



## *THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY*

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**NEWSLETTER**

**WINTER 2019**

### **PETER FIENNES AT THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP**

Members will be able to hear a talk by Peter Fiennes – ‘Footnotes: In the footsteps of Dickens and Collins’ - at the first meeting of the Dickens Fellowship for 2020. This will take place at 6.30pm on Tuesday 21 January at Lumen URC, 88 Tavistock Place, London WC1H 9RS.

### ***FOOTNOTES: A JOURNEY ROUND BRITAIN IN THE COMPANY OF GREAT WRITERS***

*Footnotes*, written by Peter Fiennes, is a series of twelve walks around Britain following in the footsteps of well-known authors. His original premise was “to travel around Britain in the footsteps of a succession of (mostly) famous writers, without leaving any gaps, and without straying from their recorded paths, passing from one to the next like a baton in a relay, or a snowball swelling as it rolls, picking up people and debris along the way.” This idea changed to become a journey “from childhood to death.”

Wilkie appears in three sections, the first two concerning his walking tour of Cornwall in 1850 with the third in the company of Charles Dickens and their trip to the Lake District and Doncaster. The former relates to *Rambles Beyond Railways* published in 1851 while the latter to ‘The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices’ which appeared in *Household Words* from 3-31 October 1857.

Fiennes text is a mixture of biography, paraphrased extracts from Wilkie's text and a current view of the places mentioned.

Fiennes' fellow travellers also include Enid Blyton (Isle of Purbeck, Swanage, Weymouth); Ithell Colquhoun (Lamorna Cove); Celia Fiennes (Glastonbury, Wells, Bath, Bristol, Gloucester, Hereford); Gerald of Wales (Hereford, Hay on Wye, Newport, Cardiff, St David's, Snowdonia); Somerville & Ross (north Wales); JB Priestley & Beryl Bainbridge (Stoke, Liverpool, Manchester, Blackpool, Bradford, Newcastle, York, Hull); Charles Dickens (Lake District, Doncaster, London); and Johnson & Boswell (Edinburgh, Skye, Aberdeen).

*Footnotes: A Journey Round Britain in the Company of Great Writers* is published by Oneworld Publications in both hard and paperback (ISBN 978-1-78607-629-8).

### **A NEW EDITION OF *THE MOONSTONE* - AND AN OUP OFFER**

Oxford University Press have announced a new edition of *The Moonstone* using the 1871 corrected edition and which will consider the large amount of new material now available. The OUP blurb states that the introduction by Francis O'Gorman - professor of Victorian literature and head of the school of English at the University of Leeds

Sees the novel as a bravura exploration of mistaken judgements, a plot that strikingly reflected Collins's own private life, and a dazzling meditation on what can, but importantly, cannot be merely made into sense. Additional materials presented in three appendices include a cartoon reaction to the conclusion of the novel in 1875; a detailed review of the dramatized version in 1877; and the long letter of advice that Collins received on how to manage the end of the novel.

OUP are also giving away five free copies of the **previous** edition, so excellently edited by John Sutherland back in 1999. Copies will be available to the first five emails to Andrew Gasson at [apogee@apgee.co.uk](mailto:apogee@apgee.co.uk).

### ***ANCIENT ROME AND VICTORIAN MASCULINITY***

*Ancient Rome and Victorian Masculinity* by Laura Eastlake which was originally issued in book form has now been published to Oxford Scholarship Online. The book examines Victorian receptions of ancient Rome from the French Revolution to the First World War, with a specific focus on how those receptions were deployed to create useable models of masculinity. Chapters include topics on education, politics, empire, and late Victorian decadence with reference to authors like Wilkie Collins, Anthony Trollope, H. Rider Haggard, Rudyard Kipling, and others. (ISBN-13: 9780198833031).

