



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

WILKIE COLLINS'S RELIGIOUS UPBRINGING

BY

ALAN BEAN

Hide and Seek, published in 1854, is often thought of as Wilkie's most autobiographical novel. A recent biography states that¹ : '...the novel's edge came from its personal input, as Wilkie began to work through unresolved issues with his father. Only six years after dutifully writing the *Memoirs*², he was now prepared to expose the traumas he had experienced as a result of William Collins's fundamentalism.'

The book is divided into two parts, but the scene is first set, some fourteen years earlier than the main narrative in an opening chapter, 'A Child's Sunday'. It is 1837. Zack, then aged six, is disciplined by his father for showing inattention during a forty minute sermon on 'Justification by Faith' and required to learn and recite three texts from *Select Bible Texts for Children*. Upon refusing to do so, he is locked in an upstairs room, his reaction being to turn on the bath tap in the room, with the intention of causing a flood. Zack's father is aided and abetted by his mother, who tells Zack he is wicked, and uses emotional blackmail to persuade Zack to learn the texts. Meanwhile Zack's maternal grandfather attempts to remonstrate with his father about his method of bringing up Zack. These attempts fall on stony ground, Zack's father rebuffing all arguments as grounded on heretical principles such as Latitudinarianism or Rationalism, while apparently drawing inspiration and strength from a lithograph on the wall of the Reverend Aaron Yollop. Zack recites his verses, but is then forbidden by his father to play with his grandfather's stick (by using it as a hobby horse) on the grounds that it is Sunday. His grandfather attempts to console him by getting him to think about the pudding for supper, but Zack wants to be put to bed after supper and wake up when it's no longer Sunday. He whispers in his grandfather's ear 'I say, grandpapa, I hate Sunday!'

What do we know about the family's religious upbringing, and is the Reverend Aaron Yollop modelled on a real-life person? The answers may help to show whether is indeed describing his own upbringing. Or they may suggest that Wilkie was doing what most writers do – quarrying their own past, and mixing it with a hefty dose of imagination and anecdotes, so as to make a good story.

This article looks at his mother's memoir³ her surviving diaries⁴, records relating to the church members of the family attended between 1838 and 1858⁵ and a number of other sources such as correspondence, and biographies of William's contemporaries, to see what light they shed and whether it is possible to reach any conclusions.

Little is known about the way in which William himself was brought up, and nothing in his early diary/journal entries suggests any particular interest in religion. Nor is there anything in the extracts from his diary at the

¹ Andrew Lycett, *Wilkie Collins A Life of Sensation*, London 2013, at page 128. See Also William M Clarke, *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*, London 1989, page 10: "William's early career had often teetered on the [edge of disasters] and his response to them was to forge the excesses of his religious conviction Wilkie had to endure in his formative years."

² Wilkie Collins, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq, R.A.*, 2 volumes, London 1848 ["LIFE"]. In writing LIFE, Wilkie had access, through his mother, to his father's then surviving correspondence and his journals. Many of the letters have survived, but unfortunately the Journals have either not survived or have not yet come to light.

³ Harriet's unpublished Memoir ["MEMOIR"], is held in the Harry Ransom Centre, University of Texas, Austin, Texas. The Centre also holds a transcript of the MEMOIR, which appears to have been transcribed by Catherine Peters. All page references are to the Peters transcript.

⁴ It seems probable that Harriet was a life long diarist, but unfortunately the only diaries which are currently known about are her 1835 diary ["1835 DIARY"] and the diary she kept during the family's continental trip 1836-1838, which covers the period September 1836 to December 1837 ["ITALIAN DIARY"]. Both of these diaries are held in the National Art Library at the Victoria and Albert Museum. I am grateful to Angela Richardson for making available to me her transcript of the first part of this diary, September to December 1836. Unfortunately, very few letters from Harriet to William appear to have survived.

⁵ Records for Christ Church, Albany Street deposited by the Diocese of London in the London Metropolitan Archives ["LMA"].

time of his father's death in 1812 of a religious nature. In 1814 he refers to a fellow artist's death at the age of 22, but refers only to the hope that his friend's parents will be compensated by 'Providence'⁶.

In April 1814 William met Harriet for the first time, when he and his brother invited Harriet's sister Margaret and Harriet to an artists' ball⁷. Although she appears to have been brought up to observe Sunday as a day of church attendance and readings from the Bible and Prayer Book, the subject of religion was apparently never otherwise mentioned, whether in her family or by the cathedral clergy and other vicars and curates with whom the family socialised⁸.

By Easter 1815, the relationship between William and Harriet had progressed to the point where William spent two evenings sketching the back of Harriet's head and neck for a picture he was then painting⁹ and then invited Harriet and her sister to Sunday lunch at his mother's to be followed by an outing to hear a famous preacher¹⁰.

Circumstances then separated the two for over three years; they were not to meet again until August 1818. Harriet needed to support herself by working as a governess, first in Hampshire and then for two years in Scotland. She spent her free time in Scotland reading philosophy, literature, and also 'many books of a religious character'. She walked two miles every Sunday to hear the preacher at the local episcopal chapel, and referred to his 'excellent pulpit eloquence'¹¹. Harriet's relationship with her employer, who appears to have been quite an eccentric woman, were very difficult. However, her redeeming features, in Harriet's eyes, was that she possessed an excellent library and was a very good conversationalist on religious topics¹².

