



A Stone from an Unseen Hand

Mr Dick's Kite

FOR ALL DICKENS FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS

No 90

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“No Popery!” This favourite cry the rest re-echoed, and the mob, which might have been two hundred strong, joined in a general shout.

Mr. Haredale had stood calmly on the brink of the steps.... He was pretty near the boat, when Gashford, as if without intention, turned about, and directly afterwards a great stone was thrown by some hand, in the crowd, which struck him on the head, and made him stagger like a drunken man.

The blood sprung freely from the wound.....

“Who did that? Show me the man who hit me.....” Who did that?” he repeated. “Show me the man who did it. Dog, was it you? It was your deed, if not your hand – I know you”.

He threw himself on Gashford as he said the words, and hurled him to the ground.

Barnaby Rudge, Chapter XLIII

Shakespeare's Globe celebrates Dickens Bicentennial

For the Bicentenary, the summer edition of *Around the Globe*, the journal of Shakespeare's Globe, London, carries two articles on Charles Dickens's familiarity with, knowledge of, use of, and love of Shakespeare's works.

The first of these, titled *He Knew Him By Heart*, discussed the way Dickens used Shakespeare in his work, showing both knowledge and understanding, using him for quotations and allusions – well over a thousand of them – and extends to his developing Shakespearean traits in his characters. The article sees Richard III used in Quilp, Falstaff in Mrs Gamp, and something of Hamlet in all three of Nicholas Nickleby, Clennam and Pip – even finding an echo of Hamlet's reference to his own dead father in Mr Micawber's comment on his deceased father-in-law – “*Take him for all in all, we ne'er shall – in short - make the acquaintance, probably of anyone else possessing at his time of life, the same legs for gaiters.*” The article also noted Dickens's mockery of pretentious Shakespearean acting, but dwelt even more on his own excellent, if supposedly amateur performances both in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (played for Queen Victoria) and in the public readings of his own works. Comparing the two “*greatest popular writers*”, it notes their “*tragedy is never unchallenged by hope and courage, by the sheer wilfulness and indomitability of [their] greatest comic creations.*”

The second article – *Visits from Boz* – shows Dickens's signature in the visitors book at the “Shakespeare Birthplace” (and Phiz's); it refers to his fundraising for the purchase and renewal of the house, including his highly-praised productions of and performances in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Jonson's *Every Man in his Humour* put on explicitly to provide a stipend for one of Dickens's colleagues, Sheriden Knowles, though he never took up the post. It is noted that, in *Nicholas Nickleby*, Dickens has Mrs Witterley make the “satirical observation” “*I find I take so much more interest in his plays, after having been to that dear little dull house he was born in! I don't know how it is, but after you've seen the place and written your name in the little book, somehow or other you seem to be inspired; it kindles up quite a fire within one.*” (That statement probably had satirical undertones because Dickens had doubts that the great writer was even born in Stratford, let alone in that particular house – but, to him, theatricality was all.) **AJP**

Dickens in the age of electronics

I'm always – for no definable reason – surprised at the number of times Dickens is mentioned in other people's books. I was reading a story by Norah Lofts the other day (“But I've had Everything!” in *Heaven in your Hand*, Fawcett, 1958) and learned that “*Mrs Lacey was anything but childlike, there was nothing of Dora Copperfield about her.*” P.G. Wodehouse frequently uses Dickens characters adjectivally. Reading one of his stories before I had ever read *Nicholas Nickleby*, I was a little perplexed

by someone's having "*their very own Cheeryble brothers*". That sort of reference no longer perplexes me, thank goodness! It is amusing to ponder what Dickens would have made of modern communication methods. He would undoubtedly have deplored the "language" used in text transmissions. Computers would have made his work easier, but we would have been poorer for the lack of manuscripts! However, some who have to change computer passwords frequently may be grateful to Dickens. Combine dates of publication with titles or character names; mix his initials with his date of birth or death, the permutations are enormous! I had a slight problem once, though. Working in Germany with an English keyboard, I confounded the system; I chose "Barnaby" as my password, and the computer accepted it, but I then found I had to write "Barnabz" to get in. Of course, there are plenty of names without that confusing "y", so, after 6 months, when the company said it was time to change, I used the name of a different character. Even hackers who know my penchant for Dickens and may guess that I would use him as a source should be defeated by the sheer number of possibilities! Thank you, Mr. D!

JE

Dickens's Favourite Christmas Book?

