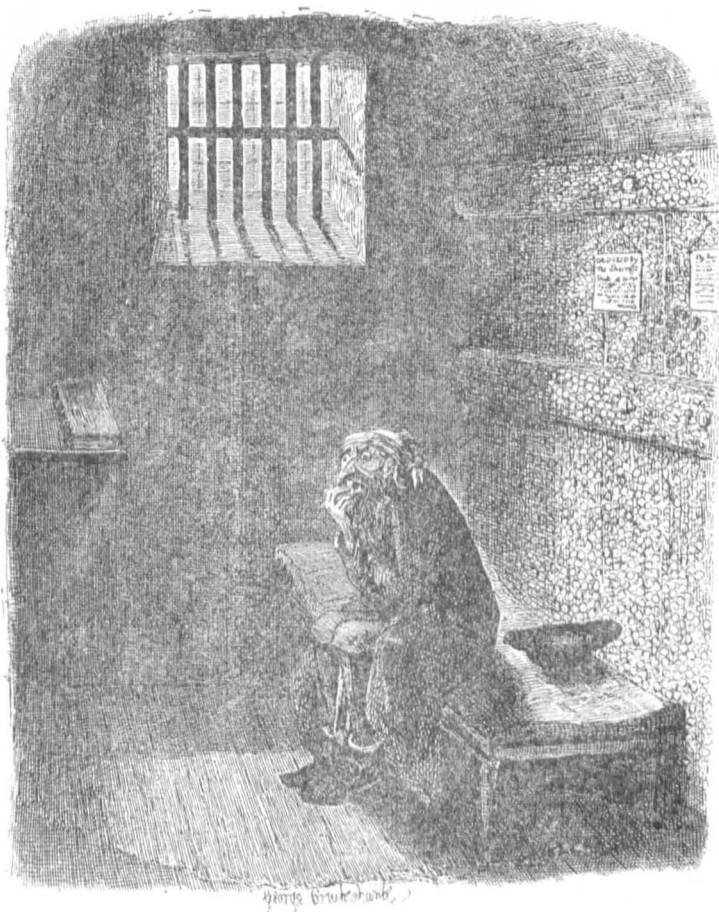


Dickens and Prisons (I)

THE ORIGINAL ILLUSTRATIONS from the works of Charles Dickens, reproduced here by permission of the Oxford University Press, exemplify what the great American Dickens scholar, Professor Edgar Johnson, calls "Dickens's lifelong preoccupation with prisons". It was said of Sir Alexander Paterson that, "one may well ask whether any one

man has had a knowledge at once so deep and so wide of the condition of man in captivity". In his own time much the same might have been said of Dickens. "Everywhere" says Johnson, "in London, in the cities of the United States, and on the Continent, he had been an assiduous visitor of every kind of prison". And he remarks that



FROM OLIVER TWIST.

Cruikshank's Fagin in the Condemned Cell (Newgate).

"From the early 'Visit to Newgate' in *Sketches by Boz*, through Mr. Pickwick's detention in the Fleet, the frightful description of Fagin in the condemned cell, and Mr. Micawber's incarceration in the King's Bench, to the unwritten

King's Bench prison, in *David Copperfield* is in fact a fictional version of the author's father John Dickens' imprisonment in the Marshalsea; and the portrait of William Dorritt confined in the Marshalsea was drawn from his



FROM *BARNABY RUDGE*.

Phiz's Barnaby in his Cell (Newgate).

ending of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, in which the murderer was to gasp out his confession in another prison cell, the sombre theme runs like a dark thread through all Dickens's work". Mr. Micawber's incarceration in the

memories of his father's behaviour there. It is unquestionable that this experience was extremely painful and humiliating for young Charles; and the prison is a dominating and pervasive image in many of his novels.

The first picture, George Cruikshank's powerful grotesque Fagin, is perhaps the most famous of all that gifted artist's illustrations. The next four pictures are the work of H. K. Browne or Phiz as he usually

model prison at Pentonville. Anyone inclined to think Dickens merely sentimental about prisoners should read the sharply satirical fifty-first chapter in that novel.

Yet he was extremely sensitive



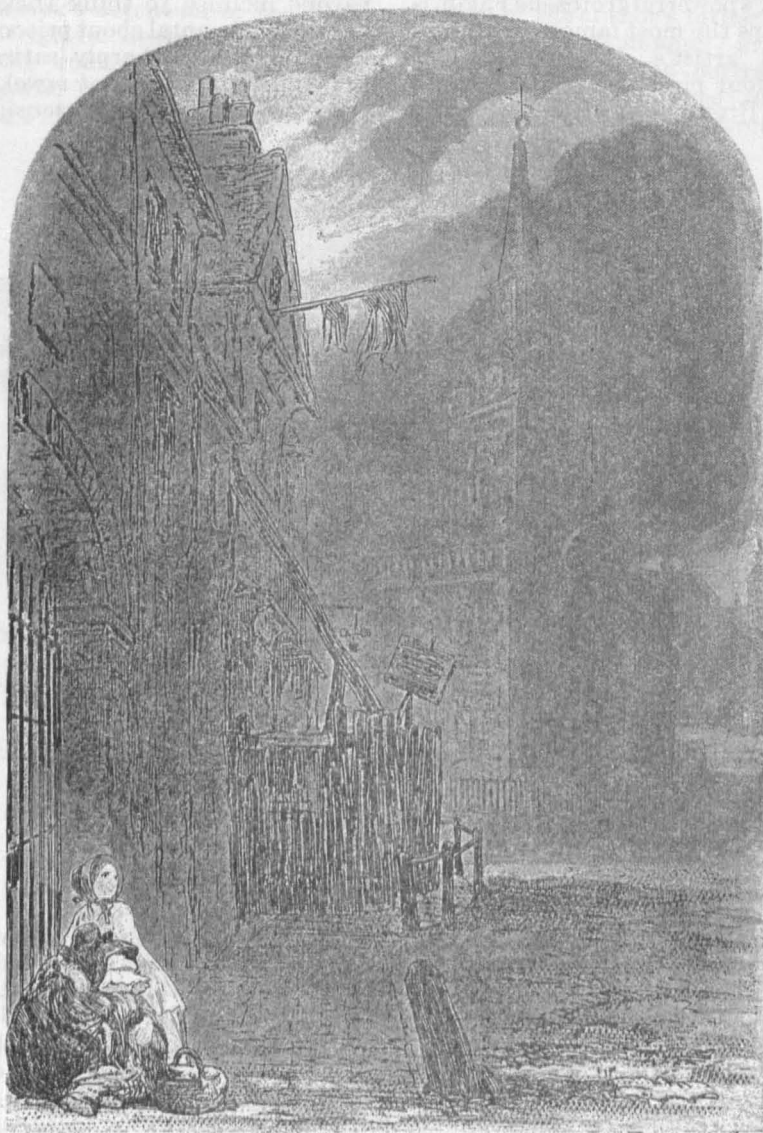
FROM *BARNABY RUDGE*.

