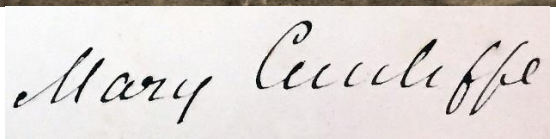
THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

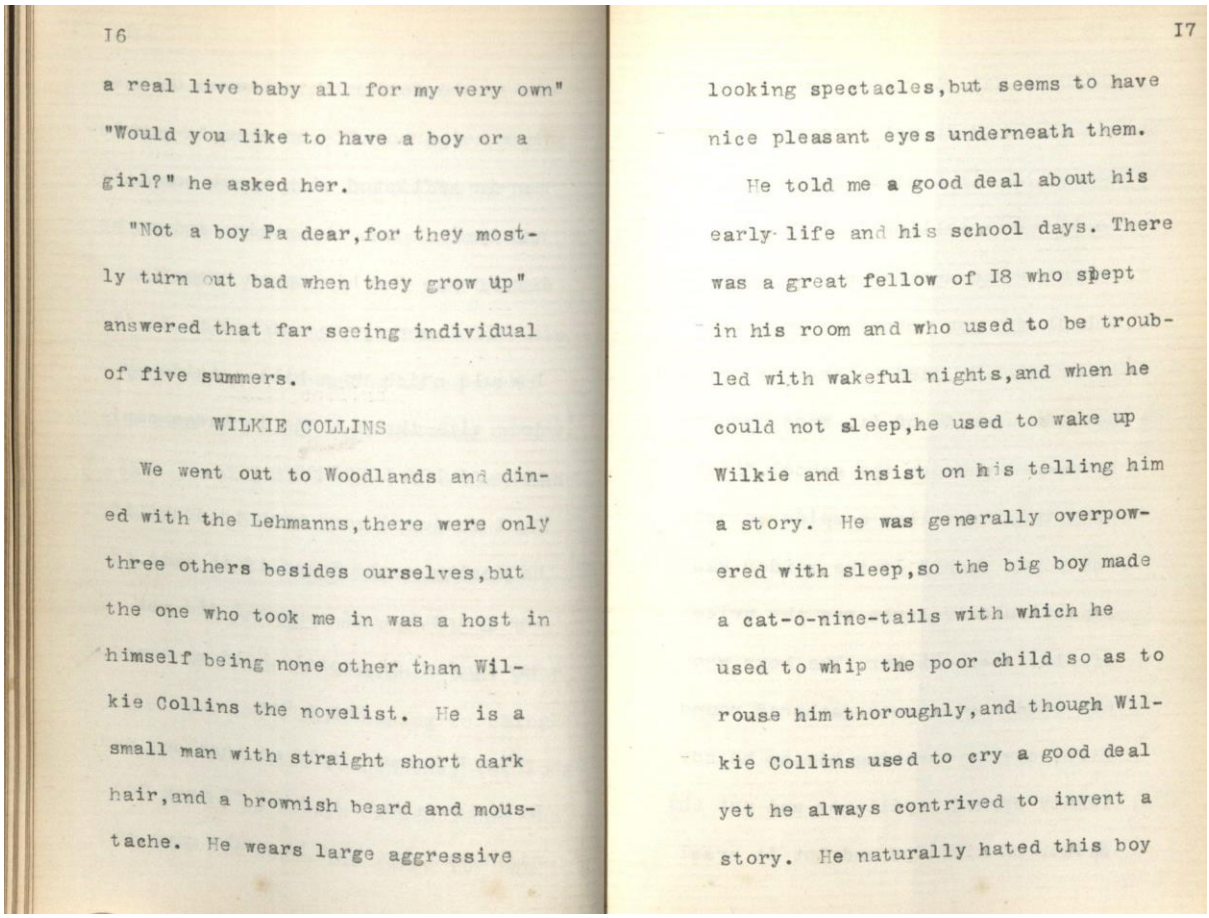
Mary Cunliffe's Recollections of Wilkie Collins



From the photograph pasted into the typescript of *Notes by the Way*, McHenry Library, UC Santa Cruz

by
Paul Lewis

Wilkie Collins Society
April 2020



a real live baby all for my very own" "Would you like to have a boy or a girl?" he asked her.

"Not a boy Pa dear,for they mostly turn out bad when they grow up" answered that far seeing individual of five summers.

WILKIE COLLINS

We went out to Woodlands and dined with the Lehmanns,there were only three others besides ourselves,but the one who took me in was a host in himself being none other than Wilkie Collins the novelist. He is a small man with straight short dark hair,and a brownish beard and moustache. He wears large aggressive

looking spectacles,but seems to have nice pleasant eyes underneath them.

