



AN ODD COUPLE

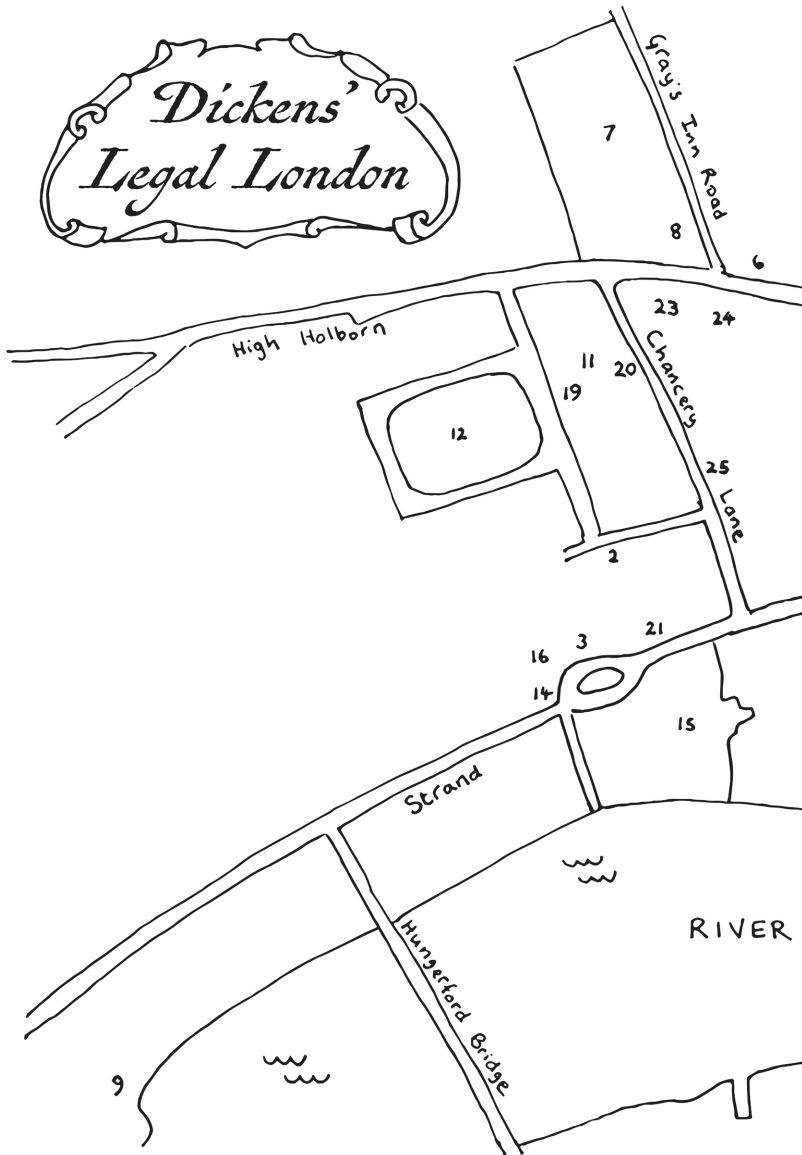
FROM *DICKENS AND HIS LAWYERS*

Paul Howcroft

Searches for “dickens” / 5 “bleak house” on Westlaw turn up 330 citations in judicial opinions and 857 citations in secondary sources. Those are big numbers for Charles Dickens and his *Bleak House*, with its famous *Jarndyce v. Jarndyce*. But searches for “dickens” / 5 “david copperfield” turn up just 34 hits in judicial opinions and 114 in secondary sources. Similarly, “dickens” / 5 “great expectations” delivers just 13 hits in judicial opinions and 126 in secondary sources. The citation counts are even lower for his other novels. Why might that be, even though several of his books are literary classics, rich in lawyers and legal material? Perhaps it is because we lawyers never knew (or have forgotten) just how much we have to learn from (and enjoy in) Dickens, and how much light (and heat as well, perhaps) his works beyond *Bleak House* can bring to our work as advocates, judges, and teachers. Paul Howcroft’s *Dickens and his Lawyers* is a compact and entertaining yet comprehensive and scholarly cure for what ails us. We present here one example: his chapter on *Our Mutual Friend* – a story that has been cited no more than a half-dozen times in works on law practice or professional responsibility. Soon you will be thinking, oh, the opportunities missed! Enjoy.

