



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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*All The Year Round*  
Non-Fiction by Wilkie Collins (I)

Sure to be Healthy Wealthy and Wise  
Royal Academy in Bed  
New View of Society

Introduction © Paul Lewis 2011

**The Wilkie Collins Society**  
**April 2011**

# *All The Year Round*

## Non-fiction by Wilkie Collins

### Introduction

In 1859 Dickens closed *Household Words* after a row with his publisher and launched a new periodical called *All The Year Round* which he published himself.

Wilkie Collins wrote less non-fiction for the new periodical as his novel writing career took off. He published three long novels in *All The Year Round* – *The Woman in White* (1859-60) *No Name* 1862-63), and *The Moonstone* (1867-68). Only *Armadale* of the big four novels of this era was not published by Dickens after Wilkie was tempted by an advance of £5000 to publish in *The Cornhill* (1865-66).

When *All The Year Round* was launched in 1859 Dickens was keen to make an impact with his new venture. Wilkie Collins was one of his trusted staff members and he contributed several pieces in the first few months before his time became dominated by writing *The Woman in White*.

There is no contemporary record of who wrote what for *All The Year Round*. The ‘office book’ which listed contributors and their payments has never been found and the ‘office set’ of the periodical with the names of authors written against each piece disappeared in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. So we have to rely on other evidence.

There are three major sources of attribution.

- *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1969) attributes 16 pieces to Collins though seven have a ‘?’ next to them. It omits three pieces published separately by Collins.
- Ella Ann Oppenlander *Dickens’ All The Year Round: Descriptive Index and Contributor List* New York 1984. She identifies twenty pieces by Collins.
- *New Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (1999) also identifies twenty pieces, many sourced from the 1969 edition and Oppenlander.

Between them, these three sources attribute 23 non-fiction pieces in *All The Year Round* to Wilkie Collins. Of these, only seven are clearly tied to him by external evidence.

Three were included in Collins's book *My Miscellanies* (1863) – a collection of pieces published under Collins's name from *Household Words* and *All The Year Round*.

1. Pray Employ Major Namby! (*ATYR* 4 June 1859 pp. 136-141)
2. Portrait of an Author. (*ATYR* 18 June 1859 pp. 184-189 and 25 June pp. 205-210)
3. The Bachelor Bedroom. (*ATYR* 6 August 1859 pp. 355-360)

Two were clearly mentioned by Charles Dickens in letters.

4. Sure to be Healthy Wealthy and Wise (*ATYR* 30 April 1859 pp. 5-10)  
see CD to WC 9 April 1859 - see Pilgrim *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, IX pp. 48-49.
5. The Dead Lock in Italy (8 December 1866 *ATYR* pp. 510-514)  
see CD to James Birtles 25 November 1866 Pilgrim XI p. 277

One more was mentioned by Charles Dickens in letters referring to a joint effort between Dickens and Collins.

6. Occasional Register (*ATYR* 30 April 1859 pp. 10-11)  
see CD to WC 9 April 1859 Pilgrim IX pp. 48-49 and CD to Wills 11 April 1859 Pilgrim IX p. 49. In addition Frederic Kitton who saw the office set of *All The Year Round* "in which each article has appended the name of the author written by a member of the printing staff" says that Dickens wrote paras 1, 6, 9, 10, and 15. We can infer that Collins wrote paras 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18 (*Minor Works of Charles Dickens* 1900 pp. 138 and 142).

Another was mentioned and may be a joint effort involving Wilkie Collins

7. Occasional Register (*ATYR* 7 May 1859 pp. 35-36) may have been written partly by Collins. Some was written by Edmund Yates and some by Dickens (see CD to Wills 11 April 1859 Pilgrim IX p. 49 and CD to Yates 19 April 1859 Pilgrim IX p. 52.) Kitton says CD wrote paras 2, 5, 7, 8, 12 leaving 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, 10,11 to be shared between Collins and Yates.

Of the remaining 16 pieces, three are tied to other people by clear evidence and identified as such by Oppenlander.

8. The Tattlesnivele Bleater (*ATYR* 31 December 1859 pp. 226-229) is by Charles Dickens. See Kitton, *op cit* p. 139 and Oppenlander p. 263.
9. An Unreported Speech (*ATYR* 16 November 1861 pp. 179-181) is by Wilkie's brother Charles Allston Collins. See CD to John Leech 4 December 1861, Pilgrim IX p. 533. Oppenlander p. 256.
10. Going into Housekeeping (8 July 1865 pp. 564-567) is by Andrew Halliday and is collected in his *Town and Country Sketches* 1866. Oppenlander p. 271.

Two others are probably by Wilkie's brother Charles. He used the phrase 'Lumbago Terrace' to refer to his home in London in two pieces that are undoubtedly by him – 'An Unreported Speech' (see above) and 'Our Eye-Witness Among the Buildings' (2 June 1860 pp. 188-192 which was later collected in *The Eye-Witness* 1860) and the same phrase appears in two pieces ascribed by NCBEL to Wilkie Collins

11. Boxing-Day (*ATYR* 22 December 1860 pp. 258-260)
12. A Night in the Jungle (*ATYR* 3 August 1861 (pp. 444-449)

Another piece is most likely to be by Charles Collins – it reads like him and Wilkie already had one piece in that issue, 'Portrait of an Author'.

13. My Advisers (*ATYR* 18 June 1859 pp. 181-183)

And a second piece is almost certainly by Andrew Halliday

14. To Let (*ATYR* 18 June 1864 pp. 444-447) is a pair with his 'Going into Housekeeping' (see above).

Of the remaining nine pieces, four are almost certainly not by Wilkie Collins as he was too busy writing *The Woman in White* to be writing non-fiction pieces as well. They are

15. Small Shot–Cooks at College (29 October 1859 pp 6-7)
16. My Boys (28 January 1860 pp. 326-329) is not Collins's style
17. My Girls (11 February 1860 pp. 370-374) is not Collins's style or sentiment
18. Vidocq, French Detective (14 and 21 July 1860 pp. 331-336 and 355-360) does not read like Collins and he is at a crucial time for finishing *The Woman in White*. This piece could be by Charles Collins – he received a payment of £9-9s from Wills on 11 August 1860 which would be the normal amount for 18 columns in *All The Year Round*. Vidocq occupies 20. Oppenlander cites Phillip Collins's unpublished notes for the WC attribution.

Two remaining pieces are of unknown authorship but there is no evidence that they are by Collins.

19. A Trial at Toulouse (15 February 1862) is wrongly attributed in Pilgrim to Charles Collins (X pp. 26-27 and n.9). In fact that letter refers to 'The Cost of Coal' (*ATYR* 15 February 1862 pp. 492-496). See [3081] WC to Wills 27 January 1862 "Charley ought to make something good of that terrible colliery subject" (*Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins, Addenda & Corrigenda* (4), Wilkie Collins Society 2008 pp. 4-5).
20. Notes of Interrogation (10 May 1862 pp. 210-212) is not Wilkie Collins's style and he was very busy at that time writing *No Name*. The piece uses a couple of ideas repeated in 'Suggestions from a Maniac' (see below).

That leaves three other pieces that are almost certainly by Collins based on style and internal evidence from the pieces themselves. They are

21. Royal Academy in Bed (*ATYR* 28 May 1859 pp. 105-109) the style, the views, the personal details such as that the author has been visiting the Royal Academy summer exhibition since 1835 tie this firmly to Collins.
22. New View of Society (*ATYR* 20 August 1859 pp. 396-399) the style, the subject, and the view of 'dressing' ties this to Collins.
23. Suggestions from a Maniac (*ATYR* 13 February 1864 pp. 9-13) the style and the reference to Thomas Idle (a name used for Collins in *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*).

This analysis identifies eight pieces by Collins (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 21, 22, 23) and two pieces partly by him (6, 7). The rest are certainly – or at least almost certainly – not by him.

The three pieces reproduced here – nos 4, 21, and 22 – are all from the early days of *All The Year Round*. Not only do they fit Wilkie Collins's style and interests, they illustrate why Dickens trusted him at this important time.

**Paul Lewis**  
**April 2011**

## SURE TO BE HEALTHY, WEALTHY AND WISE.

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I HAVE much pleasure in announcing myself as the happiest man alive. My character is, I have reason to believe, new to the world. Novelists, Dramatists, and Entertainers of an easily-amused public have never yet, to my knowledge, laid hands on me. Society is obscurely aware of my existence; is frequently disposed to ask questions about me; is always wanting to get face to face with me, and see what I am like; and has never been fortunate enough yet to make the desired discovery. I come forward of my own accord, actuated by motives of the most purely amiable sort, to dispel the mists in which I have hitherto been hidden, and to gratify the public by disclosing myself. Behold me, then, self-confessed and self-announced—the long-sought type; the representative Individual; the interesting Man who believes in Advertisements.

