The Selected Letters of W.E. Henley

Damian Atkinson

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Henley as a young man *c.* 1880

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Edited by
Damian Atkinson

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The Nineteenth Century General Editors' Preface

The aim of this series is to reflect, develop and extend the great burgeoning of interest in the nineteenth century that has been an inevitable feature of recent decades, as that former epoch has come more sharply into focus as a locus for our understanding, not only of the past but of the contours of our modernity. Though it is dedicated principally to the publication of original monographs and symposia in literature, history, cultural analysis, and associated fields, there will be a salient role for reprints of significant texts from, or about the period. Our overarching policy is to address the spectrum of nineteenth-century studies without exception, achieving the widest scope in chronology, approach and range of concern. This, we believe, distinguishes our project from comparable ones, and means, for example, that in the relevant areas of scholarship we both recognize and cut innovatively across such parameters as those suggested by the designations 'Romantic' and 'Victorian'. We welcome new ideas, while valuing tradition. It is hoped that the world which predates yet so forcibly predicts and engages our own will emerge in parts, as a whole, and in the lively currents of debate and change that are so manifest an aspect of its intellectual, artistic and social landscape.

Vincent Newey
Joanne Shattock
University of Leicester

List of Plates

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Autumn 1999 Damian Atkinson

Introduction

In a letter to the novelist R. Murray Gilchrist in January 1901 the fifty-one year old Henley remarked that 'I am a kind of walking imposture. I look well, but have wretched health. I talk bravely, & do nothing. I cannot hope nor believe that the New Century has much in the way of work in hand for me.' To a great extent this was true for Henley had made his mark as an editor and poet in the 1880s and 1890s. He had talked bravely and done much.

Henley's literary career was marked by four journal editorships: *London* (1878-79), the *Magazine of Art* (1881-86), the *Scots* (later *National*) *Observer* (1889-94), and the *New Review* (1895-97). As an aspiring journalist and hopeful poet, having published his 'In Hospital' verse sequence in 1875, he and Robert Louis Stevenson, together with George Saintsbury and Andrew Lang, were the main contributors to Glasgow Brown's weekly Conservative *London.* Other contributors were the novelist Grant Allen and the journalist James Runciman. This short-lived journal, one of a multitude of similar Victorian journals, gave Henley a good introduction to the day-to-day workings of a weekly journal. Stevenson's wife Fanny gives a picture of *London* under Henley's editorship:

> Mr. Henley was performing prodigies to keep it afloat. His own salary was small and the limited funds at his disposal allowed him to pay next to nothing to contributors. Both his and my husband's friends helped so far as they could, but a weekly publication made too heavy a drain on their good-nature. It often happened that an entire number of *London* was written by Mr. Henley and my husband alone... The circulation of *London* was extremely small...
>
> There were occasions when the journal presented the odd appearance of being almost wholly composed of verses. This occurred when the too sanguine editor found himself disappointed and had to make up his pages at the very moment of going to press. Verses filled space more readily than prose, and were easier to do; in such emergencies poem after poem would be dashed off by Mr. Henley and my husband until the blanks were filled. 'Hurry, my lad,' Mr. Henley would shout; 'only six more lines now!' My husband would scratch off the six lines, hand them to the printer's devil, who stood waiting with outstretched hand, and the situation was saved for another week.[1]

Much of Henley's *London* contributions were unsigned poems in the French style, best exemplified by Austin Dobson, and they included many to his future wife Anna Boyle. Henley and Dobson corresponded from then until Henley's

[1] 'Prefatory Note', in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, Tusitala Edition (1923-24), *1*, 216-17.

death, with Henley often seeking help and encouragement from Dobson on his poetry and some of his editorial projects. Saintsbury later remarked that 'we made things hum'. Today *London* is remembered for the first appearance of Stevenson's stories which became the *New Arabian Nights* (1882).

Henley's early life, with his battle against tuberculosis, is now well documented and his first strong friendship, to the East End coffee-house owner Harry Nichols in the 1870s is reflected in his masculine and descriptive letters to him from Margate and Edinburgh. Contact with Nichols seems to have been lost once Henley became involved with *London* and married Anna Boyle. Stevenson had now supplanted Nichols.

