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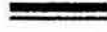
CHARLES DICKENS  
THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

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CHARLES DICKENS

# *The Old Curiosity Shop*

With the Original Illustrations



*Edited with an Introduction by*

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## INTRODUCTION

In the ten years from 1827 to 1837 Charles Dickens rose from 15-year-old solicitors' clerk to 25-year-old author, known for a remarkably wide range of journalistic and literary work. His first stories and sketches of people and places, contributed to newspapers and magazines from 1833 onwards, were collected as *Sketches by Boz* in February 1836 and *Sketches by Boz: Second Series* that December. Subsequently issued—as *Pickwick Papers* and *Nicholas Nickleby* had been—in twenty monthly parts, in 1839 they were published complete in one volume. Between 1837 and 1839 Dickens edited and contributed to *Bentley's Miscellany*—a monthly magazine published by Richard Bentley—wrote the second half of *Pickwick Papers*, all of *Oliver Twist* (for serialization in *Bentley's Miscellany*)—and the first half of *Nicholas Nickleby*.

He had also signed a contract to deliver *Barnaby Rudge* to Bentley on 1 January 1840. However, as his friend and biographer John Forster recorded, Dickens felt that his public was 'likely to tire of the same twenty numbers over again'. Unwilling to embark on the composition of another long story 'with all its strain on his fancy',<sup>1</sup> he conceived the idea of producing his own weekly periodical of miscellaneous items—stories, sketches, and satirical commentary on life—organized round an elderly cripple, Master Humphrey, and his friends, and called, with reference to the clock-case in which their work was stored, *Master Humphrey's Clock*.

Setting aside *Barnaby Rudge*—the contract for which he later cancelled—Dickens was seized with enthusiasm for his new project: an enthusiasm shared by the publishers Chapman and Hall. In the August number of *Nicholas Nickleby* they advertised a 'NEW WORK BY BOZ', declaring their pleasure in having 'completed arrangements with Mr. CHARLES DICKENS for the publication of A NEW WORK, ON AN ENTIRELY NEW PLAN'. Readers knew that Boz and Dickens were one and the same, but it was Dickens the novelist, not Boz the author of sketches and short stories, whom they preferred. On 4 April 1840

<sup>1</sup> John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, ed. A. J. Hoppé, 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1969), vol. I, bk. ii, chap. 6: hereafter cited by book and chapter.

60,000 copies of the first weekly number of *Master Humphrey's Clock* were sold and a further 10,000 ordered. Dickens was elated, but his readers were disappointed. A sharp decline in the sales of Numbers 2 and 3 made the new work a financial liability for Chapman and Hall and a financial disaster for Dickens, the first in his spectacularly successful career. A letter he wrote in mid-April to the Countess of Blessington gives an insight into his predicament: 'my thoughts are so constantly and continually occupied with the very difficult game that I am playing now, (which I would never have undertaken but with very high stakes before me) that I *have not leisure* to turn them to any other occupation, however slight.'<sup>2</sup>

Even before publication of the first number of the *Clock*, Dickens changed the order of its contents to give prominence in the fourth number to a tale called 'The Old Curiosity Shop'. Presented as one of Master Humphrey's personal adventures, it told of his late-night encounter with a young girl who, having lost her way in the City of London, appeals to him for help. He guides her to the curiosity shop where she lives with her grandfather and, during the day, his young servant Kit Nubbles. Late as it is, when Master Humphrey takes his leave the old man also quits the shop. Back at his own fireside Master Humphrey speculates on the beautiful girl, left alone in such incongruous surroundings. A letter from a jilted lady filled up the rest of the fourth weekly number.

Dickens's need to make adjustments to the *Clock* led to the inevitable recognition that he would not be able to commission or accept contributions to it. He alone would have to create all its sketches, correspondence, and stories told by Master Humphrey and members of the Clock club. Thus, instead of incurring the strain of composing another twenty-part monthly serial, he subjected himself to the greater strain of keeping at a weekly one.

Despite the evidence of falling sales and the hints of friends that readers would prefer him to produce another novel, he was reluctant to give up the idea of his miscellany, for which he still had material planned. Mr Pickwick was introduced to Master Humphrey's circle and his tale of superstition and mystery in Jacobean London occupied two successive numbers before, in Number 7, a second chapter of 'The

<sup>2</sup> Letter to the Countess of Blessington, [16] Apr. 1840, *The Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. Madeleine House, Graham Storey, and Kathleen Tillotson (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1965– ), ii. 59: hereafter cited as *Letters*.



