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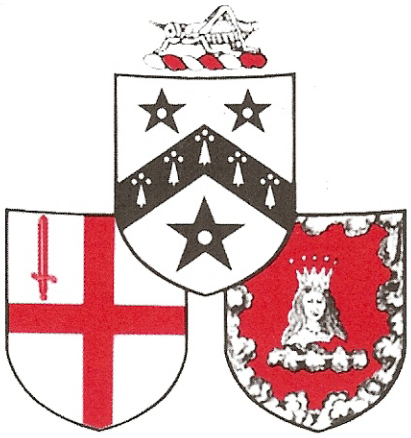

LITERARY LONDONERS

II

A Series of Lectures given in
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CHARLES DICKENS

Professor Michael Slater

This is an overwhelming topic. Where does one begin? When Dickens was young, a clerk in a solicitor's office, one of his fellow clerks said, "I thought I knew something about the town until I talked to Dickens, but he knew it all from Bow to Brentford". That was when he was twenty, and he went on knowing London better and better. One could give an enormous long series of lectures on Dickens as a Londoner, taking different aspects of London in each one. One could give a lecture on Dickens and the Borough, Dickens and the West End, Dickens and the suburbs, e.g. Camden Town, the river, the East End, Covent Garden. All of these are rich and wonderful topics as regards Dickens, but I thought that for today, as I was speaking in the City and in Gresham College and, indeed, in Barnard's Inn (though Dickens was never very polite about Barnard's Inn - you may remember Joe Gargery when he visits Barnard's Inn in *Great Expectations* to see Pip being a gentleman, says, Well, he wouldn't keep a pig in it himself)... There again, one could give a whole lecture about Dickens and the Inns of Court, but I thought it most appropriate to talk about Dickens and the City of London. I don't remember seeing any extensive discussion of the love/hate relationship that Dickens had with the City and the City Corporation, so I want, in the 45 minutes that we have, to try and touch briefly, with the help of some quotations, on at least some aspects of this fascinating relationship.

I'll begin by quoting from a wonderful essay that Dickens wrote for his magazine *Household Words* in 1853 called "Gone Astray", in which he describes himself as a small boy getting lost in London, and specifically in the City of London. I want to begin with it because it has in it those two aspects of Dickens's approach to the City of London, the romantic one and the satiric, that I want to try and bring out this afternoon. He writes:

> When I go into the City, now, it makes me sorrowful to think that I am quite an artful wretch. Strolling about it as a lost child, I thought of the British Merchant and the Lord Mayor, and was full of reverence. Strolling about it now, I laugh at the sacred liveries of state, and get indignant with the corporation as one of the strongest practical jokes of the present day. What did I know then, about the multitude who are always being disappointed in the City; who are always expecting to meet a party there, and to receive money there, and whose expectations are never fulfilled? What did I know then, about that wonderful person, the friend in the City, who is to do so many things for so many people; who is to get this one into a post at home, and that one into a post abroad; who is to settle with this man's creditors, provide for that man's son, and see that other man paid; who is to "throw himself" into this grand Joint-Stock certainty, and is to put his name down on that Life Assurance Directory, and never does anything predicted of him? ... I wandered about the City, like a child in a dream, staring at the British merchants, and inspired by a mighty faith in the marvellousness of everything. Up courts and down courts - in and out of yards and little squares - peeping into counting-house passages and running away - poorly feeding the echoes in the court of the South Sea House with my timid steps - roaming down into Austin Friars, and wondering how the Friars used to like it - ever staring at the

> British merchants, and never tired of the shops - I rambled on, all through the day. In such stories as I made, to account for the different places, I believed as devoutly as in the City itself. I particularly remember that when I found myself on 'Change, and saw the shabby people sitting under the placards about ships, I settled that they were Misers, who had embarked all their wealth to go and buy gold-dust or something of that sort, and were waiting for their respective captains to come and tell them that they were ready to set sail. I observed that they all munched dry biscuits, and I thought it was to keep off sea-sickness.

It's a marvellous essay which I strongly recommend to you - you will have to wait until volume 3 of my edition to read it properly presented, but there it is in *Household Words* in August 1853. It gives us this double focus, the romance of the City and a satirical view of it. I would like now to move to two figures, one very familiar, Scrooge in *A Christmas Carol,* and one less familiar, the Lord Mayor of London in a little-read work of Dickens's, *Master Humphrey's Clock, to* illustrate these two aspects. You will remember Scrooge, on Christmas Eve,

> of all good days of the year ... sat busy in his counting-house. It was cold, bleak, biting weather: foggy withal: and he could hear the people in the court outside, go wheezing up and down, beating their hands upon their breast, and stamping their feet upon the pavement-stone to warm them.