He told me a good deal about his early life and his school days. There was a great fellow of I8 who slept in his room and who used to be troubled with wakeful nights,and when he could not sleep,he used to wake up Wilkie and insist on his telling him a story. He was generally overpowered with sleep,so the big boy made a cat-o-nine-tails with which he used to whip the poor child so as to rouse him thoroughly,and though Wilkie Collins used to cry a good deal yet he always contrived to invent a story. He naturally hated this boy

From the typescript of *A Record of Pleasant Memories* by Mary Cunliffe, Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Mary Cunliffe's Recollections of Wilkie Collins

These Recollections are taken from two typescripts written in 1885 by Mary Cunliffe. The typescripts have been combined and the text divided into ten stories that were told on five different occasions. The first four at the homes of Nina and Frederick Lehmann – Woodlands and Berkeley Square – who were close friends with Wilkie Collins.

1. WOODLANDS, HIGHGATE

Undated: probably mid 1860s

a. School bully

We went out to Woodlands and dined with the Lehmanns, there were only three others besides ourselves, but the one who took me in was a host in himself being none other than Wilkie Collins the novelist. He is a small man with straight short dark hair, and a brownish beard and moustache. He wears large aggressive looking spectacles, but seems to have nice pleasant eyes underneath them.

He told me a good deal about his early life and his school days. There was a great fellow of 18 who slept in his room and who used to be troubled with wakeful nights, and when he could not sleep, he used to wake up Wilkie and insist on his telling him a story. He was generally overpowered with sleep, so the big boy made a cat-o-nine-tails with which he used to whip the poor child so as to rouse him thoroughly, and though Wilkie Collins used to cry a good deal yet he always contrived to invent a story. He naturally hated this boy while he was at school, yet he feels now that had it not been for his tormentor, he might never have made story-telling his calling in life.

Notes

This story is clearly one which Wilkie told often. It is mentioned, though in no great detail, in an account of an interview by Edmund Yates ('Celebrities at Home' from *The World*, Third Series, London 1879 pp. 145-156).

Wilkie himself also published the tale towards the end of his life in a rare autobiographical piece 'Reminiscences of a Story Teller', ending it with "I never had an opportunity of reminding the captain that I had served my apprenticeship to story-telling under his superintendence. He went to India with good prospects, and died, poor fellow, a few years only after he had left school." (*Universal Review*, 15 June 1888, p. 183).

Many biographers have repeated it citing Wilkie's piece as the source. None cites Cunliffe, not even Catherine Peters (*The King of Inventors,* 1991) who had seen the typescript which includes it. Some either mention or quote from L. B. Walford *Memories of Victorian London* (1912) pp. 61-62.

The Scottish novelist Lucy Bethia Walford (née Colquhoun 17 April 1845–11 May 1915) was a close friend of Mary Cunliffe and in her book she claimed to hear this story and the next one from Wilkie Collins himself as he sat in a basket chair on a balcony after a dinner at Mary Cunliffe's London home at which Lord Palmerston, then the Prime Minister was present. Palmerston, she recalled, "was not in himself an interesting personality". If true, that would date the occasion before 18 October 1865 when Palmerston died. Walford clearly says Mary Cunliffe was not present when Wilkie told the

story, so it is possible that he told it separately to Mary on another occasion at Woodlands; or that Walford made the context up, using Cunliffe's letters as her own, something she did on another occasion (see Notes p. 9, below).

Wilkie wrote a rather longer version of the account in his original manuscript for the *Universal Review*. Dorothy L. Sayers quotes from the original in her unfinished biography *Wilkie Collins – A Critical and Biographical Study*, Ed. E. R. Gregory (1977: Toledo), see pp. 45-46. On pp. 119-120 there is a collation of the published version of this story with the manuscript which is now held at the Humanities Research Centre, Austin, Texas.

All the photographs and portraits of Wilkie show him with rather small eyeglasses. Compare the passage here with Walford's almost identical words. "he was rather a small man, with short, dark hair, and a brownish beard and moustache; while the large spectacles he habitually wore did not disfigure him, as one could see the pleasant expression of the eyes beneath." (Walford p. 61).

Cunliffe's introduction makes it likely this was the first time she met Wilkie Collins.

b. Spider

There was another boy at the school who got notoriety in a singular way. He used to swallow spiders he made a trade of it. Word used to be passed through the school. "Dick is going to swallow a spider, places one penny each." If the spider was a particularly large one the price of places was higher. The boys who had paid their money gathered round Dick eagerly watching him, as he solemnly opened a pill-box and put the spider on his lips and let it crawl down his throat. I asked him what had become of that remarkable boy and Mr Collins told me he is a well known lawyer, as successful in his profession now as he was in the spider business long ago.

I suggested that Mr Collins should go one day to his office and produce a spider in a pill-box and say: "Swallow me this for six and eight-pence" and see what the effect would be on the lawyer.

