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# London Particular

## The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

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**2021 CENTRAL PROGRAMME** It seems highly unlikely that physical meetings will be possible any time soon, so we have planned the programme on the basis of virtual meetings. Members who provided their e-addresses will continue to receive the link that will enable them to join the meetings via Zoom. If you have not yet provided us with your e-address, but wish to join these meetings, please send it to [postbox@dickensfellowship.org](mailto:postbox@dickensfellowship.org) and we will send regular invitations.

**HAARLEM CONFERENCE POSTPONED** Sadly, the pandemic has resulted in the postponement to next year (2022) of the planned DF Conference in Haarlem in July. Instead, it is intended to organise a virtual Conference via Zoom over the weekend of **17/18 July**, the AGM to be held on the evening of **Friday 16**. Further details will be published once the programme has been finalised.

**MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER**  
Members should have received a renewal form for 2021 with the last LP. If you have renewed, you will have received membership card/programme for 2021. If not, please renew 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 2HX. Fees are unchanged, i.e. £17 for membership, £15 for *The Dickensian*.

**MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE** The Management Committee of the Fellowship meets 4 times a year (currently virtually) to manage the affairs of the Fellowship in between meetings of Council and the AGM. We are always looking for any member who feels that he or she may be able to make a positive contribution to the running of the Fellowship, and is able to spare the time, to join

the Committee. We would particularly welcome anyone with experience in the areas of marketing and/or member/subscriber recruitment. If you would like to join the MC, please let us know by mailing [postbox@dickensfellowship.org](mailto:postbox@dickensfellowship.org)

**Newspaper Wars** DF members **Barbara** and **Mike Bowler** have written in with some interesting information culled from *"The Thirties" '1930-1940 in Great Britain'* by Malcolm Muggeridge. Apparently, "during the constant struggle to increase circulation, popular newspapers made numerous attempts to gain readers by offers of gifts, free insurance etc. To put an end to this ruinous competition, the national dailies agreed to renounce all free gift schemes. *The Daily Herald* reopened hostilities, however, by offering a set of Dickens's novels in 16 volumes, worth 4 guineas, for 11/-. *The Daily Mail*, *The Daily Express* and the *News Chronicle* offered their readers sets of CD's works for 10/- (a loss for the papers). When the death of Sir Henry Dickens released the *Life of Christ*" [sic] for publication, *The Daily Mail* acquired it for £40,000, or more than £1 per word. Posters appeared in tube stations of CD's head looking out from a crown of thorns [Barbara and Mike wonder if there is a copy of the poster anywhere? Ed.] *The Daily Express* produced an effective counterblast in the shape of an article by Mr Thomas Wright, disclosing for the first time the details of Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan, as related by her to Canon Benham. The *"Life of Christ"* failed to arouse much interest".

**Dickens's Birthday and a hidden gem** As many of you will know, on Sunday 7 Feb, **Lucinda Hawksley** (CD's great-great-great-granddaughter) and **Miriam Margolyes** (actress and DF member) co-presented *"Happy Birthday Mr Dickens!"* on Zoom, ably abetted by **Cindy Sughrue**, Director of the CD Museum. It was a delightful evening. One of the characters brought to life by Miriam during the session was Mrs Lirriper (of *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* and *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy*). In his biography of CD, **Prof Michael Slater** describes Mrs Lirriper as "a kindly, garrulous, middle-aged and childless widow who lets

*lodgings in Norfolk Street, Strand*". She becomes the narrator of the Christmas number of *All the Year Round* 1863. Michael calls her "a genuinely humorous creation. She is certainly comic but also moving, one of Dickens's most successful depictions of a good woman, hidden away now in a little-read minor work". Michael reminds us, though, that Mrs L was presented to a wider public not so long ago by Miriam herself in her acclaimed one-woman stage show *Dickens's Women* (2012).

