VALENTINE'S DAY AT THE POST-OFFICE.

LATE in the afternoon of the 14th of February last past, an individual who bore not the smallest resemblance to a despairing lover, or, indeed, to a lover in any state of mind, was seen to drop into the box of a Fleet Street receiving-house two letters folded in flaming covers. He did not look round to see if he were observed, but walked boldly into the shop with a third epistle, and deposited thereon one penny. Considering the suspicious appearance of this document—for it's envelope was green—he retired from the counter with extraordinary nonchalance, and coolly walked on towards Ludgate Hill.

Long paces soon brought him to St. Martin's-le-Grand, for he strode like a man who had an imminent appointment. Sure enough, under the clock of the General Post-Office, he joined another, who eagerly asked,—

'Have you done it?'

The answer was, 'I have!' 'Very well. Let us now watch the result.'

Most people are aware that the Great National Post-Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand is divided into halves by a passage, whose sides are perforated with what is called the 'Window Department.' Here huge slits gape for letters, whole sashesawn for newspapers, or wooden panes open for clerks to frame their large faces, like giant visages in the slides of a Magic Lantern; and to answer inquiries, or receive unstamped paid letters. The southern side is devoted to the London District Post, and the northern to what still continues to be called the 'Inland Department,' although foreign, colonial, and other outlandish correspondence now passes through it. It was with

{Page 7 in the original} the London District Branch that the two gentlemen first appeared to have business.

Having been led through a maze of offices and passages more or less dark, they found themselves—like knights-errant in a fairy tale—'in an enormous hall, illumined by myriads of lights.' Without being exactly transformed into statues, or stricken fast asleep, the occupants of this hall (whose name was Legion) appeared to be in an enchanted state of idleness. Among a wilderness of long tables, and of desks not unlike those on which buttermen perform their active parts of legerdemain in making 'pats'—only these desks were covered with black cloth—they were reading books, talking together, wandering about, lying down, or drinking coffee—apparently quite unused to doing any work, and not at all expectant of ever having anything to do, but die.

In a few minutes, and without any preparation, a great stir began at one end of this hall, and an immense train of private performers, in the highest state of excitement, poured in, getting up, on an immense scale, the first scene in the 'Miller and his Men.' Each had a sack on his back; each bent under its weight; and the bare sight of these sacks, as if by magic, changed all the readers, all the talkers, all the wanderers, all the liers—down, all the coffee-drinkers, into a colony of human ants!

For the sacks were great sheepskin bags of letters tumbling in from the receiving-houses. Anon they looked like whole flocks suddenly struck all of a heap, ready for slaughter; for a ruthless individual stood at a table, with sleeves tucked up and knife in hand, who rapidly cut their throats, dived into their insides, abstracted their contents, and finally skinned them. 'For every letter we leave behind,' said the bag-opener, in answer to an inquiry, 'we are fined half-a-crown. That's why we turn them inside out.'

The mysterious visitors closely scrutinised the letters that were disgorged. These were from all parts of London to all parts of London and to the provinces and to the far-off quarters of the globe. An acute postman might guess the broad tenour of their contents by their covers:
business letters are in big envelopes, official letters in long ones, and lawyers' letters in none at all; the tinted and lace-bordered mean Valentines, the black-bordered tell of grief, and the radiant with white enamel announce marriage. When the Fleet Street dispatch appeared, the visitors tracked it, and the operations of the clerk who separated the three bundles of which it consisted were closely followed. With the prying curiosity which now only began to show itself, one of the intruders actually took a copy of the bill which accompanied the letters. It set forth in three lines that there were so many 'Stamped,' so many 'Prepaid,' and so many 'Unpaid.'

The clerk counted the stamped letters like lightning, and a flash of red gleaming past showed the inquirers that one of their epistles was safe. Suddenly the motion was stopped; the official had instinctively detected that one letter was insufficiently adorned with the Queen's profile, and he weighed and taxed it double in a twinkling. Having proved the number of stamped letters to be exactly as per account rendered, he went on checking off the prepaid, turning up the sender's green missive in the process. He then dealt with the unpaid, amongst which the lookers-on perceived their yellow one. The cash column was computed and cast in a single thought, and a short-hand mark, signifying 'quite correct,' dismissed the Fleet Street bill upon a file, for the leisurely scrutiny of the Receiver-General's office. All the other letters, and all the other bills of all the other receiving-houses, were going through the same routine at all the other tables; and these performances are repeated ten times in every day, all the year round, Sundays excepted!

'You perceived,' said one of the two friends, 'that in the rapid process of counting, our stamped letter gleamed past like a meteor, whilst our money-paid and unpaid epistles remained long enough under observation for a careful reading of the superscriptions.'

'That delay,' said an intelligent official, 'is occasioned because the latter are unstamped. Such letters cause a great complication of trouble, wholly avoided by the use of Queen's heads. Every officer through whose hands they pass—from the receiving-house-keeper to the carriers who deliver them at their destinations—has to give and take a cash account of each. If the public would put stamps on all letters, it would save us, and therefore itself, some thousands a year.'

'What are the proportions of the stamped to the prepaid and unpaid letters which pass through all the post-offices during the year?'

'We can tell within a very near approximation to correctness:—337,500,000 passed through the post-offices of the United Kingdom during last year, and to every 100 of them about forty had stamps; 46 were pre-paid with pennies; and only 4 were committed to the box unpaid.'

While one of the visitors was receiving this information, the other had followed his variegated letters to the next process; which was that of stamping on the sealed face, in red ink, the date and hour of despatch. The letters are ranged in a long row, like a pack of cards thrown across a table, and so fast does the stamper's hand move, that he can mark 3000 in an hour. While defacing the Queen's heads on the other side, he counts as he thumps, till he enumerates fifty, when he dodges his stamp on one side to put his black mark on a piece of plain paper. All these memoranda are afterwards collected by the president, who, reckoning fifty letters to every black mark, gets a near approximation to the number that have passed through the office. It was by this means that our friends

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obtained the following account of the number of district letters that passed through this office on St. Valentine's Day:

Feb. 14th, 1850
Paid.
Unpaid. Stamped. Total. 1 d. 1 d. 2 d.
Collections.
8 o'clock
6,872
52
1,216
20,062
28,222 10 "6,212160713,62920,46712
"7,0693661215,24022,9571 "2,989172776,3959,6782
"6,5203953513,69620,7903 "2,456363286,9099,7294
"4,8733637314,7813,4785 "3,340283178,20711,8926
"9,3001295827,95038,3378 "3,903328126,65011,4875
this total are to be added 6,000 'bye' letters—or
those which passed from village to village within
the suburban limits of the district post without
reaching the chief office—and 100,000 destined
for the provinces and places beyond sea, which
were transferred to the Inland Department. The
grand total for the day, therefore, rose to nearly
300,000. Thus the sacrifices to the fane of St.
Valentine—consisting of hearts, darts, Cupid
peeping out of paper-roses, Hymen embowered
in hot-pressed embossing, swans in very blue
coats and nympha in very opaque muslin, coarse
caricatures and tender verses caused an aug-
mentation to the revenue on this anniversary
equal to about 70,000 missives; 123,000 being
the usual daily average for district and 'byes'
during the month of February. This increase,
being peculiar to cross and district posts, does
not so much affect the Inland Office, for lovers
and sweethearts are generally neighbours. The
entire correspondence of the three kingdoms is
augmented on each St. Valentine's day to the
extent of about 400,000 letters.