He goes on to describe with great relish the thickening fog and darkness in the City that Christmas Eve:

> ...the fog and darkness thickened so, that people ran about with flaring links, proffering their services to go before horses in carriages, and conduct them on their way. The ancient tower of a church, whose gruff old bell was always peeping slily down at Scrooge out of a gothic window in the wall, became invisible, and struck the hours and quarters in the clouds, with tremulous vibrations afterwards, as if its teeth were chattering in its frozen head up there... The Lord Mayor, in the stronghold of the mighty Mansion House, gave orders to his fifty cooks and butlers to keep Christmas as a Lord Mayor's household should...

It's too well-known for me to go on quoting, wonderful as it is. We all know *A Christmas Carol* and of course, it is one of the great fairy tales, one of the great ghost stories, one of the most marvellous stories in our literature, and much of it (there is, of course the Cratchits' home in Camden Town) is set right here in the City of London. So, we have Scrooge in his counting-house, and we have another figure, a rather different Lord Mayor, from *Master Humphrey's Clock*:

> Once upon a time, that is to say, in this our time - the exact year, month, and day are of no matter - there dwelt in the City of London a substantial citizen, who united in his single person the dignities of wholesale fruiterer, alderman, common-councilman, and member of the Worshipful Company of Patten-makers; who had superadded to these extraordinary distinctions the important post and title of Sheriff, and who at length, and to crown all, stood next in rotation for the high and honourable office of Lord Mayor. He was a very substantial citizen indeed. His face was like the full moon in a fog, with two little holes punched out for his eyes, a very ripe pear stuck on for his nose, and a wide gash to serve for a mouth. The girth of his waistcoat was hung up and lettered in his tailor's shop as an

> extraordinary curiosity. He breathed like a heavy snorer, and his voice in speaking came thickly forth, as if it were oppressed and stifled by feather-beds. He trod the ground like an elephant, and ate and drank like - like nothing but an alderman, as he was.

Then he describes how he had been

> a very lean, weazen little boy, never dreaming of carrying such a weight of flesh upon his bones or of money in his pockets, and glad enough to take his dinner at a baker's door, and his tea at a pump. But he had long ago forgotten all this, as it was proper that a wholesale fruiterer, alderman, common-councilman, member of the Worshipful Company of Patten-makers, past Sheriff and, above all, a Lord Mayor that was to be, should; and he never forgot it more completely in all his life than on the eighth of November in the year of his election to the great golden civic chair, which was the day before his grand dinner at Guildhall.
>
> It happened that as he sat that evening all alone in his counting-house, looking over the bill of fare for next day, and checking off the fat capons in fifties, and the turtle-soup by the hundred quarts, for his private amusement...

A very different figure from the figure of Scrooge and a very satirical description of a sort of generic Lord Mayor of London. But even in that satirical description, you can see the romance lies just beneath the surface. There lurks a satirical version of the most famous legend of all in the City of London, the legend of Dick Whittington, which had such profound resonance for Dickens, for fairly obvious autobiographical reasons - he, too, was a little wayward ragged starving boy as he thought of himself in those terrible years with his parents in the Marshalsea Prison - and now he had come to become a sort of unofficial Lord Mayor of London and one of the most beloved men in the country. He wrote once of "that relationship, personally affectionate and like no other man's, that exists between me and the public", and he was above all associated with London. He was a kind of uncrowned king of London, and he who had been this starving boy dawdling down Tottenham Court Road, wondering if he could afford to lay out a penny or two to buy the stale pastries put out in the shops there, was now rich, famous, and adored. He was of course rightly celebrated for his tremendous and munificent charity. It's no wonder that the legend of Dick Whittington had such resonance for Dickens, and that he can't keep it out, even in that rather satirical description there of the Lord Mayor. In fact, in one of his essays, he refers to coming into the City as "coming into the region of Whittington", and those of you who know his great City novel, *Dombey and Son,* will recall how the legend of Dick Whittington resonates throughout the whole story associated with the fate and fortunes of Walter Gay.