Meanwhile, something equally significant was happening to William. On Sunday 29th September 1816, he was in St Clement's Church at Hastings where he made a solemn resolution as to self-improvement. He reflects that the date of that resolution was his late father's birthday: 'God grant him peace'¹³. An interest in religious discussion appears around this time, since the following month, November 1816, he had a conversation with Washington Allston 'upon religion'¹⁴. Allston was a friend of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William met Coleridge (along with Wordsworth and Southey) during a visit to the Lake District in the autumn of 1818. Whilst there he painted a portrait of Coleridge's fifteen year old daughter, Sara, which he presented to Coleridge on his return to London¹⁵. Just before setting off for his tour, in early August 1818, he met Harriet again. She was staying at her sister's, to help out following the birth of Margaret's first child, when William unexpectedly called by and the two suddenly found themselves face to face again, and alone together. Harriet recalled¹⁶: 'By degrees our talk became very interesting, for we got on religious topics. He had heard the great

⁶ LIFE Journal entry for 2nd March 1814.

⁷ MEMOIR pages 91 to 94.

⁸ MEMOIR page 56.

⁹ Probably *The Reluctant Departure*, now in the City of Birmingham Museum and Art Gallery.

¹⁰ MEMOIR page 115: "...when he heard that I was to leave town on Monday or Tuesday at furthest, he asked us to dine with his mother on the Sunday, and he would take us in the even[ing] to hear Mr – the then celebrated preacher. This was too tempting an offer to be refused and we had another happy day at his house and were much edified by the eveng. Sermon".

¹¹ MEMOIR pages 137-8. She adds: "I felt indeed to seek God's blessing and guidance was a treasure that none of this world's crosses need deprive me of, and that I had a never failing Hand to support me."

¹² MEMOIR, page 143.

¹³ LIFE Journal entry for October 1816.

¹⁴ LIFE Journal entry for 3rd November 1816.

¹⁵ Coleridge was highly delighted with it – see the correspondence reproduced by Wilkie in LIFE, November and December 1818.

¹⁶ MEMOIR, page 153.

Dr Chalmers preach twice in London, that season and he had since been reading Wilberforce on vital Christianity¹⁷, and other striking books, that had affected his mind so as to deeply impress him with many momentous truths he had formerly treated as of small importance.’

Harriet and William married in 1822. In 1824 Wilkie was born, and in 1828 his brother Charlie was born.

Not a great deal is known about how William and Harriet’s beliefs and religious practice developed during the period 1818 to 1831. Wilkie states that in 1825 his father met the charismatic preacher Edward Irving (1792-1834) at Mr Gillman’s house in Highgate, where Coleridge lived from 1816 onwards, and describes this as his first meeting with Irving. However, Irving had moved to London three years earlier, in 1822, one of his contacts there being William’s lifelong friend Sir David Wilkie. In his biography of Sir David Wilkie, Alan Cunningham observed¹⁸ that the first time he, Cunningham, had met Irving was at Wilkie’s house, and that ‘William Collins the painter’ was there, so his first meeting could have been earlier.¹⁹ Another person who came under the influence of Irving in the mid 1820’s was the clergyman William Dodsworth. The common link between Coleridge, Irving and Dodsworth was their interest in Prophetic studies, interpreted in the light of current political events and social concerns²⁰. Coleridge was a prolific writer on the subject of Religion and Politics, and a recent commentator makes the observation that he ‘made the case that the Bible was not only a spiritual guide to wisdom, it was the most practical of political and moral primers as well. It was a guide to right action and good government’²¹, a case that would have undoubtedly been endorsed by both Dodsworth and William.

In 1829 Dodsworth was appointed at the minister of the Margaret Street Chapel, Marylebone²², and we know that William went to hear him speak there. In October 1831, he wrote to Harriet that ‘Mr Dodsworth continues his sermons upon the fearful character of the present times’²³. From 1830 to 1838 the family lived in Porchester Terrace, Bayswater. This was a bit over a mile and a half’s walk from the Margaret Street Chapel.

Dodsworth preached at the Margaret Street Chapel until 1837, and presumably the Collinses attended there, with Wilkie and Charley, until 1836 when they set off for Italy. Unfortunately, the records for Margaret Street Chapel appear not to have survived²⁴, or we might know rather more about the Collins family’s churchgoing

¹⁷ In 1794 William Wilberforce, the anti-slavery campaigner, had written *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of this Country Contrasted with Real Christianity*. This went through 7 editions in four years. At over 300pp (7th edition, 1798) we do not know what aspects of Wilberforce’s book particularly struck William, but Wilberforce certainly stresses, right at the outset of his book, the duty of Christians to educate their children in the principles of religion (as Wilberforce would say, to be found in the literal words of the Bible) in the same manner as they took pains to ensure their children were appropriately knowledgeable about other subjects; see pages 5-6 of the seventh edition.

¹⁸ Cunningham, Alan *The Life of Sir David Wilkie (with his journals, tours and critical remarks of Works of Art and a selection from his correspondence)*, 3 volumes, London 1843, Volume III, at p98.

¹⁹ Irving became minister of the Caledonian Chapel, Hatton Garden in 1822 and moved to the new National Scotch Church, Regent Square in 1827.