The friendship with Stevenson was a turning point in Henley's life and career, and introduced him to the lawyer Charles Baxter and the art critic Sidney Colvin. Henley, although a strongly opinionated thinker and forceful talker, needed the approval of a mentor as well as a friend. The friendship, at first boyish and light-hearted as seen in the letters ('Dear Lad', 'Dear Boy'), developed into a major literary friendship with the collaboration on four unsuccessful plays. Henley was the dominant force in the collaboration as he believed that their fortune could be made. He writes of ideas for further plays and operas and of his attempts to seek performances. To some extent his persistence in wanting to revitalise British drama was an underlying cause of dissatisfaction in their relationship. Stevenson's marriage in 1880 to Fanny Osbourne was not welcomed by Henley, nor indeed by other friends, as he saw an interference in their friendship by the forceful Fanny. Despite this the friendship between the Henleys and the Stevensons prospered. In May 1884 Fanny turned to Henley for help when Stevenson was ill in France and he arranged for his own doctor to visit Stevenson. Throughout the late summer of 1884, after the matinée production of their play *Deacon Brodie* in London, Henley was visiting the Stevensons in Bournemouth where the two men worked hard on their plays. Henley's enthusiasm for the plays was supported by Fanny until she realised that her husband's success and skills lay in prose and she later resented Henley's persistence. Henley's letters of this period are frequent, often long, and full of literary news and ideas. Henley acted as Stevenson's unpaid literary agent when Stevenson was abroad and was instrumental in the publication of *Treasure Island* (1883) and *A Child's Garden of Verses* (1885), as well as the transfer of Stevenson's publishers from Kegan Paul to Chatto and Windus.

In November 1881 Henley, with the help of his friend Sidney Colvin, then Slade Professor of Fine Art at Cambridge, had become editor of Cassell's *Magazine of Art*, a rather staid monthly given to supporting the Royal Academy and English art. It is rather ironic that Henley gained the position at the same time as he was scathingly attacked by Ruskin in the October *Nineteenth Century* for his comparison of Millet with Michelangelo in his *Twenty Etchings and Woodcuts* (1881). Over the next five years Henley revitalised the journal introducing new blood and broadening its coverage of art. Edmund Gosse, Andrew Lang, Austin Dobson, Kate Greenaway, the drama

critic William Archer, Robert Louis Stevenson and his cousins Katharine de Mattos and Robert ('Bob') Alan Mowbray Stevenson were among those who wrote for Henley. It was Henley who suggested to Bob Stevenson that he become an art critic rather than a painter and Henley was delighted when this happened. Henley included in the *Magazine of Art*, needlework and poetry, American and Japanese art, praised the Brabizon painters, introduced the English reading public to the merits of Rodin, and supported Whistler. Henley had met Rodin in 1881 and became his foremost admirer and championed him in the *Magazine of Art* and was later awarded by Rodin making his bust. The two men had much in common and corresponded until Henley's death. Whistler and Henley became friends and Whistler produced a lithograph of Henley but was not satisfied and pulled only six copies. The major portrait he promised did not materialise. Two of the existing contributors to the *Magazine of Art* were the Catholic literary couple Wilfrid and Alice Meynell, who were experienced writers and editors and introduced Henley to a new circle of friends. Wilfrid became godfather to Henley's daughter Margaret Emma in 1888. The young art historian and critic Julia Cartwright was given every encouragement but unfortunately no correspondence has been found.

Henley's strong opinions on art and literature ensured that his contributors' work was as he wanted it and he edited it to conform to his rigorous standards. His constant battle with the orthodoxy of his publishers led to his resignation in October 1886. After this the magazine began to revert to its former dullness and conservatism while Henley engaged in freelance journalism and the production of his *A Book of Verses* (1888). Not long after its publication he became consulting editor to the *Art Journal* for a period.

The Stevensons had left for America in August 1887 and the correspondence between the two men continued in the usual style until Henley's letter of 9 March 1888. In this letter, which he marked 'Private and Confidential', he remarked that Fanny's story 'The Nixie' was based on the story by Stevenson's cousin Katherine de Mattos and this was taken by Stevenson as an unwarranted attack on his wife. Henley believed that Katharine's signature should have appeared with Fanny's. Neither side would give way and the bitterness lasted until the end of both lives. Charles Baxter acted as intermediary, but he could not reconcile the two men, although the correspondence did restart later but not in the same friendly way. A full account, with the letters from both sides and those of Charles Baxter, is published in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, vol. 6 (1995), edited by Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew.