### **SEASONS OF DARKNESS**

*Season of Darkness* by Cora Harrison is yet another new novel featuring Collins as a character. (Severn House Publishers, ISBN-10: 0727888765). Quoting a review from Kirkus, “Maid Isabella Gordon went missing shortly after hinting to her friend and fellow maid Sesina that she knew a secret a certain someone would pay handsomely to keep hidden. All too soon, Isabella’s corpse is fished from the river, and Inspector Field, the real-life inspiration for Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*, is called to investigate. Since Field’s friend Charles Dickens still remembers Isabella as a notably non-compliant tenant of Urania Cottage, a home for unfortunate young women largely underwritten by Dickens, the celebrated novelist promptly interjects himself and Wilkie Collins into the case. The pair, guided largely by Dickens’ ebullient certainty that “I’m always right when I put my mind to a matter,” decide for highly plausible reasons to focus their suspicions on Isabella’s pre-Urania years for clues to her killing. Despite a plot twist borrowed from one of Agatha Christie’s last novels, the results are never exactly surprising, but the Victorian atmosphere, filtered alternately through Sesina and Collins, is thick enough to cut with a knife. The real triumph is Harrison’s Dickens: sublimely conceited, short-tempered, self-dramatizing, often bombastic, and perfectly matched with the infinitely less self-assured Collins.”

### **A QUAIN AND CURIOUS VOLUME**

*A Quaint and Curious Volume: Tales & Poems of the Gothic* has an introduction by Sarah Perry, author of *The Essex Serpent*. The compilation includes works by Edgar Allan Poe, Christina Rossetti, Mary Shelley and, of course Wilkie whose contribution is the ever popular ‘The Dream Woman’. There are also extracts from classic gothic novels such as *Frankenstein*, *The Castle of Otranto* and *Northanger Abbey* and relatively unknown stories such as ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. (Harper Collins, ISBN: 97800008351823).

### **OPENING DOORS FOR YOUNG READERS**

*Opening Doors to Quality Writing* by Bob Cox “introduces teachers to engaging strategies which use literary heritage texts as the stimulus for excellent learning” for ages 10 to 13. Interestingly enough the first entry is ‘Night Encounter – *The Woman in White*. (<https://www.crownhouse.co.uk/publications/opening-doors-to-quality-writing1>).

### **PICTURE WORLD**

Forthcoming during 2020 will be *Picture World: Image, Aesthetic, and Victorian New Media* by Rachel Teukolsky, associate Professor of English at Vanderbilt

University. Her new book will analyse the ways that new forms of visual culture worked to shape key Victorian aesthetic concepts. Chapters consider different kinds of emergent visual media in the nineteenth century, including pictorial newspapers, photographs, stereoscopic views, illustrated magazines, and advertising posters.

### **SENSATIONAL THINGS**

A very academic study of Wilkie is *Sensational Things – Souvenirs, Keepsakes and Mementos in Wilkie Collins’s Fiction* by Sabina Fazli (Heidelberg: 2017). It does just what it says in the title. Fazli analyses the significance of objects in seven of his books from *After Dark* to *The Woman in White*. She includes the significance of hair in *Hide and Seek*, photography in *The Law and the Lady*, and keys in *The Dead Secret* which is nicely illustrated by the cover of the 1871 Smith Elder yellowback edition showing Sarah Leeson ‘furtively’ dropping a key into a well. There are also several references to the importance of letters in Collins’s fiction. Now on offer at Amazon around €10 – search ISBN 9783825369132.

### **LO SCRIGNO DI MR WRAY**

WCS member Mariaconcetta Costantini continues to contribute, as she puts it, “to circulating Collins's work among Italians” with her edition of *Mr Wray’s Cash Box*. Her fine edition of *Lo scrigno di Mr Wray, ovvero la maschera e il mistero* translated by Emilia Carmen Cavaliere is published by Croce Libreria. With a lovely cover using ‘The Skating Minister’ by Henry Raeburn and an introduction and notes by Mariaconcetta this edition is €17.90 from the publisher or search Amazon using ISBN 9788864023717.

Mariaconcetta is Professor of English Literature at D'Annunzio University of Chieti-Pescara. Her previous works include the collection of essays *Armadaile. Wilkie Collins and the dark threads of life* which she edited, published by Aracne in 2009 and *Sensation and Professionalism in the Victorian Novel* (Bern: 2015) which contains many references to works by Collins.

