, p. 178.

³Cruikshank, p. 69.

⁴II, iii.

rejoices Twemlow, feelingly, "that it is the best club in London!!"⁵

In Dombey and Son we see a criticism of the lack of public health measures that only the government can supply. While asking whether Dombey's pride is natural or unnatural, Dickens digresses as follows:

But follow the good clergyman or doctor, who, with his life imperilled at every breath he draws, goes down into their dens, lying within the echoes of our carriage wheels, and daily treads upon the pavement stones. Look round upon the world of odious sights--millions of immortal creatures have no other world on earth--at the lightest mention of which humanity revolts, and dainty delicacy living in the next street, stops her ears, and lisps, 'I don't believe it.' Breathe the polluted air, foul with every impurity that is poisonous to health and life; and have every worse sense, conferred upon our race for its delight and happiness, offended, sickened, and disgusted, and made a channel by which misery and death alone can enter. . . . And then, calling up some ghastly child, with stunted form, and wicked face, hold forth on its unnatural sinfulness, and lament its being so early, far away from Heaven--but think a little of its having been conceived, and born and bred in Hell!⁶

In Bleak House this attack on England's lack of public health measures is continued, but the criticism is much more thorough. Tom-all-Alone's is the symbol of what the lack of such measures brings. The passage describing Mr. Snagsby's journey into Tom-all-Alone's is typical of Dickens' description of the slum area.

⁵III, iii.

⁶Dombey and Son, Ch. XLVII

Between his two conductors Mr. Snagsby passes along the middle of a villainous street, undrained, unventilated, deep in black mud and corrupt water--though the roads were dry elsewhere--and reeking with such smells and sights that he, who has lived in London all his life, can scarce believe his senses. Branching from this street and its heap of ruins, are other streets and courts so infamous that Mr. Snagsby sickens in body and mind, and feels as if he were going, every moment deeper down, into the infernal gulf.⁷

Tom-all-Alone's is responsible for killing several children, ruining Esther's face, and also is the apparent reason for Lady Dedlock's death. In Tom-all-Alone's we see a "moral type of London slum, rather than a carefully documented portrait based on the evidence of reports."⁸ But contemporary accounts of slum conditions indicate that Dickens was fairly accurate. It should be noted that Bleak House was written between the two great cholera epidemics of London in 1849 and 1854.

This passionate plea for the need of some sort of public health and sanitation standards appears in many of Dickens' novels. It is an outcry against what Carlyle calls a "cold, implacable laissez-faire" government that will do nothing to remedy England's abuses. In David Copperfield Dickens gives what can be assumed to be his opinion of the government of England when David says,

⁷Bleak House, Ch. XXII.

⁸House, pp. 193-194.

Night after night, I record predictions that never come to pass, professions that are never fulfilled, explanations that are only meant to mystify. I wallow in words. Britannia, that unfortunate female, is always before me, like a trussed fowl: skewered through and through with office-pens, and bound hand and foot with red tape. I am sufficiently behind the scenes to know the worth of political life. I am quite an infidel about it, and shall never be converted.⁹

Dickens mentions his feelings about the inadequacies of English government in his miscellaneous writings. "Sunday Under Three Heads" gives his opinion of the Sunday Closing Law. Several other short stories are outpourings of feelings against the inadequacy and stupidity of English governmental policies. But Dickens repeatedly refused to run for Parliament. On the first occasion of such an offer he declined, telling his friend Talfourd, "I beg you to understand . . . that I am restrained solely (and much against my will) by the consideration I have mentioned."¹⁰ The "consideration" was a financial one. He was apparently being polite in his answer, however, because when it was mentioned that the government might bear the cost of an election he still refused. In American Notes Dickens makes the following statement after watching the American Congress in action:

In the first place--it may be from some imperfect development of my organ of veneration--I do

⁹David Copperfield, Ch. XLVII.

¹⁰Johnson, Charles Dickens: His Triumph and Tragedy, I, 317.

not remember having ever fainted away, or having ever been moved to tears of joyful pride, at sight of any legislative body. I have borne the House of Commons like a man, and have yielded to no weakness but slumber in the House of Lords. I have seen elections for borough and county, and have never been impelled (no matter what party won) to damage my hat by throwing it up into the air in triumph, or to crack my voice by shouting forth any reference to our Glorious Constitution, to the noble purity of our independent voters, or the unimpeachable integrity of our independent members. Having withstood such strong attacks upon my fortitude, it is possible that I may be of a cold and insensible temperament, amounting to iciness in such matters.¹¹

To Dickens, Parliament seemed to be "merely a device for obstructing the passage of proper legislation."¹² He could see that for all the wrangling among the parties and factions, they stood for the same thing. The Blues and the Buffs differ only in which narrow doctrine will be applied, that of the aristocracy or that of the middle class. Dickens had been a reporter during the passage of the Reform Bill of 1832, and he, like most of his journalistic friends, had felt that some good might come of the assumption of power by the middle class. He had been sorely disappointed, however, and perhaps this was the cause of the disillusionment in English politics that lasted throughout his life.