Whittington and his legend stood foremost in Dickens's thinking and his enjoyment of the City of London. By the time he spoke at the Mansion House in 1861, as one of the most brilliant and celebrated after-dinner speakers of the day, he had already spoken there several times. However, it had always been a rather prickly occasion, and if you read his speeches in K.J.Fielding's excellent edition, in nearly all of those given at the Mansion House, there is something very uncomfortable about them. The exception was this last one in 1861, because the Lord Mayor then was William Cubitt, the great builder, and his daughter was a close personal friend of Dickens. Dickens said in his toast to the Lady Mayoress, "The literature of English romance losing its Lord Mayors would lose at one blow its wealthiest of London merchants and its most beautiful merchant's daughter, its crossest cook, its best known foreign

adventurer, its most profitable investment on record, and its most wonderful cat." For Dickens, the Lord Mayor of London presides over an intensely romantic place, a sort of magic labyrinth which is both sinister and fascinating, a place of all sorts of marvellous possibilities, where on a foggy day it wouldn't be amazing to meet a Megalosaurus forty feet long or so, waddling up Holborn Hill (as at the beginning of *Bleak House*). You may remember another wonderful City novel, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where Tom Pinch is conducted to this strange remote chamber in a rather ghostly house in Austin Friars, and there are "heaps and heaps and heaps of books" all scattered about on the floor, and Mr Fips says this magical, unknown employer whom Tom doesn't know is going to pay him a very good salary to sort all these books out and catalogue them properly, put them on shelves and so on. This seems to echo the fairy tale in which the princess is shut up in a tower and has to separate out all these grains of wheat, a task set by her cruel stepmother. Tom's task is entirely the result of benevolence but it is also very fairy-tale and magical. In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, there is one of the best descriptions of this strange labyrinth of the City, surrounding Todgers's Boarding House. Mrs Todgers runs a boarding house for commercial gentlemen - the marvellous Mrs Todgers who greets her guest "with affection beaming out of one eye and calculation shining out of the other". Dickens says:

> You couldn't walk about in Todgers's neighbourhood, as you could in any other neighbourhood. You groped your way for an hour through lanes and by-ways, and courtyards, and passages; and you never once emerged upon anything that might be reasonably called a street. A kind of resigned distraction came over the stranger as he trod those devious mazes, and, giving himself up for lost, went in and out and round about and quietly turned back again when he came to a dead wall or was stopped by an iron railing, and felt that the means of escape might possibly present themselves in their own good time, but that to anticipate them was hopeless... Strange solitary pumps were found near Todgers's hiding themselves for the most part in blind alleys, and keeping company with fireladders. There were churches also by dozens, with many a ghostly little churchyard, all overgrown with such straggling vegetation ... Among the narrow thoroughfares at hand, there lingered, here and there, an ancient doorway of carved oak, from which, of old, the sounds of revelry and feasting often came; but now these mansions, only used for storehouses, were dark and dull, and, being filled with wool, and cotton, and the like... had an air of palpable deadness about them which, added to their silence and desertion, made them very grim. In like manner, there were gloomy court-yards in these parts...

There are pages of wonderful description of this labyrinth of London, full of wondrous sights and astonishing creatures, like the Monument, for instance, which suddenly seems to become alive. You turn around in Todgers's and suddenly you see that there right beside you is the Monument. As Dickens says, "every golden hair upon its head erect as if the doings of the City frightened it" (he is referring to the ball at the top with the golden flames). In the City, all kinds of races are hidden away, strange tribes of people: near Todgers's, for instance, in the queer old taverns that were there, you would find the

> ancient inhabitants of that region; born, and bred there from boyhood, who had long since become wheezy and asthmatical, and short of breath, except in the article of story-telling... These gentry were much opposed to steam and all newfangled ways, and held ballooning to be sinful, and deplored the degeneracy of the times; which that particular member of each little club who kept the keys of the nearest church professionally, always attributed to the prevalence of dissent and

> irreligion: though the major part of the company inclined to the belief that virtue went out with hair-powder, and that Old England's greatness had decayed amain with barbers.

