

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

by Charles Dickens



THE AUTHOR

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was the second of eight children in a family plagued by debt. When he was twelve, his father was thrown into debtors' prison, and Charles was forced to quit school and work in a shoe-dye factory. These early experiences gave him a sympathy for the poor and downtrodden, along with an acute sense of social justice. At the age of fifteen, he became a clerk in a law firm, and later worked as a newspaper reporter. He published his first fiction in 1836 - a series of character sketches called *Sketches by Boz*. The work was well-received, but its reception was nothing compared to the international acclaim he received with the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in the following year.

After this early blush of success, Dickens took on the job as editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a literary magazine in which a number of his early works were serialized, including *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) and *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9). He left to begin his own literary magazine, *Master Humphrey's Clock*, in 1840, and over the next ten years published many of his most famous novels in serial form, including *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1840-1), *A Christmas Carol* (1844), and *David Copperfield* (1849-50), perhaps the most autobiographical of all his novels. Other works were serialized in *Household Words* between 1850 and 1859, which was then succeeded by *All the Year Round*, which he edited until his death in 1870, publishing such novels as *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), *Great Expectations* (1860-1), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5). A workaholic to the end, Dickens died of a stroke in 1870 after having penned a chapter of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, his final (and unfinished) novel, the previous day.

As far as his personal life was concerned, Dickens was a tireless writer and speaker, but his own personal insecurities made him very difficult to live with. He married Catherine Hogarth in 1836 and, though they had ten children together, their relationship grew increasingly strained until they finally divorced in 1859. He traveled extensively, including making several trips to America (he never much liked the country or its people), and was frequently called upon to read from his own writings, drawing large and enthusiastic crowds. Dickens also spoke out on a variety of social issues, including American slavery and the lack of copyright laws that made it far too easy for unscrupulous people to steal his writings, as well as the abuses of industrial society that play such a prominent role in his novels.

Even though *Nicholas Nickleby* was one of Dickens' earlier novels, he had already become mightily frustrated with the fraud and plagiarism that were rife in the publishing world of his day. Cheap knockoffs of serialized novels, and even stage versions of stories that had not yet been finished, were written by hacks seeking to capitalize on the fame of the young novelist. Though Dickens took out a three-page advertisement warning of serious consequences for anyone trying to pirate his new novel, at least twenty-five stage versions appeared in the theaters before the novel had been completed. The novel shares both the comic genius of *The Pickwick Papers* and the social criticism of *Oliver Twist*, which was written at least partly concurrently. The main target of the social criticism in the novel is the pathetic educational system offered by the Yorkshire schools, here represented by Dotheboys Hall, based on Bowes Academy, whose proprietor, William Shaw, was the model for Wackford Squeers (as a result of the publication of the novel, almost all of the Yorkshire schools were shuttered within a decade). Dickens also takes aim for the first time at the grasping capitalist in the person of Ralph Nickleby, who will appear repeatedly in such characters as Ebenezer Scrooge and Paul Dombey. Here Ralph is a stock villain, but Dickens cannot avoid giving him touches of humanity, not only in his interactions with his niece Kate, but also in the scene immediately preceding his death.

PLOT SUMMARY

Dickens begins the story by giving the background of the Nickleby family. Godfrey Nickleby, the protagonist's grandfather, was a poor man who had married for love and had never managed to get ahead in the world until his uncle died suddenly and left him five thousand pounds. He had used the money to buy a small farm in Devonshire, and at his death left the bulk of his money to his elder son Ralph, while leaving the farm to his younger offspring Nicholas along with a smaller sum to sustain him. Ralph went on to become a prosperous capitalist, though the exact nature of his business would be difficult to define, while Nicholas was content to run the farm. Nicholas married and produced two children - his namesake (our hero) and a younger daughter, Kate. When the children are 19 and 17 (Dickens contradicts himself on Kate's age), respectively, their father, looking to increase their patrimony, puts his money at his wife's urging into a speculative venture that was popular at the time (these were the days of the infamous South Seas Bubble) and loses everything, then promptly dies.

Ralph, meanwhile, has accumulated considerable wealth and is the owner of a large house in London. After a description of the house and the somewhat vague business in which Ralph is engaged, we meet his clerk, Newman Noggs, a drunken and depressed man whom Ralph has kept in perpetual debt so that he may get away with paying him scandalously low wages. Ralph is visited by a Mr. Bonney, who invites him to a meeting of wealthy and important men who are seeking to form a corporation called the United Metropolitan Improved Hot Muffin and Crumpet Baking and Punctual Delivery Company. They propose to gain a monopoly on muffin sales in London by convincing Parliament that the street vendors who currently peddle muffins by walking around and ringing bells through the neighborhoods abuse their child laborers, the Muffin Boys, and therefore should be put out of business. Their ambition extended to requiring all households, rich and poor, to consume a certain quantity of muffins, meanwhile expanding their monopoly into all England, along with Scotland and Ireland.

Later that day, Noggs brings his master word of his brother's death. Ralph is unmoved, remarking only at the unfairness of expecting a man to care for his poor relations after their

provider's death. He visits his sister-in-law and the children at the home of Miss La Creevy, a painter of miniatures, where they are renting rooms. He immediately informs the landlady that her boarders are destitute and can expect no help from him, and advises her to turn them out as soon as possible. He treats the widow and her children heartlessly, and develops an intense hatred for Nicholas on sight, since the young man is clearly everything he is not - simple, innocent, kind, generous, and noble. He suggests that Nicholas pursue employment immediately and offers to put him in touch with one Wackford Squeers, a Yorkshire schoolmaster of his acquaintance. He further offers to find places for Kate and Mrs. Nickleby should Nicholas succeed in securing the job at the school. The three, in their naive innocence, are thrilled with his generosity.

Ralph and Nicholas then go to the Saracen's Head Inn to meet with Squeers. Before they arrive, he is seen abusing and bullying a young student. When a man arrives with two more prospects (his stepsons), Squeers clearly implies that the boys will be kept out of the way for a nominal fee and will trouble their stepfather no more - a tacit agreement into which the two scoundrels gladly enter. When Ralph arrives (the two have had dealings before, as we will later see), Squeers agrees to take Nicholas into his employ at the degrading salary of five pounds per year. Ralph then gives Nicholas some papers to deliver to Noggs, and when Nicholas does so, Noggs asks him the nature of the arrangement into which he has entered, then falls into a blank stare, at which point Nicholas realizes that he is drunk. The next morning, Nicholas meets the coach to Yorkshire and Dotheboys Hall after saying farewell to his mother and sister; before he departs, Noggs slips an envelope into his hand. All along the way, Squeers stuffs himself with food and drink but gives the boys traveling to enroll in the school virtually nothing. As they travel, a storm arises, and the coach overturns on the slippery road. While awaiting fresh transport, the passengers stay at a local inn and regale one another with stories, two of which are included in the text: *The Five Sisters of York* and *The Baron of Grogzwig* (Dickens later admitted he needed to fill space for the installment required by the publisher).

Upon arriving at Dotheboys Hall, a shabby house with a few outbuildings, Nicholas stands by while Squeers is greeted effusively by his ill-tempered wife, who shows little interest in the new teacher. Squeers is fed a juicy steak, while Nicholas eats a few scraps and the boys are given nothing but porridge. Before retiring, Nicholas glances at the letter given him by Noggs, which assures him that, if he ever needs a friend in London, he need only look up the author of the note. Upon arising in the morning, Nicholas finds that he has no water to wash himself because the well water is frozen. The boys are being fed brimstone and treacle by Mrs. Squeers, who assures Nicholas that periodic treatments not only serve to purge them, but also suppress their appetites, thus saving money. He quickly sees that the boys are taught virtually nothing, are used as slave labor, and are abused with frequent senseless beatings, to say nothing of having anything sent to them by their parents stolen by Mrs. Squeers and lavished on her children, twenty-three-year-old Fanny and young Wackford, Jr. Nicholas also notices that one boy in his late teens named Smike is singled out for the worst abuses. When Nicholas speaks to him kindly, he immediately attaches himself to the new tutor.

