

THE STORY OF GIOVANNI BELZONI.

ONE day in the beginning of the year 1803, Mr. Salt, whose name has since become so celebrated amongst the discoverers of Egyptian antiquities, observed before one of the public rooms of Edinburgh, a great crowd assembled. For almost every one there exists a mysterious attraction in the sight of a number of people, and Mr. Salt, no wiser than his neighbours, pushed his way, when the doors were opened into the room. There, on a sort of stage, he saw a tall and powerfully-built young man, performing various gymnastic exercises, and feats of strength. While this Hercules in tinsel was lifting enormous weights and jumping from a table over the heads of twelve men, a pretty, delicate-looking young woman, was arranging some hydraulic machines and musical glasses with which the entertainment was to terminate. As the price of admission was nominal, she occasionally also handed round a small wooden bowl, in order to collect gratuities from the spectators.

Very few of those who were enjoying the exhibition gave anything; and when the young woman approached her husband, and showed him the few coins she had received, he hastened; to terminate his performance. Mr. Salt pitied the poor fellow, and as the young woman was passing, said to her,

"You forgot to present your bowl for my contribution.— Here it is."

He slipped a silver coin into her hand. Both she and her husband thanked him warmly; the latter in broken English, and with an Italian accent.

Mr. Salt, who had but just returned from Rome, replied in Italian; and, perceiving in the stranger's manner of expressing himself a degree of refinement not to be expected from a mountebank, asked him whence he came, and what was his history?

"Six months ago, sir," replied the man, "if any one had told me that I should be reduced to earn

my bread by exhibiting my strength in public, I should have felt greatly inclined to knock him down. I came to England for the purpose of making known some hydraulic machines of my invention; but the spirit of routine, and the love of ignorance, closed every avenue against me. Previously, before losing all my hopes of success, I married this young girl. Had I been alone in the world, I verily believe that the bitter destruction of my expectations would have rendered me careless of supporting life; but how could I leave *her* in misery?"

"But why not try to display your really extraordinary strength and dexterity under

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more favourable circumstances? Why do you not offer your services to some theatrical manager?"

"Hungry people, sir, cannot wait. I did not think of resorting to this method of earning a piece of bread, until I saw my wife ready to perish for the want of it."

The kind Mr. Salt not only relieved his immediate wants, but offered to recommend him and his wife to the: manager of Astley's Circus, in London. Gratefully and eagerly did the wanderers accept this offer; while in company with their benefactor, who paid for their places on the coach, they journeyed towards town, the man related his history. Born at Padua, the son of a poor barber, and one of fourteen children, Giovanni Battista Belzoni felt from his earliest youth a longing desire to visit foreign lands This "truant disposition" was fostered, if not caused, by the stories of maritime adventures told him by an old sailor; who was strongly suspected of having, during many years, practised the profession of a pirate.

The reading, or rather devouring, of a translated copy of "Robinson Crusoe" (and it is a most remarkable circumstance that the book which has for its avowed purpose the disheartening of restless adventurers, should have made



wanderers and voyagers innumerable) gave form and fixedness to his purpose of rambling; and, in company with his youngest brother the boy set out one fine morning, without any intention but the somewhat vague one of "travelling to seek their fortune." The young fugitives walked several miles without knowing, in the least, whither they were going, when a pedlar, who was riding slowly by in a cart, accosted them, and asked if they were going to Ferrara. Belzoni, although he never heard the name before, immediately answered in the affirmative. The good-natured merchant, pleased with the countenances, and pitying the tired looks of the children, not only gave them a place in his vehicle, but shared with them his luncheon of bread, cheese, and fruit. That night they occupied part of their companion's lodging; but next day, as his business required him to stop at the village where they slept, the two boys took leave of him, and pursued their journey. Their next adventure was not so fortunate. Meeting an empty return carriage, they asked the *vetturino* to give them a ride; and he consenting, they joyfully got in. Arrived at Ferrara, the *vetturino* asked them for money. Giovanni, astonished, replied that they had none; and the unfeeling man stripped the poor children of their upper garments, leaving them half naked and penniless in the streets of an unknown city. Giovanni's undaunted spirit would have led him still to persevere in the wild-goose chase which had lured him from his home; but his brother Antonio wept, and complained so loudly, that he was fain to console the child by consenting to retrace their steps to Padua. That night, clasped in each other's arms, they slept beneath a doorway and the next morning set out for their native city, begging their food on the journey.