Dickens unearths these strange little tribes of people living in this maze. I shall now go slightly outside the City but the passage is so *à propos* that I can't resist mentioning it. This is Seven Dials, at the southern end of Tottenham Court Road. Dickens says in *Sketches by Boz*:

> But what involutions can compare with those of Seven Dials? Where is there such another maze of streets, courts, lanes and alleys? ... The stranger who finds himself in "The Dials" for the first time, and stands Belzoni-like [the archaeologist who excavated the Great Pyramid of Egypt], at the entrance of seven obscure passages, uncertain which to take, will see enough around him to keep his curiosity and attention awake for no inconsiderable time...
> On one side, a little crowd has collected round a couple of ladies, who having imbibed the contents of various "three-outs" of gin and bitters in the course of the morning, have at length differed on some point of domestic arrangement, and are on the eve of settling the quarrel satisfactorily, by an appeal to blows, greatly to the interest of other ladies who live in the same house, and tenements adjoining, and who are all partisans on one side or other.
> "Vy don't you pitch into her, Sarah?" exclaims one half-dressed matron by way of encouragement. "Vy don't you? If *my* 'usband had treated her with a drain last night, unbeknown to me, I'd tear her precious eyes out—a wixen !"
> "What's the matter, ma'am ?" inquires another old woman, who has just bustled up to the spot.
> " Matter !" replies the first speaker, talking *at* the obnoxious combatant, "matter ! Here's poor dear Mrs. Sulliwin, as has five blessed children of her own, can't go out a charing for one arternoon, but what hussies must be a-comin', and 'ticing avay her oun' 'usband, as she's been married to twelve year come next Easter Monday, for I see the certificate ven I vas a-drinkin' a cup o' tea vith her, only the werry last blessed Ven'sday as ever was sent. I 'appen'd to say promiscuously, "Mrs. Sulliwin," says I -
> "What do you mean by hussies?" interrupts a champion of the other party, who has evinced a strong inclination throughout to get up a branch fight on her own account ("Hooroar", ejaculates a pot-boy in parenthesis, "put the kye-bosk on her, Mary!"). "What do you mean by hussies?" reiterates the champion.
> "Niver mind," replies the opposition expressively, "niver mind; *you* go home, and, ven you're quite sober, mend your stockings."

- which leads to a tremendous fracas. Here Dickens unearths another extraordinary tribe unknown to his middle-class readers, a tribe living in these strange mazes and labyrinths. Of course, there is also a very sinister aspect to them, as in *Oliver Twist*. When Oliver first arrives in London, conducted by the Artful Dodger, there is a marvellous description of them coming into the City of London which you can follow on the map, or indeed on foot. Dickens gives all this topographical exactitude but also conveys a strong sense of going deeper and deeper into a maze:

> As John Dawkins objected to their entering London before nightfall, it was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St John's Road; struck down the small street which terminates at

> Sadler's Wells Theatre; through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great: along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels.

Right at the centre of the labyrinth they find Fagin, who is in control of the London of *Oliver Twist*, a dark and sinister place. I haven't time to talk about another sinister maze, that of legal London in *Bleak House*, but should mention that in many pieces of journalism, in the old City churchyards, for instance, Dickens is exploring this intense romantic jumble that is the City of London. He writes:

> Such strange churchyards hide in the City of London; churchyards sometimes so entirely detached from churches, always so pressed upon by houses; so small, so rank, so silent, so forgotten, except by the few people who ever look down into them from their smoky windows... One of my best beloved churchyards, I call the churchyard of Saint Ghastly Grim; touching what men in general call it, I have no information [it is, in fact, St Olave's in Hart Street]. It lies at the heart of the City, and the Blackwall Railway shrieks at it daily. It is a small churchyard, with a ferocious strong spiked iron gate, like a jail. This gate is ornamented with skulls and cross-bones, larger than the life, wrought in stone; but it likewise came into the mind of Saint Ghastly Grim, that to stick iron spikes a-top of the stone skulls, as though they were impaled, would be a pleasant device. Therefore the skulls grin aloft horribly, thrust through and through with iron spears. Hence, there is attraction of repulsion [a favourite phrase of Dickens's] for me in Saint Ghastly Grim, and, having often contemplated it in the daylight and the dark, I once felt drawn towards it in a thunderstorm at midnight.

There is a wonderful description, too long to quote, of the terror of the cab-driver as Dickens asks him in this thunderstorm to drive into the City and to the church of 'St Ghastly Grim' so that Dickens can admire the effect of the lightning playing on the skulls:

> ... most effective, having the air of a public execution, and seeming, as the lightning flashed, to wink and grin with the pain of the spikes.

