Dickens and America
Some Unpublished Letters

In the manuscript collections at The Historical Society of Pennsylvania are preserved some twenty-one holograph letters from Charles Dickens.¹ With the generous permission of the Society and of Henry Charles Dickens, O.B.E., I am able to print here, in chronological order, those uncollected (and in most cases hitherto unprinted) letters which have some reference to America. One of them is among the earliest known letters to Carlyle, and another the latest one yet discovered which Dickens wrote to Edgar Allan Poe. I include also a document which throws light on Dickens' relations with American businessmen—specifically, with the buyer of the American rights for All the Year Round.

I. Dickens to William T. Mann [?]²
1 Devonshire Terrace,
York Gate
Regents Park London
12th April 1840

Sir.

Let me thank you for your letter, and the obliging terms in which it is couched. I fear I am rather behind-hand in my reply, but constant occupation makes me too often an indifferent correspondent. It shall never make me unmindful of your hospitable offer if I visit America, or of that English Farmer's home to which you welcome me (in anticipation) with so much kindness.

¹ Four of them appear in the Nonesuch edition of Dickens' letters, edited by Walter Dexter (London, 1938). Since Dexter fails to give the present location of these letters, it may be well to identify them here. They are those to Dr. Shelton Mackenzie, February 16, 1838 (Dexter, I, 160), to Thomas Noon Talfourd, February 16, 1841 (I, 300), to Talfourd, March 22, 1841 (I, 308-309), and to Joseph S. Smith, February 12, 1842 (I, 382). Letters II, V, VIII, IX, X, and XI in the present article are a part of the rich Dreer Collection of autographs now owned by The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
² I have been unable to identify Mann. The name may possibly be Totham.
Pray assure the proprietors of the Knickerbocker that I have not forgotten my promise, though appearances are certainly against me. I fear I shall find it more difficult to redeem than ever, engaged as I am just now, but as I do not despair myself, I would not have them do so, either. To Mr. Clark, I beg you to convey my best remembrances with the assurance that I will take an early opportunity of writing to him through the Knickerbocker agents.

I cannot charge you with any commission for New York, but this is my residence and if you can call here before you sail, I shall be quite as happy to see you, as you are good enough to say you will be to see me.

Believe me
Very truly yours
Charles Dickens

Mr. William T. Mann [?]

II. Dickens to R. Gilmor

Washington.
Sixteenth March 1842.

My Dear Sir.

I hope to be in Baltimore on Monday night, and to remain there two days, before going west—in the course of which brief stay, I shall rob you of certain large sums in Gold and Silver to carry into those remote parts. Meanwhile let me advise you that as Coutts's house by some strange mistake directed my letter of credit to a gentleman, formerly of this place, who has been dead some six years, I have been obliged to draw Fifty Pounds from the Metropolis Bank, and have given them a draft on you to that amount. I should have written to you for a supply, but it did not occur to me to enquire after the


4 Robert Gilmor (1774-1848) was a shipping merchant in Baltimore.

5 During his first American tour, Dickens' financial affairs were confided to correspondents of Edward Marjoribanks, a partner in the London banking house of Coutts & Co. Writing to Miss Coutts from Baltimore, March 22, 1842 (Dexter, I, 412), Dickens said that he had "received the greatest attention from all his [Marjoribanks'] correspondents—except the poor gentleman at Washington—who has been dead six years."
deceased agent until last night (though I thought it odd not to have heard of him)—and tonight I leave this city, for Richmond.

Dear Sir

Faithfully Yours

Charles Dickens


III. Dickens to R. Gilmor

Barnum's Hotel
Monday Evening Twenty First March
[1842]

My Dear Sir

I am greatly obliged to you for your kind letter.—I should have come to you today, beyond all doubt if I had been here; but I have only just now (past 6 o'clock) arrived. I will call on you tomorrow at eleven, and shall hope to find you as much better as in these sudden changes of temperature, may be reasonably expected.

