

„Shake me up, Judy!” – on Dickens, Medicine and Spinal Cord Disorders

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SUMMARY

Charles Dickens' (1812-1870) works were for a long time a solid background for social, historical, psychological, literary and medical 19th century studies. In this article, some light is casted on Dickens, medicine and disabled people in his works, especially on paraplegics.

"Writing is a cop-out. An excuse to live perpetually in fantasy land, where you can create, direct and watch the products of your own head. Very selfish. "

Monica Enid Dickens, MBE, [1915-1992], an English writer, the great-granddaughter of Charles Dickens

Key words: Charles Dickens, literature & medicine, 19th century, paraplegia, disabilities

INTRODUCTION AND BASIC THESIS

The survival rate of people with disabilities was very low until the middle of the twentieth century. Those with spinal cord injury, for example, who survived in earlier times, had low or incomplete neurological lesions mainly caused by congenital malformation [spina bifida], infectious diseases [leprosy, syphilis, tuberculosis] or conversion reaction („hysteria”, somatoform disorders). We assumed that those disabled figures, shown in masterpiece-paintings by European Painters, were often real people whom the artists met in the streets, churches’ yard, asylums, etc. [1].

Charles Dickens’ novels include many descriptions of individuals with physical disabilities or deformities. Were these conditions used symbolically to highlight the author’s social, moral and political views? In my opinion, after thorough reviewing the literature, it is more likely that these figures were real. „Disabled or deformed children are depicted as innocent victims, while their older counterparts are most often viewed as corrupt victimizers whose physical deformities are outward manifestations of their inner depravity. Punishment for moral failings in non-disabled characters frequently takes the form of paralysis and/or aphasia resulting from a cerebrovascular accident. In this context the wheelchair becomes a potent metaphor of imprisonment as a form of retributive justice.” [2].

During Dickens’s day, disabled people were still commonly feared and derided as „monsters and freaks”. So, to show a disabled person as sympathetic and inspirational was actually quite progressive.

The role of Tiny Tim and Ebenezer Scrooge was examined „as symbols of the social ills of Dickens’ time and his attack on proposals by the social economist, Thomas Malthus in his essay “The Principle Of Population” (1803), Dickens apparently, expressed his disapproval of Malthus’ idea of “surplus population”. Dickens tends to use disabled people in his novels as „symbols of criminality and evil or, at the other extreme, as objects of pity”. In *Bleak House* (1852-53) for example, a disabled but a parasitic character of Smallweed. In opposition to Smallweed is the sympathetic character of Phil Squod, very loyal servant to Mr. George Rouncewell, in the shooting gallery that he runs. Phil is odd and disfigured, but he is a good man, like his master. Many of Dickens’ novels are social commentary the lack of political will to help those most in need [3].

„the 19th century was a period of significant social change, and this was apparent in attitudes toward disabled people who exhibited themselves. In

1847, the word „freak” took on its contemporary association with human anomaly, and „freak shows”, where groups of people showed themselves, rather than the individualized exhibitions of the 17th and 18th centuries, grew in popularity. ...the Victorians were fascinated by museums of anatomy and pathology... sometimes disabled children were rejected by their families as the family may have been ostracized by neighbours or the community... [4].

DICKENS, SOCIAL REFORM, AND MEDICINE

Charles John Huffam Dickens was the most popular English novelist of the Victorian era. Even today, some of his literary characters became eponymous [5-7], i.e., in *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, the term „Pickwickian syndrome” was derived (Joe – the „fat boy” who constantly falls often asleep at any time of day; Obesity hypoventilation syndrome or obstructive sleep apnea syndrome) [7].

Dickens’ interest in social reform, children’s health and education, phrenology, water-cure, and mesmerism/hypnotism, made him in close acquaintance with doctors and especially the Hospital for Sick Children, Great Ormond Street, London [7]. His own early adulthood had been miserable and impoverished, he was outraged at the conditions of the urban working classes, to which many of his readers were oblivious.

‘During the mid 19th century, many people from all society’s levels, recognized „that medical and public health provisions were a vast social and economic problem to be investigated and solved by national means rather than left to individual humanitarianism or private charity” [8]. Various societies were created for collecting information; hospital statistics became more organized; social sciences were established; social laws were legislated; One of the BMA ‘s primary aims was to set up an investigation-committees to inquire the Poor Law Medical Service; medical journals played a crucial role. [8].