Notes

This story is also in Walford (pp. 62-63), though she ends it differently

> What would have happened if the spider had declined to fulfil its part of the engagement, Mr. Collins protested he could not imagine—but it never did decline. Of that he was positive; and I gathered that he was one of the paying guests on every occasion when he could afford it. "It really was worth a penny," he said, laughing.
>
> I inquired if anything were known of the after-life of this extraordinary boy?
>
> "Oh, very much so," replied Mr. Collins, briskly, "he is still alive, well, and prosperous—in fact, one of the leading lawyers of the day. Perhaps his success in the spider business showed him how to turn ingenuity and enterprise to account, but I have occasionally asked myself, 'If I were to go to this big man some fine day, with a pillbox and a spider, and say, "Swallow me this for six-and-eightpence,"' what would be the effect? Would the old Dick respond, or would a new Dick have arisen, who knows not Joseph? And do you know, I dare not risk it!"

'knows not Joseph' – see *Bible* Exodus 1:8 and Acts 7:18.

This story is in only one of the Cunliffe typescripts and it has never been cited anywhere but from Walford – see for example Robinson, *Wilkie Collins* (1951), p. 30. Cunliffe provides a second source for it – perhaps a second occasion on which it was told – see notes to 5a.

2. BERKELEY SQUARE
1869: probably in the first quarter of the year

a. Music
We had such a treat last Friday; we spent the evening with the Lehmanns, and heard Joachim play the violin.

Mr Lehmann and he were boys together in Hamburg and are still great friends. They both began to learn the violin when they were five years old, and they shed many tears over their lessons as their master was often very cross to them.

There were only thirty people at the party and Joachim stood in the middle of the room and played gloriously. His face was a wonderful study; it changed its expression with the music; every fibre of his body seemed to vibrate in harmony with the notes of the violin, he seemed like one entranced.

I felt compelled to distract my attention from the music for a few moments to see how it affected the audience.
…
I was astonished at the capacity for enjoyment that Wilkie Collins seemed to have, for he generally strikes one as being rather apathetic and weary looking except when he is talking. He seemed to absorb the music (I can use no other expression). He told me afterwards it had made him feel ten years younger.
…
Just before we came away Joachim played some Hungarian dances which he is shortly going to publish. They are very bright and attractive and will I think take with the Public.

Notes
This story has not been published before.

Joseph Joachim (1831-1907) was a Hungarian composer and celebrated throughout Europe as one of the greatest violin virtuosos of all time. He formed his string quartet in 1868 in Berlin but came to London in January 1869 for a series of performances largely at the Monday Concerts at St James's Hall. His last recorded appearance was on 12 April and it is likely this event took place early in 1869 and probably at the Lehmann's town home at 15 Berkeley Square rather than the more remote Woodlands in Highgate. His *Hungarian Dances* Books 1 and 2 were arrangements of Brahms's originals and published 1868-1872 (*Grove Music Online*).

Other acquaintances of Collins present included Charles Reade, Robert Browning, Anne Thackerary, and the Talmudic scholar E. O. Deutsch (see Notes 4.b. below).

Wilkie had attended another concert with the Lehmann's in 1860 where the conductor and pianist Charles Hallé (1819–1895) performed Beethoven's Kreuzer Sonata with an unknown violinist. Wilkie wrote the next day to Nina Lehmann that it

> has upset me about classical music. I am afraid I don't like classical music, after all – I am afraid I am not the Amateur I once thought myself. The whole violin part of "The Great K.S." appeared to me to be the musical expression of a varying and violent stomach-ache, with intervals of hiccups.
> ([0351] To Nina Lehmann…12 June 1860).

3. WOODLANDS, HIGHGATE
1869: probably the second half of July

I drove out to Woodlands last week and spent the afternoon and evening there. Wilkie Collins and his brother Charles are staying there. The latter is very thin and pale and has red hair. He married one of the daughters of Charles Dickens. He wrote a charming book: called "A Cruise upon Wheels" which is very popular and I think you would like. We all sat in the garden during the afternoon and had a good deal of pleasant talk.

a. Dilke
Sir Charles Dilke came to dinner. He has just published a book called "Greater Britain". He rather spoilt our fun for he sat solemnly by and never smiled. At first we all took it in turn to talk to him, as he did not seem to care for general conversation. He soon discovered however that Mr Lehmann and I were the only two of the company who had read his book, so then he addressed his remarks either to him or to me. One of his monologues for my benefit lasted ten minutes by the clock, the rest of the company meanwhile were laughing at Wilkie Collins' funny stories, and I felt it rather hard to have to keep grave and to listen with a show of interest to Sir Charles while the others were having such fun.

Wilkie Collins asked Sir Charles if he thought there was an opening for him in the far West, as he would gladly write for some of the Papers in those regions if they wanted a London Correspondent. Sir Charles took the remark seriously and said the only difficulty would be that they might want to pay in kind. "Do you think they would pay me in vegetables?" said Wilkie "because if so, they might get rotten before they reached me, and then I should be out of pocket."

He told Sir Charles that he did not believe he really got to know the sentiments of the Mormons, at least of the women: He felt certain that the day before Sir Charles's visit, Brigham Young called all his wives to him and said: "There is a man coming to see us from London, who is writing a book about the Community, and if you don't give him a good impression it will be the worse for you". Sir Charles evidently did not fancy being chaffed, so Wilkie Collins desisted and I had to take my turn at listening again.

