

The Puzzle of Dickens's Last Plot

Andrew Lang



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THE PUZZLE OF DICKENS'S LAST PLOT

BY
ANDREW LANG

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INTRODUCTION

FORSTER tells us that Dickens, in his later novels, from *Bleak House* onwards (1853), “assiduously cultivated” construction, “this essential of his art.” Some critics may think, that since so many of the best novels in the world “have no outline, or, if they have an outline, it is a demned outline,” elaborate construction is not absolutely “essential.” Really essential are character, “atmosphere,” humour.

But as, in the natural changes of life, and under the strain of restless and unsatisfied activity, his old buoyancy and unequalled high spirits deserted Dickens, he certainly wrote no longer in what Scott, speaking of himself, calls the manner of “hab nab at a venture.” He constructed elaborate plots, rich in secrets and surprises. He emulated the manner of Wilkie Collins, or even of Gaboriau, while he combined with some of the elements of the detective novel, or *roman policier*, careful study of character. Except *Great Expectations*, none of his later tales rivals in merit his early picaresque stories of the road, such as *Pickwick* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. “Youth will be served;” no sedulous care could compensate for the exuberance of “the first sprightly runnings.” In the early books the melodrama of the plot, the secrets of Ralph Nickleby, of Monk, of Jonas Chuzzlewit, were the least of the innumerable attractions. But Dickens was more and more drawn towards the secret that excites curiosity, and to the game of hide and seek with the reader who tried to anticipate the solution of the secret.

In April, 1869, Dickens, outworn by the strain of his American readings; of that labour achieved under painful conditions of ominously bad health—found himself, as Sir Thomas Watson reported, “on the brink of an attack of paralysis of his left side, and possibly of apoplexy.” He therefore abandoned a new series of Readings. We think of Scott’s earlier seizures of a similar kind, after which *Peeveril*, he said, “smacked of the apoplexy.” But Dickens’s new story of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, first contemplated in July, 1869, and altered in character by the emergence of “a very curious and new idea,” early in August, does not “smack of the apoplexy.” We may think that the mannerisms of Mr. Honeythunder, the philanthropist, and of Miss Twinkleton, the schoolmistress, are not in the author’s best vein of humour. “The Billickin,” on the other hand, the lodging-house keeper, is “in very gracious fooling;” her unlooked-for sallies in skirmishes with Miss Twinkleton are rich in mirthful surprises. Mr. Grewgious may be caricatured too much, but not out of reason; and Dickens, always good at boys, presents a *gamin*, in Deputy, who is in not unpleasant contrast with the pathetic Jo of *Bleak House*. Opinions may differ as to Edwin and Rosa, but the more closely one studies Edwin, the better one thinks of that character. As far as we are allowed to see Helena Landless, the restraint which she puts on her “tigerish blood” is admirable: she is very fresh and original. The villain is all that melodrama can desire, but what we do miss, I think, is the “atmosphere” of a small cathedral town. Here there is a lack of softness and delicacy of treatment: on the other hand, the opium den is studied from the life.

On the whole, Dickens himself was perhaps most interested in his plot, his secret, his surprises, his game of hide and seek with the reader. He threw himself into the sport with zest: he spoke to his sister-in-law, Miss Hogarth, about his fear that he had not sufficiently concealed his tracks in the latest numbers. Yet, when he died in June, 1870, leaving three completed numbers still unpublished, he left his secret as a puzzle to the curious. Many efforts have been made to decipher his purpose, especially his intentions as to the hero. Was Edwin Drood killed, or did he escape?

By a coincidence, in September, 1869, Dickens was working over the late Lord Lytton's tale for *All the Year Round*, "The Disappearance of John Ackland," for the purpose of mystifying the reader as to whether Ackland was alive or dead. But he was conspicuously defunct! (*All the Year Round*, September-October, 1869.)

The most careful of the attempts at a reply about Edwin, a study based on deep knowledge of Dickens, is "Watched by the Dead," by the late ingenious Mr. R. A. Proctor (1887). This book, to which I owe much aid, is now out of print. In 1905, Mr. Cuming Walters revived "the auld mysterie," in his "Clues to Dickens's Edwin Drood" (Chapman & Hall and Heywood, Manchester). From the solution of Mr. Walters I am obliged to dissent. Of Mr. Proctor's theory I offer some necessary corrections, and I hope that I have unravelled some skeins which Mr. Proctor left in a state of tangle. As one read and re-read the fragment, points very dark seemed, at least, to become suddenly clear: especially one appeared to understand the meaning half-revealed and half-concealed by Jasper's babblings under the influence of opium. He saw in his vision, "that, I never saw that before." We may be sure that he was to see "that" in real life. We must remember that, according to Forster, "such was Dickens's interest in things supernatural that, but for the strong restraining power of his common sense, he might have fallen into the follies of spiritualism." His interest in such matters certainly peeps out in this novel—there are two specimens of the supernormal—and he may have gone to the limited extent which my hypothesis requires. If I am right, Dickens went further, and fared worse, in the too material premonitions of "The Signalman" in *Mugby Junction*.

With this brief preface, I proceed to the analysis of Dickens's last plot. Mr. William Archer has kindly read the proof sheets and made valuable suggestions, but is responsible for none of my theories.

ANDREW LANG.

ST. ANDREWS,

September 4, 1905.

THE STORY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

FOR the discovery of Dickens's secret in *Edwin Drood* it is necessary to obtain a clear view of the characters in the tale, and of their relations to each other.

About the middle of the nineteenth century there lived in Cloisterham, a cathedral city sketched from Rochester, a young University man, Mr. Bud, who had a friend Mr. Drood, one of a firm of engineers—somewhere. They were “fast friends and old college companions.” Both married young. Mr. Bud wedded a lady unnamed, by whom he was the father of one child, a daughter, Rosa Bud. Mr. Drood, whose wife's maiden name was Jasper, had one son, Edwin Drood. Mrs. Bud was drowned in a boating accident, when her daughter, Rosa, was a child. Mr. Drood, already a widower, and the bereaved Mr. Bud “betrothed” the two children, Rosa and Edwin, and then expired, when the orphans were about seven and eleven years old. The guardian of Rosa was a lawyer, Mr. Grewgious, who had been in love with her mother. To Grewgious Mr. Bud entrusted his wife's engagement ring, rubies and diamonds, which Grewgious was to hand over to Edwin Drood, if, when he attained his majority, he and Rosa decided to marry.

Grewgious was apparently legal agent for Edwin, while Edwin's maternal uncle, John Jasper (aged about sixteen when the male parents died), was Edwin's “trustee,” as well as his uncle and devoted friend. Rosa's little fortune was an annuity producing £250 a-year: Edwin succeeded to his father's share in an engineering firm.

When the story opens, Edwin is nearly twenty-one, and is about to proceed to Egypt, as an engineer. Rosa, at school in Cloisterham, is about seventeen; John Jasper is twenty-six. He is conductor of the Choir of the Cathedral, a “lay precentor;” he is very dark, with thick black whiskers, and, for a number of years, has been a victim to the habit of opium smoking. He began very early. He takes this drug both in his lodgings, over the gate of the Cathedral, and in a den in East London, kept by a woman nicknamed “The Princess Puffer.” This hag, we learn, has been a determined drunkard,—“I drank heaven's-hard,”—for sixteen years *before* she took to opium. If she has been dealing in opium for ten years (the exact period is not stated), she has been very disreputable for twenty-six years, that is ever since John Jasper's birth. Mr. Cuming Walters suggests that she is the mother of John Jasper, and, therefore, maternal grandmother of Edwin Drood. She detests her client, Jasper, and plays the spy on his movements, for reasons unexplained.

Jasper is secretly in love with Rosa, the *fiancée* of his nephew, and his own pupil in the musical art. He makes her aware of his passion, silently, and she fears and detests him, but keeps these emotions private. She is a saucy school-girl, and she and Edwin are on uncomfortable terms: she does not love him, while he perhaps does love her, but is annoyed by her manner, and by the gossip about their betrothal. “The bloom is off the plum” of their prearranged loves, he says to his friend, uncle, and confidant, Jasper, whose own concealed passion for Rosa is of a ferocious and homicidal character. Rosa is aware of this fact; “a glaze comes over his eyes,” sometimes, she says, “and he seems to wander away into a frightful sort of dream, in which he threatens most . . .” The man appears to have these frightful dreams even when he is not under opium.

OPENING OF THE TALE

The tale opens abruptly with an opium-bred vision of the tower of Cloisterham Cathedral, beheld by Jasper as he awakens in the den of the Princess Puffer, between a Chinaman, a Lascar, and the hag herself. This Cathedral tower, thus early and emphatically introduced, is to play a great but more or less mysterious part in the romance: that is certain. Jasper, waking, makes experiments on the talk of the old woman, the Lascar and Chinaman in their sleep. He pronounces it “unintelligible,” which satisfies him that his own babble, when under opium, must be unintelligible also. He is, presumably, acquainted with the languages of the eastern coast of India, and with Chinese, otherwise, how could he hope to understand the sleepers? He is being watched by the hag, who hates him.

Jasper returns to Cloisterham, where we are introduced to the Dean, a nonentity, and to Minor Canon Crisparkle, a muscular Christian in the pink of training, a classical scholar, and a good honest fellow. Jasper gives Edwin a dinner, and gushes over “his bright boy,” a lively lad, full of chaff, but also full of confiding affection and tenderness of heart. Edwin admits that his betrothal is a bore: Jasper admits that he loathes his life; and that the church singing “often sounds to me quite devilish,”—and no wonder. After this dinner, Jasper has a “weird seizure;” “a strange film comes over Jasper’s eyes,” he “looks frightfully ill,” becomes rigid, and admits that he “has been taking opium for a pain, an agony that sometimes overcomes me.” This “agony,” we learn, is the pain of hearing Edwin speak lightly of his love, whom Jasper so furiously desires. “Take it as a warning,” Jasper says, but Edwin, puzzled, and full of confiding tenderness, does not understand.

