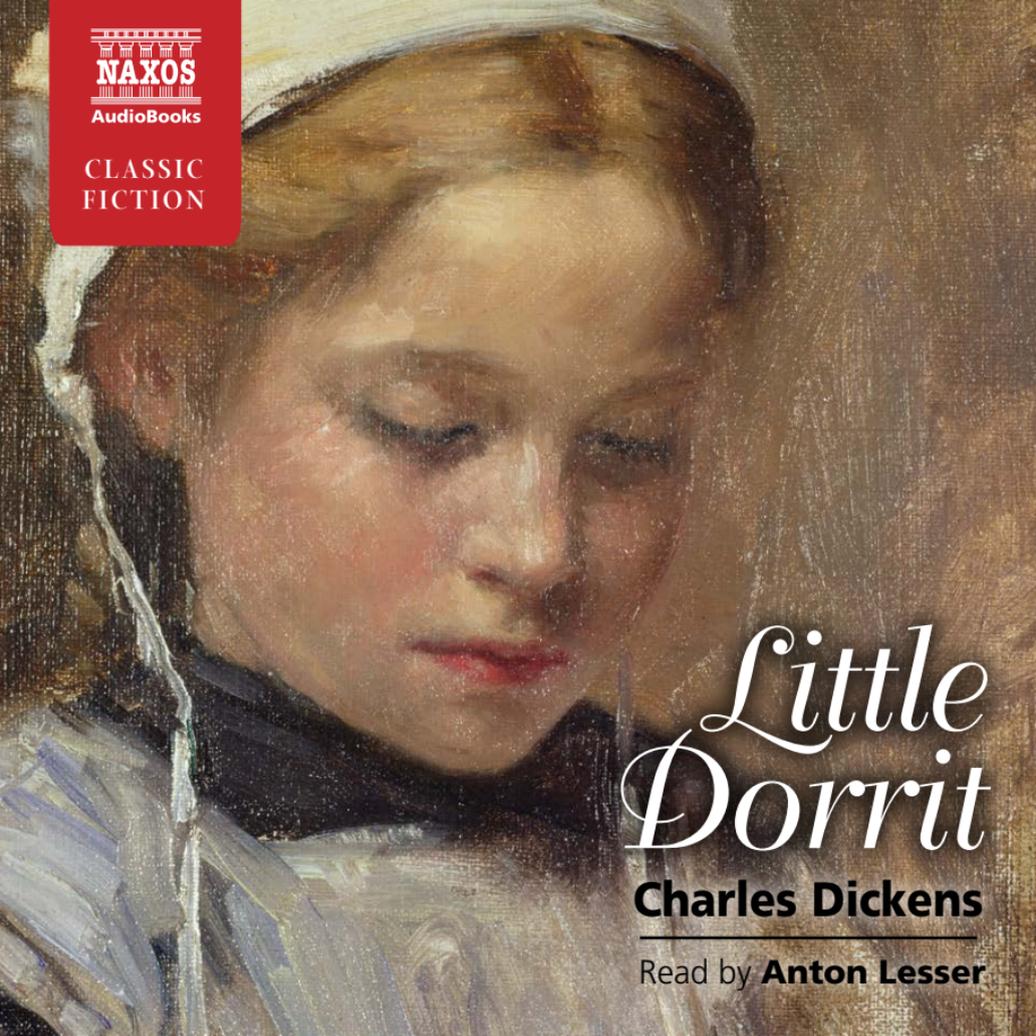




NAXOS
AudioBooks

CLASSIC
FICTION



*Little
Dorrit*

Charles Dickens

Read by **Anton Lesser**

CD 1

1	LITTLE DORRIT	7:01
2	By and by the noise of the key...	8:09
3	They were about thirty in company...	6:56
4	Mr Arthur Clennam took up his hat...	5:24
5	She then put on the spectacles...	6:33
6	As the city clocks struck nine...	5:02
7	She stetched out her arm...	4:30
8	Thirty years ago...	5:27
9	The baby was handed down...	5:45
10	The old man turned in...	6:29
11	The morning light was in no hurry to climb...	4:53
12	Thus they emerged upon the Iron Bridge...	5:46
13	The Circumlocution Office	7:16

