

The Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins: Addenda and Corrigenda (1)

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This is the first of a series of planned annual updates to *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters*, published in four volumes by Pickering & Chatto. The editorial principles, transcription conventions, and abbreviations employed here remain consistent with those described in the prefatory sections of Volume I. In the course of time, it is hoped that this material will be incorporated into a revised edition available in digital form with the added benefit of searchability. Though *The Public Face* appeared as recently as June 2005, in the meantime eleven more letters have come to light, including three to Georgina Hogarth and one to James Payn. This raises the number of known extant letters to those recipients to eighteen and sixteen respectively, and the total sum of recorded letters to 2998. The opportunity has also been taken to correct one or two substantial editorial slips. We hope readers of the *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* will be able to draw our attention to further sins of omission and commission.

(A) Addenda

* TO UNIDENTIFIED RECIPIENT, 20 AUGUST 1860

MS: Texas (Ms Works, W. Collins, Ellery Queen Collection).¹

A Square in a Country Town.

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“There was a bare little plot of grass in the middle, protected by a cheap wire fence. An elderly nursemaid and two children were standing in a corner of the enclosure, looking at a lean goat tethered to the grass. Two foot-passengers were talking together on one side of the pavement before the houses, and an idle little boy was leading an idle little dog along by a string on the other. I heard the dull tinkling of a piano at a distance, accompanied by the intermittent knocking of a hammer nearer at hand. These were all the sights and sounds of life that encountered me when I entered the square.”

From “The Woman In White”² | By | Wilkie Collins | August 20th 1860

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1. Accompanied by a photograph of WC, the full-length miniature portrait by Herbert Watkins – see to him of 12 June 1861. The photograph and autograph face each other on opposite sides of a folded sheet of paper to which they have been pasted.
 2. From 5. The Narrative of Walter Hartwright, VIII, where Hartwright seeks out Mrs Catherick in Welmingham, ‘an English country town in the first stage of its existence’. This appears to be the first extant example of WC providing an autograph hunter with a signed passage from one of his novels.

* **TO UNIDENTIFIED RECIPIENT, [25] DECEMBER 1862**

MS: Unknown. On sale: Catalogue of Myers & Co., Autumn, 1955.

Summary: *Signature, subscription and date cut from a letter, Christmas 1862.*

* **TO UNIDENTIFIED RECIPIENT, 12 FEBRUARY 1867**

MS: Unknown. On sale: Puttick & Simpson (sold to Woodhouse for 10s., 11 November 1915, according to E. H. Courville in *Autograph Prices Current* I, August 1914-July 1916).

Summary: ‘A.L.s. 3 pp. 8vo. Feb. 12, 1867, mentioning Chas. Reade, Dickens and his reading tour etc, etc.’

* **TO MARY MOTLEY,¹ 22 MARCH 1870**

MS: Unknown. On sale: Christie’s (Sale 5621, 7 June 2005, South Kensington, Lot 12).

90 Gloucester Place | Portman Square | March 22nd 1870
Mr Wilkie Collins accepts with much pleasure the honour of dining with the Minister of the United States and Mrs Lothrop Motley on Monday 28th March at ¹/₄ to 8 ’oclock. /

1. The reply to the invitation would have been formally addressed to Mary Motley, née Benjamin (d. 1874), the wife of John Lothrop Motley (1814-1877: *ANB*), American ambassador in London from April 1869 to December 1870. Born near Boston, Massachusetts, Motley was a distinguished historian and diplomat who spent much of his life in Europe.

* **TO LEWELLYN JEWITT,¹ 29 OCTOBER 1875**

MS: Unknown. On sale: Christie’s (Sale 5621, 7 June 2005, South Kensington, Lot 12).

Brussels | 29th October 1875

Dear Sir,

I have been travelling – and there has been some occasional delay in forwarding my letters.² This circumstance will, I hope, plead my apology for not having written to you sooner.