Notes
This story has not been published before.

Wilkie stayed with the Lehmanns in the latter half of July 1869, making that the likely date though there is no evidence of his brother Charles being with him. Charles Allston Collins (1828-1873) was a pre-Raphaelite artist and writer who had married Dickens's daughter Kate Macready Dickens (1839-

1929) in July 1860. *A Cruise upon Wheels* (London: Routledge, 1862) was the most popular of all his works and was reprinted in several editions right up to 1926.

Sir Charles Dilke (1843-1911), *Greater Britain – a Record of Travel in English Speaking Countries during 1866-7* (London: Macmillan 1869). It extols the virtues of the British Empire and what it had given to the world. Chapter XIV, 'Brigham Young', is devoted to his visit to the Mormons.

> "The women here, knowing no other state, seem to think themselves as happy as the day is long… Discussion of the institution of plural marriage in Salt Lake City is fruitless; all that can be done is to observe. In assaulting the Mormon citadel, you strike against the air. "Polygamy degrades the women," you begin. "Morally or socially?" says the Mormon. "Socially." "Granted," is the reply, "and that is a most desirable consummation. By socially lowering, it morally raises the woman. It makes her a servant, but it makes her pure and good."

b. Autograph hunters

In the evening the conversation turned on the mania some people have for collecting autographs. Mr Collins said that lately he had received many letters from ladies asking him for his autograph. He always feels annoyed at these letters, but if they enclose an envelope stamped and directed he feels bound to write his name and send it in the envelope as he does not like the notion of keeping the stamp: but if no envelope is enclosed he takes no notice of the request.

About a month ago he got a very enthusiastic letter from a lady who said she admired his writings so much, that she had set her heart on getting his autograph, and she hoped he would send it. As there was no stamped envelope enclosed he burnt the letter and thought no more about it. Yesterday he got a long letter from the same lady beginning "Mr Wilkie Collins, I see you are no gentleman, or you would not have left my letter so long unanswered. Don't trouble to send me your autograph now, as I have no desire to possess it." Mr Collins said it was as well she did not want it, seeing he had not the smallest intention of sending it to her.

Notes

This story has not been published before.

Wilkie's admission that he hated sending autographs and burnt many requests is in sharp contrast to the many he sent to autograph collectors together, in some cases, with overly polite replies even to people he did not know but who had, presumably, enclose a stamped and directed envelope. For example, this reply a few years later to another second request for his signature.

> Dear Miss Marian,
>
> I am quite incapable of disappointing a young lady who is one of my kind readers. Your first letter never reached me – so far as I can remember. I contribute with the greatest pleasure to your collection of autographs, and I hope you will excuse me for keeping you waiting – quite unintentionally.
>
> Faithfully yours | Wilkie Collins
>
> ([3010] to Marian J. Snook, 21 May 1879)

It is ironic that Mary Cunliffe's friend Caroline Sim Edlmann (née Elliot) herself prepared an album of signatures and letters to which Mary contributed 13 letters written to her including one from Wilkie Collins. The album was sold at Bonhams on 11 March 2020, lot 28, and two letters were sold separately as lots 17 from Charles Warren and 39 from Wilkie Collins (see p. 8 below).

c. Plot changes

He told us also that whenever he brings out a serial story he frequently gets letters from people asking him not to let this or that happen to his characters. Once when it became evident in one number that a person was on the eve of committing suicide he got endless letters entreating him to change his mind about it.

Notes

This story has not been published before.

The potential suicide he refers to was probably a reference to the scene in *No Name* where Magdalen Vanstone considers taking a fatal dose of laudanum to avoid marrying a man she loathes. In the part published in *All The Year Round* on 11 October 1862 she resists. But in the next weekly part she thinks

> "How do I know what that life may have in store for me?" She turned from the window and went back to the table. "I may be forced to drink it yet," she said, and put the laudanum into her dressing-case.
> (*All The Year Round*, 18 October 1862 p.[121]b).

Two years earlier Wilkie had written to Nina Lehmann's sister Janet Chambers about what was going to happen in *The Woman in White* then appearing in weekly parts in *All The Year Round.*

> I beg to assure Miss Chambers, solemnly, that nobody about whom she is interested and over whom the undersigned can exercise benevolent control, shall come to any harm. If she will look at the number published tomorrow, she will see that Laura is not murdered, and in another week she will know that Anne Catherick is caught. In the same two numbers, Miss Halcombe's whereabouts is satisfactorily ascertained, and Miss Halcombe's recovery positively asserted.
> ([0345] to Janet Chambers, 15 May 1860).

4. WOODLANDS, HIGHGATE

1871: July or August

a. Paris

Wilkie Collins was also at Woodlands and was very bright and pleasant. He is in much better health than he used to be and looks ten years younger. He used not to be able to walk at all, and that day he had been taking his walks abroad for the space of two hours.