In the next scene we meet the school-girl, Rosa, who takes a walk and has a tiff with Edwin. Sir Luke Fildes’s illustration shows Edwin as “a lad with the bloom of a lass,” with a *classic profile; and a gracious head of long, thick, fair hair*, long, though we learn it has just been cut. He wears a soft slouched hat, and the pea-coat of the period.

SAPSEA AND DURDLES

Next, Jasper and Sapsea, a pompous ass, auctioneer, and mayor, sit at their wine, expecting a third guest. Mr. Sapsea reads his absurd epitaph for his late wife, who is buried in a “Monument,” a vault of some sort in the Cathedral churchyard. To them enter Durdles, a man never sober, yet trusted with the key of the crypt, “as contractor for rough repairs.” In the crypt “he habitually sleeps off the fumes of liquor.” Of course no Dean would entrust keys to this incredibly dissipated, dirty, and insolent creature, to whom Sapsea gives the key of his vault, for no reason at all, as the epitaph, of course, is to be engraved on the outside, by Durdles’s men. However, Durdles insists on getting the key of the vault: he has two other large keys. Jasper, trifling with them, keeps clinking them together, so as to know, even in the dark, by the sound, which is the key that opens Sapsea’s vault, in the railed-off burial ground, beside the cloister arches. He has met Durdles at Sapsea’s for no other purpose than to obtain access at will to Mrs. Sapsea’s monument. Later in the evening Jasper finds Durdles more or less drunk, and being stoned by a *gamin*, “Deputy,” a retainer of a tramp’s lodging-house. Durdles fees Deputy, in fact, to drive him home every night after ten. Jasper and Deputy fall into feud, and Jasper has thus a new, keen, and omnipresent enemy. As he walks with Durdles that worthy explains (in reply to a question by Jasper), that, by tapping a wall, even if over six feet thick, with his hammer, he can detect the nature of the contents of the vault, “solid in hollow, and inside solid, hollow again. Old ’un crumbled away in stone coffin, in vault.” He can also discover the presence of “rubbish left in that same six foot space by Durdles’s men.” Thus, if a foreign body were introduced into the Sapsea

vault, Durdles could detect its presence by tapping the outside wall. As Jasper's purpose clearly is to introduce a foreign body—that of Edwin who stands between him and Rosa—into Mrs. Sapsea's vault, this "gift" of Durdles is, for Jasper, an uncomfortable discovery. He goes home, watches Edwin asleep, and smokes opium.

THE LANDLESSES

Two new characters are now introduced, Neville and Helena Landless, [11] twins, orphans, of Cingalese extraction, probably Eurasian; very dark, the girl "almost of the gipsy type;" both are "fierce of look." The young man is to read with Canon Crisparkle and live with him; the girl goes to the same school as Rosa. The education of both has been utterly neglected; instruction has been denied to them. Neville explains the cause of their fierceness to Crisparkle. In Ceylon they were bullied by a cruel stepfather and several times ran away: the girl was the leader, always "*dressed as a boy, and showing the daring of a man.*" Edwin Drood's air of supercilious ownership of Rosa Bud (indicated as a fault of youth and circumstance, not of heart and character), irritates Neville Landless, who falls in love with Rosa at first sight. As Rosa sings, at Crisparkle's, while Jasper plays the piano, Jasper's fixed stare produces an hysterical fit in the girl, who is soothed by Helena Landless. Helena shows her aversion to Jasper, who, as even Edwin now sees, frightens Rosa. "You would be afraid of him, under similar circumstances, wouldn't you, Miss Landless?" asks Edwin. "Not under any circumstances," answers Helena, and Jasper "thanks Miss Landless for this vindication of his character."

The girls go back to their school, where Rosa explains to Helena her horror of Jasper's silent love-making: "I feel that I am never safe from him . . . a glaze comes over his eyes and he seems to wander away into a frightful sort of dream in which he threatens most," as already quoted. Helena thus, and she alone, except Rosa, understands Jasper thoroughly. She becomes Rosa's protectress. "*Let whomsoever it most concerned look well to it.*"

Thus Jasper has a new observer and enemy, in addition to the omnipresent street boy, Deputy, and the detective old hag of the opium den.

Leaving the Canon's house, Neville and Edwin quarrel violently over Rosa, in the open air; they are followed by Jasper, and taken to his house to be reconciled over glasses of mulled wine. Jasper drugs the wine, and thus provokes a violent scene; next day he tells Crisparkle that Neville is "murderous." "There is something of the tiger in his dark blood." He spreads the story of the *fracas* in the town.

MR. GREWGIOUS

Grewgious, Rosa's guardian, now comes down on business; the girl fails to explain to him the unsatisfactory relations between her and Edwin: Grewgious is to return to her "at Christmas," if she sends for him, and she does send. Grewgious, "an angular man," all duty and sentiment (he had loved Rosa's mother), has an interview with Edwin's trustee, Jasper, for whom he has no enthusiasm, but whom he does not in any way suspect. They part on good terms, to meet at Christmas. Crisparkle, with whom Helena has fallen suddenly in love, arranges with Jasper that Edwin and Landless shall meet and be reconciled, as both are willing to be, at a dinner in Jasper's rooms, on Christmas Eve. Jasper, when Crisparkle proposes this, denotes by his manner "some close internal calculation." We see that he is reckoning how the dinner suits his plan of campaign, and "*close calculation*" may refer, as in Mr. Proctor's theory, to the period of the moon: *on Christmas Eve there will be no moonshine at*

midnight. Jasper, having worked out this problem, accepts Crisparkle's proposal, and his assurances about Neville, and shows Crisparkle a diary in which he has entered his fears that Edwin's life is in danger from Neville. Edwin (who is not in Cloisterham at this moment) accepts, by letter, the invitation to meet Neville at Jasper's on Christmas Eve.

Meanwhile Edwin visits Grewgious in his London chambers; is lectured on his laggard and supercilious behaviour as a lover, and receives the engagement ring of the late Mrs. Bud, Rosa's mother, which is very dear to Grewgious—in the presence of Bazzard, Grewgious's clerk, a gloomy writer of an amateur unacted tragedy. Edwin is to return the ring to Grewgious, if he and Rosa decide not to marry. The ring is in a case, and Edwin places it "in his breast." We must understand, in the breast-pocket of his coat: no other interpretation will pass muster. "Her ring—will it come back to me?" reflects the mournful Grewgious.

THE UNACCOUNTABLE EXPEDITION

Jasper now tells Sapsea, and the Dean, that he is to make "a moonlight expedition with Durdles among the tombs, vaults, towers, and ruins to-night." The impossible Durdles has the keys necessary for this, "surely an unaccountable expedition," Dickens keeps remarking. The moon seems to rise on this night at about 7.30 p.m. Jasper takes a big case-bottle of liquor—drugged, of course and goes to the den of Durdles. In the yard of this inspector of monuments he is bidden to beware of a mound of quicklime near the yard gate. "With a little handy stirring, quick enough to eat your bones," says Durdles. There is some considerable distance between this "mound" of quicklime and the crypt, of which Durdles has the key, but the intervening space is quite empty of human presence, as the citizens are unwilling to meet ghosts.

In the crypt Durdles drinks a good deal of the drugged liquor. "They are to ascend the great Tower,"—and why they do that is part of the Mystery, though not an insoluble part. Before they climb, Durdles tells Jasper that he was drunk and asleep in the crypt, last Christmas Eve, and was wakened by "the ghost of one terrific shriek, followed by the ghost of the howl of a dog, a long dismal, woeful howl, such as a dog gives when a person's dead." Durdles has made inquiries and, as no one else heard the shriek and the howl, he calls these sounds "ghosts."

They are obviously meant to be understood as supranormal premonitory sounds; of the nature of second sight, or rather of second hearing. Forster gives examples of Dickens's tendency to believe in such premonitions: Dickens had himself a curious premonitory dream. He considerably overdid the premonitory business in his otherwise excellent story, *The Signalman*, or so it seems to a student of these things. The shriek and howl heard by Durdles are to be repeated, we see, in real life, later, on a Christmas Eve. The question is—when? More probably *not* on the Christmas Eve just imminent, when Edwin is to vanish, but, on the Christmas Eve following, when Jasper is to be unmasked.

All this while, and later, Jasper examines Durdles very closely, studying the effects on him of the drugged drink. When they reach the top of the tower, Jasper closely contemplates "that stillest part of it" (the landscape) "which the Cathedral overshadows; but he contemplates Durdles quite as curiously."

There is a motive for the scrutiny in either case. Jasper examines the part of the precincts in the shadow of the Cathedral, because he wishes to assure himself that it is lonely enough for his later undescribed but easily guessed proceedings in this night of mystery. He will have much to do that

could not brook witnesses, after the drugged Durdles has fallen sound asleep. We have already been assured that the whole area over which Jasper is to operate is “utterly deserted,” even when it lies in full moonlight, about 8.30 p.m. “One might fancy that the tide of life was stemmed by Mr. Jasper’s own gate-house.” The people of Cloisterham, we hear, would deny that they believe in ghosts; but they give this part of the precinct a wide berth (Chapter XII.). If the region is “utterly deserted” at nine o’clock in the evening, when it lies in the ivory moonlight, much more will it be free from human presence when it lies in shadow, between one and two o’clock after midnight. Jasper, however, from the tower top closely scrutinizes the area of his future operations. It is, probably, for this very purpose of discovering whether the coast be clear or not, that Jasper climbs the tower.