Old Curiosity Shop' developed the narrative interest of the first through the expansion of the curiosity dealer's family to include his grandson Fred, who enters with his drunken friend Dick Swiveller. Nell does not appear till the last line of the chapter, but the eighth number of the *Clock* contained Chapter 3, at the end of which Master Humphrey withdraws from the narration, and Chapter 4, which introduces the first animate curiosity to the shop, the dwarf Daniel Quilp.

Having seen how harshly the ill-tempered dwarf treats his wife and her mother, Mrs Jiniwin, in Chapter 5 (published in Number 9) we witness him similarly threatening and mistreating Tom Scott, his office-boy. The boy's habit of standing and walking on his hands provokes his employer's violence, but the narrator comments: 'between this boy and the dwarf there existed a strange kind of mutual liking. How born or bred, or how nourished upon blows and threats on one side, and retorts and defiances on the other, is not to the purpose.' What is to the purpose, is that we have here an allusion to the song 'Tell me, where is Fancy bred' (from *The Merchant of Venice*, III. ii) which enabled Bassanio to choose the casket containing the token that allowed him to claim Portia and her fortune—and so bring off the gamble of his expedition to Belmont—at the very time when Dickens was trying to decide whether to change the nature of his publishing gamble by developing 'The Old Curiosity Shop' into a full-length novel and dropping Master Humphrey and his friends as providers of other tales. It is consequently no more surprising that the nightly expeditions of Nell's grandfather should turn out to be to the gambling table than that her beauty should attract the unwelcome attentions of the lecherous dwarf and—combined with her supposedly large inheritance—should entice Dick Swiveller from his courtship of Sophy Wackles in the hope of gaining her hand and fortune. Indeed, in this most allusive of his novels, Dickens's recollection of Shakespeare's song becomes Swiveller's own when, in Chapter 21, Dick goes in search of Nell in order to pursue this plan.

Once *The Old Curiosity Shop* was firmly established as a novel of which two chapters could be expected to appear in each weekly number of *Master Humphrey's Clock*,<sup>3</sup> readers returned and multiplied. Making Nell flee with her grandfather from the curiosity shop, of

<sup>3</sup> No. 26 contained one short chapter; No. 41 a long one: see Appendix C.

Dick, "that was the object of the present expedition. I fancied it possible—but let us go ring fancy's knell. *I'll begin it*" ' (Chap. 21).

Even if the modern reader needs the Explanatory Notes in order to catch Dick's allusive associations of ideas, doing so enriches appreciation of the fun that went into Swiveller's creation. It also indicates the extent to which Dickens relied on easily accessible material to keep his work going from week to week.

The light-hearted tone of Swiveller's discourse also prepares us for his moral growth. Employed at Quilp's behest by the crooked attorney Sampson Brass, Dick is expected to spy upon the Brasses' mysterious lodger, the Single Gentleman. Instead, Dick spies out Sally Brass's ill-treatment of the small servant (whom he calls the Marchioness). Eccentric in dress and as masculine in appearance as her brother, Sally is likened by Dick to a female dragon. She, too, is one of the human curiosities in the novel.

Kit Nubbles's innate loyalty—to the curiosity-dealer, to Nell, and to his mother and small brothers—is developed in a way which leads the reader to forget that he had been first presented as a clumsy, illiterate boy. He becomes a responsible and articulate employee of Mr Abel Garland, and later—after his release from false imprisonment—a fit, if lowly, member of the Single Gentleman's expedition to find and rescue Nell and her grandfather.

Many original readers feared what we all now know: the rescue party arrives too late to save Little Nell. As readers' interest in her welfare grew, the sales of *Master Humphrey's Clock* rose to 100,000 copies per week. Forster wrote of the novel's development:

And thus was taking gradual form, with less direct consciousness of design on his own part than I can remember in any other instance of all his career, a story which was to add largely to his popularity, more than any other of his works to make the bond between himself and his readers one of personal attachment, and very widely to increase the sense entertained of his powers as a pathetic as well as humorous writer. (II, 7)

Though the profits from the periodical were much smaller than Dickens had calculated they would be, in respect of the maintenance of a close relationship with his public his gamble paid off. Never having had to work to such a tight schedule before, however, he always felt himself both physically and imaginatively confined. He had to decline social invitations and took only one day's holiday in the summer of



1840. He complained to his friend Walter Savage Landor in a letter of 26 July: 'I am more bound down by this Humphrey than I have ever been yet—Nickleby was nothing to it, nor Pickwick, nor Oliver—it demands my constant attention and obliges me to exert all the self-denial I possess' (*Letters*, ii. 106).