— The Editors

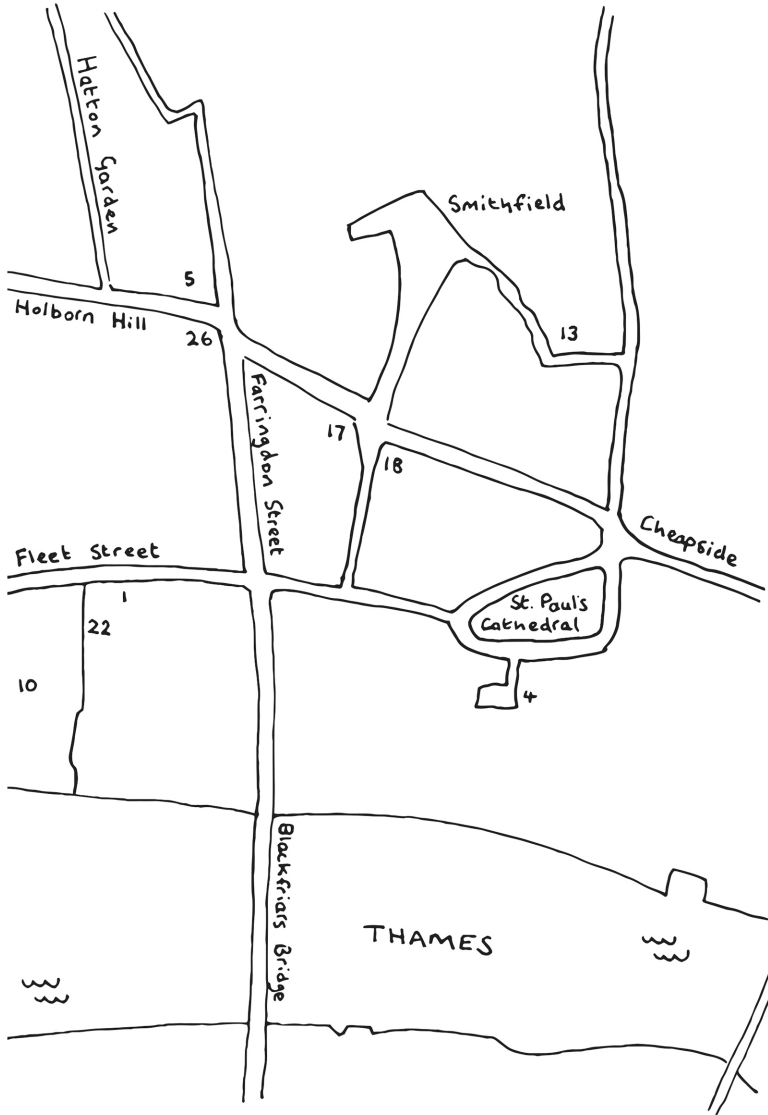
Paul Howcroft is an English solicitor advocate who specialized in civil litigation and practiced in London throughout his career as a partner in firms in the City of London and Holborn. He retired in 2016 and now lives in Devon. This article (and the accompanying map) first appeared as a chapter (and the lead illustration) in Howcroft’s book, DICKENS AND HIS LAWYERS (Talbot Publishing 2023), and are reprinted here with permission from the author and the publisher. Copyright 2023 Paul Howcroft. We confess to making a small handful of slight, non-substantive changes (e.g., positioning of footnote calls) for the benefit of some of our more easily distracted American readers.



Key

- | | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Barnard's Inn | 5. Ely Place | 10. Inner Temple |
| 2. Carey Street | 6. Furnival's Inn | 11. Lincoln's Inn |
| 3. Clement's Inn | 7. Gray's Inn | 12. Lincoln's Inn Fields |
| 4. Doctors' Commons | 8. Holborn Court | 13. Little Britain |
| | 9. Hungerford Stairs | 14. Lyon's Inn |

An Odd Couple



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|--------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| 15. Middle Temple | 19. Old Hall, Lincoln's Inn | 23. Southampton Buildings |
| 16. New Inn | 20. Old Square | 24. Staple Inn |
| 17. Newgate Prison | 21. Royal Courts of Justice | 25. Symonds Inn |
| 18. Old Bailey | 22. Serjeants' Inn | 26. Thavies Inn |

PASSING OVER THE LAWYER-SPARSE *Barnaby Rudge*, Dickens' next novel, and his last to be completed, was *Our Mutual Friend*. It was published from May 1864 to November 1865. When assembled as a book, it is a weighty tome with a complex plot. Page by page, Dickens writes with his characteristic flare, which makes for an entertaining read, but the overabundance of characters and story-lines can at times bewilder.