One of Henley's influential Edinburgh friends was the wealthy art collector Hamilton Bruce who undoubtedly managed to have Henley commissioned to write the preface to the Edinburgh *Memorial Catalogue of the French and Dutch Loan Collection* (1888) and the notes to *A Century of Artists* (1889). Bruce, together with Charles Baxter, Walter Blaikie the printer and later Chairman of T. and A. Constable, and the lawyer and financier Robert Fitzroy Bell, appointed Henley editor of their weekly *Scots Observer* in December 1888. This venture had started in November 1888 but it needed a strong

editorial hand and Henley was to rule over it for nearly five and a half years.

Henley, now aged forty, took control with his first issue of 19 January 1889 and quickly stamped his authority on the contents. The journal was already Tory and imperialist in outlook and Henley ensured that this aspect was even stronger. He now had the greatest editorial freedom of his career and used it accordingly. Among his contributors was the young scholar Charles Whibley, whom Henley had met while working for Cassells. Whibley became a minor replacement for Stevenson in Henley's affections and also acted as second-in-command on the journal. The relationship can be traced in the letters to Whibley where Henley is constantly badgering the lethargic Whibley for copy, taking him to task for failing to achieve deadlines and discussing ideas for the paper.

Henley's editorship is not only marked by his strident literary and political views but also by his clique of young writers including Kipling, Arthur Morrison, Gilbert Parker, Yeats, Barrie, Kenneth Grahame, the novelist H. B. Marriott Watson, the journalist G. W. Steevens, Harry Cust (later editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*), the politican George Wyndham and Wells. It must be stressed that although Henley published Alice Meynell, the poetess 'Graham R. Tomson' (later to write as Rosamund Marriott Watson), Katharine Tynan, Katharine de Mattos and E. Nesbit, they were not among the *Modern Men of the Scots Observer* (1890) and *Twenty Modern Men from the National Observer* (1891). Henley's restaurant dinners for his 'Observers' at Solferino's were for men only. Henley's advocacy of promising writers is best demonstrated by Wells and *The Time Machine*. Wells was encouraged to continue writing the story after preliminary chapters had appeared in the *National Observer* and the final version appeared later under Henley's editorship in the *New Review*, with the book being dedicated to Henley. The Realist novelist Arthur Morrison was encouraged to publish his stories of the East End of London in the *National Observer* which later became *Tales of Mean Streets*.

The letters of this period are rich in descriptions of the work he was engaged in as an editor. He harried Gladstone and the Liberals, supported the Tory party, damned Parnell over Home Rule for Ireland, attacked the concept of the 'limited edition' of Ruskin, published Kipling's 'Cleared' which was an attack on the Parnell Commission, asked his contributors for more and yet more copy, and praised young writers. In 1890 Whibley involved Henley indirectly in an argument in the paper over the morals of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. 'Why go grubbing in muck heaps?' asks Whibley, setting the tone of the criticism as a personal attack. A correspondence between Wilde and the journal on the morals of art and writing was closed by the editor after a few weeks, but it demonstrated the tough, rigid views of the *National Observer*. In April 1895 the *National Observer* published a leader in support of the Marquis of Queensberry and urging a second trial.

Unfortunately Henley had never been too concerned with the business side of journalism, what was written and how it was written was of paramount

importance to him, style was more important than popularity, and the *Scots Observer*, planned as a northern rival to the London journals, was forced to change its name in November 1890 to the *National Observer* in order to survive. As a last resort to counteract falling circulation it moved to London in 1892, but was finally sold by Fitzroy Bell in March 1894. Henley's third editorship, although a literary success, had failed commercially. As the editorship was drawing to a close Henley suffered the bitterest blow of his life with the death of his daughter from meningitis in February 1894. He never fully recovered.