'Is it possible? ' exclaimed one of the visitors,
regarding the piles of epistles on the numerous
tables, 'that this mass of letters can be arranged
and sent away to their respective addresses in
time to receive the next collection, which will
arrive in less than an hour? '

'Quite,' replied an obliging informant, 'I'll
tell you how we do it. We have divided Lon-
don into seventeen sections. There they are,
you perceive.' He then pointed to the tables
with pigeon-holes numbered from one to sev-
eventeen; one marked 'blind,' with a nineteenth
labelled 'general.' It was explained that the
proper arrangement of the letters in these com-
partments constitutes the first sorting. They
are then sorted into sub-divisions; then into
districts, and finally handed over to the letter-
carriers, who, in another room, arrange them for
their own convenience into 'walks.' As the vis-
itors looked round they perceived their coloured
envelopes, all addressed to Scotland—suddenly emerge from a chaotic heap,
and lodge in the division marked 'general,' as
magically as a conjurer causes any card you may
choose to fly out of the whole pack. 'These let-
ters,' remarked the expositor, 'being for the
country will presently passed into the Inland
Office through a tunnel under the hall. The
'blind' letters have superscriptions which the
sorters cannot decipher, and are sent to the
'blind' table where a gentleman presides, to
whom, from the extreme sharpness of his vision,
we give the lucus à non lucendo name of the 'blind clerk.' You will have a specimen of his
powers presently.'

While this dialogue was going on there was
a general abatement of the noise of stamp-
ing, and shuffling letters, and when the visitors
looked round, the place had relapsed into its for-
mer tranquillity. It was scarcely credible that
from 30,000 to 40,000 letters had been received,
stampèd, counted, sorted, and sent away in so
short a time. 'A judicious division of labour,'
remarked one of our friends, 'must work these
miracles.'

'Yes, sir,' was the reply of an official, 'and
there are from 1200 to 1700 of us to do the work
of the district post alone. When it was removed
from Gerard Street to this building there was
not a quarter of that number. For instance—
then, three carriers sufficed for the Paddington
district; but, by the dispatch you have just seen
completed, we have sent off 2000 letters to that
single locality by the hands of twenty-five carriers.

'The increase is attributable to the penny system? 'interrogated one of our inquiring friends.

'Entirely.'

The questioner then referred to a Parliamentary paper of which he had obtained possession. It showed him the history of general postal increase since the era of dear distance rates. In 1839—under the old system—the number of letters which passed through the post was 76,000,000. In 1840 came the uniform penny, and for that year the number was 162,000,000, or an increase of 93,000,000, equal to 123 per cent. That was the grand start; afterwards the rate of increase subsided from 36 per cent. in 1841, to 16 per cent, in 1842 and 1843. In 1845, and the three following years, the increase was respectively, 39, 37, and 30 per cent. Then succeeded a sudden drop; perhaps the culminating point had been attained. The Post-Office is, however, a thermometer of commerce: during the depressing year 1848, the number of letters increased no more than 9 per cent. But last year 37,500,000 epistles passed through the office, being an augmentation of 8,500,000 upon the preceding year, or 11 per cent. of progressive increase. Another Parliamentary document shows, that, although the business is now exactly four- and-a-half times more than it was in 1839, the expense of doing it has only doubled. In the former year the cost of the establishment was not quite 690,000l.; in 1849 it was about 1,400,000l.

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While one visitor was poring over these documents, the other deliberately watched the coloured envelopes. They were, with about 2000 other General Post letters, put into boxes and taken to the tunnel to be conveyed into the Inland Office upon a horizontal band worked by a wheel. The two friends now took leave of the District Department to follow the objects of their pursuit.

It was a quarter before six o'clock when they crossed the Hall—six being the latest hour at which newspapers can be posted without fee.

It was then just drizzling newspapers. The great window of that department being thrown open, the first black fringe of a thunder-cloud of newspapers impending over the Post-Office was discharging itself fitfully —now in large drops, now in little; now in sudden plumps, now stopping altogether. By degrees it began to rain hard; by fast degrees the storm came on harder and harder, until it blew, rained, hailed, snowed, newspapers. A fountain of newspapers played in at the window. Water-spouts of newspapers broke from enormous sacks, and engulfed the men inside. A prodigious main of newspapers, at the Newspaper River Head, seemed to be turned on, threatening destruction to the miserable Post-Office. The Post-Office was so full already, that the window foamed at the mouth with newspapers. Newspapers flew out like froth, and were tumbled in again by the bystanders. All the boys in London seemed to have gone mad, and to be besieging the Post-Office with newspapers. Now and then there was a girl; now and then a woman; now and then a weak old man: but as the minute hand of the clock crept near to six, such a torrent of boys, and such a torrent of newspapers came tumbling in together pell-mell, head over heels, one above another, that the giddy head looking on chiefly wondered why the boys springing over one another's heads, and flying the garter into the Post-Office with the enthusiasm of the corps of acrobats at M. Franconi's, didn't post themselves nightly, along with the newspapers, and get delivered all over the world.

Suddenly it struck six. Shut Sesame! Perfectly still weather. Nobody there. No token of the late storm—Not a soul, too late!

But what a chaos within! Men up to their knees in newspapers on great platforms; men gardening among newspapers with rakes; men
digging and delving among newspapers as if a new description of rock had been blasted into those fragments; men going up and down a gigantic trap—an ascending and descending-room worked by a steam-engine—still taking with them nothing but newspapers! All the history of the time, all the chronicled births, deaths, and marriages, all the crimes, all the accidents, all the vanities, all the changes, all the realities, of all the civilised earth, heaped up, parcelled out, carried about, knocked down, cut, shuffled, dealt, played, gathered up again, and passed from hand to hand, in an apparently interminable and hopeless confusion, but really in a system of admirable order, certainty, and simplicity, pursued six nights every week, all through the rolling year! Which of us, after this, shall find fault with the rather more extensive system of good and evil, when we don't quite understand it at a glance; or set the stars right in their spheres?