The themes are of social mobility, money, greed, death and rebirth, with the river Thames playing more than a bit part. It is on the river that the book begins, with another of Dickens' great opening images. In the autumn dusk, a man is being rowed by his unhappy young daughter, Lizzie Hexham, as he pursues his occupation. He is equipped with a rusty boat-hook and a coil of rope and he is 'on the look out' for floating corpses. He makes his living by emptying their pockets before taking them ashore. After publication, there was a debate about whether such an occupation really existed,¹ but that hardly matters.

Two of the main characters in *Our Mutual Friend* are lawyers and very close friends. They are Mortimer Lightwood, a solicitor and attorney, and Eugene Wrayburn, a barrister. For present purposes, it is unnecessary to set out the whole labyrinthine plot of the book, and although the lawyers form more than a sub-plot, it is possible to confine their story as follows. Neither has any enthusiasm for legal practice, and they mostly avoid it; they are both over-privileged, selfish and snobbish. Wrayburn falls in love with Lizzie, aged 19 or 20, who is also pursued by a teacher called Bradley Headstone. This rivalry is intense and becomes violent. Headstone almost kills Wrayburn and as it seems that he will soon expire, he is able to marry Lizzie, to save her reputation without fear of the lasting consequences for both of his marrying so far beneath his social status. During the latter events, Wrayburn is morally redeemed, and his unexpected survival provides a happy outcome.

The two lawyers had known each other since school days and are as close as any of Dickens' couples. They live together and at least sleep in the same room, and when Wrayburn believes he is on his death-bed he tells another character that he and Lightwood "have long been much more

¹ 'Table Talk,' *Once a Week*, (September 1869), 152.

An Odd Couple

than brothers,” and he asks Lightwood to kiss him and “touch my face with yours.” The modern reader may well reach a conclusion about the relationship, and yet surely Dickens would not have meant that.² Unlike his two characters, he did not experience public school, and as the most famous and respected mid-Victorian novelist, even read by Queen Victoria, he was unlikely to want to break shocking new ground. On the other hand, he was far from un-worldly, and if it occurred to him that even a small proportion of his readers might suspect that these lawyers had a criminal practice,³ he might have been happy to let them.

Although Lightwood is later described as an ‘eminent solicitor’ in the newspapers, any such eminence must have been social rather than professional. In any event, it was sufficient for him to be invited to a dinner party at the home of Mr and Mrs Veneering, where he first appears in the novel. Inevitably he is accompanied by Wrayburn, who is seen to be ‘gloomily resorting to the champagne chalice whenever proffered.’ It seems that the Veneerings aspire status by inviting various people of the better classes to their events, pretending to be the oldest of friends. Lightwood does not even know his hosts and is reluctant when invited to talk. Eventually he gives in and tells of one of his legal matters, which is in fact almost his only. It concerns the death of a client who was “a tremendous old rascal who made his money by Dust,”⁴ the finding of a will, and the deceased’s son being on his way to come into a vast fortune.

Then, by remarkable coincidence, Lightwood receives a message that the son, called John Harmon, has been found drowned, and with papers that refer to Lightwood. The finders were of course Lizzie and her father, and the message has been brought by Lizzie’s younger brother. Lightwood and Wrayburn go with the boy to the scene, and with the boy riding outside the carriage, the two lawyers discuss how they came to the legal profession. Given their long and close association, it is odd that they did not already know, but Dickens needs to tell the reader.

² Exceptionally close male bonding was a feature of Victorian literature, as in Tennyson’s *In Memoriam*.

³ Credit to *Round the Horn*’s Julian and Sandy (of Bona Law) for that pun.

⁴ That is he collected and piled domestic rubbish, which would have included ash from fires. Apart from coal dust, there was ‘vegetable dust, bone dust, crockery dust, rough dust and sifted dust.’