He would have been even more fascinated, I think, if he had known that Mother Goose is actually buried in that church. But then he goes on, as he always does, to penetrate deeper into the labyrinth and to find these extraordinary people, like an old man and woman he sees one Saturday evening in an old churchyard:

> an old old man and an old old woman in it, making hay. Yes, of all occupations in this world, making hay! It was a very confined patch of churchyard lying between Gracechurch Street and the Tower, capable of yielding, say an apronful of hay. By what means the old old man and woman had got into it, with an almost toothless hay-making rake, I could not fathom. No open window was within view; no window at all was within view, sufficiently near the ground to have enabled their old legs to descend from it; the rusty churchyard-gate was locked, the mouldy church was locked. Gravely among the graves, they made hay, all alone by themselves. They looked like Time and his wife.

One can take this sort of thing out of Dickens's essays by handfuls. One last quotation descriptive of the extraordinary denizens of Dickens's City: he spends many Sundays going to old City churches with tiny congregations and he is curious to know what sort of people still actually *live* in the City. Here is one that he finds, a person that was dressed

> in black of square cut, and was stricken in years, and wore a black velvet cap, and cloth shoes. He was of a staid, wealthy, and dissatisfied aspect. In his hand, he conducted to church a mysterious child: a child of the feminine gender. The child had a beaver hat, with a stiff drab plume that surely never belonged to any bird of the air...the personage never opened his book, and never looked at the clergyman. *He* never sat down either, but stood with his arms leaning on the top of the pew, and his forehead sometimes shaded with his right hand, always looking at the church door. It was a long church for a church of its size, and he was at the upper end, but he always looked at the door. That he was an old bookkeeper, or an old trader who had kept his own books, and that he might be seen at the Bank of England about Dividend times, no doubt. That he had lived in the City all his life and was disdainful of other localities, no doubt. Why he looked at the door, I never absolutely proved, but it is my belief that he lived in expectation of the time when the citizens would come back to live in the City, and its ancient glories would be renewed. He appeared to expect that this would occur on a Sunday, and that the wanderers would first appear in the deserted churches, penitent and humbled. Hence, he looked at the door which they never darkened. Whose child the child was ... there was nothing to lead up to. It never played, or skipped, or smiled. Once, the idea occurred to me that it was an automaton, and that the personage had made it; but following the strange couple out one Sunday, I heard the personage say to it, 'Thirteen thousand pounds'; to which it [the child] added in a weak human voice, 'Seventeen and fourpence.' Four Sundays I followed them out, and this is all I ever heard or saw them say.

Dickens has an intensely, one might say Gothic, view of the history of the City. Going back to *Master Humphrey's Clock* we find a wonderful interlude in which he makes the giants in the Guildhall, Gog and Magog, talk to each other and tell stories. It was intended to be a running feature but I think the public didn't really like it, so he didn't carry it on, and anyway it got overwhelmed by the story of Little Nell and *The Old Curiosity Shop* which developed in the journal. Here is an example of Dickens's vision of the history of the City of London:

> The crumbled walls [says Gog] encircle us once more, the postern-gates are closed, the drawbridge is up, and pent in its narrow den beneath, the water foams and struggles with the sunken starlings. Perkins and quarterstaves are in the streets again, the nightly watch is set, the rebel, sad and lonely in his Tower dungeon, tries to sleep and weeps for home and children. Aloft upon the gates and walls are noble heads glaring fiercely down upon the dreaming city, and vexing the hungry dogs that scent them in the air, and tear the ground beneath with dismal howlings. The axe, the block, the rack, in their dark chambers give signs of recent use. The Thames, floating past long lines of cheerful windows whence come a burst of music and a stream of light, bears suddenly to the Palace wall the last red stain brought on the tide from Traitors' Gate.