Mrs. Squeers takes an immediate dislike to Nicholas, perceiving him as proud and haughty, but Fanny, hearing that he is a gentleman, finds him attractive and decides to make his acquaintance. After shyly entering the schoolroom and asking him to fix her quill pen, she is smitten. She seizes the next occasion when her mother is away and her father is spending the evening at the local tavern to arrange a dinner for her best friend, Matilda Price, her fiancée John Browdie, and Nicholas. The new assistant teacher has no idea of Fanny's tender feelings, and

goes out of his way to show favor to Matilda in order to discourage any such delusions on her part. This only succeeds in angering both Fanny and Browdie, and the party is a total failure. Fanny and her friend soon make up, and Browdie is unsettled enough by the threat he perceives in Nicholas that he agrees to set the wedding date for three weeks hence with Matilda, but when Fanny the next day pretends to faint in order to attract Nicholas' attention and he, being told by Matilda of Fanny's belief in his love for her, disabuses her of her foolish notion in no uncertain terms, Fanny swears to be his lifelong enemy. From this point on, both Fanny and her mother get revenge on Nicholas by striking out at an easy target - Smike, whose daily beatings become ever more severe, much to the torment of his new friend.

Meanwhile, Ralph Nickleby finds employment for Kate in a milliner's shop owned by Madame Mantalini - hard, low-paying work for which she is nonetheless grateful. She asks if housing could be provided for her mother and herself near her new workplace, and Ralph grudgingly turns over to them a dirty and dingy flat in his possession. Noggs, working behind the scenes, makes sure to provide a few basic comforts and necessities, which they mistakenly believe were sent by Ralph.

Back at Dotheboys Hall, Smike runs away. Squeers is furious because of the bad example it sets - all the boys would run at the first opportunity if they thought they could get away with it - and the schoolmaster and his wife take wagons in opposite directions to find the recalcitrant inmate. Mrs. Squeers locates him and brings him back, bound with rope, and everyone in the school knows that Smike is in for the beating of his life. Squeers waits until afternoon to allow the tension to build, then brings Smike out in front of the whole school and begins to lash him. Nicholas, unable to stand the abuse any longer, stops Squeers after the first blow. When the schoolmaster slashes Nicholas across the face, he seizes the whip and turns it on Squeers, much to the amusement of the young scholars looking on. After thrashing Squeers soundly and leaving him unconscious, he stalks out of the school onto the highway, never to return. He has only four shillings in his pocket and London is 150 miles away, but he is determined to walk if he has to. Out on the highway he meets John Browdie, who is so pleased to hear what Nicholas has done to Squeers that he gives him a sovereign to help him on his trip to London, and would have given more had Nicholas been willing to accept it. That night he sleeps in a barn and wakes to find Smike lying nearby. Clearly, his poor friend has been following him, and the lame lad begs to be allowed to accompany Nicholas wherever he goes. Nicholas explains that he has no money and no means of support, but Smike insists on staying with him nonetheless. In the face of such unflinching loyalty and affection, Nicholas agrees that he and Smike will keep one another company through thick and thin.

The author next takes us to the humble attic flat of Newman Noggs. A quiet and taciturn man who quenches his sorrows in alcohol, he lives in a poor quarter under the most wretched conditions. As the chapter begins, his neighbor Crowl is seeking to take advantage of his kindness and sit by his fire and, if possible, eat his food. Noggs informs him that he has been invited downstairs for dinner, where the Kenwigs family is celebrating eight years of marriage. They are the most well-off couple in the building, and have connections that include a woman in the theater, Miss Petowker, and a water-rate collector, Mr. Lillyvick, after whom they have named one of their children in the hope of receiving a legacy. As the party progresses, Noggs receives a message that two men have come to call on him; they turn out to be Nicholas and Smike. Noggs immediately leaves the party and goes upstairs to care for them, at which point Nicholas tells him their story. Noggs then shows Nicholas a letter sent by Fanny Squeers to Ralph Nickleby containing the basest slanders against both Nicholas and Smike.

Nicholas sets out the next day to find lodging and employment, not wishing to impose on the generosity of Noggs more than necessary. He arranges to rent a shabby attic room, then goes to a labor exchange and inquires about a job as a personal secretary. He is given the address of a member of Parliament in need of secretarial help, but finds him shallow, hypocritical, and searching for someone who will do all his work for him for the meager salary of fifteen shillings per week. Nicholas turns down the job and returns to Noggs in poor spirits. Noggs, however, asks if he would be interested in a tutoring position, and Nicholas agrees, soon discovering that the children who are in need of tutoring are the Kenwigs offspring from the first floor. He immediately embarks upon his new responsibilities despite a stream of negative comments from the arrogant Mr. Lillyvick.

Kate, meanwhile, is working hard at the establishment of Madame Mantalini. The senior worker in the shop, Miss Knag, soon takes Kate under her wing, clearly enjoying the experience of feeling superior to the newcomer. Three days later, however, a customer asks to be waited on by Kate, who is young and pretty, rather than by Miss Knag, who is old and tiresome. The insult is too much for Miss Knag to bear, and she thereafter treats Kate as her enemy, blaming her for a slight with which she had nothing to do. One day after work, Ralph Nickleby appears outside Madame Mantalini's establishment and asks Kate if she would be willing to serve as hostess at a dinner party he is planning for a few of his friends. Mrs. Nickleby is overjoyed at this sign of favor, but Kate is doubtful of her uncle's good intentions. She dresses up in her best attire, but is immediately confronted with a group of men who are loud and uncouth at best. These are men Ralph is seeking to cultivate, hoping that they will borrow money from him. The most notable of the company are Lord Frederick Verisopht, a weak man whom Ralph wants to draw into his orbit, and Sir Mulberry Hawk, a ruffian who has no respect for anyone, least of all Ralph Nickleby. The men are very rude to Kate, and Hawk in particular forces his attentions on her, embarrassing her to such an extent that she runs from the room in tears. His rudeness is such that even Ralph feels called upon to apologize, for a moment seeing his deceased brother in the face of his distraught niece.

Kate tells no one about her distressing experience, but several days later Nicholas confronts his uncle with regard to the slanders in Fanny Squeers' letter. Ralph calls him a criminal and insists that he leave London at once, telling him that unless he does so, his mother and sister can expect no further help from him. Nicholas agrees to leave, much to the dismay of his mother and sister, but sternly warns Ralph that he will hold him accountable if any harm comes to them in his absence. When Nicholas returns to his poor flat, he finds Smike preparing to leave him because he considers himself to be too much of a burden. Nicholas, however, convinces him that they should leave together, linking their fortunes to one another no matter what the future may bring. Ralph, meanwhile, forecloses on a loan owed him by Mantalini and forces the business into bankruptcy. Kate thus loses her job, while Miss Knag, who continues to be rude to Kate, takes over management of the dress shop. Kate then follows up on a newspaper advertisement seen by her mother and accepts a position as companion to Mrs. Witterly, a middle-class married woman with pretensions above her social status. Mrs. Nickleby, as usual, has delusions of grandeur, imagining that Kate's employer will die and Kate will marry her wealthy husband.

Nicholas and Smike leave London for the open road. Their intention is to go to Portsmouth and seek employment on a ship. On the way they stop for the night in a poor tavern, where they meet one Vincent Crummies, the head of a traveling theatrical troupe. He tells Nicholas that his hope of finding employment on a vessel is futile, since he lacks experience and