Faithfully yours

Charles Dickens

[Addressed: Robert Gilmor Esquire/Exchange Place]

IV. Dickens to Thomas Carlyle

Devonshire Terrace
Eighteenth April 1843

My Dear Carlyle

In the multitude of our unmentioned Wrongs under the Black Flag of Literature, I don't think Mr. Ticknor's case deserving of

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The first letter from Dickens to Carlyle published by Dexter is dated March 4, 1853. The two men first met about 1840. The strongest bond between them in the early years of their friendship was their interest in the cause of international copyright, which was the occasion of the present letter. Dickens' controversial letter on the subject, published in the *New York Evening Post* for May 9, 1842, was accompanied by a letter signed by twelve British authors and a separate one over Carlyle's signature. Cf. letters in which Dickens praises Carlyle's stand at that time in Dexter, 1, 446-447, 456.
especial mention; and I have therefore returned it, as you requested, to the Geologist. I am the less disposed to assist in giving it publicity, because of certain thieves in books, called Wiley and Putnam, having recently published a variety of similar statements, to which publicity was given by the Athenaeum—and in which, they lie consumedly—after the true American fashion of smartness.

Always
Faithfully your friend
Charles Dickens

Thomas Carlyle Esquire

7 We may, I think, assume that “the Geologist” was Sir Charles Lyell, and reconstruct the incident on that basis. Probably George Ticknor, the Harvard Spanish scholar, whom Lyell visited during his American tour in 1841 and who was Lyell’s warm friend, had written to him concerning some matter relating to the English piracy of American books. Lyell passed the letter on to Carlyle, who was attending Lyell’s lectures at the time. Cf. Alexander Carlyle, ed., Letters of Thomas Carlyle to John Stuart Mill, John Sterling, and Robert Browning (London, 1923), 267. Carlyle in turn sent the letter to Dickens. Although a substantial portion of the Ticknor-Lyell correspondence has been printed in the Life, Letters, and Journals of George Ticknor (new ed., 2 vols., Boston and New York, 1909), and the Life, Letters and Journals of Sir Charles Lyell, Bart., ed. by his sister-in-law, Mrs. Lyell (2 vols., London, 1881), the letters which might throw light on the subject in question unfortunately do not appear.

8 The Athenaeum article is probably that in the issue of April 1, 1843, page 307—a three-column notice of The American Book Circular, published by Wiley and Putnam. The reviewer was mainly concerned with “a preliminary paper, in which the publishers . . . defend their compatriots from charges, often preferred [by Englishmen], of indifference to the claims of literature and literary men—of systematic literary piracy. . . .” Wiley and Putnam, crying _tu quoque_, implied that Dickens, the most articulate apostle of international copyright, was himself not innocent of sly dealings with other men’s literary property. They pointed out that Joseph C. Neal’s Charcoal Sketches, first published in America, had been included, “entire, plates and all,” in a three-volume work called _Pic-Nic Papers_, “edited by C. Dickens, Esq., London, 1841,” without even a mention of the true author or the dignity of a separate title. The Athenaeum reviewer commented that while _Pic-Nic Papers_ was a collection made up and published for the benefit of the widow and children of Dickens’ early publisher, Macrone, Dickens’ connection with it had been limited to his contribution of “The Lamplighter” and his permission for the use of his name on the title page. John Forster, in his _Life of Dickens_ (London, 1872–1874), Bk. II, Chap. IX, says, however, that the work had been “edited by him.” In any event, it is plain to see why Dickens was angered.
V. Dickens to Messrs. Lea and Blanchard

London. 1 Devonshire Terrace
York Gate Regents Park.
Second April 1844.

My Dear Sirs

Many thanks to you for your kind recollection of me in the matter of the Indian Biography. I had just given up the rest; and had my numbers bound—not doubting you, but thinking (I am sure I don’t know why) that the rest were not going to be published. It is needless for me, I hope, to say, that personal regard would lead me to break my determination in your favor, if I could possibly contemplate the breaking of it upon any consideration. But I cannot. I have made a covenant with myself, which admits of no violation.

How came you to address your letter to me at my publishers, when Mr. Willis has given you (as I understand) my address so elaborately in print! Surely you don’t doubt the mouthpiece of the greatest country in the world—do you! I will swear that neither of you will ever get into Congress if you do.

Faithfully Yours
Charles Dickens

Messrs. Lea and Blanchard.


Other letters from Dickens to the publishing firm of Lea and Blanchard, dated from November, 1841, to December, 1842, are printed in Dexter, I, 363, 382, 420-431, 460, 496.