The friends were informed that 70,000,000 newspapers pass through all the post-offices every year. Upwards of 80,000,000 newspaper-stamps are distributed annually from the Stamp-Office; but most of the London papers are conveyed into the country by early trains. On the other hand, frequently the same paper passes through the post several times, which accounts for the small excess of 10,000,000 stamps issued over papers posted. In weight, 187 tons of paper and print pass up and down the ingenious 'lift' every week, and thence to the uttermost corners of the earth—from Blackfriars to Botany Bay, from the Strand to Chusan.

As to the rooms, revealed through gratings in the wall, traversed by the ascending and descending-room, and walked in by the visitors afterwards,—those enormous chambers, each with its hundreds of sorters busy over their hundreds of thousands of letters—those dispatching places of a business that has the look of being eternal and never to be disposed of or cleared away—those silent receptacles of countless millions of passionate words, for ever pouring through them like a Niagara of language, and leaving not a drop behind—what description could present them? But when a sorter goes home from these places to his bed, does he dream of letters? When he has a fever (sorters must have fevers sometimes) does he never find the Welsh letters getting into the Scotch divisions, and the London letters going to Jericho? When he gets a glass too much, does he see no double letters mis-sorting themselves unaccountably? When he is very ill, do no dead letters stare him in the face? And yonder dark, mysterious, ground-glass balcony high up in the wall, not unlike a church organ without the pipes—the screen from whence an unseen eye watches the sorters who are listening to temptation—when he has a nightmare, does he never dream of that?

Then that enormous table upon which the public shoot their letters through the window-slits—do the four men who sit at it never fancy themselves playing at whist, gathering up an enormous pack of red aces, with here and there a many-hued Valentine to stand for a Court card? Their duty is termed 'facing,' or turning the ace-like seals downwards, 'ready for stamping.'

The system of stamping, sorting, and arranging, is precisely similar to that in the District Branch, and by his recently acquired knowledge of it, the person who posted the coloured letters was able to trace them through every stage, till they were tied up ready to be 'bagged,' and sent away. While thus employed, his companion made the following observations:—

In an opposite side of the enormous apartment, a good space and a few officials are devoted to repairing the carelessness of the public, which is—in amount and extent—scarcely credible. Upon an average, 300 letters per day pass through the General Post-Office totally un-
fastened; chiefly in consequence of the use of what stationers are pleased to call 'adhesive' envelopes. Many are virgin ones, without either seal or direction; and not a few contain money. In Sir Francis Freeling's time, the sum of 5000l. in Bank notes was found in a 'blank.' It was not till after some trouble that the sender was traced, and the cash restored to him. Not long since, an humble post-mistress of an obscure Welch post-town, unable to decipher the address on a letter, perceived, on examining it, the folds of several Bank notes protruding from a torn edge of the envelope. She securely re-enclosed it to the secretary of the Post-Office in St. Martin's-le-Grand; who found the contents to be 1500l., and the superscription too much even for the hieroglyphic powers of the 'blind clerk.' Eventually the enclosures found their true destination.

It is estimated that there lies, from time to time, in the Dead-Letter Office, undergoing the process of finding owners, some 11,000l. annually, in cash alone. In July, 1847, for instance—only a two months' accumulation—the post-haste of 4658 letters, all containing property, was arrested by the bad super-scriptions of the writers. They were consigned—after a searching inquest upon each by that efficient coroner, the 'blind clerk'—to the Post-Office Morgue. There were Bank notes of the value of 1010l., and money-orders for 407l. 12s. But most of these ill-directed letters contained coin in small sums, amounting to 310l., 9s. 7d. On the 17th of July, 1847, there were lying in the Dead-Letter Office bills of Exchange for the immense sum of 40,410l. 5s. 7d.

'I assure you,' said a gentleman high in this department, 'it is scarcely possible to take up a handful of letters without finding one with coin in it, despite the facilities afforded by the money-order system. All this is very distressing to us. The temptation it throws in the way of sorters, carriers, and other humble employés is greater than they ought to be subjected to. Seventy men have been discharged for dishonesty from the District Office alone during the past two years.'

'But the public do use the Money-Order Office extensively?'

This question was startlingly answered by reference to a Parliamentary Return which showed that there were issued and paid in England and Wales alone, during the year which ended on the 5th of January, 1849, 6,852,911 Post-office orders for sums amounting to the enormous aggregate of 13,678,377 l. 3s. 1d.

Taking up a thin card-board box of artificial flowers, which had been shaken into the form of an irregular rhomboid, under the pressure of several pounds' weight of letters and newspapers, a 'sub-president' remarked—'The faith the public have in us is extraordinary. Here is an article which is designed to go safely to Dublin; yet not one single precaution, except this thin piece of twine, is taken by the sender to ensure its preservation. Here, again, is a pair of white satin shoes, fast losing their colour from friction with damp newspapers and the edges of books. The other day the toe of a similar packet protruded from its very thin casing, and the stampers not being able to stop his hand in time, ornamented it, in vividly blue ink, with the words, "York, Feb. 1, 1850, D." You will see by this Parliamentary Return of the articles found in the Dead-Letter Office what curious things are trusted to our care.'

The obliging gentleman then produced the document. Its lists showed, amongst other articles,—tooth-picks, tooth-files, fishing-flies, an eye-glass, brad-aws, portraits, miniatures, a whistle, corkscrews, a silver watch, a pair of spurs, a bridle, a soldier's discharge and sailors' register tickets, samples of hops and corn, a Greek MS., silver spoons, gold thread, dinner, theatre, and pawn tickets, boxes of pills, shirts, night-caps, razors, all sorts of knitting and lace, 'doll's things,' and a vast variety of
other articles, that would puzzle ingenuity to conjecture.

' Besides carelessness we have to contend against ignorance,' was remarked as the visitors were introduced to the 'blind' table, and to the hawk-eyed gentleman who presides at it. 'He is provided, you perceive, with a small library of local and general Directories, Court Guides, Army, Navy, and Clergy Lists; and much he needs them, as will be seen by these fac-similes.' Several transcripts of curiously addressed letters were then produced. 'Where would you or I have sent a letter certain, not to its proper destination, which turned out to be the "Amphitrite," Valparaiso, or elsewhere? Who but our friend here would have found out that another boy in her Majesty's naval service said to be on board

H. M. Steam Frigkt Vultur Uncon or els ware, belonged to the Steam Frigate Vulture, at Hong Kong? Few would think that

Mr. Weston Osburn Cottage Ilawait was a neighbour of her Majesty, and lived at Osborne Cottage, Isle of Wight.'