Dickens came as close to giving a statement of his political beliefs as one is likely to find in his writings

¹¹Ch. VIII.

¹²House, p. 175.

in a speech made in 1869 before a meeting of the Birmingham and Midland Institute when he said, "My faith in the people governing, is, on the whole, infinitesimal; my faith in the People governed, is, on the whole, illimitable."¹³ These remarks were misunderstood to mean that Dickens had little faith in democratic government, since his hearers were unable to see the use of capitalization that Dickens later added. When he was again called upon to speak before the Institute in January of 1870, he explained himself as follows:

When I was here last autumn I made, in reference to some remarks of your respected member, Mr. Dixon, a short confession of my political faith, or perhaps I should say, want of faith. It is imported that I have very little faith in the people who govern us--please to observe "people" there with a small "p," but that I have great confidence in the People whom they govern: please to observe "People" there with a larg "P." This was shortly and elliptically stated; and was, with no evil intention I am absolutely sure, in some quarters inversely explained.¹⁴

These statements from the author's own mouth show exactly what can be seen in Hard Times: that Dickens had no faith in English parliamentary government. The difficulty arises when it is asked just what sort of government he did have faith in. He answers such a question in none of his novels or private writings. Many have answered this question by

¹³K. J. Fielding (ed.), The Speeches of Charles Dickens (Oxford, 1960), p. 407.

¹⁴Fielding, The Speeches of Charles Dickens, p. 411.

saying that Dickens was working toward the same sort of thing that Marx and Engels were to advocate. But this is to take Dickens out of context as much as it would be to say that he advocated a ~~Carlyle~~ government by here. In his criticism of English government, as in his criticism of other aspects of English life, Dickens was a reformer, not a revolutionary. This is illustrated by the fact that he proposes no sweeping changes in the structure of the English constitution. Those who favor the actual breaking up of a system usually have some formula for accomplishing the breakup and for the imposition of a new system. Dickens merely points out things that are intrinsically wrong, which, ~~as George Orwell says in his essay "Charles Dickens," is all that it is necessary for a novelist to do. Even Carlyle, who was far removed from the field of imaginative fiction, gives no specific formula for reforming England. He tells us that more centralized authority is needed, but he stops short of telling exactly how to choose that authority. But whether Dickens' criticism of government in Hard Times is constructive or not, it is certainly the most violent criticism in his novels, up to 1858. Only Little Dorrit gives us a more vitriolic attack on English government, and its violence is primarily noted for its length rather than its intensity.~~

In most of his novels written prior to Hard Times Dickens criticizes aspects of government. ~~In Oliver Twist~~

~~it was the nature and application of the Poor Law of 1834;~~
~~in The Pickwick Papers it was the process of election;~~
~~Nicholas Nickleby it was the dishonesty of an individual~~
~~politician; in Little Dorrit, written after Hard Times, it~~
~~was one arm of government--the Circumlocution Office. /~~ But
 in Hard Times Dickens aims at no particular aspect of govern-
 ment. He condemns the whole laissez-faire attitude of
 government that Gradgrind represents and the dilettantism ^{superficial amateur} that James Harthouse represents. ^{superficial}

Harthouse, a young gentleman of good family who has
~~"Found out everything to be worth nothing,"~~ ¹⁵ has,

tried life as a Cornet of Dragoons, and found it a bore; and had afterwards tried it in the train of an English minister abroad, and found it a bore; and had then strolled to Jerusalem, and got bored there; and had gone yachting about the world, and got bored everywhere. ¹⁶

~~He consequently~~ decided to "go in" for politics, and is sent to Coketown to become known. ~~Harthouse is Carlyle's dilettante personified.~~ He is an example of an "idle, game-preserving and even corn-lawing Aristocracy" ¹⁷ who has gone in for the "hard Fact fellows." ^(Hard Times, Book 2, Chapter 2) It is unimportant that he does not in the slightest believe in what they have to say; nor, for that matter, does he believe in much of anything else. ~~As Harthouse puts it,~~

¹⁵II, 11.

