

---

# London Particular

## The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

---

**NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN** that the AGM of the Fellowship will take place on Saturday 27 October in the Pullman Hotel, Hyde Park, Sydney. All three executive officers have indicated their willingness to stand for election for a further term of one year. If any member wishes to stand for election as Honorary General Secretary, Honorary Editor of the Dickensian or Honorary Treasurer, please notify us at least 3 months before the meeting via [postbox@dickensfellowship.org](mailto:postbox@dickensfellowship.org). The following business will be transacted:

- a) to receive and to consider the report of Council on the activities of the Fellowship;
- b) to receive and to consider the annual accounts and balance sheet of the Fellowship;
- c) to elect the Honorary Officers;
- d) to transact such business as Council may decide is appropriate for a general meeting.

The agenda for the meeting will be published on the Fellowship website in due course.

**Payment by US\$ and Amex Card** Due to the cost and complexity involved, the Management Committee has decided that payment by either Amex card or US\$ cheque will no longer be accepted. We hope this doesn't inconvenience people too much and that this notification gives them time to make alternative payment arrangements. If anyone needs help or advice, or would like to set up a Standing Order payment, please email the Treasurer at: [df treasurer@btinternet.com](mailto:df treasurer@btinternet.com).

**An early effort** DF member Robert Missen recently came across a copy of "100 Facts on Charles Dickens", the twentieth title in *Smatterbooks*, a series of books of 'essential facts about a variety of subjects', edited by Charles Graves, brother of poet Robert Graves. Mr Missen

was intrigued by Fact 20, which stated: "The two years at Wellington House School gave us the very first piece of writing which has survived from the pen of Charles Dickens. It was a nonsense letter and ran: 'Jim, I am quite ashamed I have not returned your leg, but you shall have it by Harry tomorrow. If you would like to purchase my clavis {clavicle?}, you shall have it at a very reduced price, cheaper in comparison than a leg. Yours etc Charles Dickens. PS. I suppose all this time you have had a wooden leg. I have weighed yours every Saturday night.'" {According to the editors of the Pilgrim Edition of Dickens's letters, "leg" is schoolboy slang for "lexicon".} As Mr Missen says: Mighty oaks from little acorns come to mind! (Including perhaps oaks such as medical students Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen in *Pickwick!* Ed.)

**Van Gogh influenced by CD?** Director of Tate Britain, Alex Farquharson, recently reviewed an exhibition of "Van Gogh in London", to be shown in 2019. VG lived in London, mainly Brixton, for about 2 years, from 1873. Farquharson says, "CD's sympathy for the downtrodden, the way he made their predicaments and their interior world part of great literature – that was a very big influence ...what VG took from Dickens was a moral vision". One of the paintings which will be on show is *L'Arlesienne*, 1890. In front of the elderly 'Woman from Arles', on a table, are two books, at least one by CD. Sadly, I couldn't read the titles when I looked at the painting online. Can anyone help? Incidentally, Tate Britain have formally approached the CDM to lend art work and books for their exhibition.

**It's all vanity...** Many people will remember the sensation caused by the book "*Bonfire of the Vanities*" by Tom Wolfe in 1987. He died last month and was described in an obituary (Daily Telegraph, 16 May) as "one of the great American authors and a founder of the New Journalism movement". He is said to have been inspired by Dickens, and by Thackeray's portrait of early 19<sup>th</sup> century London in *Vanity Fair*.

**Dickens and religion (cont'd)** In connection with the article by Simon Heffer, "How religious was Dickens?" (LP March 2018), DF member

Jacque Stamp wrote: "Readers wishing to follow this up could do a lot worse than read Keith Hooper's *Charles Dickens: Faith, Angels and the Poor* (pub. Lion Books 2017). In chapter 17, 'The Simple Faith of Dickens', Hooper asserts that 'Uninterested in matters of doctrine and petty sectarian squabbles, {Dickens} passionately believed that the role of the Church, and those individuals within it, was to live out the example of Christ...especially...with regard to social justice and the plight of the poor. Christianity was...a matter of individual conscience and attitude of heart, which manifested itself in actions, rather than words'." Jacque adds "Amen to that!"

