

**Dickensian Intemperance: The Representation of the Drunkard in ‘The
Drunkard’s Death’ and *The Pickwick Papers***

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In her unpublished doctoral dissertation ‘The Most Dreadful Visitation: an Examination of Dickens’s Treatment of Madness in his Novels’, Heather Pike expresses the view shared by a number of literary critics that Charles Dickens was well aware of contemporary issues relating to insanity.¹ Leonard Manheim has similarly argued that Dickens ‘had rather more acquaintance with the psychopathology and psychiatry of his age than other men of his education’ and that ‘neither Thackeray nor Conan Doyle can be compared to Dickens as a descriptive psychopathologist.’² Dickens owned copies of seminal medical books on insanity, including Robert Macnish’s *The Anatomy of Drunkenness* first published in 1827, Forbes Winslow’s *The Incubation of Insanity* (1846) and John Conolly’s *Croonian Lectures, delivered at the Royal College of Physicians, 1849, on Some Forms of Insanity*, to name but a few, and he had been personally acquainted with prominent medical figures such as John Connolly, the adamant supporter of the non-restraint system of moral treatment, William Charles Hood of Bethlehem hospital, John Elliotson, and Forbes Winslow.³ Dickens was also close friends with two Lunacy Commissioners: John Forster and Bryan Proctor.⁴ In a series of articles published in *Household Words* which were thoroughly scrutinised and sanctioned by Dickens himself, he shows his personal interest in the welfare of the mentally afflicted and records some of his observations made on his personal visits to both English and American lunatic asylums.⁵

In spite of the growing scholarly interest in Dickens’s treatment of madness in his journalism and novels, only a few literary critics have previously explored the representation of drink-induced madness in Dickens’s early fiction.⁶ Although both Heather Pike and Leonard Manheim have acknowledged Dickens’s extensive knowledge and immense interest in insanity, they have both failed to consider the Dickensian alcoholic madman within the context of nineteenth-century medical science. Pike has argued that ‘Dickens, while aware of medical debate[s] about the treatment of insanity, and acquainted with a variety of literature in which this subject was portrayed, tended to adopt a broadly moral framework when depicting the

theme of madness, particularly in his early novels.’⁷ According to Pike, Dickens, by drawing heavily upon the Biblical tradition, depicts the drunkard’s madness in *Sketches by Boz* and *The Pickwick Papers* ‘as the consequence of villainy and of various forms of moral failure.’⁸ Amanda Claybaugh’s recent study *The Novel of Purpose* has explored the representation of drunkenness in *Sketches by Boz* and *The Pickwick Papers* by highlighting Dickens’s opposition to temperance reform.⁹ Although Claybaugh has explored the Dickensian drunkard within the historical context of temperance reform, she, very much like Pike and Manheim, has not considered the development of medical discourses about drunkenness and the ways in which Dickens engaged with them both as a journalist and novelist.

Dickens’s opposition to the temperance movement in its extreme form (abstinence) is well-documented. Indeed, in a letter to Lydia Maria Child in 1842, Dickens openly confessed that he was ‘a great foe to abstinence.’¹⁰ Although Dickens, as his personal letters and journalism suggest, did not believe in total abstinence, this does not mean he condoned intemperance. On the contrary, Dickens consistently advocated moderation. He admitted that he was ‘a great friend to Temperance’ and alcohol ‘*moderately* used, is undoubtedly a cheerful, social, harmless, pleasant thing — often tending to kindness of feeling and openness of heart.’¹¹ In his letter to Mrs Charles Wilson in 1847, Dickens openly attacked those who were ‘prone to make a Beast of [themselves] by irrational excess in those things [alcoholic liquors]’ and claimed:

I would endeavour, in my poor way, to teach people to use such goods of life, cheerfully and thankfully, and *not to abuse them*. I am not sure but that this is the higher lesson, and that the principle will last the longer in the better ages of the World.¹²

Indeed, from *The Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield* to *Our Mutual Friend*, Dickens’s novels contain a plethora of realistic descriptions of the detrimental effects of alcohol abuse on both mental and bodily health. Exploring the representation of the drunkard in Dickens’s ‘The Drunkard’s Death’ and *The Pickwick Papers*, this essay will demonstrate Dickens’s familiarity with current medical debates concerning intemperance and how he utilised his extensive knowledge of the somatic and mental effects of alcohol abuse to create authentic,

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realistic and memorable characters. As will become evident, Dickens records the effects of both acute and chronic drunkenness with remarkable medical detail and accuracy.

Drunkenness was firmly established as a disease in the first half of the nineteenth century. Thomas Trotter's medical treatise, *An Essay [...] On Drunkenness, and its Effects on the Human Body*, published in 1804, was the earliest book-length analysis by a British physician which defined drunkenness as a disease. As Trotter proclaimed: 'In Medical language, I consider drunkenness, strictly speaking to be a disease; produced by a remote cause, and giving birth to actions and movements in the living body, that disorder the functions of health.'¹³ He blamed alcohol consumption for a wide range of bodily and mental diseases, including apoplexy, epilepsy, hysteria, idiocy, and madness.¹⁴ The disease concept of drunkenness was repeatedly emphasised by other prominent medical figures who unreservedly insisted that there was a direct link between drunkenness and mental disease. In his *Anatomy of Drunkenness*, a medical treatise which the *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* described as 'excellent' and 'the production of a man of genius,' Robert Macnish wrote that '[d]runkenness, according to the reports of Bethlehem Hospital, and other similar institutions for the insane, is one of the most common causes of lunacy [...] one-half owe their madness to drinking.'¹⁵ Similarly, James Prichard wrote in his *Treatise on Insanity* in 1835 that '[a]mongst physical causes of madness, one of the most frequent is the immoderate use of intoxicating liquors [...] It has been repeatedly observed that a large proportion of the cases admitted into pauper lunatic asylums arise from this cause.'¹⁶ Whilst Prichard believed that only excessive alcohol consumption could cause insanity, other physicians such as William Moseley maintained that any quantity was enough to produce mental derangement. As Moseley claimed: '[t]hat the liquids which have an immediate influence on the organ of the brain, should produce diseases in it, can create no surprise. Man is so constituted, that all liquids which contain *alcohol* act immediately on the brain.'¹⁷ Moseley went so far as to include 'Eau de Cologne and other *waters*, scents, & C.,' among the alcoholic liquids dangerous for health and to argue that 'these are no less causes of mental disturbances, and will produce low

