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# London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

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**Mr Dick's Kite** Members may have heard by now that Alan Watts died on 1<sup>st</sup> May in his 97<sup>th</sup> year. Alan served as Honorary General Secretary of the Fellowship from 1976 until 1990, when he became President for a two-year term of office. The Fellowship owes a huge debt to Alan's tireless work and commitment over many years. Amongst his achievements was the inauguration of *Mr Dick's Kite* which he largely wrote single-handedly. In recent years, due to Alan's declining health, the *Kite* has been written and prepared for publication by Alan's daughter Fleur. This task has required a great deal of Fleur's time and effort – for which the Fellowship are extremely grateful. With the passing of Alan, Fleur has decided that now is an appropriate time for the *Kite* to cease to fly. This will undoubtedly disappoint its many loyal and enthusiastic readers, but I am sure that they will respect the decision. The Winter 2016 issue of the *Kite* was therefore the last to be published.

**Timed Entry to CDM** As a result of its growing popularity and increasing visitor numbers, the Charles Dickens Museum is introducing a new entry system from 1 July 2016. Timed entry every 15 minutes will ensure that all visitors will have time to enjoy the Museum to the full. Don't worry if you've already booked your tickets – they will still be valid.

**Fanny Kemble** Michael Slater was reading the journal of this celebrated English actress, who made her debut at Covent Garden as a wonderful Juliet and married an American plantation owner (whom she later divorced). Going out to join him in Georgia, she had a horrible journey on a steamboat from Baltimore to Portsmouth, Virginia. She writes about it in her *Journal of a Residence on a Georgian Plantation in 1838-1839* published in 1863, which gives a pretty horrific account of life on a plantation worked by slave labour. She had 'a very wretched night on board' and records that she betook herself to reading *Oliver Twist* till nearly midnight. She adds: 'I wonder if Mr Dickens

*had any sensible perception of the benedictions which flew to him from the bosom of the broad Chesapeake as I closed his book; I am afraid not.'* She must have known her *Pickwick* very well because later on, when she kisses a slave's baby, she gave '*inexpressible delight*' to all the female slaves and comments, referring to the Eatanswill election, '*indeed, the Honorable Mr Slumkey could not have achieved more popularity by his performances in that line than I by this exhibition of feeling*'.

**Takeaway Dickens** DF member, Richard Davis, from Weston Underwood, Bucks, sent me the following: "**In January this year my wife and I were visiting my daughter and family in Sydney. My two granddaughters Evie and Ella aged 7 and 8 were listening to me reading a shortened version of *David Copperfield* as a bedtime story. I had reached the point in the story where everything went wrong at Dora and David's first dinner party. Quick as a flash Ella called out 'Why couldn't Dora order a takeaway?' A reflection of our times, I feel.**"

...Of course, Ella's advice would not have sounded that odd to the Victorians; sending out for food was not uncommon (at least for the well off). In *Edwin Drood* Mr Grewgious, a lawyer in chambers in Staple Inn, Holborn, asks his clerk to "*step over to the hotel in Furnival's, and ask them to send in materials for laying the cloth. For dinner we'll have a tureen of the hottest and strongest soup available, and we'll have the best made-dish that can be recommended, and we'll have a joint (such as a haunch of mutton), and a goose or a turkey or any little stuffed thing of that sort that may happen to be in the bill of fare...*" This feast is accordingly provided by two waiters, a "flying" waiter (who makes a series of "flights" between Furnival's and Staple Inn) and an "immovable" waiter who does nothing but find fault with his colleague. (According to Judith Flanders in "The Victorian House", a "made-dish" was a side or corner dish cooked in a sauce. She quotes the *Lady's Every-Day Book* which warned that '*made-dishes, as the horrible imitations of French cookery are termed... are very unwholesome*'.)

...It's good to know that people do still read to their grandchildren at bedtime - and read Dickens, what's more! Evie and Ella were obviously paying attention, too, which makes it even better!