It is possible, that Dickens met Dr. Henry Wyldbore Rumsey, (1809-1876) who was one of the leading „sanitarians” of his generation. In 1835, after the establishment of provident societies among the working classes, he commenced his 10 years as the Honorary Secretary of the *Sick Poor Committee of the Provincial Medical and Surgical Association* .

DICKENS AND THE DOCTORS

One of his close friends was Dr. Francis Carr Beard (obituary, *BMJ* 19/8/1893 p. 4489). Before being well known to the London’s literary circles, he was a surgeon at the *St. Margaret infirmary* for consumption. It is known that Dickens introduced his

younger colleague and intimate friend, the author William Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) to Dr Carr-Beard: Collins's health began to decline due to 'rheumatic gout' or 'neuralgia', and eyes' problems. He tried various remedies including Turkish and „electric baths,, health spas, hypnotism and quinine. Beard prescribed opium in the form of laudanum as a pain-killer and sedative. [9] Apart of cardiac failure, in January 1889 he was involved in an accident and thrown from a cab by the force of the collision. Then, a severe of attack of bronchitis which was followed by a fatal cerebral stroke. Dickens was a close friend of John Elliotson (1791-1868), Professor of Medicine at University College, London, who mesmerized his family and friends for entertainment, although he would never let himself be hypnotized. It is quite possible that Elliotson actually served as the Dickens family physician. He was the first physician in Britain to use stethoscope for medical examinations, and reported (although the formal medical establishment dismissed mesmerism at all!) on *Numerous Cases of Surgical Operations Without Pain in the Mesmeric State*. G K Chesterton [10] wrote that „Dickens was always a little too irritable because he was a little too happy”it could be called more than a touch, for he suffered from a formidable malady and could always through his life endure a great degree of exertion, even if it was only the exertion of walking violently all night... physically he was always very weak and never very well... struck with sudden bodily pain..” Dickens considered in 1832 a career in acting, but he failed on account of his weakness and „exhaustion,,. Towards the *fin de siècle*, some scholars erroneously blamed the pace of „accelerated modernism” for many maladies [11-13].

It is apparent, that scholars of the 19th century, knew their 18th century ancestors satirical views on doctors:

*„The doctors, tender of their Fame,
Wisely on me lay all the blame.” Dean Swift.*

*„Physicians think they do a lot for a patient when
they give his disease a name. ,, E. Kant.*

*„Who are the greatest deceivers? The doctors.
And the greatest fools? The patients.” Voltaire.*

In 1896, Thomas Frost (1821-1908) wrote as follows:

„Dickens, it must be admitted....was not successful in his delineations of the medical profession. Though his most humorous as well as his most pathetic pictures of human life are drawn from the humbler walks

*in the pilgrimage of humanity, he has given us some good touches of his skill in his presentments of other professions... but a life-like doctor cannot be found in his works... the most strongly marked of these are Dr. Parker Peps and Mr. Pilkins , the two members of the faculty who officiate at the closing scene in the life of Mrs. Dombey, in which a sense of humour; with difficulty suppressed by the author; mingles with the touching sadness of the death. Dr. Parker Peps, „one of the court physicians, and a man of immense reputation for assisting at the increase of great families”, is introduced .. [14] ”of Dr. Slammer [in the *The Pickwick Papers*.], also we have only a sketch...he is described as „one of the most popular personages in his own circle ...as we read of his furious jealousy of Jingle, and interrupted duel with Winkle...*

Or in Dickens own words: *„One of the most popular personages, in his own circle, present, was a little fat man, with a ring of upright black hair round his head, and an extensive bald plain on the top of it – Doctor Slammer, surgeon to the 97th.*

The Doctor took snuff with every body, chatted with every body, laughed, danced, made jokes, played whist, did every thing, and was every where. To these pursuits, multifarious as they were, the little Doctor added a more important one than any – he was indefatigable in paying the most unremitting and devoted attention to a little old widow, whose rich dress and profusion of ornament bespoke her a most desirable addition to a limited income., [The post-humorous papers of the Pickwick club].