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spirits, nervous debility, *delusions, irresolution, sleepless nights*, wretchedness, & C.’¹⁸ Such medical claims were reproduced and gained currency in popular culture through the writings of the temperance movement.¹⁹

From the early 1830s onward, there were an overwhelming number of periodicals, pamphlets, essays and books dedicated to temperance. The first annual report of the Glasgow and West Scotland Temperance Society recorded that, by December 1830, the ‘total number of Temperance Tracts and larger publications issued in Scotland’ alone were ‘considerably more than half-a-million’ and ‘about 100,000 tracts have been distributed through all parts of England.’²⁰ The temperance advocates frequently blamed alcohol abuse for most of their ‘national calamities,’ including insanity, poverty, and crime.²¹ As James Sherman claimed in one of his sermons:

Two-thirds of all the madness — nearly all the shipwrecks and destruction of vessels and lives by fire at sea — one-half of all the suicides — two-thirds of all the poverty — one-half of all the serious accidents — and four-fifths of all the crimes of England, are attributed to excessive drinking!²²

In their attempt to ‘awaken public attention to the incalculable and increasing evils of intemperance,’ the temperance advocates frequently referred to the claims of the medical profession that alcohol abuse was the most significant cause of mental disease.²³ As John Edgar, Professor of Divinity in Belfast College, wrote in 1831:

One of the highest medical authorities living, has justly described the use of ardent spirits as ‘the chiefest of the chief causes of disease’ [...] One of the most afflictive diseases produced by spirituous liquors is madness; and we have the highest [medical] authorities for asserting, that one-half of all the madness in lunatic asylums has this one cause.²⁴

Frequently referring to a number of eminent physicians, including Thomas Trotter and Robert Macnish, Ralph Grindrod maintained that ‘*Apoplexy, Palsy, Epilepsy, and Hysteria*, are among those diseases of the brain, which are not unfrequently brought on by intemperate indulgence [...] *Madness and Idiocy* are, in the present day especially, familiar and deplorable consequences of intemperate drinking.’²⁵ Paying particular attention to the statistics of medical men responsible for the treatment of the insane, John Whitecross revealed that

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In four years, from 1826 to 1829 inclusive, 495 patients were admitted into the Liverpool Lunatic Asylum; and 257 of them were known to have brought on their derangement by drinking [...] A distinguished medical gentleman, who has had extensive experience with regard to this malady, states, that more than one-half, and probably three-fourths, of all the causes of insanity which have come under his notice, were occasioned by excessive drinking.²⁶

These medical discourses on drunkenness not only informed the temperance movement but they were also informed by it. The widely circulated temperance publications which were often sent to the medical profession by the temperance advocates shaped the physicians' opinions on the subject of intemperance and encouraged them to acknowledge the harmful effects of alcohol abuse on mental and bodily health. As the *British Temperance Advocate* remarked:

MEDICAL MEN form another class to whom a very considerable number of the *Advocate* will be forwarded gratuitously, and therefore, we wish to say a few words to them...YOU CANNOT BE NEUTRAL IN THE MATTER. It is a question on which the world is becoming anxious to know your opinion.²⁷

The influence on the medical profession is highlighted by the physician John Chadwick who admitted that the

efforts of the advocates of temperance, or rather abstinence, have been also constantly bringing it under the notice of professional men, and all other men, in this and other countries, for a long time. What I have seen, read, and thought on the subject has convinced me, that a vast amount of mental and physical evil has resulted from the use of alcoholic drinks.²⁸

It is not surprising then that by 1839, a large number of distinguished medical men, including George Birkbeck and Benjamin Travers, surgeon to Queen Victoria and lecturer on Surgery at St. Thomas's Hospital, supported the temperance movement by advocating total abstinence from alcohol.²⁹ Both the medical and temperance literature contained a plethora of anecdotes and clinical case histories that described the gradual decline of previously healthy and prosperous men to poverty and disease due to their chronic drunkenness.³⁰ As his early fiction at least suggests, Dickens shared with the medical writers and temperance advocates a common theme and to some extent a similar narrative structure: namely, the gradual descent of the habitual drunkard to poverty and disease.

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In 'The Drunkard's Death', first published in the Second Series of *Sketches by Boz* in 1836, the young Dickens graphically depicts the physical, mental and moral deterioration of Master Warden, a 'confirmed and irreclaimable drunkard.'³¹ It is clear from the outset of the story that Master Warden once had 'many a friend' (SB 486), a 'happy, cheerful home' (SB 492) and was a 'respectable tradesman, or clerk, or a man following some thriving pursuit with good prospects and decent means' (SB 484). However, due to his habitual indulgence to 'the slow, sure poison [alcohol]' (SB 484), he has 'sunk lower and lower by almost imperceptible degrees [...] in all the squalor of disease and poverty' (SB 484). Dickens emphatically proclaims that 'such cases, are of too frequent occurrence to be rare items in any man's experience: and but too often arise from one cause — drunkenness' (SB, 484). Contrary to some drunkards who 'have been impelled, by misfortune and misery, to the vice that has degraded them' (SB 484), Master Warden has 'wilfully, and with open eyes, plunged into the gulf from which the man who once enters it never rises more, but into which he sinks deeper and deeper down, until recovery is hopeless' (SB 484-485). The first two introductory paragraphs of 'The Drunkard's Death' have a twofold function: to highlight the disastrous effects of habitual drunkenness and to persuade the readers that the subsequent plot of the story is drawn from real life events.