### **WILKIE AND THE AUTOGRAPH HUNTER**

There are several examples in the collected letters (*The Public Face*) of Wilkie’s generous replies to autograph collectors. These usually read along the lines of “I contribute with pleasure to your collection of autographs. Truly yours, Wilkie Collins.” In earlier Newsletters we have noted examples of Wilkie’s handwriting in contemporary journals. Another example has come to light, combining both aspects, in the monthly illustrated magazine, *The Cosmopolitan*, for January 1893 (Vol. XIV, p. 305).

Wilkie features in an article entitled ‘The Confessions of an Autograph Hunter’ by Charles Robinson in which the author describes “the ruses to which he will resort in order to accomplish his diabolic purpose” of extracting autographs from well-known personalities. Robinson’s method was “to ask for information on some topic of supposed interest to the person addressed, and endeavoured, as far as possible, to select subjects which would call for interesting answers” but of course, never hinting that he was angling for their autograph.

Robinson claimed that “His first victim was Wilkie Collins whom he ventured to address on the subject of his *Woman in White*, dwelling at length on Marian Halcombe, the brave woman of the story.” The article then includes a copy of Wilkie’s signature. The date, however, doesn’t make sense since Wilkie had died in 1889. The letter in question is the one written by Robinson’s father, Nugent, who actually corresponded with Wilkie in 1860 [letter 0370]. He received a reply dated 28 August “acknowledging your very kind expression of interest in my story.”

### **THE HANDS THAT DID THE WRITING**

1893 was obviously a good year for Wilkie as he also featured in a two-part article, ‘Hands’, in Vol. V of *The Strand Magazine* for January to June. Along with several other examples, the article shows a plaster cast of Wilkie’s hands:

Highly gruesome, but not less fascinating, are the hands of the late Wilkie Collins. ... In this connection, a gentleman who had known the novelist in life, on being shown the cast, exclaimed: Yes, those are the hands, I assure you: none other could have written the “*Woman in White*.”

The article features on pp. 119 to 123 and 295 to 301 in Vol. V of *The Strand Magazine: An Illustrated Monthly* for January to June. 1893. The magazine, of course, is better known for the appearances of Sherlock Holmes. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle acknowledged in his own notebooks that Collins was one influence that helped create his detective. Holmes emulates many of the features of both Sergeant Cuff in *The Moonstone* (1868) and the pipe-smoking Old Sharon in ‘My Lady’s Money’ (1877). In this latter story, Felix Sweetsir’s ‘Exhaustive System of Reasoning’ is remarkably like Holmes’ dictum that ‘when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.’ The notion of a ‘three-pipe problem’ was introduced by Uncle Joseph in *The Dead Secret* (1857).

### **COLLINS AT AUCTION**

The Heritage Auctions online sale of 5 September featured several early editions of Collins together with an 1888 autograph letter about *The Legacy of Cain*. Most

items were early US editions including *No Name*, *The Queen of Hearts*, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. The high spot, however, was a first English edition of *After Dark* (1856) with a presentation inscription to W. S. Herrick. Collins noted in his preface “I must also gratefully acknowledge an obligation of another kind to the accomplished artist, W. S. Herrick, to whom I am indebted for the curious and interesting facts on which the tales of “The Terribly Strange Bed” and “The Yellow Mask” are founded.” Herrick was a noted portrait painter who added his ownership signature to Volume II. The copy sold for the mighty sum of \$13,750 which included a 25% buyer’s premium.

On 24 September Sotheby’s held a more traditional auction of the unrivalled Charles Dickens Collection by Lawrence Drizen. This included the dramatic version from 1866 of *The Frozen Deep* with numerous additions and corrections in Collins’s hand which sold for the spectacular sum of £70,000 plus buyer’s premium. The sale also included two copies of the 1867 dramatic version of *No Thoroughfare* which went for the more modest £1,200 together with the 1890 book edition of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*.