In Bleak House, Frost continued: *„Harold Skimpole, we are told, had been educated for the medical profession.... he prefers to dabble in literature and music for his own amusement and look to his friends for the means of living too prosaic an occupation for himself”. Allan Woodcourt is a young surgeon who falls in love with Esther Summerson, before departing England for India as a ship's doctor. He „had gone out a poor ship's surgeon, and had come home nothing better”. Frost wrote that Woodcourt „has the kindness of heart which characterizes the profession, and exemplifies it very pleasingly in the scene with the brickmaker's wife, and with poor Jo ...,, [14].*

An attempt to create „a new syndrome” named after Dr Skimpole, was made: *„Harold Skimpole took a bright disdain for the drudgery of adult life –“I am a child, you know!” he frequently reminds us – and delighted in the innocent pleasures around him. Speaking of himself (far and away his favorite topic) he confessed to two of the oldest infirmities in the world: one was, that he had no idea of time; the other, that he had no idea of money. In consequence of which he never kept an appointment, never could*

transact any business, and never knew the value of anything! ... He was very fond of reading the papers, very fond of making fancy sketches with a pencil, very fond of nature, very fond of art. All he asked of society, was to let him live. That wasn't much. His wants were few. Give him the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret, and he asked no more. He was a mere child in the world, but he didn't cry for the moon. He said to the world, "Go your several ways in peace! Wear red coats, blue coats, lawn sleeves, put pens behind your ears, wear aprons; go after glory, holiness, commerce, trade, any object you prefer; only – let Harold Skimpole live! ", [15]

Dr. Anthony Jeddler (in „The Battle of Life,“) is a Country doctor whose view of life is altered by the sacrifices made by his youngest daughter, Marion, for her sister, Grace. Dickens describes him as „a great philosopher, and the heart and mystery of his philosophy was to look upon the world as a gigantic practical joke” [14].

Back in 1935, a Canadian doctor wrote on medical satire:

„Dickens and Thackeray, the great satirists of the age, dealt kindly, on the whole, with the doctors. Thackeray nearly always has a friendly feeling for the physician. A score or more of practitioners wander through the pages of Dickens, absent-minded, pompous, sometimes ridiculous, usually busy, and rarely very efficient. The fashionable physician attends Mr. Murdle; the fussy, rather important, physician looks after the family cares of the Chuzzlewits; Mr. Lumbe, the hard-working obstetrician, who finds no time to shave, is on hand for the growing family of the Kenwigs; the medical note of authority echoes in the resounding names of Dr. Bayham Badger and of Dr. Parker Peps; Dr. Slammer in „Pickwick” and Dr. Jobling in „Martin Chuzzlewit” are cut in the model of fashionable smartness. The energetic pair of student „sawbones” in „Pickwick”, Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen, are pictorially vivid of the propensities of medical students for hard drinking. Altogether rather an ineffectual lot – going about with creaking boots and ticking watches and pompous frock-coats, a bit bewildered, but usually carrying it off somehow or another [16].

FINALLY, ON DR. BLIMBER'S ACADEMY [From *Dombey and Son*: Charles Dickens (1846-8), ch. 11]

„Whenever a young gentleman was taken in hand by Doctor Blimber, he might consider himself sure of

a pretty tight squeeze. The Doctor only undertook the charge of ten young gentlemen, but he had, always ready, a supply of learning for a hundred, on the lowest estimate; and it was at once the business and delight of his life to gorge the unhappy ten with it. In fact, Doctor Blimber's establishment was a great hot-house, in which there was a forcing apparatus incessantly at work. All the boys blew before their time. Mental green-peas were produced at Christmas, and intellectual asparagus all the year round. Mathematical gooseberries (very sour ones too) were common at untimely seasons, and from mere sprouts of bushes, under Doctor

Blimber's cultivation. Every description of Greek and Latin vegetable was got off the driest twigs of boys, under the frostiest circumstances. Nature was of no consequence at all. No matter what a young gentleman was intended to bear, Doctor Blimber made him bear to pattern, somehow or other. „.....The Doctor was a portly gentleman in a suit of black, with strings at his knees and stockings below them. He had a bald head, highly polished; a deep voice; and a chin so very double, that it was a wonder how he ever managed to shave into the creases. He had likewise a pair of little eyes that were always half shut up and a mouth that was always half expanded into a grin, as if he had, that moment, posed a boy, and were waiting to convict him from his own lips.

