

Brief summary of Ch. 1, bk. 1 (one thing needful)

An unidentified speaker, omniscient narrator, addresses a large schoolroom on the overwhelming importance and desirability of an education consisting solely of 'fact'.

Commentary:

To begin with, we have to bear in our minds the two major critics' thoughts of *Hard Times*:

George Bernard Shaw claims: *Hard Times* was written 'to make you uncomfortable; and it will make you uncomfortable (and serve you right) though it will perhaps interest you more, and certainly leave a deeper scar (scar means a sign of damage to a person's mental state) on you.

Gilbert Keith Chesterton says: Although it may be 'bitter', it was a 'protest against bitterness'; it may be 'dark', but it is 'the darkness of the subject and not of the author'.

NB. Please see the commentary of the final chapter of the novel.

Brief summary of Ch. 2, bk. 1 (murdering the innocents)

The speaker is revealed as one Thomas Gradgrind. One of the pupils, Sissy Jupe, is asked to define a horse; her failure is contrast with the factual but unimaginative answer given by another pupil, Bitzer.

Commentary:

'murdering the innocents': Gradgrind's educational methods are likened to the massacre of the infants ordered by Herod in his attempt to rid himself of the baby Jesus.

In this chapter we have seen that a simple contrast emerges between Mr Gradgrind's philosophy of fact and Sissy's frequent indulgence in romantic, imaginative fancy. The philosophy of fact is continually shown to be at the heart of the problems of the poor whereas imagination can enhance one's sense of sympathy.

'Fact, fact, fact!' . . . **'Fact, fact, fact!'**: It sounds to me that Dickens tries to say that the philosophy of fact only is False, false, false since this idea will prove late in this novel. Furthermore the students, arguably, are usually familiar with the two letters T and F. So that Dickens uses F instead of T for the statement that says 'in this life, we want nothing but fact, . . . nothing but fact'.

Brief summary of Ch. 3, bk. 1 (a loophole)

Gradgrind discovers two of his children, Tom and Louisa peeking at the travelling circus, which has come to town, through a peephole in the fence. He marches the two home since he brings up his children according to his philosophy of fact and having permitted them no imaginative entertainment. Louisa admits that curiosity drew her to the circus and tries to defend her brother by saying she dragged him there.

Commentary:

This chapter reveals the connection between Gradgrind's philosophy of fact and mechanization of human nature especially when Tom did not look at his father, 'but gave himself up to be taken home like a machine'.