He watches Durdles for the purpose of finding how the drug which he has administered works, with a view to future operations on Edwin. Durdles is now in such a state that “he deems the ground so far below on a level with the tower, and would as lief walk off the tower into the air as not.”

All this is apparently meant to suggest that Jasper, on Christmas Eve, will repeat his expedition, *with Edwin*, whom he will have drugged, and that he will allow Edwin to “walk off the tower into the air.” There are later suggestions to the same effect, as we shall see, but they are deliberately misleading. There are also strong suggestions to the very opposite effect: it is broadly indicated that Jasper is to strangle Edwin with a thick black-silk scarf, which he has just taken to wearing for the good of his throat.

The pair return to the crypt, Durdles falls asleep, dreams that Jasper leaves him, “and that something touches him and something falls from his hand. Then something clinks and gropes about,” and the lines of moonlight shift their direction, as Durdles finds that they have really done when he awakens, with Jasper beside him, while the Cathedral clock strikes two. They have had many hours, not less than five, for their expedition. The key of the crypt lies beside Durdles on the ground. They go out, and as Deputy begins stone-throwing, Jasper half strangles him.

PURPOSE OF THE EXPEDITION

Jasper has had ample time to take models in wax of all Durdles’s keys. But he could have done that in a few minutes, while Durdles slept, if he had wax with him, without leaving the crypt. He has also had time to convey several wheelbarrowfuls of quicklime from Durdles’s yard to Mrs. Sapsea’s sepulchre, of which monument he probably took the key from Durdles, and tried its identity by clinking. But even in a Cathedral town, even after midnight, several successive expeditions of a lay precentor with a wheelbarrow full of quicklime would have been apt to attract the comment of some belated physician, some cleric coming from a sick bed, or some local roysterers. Therefore it is that Dickens insists on the “utterly deserted” character of the area, and shows us that Jasper has made sure of that essential fact by observations from the tower top. Still, his was a perilous expedition, with his wheelbarrow! We should probably learn later, that Jasper was detected by the wakeful Deputy, who loathed him. Moreover, next morning Durdles was apt to notice that some of his quicklime had been removed. As far as is shown, Durdles noticed nothing of that kind, though he does observe peculiarities in Jasper’s behaviour.

The next point in the tale is that Edwin and Rosa meet, and have sense enough to break off their engagement. But Edwin, represented as really good-hearted, now begins to repent his past behaviour, and, though he has a kind of fancy for Miss Landless, he pretty clearly falls deeper in love with his late *fiancée*, and weeps his loss in private: so we are told.

CHRISTMAS EVE

Christmas Eve comes, the day of the dinner of three, Jasper, Landless, and Edwin. The chapter describing this fateful day (xiv.) is headed, *When shall these Three meet again?* and Mr. Proctor argues that Dickens intends that *they shall* meet again. The intention, and the hint, are much in Dickens's manner. Landless means to start, next day, very early, on a solitary walking tour, and buys an exorbitantly heavy stick. We casually hear that Jasper knows Edwin to possess no jewellery, except a watch and chain and a scarf-pin. As Edwin moons about, he finds the old opium hag, come down from London, "seeking a needle in a bottle of hay," she says—that is, hunting vainly for Jasper.

Please remark that Jasper has run up to town, on December 23, and has saturated his system with a debauch of opium on the very eve of the day when he clearly means to kill Edwin. This was a most injudicious indulgence, in the circumstances. A maiden murder needs nerve! We know that "fiddlestrings was weakness to express the state of" Jasper's "nerves" on the day after the night of opium with which the story opens. On December 24, Jasper returned home, the hag at his heels. The old woman, when met by Edwin, has a curious film over her eyes; "he seems to know her." "Great heaven," he thinks, next moment. "Like Jack that night!" This refers to a kind of fit of Jasper's, after dinner, on the first evening of the story. Edwin has then seen Jack Jasper in one of his "filmy" seizures. The woman prays Edwin for three shillings and sixpence, to buy opium. He gives her the money; she asks his Christian name. "Edwin." Is "Eddy" a sweetheart's form of that? He says that he has no sweetheart. He is told to be thankful that his name is not Ned. Now, Jasper alone calls Edwin "Ned." "'Ned' is a threatened name, a dangerous name," says the hag, who has heard Jasper threaten "Ned" in his opium dreams.

Edwin determines to tell this adventure to Jasper, *but not on this night*: to-morrow will do. Now, *did* he tell the story to Jasper that night, in the presence of Landless, at dinner? If so, Helena Landless might later learn the fact from Neville. If she knew it, she would later tell Mr. Grewgious.

The three men meet and dine. There is a fearful storm. "Stones are displaced upon the summit of the great tower." Next morning, early, Jasper yells to Crisparkle, who is looking out of his window in Minor Canon Row, that Edwin has disappeared. Neville has already set out on his walking tour.

AFTER THE DISAPPEARANCE

Men go forth and apprehend Neville, who shows fight with his heavy stick. We learn that he and Drood left Jasper's house at midnight, went for ten minutes to look at the river under the wind, and parted at Crisparkle's door. Neville now remains under suspicion: Jasper directs the search in the river, on December 25, 26, and 27. On the evening of December 27, Grewgious visits Jasper. Now, Grewgious, as we know, was to be at Cloisterham at Christmas. True, he was engaged to dine on Christmas Day with Bazzard, his clerk; but, thoughtful as he was of the moody Bazzard, as Edwin was leaving Cloisterham he would excuse himself. He would naturally take a great part in the search for Edwin, above all as Edwin had in his possession the ring so dear to the lawyer. Edwin had not shown it to Rosa when they determined to part. He "kept it in his breast," and the ring, we learn, was "*gifted with invincible force to hold and drag*," so Dickens warns us.

The ring is obviously to be a *pièce de conviction*. But our point, at present, is that we do not know how Grewgious, to whom this ring was so dear, employed himself at Cloisterham—after Edwin's disappearance—between December 25 and December 27. On the evening of the 27th, he came to

Jasper, saying, "I have *just left Miss Landless.*" He then slowly and watchfully told Jasper that Edwin's engagement was broken off, while the precentor gasped, perspired, tore his hair, shrieked, and finally subsided into a heap of muddy clothes on the floor. Meanwhile, Mr. Grewgious, calmly observing these phenomena, warmed his hands at the fire for some time before he called in Jasper's landlady.

Grewgious now knows by Jasper's behaviour that he believes himself to have committed a superfluous crime, by murdering Edwin, who no longer stood between him and Rosa, as their engagement was already at an end. Whether a Jasper, in real life, would excite himself so much, is another question. We do not know, as Mr. Proctor insists, what Mr. Grewgious had been doing at Cloisterham between Christmas Day and December 27, the date of his experiment on Jasper's nerves. Mr. Proctor supposes him to have met the living Edwin, and obtained information from him, after his escape from a murderous attack by Jasper. Mr. Proctor insists that this is the only explanation of Grewgious's conduct, any other "is absolutely impossible." In that case the experiment of Grewgious was not made to gain information from Jasper's demeanour, but was the beginning of his punishment, and was intended by Grewgious to be so.

But Dickens has been careful to suggest, with suspicious breadth of candour, another explanation of the source of Grewgious's knowledge. If Edwin has really escaped, and met Grewgious, Dickens does not want us to be sure of that, as Mr. Proctor was sure. Dickens deliberately puts his readers on another trail, though neither Mr. Walters nor Mr. Proctor struck the scent. As we have noted, Grewgious at once says to Jasper, "*I have just come from Miss Landless.*" This tells Jasper nothing, but it tells a great deal to the watchful reader, who remembers that Miss Landless, and she only, is aware that Jasper loves, bullies, and insults Rosa, and that Rosa's life is embittered by Jasper's silent wooing, and his unspoken threats. Helena may also know that "Ned is a threatened name," as we have seen, and that the menace comes from Jasper. As Jasper is now known to be Edwin's rival in love, and as Edwin has vanished, the murderer, Mr. Grewgious reckons, is Jasper; and his experiment, with Jasper's consequent shriek and fit, confirms the hypothesis. Thus Grewgious had information enough, from Miss Landless, to suggest his experiment—Dickens intentionally made that clear (though not clear enough for Mr. Proctor and Mr. Cuming Walters)—while his experiment gives him a moral certainty of Jasper's crime, but yields no legal evidence.

But does Grewgious know no more than what Helena, and the fit and shriek of Jasper, have told him? Is his knowledge limited to the evidence that Jasper has murdered Edwin? Or does Grewgious know more, know that Edwin, in some way, has escaped from death?

That is Dickens's secret. But whereas Grewgious, if he believes Jasper to be an actual murderer, should take him seriously; in point of fact, he speaks of Jasper in so light a tone, as "our local friend," that we feel no certainty that he is not really aware of Edwin's escape from a murderous attack by Jasper, and of his continued existence.

Presently Crisparkle, under some mysterious impression, apparently telepathic (the book is rich in such psychical phenomena), visits the weir on the river, at night, and next day finds Edwin's watch and chain in the timbers; his scarf-pin in the pool below. The watch and chain must have been placed purposely where they were found, they could not float thither, and, if Neville had slain Edwin, he would not have stolen his property, of course, except as a blind, neutralised by the placing of the watch in a conspicuous spot. However, the increased suspicions drive Neville away to read law in Staple Inn, where Grewgious also dwells, and incessantly watches Neville out of his window.

About six months later, Helena Landless is to join Neville, who is watched at intervals by Jasper, who, again, is watched by Grewgious as the precentor lurks about Staple Inn.