Insomuch, that when the Doctor put his right hand into the breast of his coat, and with his other hand behind him, and a scarcely perceptible wag of his head, made the commonest observation to a nervous stranger, it was like a sentiment from the sphinx, and settled his business.,,

DICKENS, MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

Dickens' impressive library at Gad's Hill, included many books on science, mesmerism, medicine, physiology, on the alleviation of pain, general sciences, history and economics [17-18].

In December 28th 1847, Dickens met George Combe (1788-1858) at the Glasgow Athenaeum. Combe's first essay on phrenology was published in 1817 in The Scots Magazine; in 1828 he published The Constitution of Man [19], in which he popularized phrenology by making it applicable to personal philosophies as well as science.

Prominent scientists and social reformers notably Herbert Spencer, Alfred Wallace, George Lewes, and George Eliot based their work on phrenological ideas. Dr. Abraham Ernest Hart (1836- 1898) was an English surgeon, physician and editor (BMJ 1866) and a brave warrior for public health, acted against

baby-farming, and for sanitary legislation. Hart exposed the shams of hypnotism, mesmerism, etc.; „Very early in life I was brought into contact with a well-known physician, the late Dr. Elliotson, who, unfortunately for himself, was victimized by two characteristic specimens of that kind of hysterical impostors who delight in deceiving investigators of mesmerism, hypnotism, spiritualism, and the like, and whose great object is to become either centres of interest and notoriety or to make money. [20]. At least, Dickens supported Hart in his constant effort in the area of public health; In Dickens' time, medicine also benefited from the introduction of anaesthesia, and antiseptics [21].

DICKENS' BURDEN

Dickens spent the last decade of his life in an increased personal unhappiness and failing health. When Dickens settled at Gad's Hill, he started publishing his „Our Mutual Friend”, and then, the death toll of 1863 of many of his family's members, was devastating and very painful for him.

In 1865, he was involved in a bad train accident: although he was not injured, with much courage he assisted the wounded but the real shock or rather, perhaps, the PTSD came later and perhaps the shock was never really subsided [22].

It is well known, that his experience with the medical world with regard to his own, and his family's medical ailments, affected his writings. Through his extensive correspondence, it is clear, that he was acquainted with many scientists, physicians, authors, artists and politicians. It is very possible that these close acquaintances have influenced the way in which he portrayed his literary characters.

One day he collapsed, showing symptoms of mild stroke. Further public readings were cancelled, but he began to write his last book: *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. He suffered another stroke on June 8 at Gad's Hill, after a full day's work on *Edwin Drood*, and died the next day. He was buried at Westminster Abbey on June 14. Perhaps Dickens' own medical history („neuralgia” and colicky renal stones' pains in his youth, wrongly diagnosed „gouty” pains, anal fissure which was treated without anaesthesia, heart rhythm disturbances and finally, transient ischemic attacks), lead to the conclusion – „The doctor was to Dickens what the Harlem goat has been to „Puck” and „judge”, an occasion for producing a horse-laugh” ... [23].

DICKENS' DISABLED CHARACTERS

Some of his characters suffered from various movement disorders [24] even before their formal his-

torical clinical descriptions. He described hysterical or functional paralysis, and many more conditions [24].

In „Narrative prosthesis: disability and the dependencies of discourse” [25] we read that the Victorian and early modern literatures, tended to spin disability into a spectacle, into a flashing sign or symbol meant to attract attention to something other than itself”. Dickens depicted blindness as a state of darkness and guided the reader into feeling sorry for Tiny Tim. (*A Christmas Carol*, 1843): it was written in order to evoke pity and empathy. [26]. „According to Charles Dickens, disabled children are innocent victims, while disabled adults are usually bitter and twisted, or diminutive and dwarfish, like Quilp in *The Old Curiosity Shop*. And if you're an evil character in a Dickens novel, you have a better than average chance of being punished with a stroke that leaves you crippled or aphasic, like Bradley Headstone in „*Our Mutual Friend*” [27]. Miss Mowcher in *David Copperfield* proclaimed: „you are a young man, she said nodding. Take a word of advice, even from a three-foot nothing.

Try not to associate bodily defects with mental, my good friend, except for a solid reason”.