The following additional epistolary puzzles were then read, amidst, as reporters say,' loud laughter: '

Mr. Laurence New Land Ivicum (High Wycombe).

W. Stratton Commonly Caed teapot (We presume as a total abstinence man.) Weelin (Welinyn).

Thom Hoodless 3 St. Ann Ct Searhoo Skur (Soho Square).

The ingenious orthographies Ralifhaivai and Rollef Fieway went straight to the proper parties in Ratcliffe Highway; but it is a wonder how—

Mr. Dick Bishop Cans ner the Wises got his letter, considering that his place of abode was near Devizes.

For the next specimen of spelling there is some excuse. 'In England,' says a French traveller, 'what they write "Greenwich," they pronounce "Grinitch," and I am not quite sure that when they set down "Solomon," they do not pronounce it "Nebuchadnezzar."' 'I much question,' continued one of the amateur Post-Office inspectors, 'if either of us had never seen the name of the place to which the following superscription applies, that we should not have spelt it nearly similarly to the correspondent of—

Peter Robertson 2 Compney 7 Batilian Rolyl Artirian Owilige England.

' Although the writer's ear misled him grievously in the other words, he has recorded the sound into which we render Woolwich with curious correctness.'

' Innocent simplicity baulks us as much as ignorance,' remarked the head of the hieroglyphic department. 'Here are one or two specimens of it:—

To Mr. Michl Darcy In the towne of England.

A schoolboy sends from Salisbury,

To My Uncle Jon in London.

Another addressed the highest personage in the realm—no doubt on particular business—as

Miss Queene Victoria. of England.'

While this amusement was going forward, the bustle in the adjoining rooms had reached its climax. It was approaching eight o'clock, and the 'Miller and his Men' above stairs were delivering their sacks from the mouth of the ever-revolving mill at an incessant rate. These, filled nearly to the mouth with newspapers, were dragged to the tables, which the brass label fastened to the corner of each bag marked as its own, to have the letters inserted. Our friends rushed to where they saw 'Edinburgh' painted up on the walls, and there they beheld their yellow, green, and red letters in separate packets, though destined for the same place; just as they had come in at first from Fleet Street. The bun-
*Household Words*, Volume I, Magazine No. 1, 30 March 1850, Pages: 6-12

Diddles were popped in a trice into the Edinburgh bag, which was sealed and sent away. Exactly the same thing was happening to every bundle of letters, and to every bag on the premises.

The clock now struck eight, and the two visitors looked round in astonishment. Had they been guests at the ball in 'Cinderella,' when that clock struck they would not have been more astonished; for hardly less rapidly did the fancy dresses of the postmen disappear, and the lights grow dim. This is the most striking peculiarity of the extraordinary establishment. Everything is done on military principles to minute time. The drill and subdivision of duties are so perfect, that the alternations throughout the day are high pressure and sudden collapse. At five minutes before eight the enormous offices were glaring with light and crowded with men; at ten minutes after eight the glass slipper had fallen off, and there was hardly a light or a living being visible.

'Perhaps, however,' it was remarked as our friends were leaving the building, 'an invisible individual is now stealthily watching behind the ground glass screen. Only the other day he detected from it a sorter secreting 140 sovereigns.'

It is a deplorable thing that such a place of observation should be necessary; but it is hardly less deplorable—and this should be most earnestly impressed upon the reader—that the public, now possessed of such conveniences for remitting money, by means of Post-Office Orders and Registered Letters, should lightly throw temptation in the way of these clerks, by enclosing actual coin. No man can say that, placed in such circumstances from day to day, he could be steadfast. Many may hope they would be, and believe it; but

none can be sure. It is in the power, however, of every conscientious and reflecting mind, to make quite sure that it has no part in this class of crimes. The prevention for this one great source of misery is made easy to the public hand; and it is the public's bounden duty to adopt it. They who do not, cannot be blameless.

Such is the substance of information obtained by our friends before they took leave of the mighty heart of the postal system of this country.

In conclusion, they beg it to be understood that their experimental letters were not Valentines.
Valentine's Day at the Post-Office' by Charles Dickens, William Henry Wills

*Household Words*, Volume I, Magazine No. 1, 30 March 1850, Pages: 6-12

**Article:** 'Valentine's Day at the Post-Office' by Charles Dickens, William Henry Wills

**Journal:** *Household Words*, Volume I, Magazine No. 1, 30 March 1850, Pages: 6-12

**Author(s):**
- Charles Dickens


In the partnership agreement under which *H.W.* was set up, Dickens was, with the publishers Bradbury & Evans, with Forster and with Wills, one of the joint proprietors; he held an interest of one-half share. On Forster's relinquishing his one-eighth share in 1856, Dickens divided that one-eighth between himself and Wills. Dickens's salary as editor was £500 a year; he was to receive payment also for what he wrote in the periodical (Lehmann, ed., *Charles Dickens As Editor*, pp. 19, 195-97). (In the Office Book, Wills did not record the payments made or credited to Dickens for his *H.W.* writings.)

Dickens set the editorial policy of *H.W.* and supervised its being carried out. He had, in Wills, a capable and efficient subeditor on whose judgment he came more and more to rely; yet, especially in the early years of *H.W.*, he concerned himself with every detail of its production. Before the first number appeared, he wrote to friends and acquaintances asking them to become contributors. He read - especially during the early years of *H.W.* - hundreds of MSS, some submitted directly to him, others referred to him by Wills for final acceptance or rejection. When possible, he conferred weekly, sometimes more often, with Wills on editorial matters. When personal conference was not possible, he sent his instructions and suggestions by letter - instructions and suggestions ranging from matters of editorial policy to matters of typography and punctuation. He revised - sometimes almost entirely rewrote - contributed papers; he read proofs - sometimes revises of proofs that he had in the first place altered or emended. He suggested subjects for articles; he sent to the office materials to serve as the basis for articles. On occasion, he made excursions in company with a staff member to gather material for articles. He wrote much for the early volumes of *H.W.*, comparatively little for the later volumes. Morley's writings in the periodical exceeded his by some 300 pages. Nevertheless, as he stated when he brought *H.W.* to a close ("A Last Household Word"), his name had been, "as his pen and himself" had been, "inseparable from the Publication" throughout its entire existence.
Most of Dickens's writings in *H.W.*, like almost all contributions of other writers, appeared anonymously. Only *Hard Times*, the one of his novels that he serialized in the periodical, carried with the title of the work in each instalment the ascription "BY CHARLES DICKENS." Four weeks before the serialization of that book began, it was announced: "NEW TALE by Mr. CHARLES DICKENS"; thereafter, each week's *H.W.* number announced the portion of *Hard Times* by Charles Dickens that was to appear the following week; before the appearance of the final chapters, as also after the completion of the serialization, *H.W.* published advertisements for the novel in book form as a Bradbury & Evans publication. *A Child's History of England*, Dickens's only other extended work in *H.W.*, appeared in the various instalments without Dickens's name after the title, but, during the serialization, advertisements in *H.W.* for the *History* in book form as a Bradbury & Evans publication stated Dickens's authorship.