In using the word Advertisements, I mean to imply all those public announcements (made chiefly through the medium of the newspapers) which address personal interests, and which require an exercise of personal faith in the individual who reads them. Advertisements which divert an unthinking public, which excite contemptuous astonishment in superficial minds, which set flippant people asking each other, "Who believes in this? Where are the people who can possibly be taken in by it?" and so on, are precisely the Advertisements to which I now allude. To my wise belief in these beneficent public offers of assistance to humanity, I am indebted for the unruffled mental tranquillity in which my life—a model life, as I venture to think it—is now passed. I see my fellow-creatures around me the dupes of their own fatal incredulity; worn by cares, which never trouble me; beset by doubts, from which I have escaped for ever—I see this spectacle of general anxiety and general wretchedness; and I find it invariably associated with a sarcastic suspicion, an irreverent disregard of those advertised roads to happiness and prosperity along which I have travelled, in my own personal case, with such undeniable and such astonishing results. My nature has been soft from infancy. My bosom is animated by a perpetual glow of philanthropy. I behold my species suffering, in all directions, through its own disastrous sharpness—and I compassionately come forward, in consequence, to persuade humanity that its business in this world is, not to make itself miserable by fighting with troubles, but to keep itself healthy, wealthy, and wise, by answering Advertisements.

I ask, believe me, very little. Faith and a few postage stamps—I want nothing more to regenerate the civilised world. With these treasures in ourselves; and with (to quote a few widely-known advertisements)

“Graphiology,” “Ten Pounds weekly realised by either Sex,” “Matrimony Made Easy,” and “The Future Foretold,” all gently illuminating our path through life, we may amble forward along our flowery ways, and never be jolted, never be driven back, never be puzzled about our right road, from the beginning of the journey to the end. Take my own case, as an instance; and hear me while I record the results of personal experience.

I shall abstain, at the outset, from quoting any examples to establish the connexion between advertisements and health; because I may fairly assume, from the notoriously large sale of advertised medicines, that the sick public is well aware of the inestimable benefit to be derived from an implicit confidence in quacks. The means, however, of becoming, not healthy only, but wise and wealthy as well, by dint of believing in advertisements, are far less generally known. To this branch of the subject I may, therefore, address myself, with the encouraging conviction that I am occupying comparatively new ground.

Allow me, to begin by laying down two first principles. No man can feel comfortably wise, until he is on good terms with himself; and no man can, rationally speaking, be on good terms with himself until he knows himself.

And how is he to know himself? I may be asked. Quite easily, I answer, by accepting the means of information offered in the following terms, and in all the newspapers, by a benefactress of mankind:

“Know Thyself! The Original Graphiologist, Miss Blank, continues her interesting and useful delineations of character, from examination of the handwriting, in a style peculiarly her own, and which can be but badly imitated by the ignorant pretenders and self-styled professors who have lately laid claim to a knowledge of this beautiful science. Persons desirous of knowing their own character, or that of any friend, must send a specimen of writing, stating sex and age, or supposed age, with fourteen uncut penny postage stamps, to Miss Blank, for which will be returned a detail of the gifts, defects, talents, tastes, affections, &c., of the writer, with other things previously unsuspected, calculated to guide in the everyday affairs of life,” &c. &c.

This advertisement is no invention of my own. Excepting the lady’s name, it is a true copy of an original, which does really appear in all the newspapers.

Off went my handwriting, and my fourteen uncut stamps, by the next post. Back, in a day or two (for Graphiology takes its time), came that inestimable revelation of my character which will keep me to the last day of my life on the best and highest terms with myself. I incorporate my own



notes with the letter, as an unquestionable guarantee of the truth of its assertions, and a pleasing evidence, likewise, of its effect upon my mind on a first reading:

“The handwriting of our correspondent is wanting in firmness and precision.” (Solely in consequence of my having a bad pen.) “There is apparent insincerity towards those who do not know you, but it is only putting a covering on your really warm heart.” (How true!) “Large-minded, and inclined to be very forgiving. Generous, but not very open.” (Well, if I must be one or the other, and not both together, I would rather be generous than open—for who can blame the closed heart when accompanied by the open hand?) “Of sterling integrity and inflexible perseverance.” (Just so!) “You are clever in whatever you undertake—kindly—original—vivacious—full of glee and spirit.” (Myself!—I blush to own it, but this is myself, drawn to the life!) “You conceal your real nature not so much from hypocrisy as prudence—yet there is nothing sordid or mean about you.” (I should think not, indeed!) “You show least when you appear most open, and yet you are candid and artless.” (Too true—alas, too true!) “You are good-humoured, but it partakes more of volatile liveliness than wit.” (I do not envy the nature of the man who thinks this a defect.) “There is a melancholy tenderness pervades your manner” (there is, indeed!)—”when succouring any one requiring your aid, which is at variance with your general tone. In disposition you are refined and sensitive.”

With this brief, gratifying, and neatly-expressed sentence, the estimate of my character ended. It has been as genuinely copied from a genuine original as the specimen which precedes it; and it was accompanied by a pamphlet presented gratis, on the “Management of the Human Hair.” Apparently, there had been peculiarities in my handwriting which had betrayed to the unerring eye of the Graphiologist, that my hair was not totally free from defects; and the pamphlet was a delicate way of hinting at the circumstance, and at the remedial agents to which I might look for relief. But this is a minor matter, and has nothing to do with the great triumph of Graphiology, which consists in introducing us to ourselves, on terms that make us inestimably precious to ourselves, for the trifling consideration of fourteenpenn’orth of postage stamps. To a perfectly unprejudiced—that is to say, to a wisely credulous mind—such a science as this carries its own recommendation along with it. Comment is superfluous—except in the form of stamps transmitted to the Graphiologist. I may continue the record of my personal experiences.

Having started, as it were, afresh in life, with a new and improved opinion of myself—having discovered that I am clever in whatever I undertake, kindly, original, vivacious, full of glee and spirit, and that my few faults are so essentially modest and becoming as to be more of the nature of second-rate merits than of positive defects—I am naturally in that bland and wisely contented frame of mind which peculiarly fits a man to undertake the choice of his vocation in life, with the certainty of doing the fullest justice to himself. At this new point in my career, I look around me once again among my sceptical and unhappy fellow-mortals. What turbulence, what rivalry, what heart-breaking delays, disappointments, and discomfitures do I not behold among the disbelievers in advertisements the dupes of incredulity, who are waiting for prizes in the lottery of professional existence! Here is a man vegetating despondingly in a wretched curacy; here is another, pining briefless at the unproductive Bar; here is a third, slaving away his youth at a desk, on the chance of getting a partnership, if he lives to be a middle-aged man. Inconceivable infatuation! Every one of these victims of prejudice and routine sees the advertisements—as I see them. Every one might answer the following announcement, issued by a disinterested lover of his species—as I answer it:

“TEN POUNDS WEEKLY.—May be permanently realised by either sex, with each pound expended. Particulars clearly shown that these incomes are so well secured to those investing that to fail in realising them is impossible. Parties may commence with small investments, and by increasing them out of their profits, can, with unerring certainty, realise an enormous income. No partnership, risk, liability, or embarking in business. Incontestable authorities given in proof of these statements. Enclose a directed stamped envelope to,” &c. &c.

All this information for a penny stamp! It is offered—really offered in the terms quoted above—in the advertising columns of half the newspapers in England; especially in the cheap newspapers, which have plenty of poor readers, hungry for any little addition to their scanty incomes. Would anybody believe that we persist in recognising the clerical profession, the medical profession, the legal profession, and that the Ten-Pounds-Weekly profession is, as yet, unacknowledged among us!