²⁰ For a detailed analysis of Dodsworth’s career, views and place in the ecclesiastical history of his time, see *William Dodsworth (1798-1861) : The Origins of Tractarian Thought in London* by Stephen Edward Young, BD, AKC, unpublished D. Phil. Thesis, Open University Department of Religious Studies, February 2003. Young

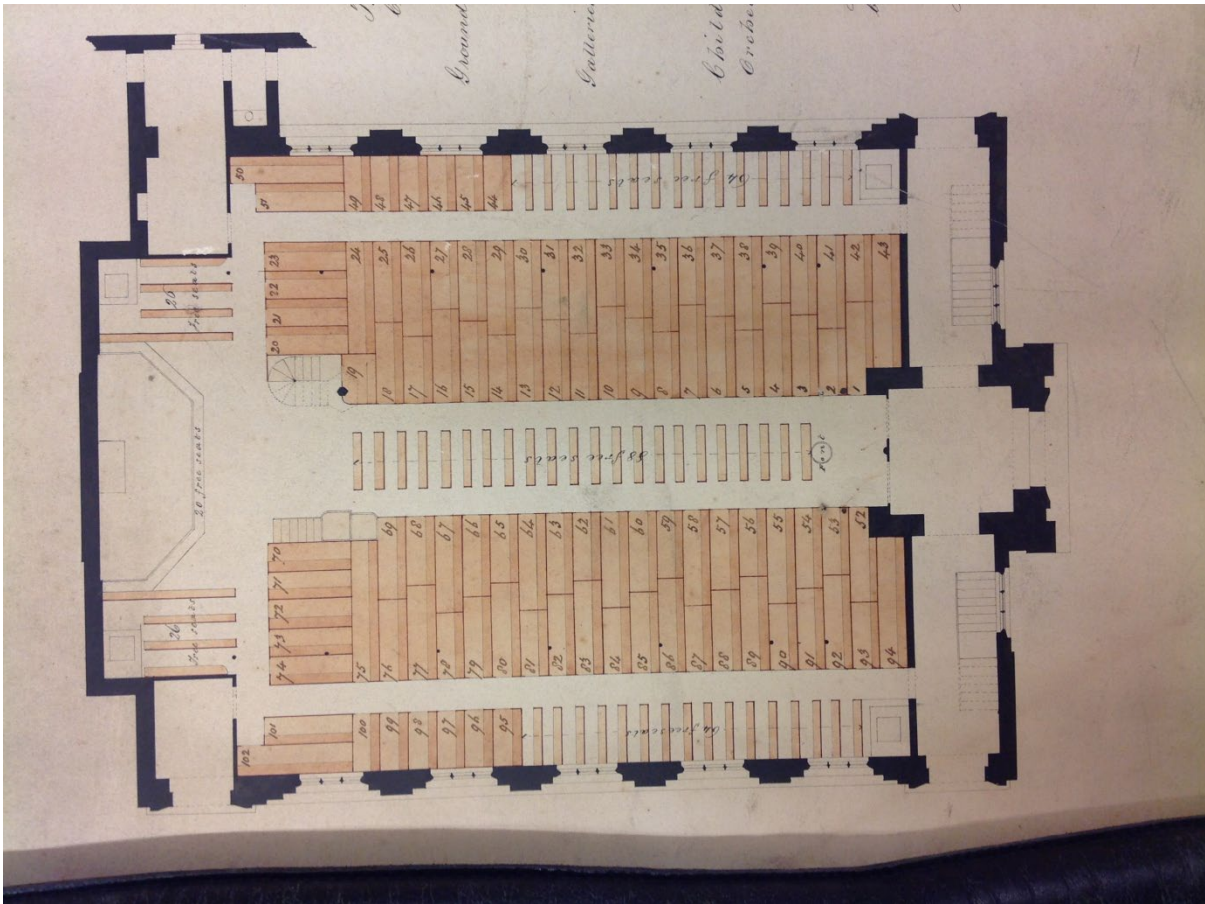
²¹ See *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* OUP 2009, Chapter 12 by Pamela Edwards ‘Coleridge on Politics and Religion’ at page 240.

²² He was appointed to that position by the Chapel’s owner Henry Drummond, the sponsor of the Albury conferences, which Dodsworth attended and contributed to – see Young, chapter Two, above. The Margaret Street Chapel was replaced in the 1850’s by William Butterfield’s All Saints, Margaret Street.

²³ Letter of 17th October 1831, held in the Morgan Library, New York, MA3154.22 and printed at pages 1-2 of Volume 2 of LIFE.

²⁴ See Young, chapter 4, note 102.

at this period, such as whether and over what period they rented a pew at the chapel. Dodsworth reputation and importance grew²⁵ and by 1835 the Bishop of London decided to put him in charge of one of the new churches scheduled to be constructed to provide for the city's burgeoning population – Christ Church, Albany Street. Here quite a number of the records do survive. The building was part funded through subscription, and we know that William gave £5 towards the building fund²⁶. We also have the architect James Pennethorne's signed plan²⁷ showing the layout and numbering of pews in the church:



The pews are numbered, and correspond to a series of pew rental records which survive from 1844 onwards. As both William and Harriet enjoyed (or at least were edified by) a good sermon it is not surprising that they chose to rent pews which were close to the pulpit, with a good line of sight. The pew they rented from the

²⁵ See Young, chapter 4. Young observes in his preliminary Abstract: "Distanced from Irving and drawn into the incipient Tractarian Movement, Dodsworth's potential for leadership was recognised by Newman, and utilized by Pusey in the establishment of Christ Church, Albany Street as a prototype of the Anglo-Catholic parish, and a first embodiment of the Oxford Movement's pastoral ideals in London." Certainly, William appears to have approved both of Newman and Pusey – see William's comments about Dr Pusey in an 1843 letter to Harriet at LIFE, Volume 2, page 235, and his comments, in a letter to Harriet of 19th April 1844 about the rejection of a candidate for Bachelor of Divinity at Oxford, at LIFE, Volume 2, page 250: "the candidate was one of Newman's friends. His essay was masterly, devout, and, as I thought, unexceptionable. It belonged, however, to 'the Newman school' and poor Mr Macmullen was rejected."