In his letter to Lea and Blanchard from Niagara Falls, February 13 [actually 30], 1842 (Dexter, I, 430), Dickens asked them to obtain for him two copies of Thomas L. McKenney’s History of the Indian Tribes of North America, with Biographical Sketches of the Principal Chiefs, etc. (Philadelphia, 1836–1844). In his letter of June 2, 1842 (Dexter, I, 460), he thanks Lea and Blanchard for “your handsome present of books,” which may have included the earlier numbers of the work that Dickens had had bound.

Dickens’ “determination” is explained in his letter to Lea and Blanchard, December 28, 1842 (Dexter, I, 496), in which he asserted that, “disgusted with the infamous state of the Law in respect of copyright,” he had resolved to withhold his permission for any authorized edition of his works in America.

The (New York) New Mirror, II (February 10, 1844), 302–303, N. P. Willis repeated rumors circulating in English newspapers that Dickens was then, in consequence of certain pecuniary embarrassments, sojourning “within the rules of the Queen’s Bench.” It was in this article that Willis included the well-known story of his visit to Dickens at Furnival’s Inn—a story which Forster characterized as “no unfair specimen of the kind of garbage that since [Dickens’] death has also been served up too plentifully by some of his own, as well as by some of Mr. Willis’ countrymen.” Forster, Bk. I, Chap. V; cf. J. W. T. Ley’s comment (“an absolute fabrication”) in his edition of Forster (London, 1928), 80.
VI. Dickens to Edgar Allan Poe

1 Devonshire Terrace, London.
Nineteenth March 1846.

Dear Sir.

Although I have not received your volume, I avail myself of a leisure moment to thank you for the gift of it. In reference to your proposal as regards the Daily News, I beg to assure you that I am not in any way connected with the Editorship or current Management of that Paper. I have an interest in it, and write such papers for it as I attach my name to. This is the whole amount of my connexion with the Journal.

Any such proposition as yours, therefore, must be addressed to the Editor. I do not know, for certainty, how that gentleman might regard it; but I should say that he [certainly crossed out] probably has as many correspondents in America and elsewhere, as the Paper can afford space to.

I am Dear Sir
Faithfully yours,
Charles Dickens.

Edgar A. Poe Esquire


VII. Contract between Dickens and Thomas C. Evans

ARTICLES OF AGREEMENT made the seventeenth day of March one thousand eight hundred and fifty nine BETWEEN CHARLES DICKENS

13 No letter from Dickens to Poe is included in Dexter's Nonesuch edition. Only three are calendared by John W. Ostrom in his Letters of Edgar Allan Poe (Cambridge, Mass., 1948): the one here printed, one dated March 6, 1842, and one dated November 27, 1842. Dickens and Poe had met in Philadelphia during the former's first American tour, and, as Professor A. H. Quinn remarks (Edgar Allan Poe: a Critical Biography [New York, 1941], 366-367), "Poe must have made a favorable impression upon Dickens, for on the British novelist's second trip to the United States [1868], he hunted up Mrs. Clemm and made a contribution to her support." In early 1846 Poe was living in New York "with no definite means of support" (Quinn, 496), the Broadway Journal having just expired. In casting about for other employment he remembered his English admirer. Hence the letter to which this is a reply.

14 Probably The Raven and Other Poems, published early in November, 1845.

15 Thomas Coke Evans (1834-1906), known to his intimates as "the Baron," was an American journalist and literary promoter, who at the time of this abortive transaction with Dickens is said to have been a correspondent of the New York World. From 1860 to 1903 he
of Tavistock House Tavistock Square in the County of Middlesex Esquire of the one part and Thomas C. Evans of New York in the United States of America of the other part

Whereas the said Charles Dickens is about to establish edit and publish a Periodical which is intended to be called "All the year round" and to be issued weekly and the first number thereof is intended to be published on Saturday the Thirtieth day of April next And whereas the said Thomas C. Evans is desirous of publishing the said Periodical simultaneously at [blank] in the United States of America and is about to depart to the said United States for that purpose and for effecting such arrangement the parties hereto have


Evans appeared in London early in 1859 and called upon Dickens, who on January 26 gave him a letter of introduction to Arthur Smith, his business agent for his readings. Dexter, III, 89. It appears from this letter that Evans was trying to arrange a new Dickens tour in America. Writing to Wilkie Collins on August 16, Dickens gave some details of Evans' proposal: "Evans of New York proposed that I should sign a conditional agreement to go to America for 80 Readings within a month after the receipt here of £10,000, if the said £10,000 were paid within three months of the agreement's date. If not, contract to be void. This agreement he meant to sell in America, if he could, and get a profit on. Driven into a corner, I thought of signing it, but Ouvry [Dickens' solicitor] was so strong against it, that I struck—refused—and knocked the whole thing on the head, so that he is going back empty-handed." Dexter, III, 115-116.