¹⁶II, 11.

¹⁷Carlyle, Past and Present, 146.

I have not so much as the slightest predilection left. I assure you I attach not the least importance to any opinions. The result of the varieties of boredom I have undergone, is a conviction (unless conviction is too industrious a word for the lazy sentiment I entertain on the subject); that any set of ideas will do just as much good as any other set, and just as much harm as any other set. There's an English family with a charming Italian motto: What will be, will be. It's the only truth going.¹⁸

Key Harthouse is not afflicted with a sense of duty. He sets out on a plan for the seduction of Louisa, utilizing her love for her brother and detestation for her husband as levers. This is the sort of assistance the Gradgrind party gets when they want ^{or} assistance in cutting the throats of the graces.¹⁹ *(Hard Times Part 2, Chapter 2)* But *Oil*

Not being troubled with earnestness was a grand point in his favour, enabling him to take to the hard fact fellows with as good a grace as if he had been born one of the tribes, and to throw all other tribes overboard, as conspicuous hypocrites.²⁰

Harthouse believes that,

check The only difference between ~~us~~ and the professors of virtue, or benevolence, or philanthropy-- never mind the name--is, that we know it is all meaningless and say so; while they know it equally and will never say so.²¹ *Scored paragraph*

new paragraph Harthouse, then, represents the aristocracy. And it is an aristocracy that will do no one any good, except

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- 18II, ii.
 - 19II, ii.
 - 20II, vii.
 - 21II, vii.

itself. It is an aristocracy that is without principles, and this is its worst feature. The aristocracy, then, is not an answer to the evils of English government.

Professor Miller says,

In Hard Times new paragraph
 In Hard Times Dickens dramatizes in strikingly symbolic terms the opposition between a soul-destroying relation to a utilitarian, industrial civilization (~~in which everything is weighed, measured, has its price, and in which emotion is banished~~), and the reciprocal interchange of love.²²

Gradgrind represents this utilitarian philosophy brought into dominance by the middle class in England, and by putting Gradgrind into Parliament we see how Dickens dislikes that theory in its governmental aspects. Gradgrind seems preferable to Harthouse in that the utilitarian is at least redeemable. He is well intentioned in what he believes.

"His character was not unkind, all things considered. It might have been a very kind one indeed, if he had only made some round mistake in the arithmetic that balanced it years before. But the fact that he is well intentioned does not make him any less wrong. Gradgrind is described in his parliamentary duties as,

one of the respected members for weights and measures, one of the representatives of the multiplication table, one of the deaf honourable

²²J. Hillis Miller, Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), p. 226.

²³I, v.

gentlemen, dumb honourable gentlemen, blind honourable gentlemen, lame honourable gentlemen, dead honourable gentlemen, to every other consideration.²⁴

He becomes one of the "national dustmen," ^{men, who remove refuse from houses.} who entertain one another with "noisy little fights among themselves."²⁵ But ~~they are worse than useless; they are actually harmful.~~

The "^{these men}national dustmen" allow ^{all} the Bounderbys to flout the law while they regulate the Stephen Blackpools quite severely. The "^{they}national dustmen" are the cause of the laissez-faire attitude that forces the hands to band together in poorly led trade unions. The "^{these men}national dustmen" with their utilitarian philosophy give the Bounderbys the ill-used power that they exercise in England. *It is stated as follows:*

Whenever a Coketowner felt he was ill-used--that is to say, whenever he was not left entirely alone, and it was proposed to hold him accountable for the consequences of any of his acts--he was sure to come out with the awful menace, that he would 'sooner pitch his property into the Atlantic.' This had terrified the Home Secretary within an inch of his life, on several occasions.

However, the Coketowners were so patriotic after all, that they had never pitched their property into the Atlantic yet, but, on the contrary, had been kind enough to take mighty good care of it. ^(Handwritten: Book 2, Chapter 1)

Although Gradgrind seems redeemable, and ^(Handwritten: Book 2, Chapter 1) is redeemed in the course of the novel, Dickens feels that there is no

²⁴I, xiv.

²⁵II, xii.

²⁶II, i.

great difference between the philosophies of Gradgrind and Harthouse. Speaking of Louisa's situation, Dickens says,

Where was the great difference between the two schools, when each chained her down to material realities, and inspired her with no faith in anything else? What was there in her soul for James Harthouse to destroy, which Thomas Gradgrind had nurtured there in its state of innocence?