Well, I despatch my directed envelope. The reply is returned to me in the form of two documents, one lithographed and one printed, and both so long that they generously give me, at the outset, a good shilling's worth of reading for my expenditure of a penny stamp. The commercial pivot on

which the structure of my enormous future income revolves, I find, on perusal of the documents—the real documents, mind, not my imaginary substitutes for them—to be a “FABRIC”—described as somewhat similar in appearance to “printed velvet.” How simple and surprising! how comprehensive and satisfactory—especially to a poor man, longing for that little addition to his meagre income! The Fabric is certain to make everybody’s fortune. And why? Because it is a patent Fabric, and because it can imitate everything, at an expense of half nothing. The Fabric can copy flowers, figures, landscapes, and historical pictures; paper-hangings, dress-pieces, shawls, scarfs, vests, trimmings, book-covers, and “other manufactures too numerous to detail.” The Fabric can turn out “hundreds of thousands of articles at one operation.” By skilful manœuvring of the Fabric “ninety per cent of material is saved.” In the multitudinous manipulations of the Fabric—and this is a most cheering circumstance—”sixty veneers have been cut to the inch.” In the public disposal of the Fabric—and here is the most surprising discovery of all—the generous patentee (who answers my application) will distribute its advantages over the four quarters of the globe, in shares—five-shilling shares—each one of which is “probably worth several hundred pounds.” But why talk of hundreds? Let clergymen, doctors, and barristers talk of hundreds. The Ten-Pounds-Weekly profession takes its stand on the Fabric, and counts by millions. We can prove this (I speak as a Fabricator) by explicit and incontrovertible reference to facts and figures.

How much (the following illustrations and arguments are not my own: they are derived entirely from the answer I receive to my application)—how much does it cost at present to dress a lady, shawl a lady, and bonnet a lady; to parasol and slipper a lady, and to make a lady quite happy after that, with a porte-monnaie, an album, and a book-cover? Eight pounds—and dirt cheap, too. The Fabric will do the whole thing—now that “sixty veneers have been cut to the inch,” mind, but not before—for Two pounds. How much does it cost to carpet, rug, curtain, chair-cover, decorate, table-cover, and paper-hang a small house? Assume ruin to the manufacturer, and say, as a joke, Ten pounds. The Fabric, neatly cutting its sixty veneers to the inch, will furnish the house, as it furnishes the lady, for Two pounds. What follows? Houses of small size and ladies of all sizes employ the Fabric. What returns pour in? Look at the population of houses and ladies, and say Seventy Millions Sterling per annum. Add foreign houses and foreign ladies, under the head of Exports, and say Thirty Millions per annum more. Is this too much for the ordinary mind to embrace? It is very good. The patentee is perfectly willing to descend the scale at a jump; to address the narrowest comprehension; and to knock off nine-tenths.

Remainder, Ten Millions. Say that “the royalty” will be thirty per cent., and “such profit would give three millions of pounds sterling to be divided among the shareholders.” Simple, as the simplest sum in the Multiplication Table: simple as two and two make four.

I am aware that the obstinate incredulity of the age will inquire why the fortunate Patentee does not keep these prodigious returns to himself. How base is Suspicion! How easily, in this instance, is it answered and rebuked! The Patentee refrains from keeping the returns to himself, because he doesn't want money. His lithographed circular informs me—really and truly does inform me, and will inform you if you have to do with him—that he has had “a good fortune” left him, and that he is “heir to several thousand pounds a year.” With these means at his disposal, he might of course work his inestimable patent with his own resources. But no!—he *will* let the public in. What a man! How noble his handwriting must be, in a graphiological point of view! What phrases are grateful enough to acknowledge his personal kindness in issuing shares to me at “the totally-inadequate sum”—to use his own modest words—of five shillings each? Happy, happy day, when I and the Fabric and the Patentee were all three introduced to one another!

When a man is so fortunate as to know himself, from the height of his “volatile liveliness” to the depth of his “melancholy tenderness”—as I know myself—when, elevated on a multiform Fabric, he looks down from the regions of perpetual wealth on the narrow necessities of the work-a-day world beneath him—but one other action is left for that man to perform, if he wishes to make the sum of his earthly felicity complete. The ladies will already have anticipated that the action which I now refer to as final may be comprehended in one word—Marriage.

The course of all disbelievers in advertisements, where they are brought face to face with this grand emergency, is more or less tortuous, troubled, lengthy, and uncertain. No man of this unhappy stamp can fall in love, bill and coo, and finally get himself married, without a considerable amount of doubt, vexation, and disappointment occurring at one period or other in the general transaction of his amatory affairs. Through want of faith and postage stamps, mankind have agreed to recognise these very disagreeable drawbacks as so many inevitable misfortunes: dozens of popular proverbs assert their necessary existence, and nine-tenths of our successful novels are filled with the sympathetic recital of them in successions of hysterical chapters. And yet, singular as it may appear, the most cursory reference to the advertising columns of the newspapers is sufficient to show the fallacy of this view, if readers would only exercise (as I do) their faculties of implicit belief. As there are

infallible secrets for discovering character by handwriting, and making fortunes by Fabrics, so there are other infallible secrets for falling in love with the right woman, fascinating her in the right way, and proposing to her at the right time, which render doubt, disappointment, or hesitation, at any period of the business, so many absolute impossibilities. Once again, let me confute incredulous humanity, by quoting my own happy experience.

Now, mark. I think it desirable to settle in life. Good. Do I range over my whole acquaintance; do I frequent balls, concerts, and public promenades; do I spend long days in wearisome country-houses, and sun myself persistently at the watering-places of England—all for the purpose of finding a woman to marry? I am too wise to give myself any such absurd amount of trouble. I simply start my preliminary operations by answering the following advertisement:

“TO THE UNMARRIED.—If you wish to Marry, send a stamped-addressed envelope to the Advertiser, who will put you in possession of a *Secret* by means of which you can win the affections of as many of the opposite sex as your heart may desire. This is suitable for either sex; for the old or young, rich or poor, whether of prepossessing appearance or otherwise.—Address, Mr. Flam, London.”

When the answer reaches me, I find Mr. Flam—although undoubtedly a benefactor to mankind—to be scarcely so ready of access and so expansive in his nature as the Proprietor of the Fabric. Instead of sending me the Secret, he transmits a printed paper, informing me that he wants two shillings worth of postage stamps first. To my mind, it seems strange that he should have omitted to mention this in the Advertisement. But I send the stamps, nevertheless; and get the Secret back from Mr. Flam, in the form of a printed paper. Half of this paper is addressed to the fair sex, and is therefore, I fear, of no use to me. The other half, however, addresses the lords of the creation; and I find the Secret summed up at the end, for their benefit, in these few but most remarkable words:

“TO THE MALE SEX.—*If a woman is clean and neat in her dress, respects the Sabbath, and is dutiful towards her parents, happy will be the man who makes her his wife.*”

Most astonishing! All great discoveries are simple. Is it not amazing that nobody should have had the smallest suspicion of the sublime truth expressed above, until Mr. Flam suddenly hit on it? How cheap, too—how

scandalously cheap at two shillings! And this is the man whose generosity I doubted—the man who not only bursts on me with a new revelation, but adds to it a column of advice, every sentence of which is more than worth its tributary postage stamp. Assuming that I have fixed on my young woman, Mr. Flam teaches me how to “circumvent” her, in the following artful and irresistible manner:

I must see her as often as possible. I must have something fresh to relate to her at every interview; and I must get that “something fresh” out of the newspapers. I must tell her where I have been, and where I am going to, and what I have seen, and what I expect to see; and if she wants to go with me, I must take her, and, what is more, I must be lively, and “come out with a few witty remarks, and be as amusing as possible”—for (and here is another Secret, another great discovery thrown in for nothing) I must recollect that “the funny man is always a favourite with the ladies.” Amazing insight! How does Mr. Flam get down into these deep, these previously-unsuspected wellsprings of female human nature? One would like a brief memoir of this remarkable person, accompanied by his portrait from a photograph, and enriched by a fac-simile (for graphiological purposes) of his handwriting.

To return once more, and for the last time, to myself. It may be objected that, although Mr. Flam has illuminated me with an inestimable secret, has fortified me with invaluable advice for making myself agreeable, and has assured me that if I attend to it, I may, “after a few weeks, boldly declare my love, and make certain of receiving a favourable answer,” he has, apparently, omitted, judging by my abstract of his reply, to inform me of the terms in which I am to make my offer, when I and my young woman are mutually ready for it. This is true. I am told to declare my love boldly; but I am not told how to do it, because Mr. Flam, of London, is honourably unwilling to interfere with the province of a brother-benefactor, Mr. Hum, of Hull, who for twenty-six postage stamps (see Advertisement) will continue the process of my enlightenment, from the point at which it left off, in “the most wonderful, astonishing, and curious work ever published in the English language, entitled MATRIMONY MADE EASY; OR, HOW TO WIN A LOVER.” It is unnecessary to say that I send for this work, and two new discoveries flash upon me at the first perusal of it.