Alterations in Dickens's manuscript and proofs also bear witness to the pressure he felt. Writing either too much or—less frequently—too little, he resorted to Procrustean remedies to produce the right amount of copy for the printer. Cuts deprived his readers of comic passages in Dick Swiveller's adventures at the Ladies' Seminary run by Sophy Wackles's formidable mother in Chapter 8, and Mrs Jarley's Wax-Works in Chapter 28. When he decided to delete from Chapter 66 Sally Brass's confession that she is the mother of the Marchioness, he had to add material to cover the excision.<sup>4</sup>

What was the form that *The Old Curiosity Shop* was taking from week to week? Inasmuch as it incorporated some of the material which would have been deployed in *Master Humphrey's Clock*,<sup>5</sup> it could be described as a miscellany within a miscellany. As a wanderer, no less than as a child in her grandfather's shop, Nell is surrounded by elements of the grotesque, while her situation evokes the same sympathy and pathos which are aroused in her when she encounters others less fortunate than herself. Though the reader is reminded of the happy laughter with which Nell responded to Kit, on her wanderings her dominant emotion is anxiety. She is untouched by the humour of the verses with which Mrs Jarley's Wax-Works are advertised. Their comedy—and that of their author, Mr Slum—are conveyed to the reader through the narrator. Ostensibly setting his tale in the past, in Chapter 45 the narrator comments on such topical issues as the evils of unemployment, and Nell hears a distracted mother inveigh against a social system which allows her son to grow up ignorant of the difference between right and wrong and a legal system which then punishes him for theft.

As Dickens's only improvised novel, *The Old Curiosity Shop* gives us a unique insight into the creative process of a young author working under intense pressure. As has already been indicated, the character-

<sup>4</sup> The most significant cuts are included in Appendix A.

<sup>5</sup> See Malcolm Andrews, 'Introducing Master Humphrey', *Dickensian*, 67 (1971), 70–86.





"Go on ladies, go on," said Daniel. "Mrs. Quilp, pray ask the ladies to stop to supper, and have a couple of lobsters and something light and palatable."

"I—I—didn't ask them to tea, Quilp," stammered his wife. "It's quite an accident."

"So much the better, Mrs. Quilp; these accidental parties are always the pleasantest," said the dwarf, rubbing his hands so hard that he seemed to be engaged in manufacturing, of the dirt with which they were encrusted, little charges for popguns. "What! Not going ladies, you are not going, surely!"

His fair enemies tossed their heads slightly as they sought their respective bonnets and shawls, but left all verbal contention to Mrs. Jiniwin, who finding herself in the position of champion, made a faint struggle to sustain the character.

"And why *not* stop to supper, Quilp," said the old lady, "if my daughter had a mind?"

"To be sure," rejoined Daniel. "Why not?"

"There's nothing dishonest or wrong in a supper, I hope?" said Mrs. Jiniwin.



"Surely not" returned the dwarf. "Why should there be? Nor anything unwholesome either, unless there's lobster-salad or prawns, which I'm told are not good for digestion."

"And you wouldn't like *your* wife to be attacked with that, or anything else that would make her uneasy, would you?" said Mrs. Jiniwin.

"Not for a score of worlds" replied the dwarf with a grin. "Not even to have a score of mothers-in-law at the same time—and what a blessing that would be!"

"My daughter's your wife, Mr. Quilp, certainly" said the old lady with a giggle, meant for satirical and to imply that he needed to be reminded of the fact; "your wedded wife."

"So she is certainly. So she is" observed the dwarf.

"And she has a right to do as she likes, I hope, Quilp," said the old lady trembling, partly with anger and partly with a secret fear of her impish son-in-law.

"Hope she has!" he replied, "Oh! Don't you know she has? Don't you know she has, Mrs. Jiniwin?"

"I know she ought to have, Quilp, and would have if she was of my way of thinking."

"Why an't you of your mother's way of thinking, my dear?" said the dwarf, turning round and addressing his wife, "why don't you always imitate your mother, my dear? She's the ornament of her sex—your father said so every day of his life, I am sure he did."

"Her father was a blessed creetur, Quilp, and worth twenty thousand of some people" said Mrs. Jiniwin; "twenty hundred million thousand."

"I should like to have known him" remarked the dwarf. "I dare say he was a blessed creature then; but I'm sure he is now. It was a happy release. I believe he had suffered a long time?"

The old lady gave a gasp but nothing came of it; Quilp resumed, with the same malice in his eye and the same sarcastic politeness on his tongue.