Dickens was familiar with Dr. John Conolly's writings and with his non-restraint approach to treatment: John Conolly (1794-1866), an English psychiatrist, published in 1856, his book: *The treatment of the insane without mechanical restraints*. (London, Smith, Elder & Co.) [28].

Conolly was a close friend of Dickens and was greatly praised in his articles.

Dickens' friend and fellow-novelist Charles Reade mercilessly parodied in 1864 Conolly in his book *Hard Cash*. Dickens wrote his article „Idiots” after visiting Conolly And Dr Andrew Reed's institution „Park House” in Highgate.

Various disabilities and diseases in Dickens literature, attracted many authors [2, 29-30]: tuberculosis [31], posttraumatic stress disorder [32], and more. It was recognized that Dickens had profound knowledge in contemporary psychology and psychiatry [33-37].

PARAPLEGIA IN DICKENS' WORK

Spinal cord injuries (SCI) were familiar to the 19th century physicians and surgeons, although patients succumb quite soon after the trauma [38-39]. In the first issue of the *Lancet*, Sir Astley Cooper brought a very thorough description of patients with traumatic SCI; later, authors from both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, further described SCIP. Most of the clinical descriptions, eventually ended with fatal outcomes.

It is possible that Mr. Smallweed managed somehow to survive through his smart-cunning character and some basic survival instincts.

I was attracted by Mr. Joshua Smallweed, in *Bleak House*, Dickens' ninth novel [40]. Smallweed is confined to a chair which is pushed by his granddaughter Judy. He orders Judy „to shake him up” very often: it seems that this maneuver aims to relieve pressure and prevent pressure sores. Judy stood behind him, holding his chest with her arms around him, under his armpits, and violently jerks him up and down several times as he continues his dialogues.

It is possible that Smallweed suffered from some kind of incomplete (partial) spinal cord injury. He was an old, evil money-lender, entirely selfish and consumed by greed. Smallweed becomes engaged in the affairs of the menacing the lawyer Mr. Tulkinghorn. Grandfather Smallweed enjoyed inflicting emotional pain on other people. He drives Mr. George Rouncewell into bankruptcy by calling in debts.

Members of family Smallweed remind us of Dickens's Scrooge. Their main and only goal in life, is to accumulate money.

In chapter 21 of *Bleak House* we read: „*Mr. Smallweed's grandfather is likewise of the party. He is in a helpless condition as to his lower, and nearly so as to his upper, limbs, but his mind is unimpaired. It holds, as well as it ever held, the first four rules of arithmetic and a certain small collection of the hardest facts. In respect of ideality, reverence, wonder, and other such phrenological attributes, it is no worse off than it used to be. Everything that Mr. Smallweed's grandfather ever put away in his mind was a grub at first, and is a grub at last. In all his life he has never bred a single butterfly.,... The excellent old gentleman being at these times a mere clothes-bag with a black skull-cap on the top of it, does not present a very animated appearance until he has undergone the two operations at the hands of his granddaughter of being shaken up like a great bottle and poked and punched like a great bolster.*”....

....”*Do you rub your legs to rub life into ‘em?’ he asks of Grandfather Smallweed after looking round the room.*

„*Why, it's partly a habit, Mr. George, and – yes – it partly helps the circulation,*” he replies. “*The cir-cu-la-tion!*” repeats Mr. George, folding his arms upon his chest and seeming to become two sizes larger. „*Not much of that, I should think.*”

„*Truly I'm old, Mr. George,*” says Grandfather Smallweed. „*But I can carry my years. I'm older than HER,*” nodding at his wife, „*and see what she is? You're a brimstone chatterer!*” with a sudden revival of his late hostility.”.... „*You're a brimstone idiot.*”

You're a scorpion—a brimstone scorpion! You're a sweltering toad. You're a chattering clattering broomstick witch that ought to be burnt!” gasps the old man, prostrate in his chair. „*My dear friend, will you shake me up a little? Mr. George, who has been looking first at one of them and then at the other, as if he were demented, takes his venerable acquaintance by the throat on receiving this request, and dragging him upright in his chair as easily as if he were a doll, appears in two minds whether or no to shake all future power of cushioning out of him and shake him into his grave. Resisting the temptation, but agitating him violently enough to make his head roll like a harlequin's, he puts him smartly down in his chair again and adjusts his skull-cap with such a rub that the old man winks with both eyes for a minute afterwards.*

„*O Lord!*” gasps Mr. Smallweed. „*That'll do. Thank you, my dear friend, that'll do.*”

Oh, dear me, I'm out of breath. O Lord!” And Mr. Smallweed says it not without evident apprehensions of his dear friend, who still stands over him looming larger than ever:...