DICK DATCHERY

About the time when Helena leaves Cloisterham for town, a new character appears in Cloisterham, “a white-headed personage with black eyebrows, *buttoned up in a tightish blue surtout*, with a buff waistcoat, grey trowsers, and something of a military air.” His shock of white hair was unusually thick and ample. This man, “a buffer living idly on his means,” named Datchery, is either, as Mr. Proctor believed, Edwin Drood, or, as Mr. Walters thinks, Helena Landless. By making Grewgious drop the remark that Bazzard, his clerk, a moping owl of an amateur tragedian, “is off duty here,” at his chambers, Dickens hints that Bazzard is Datchery. But that is a mere false scent, a ruse of the author, scattering paper in the wrong place, in this long paper hunt.

As for Helena, Mr. Walters justly argues that Dickens has marked her for some important part in the ruin of Jasper. “There was a slumbering gleam of fire in her intense dark eyes. Let whomsoever it most concerned look well to it.” Again, we have been told that Helena had high courage. She had told Jasper that she feared him “in no circumstances whatever.” Again, we have learned that in childhood she had dressed as a boy when she ran away from home; and she had the motives of protecting Rosa and her brother, Neville, from the machinations of Jasper, who needs watching, as he is trying to ruin Neville’s already dilapidated character, and, by spying on him, to break down his nerve. Really, of course, Neville is quite safe. There is no *corpus delicti*, no carcass of the missing Edwin Drood.

For the reasons given, Datchery might be Helena in disguise.

If so, the idea is highly ludicrous, while nothing is proved either by the blackness of Datchery’s eyebrows (Helena’s were black), or by Datchery’s habit of carrying his hat under his arm, not on his head. A person who goes so far as to wear a conspicuous white wig, would not be afraid also to dye his eyebrows black, if he were Edwin; while either Edwin or Helena *must* have “made up” the face, by the use of paint and sham wrinkles. Either Helena or Edwin would have been detected in real life, of course, but we allow for the accepted fictitious convention of successful disguise, and for the necessities of the novelist. A tightly buttoned surtout would show Helena’s feminine figure; but let that also pass. As to the hat, Edwin’s own hair was long and thick: add a wig, and his hat would be a burden to him.

What is most unlike the stern, fierce, sententious Helena, is Datchery’s habit of “chaffing.” He fools the ass of a Mayor, Sapsea, by most exaggerated difference: his tone is always that of indolent mockery, which one doubts whether the “intense” and concentrated Helena could assume. He takes rooms in the same house as Jasper, to whom, as to Durdles and Deputy, he introduces himself on the night of his arrival at Cloisterham. He afterwards addresses Deputy, the little *gamin*, by the name “Winks,” which is given to him by the people at the Tramps’ lodgings: the name is a secret of Deputy’s.

JASPER, ROSA, AND TARTAR

Meanwhile Jasper formally proposes to Rosa, in the school garden: standing apart and leaning against a sundial, as the garden is commanded by many windows. He offers to resign his hopes of bringing Landless to the gallows (perhaps this bad man would provide a *corpus delicti* of his own making!) if

Rosa will accept him: he threatens to “pursue her to the death,” if she will not; he frightens her so thoroughly that she rushes to Grewgious in his chambers in London. She now suspects Jasper of Edwin’s murder, but keeps her thoughts to herself. She tells Grewgious, who is watching Neville,—“I have a fancy for keeping him under my eye,”—that Jasper has made love to her, and Grewgious replies in a parody of “God save the King”!

“On Thee his hopes to fix
Damn him again!”

Would he fool thus, if he knew Jasper to have killed Edwin? He is not certain whether Rosa should visit Helena next day, in Landless’s rooms, opposite; and Mr. Walters suggests that he may be aware that Helena, dressed as Datchery, is really absent at Cloisterham. However, next day, Helena is in her brother’s rooms. Moreover, it is really a sufficient explanation of Grewgious’s doubt that Jasper is lurking around, and that not till next day is a *private* way of communication arranged between Neville and his friends. In any case, next day, Helena is in her brother’s rooms, and, by aid of a Mr. Tartar’s rooms, she and Rosa can meet privately. There is a good deal of conspiring to watch Jasper when he watches Neville, and in this new friend, Mr. Tartar, a lover is provided for Rosa. Tartar is a miraculously agile climber over roofs and up walls, a retired Lieutenant of the navy, and a handy man, being such a climber, to chase Jasper about the roof of the Cathedral, when Jasper’s day of doom arrives.

JASPER’S OPIUM VISIONS

In July, Jasper revisits the London opium den, and talks under opium, watched by the old hag. He speaks of a thing which he often does in visions: “a hazardous and perilous journey, over abysses where a slip would be destruction. Look down, look down! You see what lies at the bottom there?” He enacts the vision and says, “There was a fellow traveller.” He “speaks in a whisper, and as if in the dark.” The vision is, in this case, “a poor vision: no struggle, no consciousness of peril, no entreaty.” Edwin, in the reminiscent vision, dies very easily and rapidly. “When it comes to be real at last, it is so short that it seems unreal for the first time.” “And yet I never saw *that* before. Look what a poor miserable mean thing it is. *That* must be real. It’s over.”

What can all this mean? We have been told that, shortly before Christmas Eve, Jasper took to wearing a thick black-silk handkerchief for his throat. He hung it over his arm, “his face knitted and stern,” as he entered his house for his Christmas Eve dinner. If he strangled Edwin with the scarf, as we are to suppose, he did not lead him, drugged, to the tower top, and pitch him off. Is part of Jasper’s vision reminiscent—the brief, unresisting death—while another part is a separate vision, is *prospective*, “premonitory”? Does he see himself pitching Neville Landless off the tower top, or see him fallen from the Cathedral roof? Is Neville’s body “*that*”—“I never saw *that* before. Look what a poor miserable mean thing it is! *That* must be real.” Jasper “never saw *that*”—the dead body below the height—before. *This* vision, I think, is of the future, not of the past, and is meant to bewilder the reader who thinks that the whole represents the slaying of Drood. The tale is rich in “warnings” and telepathy.

DATCHERY AND THE OPIUM WOMAN

The hag now tracks Jasper home to Cloisterham. Here she meets Datchery, whom she asks how she

can see Jasper? If Datchery is Drood, he now learns, *what he did not know before, that there is some connection between Jasper and the hag*. He walks with her to the place where Edwin met the hag, on Christmas Eve, and gave her money; and he jingles his own money as he walks. The place, or the sound of the money, makes the woman tell Datchery about Edwin's gift of three shillings and sixpence for opium. Datchery, "with a sudden change of countenance, gives her a sudden look." It does not follow that he is *not* Drood, for, though the hag's love of opium was known to Drood, Datchery is not to reveal his recognition of the woman. He does what any stranger would do; he "gives a sudden look," as if surprised by the mention of opium.

Mr. Walters says, "Drood would not have changed countenance on hearing a fact he had known six months previously." But if Drood was playing at being somebody else, he would, of course, give a kind of start and stare, on hearing of the opium. When he also hears from the hag that her former benefactor's name was Edwin, he asks her how she knew that—"a fatuously unnecessary question," says Mr. Walters. A needless question for Datchery's information, if he be Drood, but as useful a question as another if Drood be Datchery, and wishes to maintain the conversation.

DATCHERY'S SCORE

Datchery keeps a tavern score of his discoveries behind a door, in cryptic chalk strokes. He does this, says Mr. Walters, because, being Helena, he would betray himself if he wrote in a female hand. But nobody would *write* secrets on a door! He adds "a moderate stroke," after meeting the hag, though, says Mr. Walters, "Edwin Drood would have learned nothing new whatever" from the hag.

But Edwin would have learned something quite new, and very important—that the hag was hunting Jasper. Next day Datchery sees the woman shake her fists at Jasper in church, and hears from her that she knows Jasper "better far than all the reverend parsons put together know him." Datchery then adds a long thick line to his chalked score, yet, says Mr. Walters, Datchery has learned "nothing new to Edwin Drood, if alive."

This is an obvious error. It is absolutely new to Edwin Drood that the opium hag is intimately acquainted with his uncle, Jasper, and hates Jasper with a deadly hatred. All this is not only new to Drood, if alive, but is rich in promise of further revelations. Drood, on Christmas Eve, had learned from the hag only that she took opium, and that she had come from town to Cloisterham, and had "hunted for a needle in a bottle of hay." That was the sum of his information. Now he learns that the woman knows, tracks, has found, and hates, his worthy uncle, Jasper. He may well, therefore, add a heavy mark to his score.

We must also ask, How could Helena, fresh from Ceylon, know "the old tavern way of keeping scores? Illegible except to the scorer. The scorer not committed, the scored debited with what is against him," as Datchery observes. An Eurasian girl of twenty, new to England, would not argue thus with herself: she would probably know nothing of English tavern scores. We do not hear that Helena ever opened a book: we do know that education had been denied to her. What acquaintance could she have with old English tavern customs?

If Drood is Datchery, then Dickens used a form of a very old and favourite *ficelle* of his: the watching of a villain by an improbable and unsuspected person, in this case thought to be dead. If Helena is Datchery, the "assumption" or personation is in the highest degree improbable, her whole bearing is quite out of her possibilities, and the personation is very absurd.

Here the story ends.