My first discovery is, that identically the same ideas on the subject of matrimony, and identically the same phrases in expressing them, appear to have occurred to Mr. Flam, of London, and to Mr. Hum, of Hull. The whole first part of Mr. Hum’s pamphlet is, sentence for sentence, and word for word, an exact repetition of the printed paper previously forwarded to me by Mr. Flam. To superficial minds this very remarkable coincidence

might suggest that Mr. Flam and Mr. Hum, in spite of the difference in their respective names and addresses, were one and the same individual. To those who, like myself, look deeper, any such injurious theory as this is inadmissible, because it implies that a benefactor to mankind is capable of dividing himself in two for the sake of fraudulently procuring from the public a double allowance of postage stamps. This is, under the circumstances, manifestly impossible. Mr. Flam, therefore, in my mind, remains a distinct and perfect Flam, and Mr. Hum, a distinct and perfect Hum; and the similarity of their ideas and expressions is simply another confirmation of the well-known adage which refers to the simultaneous jumping of two great wits to one conclusion. So much for my first discovery.

The second revelation bursts out on me from the second part of Mr. Hum's pamphlet, which I may remark, in parenthesis, is purely and entirely his own. I have been previously in the habit of believing that offers of marriage might extend themselves in the matter of verbal expression, to an almost infinite variety of forms. Mr. Hum, however, taking me up at the point where Mr. Flam has set me down, amazes and delights me by showing that the matrimonial advances of the whole population of bachelors may be confidently made to the whole population of spinsters, in one short and definitely-stated form of words. Mr. Flam has told me when to declare my love; and Mr. Hum, in the following paragraph, goes a step further, and tells me how to do it:

“When the gentleman has somewhat familiarised himself with the lady, and perceived that he is not, at all events, an object of aversion or ridicule, he should seek a favourable opportunity, and speak to this effect:—‘I have come (miss, or madam, as the case may be) to take a probably final leave of you.’ The lady will naturally ask the reason; when the lover can add (and if he is a fellow of any feeling, the occasion may give a depth of tone and an effect to his eloquence, that may turn the beam in his favour, if it was an even balance before):—‘Because, madam, I find your society has become so dear to me, that I fear I must fly to save myself, as I may not dare to hope that the suit of a stranger might be crowned with success.’”

No more—we single men may think it short—but there is actually not a word more. Maid or widow, whichever she may be, “crowned with success,” is the last she will get out of us men. If she means to blush, hesitate, tremble, and sink on our bosoms, she had better be quick about it, on the utterance of the word “success.” Our carpet-bag is in the hall, and we shall take that “final leave” of ours, to a dead certainty, unless she looks sharp.

Mr. Hum adds, that she probably *will* look sharp. Not a doubt of it. Thank you, Mr. Hum; you have more than earned your postage stamps; we need trouble you no further.

I am now thoroughly prepared for my future transactions with the fair sex—but where, it may be objected, is the woman on whom I am to exercise my little arts? It is all very well for me to boast that I am above the necessity of toiling after her, here, there, and everywhere—toil for her, I must: nobody will spare me that trouble, at any rate. I beg pardon—Destiny (for a consideration of postage stamps) will willingly spare me the trouble. Destiny, if I will patiently bide my time (which I am only too willing to do), will hunt out a woman of the right complexion for me, and will bring her within easy hearing-distance of the great Hum formula, at the proper moment. How can I possibly know this? Just as I know everything else, by putting my trust in advertisements, and not being stingy with my postage stamps. Here is the modest offer of service which Destiny, speaking through the newspapers, makes to mankind:

“THE FUTURE FORETOLD.—Any persons wishing to have their future lives revealed to them correctly, should send their age, sex, and eighteen stamps, to Mr. Nimbus (whose prophecies never fail).”

I send my age, my sex, and my eighteen stamps; and Mr. Nimbus, as the mouthpiece of Destiny, speaks thus encouragingly in return:

“PRIVATE.—I have carefully studied your destiny, and I find that you were born under the planet Mars. You have experienced in life some changes, and all has not been found to answer your expectations. There are brighter days and happier hours before you, and the present year will bring to you greater advantages than the past. You will marry a Female of Fair Complexion, most desirous of gaining your hand.” (That’s the woman! I am perfectly satisfied. Destiny will bring us together; the system of Mr. Flam will endear us to each other; and the formula of Mr. Hum will clench the tender business. All right, Mr. Nimbus—what next?) “You will make a most fortunate speculation with a Male of whom you have some knowledge”—(evidently the proprietor of the Fabric)—“and, although there will be some difficulties arise for a time, they will again disappear, and your Star rises in the ascendant. You will be successful in your undertakings and pursuits, and you will attain to a position in life desirable to your future welfare.”



I have done. All the advertisements presented here, I must again repeat, are real advertisements. Nothing is changed in any of them but the names of the advertisers. The answers copied are genuine answers obtained, only a short time since, in the customary way, by formal applications. I need say no more. The lesson of wise credulity which I undertook to teach, from the record of my own experience, is now before the world, and I may withdraw again into the healthy, wealthy, and wise retirement from which I have emerged solely for the good of others.

Take a last fond look at me before I go. Behold me immovably fixed in my good opinion of myself, by the discriminating powers of Graphiology; prospectively enriched by the vast future proceeds of my Fabric; thoroughly well grounded in the infallible rules for Courtship and Matrimony, and confidently awaiting the Female of Fair Complexion, on whom I shall practise them. Favoured by these circumstances, lavishly provided for in every possible respect, free from everything in the shape of cares, doubts, and anxieties, who can say that I have not accurately described myself as “the happiest man alive;” and who can venture to dispute that this position of perfect bliss is the obvious and necessary consequence of a wise belief in Advertisements?

First published: *All The Year Round* 30 April 1859 vol. I pp. 5-10

## NOTES

This piece is directly referred to by Charles Dickens in his letter to Collins on 9 April 1859 (Pilgrim IX pp. 48-49)

will you make one more alteration in it, or the title will not by any means fit in among the other titles? -- such an alteration as will admit of the paper's being called:

SURE TO BE HEALTHY, WEALTHY, AND WISE.

Collins adds the phrase early in the piece at the end of paragraph 2 (see p. 5 above).

## THE ROYAL ACADEMY IN BED.

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THE opening of The Royal Academy Exhibition of eighteen hundred and fifty-nine is the first opening that I have missed for something like a score of years past. Illness, which confines me to my bed, has been the sole cause of my absence when the rooms in Trafalgar-square were thrown open to an immense shilling public, for the present season. My admiration for modern Art almost amounts to fanaticism; and my disappointment at missing the first week of the Exhibition is not to be described in words or depicted on canvas.

My doctor informs me that I may hope to get out again before the doors of the elegant and commodious Palace of Art, which occupies the north side of Trafalgar-square, are closed at the end of July. While I am waiting for the happy period of my emancipation, I have been finding consolation and occupying the weary hours by a careful perusal of the Royal Academy Catalogue for the present year. Thanks to this invaluable document, I have found myself in a condition to plan out my future visit to the Exhibition, in its minutest details, beforehand. I have decided what pictures I shall see and what pictures I shall miss; I know where I shall want to look up and where I shall want to look down; I have even settled in my own mind when I shall tread on the toes of other people, and when other people will return the compliment by treading on mine—in short, I have excited my imagination to such a pitch of preternatural lucidity, that I have all but got the whole picture-show at my fingers' ends already, though I have not the slightest chance of paying a visit to it for at least six weeks to come.

Allow me to present my Private View of The Royal Academy Exhibition, taken from my bedroom at Peckham Rye, by the telescopic help of the Catalogue for the present year.

