

A Twist of Dickens



Newsletter of the Cleveland Branch,
International Dickens Fellowship

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January 2021

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Meeting Schedule

2020-2021 Book of the Year:

Barnaby Rudge

Meetings, free and open to all admirers of Charles Dickens, begin at 7:00 pm. To ensure entry, try to activate your link on time.

We will meet via Zoom until the library allows meetings. Please watch your email for the link to a specific meeting, or the good news that we can meet at the library.

Thurs. Jan. 14. Zoom. Happy New Year!
Scott Wachter joins us on the topic "Dickens and 'The Simpsons' TV show."

Thurs. Feb. 11. Zoom (or Richmond Library).
Anne Meissner explores the Dolly Varden craze in popular culture.

Thurs. March 11. Zoom (or Beachwood Library, Mtg. Rm. A). Kathleen Schuerger leads a Zoom discussion of fathers and sons in *Barnaby Rudge*.

Thurs. April 8. Zoom (or Beachwood Library, Mtg. Rm. A). Beth Bliss traces the history of Dickens's weekly journal *Master Humphrey's Clock* (1840-1841) and shows us a first edition of same.

Book of the Year for 2020-2021:

Barnaby Rudge



Having trouble feeling
nostalgic for 2020?
Dickens had the same
problem in 1836.

"There must have been some few occurrences in the past year to which we can look back, with a smile of cheerful recollection, if not with a feeling of heartfelt thankfulness. And we are bound by every rule of justice and equity to give the New Year credit for being a good one, until he proves himself unworthy the confidence we repose in him"

From *Bell's Life in London*.

Dickens takes aim at Lord Chesterfield.

In his 2009 biography of Dickens, Michael Slater cites Lord Chester in *Barnaby Rudge* as Dickens's version of an historic personage, Lord Chesterfield (right). Philip Stanhope, (1694-1773), Lord Chesterfield, was an aristocratic statesman remembered for hundreds of private letters written to his beloved illegitimate son Philip. Illegitimacy debarred bastards from inheriting titles and property. Identity was kept secret to prevent criticism of England's morality bound aristocracy.

Chesterfield thought his son could excel in diplomatic circles if Philip followed his counsels on the "Fine Art of Becoming a Man of the World and a Gentleman." Addressed to "boy," Chesterfield's 400 letters demanded adherence to a curriculum of classics, history, literature, languages, geography, deportment, life and love. Prestigious appointments and self-reliance would mark Philip's success; with failure, Chesterfield would cut funds.

Witticisms abound in the letters together with, the father writes, "a thousand things... which I would not have any mortal living but yourself see and know." For example:

"Most people enjoy the inferiority of their best friends."

"Let your enemies be disarmed by ... gentleness of ... manner, but ... let them feel, the steadiness of your resentment."

"Lasting peace between a man and his wife is ... separation."

Philip died unexpectedly at age 36. Chesterfield learned then that Philip had not "married up." His wife, Eugenia Peters, was illegitimate and Irish. They had two sons. Chesterfield provided only for his grandsons in his will. To secure income, Eugenia published his letters to Philip. The book proved to be a global sensation. Many, like Lord Chester in *Barnaby Rudge*, read them with enthusiastic agreement.

Dickens takes aim and brilliantly subverts Lord Chesterfield and his values. Whereby Chesterfield associates only with elite, Dickens's title character is Barnaby Rudge, a mental simpleton, loving and loyal to his mother. He is rooted in nature with Grip, his pet raven. Dickens's aristocrat, Chester, lives in debt and debauchery. With disdain for his



illegitimate son Hugh, he ignored the boy's mother who was publicly executed for a frivolous crime.

Lord Chesterfield values control and a stable society. Dickens's historic novel, set during the Gordon Riots of 1780, shows London awash with mobs and political upheavals. Hugh participates in the riots and is executed. At the scaffold he decries Chester who only "owns his paternity in his conscience." Like Chesterfield Chester expects his legitimate son Ned to marry a woman of higher rank. He wants the marriage dowry to pay his debts. Neither expect love to motivate or sustain marriage.

Dickens ends *Barnaby Rudge* with Dolly and Joe, Emma and Ned, marrying for love, having large families, and gainfully employed. —Anne Meissner



Dolly Varden Cake

*Here we have cake as metaphor! Use 2 cake mixes, white and spice. * Add cherries to the white cake mix and extra spice (nutmeg, cardamom) to the darker one, plus walnuts, currants and citron. Mortar 4 layers with fluffy white*

icing, cap the cake with icing, cocoanut and cherries. Sweet alternated with sharp citrus and crunchy nuts—Here's Dolly!

**Freeze 1 layer from each mix to use another time. Slice 2 remaining layers horizontally to make 4. (To find recipe, Google "Dolly Varden cake.")*

A Twist of Dickens is published three times yearly by the Cleveland Dickens Fellowship. Coeditors: Beth Bliss, Kathleen Schuerger.

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It's not Dickens...but Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows.*

Covid breaks taken in woodsy parks drew me back to *The Wind in the Willows*, an admittedly quirky read.

Remember the Water Rat? “Believe me, my young friend, there is nothing—absolutely nothing—half so much worth doing as simply messing about in boats.”

Grahame presumes his reader knows basic Latin and history. In a chapter entitled “Dulce Domum,” Mole rediscovers his humble home. In another adventure Mr. Toad dresses as a washerwoman for his escape from a medieval prison. (His term is considerably lengthened for being cheeky to a rural constable.)

Mr. Toad's a clown. On the lam, in disguise, he “met a fox who stopped, looked him up and down in a sarcastic sort of way, and said, “Hullo, washerwoman! Half a pair of socks and a pillow-case short this week! Mind it doesn't occur again!” Sniggering, the fox walked on.