many are seeking jobs, but after an evening's conversation, he offers Nicholas and Smike jobs in his acting company. They accept, and after arriving in Portsmouth are introduced to the other members of the company, which includes the entire Crummles family and about a dozen others. Remarkable among their number is Crummles' daughter, "the infant phenomenon," who is allegedly ten years old but is in reality nearly twice that age. One of Nicholas' responsibilities is to take the script of a French drama and translate it into English, meanwhile making adaptations suitable to the company. He also is persuaded to accompany the leading lady, Miss Snevellicci, and the infant phenomenon in a canvassing expedition around Portsmouth seeking subscribers for coming performances. The trip bears fruit, and a goodly number of people fill the audience on the night when Nicholas' play debuts. Not only is the play a success, but Nicholas also earns a rousing ovation from the crowd for his first appearance on stage, even sharing the final curtain call with Miss Snevellicci. Later the company is surprised by a visit from Henrietta Petowker, an old friend of Mrs. Crummles. She acts briefly with the company, but the real reason for her arrival is to get away and secretly marry Mr. Lillyvick, who accompanies her. Nicholas' play continues to draw enthusiastic audiences, and his acting is much admired. He then undertakes the task of preparing the slow-witted Smike to enact the role of the Apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Back in London, Lord Verisopht and Sir Mulberry Hawk are plotting how they might have further contact with Kate Nickleby. They use their business relationship with her uncle to obtain her address, but hardly find it necessary, since they meet her mother at Ralph's office and she gladly gives them directions to her home, wondering all the while which one of these noble gentlemen Kate will choose to marry. Ralph secretly wants to protect his niece, for whom he has some warm feelings, but chooses instead the pecuniary advantages of cultivating the wealthy young men. The next day, Mrs. Nickleby receives a visit from Mr. Pyke and Mr. Pluck, two of Mulberry Hawk's friends. They flatter her, drop hints about Hawk's interest in her daughter, and invite her to join them at the theater that evening. All aflutter, she goes with great expectations, and is surprised to find that Kate is in the next box at the theater, brought there as a companion for Mrs. Witterly (Hawk had bribed a servant to learn of their plans). The men quickly make contact with the adjoining box and Hawk spends the evening with Kate, much to her discomfiture. When the evening is over, Mrs. Nickleby, unconscious of the rude treatment received by her daughter, still dreams of wedding bells, while Kate is thoroughly embarrassed. The men have a good laugh at their expense after they leave. The next morning, Mrs. Nickleby is so immersed in her dream world that she writes a long letter to Kate expressing her pleasure with Kate's choice of Hawk as a husband. Kate, meanwhile, is so miserable that she has been unable to sleep, while Hawk and his friends, full of their success, vow to continue their persecution of the helpless maiden, knowing they will have the full cooperation of both Mrs. Nickleby and Mrs. Witterly. This goes on for two full weeks, until Kate finally decides to go to her uncle for protection. Ralph listens to her pleas, then claims that he can do nothing because of his business relationship with the men, whom he cannot afford to offend. Newman Noggs, who overhears the conversation, tries to comfort Kate and promises her any help he can give, while Ralph ironically fumes with hatred at the young men he himself has encouraged in the abuse of his niece.

Back in Portsmouth, all is not well with the Crummles theatrical troupe. Nicholas is a rousing success, both with his writing and his acting, and this generates increasing jealousy among the male members of the troupe, especially in the heart of Lenville, the leading man who has been reduced to smaller parts by Nicholas' popularity. He sends a message through Folair, the pantomimist, inviting Nicholas to meet him in order to have his nose pulled in the presence of the entire company. Nicholas finds the insult rather humorous, and punches Lenville in the nose, then

accepts his apology for the offensive missive. A letter then arrives from Noggs in London telling Nicholas in cryptic tones that he should plan to come up to town soon. When he tells Crummles that he must leave them, the company throws a farewell party for him to which Miss Snevellicci invites her parents; she clearly has set her cap for the new leading man. Nicholas has no interest in starting a relationship, however, and leaves for London before Crummles can milk the maximum number of "final performances" out of his impending departure.

Back in London, Ralph continues to feel guilty about the treatment Kate is receiving at the hands of his business associates, though not guilty enough to put a stop to it. He even goes so far as to imagine that Nicholas has been hanged and his mother has died, leaving Kate to live at his home as his hostess and companion. Noggs, who has summoned Nicholas without telling him any particulars of the problem and knowing that the young man will not let a moment pass without seeking redress of the grievance perpetrated against his sister, now arranges for himself, Mrs. Nickleby, and Miss La Creevy to be away from home when Nicholas arrives in order to avoid an immediate confrontation with either Ralph or Mulberry Hawk. Nicholas and Smike do arrive, and Nicholas is frustrated when he is unable to contact any of his friends or relations in the city. He goes for a walk to work off nervous energy, and after wandering for several hours, stops at a local hotel for refreshment. There he overhears a conversation in which he is amazed to hear his sister's name. Four men are jesting about her and her mother (the reader is not surprised to find that the four are Hawk, Verisopht, Pyke, and Pluck), and Nicholas grows more angry by the minute listening to them. Finally he challenges the loudest of the four, calling him a liar and scoundrel and demanding to know his name and address. Hawk refuses to give it, insulting Nicholas in the process, but the young man threatens to follow him home and get the information he seeks. Hawk treats him with contempt, and when Nicholas follows him out to his chariot and tries to restrain him, Hawk takes his whip and strikes Nicholas in the face. Nicholas grabs the whip and returns the compliment, and the horses rush off, leaving Nicholas sprawled in the middle of the street, bleeding from the whip wounds on his face, while the crash of the carriage further down the street draws a curious crowd.

The next morning, Nicholas moves quickly to get his family away from his uncle's influence. He goes to the Witterly home and removes Kate immediately, then takes her to the pitiful flat in which Ralph had housed Mrs. Nickleby. Miss La Creevy had been preparing her for the move, but she still dithers over trifles, not recognizing the seriousness of what has been occurring. Finally she and her possessions are safely on their way back to Miss La Creevy's home, and Nicholas then meets Noggs and gives him a letter for his employer. In the letter, Nicholas excoriates Ralph for his mistreatment of the family and leaves him to a lonely, bitter old age. Later that morning, Ralph receives a visit from Alfred Mantalini, who bears two bills owed to his wife and wants Ralph to discount them. They total seventy-five pounds, and Ralph offers him fifty, which Mantalini quickly accepts. No sooner does he pocket the money than his wife storms in, furious at him for having stolen the bills and determined to put him on an allowance. In his typical extravagant manner he threatens to commit suicide, but she soon forgives him and the bills are forgotten. As they prepare to leave, Mantalini mentions the accident in which Mulberry Hawk had been injured the night before, and tells Ralph that the accident had been caused by an attack by Nicholas. Ralph asks, hopefully, if Nicholas had been killed or maimed, but upon finding that neither was the case, sought to use this incident in some way to revenge himself upon his nephew. After the Mantalinis leave, Squeers arrives with his corpulent son. Ralph inquires after his health, asking if he has recovered from the beating administered by

Nicholas. He quickly finds that Squeers is eager for revenge as well, and tells him that he will be in touch with him when he is able to formulate a suitable scheme that will satisfy them both.

Nicholas now undertakes to introduce Smike to his mother and sister. They, along with Miss La Creevy, welcome him gladly and make him feel at home. Despite Nicholas' misgivings, Smike and his mother get along very well together, since the latter is an incessant talker and the former is a patient listener. The next problem for Nicholas is to secure some income, and he goes to the Register Office to seek employment. While he is there, he meets a fat and jolly man named Ned Cheeryble, who strikes up a conversation with him, and having learned his history, offers him a job in his clothing merchandise business. Nicholas readily agrees, and he follows his new employer back to the shop, where he meets his twin brother Charles and the head bookkeeper, Tim Linkinwater. He quickly learns that the Cheeryble brothers are generous to a fault and are beloved of all their employees. They not only offer him a handsome salary, but arrange for Linkinwater to train him as a replacement, since he is rather advanced in years, and offer him and his family the use of a pleasant cottage; they consider providing it rent-free, but decide that Nicholas would appreciate the domicile more if he had to pay a small sum for it (of course, they intend to make up that money and more in other subtle ways). Nicholas is invited soon after to a dinner celebrating Linkinwater's birthday. After he returns home, his mother tells him that their new neighbor to the rear has been throwing vegetables over the back fence in an attempt to court her. She professes no interest in him, but is nonetheless flattered by his attentions.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Kenwigs delivers her sixth child, a young boy. During the celebration surrounding the child's birth, Nicholas visits them with a message from Mr. Lillyvick announcing his marriage to Miss Petowker. Kenwigs is enraged, seeing the possibility of his children inheriting Lillyvick's fortune slipping through his fingers. Meanwhile, Miss La Creevy, who has been helping the Nicklebys to get settled in their new cottage, prepares to return to London. Smike escorts her home, but on the return trip he inadvertently bumps into Squeers and his son, who seize him, throw him into a carriage, take them to the house where they are staying and lock him in a bedroom, fully intending to take him back to Dotheboys Hall. Fortunately for Smike, however, John Browdie, who has finally married Mathilda Price, is on his way to London for their honeymoon, traveling with the maid of honor, none other than Fanny Squeers. When they arrive at the house where Squeers and his son are staying, they are immediately regaled with the adventure of the capture of poor Smike. After dinner, Browdie feigns illness, goes upstairs to lie down, and quickly releases Smike, who heads back home, finally arriving safely at the flat of Newman Noggs. During this time Mulberry Hawk is recovering slowly from his injuries, which include a broken leg, and is treating all of his so-called friends brutally. When Ralph Nickleby comes to visit, the two speak of their desire to revenge themselves upon Nicholas, but, somewhat surprisingly, Lord Verisopht comes to his defense, affirming that he had behaved like a gentleman while Hawk had acted boorishly. He also defends Kate, whom Hawk is still intent on deflowering.