²⁶ LMA, P90/CTC2/106: The subscription list includes "Collins W Esq, Porchester Terrace Bayswater, £5". Harriet may have added the results of a collection herself: an entry shows a Mrs Collins as depositing six shillings.

²⁷ LMA, P90/CTC2/128. I am grateful to the Diocese of London for permission to reproduce the plan in this article.

time of their return to England in the summer of 1838 was D28²⁸, four rows back in the aisle on the pulpit side. Notice to quit was given expiring December 1845, presumably because William's ill-health now meant that he was hardly attending. In that year, he was only able to get to church in May and June, when he heard Archdeacon (later Cardinal) Manning preach²⁹, and then not until 15th April 1846, which may have been his last visit³⁰. The church was about a mile and a half from the family's home between 1838 and 1840, when they would first have been attending Christ Church, Albany Street, and just over two miles from the two addresses the family lived at between 1840 and the time of William's death in February 1847³¹.

It is not clear whether Harriet continued going to Christ Church on a regular basis once their pew was given up. She may well have been invited to join friends in another pew. But from March 1849 until 1854 she rented a single space in pew number 45, the outer aisle three seater pew adjacent to their previous family pew³². During 1854 she moved to pew number 10, a six seater pew. Possibly this was so that she could sit with Charley, who rented a seat in the same pew between 1854 and 1857³³. Harriet finally gave notice to quit in June 1858³⁴. Significantly, the four houses she lived in after William's death got progressively closer to Christ Church³⁵.

²⁸ The first pew rental book, or books covering the period 1837 to 1843 do not, unfortunately, appear to have survived, but the family rented D28 from March 1844 to December 1845 (see LMA, P90/CTC2/159), and it seems likely that this five seater pew would have been theirs from the time of their return in 1838.

²⁹ 1st June 1845, see LIFE, volume 2, pages 272-273.

³⁰ LIFE, volume 2, page 293.

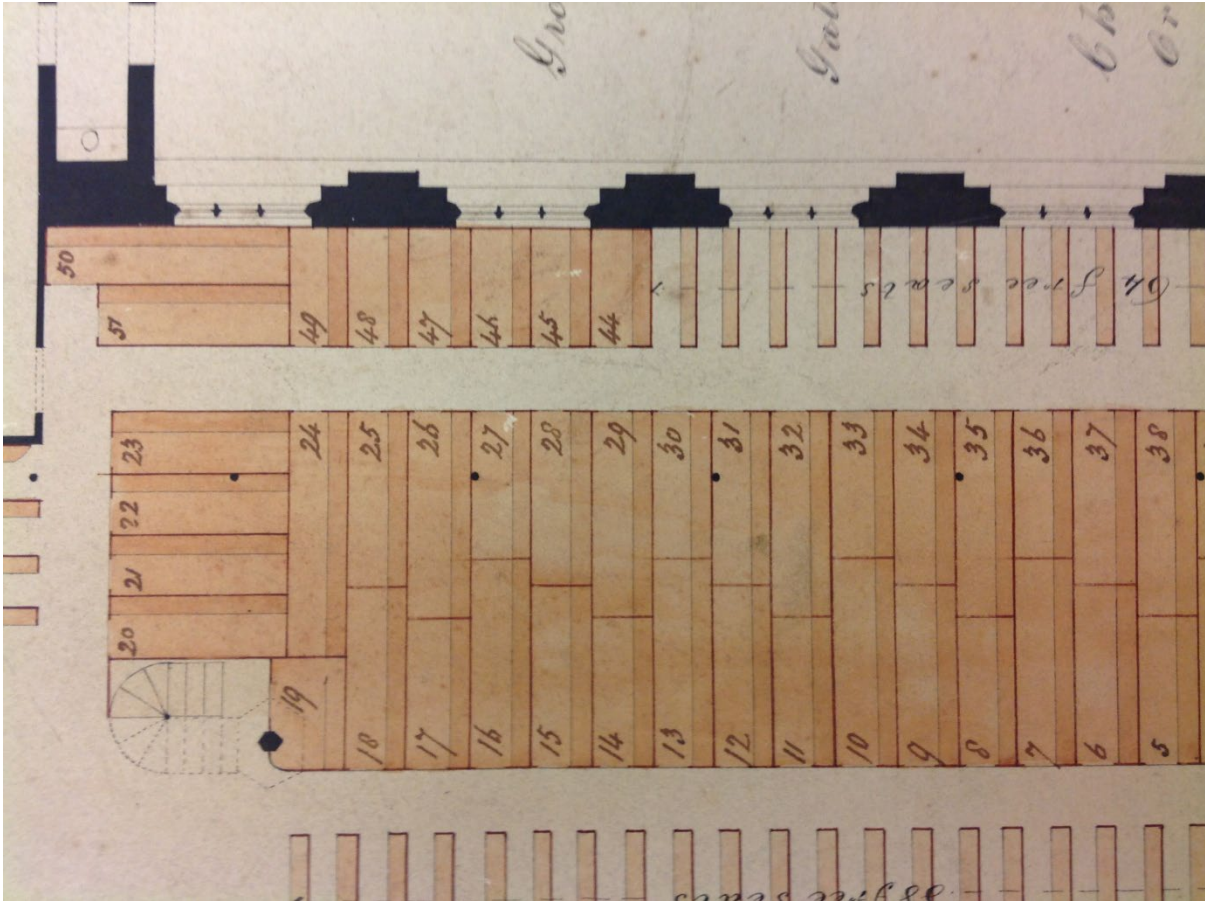
³¹ 20 Avenue Road, St John's Wood from autumn 1838-1840, 85 Oxford Terrace from 1840 to August/September 1843 and 1 Devonport Street from August/September 1843.