**Charles Dickens v. Rudyard Kipling or Who'd want a daughter like that?** Prof Michael Slater has kindly sent me extracts from 'A Blessed Girl: *Memoirs of a Victorian Girlhood Chronicled in an Exchange of Letters*', (Lady Emily Lutyens, pub. 1953). Bulwer-Lytton's granddaughter, Emily (aged 16), is corresponding with the 74-year old Rev Whitwell Elwin (a great friend of John Forster). It's interesting to see how CD was regarded in late 19<sup>th</sup> century aristocratic circles.

Emily tells Elwin that she herself likes *Martin Chuzzlewit*, but adds that her Mother 'cannot read Dickens, he is so dreadfully vulgar, and the people seem to do nothing but drink'. Emily disagrees: 'I am sure they are not half as vulgar as a great many modern books which people delight in, and I think all modern books horribly dull, which Dickens is certainly not. What I do not understand is that Mother reads all the new French novels and Rudyard Kipling, and those sort of books, and though she says they are so horrible she can hardly get through them, she will go on reading them. I suppose it is because she likes to read what everyone else is reading. But how, if you cannot read Dickens because of the vulgarity, you can enjoy Rudyard Kipling is more than I can understand'. For the Rev Elwin's amusing reply, please see next issue of LP.

**Mr Squeers comes to Westminster** During the recent controversy over alleged bullying by the Speaker of the House of Commons, John Bercow, a Conservative MP Andrew Bridgen said: 'That the Speaker is a bully is obvious to anyone who watches his performances in the Chair. The Speaker behaves like a pint-sized Wackford Squeers, lashing out at elected MPs as if they were schoolchildren in need of his chastisement'.

**Still going strong** In September 2017, a 70-year old man died after being found ablaze near his north London home. Detectives said they'd found no obvious cause for the fire. Bernard Knight, a Home Office pathologist for 31 years,

said 'the "wick effect" can explain the phenomenon, whereby the clothing of a victim soaks up melted fat and accelerates a fire, but it was ridiculous to suggest a body could ignite without an external cause. For someone to walk in the streets and just burst into flames is extremely peculiar. In the course of my career I saw maybe 3 or 4 cases of so-called Spontaneous Human Combustion, but they were all indoors near an open fire-place. This is very unusual, because it took place outside...' He went on to say alcohol was a common factor in such deaths. This time there was no mention of the alcoholic Krook's death in *Bleak House*. CD was of course convinced Spontaneous Combustion could happen – and it appears modern science has not yet proved him wrong.

**A false attack** In the last edition of LP, I quoted a rather nasty letter from CD to Florence Marryat, rejecting a story she had submitted. DF member Prof Tony Pointon feels that Florence was lucky to receive a letter at all. He notes that CD would probably not have written to her if she hadn't been the daughter of his friend Captain Marryat – who had died before this incident took place. 'Suppose', says Prof Pointon, 'he'd sent comments to everyone who asked him, we would probably have had several fewer Dickens works. The fact that CD did take time to write a straight criticism has opened him up for a false attack by the anti-Dickens brigade'.

**Miriam's History Hero** In a recent BBC History magazine, DF member and Patron Miriam Margolyes was asked to nominate her history hero. She chose Charles Dickens and said: "Like Shakespeare, Dickens wrote for all time and his characters are as vivid now as when he first put pen to paper, more than 180 years ago". Starting with *Oliver Twist* at age 11, Miriam went on to read all his books, her favourite being *Little Dorrit*. She admires the way he was to incorporate the extraordinary events of his life into a critique of English society from top to bottom... In response to the question, "What would you ask CD if you met him?", she replied, 'Oh goodness, I'd just listen to anything he said. I'd be the archetypal gobsmacked fan with my eyes on stalks!'

**'There is no such passion in human nature, as the passion for gravy among commercial gentlemen.'** (Mrs Todgers, *Martin Chuzzlewit*). Your Editor's passion for contributions comes close though, so please send one to: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – [aligowans17@outlook.com](mailto:aligowans17@outlook.com)