**This extract is from the start of *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens. It was written in 1852, and is a satirical story about the legal system in England that eventually led to a change in the law.**

LONDON. Michaelmas Term[[1]](#footnote-1) lately over, and the Lord Chancellor[[2]](#footnote-2) sitting in Lincoln’s Inn Hall[[3]](#footnote-3). Implacable November weather. As much mud in the streets as if the waters had but newly retired from the face of the earth, and it would not be wonderful to meet a Megalosaurus[[4]](#footnote-4), forty feet long or so, waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill. Smoke lowering down from chimney-pots, making a soft black drizzle, with flakes of soot in it as big as full-grown snow-flakes — gone into mourning, one might imagine, for the death of the sun. Dogs, undistinguishable in mire. Horses, scarcely better; splashed to their very blinkers[[5]](#footnote-5). Foot passengers, jostling one another’s umbrellas in a general infection of ill-temper, and losing their foot-hold at street-corners, where tens of thousands of other foot passengers have been slipping and sliding since the day broke (if the day ever broke), adding new deposits to the crust upon crust of mud, sticking at those points tenaciously to the pavement, and accumulating at compound interest[[6]](#footnote-6).

100

5

Fog everywhere. Fog up the river, where it flows among green aits[[7]](#footnote-7) and meadows; fog down the river, where it rolls defiled[[8]](#footnote-8) among the tiers of shipping and the waterside pollutions of a great (and dirty) city. Fog on the Essex marshes, fog on the Kentish heights. Fog creeping into the cabooses[[9]](#footnote-9) of collier-brigs[[10]](#footnote-10); fog lying out on the yards, and hovering in the rigging of great ships; fog drooping on the gunwales[[11]](#footnote-11) of barges and small boats. Fog in the eyes and throats of ancient Greenwich[[12]](#footnote-12) pensioners, wheezing by the firesides of their wards; fog in the stem and bowl of the afternoon pipe of the wrathful skipper[[13]](#footnote-13), down in his close cabin; fog cruelly pinching the toes and fingers of his shivering little ’prentice boy[[14]](#footnote-14) on deck. Chance people on the bridges peeping over the parapets[[15]](#footnote-15) into a nether sky of fog, with fog all round them, as if they were up in a balloon, and hanging in the misty clouds.

200

150

Gas looming through the fog in divers places in the streets, much as the sun may, from the spongey fields, be seen to loom by husbandman[[16]](#footnote-16) and ploughboy. Most of the shops lighted two hours before their time — as the gas seems to know, for it has a haggard and unwilling look.

250

The raw afternoon is rawest, and the dense fog is densest, and the muddy streets are muddiest near that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation, Temple Bar[[17]](#footnote-17). And hard by Temple Bar, in Lincoln’s Inn Hall, at the very heart of the fog, sits the Lord High Chancellor in his High Court of Chancery.

300

Never can there come fog too thick, never can there come mud and mire too deep, to assort with the groping and floundering condition which this High Court of Chancery[[18]](#footnote-18), most pestilent of hoary sinners, holds this day in the sight of heaven and earth.

1. The school term from September until Christmas [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The government minister responsible for the running of the law courts in the UK [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lincoln’s Inn is a society of solicitors, and the Lord Chancellor is sitting in the hall of their building in London [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. A type of dinosaur [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The screens on a horse’s bridle that stop it from seeing anywhere but in front of it [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. A term from banking, that means to keep saving and saving [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. A small island in a river [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. To march in single file [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The part of a train or ship where the staff sleep [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. A coal carrying ship [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. The top of the side of a ship (ie: where the guns would go) [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. A place in London [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. The captain of a ship [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. The apprentice boy [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. A protective wall [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Husbandman – someone who looks after animals, like cows and sheep [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. The gateway to the City of London (ie: the business and political area of London) [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. A special, and very powerful court with a wider range of powers than the normal criminal courts, which specialised in wills, property law etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)