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Literature.

Nicholas Nickleby. By Boz; with Illustrations by Phiz. Lea & Blanchard, Philadelphia. From Messrs. C. Griffin & Broadway, we have received this work complete in one volume, which places before us the whole of the valuable periodical papers with which we have entertained you for the last eighteen months, in a convenient form and at an inconsiderable price.

Nicholas Nickleby will long maintain a high rank amongst our best and lasting works of fiction. It abounds with powerful passages which are unequalled in any other work of the modern times, and it contains scarcely a chapter which does not come home to the reader with a force far beyond the ordinary portraiture of painful realities. To this author has alluded in his neat preface, which we cannot resist the temptation to copy.

It has afforded the author great amusement and satisfaction, during the progress of this work, to learn from country friends and from a variety of ludicrous statements concerning himself in provincial newspapers, that more than one Yorkshire schoolmaster lays claim to being the original of Mr. Squeers. One of these, he has reason to believe, has actually solicited authorities learned in the law, as to having good grounds on which to rest a case for libel; another has meditated a journey to London, for the express purpose of writing an assault and battery upon his character; a third perfectly remembers being on last January twelfth month by two gentlemen, one of whom held him in conversation while the other took his likeness; and, fourthly, Mr. Squeers has but one eye, and the two, and the published sketch does not resemble him (whoever he may be) in any respect, still he and all his friends and neighbors know at once for whom it is meant, and the character is so like him.

While the author cannot but feel the full force of the compliment thus conveyed to him, he is disposed to suggest that these confessions arise from the fact that Mr. Squeers is the representative of a class, and not of an individual. Where imposture, ignorance, and brutality, are the stock in trade of a small body of men, and one is described by these characteristics, all his fellows will recognise something in themselves, and each will have a living that the portrait is his own.

In this general description, as to most things, there may be some exceptions; and although the author neither saw nor heard of any course of an excursion which he made to Yorkshire, before he commenced these sketches, or before or since, it affords him more pleasure to assume their existence without it. He has dwelt thus long upon this point, because his object in calling the attention to the system would be very completely fulfilled, if he did not show to any person, emphatically and earnestly, that Mr. Squeers and his school are faint pictures of an existing reality, purposely and kept down lest they should be impossible—that there are upon record in law in which damages have been a poor recompense for lasting agonies of torment inflicted upon children by the argument of the master in these places, and such offensive and foul details of cruelty, and disease, as no writer could have the boldness to imagine, since he has been engaged upon these sketches, he has received from private sources far beyond the reach of suspicion or account of atrocities, in the perpetration of which upon neglected or repudiated schools have been the main objects, very far exceeding any that appear in a more pleasant subject, it may be said, that there are two characters which are drawn from life. It is probable that what we call the world, which is very credulous in what professes to be most incredulous in what professes to be true; and that while every day in it will allow in one man no blemishes,

and in another no virtues, it will seldom admit a very strongly-marked character, either good or bad, in a fictitious narrative, to be within the limits of probability. For this reason, they have been very slightly and imperfectly sketched. Those who take an interest in this tale will be glad to learn that the Brothers Cheerybly live; that their liberal charity, their singleness of heart, their noble nature, and their unbounded benevolence, are no creations of the author's brain; but are prompting every day (and often by stealth) some magnificent and generous deed in that town of which they are the pride and honor.

It only now remains for the writer of these passages, with that feeling of regret with which we leave almost any pursuit that has for a long time occupied us and engaged our thoughts, and which is naturally augmented in such a case as this, when that pursuit has been surrounded by all that could animate and cheer him; on—it only now remains for him, before abandoning this task, to bid his readers farewell.

"The author of a periodical performance," says Mackenzie, "has indeed a claim to the attention and regard of his readers, more interesting than that of any other writer. Other writers submit their sentiments to their readers, with the reserve and circumspection of him who has had time to prepare for a public appearance. He who has followed Horace's rule, of keeping his book nine years in his study, must have withdrawn many an idea which, in the warmth of composition, he had conceived, and altered many an expression which in the hurry of writing he had set down. But the periodical essayist commits to his readers the feelings of the day, in the language which those feelings have prompted. As he has delivered himself with the freedom of intimacy and the cordiality of friendship, he will naturally look for the indulgence which these relations may claim; and when he bids his readers adieu, will hope, as well as feel, the regrets of an acquaintance, and the tenderness of a friend."