"You look ill, Mrs. Jiniwin; I know you have been exciting yourself too much—talking perhaps, for it is your weakness. Go to bed. Do go to bed."

"I shall go when I please, Quilp, and not before."

"But please to go now. Do please to go now," said the dwarf.

The old woman looked angrily at him, but retreated as he advanced, and falling back before him suffered him to shut the door upon her and bolt her out among the guests, who were by this time crowding down stairs. Being left alone with his wife, who sat trembling in a corner with her eyes fixed upon the ground, the little man planted himself before

"Yes, Quilp," she meekly replied.

Instead of pursuing the theme he had in his mind, Quilp rose, folded his arms again, and looked at her more sternly than before, while she averted her eyes and kept them on the ground.

"Mrs. Quilp."

"Yes, Quilp."

"If ever you listen to these beldames again, I'll bite you."

With this laconic threat, which he accompanied with a snarl that gave him the appearance of being particularly in earnest, Mr. Quilp bade her clear the tea-board\* away, and bring the rum. The spirit being set before him in a huge case-bottle,\* which had originally come out of some ship's locker, he ordered cold water and the box of cigars; and these being supplied, he settled himself in an arm-chair with his large head and face squeezed up against the back, and his little legs planted on the table.

"Now, Mrs. Quilp," he said; "I feel in a smoking humour, and shall probably blaze away all night. But sit where you are, if you please, in case I want you."

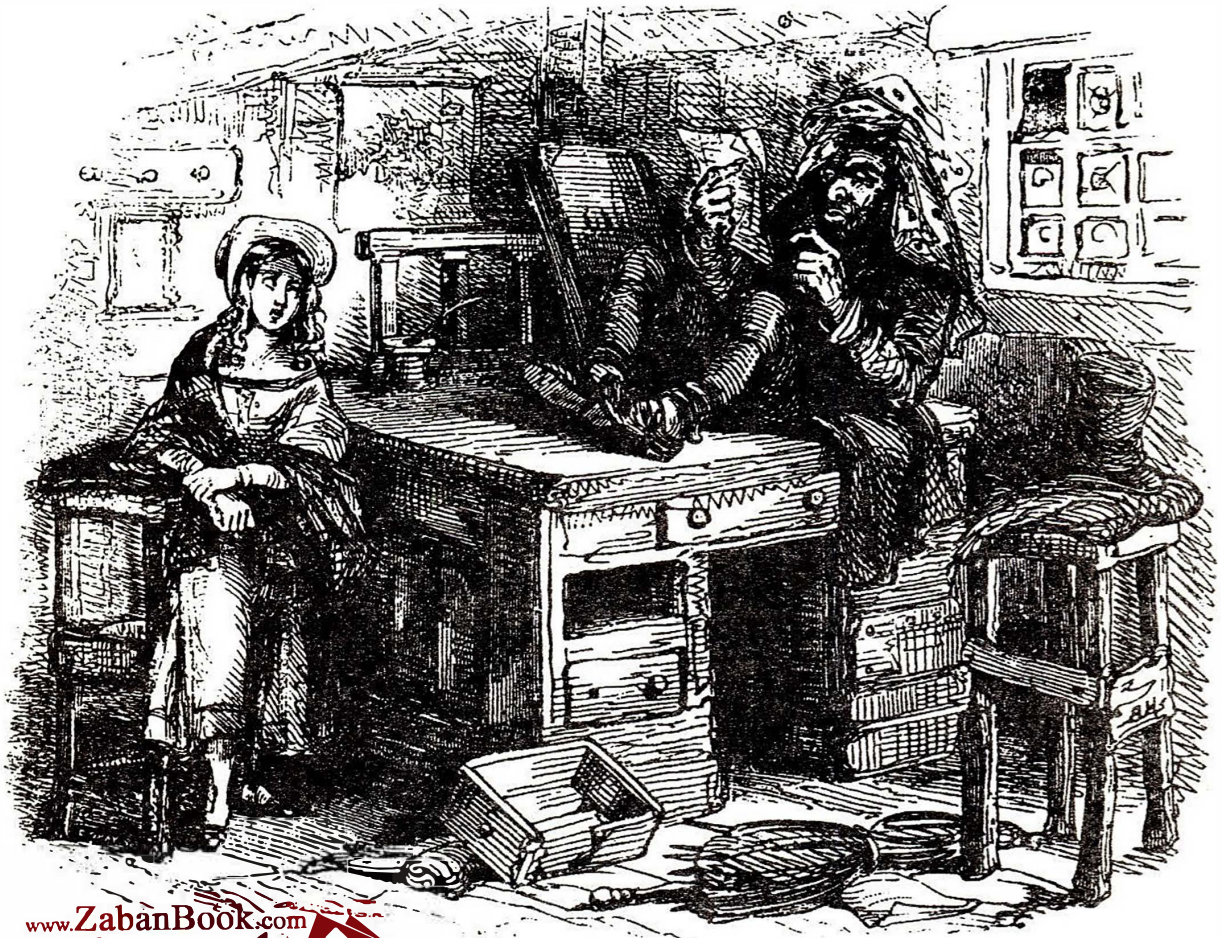
His wife returned no other reply than the customary "Yes, Quilp," and the small lord of the creation\* took his first cigar and mixed his first glass of grog. The sun went down and the stars peeped out, the Tower turned from its own proper colours to grey and from grey to black, the room became perfectly dark and the end of the cigar a deep fiery red, but still Mr. Quilp went on smoking and drinking in the same position, and staring listlessly out of window with the dog-like smile always on his face, save when Mrs. Quilp made some involuntary movement of restlessness or fatigue; and then it expanded into a grin of delight.