As Nicholas and Linkinwater discuss the relative merits of town and country living, a message arrives. When Nicholas takes the message in to his employer, he finds there a beautiful young woman in considerable distress. He recognizes her as the girl he had seen earlier at the Register Office. He quickly excuses himself, but can't get the girl out of his mind, and finally convinces himself that he is in love with her despite the fact that the two have never spoken one word to each other. Frustrated in his attempts to catch a glimpse of her again, he finally engages Newman Noggs to wait outside and follow her home the next time she comes to the office. One

night Noggs sees her servant and follows her, then reports to Nicholas that her name is Cecilia Bobster and gives him her address. The two then pay a visit to the place, but Nicholas quickly discovers that Noggs has followed the wrong woman home, and that he knows no more about his mysterious love than he had the day before.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Nickleby has continued to receive vegetables thrown over the fence by her secret admirer next door. One night she and Kate are in the garden and hear his voice, then see his face over the fence. He professes his undying affection, which she of course rejects, then is pulled back over the fence by his attendant, who explains that the man is insane. Mrs. Nickleby, however, refuses to believe it, especially since he is so clearly attracted to her. Nicholas then goes to visit the Browdies to thank John for delivering Smike. He then hears the whole story, and the three have a laugh at the expense of the Squeers family. The objects of their humor happen to be listening on the other side of the door, however, and an angry exchange ensues, with Fanny breaking all ties with her former friend Mathilda. Soon after their departure, Nicholas and the Browdies hear a commotion in the next room and there find a young man who has just laid another man low for insulting language to a lady of his acquaintance. The young man turns out to be Frank Cheeryble, the nephew of Nicholas' employers. The two quickly become friends and find that they have much in common. Later that week, Charles Cheeryble and his nephew pay a visit to Mrs. Nickleby and Kate, and Nicholas quickly notices that Frank is impressed with his lovely young sister. Smike, who also has fallen in love with Kate, suffers silently.

Later, Noggs reports to Ralph Nickleby that both Hawk and Verisopht have gone abroad. Ralph continues to be confident of his hold over the young men, however. As Ralph returns to his office later in the day, he is confronted by a shabby man who introduces himself as Brooker. Ralph had employed him in some shady business years earlier, but he had then spent time in prison and had recently been released. He is destitute, and seeks money from his former employer in exchange for a secret of great importance. Ralph, unable to believe that Brooker possesses such a secret, refuses to be bribed and sends the man away empty-handed. Noggs, however, pulls him aside and the two have a private and mutually satisfying conversation. Ralph then proceeds to the Mantalini residence, which is in a great upheaval because Mr. Mantalini has feigned suicide for the seventh time because his wife has threatened to leave him. Ralph has no comfort to give to anyone, and soon leaves.

Nicholas convinces his mother to invite the Browdies over for tea, and though she is skeptical at first, the festivities go smoothly and a good time is had by all. Suddenly, late at night, a knock at the door reveals Ralph Nickleby, Squeers, and Snawley, a nasty character who has already entrusted two of his stepchildren to Squeers' tender mercies. Ralph produces documents alleging that Smike is really Snawley's son and attempts to seize the boy and carry him off. Nicholas and Browdie, unable to see any flaws in the documents, nevertheless refuse to release Smike from their care and drive the scoundrels from the premises. They realize, however, that the villains are determined to get revenge on Nicholas through the weak and helpless boy.

The next day, Nicholas finds an opportunity to speak to Charles Cheeryble alone and asks his advice about keeping Smike from his real father. His employer heartily affirms his decision, then asks him to do a favor for him. He asks Nicholas if he remembers the young lady who had visited the office earlier - a memory that Nicholas has no trouble recalling. He then tells Nicholas something of her history. Her mother had once been in love with Ned Cheeryble, but they had parted and she had married a man named Bray, who had turned out to be a cold and miserable

wastrel. The wife had died, but before dying had asked the Cheerybles to take care of her young daughter. They had managed to set up an arrangement whereby they would purchase some of her handiwork at far above market prices under the fiction of being able to sell the paintings and needlework at a profit. The transactions had to be kept from the father, however, who hated the Cheerybles, suspecting that his late wife had never lost her affection for them and regretted her decision to marry him. They therefore ask Nicholas to serve as a go-between in the transactions - a task he readily agrees to undertake. The Cheerybles, of course, are doing a bit of matchmaking, unknown to Nicholas or the lovely young Madeline. Nicholas finds Madeline and her father living in a shabby room in a debtors' prison. The father is rude and selfish, treating Nicholas as an inferior and taking the money Madeline earns to spend on his own wants. Before leaving, Nicholas professes his devotion to Madeline and tells her that he would do anything in his power to assist her.

That same day, Noggs is grumpily waiting for his master to return to the office so he can go get dinner. He is about to leave without permission, but hears Ralph arrive and hides in his closet. Ralph brings with him into the office an old moneylender named Arthur Gride. The two are old hands at the financial game, and each is more underhanded than the other. Gride tells Ralph that he intends to get married. Ralph finds this incredible, but the old skinflint explains that a man who owes him money has a beautiful young daughter that Gride desires. He intends to offer to forgive the man's debts in exchange for the daughter's hand, but needs Ralph's cooperation, since the father also owes money to him. After some hard bargaining, the two agree on an arrangement beneficial to both. They then go to visit the man in the debtors' prison; to no one's surprise who is used to Dickens' reliance on coincidence, his name is Walter Bray, and Nicholas' newfound love Madeline is the lovely thing on whom Gride has designs. They place their offer before Bray, knowing that he will be unable to resist the opportunity of release from prison and a lifetime annuity and that the dutiful Madeline will not be able to refuse her father, no matter how unpleasant the outcome is for herself.

Nicholas, meanwhile, can think of nothing but Madeline, and gives little attention to his work that day. On his way home, a notice outside a theater catches his attention. It announces the final appearance on the stage of the great Vincent Crummies, and indicates that the members of his family are likewise delivering their farewell appearances. Nicholas goes immediately to the theater and discovers that the entire family is emigrating to America. After the performance, he is invited to a farewell dinner, during which Dickens takes the opportunity to ridicule an unnamed playwright who steals unfinished novels hot off the press and rushes them into badly-turned theatricals (at least 25 versions of *Nicholas Nickleby* reached the stage before the last installment of the novel was even published).

During this time the Nickleby family experiences relative peace - the Cheeryble brothers take good care of them, friendships deepen with Tim Linkinwater, who has never had friends before in his life, and Frank Cheeryble, who shows increasing interest in Kate. One evening, Tim even begins flirting with Miss La Creevy, who is very gratified at the attention. Later that night, Mrs. Nickleby's unbalanced admirer from next door comes down the chimney, much to the consternation, and then the amusement, of the company. Mrs. Nickleby becomes insulted, however, when he directs his attentions to Miss La Creevy, and later expresses to Kate her sorrow that affection for herself has driven the poor man mad at last. Smike, meanwhile, not only grieves over his secret and unrequited love for Kate, but grows increasingly ill with consumption (tuberculosis), in those days a fatal disease.

After a day of drinking and gambling at the races, Mulberry Hawk and his friends continue drinking and gambling at a local club. While there, Hawk declares his intention of killing or maiming Nicholas Nickleby. Lord Verisopht confronts him, insisting that Nicholas had acted the part of a gentleman in seeking to protect his sister's reputation, and that Hawk had behaved boorishly. The drunken argument escalates into a brawl, during which Verisopht challenges Hawk to a duel. When the duel takes place the next morning, Hawk kills Verisopht, then flees to the Continent for safety.

Arthur Gride, meanwhile, is preparing for his impending marriage to Madeline Bray. He carefully chooses his suit, much to the disgust of his housekeeper, Peg Sliderskew, who fears losing her standing in the household if her master brings home a young bride. Noggs arrives with a letter from Ralph, setting the date and time for the wedding. For days now, Noggs has been followed by Brooker, who professes to possess a secret of great importance to Ralph Nickleby. Being full of interesting news, Noggs seeks out Nicholas and confides in him, not realizing that Madeline is the same girl with whom Nicholas has lately fallen in love. Nicholas, needless to say, is determined to deliver her from a fate worse than death, but is uncertain how to proceed, knowing that the dirty trick being played by the two old usurers is legal, though morally dubious – especially since Gride's main goal in the marriage is to gain control of a property that Madeline will inherit upon her marriage, and of which she is totally ignorant. He decides that the only feasible approach is to confront Madeline directly and try to talk her out of her resolution.