The severe chastisement which Giovanni, as the instigator of this escapade, received on his return, did not in anywise cure his love of rambling. He submitted, however, to learn his father's trade, and at the age of eighteen, armed

with shaving and hair-cutting implements, he set out for Rome, and there exercised the occupation of a barber with success. After some time, he became deeply attached to a girl who, after encouraging his addresses, deserted him and married a wealthy rival. This disappointment preyed so deeply on Belzoni, that, renouncing at the same time love and the razor, the world and the brazen bowl of suds, he entered a convent, and became a Capuchin. The leisure of the cloister was employed by him in the study of hydraulics; and he was busy in constructing an Artesian well within the monastic precincts when the French army under Napoleon took possession of Rome. The monks of every order were expelled and dispersed; and our poor Capuchin, obliged to cut his own beard, purchased once more the implements of his despised calling, and travelled into Holland, the head-quarters of hydraulics, which were still his passion. The Dutch did not encourage him, and he came to this country. Here he met his future wife, and consoled himself for his past misfortunes by marrying one who proved, through weal and woe, a fond and faithful partner. The crude hydraulic inventions of a wandering Italian were as little heeded here, as on the Continent; and we have already seen the expedient to which Belzoni was obliged to have recourse when Mr. Salt met him in Edinburgh.

Having reached London, the kind antiquary introduced his *protégés* to the manager of Astley's. The practised eye of the renowned equestrian immediately appreciated at their value the beauty and athletic vigour of the Paduan Goliath; and he engaged both him and his wife at a liberal salary. He caused a piece entitled "The twelve labours of Hercules" to be arranged expressly for his new performers; and Mr. Salt had soon afterwards the satisfaction of seeing Giovanni Belzoni appear on the stage, carrying twelve men on his arms and shoulders, while Madame, in the costume of Cupid, stood at the top, as the apex of a pyramid, and waved a tiny

crimson flag.

After some time, Mr. Salt went to Egypt as consul, and there became acquainted with Signor Dronetti. The two friends, equally enthusiastic on the subject of Egyptian antiquities, set to work to prosecute researches, with an ardour of rivalry which approached somewhat too nearly to jealousy. Each aspired to undertake the boldest

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expeditions, and to attempt the most hazardous excavations. But the great object of their ambition was an enormous bust of Memnon, in rose-coloured granite, which lay half buried in the sand on the left bank of the Nile.

Signer Dronetti had failed in all his attempts to raise it, nor was Mr. Salt a whit more successful. One day, while the latter was thinking what a pity it was that such a precious monument should be left to perish by decay, a stranger asked to speak with him. Mr. Salt desired him to be admitted; and immediately, despite his visitor's oriental garb and long beard, he recognised the Hercules of Astley's.

"What has brought you to Egypt ? " asked the astonished consul.

"You shall hear, sir," replied the Italian. "After having completed my engagement in London, I set out for Lisbon, where I was employed by the manager of the theatre of San Carlo to perform the part of Samson in a Scriptural piece which had been arranged expressly for me. From thence I went to Madrid, where I appeared with applause in the theatre Delia Puerta del Sol. After having collected a tolerable sum of money, I resolved to come here. My first object is to induce the Pasha to adopt an hydraulic machine for raising the waters of the Nile."

Mr. Salt then explained his wishes respecting the antiquities; but Belzoni, could not, he said, enter upon that till he had carried out his scheme of waterworks.