Having already subscribed to the Testimonial, I must beg you to excuse me if I refrain from availing myself of the proposal which you are so good as to address to me.³

I remain, Dear Sir, | Faithfully yours | Wilkie Collins
Llewellyn Jewitt Esqr

1. Llewellyn Frederick William Jewitt (1816-1886: *DNB*), engraver, art historian, archaeologist and Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries. Friend of Samuel Carter Hall, editor of the *Art Journal*, with whom he wrote *The Stately Homes of England* (1874-7).
2. WC seems to have left London for the continent on or about 10 October, returning around a month later.
3. The nature of the proposal remains unclear, though the testimonial might be that of £1,600 presented to Samuel Carter Hall and his wife Anna Maria on the occasion of their golden wedding anniversary, 20 September 1874.

*** TO GEORGINA HOGARTH, 18 JULY 1879**

MS: Unknown. On sale: Christie's (15 July 1999, lot 186/2). Extracts and partial images: Christie's catalogue, pp. 139-40.¹

18th July 1879

My dear Georgina,

The terms seem to me to be simply preposterous.² You are quite right in refusing to accept them. Ouvry's calculation is unanswerable.³ I send you a brief sketch of the terms that I should insist on. The 3rd Clause leaves you free, if you are not satisfied with the result of the sale of the first edition, to try another publisher, or to adopt a new method of publication, in regard to the second edition....

Terms

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[10 per] cent commission

[Account]s to be rendered [regul]arly – and profits, [deduction]s stipulated [*cropped*], to be paid [promptly] at the date [when th]e account is rendered. . . .

1. The lot includes three of the many extant letters to Georgina Hogarth concerning the edition of Dickens's letters planned by her and Mamie Dickens. The three are described thus in the catalogue: '13 pages, 8vo, the first letter incomplete ... London and Ramsgate, 18-29 July 1879.' The accompanying illustration shows five overlapping leaves, exposing seven pages of text, of which five are visible only in part, though we have recorded cropped text wherever this is meaningful. This image suggests that the incomplete letter of 18 July is made up of two small leaves, each torn from a sheet of folding notepaper. Christie's

catalogue states that the letter shows WC ‘expressing his opinion that the terms seem to him “to be simply preposterous” (“...Ouvry’s calculation is manoeverable [*sic*]...), sending fresh proposed terms (including 10% commission) which he thinks Chatto & Windus would accept, and suggesting that another publisher (such as Macmillan) could be approached for a second edition’.

2. As the following letter to Hogarth makes clear, the ‘preposterous’ terms must have been those initially proposed by Chapman & Hall who published the volumes on commission for the authors.

3. The solicitor Frederic Ouvry (1814-81: *DNB*), who had served Dickens for many years. Also in the Christie sale (Lot 186/1) was a two-page memorandum on the costs of printing Dickens’s letters, dated 17 December 1878, suggesting that the profit on an edition of 2000 copies priced at 30 shillings each should be around £1100.

*** TO GEORGINA HOGARTH, [27] JULY 1879¹**

MS: Unknown. On sale: Christie’s (15 July 1999, lot 186/2). Extracts and partial images: Christie’s catalogue, pp. 139-140.²

. . . [the] alternative lies [between] £2.... and £1..10..., [there] is no harm in [a delay o]f a day or two [to wr]ite confidentially [to Mr] Bentley, and [consult h]is experience. . . .

Notes on the Agreement³

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1st Clause:- “The first edition of the Work of 2000 copies” – deducting such copies as may be required for presentation, ~~and~~ for the newspapers, and for delivery to the British Museum & [*illegible*]

Query:- Add to the Clause words to this effect (?)

5th Clause. I fancy the sale of copies over the counter to ...

2)

[Mr Chap]man has [consented] to the altered [terms – i]t might be [more grac]ious to [consult hi]m on [this as we]ll as [on the point] respecting [the agents’ Com]mission [which is quite] a [new element so far as my experience goes.]

1. Conjectural dating based on the fact that WC writes on the same day from Ramsgate to George Bentley, consulting his experience on the question of the pricing the Dickens’s letters (Baker & Clarke, II, p. 423).

2. The image suggests that the letter comprises five pages in all, four on a single sheet of folding notepaper, and the fifth on a separate half-sheet headed ‘2)’. The third page is fully visible, the second and fifth partially so.