When we first encounter Master Warden, he is standing by 'the bedside of his dying wife, while his children knelt around, and mingled low bursts of grief with their innocent prayers' (SB 485). This is the first scene in which Dickens explicitly refers to Master Warden's drunkenness and exhibits some of its effects on his body. We are told that his 'face [was] inflamed, his eyes blood shot and heavy' (SB 485). His inflamed face and red eyes are presented as typical signs of his 'wild debauch' (SB 485) and are consistent with early nineteenth-century medical accounts of the drunkard's physiognomy. Thomas Trotter, for example, regarded the drunkard's inflamed face and eyes as distinctive signs of his diseased condition. As he wrote: '[t]he countenance looks swoln and inflamed [...] This complaint [inflammation] of the eyes is one distinguishing badge of a drunkard.'³² Robert Macnish similarly noted that

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the eyes may be affected with acute or chronic inflammation. Almost all drunkards have the latter more or less. Their eyes are red and watery, and have an expression so peculiar, that the cause can never be mistaken [...] The rest of the face often presents the same carbuncled appearance.³³

Master Warden's 'slovenly and disordered' dress (*SB* 485), his wife's 'grief, and want' (*SB* 485) and their 'scantily and meanly furnished' room (*SB* 485), are all suggestive of the family's impoverished condition due to Warden's habitual intoxication. Soon after the death of his wife, Master Warden returns to the 'tavern he had just quitted shortly before' (*SB* 486) to drown his sorrow by consuming the very same stupefying substance that caused his gradual decline to poverty and disease. As Dickens writes: 'Glass succeeded glass [...] Another glass — one more! Hurrah! It was a merry life while it lasted; and he would make the most of it' (*SB* 486).

Warden's frequent bouts of intoxication have also impaired his moral and intellectual faculties. In his *Reports on the Diseases in London*, first published in 1801, the physician Robert Willan, most famously known for his study on *Cutaneous Diseases*, noted that drunkenness produces '[a]n entire change in the state of the mind.'³⁴ He explained that '[n]o interest is taken in the concerns of others: no love, no sympathy remain. Even natural affection to nearest relatives is gradually extinguishing, and the moral sense seems obliterated.'³⁵ The inevitable moral degradation of the drunkard was repeatedly emphasised in the medical and temperance literature throughout the nineteenth century. That Warden's moral sense is obliterated is evident by his failure to provide for his family and maintain the order of the household. Warden is described by the narrator as 'some fallen and degraded man' (*SB* 484) who has cast 'aside wife, children, friends, happiness and station' (*SB* 484). Dickens suggests Warden's moral insensibility is the first sign of his gradual descent to madness. As Dickens writes: '[t]he man thought of his hungry children, and his son's danger. But they were nothing to the drunkard. He did drink; and his reason left him' (*SB* 490).

It is not long before Master Warden's physical and mental health is completely destroyed by his chronic intemperance. We are told that the 'premature decay of vice and profligacy had worn him to the bone. His cheeks were hollow and

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livid; his eyes were sunken, and their sight was dim. His legs trembled beneath his weight, and a cold shiver ran through every limb' (*SB* 492). Dickens's description of Warden's physical infirmity suggested by his hollow cheeks, sunken eyes, dim sight and trembling legs echoes the medical accounts of the drunkard's emaciated body. Thomas Trotter, for example, noted the drunkard's 'dim eye, the quivering lip [...] the trembling hand and tottering gait.'³⁶ Similarly, Robert Macnish was convinced that '[a]ll drunkards, however, if they live long enough, become emaciated. The eyes get hollow, the cheeks fall in [...] and the whole form gets lank and debilitated.'³⁷ Although Dickens does not actually refer to delirium tremens by its name, his description of Warden's total loss of reason exhibits some of the most distinguishing characteristics of this disease.

First described by the physician Thomas Sutton in *Tracts on Delirium Tremens* in 1813, delirium tremens, which was commonly known as 'the drunkard's madness,' referred to a set of symptoms directly caused by excessive and/or prolonged use of intoxicating liquors.³⁸ These symptoms included tremors of the limbs, complete sleeplessness, frequent exacerbations of cold, and an incoherent speech with a tremulous voice.³⁹ Describing Master Warden's descent to madness, Dickens writes that

He rose, and dragged *his feeble limbs* a few paces further [...] and his *tremulous voice* was lost in the violence of the storm. *Again* that *heavy chill* struck through his frame, and his blood seemed to stagnate beneath it. He coiled himself up in a projecting doorway, and tried to sleep.

But sleep had fled from his dull and glazed eyes. His mind wandered strangely, but he was awake, and conscious [...] Hark! A groan! — another! His senses were leaving him: *half-formed* and incoherent words burst from his lips [...] He was going mad, and he shrieked for help till his voice failed him' (*SB* 493, my emphasis).

As we observe from the above extract, Master Warden's speech is fragmentary and dislocated, and his voice is described as tremulous. We are told that he frequently suffers from 'cold shiver[s]' (*SB* 492) and heavy chills, that he is sleepless and his limbs tremble and are feeble. One of the most defining aspects of delirium tremens, however, was the drunkard's hallucinations and 'delusions of sight.'⁴⁰ As an anonymous writer who claimed to be a 'medical adviser' reported: 'I have known

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patients fancy they saw devils running round the room, and that they are talking to their friends who have long been dead. In fact, they labour under all kinds of delusions.’⁴¹ Similarly, Master Warden experiences both visual and auditory hallucinations. He is haunted, for example, by the apparition of his dead children and by other ‘Strange and fantastic forms’ (*SB* 494). As Dickens explains:

the forms of his elder children seemed to rise from the grave, and stand about him — so plain, so clear, and so distinct they were that he could touch and feel them [...] voices long since hushed in death sounded in his ears like the music of village bells [...] dark gleaming eyes peered from the water, and seemed to mock his hesitation, while hollow murmurs from behind urged him onwards (*SB* 492-494).

Dickens would again draw upon these medical descriptions of delirium tremens in ‘The Stroller’s Tale,’ the first of the nine interpolated tales in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-1837).⁴²

The narrative structure of ‘The Stroller’s Tale’ is very similar to ‘The Drunkard’s Death’ in that it follows the gradual descent of an ‘habitual drunkard’ (*PP* 35) to poverty, disease and subsequent death. Describing the drunkard’s insatiable appetite for alcohol, the story’s narrator (Dismal Jemmy) exclaims that the

public-house had a fascination for him which he could not resist. Neglected disease and hopeless poverty were as certain to be his portion as death itself, if he persevered in the same course; yet he *did* persevere, and the result may be guessed (*PP* 35, Dickens’s emphasis).

