THE TROUBLED WATER QUESTION.

MY excellent and eloquent friend, Lyttleton, of Pump Court, Temple, barrister-at-law, disturbed me on a damp morning at the end of last month, to bespeak my company to a meeting at which he intended to hold forth. 'It is,' he said, 'the Great Water Supply Congress, which assembles to-morrow.'

'Do you know anything of the subject?'

'A vast deal both practically and theoretically. Practically, I pay for my little box in the Regent's Park, twice the price for water our friend Fielding is charged, and both supplies are derived from the same Company. Yet his is a mansion, mine is a cottage; his rent more than doubles mine in amount, and his family trebles mine in number. So much for the consistency and exactions of an irresponsible monopoly. Practically, again, there are occasions when my cisterns are without water. So much for deficient supply.'

'Is your water bad?'

'Not absolutely unwholesome; but I have drunk better.'

'Now then, Theoretically.'

'Theoretically, I learn from piles of blue books—a regular blue mountain of parliamentary inquiry instituted in the years 1810, 1821, 1827, 1828, 1834, 1840, and 1845—from a cloud of prospectuses issued by embryo

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Water Companies, from a host of pamphlets pro and con, and from the reports of the Board of Health, that of the 300,000 houses of which London is said to consist, 70,000 are without the great element of suction and cleanliness; I find also that the supply, such as it is, is derived from nine water companies all linked together to form a giant monopoly; and that, in consequence, the charge for water is in some instances excessive; that six of these companies draw their water from the filthy Thames;—and the same number, including those which use the Lea and New River water, have no system of filtration—hence it is unwholesome: that in short, the public of the metropolis are the victims of dear, insufficient and dirty water. Like Tantalus of old they are denied much of the great element of life, although it flows within reach of their parched and thirsty lips. And by whom? By that many-headed Cerberus—that nine gentlemen in one—the great monopolist Water Company combination of London! Unless, therefore, we bestir ourselves in the great cause for which this numerous, enlightened, and respectable meeting have assembled here this day—'

'You forget; you have only two listeners at present—myself and my spaniel. I can suggest a more profitable morning's amusement than a rehearsal of your speech.'

'What?'

'Your theoretical knowledge is, I doubt not, very comprehensive and varied. But second-hand information is not to be trusted too implicitly. Every statement of fact, like every story, gains something in exaggeration, or loses something in accuracy by repetition from book to book, or from book to mouth.'

'Granted; but what do you suggest?'

'Ocular demonstration. Let us at once visit and minutely inspect the works of one of the Companies. I am sure they will let us in at the Grand Junction, for I have already been over their premises.'

'A capital notion! Agreed.'

The preliminaries—consisting of the hasty bundling up of Mr. Lyttleton's notes for the morrow's oration, and the hire of a Hansom cab—were adjusted in a few minutes.

The order to drive to Kew Bridge, was obeyed in capital style; for in three-quarters of an hour we were deposited on the towing path on the Surrey side of the Thames, opposite the Kong of Hanover's house, and a quarter of a mile west of Kew Bridge.

'Here,' I explained 'is the spot whence the Grand Junction Company derive their water. In
The bed of the river is an enormous culvert pipe laid parallel to this path. Its mouth—open towards Richmond—is barred across with a grating, to intercept stray fish, murdered kittens, or vegetable impurities, and—except now and then the intrusion edgeways of a small flounder, or the occasional slip of an erratic eel—it admits nothing into the pipe but what is more or less fluid. The culvert then takes a bend round the edge of the islet opposite to us; burrows beneath the Brentford road, and delivers its contents into a well under that tall chimney and taller iron "stand-pipe" which you see on the other side of the river.

'And is this the stuff I have to pay four pounds ten a year for?' exclaimed Mr. Lyttleton, contemplating the opaque fluid; part of which was then making its way into the cisterns of Her Majesty's lieges.

'Certainly; but it is purified first. We will now cross the bridge to the Works.'