### **WOMAN IN WHITE BRACELET SELLS FOR £20,000**

A Victorian bracelet – loosely connected to Wilkie’s novel *The Woman in White* – was sold for £20,000 on 30 October 2019. The gold bracelet depicts four members of the Nottidge family who became notorious in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century for incarcerating the perfectly sane Louisa Nottidge (1802-1858) in an asylum in 1846. Earlier she and three sisters had travelled to live with the religious cult Agapemone in Somerset. Her sisters married priests of the cult but Louisa did not and was abducted – or ‘rescued’ as they saw it – by her brother and brother-in-law and sent to Moorcroft House lunatic asylum in Hillingdon. She escaped, was recaptured, released again and then successfully sued her family for false imprisonment. She returned to Agapemone where she died in 1858. Her story, widely covered in the press at the time, was said to be one inspiration for *The Woman in White*.

The bracelet exceeded its estimate of £8,000 to £12,000 and the hammer fell at £16,000 which, with 25% buyer’s premium, totalled £20,000 for the winning bid. [www.woolleyandwallis.co.uk/departments/jewellery/jw301019/view-lot/1485/](http://www.woolleyandwallis.co.uk/departments/jewellery/jw301019/view-lot/1485/) And for more on the Nottidge family see the WCS Newsletter for Spring 2012.

### **EWANRIGG HALL AND LIMMERIDGE HOUSE**

Also for sale at auction (eBay this July) was a letter dated 1773 from Bridget Christian to Ewanrigg Hall, the likely model for Limmeridge House in *The Woman in White*. The house was the ancestral home of the Christian family

(Fletcher Christian of mutiny fame) and was originally built around 1688 and rebuilt in stone about 1753 with a large drawing room, a breakfast room, library and eight good-sized bedrooms. It had views across the Solway Firth and the Scottish mountains. Collins must have noted the location for future use during his walking tour of Cumberland with Dickens in 1857.

## **QUOTATIONS FROM COLLINS**

Also for sale on eBay over recent weeks have been various household items such as mugs and storage tins over-printed with quotations from Collins. These included “No sensible man ever engages, unprepared, in a fencing match of words with a woman” from *The Woman in White*; and “My hour for tea is half-past five, and my buttered toast waits for nobody.” These items are produced by Stamp Press and some are now available through Amazon.

Not included in the ebay quotes, but highly appropriate for this festive time of year, is “My Weight has been the grand misfortune of my life” from 'The Fatal Cradle' (1861); a personal favourite is “It is the grand misfortune of my life that nobody will let me alone” by Mr Fairlie in *The Woman in White*. More Wilkie quotations can be found at [www.wilkie-collins.info](http://www.wilkie-collins.info).

## **CHRISTMAS GHOSTS**

Writer and artist Leanne Shapton, who recently published a collection of ghost stories, collected nine short quotes describing ghosts for *The New York Times* (27 December 2019) including this description by Walter Hartright of Anne Catherick in that famous meeting on the high road

She held a small bag in her hand: and her dress — bonnet, shawl and gown all of white — was, so far as I could guess, certainly not composed of very delicate or very expensive materials. (*The Woman in White*, Chapter IV).

## **THE LIGHTHOUSE IN NEW ZEALAND**

WCS member Annabel Gormack writes about the amateur production of Wilkie’s play *The Lighthouse*, which she directed for the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship Players at Hagley House, Christchurch, New Zealand on Saturday 2 November 2019.

Having a few years ago studied and performed Wilkie Collins’s *The Frozen Deep*, our branch decided to have a go at the first play Collins wrote, *The Lighthouse*. This play was the first occasion on which he and his friend Charles Dickens collaborated to produce a dramatic work, performed for an invited audience at the “smallest theatre in the world” at Dickens’s home,

Tavistock House, in 1855. Dickens threw himself wholeheartedly into the production and of course took the leading role of Aaron Gurnock.