Dickens shows the two dominating classes in English politics, and one seems no better than the other. This situation has caused many people to feel that in Hard Times Dickens was convinced of the need for a vast social and political upheaval in England. Such a statement as the following has done little to alter this feeling:

Utilitarian economists, skeletons of schoolmasters, Commissioners of Fact, genteel and used-up infidels, gabblers of many little dog's eared creeds, the poor you will have always with you. Cultivate in them, while there is yet time, the utmost graces of the fancies and affections, to adorn their lives so much in need of adornment; or in the day of your triumph, when romance is utterly driven out of their souls, and they and a bare existence stand face to face, Reality will take a wolfish turn, and make an end of you.²⁸ (Hard Times, Book 2, Chapter 6)

But this is not a plea for a revolution. It is a plea against the creation of a need for one. ~~It is essentially the same sort of argument that Dickens was to make in A Tale of Two Cities: if people are pushed far enough they will rebel.~~ Dickens views such a situation with alarm, not

27II, vii.

28II, vii.

with satisfaction. His view of the mob in A Tale of Two Cities shows a dislike for such creatures, and the view of the trade union in Hard Times is not a great deal different. A Slackbridge could easily become a Madame Defarge. Dickens is afraid of such things, not anticipatory.

Hard Times, then, is not a hymn to revolution; it is the most striking of Dickens' pleas for reform. Reform of government is a part of this plea, and reform of human attitudes is another, and perhaps a more basic part. ~~In the above quoted paragraph~~ he pleads for a measure of love and kindness of the sort represented by the Slearys, ~~both~~ from the standpoint of government and from the standpoint of private individuals. He tells his readers to forget creeds and systems and to return to the teaching of the golden rule. There is no hint that this cannot be done within the framework of English government. Dickens, in fact, ends his novel with the following ^{message} exhortation to his reader:

Dear reader! It rests with you and me, whether, in our two fields of action, similar things shall be or not. Let them be! We shall sit with lighter bosoms on the hearth, to see the ashes of our fires turn grey and cold. *(Hard Times, Book 3, Chapter 9)*

It rests with the people of England to reform the evils he has displayed in Hard Times. A real stretch of the imagination is required to turn anything Dickens has to say in this novel into a plea for a revolution of the

proletariat. But the reforming zeal of Dickens is displayed at its most potent level in Hard Times.

Chapter VII

HARD TIMES AS GREAT LITERATURE

Literary criticism has not been kind to Hard Times. Criticism of the novel by Dickens' contemporaries tends toward Macaulay's statement that the novel is a little exquisite pathos and the rest "sullen socialism." Modern criticism has, as a rule, been equally unkind to the novel. Stephen Leacock is fairly typical of modern critics when he makes the following statement:

The story of Hard Times has no other interest in the history of letters than its failure. At the time, even enthusiastic lovers of Dickens found it hard to read. At present they do not even try to read it. A large part of the book is mere trash; hardly a chapter of it is worth reading today; not an incident or a character belonging to it survives or deserves to. The names of Mr. Gradgrind and Mr. Bounderby are still quoted, but only because they are felicitous names for hard, limited men, not because the characters in the book are known or remembered. Not a chapter or a passage in the book is part of Dickens' legacy to the world.¹

Professor Leacock's remarks are typical of the modern judgments of Hard Times, although Leacock is somewhat more harsh than most critics. Professor Wagenknecht states that

¹Leacock, pp. 169-170.

Hard Times "interests most students of his [Dickens'] fiction primarily as illustrating what a great genius turns out when he gets completely away from his own material and method."² Monroe Engel writes, "curiously enough, Hard Times grants a scant measure of the very quality for which it argues, imaginative pleasure."³ Criticism of the novel runs the gamut from statements that refer to the wrong-headed attitude Dickens had toward his age to statements that are too general to be of value. Neither extreme has anything to do with competent criticism.

When the matter is reduced to its essence, the principal fault that modern critics find with Hard Times, when they condescend to discuss it at all, is that it is somehow not "Dickensian." It does not abound with the entertaining flat characters that are so plentiful in the earlier novels. There are no Sarrie Gamps, Sam Wellers, or Micawbers for the reader to laugh at. Even the Dickensian, the bible of the Dickens lover, refuses to show a copy of the novel on its cover, although all the other novels are represented there. The average Dickensian, one must admit, cannot take the Pickwick, the Weller, the Micawber, and the Dick Swivler out of Dickens and view him as a serious novelist: a novelist capable of creating a

²Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel (New York, 1943), p. 218.