There is no doubt that, for a majority of people, their favourite Dickens book, among all he wrote, will be *A Christmas Carol*. And by extension, they are bound to think it was Dickens's favourite also. He certainly seems to have given more public readings from it than any other of his books, and it may have been read – in English and in translation – more than any other book in the world. Yet it is known he was not entirely happy with its effect.

The *Carol*, written in 1843, was, in reality, a replacement for his story of the *Goblins who Stole the Sexton* in the Christmas number of *Pickwick* 1836, which did not get across the redemption message so important to Dickens. Yet the *Carol's* impact as the "sledge-hammer blow" for the poor that Dickens wanted it to be did not satisfy him: it was too diluted by the messages of hope and cheerfulness that would keep breaking through.

So, when he began to think about his next Christmas book in the summer of 1844, soon after arriving with family and servants in Genoa, he was looking for a harsh story to include a message on real poverty which could not be avoided. And he found one in his book *The Chimes*.

If one reads the usual commentaries on *The Chimes* – which is about the same length as the *Carol* – they will usually concentrate on the difficulty Dickens had in starting it, on the way he was inspired by the Genoa bells – the "chimes at midnight" as he called them – on his winter journey with the manuscript to London, over the Alps and across the Channel, to read this "New Year" tale in Lincoln's Inn to his friends – moving some of them to tears; and how, riding on the back of the *Carol*, the initial sales of *The Chimes* were even greater.

The story is sometimes spoken of as a satire on the times, though the ridicule and exaggeration is missing, and its cruel message of poverty and the poor is unsoftened. When the heroine, Meg Veck, babe in arms, is forced from her lodgings, in the cold, for not paying her rent, and heads for the river, it is just too realistic to be smiled away. (It is no wonder A.N. Wilson found himself sobbing openly on a bus while reading it.) And the supernatural intervention of the spirits of the bells is not directed at the insensitive upper-class, but at the pessimistic guilt accepted by the hero, Trotty Veck. Even the final twist that gives the story a mock happy ending stresses the pessimism of the whole, rather than diminishing it.

It has been said that this was Dickens's favourite Christmas book, but whether it was or not, if one wanted a book for 2012 which encapsulates his impact as a spokesman for the poor, this could well be it. **AJP**

Bits of Dickens

1. *"It was the Dover Road which lay...."*

When I was a boy this half-completed sentence contained the very essence of Dickens. It was a long time before I knew the rest of the quote, but when I did know it, it did not stir me, and give me the thrill of Dickens like these few words have done. There are other bits of Dickens which I carry about in my mind, and repeat and examine from time to time, and I thought that readers of the Kite might like to share them with me, so I have listed them below. (I give no references where they can be found and have not checked as to their accuracy but they have been my companions for many years.

2. *"An unhappy culprit, guilty of imperfect exercise, approaches at his command. He cracks a joke, before he beats him, and we laugh at it, miserable little dogs, we laugh, with our hearts sinking into our boots, and our faces as white as ashes."*

3. *"I do not write angrily or resentfully, but I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my Mother was warm for my being sent back."*

4. *"You know the consequences of mixing them, Citizen."* *"Perfectly."*

5. *"Nose – flat"* *"Aquiline! Aquiline, you hag!"*

ASW

Little Dorrit and Cordelia

Recently, I saw a book quoted, and praised, in respect of its claim that Dickens had "clearly" based his character Little Dorrit on Cordelia in Shakespeare's *King Lear*, while William Dorrit was based on Lear himself. It has been of interest to try to figure out how anyone would make such an identification mistake, and even more interesting to find out why they were praised for a valuable scholarly contribution. The main features of Lear can be summarised as follows: he was an ancient King of Britain, possessed of vast possessions and wealth. He took the peculiar decision, in effect, to give up the ruling of his realm and the control of its wealth, and to divide them

between his *three* daughters, Regan, Goneril and Cordelia. However, he expected to continue to have a share in the wealth of the realm that he was giving away and have influence over decisions and some trappings of monarchy. (So no problems with the parallels to William Dorrit so far!)

Lear then totally disinherited his youngest daughter, Cordelia, because she told him a self-evident truth he did not want to hear, that she could not guarantee that he would always be the first love of her life. The two other daughters had no qualms about lying. Cordelia, cast off with nothing, got married. Then, when Cordelia's two sisters, whose lies Lear had preferred to Cordelia's truth, pauperised him by denying him either wealth or influence or even comfort, he went mad. Cordelia returned to look after him but, in defending him, she was murdered by one of those sisters. Lear, distraught at the death of his wronged best daughter, collapses and dies with her in his arms. So, out of all that, we have only two trivial similarities between Cordelia and Little Dorrit: she was her father's youngest daughter and it was she who looked after him. (However, she also helped her sister Fanny who, though selfish, did nothing to harm her or her father. Furthermore, though William Dorrit had a mental breakdown, it had nothing to do with the actions of his children or any crazy decisions he made about them, and, when he died, Little Dorrit was released to marry and make a new life.)