But finding Dickens unresponsive to the tour proposal, Evans presented another scheme, of which the document here printed is the chief exhibit. In a letter to Forster, March 11, 1859, Dickens said, "My American ambassador [presumably Evans] pays a thousand pounds for the first year, for the privilege of republishing in America one day after we publish here. Not bad?" Dexter, III, 95. All the Year Round commenced publication on April 30, six weeks after the date of the agreement. But during the ensuing spring or summer Dickens discovered that all was not well. To Edward Bulwer Lytton he wrote on August 9, "I recommend you to be very careful as to Mr. Evans of New York. I have made some private enquiries respecting him in America, and have ascertained that he has no capital whatever, though there seems to be nothing against his character. I have reason to believe that if you made any agreement with him, he would take it to New York, and sell it to the highest bidder there. He is a kind of unaccredited agent, and seeks to live upon what such transactions would yield in the way of profit. He has sold All the Year Round for six months in this manner but does not know that I know it." Dexter, III, 115.

Professor Gerald G. Grubb, who has examined the "Office Book" of All the Year Round, now in the Huntington Library, tells me that the business correspondence relating to the American edition of the periodical was addressed to Evans until the late summer or early autumn of 1859. After that time it was conducted with J. M. Emerson & Co. of New York, a firm which continued as the American publisher of All the Year Round until the magazine's demise.
agreed to enter into the mutual stipulations hereinafter contained that is to say

1. The said Thomas C. Evans is to have the sole privilege of publishing the said Periodical in the United States simultaneously with its publication in England.

2. That for the purpose of enabling the said Thomas C. Evans to effect such publication in America the said Charles Dickens shall two weeks before the said thirtieth day of April and two weeks before the day of publication in England of every subsequent number of the said Periodical transmit to the said Thomas C. Evans at [blank] Stereotype Plates of the number to be published and shall also transmit at the same periods by post and if possible by a different Ship than that which shall convey the stereotypes one printed Copy of the same number and shall also take all reasonable precaution to prevent any other printed Copy being made public in England previously to the time when in the ordinary course and custom of business the numbers would be issued to the trade.

3. The Stereotypes to be so sent shall vary as to date and imprint from the English Edition so as to make them applicable to the publication thereof in the United States.

4. It is understood and stipulated that the said Charles Dickens shall write a new Story to be published in the said Periodical commencing with the first number and thence continued from week to week till completion, such Story to extend over a period of six months.

5. The expense of the said Stereotype plates and transmitted Copies and of the transmission thereof is to be borne by the said Thomas C. Evans and to be payable half yearly on the Thirtieth October next and the Thirtieth day of April One thousand eight hundred and sixty.

6. The said Thomas C. Evans in consideration of the privileges granted to him by this Agreement is to pay to the said Charles Dickens his executors administrators or assigns the sum of One thousand pounds Sterling. Five hundred pounds part thereof to be remitted within one Calendar month after the arrival of the said Thomas C. Evans in the United States and Five hundred pounds residue thereof seven Calendar months after such arrival.
7. This Agreement shall endure for a year.
As Witness the hands of the parties the day and year first above written,
Witness Charles Dickens
    W. H. Wills Thomas C. Evans
Witness
    Wilkie Collins
[Endorsed: Dated 17 March 1859 / Charles Dickens Esqr / and / Thomas C. Evans Esq/Agreement]

VIII. Dickens to Robert Dale Owen

Gad’s Hill Place
Higham by Rochester, Kent.
Tuesday Thirty First July, 1860

Dear Sir

I have been much interested by your letter, and beg to assure you that your book shall have my immediate and earnest attention. I thank you for it cordially, and am naturally prepossessed in its favor by your moderate and unaffected words.

The article to which you refer, is not of my writing. I need not add that I approve of it, however, as that may be inferred from its channel of publication. I fully agree with you in holding that the history of imposture and credulity is singularly remarkable for the perpetual recurrence of one little list of absurdities.—The Cock Lane Ghost has traveled a long way from Smithfield in these latter days, for example.