³Engel, p. 172.

structured work of art with a significant theme and relevant characters.

It is a mistake, however, to say that Hard Times completely lacks the vivacious sparkle that indelibly marks a work as Dickensian. Dickens was quite incapable of writing anything that did not bear this stamp of his creative genius. Even his letters show this great good humor, this special talent for hunting out the ludicrous and setting it on paper. Hard Times has its measure of the Dickens genius, but the humor is of a somewhat different sort. The Dickens genius for comedy becomes a bitter humor with ironic overtones in Hard Times.

Hard Times is, as has been earlier mentioned, considerably shorter than any of Dickens' earlier novels. It would have been impossible for him to allow himself to create the sort of irrelevant comedy that abounds in the earlier novels. It would have been great fun, no doubt, to place Mr. Bounderby in one of his own woolen mills to become entangled in his own bobbins and spindles, but weekly serialization did not allow for this sort of horse-play. Dickens was forced to limit his bubbling good humor somewhat, a restraint that became more natural in the later novels. This restraint, along with Dickens' general disillusionment about the progress of reform in England, resulted in the sort of embittered humor and irony that underlies the language of the novel. The Dickens sparkle

is still there; it is merely channeled and somewhat sarcastic, not omitted.

This ironic treatment of the abuses discussed in Hard Times is apparent in the first words of the novel. In Chapter Two the "third person" present in the school-room, who, according to Professor Fielding,⁴ is a caricature of Henry Cole, the superintendent of the Department of Practical Art, furnishes the center of this ironic humor. The utilitarian gentleman from the Department of Education convinces the reader of the fallacy of his system through his own words, without comment from the narrator. He says, after inquiring of the students whether horses should be represented on wallpaper,

"Do you ever see horses walking up and down the sides of rooms in reality--in fact? Do you?"

"Yes, Sir!" from one half. "No, Sir!" from the other.

"Of course, no" said the gentleman, with an indignant look at the wrong half. "Why, then, you are not to see anywhere, what you don't see in fact; you are not to have anywhere, what you don't have in fact. What is called Taste, is only another name for Fact."⁵

There is a good deal of irony in allowing this "third person" to mouth the more absurd aspects of utilitarian philosophy without interruption from the narrator. The irony is limited only by Dickens' impatience with his character's

⁴K. J. Fielding, "Charles Dickens and the Department of Practical Art," NLR, XLVIII (1948), 270-277.

⁵I, 11.

doctrine. Eventually the author must interrupt and say, "When from thy [the schoolmaster's] boiling store, thou shalt fill each jar brim full by-and-by, dost thou think that thou wilt always kill outright the robber Fancy lurking within--or sometimes only maim him and distort him!"⁶

There is a good deal of irony in the characterization of Bounderby. The reader, through generous Dickensian hints, knows full well that Bounderby is a fraud in his pretensions to early poverty, and there is a sardonic sort of irony in the knowledge that this self-made man's trumpeting of self-reliance is a lie. Many of Gradgrind's statements also show a twist of sarcastic humor and irony. The following quotation, made to Louisa when she asks whether she should love Bounderby, or he should love her, illustrates dramatic irony:

"Why my dear Louisa," said Mr. Gradgrind, completely recovered by this time, "I would advise you (since you ask me) to consider this question, as you have been accustomed to consider every other question, simply as one of tangible Fact. The ignorant and the giddy may embarrass such subjects with irrelevant fancies, and other absurdities that have no existence, properly viewed--really no existence--but it is no compliment to you to say, that you know better. Now what are the Facts of this case?"⁷

The reader sees the complete futility of applying utilitarian doctrines to nonutilitarian sentiments, and there

⁶I, 11.

⁷I, xv.

is a good deal of irony in Gradgrind's not seeing this futility. But the humor in the situation, or in any of the examples here presented, is certainly not jovial.

The unmistakable Dickensian descriptions are present in Hard Times, with Mrs. Sparsit's Coriolanian nose, Sleary's nasal speech, and Bitzer's blink showing in abbreviated and relevant form the Dickensian gift for picking out the ludicrous in his characters. The Dickens touch, the touch that can put humor in the most serious matter, is seen in the description of Coketown:

A town so sacred to fact, and so triumphant in its assertion, of course got on well? Why no, not quite well. No? Dear me!