Total time on CD 1: 79:17

CD 2

1	Arthur Clennam put his forms in his pocket.	7:13
2	A late, dull autumn night was closing in...	8:18
3	In London itself, though in the old rustic...	7:31
4	The mention of Mr Casby...	7:01
5	The return of Mr Casby with his daughter...	7:46
6	He left the house miserably enough...	6:06
7	Arthur Clennam rose hastily...	6:37
8	'Little Dorrit,' said Clennam...	6:23
9	On a wintry afternoon at twilight...	4:47
10	The time being come...	5:03
11	Clennam could not help speculating...	4:56
12	Before breakfast in the morning...	7:46

Total time on CD 2: 79:34

CD 3

1	Little Dorrit had not attained her twenty...	8:23
2	And so he left her...	6:38
3	'I have a son...'	5:32
4	They spoke no more...	5:35
5	Mr Clennam did not increase in favour...	5:52
6	Mr Meagles called on Clennam...	6:36
7	The Patriarch, meanwhile...	6:15
8	Little Dorrit received a call...	7:31
9	When dinner time came...	7:28
10	The private residence...	5:56
11	Clennam returned home one evening...	5:40
12	The visitors had had a minute or two...	7:54

Total time on CD 3: 79:27

CD 4

1	They were now by an avenue of trees.	5:18
2	The House in the city...	7:23
3	Mr Flintwinch panted up to the door...	8:22
4	Mrs Plornish's father...	4:28
5	Fanny began to cry herself...	8:02
6	Maggy sat at her work...	7:12
7	Resigning herself to inevitable fate...	6:48
8	It was at this time...	8:23
9	And now the day arrived...	6:07
10	In the autumn of the year...	6:01
11	The young gentleman...	5:37
12	After finishing his veal...	5:41

Total time on CD 4: 79:28

CD 5

1	The tired company had broken up...	7:28
2	they were a goodly company...	6:27
3	A Letter from Little Dorrit	7:13
4	So the valet was instructed...	5:47
5	Mrs General's view was...	6:57
6	To be in the halting state of Mr Henry Gowan...	6:44
7	Minnie was too much disturbed...	5:59
8	At dinner time Mr Sparkler made a splendid...	5:56
9	While the waters of Venice...	4:21
10	'Arthur, my dear boy...'	5:21
11	The whole vista had no one in it...	4:48
12	The shady waiting rooms...	5:57
13	The amazement, suspicion, resentment, and...	6:23

Total time on CD 5: 79:28

CD 6

1	The famous name of Merdle...	7:44
2	Mr Pancks was making a very porcupine...	5:55
3	When it became known to the Britons...	8:01
4	Mr Dorrit, on being informed...	8:27
5	The term of Mr Dorrit's visit...	5:58
6	John Chivery, in his best clothes...	5:57
7	The sun had gone down full four hours...	5:53
8	He took very little supper...	7:09
9	He looked confusedly about him...	6:49
10	The passengers were landing from the packet...	4:56
11	A sufficiently expressive hint of suspicion...	5:27
12	Arthur Clennam had made his unavailing...	6:59

Total time on CD 6: 79:22

CD 7

1	Left alone, Clennam entered on a weary...	7:56
2	Fully three months had passed...	5:54
3	The dinner party was at the great...	6:08
4	With a precursory sound of hurried breath...	4:49
5	Though Mr Rugg saw plainly...	5:41
6	The day was sunny...	5:42
7	As if the difficulty were contagious...	6:21
8	Imprisonment began to tell upon him.	5:07
9	Cavalletto got up again as before...	7:29
10	Brooding all day...	7:50
11	It had grown darker...	5:35
12	The last day of the appointed week...	5:26
13	After gazing at her in silence...	4:44