³² LMA, P90/CTC2/161.

³³ LMA, P90/CTC2/162.

³⁴ LMA, P90/CTC2/162.

³⁵ 38 Blandford Square (1848-1850) was about one and a quarter miles away; 17 Hanover Terrace (1850-1856) and 2 Clarence Terrace (1856) were a little less than a mile away, and their home in Harley Place (1857-1858) was only about half a mile away.



By the time Harriet stopped attending Christ Church, Albany Street, Dodsworth himself had long since resigned as Perpetual Curate. He had resigned early in 1851, in order to convert to Roman Catholicism, but he appears to have been a significant part of the family's spiritual life between 1831 (if not earlier) and the late 1840s.

He was passionate about the importance of education – and the need for the established church to control it. He was also extremely clear about the importance of infant Baptism, and the responsibilities of the Church and parents and godparents, which flowed from that, to see that the baptised child was 'Christianly and virtuously brought up'³⁶. Baptism in itself was, however, simply the beginning of the road and not a ticket to salvation justifying idleness – 'it is for us to make that calling and election sure', Dodsworth stated, adding 'Sacrifices must be made; self-ease and self-indulgence and lazy habits must be given up.'³⁷ This resonates with William's 1816 resolution, referred to above, of which he writes: 'as it has for its end the improvement of my powers as an artist and a man, I shall proceed to adopt a more strict and periodical examination of my conduct, with a view to banish from my constitution those inclinations to indolence which...might overcome my mental resources.' However, these notions are in no way unusual in terms of religious thinking and practice at the time. Moreover, one of William Dodsworth's particular concerns was that his parishioners should take

³⁶ William Dodsworth, *Correlative claims of the Church and her Members*, London, 1837 - sermon preached on 16th July 1837, the first Sunday after the consecration of Christ Church, Albany Street - at page 15.

³⁷ William Dodsworth, *On Diligence in the Christian Character*, a sermon, printed in *The Church of England Preacher*, volume 1, no. 8, 1837. Although the Collins family were abroad at the time Christ Church was consecrated and these two sermons were published, it is highly probable that William and Harriet would have obtained and read them on their return.

Holy Communion more frequently, preferably each Sunday³⁸. It is clear from the 1835 Diary and the Italian Diary that William and Harriet did not follow his precepts in this regard³⁹ but that certainly did not stand in the way of their socialising with Dodsworth and his wife⁴⁰. On one such social occasion William and Harriet spent the evening at Mr Dodsworth's and were introduced there to Bishop Chase of Illinois; William painted his portrait in 1836 and presented it to Dodsworth⁴¹.

Of course, it is difficult to know how their parents' religious views, and their socialising with Mr and Mrs Dodsworth affected the home life of Wilkie and Charley. Some insights can, however, be gleaned from Harriet's 1835 Diary and Italian Diary. It is fairly certain that Sundays were always observed as a day of rest⁴², and that there was regular attendance at church⁴³. Nevertheless, there were frequent visits to, and from friends after Church on Sundays.⁴⁴

While the family was abroad, they attended Anglican churches wherever they could find them on their travels. When they could not, for example during the five months spent near Sorrento and on Ischia, they held family prayers in their lodgings on Sundays⁴⁵. They visited Catholic churches to see the sights. Harriet was impressed by the splendour of processions in and around St Peter's but horrified by some practices she observed which were completely at odds with her understanding of Christianity, for example horses being blessed⁴⁶. In a

³⁸ See his four sermons *Discourses on the Lord's Supper, preached in Margaret Chapel St Marylebone*, London 1835. A fresh edition was published in 1840 with additional sermons on this topic.

³⁹ See Harriet's 1835 Diary and Italian Diary. She records where they went to church each Sunday, and records each time she takes Holy Communion, ten times in all during 1835, i.e. once every five weeks or so. During 1837, whilst the family were in Italy, it was practicable for her to get to an Anglican church on 26 Sundays – she took Holy Communion on only four occasions.

⁴⁰ See Harriet's 1835 Diary. The Collinses and Dodsworths met eight times socially between May and December 1835, at both their houses and as guests at dinner.

⁴¹ For the meeting, see entry in the 1835 Diary for Tuesday 24th November. For the portrait, see LIFE, Volume 2 page 349.

⁴² John Linnell's biographer Alfred Story tells a story about William being very shocked at seeing John Linnell nailing his peach and nectarine trees to the north wall of his garden on a Sunday (*John Linnell, 2 vols.* 1892, Volume 1 at page 277). This would have been between 1830 and 1836 when the families were neighbours at Porchester Terrace, but the incident did not stand in the way of a lifelong friendship between the two artists despite the fact that Linnell's own religious views were unconventional and highly personal – he seems to have considered becoming a member of the Plymouth Brethren in the early 1840's. Harriet's diary entry for 16th October 1836 references French laxity about Sunday Observance: "delighted to see for the first time in France shops shut and Sunday to some degree observed".