Phiz's Mr. Dennis the Hangman before the Condemned Cells (Newgate).

signed himself. Those of Barnaby Rudge and Mr. Dennis the hangman may recall the vivid scenes in which Dickens "imagined with mingled emotions of horror and exultation a violent uprising battering down the gates and firing the walls of Newgate". The picture of Little Dorrit outside the Marshalsea reminds us that here Dickens' interest in prisons was born. The next picture, from *David Copperfield*, presents Uriah Heep in the role of a model prisoner in the new

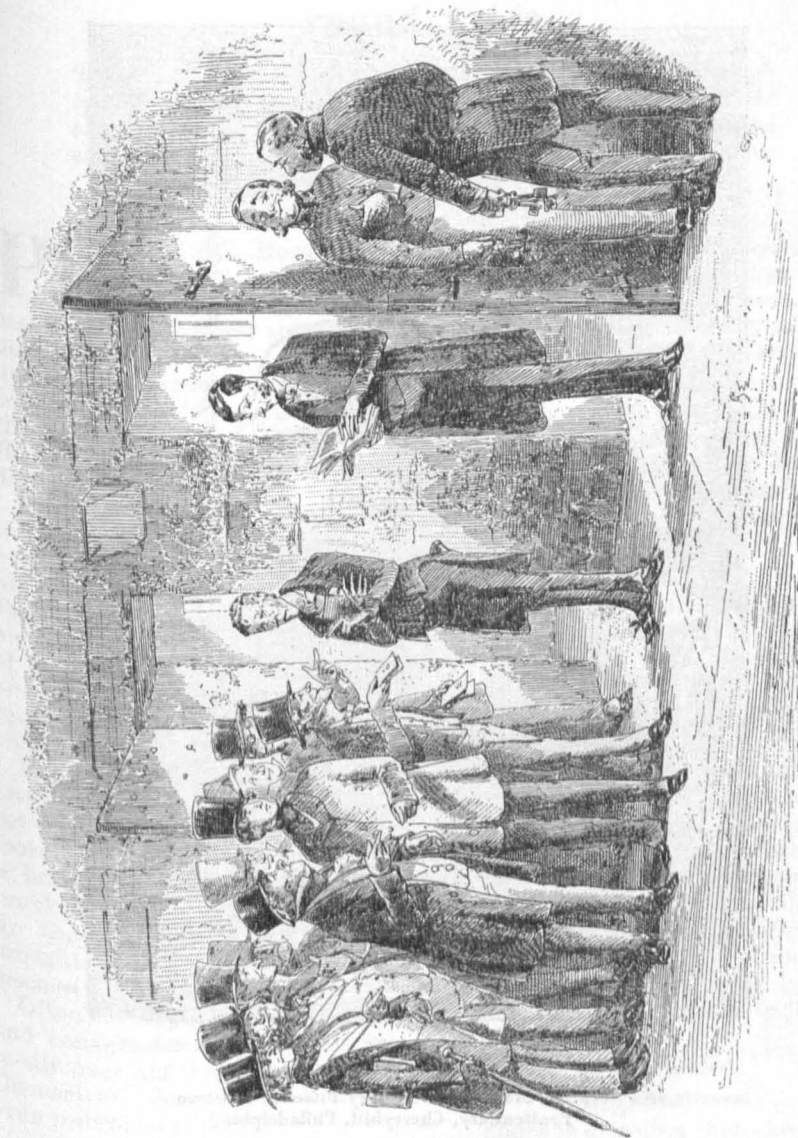
to abuse. Almost alone of the many distinguished visitors (including de Tocqueville, Harriet Martineau and Elizabeth Fry's brother J. T. Gurney) to the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania at Cherry Hill, Philadelphia, Dickens was critical of the Solitary system in operation there. And in his *American Notes*, from which the last picture, by Marcus Stone, is taken, he denounced it as "cruel and wrong".

G.H.



FROM LITTLE DORRIT.

Phiz's Little Dorrit outside the Prison Gates (Marshalsea).



FROM DAVID COPPERFIELD.
Phiz's David meets Uriah Heep in the Model Prison (Pentonville).



FROM AMERICAN NOTES.

Marcus Stone's The Solitary Prisoner (Eastern Penitentiary, Cherryhill, Philadelphia.)