**Dastardly Husbands** A writer to the Daily Telegraph (12.3.16) points out that the radio soap, 'The Archers', is retelling a plot from Dickens. She says, "*There are distinct echoes of Dickens in the current plot-line of The Archers. Pathetic Mrs Copperfield (Helen) is in thrall to the dastardly Mr Murdstone (Rob), abetted by Miss Murdstone (Rob's mother). Little Master Davey (Henry) is to be sent away to the blacking factory (prep school). Then poor Mrs Copperfield (Helen) and her baby will die, leaving Mr Murdstone (Rob) to inherit. Let's hope that a Betsey Trotwood appears to rescue Henry. Not Helen's truly pathetic parents, but perhaps Tom?*" (Carole Davies, Ledbury, Herefordshire). Another letter-writer, Jane Kelly from Oxford, felt the story-line bore a greater resemblance to Patrick Hamilton's 1938 play *Gaslight*.

**Don't try this at home...** Here are a couple of quotes that make interesting background for Vincent Crummles's praise of the spectacular act his wife had performed in her earlier years on the stage (*Nicholas Nickleby*). In Broadbent's *Annals of the Liverpool Stage* we find this: 'Signora Belinda at the Olympic Circus, Liverpool 1804, was advertised to "stand on her head ... on the point of a spear, which has never been attempted by any female performer but herself, and will go through the same surprising balances on a candle-stick". The entertainment was to conclude with fireworks. On 1 October 1817 the famous clown Mr Paulo took a benefit (i.e. all the takings for that particular performance were given to him) at Sadler's Wells in which, among many other items, he performed the 'astonishing trick of the Magic Funnel': 'Mr Paulo ... will stand on his Head on a Spear, Surrounded by a Brilliant Shower of Fire!' So Mrs Crummles was in good company, you see!

**"A specially trying mode of publication"** (CD) The *Evening Standard* of 13.4.16 notes that Downton Abbey creator, Julian Fellowes, is following in Charles Dickens's footsteps by releasing his new novel in instalments - one chapter of *Belgravia* to be released each week for 11 weeks, via an app. Lord Fellowes told the London Book Fair: "*I would have thought the serial reading format could be something for now. I think it's possible that this could be the beginning of a new chapter.*" Unlike Dickens, who altered his plots as he went along, Lord Fellowes has already written his novel in full (which seems duller than CD's method! Ed).

**G B Shaw on CD's family letters** On dipping into a volume of Shaw's correspondence recently, Michael Slater found some lively comments on CD's letters to his family. Writing to G K Chesterton on 1 March 1908 about the freethinker Charles Bradlaugh, Shaw says that Bradlaugh was 'almost beyond belief incapable of intercourse in private conversation', and, 'as to exchanging ideas, or expressing the universal part of his soul, you might as well have been reading the letters of Charles Dickens to his family - those tragic monuments of dumbness of soul and noisiness of pen.' How about that? asks Michael.

...I wonder what Shaw, not all that much of a family man himself, expected. I don't see much dumbness or noisiness in the following, written by CD from Broadstairs on 4.8.1847 to his 9-year old daughter, Mamey, (*The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens Ed. Jenny Hartley*): "***My Dearest Mamey, I am delighted to hear that you are going to improve in your spelling, because nobody can write properly without spelling well. But I know you will learn whatever you are taught, because you are always good, industrious, and attentive. That is what I always say of my Mamey. The note you sent me this morning is a very nice one, and the spelling is beautiful. Always, my dear Mamey, Your affectionate Papa.***"

**Dickens as Theatre Manager** Dickens wrote to a friend, Cornelius Felton, ("*heartiest of Greek professors*") during his first American tour. If (Felton) could only see him, he wrote, in that dark and dusty theatre, "***urging impracticable ladies and impossible gentlemen on to the very confines of insanity, shouting and driving about, to an extent which would justify any philanthropic stranger in clapping me into a strait-waistcoat without further enquiry, endeavouring to goad Putnam {his secretary} into some dim and faint understanding of a prompter's duties, and struggling in such a vortex of noise, dirt, bustle, confusion and inextricable entanglement as you would grow giddy in contemplating.***"

**As Mrs Micawber said, 'Blood cannot be obtained from a stone, neither can anything on account be obtained at present (not to mention law expenses) from Mr Micawber.' But I'm hoping it will be easier to obtain more contributions for LP, to be sent, please, to: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email - aligowans@hotmail.co.uk**