To begin (as the critics do) with general characteristics. I find the Exhibition to be, in two respects, negatively unlike its predecessors. The Vicar of Wakefield is, unless I mistake, at last used up; and there is no statue of Musidora ("at the doubtful breeze alarmed") in the Sculpture Room. In regard to positive changes, I observe a remarkable tendency in the artists, this year, to take each others' likenesses; and (judging by certain quotations) to plunge into abstruse classical reading, through the medium of some highly unintelligible English translations. In other respects, the Catalogue affords cheering evidences of strictly Conservative policy on the part of the Academy in particular, and of the Artists in general. There is still a strong infusion of the recently-imported Spanish element. Certain painters still stagger and drop under the weight of the

English grammar, in composing their titles, or offering their necessary explanations in small type. Certain subjects which have been perpetually repeated in countless numbers, are reiterated once again for the benefit of a public faithful to its darling conventionalities. Poor old Venice continues to be trotted out, and has no present prospect of retiring into private life. Our more juvenile, but still well-known old friend, the transparent pool, with the wonderful reflexions, the pretty sky, and the unpronounceable Welsh name to distinguish it in the Catalogue, still courts the general admiration. So do the Campagna of Rome, the Festa Day at Naples, the Contadina, Rebecca, the Bride of Lammermoor, the portrait of a gentleman, and the portrait of a lady. As for Cordelia, Othello, Macbeth, Falstaff, and Ophelia, they all cry "Here we are again!" from their places on the walls, as regular to their time as so many Harlequins, Clowns, Pantaloons, and Columbines, in so many Christmas Pantomimes. Thus much for the general character of the Exhibition. Descending next to details, I beg to communicate the following classification of the thirteen hundred and odd works of art, exhibited this year, as adapted to the necessities of my own Private View. I divide the Catalogue, then, for my own purposes, into—

1. The pictures that are vouched for by their artists' names.
2. The pictures that are sure to be hung scandalously high, or scandalously low.
3. The pictures that I don't think I shall look for.
4. The pictures that I shall be obliged to see, whether I like it or not.
5. The pictures that puzzle me.
6. The pictures that I am quite certain to come away without seeing.

Past experience, close study of titles, and a vivid imagination, enable me to distribute the whole of this year's collection of works of art quite easily under the foregoing six heads. The first head, embracing the pictures that are vouched for by their artists' names, naturally gives me no trouble whatever, beyond the exertion involved in a moderate exercise of memory. Here in my bed, I know what main features the new works of the famous painters will present, as well as if I was looking at them in the Academy Rooms. Mr. Creswick again gives me his delicate, clear-toned, cheerful transcripts of English scenery. Mr. Leslie still stands alone, the one painter of *ladies*—as distinguished from many excellent painters of *women*—whom England has produced, since Gainsborough and Sir Joshua dropped their brushes for ever.\* Sir Edwin Landseer may be as eccentric in his titles as he pleases: I know very well that there are deer and dogs on the new canvases such as no other master, living or dead, native or foreign, has ever painted. Mr. Stanfield may travel where he will; but I am

glad to think that he cannot escape from that wonderful breezy dash of sea-water which it will refresh me to look at the moment I can get to Trafalgar-square. Mr. Ward has only to inform me (which he does by his title) that he has happily stripped off his late misfitting Court suit, and I see his old mastery of dramatic effect and his old force of expression on this year's canvas as plainly as I see my own miserable bed-curtains. Mr. Roberts finds the most formidable intricacies of architecture as easy to master this season as at any former period of his life. Mr. Danby is still writing poetry with his brush, as he alone can write it. Mr. Stone has not lost that sense of beauty which is an artist's most precious inheritance. Mr. Egg is as manfully true to nature, as simply powerful in expression, and as admirably above all artifice and trickery of execution as ever. And Mr. Millais—who must only come last to pay the enviable penalty due from the youngest man—has got pictures, this year, which will probably appeal to all spectators to empty their minds of conventionalities, and to remember that the new thing in Art is not necessarily the wrong thing because it is new.

It is time now to get to the second head—to the pictures that are sure to be hung scandalously high or scandalously low. How can I—in bed at Peckham Rye at this very moment—presume to say what pictures are under the ceiling, or what pictures are down on the floor, in Trafalgar-square? There is no presumption in the matter. I consult the Catalogue by the light of past experience, and certain disastrous titles immediately supply me with all the information of which I stand in need.

“Dead Game,” “A View near Dorking,” “A Brig signalling for a Pilot,” “A Madonna,” “An Autumnal Evening,” “A Roman Peasant,” “The Caprices of Cupid,” “Fugitives escaped from the Massacre of Glencoe,” and “Preparing the Ark for the Infant Moses”—are nine specimens of pictures which, I am positively certain, before I see them, are all hung scandalously high or scandalously low. In the interests of these works, and of others too numerous to mention, I shall take with me, when I get to the Academy, at the end of July, a telescope for the high latitudes, and a soft kneeling-mat for the humble regions of the wainscot. In the mean time, I would privately suggest to the painters of this uniformly ill-treated class of works the propriety of changing their titles, in such a manner as to administer a few dexterous compliments, next time, to the Academy authorities. If the “Caprices of Cupid” had been called “Ideal View of a Member of the Hanging Committee;” or if “Preparing the Ark for the Infant Moses” had been altered to “Preparing a nice Place for a meritorious Outsider,” the destiny of these two pictures might have been happier. “Dead Game,” again, might have done better if the artist had added to the title, “not

higher than you would like it at your own hospitable table, and not low, out of consideration for the landed aristocrat who once preserved it." I throw out these slight hints on the assumption that even an Academician is a man, and that, as such, he is not inaccessible to flattery.

Head Number Three: The pictures that I don't think I shall look for. Here, once more, I trust myself implicitly to the titles. They warn me, when I go to the Exhibition, to be on my guard (without intending any personal disrespect towards the artists) against the following works, among many others:

"Pœonian Woman. 'When she came to the river, she watered her horse, filled her vase, and returned by the road, bearing the water on her head, leading the horse, and spinning from her distaff.—Herod. Terps. 12.' " No, no, madam; I know you, and your extract from "Herod. Terps. 12" has no effect upon me. I know your long leg that shows through your diaphanous robe, and your straight line from the top of your forehead to the tip of your nose, and your short upper lip and your fleshy chin, and your total want of all those embraceable qualities which form the most precious attribute of your sex in modern times. Unfascinating Pœonian woman, you can do three things at once, as I gather from your extract; but there is a fourth thing you can't do—you can't get me to look at you!

"Warrior -Poets of Europe contending in Song? Well? I think not. What can Painting do with such a subject as this? It can open the warrior-poets' mouths; but it cannot inform me of what I want to know next—which is, what they are singing? Will the artist kindly stand under his work (towards the end of July); and, when he sees a sickly -looking gentleman approach, with a white handkerchief in his left hand, will he complete his picture by humming a few of the warrior-poets' songs? In that case, I will gladly look at it in—any other, No.

"So sleepy!" Dear, dear me! This is surely a chubby child, with swollen cheeks, and dropsical legs. I dislike cherubs in Nature (as my married friends know), because I object to corpulence on any scale, no matter how small, and I will not willingly approach a cherub, even when presented to me under the comparatively quiet form of Art. "Preparing for the Masquerade"? No; that is Costume, and I can see it on a larger scale in Mr. Nathan's shop. "Felice Ballarin reciting Tasso to the people of Chioggia"? No; I never heard of Felice Ballarin; and it does not reconcile me to his being painted, to know that he is reciting at Chioggia. "The Monk Felix"? Bah! a snuffy man with a beard; let him move on, with the Pœonian woman to keep him company. "Ideal Bust of a Warrior"? I fear the temptation to look at this will be too much for me; although I know, by experience, that ideal busts of warriors always over-excite my system even

when I am in perfect health. It will be best, perhaps, not to venture into the sculpture-room at all. "Unrequited Love"? "The Monastery of Smolnoi"? "Allsopp's new Brewery"? No, no, no; I must even resist these, I must resist dozens more on my list—time and space fail me—let me abandon the fertile third head in my classification, and get on to my fourth: The pictures that I shall be obliged to see, whether I like it or not.

"Equestrian Portrait of His Grace the Duke of Bedford." The horse will run me down here, to a dead certainty, the moment I get into the room. "Cordelia receives Intelligence how her Father had been ill-treated by her Sisters." Cordelia had better have received intelligence first on the subject of English grammar—but, no matter; right or wrong in her construction, she has been from time immemorial the most forward young woman on the Academy walls, and she will insist, as usual, on my looking at her, whether I like it or not. "General Sir George Brown." This case involves a scarlet coat and decorations—and who ever escaped *them* at an exhibition, I should like to know? "Dalilah asking Forgiveness of Samson." When I venture to acknowledge that I am more unspeakably tired of these two characters (on canvas) than of any other two that ever entered a painter's studio, all intelligent persons are sure to understand that Dalilah and Samson will be the very first picture I see when I look about me in the Academy. For much the same reason, "Portrait of a Lady," and "Portrait of a Gentleman," will of course lay hold of me in all directions. Are not pictures of this sort always numerous, always exactly alike, always a great deal too large, and always void of the slightest interest for any one, excepting the "ladies" and "gentlemen" themselves? And, granted this, what is the necessary and natural result? I must see them, whether I like it or not—and so must you.