On the way home, Noggs stops by the flat of the Kenwigs family, and is asked to escort Morleena to the hairdresser's to prepare for a party to which she has been invited. There, they are surprised to encounter Mr. Lillyvick, who looks nothing like his usual proud and prosperous self. Morleena's parents refuse to greet him with civility, still angry because his marriage has deprived their children of a potential inheritance from him. When he confesses that Henrietta Petowker left him a week earlier and ran off with a retired army captain, they change their tune and receive him gladly, especially when he wears that their children will receive his entire inheritance.

Nicholas then follows through on his plan to dissuade Madeline, but finds her totally obdurate - not because she has the least desire to marry Gride, but because her loyalty to her father and submission to his will override any desires of her own. She tells Nicholas that she makes her decision gladly because she wants to help her father. Her self-sacrifice breaks his heart, and he leaves fearing that he will never see her again. He is not ready to give up yet, however. He next pays a visit to the old man and attempts to bribe him to call off the marriage, offering money that he knows the Cheerybles will be more than willing to pay, but Gride is immovable, finding satisfaction in his ability, not only to enjoy a blooming young bride, but also to foil the ambitions of a handsome young suitor in the process. Nicholas is not the only opponent of this marriage, however. Old Peg Sliderskew fears that she will be cast aside by her long-time master should he marry this sweet young thing, and determines to do something to secure her future. At this point neither he nor Madeline knows Nicholas' identity, nor is Ralph aware of his hated nephew's interest in Madeline.

The next day is the day of the wedding, and Gride speaks to his housekeeper of his intention to break the will and spirit of his new wife as soon as possible after securing her property. When he and Ralph arrive at the Bray residence, they find Madeline's father entertaining doubts about his bargain. Ralph encourages him by reminding him that Gride can't live much longer, and will then leave Madeline a rich widow. He then goes upstairs to fetch his

daughter, who can be heard weeping as she prepares for the ceremony. Soon footsteps are heard on the stairs, but they are not the steps of Bray and Madeline. Instead, Nicholas and Kate enter, much to the surprise and consternation of Ralph and Gride, who immediately identifies Nicholas as the young suitor who had visited him the night before. Suddenly a loud thump is heard from above, followed by screams of despair. Nicholas rushes up the steps to find Madeline on the floor, clinging to the dead body of her father, who has just had a heart attack. Nicholas and Kate take the unconscious girl back to their cottage to care for her, and the evil machinations of Ralph and Gride are foiled by Bray's untimely death. On the way out the door, Nicholas reminds Ralph that his fortune is rapidly melting away; not only has he lost the money owed him by Bray, but he also has no way of recovering the debts owed him by the late Lord Verisopht and the exiled Sir Mulberry Hawk.

The shock and trauma experienced by Madeline are too much for her to handle, and she becomes gravely ill. Kate stays by her side and nurses her every day, and the Cheerybles see that she has the best of medical care. Frank comes often to visit, and Mrs. Nickleby observes that he pays a great deal more attention to Kate than he does to Madeline. As insightful as she is regarding Frank's attraction to Kate, she senses nothing at all about Nicholas' love for Madeline. When she excitedly speaks to Nicholas about the budding relationship between Frank and his sister, he is completely surprised, having been totally absorbed in his own emerging love. In fact, he believes that any attachment between Frank and Kate ought to be discouraged in order to avoid having the Cheerybles, who have been so kind to them, think that they are taking advantage of their generosity in order to form an alliance that would be much to the advantage of the Nickleby family financially. Meanwhile, Smike's condition is worsening by the day, and the doctor advises Nicholas to take him to the country.

After the debacle surrounding Bray's death, Ralph takes Gride home, as usual blaming Nicholas for all his misfortunes. Gride finds Peg gone, and upon climbing the wall and entering by the back door, discovers that she has robbed him of important papers, among them the will that provides for Madeline's fortune. Ralph now sees another opportunity of seeking to avenge himself on Nicholas. If he is able to find and destroy the crucial document, he will at least assure that Nicholas marries a pauper rather than an heiress. He promptly contacts Squeers and offers him fifty pounds to locate Peg and separate her from the document, which should be an easy task because she is illiterate and has no idea of the value of what she has stolen. Squeers demands a hundred pounds for his services, then goes off to locate the elderly housekeeper. After six weeks of searching, he finds her and begins to cultivate her. One night, the two become exceedingly drunk and he convinces her to bring out the papers she has stolen from Gride. He offers to go through them for her and advise her which ones to burn and which ones to keep in order to extort money or harm her former employer. She readily agrees, and Squeers begins going through the papers while Peg builds a fire. They are so occupied with their nefarious deeds that they don't even notice Newman Noggs and Frank Cheeryble sneak into the room behind them. When Squeers finds the document containing Madeline's inheritance, he conceals it in his coat pocket, just as Noggs brings a bellows down with great force upon his head.

Meanwhile, Nicholas has taken Smike to Devonshire, to the area where he and Kate grew up. As the boy's life ebbs away, Nicholas shows him all his old haunts and talks of his childhood memories. Smike enjoys hearing of these things, and when Nicholas points out one particular tree under which Kate had fallen asleep one day and under which his father was now buried, Smike asks one favor - to be buried under the same tree when he dies. Nicholas readily agrees. A few days later, Smike's scream awakens Nicholas from a sound slumber out in the fields. Smike tells

Nicholas that he saw the man who years ago had taken him to Dotheboys Hall hiding behind a tree at the edge of the field. Nicholas tells him that he must have been dreaming, but Smike is insistent, even when searches over the next few days turn up no sign of such a man. As time passes, the end is clearly near, and Smike's last words to Nicholas are to confide in him his love for Kate, and to request that he should be buried with a lock of her hair in a ribbon around his neck. Then, seeing visions of Eden, he passes peacefully into a better world.

Back in London, Ralph Nickleby can neither eat nor sleep. He has no energy or ambition, and is unable to explain his torpidity. Worse yet, Noggs has not arrived for work, and the noon hour has passed. His maidservant tells him that he has a visitor. He at first refuses to see anyone, but finally goes downstairs, only to encounter Frank Cheeryble. He refuses to speak to him, but Cheeryble, on his way out the door, tells him that he comes on an errand of mercy to the benefit of Ralph himself, though he is met only with scorn. Ralph then seeks out his various co-conspirators, but finds that Snawley and Gride refuse to see him and Squeers is nowhere to be found. He finally goes to the office of Cheeryble Brothers, where the twins and Tim Linkinwater await him. He goes into the office, where he is immediately confronted with a description of his own villainies. Noggs appears and tells him how he overheard the schemes plotted in what Ralph and his confederates thought to be secret, and how Brooker (at this point unnamed) had told him that Smike was not Snawley's son. He tells him how Squeers was followed and captured, along with the incriminating documents, how Snawley had turned state's evidence in order to protect himself, implicating Ralph and Squeers in the process, how Gride had locked himself into his attic in order to avoid any unpleasant encounters with the police, and that Squeers and Peg were now under arrest. The plots against Smike and Madeline thus have been uncovered, and enough evidence, both documentary and in the form of testimony, is available to convict Ralph many times over. The Cheeryble brothers, not wishing to see ill befall Nicholas' kin, no matter what he may deserve, warn him of his impending danger and advise him to flee the country. Ralph scorns their advice and dares them to do their worst, still convinced of his own impregnability. He then goes to visit Squeers in prison and tells him to bluff his way through using an invented excuse. Squeers, recognizing that his career as a schoolmaster is finished, refuses to listen to Ralph any more and tells him that he will simply speak the truth when confronted, implicating Ralph in the process.

