
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

2018 Programme of Events This will get under way on Tuesday 23rd January with the now-traditional President's evening. Professor John Bowen of the University of York will talk to us on the subject of *Dickens's Magic*. On Tuesday 20th February novelist Anna Mazzola will speak about writing her debut novel: *The Unseeing*. This is a fictionalised account of the notorious Edgware Road murder of 1837 which intrigued all of London – including the young Dickens. The theme of murder and mayhem will continue on Tuesday 20th March, when Michael Eaton MBE will discuss the life and legend of Charles Peace. Michael is a playwright and scriptwriter, best known for his BBC documentary dramas such as *Shipman*, *Why Lockerbie?*, and *Shoot to Kill*. Michael has dramatized several of Dickens's works for BBC Radio 4 and recently adapted *Great Expectations* for the West Riding Playhouse.

Dickensian Lists In reply to my request in the July LP for Dickensian 'lists', DF member Christopher Beal cites one of the most moving examples (from *Bleak House*). He writes: "The rhetorical flourish immediately after the death of Jo: 'The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead! Dead your Majesty. Dead my lords and gentleman. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, born with heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day.' The drum-beat of the monosyllabic 'Dead': the deliberate address to those unaware of and yet the cause of the death. The joke upon 'Wrong Reverends', the hopeful inclusiveness that there are those 'with heavenly compassion in your hearts' and the conclusiveness of the perfect iambic pentameter of the last sentence – a stylistic, moral and emotional intensity constructed upon lists."...

..."When he who adores thee has left but the name..." as Dick Swiveller said in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. The editor regrets that she has mislaid the name of the next contributor. If he/she could let me know, I'll include it next time. Many apologies. He or she kindly sent in the following:

"CD uses fantastic elaboration successfully, e.g. the description of the Veneerings in *Our Mutual Friend*. No writer would risk D's insistence in which the 'newness' of the Veneerings is described in a series of mad repetitions. 'Mr and Mrs V were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the V's was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriages were new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new and they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby.'" This contributor also mentions *Dombey & Son* and *Great Expectations* – when I have the name, I will quote these in the next edition, together with one or two other examples members have kindly sent in.

CD and Freemasonry DF member Glynn Downton says: "CD was not a Freemason, but had many friends and connections who were and there are a number of references to the Craft in his works. There are number of Lodges which have/or had connections with him. The two oldest are, as far as I know, the Cheerybles Lodge 2466 and the Pickwick Lodge 2467. The former no longer exists but the latter still meets in London. A number of the Founders of 2466 were members of the Pickwick Musical Society, whereas some of the Founders of 2467 were members of the Pickwick Bicycle Club, which is still going strong."

Mr Downton's contribution reminds me of a sad reference to Freemasonry at the end of CD's essay "Wapping Workhouse" (*Uncommercial Traveller*). An elderly male pauper tells CD he has "seen better days." Dickens replies that he is sorry to hear it. "Sir, I have a complaint to make against the master... The master and myself are both masons, sir, and I make him the sign continually, but, because I am in this unfortunate position, sir, he won't give me the countersign!"

As "that time of year" approaches... Michael Slater has come across an article called 'Dickens's Inner Child' in *Vanity Fair*, magazine (February 2012) written by the late Christopher

Hitchens, noted for his trenchant views. He refers to *The Dickensian* as 'that agreeable little journal' and very much approves of Dickens's delight in celebrating birthdays. He adds that if we made more of such celebrations 'It would help me to forgive just a little, the man who helped generate the Hallmark birthday industry and who, with some of his less inspiring and more moistly sentimental prose scenes in *A Christmas Carol*, took the Greatest Birthday Ever Told and helped make it into the near Ramadan of protracted obligatory celebration now darkening our Decembers.' As Michael asks, 'How's that for Scrooginess?'

Railway Spine Mrs Barbara Bowler, wife of DF member Mike Bowler, has kindly sent me a fascinating article about the Staplehurst railway accident of 1865 by Dr Malcolm Timperley, from the December 2013 issue of *Backtrack*, a railway journal. It quotes a letter that CD wrote to his friend, Thomas Mitton, the day after the accident, where he describes himself as "a little shaken, not by the beating and dragging of the carriage in which I was, but by the hard work afterwards in getting out the dying and the dead, which was most horrible."

The article continues: "The rapid growth of the railways had led to more frequent accidents. Accident victims were complaining of symptoms such as memory impairment and sleep disturbance. Sir John Erichsen, a distinguished surgeon of the time, believed that the symptoms were entirely physical, arising from microscopic haemorrhages in the spine triggered by the accident – 'Railway Spine' (the notion of psychological trauma was not known at the time). Substantial damages were often obtained from the railway companies. An American surgeon, R M Hodges, summed up the situation. 'An accident victim has merely to go to bed, call in a sympathetic doctor, peruse Mr Erichsen's work on *Railway Injuries*, and go to court on crutches, to be assured a jury would give large damages.' American lawyer Clark Bell in 1894 wrote: 'Railway Spine is the Nemesis of the modern railway...an ever-to-be-dreaded terror to railway commerce. Invented by a clever English surgeon...it is the ready refuge of the malingeringer'. As Mrs Bowler says, it is interesting to note that ambulance-chasing lawyers existed even in the 1860s. One case history describes 'a 50-year old widow of humble station whose friends foolishly allowed her case to be taken up by a solicitor who offered his services directly after the accident. It was later learned that the whole of the money was kept by the lawyer, this poor woman not getting one single farthing.' Mrs Bowler adds, "Had circumstances been different, and knowing CDs

feelings for lawyers in general, you feel he might have laid into the 'railway compensation' variety in his writings!"

The article sadly notes that Dickens never fully recovered from the Staplehurst accident. "His daughter Mamie said: 'my father's nerves never really were the same again. We have often seen him, when travelling home by train from London, suddenly fall into a paroxysm of fear, tremble all over and clutch the arms of the railway carriage.' Two years later, he wrote that the effect of the disaster 'tells more and more.' He continued to write, but at a reduced rate. As we know, he died five years – to the day – after the accident.

Ideas for Christmas entertainment... CD wrote to his actor friend Macready, '...I conjured bravely, a plum pudding was produced from an empty saucepan, held over a blazing fire kindled in Stanfield's hat without damage to the lining; a box of bran was changed into a live guinea-pig, which ran between my godchild's feet.' Jane Carlyle commented: 'Only think of that excellent Dickens playing the conjuror for one whole hour – the best conjuror I ever saw...' What larks!

Overseas Branch Representatives Needed At the recent meeting of Council, it was decided that Metro-Detroit would become the 55th Branch of the Fellowship. Congratulations and welcome to all concerned. If any member in the London area is prepared to act as representative for the new branch, or for one of the others currently unrepresented at the two Council meetings held annually – on Saturday afternoons in April and October – please let the Editor know at the address below. You may even enjoy it!

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS A renewal form for 2018 is enclosed. Members are invited to complete and return it asap, with subscription fee, to the Membership Secretary, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX. Fees are unchanged. Those who have already elected to pay by Standing Order should not complete a form.

"No more!" cried Scrooge. "No more. I don't wish to see it. Show me no more!" These are **NOT** the sentiments of the LP editor, who would warmly welcome more contributions sent to: Alison Gowans, "Danesydyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans@hotmail.co.uk