Our crew were no less enthusiastic, co-operating to find or make costumes, stage sets, sound effects and props. We held several rehearsals, with much hilarity on occasion. However, on the day, our cast performed in great earnest, faithfully recreating the atmosphere at the Eddystone Lighthouse where three lighthouse keepers are waiting out a storm with food supplies exhausted. Their only hope of rescue lies with their brave family and friends ashore who must put out to save them before they perish. A break in the storm allows the rescue attempt to proceed. Meanwhile Aaron Gurnock, played by Graeme Yardley, has confessed a dreadful secret to his son and fellow lighthouse keeper, Martin Gurnock (John Sullivan). Martin is in despair at hearing his father's tale of supposed murder of an innocent woman and the disposal of her body. Martin feels he cannot wed his bride-to be, Phoebe Dale (Ros Calvert). Nor can he face his soon-to-be father-in-law, Jacob Dale (Peter Lewis) who is the third of the lighthouse keepers trapped together.

Enter the crew from shore, Capt. Furley (Vanessa Grenfell), Sailor (Rose Oakley) and Fishermen (Relda & Henry Oakley). Along with them comes brave Phoebe who cannot understand Martin's distant attitude towards her. While the keepers are enjoying their first good meal in a long time, she sings to them 'The Song of the Wreck', which was performed by Dickens' daughter Mamie in the first production. We were doubly fortunate to have the kind permission of Dr Caroline Radcliffe from the University of Birmingham, UK, to use her adaptation of this song and to have a soprano in Ros Calvert (who played Phoebe Dale) to sing it. All is made well with the arrival of Lady Grace, played by Pauline Francis-Fox, who is shipwrecked on the rocks just below the lighthouse and reveals herself to be the woman who was attacked and left for dead at Aaron Gurnock's farmhouse full seven years before. Aaron had no part in the attack but helped her attacker hide her body in a sea cave. The incident has haunted him ever since but Lady Grace did not die, she was rescued from the cave and taken to France. Now she claims the right to forgive Aaron and the wedding of Martin and Phoebe can proceed. All's well that ends well.

Our cast received compliments from the audience who felt that Collins's script was clear and dramatic and swept you along in spite of 21<sup>st</sup> century sensibilities about the plausibility of the plot! We all felt it was much easier to follow than Dickens's early efforts as a playwright, all of which we have attempted in previous years. It is fair to say that there are many Collins admirers amongst our company and *The Lighthouse* may well have added a few more. It was great fun for myself and my right-hand woman, Kathleen Campbell, to produce. To cap off the production two of the cast, Pauline Francis-Fox and Vanessa Grenfell, had produced a delicious 'lighthouse' cake which we enjoyed at afternoon tea following the performance. We send a big thank you to the Wilkie Collins Society, UK, for their support and for allowing us to use their published script for our performance.

### ***THE WOMAN IN WHITE BY THE SKIPTON PLAYERS***

Dramatisations of *The Woman in White* continue to appeal to audiences. In October the Constance Cox adaptation was enjoyed by audiences at Skipton Little Theatre. "*The Woman in White* has lost none of its power in the century-and-a-half since it was written" said one preview. WCS member Barbara Speak has written this review for the Newsletter.



On Saturday 5th October I went to see the Skipton Players' production of *The Woman in White* at the Skipton Little Theatre in North Yorkshire. The theatre is quite small with a seating capacity of just 70 so the atmosphere is both intimate and friendly. In this production all the scenes took place at Limmeridge House so changes were made to the storyline in order to accommodate this. As a faithful adaptation of the *Woman in White* it was far from perfect but the actors did a great job of portraying the characters and, despite the limitations of the theatre, the story came through strongly and was certainly very well received by the audience.

## **FRAUDS**

References to Wilkie Collins are found in many odd places. During some research into Victorian frauds he was found mentioned in *Guilty Money* by Ranald Michie (2009) who cites six of Wilkie's books.

The first two are used to support Michie's view that early in the nineteenth century the City of London was seen in a favourable light. He cites *A Rogue's Life* (1856) which 'omitted any potential areas of wrongdoing associated with the City' (p. 35). In *No Thoroughfare* (1867) Michie says 'the principle character was a respectable City merchant'. (p. 62). His next quotation is from *The Moonstone*, which has a very modern ring.