THEORIES OF THE MYSTERY

FORSTER'S EVIDENCE

WE have some external evidence as to Dickens's solution of his own problem, from Forster. [48] On August 6, 1869, some weeks before he began to work at his tale, Dickens, in a letter, told Forster, "I have a very curious and new idea for my new story. Not communicable (or the interest of the book would be gone), but a very strong one, though difficult to work." Forster must have instantly asked that the incommunicable secret should be communicated to *him*, for he tells us that "*immediately after I learnt*"—the secret. But did he learn it? Dickens was ill, and his plot, whatever it may have been, would be irritatingly criticized by Forster before it was fully thought out. "Fules and bairns should not see half-done work," and Dickens may well have felt that Forster should not see work not even begun, but merely simmering in the author's own fancy.

Forster does not tell us that Dickens communicated the secret in a letter. He quotes none: he says "I was told," orally, that is. When he writes, five years later (1874), "Landless was, *I think*, to have perished in assisting Tartar finally to unmask and seize the murderer," he is clearly trusting, not to a letter of Dickens's, but to a defective memory; and he knows it. He says that a nephew was to be murdered by an uncle. The criminal was to confess in the condemned cell. He was to find out that his crime had been needless, and to be convicted by means of the ring (Rosa's mother's ring) remaining in the quicklime that had destroyed the body of Edwin.

Nothing "new" in all this, as Forster must have seen. "The originality," he explains, "was to consist in the review of the murderer's career by himself at the close, when its temptations were to be dwelt upon as if, not he the culprit, but some other man, were the tempted."

But all this is not "hard to work," and is not "original." As Mr. Proctor remarks, Dickens had used that trick twice already. ("Madman's Manuscript," *Pickwick*; "Clock Case Confession," in *Master Humphrey's Clock*.) The quicklime trick is also very old indeed. The disguise of a woman as a man is as ancient as the art of fiction: yet Helena *may* be Datchery, though nobody guessed it before Mr. Cuming Walters. She ought not to be Datchery; she is quite out of keeping in her speech and manner as Datchery, and is much more like Drood.

"A NEW IDEA"

There are no new ideas in plots. "All the stories have been told," and all the merit lies in the manner of the telling. Dickens had used the unsuspected watcher, as Mr. Proctor shows, in almost all his novels. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, when Jonas finds that Nadgett has been the watcher, Dickens writes, "The dead man might have come out of his grave and not confounded and appalled him so." Now, to Jasper, Edwin *was* "the dead man," and Edwin's grave contained quicklime. Jasper was sure that he had done for Edwin: he had taken Edwin's watch, chain, and scarf-pin; he believed that he had left him, drugged, in quicklime, in a locked vault. Consequently the reappearance of Edwin, quite well, in the vault where Jasper had buried him, would be a very new idea to Jasper; would "confound and appall him." Jasper would have emotions, at that spectacle, and so would the reader! It is not every

day, even in our age of sixpenny novels, that a murderer is compelled to visit, alone, at night, the vault which holds his victim's "cold remains," and therein finds the victim "come up, smiling."

Yes, for business purposes, this idea was new enough! The idea was "difficult to work," says Dickens, with obvious truth. How was he to get the quicklime into the vault, and Drood, alive, out of the vault? As to the reader, he would at first take Datchery for Drood, and then think, "No, that is impossible, and also is stale. Datchery cannot be Drood," and thus the reader would remain in a pleasant state of puzzlement, as he does, unto this day.

If Edwin is dead, there is not much "Mystery" about him. We have as good as seen Jasper strangle him and take his pin, chain, and watch. Yet by adroitly managing the conduct of Mr. Grewgious, Dickens persuaded Mr. Proctor that certainly, Grewgious knew Edwin to be alive. As Grewgious knew, from Helena, all that was necessary to provoke his experiment on Jasper's nerves, Mr. Proctor argued on false premises, but that was due to the craft of Dickens. Mr. Proctor rejected Forster's report, from memory, of what he understood to be the "incommunicable secret" of Dickens's plot, and I think that he was justified in the rejection. Forster does not seem to have cared about the thing—he refers lightly to "the reader curious in such matters"—when once he had received his explanation from Dickens. His memory, in the space of five years, may have been inaccurate: he probably neither knew nor cared who Datchery was; and he may readily have misunderstood what Dickens told him, orally, about the ring, as the instrument of detection. Moreover, Forster quite overlooked one source of evidence, as I shall show later.

MR. PROCTOR'S THEORY

Mr. Proctor's theory of the story is that Jasper, after Edwin's return at midnight on Christmas Eve, recommended a warm drink—mulled wine, drugged—and then proposed another stroll of inspection of the effects of the storm. He then strangled him, somewhere, and placed him in the quicklime in the Sapsea vault, locked him in, and went to bed. Next, according to Mr. Proctor, Durdles, then, "lying drunk in the precincts," for some reason taps with his hammer on the wall of the Sapsea vault, detects the presence of a foreign body, opens the tomb, and finds Drood in the quicklime, "his face fortunately protected by the strong silk shawl with which Jasper has intended to throttle him."

A MISTAKEN THEORY

This is "thin," very "thin!" Dickens must have had some better scheme than Mr. Proctor's. Why did Jasper not "mak sikker" like Kirkpatrick with the Red Comyn? Why did he leave his silk scarf? It might come to be asked for; to be sure the quicklime would destroy it, but why did Jasper leave it? Why did the intoxicated Durdles come out of the crypt, if he was there, enter the graveyard, and begin tapping at the wall of the vault? Why not open the door? he had the key.

Suppose, however, all this to have occurred, and suppose, with Mr. Proctor, that Durdles and Deputy carried Edwin to the Tramps' lodgings, would Durdles fail to recognize Edwin? We are to guess that Grewgious was present, or disturbed at his inn, or somehow brought into touch with Edwin, and bribed Durdles to silence, "until a scheme for the punishment of Jasper had been devised."

All this set of conjectures is crude to the last degree. We do not know how Dickens meant to get Edwin into and out of the vault. Granting that Edwin was drugged, Jasper might lead Edwin in, considering the licence extended to the effects of drugs in novels, and might strangle him there.

Above all, how did Grewgious, if in Cloisterham, come to be at hand at midnight?

ANOTHER WAY

If I must make a guess, I conjecture that Jasper had one of his “filmy” seizures, was “in a frightful sort of dream,” and bungled the murder: made an incomplete job of it. Half-strangled men and women have often recovered. In Jasper’s opium vision and reminiscence there was no resistance, all was very soon over. Jasper might even bungle the locking of the door of the vault. He was apt to have a seizure after opium, in moments of excitement, and *he had been at the opium den through the night of December 23*, for the hag tracked him from her house in town to Cloisterham on December 24, the day of the crime. Grant that his accustomed fit came upon him during the excitement of the murder, as it does come after “a night wi’ opium,” in chapter ii., when Edwin excites him by contemptuous talk of the girl whom Jasper loves so furiously—and then anything may happen!

Jasper murders Edwin inefficiently; he has a fit; while he is unconscious the quicklime revives Edwin, by burning his hand, say, and, during Jasper’s swoon, Edwin, like another famous prisoner, “has a happy thought, he opens the door, and walks out.”

Being drugged, he is in a dreamy state; knows not clearly what has occurred, or who attacked him. Jasper revives, “look on’t again he dare not,”—on the body of his victim—and *he* walks out and goes home, where his red lamp has burned all the time—“thinking it all wery capital.”

“Another way,”—Jasper not only fails to strangle Drood, but fails to lock the door of the vault, and Drood walks out after Jasper has gone. Jasper has, before his fit, “removed from the body the most lasting, the best known, and most easily recognizable things upon it, the watch and scarf-pin.” So Dickens puts the popular view of the case against Neville Landless, and so we are to presume that Jasper acted. If he removed no more things from the body than these, he made a fatal oversight.

Meanwhile, how does Edwin, once out of the vault, make good a secret escape from Cloisterham? Mr. Proctor invokes the aid of Mr. Grewgious, but does not explain why Grewgious was on the spot. I venture to think it not inconceivable that Mr. Grewgious having come down to Cloisterham by a late train, on Christmas Eve, to keep his Christmas appointment with Rosa, paid a darkling visit to the tomb of his lost love, Rosa’s mother. Grewgious was very sentimental, but too secretive to pay such a visit by daylight. “A night of memories and sighs” he might “consecrate” to his lost lady love, as Landor did to Rose Aylmer. Grewgious was to have helped Bazzard to eat a turkey on Christmas Day. But he could get out of that engagement. He would wish to see Edwin and Rosa together, and Edwin was leaving Cloisterham. The date of Grewgious’s arrival at Cloisterham is studiously concealed. I offer at least a conceivable motive for Grewgious’s possible presence at the churchyard. Mrs. Bud, his lost love, we have been told, was buried hard by the Sapsea monument. If Grewgious visited her tomb, he was on the spot to help Edwin, supposing Edwin to escape. Unlikelier things occur in novels. I do not, in fact, call these probable occurrences in every-day life, but none of the story is probable. Jasper’s “weird seizures” are meant to lead up to *something*. They may have been meant to lead up to the failure of the murder and the escape of Edwin. Of course Dickens would not have treated these incidents, when he came to make Edwin explain,—nobody else could explain,—in my studiously simple style. The drugged Edwin himself would remember the circumstances but mistily: his evidence would be of no value against Jasper.

Mr. Proctor next supposes, we saw, that Drood got into touch with Grewgious, and I have added the

circumstances which might take Grewgious to the churchyard. Next, when Edwin recovered health, he came down, perhaps, as Datchery, to spy on Jasper. I have elsewhere said, as Mr. Cuming Walters quotes me, that “fancy can suggest no reason why Edwin Drood, if he escaped from his wicked uncle, should go spying about instead of coming openly forward. No plausible unfantastic reason could be invented.” Later, I shall explain why Edwin, if he is Datchery, might go spying alone.