Mr Lehmann has just returned from Paris and takes a very dismal view of French affairs, and seems to think the whole nation are losing heart with all their troubles. Mr Collins did not agree with him and said he was sure that in a year every one of the buildings destroyed by the Communists will be re-built, and that in three years more the Nation will feel itself so prosperous again, that they will declare war against the Prussians. I think this last is a very sanguine view of affairs, for though they have still an enormous army yet where are the Generals to come from? Not one man was really found capable last year.

Notes

This story has not been published before.

The Siege of Paris had ended on 28 January 1871 after heavy bombardment by German forces. Prussian troops then occupied Paris until the Communards formed their own local government and burned down many of the buildings which had survived the bombardment. At the end of May their rule was ended by the French army which arrested 43,000 of them and killed up to 10,000. Lehmann's visit – almost certainly on business – is not likely to have been before the summer of 1871 when Paris was more peaceful.

For some months in the first half of 1871 Wilkie had "been suffering severely from rheumatic gout" ([1100] To Charles Kent, 28 June 1871) but by the following day "I am right again" ([3156] To William F. Tindell, 29 June 1871), helping to place the meeting in the Summer of 1871.

Wilkie was adamantly against war and his remark is more likely a cynical joke than the serious prediction which Mary seems to take it as. She clearly blamed the French Generals for failing to stop the Prussians advancing on Paris from the autumn of 1870 and taking it in January.

b. Tichborne

The conversation got upon the Tichbourne trial, and Mr Collins was strongly in favour of the Claimant being the right man. He said as to forgetting what he had learned at school, that was in no way remarkable, for that he himself though he had been twenty years before the Public as a literary man, not unfrequently made mistakes in spelling, and sometimes the printer had to correct his grammar. His Father was an artist and he painted that beautiful picture called "Happy as a King" which perhaps you saw in our National gallery when you were in England. When Wilkie was twelve years old his father took him away from school and took him abroad with him, and in Italy where they spent the next two or three years he got little regular schooling so it is not to be wondered at that he makes mistakes. The real Tichbourne however had a first rate education at Stoneyhurst so there is not the same reason why he should forget what he learned in his youth.

Notes

This story has not been published before.

The Claimant was Arthur Orton, the son of a butcher from Wapping who asserted he was the missing heir to the Tichborne baronetcy. The case of Tichborne v. Lushington began on 11 May 1871 and was adjourned in July finally concluding on 4 March 1872. After a further trial in 1874 Orton was convicted of perjury and sentenced to 14 years in jail. That is consistent with the visit being in the summer of 1871 when the trial was much talked about. Mary mis-spells it 'Tichbourne'.

Happy as a King was one of William Collins's major paintings and shown at the Royal Academy Exhibition in 1836. It was so popular he painted two versions and one was bought from William by Robert Vernon who gave it to the National Gallery in 1847. It is now in the Tate collection where it can be seen online.

This passage confirms that Mary Oakford was in England, probably in 1860, and this was almost certainly the time she met Mary Cunliffe.

Stonyhurst Hall (which Mary mis-spells) is a Catholic boarding school in Lancashire founded in 1593.

Wilkie later wrote "My poor father paid (I think) £90 a year for my education. I learnt Latin & Greek – and nothing else, because nothing else was taught…To this day, I don't know my English Grammar" ([1270] To Emanuel Oscar Menahem Deutsch, 20 November 1872).

5. LANCASTER GATE, LONDON
1874: 16 July

American experiences
Mr Wilkie Collins has just returned from America. There was no chance of my seeing him at the Lehmann's now as they are so little in London, and they have sold their house at Highgate, so I asked him to come to lunch one day to tell me his adventures. He wrote me that he always worked till three o'clock but he would call after that and have a talk about America. He came last Thursday and remained a long time. I wonder why he puts so little fun in his books seeing there is so much fun in his conversation; he has a most amusing way of telling a story.

Notes
The letter he wrote to Mary has recently turned up and was written on 10 July 1874 dating this visit to Thursday 16 July 1874.

90, Gloucester Place, | Portman Square. W.
10th July 1874

My dear Mrs Cunliffe

Pray forgive this late acknowledgment of your very kind letter. I have not been very well – and I have been out of town for the last three or four days.

Tomorrow – if I can manage it – I go to Formosa, to stay till Monday. Tuesday and Wednesday I have appointments. But if Thursday next at 5 oClock in the afternoon will be convenient I shall be delighted to call on you – and if you will give me the mildest of iced drinks, you will gratify my utmost ambition in the matter of refreshment. I suggest the afternoon because I am (most unfortunately for myself) obliged to occupy my mornings at my desk – beginning a new novel in this frightfully hot weather. If you are engaged on Thursday afternoon next, choose any later day at 5 that you like. I am entirely at your service. Your will is law,

to yours truly | Wilkie Collins

a. Clothes
You must know in the first place he is most particular about his garments, and prides himself on being well dressed. Imagine his horror therefore on finding when he landed in America that the rats on board had in some unaccountable way got into his trunk, and all his clothes were spoiled. He knew that he would be interviewed on the evening of his arrival by some of your enterprising reporters for newspapers, so he drove to a shop and invested in some ready made garments. He was naturally anxious to see what the Papers said next day about him, and he was relieved to read that, "Mr Wilkie Collins is a small man, but very well made, and very well dressed".

