

Mr Dick's Kite

No. 92

Autumn 2013



The Gentleman next door declares his passion for Mrs Nickleby

As Kate rose from her seat, in some alarm, and caught her mother's hand to run with her into the house, she felt herself rather retarded than assisted in her intention; and following the direction of Mrs Nickleby's eyes, was quite terrified by the apparition of an old black velvet cap, which, by slow degrees, as if its wearer were ascending a ladder or pair of steps, rose above the wall dividing their garden from that of the next cottage, and was gradually followed by a very large head, and an old face in which were a pair of most extraordinary grey eyes : very wild, very wide open, and rolling in their sockets, with a dull, languishing, leering look, most ugly to behold.

Notes from the Editor

“*Mr Dick’s Kite* will now be produced electronically which will bring it into the 21st century and make it more immediate and cost effective. Although in a slightly different format it will still be the same old *Kite* you have known over the years. My daughter, Fleur Hogarth, will be taking on the responsibility for putting it all together, with the assistance and support of members of the Fellowship. Comments and short items are always

welcome and should be sent to alanwatts1@supanet.com or to Fleur’s e-mail once she gets it set up. Meanwhile enjoy the *Kite* flying once again.”

Alan S Watts

Apologies for the fact that several items submitted over the past few months have not been printed in *Mr Dick’s Kite*. We’ve a little catching up to do.

Fleur Hogarth

To make sure that those among our valued readers who do not have access to computers can read *Mr Dick’s Kite*. I would be grateful if branch secretaries would print off a copy and give it to their members who are in this situation. If you know of others who cannot receive the *Kite* in its new form please let me know so that I can arrange a copy for them.

The Charles Dickens Museum

The purchase of the freehold of 48 Doughty Street, and its opening in 1925 as a museum dedicated to the life and work of Charles Dickens, remains the greatest single achievement to date of the Dickens Fellowship.

As everyone will know, the Museum re-opened in December 2012 after a £3 million restoration and refurbishment programme. The work was substantially funded



by the Heritage Lottery Fund and secures the future of the building for generations to come. Given this level of investment, it was inevitable that there would be an overhaul of the rather antiquated structure by which trustees are appointed.

A Special Meeting of the trustees was held in September to change the existing method and criteria for the appointment of trustees. The new Board is composed of those with the special skills and experience to enable the museum to thrive and prosper in the 21st century and ensure that the Fellowship's legacy remains in good hands. The special role of the Dickens Fellowship in the establishment of the museum

will continue to be recognised by the reservation of one place for a Fellowship-nominated Director on the new Board.

Members are reminded that, whilst all postal communications with the Fellowship should continue to be addressed care of the museum, the Fellowship has no staff working there and the staff of the museum will be unable to respond to any telephone queries about Fellowship related matters. Please e-mail any such queries to: postbox@dickensfellowship.org.

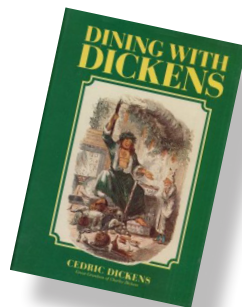
Food

A recent copy of the *Spectator* contained an article bearing the title 'FOOD', which was chiefly about the Savoy Grill in London, which offers an "Olde British" menu of fare. This did not have any reference to Dickens, although a year or two ago Mr Cedric Dickens published a book entitled *Dining with Dickens!* Readers of this must have looked in vain for any reference to today's most popular dish, which I beg pardon for introducing with the riddle:

Q. "Why did the French lose the Battle of Trafalgar?"

A. "Because they did not have sufficient ships (fish and chips)".

ASW



The Uncommercial Traveller

In his later years Dickens was a regular visitor to France, as we all know, so he must have travelled frequently on the Calais night-mail. This essay in *The Uncommercial Traveller* entitled “*The Calais Night Mail*” is a typical piece of Dickens’s writing.

“As I wait here on board the night-packet, for the South-Eastern Train to come down with the mail, Dover appears to me to be illuminated for some intensely aggravating festivity in my personal dishonour. The wind blows stiffly from the Nor’-East, the sea runs high, we ship a deal of water, the night is dark and cold, and the shapeless passengers lie about in melancholy bundles, as if they were sorted out for the laundress. I am under a curious compulsion to occupy myself with the Irish melodies. “Rich and rare were the gems she wore,” is the particular melody to which I find myself devoted. I sing it to myself in the most charming manner and with the greatest expression. Now and then, I raise my head (I am sitting on the hardest of wet seats in the most uncomfortable of wet attitudes, but I don’t mind it,)....

