

## THE MARTYR IN DICKENS

1) *Monsters and mares in history* (from A Child's History of England) a) King Henry the Eighth. 'The plain truth is, that he was a most intolerable ruffian, a disgrace to human nature, and a blot of blood and grease upon the History of England'. b) 'Bloody Queen Mary': "By their fruits ye shall know then" said OUR SAVIOUR. The stake and the fire were the fruits of this reign, and you will judge this Queen by nothing else .... Jane Grey, Hooper, Rogers, Ridley, Latimer, Cranmer, and three hundred people burnt alive within four years of my wicked reign, including sixty women and forty little children. But it is enough, that their deaths were written in Heaven.' c) 'a drunken ruffian of the name of JEFFREYS; a red-faced swollen bloated horrible creature, with a bullying roaring voice, and a more savage nature perhaps than was ever lodged in any human breast ... a great crimson toad, sweltering and swelling with rage.'

2) *David Copperfield looks back on his childhood*

a) David Copperfield remembers Foxe's Book of Martyrs at Peggotty's: 'This precious volume, of which I do not recollect one word, I immediately discovered and immediately applied myself to; and I never visited the house afterwards, but I kneeled on a chair, opened the casket where this gem was enshrined, spread my arms over the desk, and fell to devouring the book afresh. I was chiefly edified, I am afraid, by the pictures, which were numerous, and represented all kinds of direst horrors, but *the* Martyrs and Peggotty's house have been inseparable in my mind ever since, and am now.'

h) David at the Murdstones: 'there was no face to look on mine with love or liking any more .... And now I fell into a state of neglect, which I cannot look back upon without compassion. I fell at once into a solitary condition, apart from all friendly notice, apart from the society of all other boys of my own age, apart from all companionship but my own spiritless thoughts, ... I was not actively ill-used. I was not beaten, or starved; but the wrong that was done to me had no intervals of relenting, and was done in a systematic, passionless manner. Day after day, week after week, month after month, I was coldly neglected.'

c) David looks at himself in the mirror, after being beaten by Mr Murdstone: 'so swollen, red, and ugly, that it almost frightened me. My stripes were sore and stiff, and made me cry afresh, when I moved; but they were nothing to the guilt I felt. It lay heavier on my breast than if I had been a most atrocious criminal, I dare say.'

3) *Dickens looks back on his childhood*

It is wonderful to me how I could have been so easily cast away at such an age .... The deep remembrance of the sense I had of being utterly neglected and hopeless; of the shame I felt in my position; of the misery it was to my young h~ to believe that, day by day, what I had learned, and thought, and delighted in, and raised my fancy and my emulation up by, was passing away from me, never to be brought back any more; cannot be written. My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.' ('Autobiographical fragment', in Forster's biography)

4) *Some martyrs in Dickens, more and less serious*

a) Mr Toots and Mr Feeder at Dr Blimber's: 'In the course of which ... they endured surprising torments with the constancy of martyrs: and, drinking table-beer at intervals, felt all the glories of dissipation.' (Dombey and Son)

b) Mrs Crupp: 'a martyr to a curious disorder called "the spazzums," which was generally accompanied with inflammations of the nose, and required to be constantly treated with peppermint' (David Copperfield)

c) Mrs Jarley in response to Little Nell asking her if she's had a bad night: 'I seldom have anything else, child', replied Mrs Jarley, with the air of a martyr: 'I sometimes wonder how I bear it.' (The Old Curiosity Shop)

d) 'Mrs Wittiterley is quite a martyr' (Nicholas Nickleby)

c) Mrs Skewton: 'Don't tell me, my dear Edith, that you, so enviably self-possessed, are beginning to be a martyr too, like your unfortunately constituted mother!' (Dombey and Son)

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f) Gabriel Varden's wife: 'A lady of what is commonly called an uncertain temper — a phrase which being interpreted signifies a temper tolerably certain to make everybody more or less uncomfortable...' (Barnaby Rudge)

g) Joe Gargery's wife (Pip's sister) in Great Expectations

h) Mrs Wilfer on the melancholy celebration of their wedding anniversary: 'The noble lady's condition on these delightful occasions was one compounded of heroic endurance and heroic forgiveness. Lurid indications of the better marriages she might have made, shone athwart the awful gloom of her composure, and fitfully revealed the cherub [her husband] as a little

monster unaccountably favoured by Heaven, who had possessed himself of a blessing for which many of his superiors had sued and contended in vain...