He presumed that last remark had been made because his garments had a truly American cut about them.

Notes
This tale will also be familiar to students of Collins, largely because Walford retold these American reminiscences, claiming she was with Mary Cunliffe at the time. However, she gives an account (pp. 206-207) of how Wilkie came to be dining with Mary Cunliffe which is at odds with both Cunliffe's typescript and the newly discovered letter. Walford also claimed that she reminded Wilkie of the previous meeting where he told her about his school days and Wilkie said that the spider eating

lawyer was also now dead. It is possible that Walford was not there at all but relied on Mary's letters for both this story (Walford, pp. 207-208) and the earlier one about the school bully.

Wybert Reeve told a similar tale from his time with Wilkie in New York – but without the rats.

> I afterwards joined Collins at the Westminster Hotel in New York, and found him comfortably settled in the same sitting-room and bedroom that his friend Charles Dickens had lived in. Every one knows the extent to which interviewing is carried on in America, and of course Collins was interviewed. It was the pest of his life for the first two or three weeks. One thing greatly amused us. Before leaving England he found himself in want of a rough travelling suit of clothes, and driving through the City, he turned into Moses' great emporium and bought a cheap shoddy suit. The *New York Herald*, in describing Collins, gave an elaborate account of his person. He was wearing at the time the slop suit, and the description wound up with the statement that Mr Collins was evidently a connoisseur in dress. He had on one of those stylish West End tailor's suits of a fashionable cut by which an Englishman of taste is known.
> ('Recollections', *Chamber's Journal*, 16 June 1906, pp. 458-461).

Wilkie arrived in New York on board the *Algeria* on Thursday 25 September. The closest to this quote that can be found is in the *New York Sun* which reported on 27th "He is of medium height, very stout, and wears a heavy beard, whiskers and moustache. He was dressed in a faultlessly fitting suit of gray clothes, and looks in all respects the beau ideal of a fashionable Londoner." (quoted in *Buffalo Weekly Courier*, 1 October 1873, p. 5f).

b. Interviews

There were endless people who wished to "Interview" him, and he got rather weary of the process. Conversation mostly began by his Interviewers asking him what he thought of their Country. Sometimes the remarks were personal: one man said frankly "Why you are a small man Mr Collins I always pictured you to myself as being very tall."

When he could arrange it, he used to get his interviewers to come in batches. One day he went into his sitting room and there he found twelve ladies, mostly editors of newspapers who had all come to interview him.

After he had bowed to them, the oldest and ugliest came up to him and said "Let me embrace you for the company," which accordingly she did. He told me he could have wished the embrace had been given by the youngest and the prettiest, but he did not tell them so of course.

He told me many stories about Americans and their sayings and doings which you would be too patriotic to be amused with, so I won't repeat them. He was however delighted with America and her people, so his stories were only amusing comments on their little peculiarities. He said he heartily wished himself back in America as he had not an ache or pain while he was in your favoured land, and at home he is a martyr to rheumatic gout, and is rarely free from pain.

Notes
This story and the postscript are also in Walford (pp. 208-209). Again, Cunliffe gives us either the original source for it or a second one.

After his trip Wilkie told friends that during the six months he was in America he was free from the pain of rheumatic gout. For example, nine months after returning to England he wrote to an American friend Jane Bigelow complaining about being indisposed with rheumatism caused by the damp weather "when is it dry for three days together in England? Never! In your country, I felt five and twenty years old. In my country, I (not infrequently) feel five and ninety" ([1501], 31 December 1874).

BACKGROUND TO THE RECOLLECTIONS

These new recollections about Wilkie Collins have come to light in two libraries in American universities.

Both are typescripts prepared in 1885 by the author from letters she wrote between 1861 and 1878.

1. *A Record of Pleasant Memories*[1] is a 178 page typescript at The Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, Texas. The typescript contains four lengthy passages about Collins and one shorter one which give new insights into his sociability and his attitude to the autograph collectors who chased him for signatures. It was seen by his biographer Catherine Peters who refers to it in *The King of Inventors* (1991). But she reproduced just a few sentences from it.[2]

2. *Notes by the Way*[3] is in Special Collections & Archives, McHenry Library, UC Santa Cruz. It is longer at 292 pages but has less about Collins – just three passages which are much the same as three in *A Record of Pleasant Memories* plus some extra material and another short anecdote about Wilkie. It has not been seen or recorded by Collins scholars before.