Ralph then goes home, but late that night Tim Linkinwater arrives at his door, summoning him back to the Cheeryble house. Ralph reluctantly follows, and senses pity for himself in the attitude of the brothers. He first fears that Kate has died, then hopes that Nicholas has. Despite their disgust, the brothers tell him of Smike's death, for which he cares nothing. Brooker then emerges from the shadows and tells Ralph that Smike was his only son. Years ago, Ralph had contracted a marriage in the hope of benefitting from the woman's property, but had kept the marriage secret, waiting for her brother to die so the inheritance would be secured. They had a son, but the woman quickly discovered that Ralph cared for nothing but money, and ran off with another man, dying soon thereafter. While Ralph was busy trying to secure his wife's fortune, he entrusted the child to the care of Brooker, who brought him to Ralph's London house and imprisoned him in the garret. After much rude treatment at the hands of Ralph, Brooker spirited the boy away to Dotheboys Hall and told Ralph the child had died. Brooker hoped by this scheme to have the means to blackmail Ralph in later years, but he ran afoul of the law and was transported, leaving the poor boy, whose identity was known to no one, to the tender mercies of Squeers. Ralph, overcome by who knows what emotions, dashes the lamp to the ground and runs

from the room after hearing this tale. He staggers homeward, where he analyzes his own feelings, and finds that his deepest anger is elicited by the fact that his son loved and respected his hated nephew when the two rightly should have been sworn enemies. Seeing no way to harm Nicholas further, he goes up to the garret where Smike had been imprisoned by Brooker and hangs himself.

Nicholas and Kate are meanwhile struggling with their affections. Nicholas clearly loves Madeline and Kate returns Frank's affections, but both fear appearing to take advantage of the Cheerybles' generosity. Kate has therefore rejected Frank's proposal of marriage, and Nicholas fully intends to ask the Cheerybles to remove Madeline from his mother's household to avoid any contact between them; he has not, in fact, ever made any declaration of his feelings to her at all. Nicholas hopes, however, that he can sustain his friendship with Frank, while encouraging the Cheerybles to allow Kate and Madeline to keep in touch with one another, since they have grown close during the weeks when Kate has been nursing Madeline back to health. Now that Madeline is getting better, Nicholas pays a visit to Charles Cheeryble and unburdens his heart to him, making his requests formally. The kindly old man listens patiently to Nicholas and commends him for his sensitivity. Two weeks later, however, Nicholas, Kate, Mrs. Nickleby, and Miss La Creevy receive an invitation to dine at the Cheerybles, and before the night is over, three couples have become engaged - Nicholas and Madeline, Frank and Kate, and, much to everyone's surprise except the Cheeryble brothers, Tim Linkinwater and Miss La Creevy!

Some time later, Nicholas and Kate are walking around London and find themselves temporarily lost. They suddenly hear a familiar voice, and find none other than Mr. Mantalini, slaving away in a laundry. The woman screaming at him apparently bought him out of debtors' prison and employed him, and from their interchange he is clearly as irresponsible and miserable as ever. Nicholas then travels to Yorkshire to locate John Browdie and his wife, and finds them prosperous and happy. John tells Nicholas that Squeers had been convicted and transported to Australia (along with Peg Sliderskew). The two then wonder what will become of the school, and Browdie decides to take a trip to Dotheboys Hall to find out. When he gets there, the news has just arrived and a riot has broken out. The boys are forcing brimstone and treacle down Mrs. Squeers' throat, are dunking Wackford Jr.'s head repeatedly in the noxious mixture, and are beating Fanny with whatever is handy at the time. Browdie quickly quells the outbreak, tells the boys they are free to go, and reminds them that gentlemen do not strike ladies. The boys all flee, and Browdie gallantly offers the furious Fanny any help she may need to settle herself elsewhere now that the school is closed and her father is no longer on the scene; she angrily refuses his help, of course. He soon sees to it that the boys have a good meal and enough money to get them back home before they take to the highways.

The final chapter wraps up all the loose ends, as Dickens is wont to do. When the mourning period for Mr. Bray is over, Madeline and Nicholas and Kate and Frank are united in a double wedding ceremony. Tim Linkinwater and his blushing bride are invited to join them, but decline to interfere with the joy of the young ones and marry quietly several weeks later. Frank and Nicholas become partners in the firm after the twin brothers retire, while Tim and his bride continue to live happily in Tim's flat in the office building. Ralph Nickleby left no will, so by rights his fortune would have gone to his only living relatives, but they had no desire to benefit from such ill-gotten gains, so his remaining money went to the government. Arthur Gride was acquitted on a technicality, but some years later was murdered in his bed by a thief seeking his rumored wealth. Brooker repented of his crimes and died quietly in his bed. Mulberry Hawk returned from abroad, was promptly arrested for debt and thrown into prison, where he died

miserably. Nicholas, meanwhile, used part of Madeline's money to buy the old family home, where he and his lovely wife lived happily and produced a brood of children. Kate and Frank bought a home nearby, and the two sets of cousins lived a merry life, always watched over by their dear friend Newman Noggs, who took up residence in a cottage on the property. But always, in the presence of so much joy, they remembered their poor cousin Smike, who was buried under the great tree near the edge of the estate.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Nicholas Nickleby - The protagonist, he is a young man who must battle for success in the world against the machinations of his wicked uncle.
- Mrs. Nickleby - His mother, a weak and ineffectual woman who gladly leaves the household decisions to her son.
- Kate Nickleby - His sister, and lovely young girl who is taken advantage of by her uncle Ralph to court his business associates, but who is shielded by Nicholas and the Cheerybles and eventually marries Frank Cheeryble.
- Ralph Nickleby - Nicholas' uncle, a heartless capitalist who is determined to destroy him for reasons that are never made quite clear.
- Newman Noggs - Ralph's underpaid and alcoholic clerk, he came years ago seeking help with debt and became virtually enslaved to the greedy financier, who keeps him in debt in order to control him. Noggs helps Nicholas and his family by using the secrets he overhears in Ralph's office.
- Wackford Squeers - He is the one-eyed Master of Dotheboys Hall, the dreadful establishment at which Nicholas becomes assistant schoolmaster. He is mean and abusive and teaches the boys in the school nothing at all while starving them half to death. He is also the tool of Ralph Nickleby, and is drawn by him into a number of his schemes against Nicholas.
- Mrs. Squeers - His brutal and selfish wife, who spoils her children while abusing the boys entrusted to her care.
- Fanny Squeers - The plump and plain daughter who fancies briefly that Nicholas is in love with her, then vows to get her revenge when she finds he is not.
- Wackford Squeers, Jr. - The young son who is given by his parents all the clothes sent to the boys in the school by their relatives, he takes on the responsibility of abusing the boys when his father is away.

- Smike - A lame boy who has grown up at Dotheboys Hall after being abandoned at birth, he is in reality Ralph Nickleby's son, believed by his father to be dead. Nicholas rescues him from the tyranny of the school and the two become fast friends, but near the end of the book he dies of tuberculosis.
- Mathilda Price - Fanny's best friend, she marries John Browdie, much to Fanny's consternation.
- John Browdie - A large Yorkshireman who marries Miss Price, he also lends Nicholas money when he runs away from Dotheboys Hall and later rescues Smike from the clutches of Squeers when the latter kidnaps him.
- Miss La Creevy - A painter of miniatures with whom Mrs. Nickleby and her children originally board in London, she treats them kindly and stands by them when they later encounter trouble from their villainous uncle.
- Madame Mantalini - The owner of the millinery shop where Kate takes a job, she loses her business when Ralph suddenly calls her loan.
- Mr. Mantalini - He is an irresponsible spendthrift; his wife finally leaves him and he winds up, first in debtors' prison, then doing manual labor for a buxom laundress.
- Miss Knag - The senior worker at Mantalini's shop, she initially takes Kate under her wing, but then comes to hate her when customers favor Kate over her because of her beauty.
- Lord Frederick Verisopht - A young aristocrat who attends a dinner organized by Ralph Nickleby, sees Kate being abused by Mulberry Hawk, challenges him to a duel, and is killed in the process, resulting in Ralph losing a great deal of money owed him by the dead man.
- Sir Mulberry Hawk - A young ruffian who has no respect for anyone; he embarrasses Kate at the dinner party and forces his attentions on her, leading Nicholas to assault him and Lord Verisopht to challenge him to a duel.
- Julia Witterly - A class-conscious wife who hires Kate as her companion.
- Vincent Crummles - The head of a theatrical troupe who befriends Nicholas and Smike and offers them acting jobs.
- Ninetta Crummles - "The infant phenomenon," her father claims she is ten years old, but the other members of the troupe know she has been said to be that age for five years at least.