⁴³ From her 1835 Diary, it is clear that certainly in that year Harriet herself invariably went to church on Sundays unless prevented by illness of a family member. On one occasion, she went twice. In 1837 she went twice on 6 out of 26 churchgoing Sundays. She blamed herself for not having taken the boys to church on the afternoon of New Year's Eve 1837, when Charlie's arm got broken when he was pushed off a wall in the gardens of the Villa Reale, Naples: "Alas what an end to the old year but I take shame to myself for not taking my boys to church with me in the afternoon as I ought to have done".

⁴⁴ See Harriet's 1835 Diary; she records 28 visits to friends, 9 from friends, and one occasion each of having people round to dinner on a Sunday and dining with others on a Sunday.

⁴⁵ See Harriet's Italian Diary for June to October 1837. The only times the family did not hold Sunday prayers, when away from cities, was when William was very ill – see diary entries for 20th August, 27th August, 3rd September and 15th October.

⁴⁶ See Harriet's Italian Diary, entry for Monday 23rd January: "out at 2 with Wm and children to St Anthony's church to see horses blessed by the priest most ridiculous and disgusting ceremony" and for Sunday 18th June: "Grand festa of San Antonio figure draped up with infant with arms dirty children dressed as angels, awful nonsense and mockery of Christianity." She had been similarly scathing when at Cannes, in France, on the journey to Italy, observing on 27th October 1836 that the church there was "worse than usual for frippery and idolatry about twenty different virgins and

long diary entry which appears to have been written on the first day of the New Year 1838 she looks back at the year 1837 and records the following indictment on what she has seen: “ the chief drawback to the enjoyment of the beauties and advantages of Italy is the dreadful and debasing idolatry they call the Christian religion not a trace to be found of the religion revealed in God’s Word but a few – names for instance Jesu Christo but how is this blessed name affronted his mother exalted on every occasion above him Saints days more attended to than the Lord’s day Saints called on as mediators between the sinner and God in express contradiction to Scripture.- money the grand object of the priests and monks the poor subject to the most grinding extortion and made to believe that the salvation of their souls depends on their paying for masses candles and other trumpery. In short, the full light of the Gospel never permitted to shine on the poor benighted misguided people. Lord How long wilt thou suffer these blind guides to prevail When wilt thou come in power and great glory to rule the nations in Righteousness to cleanse thy Sanctuary and cast out Satan from his usurped dominion to his bondage for a thousand years –“

Harriet evidently retained her early interest both in a well crafted sermon⁴⁷ and in religious discussion⁴⁸ which could, it seems, get quite heated⁴⁹.

From these diary entries it is possible to glean a considerable amount about the religious views of Wilkie and Charley’s mother around 1835, and they are consistent with what might be expected from an attentive member of Dodsworth’s congregation.

One of the things Wilkie’s biographers have cited⁵⁰, in support of the proposition that William had fundamentalist views, of such a nature as to result in trauma to his children, is a diary entry made in 1848, at the time the LIFE was published, by the barrister, diarist and Unitarian Henry Crabb Robinson. Robinson first met William at Coleridge’s house⁵¹ where a large party including William listened to Coleridge and Irving discoursing about religion. Robinson met William again in Rome when he accompanied William Wordsworth there in 1837. Harriet, William and the boys bumped into Wordsworth and Robinson when returning from a

infants one in drop earrings, gold crown diamond cross and all the finery that could be heaped upon her most awful to behold".

⁴⁷ See 1835 Diary entry for Sunday 12th July: “went to church striking sermon 8th of Roms”. Her Italian Diary records that on Sunday 8th January 1837 she “went to english church in the afternoon heard a most striking sermon that we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”, and that on the following Sunday she “went to church in the morning Severn with us heard a fine sermon from an old man whose name we did not know went again in the afternoon very fine sermon from Mr Hutchins”. There are many other references to “very good” and “excellent” sermons. She also recorded her disappointments in her diaries: on Sunday 4th October 1835, she “went to St Johns not edified”. On Sunday 16th April 1837 “Charlie and I went in afternoon no sermon”. On Saturday 22nd April 1837, she and William, together with the sculptor Joseph Severn and his wife went to the requiem service for the recently deceased English Cardinal Weld, but she noted that Dr Wiseman’s sermon was “merely a biographical memoir”.

⁴⁸ On Tuesday 2nd May 1837 Harriet records that she “had a discussion with our Roman Cath(olic) friend”. On Saturday 1st July, the painter Thomas Uwins, who had been out all day sketching with William, brought some friends in the evening including a Mr Nicholls, of whom Harriet writes: “had a great deal of religious conversation with the latter a clergyman they staid till eleven”. On Wednesday 1st November Harriet records that “Mad(ame) Politi came to see sketches &c with us nearly all the mornng had some interesting talk on religion with her”.

⁴⁹ On Friday 29th September Harriet records that in the evening there was a religious discussion with their friend Mr Hills which “ended in his going off in a fret” and that their other guests “followed soon after-“.

⁵⁰ Clarke, at page 16; Lycett, at page 71.