During his editorship he had continued his literary interests and published an introduction to *Sir Henry Raeburn: a Selection from his Portraits* (1890), *Views and Reviews: Literature* (1891), and his successful poetical anthology *Lyra Heroica* (1892). He had also begun work on the seven volume *Slang* (1890-1904) with John S. Farmer and taken on the general editorship of the multivolume *Tudor Translations*, a project which was completed after his death by Whibley. Henley continued to write poetry and in 1893 he published *London Voluntaries* which included his jingoistic poem 'The Song of the Sword', dedicated to Kipling. This was a trite, bombastic poem which counterbalanced his evocative and lyrical descriptions of London in the verses which gave the book its title. In 1894 he began, with the Scot T. F. Henderson, an edition of Burns, which became a definitive edition for some years despite the severe criticism Henley's terminal essay received in Scotland for the treatment of Burns as a man and poet. Many of Henley's letters to Lord Windsor and Lord Rosebery deal with the progress of this work. With Whibley he published *A Book of English Prose* in 1894. His editorship of a major series, *English Classics*, managed only five titles.

By November 1894 Henley was preparing to take over the editorship of the monthly *New Review* which had been acquired by some of his friends, including the publisher William Heinemann and George Wyndham. It was to be a vehicle for Henley's editorial talents, but after the first year it was controlled by Wyndham and the editorial board with Henley as nominal editor. In spite of failing health, Henley spent much of his time working on his other, and to him, more important interests: his uncompleted edition of *Byron*, the final volumes of *Burns*, and the anthology *English Lyrics* with Charles Whibley. His editorship is marked by the publication of *The Time Machine*, Arthur Morrison's *A Child of the Jago*, Conrad's *Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*, and under protest Henry James's *What Masie Knew*. He also included work by Paul Verlaine and Paul Valéry, and increased the journal's literary content. The work of the old *Observer* days continued, though not with the strident impetuosity of old. Falling circulation and financial problems not unconnected with the serious political stand of the *New Review* and Henley's continued failing health forced him to resign in December 1897.

Henley's remaining years were spent on various literary works, notably editions of Fielding, Smollett and Hazlitt, the jingoistic Boer War verses *For England's Sake* (1901), the lyrical *Hawthorn and Lavender* (1901) and his second

collection of *Views and Reviews* (1902). Henley had one final literary outburst with his 'assassin' *Pall Mall Magazine* article on Stevenson in December 1901. He used his review of Graham Balfour's biography of Stevenson to attack the myth of Stevenson 'this Seraph in Chocolate, this barley-sugar effigy of a real man', and it appears to be a jealous attempt to down grade Stevenson. Henley was an embittered man: he no longer had Stevenson in his life, his daughter was dead, and his clan of aspiring young writers had dispersed to make their own way in life. He was no longer the 'Viking Chief'. The Stevenson followers rounded on Henley, as the Burns followers had done earlier, but Henley would not retract.

The opinions expressed in his letter to Gilchrist in 1901 were mainly true, the 'New Century' offered him little, the attitudes towards literary expression were changing and he was not part of that change. His ardent politics were not in vogue and he was still a Victorian and no longer at the helm.

Letter selection and editorial principles

The present edition is a selection of some two hundred and fifty letters selected from over 2,300 letters known to exist. The main holdings of Henley letters are the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale, and the Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. These two important holdings comprise well over half the known letters and are well represented in this selection. A few letters in private hands are represented, though the extent of private holdings is not accurately known. The Beinecke holdings are the majority of those to Stevenson, some one hundred and eighty, together with over one hundred and fifty to their mutual friends Charles Baxter and Sidney Colvin. Later letters are to Henley's publisher Alfred Nutt, one hundred and five to the Edinburgh art collector R. T. Hamilton Bruce, and thirty to the financier and lawyer Fitzroy Bell. The Pierpont Morgan has well over eight hundred letters including those to Henley's future wife Anna Boyle, his collaborator John S. Farmer on the *Dictionary of Slang*, Lord Windsor, and nearly six hundred letters to Charles Whibley. The National Library of Scotland holds forty letters to Lord Rosebery concerning Henley's work on Robert Burns, and seventy-nine letters mainly to the publisher Blackwood and those to Stevenson relating to the quarrel. London University holds sixty-eight letters to Austin Dobson. There are sixty-three letters to H. G. Wells at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Other important collections are the fifty-five letters at the Huntington Library most of which are the previously published letters to Harry Nichols. The few letters to J. M. Barrie, a lifelong friend, are at the University of British Columbia. Henley encouraged many young writers, apart from Wells, among them the novelists Arthur Morrison, Bernard Capes and Murray Gilchrist. The majority of the letters to Morrison are at the University of Rochester with some in private hands. Letters to Bernard Capes are at New York University and those to Murray Gilchrist at Pierpont Morgan Library. Henley's correspondence with his publisher William Heinemann is at the Houghton Library as are his letters to the artist William Rothenstein. The