- Lenville - The leading tragedian in the company, he becomes jealous of Nicholas when the latter enjoys success and popularity above his own.
- Miss Snellicci - The leading lady of the company, she falls in love with Nicholas and seeks to entice him to marry her, but he has no interest in another misunderstanding with a woman after the debacle with Fanny Squeers at Dotheboys Hall.
- Henrietta Petowker - A London actress who is a good friend of Mrs. Crummles and appears briefly with their company.
- Mr. Lillyvick - A water-rate collector related to the Kenwigs family, he feels that they are beneath him and that he is condescending to spend time in their presence. He marries Miss Petowker, who leaves him shortly thereafter.
- Ned and Charles Cheeryble - Traders in cloth who hire Nicholas as a clerk; they are jolly, kind, and generous, and do everything they can to make their employees happy.
- Frank Cheeryble - The nephew of the twins, he and Nicholas become fast friends, and near the end of the book he marries Kate.
- Tim Linkinwater - Head bookkeeper at Cheeryble Brothers, he trains Nicholas to do his job and works with the Cheerybles in their task of assisting the Nicklebys, and eventually falls in love with and marries Miss La Creevy.
- Brooker - A man hired long ago by Ralph Nickleby to take care of his son, he takes him to Dotheboys Hall instead and tells Nickleby that the boy has died. He had not, and in fact that boy was Smike.
- Madeline Bray - A poor young woman who supports her father by painting and sewing crafts that are purchased by the Cheerybles. Nicholas falls in love with her and the two eventually marry.
- Walter Bray - Madeline's father is a selfish old man who thinks of no one but himself and tries to marry Madeline off to a rich moneylender provided by Ralph Nickleby in order to get his debts paid off.
- Arthur Gride - An elderly usurer who conspires with Ralph Nickleby to coerce Walter Bray into giving him Madeline in marriage in exchange for forgiving his debts and granting him a small allowance.
- Peg Sliderskew - Gride's housekeeper, she steals an important document from him that holds the key to Madeline's future inheritance.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Two people who cannot afford to play cards for money, sometimes sit down to a quiet game for love.” (ch.1, p.17)

“Ralph, the elder, deduced from the oft-repeated tale the two great morals that riches are the only true source of happiness and power, and that it is lawful and just to compass their acquisition by all means short of felony.” (ch.1, p.18-19)

“Gold conjures up a mist about a man more destructive of all his old senses and lulling to his feelings than the fumes of charcoal.” (ch.1, p.20)

“My brother never did anything for me, and I never expected it; the breath is no sooner out of his body than I am to be looked to, as the support of a great hearty woman and a grown boy and girl. What are they to me? *I* never saw them.” (Ralph, ch.3, p.33)

“It was no *uncommon* loss, ma’am. Husbands die every day, ma’am, and wives too.” (Ralph, ch.3, p.36)

“And the world shall deal by you as it does by me, till one or both of us shall quit it for a better.” (Nicholas, ch.13, p.162)

“What is a little poverty or suffering, to the disgrace of the basest and most inhuman cowardice! I tell you, if I had stood by, tamely and passively, I should have hated myself, and merited the contempt of every man in existence.” (Nicholas, ch.15, p.175)

“You would sell your flesh and blood for money; yourself, if you have not already made a bargain with the devil.” (Mulberry Hawk, ch.19, p.232)

“Ralph Nickleby, who was proof against all appeals of blood and kindred - who was steeled against every tale of sorrow and distress - staggered while he looked, and reeled back into his house, as a man who had seen a spirit from some world beyond the grave.” (ch.19, p.240)

“Whatever step you take, sir, I will keep a strict account of. I leave them to you, at your desire. There will be a day of reckoning sooner or later, and it will be a heavy one for you if they are wronged.” (Nicholas, ch.20, p.250)

“Let me do something for you, at least. You will never let me serve you as I ought. You will never know how I think, day and night, of ways to please you.” (Smike, ch.22, p.267)

“He had likewise proved, that by altering the received mode of punctuation, any one of Shakespeare’s plays could be made quite different, and the sense completely changed; it was needless to say, therefore, that he was a great critic, and a very profound and most original thinker.” (ch.24, p.300)

“Cases of injustice, and oppression, and tyranny, and the most extravagant bigotry, are in constant occurrence among us every day. It is the custom to trumpet forth much wonder and astonishment at the chief actors therein setting at defiance so completely the opinion of the world; but there is no greater fallacy; it is precisely because they do consult the opinion of their own little world that such things take place at all, and strike the great world dumb with amazement.” (ch.28, p.344)

“Although a skillful flatterer is a most delightful companion if you can keep him all to yourself, his taste becomes very doubtful when he takes to complimenting other people.” (ch.28, p.348)

“It is one of those problems of human nature, which may be noted down, but not solved; - although Ralph felt no remorse at that moment for his conduct towards the innocent, true-hearted girl; although his libertine clients had done precisely what he expected, precisely what he most wished, and precisely what would tend most to his advantage, still he hated them for doing it, from the very bottom of his soul.” (ch.28, p.357)

“He came back again to the cold fireside and the silent dreary splendour; and in that one glimpse of a better nature, born as it was in selfish thoughts, the rich man felt himself friendless, childless, and alone. Gold, for the instant, lost its lustre in his eyes, for there were countless treasures of the heart which it could never purchase.” (ch.31, p.384)

“In short, the poor Nicklebys were social and happy, while the rich Nickleby was alone and miserable.” (ch.35, p.437)

“I neither revile nor threaten. I can tell you of what you have lost by my act, what I only can restore, and what, if I die without restoring, dies with me, and can never be regained.” (Brooker, ch.44, p.543)

“Reverence for the truth and purity of her heart, respect for the helplessness and loneliness of her situation, sympathy with the trials of one so young and fair, and admiration of her great and noble spirit, all seemed to raise her far above his reach, and, while they imparted new depth and dignity to his love, to whisper that it was hopeless.” (ch.48, p.591)

“You say you have a duty to discharge, and so have I. And with the help of Heaven I will perform it.” (Madeline, ch.53, p.657)

“You see what a dry, shrivelled, withered old chip it is. If he were younger, it might be cruel, but as it is - hark'ee, Mr. Bray, he'll die soon, and leave her a rich young widow. Miss Madeline consults your tastes this time; let her consult her own next.” (Ralph, ch.54, p.670)

“The grass was green above the dead boy's grave, and trodden by feet so small and light, that not a daisy drooped its head beneath their pressure. Through all the spring and summertime, garlands of fresh flowers wreathed by infant hands rested upon the stone, and when the children came to change them lest they should wither and be pleasant to him no longer, their eyes filled with tears, and they spoke low and softly of their poor dead cousin.” (ch.65, p.777)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. Compare and contrast the villainous capitalists in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* and *A Christmas Carol*. How are Ralph Nickleby and Ebenezer Scrooge the same, and how are they different? Why was Scrooge able to repent, while Nickleby was unable to do so? What do the comparisons and contrasts indicate about Dickens' understanding of the major problems with and possible solutions for the capitalist system of his day?
2. The villainous capitalist and the benevolent man of wealth are presented as separate characters in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, in the persons of Ralph Nickleby and the Cheeryble brothers. In the later novella *A Christmas Carol*, the two are combined in one person, and Dickens shows how the transformation from one to the other might be accomplished. In your opinion, which manner of presentation better fits the purposes of the author's social criticism? Why? Support your conclusion with specifics from both works of literature.
3. In Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, the protagonist's father only appears in memory after a brief introductory chapter, but Nicholas encounters other father figures in the course of the narrative, including his uncle Ralph, Wackford Squeers, and the Cheeryble brothers. Use the information given about Nicholas' late father and the characterizations of his father figures to discuss Dickens' view of what makes a good father. To what extent do his ideas on the subject coincide with Scripture?
4. George Orwell once said that "the outstanding, unmistakable mark of Dickens's writing is the *unnecessary detail*." Do you consider this to be a strength or weakness of his work? Answer the question by choosing either the descriptions of places, the idiosyncracies of character, or the dialogue of the protagonist's mother in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*.
5. Some of the characters in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* live in dream worlds of their own making, such as Mrs. Nickleby, Mr. Mantalini, and Mrs. Nickleby's amorous neighbor. While the last is clearly mad, the other two somehow manage to get on in the world, despite the fact that the reader often wonders how they manage to do so. Discuss the author's view of self-made reality using these and any other characters who might be appropriate. Are such people better off than the realists, or does Dickens think them fools worthy of ridicule? Support your answer with details from the novel.
6. Charles Dickens loved the theater. Early in his life he considered auditioning for a professional acting career, but backed out at the last minute. How is this love reflected in his novel *Nicholas Nickleby*? How do the scenes involving the theater troupe led by Vincent Crummles illustrate the positive values that attracted him to the life of an actor, despite the satire with which these scenes are filled?

