

Diary of Sydney Race recording a visit to Charles Dickens' daughter, 1913

Saturday October 11th 1913 Called on Mrs Perugini, Dickens' daughter Kate.¹ She lives at 32 Victoria Road, Kensington, rather a small house as London houses go, & a little off the fashionable part of Kensington but still a roomy one, & a very comfortable one. Was shown into the drawing room, which is nicely furnished after the mid Victorian style, & found Mrs Perugini with a rather assertive American lady – a visitor. She is a delightfully sweet looking old lady – has a pleasing, open face, good nose, large bright eyes, white hair – nicely gowned, & speaking with a good accent – better almost than her brother Henry², who is slightly cocknefied. She spoke very freely about her father, whom she said she remembered as clearly as if he was then sitting in the next room (afterwards the American told me that she greatly objected to people thinking her old, or fearing that she could not remember past events). I really called on her to talk about Edwin Drood³, to thank her for her letters about that book. She said she was amused at the way people quarrelled about the plot – when no one really knew what the solution was. She was sure no one had been more completely taken into her father's confidence than John Forster⁴. I could see she thought very highly of JF. Ainsworth⁵ she said was never a great friend of her father's, tho' she remembered his visiting their house. Thackeray⁶ she had a perfect recollection of. He was in her house every day after her marriage to Mr Collins⁷ (she spoke freely of her first husband) when they lived in Kensington. Earlier she was great friends with T's daughters, remembered attending a children's party, to which all the girls had to bring some dish prepared by themselves. She was no cook herself, & so she took a dish of boiled rice, which T tasted & pronounced delicious. She thought it strange that both T & her father should leave unfinished books. She said she sometimes felt that people were only interested in her because she was the daughter of 'so great a man'. The American answered her to the contrary. Her first husband gave up painting in early life. He was a writer engaged in Journalism. She was present when D burnt his letters at Gads Hill⁸. 'Oh papa what a shame', she said, but D was very determined. She thinks it a good thing, & that she herself sometimes says very awful things in her correspondence. She strongly emphasized her opinion that her father was a 'creator' & not a 'copyist'. So many people were so constantly seeking for the originals from which his characters were drawn. This was all wrong. Some of his best friends did not appear in the novels

¹ Kate (Katherine Elizabeth Macready Dickens) was Dickens' younger daughter (1839-1929). Her second husband was the artist Charles Edward Perugini, whom she married in 1873.

² Sir Henry Fielding Dickens KC (1849-1993), Dickens' eighth child

³ The Mystery of Edwin Drood, Charles Dickens' final unfinished novel, a murder mystery, was published in 1870.

⁴ John Forster (1812-1876) was a writer, theatre critic and literary adviser who had a close friendship with Dickens.

⁵ William Harrison Ainsworth (1805-1882), novelist and editor, and friend of Dickens.

⁶ William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), novelist and sometime friend of Dickens.

⁷ Charles Collins (1828-1873), painter and writer; he was the brother of the novelist Wilkie Collins. In 1860 he married Kate Dickens.

⁸ Gads Hill Place, a Georgian house near Rochester in Kent which Dickens purchased in 1856.