Those of my readers who make prandial expeditions to Richmond, must have noticed at the beginning of Old Brentford, a little beyond where they turn over Kew Bridge, an immensely tall thin column that shoots up into the air like an iron mast unable to support itself, and seems to require four smaller, thinner, and not much shorter props to keep it upright. This, with the engine and engine-houses, is all they can see of the Grand Junction Waterworks from the road. It is only when one gets inside, that the whole extent of the aquatic apparatus is revealed.

Determined to follow the water from the Thames till it began its travels to London, we entered the edifice, went straight to the well, and called for a glass of water. Our hosts—who had received our visit without hesitation—supplied us. 'That,' remarked one of them, as he held the half-filled tumbler up to the light, 'is precisely the state of the water as emptied from the Thames into the well.'

It looked like a dose of weak magnesia, or that peculiar London liquid known as 'skim-sky-blue,' but deceitfully sold under the name of milk.

'The analysis of Professor Brande,' said Lyttleton, 'gives to every gallon of Thames water taken from Kew Bridge, 19.2 parts of solid matter; but the water, I apprehend, in which he experimented must have been taken from the river on a serener occasion than this. Today's rain appears to have drained away the chalk—so as to give in this specimen a much larger proportion of solids to fluids than his estimate.'

'In this impure state,' one of the engineers told us, 'the water is pumped by steam power into the reservoirs to which you will please to follow me.'

Passing out of the building and climbing a sloping bank, we now saw before us an expanse of water covering 3½ acres; but divided into two sections. Into the larger, the pump first delivers the water, that so much of the impurity as will form sediment may be precipitated. It then slowly glides through a small opening into the lesser section, which is a huge filter.

'The impurities of water,' said the barrister, assuming an oratorical attitude, to give us a taste of his 'reading up,' 'are of two kinds; first, such as are mechanically suspended—say earth, chalk, sand, clay, dead vegetation or decomposed cats; and secondly, such as are dissolved or chemically combined—like salt, sugar, or alkali. Separation in the one case is easy, in the other it involves a chemical process. If you throw a pinch of sand into a tumbler of water, and stir it about, you produce a turbid mixture; but to render the fluid clear again you have only to adopt the simple process of letting it alone; for on setting the tumbler down for awhile, the particles—which, from their extreme minuteness, were easily disturbed and distributed amidst the fluid—being heavier than water, are precipitated, or in other words, fall to the bottom, leaving the liquid translu-

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.. This is what is happening in the larger section of the reservoir to the chalky water of which we drank. I think I am correct? asked the speaker, angling for a single 'cheer' from the Engineer.

'Quite so,' replied that gentleman.

'Provided the water could remain at rest long enough—which the insatiable maw of the modern Babylon does not allow,'—continued the honourable orator, rehearsing a bit more of his speech, 'this mode of cleansing would be perfectly effectual. In proof of which I may only allude to Nature's mode of depuration, as shown in lakes—that of Geneva for instance. The waters of the Rhone enter that expansive reservoir from the Valais in a very muddy condition; yet, after reposing in the lake, they issue at Geneva as clear as crystal. But so incessant is the London demand, that scarcely any time can be afforded for the impurities of the Thames, the Lea, or the New River to separate themselves from the water by mere deposition.'

'True,' interjected one of the superintendants. 'It is for that reason that our water is passed afterwards into the filtering bed, which is four feet thick.'

'How do you make up this enormous bed?'

'The water rests upon, and permeates through, 1st, a surface of fine sand; 2d, a stratum of shells; 3d, a layer of garden gravel; and 4th, a base of coarse gravel. It thence falls through a number of ducts into cisterns, whence it is pumped up so as to commence its travels to town through the conduit pipe.'

We were returning to the engine-house, when Lyttleton asked the Engineer, 'Does your experience generally, enable you to say that water as supplied by the nine companies, is tolerably pure?'

'Upon the whole, yes,' was the answer.

'Indeed!' ejaculated the orator, sharply. 'If that be true,' he whispered to me, in a rueful tone, 'I shall be cut out of one of the best points in my speech.'

'Of course,' continued the Engineer, 'purity entirely depends upon the source, and the means of cleansing.'