Of various other of his *H.W.* writings Dickens also made his authorship known. "Personal," his statement concerning the "domestic trouble," bore his name as signature. "Curious Misprint in the Edinburgh Review," his reply to J. F. Stephen's article "The License of Modern Novelists," announced: "the hand of Mr. Dickens writes this paper." In "A Nightly Scene in London," it was "I, the Conductor of this journal," who told of coming upon the poor souls crouched before a Whitechapel workhouse. The footnote that Dickens added to "Three Graces of Christian Science" he signed "C.D." Writing in first or third person, Dickens also made clear that he was author of the introductory and closing comments in *H.W.* ("A Preliminary Word," "All the Year Round," "A Last Household Word"), as of "Pet Prisoners," the detective police articles, "The Guild of Literature and Art," "The Late Mr. Justice Talfourd," and "To Working Men."

In bold type, the words "CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS" appeared on the *H.W.* masthead; in small type they spanned the verso and recto of facing pages. In the first five years of *H.W.*'s publication, Dickens's name appeared in more than seventy-five *H.W.* advertisements and announcements in connection with the periodical and one of its supplementary publications, and in connection with *A Child's History* and *Hard Times* (in some advertisements and announcements his name appeared as many as three times). In the last year of *H.W.*'s publication, readings by Mr. Charles Dickens were announced in forty-one *H.W.* numbers. Dickens was omnipresent in his periodical.

In view of this fact, as also for other obvious considerations, Dickens naturally wanted in *H.W.* stories and articles no laudatory references to himself - or references that might be so construed. Thus, in "Our Society at Cranford," he substituted mentions of Hood and Hood's writings for Mrs. Gaskell's mentions of Boz and Boz's Pickwick and Christmas Carol: "... with my name on every page of Household Words," he wrote to Mrs. Gaskell (Dec. 5 [4], 1851.), "there would be - or at least I should feel - an impropriety in so mentioning myself." In a letter to Cunningham, June 24, 1853, he referred to his "usual precaution" in deleting from articles references that "unmistakably" applied to himself. An exception to this policy was the publication in *H.W.* of a personal letter from John Pascoe Fawkner, in which Fawkner stated that Dickens's writings had "beguiled many an hour of my life," and wished Dickens "many years of healthful employment in the highly useful manner" in which he had been so long engaged ("A Colonial Patriot").

But the observation of a reader (a reader of "a quick wit and a happy comprehension," as Dickens characterized him) that Dickens's writings had the tendency "to hold up to derision..."
those of the higher classes" also found a place in H.W. pages ("Ready Wit").

Impersonal references to himself and to his books Dickens had no objection to. Mention of "Mr. Dickens" appeared of necessity in Morley's "Our Wicked Mis-statements"; in occasional articles by non-staff writers mention of Dickens was appropriate and unobtrusive. References to his novels - Pickwick, Oliver Twist, Nickleby, Chuzzlewit, Dombey, Copperfield, Bleak House, Hard Times, Little Dorrit - their characters, place-names, distinctive phraseology - appeared in one or more items by Stone, Dodd, Capper, Oxenford, Miss Lawrance, Payn, Morley, Costello, the Rev. James White, Samuel Sidney, Kent, Percy Fitzgerald, Wilkie Collins, Mrs. Linton, and Thornbury. (The reference to Mrs. Gamp in "Railway Waifs and Strays" could be by either of the joint authors - Wills or Hill.) Of these references, the most extended was Fitzgerald's recital, in "My Long Lost Cheesy Idol!", of the plot of a melodrama based on Dombey; the most amusing was White's depiction, in "Fiction Crushing," of a Dora-like wife who comes to despise her Copperfield prototype. In at least seven of his own articles, and in one by him and Wills, Dickens referred to characters in his novels. In a footnote to "Pet Prisoners" he mentioned American Notes, and in "That Other Public" he quoted from the book.

Various of Dickens's H.W. writings elicited praise from contemporaries. Among his articles in the early volumes, for example, "A Child's Dream of a Star" seemed to Percy Fitzgerald written with Dickens's "most delicate touch"; and nothing, thought Fitzgerald, could be "more witty or sarcastic" than "Red Tape" (Memories of Charles Dickens, pp. 137, 155). Crabb Robinson found one of the "Raven" articles "a witty paper," "a capital satire" (On Books and Their Writers, II, 704). The Quart. Rev. (June 1856) mentioned Dickens's "excellent papers" on the London detective police. Mrs. Cowden Clarke wrote to a friend: "The 'Christmas Tree' paper is charming, is it not?" (Letters to an Enthusiast, p. 32). Among Dickens's articles that antagonized certain readers were "Frauds on the Fairies," "Pet Prisoners," and "Whole Hogs." Dickens's remonstrance, in "Frauds on the Fairies," against George Cruikshank's rewriting "Hop-o'-My-Thumb" to serve propaganda purposes provoked a reply from Cruikshank, in which he justified his treatment of fairy tales and set Dickens right "upon one or two points" (George Cruikshank's Magazine, Feb. 1854). Dickens's comments on prison chaplains, in "Pet Prisoners," resulted in his being "severely mauled at the hands of certain Reverend Ordinaries" ("Small-Beer Chronicles," A.Y.R., Dec. 6, 1862). "Whole Hogs" aroused the indignation of temperance advocates (Kitton, "Introduction" to Old Lamps for New Ones and Other Sketches and Essays, by Dickens; also, Dickens's H.W. article "Sucking Pigs"). Dickens's statement, in H.W., concerning his domestic affairs was generally condemned as in poor taste.

Dickens's relationship with most of his contributors was amicable. To some who were newcomers in the field of writing he at times wrote detailed criticisms of their submitted MSS, with words of advice and encouragement. Among H.W. writers who, at one time or another, showed their regard for him by dedicating to him a book were Marston, the Rev. James White, Wickenden, Forster, Prince, Landor, Charles Knight, Samuel Sinai, Wilkie Collins, Margaretie Power, Duthie, Spicer, Wills, Yates, Lever, Kent, Percy Fitzgerald, Payn, and Thornbury. Hans Christian Andersen, who was technically not a contributor, but one of whose stories appeared in H.W., dedicated three books to Dickens.

