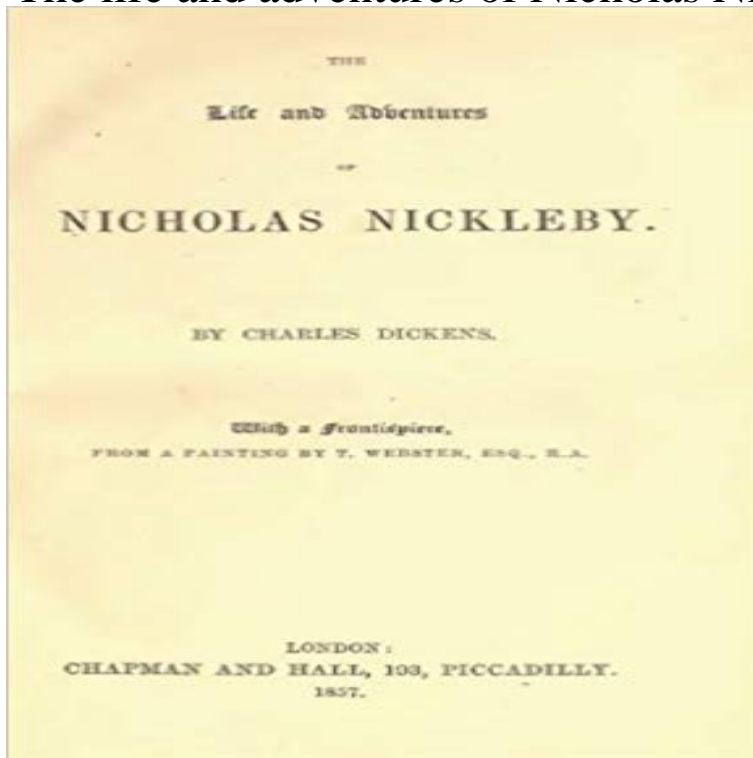


# The life and adventures of Nicholas Nickleby



PREFACE. THIS story was begun, within a few months after the publication of the completed Pickwick Papers. There were, then, a good many cheap Yorkshire schools in existence. There are very few now. Of the monstrous neglect of education in England, and the disregard of it by the State as a means of forming good or bad citizens, and miserable or happy men, this class of schools long afforded a notable example. Although any man who had proved his unfitness for any other occupation in life, was free, without examination or qualification, to open a school anywhere ; although preparation for the functions he undertook, was required in the surgeon who assisted to bring a boy into the world, or might one day assist, perhaps, to send him out of it, in the chemist, the attorney, the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker, the whole round of crafts and trades, the schoolmaster excepted ; and although school-masters, as a race, were the blockheads and impostors that might naturally be expected to arise from such a state of things, and to flourish in it ; these Yorkshire schoolmasters were the lowest and most rotten round in the whole ladder. Traders in the avarice, indifference, or imbecility of parents, and the helplessness of children ; ignorant, sordid, brutal men, to whom few considerate persons would have entrusted the board and lodging of a horse or a dog ; they formed the worthy corner-stone of a structure, which, for absurdity and a magnificent high-handed laissez-aller neglect, has rarely been exceeded in the world. We hear sometimes of an action for damages against the unqualified medical practitioner, who has deformed a broken limb in pretending to heal it. But, what about the hundreds of thousands of minds that have been deformed for ever by the incapable pettifoggers who have pretended to form them ! I make mention of the race, as of the Yorkshire schoolmasters, in the

past tense. Though it has not yet finally disappeared, it is dwindling daily. A long days work remains to be done about us in the way of education, Heaven knows ; but great improvements and facilities towards the attainment of a good one, have been furnished, of late years, to those who can afford to pay for it. I cannot call to mind, now, how I came to hear about Yorkshire schools when I waa a not very robust child, sitting in bye-places, near Rochester T. PREFACE. Castle, with a head full of PARTRIDGE, STRAP, TOM PIPES, and SANCHO PANZA; but I know that my first impressions of them were picked up at that time, and that they were, somehow or other, connected with a suppurated abscess that some boy had come home with, in consequence of his York- shire guide, philosopher, and friend, having ripped it open with an inky pen-knife. The impression made upon me, however made, never left me. I was always curious about them fell, long afterwards, and at sundry times, into the way of hearing more about them at last, having an audience, resolved to write about them. With that intent I went down into Yorkshire before I began this book, in very severe winter-time which is pretty faithfully described herein. As I wanted to see a schoolmaster or two, and was forewarned that those gen- tlemen might, in their modesty, be shy of receiving a visit from the author of the Pickwick Papers, I consulted with a professional friend here, who had a Yorkshire connection, and with whom I concerted a pious fraud. He gave me some letters of introduction, in the name, I think, of my travelling companion ; they bore reference to a suppositions little boy who had been left with a widowed mother who didnt know what to do with him ; the poor lady had thought, as a means of thawing the tardy com- passion of her relations in his behalf, of sending him to a Yorkshire school ; I was the poor ladys friend, travelling that way ; and if the recipient of the letter could inform me of a school in his neighbourhood, .....

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