He was accompanied, he said in continuation, by Mrs. Belzoni, and by an Irish lad of the name of James Curtain; and had reached Alexandria just as the plague was beginning to disappear from that city, as it always does on the approach of St. John's day, when, as almost everybody knows, " out of respect for the saint," it entirely ceases. The state of the country was still very alarming, yet Mr. Belzoni and his little party ventured to land, and performed quarantine in the French quarter; where, though really very unwell, they were wise enough to disguise their situation; " for the plague is so dreadful a scourge," he observed, " and operates so powerfully on human fears and human prejudices, that, during its prevalence, if a man be ill, he must be ill of the plague, and if he die, he must have died of the plague."

Belzoni went straight to Cairo, where he was well received by Mr. Baghos, interpreter to Mahommed Ali, to whom Mr. Salt recommended, him. Mr. Baghos immediately prepared to introduce him to the Pasha, that he might come to some arrangement respecting the hydraulic machine, which he proposed to construct for watering the gardens of the seraglio. As they were proceeding towards the palace, through one of the principal streets of Cairo, a fanatical Mussulman struck Mr. Belzoni so fiercely on the leg with his staff, that it tore away a large piece of flesh. The blow was severe, and the discharge of blood copious, and he was obliged to be conveyed home, where he remained under cure thirty days before he could support himself on the wounded leg. When able to leave the house, he was presented to the Pasha, who received him very civilly ; but on being told of the misfortune which had happened to him, contented himself with coolly observing, " that such accidents could not be avoided where there were troops."

An arrangement was immediately concluded for erecting a machine which was to raise as much water with one ox as the ordinary ones



do with four. Mr. Belzoni soon found, however, that he had many prejudices to encounter, and many obstacles to overcome, on the part of those who were employed in the construction of the work, as well as of those who owned the cattle engaged in drawing water for the Pasha's gardens. The fate of a machine which had been sent from England taught him to augur no good for that which he had undertaken to construct. Though of the most costly description, and every way equal to perform what it was calculated to do, it had failed to answer the unreasonable expectations of the Turks, — because "the quantity of water raised by it was not sufficient to inundate the whole country in an hour!— which was their measure of the power of an English water-wheel."

When that of Belzoni was completed, the Pasha proceeded to the gardens of Sonbra to witness its effect. The machine was set to work, and, although constructed of bad materials, and of unskilful workmanship, its powers were greater than had been contracted for; yet the Arabs, from interested motives, declared against it. The Pasha, however, though evidently disappointed, admitted that it was equal to four of the ordinary kind, and, consequently, accorded with the agreement. Unluckily, he took it into his head to have the oxen removed, and, "by way of frolic," to see what effect could be produced by putting fifteen men into the wheel. The Irish lad got in with them.; but no sooner had the wheel begun to turn than the Arabs jumped out, leaving the lad alone in it. The wheel, relieved from its load, flew back with such velocity, that poor Curtain was flung out, and in the fall broke one of his thighs; and, being entangled in the machinery, would, in all probability, have lost his life, had not Belzoni applied his prodigious strength to the wheel, and stopped it. The accident, however, was fatal to the project and to the future hopes of the projector.

At that time the insolence of the Turkish of-

ficers of the Pashalic was at its height, and the very sight of a "dog of a Christian" raised the ire of the more bigoted followers of the Prophet. While at Soubra, which is close to Cairo, Belzoni had a narrow escape

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from assassination. He relates the adventure in his work on Egypt:—

"Some particular business calling me to Cairo, I was on my ass in one of the narrow streets, where I met a loaded camel. The space that remained between the camel and the wall was so little, that I could scarcely pass; and at that moment I was met by a Binbashi, a subaltern officer, at the head of his men. For the instant I was the only obstacle that prevented his proceeding on the road; and I could neither retreat nor turn round, to give him room to pass. Seeing it was a Frank who stopped his way, he gave me a violent blow on my stomach. Not being accustomed to put up with such salutations, I returned the compliment with my whip across his naked shoulders. Instantly he took his pistol out of his belt; I jumped off my ass; he retired about two yards, pulled the trigger, fired at my head, singed the hair near my right ear, and killed one of his own soldiers, who, by this time, had come behind me. Finding that he had missed his aim, he took a second pistol; but his own soldiers assailed and disarmed him. A great noise arose in the street, and, as it happened to be close to the seraglio in the Esbakie, some of the guards ran up; but on seeing what the matter was, they interfered and stopped the Binbashi. I thought my company was not wanted, so I mounted my charger, and rode off. I went to Mr. Baghos, and told him what had happened. We repaired immediately to the citadel, saw the Pasha, and related the circumstance to him. He was much concerned, and wished to know where the soldier was, but observed, that it was too late that evening to have him taken up. However, he was apprehended the next day,



and I never heard or knew anything more about him. Such a lesson on the subject was not lost upon me; and I took good care, in future, not to give the least opportunity of the kind to men of that description who can murder an European with as much indifference as they would kill an insect."