No. Coketown did not come out of its own furnace, in all respects like gold that stood before the fire. First, the perplexing mystery of the place was, who belonged to the eighteen denominations? Because, whoever did, the labouring people did not. It was very strange to walk through the streets on a Sunday morning and note how few of them the barbarous jangling of bells that was driving the sick and nervous mad, called away from their own quarter, from their own close rooms, from the corners of their own streets, where they lounged listlessly, gazing at all the church and chapel going, as at a thing with which they had no manner of concern. Nor was it merely the stranger who noticed this, because there was a native organization in Coketown itself, whose members were to be heard of in the House of Commons every session, indignantly petitioning for Acts of Parliament that should make these people religious by main force.⁸

Even the most casual reading of the novel shows this special Dickens humor in great abundance. Often it takes

⁸I, v.

a sardonic turn, but it is the same sort of humor that enlivens the author's earlier novels; the humor has merely been made relevant to something other than its own end.

Hard Times is structurally superior to Dickens' other novels. The setting, characterization, and plot are welded into a coherence that is not present in the rest of the Dickens canon. The setting, for instance, is not all of England and maybe America too, as it is in Martin Chuzzlewit. The setting is Coketown, and Dickens does not take the reader on any journeys. The organization of the novel is too tight for this favorite, and sometimes artistically distressing, Dickensian device.

Characterization in Hard Times is typically Dickensian, as has been mentioned, but the novel lacks the largely irrelevant characters that one so often sees in Dickens' fiction who contribute nothing to the development of the work as a whole. There are no little Maggies, whose only function seems to be the expression of a great fondness for "chicking" and hospitals,⁹ nor is there the extravagance of a Dick Swivler, whose machinations have little enough to do with the development of The Old Curiosity Shop. Every character in Hard Times serves a specific purpose in the progression of the plot. It is true that some of the characterization is badly done. Stephen Blackpool is too

⁹Little Dorrit, Ch. IX.

frequently a glob of sentimental nonsense, "too consistent and insistent and persistent for any record but that of a martyrology."¹⁰ His motivation for not joining the union is ridiculous. Rachael is too much a ministering angel to be believable, and one wonders how she lost her brogue when Stephen's is so evident. But on the whole the characterization, as of Gradgrind, Bounderby, Louisa, Tom, and James Harthouse, is well done and relevant to Dickens' purpose. These characters are lifelike, and they "bounce"¹¹ the reader into belief in typical Dickensian fashion. As Mr. Forster puts it,

Probably the immense vitality of Dickens causes his characters to vibrate a little, so that they borrow his life and appear to lead one of their own. . . . Part of the genius of Dickens is that he does use types and caricatures, people whom we recognize the instant they re-enter, and yet achieves effects that are not mechanical and a vision of humanity that is not shallow. Those who dislike Dickens have an excellent case. He ought to be bad.¹²

In Hard Times the characterization that Forster says ought to be bad, but somehow is not, is toned down a good deal, but the characters still possess the indefinable vibrancy that Forster mentions. Bounderby and Gradgrind are caricaturized somewhat, but they are not so extravagantly

¹⁰Algernon Charles Swinburne, Charles Dickens (London, 1913), p. 40.

¹¹E. M. Forster, Aspects of the Novel (New York, 1927), p. 119.

¹²Forster, p. 109.

drawn as Bumble or Quilp. They retain, however, the unforgettable quality with which Dickens was capable of endowing his characters.

Edmond Wilson states that "the real beginning of a psychological interest [in Dickens' writing] may be seen in Hard Times." This tracing of psychological motivation is crude by modern standards, but "it is the first novel in which Dickens tries to trace with any degree of plausibility the processes by which people become what they are."¹³ This statement is quite true in regard to Louisa and young Tom Gradgrind. The Gradgrind children are presented as the natural culmination of the strangulation of the imagination. Dickens sums up their situation through Louisa when she discusses the matter of marriage to Bounderby with her father.

"What do I know, father," said Louisa in her quiet manner, "of tastes and fancies; of aspirations and affections; of all that part of my nature in which such light things might have been nourished? What escape have I had from problems that could be demonstrated, and realities that could be grasped?" As she said it, she unconsciously closed her hand, as if upon a solid object, and slowly opened it as though she were releasing dust or ash.

"My dear," assented her eminently practical parent, "quite true, quite true,"

"Why, father," she pursued, "what a strange question to ask me! The baby-preference that even I have heard of as common among children, has never had its innocent resting place in my breast. You have been so careful of me, that I never had a

¹³Wilson, p. 61.

child's heart. You have trained me so well, that I never dreamed a child's dream. You have dealt so wisely with me, father, from my cradle to this hour, that I never had a child's belief or a child's fear.