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## CHAPTER THE SIXTH.



LITTLE NELL stood timidly by, with her eyes raised to the countenance of Mr. Quilp as he read the letter, plainly showing by her looks that while she entertained some fear and distrust of the little man, she was much inclined to laugh at his uncouth appearance and grotesque attitude. And yet there was visible on the part of the child a painful anxiety for his reply, and a consciousness of his power to render it disagreeable or distressing, which was strongly at variance with this impulse and restrained it more effectually than she could possibly have done by any efforts of her own.

That Mr. Quilp was himself perplexed, and that in no small degree, by the contents of the letter, was sufficiently obvious. Before he had got through the first two or three lines he began to open his eyes very wide and to frown most horribly, the next two or three caused him to scratch his head in an uncommonly vicious manner, and when he came to the conclusion he gave a long dismal whistle indicative of surprise and dis-



may. After folding and laying it down beside him, he bit the nails of all his ten fingers with extreme voracity; and taking it up sharply, read it again. The second perusal was to all appearance as unsatisfactory as the first, and plunged him into a profound reverie from which he awakened to another assault upon his nails and a long stare at the child, who with her eyes turned towards the ground awaited his further pleasure.

"Halloa here!" he said at length, in a voice, and with a suddenness, which made the child start as though a gun had been fired off at her ear. "Nelly!"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know what's inside this letter, Nell?"

"No, sir!"

"Are you sure, quite sure, quite certain, upon your soul?"

"Quite sure, sir."

"Do you wish you may die if you do know, hey?" said the dwarf.

"Indeed I don't know," returned the child.

"Well!" muttered Quilp as he marked her earnest look. "I believe you. Humph! Gone already? Gone in four-and-twenty hours! What the devil has he done with it, that's the mystery!"

This reflection set him scratching his head and biting his nails once more. While he was thus employed his features gradually relaxed into what was with him a cheerful smile, but which in any other man would have been a ghastly grin of pain, and when the child looked up again she found that he was regarding her with extraordinary favour and complacency.

"You look very pretty to-day, Nelly, charmingly pretty. Are you tired, Nelly?"

"No, sir. I'm in a hurry to get back, for he will be anxious while I am away."

"There's no hurry, little Nell, no hurry at all," said Quilp. "How should you like to be my number two, Nelly?"

"To be what, sir?"

"My number two, Nelly, my second, my Mrs. Quilp," said the dwarf.

The child looked frightened, but seemed not to understand him, which Mr. Quilp observing, hastened to explain his meaning more distinctly.