He finds modern Gothic in Newgate Prison which, of course, of all the buildings in the City, is the one that most fascinates Dickens. He is intensely fascinated with prisons for obvious

autobiographical reasons but also for some not so obvious reasons. I think that Dickens was perhaps one of the most superdynamic energetic people of which there is any record in human history - G.K.Chesterton said that one week of Dickens would finish off most of us, we'd have to be wheeled about in Bournemouth in a bath chair for the rest of our lives. The more one reads this amazing man's letters and life, the more one feels that, for such a man, the idea of prison, of stasis, of being completely blocked from movement and activity, must have been the ultimate horror. There were other reasons as well. He can't keep the prison out of his fiction from *Pickwick* onwards, but it is Newgate, a very grim-looking building as it was then, rebuilt after the Gordon riots, which particularly fascinates him, reappearing again and again. When any character gets into London, almost the first thing they see is Newgate. When Pip comes to London and steps outside Mr Jaggers's office, "I saw the great black dome of St. Paul's bulging at me from behind the grim stone building which a bystander told me was Newgate Prison," and then he sees the debtors' door out of which the culprits come to be hanged, "that dreadful portal" which so fascinates him. It isn't only a fascination with prison generally, but with Newgate, because of its association with capital punishment - public executions which was a subject of intense concern to Dickens throughout his career. He was fascinated, as was his age, with the punishment of death, and had an extremely complicated reaction to it; and Newgate stood for all that. It is not surprising that his letters become well-nigh hysterical when he is writing *Barnaby Rudge* and he describes the Gordon rioters burning their way into Newgate. He says in one letter, "I am burning my way into Newgate and about to tear the prisoners out by the hair of their heads." There are two mighty descriptions in Dickens of the burning down of prisons - the other is the destruction of the Bastille in *A Tale of Two Cities* - but the burning of Newgate must have been as sensational a thing for him to write as it was for us to read.

You will notice, going back to the Gothic view of the history of London, he mentions Traitors'Gate, and although not by name, he mentions Temple Bar, where the heads of traitors used to be exhibited, up until Dr Johnson's day. Temple Bar became for Dickens, a very resonant symbol. It had this Gothic historical aspect, with traitors' heads impaled on it, and also a very strong modern, satirical application. You may remember the first chapter of *Bleak House* where he refers to Temple Bar as "that leaden-headed old obstruction, appropriate ornament for the threshold of a leaden-headed old corporation". By the 1850s it had become a severe traffic hazard but the City Corporation resisted all attempts to move it, until seven or eight years after Dickens's death. The City Corporation, the Court of Common Council, and the aldermen, were for Dickens, pretty constantly a topic for contemptuous satire, as a very obvious example of antiquated privilege, reaction and obstinacy in the face of progress. Remember, Dickens was called by Ruskin "the leader of the steam whistle party par excellence" and all for technological progress, so he hadn't got much patience with the City Corporation. Many of his friends were associated with the journal *Punch*, in the pages of which you will find in the 1840s wonderful cartoons of gourmandising aldermen and so on - there is a particularly delightful one of an alderman begging in the street in his robes, holding a tureen out, with a placard saying, "I have not tasted turtle for a week". A particular focus for all this antagonism towards the City Corporation for people of Dickens's sentiments was Smithfield, because there was, from the early nineteenth century, a big campaign to move Smithfield, which had become, to the eyes of people like Dickens, a national shame and a disgrace. If we go back to Pip again, we might recall that a minute after he sees Newgate, he sees Smithfield, "that shameful place being all asmear with filth and fat and blood and foam and it seemed to stick to me". There is a terrific description of the place in chapter 21 of *Oliver Twist*, when Bill Sikes drags Oliver through Smithfield on a market morning, and Dickens writes of

> the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house; the crowding, pushing, driving, beating, whooping, and yelling; the hideous and discordant din that resounded from every corner of the market; and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng...

and he describes, too, the appalling suffering of the animals amidst all this. The City Corporation, which made a very, very substantial profit out of Smithfield Market, steadfastly resisted all attempts to move it. Dickens wrote not only the descriptions in the novels, but also some very powerful essays in his journal attacking this obstinacy. There is one marvellous one called "A Monument of French Folly", from which I will just quote briefly. He's been to Paris and had a look at the new abattoirs in Montmartre, and on his return, writes ironically about the French:

> Of a great Institution like Smithfield, they are unable to form the least conception. A Beast Market in the heart of Paris would be regarded an impossible nuisance. Nor have they any notion of slaughter-houses in the midst of a city. One of these benighted frog-eaters would scarcely understand your meaning, if you told him of the existence of such a British bulwark.

