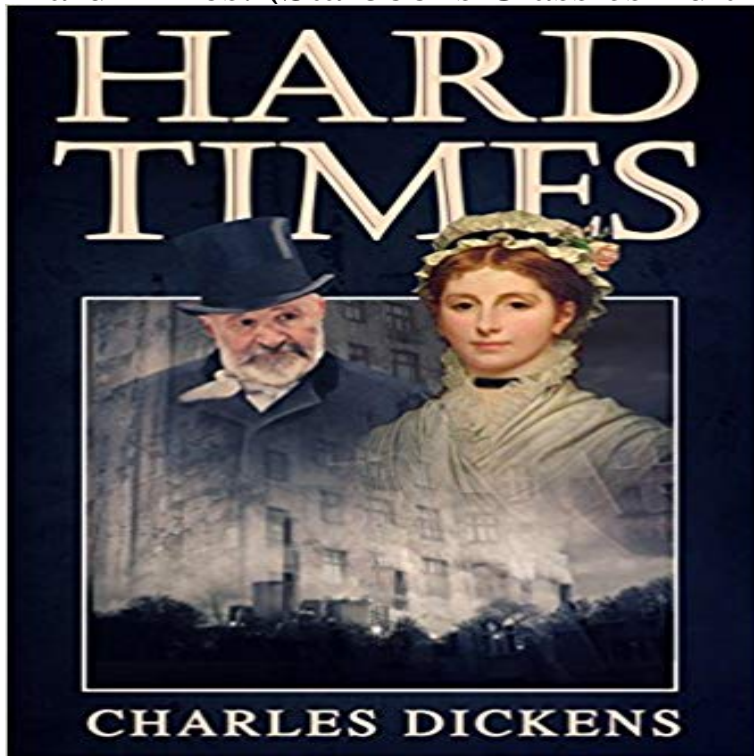


Hard Times: (Starbooks Classics Editions)



Hard Times For These Times (commonly known as Hard Times) is the tenth novel by Charles Dickens, first published in 1854. The book appraises English society and is aimed at highlighting the social and economic pressures of the times. Literary significance & criticism Critics have had a diverse range of opinions on the novel. The critic John Ruskin declared Hard Times to be his favourite Dickens work due to its exploration of important social questions. However, Thomas Macaulay branded it sullen socialism, on the grounds that Dickens did not fully comprehend the politics of the time. This point was also made by George Bernard Shaw, who decreed Hard Times to be a novel of passionate revolt against the whole industrial order of the modern world. Shaw criticised the novel for its failure to provide an accurate account of trade unionism of the time, deeming Dickens's character of Slackbridge, the poisonous orator, a mere figment of middle-class imagination. However, believing it to be very different from Dickens's other novels, he also said: Many readers find the change disappointing. Others find Dickens worth reading almost for the first time. F. R. Leavis, in *The Great Tradition*, described the book as essentially a moral fable, and said that of all Dickens works (it is) the one that has all the strengths of his genius that of a completely serious work of art. This, however, was a view which he later revised in *Dickens the Novelist*, which recognised that Dickens's strengths and artistry appeared fully in other works. Walter Allen, in an introduction to an alternative edition, characterised Hard Times as being an unsurpassed critique of industrial society, which was later superseded by works of D. H. Lawrence. Other writers have described the novel as being, as G. K. Chesterton commented in his work *Appreciations and Criticisms*, the harshest of his stories; whereas George Orwell

praised the novel (and Dickens himself) for generous anger.

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