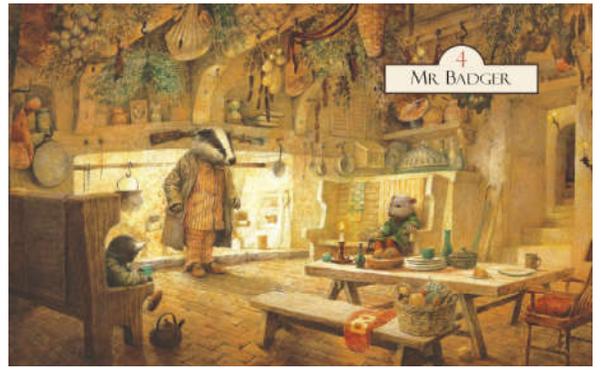
Grahame began his project by telling bedtime stories to his son (Mr. Toad), added to them in letters and, in 1908, published the stories we know with great success.

No stranger to the art of biography, A. N. Wilson (*Hitler; Victoria, a Life*) has written a new biography of Dickens. *The Mystery of Charles Dickens* differs from existing biographies in that it is relatively short: 319 pages (excluding bibliography, notes, and index) compared to Michael Slater's (623) and Peter Ackroyd's (1083); and its 7 chapters are presented as mysteries. Although Wilson hits salient points of Dickens's life, this is not a chronological study.

The first chapter, “The Mystery of Fifteen Pounds, Thirteen Shillings and Ninepence,” delves into Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan. The sum in question is an amount not accounted for after Dickens's death when six pounds, six shillings, and threepence was found by Georgina Hogarth in his pockets. Dickens was known to have cashed a check for 22 pounds on the morning of June 8, 1870, before going to Ellen's house in Peckham. The missing money would have been given to Ellen for her housekeeping expenses.

Wilson posits that Dickens collapsed at Ellen's house, and he is explicit about exactly what activity Dickens was engaged in at the time. Dickens then had to be transported to Gads Hill in order to avoid the certain scandal that dying at Ellen's would bring.

Other chapter headings include: “The Mystery of his childhood,” “The Mystery of the cruel marriage,” and “The Mystery of Edwin Drood.” As Wilson explores these and other topics, an unflattering picture of Dickens emerges. In fact, “hyper-energetic, over-sexed, tormented, exultant,



For a 2007 edition Robert Ingpen illustrated Badger's kitchen in the winter: fireplace, settles, wooden table, ceiling hung with herbs, nets of onions, eggs. Note rudely awakened Badger in his pj's and robe.

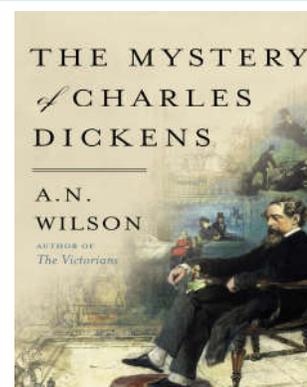
I wonder at what age young English boys enjoyed woodland animal fantasies told with wit and elegance. Would American kids be interested at any age? Or is this classic's current purpose to charm the elderly caught in the pandemic? —K. S.

Book review:

The Mystery of Charles Dickens

hilarious, despondent” are some of the adjectives Wilson uses for his “opium dependent,” “divided self” subject in the first chapter alone.

But, in spite of this rather unfavorable portrait, Wilson depicts Dickens's pop-star status in his time and his relevance today. He uses his own horrific experience at a sadistic boarding school to illustrate Dickens's power to transport and offer salvation to his readers. The “mystery” of Dickens is how he creates an alternative universe that readers are persuaded is realistic. We declare his over-the-top comedy, characters, and pathos to be just like “real life.”



While I wouldn't recommend this as the first biography of Dickens to read, I enjoyed the arrangement and found it engaging.
—Kathy Broz

Dr. Emily Bell, new editor of *The Dickensian*



Already a veteran editor, teacher, leader of workshops, and soon biographer of Dickens, this winning candidate for the editorship of *The Dickensian* “rings all the bells.” The 2021 Winter Issue inaugurates her tenure.

She promises great things. In her application for the position, she proposes that the journal we all love accepts even more non-academic and international contributions. She suggests that more issues contain a theme, e.g., CD’s childhood as a tribute to the anniversary in 2022 of the publication of Forster’s biography. She brings experience with social media and would like to forge for the journal a stronger online presence.

Perhaps Malcolm Andrews, out from under the backbreaking job of editorship, will have more time for videos and presentations for far-flung branches like ours.

If you haven’t subscribed for this new year, go to the Fellowship’s main website, choose from the top toolbar *The Dickensian*, and scroll down to the very bottom of the page for the subscription form. Don’t worry about the currency exchange; your credit card company will take care of it. —K. S.



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Zooming, streaming, innovating

We’re learning to do it differently, and even to see some advantages. Undoubtedly the International Fellowship and the Cleveland branch will continue to find new ideas. We’ve learned that, while Zoom meetings have their limitations (no treats!), they allow us to see old friends who live far from meeting places. Think **Bob McDonough** and **Peggy Smith**.

And there’s more. Amazon streams the new *David Copperfield* film with Dev Patel. Children’s theaters send plays in boxes (props, costume ideas, story outlines). Museums offer virtual tours and experts examine artifacts on camera.

Forget geographical limits. What’s next? —K. S.



December Meeting
Above and clockwise: **Bill Owen** in his Christmas hat, **Charla Coatoam** costumed for Locksmith of London reading, **Linda Ehrbar**.
(Photos taken from Zoom screen.)