3. According to Christie’s catalogue, in this letter WC considers ‘the agreement with Chapman & Hall “beyond criticism”, but quibbles about certain clauses including the

proposed price of the volumes (“... I should be inclined to say £1.10...”), cites advertisements in the *Athenaeum* as “a safe guide to follow”, and seeks clarification of some wording (“... Or – seeing that Mr Chapman has consented to the altered terms – it might be more gracious to consult him on this as well as on the point respecting the agents’ Commission which is quite a new element so far as my experience goes ...”).

*** TO GEORGINA HOGARTH, 29 JULY 1879**

MS: Unknown. On sale: Christie’s (15 July 1999, lot 186/2). Extracts and partial images: Christie’s catalogue, pp. 139-140.¹

. . . [cou]nse]l caution in the matter of those “people living abroad” – mentioned in Mr Chapman’s letter.

. . . – to [Mr Lippin]incott, and [ask h]im for his [prop]osal by return [of] mail. It may not be amiss, in the mean time, to ask Mr Chapman to name the person . . .²

1. The image suggests that this letter consists of four pages of text on a single sheet of folding notepaper, though only lower portions of the second and third pages are clearly visible.

2. According to Christie’s catalogue, in this letter WC ‘refers to George Bentley’s view of the price, suggests seeing “what Forster did, in the case of the ‘Life’” (“...His account with Chapman would be of some use as a guide...”), notes that Smith & Son and Mudie “are monopolists who have you at their mercy”, mentions arrangements for correcting proofs, and comments on the “anonymous applicant” whose potential offer should be considered.’ Given the apparent mention of the Philadelphia publisher J. B. Lippincott, this last reference probably concerns the question of publication in North America, reverted to in the letters to Hogarth of 11 and 16 October 1879.

TO A.S. BARNES & CO., [SPRING] 1880

MS: Unknown. Extract: *International Review* NS 8:6 (June 1880) p. 18.

It [this article] has my name attached to it because I wish to take on myself the entire responsibility of the tone in which this little protest is written. If the article is published, I must ask as a condition that it shall be published without alterations of any kind, excepting palpable errors or slips of the pen, *exactly as it is written*.¹

1. WC refers to ‘Considerations on the Copyright Question’, published by A.S. Barnes & Co. of New York in their monthly *International Review* (June 1880) pp. 609-18. Following the signed article appears the following note:

The editors agree with Mr. Collins in thinking that a treaty securing International Copyright is in every way just and proper; but they must disclaim all responsibility for the language adopted by him in his argument. In a letter to the publishers of this Review Mr. Collins says: [*cites extract as above*] The article is printed in exact accordance with this request.

TO JAMES PAYN, 6 OCTOBER 1884

MS: Lewis Collection. Published: Lewis Website.

Ramsgate | 6th Oct: 1884

My dear Payn

Two questions:

1. Has “By Proxy” escaped the clutches of the ordinary Italian translator?¹

2. If yes – do you care to extend the influence of that interesting story to a new circle of readers in Italian newspapers?

By far the best translator whom I have yet met with is the Italian lady who translates my books.² She is not dependent on her pen, and she follows her original conscientiously and gives herself all the time that is required for her difficult task.

On the other side, let me add, that you would be served up in daily teaspoonfuls, in a feuilleton.³ Also that the translation fees are so contemptible that they are not even to be thought of, either by you or me.

I go back tomorrow to 90. Gloucester Place – after some glorious sailing. On the deck of the yacht, I read with sincere pleasure some friendly words relating to poor dear Charley and to myself, in “Literary Recollections”, which added to the delights of my holiday.⁴

Ever yours | Wilkie Collins

1. Payn’s most highly regarded novel, with the opening scenes set in the north of China. It was serialised in *Belgravia* from July 1877, before appearing the following year in two volumes from Chatto & Windus.

2. Presumably Lida Cerracchini, who translated both *The Black Robe* (as *La Vesti Nere*; Milan: Fratelli Treves, 1882) and *Heart and Science* (as *Cuore e Scienza*; Milan: Eduardo Souzegno, 1884). The latter volume is recorded on the title page as an authorised translation.

3. That is, serialised in a daily newspaper.

4. Payn’s *Some Literary Recollections* was published by Smith, Elder in 1884. There is in fact very little in the book about the Collins brothers: WC’s reaction to a book of Payn’s occupies ten lines on pp. 242-3, while a couple of anecdotes concerning CAC are found on pp. 255-8.