The author of both was Mary Cunliffe. The reminiscences were mainly about people she met at social gatherings at Woodlands, the north London home of Nina Lehmann and her husband Frederick, a businessman. They were good friends of Wilkie Collins. Later passages about Wilkie's time in America were reported from an occasion when Wilkie visited Mary at her home, 2 Lancaster Gate, London.

The recollections were drawn from letters Mary wrote to an American friend, Mary Oakford (1846 – 18 March 1879), a rather sickly woman who lived in New Haven, Connecticut. The letters were returned to Mary after Mary Oakford died.

These typescripts are important contemporaneous records of people and events from which these recollections about Wilkie Collins have been extracted.

Mary Cunliffe
Mary Cunliffe (née Herschell 21 August 1836-31 July 1899), was the daughter of Ridley Haim Herschell (*ODNB*: 1807-1864), a Jewish man from Prussian Poland who converted to Christianity and became an evangelist to convert Jews to the Christian faith.[4] Her mother was Helen Skirving Mowbray (1798-

[1] Cunliffe, Mary. *A Record of Pleasant Memories*. N.D. L0083.1, Browning Collections. Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University, Waco, TX.
[2] See pp. 51 n.33, 333 n.1, 342 n.23
[3] Cunliffe, Mary. *Notes by the Way*. Typescript. 1885. 292 pages. MMS ID 991020964049704876
[4] *ODNB* and Geoffrey Henderson, *All Love – A Biography of Ridley Herschell* (2007).

1853) from Leith in Scotland. Ridley became a Minister of an Independent Chapel. They had five children – three survived to adulthood. Ridley's son, Farrer Herschel (*ODNB:* 1837-1899), became a barrister in 1860 and was elected to Parliament in 1874. In 1886 he was made Baron Herschell of the City of Durham and appointed as Lord Chancellor, a post he held briefly but returned to from 1892 to 1895. He died unexpectedly in Washington in 1899 leaving a son, Richard Farrer Herschell.

Mary was the third child and married a wealthy banker John Cunliffe (12 September 1825-1 February 1894) on 15 July 1857. They had no children and lived first at 1 Upper Hyde Park Street, London and then at 2 Lancaster Gate, London. John had been born in Blackburn, Lancashire and by 1851 he lived in London with his banker father James whose bank had expanded from its Manchester roots to become a force in the City of London. John Cunliffe was a very private man leaving behind few records but he was active in the family banking business and became a Director of the National Discount Company in 1877. On his unexpected death from pneumonia and septicaemia in 1894 he left more than £629,000 – around £70m in today's terms. Mary died on 31 July 1899 at 64 Banbury Road, Oxford leaving £69,740 – around £8 million today – mainly to Farrer's son Richard.

Travelogue

In 1875 Mary Cunliffe wrote a travelogue called *Letters from Abroad* about her visits to the Middle East, America, Europe, and Russia. It is in the form of letters sent every week or so to an unnamed correspondent – possibly again to Mary Oakford – in which she recalls the recent events of her trip. It was printed for private circulation in 1875 and few copies have survived.[5]

Her two month American trip with her husband John and friends Mr and Mrs Chalmers began on 6 April 1872. She was seen off at Liverpool by her brother Farrer and arrived in New York on 17 April having been very sick on board the Cunard liner *Russia* during the passage. She spent a day or two recovering in her room at the Fifth Avenue Hotel, then on 20 April she made the 80 mile train journey to visit her friend, Mary Oakford.

> On Saturday, I set off alone for New Haven. The parlour car was quite full, so I had to go in an ordinary one. You pay one or two cents a mile extra for the parlour car but it is worth double that for the comfort you get, as each person has an armchair and a foot-stool.
>
> The common cars hold forty-eight people, and are generally so full that one is cramped for space. The constant passing up and down of passengers, and banging of doors is tiring after a time. The vendors of bananas and oranges, books and popped corn, and divers other wares, perambulate the cars crying out their goods for sale, each with a more unmusical note than his predecessor. It is an ugly road to New Haven, flat and uninteresting…
>
> Mrs. Oakford met me at the station, and we knew each other at once, despite the twelve years that have passed since we last met.[6]
>
> New Haven is considered the prettiest town in America…I did nothing when I was at New Haven but lie down and talk to Mary. She was pretty well for her, and able to sit up for some hours every day. I came back to New York on Monday morning.[7]

Recollections

Ten years after publishing *Letters from Abroad* Mary put together the two typescripts transcribed in this pamphlet. Although not structured as a series of letters they consist mainly of passages copied

[5] Printed and published by the Army and Navy Cooperative Society. One copy is in the British Library: BLL01000836884.

[6] Ellen Oakford, (b.1828) who lived with her husband, shipping merchant Isaac S Oakford (b.1820), and her other daughter, also Ellen, then aged 15. Mary implies they last met in 1860 when she was 24 and Mary Oakford 14. That fits in with her letters to Oakford beginning in 1861.

[7] *Letters from Abroad* pp. 85-86.

from the letters she wrote to Mary Oakford between 1861 and 1878, the year before Mary Oakford died. They have been combined here to give the longest version of the stories.

