

## Little Dorrit: Circumlocution Office

*The following reading is taken from chapter 10 of Little Dorrit. A lot of text has been cut to make the reading shorter, but no words changed. Do go and read the whole chapter later! First, an introduction to the office...*

1 The Circumlocution Office was (as everybody knows without being told) the most  
 2 important Department under Government. No public business of any kind could possibly be  
 3 done at any time without the acquiescence of the Circumlocution Office. Its finger was in the  
 4 largest public pie, and in the smallest public tart. Whatever was required to be done, the  
 5 Circumlocution Office was beforehand with all the public departments in the art of perceiving  
 6 – HOW NOT TO DO IT. It is true that every new government, coming in because they had  
 7 upheld a certain thing as necessary to be done, were no sooner come in than they applied  
 8 their utmost faculties to discovering How not to do it. It was this spirit of national efficiency in  
 9 the Circumlocution Office that had gradually led to its having something to do with  
 10 everything. In short, all the business of the country went through the Circumlocution Office,  
 11 except the business that never came out of it; and its name was Legion.

*Arthur Clennam has something he wants to know from the Circumlocution Office. He tries to ask Mr Barnacle a direct question:-*

12 ‘I want to know-’ ‘Look here. Upon my soul you mustn’t come into the place saying you  
 13 want to know, you know,’ remonstrated Barnacle, turning about and putting in his eye glass.  
 14 ‘I want to know,’ said Arthur Clennam, ‘the precise nature of the claim of the Crown against a  
 15 prisoner for debt, named Dorrit.’ ‘I say. Look here. You really are going it at a great pace,  
 16 you know. Egad, you haven’t got an appointment,’ said Barnacle, as if the thing were  
 17 growing serious. ‘I want to know,’ said Arthur, and repeated his case. ‘Well, I tell you what.  
 18 Look here. You had better try the Secretarial Department,’ he said at last, sidling to the bell  
 19 and ringing it. ‘Jenkinson,’ to the messenger, ‘Mr Wobbler!’

20 Arthur Clennam accompanied the messenger to another floor of the building, where that  
 21 functionary pointed out Mr Wobbler’s room. He entered and found two gentlemen sitting  
 22 face to face at a large desk, one of whom was polishing a gun-barrel on his pocket-  
 23 handkerchief, while the other was spreading marmalade on bread with a paper-knife. ‘Mr  
 24 Wobbler?’ Both gentlemen glanced at him, and seemed surprised at his assurance. ‘So he  
 25 went,’ said the gentleman with the gun barrel, ‘down to his cousin’s place, and took the Dog  
 26 with him by rail. He got half-a-dozen fellows into a Barn, and a good supply of Rats, and  
 27 timed the Dog. Finding the Dog able to do it, made the match, and heavily backed the Dog.  
 28 When the match came off, some devil of a fellow was brought over, Sir, Dog was made  
 29 drunk, Dog’s master was cleaned out.’ ‘Mr Wobbler?’ The gentleman who was spreading  
 30 the marmalade returned, without looking up, ‘What did he call the Dog?’ ‘Called him Lovely,’  
 31 said the other gentleman. ‘Said the dog was the perfect picture of the old aunt, particularly  
 32 like her when hocused<sup>1</sup>.’ ‘Mr Wobbler?’ Both gentlemen laughed for some time. ‘Mr  
 33 Wobbler?’ ‘What’s the matter?’ then said Mr Wobbler, with his mouth full. ‘I want to know –’  
 34 and Arthur Clennam again mechanically set forth what he wanted to know. ‘Can’t inform  
 35 you,’ observed Mr Wobbler, apparently to his lunch. ‘Never heard of it. Nothing at all to do

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<sup>1</sup> drunk

36 with it. Better try Mr Clive, second door on the left in the next passage.' 'Perhaps he will  
37 give me the same answer.' 'Very likely. Don't know anything about it,' said Mr Wobbler.

38 A few steps brought him to the second door on the left in the next passage. In that room  
39 he found three gentlemen; number one doing nothing particular, number two doing nothing  
40 particular, number three doing nothing particular. [*a 4<sup>th</sup> man takes papers from this office to*  
41 *another, and brings papers back.*] 'I want to know,' said Arthur Clennam, - and again stated  
42 his case. As number one referred him to number two, and as number two referred him to  
43 number three, he had occasion to state it three times before they all referred him to number  
44 four, to whom he stated it again. Number four was a vivacious, well-looking, well-dressed,  
45 agreeable young fellow and he said in an easy way, 'Oh! You had better not bother yourself  
46 about it, I think.' 'Not bother myself about it?' 'No! I recommend you not to bother yourself  
47 about it. You can if you like. I can give you plenty of forms to fill up. Lots of 'em here. You  
48 can have a dozen if you like. But you'll never go on with it,' said number four.