

September, 1987

For publication

Wilkie Collins' "Intimacies"

Laurence Ince, in his interesting article in the last issue of the Wilkie Collins Society Journal, made a brave attempt to trace the background of Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd. He managed to find useful traces of Caroline (though, alas, he reversed the occupations of her father and that of her husband's father).

On Martha Rudd, I am afraid, he has come a cropper. She was not born in London; she was not the Martha Elizabeth Rudd he suggests; and at the time Mr Ince suggests she first met Wilkie Collins in the early 1850s, Martha was less than ten years old.

I would like to give you the full facts now. They are, however, contained in the manuscript of a book now in the hands of my publisher, Allison and Busby (part of W.H. Allen), entitled *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*, to be published in London in June, 1988.

William M. Clarke
Greenwich, England.
September, 1987.

January, 1988

Laurence Ince replies:-

I am grateful to receive Mr. Clark's views on my recent article regarding Wilkie Collins' 'Intimacies'. With Mr. Clark's book to be published in 1988 and Kirk Beetz's collected letters in 1989 we can perhaps look forward to entertaining and informative years leading up to the centenary of Collins' death in 1989.

I would of course like to know Mr. Clark's sources of information for if there is one thing that I have learnt while researching into Collins' life is to be very careful when examining the evidence. Wilkie Collins and his associates have left a very difficult trail to follow with much false information being given on official forms.

I tried to achieve two main goals in my article, one was to discover the name and background to Wilkie's real 'woman in white' - which I believe I did. The second was to investigate the true life circumstances to the novel 'Basil'. Robinson and I agree with the premise that Collins had undergone a traumatic emotional experience which resulted in the writing of the novel. Again we must hark back to Seccombe's statement that, 'intimacies formed as a young man led to his being harassed after he was famous'. This must take us back to the late 1840s and early 1850s. If Elizabeth Compton was the first proven intimacy, who was (or were) the others? Perhaps at this juncture I can introduce the shadow of a third intimacy. Recently I examined the will left by Wilkie Collins. This I regarded to be rather a chore as both Robinson and Ashley quote from the will and I thought most of the interesting material would be well known already. However, I was astounded to come across the following passage in the will,

I also desire that the annuity of twenty one pounds now paid by me to Mrs. Eliza Collins Jones of N^o. 4 Upper Mount Pleasant Avenue, Rathmines, Dublin shall in conformity with the terms on which (by my letter to her I have consented to pay it) cease on my death.

For what reasons would Wilkie Collins be paying a yearly sum of £21 to a lady in Dublin? It is surely not a coincidence that the woman's middle name is Collins.

Could this provision be the result of the harassment Collins had to bear in his later life? Was Eliza Collins Jones the daughter of Wilkie Collins and a result of the intimacies of the early 1850s? Let us hope that by 1989 the true nature of Wilkie's private life and its bearing on his novel writing is truly revealed.

THE SECRET LIFE OF WILKIE COLLINS

William Clarke's forthcoming biography, The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins, referred to on page [] is now due for publication in London in June by Allison and Busby, part of the W. H. Allen group, at a price of £14.95. The Society is arranging for a discount for members.

In discussing the coverage of the book with Andrew Gasson, the Society's secretary in London, William Clarke has recently explained for the first time why he has written the book and, briefly, what it will contain. He is married to Faith, a great grand-daughter of Wilkie Collins and Martha Rudd (Dawson). And he has persuaded his wife and the Dawson family to provide what they know of Martha.

He has also traced the present descendants of Caroline, Collins' other mistress as well as those of Collins' solicitor, who married Caroline's daughter Harriet. All have agreed to co-operate with him in piecing together Collins' complex private relationships.

The book will contain the first published photographs of Caroline (discovered in a photograph album in a bottom drawer in Streatham, London) and of Martha.

The Dawson family had been reticent about their relationship with Collins largely because of the natural sensitivity of Collins' two daughters, Harriet and Marion. They never married and died in 1955 within a few months of each other. Martha had died earlier in 1919. Collins' son, William Charles, who died young, had two children Lionel Charles Dawson and Helen Martha ("Bobbie") Dawson. Both died last year. Faith Clarke (nee Dawson), the daughter of Lionel, is now the only surviving "Dawson".

Clarke's biography will concentrate on Collins' private life rather ^{than} Collins' stature as a writer.