The forewords

Both typescripts are preceded by short forewords. *A Record of Pleasant Memories* begins with this

> To
> Lady Campbell
>
> Dear Nina,
>
> I think that the following records of some of the pleasant hours spent in the company of your Father and Mother will interest you, and that in the years to come your children will read with pleasure these recollections of some the interesting men and women who used to be gathered together in the home of their grandparents.
>
> These extracts are mostly taken from letters written to a friend in America which were returned to me after her death.
>
> Your affectionate friend
> Mary Cunliffe (signed)

The grandparents mentioned are Jane Nina née Chambers (1830-1902) and her husband Frederick Lehmann, a businessman. Their daughter, also called Nina, married Sir Guy Theophilus Campbell, Bt (1854–1931) on 30 April 1884, hence her title.

Between the 1860s and the early 1870s the Lehmanns' north London home was Woodlands in Southwood Lane, Highgate and they also had a central London home at 15 Berkeley Square. They were close friends of Wilkie Collins from the 1850s until his death. Wilkie stayed at Woodlands with the Lehmanns on at least three occasions, mostly when he was writing *Man and Wife* which is dedicated to them.[8] Altogether seven of his letters from 1868 to 1870 are written from that address.[9]

Notes by the Way is dedicated to Mary's nephew and nieces, children of her brother Farrer.

It begins with a short preface

> The following extracts were mostly taken from letters which I wrote to my American friend Mary Oakford.
>
> These letters were returned to me after her death in the year 1879 by her Mother.
>
> Some of the letters were undated so I could only place them by guess-work, this will account for any inaccuracies with regard to dates.
>
> Mary Cunliffe
> London 1885

The only recorded copy of *Notes by the Way* is in the University of California Santa Cruz library. However, another copy was sold by the UK auction house Bamfords in 2010.[10]

[8] The book is "Affectionately dedicated to Mr. and Mrs. Frederick Lehmann."

[9] [0847] and [0848] to Edward Benham, 18 and 19 July 1868; [0896] and [0897] to J C Parkinson, 17 and 21 July 1869; [1001], [1003] to William F Tindell, 26 and 30 June 1870; and [1004] to Charles Ward, 30 June 1870.

[10] "Cunliffe, Mary (19th century), Notes by the Way, a typescript volume of unpublished letters and personal reminiscences of people she has known or met written to her American friend, Mary Oakford (d.1879), dedicated to Farrer Herschell…bound tooled and gilt green leather." Bamfords catalogue for the sale on 18 March 2010. Lot 1433 sold for £360 in the room. It was consigned from a property in Leicestershire.

Walford

The letters were also used by Walford to prepare her book *Memories of Victorian London*. In the Preface dated September 1912 she describes Mary Cunliffe and confirms the immediacy of the letters.

> …it was my happy fate to be from time to time, from early youth onwards, the guest of a beloved relation, to me as a sister, in her London home, where she was the centre of a singularly attractive circle.
>
> Albeit a rich and handsome young married woman with abundance of energy and leisure, she cared nothing for gay society, but sought and was sought by many either already prominent in the world of letters, or destined to become so. Her endearing personality and charm of manner captivated all she came across – and they were of varied excellence, for her tastes were eclectic, and she could appreciate equally the scientist, the poet, the painter, the musician – the anybody, in short, gifted with a *mind*. It should be added that her position enabled her to obtain the society of such without there being a suspicion of lion-hunting, which was entirely foreign to her nature.
>
> To her I owe much that has enabled me to write these "Memories" – for her journal-letters, sent off red-hot from the scenes she described to a sick friend, long since dead, are in my hands at this moment – (together with her full permission, ere she too died, to make what use of them I chose).
>
> These letters are absolutely truthful, absolutely reliable; they were penned without a thought of publication – and of course have had to be carefully sifted, in consequence; but they have been of inestimable value to me, as supplementing my own crude impressions and correcting a too exuberant imagination.
>
> It is not necessary to give the full name of one known to so many at the time – and to a few still – as simply "Mary"; so as "Mary" she shall appear in these pages.

In her will Mary Cunliffe left £50 to Lucy. The passages in Walford's book are presented as her own memories but some at least are clearly taken almost word for word from Mary Cunliffe's letters. Perhaps the 'too exuberant imagination' of the novelist was being let loose.

Wilkie Collins's letters

All extracts from Wilkie's letters are taken from Baker, Gasson, Law, and Lewis *The Collected Letters of Wilkie Collins* (Charlottesville, Virginia, USA: InteLex Corporation, 2018) ISBN: 978-1-57085-269-5 which is available on subscription to universities and institutions only. A few more recently found ones are from *Addenda and Corrigenda* 12 (2018) and 13 (2020) published by the Wilkie Collins Society. Each letter begins with a unique reference number assigned by the Editors which never changes.

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Paul Lewis
March 2020

This edition of

Mary Cunliffe's Recollections
of Wilkie Collins

is limited to 200 copies.