The problem in this sort of nebulous area of literary detection is that it is apparently not considered proper to point out where flights of invention, based on pure flights of fancy, are unhelpful (to say the least). Perhaps it was thought useful to father Shakespeare with the invention of Dickens's characters? Yet there must have been somebody within those who read that book prior to publication who could have pointed out that William Dorrit was based, root and branch, on Dickens's own father – with a little imaginative adaptation and extrapolation - while the character of Little Dorrit owed more to Dickens's own personal experiences than any other source.

AJP

The most discussed artefact in Dickens

There are a number of artefacts in Dickens which have attracted the attention of scholars, amateur and professional. One of these, of course, has been the Workhouse in *Oliver Twist*: in that case however, it is more its location which has focussed minds: its nature seems to have been too similar to other such establishments to be interesting, falling far short of the disastrous one at Fareham near Portsmouth which led to a Parliamentary enquiry all by itself. Dickens placed Oliver's some 70 miles from London, and the one at Northampton seems to be a good candidate for that purpose.

Some have queried the exact nature of the Yorkshire Schools in *Nicholas Nickleby*: were they as awful as Dickens made out, or did he exaggerate? The argument began as soon as Dotheboys Hall appeared in print, but there are too many facts available to permit the free speculation which is so

enjoyable. Similarly, there have been intermittent discussions around the collapse of the Clennam's house in *Little Dorrit*, and whether Dickens based it on one that fell down (not that rare an event at the time) in Tottenham Court Road even while he was writing the book. However, he gave too many hints earlier in the book of the house's instability to suppose he did not plan it to fall down as an allegory. Yet one artefact, boot blacking bottles, which appear multiply in the novels admits of no discussion. At the time, though, anyone without Dickens's memory would have found them totally baffling.

If a route can be an artefact, then the 125-mile journey followed in the flight of Little Nell, has given enjoyment to the erudite and the merely curious, especially with its basis in *Pilgrim's Progress*. In order to define its end as Tong in Shropshire, a plaque has been put on a "grave" there sometime in the last 60 years to mark her fictitious resting place. Likewise, if an animal could be an artefact, a number in Dickens have attracted attention: the ever-living, super-intelligent Grip in *Barnaby Rudge*; Jip, the questionable King Charles Spaniel in *David Copperfield*; Bull's Eye, who raised hackles recently when used to advertise *Oliver Twist*; and Whiskers, the Garlands' pony in *The Old Curiosity Shop*.

However, possibly the most intense though friendly debate has centred on Daniel Peggotty's boat-house in *Copperfield*, with a number of Dickens's later illustrators physically entering the lists. This debate arises, of course, because Phiz - obviously approved by Dickens - showed it upside-down, when one can detect no hint for that in the novel's text. Was it Phiz's artistic idea, as his biographer Valerie Brown Lester suggests? Was it erudition, based on the fact that some old roofs were built like upturned boats - hence the ecclesiastical term "nave" from the Latin "navis" for boat. Or was it simple observation of what seems quite natural. One story is that Dickens got the idea from his Grandmother Dickens who, when working for the Durantes at Tong Castle, saw an upturned boat at the side of the lake. It is obvious Dickens wanted it "upside-down" for that is how it appeared at the front of the full novel, much to the joy of most of his readers. **AJP**

Poor old Dickens

A publisher's advance notice of a new novel *Charles Dickens and the Night Visitors* - claims it recounts Dickens's attempts to use hypnosis in helping to cure a Mme de la Rue of her hallucinations, nightmares and depression in Genoa in 1844/5. According to that publicity, which may, of course, not be strictly accurate, the book's selling points are:

it is told from the point of view of the Dickens children and servants - who left us no record; it deals with his attempts at ghost busting (which never happened); it deals with his "unorthodox relationship" with the wife of a friend that split up his family (which it did not); it shows Dickens as a misogynist, a woman hater (which he was not). **AJP**

He gets everywhere.