⁵¹ On June 10th, 1824. See *The Diary of Henry Crabb Robinson* [“Robinson Diary”], ed. D. Hudson, Oxford Univeristy Press, 1967, at page 79.

walk on the Pincio⁵² and two days later Wordsworth and Robinson called on the Collinse⁵³, and went to look at some paintings which William had commended to them⁵⁴. It seems that at some point between that meeting and 1840 Robinson was told by a mutual acquaintance, the painter Edward Thomas Daniell, that William had commented to Daniell that he would not willingly shake hands with a Unitarian. Evidently Robinson took serious umbrage, and made no further contact with William. In December 1848, he read the LIFE on a train journey to see Wordsworth, and made a disparaging entry in his diary⁵⁵. We know nothing of the context of William's comment to Daniell, but an antipathy to Unitarianism, with its specific denial of the doctrine of the Trinity, would have been a fairly mainstream view in the church which Harriet and William attended⁵⁶. However, it is difficult to gauge how, if at all, such antipathy would have impacted on their children. Whatever views they may have held about Christian non-conformity, William and Harriet appear to have had no difficulty in accepting a Jewish tutor for William while they were in the south of France in November 1836⁵⁷. Harriet's views on Roman Catholicism, as practised on the continent, are evident from her diaries, but William's are unclear – it is evident from Harriet's diaries that he took considerable interest in Catholic ritual and festivities, and took Wilkie to see some of them.

William, like many artists at the time, spent parts of the summer and autumn visiting patrons and art collectors who had invited him to stay at their country houses. That would have left Harriet to deal with the children. In August 1835, the day before he set off home after such an absence, he wrote to Harriet: 'Your letter gave me much comfort, so does the thought of returning; which, God willing, I hope to do tomorrow. I have been much in company, and have been sketching a great deal; but all will not do – dull I am, and dull I fear I shall be, until I find myself in the same house as those it has pleased God to spare for my comfort. Tell the dear children that the only way they can serve their parents is to obey them in all things: let Charley find out the passages in Scripture where this duty is most strongly insisted on, and write them down for me.'⁵⁸ Since Charlie was aged only seven and a half at this point in time, this does have some resonances with *Hide and Seek's* opening chapter, but without knowing the context, including what Harriet had written in her letter to William, it is difficult to draw any firm conclusions. We do, however, know that he was only away for a fortnight on this

⁵² Italian Diary, entry for Wednesday 26th April 1837.

⁵³ Italian Diary, entry for Friday 28th April 1837, and the Robinson Diary at page 169 : "We chatted with Collins the landscape-painter, who is a great favourite of Wordsworth's".

⁵⁴ Entry for 6th May in the 1872 edition of Henry Crabb Robinson's diaries edited by Thomas Sadler, volume two at page 190.

⁵⁵ Robinson Diary, entry for 26th December 1848 on page 249: "...*The Times*...and the *Life of Collins* the painter occupied me all day. The book, an ordinary work, which to one unacquainted with the art could give no pleasure. I saw a little of Collins when travelling with Mr Wordsworth in 1837, when I liked him well enough. He was civil to me on account of my companion. But I declined his further acquaintance in London, Mr Daniell having told me that Collins had said to him: 'I would not shake hands with a Unitarian knowingly.' I would not defraud him of so small a gift as a token of good will surreptitiously. I valued him as an artist only for his fresh and *healthy* landscapes...".

⁵⁶ In his first sermon after the consecration of Christ Church Albany Street, *Correlative claims of the Church and her Members*, London, 1837 - sermon preached on 16th July 1837, Dodsworth stated: "With regard to dissenters - for such I understand there are in this district - I trust I shall ever be able to distinguish between them and the system to which they belong; in a word between dissenters and dissent itself." Dodsworth states that he will struggle to bring them back into the fold, and can hold no terms with their views" ...but I cannot admit that these convictions will incapacitate me from feeling towards dissenters a Christian affection and exercising towards them all Christian charity". He adds that they may be far holier and better.

⁵⁷ See Italian Diary, entry for Tuesday 15th November 1836: "young Jew came to teach Willy", and the entry for Monday 21st November 1836: "William and children walked out with Willys master".

⁵⁸ LIFE, Volume 2, page 51; letter from Stratton Park, 28th August 1835.

occasion, and that Harriet was relieved to see him back⁵⁹. We also know from Harriet's diaries that the boys could, perhaps unsurprisingly, be quite a handful⁶⁰ from time to time.

William's contemporaries had nothing ill, and many complimentary things to say about William's personality. Even Benjamin Haydon, who was generally excoriatingly rude in his diary entries about Royal Academicians writes: 'you cannot help loving the fellow. I am very much attached to him.'⁶¹ whilst for his part William, who might have been expected to react with an uncompromising lack of empathy when Haydon committed suicide, contributed three guineas to a subscription for Haydon's family⁶². John Linnell, asked in 1835 by the newspaper editor and poet Alaric Watts⁶³ to provide some biographical material about William, responded that he thought it "best to mention ... only those facts which his modesty and goodness would prevent you from obtaining from himself - such for instance as his supporting his mother entirely to the day of her death and family of his brother"⁶⁴. John Linnell's sons, who were playmates of Wilkie, mentioned something Wilkie had said to them, which suggests an altogether gentler side to William.⁶⁵ The personal recollections of Samuel Carter Hall, editor of the *Art Journal* were similarly positive⁶⁶, while in 1830 the writer of an article published in the *Dublin Literary Gazette* wrote of him that whilst (in contrast to David Wilkie) no one would regard William as a genius "he is simply a gentleman, mild and pleasing, without foppery, affectation, or even peculiarity of any kind."⁶⁷