Of the items included by Dickens in Reprinted Pieces, "A Plated Article," recorded in the Office Book as by Dickens and Wills, was reprinted by Wills in his Old Leaves: Gathered from
Household Words, 1860, there indicated as written in part by Dickens. Wills's Office Book ascription of the item to Dickens and to himself is more authoritative as to its authorship than is Dickens's reprinting.

As Dickens's letters and as occasional comments by contributors indicate, Dickens made changes - deletions, additions, emendations - in more items than those for which the initials "C.D." appear in the Office Book jointly with the name of a contributor. Thus, it is not inconceivable that he might have written the hymn, sometimes attributed to him, that concludes "Poor Dick's Story" in the 1856 Christmas number (see identification note on Harriet Parr). The attribution, however, seems to be in error.

Harper's reprinted, in whole or part, seventeen of Dickens's H.W. articles and stories (including "A Plated Article," claimed by both Dickens and Wills), three acknowledged to H.W., nine to Dickens personally, and five unacknowledged to any source. Harper's reprinted as by Dickens eight items not by him (see Elizabeth Gaskell, Home, Sala, Morley, the Rev. James White, Harriet Martineau, Wilkie Collins, Eliza Lynn Linton). Two of Dickens's items were included in the Putnam volumes of selections from H.W.: Home and Social Philosophy, 1st and 2nd ser. The collection of Dickens's H.W. items published in 1859 by the Philadelphia publishing firm T. B. Peterson, Dickens' Short Stories. Containing Thirty-one Stories Never Before Published in This Country, contained no items that Dickens had not included in Reprinted Pieces. D.N.B.

Author: Anne Lohrli; © University of Toronto Press, 1971.

Dickens served a full newspaper apprenticeship, beginning as a teenage penny-a-liner for The British Press (1826). Having taught himself shorthand in the late 1820s, Dickens practised the craft in the antiquated courts of Doctors' Commons before moving up to join the select band of parliamentary reporters, working first for his uncle's voluminous Mirror of Parliament, then for the radical True Sun during the stormy passage of the Reform Bill through parliament (1832), and finally securing a coveted reporter's job on the newly-reorganised Morning Chronicle, under veteran Benthamite editor John Black (1783-1855). There he undertook varied work - theatre reviewing, election reporting, express reporting of extra-mural political events, as well as enduring the daily grind of parliamentary debates. Given the fluctuating demands for space which the latter placed on a 7-column broadsheet like the Chronicle, room was soon found for Dickens's witty sketches employing, amongst a wardrobe of other styles, the rhetoric of political journalism to narrate the world of everyday Londoners. These came to be signed 'Boz', and between 1836 and 1839, together with tales from the Monthly Magazine and Bell's Life in London they were republished to extensive acclaim, overlapping with the monthly release of 'Boz's next great success, The Pickwick Papers (1836-37).

Thereafter, Dickens's writing ventures all self-consciously straddled the permeable frontier between journalism and popular literature. He left the daily press for the more genteel world of monthly magazines, with the editorship of Bentley's Miscellany (1837-39), but sought to reconnect with satirical weekly journalism through editing Master Humphrey's Clock for Chapman & Hall (1840-41). This was something of a misfire, in journalistic terms, though it bequeathed Old Curiosity Shop and Barnaby Rudge to literature. So too was Dickens's involvement with the Daily News (1845-46); critics point to the fact only 17 issues of the new Liberal broadsheet were published under his watch. Yet Dickens's effectiveness, as celebrity launch editor, should not be underestimated; his newsgathering and recruiting arrangements stood the test of time,
and he led from the front with a series of inventive contributions on social and cultural issues. Even while seeking to reposition himself as a serious novelist with *Dombey and Son* (1846-48), Dickens returned to newsprint, with around 30 anonymous reviews and irony-laden leaders for the *Examiner* under John Forster (1848-49). These were a prelude to his return to full-time editing and leader-writing, with *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* - hugely successful enterprises in weekly magazine journalism which, however, did not prevent Dickens from writing a further eight serial novels and undertaking punishing tours as a public reader in Britain, France, and America. Dickens is now widely recognised - and was during his lifetime - as a crucial contributor both to the popular appeal and the respectability of the mass-market newspaper and periodical press.


Oxford Dictionary of National Biography


  Journalist. Received limited education; must have acquired knowledge of books by wide reading. J. A. Crowe (*Reminiscences*, p. 71) wrote of him as "well read in Shakespeare and the poets of the last two centuries". According to Vizetelly (*Glances Back through Seventy Years*, I, 247), was "brought up as a wood-engraver" in office of Vizetelly's father, then "drifted into literature". Contributed to *Penny Magazine*, *Saturday Magazine*, and other periodicals. Was on original staff of *Punch*; sometime dramatic critic for the periodical. In Edinburgh, 1842-1845, was assistant editor of *Chambers's*. Married Janet Chambers, sister of the Edinburgh publishers. Was on original staff of *Daily News*. From 1850 to 1869, connected with *H.W.* and *A.Y.R.*. Author of *The Law of the Land*, produced at Surrey Theatre, 1837. Brought out an edition of the Sir Roger de Coverley papers, 1850; a selection of his *H.W.* contributions and a selection of his contributions to *Chambers's*; an anthology, *Poets' Wit and Humour*, 1861, in which he included two of his own pieces. According to Tinsley (*Random Recollections*, II, 290), was one "of the best known men of his time in the London literary world".

  Wills sent at least two items to *Bentley's Miscellany* at the time that Dickens was editor of the periodical; Dickens accepted one, returned the other, and invited further contributions. In the latter months of 1845, Wills served as Dickens's secretary during Dickens's establishment of the *Daily News*; he was engaged by Dickens as a member of the staff and remained on the staff under Forster's editorship, after Dickens's resignation as editor. It was Forster who suggested to the engagement of Wills as assistant editor of *H.W.*. In the partnership agreement under which *H.W.* was set up, Wills was, with Dickens, with the publishers Bradbury & Evans, and with Forster, one of the joint proprietors; he held an interest of one-eighth share. He was to serve as sub-editor at a salary of eight pounds a week. On Forster's relinquishing his one-eighth share in 1856, Dickens allotted half of that one-eighth to Wills. In the partnership agreement under which *A.Y.R.* was set up, Wills was, with Dickens, joint proprietor; he held an interest of one-fourth share. At a salary of £420 a year, he was to serve as sub-editor and also as general manager of "the Commercial Department" (Lehmann, ed., *Charles Dickens As Editor*, pp. 19, 195-197, 212, 261).
H.W. and A.Y.R. were Dickens's periodicals. Dickens wanted no brother near the editorial throne. Throughout the nineteen years during which Wills was his co-worker, Dickens accorded him no higher title than "subeditor". But in the public mind, Wills was as much a part of the two periodicals as was Dickens. Of H.W. (or at times of H.W. and A.Y.R. jointly), he was variously referred to as "acting editor" (Athenaeum, September 4 1880), "working editor" (Hollingshead, My Lifetime, I, 98), "assistant editor" (Lady Priestley, Story of a Lifetime, p. 95), "co-editor" (Athenaeum, October 29 1892), "editor" (W. J. Linton, Memories, p. 161). Patmore, writing of one of Allingham's poems that had been published at the time that Wills was Dickens's only editorial assistant, expressed his disgust at the way in which it had been treated "by the Editor (not Dickens) of 'Household Words'" (Champneys, Memoirs ... of Coventry Patmore, II, 175). Harriet Martineau, levelling her attack at "the editors"—"the proprietors"—of H.W. as philosophically and morally inadequate to their function, held Wills equally as responsible for editorial policy as she did Dickens (Autobiography, II, 91-95). Samuel Smiles (Autobiography, p. 261) called Wills "editor of All the Year Round". Commenting on the fact that Dickens's periodicals bore Dickens's name alone as editor, Tinsley wrote (Random Recollections, II, 290-291): "... I take the liberty to think that, when 'Household Words' and Charles Dickens's name is mentioned, the name and good work of William Henry Wills should not be forgotten".