It is also urged that Edwin left Rosa in sorrow, and left blame on Neville Landless. Why do this? Mr. Proctor replies that Grewgious’s intense and watchful interest in Neville, otherwise unexplained, is due to his knowledge that Drood is alive, and that Neville must be cared for, while Grewgious has told Rosa that Edwin lives. He also told her of Edwin’s real love of her, hence Miss Bud says, “Poor, poor Eddy,” quite *à propos de bottes*, when she finds herself many fathoms deep in love with Lieutenant Tartar, R.N. “‘Poor, poor Eddy!’ thought Rosa, as they walked along,” Tartar and she. This is a plausible suggestion of Mr. Proctor. Edwin, though known to Rosa to be alive, has no chance! But, as to my own remark, “why should not Edwin come forward at once, instead of spying about?” Well, if he did, there would be no story. As for “an unfantastic reason” for his conduct, Dickens is not writing an “unfantastic” novel. Moreover, if things occurred as I have suggested, I do not see what evidence Drood had against Jasper. Edwin’s clothes were covered with lime, but, when he told his story, Jasper would reply that Drood never returned to his house on Christmas Eve, but stayed out, “doing what was correct by the season, in the way of giving it the welcome it had the right to expect,” like Durdles on another occasion. Drood’s evidence, if it was what I have suggested, would sound like the dream of an intoxicated man, and what other evidence could be adduced? Thus I had worked out Drood’s condition, if he really was not killed, in this way: I had supposed him to escape, in a very mixed frame of mind, when he would be encountered by Grewgious, who, of course, could make little out of him in his befogged state. Drood could not even prove that it was not Landless who attacked him. The result would be that Drood would lie low, and later, would have reason enough for disguising himself as Datchery, and playing the spy in Cloisterham.

At this point I was reinforced by an opinion which Mr. William Archer had expressed, unknown to me, in a newspaper article. I had described Edwin’s confused knowledge of his own experience, if he were thoroughly drugged, and then half strangled. Mr. Archer also took that point, and added that Edwin being a good-hearted fellow, and fond of his uncle Jasper, he would not bring, or let Grewgious bring, a terrible charge against Jasper, till he knew more certainly the whole state of the case. For that reason, he would come disguised to Cloisterham and make inquiries. By letting Jasper know about the ring, he would compel him to enter the vault, and then, Mr. Archer thinks, would induce him to “repent and begin life afresh.”

I scarcely think that Datchery’s purpose was so truly honourable: he rather seems to be getting up a case against Jasper. Still, the idea of Mr. Archer is very plausible, and, at least, given Drood’s need of evidence, and the lack of evidence against Jasper, we see reason good, in a novel of this kind, for his playing the part of amateur detective.

DICKENS’S UNUSED DRAFT OF A CHAPTER

Forster found, and published, a very illegible sketch of a chapter of the tale: “How Mr. Sapsea ceased to be a Member of the Eight Club, Told by Himself.” This was “a cramped, interlined, and blotted” draft, on paper of only half the size commonly used by Dickens. Mr. Sapsea tells how his Club mocked him about a stranger, who had mistaken him for the Dean. The jackass, Sapsea, left the Club, and met the stranger, *a young man*, who fooled him to the top of his bent, saying, “If I was to deny that

I came to this town to see and hear you, Sir, what would it avail me?" Apparently this paper was a rough draft of an idea for introducing a detective, as a *young* man, who mocks Sapsea just as Datchery does in the novel. But to make the spy a *young* man, whether the spy was Drood or Helena Landless, was too difficult; and therefore Dickens makes Datchery "an elderly buffer" in a white wig. If I am right, it was easier for Helena, a girl, to pose as a young man, than for Drood to reappear as a young man, not himself. Helena *may* be Datchery, and yet Drood may be alive and biding his time; but I have disproved my old objection that there was no reason why Drood, if alive, should go spying about in disguise. There were good Dickensian reasons.

A QUESTION OF TASTE

Mr. Cuming Walters argues that the story is very tame if Edwin is still alive, and left out of the marriages at the close. Besides, "Drood is little more than a name-label, attached to a body, a man who never excites sympathy, whose fate causes no emotion, he is saved for no useful or sentimental purpose, and lags superfluous on the stage. All of which is bad art, so bad that Dickens would never have been guilty of it."

That is a question of taste. On rereading the novel, I see that Dickens makes Drood as sympathetic as he can. He is very young, and speaks of Rosa with bad taste, but he is really in love with her, much more so than she with him, and he is piqued by her ceaseless mockery, and by their false position. To Jasper he is singularly tender, and remorseful when he thinks that he has shown want of tact. There is nothing ominous about his gaiety: as to his one fault, we leave him, on Christmas Eve, a converted character: he has a kind word and look for every one whom he meets, young and old. He accepts Mr. Grewgious's very stern lecture in the best manner possible. In short, he is marked as faulty—"I am young," so he excuses himself, in the very words of Darnley to Queen Mary! (if the Glasgow letter be genuine); but he is also marked as sympathetic.

He was, I think, to have a lesson, and to become a good fellow. Mr. Proctor rightly argues (and Forster "thinks"), that Dickens meant to kill Neville Landless: Mr. Cuming Walters agrees with him, but Mr. Proctor truly adds that Edwin has none of the signs of Dickens's doomed men, his Sidney Cartons, and the rest. You can tell, as it were by the sound of the voice of Dickens, says Mr. Proctor, that Edwin is to live. The impression is merely subjective, but I feel the impression. The doom of Landless is conspicuously fixed, and why is Landless to be killed by Jasper? Merely to have a count on which to hang Jasper! He cannot be hanged for killing Drood, if Drood is alive.

MR. PROCTOR'S THEORY CONTINUED

Mr. Proctor next supposes that Datchery and others, by aid of the opium hag, have found out a great deal of evidence against Jasper. They have discovered from the old woman that his crime was long premeditated: he had threatened "Ned" in his opiated dreams: and had clearly removed Edwin's trinkets and watch, because they would not be destroyed, with his body, by the quicklime. This is all very well, but there is still, so far, no legal evidence, on my theory, that Jasper attempted to take Edwin's life. Jasper's enemies, therefore, can only do their best to make his life a burden to him, and to give him a good fright, probably with the hope of terrifying him into avowals.

Now the famous ring begins "to drag and hold" the murderer. He is given to know, I presume, that, when Edwin disappeared, he had a gold ring in the pocket of his coat. Jasper is thus compelled to revisit the vault, at night, and there, in the light of his lantern, he sees the long-lost Edwin, with his

hand in the breast of his great coat.

Horrified by this unexpected appearance, Jasper turns to fly. But he is confronted by Neville Landless, Crisparkle, Tartar, and perhaps by Mr. Grewgious, who are all on the watch. He rushes up through the only outlet, the winding staircase of the Cathedral tower, of which we know that he has had the key. Neville, who leads his pursuers, “receives his death wound” (and, I think, is pitched off the top of the roof). Then Jasper is collared by that agile climber, Tartar, and by Crisparkle, always in the pink of condition. There is now something to hang Jasper for—the slaying of Landless (though, as far as I can see, *that* was done in self-defence). Jasper confesses all; Tartar marries Rosa; Helena marries Crisparkle. Edwin is only twenty-one, and may easily find a consoler of the fair sex: indeed he is “ower young to marry yet.”

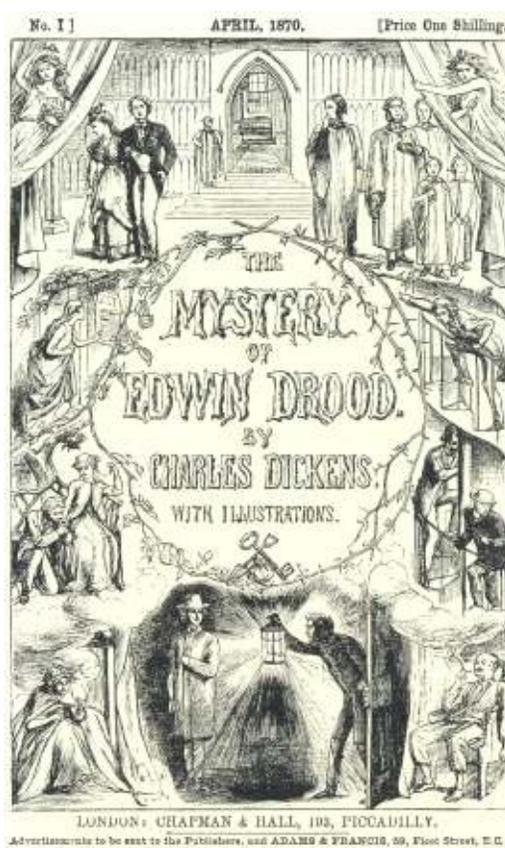
The capture of Jasper was fixed, of course, for Christmas Eve. The phantom cry foreheard by Durdles, two years before, was that of Neville as he fell; and the dog that howled was Neville’s dog, a character not yet introduced into the romance.

Such is Mr. Proctor's theory of the story, in which I mainly agree. Mr. Proctor relies on a piece of evidence overlooked by Forster, and certainly misinterpreted, as I think I can prove to a certainty, by Mr. Cuming Walters, whose theory of the real conduct of the plot runs thus: After watching the storm at midnight with Edwin, Neville left him, and went home: "his way lay in an opposite direction. Near to the Cathedral Jasper intercepted his nephew. . . . Edwin may have been already drugged." How the murder was worked Mr. Cuming Walters does not say, but he introduces at this point, the two sounds foreheard by Durdles, without explaining "the howl of a dog." Durdles would hear the cries, and Deputy "had seen what he could not understand," whatever it was that he saw. Jasper, not aware of Drood's possession of the ring, takes only his watch, chain, and pin, which he places on the timbers of the weir, and in the river, to be picked up by that persistent winter-bather, Crisparkle of the telescopic and microscopic eyesight.