Again thanking you for your communication and your book, I am

Dear Sir

Faithfully Yours
Charles Dickens

Robert Dale Owen Esquire

16 Owen (1801–1877) was the son of Robert Owen, the famous English Socialist. He spent most of his life at the New Harmony community in Indiana. In the middle fifties he was American chargé d’affaires and later minister at Naples, where he was infected with the current craze for spiritualism. This letter was printed in A Catalogue of the Collection of Autographs Formed by Ferdinand Julius Dreer (2 vols., Philadelphia: printed for private circulation, 1890), I, 162.
17 Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World (Philadelphia, 1859).
18 “Modern Magic,” All the Year Round, III (July 28, 1860), 370–374: a discussion of contemporary spiritualism.
IX. Dickens to Robert Dale Owen

Gad's Hill Place,
Higham by Rochester, Kent.
Friday Thirty First August, 1860.

Dear Sir,

My hope to get away for a holiday prevents my having the pleasure of making an appointment within the short margin of time that you are able to give me.

I confided the American Edition of your book to a trustworthy and esteemed contributor to "All the Year Round," and I placed that contributor's paper on it, in the last No: sent to the printer—which will be published three weeks hence.20 With respect to yourself personally, I hope the article will be not displeasing to you; with respect to its (and my) opinion of the evidence on which a large class of your stories rests, I can not be so sanguine.

The testimony concerning the School Teacher with the Double is remarked upon in the paper. I am not sure that I can now disturb the page even by the addition of a foot-note of one line; but if I can make that addition for the purpose of explaining that the story is withdrawn from your English re-print, I will gladly do so.21 Allow me to add that I have carefully read your book myself (I have long been interested in its main points), and that I have derived from it a genuine regard for its writer.

My Dear Sir
Faithfully Yours
Charles Dickens

Robert Dale Owen Esquire
[Addressed: Robert Dale Owen Esquire/Cox's Hotel/Jermyn Street/W Ch]

X. Dickens to Thomas Buchanan Read

Gad's Hill Place
Higham by Rochester, Kent.
Monday Fifteenth October 1860

Dear Sir

I beg to assure you that I have not leisure to accept the compliment you propose to render me by painting my portrait. I have a

19 Printed in the Dreer Catalogue, I, 162-163.
20 The review appeared, under the title "Fallacies of Faith," in All the Year Round, III (September 15, 1860), 540-545. Its tone was polite but skeptical.
21 The story of "the Governess with the Double" was referred to by the reviewer on page 544. The change to which Dickens alludes was not made before the magazine went to press.
22 Read (1822-1872) was the once well-known American writer and painter.
warm regard for Mr. Fields, and your manly and modest letter would have ensured my interest in its writer. But I sat to Mr Frith of our Royal Academy here, last year, after a long postponement; and if I were to sit again (which I think very unlikely), I should still have a conditional promise to redeem.

Dear Sir

Faithfully Yours

Charles Dickens

Thomas Buchanan Read Esquire


XI. Dickens to George William Childs

Westminster Hotel, New York
Second January 1868

My Dear Sir

I hasten to let you know that the second article of intelligence you kindly sent me this morning is altogether baseless. My daughter had no more to do with Aunt Margaret’s Trouble, or Mabel’s Progress, than you had.

Faithfully Yours Always

Charles Dickens


The Ohio State University

Richard D. Altick

23 James T. Fields, the Boston publisher and editor.

24 Childs (1829–1894), a Philadelphia publisher and longtime proprietor and editor of the Public Ledger, was Dickens’ host during the second American tour of 1868. Dexter prints six letters to him. The present letter was printed in the Dreer Catalogue, I, 163.

25 Enclosed with the letter—probably put there by Childs—was a clipping from a newspaper: “Miss Dickens, daughter of the great author, broke ground, not long since, in a story called ‘Aunt Margaret’s Trouble,’ and has just completed a second novel, entitled ‘Mabel’s Progress,’ which the ‘Athenaeum’ decidedly affirms, ‘at once places her in the first rank of living English novelists.’” Actually the novels mentioned were written by Miss Frances Eleanor Ternan, later Mrs. T. A. Trollope. The Athenaeum notice of Mabel’s Progress—a three-decker novel—appeared in its issue of November 30, 1867, pages 720–721.