He's referring here specifically to a debate in the Court of Common Council in which one more enlightened Councilman had actually pointed to what was happening in Paris and the new abattoirs (not so new in fact - Napoleon had ordered their building) and a lot of people had got up and said they didn't want any of that French nonsense here. It was well known that they ate frogs and wore wooden shoes, and so on - they came out with all that, unbelievably. It's reported in *The Times* - "we don't want a tree of Liberty planted in Smithfield, and it's the roast beef of old England and so on." The motion was lost. Dickens wrote this piece shortly after this debate. He said:

> It is agreeable, and perhaps pardonable, to indulge in a little self-complacency when our right to it is thoroughly established. At the present time, to be rendered memorable by a final attack on that good old market which is the (rotten) apple of the Corporation's eye, let us compare ourselves, to our national delight and pride as to these two subjects of slaughter-house and beast-market, with the outlandish foreigner.

He then goes on in a very powerful article, which like so much of his journalism has a great deal of relevance today, to describe the appalling suffering of the animals when they are driven into London, into the market and then into the adjacent slaughterhouses, where they are slaughtered in the most horrific ways, and, as he keeps pointing out, right in the middle of crowded houses, right next to overburdened churchyards and so forth. You can read "A Monument of French Folly" in *Reprinted Pieces.* About five years later the cattle market was moved out to Islington in the teeth of fierce opposition from the City Corporation.

I have tried in this talk to indicate briefly Dickens's dual response to the City - the tremendous stimulation to his imagination, the romance, the Gothic excitement of the bloodstained history of the City and, on the other hand, a good deal of impatience and contempt for the City and its government in the mid-nineteenth century. But now, in ending, I will move from romance and satire to the central building of London for all Victorians, St Paul's Cathedral, and end by saying something about Dickens's treatment of it. It was the great and dominant landmark of

Dickens's London, and although he never describes it in detail, it is always there, looming in the background, as in the little quote from *Great Expectations.* John Browdie in *Nicholas Nickleby*, arriving on his honeymoon trip with his wife in London, getting out of his stagecoach, says to his wife "There be Paul's Church, Ecod, he be a soizable 'un, he be!" and his wife says, "Goodness John, what a monster!" It is so hard for us now (except perhaps when looking at the City from one of the bridges) to imagine what a huge dominant symbol it was.

Dickens never, unlike Newgate or Smithfield, goes in for any set-piece description of St Paul's, but it has great symbolic resonance for him as the point at which the City links to eternity, something beyond the maze, the labyrinth, the horror and fascination. There is a memorable moment in *Bleak House* when Joe, the poor crossing-sweeper, sits, having been dismissed by the appalling Mr Chadband, who says

> Will you come tomorrow, my young friend, and inquire of this good lady where I am to be found to delivery a discourse untoe you, and will you come like the thirsty swallow upon the next day, and upon the day after that, and upon the day after that, and upon many pleasant days, to hear discourses?

(This is said "with a cow-like lightness".) Joe gets away as fast as he can, and then sits down near Blackfriars Bridge where he finds "a baking stony corner" to eat his food.

> And there he sits, munching and gnawing, and looking up at the great Cross on the summit of St. Paul's Cathedral, glittering above a red and violet-tinted cloud of smoke. From the boy's face one might suppose that sacred emblem to be, in his eyes, the crowning confusion of the great, confused city; so golden, so high up, so far out of his reach.

Dickens doesn't need to reinforce the point, one that he makes so forcibly at Joe's death later on:- "Dead Your Majesty; Dead your right reverends and wrong reverends of every order; Dead, men and women born with heavenly compassion in your hearts and dying thus around us every day." He's bringing in another consideration about the City, the metaphysical one; and I want to end by going back to *Master Humphrey's Clock* (when I began preparing this talk, it was a great treat to return to this little-known text and to find in it such a central text in regard to the subject of Dickens and the City). This quotation comes where Master Humphrey, a rather strange and reclusive old gentleman, climbs up inside St Paul's to look at the clock. He has an interest in clocks, and gets down to look at the works of the great clock in St Paul's:

> I sat down opposite to it, and hearing its regular and never-changing voice, that one deep constant note, uppermost amongst all the noise and clatter in the streets below,— marking that, let that tumult rise or fall, go on or stop, let it be night or noon, to-morrow or to-day, this year or next,—it still performed its functions with the same dull constancy, and regulated the progress of the life around, the fancy came upon me that this was London's Heart, and that when it should cease to beat, the City would be no more.

And Dickens goes on to use this situation to place the City in a religious perspective, the perspective of eternity:

> It is night. Calm and unmoved amidst the scenes that darkness favours, the great heart of London throbs in its Giant breast. Wealth and beggary, vice and virtue,