

*Diary of Iris Vaughan* sits nicely with the thirty-odd other volumes already published in this splendid enterprise.

### Jock Macleod

---

***An Edwardian's View of Dickens & His Illustrators: Harry Furniss's "A Sketch of Boz,"* by Gareth Cordery. U of North Carolina at Greensboro: ELT Press, 2005. 1880-1920 British Authors Series 20. xii + 116. ISBN 0-944318-20-7. \$40.**

Whatever other qualities he may have lacked (modesty and a regard for the sensitivities of other people spring most readily to mind), Harry Furniss could never be indicted for want of energy. One of the most talented and prolific black-and-white artists of late Victorian and Edwardian Britain, he drew regularly (but never exclusively) for *Punch* from 1880 to 1894, edited his own comic magazine, *Lika Joko*, for a few months in 1895, and even-handedly illustrated complete editions of both Dickens and Thackeray. He was, besides, an indefatigable traveller, a copious writer, a tireless public lecturer and a pioneer of cinema (working for Edison in New York in 1912-13 and later producing a still extant short film of himself drawing jingoistic cartoons). If there was a club to be joined, he joined it, and his portly figure was regularly on view at the Gaiety, the Beefsteak, the Savage and the Garrick, where he unflinchingly regaled rapt fellow-members with that torrent of anecdote and reminiscence with which he deluged the wider public in his voluminous autobiographical writings (all handsomely embellished with drawings by, and very frequently of, the author).

Unfortunately, the energy which translated itself into a vibrantly bravura draughtsmanship in Furniss's best caricatures – Gladstone's collars rising up to engulf his craggy features; Harcourt's pendulous jowls deliquescing like candle-wax – too often became bumptiousness in his literary effusions, and his lecture on Dickens's illustrators, premiered in 1905 but published here for the first time, is shot through with an unstinting enthusiasm for himself and a decided lack of it for most of his fellow-practitioners. Cruikshank, to be sure, was "a great artist," but that encomium has to be qualified because he was also "a vain old humbug" and "a very immoral man." Robert Buss's *Pickwick* plates were a "fiasco" and the trouble with "Phiz" was that, despite exhibiting a characteristically British capacity for hard work, he "came of a French family" and consequently depicted most of Dickens's characters with foreign faces and gestures. Cattermole was good on architecture but got Little Nell hopelessly wrong, while the illustrations of James Mahoney and Charles Green were studio-bound and lacked both inspiration and originality. Only Fred Barnard (an acquaintance and colleague) emerges more or less unscathed, but

Furniss nonetheless feels called upon to lament that his work for the Household Edition was both hurried and badly engraved.

There's doubtless something to be said for at least some of these judgments, and Furniss can be shrewd on detail (he provides an informed and perceptive analysis of the allegorical clutter on display in one of Browne's *Dombey* illustrations, for example), but it's hard to avoid a sneaking feeling that the lecture's principal object is to clear the field for the advent of Dickens's ideal illustrator, and too much of the script is taken up with a gushing display of the lecturer's qualifications for that starring role. Indeed, his hyperbolic veneration for Boz at one point spins so far out of control that Furniss suddenly announces: "if ever a writer could dispense with an artist to illustrate his works, that author was Charles Dickens" – a somewhat unguarded affirmation from the man who was to draw five hundred plates for the eighteen-volume Charles Dickens Library Edition of 1910.

For most readers, I suspect, the real value of this publication will lie not in Furniss's fruity ramblings but in Gareth Cordery's splendid introduction. Prudently conceding that Furniss was "no Chesterton or Gissing," Cordery instead situates the lecture within the history of popular entertainment, arguing that in its rich illustration with lantern-slides it approximates to the condition of early cinema. He goes on to contextualise Furniss's showmanship in terms of the widespread turn-of-the-century commodification of Dickens (in advertising art, for example, and on cigarette cards and calendars) and to relate this "Boom in Boz," in its turn, to Dickens's appropriation as a reassuring embodiment of "Englishness" at a time of ideological crisis, when the values of liberal individualism for which his fiction, densely populated with self-confident eccentrics, could be made representative, seemed under threat. Some of this material has appeared before in *Dickens Quarterly*, but it's good to have it again here, this time juxtaposed with the full text of Furniss's lecture, which thus acquires from Cordery's ministrations far greater interest as a cultural symptom than it could ever claim as a contribution to Dickens studies. Cordery, indeed, writes about Furniss with such zestful authority that one can only hope his projected full-scale biography will not be long delayed.

**Robert Dingley**

---

***Victorian Literature and the Victorian State: Character and Governance in a Liberal Society*, by Lauren M.E. Goodlad. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 2003. 320. ISBN 0-8018-6963-3. \$45.00 (hardback).**

Lauren Goodlad begins her illuminating study with a deceptively simple statement. "Victorian Britain," she states, "was a *liberal society*" (vii). Yet while many of us today may conflate "liberalism" with *laissez-faire* economic theory or a radically