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# London Particular

## The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

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**2018 PROGRAMME OF EVENTS - change of speaker** Sadly, Janet Snowman is now unable to deliver her advertised talk on **Thursday, 24 May – ‘Singing and Dancing Dickens’**. Instead, David Langwallner, a practising barrister at Great James Street Chambers, will talk on that date on the subject of **‘Dickens, Kafka and the Law’**.

Following last month’s talk by Anna Mazzola on the Edgware Road murder, the theme of murder and mayhem will continue on **Tuesday, 20 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 dramatised several of Dickens’s works for BBC Radio 4 and recently adapted *Great Expectations* for the West Riding Playhouse.

**PLEASE NOTE - A Disaster for the Editor** Late last year, my laptop crashed. **All** my emails were later lost. I now have a new laptop and a new email address – [aligowans17@outlook.com](mailto:aligowans17@outlook.com). I’m extremely sorry to say I won’t have received any emails sent since Oct/Nov last year, as the old address no longer exists. Oh, the joys of modern technology!

**How religious was Dickens?** Simon Heffer (*Daily Telegraph*, mid-December) wrote that **“Dickens was one of the great public figures of the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century...who discreetly dispensed with God, becoming an apostle of the secularisation we now take for granted”**. Chris Davies of Chertsey responded in a letter to the DT, “This is contrary to Dickens’s stated beliefs. He certainly disliked the Established Church; and, in a time of great hardship, detested the hypocrisy, moralising and other trappings associated with it. However, he never lost his faith, and worked to ensure that the principles of Christianity were put into action.” Chris Davies adds (no source given) that Dickens wrote: **“In this world there is no stay but the hope of a better, and no reliance but on the mercy and goodness of God”**. Above this letter, incidentally,

the *DT* printed a photo of “the stained-glass portrait of Dickens at his former home, now a museum, in Bloomsbury”.

**“Dickens’s Most Vacuous Heroine”** Would anyone like to advocate the cause of one of Dickens’s female characters for the above prestigious title? If so, please let the Editor of LP know via the email address below. A brief (7-8 minutes) presentation is required, the winner being selected by a vote of those present. This is again a **Saturday afternoon** meeting – **2 pm on 7 July**; the venue, as last year, will be the Function Room of the Rugby Tavern, 19 Great James Street, WC1N – a short walk from Doughty Street.

**A chilling rejection** Jane Shilling, writing in the *Daily Telegraph* a year or so ago, quotes a letter, dated 1860, from CD to Florence Marryat, the daughter of his friend and fellow-novelist Captain Frederick Marryat. She has obviously written to him enclosing a story for his magazine. He says, **“It is not a good story. I think its leading incident is common-place, and one that would require for its support some special observation of character, or strength of dialogue, or happiness of description. I do not find any of these sustaining qualities in it.”** I don’t think we know what effect this had on the friendship between CD and Florence’s father.

On CD’s return from his first American trip (1842), a festive reunion dinner was held at Greenwich with Captain Marryat in the chair. When the actor Charles Macready set off for America himself, it was Marryat who wrote to Dickens imploring him not to join the group of friends who went to “see him off”, as it was thought this would prejudice Macready in American eyes - CD was deeply unpopular with the US at the time, owing to his very frank remarks in *American Notes*. CD took the hint and didn’t go. Marryat was a good minor writer of adventure stories, usually naval yarns. I used to like his novels very much when I was young – *Mr Midshipman Easy*, *Masterman Ready*, *Phantom Ship*, *Children of the New Forest*...

**... But you can't keep a good woman down...**

The unfortunate Florence Marryat, born in 1838, one of 11 children, became well known for her numerous sensational novels, some considered 'unsuitable for reading by young ladies, but much to their taste'. Later, she became involved with spiritualism. From 1872-76 she worked with George ("Diary of a Nobody") Grossmith on various entertainments and also toured with her own theatrical company. She was twice married – with more than a whiff of scandal - and had 8 children herself. She evidently didn't allow CD's harsh words to crush her for long!

**A daring conjecture** Allan Clack (Membership Secretary) recently re-read *A Tale of Two Cities* and was surprised to find that the heroine, Lucie Manette, married to Charles Darnay, has a young son who dies. The death is described in one brief, mawkish paragraph. How many people remember that? It doesn't contribute to the story. Why is it there? It's been said that Dickens based the character of Lucie Manette on Ellen Ternan. He met Ellen in 1857, while acting in the play, *The Frozen Deep*, whose heroine was called Lucy. ToTC was published in 1859. Lucie and Ellen are physically similar. Dickens developed the character of Sydney Carton from the main character in *The Frozen Deep*.

It has been suggested from more than one source, including CD's daughter Kate and his son Henry, that Dickens and Ellen had a baby son, who died. Was this brief strange paragraph an allusion by CD to the lost child? (Unlikely! Ed.)

**London Particular** Members will know this newsletter's title is taken from the dense fog in Victorian London, as described by CD, especially in *Bleak House*. There is a delightful café/restaurant and bar in New Cross Road, SE London, named "London Particular". The proprietor named it after the famous London pea-souper fogs and she is aware of the Dickens connection. The 7-year old café, which serves healthy, tasty food and drinks, is a minute's walk from New Cross station and close to Goldsmith's College.

**Considering going on a cruise?** I hope you have better weather than Dickens did on his first trip to America in 1842. The ship was horribly thrown about and at one point it '*shipped a sea... that came raging and roaring down into the ladies' cabin*'. His wife and other ladies were '*in such an ecstasy of fear that I scarcely knew what to do with them. I naturally bethought myself of some restorative or comfortable cordial...I procured a tumblerful of hot brandy-and-water without delay. It being impossible to*

*sit or stand without holding on, they were all heaped together in one corner of a long sofa... where they clung to each other in momentary expectation of being drowned. When I approached this place with my specific, and was about to administer it with many consolatory expressions to the nearest sufferer, what was my dismay to see them all roll slowly down to the other end! And when I staggered to that end, and held out the glass once more, how immensely baffled were my good intentions by the ship giving another lurch, and their all rolling back again! I suppose I dodged them up and down this sofa for at least a quarter of an hour, without reaching them once; and by the time I did catch them, the brandy-and-water was diminished, by constant spilling, to a teaspoonful.'* (American Notes)

**Fake News from The Times** Further to the article about the Staplehurst railway accident in LP's last issue, Professor Angus Easson tells me that *The Times* (12.12.17) reported that a 'previously unseen' Dickens letter had 'come to light' and was to be auctioned at Sotheby's that day. The letter, to Pauline Viardot (a leading 19<sup>th</sup> century French mezzo-soprano), was, says Prof Easson, a highly interesting account of Dickens's experience of the Staplehurst crash. But, he adds, someone had not checked, since this letter was published in full in the {definitive and comprehensive collection of CD's letters known as} *Pilgrim Letters* (vol. 11, 1999, page 82-3).

**Membership Renewal reminder** Members should have received a renewal form for 2018 with the last LP. If you have renewed, you will have received membership card/programme for 2018. If you haven't renewed, please do so asap. If you've mislaid the form, send your name and address with your cheque, payable to Dickens Fellowship, or credit card details, to: Membership Secretary, Dickens Fellowship, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX. Fees are unchanged, ie, £17 for membership, £15 for *The Dickensian*.

**As we know, the irrepressible Mr Guppy in *Bleak House* described the London fog as a "London Particular". If there's anything particular you would like to contribute, please contact your editor: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – [aligowans17@outlook.com](mailto:aligowans17@outlook.com) PLEASE NOTE NEW EMAIL ADDRESS.**