Like Warden in ‘The Drunkard’s Death’, the ‘low pantomime actor’ (*PP* 35) of ‘The Stroller’s Tale’ in ‘his better days [...] had been in the receipt of a good salary’ (*PP* 35). However, his habitual drunkenness has utterly destroyed his mental and bodily health and has reduced him to an extremely impoverished condition. Revealing the habitual drunkard’s poverty, Dismal Jemmy notes that the

tattered remains of a checked curtain were drawn round the bed’s head, to exclude the wind, which however made its way into the comfortless room [...] There was a low cinder fire in a rusty unfixed grate [...] A little child was sleeping on a temporary bed which had been made for it on the floor (*PP* 37).

His weak physical health betrays a wide range of diseases, or in Dickens’s own words ‘a long catalogue of sickness’ (*PP* 36). His limbs are feeble and emaciated,

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his speech is fragmentary, and his voice is hollow and tremulous. Describing the grotesque physical appearance of the drunkard, Dickens writes:

His bloated body and shrunken legs — their deformity enhanced a hundred fold by the fantastic dress [...] the grotesquely ornamented head, trembling with paralysis, and the long skinny hands [...] all gave him a hideous and unnatural appearance [...] his voice was hollow and tremulous, as he took me aside, and in broken words recounted a long catalogue of sickness and privations (*PP* 36).

The drunkard in ‘The Stroller’s Tale’ is also described as ‘restless’ (*PP* 37) and he suffers from ‘the tortures of a burning fever’ (*PP* 39). His mind, very much like Master Warden’s, ‘wanders uneasily from scene to scene, and from place to place, without the control of reason’ (*PP* 39), and he is haunted by frightful spectres and other ‘hideous crawling things with eyes that stared upon him, and filled the very air around [...] The walls and ceiling were alive with reptiles’ (*PP* 40). Dickens’s description of the drunkard’s hallucinations is remarkably similar to several case studies recorded by the early nineteenth-century medical profession. Describing the hideous hallucinations that frequently haunted these delirious patients, the physician George Man Burrows wrote in 1828 that they ‘fancy that they see objects present which are not, and are generally haunted by frightful images [...] sometimes they declare vermin are crawling over their persons or bed-clothes, and will motion as if driving them off.’⁴³ The physician Isaac Ray similarly reported that the patient often sees ‘devils, snakes, vermin, and all manner of unclean things around him and about him.’⁴⁴ It was not uncommon, the medical profession maintained, for these patients to ‘die suddenly in a convulsion.’⁴⁵ Similarly, the drunkard in ‘The Stroller’s Tale’ grasps Dismal Jemmy’s ‘shoulder *convulsively*...and he f[a]ll[s] back — dead’ (*PP* 40, my emphasis).

Robert Seymour’s illustration of ‘The Dying Clown’, the last etching produced by the artist before his suicide, captures the melodramatic deathbed scene of the pantomime actor (see figure 1, below). The dying pantomime actor, unlike Master Warden, is surrounded by his wife, child, and his friend Dismal Jemmy. Both his ‘wretched-looking’ (*PP* 37) wife who has, as Dickens explains, ‘hastily caught [the child] in her arms, lest he should injure it in the violence of his insanity’ (*PP* 40), and Dismal Jemmy look aghast at the terrible sight of the dying

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irreclaimable drunkard. His emaciated body is clearly depicted in the illustration. His eyes, very much like Master Warden's, are 'deeply sunk and heavy' (*PP* 39), his cheeks are hollow and his bones are visibly protruding from his chest. His face expresses 'an almost unearthly air of wild anxiety' (*PP* 39), distress and general restlessness, indicated by his wide open eyes and elevated eyebrows. 'The Stroller's Tale' is followed by a handful of comic tales whose protagonists, very much like Warden and the pantomime actor, indulge, almost compulsively, in excessive alcohol consumption, and, as a consequence, they suffer from both visual and auditory hallucinations. These tales include 'The Bagman's Story,' 'The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton,' and 'The Story of the Bagman's Uncle'.

'The Bagman's Story' narrates the comic tale of Tom Smart, a weary traveller who stops at a 'road-side inn' (*PP* 180) and drinks at least four tumblers of hot punch before he goes to bed. Emphasizing Tom's love for alcohol, Dickens humorously writes that Tom

was fond of hot punch — I venture to say he was *very* fond of hot punch... He ordered another tumbler, and then another — I am not quite certain whether he didn't order another after that [...] he emptied the fourth tumbler of punch and ordered a fifth (*PP* 181-182, Dickens's emphasis).



Fig. 1 Robert Seymour, 'The Dying Clown'. *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-37).

Being restless and unable to sleep, his 'waking imagination' (*PP* 183) is caught by a 'queer chair' (*PP* 183) which to Tom 'looked like a very old man, of the previous century, with his arms akimbo [...] The chair was an ugly old gentleman; and what was more, he was winking at Tom Smart' (*PP* 184). In spite of his efforts to 'dispel the illusion' (*PP* 184), this anthropomorphic chair ostensibly comes to life and converses with him about how he could drive away Jinkins and win the widow's affections. It is through this conversation that Dickens

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infers both Tom's poverty and habitual alcohol abuse:

'I know everything about you, Tom; everything. You are very poor, Tom.'

'I certainly am,' said Tom Smart. 'But how came you to know that?'

'Never mind that,' said the old gentleman; 'you're much too fond of punch, Tom' (PP 184).