Mr. Gradgrind was quite moved by his success, and by this testimony of it. "My dear Louisa," said he, "you abundantly repay my care. Kiss me, my dear girl."¹⁴

Louisa knows that something has been left out of her life, and she resents her father for the omission. Dickens makes it obvious to the reader, largely through the bitter sort of irony that was earlier mentioned, that Louisa is ready for any suggestion that will take her out of the utilitarian world of fact in which she finds herself trapped. As Louisa is made to say while looking at the chimneys of Coketown, "There seems to be nothing there but languid and monotonous smoke. Yet when the night comes, Fire bursts out, Father."¹⁵ Louisa is amply motivated, and the motivation is largely psychological, for her abortive elopement with Harthouse. As Dickens tells us,

No little Gradgrind had ever seen a face in the moon; it was up in the moon before it could speak distinctly. No little Gradgrind had ever learnt the silly jingle, Twinkle, twinkle, little star; how I wonder what you are! No little Gradgrind had ever known wonder on the subject, each little Gradgrind having at five years old dissected the Great Bear like a Professor Owen, and driven Charles's Wain like a locomotive engine-driver. No little Gradgrind had ever associated a cow in a field with that famous cow with the crumpled horn who tossed the dog that worried

¹⁴II, xii.

¹⁵I, xv.

the cat who killed the rat who ate the malt, or with that yet more famous cow who swallowed Tom Thumb: it had never heard of those celebrities, and had only been introduced to a cow as a graminivorous ruminating quadruped with several stomachs.¹⁶

Both Louisa and Tom Gradgrind, then, are psychologically motivated characters. What they cannot get at home they go after as soon as they can get away from home. They have missed that something, "not an Ology at all,"¹⁷ that goes to make a sympathetic and understanding human being. Their motivation is not a black and white affair, one of the faults of the characterization of most Dickens novels. For the first time in his fiction, Dickens deals with the gray areas of human behavior. Dickens' protagonists are usually tailors and dummies as characters, but the Gradgrind family is far from this. If one grants E. M. Forster's conditions for effective characterization, that the novelist must "bounce" the reader into the suspension of disbelief, one must say that Hard Times is Dickens' most effective work in this area.

Hard Times has its share of the apparently inexhaustible Dickens touch for poetic prose. Dr. Leavis goes so far as to call Hard Times poetic drama. He feels that Dickens' vivid imagery and symbolic content give the novel

¹⁶I, 111.

¹⁷II, ix.

a poetic touch, and that the description of incidents resembles scenarios. He quotes the passage of the novel that shows Gradgrind getting Tom out of London after the embezzlement as an example of poetic drama.

"If a thunderbolt had fallen on me," said the father, "it would have shocked me less than this!"

"I don't see why," grumbled the son. "So many people are employed in situations of trust; so many people out of so many, will be dishonest. I have heard you tell, a hundred times, of its being a law. How can I help laws? You have comforted others with such things, father. Comfort yourself!"

The father buried his face in his hands, and the son stood in his disgraceful grotesqueness, biting straw; his hands, with the black partly worn away inside, looking like the hands of a monkey. The evening was fast closing in, and from time to time he turned the whites of his eyes. They were the only parts of his face that showed any life or expression, the pigment upon it was so thick.¹⁸

Of this passage Dr. Leavis states,

Something of the rich complexity of Dickens' art may be seen in this passage. No simple formula can take account of the various elements in the whole effect, a sardonic-tragic in which satire consorts with pathos. The excerpt in itself suggests justification for saying that Hard Times is a poetic work. It suggests that the genius of the writer may fairly be described as that of a poetic dramatist, and that, in our preconceptions about "the novel" we may miss, within the field of fictional prose, possibilities of concentration and flexibility in the interpretation of life such as we associate with Shakespearian drama.¹⁹

Monroe Engel points out that the serpent and elephant imagery of the novel does more than the other elements to

¹⁸III, vii.

¹⁹Leavis, p. 241.

wipe out the "hard facts" point of view.²⁰ Engel points out such passages as Dickens' description of "interminable serpents of smoke"²¹ coming from factory chimneys and machinery that runs all day "like the head of an elephant in melancholy madness"²² as examples. To go a step further, it might be pointed out that Dickens' imagery is always disagreeable in connection with Coketown, and this unpleasant imagery has its own symbolic effect. A church is "a pious warehouse of red brick."²³ The river of Coketown "ran purple with ill-smelling dye."²⁴ The school is a "plain, bare, monotonous vault of a school room."²⁵ The disagreeable images of the town given by Dickens to his readers symbolize the unpleasant nature of the philosophy that governs it.