7. Discuss the role of the mentally-deficient and abused Smike in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. Why does Dickens include this character in the story, aside from the role he plays in plot development? What does his character convey about what the author values? How does he produce growth or reveal flaws in the characters of others?
8. Discuss the goals of the protagonist in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. What kind of life does Nicholas desire? Does he find what he wants? Is he satisfied with achieving his goals? What do these goals tell us about the values of the author? Evaluate these goals in the light of the teachings of Scripture concerning life's priorities.
9. Charles Dickens' father was once imprisoned for debt, and as a consequence sent his twelve-year-old son out to work in a boot-black factory - the worst, and in some ways the most formative, experience of young Charles' life. The pain of this experience shows up in Dickens' novels in many forms, one of which is the character of the selfish debtor. Compare and contrast the treatment of this character in the persons of Walter Bray in *Nicholas Nickleby* and William Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*. Does Dickens' sympathy for or understanding of his father's experience progress at all between the two novels, which were written almost twenty years apart? Why or why not? Use details from the two novels to support your conclusions.
10. In Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, after leaving Dotheboys Hall, Nicholas says to Smike, "And the world shall deal by you as it does by me, till one or both of us shall quit it for a better." Discuss and evaluate the author's view of the nature of friendship as it is revealed in the novel. Consider not only the relationship between Nicholas and Smike, but other friendships in the book as well.
11. Some critics have argued that the protagonist of Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* is a Victorian knight-errant, traveling around assisting the poor and helpless from motives of pure selflessness. Do you agree? Is Nicholas too good to be true, or did the author endow him with faults that make him human? Be specific, citing examples from the novel to support your answer.
12. In Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, after Ralph Nickleby invites his niece Kate to dinner to be made sport of by his immoral friends, the narrator describes his reaction in the following words: "although Ralph felt no remorse at that moment for his conduct towards the innocent, true-hearted girl; although his libertine clients had done precisely what he expected, precisely what he most wished, and precisely what would tend most to his advantage, still he hated them for doing it, from the very bottom of his soul." What does this observation indicate about the author's insight into human nature? What does this tell us about Ralph's character, and about Dickens' understanding of humanity in general?

13. If the protagonist of Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby* is too good to be true, some have also argued that the villain, Ralph Nickleby, is too evil to be credible. Yet occasionally the author deigns to give him tinges of humanity, such as when he returns home one day and reflects thusly: "He came back again to the cold fireside and the silent dreary splendour; and in that one glimpse of a better nature, born as it was in selfish thoughts, the rich man felt himself friendless, childless, and alone. Gold, for the instant, lost its lustre in his eyes, for there were countless treasures of the heart which it could never purchase." Do you find the villain's character credible? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
14. Discuss the differences between the deaths of Smike and his father, Ralph Nickleby, in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. What do their respective deaths tell you about the quality of their lives, and about Dickens' view of life after death?
15. Charles Dickens was often accused of making the heroes of his books the least interesting characters in them. Such a charge has frequently been leveled against the protagonists of *Nicholas Nickleby* and *David Copperfield*. Do you agree with the critics' assessment of these leading men? Why or why not? Choose one of the novels and support your conclusion with telling details and quotations.
16. In Oscar Wilde's *The Importance of Being Earnest*, Miss Prism, in describing her lost three-volume novel, says, "The good ended happily and the bad unhappily; that is the meaning of fiction." Whether such a conceit is "the meaning of fiction" or not, it certainly was a commonplace of the nineteenth-century English novel. One of the greatest examples of this is Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. Dickens created in his novels a moral universe, in which good was rewarded and evil punished. How does *Nicholas Nickleby* fit this mold? From a Christian standpoint, how do you react to such an approach to the writing of fiction? Support your conclusion, both from the novel and from Scripture.
17. Consider the picture of education presented in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. What, in the author's mind, constituted a good education? Be sure to consider not only the house of horrors that was Dotheboys Hall, but other aspects of the story as well in giving your answer.
18. Compare and contrast the two "good girls" in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, Kate Nickleby and Madeline Bray. How are they similar? Do they display any significant differences? What do they tell the reader about the author's ideal of femininity? Be sure to include specific incidents and quotations in your analysis.
19. Analyze the benevolence of the Cheeryble brothers in Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*. To what extent is their generosity the result of life experience and to what extent does it stem from inner qualities of character? What role does their social class play in Dickens' social criticism? Be sure to contrast them with the characters in the story who possess inherited wealth rather than being self-made men of means.

20. While Charles Dickens said that his primary purpose in writing his novels was to present life “as cheerfully and pleasantly as in him lay,” he also was a dedicated social reformer. These two roles were not always compatible, since a realistic portrayal of social ills did not often produce lightness and cheer in the reader. Dickens thus was forced to go beyond realism to parody in order to bring down the wrath of the reader on social corruption while entertaining him at the same time. Discuss how this balance is achieved in Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby*, or indeed if it is. Focus especially on Dickens’ portrayal of the Yorkshire boarding schools, represented by Dotheboys Hall and its overbearing headmaster, Wackford Squeers.
21. Great literature ought not only to entertain, but also to transform both the reader and society as a whole. Charles Dickens realized these dual purposes in his popular fiction. One of his earlier efforts, *Nicholas Nickleby*, had a startling impact on British society, in that the Yorkshire boarding schools that he parodied in the novel were almost all closed down within ten years of its publication. Analyze the chapters in the novel that involve Dotheboys Hall and discuss how these could have produced real change in society. Keep in mind that, in order for literature to accomplish this, the audience must find it credible.
22. Some of the most memorable and humorous characters in the novels of Charles Dickens are often referred to as “grotesques” because of their seemingly-outlandish qualities. One critic, George Gissing, however, argued that “every day that I live I am more convinced of the difficulty of exaggerating human follies and singularities.” Do you find the odd characters that populate Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby* humorous because they are unrealistic, or humorous because you know people much like them? Choose three characters from the novel and answer the question using specific scenes and quotations in which they are involved.
23. G.K. Chesterton, in his commentary on Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby*, said, “In every romance there must be . . . the Princess, who is a thing to be loved; there must be the Dragon, who is a thing to be fought; and there must be St. George, who is a thing that both loves and fights.” The identity of St. George is fairly obvious, but who is the Princess? Is it Madeline Bray, the girl who eventually marries Nicholas and for whom he undoubtedly fights, or is it his sister Kate, for whom he fights every bit as energetically throughout the novel? Support your answer with specifics from the book.
24. G.K. Chesterton, in his commentary on Charles Dickens’ *Nicholas Nickleby*, said, “In every romance there must be . . . the Princess, who is a thing to be loved; there must be the Dragon, who is a thing to be fought; and there must be St. George, who is a thing that both loves and fights.” The identity of St. George is fairly obvious, but who is the Dragon? Is it Ralph Nickleby, the grasping capitalist who is Nicholas’ declared enemy throughout the story, or is it someone else such as Squeers, Arthur Gride, Walter Bray, or all of the above? Support your answer with specifics from the book.

25. G.K. Chesterton, in his commentary on Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, argues that romance, by its very character, involves the foreshortening of action. For instance, he notes, "If a modern philanthropist came to Dotheboys Hall I fear he would not employ the simple, sacred, truly Christian solution of beating Mr. Squeers with a stick," but would instead seek the appointment of a Royal Commission, which would investigate and discuss the situation for years and wind up doing nothing. Setting aside the efficacy of Nicholas' solution to Squeers' cruelty, what do you think of Chesterton's assertion that such an approach is "sacred" and "truly Christian"? Do you agree? Support your conclusion from the novel and from Scripture.
26. G.K. Chesterton, in his commentary on Charles Dickens' *Nicholas Nickleby*, contrasts the previous generation with his own that their sentimentality was such that "They were quite willing to weep over Smike, but it certainly never occurred to them to weep over Squeers." How does this insight cohere with Dickens' vision of society? How does Chesterton's critique fit our own age as well as his own? Use specifics from the novel and from contemporary life to support your conclusions.
27. G.K. Chesterton, in his commentary on *Nicholas Nickleby*, argues that the most humorous characters in Dickens are either great fools, great bores, or both; that, in fact, "the very people that we fly to in Dickens are the very people that we fly from in real life." Do you agree? If Chesterton is right, why is this the case? If a reader would find Mrs. Nickleby as embarrassing in real life as her children clearly do, why does he find her so attractive on the printed page? Choose three such character in the novel and use them to comment on Chesterton's assertion.