Gabriel Grub, the 'morose and melancholy' (PP 396) sexton of 'The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton' and Jack Martin, the protagonist of 'The Story of the Bagman's Uncle,' have, like Tom Smart, encounters with spirits after consuming large amounts of alcohol. In 'The Story of the Bagman's Uncle', for example, just before his encounter with 'the ghosts of mail coaches and horses, guards, coachmen, and passengers' (PP 697), Jack Martin imbibes 'many tumblers of whiskey toddy [...] after supper' (PP 683) before 'mix[ing] another glass' (PP 683) and taking 'a little drop more' (PP 683). Similarly, prior to the goblins' visitation, Gabriel Grub drinks gin from 'an old wicker bottle which fitted into his large deep waistcoat pocket' (PP 396). Hablot K. Browne's illustration of 'The Goblin and the Sexton' depicts the scene in which Gabriel Grub, sat on the flat tombstone, is consuming his

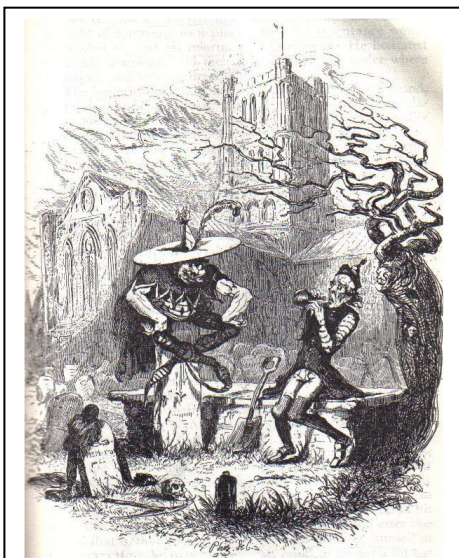


Fig. 2 Hablot Knight Browne ('Phiz'), 'The Goblin and the Sexton'. *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-37).

favourite alcoholic liquor when his unearthly visitor appears (see figure 2). Soon after the appearance of the first goblin, 'whole troops of goblins, the very counterpart of the first one, poured into the churchyard' (PP 400) and pull Gabriel Grub under the earth 'in what appeared to be a large cavern' (PP 401). The goblins then force a 'blazing liquid down his throat' (PP 401) and show him several scenes in which he sees that 'men like himself, who snarled at the mirth and cheerfulness of others, were the foulest weeds on the fair surface of the earth' (PP 404). In all three tales, then, alcohol becomes the catalyst for the

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protagonists' experiences with the supernatural. Contrary to Master Warden and the pantomime actor whose ghostly encounters signalled their total loss of reason and subsequent death, Gabriel Grub's supernatural visitors, rather like the three spirits in *A Christmas Carol*, play a significant role in the reformation of the protagonist's character. Grub is transformed from 'an ill-conditioned, cross-grained, surly fellow — a morose and melancholy man' (*PP* 396) who takes great delight in digging graves on Christmas Eve to 'an altered [...] contended' man (*PP* 405) who, having been reformed, goes on to live a long life. Although Dickens appears to affirm the supernatural elements in these three stories, his continuous references to the protagonists' excessive drinking disrupt such a reading and suggest, instead, that their supernatural experiences are nothing more than mere alcohol-induced hallucinations. We are told, for example, by the narrator of 'The Bagman's Story' that 'Tom's enemies [...] said Tom invented it altogether; and others said he was drunk, and fancied it' (*PP* 191). That Tom's experience was a figment of his disordered imagination is also indicated when he wakes up completely sober the next day and starts questioning the whole incident with the 'talking chair':

He looked at the chair; it was a fantastic and grim-looking piece of furniture, certainly, but it must have been a remarkably ingenious and lively imagination, that could have discovered any resemblance between it and an old man (*PP* 187-188).

Gabriel Grub, very much like Tom Smart, begins 'to doubt the reality of his adventures' (*PP* 404) when he wakes up and finds the 'wicker bottle [of gin] lying empty by his side' (*PP* 404). We are told that even those who had initially believed that Gabriel Grub 'had been carried away by the goblins...[after his] unlooked-for re-appearance [...] looked as wise as they could, shrugged their shoulders, touched their foreheads, and murmured something about Gabriel Grub having drunk all the Hollands, and then fallen asleep on the flat tombstone' (*PP* 405).

These interpolated tales are preceded as well as followed by the Pickwickians' comic adventures, which are saturated with alcohol. Whilst Dismal Jemmy narrates 'The Stroller's Tale,' the Pickwickians sit idly and enjoy their 'brandy and water' (*PP* 34). Similarly, 'The Bagman's Story' is narrated while 'Mr Tupman and Mr Snodgrass were [...] smoking and drinking' (*PP* 176), 'The story of

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the Bagman's Uncle' is told whilst Pickwick 'was mixing his brandy and water' (*PP* 680), and 'The Story of the Goblins who Stole a Sexton' is reported in Dingley Dell at a snowy Christmas Eve while Pickwick and his friends are sitting by the 'huge fire of blazing logs' (*PP* 393), wholeheartedly enjoying a 'mighty bowl of wassail, something smaller than an ordinary wash-house copper, in which the hot apples were hissing and bubbling with a rich look, and a jolly sound, that were perfectly irresistible' (*PP* 393). Throughout the Pickwickians' stay in Dingley Dell during the Christmas holidays, Dickens consistently emphasises the convivial effects of moderate alcohol consumption and shows it producing happiness and enjoyment to the drinkers: "let us drink their healths, and wish them prolonged life, and every blessing" [...] Pickwick proposed the old lady. Mr Snodgrass proposed Mr Wardle; Mr Wardle proposed Mr Snodgrass [...] all was happiness and festivity' (*PP* 387). Pickwick celebrates with his fellow Pickwickians at the Leather Bottle, 'a clean and commodious village ale-house' (*PP* 135), with 'a convivial glass' (*PP* 138). Almost all friendships are sealed with alcoholic liquors. The Pickwickians' friendship with Jingle at the beginning of the novel is inaugurated with a '[g]lass of wine' (*PP* 15). Similarly, Pickwick thinks that a 'bottle of wine would at once have purchased the utmost good-fellowship of a few choice spirits, without any more formal ceremony of introduction' (*PP* 579). Therefore, alcoholic liquors when moderately used are portrayed, as Brian Harrison has noted, as 'convenient, generally acceptable, easily consumed article[s] of symbolic exchange and so featured prominently in the reaffirmation of social relationships.'⁴⁶ Contrary to the horrific delusions and hallucinations that haunted the excessive drinkers of the short stories discussed earlier, the Pickwickians' moderate and social drinking produces sound sleep and pleasant dreams. As Dickens explains: 'the hot elder wine, well qualified with brandy and spice, go round, and round, and round again; and sound was the sleep and pleasant were the dreams that followed' (*PP* 383).