'Then, as to the source—how many companies take their supplies from the Thames, near to, and after it has received the contents of, the common sewers?'

'No water is taken from the Thames below Chelsea, except that of the Lambeth Company, which is supplied from between Waterloo and Hungerford Bridges; an objectionable source, which they have obtained an act to change to Thames Ditton. The Chelsea Waterworks have a most efficient system of filtration; as also have the Southwark and Vauxhall Company; both draw their water from between the Red House, Battersea, and Chelsea Hospital. The other companies do not filter. The West Middlesex sucks up some of Father Thames as he passes Barnes Terrace. Except the lowest of these sources, Thames water is nearly as pure as that of other rivers.'

'Perhaps it is,' was the answer; 'but the unwholesomeness arises from contaminations received during its course; we don't object to the "Thames," but to its "tributaries," such as the black contents of common sewers, and the refuse of gut, glue, soap, and other nauseous manufactures; to say nothing of animal and vegetable offal, of which the river is the sole receptacle. Brande shows that, while the solid matter contained in the river at Teddington is 17.4, that which the water has contracted when it flows past Westminster is 24.4, and the City of London, 28.0.'

'But,' said the Engineer, 'these adulterations are only mechanically suspended in the fluid, and are, as you shall see presently, totally separated from it by our mode of filtration.'

'Which brings us to your second point, as to efficient cleansing; you admit that without filtration this is impossible, and also that only three companies filter; the deduction, therefore, is that two-thirds of the water supplied to Lon-
The water is foul, and the companies are blamed.

"The blame belongs to the system," said the barrister. "Domestic reservoirs are not only an evil but an unnecessary expense. Besides filth, they cause waste and deficient supply: they should be abolished; for continuous supply is the real remedy. Let the pipes be always full, and the water would be always ready, always fresh, and could never acquire new impurities. Still, despite all you say, I am bound to conclude that although one-third of the water may arrive in the domestic cisterns of the metropolis in a pellucid state, the other two-thirds does not." Mr. L. then inscribed this calculation in his note book, whispering to me that his pet 'dirty water point' would come out even stronger than he had expected.

We had now returned to one of the engine-rooms.

"You have tasted the water before, I now present you with some of it after, filtration," said the chief engineer, handing us a tumbler. "This is exactly the condition in which we deliver it to our customers." It was clear to the eye, and to the taste innocuous; but Lyttleton (who I should mention, occasionally turns on powerful streams of oratory at Temperance meetings, and is a judge of the article,) complained that the liquid wanted 'flavour.'

"In other words, then it wants impurity," replied one of our cicerones with alacrity, "for perfectly pure water is quite tasteless. Indeed, water may be too pure. Distilled water which contains no salt, is insipid, and tends to indigestion. It is a wise provision of Nature, that waters should contain a greater or less quantity of foreign ingredients; for without these water is dangerous to drink. It never fails to take up from the atmosphere a certain proportion of carbonic acid gas, and when passing through lead pipes it imbibes enough carbonate of lead to constitute poison. Dr. Christie mentions several severe cases of lead (or painter's) cholic, which arose chiefly in country houses to which water was supplied from springs through lead pipes. The most remarkable case was that at Claremont, where the ex-king of the French and several members of his family were nearly poisoned by pure spring water conveyed to the mansion through lead pipes.

"Mercy!" I exclaimed, with all the energy of despair that a mere water-drinker is capable of, "if river water be unwholesome, and pure water poison, what is to become of every temperance pledgee?"

The Engineer relieved me. "All the Chemists," he stated, "have agreed that a water containing from eight to ten grains of sulphate of magnesia or soda, to the imperial gallon, is best suited for alimentary, lavatory, and other domestic purposes."

We were now introduced to the great engine. What a monster! Imagine an enormous see-saw, with a steam engine at one end, and a pump at the other. Fancy this 'beam,' some ten yards long, and twenty-eight tons in weight, moving on a pivot in the middle, the ends of which show a circumference greater than the crown of the
biggest hat ever worn. See, with what earnest deliberation the 'see,' or engine, pulls up the 'saw,' or balance-box of the pump, which then comes down upon the water-trap with the ferocious âplomb of 49 tons, sending 400 gallons of water in one tremendous squirt nearly the twentieth part of a mile high;—that is to the top of the stand-pipe.