Head Number Five: The pictures that puzzle me. These are so numerous, as judged by their titles, that I hardly know which to pick out, by way of example, first. Suppose I select the shortest—"Happy!" Not a word of quotation or explanation follows this. Who (I ask myself, tossing on my weary pillow)—who, or what is happy? Does this mysterious picture represent one of the Prime Minister's recently made peers, or a publican at election time, or a gentleman who has just paid conscience-money to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or a group of enraptured ladies at the period when watch-spring petticoats were first introduced, or boys at a Pantomime, or girls at a dance, or dogs in a cover, or cats in a dairy? Impossible to say: there are ten thousand things the picture might represent, and it probably depicts the ten thousand and first, of which I have no suspicion. Hardly less puzzling is "A Lesson on Infant Treatment." What is infant treatment? In some families it means a smack

on the head; in others, it means perpetual cuddling; in all it implies (for such is the lot of mortality) occasional rhubarb and magnesia. Is the lesson painted here a lesson on the administration of nauseous draughts, fond kisses, or corrective smacks? Do we read in this mysterious picture a warning against the general nursery error of pinning up a baby's skin and a baby's clothes both together? Or is the scene treated from a heartlessly-comic point of view; and does it represent a bedchamber by night—papa promenading forlorn with his screeching offspring in his arms, and mamma looking on sympathetically from her pillow? Who can say? It is a picture to give up in despair.

“Gretna Green.—A runaway match; the postboy announcing pursuit; one of the last marriages previous to the alteration of the Scottish law, with portraits painted on the spot.” More and more puzzling! Portraits painted on the spot, when the bride and bridegroom are running away, and the postboy is announcing pursuit! Why, photography itself would be too slow for the purpose! Besides, how did the painter come there? Was he sent for on purpose beforehand, or did he take up his position on speculation? Or is the artist himself the bridegroom, and was the taking of his own likeness and his wife's the first idea that occurred to him when he was married? Curious, if it was so. I am a single man myself, and have no right to an opinion; but I think, if I ran away with my young woman, that I should give up my profession for the day, at any rate.

No. 835—No title; nothing but this quotation:

A guid New-year I wish thee, Maggie!  
Hae, there's a ripp to thy auld baggie, &c.

What can this be? a sonsie lass takes a walk on a New-year's morning, with an old bag over her shoulder; a mischievous Scotchman rips it open most improperly; exclaims, “Hae!” for which he is little better than a brute; and abandons the poor girl in a situation which it rings the heart to think of. Is that the picture? I object to it as “painful” if it is.

“Death-bed of Lorenzo de Medici. Father-Confessor Girolamo Savonarola demands, as the condition of absolving Lorenzo de Medici of his sins, that he should restore liberty to Florence, refusing which, he abandons him to his fate.” How, in the name of wonder, can this be painted? Which of the two things is the father-confessor doing? Is he making his demand, or abandoning the unfortunate victim to his fate? If he is making the demand, he must be painted saying something, and how can that be done? If, on the other hand, he is abandoning the patient, the question arises whether he ought not to abandon the picture also, or at

least be three parts out of it, so as to convey the two necessary ideas of rapidity of action and of personal absence from the bedroom. I don't see my way to this work of art at all. Still less do I understand "Harvest," the pervading sentiment of which is supposed to be expressed in this one alarming line of quotation:

When labour drinks, *his boiling sweat to thrive.*

CHAPMAN'S *Hesiod.*

Incredulous readers must be informed that the above is copied from the catalogue of the present year, at page twenty-seven. What on earth does the line mean, taken by itself? And how in the world do the resources of Art contrive to turn it to graphic account in a picture of a Harvest? Say that "When labour drinks" is personified, in the foreground of the scene, by Hodge, with a great mug in his hand, how, in that case, does the illustrative faculty of the artist grapple next with "his boiling sweat to thrive?" Is Hodge presented bubbling all over with beer, at a temperature of I don't know how many hundred degrees Fahrenheit? And if he is, how does he "thrive" under those heated circumstances? Or is he hissing and steaming out of his own large bodily resources; and is he trying to condense his own vapour with successive jets of cold small beer? Nay, is he even one Hodge only, boiling, sweating, and thriving? May he not be possibly multiplied into all the Hodges in the neighbourhood, collected together in the harvest-field, and obscuring the whole fertile prospect by scalding agricultural exudations? I protest I am almost in the condition of Hodge myself, only with thinking of this boiling perplexity—except, indeed, that I see no chance of thriving, unless I drop the subject forthwith to cool my heated fancy. When I have done this, all succeeding titles and quotations become mirrors of truth, that reflect the pictures unmistakably by comparison with such an inscrutable puzzle as a harvest-field, painted through the medium of Chapman's *Hesiod*. With that work my bewilderment ends, through my own sheer inability to become confused under any other circumstances whatever; and here, therefore, the list of the pictures that puzzle me may necessarily and appropriately come to an end also.

As to my final head, under which are grouped The pictures that I am quite certain to come away without seeing, every reader, who has been to the Royal Academy Exhibition, can enlarge on this branch of the subject from his own experience, without help from me. Every reader knows that when he gets home again, and wearily reviews his well-thumbed Catalogue, the first picture that attracts his attention is sure to be one



among many other pictures which he especially wanted to see, and which he has accurately contrived to miss without suspecting it in the crowd. In the same way, the one favourite work which our enthusiastic friends will infallibly ask us if we admire is, in the vast majority of cases, provokingly certain to be also the one work which we have unconsciously omitted to notice. My own experience inclines me to predict, therefore, that when I come back from my first visit to the Academy, I shall find I have passed over in a general sense one full half of the whole exhibition, and in a particular sense, something not far short of one-third of the pictures that I expressly intended to see. I shall go again and again and diminish these arrears, if the doors only keep open long enough; but I shall still have missed some especially interesting things when the show has closed and there is no further chance for me. The Academy is not to blame for that; it is only our mortal lot. In the greater Exhibition-room of Human Life, how often, in spite of all our care and trouble, we miss the one precious picture that we most wanted to see! Excuse a sick man's moral. When he has closed his Catalogue, what has he left to do but to turn round in bed, and take his mental composing-draught in the form of sober reflection?

\* The ink was hardly dry on these lines, when the writer received the news of this admirable painter's death. Insufficient though it be, let the little tribute in the text to one only of Mr. Leslie's many great qualities as an artist, remain unaltered; and let a word of sincere sorrow for the loss of him be added to it here. No man better deserved the affectionate regard which all his friends felt for him. He was unaffectedly kind and approachable to his younger brethren, and delightfully genial and simple-minded in his intercourse with friends of maturer years. As a painter, he had no rival within his own range of subjects; and he will probably find no successor now that he is lost to us. In the exact knowledge of the means by which his art could illustrate and complete the sister-art of the great humorists—in the instinctive grace, delicacy, and refinement which always guided his brush—in his exquisite feeling for ease, harmony, and beauty, as applied to grouping and composition—he walked on a road of his own finding and making, following no man himself, and only imitated at an immeasurable distance by those who walked after him. Another of the genuinely original painters of the English School has gone, and has made the opening for the new generation wider and harder to fill than ever.

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## NOTES

Charles Robert Leslie died 5 May 1859. He was a good friend of William Collins and wrote Wilkie a kind letter on his father's death – *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.* 1848, vol. I pp. 103-104.

The RA summer exhibition opened to the public on Saturday 30 April. See the review in *The Times* 30 April 1859 10D. We know that Collins saw it from his letter [0309] to his mother Harriet Collins 26 July 1859, Baker & Clarke *The Letters of Wilkie Collins* 1999, pp. 169-170.

The R.A. Ticket was forwarded to me at Gadshill last week. And I sent it by post to Mrs E.M. Ward - so "F.G." will see the pictures and the company - and if the company is not better worth looking at than the pictures, I, for one, pity "F.G." from the bottom of my heart.

Although Collins was busy at this time, there is no evidence that he was ill. So this approach is a technique not a reality and the fact that he states he lives at Peckham Rye is also a conceit.

## NEW VIEW OF SOCIETY.

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IN these times, when a man sits down to write, it is considered necessary that he should have a purpose in view. To prevent any misapprehension on this point, so far as I am personally concerned, I beg to announce at once that I am provided with a purpose of an exceedingly serious kind. I want to know whether I am fit for Bedlam, or not?

This alarming subject of inquiry was started in my mind, about a week or ten days ago, by a select circle of kind friends, whose remarks on the condition of my brains have, since that period, proved to be not of the most complimentary nature. The circumstances under which I have lost caste, intellectually speaking, in the estimation of those around me, are of a singular kind. May I beg permission to relate them?