“Let me see,” said Mortimer, as they went along; “I have been, Eugene, upon the honourable roll of solicitors of the High Court of Chancery, and attorneys at Common Law, five years; and – except gratuitously taking instructions, on an average once a fortnight, for the will of Lady Tippins who has nothing to leave – I have had no scrap of business but this romantic business.”

“And I,” said Eugene, “have been ‘called’ seven years,⁵ and have had no business at all, and never shall have any. And if I had, I shouldn’t know how to do it.”

“I am far from being clear as to the last particular,” returned Mortimer, with great composure, “that I have much advantage over you.”

“I hate,” said Eugene, putting his legs up on the opposite seat, “I hate my profession.”

“Shall I incommode you, if I put mine up too?” returned Mortimer. “Thank you. I hate mine.”

“It was forced upon me,” said the gloomy Eugene, “because it was understood that we wanted a barrister in the family. We have got a precious one.”

“It was forced upon me,” said Mortimer, “because it was understood that we wanted a solicitor in the family. And we have got a precious one.”

“There are four of us, with our names painted on a door-post in right of one black hole called a set of chambers,” said Eugene; “and each of us has the fourth of a clerk – Cassim Baba,⁶ in the robber’s cave – and Cassim is the only respectable member of the party.”

“I am one by myself, one,” said Mortimer, “high up an awful staircase commanding a burial-ground, and I have a whole clerk to myself, and he has nothing to do but look at the burial-ground, and what he will turn out when arrived at maturity, I cannot conceive. Whether, in that shabby rook’s nest, he is always plotting wisdom, or plotting murder; whether he will grow up, after so much solitary brooding, to enlighten his fellow-creatures, or to poison them; is

⁵ Called to the bar, that is become qualified.

⁶ The greedy and villainous older brother of Ali Baba in *The Arabian Nights*.

An Odd Couple

the only speck of interest that presents itself to my professional view. Will you give me a light? Thank you.”

“Then idiots talk,” said Eugene, leaning back, folding his arms, smoking with his eyes shut, and speaking slightly through his nose, “of Energy. If there is a word in the dictionary under any letter from A to Z that I abominate, it is energy. It is such a conventional superstition, such parrot gabble! What the deuce! Am I to rush out into the street, collar the first man of a wealthy appearance that I meet, shake him, and say, ‘Go to law upon the spot, you dog, and retain me, or I’ll be the death of you’? Yet that would be energy.”

“Precisely my view of the case, Eugene. But show me a good opportunity, show me something really worth being energetic about, and I’ll show you energy.”

“And so will I,” said Eugene.

To which Dickens adds

And it is likely enough that ten thousand other young men, within the limits of the London Post-office town delivery, made the same hopeful remark in the course of the same evening.

Dickens makes these lawyers unlikeable, not by the usual depiction of greed and dishonesty, but by idleness and decadence, which were perhaps greater sins in Victorian eyes. As a young man, Dickens was energetic but could not pursue a legal career for lack of means. He must have despised those who had the means, qualified and yet wasted the opportunity. He inevitably makes these characters unsympathetic.

The two old school friends would rather cut themselves off from the world and enjoy each other other’s company.

They had newly agreed to set up a joint establishment together. They had taken a bachelor cottage near Hampton, on the brink of the Thames, with a lawn, and a boat-house; and all things fitting, and were to float with the stream through the summer and the Long Vacation.

Whilst still in London and in Lightwood’s chambers, the two lawyers

‘their dinner done, . . . turned towards the fire to smoke . . . the coffee-house waiter was gone, the plates and dishes were gone, the wine was going – but not in the same direction.

"The wind sounds up here," quoth Eugene, stirring the fire, "as if we were keeping a lighthouse. I wish we were."

"Don't you think it would bore us?" Lightwood asked.

"Not more than any other place. And there would be no Circuit⁷ to go. But that's a selfish consideration, personal to ME."

"And no clients to come," added Lightwood. "Not that that's a selfish consideration at all personal to ME."

"If we were on an isolated rock in a stormy sea," said Eugene, smoking with his eyes on the fire, "Lady Tippins couldn't put off to visit us, or, better still, might put off and get swamped. People couldn't ask one to wedding breakfasts. There would be no Precedents to hammer at, except the plain-sailing Precedent of keeping the light up. It would be exciting to look out for wrecks."