The upshot of it was, that Rosanna Spearman had been a thief, and not being of the sort that gets up Companies in the City, and robs from thousands, instead of robbing only from one, the law laid hold of her, and the prison and reformatory followed the lead of the law. (*The Moonstone*, first period, Chapter 4).

Ten years later in *The Haunted Hotel* (1878) Henry Westwick recommends to his old nanny that she invests her unexpected £400 legacy into a hotel in Venice where 'the Directors have every reason to believe that ten per cent or more will ultimately be realised to the shareholders' which also sounds rather like a modern fraud. The nurse was dismissive of only earning three or four percent in Government bonds, known as 'the Funds'

'If you put your hundred pounds into the Funds, you will get between three and four pounds a year.' The nurse shook her head. 'Three or four pounds a year? That won't do! I want more than that'. (*The Haunted Hotel*, Chapter XII).

That exchange is but a sub-plot to the story of an underlying insurance fraud in which Lord Montbarry was murdered to secure for his widow a £1,000 life insurance pay out.

Ten years on, in *The Evil Genius* (1886), Captain Bennydeck took the opposite view when he invested a legacy from his father – the money for a house he had sold.

My idea is to invest it in the Funds, and to let it thrive at interest, until I grow older, and retire perhaps from service in the Navy. The later years of my life may well be devoted to the founding of a charitable institution, which I myself can establish and direct. (*The Evil Genius*, Chapter XXXII).

Wilkie based his final book, *Blind Love* (1889), on a true City fraud. But it is his depiction of retired City merchant Mr Henley which Michie comments on. Wilkie warns he was a ‘heartless man’ and

the successful speculations, by means of which Mr. Henley had accumulated his wealth, had raised against him enemies, who had spread scandalous reports which had never been completely refuted. (*Blind Love* First Period, Chapter 6).

Wilkie has Henley investing his money in a ‘large landed property on the north of London’ including a farm near Muswell Hill. Michie says ‘This acquisition of landed estates by the nouveau riche of the city brought them into growing conflicts with the upper echelons of the landed elite (p. 121).

Strangely Michie omits Wilkie’s first foray into fraud. In the 1856 story ‘A Paradoxical Experience’ (*Household Words* 13 November 1858, pp. 516-522 and later published as ‘Brother Morgan’s Story of Fauntleroy’ in *The Queen of Hearts* 1859) Wilkie wraps the story around the real life fraudster Henry Fauntleroy who was a partner in his family banking business which ran into difficulties in 1824 following the failure of firms to which it had lent money. To try to rescue the bank, Fauntleroy forges documents but is caught. The bank closes and all its customers lose their deposits. So far so true. But Wilkie asserts a good side to Fauntleroy who some years earlier had helped a young man start his business and now contrives to warn him of the collapse allowing him to withdraw his entire capital of some £1,500 (worth around £150,000 today) literally at the last minute before the bank pulled down the shutters. On 30 November 1824 Fauntleroy became the last person to be hanged for forgery.

## **COLLINS FAMILY SERVANTS**

Wilkie Collins appears in four censuses from 1851 to 1881 along with various members of his family and servants. One is Harriet Montague, a ‘house servant’ at 12 Harley Street, born in London and aged 16 on census day, 7 April 1861. At one time she was misidentified as Harriet Graves, the daughter of Caroline Graves (who incidentally was wrongly recorded in the same census as Caroline Collins, Wilkie’s wife). But Harriet Graves was in fact at a boarding school in Farnham on Census night (see Paul Lewis, ‘Educating Elizabeth Harriet Graves’, Wilkie Collins Society, May 2010).

Harriet Montague had presumably replaced the recently dismissed maid Wilkie mentioned a few months earlier who was the junior servant to Mary Wilding, aged 26, also listed as ‘house servant’ in the 1861 census.

We have another servant – a hybrid white-haired young person engaged to help Mary – going! The hybrid and Mary don’t agree. I am sorry to lose the hybrid. She sees me into the water-closet and out of it regularly – and tries the door every time I make water. I have reason to believe that the hybrid must have seen My Person! ([0368] to Charles Ward, 14 August 1860).