The contrast between the Pickwickians' convivial moderate drinking and the excessive alcohol consumption of the protagonists in the interpolated tales can be explained in class terms. In contrast to the financially independent Pickwickians, the anonymous pantomime actor of 'The Stroller's Tale', the debt collectors Tom Smart

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and Jack Martin in ‘The Bagman’s Story’ and ‘The Bagman’s Uncle’ respectively, as well as the grave-digger sexton Gabriel Grub in ‘The Goblins Who Stole a Sexton’, are all working-class men. Both the medical and temperance literature of the first half of the nineteenth century consistently emphasised the different drinking habits between the working and the middle/upper classes. Whilst it was believed that the middle and upper classes could, in a general way, moderate their alcohol consumption, the working classes were notorious for their drunkenness. In his speech delivered in the House of Commons in 1834 which was later ‘reported in most of the newspapers [...] in various parts of the country,’ selling ‘upwards of a million of copies,’ James Buckingham was convinced that ‘of all the single evils that afflict our common country, the increased and increasing prevalence of Drunkenness among the laborious classes, including men, women, and children, is the greatest.’⁴⁷ Similar claims were also made by a number of physicians who estimated that the majority of patients incarcerated in lunatic asylums for drink-induced insanity were predominantly from the working classes. As William Carpenter remarked: ‘Thus, in Pauper Lunatic Asylums, the proportion of those who have become insane from Intemperance, is usually much larger than it is in Asylums for the reception of Lunatics from the higher classes, among whom intemperance is less frequent.’⁴⁸ That Dickens was well aware of the different drinking habits between the lower and upper classes is not only evident in *The Pickwick Papers* but also in his pamphlet *Sunday Under Three Heads* and sketch of ‘Gin-Shops’, both published in 1836.⁴⁹ In *Sunday Under Three Heads*, for example, the upper classes, very much like the Pickwickians, are depicted as capable of convivial moderate drinking:

They reach their places of destination, and the taverns are crowded; but there is no drunkenness or brawling [...] Boisterous their mirth may be [...] but it is innocent and harmless. The glass is circulated, and the joke goes round; but the one is free from excess, and the other from offence; and nothing but good humour and hilarity prevail.⁵⁰

By contrast, as in both the medical and temperance literature, alcohol abuse is presented mostly as a characteristic of the lower classes. We are told, for example, that the working-class man ‘flies to the gin-shop as his only resource; and [he is] reduced to a worse level than the lower brute in the scale of creation.’⁵¹

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Although the Pickwickians are generally portrayed as self-controlled gentlemen, there are a number of instances when they fail to moderate their alcohol consumption and, as a consequence, they become completely drunk and temporarily incapacitated, both mentally and physically. After plenty of wine, three of the Pickwickians fall asleep at the very table at which they were dining. We are told that the ‘wine [...] had exerted its somniferous influence over Mr Snodgrass and Mr Winkle, [and] had stolen upon the senses of Mr Pickwick’ (*PP* 17). The fourth Pickwickian, Tracey Tupman, is described by Jingle, rather humorously, as a ‘dismounted Bacchus’ (*PP* 16), and Mr Winkle admits the next morning that he ‘took too much wine after dinner’ and he ‘was very drunk’ (*PP* 25). In another scene much later in the novel, we are told that the ‘constant succession of glasses produced [a] considerable effect upon Mr Pickwick’ (*PP* 257). In his depiction of the drunken Pickwickians, Dickens outlines the acute effects of alcohol abuse with remarkable detail. Describing the ‘sensations of incipient drunkenness,’ Macnish noted that ‘[f]irst, an unusual serenity prevails over the mind [...] a gayety and warmth are felt at the same time about the heart [...] Now comes a spirit of universal contentment with himself and all the world.’⁵² Pickwick’s bliss and contentment are obvious in his ‘countenance [which] beamed with the most sunny smiles, laughter played around his lips, and good-humoured merriment twinkled in his eye’ (*PP* 257). ‘In the latter stages,’ Macnish continues, ‘the speech is thick, and the use of the tongue in a great measure lost [...] The limbs become powerless and inadequate to sustain his weight [...] The last stage of drunkenness is total insensibility.’⁵³ Dickens records Pickwick’s defective memory, loss of speech, inability to sustain his weight and subsequent total insensibility when he writes that ‘from forgetting the words of the song, [Pickwick] began to forget how to articulate any words at all; and finally, after rising to his legs to address the company in an eloquent speech, he fell into the [wheel]barrow, and fast asleep, simultaneously’ (*PP* 257). Although Pickwick, unlike the habitual drunkard, does not descend to poverty, he is treated as a ‘drunken plebeian’ (*PP* 259) by Captain Boldwig who has him ‘wheeled to the Pound’ (*PP* 259). In contrast to the peaceful sleep produced by moderate alcohol consumption, after an unspecified amount of brandy and water Pickwick is restless, sleepless and,

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very much like the habitual drunkards described earlier, haunted by depressing thoughts and ‘all kinds of horrors’ (*PP* 139). Similarly, after the ‘dissipation of the previous night’ (*PP* 26), Mr Snodgrass ‘appear[s] to labour under a poetical depression of spirits’ (*PP* 26), and, at least on one occasion, his hands are trembling and his writing is, like Warden’s speech, fragmentary and incoherent. As Dickens explains: ‘the feverish influence of the wine made that gentleman’s hand so extremely unsteady, as to render his writing nearly unintelligible, and his style wholly so [...] the words “bowl” “sparkling” “ruby” “bright,” and “wine” are frequently repeated at short intervals’ (*PP* 95).

From his description of the habitual drunkard in ‘The Drunkard’s Death’ and ‘The Stroller’s Tale’ to the occasional drunken Pickwickians, it is evident that even when Dickens was a ‘very young man’ making his ‘first attempts at authorship [with]...obvious marks of haste and inexperience,’ he was well aware of the harmful effects of alcohol abuse on both mental and bodily health.⁵⁴ From the beginning of his literary career, Dickens could describe drunkenness and outline its effects, both acute and chronic, with remarkable medical precision. Dickens’s gift for keen observation and descriptive analysis of mental disorders had of course not gone unnoticed by his contemporaries. As an anonymous writer remarked in the *British Medical Journal* only nine days after Dickens’s death: ‘It must not be forgotten that his descriptions of [...] moral and mental insanity in characters too numerous to mention, show the hand of a master.’⁵⁵

My thanks to Dr Holly Furneaux, University of Leicester, and to the anonymous reviewer of *19* for their constructive comments on an earlier draft of this article.