'We have a smaller engine which "does" 150 gallons per stroke,' remarked our informant: 'each performs 11 strokes, and forces up 4400 gallons of water per minute, and thus our average delivery per diem throughout the year is from 4,000,000, to 5,000,000 gallons.'

'What proportion of London do you supply?' asked Mr. Lyttleton.

'The quadrangle included between Oxford Street, Wardour Street, Pall-Mall, and Hyde Park; besides the whole of Notting-Hill, Bayswater, and Paddington. We serve 14,058 houses, to each of which we supply 225 gallons per day, or, taking the average number of persons per house at nine, 25 gallons a head; besides public services, such as baths, watering streets, or manufactories; making our total daily delivery at the rate of 252 gallons per house. This delivery is performed through 80 miles of service pipes, whose diameter varies from 3 to 30 inches.'

'Now,' said my companion, sharpening his pencil, 'to go into the question of supply.' He then unfolded his pocket soufflet, and brought out a calculation, of quantities derived, he said, from parliamentary returns and other authorities more or less reliable:

Gals. daily. New River Company20,000,000 Chelsea Company3,250,000 West Middlesex Company3,650,000 Grand Junction Company3,500,000 East London Company7,000,000 South Lambeth Company2,500,000 South London Company and Southwark Company3,000,000 Hampstead Company 400,000 Kent Company1,290,000 44,500,000 Artesian Wells8,000,000 Land-spring Pumps3,000,000 "Catch rain water (say) 1,000,000 Making a total quantity supplied daily to London, from all sources, of 56,500,000 "An abundant supply,' said an engineer eagerly, 'for as the present population of the metropolis is estimated at 2,336,000, the total affords about 24 gallons of water per day, for every man, woman, and child.'

'Admitted,' rejoined Lyttleton; 'but we have to deal with large deductions; first, nearly half this quantity runs to waste, chiefly in consequence of the intermittent system. I live in a small house with proportionately small cisterns, which are filled no more than three times a week; now, as my neighbours have

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larger houses and larger reservoirs, the water when turned on runs for as long a time into my small, as it does into their capacious cisterns, and consequently, if my stop-taps be in the least out of order, a greater quantity descends the waste pipe than remains behind. This is universally the case in similar circumstances.'

'We supply water daily, Sundays excepted,' remarked the Engineer.

'Then you are wiser than your neighbours. But every inconvenience and nearly all the waste, would be saved by the adoption of the continuous system of supply. Secondly, a large quantity of water is consumed by cattle, breweries, baths, public institutions, for putting out fires, and for laying dust. The lieges of London have only, therefore, to divide between them some 10 gallons of water each per day; and, as it is generally admitted that a sixth part of their habitations are without water at all, the division must be most unequally made. That such is the fact is shown by your own figures—your customers get 25 gallons each per day, or more than double their share. For this excess, some in poorer districts get none at all.'

'That is no fault of the existing companies. As sellers of an article, they are but too happy to get as many customers for it as possible; but poor tenants cannot, and their landlords will
not, afford the expense. If the companies were

to make the outlay necessary to connect the

houses with their mains, they would have no le-
gal power to recover the money so expended—
nor indeed is it clear, that were they inclined
to run the risk, the parties would avail them-
selves of it. In one instance, the Southwark and
Vauxhall Company offered to construct a tank
which would give continuous supply to a block
of 100 small houses, at the rate of 50 gallons
per diem to each—if the proprietor would pay
an additional rate sufficient to yield 5 per cent.
on the outlay, such additional rate not exceed-
ing one half-penny per week for each house, but
the offer was declined.'