With such feelings and such hopes the periodical essayist, the author of these pages, now lays them before his readers in a completed form, flattering himself, like the writer just quoted, that on the first of next month they may miss his company at the accustomed time as something which used to be expected with pleasure; and think of the papers which have read, as the correspondence of one who wished their happiness, and contributed to their amusement.

To this volume, which Mr. Dickens has dedicated to his friend, W. C. Macready, esq., as a slight token of admiration and regard, and in which we confess we have been deeply interested during the progress of publication, we shall occasionally return with great pleasure, for the purpose of enriching our columns from its pages. The following extract, then which we have never quoted anything finer from the works of Mr. Dickens, will justify our opinion of his writings. It is the consummation of a series of miseries and failures that, through the latter chapters, fall heavy on the head of the usurer, Ralph Nickleby. He has at length discovered that Snake, tortured to death by his relentless persecutors, is his own son. Beyond this he will endure no more. He makes one last appointment, and keeps it.

Creeping from the house, and sinking off like a thief; groping with his hands, when first he got into the street, as if he were a blind man, and looking often over his shoulder while he hurried away, as though he were followed in imagination or reality by some one anxious to question or detain him, Ralph Nickleby left the city behind him, and took the road to his own home.

The night was dark, and a cold wind blew, driving the clouds furiously and fast before it. There was one black, gloomy mass, that seemed to follow him; not hurrying in the wild chase with the others, but lingering sullenly behind, and gliding darkly and stealthily on. He often looked back at this, and more than once stopped to let it pass over, but somehow,

when he went forward again, it was still behind him, coming mournfully and slowly up like a shadow funeral train.

He had to pass a poor, mean burial ground—a dismal place, raised a few feet above the level of the street, and parted from it by a low parapet-wall and an iron railing—a rank, unwholesome, rotten spot, where the very grass and weeds seemed, in their frowsy growth, to tell that they had sprung from paupers' bodies, and struck their roots in the graves of men sodden in staming courts and drunken hungry dens. And here, in truth, they lay—parted from the living by a little earth and a board of two—lay thick and close—contorting in body as they had been in mind—a dense and squallid crowd. Here they lay cheek by jowl with life; no deeper down than the feet of the throng that passed there every day, and piled high as their throats. Here they lay, a gnat family, all those dear departed brothers and sisters of the ruddy clergyman, who did his task so speedily when they were hidden in the ground.

As he passed here, Ralph called to mind that he had been one of a jury long before on the body of a man who had cut his throat, and that he was buried in this place. He could not tell how he came to recollect it now, when he had so often passed and never thought about him, or how it was that he felt an interest in the circumstance; but he did both, and stopping, and clasping the iron railings with his hands, looked eagerly in, wondering which might be his grave.

While he was thus engaged, there came towards him, with noise of shouts and singing, some fellows full of drink, followed by others who were remonstrating with them, and urging them to go home in quiet. They were in high good humor, and one of them, a little, weazen, hump-backed man, began to dance. He was a grotesque, fantastic figure, and the few bystanders laughed. Ralph himself was moved to mirth, and echoed the lungs of one who stood near, and who looked round in his face. As they had passed on and he was left alone again, he resumed his speculation with a new kind of interest, for he recollected that the last person who had seen the suicide alive had left him very merry, and he remembered how strange he and the other jurors had thought that at the time.

He could not fix upon the spot among such a heap of graves, but he conjured up a strong and vivid idea of the man himself, and how he looked, and what had led him to do it; all of which he recollected with ease. By dint of dwelling upon this theme, he carried the impression with him when he went away, as he remembered when a child to have had frequently before him the figure of some goblin he had once seen chalked upon a door. But, as he drew nearer and nearer home, he forgot it again, and began to think how very dull and solitary the house would be inside.