¹ Heather A. Pike, ‘The Most Dreadful Visitation: an Examination of Dickens’s Treatment of Madness in his Novels’, (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Salford, 1995), p. 24 and chapter 4. For Dickens’s extensive knowledge and immense interest in insanity see also: Leonard Manheim, ‘Dickens’s Fools and Madmen’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 2 (1972), 69-97, and Valerie Pedlar, *The*

Most Dreadful Visitation: Male Madness in Victorian Fiction (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2006).

² Manheim, p. 69, p. 96.

³ For a list of the books found in Dickens's library at Gad's Hill Place after his death see John Stonehouse, *Catalogue of the Library of Charles Dickens* (London: Piccadilly: Fountain Press, 1935).

⁴ See Edwin Fuller Torrey and Judy Miller, *The Invisible Plague: The Rise of Mental Illness from 1750 to the Present* (London: Rutgers University Press, 2001), pp. 63-64. Torrey and Miller speculate that it 'is likely that the ideas for many of Dickens's mad characters were derived from conversations with [Conolly, Forster and Proctor]' (p. 64).

⁵ See 'A Lunatic Asylum in Palermo', *Household Words*, 2 (1850), 151-155; 'The Treatment of the Insane', *Household Words*, 3 (1851), 572-576; Charles Dickens and W. H. Wills, 'A Curious Dance Round a Curious Tree', *Household Words*, 4 (1852), 385-389; 'The Star of Bethlehem', *Household Words*, 16 (1857), 145-150; 'The Cure of Sick Minds', *Household Words*, 19 (1859), 415-418; For Dickens's visits to lunatic asylums in America see: Charles Dickens, *American Notes for General Circulation*, 2nd edn, 2 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1842), i, pp. 105-111 and pp. 221-223.

⁶ For a discussion of the drunkard's madness in Dickens's early fiction see Pike, pp. 86-92, and Manheim, pp. 78-79. For Dickens's treatment of madness in his journalism and novels see also: Natalie McNight, *Idiots, Madmen, and Other Prisoners in Dickens* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993); Mariane Camus, *Gender and Madness in the Novels of Charles Dickens* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 2004); Akiko Takei, 'Benevolence or Manipulation? The Treatment of Mr Dick,' *Dickensian*, 101. 2 (2005), 116-131; Paul Marchbanks, 'From Caricature to Character: The Intellectually Disabled in Dickens's Novels (Part One)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 23. 1 (2006), 3-13; Paul Marchbanks, 'From Caricature to Character: The Intellectually Disabled in Dickens's Novels (Part Two)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 23. 2 (2006), 67-84; Paul Marchbanks, 'From Caricature to Character: The Intellectually Disabled in Dickens's Novels (Part Three)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 23. 3 (2006), 169-179.

⁷ Pike, p. 61.

⁸ Pike, p. 80.

⁹ Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹⁰ Letter to Lydia Maria Child, 28 December 1842, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Madeline House, Graham Storey and Kathleen Tillotson, 12 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-2002), iii, 403-404 (p. 404). For Dickens's anti-teetotal stance see also: 'Gareth Cordery, 'Public Houses: Spatial Instabilities in *Sketches by Boz* and *Oliver Twist* (Part One)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 20.1 (2003), 3-13 (p. 3); Gareth Cordery, 'A Special Relationship: Stiggins in England and America (Part One)', *Dickens Quarterly*, 22. 3 (2005), 135-152 (pp. 135-136).

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¹¹ Letter to Lydia Maria Child, 28 December 1842, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, iii, 403-404 (p. 404), and Letter to Theodore Compton, 26 January 1844, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, iv, 30-31 (p. 31); Dickens's emphasis.

¹² Letter to Mrs Charles Wilson, 25 March 1847, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, v, 45-46 (p. 46); my emphasis.

¹³ Thomas Trotter, *An Essay, Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical, on Drunkenness, and its Effects on the Human Body* (London: Paternoster Row, 1804), p. 8. For a detailed discussion of Trotter's treatise see Roy Porter's introduction in Thomas Trotter, *An Essay Medical, Philosophical, and Chemical on Drunkenness and its Effects on the Human Body*, ed. by Roy Porter (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. ix-xxxiv. For a discussion on drunkenness as a disease in the first half of the nineteenth century see also: William F. Bynum, 'Chronic Alcoholism in the First Half of the 19th Century', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 42.2 (1968), 160-185, and Peter McCandless, "'Curses of Civilization": Insanity and Drunkenness in Victorian Britain', *British Journal of Addiction to Alcohol and Other Drugs*, 79 (1984), 49-58.

¹⁴ For Trotter's 'Catalogue of Diseases induced by Drunkenness' see Trotter, pp. 96-135.

¹⁵ 'Anatomy of Drunkenness', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 23 (1828), 481-499 (p.481), and Robert Macnish, *The Anatomy of Drunkenness*, 4th edn, (Glasgow: W. R. McPhun, 1832), p. 156. See also Barlow's table in John Barlow, *Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (London: William Pickering, 1843), p. 68. Examining the causes of insanity in one thousand male patients, Barlow observed that drunkenness was the second most common cause of lunacy.

¹⁶ James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Paternoster Row, 1835), p. 204.

¹⁷ William Willis Moseley, *Eleven Chapters on Nervous or Mental Complaints, and on Two Great Discoveries* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1838), p. 113; Moseley's emphasis.

¹⁸ Moseley, p. 114; Moseley's emphasis.

¹⁹ For a detailed discussion about the history of temperance movement in Britain see Brian Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians: The Temperance Question in England 1815-1872* (London: Faber and Faber, 1971); Lewis Shiman, *Crusade Against Drink in Victorian England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1988).

²⁰ Glasgow & West of Scotland Temperance Society, *First Annual Report of the Glasgow & West of Scotland Temperance Society: Presented 20th December 1830* (Glasgow: James Hedderwick, 1830), p. 9, p. 34.