University of Texas hold letters to the essayist and poet Alice Meynell together with letters from James Nichol Dunn, Henley's managing editor on the *Scots* and *National Observer*. Letters to Heinemann's partner Sydney Pawling are at the University of Virginia. Over one hundred letters, including those to the publishers Macmillan and the dramatic critic William Archer are at the British Library. Henley's letters to his friend the sculptor Auguste Rodin are at the Musée Rodin, Paris. Only one letter and a telegram to Kipling have been found and they are at Sussex University. It is surprising that no letters appear to survive to his collaborator on *Burns* T. F. Henderson who also wrote Henley's entry for the *Dictionary of National Biography*. Only one letter has been found to a member of his family other than his future wife and that is to Edward John Henley, his actor brother.

Few letters to Henley exist, the majority being those from Stevenson which are published in *The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*. In a letter to the writer H. D. Lowry, Henley writes: 'I destroy most letters that come to me' (Henley to Lowry, 6 August 1899, Fales Library, New York University). The Pierpont Morgan Library holds the majority of the remaining letters to Henley, including some from Rodin and T. E. Brown. Unfortunately there are only two from Farmer to Henley. Any letters from Fitzroy Bell concerning the selling of the *National Observer* would have made interesting reading as Henley was embittered towards Bell and totally distraught at the illness and death of his only child Margaret. A letter of condolence from Oscar Wilde on the death of Henley's mother is published by Connell. It is regretted that only one letter appears to have survived from the diligent Whibley who collected Henley's letters in six volumes. Family letters seem not to have survived. Letters received relating to his notorious article on Stevenson in the *Pall Mall Magazine* have also not survived which is probably not surprising as he was bitterly attacked for his views on his dead friend and collaborator. Some letters to Henley are published in the letters of Kipling, Wells,[2] and as previously mentioned, Stevenson. Letters to Henley from Fanny Stevenson are at Yale.

The selection of the letters has been difficult. The intention was to sample, as far as possible, the life of Henley, both literary and otherwise, and present, through the letters, a truer portrait of the man. The selection has been divided into the four major stages of his life, starting with his early years as an aspiring young poet and journalist, together with his meeting with Robert Louis Stevenson, his courtship of his future wife Anna Boyle and his short-lived editorship of the weekly *London*. The second section is his editorship of the *Magazine of Art*, the third his most influential period as editor of the *Scots Observer*, later the *National Observer*, and the *New Review*, and lastly his final years of failing health and literary editorships. Each section has a short biographical introduction followed by the letters.

An editor of letters is always conscious of the problem of presenting a

[2] *The Letters of Rudyard Kipling*, ed. Thomas Pinney (1990-) and *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells*, 4 vols, ed. David C. Smith (1998).

readable text without losing the immediacy of the writer's word and this leads to a compromise between the text of the original letter and a presentable yet accurate printed copy. In editing Henley's letters I have, I hope, been careful to include as much of his style of presentation without encumbering the reader with a host of minor orthographic detail which would hinder clarity and flow of thought.

The layout of the letters has been standardised. Each letter is headed by the recipient's name, followed by the date as standardised or a conjectural date within square brackets. Immediately beneath this is the source of the text with a note of any previous publication or major quotation. The position of the address is to the right irrespective of its original position and a printed or embossed address is signified by italics.

The text of the letter is standardised in paragraphs and postscripts are retained with prescripts placed after the closure, except where a letter is marked 'Private' or 'Confidential'. Henley's spelling has been retained throughout, as has his punctuation except where clarity demands an alteration or insertion. Henley's handwriting varies with age and health and is often very difficult or impossible to read. T. E. Brown writing to Henley in 1891 comments: 'Are you feeling stronger? Do you mind my telling you that your handwriting shows signs of nervous trouble, begins, in fact to be frequently illegible? (9 May 1891, Pierpont Morgan). This, unfortunately, was often the case. Cancelled passages are silently excised unless they are of importance and illegible words are indicated as empty square brackets. False starts have been omitted and words inserted by Henley have been silently included. A few omitted words are supplied in square brackets. Henley made frequent use of the ampersand and this has been retained; his occasional use of an underlined initial uppercase letter has been replaced by an italicised letter. Underlined words or phrases have been replaced by italics. Henley overused the dash and this has been retained. Titles of books and plays have been italicised and other titles are in single quotation marks. Henley frequently used contractions such as ''em' and ''tis' and these have been retained. A letter in French (with Henley's mistakes included) is followed by a translation. Quotations have been identified where possible and Henley did not always have a good memory for them.