Ruined by the loss of all his savings, which he had spent in the construction of his water machines, Belzoni once more applied to Mr. Salt, and undertook the furtherance of his scheme, to convey to England the bust of Memnon. So eager was he, that the same day, the Italian set out for the ruins of Thebes, and hired a hundred natives, whom he made clear away the sand which half covered the stone colossus. With a large staff in his hand, Belzoni commanded his army of Mussulmen, directed their labours, astonished them with displays of his physical strength, learned to speak their language with marvellous facility, and speedily came to be regarded by them as a superior being, endowed with magical power.

One day, however, his money failed; and at the same time the rising of the Nile destroyed, in two hours, the work of three months. The *fellahs* rebelled : one of them rushed towards Belzoni, intending to strike him with his dagger. The Italian coolly waited his approach, disarmed him ; and then, seizing him by the feet, lifted him as though he had been a hazel wand, and began to inflict vigorous blows on the other insurgents with this novel and extemporary weapon of defence. The lesson was not thrown away : very speedily the *fellahs* returned to their duty ; and after eighteen days' incessant labour, Memnon trembled at his base, and was moved towards the bank of the Nile.

The embarkation of this enormous statue presented difficulties almost as great as those which attended its disinterment and land transport. Nevertheless, the intelligence and perseverance of Belzoni surmounted every obstacle; and he brought his wondrous conquest to Lon-

don, where its arrival produced a sensation similar to that caused more recently in Paris by the sight of the Obelisk of Luxor. Loaded with praise, and also with more substantial gifts, Belzoni, now became an important personage, returned to Egypt and to his friend Mr. Salt. The latter proposed to him to go up the Nile, and attempt the removal of the sand-hills which covered the principal portion of the magnificent temple of Ebsamboul. Belzoni readily consented, set out for Lower Nubia, ventured boldly amongst the savage tribes who wander through the sandy desert; returning to Thebes, he was rewarded, not only by the success of his special mission, but also by discovering the temple of Luxor.

In all his undertakings, however enterprising, Belzoni was aided and cheered by the presence of his wife. The expedition to Nubia was, however, thought too hazardous for her to undertake. But in the absence of her husband she was not idle; she dug up the statue of Jupiter Ammon, with the ram's head on his knee, which is now in the British Museum.

The temple of Luxor had been so completely, and for so long a period, buried in sand, that even its existence remained unsuspected. It had been dedicated to Isis by the Queen of Rameses the Great; and the descriptions which travellers give of it, resemble those of the palaces in the " Arabian Nights." Four colossal figures, sixty-one feet in height, are seated in front. Eight others, forty-eight in height, and standing up, support the roof of the principal inner hall, in which gigantic bas-reliefs represent the whole history of liameses. Sixteen other halls, scarcely smaller than the first, display, in all their primitive splendour, many gorgeous paintings, and the mysterious forms of myriads of statues.

After this discovery, Belzoni took up his temporary abode in the valley of *Biban-el- Mouloch* (Tombs of the Kings). He had already remarked there, amongst the rocks, a fissure of a peculiar form, and which was evidently the work of man.