' That is an extreme case of cheapness on the
one side, and of stupidity on the other,' said the
barrister. ' Other landlords will not turn on wa-
ter for their tenants, because of the expense; not
only of the "plant," in the first instance, but of
the after water-rent. I find, by the account
rendered to the House of Commons in 1834,
that the South London Company (since incor-
porated with the Southwark, as the "Southwark
and Vauxhall," —the very Company you men-
tion,) charged considerably less than any other.
The return shows that while they obtained only
15s. per 1000 hogsheads; the West Middlesex
(the highest) exacted 48s., 6d. for the same
quantity; consequently, had the houses of the
foolish landlord who refused one half-penny per
week for water, stood in north-western instead
of southern London, he would have had to pay
more than treble, or a fraction above three half-
pence per week.'

'Allowing for difference of level,' I remarked,
'and other interferences with the cheap delivery
of water; the disparity in the charges of the dif-
ferent companies, and even by the same com-
pany to different customers, is unaccountable:
they are guided by no principle. You have men-
tioned the extreme points of the scale of rates;
the remaining companies charged at the time
you mention, respectively per 1000 hogsheads,
17s., 17s. 2d., 21s., 28s., 29s., and 45s. The
only companies whose charges are limited by
act of parliament are the Grand Junction, the
East London, the Southwark and Vauxhall, and
the Lambeth. The others exact precisely what
they please.'

' And, ' interposed Lyttleton, ' there is no re-
dress: the only appeal we, the taxed, have, is to
our taxers, and the monopoly is so tight that—
as is my case—although your next door neigh-
bour is supplied from a cheaper company, you
are not allowed to change.'

' The companies were obliged to combine, to
save themselves from ruin and the public from
extreme inconvenience,' said our informant; ' dur-
ing the competition streets were torn up,
traffic was stopped, and confusion was worse
confounded in the districts where the opposi-
tion raged.'

' But what happened when the war ceased,
and the general peace was concluded? ' said
Lytton, chuckling. ' To show how ill some
of the companies manage their affairs, I could
cite some laughable cases. When the combi-
nation commenced, some of them forgot to stop
off their mains, and supplied water to customers
whom they had previously turned over to their
quondam rivals; so that one company gave the
water, and the other pocketed the rent. This,
in some instances, went on for years.'

Here the subject branched off into other top-
ics. It is worthy of notice that the conversa-
tion was carried on by the side of the enormous Cor-
nish engine, that was driving 4400 gallons per
minute 218 feet high.

' It is marvellous,' I remarked, ' that so much
power can be exercised with so little noise and
vibration.'

' That's owing to the patent valves in the
pump,' said the stoker.

Taking a last look at the monster, we went
outside to view the stand-pipe. Being, we were
told, 218 feet high, it tops the Monument in
Fish Street-hill by 16 feet. Within it is per-
formed the last stroke of hydraulic art which is needed; for nature does the rest. The water, sent up through the middle or thickest of the tubes, falls over into the open mouths of the smaller ones—(which most people mistake for supports)—descends through all four at once into the conduit-pipe, and travels of its own accord leisurely to London. In obedience to the law of levels, it rises without further trouble to the tops of the tallest houses on the highest spots in the Company’s district. In its way it fills a large reservoir on Camden-hill.

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The iron conduit-pipe ends at Poland-street, Oxford-street, and is 7 ½ miles long.

Our inspection was now terminated. We took a parting glass of water with our intelligent and communicative hosts, and returned to town.

I firmly believe that the success of Lyttleton’s speech at the great meeting next day, was very much owing to this visit. The room was crowded in every part. His tone was moderate. He avoided the extravagant exaggerations of the more fiery order of water spouters. Neither was he too tame; he was not—as Moore said of a tory orator—like an

‘awkward thing of wood Which up and down its clumsy arm doth move; And only spout, and spout, and spout away, In one weak, wavy, everlasting flood,’

but he came out capitally in the hard, argumentative style. His oration bristled with logic and statistics to a degree of which I cannot pretend to give the faintest notion.