*** TO UNIDENTIFIED RECIPIENT, 24 SEPTEMBER 1888**

MS: Unknown.¹ On sale: Swann Galleries, New York, 22 November 2005, sale 2058 lot 321.

Vy truly yours | Wilkie Collins
82 Wimpole St | London | 24th September 1888

1. On a small rectangular piece of card. Presumably an autograph scrap only.

(B) Corrigenda

TO SYDNEY DAVIS, 1 MARCH 1873

II, pp. 381-2, Note 2, latter part:

The paragraph below had appeared . . . unauthorized dramatic version of *Poor Miss Finch*.

Should read:

The following paragraph had appeared in the *Hornet*, 7:225 (3 May 1873), p. 13a, in the 'Buzzings at the Wings' column devoted to theatrical gossip:

Mr. Charles Reade is often blamed for plain speaking, but Mr. Collins can put a point quite as bluntly. Take this, for example: 'My Poor Miss Finch has been dramatised (without asking my permission) by some obscure idiot in the country. I have been asked to dramatised it, and I have refused, because my experience tells me that the book is eminently unfit for stage purposes. What I refuse to do with my own work, another man (unknown in literature) is perfectly free to do against my will, and (if he can get his rubbish played) to the prejudice of my novel and my reputation.' 'Obscure idiot' is good!

This brief notice had appeared the following week, in the *Hornet*, 7:226 (10 May 1873), pp. 13c-14a:

BLYTH | At the Octagon Theatre there were performances of the new comedy-drama *Shipmates* and *Poor Miss Finch*, the play recently alluded to by Mr. Wilkie Collins, who mentioned the author in terms the reverse of courteous. The leading performers were Mr. Sydney Davis and Miss Emily Cross.

The original source of WC's complaint was a letter to John Hollingshead of 25 February 1873 (Baker & Clarke, II, pp. 362-3), written in response to a request for support in the fight against the unauthorized dramatic adaptation of published works of fiction. Along with opinions from the likes of George Eliot, M.E. Braddon, and W.S. Gilbert, the paragraph in question was reprinted by Hollingshead in April 1873 in a pamphlet entitled *Copyright Reform, as Affecting the Right of Stage Representation of Novels* – see John Hollingshead *My Lifetime* (2 vols, London: Sampson Low, 1895), II, pp. 50-4. We are unfortunately unable to identify the 'obscure idiot' and his unauthorized dramatic version of *Poor Miss Finch*.

TO ADA CAVENDISH, 23 JUNE 1883

IV, Addenda, pp. 403-4: The following revised transcript of a letter not previously seen by the editors incorporates a number of minor corrections:

90, GLOUCESTER PLACE, | PORTMAN SQUARE. W.

23rd June 1883

My dear Ada,

The business letter – relating to your tour – is enclosed. The terms – to you – are £3,,-, for each representation. Let us consider them confidential (because I have refused to accept them in the case of proposals not made by my own original Mercy Merrick).

As to the January revival (1884) in London, here are my “sentiments”:-

If the contemplated performances are supported by a capitalist who finds the money, I will at once send you a Draft of agreement, stating the conditions on which I will consent to ~~the~~ a new series of representations in London next year.

But – if the responsibility of the speculation is your’s; I don’t like making you answerable to me (or to my Executors?). To insist on a guaranteed “run” and on stipulated payments – with you – if the venture turned out to be less successful than we had hoped, would (as I am sure you must know, my dear) be simply impossible. And, in that disastrous case, what would my position be? After having refused over and over again to allow the piece to be prematurely revived – I should be left with a worthless dramatic commodity on my hands for years to come. This (after the pecuniary sacrifices I have made in keeping the play in my desk) is a prospect which I cannot afford to contemplate. In one word – I must be paid, and I wont say “must” to you. There it is – roughly ~~as~~ stated as if I was writing to a man. Will you forgive me?

I still hope to hear that the risk is not your risk.

There has been some electric disturbance in the atmosphere, which you are feeling, I suspect. Let me hear that you are better.

Always affectly yours, | WC

I have been away – or I should have written earlier. My illness is – feeling ninety years old, and badly preserved for my age.