Harriet Montague was baptised on 20 July 1844 at St Mary Abbots Church in Kensington. Her parents are listed as Mary and William, a labourer. They lived in Upper Uxbridge Street in Kensington where presumably Harriet was born. William and Mary were both born around 1812 in Middlesex, he in Ruislip and she in West Drayton. In the 1851 census they had six children with them from John aged 14 to Emma aged 1. They lived at 4 Uxbridge Street with another family of eight – coachman Thomas Hoclee and his wife Ann. This census, taken on 30 March 1851, gives Harriet’s age as 7. By 1861 when Harriet was Wilkie’s junior house servant, the census shows Mary as a widow, living in Silver Street, Kensington with her 23 year old son George. She gave her occupation as laundress, his as painter. By 1871 Mary was back in Uxbridge Street at number 35 working as a seamstress and living with her youngest child Emma aged 21. Emma, like her sister Harriet was a domestic servant. No further records of Harriet Montague have been traced. But even these few details give a brief insight into the family and early life of one domestic servant who knew Wilkie at that time in Harley Street.

### **MUTUALLY ASSURED FURSTRUCTION**

The most obscure reference to Wilkie was in an article by the New York writer and lawyer Tyler Grant in the USA edition of *The Spectator* late in 2019. He wrote a humorous piece suggesting the USA government should kidnap all pandas residing in America to force China to the negotiating table. He said it was low risk as China would not ‘go to war over a panda – mutually assured furstruction, as Wilkie Collins would have written’.

This can only be a reference to Wilkie’s prescient letter in 1870 to his friend Emil Lehman expressing his horror at the start of the Franco-Prussian war

“what is to be said of the progress of humanity? Here are the nations still ready to slaughter each other, at the command of one miserable wretch whose interest it is to set them fighting! Is this the nineteenth century? or the ninth? Are we before the time of Christ or after? I begin to believe in only one civilising influence – the discovery one of these days, of a destructive agent so terrible that War shall mean annihilation, and men’s fears shall force them to keep the peace.” ([1013] to Emil Lehmann, 7 August 1870).

Where Tyler Grant came across this foretelling of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century Cold War, when the phrase MAD or Mutually Assured Destruction was coined, or how he expected his readers to recognise it remains a mystery! Read the whole piece by searching online for ‘America should kidnap pandas.’

### **COLLINS IN CBS RADIO MYSTERY THEATER**

Pierre Tissot Van Patot from Holland has recently discovered the CBS Radio Mystery Theater of ‘old time radio shows’ from the ‘golden age of radio’ - mainly the 1970s. There are 1,399 shows in all but those of particular Collins interest are episode 120 which features ‘The Dream Woman’ and episode 256 with ‘Mad Monkton’. The sound quality is rather poor but they can be downloaded for free from <http://www.cbsrmt.com>.

### **COLLINS ON RADIO 4EXTRA**

As predicted in our Spring Newsletter, Collins has made two recent repeat appearances on Radio 4 Extra – with excellent sound quality. The first was the broadcast of *No Name* (1862) in six episodes which was transmitted in October. This adaptation was originally broadcast in January 2008 with a cast including the late Jack May as Captain Wragge and John Moffatt as the Vanstone family solicitor, Mr Pendril.

More topically, in five episodes from 3 to 7 December we heard ‘A House to Let’, originally the Extra Christmas Number of *Household Words* for December 1858. This was written in collaboration with Dickens; Collins contributed the short story, ‘Trotles Report’ together with parts of the opening and closing framework narratives.

### **SUBWAY NOOK**

Rivka Galchen, a Canadian-American novelist and writer, explained in September in the *Los Angeles Times* that the subway was as good as her bath for reading novels with no one to disturb her:

I recently reread Wilkie Collins’ “The Moonstone,” a solid week’s worth of subway rides. The epistolary form of the 1868 novel matched the punctuated reading of the subway nook.

Paul Lewis  
Andrew Gasson

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