Wilkie himself has very little to say about his religious upbringing in his voluminous correspondence. Both he and his brother Charley were prepared by William Dodsworth for confirmation at Christ Church Albany Street, and duly confirmed in 1841 and 1844 respectively⁶⁸. In September 1845, he writes teasingly of his father, in a letter from Paris to his mother, referring to William as 'a lamb of Mr Dodsworth's flock'⁶⁹. Dodsworth died in

⁵⁹ See Harriet's 1835 Diary. Harriet helped him pack on Thursday 13th August, and he left on 14th August. Harriet's diary entries for this year are brief, and very rarely qualify events with how she felt about them, but on 28th August she wrote: "At home morn and letter from Wm to announce his return came home to tea – Happy meeting". Wilkie was home from school, so she had both boys to deal with.

⁶⁰ See, for example, Harriet's diary entry for Monday 24th July 1837: "Wm out sketching I went to call on Miss Maitland Willy very tiresome all day his father obliged to punish him at dinner time made us all miserable". On Saturday 2nd September 1837, she wrote of being "much worried with boys" and on Friday 6th October 1837: "Willy in disgrace again". Punishment on that occasion involved being deprived of an expected treat, going out riding.

⁶¹ *Diary of Benjamin Robert Haydon*, 5 volumes 1960-63, Volume V, page 319, diary entry for 5th October 1843.

⁶² See the payment made on 23rd October 1846 from William's bank account with Coutts Bank.

⁶³ Watts was later to give editorial assistance to Wilkie when he came to write the *LIFE*.

⁶⁴ Fitzwilliam Museum: Linnell papers 55303-2000, quoted in Story, Alfred T: *John Linnell*, 2 volumes, London, 1892; at volume 1, page 285.

⁶⁵ Story, *op.cit.* page 287: 'Young Wilkie Collins, who was their playmate at Bayswater, was one day in the garden with them, when they happened to draw upon themselves the wrath of their father. Said young Wilkie after the passing storm was over: "I should not like your father to be mine. Your father is a bull; mine is a cow."'

⁶⁶ Hall, Samuel Carter *A book of Memories of Great Men and Women of the Age from personal acquaintance*, Londo, 1871: 'a cheerful man - contented with his lot and the modest independence his professional labour obtained for him. He was truly a pleasant companion; pleasant to look at, to sit with, to converse with; a very lovable man, even to those who knew little of him, and greatly so to the domestic circle - wife, children and friends. He was a scholar as well as a gentleman, graceful and gracious in manners, considerate and kind to all who approached him.'

⁶⁷ Cited in Whitley, W *Art in England 1820-1837*, Cambridge, 1928, at page 189.

⁶⁸ LMA, CTC2/90/019. Charlie was confirmed by the Bishop of London on 13th May 1844 – see William's journal entry for that date in *LIFE*, volume 2, at page 255.

⁶⁹ Ed. Baker, Gasson, Law & Lewis: *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters* (4 volumes, London 2005), ['LETTERS'] letter [0027] dated 16th September 1845: "I always read your letters through. Considering that he is a lamb of Mr Dodsworth's flock Mr Collins evinces a most unchurchmanlike disposition to scandalise other people..."

1861. If he had indeed been the model for the Reverend Aaron Yollop, one might have expected Wilkie to have been rather more acerbic in a letter he wrote to Harriet in December 1861 in which he copies out a note from The *Times* obituary page and adds: 'Is this our poor old pompous Doddy? I suppose so. Twenty years ago would you ever have thought of seeing R.I.P. after his name?'⁷⁰.

So what conclusions can be drawn about whether Chapter 1 of *Hide and Seek* is autobiographical or primarily a literary construct? In support of autobiography, there is really nothing except the fact that both William and Harriet had strong views about the importance of Sunday Observance and that, on one occasion, William suggested in a letter that his seven year old younger son should look out passages in the Bible referring to the duty of children to obey their parents. Against that is the evidence of William's contemporaries about his personality, and the picture that emerges from Harriet's memoir and diaries about family life and her own religious views and convictions.

In the absence of the discovery of a memoir about their childhood written by Wilkie or Charlie, there will probably never be a definitive answer to this question. But I would suggest that the sources presently available to us point to the conclusion that Chapter 1 of *Hide and Seek* is essentially a construction by Wilkie the storyteller, designed as a counterpoint to the final unmasking of Zack's father's hypocrisy. Biographers of course need to capture and hold the reader's attention, and there is also, in the public's imagination, a vision of the artist as a person struggling to overcome the deprivations of his or her upbringing. But it may well be the case that both Wilkie and Charlie felt themselves to have had a very secure and (with the exception of their two years abroad between 1836 and 1838) fairly ordinary upbringing. Perhaps the last words should go to Wilkie himself –asked in 1862 by a French critic to provide some biographical details, he refers to his father as 'uniformly kind and considerate to his children'⁷¹.

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⁷⁰ LETTERS, [0450], 12th December 1861. Twenty years previously, in 1841, Wilkie would have had direct contact with Dodsworth, as he would have had to attend Dodsworth's classes for Confirmation candidates.

⁷¹ LETTERS, [0462] dated 21st March 1862, Wilkie to Alfred-August Ernouf.