Following 3-months TV abstinence, ended with the Bicentennial Conference, there was chance to see the last part of a must see film – *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. The fade-out scene, with the pyjamas of those men, youths and boys who had just died in a gas-chambers all hanging up, with each pair telling a moving story of their owners, had surely to be an echo of Dickens's *Meditations in Monmouth Street* in "Sketches", where he made the second-hand garments hanging there recount the history of *their* owners.

AJP

The Mistakes about Edwin Drood (continued)?

One's subconscious, realising it has been quite deceived over the years by the debates on how *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* might have finished, might decide to amuse itself. Can it really be possible, it might ask, that Dickens would really kill off his eponymous hero a third of the way through the novel, thus removing his major romantic lead? Might he then, while pretending to be a detective-story-writer, give out all the information needed to solve the crime by the time the novel was half way through, leaking the solution through hints to friends and the frontispiece illustration – and to do that without providing a convincing motive or even a definite crime: would he leave the supposed disguised detective Dick Datchery with no surprises to find or brilliant deductions to make to startle the reader during the second half of the book. Is the story only to have one death and one marriage, when the popular prejudice runs in favour of two (of each). Are we sure the clues in the story up to halfway (added to those Dickens had supposedly – and carelessly – given to his friends and family) were not at best ambiguous, at worst misleading, waiting to be reinterpreted in the round-up after further information had come to hand and the detective mind had put it all together?

The cast may be small, with only 24 significant characters (so far), but that number is still big enough to allow for some surprises as well as decoys. (One Agatha Christie story had ten characters, and the murderer turned out to be already "dead". In another, all the possible suspects turned out to be murderers.) We don't know the secret of Princess Puffer that lay behind her fist-waving in the Cathedral, but she knew or suspected something we do not know or can't be sure about. Don't real mystery writers give their readers clues with misleading meanings, and spin out the final revelation till the absolute last moment, or nearly so? Would Dickens have risked a repeat of the embarrassment with *Barnaby Rudge* when Edgar Allan Poe had published the solution to the "murder" before the novel was half finished? There may not be a butler to be the surprise culprit here, but what about Crisparkle, or Mrs Billikin, or (even better) the Reverend Honeythunder. And, finally, one's subconscious might ask why do all the proposed continuations of the novel not concentrate on explaining the content of Charles Collins's illustration for the front cover of the separate parts? It may be enigmatic, but

surely it should be consistent with the story as finally revealed. Funny thing, the subconscious! What if it makes its revelation in a dream, and, horror of horrors, it turns out to be, that we will never know the answer. **AJP**

Matters Arising

Commenting on the May issue of “The Kite”, and contrary to what we had read, Joanne Eysell tells us that the Italian analysis of the Drood case – namely, *The D Case or the Truth about the Mystery of Edwin Drood* – was translated by George Dowling and published in 1992 as a Harvest Book, Harcourt & Co., NY: many thanks. (JE suspects that anyone who knows about Gad’s Hill will not be exactly convinced.)

JE also wondered whether Mrs Woodcourt’s stress on her son’s elevated Welsh lineage in *Bleak House* was not an echo of Tabitha Bramble harping on the same theme in Smollett’s *Humphrey Clinter* (1771). (That is possible, of course, but such obsession is not unusual in reality; and George Meredith complained of having the same problem with the aunts who educated him.)

JE also pointed out, on the importance of Dr Manette, that he was more prominent in the story as a patient than as a medic, (That is true, but it was as the latter that he was crucial to the existence of *The Tale of Two Cities*.)

Front Page Picture

Geoffrey Haredale leaves his house one evening, and, while passing through Westminster Hall encounters Sir John Chester and Gashford, Lord George Gordon’s secretary. At the behest of Sir John, a somewhat uncomfortable conversation ensues between the three, until it is broken by the arrival of Lord George and his entourage, Lord George having just come from the House of Commons. Sir John introduces Lord George and Haredale to each other but, unsurprisingly, the conversation becomes even more heated, and the latter doesn’t mince his words when telling the former what he thinks and knows about Gashford. As they pass out through the Hall-door, Haredale turns away towards the river stairs to get a boat, and as he does so, someone in the crowd hurls a stone at him, hitting him on the head; this being the subject matter of the front page picture and quotation.

GC

Contributions

Comments and short items, for the Kite, and queries, are always welcome. (See “Matters Arising” above.) Please send them either through alanwatts1@supanet.com or, (for Geoffrey Christopher), 39 Northern Parade, Hilsa, Portsmouth, Hants., PO2 9PB. geoffreychristopher132@btinternet.com

In fellowship,

Compiled by Alan S. Watts and friends, for The Dickens Fellowship.