This feeling became so strong at last, that when he reached his own door, he could hardly make up his mind to turn the key and open it when he had done that and gone into the passage, he felt as though to shut it again would be to shut out the world. But he let it go, and it closed with a loud noise. There was no light. How very deary, could, and still it was!

Shivering from head to foot, he made his way up stairs into the room where he had been last disturbed. He had made a kind of compact with himself that he would not think of what had happened until he got home. He was at home now, and suffered himself, for the first time, to consider it.

His own child—his own child! He never doubted the tale; he felt it was true; knew it as well now as if he had been privy to it all along. His own child! And dead too! Dying beside Nicholas; loving him, and looking upon him as something like an angel! This was the worst.

They had all turned from him and deserted him in his very first need—even money could not buy them now; every thing must come out, and every body must know all. Here was the young Lord dead, his companion abroad and beyond his reach, ten thousand pounds gone at

one blow, his plot with Grice over-set at the very moment of triumph, his after schemes discovered, himself in danger, the object of his persecution and Nicholas' love, his own wretched boy; every thing crumbled and fallen upon him, and he beaten down beneath the ruins, and groveling in the dust.

If he had known his child to be alive; if no deceit had ever been practised; and he had grown up beneath his eye, he might have been a careless, indifferent, rough, harsh father—like enough he felt that—but the thought would come that he might have been otherwise, and that his son might have been a comfort to him, and they two happy together. He began to think now, that his supposed death and his wife's flight had had some share in making him the morose, hard man he was. He seemed to remember a time when he was not quite so rough and obdurate; and almost thought that he had first hated Nicholas because he was young and gallant, and perhaps like the stripling who had brought dishonor and loss of fortune on his head.

But one tender thought, or one of natural regret in that whirlwind of passion and remorse, was a drop of calm water in a stormy, maddened sea—his hatred of Nicholas had been fed upon his own selfishness, nourished on his interference with his schemes, attended upon his bold defiance and success. There were reasons for its increase; it had grown and strengthened gradually. Now it attained a height which was sheer wild fancy. That his of all other should have been the hands to rescue his miserable child; that he should have been his protector and faithful friend; that he should have shown him that love and tenderness which, from the wretched moment of his birth, he had never known; that he should have taught him to hate his own parent and execrate his very name; that he should now know and feel all this, and triumph in the recollection, was gall and madness to the usurer's heart. The dead boy's love for Nicholas, and the attachment of Nicholas to him, was insupportable agony to him. The picture of his death-bed; with Nicholas at his side, leaning and supporting him, and he weeping, and his arms round his arms, when he would have had them round his enemies and hating each other to the last, drove him frantic. He gasped his teeth and snote the air, and, looking wildly round with eyes which gleamed through the darkness, cried aloud:

"I am trampled down and ruined. The wretch told me true. The night has come. Is there no way to rob them of further triumph, and spare their mercy and compassion? Is there no devil to help me?"

Swiftly these glided into his brain the figure he had raised that night. It seemed to lie before him. The head was covered now. So it was when he first saw it. The rigid, upturned marble feet, too, he remembered well. Then came before him the pale and trembling relatives who had told their tale upon the inquest—the shrieks of women—the silent dread of men—the consternation and disquiet—the victory achieved by that heap of clay when one motion of its hand had let out the life and made this stir among them.

He spoke no more, but after a pause softly groped his way out of the room, and up the echoing stairs—up to the top—to the front garret—where he kicked the door behind him, and remained.

It was a mere lumber-room now, but it yet contained an old dismantled bedstead; the one on which his son had slept, for no other had ever been there. He viewed it hastily, and sat down as far from it as he could.

The weakened glare of the lights in the street below, shining through the window, which had no blind or curtain to intercept it, was enough to show the character of the room, though not sufficient fully to reveal the various articles of lumber, old corded trunks and broken furniture, which were scattered about. It had a shivering roof, high at one part, and at another descending almost to the floor. It was towards the highest part that Ralph directed his eyes, and upon it he kept them fixed steadily for some minutes, when he rose, and dragging thither an old chest upon which he had been seated,