Henley rarely failed to date his letters though when he did so he often wrote the day of the week rather than a date, thus making it difficult to date accurately. His letters to Baxter and Whibley often have the date recorded by the recipient. The closing of the letters has been centralised irrespective of the original position. Henley often used the closure 'Ever Affectionately Yours' which he also abbreviated as 'E. A. Y.'

Sources of Letters, Abbreviations and Short Titles

Archer	Lieut.-Colonel C, Archer. *William Archer: Life, Work and Friendships* (1931).
Baxter Letters	*R.L.S.: Stevenson's Letters to Charles Baxter*, ed. DeLancey Ferguson and Marshall Waingrow (New Haven and London, 1956).
Berg	Henry W. and Albert A. Berg Collection, New York Public Library.
BL	British Library, London.
Brotherton	The Brotherton Library, Leeds University.
Burns	*The Poetry of Robert Burns*. Centenary edition, ed. W. E. Henley and T. F. Henderson, 4 vols (Edinburgh, 1896-97).
Champneys	*Memoirs and Correspondence of Coventry Patmore*, ed. B. Champneys, 2 vols (1900, 1901).
Cohen	Edward H. Cohen, 'Uncollected Early Poems by William Ernest Henley,' *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 79, No. 3, Spring 1976, 297-314.
Connell	John Connell [J. H. Robertson], *W. E. Henley* (1949).
Columbia	University of British Columbia.
Columbia Univ	Columbia University, New York.
Congress	Library of Congress, Washington DC.
Duke	William R. Perkins Library, Duke University.
Fales	The Fales Library, New York University.
Glasgow	Glasgow University Library.
Glines	Elsa F. Glines, '"My Dear Miss Page" and "Demon Harry": some early letters of William Ernest Henley,' *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 49, November 1986, 325-51.
Goldman	Martin Goldman, *Lister Ward* (Bristol and Boston, 1987).
Haggard	Sir H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life: An Autobiography*, 2 vols (1926).
Hallam	J. S. Hallam, 'Some Early Letters and Verses of W. E. Henley,' *Blackwood's Magazine*, September 1943, 200-209.
Harvard	Houghton Library, Harvard University.
Hayward	The Library, California State University, Hayward, California.
Huntington	The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.
Illinois	The Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

London	University of London Library.
Lucas	E. V. Lucas, *The Colvins and their Friends* (1928).
Mackenzie	Norman and Jean MacKenzie, *The Time Traveller: The Life of H. G. Wells* (1973).
Meynell	Viola Meynell, *Alice Meynell: A Memoir* (1929).
Mitchell	The Mitchell Library, Glasgow.
Morgan	Pierpont Morgan Library, New York.
Murray	Archives of the publisher John Murray, London.
Paris	Musée Rodin, Paris.
New College	New College, Oxford.
Payen-Payne	*Some Letters of William Ernest Henley*, ed. V. Payen-Payne (Privately Printed, Chelsea, 1933).
Princeton	Princeton University Library.
Quarrel	Edward H. Cohen, *The Henley-Stevenson Quarrel* (Gainesville Florida, 1974).
RLF	Royal Literary Fund.
Rochester	University of Rochester Library.
Ross	*Robert Ross: Friend of Friends*, ed. Margery Ross (1952).
Stevenson Letters	*The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson*, ed. Bradford A. Booth and Ernest Mehew, 8 vols (New Haven and London, 1994-95).
Sussex	University of Sussex Library.
Texas	The Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center, University of Texas at Austin.
Virginia	University of Virginia Library.
Williamson	Kennedy Williamson, *W. E. Henley: A Memoir* (1930).
Works	*The Works of W. E. Henley*, 7 vols (1908).
Yale	The Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University Library.

Private holdings

Fleming	Mrs Anna Fleming.
Meynell	Meynell family library.
Quayle	Mr Eric Quayle.