He caused this

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opening to be enlarged, and soon discovered the entrance to a long corridor, whose walls were covered with sculptures and hieroglyphical paintings. A deep fosse and a wall barred the farther end of the cave ; but he broke a passage through, and found a second vault, in which stood an alabaster sarcophagus, covered with hieroglyphics. He took possession of this, and sent it safely to Europe. His own account of these difficulties is extremely interesting:—

"Of some of these tombs many persons could not withstand the suffocating air, which often causes fainting. A vast quantity of dust rises, so fine that it enters the throat and nostrils, and chokes the nose and mouth to such a degree, that it requires great power of lungs to resist it and the strong effluvia of the mummies. This is not all; the entry or passage where the bodies are is roughly cut in the rocks, and the felling of the sand from the upper part or ceiling of the passage causes it to be nearly filled up. In some places there is not more than the vacancy of a foot left, which you must contrive to pass through in a creeping posture, like a snail, on pointed and keen stones, that cut like glass. After getting through these passages, some of them two or three hundred yards long, you generally find a more commodious place, perhaps high enough to sit. But what a place of rest! surrounded by bodies, by heaps of mummies in all directions; which, previous to my being accustomed to the sight, impressed me with horror. The blackness of the walls, the faint light given by the candles or torches for want of air, the different objects that surrounded me, seeming to converse with each other, and the Arabs with the candles or torches in their hands, naked and covered with dust, themselves resembling living mummies, absolutely formed a scene that cannot be described. In such a situation I found myself several times, and often returned ex-

hausted and fainting, till at last I became inured to it, and indifferent to what I suffered, except from the dust, which never failed to choke my throat and nose; and though, fortunately destitute of the sense of smelling, I could taste that the mummies were rather unpleasant to swallow. After the exertion of entering into such a place, through a passage of fifty, a hundred, three hundred, or perhaps six hundred yards, nearly overcome, I sought a resting-place, found one, and contrived to sit; but when my weight bore on the body of an Egyptian, it crushed it like a band-box. I naturally had recourse to my hands to sustain my weight, but they found no better support; so that I sunk altogether among the broken mummies, with a crash of bones, rags, and wooden cases, which raised such a dust as kept me motionless for a quarter of an hour, waiting till it subsided again. I could not remove from the place, however, without increasing it, and every step I took I crushed a mummy in some part or other. Once I was conducted from such a place to another resembling it, through a passage of about twenty feet in length, and no wider than that a body could be forced through. It was fed with mummies, and I could not pass without putting my face in contact with that of some decayed Egyptian ; but as the passage inclined downwards, my own weight helped me on: however, I could not avoid being covered with bones, legs, arms, and heads rolling from above. Thus I proceeded from one cave to another, all full of mummies piled up in various ways — some standing, some lying, and some on their heads."

Afterwards, Belzoni travelled to the shores of the Red Sea, inspected the ruins of Berenice; then returned to Cairo, and directed excavations to be made at the bases of the great pyramids of Ghizeh; penetrated into that of Chephren—which had hitherto been inaccessible to Europeans — and discovered within it the sacred chamber where repose the hallowed bones of the bull Apis. The Valley of Faioum,



the Lake Mœris, the ruins of Arsinœe, the sands of Lybia, all yielded up their secrets to his dauntless spirit of research. He visited the oasis of El-Cassar, and the Fountain of the Sun; strangled in his arms two treacherous guides, who tried to assassinate him; and then left Egypt, and returned to Padua with his wife.

The son of the humble barber had now become a rich, and celebrated personage. A triumphal entry was prepared for him; and the municipal authorities of his native city met him at the gate, and presented him with an address. Manfredini was commissioned to engrave a medal which should commemorate the history of the illustrious traveller. England, however, soon claimed him; and on his arrival in London, he was received with the same honours as in his own country. Then he published an account of his travels, under the following title: "Narrative of the Operations and recent Discoveries in the Pyramids, Temples, Tombs, and Cities of Egypt and Nubia, &c."

In 1822, Belzoni returned to Africa, with the intention of penetrating to Timbuctoo. Passing in the following year from the Bight of Benin

towards Houssa, he was attacked with dysentery; was carried back to Gato, and thence put on board an English vessel lying off the coast. There, with much firmness and resignation, he prepared to meet his end. He entrusted the captain with a large amethyst to be given to his wife, and also with a letter which he wrote to his faithful companion through good and evil days. Soon afterwards, he breathed his last. They buried him at Gato, at the foot of a large tree, and engraved on his tomb the following epitaph in English—

"Here lies Belzoni, who died at this place, on his way to Timbuctoo, December 3rd, 1823."