"But otherwise," suggested Lightwood, "there might be a degree of sameness in the life."

"I have thought of that also," said Eugene, as if he really had been considering the subject in its various bearings with an eye to the business; "but it would be a defined and limited monotony. It would not extend beyond two people. Now, it's a question with me, Mortimer, whether a monotony defined with that precision and limited to that extent, might not be more endurable than the unlimited monotony of one's fellow-creatures."

As Lightwood laughed and passed the wine, he remarked, "We shall have an opportunity, in our boating summer, of trying the question."

"An imperfect one," Eugene acquiesced, with a sigh, "but so we shall. I hope we may not prove too much for one another."

Despite having virtually no practice, Lightwood also has a clerk. He is a poor boy called Blight, and Dickens tells that

Whosoever had gone out of Fleet Street into the Temple at the date of this history, and had wandered disconsolate about the Temple until he stumbled on a dismal churchyard, and had looked up at the dismal windows commanding that churchyard until at the

⁷ Judges and their courts would go on a circuit of cities to conduct trials.

An Odd Couple

most dismal window of them all he saw a dismal boy, would in him have beheld, at one grand comprehensive swoop of the eye, the managing clerk, junior clerk, common-law clerk, conveyancing clerk, chancery clerk, every refinement and department of clerk, of Mr Mortimer Lightwood, erewhile called in the newspapers eminent solicitor.

In connection with the Harmon will, the new beneficiary, Mr Boffin, comes to visit the ‘dusty eyrie’ to meet Lightwood. Boffin tells the clerk that he has an appointment, which gives him an opportunity to pretend that he has a real job in a busy practice.

Young Blight made a great show of fetching from his desk a long thin manuscript volume with a brown paper cover, and running his finger down the day’s appointments, murmuring, “Mr Aggs, Mr Baggs, Mr Caggs, Mr Daggs, Mr Faggs, Mr Gaggs, Mr Boffin. Yes, sir; quite right. You are a little before your time, sir. Mr Lightwood will be in directly.

“. . . I’ll take the opportunity, if you please, of entering your name in our Callers’ Book for the day.” Young Blight made another great show of changing the volume, taking up a pen, sucking it, dipping it, and running over previous entries before he wrote. As, “Mr Alley, Mr Balley, Mr Calley, Mr Dalley, Mr Falley, Mr Galley, Mr Halley, Mr Lalley, Mr Malley. And Mr Boffin.”

“Strict system here; eh, my lad?” said Mr Boffin, as he was booked.

“Yes, sir,” returned the boy. “I couldn’t get on without it.”

By which he probably meant that his mind would have been shattered to pieces without this fiction of an occupation. Wearing in his solitary confinement no fetters that he could polish, and being provided with no drinking-cup that he could carve, he had fallen on the device of ringing alphabetical changes into the two volumes in question, or of entering vast numbers of persons out of the Directory as transacting business with Mr Lightwood. It was the more necessary for his spirits, because, being of a sensitive temperament, he was apt to consider it personally disgraceful to himself that his master had no clients.

It is difficult not to feel sorry for the poor lad, who having secured a respectable position, had little to do and had no hope of gaining experience

nor any prospects of advancement. Boffin engages him in conversation, and more is revealed. He has been ‘in the law’ for three years. When asked if he likes it, he says “I don’t mind it much,” to which Dickens adds ‘as if its bitterness were past.’ Blight wishes he was earning fifteen shillings a week, but gets half that. Asked by Boffin how long it would take the boy to become a judge, the boy responds

that he had not yet quite worked out that little calculation. “I suppose there’s nothing to prevent your going in for it?” said Mr Boffin. The boy virtually replied that as he had the honour to be a Briton who never never never, there was nothing to prevent his going in for it. Yet he seemed inclined to suspect that there might be something to prevent his coming out with it.

While Boffin waits, he sat

staring at a little bookcase of Law Practice and Law Reports, and at a window, and at an empty blue bag, and at a stick of sealing-wax, and a pen, and a box of wafers, and an apple, and a writing-pad – all very dusty – and at a number of inky smears and blots, and at an imperfectly-disguised gun-case pretending to be something legal, and at an iron box labelled HARMON ESTATE, until Mr Lightwood appeared.