As a matter of fact, Coketown itself can be seen as a symbol, a symbol of the English industrial world in much the same way that Herman Melville makes the Neversink symbolic of society in White Jacket. The people who inhabit Coketown can be seen as representatives of the various

²⁰Engel, p. 175.

²¹I, iv.

²²I, iv.

²³I, iv.

²⁴III, xii.

²⁵I, i.

classes of the industrial world as Dickens sees it. In the fictional world of Hard Times, Gradgrind represents both utilitarian philosophy and the "national dustmen." Bounderby represents the class that perverts the well-intentioned philosophy of Gradgrind. Stephen Blackpool symbolizes the working classes that must suffer from the rapaciousness of the latter and the cold-hearted philosophy of the former. All of the characters of the novel, Slackbridge, the Gradgrind children, Harthouse, and Sissy Jupe, represent types and classes of English society, and when put together in the novel they make a world that seems strikingly similar to the elements of English industrial society. Coketown is more than just a small industrial town. It is all of English industrialism with all its unpleasantness.

Characterization, plot, setting, and language are aimed toward something larger and more important than the mechanics themselves. Flat characters are not allowed to run away with the novel, as Micawber runs away with David Copperfield or Bumble with Oliver Twist. All elements of the novel are controlled as in no other Dickens novel for the development of a unified theme, which might be stated as a sweeping condemnation of Victorian morality. No low, though delightful, comedy is allowed to interfere with the development of that theme.

That Dickens was a great entertainer can hardly be denied, but he was seldom preoccupied with form or unity. Hard Times has the form and unity that is lacking in most of Dickens' novels. As Dr. Leavis puts it,

I think of only one of his books in which his creative genius is controlled throughout to a unifying and organizing significance, and that is Hard Times, which seems, because of its unusualness and comparatively small scale, to have escaped recognition for the great thing it is.

It has a kind of perfection as a work of art that we don't associate with Dickens . . . a perfection that is one with the sustained and complete seriousness for which among his productions it is unique. Though in length it makes a good-sized modern novel, it is on a small scale for Dickens: it leaves no room for the usual repetitive over-doing and loose inclusiveness.²⁶

Hard Times has form, but it has more than form. It has the sort of effective characterization, well-planned plot, and effectively laid setting that great fiction must have: all of which are enhanced by the inimitable Dickens talent that forges words into poetry. But in Hard Times Dickens fulfills the novelist's task of creating life that is relevant to a set of human values. He creates life that informs life.

It would be a mistake, however, to say that Hard Times was Dickens' only great novel. Dr. Leavis belittles Dickens' other novels because, as he says, "The adult mind doesn't as a rule find in Dickens a challenge to an unusual

²⁶Leavis, pp. 18-19.

and sustained seriousness.²⁷ Dickens was essentially a comic novelist, and Dr. Leavis' statement does not take into account the fact that the adult mind is not always satisfied with a steady diet of sustained seriousness. Micawber, in his irrelevant way, has his own kind of greatness. Hard Times is great as a work of serious and purposeful art just as The Pickwick Papers is great as comic art. The Pickwick Papers is great in a completely inimitable sense. In The Pickwick Papers Dickens ignores the stylistic boundaries, and achieves greatness in spite of rather than because of its structure.

The fusion of art and purpose must be considered the ultimate objective of the novelist of purpose. If this fusion does not take place, the novelist will not achieve his goal. If the criticism of society is not related to a real world, and related in significant manner, the purpose of the novel will be lost in incoherence. Dickens does not achieve this fusion in any other novel. It is true that he has some criticism of English society in every novel he wrote, but this criticism is always incidental to the amusement of his reading public. Invariably, the sugar-coating is greater than the pill, and the sugar and the pill are always distinctly recognizable and separable. Although Hard Times has all of the traditional Dickens elements of humor and pathos, these elements are dictated toward the one purpose of criticising English society, and

²⁷Leavis, p. 19.

this unity of purpose makes the novel Dickens' most comprehensive and effective work of social criticism. It does not deserve to be divorced from the Dickens canon. Perhaps its niche should be a little apart and slightly to the left of David Copperfield, but to ignore the work would be to forget one of Dickens' finest novels and his most comprehensive indictment of English society.

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