Sipping inspiration out of a tumbler filled with the flowing subject of discussion, Mr. Lyttleton commenced by declaring his conviction that the water supplied to the metropolis was, generally speaking, bad in quality, extravagantly dear, and, from excessive waste, deficient in quantity. In order to remedy those defects an efficient control was essential. Continuous supply, filtration, and a uniform scale of rates must be en-

forced. Some of the companies were pocketing enormous dividends, and was it a fair argument to retort, that they are now being reimbursed for periods of no dividend at all? Are we of the present day to be mulcted to cover losses occasioned because the early career of some of these companies was marked by the ignorance, imprudence, and reckless extravagance, which he (Mr. Lyttleton) could prove it was? If our wine merchant, or coal merchant, or baker, began business badly and with loss, would he be tolerated, if, when he grew wiser and more prosperous, he tried to exact large prices to cover the consequences of his previous mismanagement? Mr. Lyttleton apprehended not. With this branch of the question—he proceeded to remark—the important subjects of distribution and supply were intimately connected. It had been ascertained that a vast proportion of the poor had no water in their houses. Why? Partly because it was too dear; but partly he (the learned speaker) was bound to say from the parsimony of landlords. He had pointed out a remedy for the first evil; for the second he would propose that every house owner should be bound to introduce pipes into every house. The law was stringent on him as to sewers and party-walls, and why should not a water supply be enforced on him also?—In dealing with the whole question of supply—the honourable gentleman went on to say, he could not agree with those who stated that the delivery of it was deficient. A moderate calculation estimated the quantity running through the underground net-work of London pipes at 56,000,000 of gallons per day. Waste (of which there is a prodigious amount), steam-engines, cattle, public baths and other supplies deducted, left more than 10 gallons per diem per head for the whole population,—that is supposing these gallons were equitably distributed; but they are not,—the rich get an excess, and the poor get none at all. He (the learned barrister) was not prepared to say that 10 or 20 gallons per head daily were sufficient for all the
purposes of life in this or in any other city, great or small; but this he would say, that under proper management the existing supply might be made ample for present wants;—whether for the requirements of augmenting population and increased cleanliness we need not discuss now. What was wanted at this time was a better distribution rather than a greater supply; but what was wanted most of all was united action and one governing body. Without this, confusion, extravagance, and waste, would inevitably continue.

Mr. Lyttleton wound up with a peroration that elicited very general applause. 'Although we must,' he said, 'establish an efficient control over the existing means of water supply, we must neither wholly despise nor neglect them, nor blindly rush, into new and ruinous schemes. We must remove the onus of payment from the poorer tenants to their landlords, and into whatever central directing power the Water-works of this great city shall pass,' concluded the learned orator, with energetic unction, 'our motto must be 'continuous supply, uniform rates, and universal filtration!"'

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Author(s):
  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" (Lehmann, p. 166).

Wills's position as *H.W.* sub editor 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 1865). 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 Minnegissengen" ap-
peared 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, ap-
peared 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 fur-
nished 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).

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

- Prose: Short Fiction
  Fictional narrative published in a single instalment, e.g. a short story, 'with a fully developed
theme' (OED), or which is simply self-contained.

- Cross-genre
  A cross-genre or hybrid-genre article is one which is deemed to purposefully blend rhetorical
and stylistic features and incorporate iconography from more than one pre-existent genres. Depending on the genres crossed, this can also be referred to as: creative non-fiction, witness literature, 'Gonzo' journalism, immersion journalism, narrative non-fiction. The blurring of boundaries is frequently defined as 'New' (hence the slightly puzzling recurrence of the term 'New Journalism' to describe approaches to periodical writing in the late 19th-century, mid-20th and early 21st centuries, as clearly it was alive and flourishing in Dickens's Wellington Street offices from 1850 onwards).

Subject(s):
- Engineering;
- Great Britain—Politics and Government
- Great Britain—Social Conditions—Nineteenth Century
- Health; Diseases; Personal Injuries; Hygiene; Cleanliness—Fiction
- Life Sciences (Physiology / Biology / Immunology / Medicine / Pharmacology / Anatomy / Ecology)
- London (England)—Description and Travel
- Money; Finance; Banking; Investments; Taxation; Insurance; Debt; Inheritance and Succession
- Public Health; Sanitation; Water

Citation (MHRA): Wills, W[illiam] H[enry], 'The Troubled Water Question’, Household Words, I, 13 April 1850, 49-54

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.