I must begin (if I can be allowed to do so without giving offence) in my own bedroom; and I must present myself, with many apologies, in rather less than a half-dressed condition. To be plainer still, it was on one of the hottest days of this remarkably hot summer—the time was between six and seven o'clock in the evening—the thermometer had risen to eighty, in the house—I was sitting on a cane chair, without coat, waistcoat, cravat or collar, with my shirt-sleeves rolled up to cool my arms, and my feet half in and half out of my largest pair of slippers—I was sitting, a moist and melancholy man, with my eyes fixed upon my own Dress Costume reposing on the bed, and my heart fainting within me at the prospect of going out to Dinner.

Yes: there it was—the prison of suffocating black broadcloth in which my hospitable friends required me to shut myself up—there were the coat, waistcoat, and trousers, the hideous habilimentary instruments of torture which Society actually expected me to put on in the scorching hot condition of the London atmosphere. All day long I had been rather less than half dressed, and had been fainting with the heat. At that very moment, alone in my spacious bedroom, with both the windows wide open, and with nothing but my shirt over my shoulders, I was in the condition of a man who is gradually melting away, who is consciously losing all sense of his own physical solidity.

How should I feel, in half an hour's time, when I had enclosed myself in the conventional layers of black broadcloth? How should I feel, in an hour's time, when I was shut into a dining-room with fifteen of my melting fellow-creatures, half of them, at least, slowly liquefying in garments as black, as heavy, as outrageously unsuited to the present weather as my own? How should I feel in three hours' time, when the evening party, which was to follow the dinner, began, and when I and a hundred other polite

propagators of animal heat were all smothering each other within the space of two drawing-rooms, and under the encouraging superincumbent auspices of the gas chandeliers? Society would have been hot in January, under these after-dinner circumstances—what would Society be in July?

While these serious questions were suggesting themselves to me, I took a turn backwards and forwards in my bedroom; and perspired; and sat down again in my cane chair. I got up once more, and approached the neighbourhood of my dress coat, and weighed it experimentally in my arms; and perspired; and sat down again in my cane chair. I got up for the third time, and tried a little eau-de-Cologne on my forehead, and attempted to encourage myself by thinking of the ten thousand other men, in their bedrooms at that moment, patiently putting themselves into broadcloth prisons in all parts of London; and perspired; and sat down again in my cane chair. Heat, I believe, does not retard the progress of time. It was getting nearer and nearer to seven o'clock. I looked, interrogatively, from my dress trousers to my legs. On that occasion, only, my legs were eloquent, and they looked back at me, and said, No.

I rose, in a violent perspiration, and reviled myself bitterly, with my forlorn dress trousers grasped in my hand. Wretch (I said), you are unworthy of the kind attentions of your friends—you are a base renegade from your social duties—you are unnaturally insensible to those charms of society which your civilised fellow-creatures universally acknowledge! It was all in vain. Common Sense—that low-lived quality which has no veneration for appearances—Common Sense, which had not only suggested those terrible questions about what my sensations would be after I was dressed, but had even encouraged my own faithful legs to mutiny against me, now whispered persistently, My friend, if you make yourself at least ten degrees hotter than you are already, of your own accord, you are an Ass—Common Sense drew my trousers from my grasp, and left them in a dingy heap on the floor; led my tottering steps (to this day I don't know how) down stairs to my writing-table; and there suggested to me one of the most graceful epistolary compositions, of a brief kind, in the English language. It was addressed to my much-injured hostess; it contained the words “sudden indisposition,” neatly placed in the centre of a surrounding network of polite phraseology; and when I had sealed it up, and sent it off upon the spot, I was, without any exception whatever, the happiest man, at that moment, in all London. This is a startling confession to make, in a moral point of view. But the interests of truth are paramount (except where one's host and hostess are concerned); and there are unhappily crimes, in this wicked world, which do *not* bring with them the slightest sense of misery to the perpetrator.

Of the means by which I contrived, after basely securing the privilege of staying at home, to get up a nice, cool, solitary, impromptu dinner in my own room, and of the dinner itself, no record shall appear in these pages. In my humble opinion, modern writers of comic literature have already gorged the English public to nausea with incessant eating and drinking in print. Now-a-days, when a man has nothing whatever to say, he seems to me to write, in a kind of gluttonous despair, about his dinner. I, for one, am tired of literary gentlemen who unaccountably take it for granted that I am interested in knowing when they are hungry; who appear to think that there is something exquisitely new, humorous, and entertaining, in describing themselves as swallowing large quantities of beer; who can tell me nothing about their adventures at home and abroad, draw me no characters, and make me no remarks, without descending into the kitchen to fortify themselves and their paragraphs with perpetual victuals and drink. I am really and truly suffering so acutely from the mental dyspepsia consequent on my own inability to digest other people's meals, as served up in modern literature, that the bare idea of ever writing about breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, or supper, in my own proper person, has become absolutely revolting to me. Let my comic brethren of the pen feed in public as complacently and as copiously as they please. For myself, if I live a hundred years, and write a thousand volumes, no English reader—I solemnly declare it—shall ever know what I have had for dinner, in any part of the world, or under any stress of gastronomic circumstances. Dismissing my lonely meal, therefore, with the briefest possible reference to it, let me get on to the evening, and to the singular—or, as my friends consider it, to the crack-brained—occupation by which I contrived to enliven my self-imposed solitude.

It was approaching nine o'clock, and I was tasting the full luxury of my own cool seclusion, when the idea struck me that there was only one thing wanting to complete my sense of perfect happiness. I rose with a malicious joy in my heart; I threw my lightest paletot over my shoulders, put on a straw hat, pulled up my slippers at the heel, and directed my steps to the house of my friend and host, from whose dinner-party "sudden indisposition" had compelled me to be absent. What was my object in taking this extraordinary course? The diabolical object—for surely it can be qualified by no other term—of gloating over the sufferings of my polite fellow-creatures in the dining-room, from the cool and secret vantage-ground of the open street.

Nine o'clock had struck before I got to the house. A little crowd of street idlers—cool and comfortable vagabonds, happily placed out of the pale of Society—was assembled on the pavement, before the dining-room

windows. I joined them, in my airy and ungentlemanlike costume—I joined them, with the sensations of a man who is about to investigate the nature of some great danger from which he has just narrowly escaped. As I had foreseen, the suffocating male guests had drawn up the blinds on the departure of the ladies to the drawing-room, so as to get every available breath of air into the dining-room, reckless of all inquisitive observation on the part of the lower orders in the street outside. Between us—I willingly identify myself, on this occasion, with the mob—and the gorgeously-appointed dessert-service of my friend and host, nothing intervened but the area railings and the low, transparent, wire window-blinds. We stood together sociably on the pavement and stared in. My brethren of the mob surveyed the magnificent epergne, the decanters glittering under the light of the chandelier, the fruit, flowers, and porcelain on the table; while I, on my side, occupied myself with the human interest of the scene, and looked with indescribable interest and relish at the guests.

There they were, all oozing away into silence and insensibility together; smothered in their heavy black coats, and strangled in their stiff white cravats! On one side of the table, Jenkins, Wapshare, and two strangers, all four equally speechless, all four equally gentlemanly, all four equally prostrated by the lights, the dinner, and the heat. I can see the two strangers feebly dabbing their foreheads with white pocket-handkerchiefs; Jenkins is slyly looking at his watch; the head of Wapshare hangs helplessly over his finger-glass. At the end of the table, I discern the back of my injured host—it leans feebly and crookedly against the chair—it is such a faint back to look at, on this melancholy occasion, that his own tailor would hardly know it again. On the other side of the table, there are three guests only: Soward, fast asleep, and steaming with the heat; Ripsher, wide awake, and glittering with the heat; and Pilkington—the execrable Pilkington, the scourge of society, the longest, loudest, cruelest, and densest bore in existence—Pilkington alone of all this miserable company still wags complacently his unresting tongue. There is a fourth place vacant by his side. *My* place, beyond a doubt. Horrible thought! I see my own ghost sitting there: the appearance of that perspiring spectre is too dreadful to be described. I shudder in my convenient front place against the area railings, as I survey my own full-dressed Fetch at the dinner-table—I turn away my face in terror, and look for comfort at my street-companions, my worthy fellow outcasts, watching with me on either side. One of them catches my eye. “Ain’t it beautiful?” says my brother of the mob, pointing with a deeply-curved thumb at the silver and glass on the table. “And sich lots to drink!” Artless street-innocent! unsophisticated costermonger! he actually envies his suffering superiors inside!