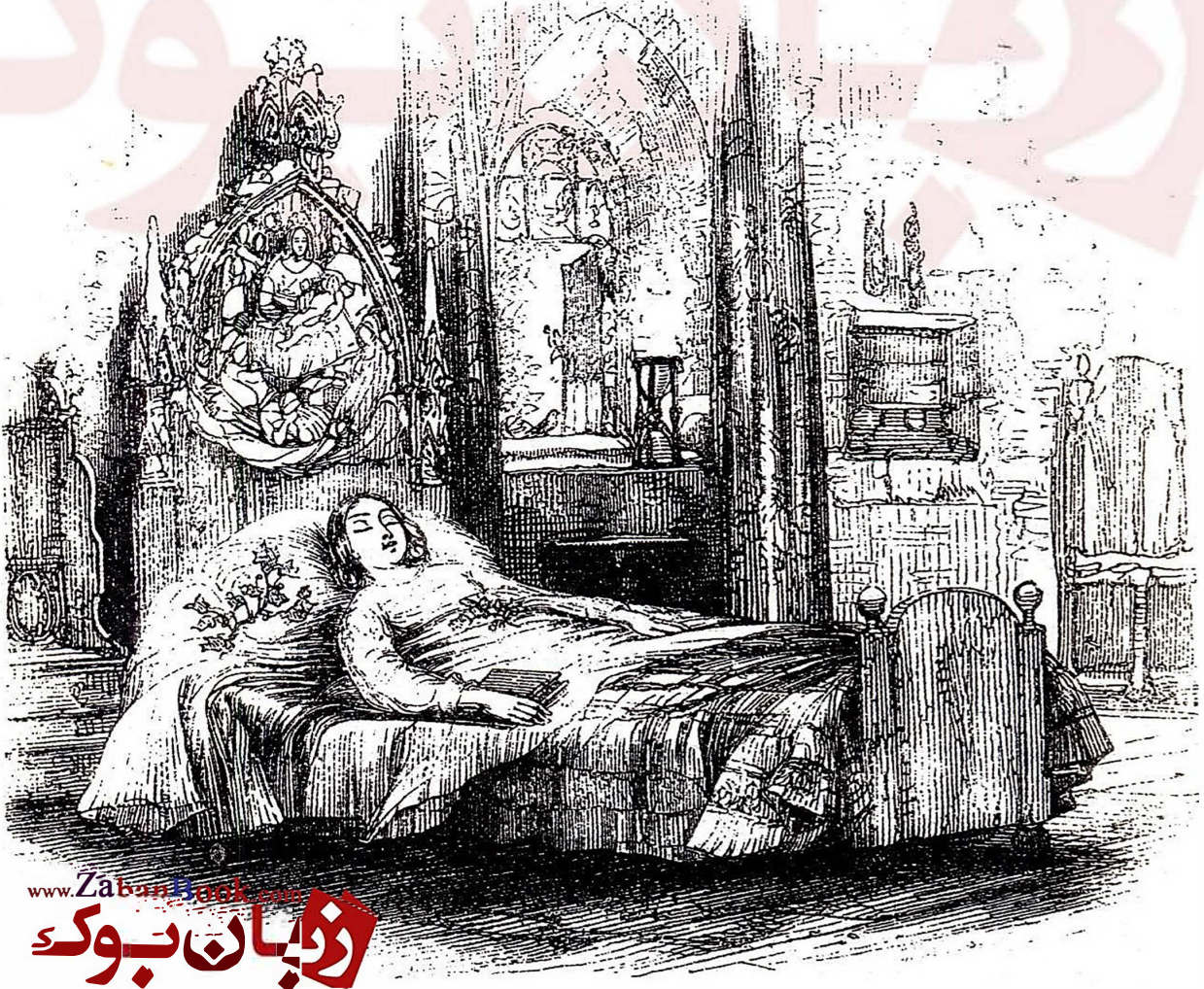
"To be Mrs. Quilp the second, when Mrs. Quilp the first is dead, sweet Nell," said Quilp, wrinkling up his eyes and luring her towards



bird—a poor slight thing the pressure of a finger would have crushed—was stirring nimbly in its cage; and the strong heart of its child-mistress was mute and motionless for ever.

Where were the traces of her early cares, her sufferings, and fatigues? All gone. Sorrow was dead indeed in her, but peace and perfect happiness were born; imaged in her tranquil beauty and profound repose.

And still her former self lay there, unaltered in this change. Yes. The old fireside had smiled upon that same sweet face; it had passed like a dream through haunts of misery and care; at the door of the poor school-master on the summer evening, before the furnace fire upon the cold wet night, at the still bedside of the dying boy, there had been the same mild lovely look. So shall we know the angels in their majesty, after death.



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The old man held one languid arm in his, and had the small hand tight folded to his breast, for warmth. It was the hand she had stretched out to him with her last smile—the hand that had led him on through all their wanderings. Ever and anon he pressed it to his lips; then hugged it to his breast again, murmuring that it was warmer now;



Single gentlemen

Sulando }

Notary }

Bert }

Barbara }

Mothers }

Little Jacob  
and  
the baby }

The sisters }

Coddin }

Shut }

Mrs. Taylor &amp;c }

Man at pinner's pie

Dr. H. Swallow }

Inchman's }

Chancellor }

Mrs. Quilp }

Tom Scott }

Lampoon drama }

Sally }

Schoolmaster

Bachelor ✓

Lyon - vt

Miss Morfathurst

Sam Grouse }

Grace list }

Jowl }

vt Young Hunt





Memorandum on characters

Single gentleman	Schoolmaster
Garlands	Bachelor
Notary	Sexton—qy
Kit	Miss Monflathers no
Barbara	Jem Groves
Mothers	Isaac List
Little Jacob	Jowl
and	qy Young Trent
the baby	