Grandfather Smallweed who, like Antonida Vasilievna Tarasevicheva, „la babulinka” in Dostoevsky's *The Gambler*, is a paralytic money – owner and carried in a chair.

Both of them are old and both have a granddaughter. Both of them moved around making great noise [41].

There are signs that Smallweed's neurological and functional status has worsened.

One can only assume, that the differential diagnosis in his case consists of: vascular (a-v malformation?) anomaly of the spinal cord, slowly progressive degenerative disorder, slowly developing of benign tumor (meningioma?) or infectious disease (tuberculosis?). It is feasible, that trauma caused an incomplete lesion with a late deterioration (functional? Kummell deformity? syringomyelia?).

Lord Russell Brain [42] wrote that there are a few paraplegics in Dickens' work: apart of Smallweed (who got spindle legs, sits on a cushion „in order that he may something to throw at his wife whenever she annoyed him” and he needs to be „shaken up ,,...”) he mentioned Mrs. Horace Crewler, the mother – in-law of Tommy.

Traddles in „*David Copperfield*” who suffered from an hysterical paralysis; Brain did not speculate, that perhaps Mrs. Crewler subconsciously had reacted to her daughter's sad situation:

Sophy Crewler, took care of a large brood of sisters and ailing parents before marrying Traddles. Sarah Crewler was one of Sophy's sisters. She has „something wrong with her spine”, which means that

she has to stay lying down for at least a year. When David meets up with Traddles again in London when they are both starting out in their respective law offices, Traddles explains that one reason he can't marry Sophy quite yet is because she has to nurse Sarah... In Chapter 41 in David Copperfield we read:

'Well, the Reverend Horace did,' said Traddles. 'He is an excellent man, most exemplary in every way; and he pointed out to her that she ought, as a Christian, to reconcile herself to the sacrifice (especially as it was so uncertain), and to bear no uncharitable feeling towards me. As to myself, Copperfield, I give you my word, I felt a perfect bird of prey towards the family.' 'The sisters took your part, I hope, Traddles?' 'Why, I can't say they did,' he returned. 'When we had comparatively reconciled Mrs. Crewler to it, we had to break it to Sarah. You recollect my mentioning Sarah, as the one that has something the matter with her spine?' 'Perfectly!' 'She clenched both her hands,' said Traddles, looking at me in dismay; 'shut her eyes; turned lead-colour; became perfectly stiff; and took nothing for two days but toast-and-water, administered with a tea-spoon.'

'What a very unpleasant girl, Traddles!' I remarked. 'Oh, I beg your pardon, Copperfield!' said Traddles. 'She is a very charming girl, but she has a great deal of feeling. In fact, they all have. Sophy told me afterwards, that the self-reproach she underwent while she was in attendance upon Sarah, no words could describe. I know it must have been severe, by my own feelings, Copperfield; which were like a criminal's. After Sarah was restored, we still had to break it to the other eight; and it produced various effects upon them of a most pathetic nature. The two little ones, whom Sophy educates, have only just left off de-testing me.'

The mother and one of her daughters, suffer from lower limbs paralysis. In „Little Dorrit”, following the death of his father, Arthur Clennam, returned to London to visit his mother, after spending with his father many years in China. Mrs. Clennam, a religious, tough and fanatic, is paralyzed and confined to a Wheelchair, runs the family business with the help of her servants Affery and Jeremiah Flintwinch. But, we learn, that she is able to stand and walk somehow in a face of a danger.

Mrs. Clennam fell down in the street – sustaining paralysis while her old rotten house [the dingy house – with iron railings enclose the house centers on its resemblance to a prison] literally collapses before her eyes, killing the French villain-Rigaud. Most probably, it is also a case of conversion paralysis.

In chapter 3, when Arthur visits his mother, he said: „Do you never leave your room, mother”?