**Dickens and the virus** Our Hon Gen Sec, **Paul Graham**, writes: What did Dickens think about vaccination and those 'anti-vaxxers' who publicly doubt its efficacy? The answer may be found in an article entitled 'Proposals for a National Jest-Book' that he wrote for the issue of 'Household Words' which appeared on 3 May 1856. **"A waggish member of Parliament, when vaccination had been introduced by Dr Jenner upwards of half a century, and had saved innumerable thousands of people from premature death, from suffering, and from disfigurement – as, down to that time, had been equally well-known to wise men and fools – rose in his place in the House of Commons and denounced it forsooth, 'For', says he, 'it is a failure, and the cause of death.'"** Dickens made it clear that he considered the views of this Member of Parliament to be as relevant and informed as those of Boodle, Coodle and Foodle in *Bleak House*.

**Dickens and Diphtheria** *The Times* (28.12.20) reports that a newly discovered letter reveals how an Irish doctor may have saved the lives of CD's wife and sons by persuading him to send them home from France during a diphtheria epidemic. CD and his family were spending the summer of 1856 at Boulogne. The city was the centre of an outbreak that would kill 366 people. It was spread by droplets in the air and particularly affected poorer people living closely together.

The letter, discovered by The Charles Dickens Letters Project, indicates that Sir Joseph Oliffe, physician to the British Embassy in Paris, had warned CD of the particular risk to children. CD thanked Sir Joseph for his warning: "I have ...shewn you the value I set on your advice, by sending all the boys home to London this very day. I would have sent them yesterday, but that the Steamer was gone, before your letter came. We have had a general knowledge of there being such a Malady abroad among children, and two of our children's little acquaintances have even died of it. But it is extraordinarily difficult (as you know) to discover the truth in such a place; and the townspeople are naturally particularly afraid of my

*knowing it, as having so many means of making it better known."* Diphtheria was a scourge particularly of children (unlike Coronavirus) and was known, chillingly, as "The Strangling Angel of Children". It resulted in the death of Victoria and Albert's second daughter, Alice, when she contracted it through kissing her little boy, who had the disease, and died a fortnight later, aged 35. This was announced by Disraeli in the House of Commons, famously using the phrase "the kiss of death". The 20<sup>th</sup> century brought a vaccine, but a few cases are still reported.

**Not to be missed!** A review by Kevin Maher in the *Times* (29.1.21), entitled 'Please Sir, I don't want more', slaughters a new film of *Oliver Twist*: *"Nothing can quite prepare you for the spectacular heights of idiocy to which this stultifying tripe truly soars. It is ingeniously bad"*. Bill Sikes, apparently, is played by Lena Headey (yes, a woman, from *Game of Thrones*, it seems) with *"such snarling amateurism that the credibility she gained from GoT immediately evaporates"*. Michael Caine is in it too, playing *"a mildly uninterested Fagin (cheque for Sir Michael, please!), here starring in the worst flick of his career"....*

**....Gender fluidity in *The Old Curiosity Shop*?**

The two crooked lawyers, Sampson and Sally Brass, are brother and sister. Sally cannot legally practise law, by reason of her sex, so she acts as Sampson's assistant. CD naturally describes this aberration (a female lawyer!) as repulsive and mannish: *"Had it consorted with Miss Brass's maiden modesty to have assumed her brother's clothes in a frolic, it would have been difficult... to determine which was which, especially as the lady carried upon her upper lip certain reddish demonstrations which might have been mistaken for a beard. These were, however, probably nothing more than eye-lashes in a wrong place, as the eyes of Miss Brass were quite free from any such natural impertinences"*. As we know, her femaleness is vindicated by an astonishing revelation towards the end of the book!

Coronavirus is, we hope, on the decline, things are looking up and we can say, with Little Nell: *"The birds sing again in spring... Spring! a beautiful and happy time!"*

**Paul Dombey repeatedly wondered "what it was that the waves were always saying". Perhaps it was something along the lines of "Contributions please to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – [aligowans17@outlook.com](mailto:aligowans17@outlook.com)"**