The Sisters  
 Codlin  
 Short  
 M<sup>rs</sup> Jarley &c  
 Man at furnace fire  
 Dick Swiveller  
 Marchioness  
 Chuckster  
 M<sup>rs</sup> Quilp  
 Tom Scott  
 Sampson Brass  
 Sally

[Memorandum on the Brothers]

Single gentleman and old man brothers—  
 loved the same girl—she married the elder  
 brother, had a daughter, and died. (Upon) In  
 this daughter, the father's affections were  
 (t) centred—She married a profligate, endured  
 great misery, had a son and daughter, and  
 died too. The grandfather—nearly ruined by  
 her husband—takes them both to rear. The  
 son turns out like the father; the daughter  
 like the mother. The old man devotes his  
 whole soul to the picture of his favorite  
 child; the other runs wild (and)

So the old man and child in opening of story

The younger brother when the elder married, (h.)  
 went abroad, and there remained, communicating  
 with the elder from time to time, but not often. At  
 length begins to sigh for home. Dreams of his brother—  
 of the old days—settles his affairs, and returns—  
 Brother and child have disappeared

So the single gentleman when he first pursued.

## APPENDIX C

### Contents of *Master Humphrey's Clock*, 1840–1841

<i>Monthly Part</i>	<i>Date 1840</i>	<i>Weekly No.</i>	<i>Contents</i>
	4 Apr.	1.	Master Humphrey, from his Clock-Side in the Chimney-Corner; The Clock-Case: Introduction to the Giant Chronicles
	11	2.	First Night of the Giant Chronicles; Correspondence
	18	3.	Master Humphrey, from his Clock-Side in the Chimney-Corner; The Clock-Case; A Confession found in a Prison in the Time of Charles the Second
April	25	4.	<i>Personal Adventures of Master Humphrey: The Old Curiosity Shop</i> ; Correspondence
	2 May	5.	Master Humphrey's Visitor; Mr Pickwick's Tale
	9	6.	Second Chapter of Mr Pickwick's Tale; Further Particulars of Master Humphrey's Visitor
	16	7.	The Clock; <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> : Ch. 2
May	23	8.	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> : Chs. 3 and 4
	30	9.	Mr Weller's Watch; <i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> : Ch. 5
	6 June	10.	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> : Chs. 6 and 7
	13	11.	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> : Ch. 8; Master Humphrey from his Clock-Side in the Chimney-Corner
	20	12.	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i> : Chs. 9 and 10
June	27	13.	” Chs. 11 and 12
	4 July	14.	” Chs. 13 and 14



the driver. In Browne's illustration the phaeton appears smaller than the chaise used when all three Garlands travel together.

488 *Strew then . . . blushes*: 'Strew then, oh! strew our bed of rushes, | Here we must rest till morning blushes'; a couplet from Thomas Moore's glee 'Oh Lady Fair'.

491 *Since laws . . . in me*: 'Since laws were made for ev'ry degree, | To curb vice in others, as well as me, | I wonder we han't better company | Upon Tyburn tree!', a song sung by Macheath at the end of *The Beggar's Opera*, III. xiii. Dickens originally wrote all four lines, but deleted the last two in his MS.

*scot-free*: unpunished.

492 *hobbled*: a reminder that Abel has a club foot.

497 *feelings . . . all*: an allusion to 'One touch of nature makes the whole world kin', *Troilus and Cressida*, III. iii.

*heap coals . . . head*: 'Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head'; Romans 12: 20.

*But I am a falling . . . fly from me*: proverbial references to rats fleeing from falling houses or sinking ships occur from the sixteenth century onwards. Dickens reiterates that 'it [the house] is a ruin and the rats fly from it' in *Dombey and Son* (1848), chap. 59.

498 *split*: betray the secrets of one's accomplice (slang).

501 *bite the lid*: a cut made here is given in Appendix A.

502 *And she . . . to spare*: 'And ye sall walk in silk attire, | And siller hae to spare', the first lines of 'The Siller Crown' by Susan Blamire (1747–94).

503 *the cloud . . . house*: an allusion to the beginning of Gloucester's soliloquy, 'Now is the winter of our discontent | Made glorious summer by this sun of York, | And all the clouds that lowered upon our house, | In the deep bosom of the ocean buried' (*Richard III*, I. i).