Belzoni was but forty-five years old when he died. A statue of him was erected at Padua on the 4th of July, 1827. Very recently the Government of Great Britain bestowed on his widow the tardy solace of a small pension.

Giovanni Belzoni, the once starving mountebank, became one of the most illustrious men in Europe!—an encouraging example to all those, who have not only sound heads to project, but stout hearts to execute.

Article: 'The Story of Giovanni Belzoni' by W[illiam] H[enry] Wills, [?] Hoare

Journal: *Household Words*, Volume II, Magazine No. 49, 1 March 1851, Pages: 548-552

Author(s):

- W[illiam] H[enry] Wills

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.* 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

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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 Minnigissengen" 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

- [?] Hoare

Irish author. Listed in Publishers' Circular, March 1 1851, as "Hoare (W.)". Lived, at least during early 1850s, in Monkstown, Co. Cork Contributed to Sharpe's (verse and prose), to Howitt's Journal (at least one sketch), to *H.W.*, and to other periodicals. In 1851 published *Shamrock Leaves*, her one book, a collection of some of her tales and sketches that had appeared in periodicals.

Mrs. Hoare "had from childhood been an ardent admirer" of Mary Russell Mitford's writings; in 1852 she began a correspondence with Miss Mitford that continued "till within a short period of Miss Mitford's death". In the second year of their correspondence, Miss Mitford wrote: "I do, indeed, adopt you, dearest Mrs. Hoare, as 'a friend upon paper'—a true and dear friend!" *Shamrock Leaves*, of which Mrs. Hoare sent Miss Mitford a copy, Miss Mitford



thought a "painful book" for its depiction of the famine years in Ireland; but she found in it "unmistakable truth, a quality rare among ... the works of living Irish writers" (Life of Mary Russell Mitford III, 229n, 264, 238-239; Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford, p. 357).

Mrs. Hoare was apparently acquainted with Wills. In the Office Book, Wills recorded "A Suburban Romance" (December 14, 1850) as by "W.H.W. (suggested by Mrs. Hoare)" with payment of £0.10.6 to Mrs. Hoare for the suggestion. In reprinting the story in his collection of his H.W. contributions, *Old Leaves: Gathered from Household Words*, Wills did not acknowledge Mrs. Hoare's suggestion (though in reprinting "To Clergymen in Difficulties", suggested to him by "facts derived from a correspondent", he did make such acknowledgment).

Mrs. Hoare's H.W. contributions were evidently much liked. Of the eighteen items, eleven were reprinted in Harper's, two of them acknowledged to H.W. One of her contributions, "Father and Son", was included in *Choice Stories from Dickens' Household Words*, pub. Auburn, N.Y., 1854.

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Genre(s):

- Prose: Digest; Review
Article largely consisting of information derived, summarised or otherwise digested from (an)other print publication(s) which may or may not be acknowledged in the text; and/or a critical commentary on this; or, an account or review of a performance, exhibition etc.
- Prose: Autobiography; Biography; Memoirs; Obituary; Anecdotes
Article falling within or between these four forms of life-writing, itself a term that clearly now reaches far beyond '(the writing of) biography' (OED), and which is notable for its 'generic instability and hybridity' (D. Amigoni, *Life Writing and Victorian Culture*, 2006).

Subject(s):

- Agriculture; Fishing; Forestry; Gardening; Horticulture
- Biography
- Civilization—Ancient
- Egypt—Description and Travel
- Egypt—Politics and Government
- Europe—Description and Travel
- Explorers and Exploration; Wilderness Survival; Survival; Adventure and Adventurers
- Popular Culture; Amusements
- Race; Racism; Ethnicity; Anthropology; Ethnography
- Theatre; Performing Arts; Performing; Dance; Playwriting; Circus



Citation (MHRA): Wills, W[illiam] H[enry], and [?] Hoare, 'The Story of Giovanni Belzoni', *Household Words*, II, 1 March 1851, 548-552

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.