"My face might be a martyrdom, but what would that import, or who should know it, if I smiled?" And she did smile; manifestly freezing the blood of Mr George Sampson [one of the guests] by so doing...' (Our Mutual Friend)

l) Mrs Quilp: 'All the ladies then sighed in concert, shook their heads gravely, and looked at Mrs Quilp as at a martyr. A pretty little, mild-spoken, blue-eyed woman, who having allied herself in wedlock to the dwarf in one of those strange infatuations of which examples are by no means scarce, performed a sound practical penance for her folly, every day of her life.' (The Old Curiosity Shop)

j) Edith Skewton and Mr Dombey at Warwick Castle: 'Loves and Cupids took to flight afraid, and Martyrdom had no such torment in its painted history of suffering.' (Dombey and Son)

k) The footman Mr Whiffers has resigned because his employers have required him to eat cold meat: 'It is impossible to conceive the disgust which this avowal awakened in the bosoms of the hearers. Loud cries of 'Shame!' mingled with groans and hisses, prevailed for a quarter of an hour the health of the interesting martyr was drunk in a most enthusiastic manner'. (Pickwick Papers)

l) Nicholas Nickleby: 'persuading himself that he was a most conscientious and glorious martyr, [he] nobly resolved to do what, if he had examined his own heart a little more carefully, he would have found, he could not resist'. (Nicholas Nickleby)

m) His wicked Uncle Ralph: 'it's the cant of the day. If a man can't pay his debts, he dies of a broken heart, and his widow's a martyr.'

n) Susan Nipper accuses Mr Dombey of cold neglect towards his daughter Florence: for I have seen her in her grief and I have seen her in her joy (there's not been much of it) and I have seen her with her brother and I have seen her in her loneliness and some have never seen, and I say to some and all — I do!" and here the black-eyed shook her head, and slightly stamped her foot; "that she's the blessedest and dearest angel is Miss Floy that ever drew the breath of life, the more that I was tom to pieces Sir the more I'd say it though I may not be a Fox's Martyr.' (Dombey and Son)

o) Daniel Doyce tells Clennam: 'I must not make a martyr of myself, when I am one of so large a company.' (Little Dorrit)

#### 5) *The death of Jo the crossing-sweeper:*

'Jo, my poor fellow!'

'I hear you, sir, in the dark, but I'm a gropin—a gropin—let me catch hold of your hand.'

'Jo, can you say what I say?'

'I'll say anythink as you say, sir, for I knows it's good.'

'OUR FATHER.'

'Our Father! — yes, that's wery good, sir.'

'WHICH ART IN HEAVEN.'

'Art in Heaven — is the light a comin, sir?'

'Hallowed be — thy -'

The light is come upon the dark benighted way. Dead!

Dead, your Majesty. Dead, my lords and gentlemen. Dead, Right Reverends and Wrong Reverends of every order. Dead, men and women, horn with Heavenly compassion in your hearts. And dying thus around us every day. (Bleak House, end of ch. XLVII)

#### 6) *King Charles the Martyr*

'With all my sorrow for him, I cannot agree with him that he died 'the martyr of the people;' for the people had been martyrs to him, and to his ideas of a King's rights, long before. Indeed, I am afraid that he was but a bad judge of martyrs; for he had called that infamous Duke of Buckingham 'the Martyr of his Sovereign.'" (A Child's History of England)

ADRIAN POOLE