As to the ring, Mr. Cuming Walters erroneously declares that Mr. Proctor "ignores" the power of the ring "to hold and drag," and says that potent passage is "without meaning and must be disregarded." Proctor, in fact, gives more than three pages to the meaning of the ring, which "drags" Jasper into the vault, when he hears of its existence. ^[74] Next, Mr. Cuming Walters supposes Datchery to learn from Durdles, whom he is to visit, about the second hearing of the cry and the dog's howl. Deputy may have seen Jasper "carrying his burden" (Edwin) "towards the Sapsea vault." In fact, Jasper probably saved trouble by making the drugged Edwin walk into that receptacle. "Datchery would not think of the Sapsea vault unaided." No—unless Datchery was Drood! "Now Durdles is useful again. Tapping with his hammer he would find a change . . . inquiry must be made." Why should Durdles tap the Sapsea monument? As Durdles had the key, he would simply walk into the vault, and find the quicklime. Now, Jasper also, we presume, had a key, made from a wax impression of the original. If he had any sense, he would have removed the quicklime as easily as he inserted it, for Mr. Sapsea was mortal: he might die any day, and be buried, and then the quicklime, lying where it ought not, would give rise to awkward inquiries.

Inquiry being made, in consequence of Durdles's tappings, the ring would be found, as Mr. Cuming Walters says. But even then, unless Deputy actually saw Jasper carry a man into the vault, nobody could prove Jasper's connection with the presence of the ring in the vault. Moreover, Deputy hated Jasper, and if he saw Jasper carrying the body of a man, on the night when a man disappeared, he was clever enough to lead Durdles to examine the vault, *at once*. Deputy had a great dislike of the Law and its officers, but here was a chance for him to distinguish himself, and conciliate them.

However these things may be, Mr. Cuming Walters supposes that Jasper, finding himself watched, re-enters the vault, perhaps, "to see that every trace of the crime had been removed." In the vault he finds—Datchery, that is, Helena Landless! Jasper certainly visited the vault and found somebody.



EVIDENCE OF COLLINS'S DRAWINGS

We now come to the evidence which Forster strangely overlooked, which Mr. Proctor and Mr. Archer correctly deciphered, and which Mr. Cuming Walters misinterprets. On December 22, 1869, Dickens wrote to Forster that two numbers of his romance were “now in type. Charles Collins has designed an excellent cover.” Mr. C. A. Collins had married a daughter of Dickens. [77] He was an artist, a great friend of Dickens, and author of that charming book, “A Cruise on Wheels.” His design of the paper cover of the story (it appeared in monthly numbers) contained, as usual, sketches which give an inkling of the events in the tale. Mr. Collins was to have illustrated the book; but, finally, Mr. (now Sir) Luke Fildes undertook the task. Mr. Collins died in 1873. It appears that Forster never asked him the meaning of his designs—a singular oversight.

The cover lies before the reader. In the left-hand top corner appears an allegorical female figure of joy, with flowers. The central top space contains the front of Cloisterham Cathedral, or rather, the nave. To the left walks Edwin, with hyacinthine locks, and a thoroughly classical type of face, and Grecian nose. *Like Datchery, he does not wear, but carries his hat*; this means nothing, if they are in the nave. He seems bored. On his arm is Rosa; *she* seems bored; she trails her parasol, and looks away from Edwin, looks down, to her right. On the spectator’s right march the surpliced men and boys of the Choir. Behind them is Jasper, black whiskers and all; he stares after Edwin and Rosa; his right hand hides his mouth. In the corner above him is an allegorical female, clasping a stiletto.

Beneath Edwin and Rosa is, first, an allegorical female figure, looking at a placard, headed “LOST,” on a door. Under that, again, is a girl in a garden-chair; a young man, whiskerless, with wavy hair, kneels and kisses her hand. She looks rather unimpassioned. I conceive the man to be Landless, taking leave of Rosa after urging his hopeless suit, for which Helena, we learn, “seems to compassionate him.” He has avowed his passion, early in the story, to Crisparkle. Below, the opium hag is smoking. On the other side, under the figures of Jasper and the Choir, the young man who

kneels to the girl is seen bounding up a spiral staircase. His left hand is on the iron railing; he stoops over it, looking down at others who follow him. His right hand, the index finger protruded, points upward, and, by chance or design, points straight at Jasper in the vignette above. Beneath this man (clearly Landless) follows a tall man in a “bowler” hat, a “cut-away” coat, and trousers which show an inch of white stocking above the low shoes. His profile is hid by the wall of the spiral staircase: he might be Grewgious of the shoes, white stockings, and short trousers, but he may be Tartar: he takes two steps at a stride. Beneath him a youngish man, in a low, soft, clerical hat and a black pea-coat, ascends, looking downwards and backwards. This is clearly Crisparkle. A Chinaman is smoking opium beneath.

In the central lowest space, a dark and whiskered man enters a dark chamber; his left hand is on the lock of the door; in his right he holds up a lantern. The light of the lantern reveals a young man in a soft hat of Tyrolese shape. His features are purely classical, his nose is Grecian, his locks are long (at least, according to the taste of to-day); he wears a light paletot, buttoned to the throat; his right arm hangs by his side; his left hand is thrust into the breast of his coat. He calmly regards the dark man with the lantern. That man, of course, is Jasper. The young man is EDWIN DROOD, of the Grecian nose, hyacinthine locks, and classic features, as in Sir L. Fildes’s third illustration.

Mr. Proctor correctly understood the unmistakable meaning of this last design, Jasper entering the vault—

*“To-day the dead are living,
The lost is found to-day.”*

Mr. Cuming Walters tells us that he did not examine these designs by Mr. Collins till he had formed his theory, and finished his book. “On the conclusion of the whole work the pictures were referred to for the first time, and were then found to support in the most striking manner the opinions arrived at,” namely, that Drood was killed, and that Helena is Datchery. Thus does theory blind us to facts!

Mr. Cuming Walters connects the figure of the whiskerless young man kneeling to a girl in a garden seat, with the whiskered Jasper’s proposal to Rosa in a garden seat. But Jasper does not kneel to Rosa; he stands apart, leaning on a sundial; he only once vaguely “touches” her, which she resents; he does not kneel; he does not kiss her hand (Rosa “took the kiss sedately,” like Maud in the poem); and—Jasper had lustrous thick black whiskers.

Again, the same whiskerless young man, bounding up the spiral staircase in daylight, and wildly pointing upwards, is taken by Mr. Cuming Walters to represent Jasper climbing the staircase to reconnoitre, at night, with a lantern, and, of course, with black whiskers. The two well-dressed men on the stairs (Grewgious, or Tartar, and Crisparkle) also, according to Mr. Cuming Walters, “relate to Jasper’s unaccountable expedition with Durdles to the Cathedral.” Neither of them is Jasper; neither of them is Durdles, “in a suit of coarse flannel”—a disreputable jacket, as Sir L. Fildes depicts him—“with horn buttons,” and a battered old tall hat. These interpretations are quite demonstrably erroneous and even impossible. Mr. Archer interprets the designs exactly as I do.

As to the young man in the light of Jasper’s lamp, Mr. Cuming Walters says, “the large hat and the tightly-buttoned surtout must be observed; they are the articles of clothing on which most stress is laid in the description of Datchery. But the face is young.” The face of Datchery was elderly, and he had a huge shock of white hair, a wig. Datchery wore “a tightish blue surtout, with a buff waistcoat and grey trousers; he had something of a military air.” The young man in the vault has anything but a military

air; he shows no waistcoat, and he does not wear “a tightish blue surtout,” or any surtout at all.



The surtout of the period is shown, worn by Jasper, in Sir L. Fildes’s sixth and ninth illustrations. It is a frock-coat; the collar descends far below the top of the waistcoat (buff or otherwise), displaying that garment; the coat is tightly buttoned beneath, revealing the figure; the tails of the coat do not reach the knees of the wearer. The young man in the vault, on the other hand, wears a loose paletot, buttoned to the throat (vaults are chilly places), and the coat falls so as to cover the knees; at least, partially. The young man is not, like Helena, “very dark, and fierce of look, . . . of almost the gipsy type.” He is blonde, sedate, and of the classic type, as Drood was. He is no more like Helena than Crisparkle is like Durdles. Mr. Cuming Walters says that Mr. Proctor was “unable to allude to the prophetic picture by Collins.” As a fact, this picture is fully described by Mr. Proctor, but Mr. Walters used the wrong edition of his book, unwittingly.

Mr. Proctor writes:—“Creeping down the crypt steps, oppressed by growing horror and by terror of coming judgment, sickening under fears engendered by the darkness of night and the charnel-house air he breathed, Jasper opens the door of the tomb and holds up his lantern, shuddering at the thought of what it may reveal to him.

“And what sees he? Is it the spirit of his victim that stands there, ‘in his habit as he lived,’ his hand clasped on his breast, where the ring had been when he was murdered? What else can Jasper deem it? There, clearly visible in the gloom at the back of the tomb, stands Edwin Drood, with stern look fixed on him—pale, silent, relentless!”



Again, “On the title-page are given two of the small pictures from the Love side of the cover, two from the Murder side, and the central picture below, which presents the central horror of the story—the end and aim of the ‘Datchery assumption’ and of Mr. Grewgious’s plans—showing Jasper driven to seek for the proofs of his crime amid the dust to which, as he thought, the flesh and bones, and the very clothes of his victim, had been reduced.”