Whatever literary career Wills might at one time have contemplated was put an end to by his acceptance of the sub-editorship. The book that he was writing in the later years of his life remained unfinished at his death. The subeditorship, in Dickens's understanding, was to engross all of Wills's time and energy. When Wills, in 1855, in order to increase his income, contemplated accepting the editorship of the Civil Service Gazette and carrying on the work concurrently with his work on H.W., Dickens flatly informed him that such an arrangement was out of the question. Wills immediately acquiesced in Dickens's decision. He wrote to Dickens that his "whole life" was bound up in H.W. "and in the connexion into which it brings me with you" (Lehmamn, p. 166).

Wills's position as H.W. subeditor was a responsible one. He handled the business transactions of the periodical. He had entire charge of the day-to-day management of the editorial office, carrying on correspondence, conferring with the printers and with contributors, delegating some of the assignments. He accepted and rejected contributions, referring to Dickens those that required Dickens's final decision. He kept, in the Office Book, a record of items published in H.W. numbers, with the amounts paid for contributed items - himself determining (roughly within the set payment scale) what the payment for any contribution should be. He set up—sometimes in consultation with Dickens, as frequently by himself—the numbers of the periodical, deciding on the contents and the order of items, then carried out Dickens's instructions for whatever changes Dickens wanted made. On his own initiative, as also at the direction of Dickens, Wills revised contributed items. (As Dickens's letters and as occasional memoranda in the Office Book indicate, Wills revised or made changes
in more items than those of which he listed himself in the Office Book as reviser). He read and corrected proof. From the letters sent in by readers, he contrived "chips"; he did much of the hackwork of writing "chips" to correct typographical errors and misstatements in items that had appeared. Occasionally he accompanied Dickens to places or institutions and collaborated with him on articles based on the excursions. He wrote original material for the periodical (his original material was, until 1855, considered as paid for in his weekly salary). In addition, probably in 1854 on Forster's discontinuing his active participation in H.W. matters, Wills assumed "the labouring oar" in the Household Narrative of Current Events (Lehmann, p. 165).

Wills carried out his duties capably and conscientiously. Dickens could have had no better co-worker. "If there were only another Wills", said Thackeray on undertaking the editorship of Cornhill, "my fortune would be made!" (Lady Priestley, Story of a Lifetime, p. 143).

Dickens realized Wills's value to him. He mentioned Wills at times as his "fellow-workman", even as his "colleague" but also as his "factotum". In the business management of the periodical and its journalistic routine he relied on Wills completely; the responsibility that he gave him in editorial matters indicates that he thought Wills's literary ability at least competent; his letters indicate that he thought it little more. To Cunningham, he wrote (May 12 1850): "Wills is a capital fellow for his work, but decidedly of the Nutmeg-Grater, or Fancy-Bread-Rasper School you mention"; and to Bulwer Lytton (May 15 1861): "Wills has no genius, and is, in literary matters, sufficiently commonplace to represent a very large proportion of our readers". Representation of "a very large proportion of our readers" may not have seemed to Dickens a quality to be in all ways deplored.

Sending New Year's greetings to Wills on January 2 1862, Dickens mentioned their many years of association. "And I think," he wrote, "we can say that we doubt whether any two men can have gone on more happily and smoothly, or with greater trust and confidence in one another". The statement was true; yet Dickens was not an easy editor to work for, and, but for Wills's good nature, their association would not have been, for the most part, free from misunderstandings and arguments. Wills was obviously expected to exercise his own judgment in editorial matters; yet, when his judgment failed to coincide with Dickens's, it was Wills's judgment that was at fault. Dickens's criticisms were at times, particularly during the early years of H.W., so offensively phrased as to be humiliating to their recipient. Wills's setting up a certain item as a separate article, rather than as a "chip", Dickens termed "ridiculous". Of an article-title that Wills had suggested, Dickens wrote: "I don't think there could be a worse one within the range of the human understanding" (July 30 1854; July 12 1850). On this occasion Wills rose to his defence. He had given, he replied "a 'mild suggestion'" for a title, "for I think it useless to hint what may strike me as a defect without indicating a remedy"; the title might not be the best possible one, "but I am sure it is not the worst one within the range of human understanding". Replying to an objection concerning the manner in which he had handled a passage in another item, Wills sensibly explained his point, adding: "I did not suppose you would wish me to consult you upon so simple a matter of mechanical convenience" (Lehmann, pp. 30-32). In a letter to Dickens, October 17 1851, Wills wrote: "I have my own notions of what such a publication as Household Words should be; and, although I have good reason to suppose from the latitude of confidence you give me, that my notions square with your own generally, yet I cannot (less perhaps than many other men) be always right; and it would lift a
great weight of responsibility from me if everything which passes into the columns of Household Words had the systematic benefit of another judgment before publication" (Lehmann, pp. 74-75). During Dickens's absences from London, much that appeared in H.W. did not have the benefit of Dickens's surveillance. The editorial work was Wills's.