The lawyer explained that he came from the proctors, with whom he had been transacting Boffin’s affairs. Not realising that Lightwood’s weariness was chronic, Boffin remarks “they seem to have taken a deal out of you.” Having confirmed to Boffin that he has inherited a vast fortune, Lightwood advises in a cavalier and arrogant manner, making it clear that he cares little for this client who any other lawyer would be delighted to have.

This arrogance and languid aloofness is the hallmark of both Lightwood and Wrayburn in dealing with others, especially anyone of lesser status. For example, the conversation after dinner, set out earlier, is interrupted by the arrival of a stranger. Wrayburn had been looking out over the nearby graveyard, and then he sees someone at his door. He remarks to Lightwood

“Apparently one of the ghosts has lost its way, and dropped in to be directed. Look at this phantom!”

An Odd Couple

Lightwood, whose back was towards the door, turned his head, and there, in the darkness of the entry, stood a something in the likeness of a man: to whom he addressed the not irrelevant inquiry, "Who the devil are you?"

"I ask your pardons, Governors," replied the ghost, in a hoarse double-barrelled whisper, "but might either on you be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"What do you mean by not knocking at the door?" demanded Mortimer.

"I ask your pardons, Governors," replied the ghost, as before, "but probable you was not aware your door stood open."

"What do you want?"

Hereunto the ghost again hoarsely replied, in its double-barrelled manner, "I ask your pardons, Governors, but might one on you be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"One of us is," said the owner of that name.

"All right, Governors Both," returned the ghost, carefully closing the room door; "tickler business."

Mortimer lighted the candles. They showed the visitor to be an ill-looking visitor with a squinting leer, who, as he spoke, fumbled at an old sodden fur cap, formless and mangey, that looked like a furry animal, dog or cat, puppy or kitten, drowned and decaying.

"Now," said Mortimer, "what is it?"

"Governors Both," returned the man, in what he meant to be a wheedling tone, "which on you might be Lawyer Lightwood?"

"I am."

"Lawyer Lightwood," ducking at him with a servile air, "I am a man as gets my living, and as seeks to get my living, by the sweat of my brow. Not to risk being done out of the sweat of my brow, by any chances, I should wish afore going further to be sworn in."

"I am not a swearer in of people, man."

The visitor, clearly anything but reliant on this assurance, doggedly muttered "Alfred David."

Paul Howcroft

"Is that your name?" asked Lightwood.

"My name?" returned the man. "No; I want to take a Alfred David."

(Which Eugene, smoking and contemplating him, interpreted as meaning Affidavit.)

"I tell you, my good fellow," said Lightwood, with his indolent laugh, "that I have nothing to do with swearing."

"He can swear AT you," Eugene explained; "and so can I. But we can't do more for you."

Much discomfited by this information, the visitor turned the drowned dog or cat, puppy or kitten, about and about, and looked from one of the Governors Both to the other of the Governors Both, while he deeply considered within himself.

As the novel develops, Wrayburn becomes the more prominent of the two, due to his romantic feelings for Lizzie. The backdrop is revealed in his discussions with Lightwood, and it concerns the intentions of Wrayburn's father.

"Now, regarding your respected father," said Lightwood, bringing him to a subject they had expressly appointed to discuss: always the most slippery eel of eels of subjects to lay hold of.

"Yes, regarding my respected father," assented Eugene, settling himself in his arm-chair. "I would rather have approached my respected father by candlelight, as a theme requiring a little artificial brilliancy; but we will take him by twilight, enlivened with a glow of Wallsend."

He stirred the fire again as he spoke, and having made it blaze, resumed.

"My respected father has found, down in the parental neighbourhood, a wife for his not-generally-respected son."

"With some money, of course?"

"With some money, of course, or he would not have found her. My respected father – let me shorten the dutiful tautology by substituting in future M.R.F., which sounds military, and rather like the Duke of Wellington."

"What an absurd fellow you are, Eugene!"

An Odd Couple

“Not at all, I assure you. M.R.F. having always in the clearest manner provided (as he calls it) for his children by pre-arranging from the hour of the birth of each, and sometimes from an earlier period, what the devoted little victim’s calling and course in life should be, M.R.F. pre-arranged for myself that I was to be the barrister I am (with the slight addition of an enormous practice, which has not accrued), and also the married man I am not.”

