



Hard Times

Charles Dickens

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ard Times is unusual in several respects. It is by far the shortest of Dickens' novels, barely a quarter of the length of those written immediately before and after it. Also, unlike all but one of his other novels, Hard Times has neither a preface nor illustrations. Moreover, it is his only novel not to have scenes set in London. Instead the story is set in the fictitious Victorian industrial Coketown, a generic Northern English mill-town, in some ways similar to Manchester, though smaller. Coketown may be partially based upon 19th-century Preston.

One of Dickens's reasons for writing Hard Times was that sales of his weekly periodical, *Household Words*, were low, and it was hoped its publication in instalments would boost circulation – as indeed proved to be the case. Since publication it has received a mixed response from critics. Critics such as F. R. Leavis, George Bernard Shaw, and Thomas Macaulay have mainly focused on Dickens's treatment of trade unions and his post-Industrial Revolution pessimism regarding the divide between capitalist mill owners and undervalued workers during the Victorian era.

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