Begun as a business relationship, the association of Wills and Dickens developed into friendship. Dickens in his later years, wrote Forster (Life, Book VI, sect. iv), "had no more intimate friend" than Wills. Dickens's letters—with their frank comments on friends, on family and personal matters—indicate this intimacy. Wills knew, of course, of the Ellen Ternan affair; he was acquainted with Miss Ternan. Wills was at various times in Dickens's company on social occasions, as was also Mrs. Wills. He was a member of Dickens's amateur company that staged a benefit performance for the actress Frances Kelly, January 3 1846 (playbill, Dickensian, xxxv, 241). He accompanied Dickens during a part of the theatrical tour undertaken in 1851 for the benefit of the Guild of Literature and Art; he served as secretary to the Guild. Dickens was instrumental in procuring for Wills the appointment as confidential secretary to, and as almoner for, Miss Burdett-Coutts. He proposed Wills for membership in the Garrick Club, and resigned from the Garrick on Wills's being blackballed. In 1864 Wills gave Dickens the present of a brougham. "It will always be dear to me ... ", wrote Dickens (November 30), "as a proof of your ever generous friendship and appreciation, and a memorial of a happy intercourse and a perfect confidence that have never had a break, and that surely never can have any break now (after all these years) but one".

The Athenaeum obituary on Wills (September 4 1880) stated that no man "left behind him fewer enemies and more friends" than did he. With his editorial assistants, Wills's personal relationship was friendly. The friction that developed between him and Horne resulted from Wills's conviction that Horne was not doing sufficient writing for H.W. to justify his salary; but personally, wrote Wills, he had "a liking for Horne" (Lehmann, p. 36). Morley called Wills "my dear friend" (Early Papers and Some Memories, p. 30); Collins showed his partisanship of Wills by resigning from the Garrick in protest against the Club's blackballing of Wills. Of persons associated with H.W., only Forster disliked Wills—or, rather, came to dislike him, for he must have had a reasonably amicable attitude toward him and some appreciation of his abilities when he suggested him to Dickens as assistant editor of H.W. With contributors, Wills's personal relationship was also friendly, though some writers resented his editorial alteration of their contributions. H.W. contributors who expressed their regard for him by dedicating to him a book were Murray, Payn (joint dedication to Ritchie and Wills), Percy Fitzgerald, Duthie, and Eliza Lynn Linton (joint dedication to Wills and his wife).

Wills wrote twenty-eight full-length items for the first volume of H.W., but increasingly fewer for the following volumes; for some of the later volumes he wrote none. As he explained in 1855, at the time that his accepting the editorship of the Civil Service Gazette was under discussion, he left the writing mainly to others, once a corps of contributors had been established. Since Wills had contemplated the Gazette editorship as a means of increasing his earnings, Dickens, in ruling it out of the question, suggested, instead, that Wills be paid for H. W. articles in the writing of which he had a substantial share. Wills interpreted this to mean articles that he wrote by himself; in the Office Book he recorded payment for seven such articles and one story. Of the eighteen articles or sections of articles that Wills recorded in the Office Book as jointly
by him and Dickens, some were actual collaborations of the two writers. One—the first section of "The Doom of English Wills"—Dickens mentioned in a letter to Wills (September 8, 1850) as "our joint article". Other of the articles Dickens merely revised or added material to. (For suggestion as to the revision and additions, see Stone, ed., Charles Dickens' Uncollected Writings from Household Words). Reprinting certain of the articles in Old Leaves: Gathered from Household Words—which he dedicated to Dickens Wills wrote that they owed "their brightest tints" to Dickens's "masterly touches". Included in Old Leaves was "A Plated Article", which Dickens had reprinted as his writing. Wills's Office Book ascription of the item to Dickens and to himself is more authoritative as to its authorship than is Dickens's reprinting.

Dickens suggested the title for Wills's "The Great Bar in the Harbour of London". He thought Wills's "Review of a Popular Publication" and "To Clergymen in Difficulties" very good, as he did Wills's autobiographical article in A.Y.R. (April 8, 1865), "Forty Years in London" (to Wills, July 17, 1851; July 12, 1850; March 9, 1851: MS Huntington Library; March 26, 1850). In a long letter to Wills, April 13, 1855, Dickens analysed one of Wills's stories (not published in H.W.), pointing out what he saw as its defects, but mentioning also its merits.

Of the items reprinted, "Railway Waifs and Strays" and "The Tyrant of Minnigisengen" appeared in Old Leaves without acknowledgment of the joint authorship that Wills had recorded for them in the Office Book. "A Suburban Romance", recorded in the Office Book as by "W.H.W. (suggested by Mrs. Hoare)", with payment to Mrs. Hoare for the suggestion, appeared without acknowledgment of Mrs. Hoare's suggestion. "To Clergymen in Difficulties", recorded in the Office Book as by Wills, with payment to the man (name unclear) "who furnished the idea", appeared with acknowledgment that the facts on which the account was based were "derived from a correspondent".

Nine of Wills's H.W. articles (including "A Plated Article" claimed by both Wills and Dickens) were reprinted in whole or part in Harper's, four of them acknowledged to H.W. (In addition, one of Wills's articles—"The Private History of the Palace of Glass"—may have served in part as the basis of "The Crystal Palace", Harper's, April 1851). Three of Wills's articles were included in the Putnam volumes of selections from H.W.: Home and Social Philosophy, 1st and 2nd series, and The World Here and There. "The Ghost of the Late Mr. James Barber" was included in Choice Stories from Dickens' Household Words, published Auburn, N.Y., 1854. "A Suburban Romance", credited to Dickens, was included by Alice and Phoebe Cary in their Josephine Gallery, 1859. "A Curious Dance round a Curious Tree", credited to Dickens, was twice issued in 1860 as a promotional pamphlet by St. Luke's Hospital for Lunatics (Eckel, First Editions of the Writings of Charles Dickens). Three paragraphs from "Post Office Money-Orders", acknowledged to H.W., were quoted in an anonymous pamphlet, Methods of Employment, 1852 (Stone, ed., Charles Dickens' Uncollected Writings from Household Words).

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Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

Genre(s):
- Prose: Report
  A 'more or less detailed description of any event ... intended for publication'; an 'account
given . . . on some particular matter, esp. after investigation' (OED) involving e.g. fieldwork, first-hand experience, original research.

Subject(s):

- Communication; Telegraph; Postal Service
- Great Britain—Social Life and Customs
- Literature; Writing; Authorship; Reading; Books; Poetry; Storytelling; Letter Writing
- London (England)—Description and Travel
- Money; Finance; Banking; Investments; Taxation; Insurance; Debt; Inheritance and Succession
- Newspapers; Periodicals; Journalism
- Work; Work and Family; Occupations; Professions; Wages

Citation (MHRA):  Dickens, Charles, and W[illiam] H[enry] Wills, 'Valentine's Day at the Post-Office', Household Words, I, 30 March 1850, 6-12

N.B. The layout of prose articles exported to PDF follows the two-column format of the original, but does NOT preserve the original line breaks. The layout of poems exported to PDF follows the original line breaks, but does NOT attempt to replicate the original indentation or stanza structure. For all these features please refer to the facsimile pages on DJO.