Then I go on again, “Rich and rare were the ge-ems she-e-e-e wore, And a bright gold ring on her wa-and she bore, But O her beauty was fa-a-a-a-r beyond”



— I am particularly proud of my execution here, when I become aware of another awkward shock from the sea, and another protest from the funnel, and a fellow-creature at the paddle-box more audibly indisposed than I think he need be —“Her sparkling ge-ems, or snow-white wand, But O her beauty was fa-a-a-a-r be-yond”—another awkward one here, “Her spa-a-rkling ge-ems, or her- Port! port! steady! “snow-white —“ fellow creature at the paddle-box very selfishly audible, bump roar wash white wand”.

ASW

Literally

There are certain words which trouble me; “Literally” is one. Dickens describes the blacking warehouse where he worked as a boy as being “literally overrun with rats”. Well, why not simply say “it was overrun with rats?” The word “literally” does not add anything to the sense. Dickens should have seen how Browning described an infestation of rats:

*“Rats! They fought the
dogs, and killed the cats,
And bit the babies in the cradles,*

*And ate the cheeses out of the vats,
And licked the soup from
the cooks’ own ladles,
Split open kegs of salted sprats,
Made nests inside
men’s Sunday hats,
And even spoilt the women’s
chats...”*

And so on and so on.

But don’t we all enjoy the discursiveness of Dickens. There was nothing mean about him.

ASW

The English Language

Monica Dickens attended a book signing of one of her popular novels. The crowds were large, and it was rather tiring asking, “And who is it for?” to each new customer, before writing the name on the flyleaf. Glancing up she was relieved to see that the queue was thinning. A lady stuck herself in front of the desk and Monica looked up, preparing to ask the by now routine question. Before she could say anything the lady said, “Emma Chizzit” and Monica began to write “To Emma Chizzit.....” when the lady stopped her and said

“Naw! Wot’s the price?” Then the penny dropped and Monica realised to her amusement that the lady had in fact said “How much is it?”

Galsworthy writes in *The Forsyte Saga*, about Old Jolyon amusing his grandchildren with the tale of the little boy who asked his grandfather, “Do plummers (plums) have leggers?” and when told, “No they don’t!” says “Well, bless me if I haven’t been and gone and swallowed a sniley-bob!”

What a wonderful language we have!

ASW

Among The Immortals

Some characters are more immortal than others.

Thackeray seemed indifferent to the immortality of his characters. At the end of *'Vanity Fair'* he would cheerfully “sweep his puppets into a box and close the lid”.

Dickens, however, had more respect for his creations. Perhaps it took a little while before Mr Pickwick and Sam Weller were recognised as “immortal”, but Dickens never swept them into a box and closed the lid.

He treated even his minor characters with due respect. This is not to say that Dickens treated them all equally. He knew that some would die on the battlefield while others would survive to enjoy happy longevity in a prosperous tavern where many of his other characters would foregather to enjoy the hospitality and good fellowship of their host.

ASW



Parenting

I was listening to an interesting radio programme the other afternoon which discussed the need for ‘parenting skills’ to be taught to new parents. The programme drew attention to the way in which many children are brought up in circumstances which do not allow them to understand what constitutes a ‘normal’ family life. I was immediately reminded of the Jellyby family.

We usually think of Dickens as a social reformer in the 19th century and we overlook the fact that there are still many social reforms required today. I learned for instance, that there are many new mothers who are quite ignorant in the art of changing nappies and preparing feeding bottles. At one time such skills

were handed down from mothers to daughters but now, with changing times, parents are often forced to go out to work for economic reasons, and have less and less time to spend with their offspring, and as a result young children are often neglected. Against this background the Government are putting forward tentative proposals for parenting classes to be offered at ante-natal clinics for new parents.

Caddy Jellyby’s words have a sharp relevance in today’s world.

“It’s disgraceful,” she said. “You know it is. The whole house is disgraceful. The children are disgraceful. I’m disgraceful. Pa’s miserable and no wonder!”

ASW

Get Fell In

My Grandfather joined the army in 1914. Nearly all the new recruits were university graduates or public schoolboys, intelligent and very well-spoken.

On his second day the drill sergeant marched up to him with his swagger-

cane under his arm and a face like thunder.

“You was larfing,” he bawled down the new recruit’s ear.

“No, I weren’t.” ventured the new recruit.