“The first you have often told me.”

“The first I have often told you. Considering myself sufficiently incongruous on my legal eminence, I have until now suppressed my domestic destiny. You know M.R.F., but not as well as I do. If you knew him as well as I do, he would amuse you.”

“Filially spoken, Eugene!”

“Perfectly so, believe me; and with every sentiment of affectionate deference towards M.R.F. But if he amuses me, I can’t help it. When my eldest brother was born, of course the rest of us knew (I mean the rest of us would have known, if we had been in existence) that he was heir to the Family Embarrassments — we call it before the company the Family Estate. But when my second brother was going to be born by-and-by, “this,” says M.R.F., “is a little pillar of the church.” WAS born, and became a pillar of the church; a very shaky one. My third brother appeared, considerably in advance of his engagement to my mother; but M.R.F., not at all put out by surprise, instantly declared him a Circumnavigator. Was pitchforked into the Navy, but has not circumnavigated. I announced myself and was disposed of with the highly satisfactory results embodied before you. When my younger brother was half an hour old, it was settled by M.R.F. that he should have a mechanical genius. And so on. Therefore I say that M.R.F. amuses me.”

“Touching the lady, Eugene.”

“There M.R.F. ceases to be amusing, because my intentions are opposed to touching the lady.”

“Do you know her?”

“Not in the least.”

“Hadn’t you better see her?”

“My dear Mortimer, you have studied my character. Could I possibly go down there, labelled ‘ELIGIBLE. ON VIEW,’ and meet the lady, similarly labelled? Anything to carry out M.R.F.’s arrangements, I am sure, with the greatest pleasure – except matrimony. Could I possibly support it? I, so soon bored, so constantly, so fatally?”

“But you are not a consistent fellow, Eugene.”

“In susceptibility to boredom,” returned that worthy, “I assure you I am the most consistent of mankind.”

“Why, it was but now that you were dwelling in the advantages of a monotony of two.”

“In a lighthouse. Do me the justice to remember the condition. In a lighthouse.”

Mortimer laughed again, and Eugene, having laughed too for the first time, as if he found himself on reflection rather entertaining, relapsed into his usual gloom, and drowsily said, as he enjoyed his cigar, “No, there is no help for it; one of the prophetic deliveries of M.R.F. must for ever remain unfulfilled. With every disposition to oblige him, he must submit to a failure.”

Even if Lightwood has not yet understood it, Wrayburn’s opposition to his father’s wishes may be partly because there was some element of ‘love at first sight,’ when he first encountered Lizzie. It happened after a dramatic episode that included the death of Lizzie’s father and Wrayburn’s observing the poor girl through her window,

It passed into Mortimer Lightwood’s mind that a change of some sort, best expressed perhaps as an intensification of all that was wildest and most negligent and reckless in his friend, had come upon him in the last half-hour or so. Thoroughly used to him as he was, he found something new and strained in him that was for the moment perplexing. This passed into his mind, and passed out again; but he remembered it afterwards.

It becomes clear that Wrayburn has taken a particular interest in Lizzie. Lightwood is ‘astonished by his friend’s unusual heat’ in opposing the arrest of the girl. Wrayburn strives to help and advance the girl by paying for her to have some education, although she takes some persuasion, understandably distrusting Wrayburn’s motives. The arrangement gives rise to suspicion

An Odd Couple

and resentment on the part of the teacher Bradley Headstone, who has a passion for the girl. Headstone is her brother's teacher and he persuades the boy that Wrayburn's intentions must be dishonourable, and Headstone and the boy visit Lightwood and Wrayburn's chambers for what becomes a heated confrontation.

With his 'pernicious assumption of lassitude and indifference, which had become his second nature,' Wrayburn gives Headstone 'a cruel look, in its cold disdain of him, as a creature of no worth.' Headstone and the boy demand to know why Wrayburn is paying for Lizzie's education and they sneer at Wrayburn who just blows off the feathery ash of his cigar.