Total time on CD 7: 78:51

CD 8

1	Mrs Clennam's face changed.	5:50
2	She had already more than once struck...	5:20
3	'That Frederick Dorrit was the beginning of...'	6:43
4	'My brother Ephraim, the lunatic keeper...'	6:12
5	The sun had set...	8:01
6	Little Dorrit tried not to show it...	5:55
7	Arthur continuing to lie very ill...	4:21
8	The Patriarch, approaching with his usual...	4:19
9	The changes of a fevered room...	7:28
10	The faithful John was on duty...	7:26
11	On a healthy autumn day...	8:05
12	'There are only three branches of my subject...'	7:54

Total time on CD 8: 77:42

Total time on CDs 1-8: 10:33:09

Charles Dickens

(1812–1870)

Little Dorrit

Dickens was full of ideas for this, his eleventh novel, as he started work on it, and was convinced that he had a ‘capital name’ for it – *Nobody’s Fault*.

However, try as he might, he couldn’t settle to the writing of it: there were too many distractions. For instance, Dickens always loved amateur theatricals, and he was keen to produce and act in a new melodrama by his young friend Wilkie Collins called *The Lighthouse*, which was to be performed in the school-room at Tavistock House (Dickens’s home) by his family and friends. Dickens characteristically threw himself into every aspect of the production: scenery, special effects, lighting and, of course, his own full-blooded acting, which often reduced the audience to tears. Meanwhile the manuscript of his new novel lay untouched.

He took up the threads again in Folkestone, where he went for the summer of 1855, seeking peace and quiet to concentrate on the book. The novel was taking a long time to take shape and Dickens was afraid he might be losing his imaginative powers. He was having difficulty finding a theme that would draw the book together.

Though he set the book in the 1820s, it was the issues of the 1850s he wished to address. The book’s origins are to be found in his disgust at the appalling administration of the Crimean War (1854–56). He made speeches against the Prime Minister Palmerston and his administration. Hundreds of British soldiers had died, not through the conflict of war, but through neglect and lack of essential supplies from the British Government. The original title *Nobody’s Fault* had become

the official response to the disaster, and this was Dickens's way of exposing the crippling bureaucracy and red tape that hampered the Civil Service and prevented Britain from becoming an efficient modern nation. The fictional Circumlocution Office was born:

It is true that How not to do it was the great study and object of all public departments and professional politicians all round the Circumlocution Office. It is true that every new premier and every new government, coming in because they had upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it.

The background theme of the novel is the atrophying of the British nation as the result of outmoded political institutions, and the apathy that breeds in a society which never moves forward. Over the whole book Dickens casts a dirty and dingy pall; the odour of decay pervades

every character. Against this gloomy background, Dickens developed his narrative: the story of a middle-aged man (Arthur Clennam) who finds inspiration and escape from his own personal apathy in the simple but devoted spirit of a young woman willing to serve and help others at the expense of herself. Dickens works hard to show that an inert society can be re-vitalised by the example of individuals: Doyce working single-handedly for the betterment of British industry and the conditions of the working-man; Mr Meagles's kindness and generosity of spirit; Pancks rebelling finally against the rent-racketeer Casby; and Little Dorrit herself, of course. So important did this young woman – born in the Marshalsea itself – become, that Dickens changed the title of the book to *Little Dorrit*, though 'Nobody's Fault' is heard as the recurring cry throughout the book.

Dickens's restless energy, which he had displayed in Collins's amateur theatricals, continued throughout his creation of the novel. For instance, the latter part was completed during a prolonged stay in Paris. 'One is driven

by an irresistible might until the journey is worked out! It is much better to go on and fret than stop and fret,' he wrote manically to his friend Forster at this time. It shows how closely he associated himself with the theme of his novel: action rather than atrophy. To be continually on the move avoids the inevitable – becoming a prisoner of one's own personality and past – and Dickens was a man haunted by his past.

