

Brief summary of Ch. 11, bk. 1 (no way out)

No way out . . . is the verdict Bounderby gives Stephen, when the latter consults his employer as to the possibility of a divorce. Bounderby explains that only the wealthy can obtain divorces and that Stephen would be better off accepting his miserable situation.

Commentary:

In this chapter, the narrator tries to point out how middle classes ignore the working classes. This can be clearly appeared when Dickens makes smart simile between factories and 'Fairy palaces': the notion that factories were like palaces reveals the effort to accommodate a new strange and disturbing or distressing experience to a familiar and economical conceptual structure. We have seen, in this chapter, ironic image that as fires are lit inside the factories. Although the Fair palaces are filled with smoke, grime, and noise, the fancy can make Coketown beautiful and magical since one of the implications of fire is imagination.

The word 'muddle' has been repeated many times in this chapter. One of its implications might be that through Stephen, Dickens suggests that industrialization threatens to compromise both the employee's and employer's moral integrity, thereby creating a social muddle to which there is no easy solution.

Brief summary of Ch. 12, bk. 1 (the old woman)

Leaving Bounderby's, Stephen encounters a strange old woman who interrogates him the health and general welfare of his employer.

Commentary:

‘He did not go so far as to say, for her pleasure, that there was a sort of Divine Right there; but, I have heard claims almost as magnificent of late years’: this means that in earlier times it was thought that monarchs (a king or queen) reigned by ‘Divine Right’, that is the divine intervention of God was experienced at the moment in the coronation ceremony when the ruler was anointed with oil so that the monarch became thereafter, like modern popes, infallible.

‘Towers of Babel’: at the beginning of the Biblical story the whole earth was of one language, and one speech, but as evil spread the Lord scattered them abroad upon the face of the earth and they left off to build the city. Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth.