PERFECT FELICITY.

IN A BIRD’S-EYE VIEW.

I AM the Raven in the Happy Family—and nobody knows what a life of misery I lead!

The dog informs me (he was a puppy about town before he joined us; which was lately) that there is more than one Happy Family on view in London. Mine, I beg to say, may be known by being the Family which contains a splendid Raven.

I want to know why I am to be called upon to accommodate myself to a cat, a mouse, a pigeon, a ringdove, an owl (who is the greatest ass I have ever known), a guinea-pig, a sparrow, and a variety of other creatures with whom I have no opinion in common. Is this national education? Because, if it is, I object to it. Is our cage what they call neutral ground, on which all parties may agree? If so, war to the beak I consider preferable.

What right has any man to require me to look complacently at a cat on a shelf all day? It may be all very well for the owl. My opinion of him is that he blinks and stares himself into a state of such dense stupidity that he has no idea what company he is in. I have seen him, with my own eyes, blink himself, for hours, into the conviction that he was alone in a belfry. But I am not the owl. It would have been better for me, if I had been born in that station of life.

I am a Raven. I am, by nature, a sort of collector, or antiquarian. If I contributed, in my natural state, to any Periodical, it would be The Gentleman’s Magazine. I have a passion for amassing things that are of no use to me, and burying them. Supposing such a thing—I don’t wish to be known to our proprietor that I put this case, but I say, supposing such a thing—as that I took out one of the Guinea-Pig’s eyes; how could I bury it here? The floor of the cage is not an inch thick. To be sure, I could dig through it with my bill (if I dared), but what would be the comfort of dropping a Guinea-Pig’s eye into Regent Street?

What I want, is privacy. I want to make a collection. I desire to get a little property together. How can I do it here? Mr. Hudson couldn’t have done it, under corresponding circumstances.

I want to live by my own abilities, instead of being provided for in this way. I am stuck in a cage with these incongruous companions, and called a member of the Happy Family; but suppose you took a Queen’s Counsel out of Westminster Hall, and settled him board and lodging free, in Utopia, where there would be no excuse for ’his quiddits, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks,’ how do you think he’d like it? Not at all. Then why do you expect me to like it, and add insult to injury by calling me a ’Happy’ Raven!

This is what I say: I want to see men do it. I should like to get up a Happy Family of men, and show ’em. I should like to put the Rajah Brooke, the Peace Society, Captain Aaron Smith, several Malay Pirates, Doctor Wiseman, the Reverend Hugh Stowell, Mr. Fox of Oldham, the Board of Health, all the London undertakers, some of the Common (very common I think) Council, and all the vested interests in the filth and misery of the poor, into a good-sized cage, and see how they’d get on. I should like to look in at ’em through the bars, after they had undergone the training I have undergone. You wouldn’t find Sir Peter Laurie ’putting down’ Sanitary Reform then, or getting up in that vestry, and pledging his word and honour to the non-existence of Saint Paul’s Cathedral, I expect! And very happy he’d be, would n’t he, when he couldn’t do that sort of thing?

I have no idea of you lords of the creation coming staring at me in this false position. Why don’t you look at home? If you think I’m fond of the dove, you’re very much mistaken. If you imagine there is the least good will between me
and the pigeon, you never were more deceived in your lives. If you suppose I wouldn't demolish the whole Family (myself excepted), and the cage too, if I had my own way, you don't know what a real Raven is. But if you do know this, why am I to be picked out as a curiosity? Why don't you go and stare at the Bishop of Exeter? 'Ecod, he's one of our breed, if any body is!

Do you make me lead this public life because I seem to be what I ain't? Why, I don't make half the pretences that are common among you men! You never heard me call the sparrow my noble friend. When did I ever tell the Guinea Pig that he was my Christian brother? Name the occasion of my making myself a party to the 'sham' (my friend Mr. Carlyle will lend me his favourite word for the occasion) that the cat hadn't really her eye upon the mouse! Can you say as much? What about the last Court Ball, the next Debate in the Lords, the last great Ecclesiastical Suit, the next long assembly in the Court Circular? I wonder you are not ashamed to look me in the eye! I am an independent Member—of the Happy Family; and I ought to be let out.

I have only one consolation in my inability to damage anything, and that is that I hope I am instrumental in propagating a delusion as to the character of Ravens. I have a strong impression that the sparrows on our beat are beginning to think they may trust a Raven. Let 'em try! There's an uncle of mine, in a stable-yard down in Yorkshire, who will very soon undeceive any small bird that may favour him with a call.

The dogs too. Ha ha! As they go by, they look at me and this dog, in quite a friendly way. They never suspect how I should hold on to the tip of his tail, if I consulted my own feelings instead of our proprietor's. It's almost worth being here, to think of some confiding dog who has seen me, going too near a friend of mine who lives at a hackney-coach stand in Oxford Street. You wouldn't stop his squeaking in a hurry, if my friend got a chance at him.

It's the same with the children. There's a young gentleman with a hat and feathers, resident in Portland Place, who brings a penny to our proprietor, twice a week. He wears very short white drawers, and has mottled legs above his socks. He hasn't the least idea what I should do to his legs, if I consulted my own inclinations. He never imagines what I am thinking of, when we look at one another. May he only take those legs, in their present juicy state, close to the cage of my brother-in-law of the Zoological Gardens, Regent's Park!

Call yourselves rational beings, and talk about our being reclaimed? Why, there isn't one of us who wouldn't astonish you, if we could only get out! Let me out, and see whether I should be meek or not. But this is the way you always go on in—you know you do. Up at Pentonville, the sparrow says—and he ought to know, for he was born in a stack of chimneys in that prison—you are spending I am afraid to say how much every year out of the rates, to keep men in solitude, where they CAN'T do any harm (that you know of), and then you sing all sorts of choruses about their being good. So am I what you call good—here. Why? Because I can't help it. Try me outside!

You ought to be ashamed of yourselves, the Magpie says; and I agree with him. If you are determined to pet only those who take things and hide them, why don't you pet the Magpie and me? We are interesting enough for you, ain't we? The Mouse says you are not half so particular about the honest people. He is not a bad authority. He was almost starved when he lived in a workhouse, wasn't he? He didn't get much fatter, I suppose, when he moved to a labourer's cottage? He was thin enough when he came from that place, here—I know that. And what does the Mouse (whose word is his bond) declare? He declares that you don't take half the care you ought; of your own young, and don't teach 'em half enough. Why don't you then? You might give our proprietor something
to do, I should think, in twisting miserable boys and girls into their proper nature, instead of twisting us out of ours. You are a nice set of fellows, certainly, to come and look at Happy Families, as if you had nothing else to look after!

I take the opportunity of our proprietor's pen and ink in the evening, to write this. I shall put it away in a corner—quite sure, as it's intended for the Post Office, of Mr. Rowland Hill's getting hold of it somehow, and sending it to somebody. I understand he can do anything with a letter. Though the Owl says (but I don't believe him), that the present prevalence of measles and chicken-pox among infants in all parts of this country, has been caused by Mr. Rowland Hill. I hope I needn't add that we Ravens are all good scholars, but that we keep our secret (as the Indians believe the Monkeys do, according to a Parrot of my acquaintance) lest our abilities should be imposed upon. As nothing worse than my present degradation as a member of the Happy Family can happen to me, however, I desert the General Freemasons' Lodge of Ravens, and express my disgust in writing.
'Perfect Felicity. In a Bird's-Eye View' by Charles Dickens

*Household Words*, Volume I, Magazine No. 2, 6 April 1850, Pages: 36-38

**Article:** 'Perfect Felicity. In a Bird's-Eye View' by Charles Dickens

'Happy Families', or collections of small animals and birds who were natural enemies shown living peaceably together in the same cage, were a popular form of street entertainment in the mid-Victorian period, one such show being elaborately described by Mayhew (*London Labour and the London Poor* [1861-2], Vol. III, pp. 214-19). This provides Dickens with a fine device for a general satire on contemporary squabbling over such matters as national education (bedevilled by sectarian rivalry) and ecclesiastical affairs, dubious social experiments such as the Pentonville Prison 'solitary system' [see 'Pet Prisoners', *HW*, Vol. I, 27 April 1850], Parliamentary conventions (more extensively ridiculed in 'A Few Conventionalities', *HW*, Vol. III, 28 June 1851), and the organised hypocrisy of 'Society'.

Sir Peter Laurie, whom Dickens had already satirised as 'Alderman Cute' in *The Chimes* (1844) following the former Lord Mayor's notorious campaign to 'put down' suicide, is again singled out for special attack. he had just made himself ridiculous by declaring at a meeting of the Marylebone Vestry in March that the slum area of Jacob's Island did not really exist, but was 'only' an invention of Dickens's in *Oliver Twist*. Dickens had seized the opportunity of the issue of the Cheap Edition of *Oliver* in that same month to write a whole new Preface mocking Laurie's absurdity ('when Fielding described Newgate, the prison immediately ceased to exist...') and gives him the coup de grâce here. The device of this piece also gives Dickens an opportunity to express his delight in the nature of ravens. He had kept two successively as pets and took great pleasure in studying their behaviour. The first died in March 1841 and Dickens write a marvellous comic lament for him in a letter to Maclise (*Pilgrim*, Vol. II, pp. 230-2); the second, 'older and more gifted', was soon afterwards found for Dickens at a village pub in Yorkshire and survived till 1845. Both birds contributed to the character of Grip in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841) and were celebrated by Dickens in the Preface to the Cheap Edition of that novel (March 1849).

Literary allusions

'his quiddits, his quillets...': Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 5, Sc. I; 'sham': a favourite word of Carlyle's.

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**Journal:** *Household Words*, Volume I, Magazine No. 2, 6 April 1850, Pages: 36-38

**Author(s):**

- Charles Dickens

death. Published *Pickwick Papers*, 1836-37; thirteen other novels and the incomplete *Edwin Drood*, also Christmas books, some volumes of sketches, two travel books, some dramatic pieces. Organized theatricals; gave readings based on his works.

In the partnership agreement under which *H.W.* was set up, Dickens was, with the publishers Bradbury & Evans, with Forster and with Wills, one of the joint proprietors; he held an interest of one-eighth share. On Forster's relinquishing his one-eighth share in 1856, Dickens divided that one-eighth between himself and Wills. Dickens's salary as editor was £500 a year; he was to receive payment also for what he wrote in the periodical (Lehmann, ed., *Charles Dickens As Editor*, pp. 19, 195-97). (In the Office Book, Wills did not record the payments made or credited to Dickens for his *H.W.* writings.)

Dickens set the editorial policy of *H.W.* and supervised its being carried out. He had, in Wills, a capable and efficient subeditor on whose judgment he came more and more to rely; yet, especially in the early years of *H.W.*, he concerned himself with every detail of its production. Before the first number appeared, he wrote to friends and acquaintances asking them to become contributors. He read - especially during the early years of *H.W.* - hundreds of MSS, some submitted directly to him, others referred to him by Wills for final acceptance or rejection. When possible, he conferred weekly, sometimes more often, with Wills on editorial matters. When personal conference was not possible, he sent his instructions and suggestions by letter - instructions and suggestions ranging from matters of editorial policy to matters of typography and punctuation. He revised - sometimes almost entirely rewrote - contributed papers; he read proofs - sometimes revises of proofs that he had in the first place altered or emended. He suggested subjects for articles; he sent to the office materials to serve as the basis for articles. On occasion, he made excursions in company with a staff member to gather material for articles. He wrote much for the early volumes of *H.W.*, comparatively little for the later volumes. Morley's writings in the periodical exceeded his by some 300 pages. Nevertheless, as he stated when he brought *H.W.* to a close ("A Last Household Word"), his name had been, "as his pen and himself" had been, "inseparable from the Publication" throughout its entire existence.

Most of Dickens's writings in *H.W.*, like almost all contributions of other writers, appeared anonymously. Only *Hard Times*, the one of his novels that he serialized in the periodical, carried with the title of the work in each installment the ascription "BY CHARLES DICKENS." Four weeks before the serialization of that book began, it was announced: "NEW TALE by Mr. CHARLES DICKENS"; thereafter, each week's *H.W.* number announced the portion of *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens that was to appear the following week; before the appearance of the final chapters, as also after the completion of the serialization, *H.W.* published advertisements for the novel in book form as a Bradbury & Evans publication. *A Child's History of England*, Dickens's only other extended work in *H.W.*, appeared in the various instalments without Dickens's name after the title, but, during the serialization, advertisements in *H.W.* for the *History* in book form as a Bradbury & Evans publication stated Dickens's authorship.

Of various other of his *H.W.* writings Dickens also made his authorship known. "Personal," his statement concerning the "domestic trouble," bore his name as signature. "Curious Misprint in the Edinburgh Review," his reply to J. F. Stephen's article "The License of Modern Novelists," announced: "the hand of Mr. Dickens writes this paper." In "A Nightly Scene in London," it
was "I, the Conductor of this journal," who told of coming upon the poor souls crouched before a Whitechapel workhouse. The footnote that Dickens added to "Three Graces of Christian Science" he signed "C.D." Writing in first or third person, Dickens also made clear that he was author of the introductory and closing comments in H.W. ("A Preliminary Word," "All the Year Round," "A Last Household Word"), as of "Pet Prisoners," the detective police articles, "The Guild of Literature and Art," "The Late Mr. Justice Talfourd," and "To Working Men."

In bold type, the words "CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS" appeared on the H.W. masthead; in small type they spanned the verso and recto of facing pages. In the first five years of H.W.'s publication, Dickens's name appeared in more than seventy-five H.W. advertisements and announcements in connection with the periodical and one of its supplementary publications, and in connection with A Child's History and Hard Times (in some advertisements and announcements his name appeared as many as three times). In the last year of H.W.'s publication, readings by Mr. Charles Dickens were announced in forty-one H.W. numbers. Dickens was omnipresent in his periodical.

In view of this fact, as also for other obvious considerations, Dickens naturally wanted in H.W. stories and articles no laudatory references to himself - or references that might be so construed. Thus, in "Our Society at Cranford," he substituted mentions of Hood and Hood's writings for Mrs. Gaskell's mentions of Boz and Boz's Pickwick and Christmas Carol: "... with my name on every page of Household Words," he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell (Dec. 5 [4], 1851.), "there would be - or at least I should feel - an impropriety in so mentioning myself." In a letter to Cunningham, June 24, 1853, he referred to his "usual precaution" in deleting from articles references that "unmistakably" applied to himself. An exception to this policy was the publication in H.W. of a personal letter from John Pascoe Fawkner, in which Fawkner stated that Dickens's writings had "beguiled many an hour of my life," and wished Dickens "many years of healthful employment in the highly useful manner" in which he had been so long engaged ("A Colonial Patriot").

But the observation of a reader (a reader of "a quick wit and a happy comprehension," as Dickens characterized him) that Dickens's writings had the tendency "to hold up to derision those of the higher classes" also found a place in H.W. pages ("Ready Wit").

Impersonal references to himself and to his books Dickens had no objection to. Mention of "Mr. Dickens" appeared of necessity in Morley's "Our Wicked Mis-statements"; in occasional articles by non-staff writers mention of Dickens was appropriate and unobtrusive. References to his novels - Pickwick, Oliver Twist, Nickleby, Chuzzlewit, Dombey, Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, Little Dorrit - their characters, place-names, distinctive phraseology - appeared in one or more items by Stone, Dodd, Capper, Oxenford, Miss Lawrance, Payn, Morley, Costello, the Rev. James White, Samuel Sidney, Kent, Percy Fitzgerald, Wilkie Collins, Mrs. Linton, and Thornbury. (The reference to Mrs. Gamp in "Railway Waifs and Strays" could be by either of the joint authors - Wills or Hill.) Of these references, the most extended was Fitzgerald's recital, in "My Long Lost CheeryId!", of the plot of a melodrama based on Dombey; the most amusing was White's depiction, in "Fiction Crushing," of a Dora-like wife who comes to despise her Copperfield prototype. In at least seven of his own articles, and in one by him and Wills, Dickens referred to characters in his novels. In a footnote to "Pet Prisoners" he mentioned American Notes, and in "That Other Public" he quoted from the book.
Various of Dickens's H.W. writings elicited praise from contemporaries. Among his articles in the early volumes, for example, "A Child's Dream of a Star" seemed to Percy Fitzgerald written with Dickens's "most delicate touch"; and nothing, thought Fitzgerald, could be "more witty or sarcastic" than "Red Tape" (*Memories of Charles Dickens*, pp. 137, 155). Crabb Robinson found one of the "Raven" articles "a witty paper," "a capital satire" (*On Books and Their Writers*, II, 704). The *Quart. Rev.* (June 1856) mentioned Dickens's "excellent papers" on the London detective police. Mrs. Cowden Clarke wrote to a friend: "The 'Christmas Tree' paper is charming, is it not?" (*Letters to an Enthusiast*, p. 32). Among Dickens's articles that antagonized certain readers were "Frauds on the Fairies," "Pet Prisoners," and "Whole Hogs." Dickens's remonstrance, in "Frauds on the Fairies," against George Cruikshank's rewriting "Hop-o'-My-Thumb" to serve propaganda purposes provoked a reply from Cruikshank, in which he justified his treatment of fairy tales and set Dickens right "upon one or two points" (*George Cruikshank's Magazine*, Feb. 1854). Dickens's comments on prison chaplains, in "Pet Prisoners," resulted in his being "severely mauled at the hands of certain Reverend Ordinaries" ("Small-Beer Chronicles," *A.Y.R.*, Dec. 6, 1862). "Whole Hogs" aroused the indignation of temperance advocates (Kitton, "Introduction" to *Old Lamps for New Ones and Other Sketches and Essays*, by Dickens; also, Dickens's *H.W.* article "Sucking Pigs"). Dickens's statement, in *H.W.*, concerning his domestic affairs was generally condemned as in poor taste.

Dickens's relationship with most of his contributors was amicable. To some who were newcomers in the field of writing he at times wrote detailed criticisms of their submitted MSS, with words of advice and encouragement. Among *H.W.* writers who, at one time or another, showed their regard for him by dedicating to him a book were Marston, the Rev. James White, Wickenden, Forster, Prince, Landor, Charles Knight, Samuel Sidney, Wilkie Collins, Marguerite Power, Duthie, Spicer, Wills, Yates, Lever, Kent, Percy Fitzgerald, Payn, and Thombury. Hans Christian Andersen, who was technically not a contributor, but one of whose stories appeared in *H.W.*, concerning his domestic affairs was generally condemned as in poor taste.

Of the items included by Dickens in *Reprinted Pieces*, "A Plated Article," recorded in the Office Book as by Dickens and Wills, was reprinted by Wills in his *Old Leaves: Gathered from Household Words*, 1860, there indicated as written in part by Dickens. Wills's Office Book ascription of the item to Dickens and to himself is more authoritative as to its authorship than is Dickens's reprinting.

As Dickens's letters and as occasional comments by contributors indicate, Dickens made changes - deletions, additions, emendations - in more items than those for which the initials "C.D." appear in the Office Book jointly with the name of a contributor. Thus, it is not inconceivable that he might have written the hymn, sometimes attributed to him, that concludes "Poor Dick's Story" in the 1856 Christmas number (see identification note on Harriet Parr). The attribution, however, seems to be in error.

*Harper's* reprinted, in whole or part, seventeen of Dickens's *H.W.* articles and stories (including "A Plated Article," claimed by both Dickens and Wills), three acknowledged to *H.W.*, nine to Dickens personally, and five unacknowledged to any source. *Harper's* reprinted as by Dickens eight items not by him (see Elizabeth Gaskell, Home, Sala, Morley, the Rev. James White, Harriet Martineau, Wilkie Collins, Eliza Lynn Linton). Two of Dickens's items were included in the Putnam volumes of selections from *H.W.: Home and Social Philosophy*, 1st and 2nd ser.
The collection of Dickens's *H.W.* items published in 1859 by the Philadelphia publishing firm T. B. Peterson, *Dickens' Short Stories. Containing Thirty-one Stories Never Before Published in This Country*, contained no items that Dickens had not included in *Reprinted Pieces*. D.N.B.

Author: Anne Lohrli; © University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Dickens served a full newspaper apprenticeship, beginning as a teenage penny-a-liner for *The British Press* (1826). Having taught himself shorthand in the late 1820s, Dickens practised the craft in the antiquated courts of Doctors' Commons before moving up to join the select band of parliamentary reporters, working first for his uncle's voluminous *Mirror of Parliament*, then for the radical *True Sun* during the stormy passage of the Reform Bill through parliament (1832), and finally securing a coveted reporter's job on the newly-reorganised *Morning Chronicle*, under veteran Benthamite editor John Black (1783-1855). There he undertook varied work - theatre reviewing, election reporting, express reporting of extra-mural political events, as well as enduring the daily grind of parliamentary debates. Given the fluctuating demands for space which the latter placed on a 7-column broadsheet like the *Chronicle*, room was soon found for Dickens's witty sketches employing, amongst a wardrobe of other styles, the rhetoric of political journalism to narrate the world of everyday Londoners. These came to be signed 'Boz', and between 1836 and 1839, together with tales from the *Monthly Magazine* and *Bell's Life in London* they were republished to extensive acclaim, overlapping with the monthly release of 'Boz's next great success, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-37).

Thereafter, Dickens's writing ventures all self-consciously straddled the permeable frontier between journalism and popular literature. He left the daily press for the more genteel world of monthly magazines, with the editorship of *Bentley's Miscellany* (1837-39), but sought to reconnect with satirical weekly journalism through editing *Master Humphrey's Clock* for Chapman & Hall (1840-41). This was something of a misfire, in journalistic terms, though it bequeathed *Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* to literature. So too was Dickens's involvement with the *Daily News* (1845-46); critics point to the fact only 17 issues of the new Liberal broadsheet were published under his watch. Yet Dickens's effectiveness, as celebrity launch editor, should not be underestimated; his newsgathering and recruiting arrangements stood the test of time, and he led from the front with a series of inventive contributions on social and cultural issues.

Even while seeking to reposition himself as a serious novelist with *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), Dickens returned to newsprint, with around 30 anonymous reviews and irony-laden leaders for the *Examiner* under John Forster (1848-49). These were a prelude to his return to full-time editing and leader-writing, with *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* - hugely successful enterprises in weekly magazine journalism which, however, did not prevent Dickens from writing a further eight serial novels and undertaking punishing tours as a public reader in Britain, France, and America. Dickens is now widely recognised - and was during his lifetime - as a crucial contributor both to the popular appeal and the respectability of the mass-market newspaper and periodical press.


Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

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DJO: Dickens Journals Online (http://www.djo.org.uk)
Genre(s):

- **Prose: Report**
  A 'more or less detailed description of any event ... intended for publication'; an 'account given ... on some particular matter, esp. after investigation' (OED) involving e.g. fieldwork, first-hand experience, original research.

- **Prose: Short Fiction**
  Fictional narrative published in a single instalment, e.g. a short story, 'with a fully developed theme' (OED), or which is simply self-contained.

- **Cross-genre**
  A cross-genre or hybrid-genre article is one which is deemed to purposefully blend rhetorical and stylistic features and incorporate iconography from more than one pre-existent genres. Depending on the genres crossed, this can also be referred to as: creative non-fiction, witness literature, 'Gonzo' journalism, immersion journalism, narrative non-fiction. The blurring of boundaries is frequently defined as 'New' (hence the slightly puzzling recurrence of the term 'New Journalism' to describe approaches to periodical writing in the late 19th-century, mid-20th and early 21st centuries, as clearly it was alive and flourishing in Dickens's Wellington Street offices from 1850 onwards).

Subject(s):

- Crime; Criminals; Punishment; Capital Punishment; Prisons; Penal Transportation; Penal Colonies

- Great Britain—Social Conditions—Nineteenth Century

Citation (MHRA): Dickens, Charles, 'Perfect Felicity. In a Bird's-Eye View', *Household Words*, I, 6 April 1850, 36-38

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