„what with my rheumatic affection, and what with its attendant debility or nervous weakness- names are of no matter – I have lost the use of my limbs. I never leave my room. I have not been outside this door for-tell him for how long, she said, speaking over her shoulder. „ ...I am able, said Mrs. Klennam with a slight motion of her worsted-muffled right hand towards a chair on wheels, standing before a tall writing-cabinet close shut-up. I am able to attend to my business duties...”

Lord Feenix from *Dombey and son...* ”giving his arm to Florence, and, putting the strongest possible constraint upon his willful legs, which seemed determined to go out into the garden, he led her to the door. And finally, cousin Feenix „s legs consented to take him away...”.

In *Dombey and Son*, chapter 36: we read – „Cousin Feenix was in great force, and looked astonishingly young. But he was sometimes thoughtless in his good humour – his memory occasionally wandering like his legs – and on this occasion caused the company to shudder. It happened thus... Accordingly, Mr. Dombey produced a list of sundry eastern magnates who were to be bidden to this feast on his behalf; to which Mrs. Skewton, acting for her dearest child, who was haughtily careless on the subject, subjoined a western list, comprising Cousin Feenix, not yet returned to Baden-Baden, greatly to the detriment of his personal estate.....,

And in chapter 61: *'I could have wished, I am sure,' said Cousin Feenix, sitting down as Florence sat, 'to have had an earlier opportunity of offering my congratulations; but, in point of fact, so many painful occurrences have happened, treading, as a man may say, on one another's heels, that I have been in a devil of a state myself, and perfectly unfit for every description of society. The only description of society I have kept, has been my own; and it certainly is anything but flattering to a man's good opinion of his own resources, to know that, in point of fact, he has the capacity of boring himself to a perfectly unlimited extent.,,*

Apart of those characters who most probably contracted conversion reaction resulting in paralysis, paralysis in the 19th century could be the result of: Pott's disease, trauma which resulted in incomplete spinal cord lesion, Guillain-Barre' syndrome, Degenerative progressive neurological disorders like multiple sclerosis, syphilis, and degenerative spine disorders.

We must assume that Dickens was familiar with the medico-psychiatric British literature which dealt with hysteria, through the writings of Robert Carter (1828-1918), Thomas Laycock (1812-1876), Henry Maudsley (1835-1918), and others.

DICKENS VISITS TO THE INSTITUTIONS

Lord Russell Brain wrote that Dickens had a pathological personality who took morbid delight in visiting asylums, prisons and morgues. Wilhelm Dilthey [1833-1911] who was a German historian, psychologist, sociologist and hermeneutic philosopher, stated that the nature of creative genius rests on the wide and varied range of his experience, and in his ability to have them, retain them, and reproduce them...[43]. According to Dilthey, Dickens used his „odd” experience to describe skillfully so many sick, deformed, insane or disabled persons in his writings.

I tend not to agree with these assumptions: Dickens was truly interested in the human various conditions, in the streets, jails, institutions, hospitals and schools, asylums, lunatic homes and so forth. Dickensonian scholars are sure that most of his literary characters were real living persons he met. It is also possible, that he had consulted his fellow physicians-friends, in order to describe more accurately the clinical characteristics, appearances, gestures and postures, of his literary disabled or sick persons. Apart of the above mentioned doctors, he was closely ac-

quainted with the humorist, writer on Irish affairs, and physician Dr. Percival Leigh (1813-1889), author of such highly readable but practical works *The Comic Latin Grammar; a New and Facetious Introduction to the Latin Tongue* (London: Charles Tilt, 1840) and the *Punch* parody of *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* entitled „Mr. Pips his Diary” in Richard Doyle’s illustrated series *Ye Manners and Customs of ye Engyshe*; John Leech (1817-1864): his teachers urged him not to restrict himself to anatomic drawings but to do portraits as well. He left medical school in order to concentrate on etchings and comic sketches, which he submitted to the *Punch* and *Illustrated London New*, he illustrated books, including Dickens’ [44-47].

During Dickens’s second American tour, in 1867, Emerson remarked of him to Annie Fields, the wife of his American publisher: „*You see him quite wrong, evidently, and would persuade me that he is a genial creature, full of sweetness and amenities and superior to his talents, but I fear he is harnessed to them. He is too consummate an artist to have a thread of nature left. He daunts me! I have not the key*” [48].

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