The infuriated Headstone accuses Wrayburn of ingratiating himself by encouraging Lizzie in romantic notions about the death of her father, rather than about Wrayburn himself, in order to gain her gratitude. He repeatedly makes such serious and offensive assertions, being inflamed all the more by Wrayburn's disdain. At one stage Headstone says to Wrayburn, 'speaking in a carefully weighed and measured tone, or he could not have spoken at all,' "You think me of no more value than the dirt under your feet," to which Wrayburn responds, "I assure you, Schoolmaster, I don't think about you."

Being of humble origins, Headstone accuses Wrayburn of reviling him with the meanness of his birth, but Wrayburn hints at Headstone's ulterior motive. The closest he gets to expressing it is when he asks "Are you her schoolmaster as well as her brother's? — Or perhaps you would like to be." 'It was a stab that the blood followed in its rush to Bradley Headstone's face, as swiftly as if it had been dealt with a dagger.'

After the encounter terminates, the two lawyers discuss Wrayburn's involvement with the girl. When pressed by Lightwood, Wrayburn sets out his position. He will not capture and desert the girl. He does not design to marry her, and nor does he design to pursue her. He does not design anything, explaining, "I am incapable of designs." However, he can not answer the questions: "What is to come of it? What are you doing? Where are you going?" Wrayburn merely says that he is a "troublesome conundrum, long abandoned" by himself.

Headstone's feelings are rather more obvious. He later stalks Wrayburn who goads and infuriates the schoolmaster by leading him on all over London. Wrayburn sometimes takes cabs to drain the pocket of his fol-

lower who must do the same. One night Lightwood joins Wrayburn on such an excursion to Bethnal Green for the fun ‘of the chase.’ When they return, Lightwood cannot sleep as he “cannot lose sight of that fellow’s face.” “Odd,” says Wrayburn with a light laugh, “I can” and ‘turned over, and fell asleep again.’

There is later quite an action-packed and drawn-out adventure as the two protagonists seek Lizzie who has run away, and Headstone attacks Wrayburn, leaving him dying. He is rescued and taken to what seems his death-bed. This is a very different Wrayburn; a seemingly reformed character. An “harassing anxiety . . . gnaws and wears” him. He says to his friend

“Mortimer, while I lie here, and when I lie here no longer, I trust to you that the perpetrator is never brought to justice. . . . Her innocent reputation would be ruined, my friend. She would be punished, not he. I have wronged her enough in fact; I have wronged her still more in intention. You recollect what pavement is said to be made of good intentions. It is made of bad intentions too.

“. . . the man must never be pursued. If he should be accused, you must keep him silent and save him. Don’t think of avenging me; think only of hushing the story and protecting her. You can confuse the case, and turn aside the circumstances.

“The guilty man, brought to justice, would poison her name. Let the guilty man go unpunished. Lizzie and my reparation before all! Promise me!”

As Wrayburn lies dying, semi-conscious, for days, he keeps muttering Lizzie’s name. He eventually asks Lightwood to do one last action for him: “speak to her and tell her what I beseech of her.” When asked what he means, Wrayburn is unable to remember the words to use, but eventually manages “wife.” Moments later, his lucidity having apparently returned, he tells Lightwood

“Don’t be uneasy for me while you are gone. If my dear brave girl will take me, I feel persuaded that I shall live long enough to be married, dear fellow.”

And so it comes to pass. Amidst Wrayburn’s melodramatic fadings away, they marry, and Wrayburn humbly tells his bride that she has made

An Odd Couple

a poor marriage to “a shattered and graceless fellow.” However, the power of love being what it is, he survives. Surprisingly, his father approves of the marriage, although Lady Tippins, being representative of society, condemns Wrayburn’s marriage to ‘a female waterman,’ but typically Wrayburn does not care.

When Headstone realises that Wrayburn will not denounce him as the assailant, he believes that it is an act of indifference designed to torment him. That combined with the realisation that it was his action that brought Lizzie and Wrayburn together riles Headstone who ‘in his impotent mad rage bit, and tore, and had his fit.’

The reader last sees Wrayburn with his wife on a social visit:

Sadly wan and worn was the once gallant Eugene, and walked resting on his wife’s arm, and leaning heavily upon a stick. But, he was daily growing stronger and better, and it was declared by the medical attendants that he might not be much disfigured by-and-by.

The same could be said of the reader who has ploughed through *Our Mutual Friend* and endured two rather far-fetched lawyers. Fortunately, Dickens is back on form in his next novel.

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