As with his other novels, Dickens could not help drawing on his own eventful life when creating the characters and narrative of *Little Dorrit*. The sombre shadow of the Marshalsea Prison looms over the whole book, and is a testament to the deep effect the place had on Dickens as a child, when his own father John Dickens was imprisoned there for debt. Mr Dorrit, the Father of the Marshalsea, is based on Dickens's insolvent father. He had presented an affectionate and humorous portrait of him before, in the character of Mr Micawber in *David Copperfield*, but in Mr. Dorrit, Dickens shows his father's darker side:

Crushed at first by his imprisonment, he had soon found a dull relief in it. He was under lock and key; but the lock and key that kept him in, kept numbers of his troubles out. If he had been a man with strength of purpose to face those troubles and fight them, he might have broken the net that held him, or broken his heart; but, being what he was, he languidly slipped into this smooth descent, and never more took one step upward.

Through his father's fecklessness young Dickens became very familiar with the Marshalsea and it is in the detailed descriptions of the prison's interior that he reveals to us the misery indelibly stamped on his youthful consciousness. 'The walls and ceiling were blackened with flies,' he remembers, and later recalls a child's fancy gazing on the harsh prison walls: 'Many combinations did those spikes upon the wall assume, many light shapes did the strong iron weave itself into, many golden touches fell upon the rust, while Little Dorrit sat there musing. New zigzags

sprung into the cruel pattern sometimes, when she saw it through a burst of tears...’.

Flora Finching, the first love of Arthur Clennam, is a fictional portrait of Dickens's own first love Maria Beadnell, whom he met twenty years after their youthful romance, and who had, like Arthur's sweetheart, 'blossomed' in the intervening years: 'Flora, always tall, had grown to be very broad too, and short of breath; but that was not much. Flora whom he had left a lily, had become a peony; but that was not much. Flora who had seemed enchanting in all she said and thought, was diffuse and silly. That was much. Flora, who had been spoiled and artless long ago, was determined to be spoiled and artless now. That was a fatal blow.'

In *Flora Finching*, Dickens creates one of his most humorous characters, despite being bitterly disillusioned by the changes he saw in Maria, Flora's original. For like Flora, she was a prisoner to her youthful self.

In a sense, every character in this book is a prisoner of him or her self. There is a long chain of prisoners who in their

turn imprison those nearest to them. Dorrit suppresses the freedom of Little Dorrit by relying on her for everything; even the great Mr Merdle is a prisoner of the very society he has helped, as a great financier, to perpetuate. He escapes through suicide, when it is revealed that he 'was simply the greatest forger and the greatest thief that ever cheated the gallows'. Merdle's fall brings about Arthur Clennam's, who had invested with him. Arthur, the self-deprecating hero of the novel, is another man trapped within himself. He is dominated by Mrs Clennam. His youth was destroyed by her perverted religion and his young manhood wasted working in the stultifying family business abroad. He returns to England an empty submissive shell; all spontaneity gone. He has not the spirit to propose to Pet, the beautiful daughter of Mr Meagles, and is unaware of the love of Little Dorrit until the end of the book.

The inhabitants of Bleeding-Heart Yard are in their turn imprisoned by poverty, crippling low wages and extortionate rents. They cannot escape the treadmill of mindless drudgery, or soul-destroying

unemployment. Whose fault is it? Nobody's, is the general conclusion once again. Rents charged on people with no means to pay is one of the curses of capitalism, and Dickens's exposure of this oppressive system in the 1850s, though stopping short of demanding the reform of society itself, laid a foundation on which Karl Marx could draw for his socialist writings of the 1860s. Instead, Dickens, as a creative writer, chose to side-step politics and be true to humanity. He sends Arthur and Little Dorrit out into the world to *endure* its realities, and not to change it. They will live a good and uneventful existence where whatever happens will be, in their eyes, ultimately – nobody's fault.

Notes by David Timson



One of Britain's leading classical actors, **Anton Lesser** has worked extensively at the National Theatre, and is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company, where, over the years, he has played many of the principal roles, including Romeo, Troilus, Petruchio and Richard III. His many television appearances include roles in *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Vanity Fair*, *Perfect Strangers*, and *Dickens*. Films in which he has appeared include *Charlotte Gray*, *Fairytale – A True Story*, *Imagining Argentina*, *River Queen*, and most recently, *Miss Potter*. A familiar voice on radio, he has been involved in countless plays and recordings, and has become particularly associated with his award winning readings of Dickens for Naxos AudioBooks.

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