504 *spend the evening*: a cut made here is given in Appendix A.

505 *Banshee*: in Celtic folklore, a spirit whose howling foretells death.

510 *swung in chains*: until 1827 the bodies of pirates who had been hanged at Execution Dock, Wapping, and been washed over by three tides, were then strung from gibbets in chains. Thus Quilp's death befits his piratical life.

511 *newsmonger*: i.e. the newspaper-reading turnkey.

513 *plum-cake*: fruit cake.

520 *ancient buffalo*: a circumlocution for the slang term 'old buffer'; an old-fashioned person.

*the sex*: the fair sex; a term used in Restoration drama.

*execution*: destruction in the war of the sexes.

521 *postboy*: postilion.

*rumble*: unenclosed space, used for servants or luggage.

523 *there were . . . watchful*: Master Humphrey, the original narrator of the tale, was a cripple.

- 530 *oriel window*: Cattermole prepared his illustration before Dickens had decided on the physical details of the scene. So he showed light coming from a ground-floor window, uncurtained and set into the walls, not from one of the oriel windows mentioned in Chapter 46 as characteristic of the building.
- 532 *Ashes, and dust, and ruin!*: as in Chapter 46, the building formed from ancient monastic ruins is associated with echoes of the burial service which, in their turn, introduce echoes of the final scene of *King Lear*. Kit is like Kent, a faithful servant, formerly rejected and now unknown, while the old man re-enacts Lear's mixture of grief at Cordelia's death and belief that she may yet speak to him again.
- 535 *Happier . . . conceive*: a combination of biblical and Shakespearean echoes, perhaps unconscious. Cf. 'But as it is written [i.e. in Isaiah 64: 4], Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him' (1 Corinthians 2: 9); 'how far thou dost excel | No thought can think, nor tongue of mortal tell' (*Love's Labour's Lost*, IV. iii); 'Tongue nor heart cannot conceive, nor name thee!' (*Macbeth*, II. iii); 'a love that makes breath poor and speech unable' (*King Lear*, I. i).
- 541 *so young, so beautiful, so good*: quoted from the words Dickens wrote for the inscription on Mary Hogarth's grave: 'Young, beautiful, and good, God numbered her with His angels at the early age of seventeen.'
- 543 *to Heaven*: a cut made here is given in Appendix A.
- 546 *Chapter the Last*: the tone of the description of the sentencing and imprisonment of Sampson Brass is reminiscent of such eighteenth-century satire as Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) and Goldsmith's *Citizen of the World* (1762).
- magic reel*: like the magic ball of thread lent to Theseus by Ariadne which rolled in front of him to guide him through the Labyrinth to the Minotaur. Having slain the monster, Theseus rewound the thread, or clue, in order to find his way out. For this version of the story Robert Graves cited as his sources Plutarch's *Life of Theseus*, 29, and Apollodorus, *Epitome*, I. 8 (*The Greek Myths* (Harmondsworth, 1955), under 98.k).
- 547 *friendly bond*: i.e. bail.
- travel . . . parts*: suffer transportation.
- 548 *St Giles's*: Forster records that, even as a boy, Dickens had 'a profound attraction of repulsion' for this notorious slum area that covered Seven Dials and what is now New Oxford St. (I, 1). Most of it was demolished and rebuilt, 1844–7.
- 549 *Italian image lad*: one of the Italian boys who hawked cheap plaster statuettes in the London streets.
- 550 *Old Parr*: Thomas Parr, buried in Westminster Abbey, lived—according to his memorial—from 1483 to 1635.
- 551 *full nineteen years of age*: a detail that indicates how close in age she was to Nell.
- smoking-box*: a hut set aside for smoking, since gentlemen did not smoke in the presence of ladies. A larger house would have had a smoking-room.



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CHARLES DICKENS

THE OLD CURIOSITY SHOP

Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Elizabeth M. Brennan

'... holding her solitary way among a crowd of wild, grotesque companions; the only pure, fresh, youthful object in the throng.'

Little Nell cares for her grandfather in the gloomy surroundings of his curiosity shop. Reduced to poverty, the pair flee London, pursued by the evil and vindictive Quilp. In a bizarre, often comic kaleidoscope of events and characters, the story reaches its tragic climax, an ending that famously devastated its earliest readers. Dickens's only improvised novel blends naturalism and allegory to encompass both the actual blight of Victorian industrialization and textual echoes of Bunyan, Shakespeare, and the Romantic poets. Contrasting youth and old age, beauty and deformity, innocence and cynicism, *The Old Curiosity Shop* is a compelling tale of humour and brooding menace.

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