A recent edition of Radio 4's *A Good Read* reminded listeners that AA Milne did not only write the Winnie-the Pooh stories. His 1931 novel - *Two People* - tells the story of a married couple who have little in common with each other. It is of particular interest to Dickensians because of the interplay of two minor characters, which shines a light on contemporary reactions to the work of Dickens. Ormsby, a self-made newspaper baron, has money but no 'culture'; Raglan, a literary critic, has plenty of 'culture' but no money. The former employs the latter to review the latest books in his paper - and is disappointed at the titles selected: *The Life of Thomas Heywood*, *Pastoral Poets of the Renaissance* and *The Aesthetics of Vorticism* are not designed to achieve his ambition to encourage working men to read. Ormsby tells Raglan:

'When I was fourteen I had bought and read every book that Dickens ever wrote.' He repeated it slowly and Raglan shivered. *'I was earning ten shillings a week and took seven home to my mother.'* He murmured to himself again. *'Every Hell-be-jiggered book, on three shillings a week,'* and added aloud, *'But*

of course that's nothing to you, because you're a real book lover.' Raglan, who hadn't bought a book for twenty years, wondered *uncomfortably if he was.'*



Referring to the esoteric titles that Raglan had chosen to review Ormsby asks: 'Do you really enjoy them? I just wondered. Get as much blood-and-bones from 'em as I got from *Pickwick*?'

The distinction between the refined tastes of the intellectual elite and the mass of 'ordinary' people is nicely drawn.

Names

I like to imagine Dickens as he walked around London or Rochester, and how he would think to himself “*That’s an interesting name for a business. I’ll have to remember it when I am looking for amusing examples in my next novel*”

I will have to remember “Scrooge

and Marley”; “*Spenlow and Jorkins*” and any number more that I am sure are waiting to be called to mind:- *Codlin and Short; the Cheeryble Bros; Dombey and Son; Hillard and Botting, and of course, Dodson and Fogg.”*

ASW

Jobs-worthy

A year or two ago I published a little book entitled “*Be your own Boss at Sixteen*” which, I believe, proved useful to several young people who managed to obey its precepts. I am afraid that in the present economic climate this is not so easy to do, but in the fictitious world of Pickwick, and Dodson and Fogg, several young people were able to establish themselves, principally, by the old dodge of making a ‘nuisance’ of themselves until such time as an employer took them on to his books. SamWeller, is a good example. Once Mr Pickwick had seen what an excellent chap he was for doing any little job which his master required, Mr Pickwick hired him as his servant.

Sam is the only character about

whom Dickens never gave us details about previous spells of employment. He was employed as ‘casual labour’ cleaning the boots at the White Hart Inn, until he comes to know Mr Pickwick. And here in very readable form is Sam Weller’s curriculum vitae with interesting details about wages and conditions of employment.

“I have half made up my mind to engage you myself.”

“Have you, though?” said Sam.

Mr Pickwick nodded in the affirmative.

“Wages ?” inquired Sam.

“Twelve pounds a year,” replied Mr Pickwick.

“Clothes?”

Jobs-worthy – continued

“Two suits.”

“Work?”

“To attend upon me, and travel about with me and these gentlemen here.”

“Take the bill down.” said Sam emphatically. “I’m let to a single gentleman, and the terms is agreed upon.”

“You accept the situation?” inquired Mr Pickwick.

“Cert’nly,” replied Sam. “If the clothes fits me half as well as the place, they’ll do.”

.....“Well,” said that suddenly-transformed individual, as he

took his seat on the outside of the Eatanswill coach next morning; “I wonder vether I’m meant to be a footman, or a groom, or a game-keeper, or a seedsman. I looks like a sort of compo of every one on ‘em. Never mind; there’s change of air, plenty to see, and little to do; and all this suits my complaint uncommon, so long life to the Picvicks, says I.”

CHAPTER 12 PICKWICK PAPERS

ASW

Two of a Kind

Scene: Broadstairs Dickens Festival: drizzly afternoon: High Street men’s outfitters:

Enter gent wishing to purchase leather belt: Young lady assistant produces belt for his inspection, and asks whether he is interested in the Dickens Fellowship and the Costume Parade of characters happening later in the afternoon:

Gent says he certainly is and is

actually going to be part of the Parade, as a character! “Oh!” says the young lady, “who are you going to be?” The gent tells her proudly and making a low bow “I am Mr Pickwick.” Young lady says, “How interesting! I am also in the parade, and I am Nancy!!”

Curtain.

ASW