²¹ James Sherman, *The Advantages of Abstinence from Intoxicating Liquor: A Sermon Preached to Young Persons, at Surrey Chapel* (London: Hamilton, Adams, 1837), p. 5.

²² Sherman, p. 5.

²³ John Edgar, *A Complete View of the Principles and Objects of Temperance Societies*, 4th edn, (Bradford: Manchester Temperance Society, 1831), p. 3.

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²⁴ Edgar, p. 20.

²⁵ Ralph Barnes Grindrod, *Bacchus: An Essay on the Nature, Causes, Effects, and Cure of Intemperance* (London: Johnston and Barrett, 1839), pp. 356-359; Grindrod's emphasis.

²⁶ John Whitecross, *Temperance Anecdotes and Facts: With a Selection of Some of the Principal Arguments in Support of Temperance Principles* (Edinburgh: C. Ziegler, 1840), pp. 83-84.

²⁷ 'An Address to Those who Receive the Advocate Gratuitously,' *British Temperance Advocate and Journal*, 15 January 1840, 1-2 (p. 2).

²⁸ John Chadwick, *Essay on the Use of Alcoholic Liquors in Health and Disease* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, and Co, 1849), p.v. See also: William Benjamin Carpenter, *On the Use and Abuse of Alcoholic Liquors in Health and Disease: Prize Essay* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1850).

²⁹ For a list with some of the names of medical men who embraced 'total abstinence from all intoxicating drinks' see Benjamin Parsons, *Anti-Bacchus: an Essay of the Crimes, Diseases, and Other Evils Connected with the use of Intoxicating Drinks* (London: Paternoster Row, 1841), pp. 39-41; Glasgow & West of Scotland Temperance Society, *First Annual Report of the Glasgow & West of Scotland Temperance Society: Presented 20th December 1830* (Glasgow: James Hedderwick, 1830), p. 34.

³⁰ See Trotter, pp. 170-171; Medical Man, *Remarks on Drunkenness with Cases: And Advice to Those Persons who Are in the Habit of Drinking Spirituous Liquors* (London: Harvey and Darton, 1830), pp. 7-9; 'The Drunkard's Tree', *Youth's Magazine; or Evangelical Miscellany*, 9 (1836), p. 208; and Chadwick, pp. 48-50.

³¹ Charles Dickens, 'The Drunkard's Death', in Charles Dickens, *Sketches by Boz: Illustrative of Every-Day Life and Every-Day People* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), pp. 484-494 (p. 487). All future references will be incorporated into the main body of the text and will be to this edition.

³² Trotter, pp. 25-109.

³³ Macnish, pp. 141-142.

³⁴ Robert Willan, *Reports on the Diseases in London, Particularly During the Years 1796, 97, 98, 99, and 1800* (London: Paternoster Row, 1801), p.135.

³⁵ Willan, p. 135.

³⁶ Trotter, p. 133.

³⁷ Macnish, p. 149.

³⁸ Medical Man, p.12. The term delirium tremens was coined by Thomas Sutton (1767?- 1835) in 1813. In his *Tracts on Delirium Tremens, on Peritonitis and on Some Other Internal Inflammatory Affections, and on the Gout* (London: James Moyes, 1813), Sutton distinguished delirium tremens from phrenitis, 'a disease materially affecting the brain with continued delirium, and connected with violent morbid exertions' (p.1), with which it had previously been confounded. Some of the symptoms Sutton identified in delirium tremens were 'loathing of food, listlessness, debility, and

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want of rest [...] there is a general agitation of the frame, with tremors of the hands. Associated with these, the mind is perceived to waver' (p. 8). Sutton believed that opium could be used to relieve the symptoms of delirium tremens.

³⁹ For a discussion of the symptoms of delirium tremens see John Ware, *Remarks on the History of Delirium Tremens* (Boston: N. Hale's Steam Power, 1831); George Man Burrows, *Commentaries on the Causes, Forms, Symptoms, and Testament, Moral, Medical, of Insanity* (London: Thomas and George Underwood, 1828), pp. 326-328; George Gregory, *Elements of the Theory and Practice of Medicine: Designed for the use of Students and Junior Practitioners*, 4th edn (London: Baldwin and Cradock, 1835), pp. 195-196.

⁴⁰ Gregory, p. 195.

⁴¹ Medical Man, p. 2, p. 21.

⁴² Charles Dickens, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club* (1836-37; repr. London: Oxford University Press, 1959). All future references will be incorporated into the main body of the text and will be to this edition.

⁴³ Burrows, p. 327.

⁴⁴ Isaac Ray, *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* (London: G. Henderson, 1839), p. 377.

⁴⁵ W. H. Carter, 'DELIRIUM TREMENS', in *The Cyclopædia of Practical Medicine*, ed. by John Forbes, Alexander Tweedie and John Conolly, 4 vols (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1832-1835), i, p. 512. See also Grindrod, p. 358.

⁴⁶ Harrison, p. 44.

⁴⁷ See 'Introduction' to England. Parliament. House of Commons, *Evidence on Drunkenness: Presented to the House of Commons by the Select Committee* (London: D. Martin, 1834), pp. iii-iv (p. iv), and 'Speech of Mr. Buckingham, on the Extent, Causes, and Effects of Drunkenness, Delivered in the House of Commons on Tuesday, June 3, 1834', in *Evidence on Drunkenness*, pp. 1-31 (p. 2).

⁴⁸ Carpenter, p. 31. See also Macnish, p. 8 and p. 125; Prichard, pp. 154-155; 'GIN DRINKING', *The Times* 23 April 1834, p. 6.

⁴⁹ See Timothy Sparks (Charles Dickens), *Sunday Under Three Heads: as it is; as Sabbath bills would make it; as it might be* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1836); Charles Dickens, 'Gin-Shops', in *Sketches by Boz*, pp. 182-187.

⁵⁰ Sparks, p. 5.

⁵¹ Sparks, p. 18.

⁵² Macnish, p. 35.

⁵³ Macnish, p. 36-37.

⁵⁴ See Dickens's 'Preface' to the 1850 Cheap Edition of *Sketches by Boz*.

⁵⁵ 'Charles Dickens', in *Charles Dickens: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Philip Collins (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p. 414.

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