The imaginary view of that ghost of myself sitting at the table has such a bewildering effect on my mind, that I find it necessary to walk away a little, and realise the gratifying certainty that I am really a free man, walking the streets in my airy paletot, and not the melting victim of Pilkington and Society. I retire gently over the pavement. How tenderly the kind night air toys with the tails of my gossamer garment, flutters about my bare neck, and lifts from time to time the ribbon-ends on my cool straw hat! Oh, my much-injured host, what would you not give to be leaning against a lamp-post, in loose jean trousers (as I lean now), and meeting the breeze lazily as it wantons round the corner of the street! Oh, feverish-sleeping Soward—oh, glittering Ripsher—oh, twin-strangers among the guests, dabbing your damp foreheads with duplicate pocket-handkerchiefs—oh, everybody but Pilkington (in whose sufferings I rejoice), are there any mortal blessings you all covet more dearly, at this moment, than my vagabond freedom of locomotion, and my disgracefully undressed condition of body! Oh, Society, when the mid-year has come, and the heavenly fires of Summer are all a-blaze, what unutterable oppressions are inflicted in thy white and pitiless name!

With this apostrophe (in the manner of Madame Roland) I saunter lazily back to my post of observation before the dining-room windows. So! so! the wretched gentlemen are getting up—they can endure it no longer—they are going to change from a lower room that is hot to an upper room that is hotter. Alterations have taken place, since I saw them last, in the heart-rending pantomime of their looks and actions. The two strangers have given up dabbing their foreheads in despair, and are looking helplessly at the pictures—as if Art could make them cooler! Jenkins and Wapshare have shifted occupations. This time, it is Wapshare who is longingly looking at his watch, and Jenkins who is using his finger-glass; into the depths of which I detect him yawning furtively, under cover of moistening his lips. Sleepy Soward has been woke up, and sits steaming and staring with protuberant eyes and swollen cheeks. The glittering face of Ripsher reflects the chandelier, as if his skin was made of glass. Execrable Pilkington continues to talk. My host of the feeble back is propped against the sideboard, and smiles piteously as he indicates to his miserable guests the way up-stairs. They obey him, and retire from the room in slow funereal procession. How strangely well I feel; how unaccountably strong and cool and blandly composed in mind and body!—Hoi! hoi! hoi! out of the way there! Lord bless your honour! crash! bang! Here is the first carriage bursting in among us like a shell; here are the linkmen scattering us off the pavement, and receiving Society with all the honours of the street. The Soirée is beginning. The scorching hundreds are

coming to squeeze the last faint relics of fresh air out at the drawing-room windows. How strangely well I feel; how unaccountably strong and cool and blandly composed in mind and body!

I once more join my worthy mob-brethren; I add one to the joyous human lane which watches the guests as they go in, and which has not got such a thing as a dress-coat on either side of it. I am not in the least afraid of being recognised—for who would suppose it possible that I could conduct myself in this disgraceful manner? Ha! the first guests are well known to me. Sir Aubrey Yollop, Lady Yollop, the two Misses Yollop. “What time shall we order the carriage?” “Infernal nuisance coming at all this hot weather—get away as soon as we can—carriage wait.” Crash! bang! More guests known to me. Doctor and Mrs Gripper, and Mr Julius Gripper. “What time shall we order the carriage?” “How the devil should I know?” (Heat has made the doctor irritable) “The carriages are ordered, sir, at one.” “I can’t and won’t stand it, Mrs Gripper, till that time—cursed tomfoolery giving parties at all, this hot weather—carriage at twelve.”—Crash! bang! Strangers to me, this time. A little dapper man, fanning himself with his hat; a colossal old woman, with a red-hot garnet tiara and a scorching scarlet scarf; a slim, cool, smiling, serenely stupid girl, in that sensible half-naked costume which gives the ladies such an advantage over us at summer evening parties. More difficulty with these, and the next dozen arrivals, about ordering the carriage—more complaints of the misery of going out—nobody sharp enough to apply the obvious remedy of going home again—all equally ready to bemoan their hard fate and to rush on it voluntarily at the same time. I look up, as I make these reflections, to the drawing-room story. Wherever the windows are open, they are stopped up by gowns; wherever the windows are shut, Society expresses itself on them in the form of steam. It is the Black Hole at Calcutta, ornamented and lit up. It is a refinement of slow torture unknown to the Inquisition and the North American savages. And the name of it in England is Pleasure—Pleasure when we offer it to others, which is not so very wonderful; Pleasure, equally, when we accept it ourselves, which is perfectly amazing.

While I am pondering over Pleasure, as Society understands it, I am suddenly confronted by Duty, also as Society understands it, in the shape of a policeman. He comes to clear the pavement, and he fixes *me* with his eye. I am the first and foremost vagabond whom he thinks it desirable to dismiss. To my delight, he singles me out, before my friend’s house, on the very threshold of the door, through which I have been invited to pass in the honourable capacity of guest, as the first obstruction to be removed. “Come, I say, you there—move on!” Yes, Mr Policeman, with pleasure.



Other men, in my situation, might be a little irritated, and might astonish you by entering the house and revealing themselves indignantly to the footman. I am a philosopher; and I am grateful to you, Mr Policeman, for reminding me of my own liberty. Yes, official sir, I *can*, move on; it is my pride and pleasure to move on; it is my great superiority over the unfortunate persons shut up in that drawing-room, not one of whom can move on, or has so much as a prospect of moving on, for some time to come. Wish you good evening, Mr Policeman. In the course of a long experience of Society, I never enjoyed any party half as much as I have enjoyed this; and I hardly know any favour you could ask of me which I am so readily disposed to grant as the favour of moving on. Many, many thanks; and pray remember me kindly at Scotland-yard.

I leave the scene—or, rather, I am walked off the scene—in the sweetest possible temper. The carriages crash and bang past me by dozens; the victims pour into the already over-crammed house by twenties and thirties; Society's gowns and Society's steam are thicker than ever on the windows, as I see the last of them. Shocking! shocking! I am almost ashamed to feel so strangely well, so unaccountably strong and cool and blandly composed in mind and body.

On my airy way home (in excellent time) I endeavour—being naturally a serious and thoughtful man—to extract some useful result for others out of my own novel experience of Society. Animated by a loving and missionary spirit, I resolve to enlighten my ignorant fellow-creatures, my dark surrounding circle of social heathen, by communicating to them my new discovery of the best way of attending London dinner-parties and soirées in the fervid heat of July and August. In the course of the next few days I carry out my humane intention by relating the true narrative here set down to my most valued and intimate friends. I point out the immense sanitary advantages which are likely to accrue from the general adoption of such a sensible and original course of proceeding as mine has been. I show clearly that it must, as a matter of necessity, be followed by a wise change in the season of the year at which parties are authorised to be given. If we were all to go and look in at the windows in our cool morning costume, and then come away again, the masters and mistresses of houses would have no choice left but to adapt their hospitalities sensibly to atmospheric circumstances; summer would find us as summer ought to find us, in the fields; and winter would turn our collective animal heat to profitable and comfortable results.

I put these plain points unmistakably; but to my utter amazement nobody accepts my suggestions. My friends, who all groan over giving hot parties and going to hot parties, universally resent my ingeniously

unconventional plan for making parties cool; and universally declare that no man in his right senses could have acted in such an outrageously uncustomary manner as the manner in which I represent myself to have acted on the memorable evening which these pages record. Apparently, the pleasure of grumbling is intimately connected, in the estimation of civilised humanity, with the pleasure of going into Society? Or, in other words, ladies and gentlemen particularly like their social amusements, as long as they can say that they don't like them. And these are the people who indignantly tell me that I could hardly have been in my right senses to have acted as I did on the scorching July evening of my friend's dinner. The rest who went into the house, to half suffocate each other, at the very hottest period of the year, are all sensible persons; and I, who remained outside in the cool, and looked at them comfortably, am fit for Bedlam? Am I?

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## NOTES

Collins's dislike of dressing for dinner was reflected in his letters which frequently invited friends to dinner and warned 'no dress'. For example letter [3022] to Frederick Lehmann 25 March 1861 (*The Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins: Addenda & Corrigenda* (3) 2007 p. 37)

Dickens and Forster are coming to dine here on Saturday the 30th at 1/2 past 6. Will you make another in a free and easy way (No dress)?

And [0360] to William Holman Hunt 1 August 1860 (Baker & Clarke pp. 184-185)

I have done my book. We dine here (in celebration of the event) on Thursday August 9th at ½ past 6... No dressing - or ceremony of any kind.

This edition of  
*All The Year Round*  
Non-Fiction by Wilkie Collins  
is limited to 300 copies.