There are only two possible choices; either Collins, under Dickens’s oral instructions, depicted Jasper finding Drood alive in the vault, an incident which was to occur in the story; or Dickens bade Collins do this for the purpose of misleading his readers in an illegitimate manner; while the young man in the vault was really to be some person “made up” to look like Drood, and so to frighten Jasper with a pseudo-ghost of that hero. The latter device, the misleading picture, would be childish, and the pseudo-ghost, exactly like Drood, could not be acted by the gipsy-like, fierce Helena, or by any other person in the romance.

MR. WALTERS’S THEORY CONTINUED

Mr. Cuming Walters guesses that Jasper was to aim a deadly blow (with his left hand, to judge from the picture) at Helena, and that Neville “was to give his life for hers.” But, manifestly, Neville was to lead the hunt of Jasper up the spiral stair, as in Collins’s design, and was to be dashed from the roof: his body beneath was to be “*that*, I never saw before. *That* must be real. Look what a poor mean miserable thing it is!” as Jasper says in his vision.

Mr. Cuming Walters, pursuing his idea of Helena as both Datchery and also as the owner of “the young face” of the youth in the vault (and also of the young hands, a young girl’s hands could never pass for those of “an elderly buffer”), exclaims: “Imagine the intense power of the dramatic climax, when Datchery, the elderly man, is re-transformed into Helena Landless, the young and handsome woman; and when she reveals the seemingly impenetrable secret which had been closed up in one guilty man’s mind.”

The situations are startling, I admit, but how would Canon Crisparkle like them? He is, we know, to marry Helena, “the young person, my dear,” Miss Twinkleton would say, “who for months lived alone,

at inns, wearing a blue surtout, a buff waistcoat, and grey—” Here horror chokes the utterance of Miss Twinkleton. “Then she was in the vault in *another* disguise, not more womanly, at that awful scene when poor Mr. Jasper was driven mad, so that he confessed all sorts of nonsense, for, my dear, all the Close believes that it *was* nonsense, and that Mr. Jasper was reduced to insanity by persecution. And Mr. Crisparkle, with that elegant dainty mother of his—it has broken her heart—is marrying this half-caste gipsy *trollop*, with her blue surtout and grey—oh, it is a disgrace to Cloisterham!”

The climax, in fact, as devised by Mr. Cuming Walters, is rather too dramatic for the comfort of a minor canon. A humorist like Dickens ought to have seen the absurdity of the situation. Mr. Walters *may* be right, Helena may be Datchery, but she ought not to be.

WHO WAS THE PRINCESS PUFFER?

Who was the opium hag, the Princess Puffer? Mr. Cuming Walters writes: “We make a guess, for Dickens gives us no solid facts. But when we remember that not a word is said throughout the volume of Jasper’s antecedents, who he was, and where he came from; when we remember that but for his nephew he was a lonely man; when we see that he was both criminal and artist; when we observe his own wheedling propensity, his false and fulsome protestations of affection, his slyness, his subtlety, his heartlessness, his tenacity; and when, above all, we know that the opium vice is *hereditary*, and that a *young* man would not be addicted to it unless born with the craving; ^[91] then, it is not too wild a conjecture that Jasper was the wayward progeny of this same opium-eating woman, all of whose characteristics he possessed, and, perchance, of a man of criminal instincts, but of a superior position. Jasper is a morbid and diseased being while still in the twenties, a mixture of genius and vice. He hates and he loves fiercely, as if there were wild gipsy blood in his veins. Though seemingly a model of decorum and devoted to his art, he complains of his “daily drudging round” and “the cramped monotony of his existence.” He commits his crime with the ruthlessness of a beast, his own nature being wholly untamed. If we deduce that his father was an adventurer and a vagabond, we shall not be far wrong. If we deduce that his mother was the opium-eater, prematurely aged, who had transmitted her vicious propensity to her child, we shall almost certainly be right.”

WHO WAS JASPER?

Who was Jasper? He was the brother-in-law of the late Mr. Drood, a respected engineer, and University man. We do not know whence came Mrs. Drood, Jasper’s sister, but is it likely that her mother “drank heaven’s-hard”—so the hag says of herself—then took to keeping an opium den, and there entertained her son Jasper, already an accomplished vocalist, but in a lower station than that to which his musical genius later raised him, as lay Precentor? If the Princess Puffer be, as on Mr. Cuming Walters’s theory she is, Edwin’s long-lost grandmother, her discovery would be unwelcome to Edwin. Probably she did not live much longer; “my lungs are like cabbage nets,” she says. Mr. Cuming Walters goes on—

“Her purpose is left obscure. How easily, however, we see possibilities in a direction such as this. The father, perhaps a proud, handsome man, deserts the woman, and removes the child. The woman hates both for scorning her, but the father dies, or disappears, and is beyond her vengeance. Then the child, victim to the ills in his blood, creeps back to the opium den, not knowing his mother, but immediately recognized by her. She will make the child suffer for the sins of the father, who had

destroyed her happiness. Such a theme was one which appealed to Dickens. It must not, however, be urged; and the crucial question after all is concerned with the opium woman as one of the unconscious instruments of justice, aiding with her trifle of circumstantial evidence the Nemesis awaiting Jasper.

“Another hypothesis—following on the Carker theme in ‘Dombey and Son’—is that Jasper, a dissolute and degenerate man, lascivious, and heartless, may have wronged a child of the woman’s; but it is not likely that Dickens would repeat the Mrs. Brown story.”

Jasper, *père*, father of John Jasper and of Mrs. Drood, however handsome, ought not to have deserted Mrs. Jasper. Whether John Jasper, prematurely devoted to opium, became Edwin’s guardian at about the age of fifteen, or whether, on attaining his majority, he succeeded to some other guardian, is not very obvious. In short, we cannot guess why the Princess Puffer hated Jasper, a paying client of long standing. We are only certain that Jasper was a bad fellow, and that the Princess Puffer said, “I know him, better than all the Reverend Parsons put together know him.” On the other hand, Edwin “seems to know” the opium woman, when he meets her on Christmas Eve, which may be a point in favour of her being his long-lost grandmother.

Jasper was certainly tried and condemned; for Dickens intended “to take Mr. Fildes to a condemned cell in Maidstone, or some other gaol, in order to make a drawing.” ^[96] Possibly Jasper managed to take his own life, in the cell; possibly he was duly hanged.

Jasper, after all, was a failure as a murderer, even if we suppose him to have strangled his nephew successfully. “It is obvious to the most excruciatingly feeble capacity” that, if he meant to get rid of proofs of the identity of Drood’s body by means of quicklime, it did not suffice to remove Drood’s pin, watch, and chain. Drood would have coins of the realm in his pockets, gold, silver, bronze. Quicklime would not destroy these metallic objects, nor would it destroy keys, which would easily prove Drood’s identity. If Jasper knew his business, he would, of course, rifle *all* of Edwin’s pockets minutely, and would remove the metallic buttons of his braces, which generally display the maker’s name, or the tailor’s. On research I find “H. Poole & Co., Savile Row” on my buttons. In this inquiry of his, Jasper would have discovered the ring in Edwin’s breast pocket, and would have taken it away. Perhaps Dickens never thought of that little fact: if he did think of it, no doubt he found some mode of accounting for Jasper’s unworkmanlike negligence. The trouser-buttons would have led any inquirer straight to Edwin’s tailor; I incline to suspect that neither Dickens nor Jasper noticed that circumstance. The conscientious artist in crime cannot afford to neglect the humblest and most obvious details.

CONCLUSION

ACCORDING to my theory, which mainly rests on the unmistakable evidence of the cover drawn by Collins under Dickens's directions, all "ends well." Jasper comes to the grief he deserves: Helena, after her period of mourning for Neville, marries Crisparkle: Rosa weds her mariner. Edwin, at twenty-one, is not heart-broken, but, a greatly improved character, takes, to quote his own words, "a sensible interest in works of engineering skill, especially when they are to change the whole condition of an undeveloped country"—Egypt.

These conclusions are inevitable unless we either suppose Dickens to have arranged a disappointment for his readers in the *tableau* of Jasper and Drood, in the vault, on the cover, or can persuade ourselves that not Drood, but some other young man, is revealed by the light of Jasper's lantern. Now, the young man is very like Drood, and very unlike the dark fierce Helena Landless: disguised as Drood, this time, not as Datchery. All the difficulty as to why Drood, if he escaped alive, did not at once openly denounce Jasper, is removed when we remember, as Mr. Archer and I have independently pointed out, that Drood, when attacked by Jasper, was (like Durdles in the "unaccountable expedition") stupefied by drugs, and so had no valid evidence against his uncle. Whether science is acquainted with the drugs necessary for such purposes is another question. They are always kept in stock by starving and venal apothecaries in fiction and the drama, and are a recognized convention of romance.

So ends our unfolding of the Mystery of Edwin Drood.

THE END

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FOOTNOTES

[11] Landless is not “Lackland,” but a form of de Laundeles, a Lothian name of the twelfth century, merged later in that of Ormistoun.

[48] *Life of Dickens*, vol. iii. pp. 425–439.

[74] J. Cuming Walters, p. 102; Proctor, pp. 131–135. Mr. Cuming Walters used an edition of 1896, apparently a reprint of a paper by Proctor, written earlier than his final book of 1887. Hence the error as to Mr. Proctor’s last theory.

[77] Mrs. Perugini, the books say, but certainly a daughter.

[91] What would Weissmann say to all this?

[96] So Mr. Cuming Walters quotes Mr. Hughes, who quotes Sir L. Fildes. *He* believes that Jasper strangled Edwin with the black-silk scarf, and, no doubt, Jasper was for long of that opinion himself.

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