Chronology: William Ernest Henley 1849-1903

1849	23 August WEH born at 47 Eastgate Street, Gloucester, son of William Henley, printer, bookbinder and picture frame maker and Emma Morgan.
1851	Anthony Warton Henley born 1 August at 47 Eastgate Street, Gloucester.
1854	Attended school at Suffolk House, Gloucester, which later moved to Newark House, Gloucester.
1856	Nigel Felix Henley born?
1857	Joseph Warton Henley born 18 August at Lower Barton Street, Gloucester.
1860	Edward John Henley born 17 August at Russell House, Stroud Road, Gloucester.
1861	Entered the Crypt Grammar School, Gloucester, in August. The Manx poet, Thomas Edward Brown, Headmaster (1 August 1861- 15 October 1863).
1863	'Left Midsummer, 1863. Returned Christmas 1864. Left Christmas 1865. Returned Michaelmas, 1866' (*Crypt School Register*). His schooling was interrupted by tuberculosis of the left leg.
1867	WEH leaves the Crypt and goes to London.
1868	His father dies aged forty-two on 8 February. 16 June enters St Bartholomew's Hospital, London, for treatment of TB. His left leg amputated below the knee probably at this time.
1869	8 April discharged from hospital. At 11 Bateman's Buildings, Soho Square, London by July.
1870	Living at 17 Richmond Terrace, Shepherds Bush, London, by March/April. Writes for the weekly *Period* which publishes his 'Bohemian Ballads'. By August is living at 11 Holland Road, Notting Hill. Meets Harry Nichols.
1872	Moves to 3 Victoria Terrace, Marine Terrace, Margate, for his health
1873	Enters the Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary, Margate, in late February. Arrives in Edinburgh 23 August and enters the Edinburgh Infirmary for treatment on his right foot under Lister. His foot saved.
1874	Meets his future wife Hannah Johnson Boyle (called Anna), sister of Captain Edward Mackie Boyle, a fellow patient.
1875	Introduced to RLS by Leslie Stephen on 12 February at Edinburgh Infirmary. Writes his poem 'Invictus'. Leaves the

Infirmary in April and moves to 45 George Street, Edinburgh. Moves to 4 Straiton Place, Portobello, Edinburgh, in May. His 'Hospital Outlines: Sketches and Portraits' published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, July. His poem 'Morning' published in *Macmillan's Magazine*, August, and his ten poem 'Notes on the Firth' in the October issue.

1876 January/February moves to 19 Balfour Street, Leith Walk, Edinburgh. Contributes at least nine entries to the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica.* Moves to 19 Bristo Place, Edinburgh, in May. He is sacked from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* for his article on Christopher Columbus. WEH and Anna engaged on 6 December.

1877 WEH, with RLS, is a major contributor to Glasgow Brown's weekly *London.* He stays at Brown's address, 21 Park Side, Albert Gate, London, in August and finally settles at 11 Adelaide Terrace, Adelaide Road, Shepherds Bush, in October. WEH edits *London* from December. Contributes to the *Saturday Review.*

1878 22 January marries Anna Boyle at St Mary's Roman Catholic Chapel, Broughton Street, Edinburgh. Charles Baxter is one of the witnesses. By end of June they are living at 12 Wilton Villas, Uxbridge Road, Shepherds Bush. WEH and RLS start writing the play *Deacon Brodie.* At the end of December the Henleys are at 4 Earls Terrace, Devonport Road, Shepherds Bush.

1879 In January RLS and WEH work on *Deacon Brodie* at Swanston Cottage, Lothianburn, Edinburgh. Last issue of *London* 5 April 1879. Contributes book and drama reviews, and poetry to the *Academy*, *Athenaeum*, *Vanity Fair*, *Manchester Guardian*, *Belgravia* and the *Pall Mall Gazette* among others. Visits Dieppe in March. By 11 April the Henleys are at 36 Loftus Road, Shepherds Bush. They are at 1 The Parade, Goldhawk Road, Shepherds Bush, by the end of October. Anna has a stillborn child in December.

1880 By June the Henleys are at 51 Richmond Gardens, Shepherds Bush. Acts as RLS's unpaid agent. Contributes to T. H. Ward's *The English Poets.*

1881 RLS dedicates his *Virginibus Puerisque* to WEH. In August he meets Rodin in London and they become friends. Acts as witness at Bob Stevenson's wedding 27 August. Publishes his *Jean-François Millet. Twenty Etchings and Woodcuts.* Ruskin attacks WEH's view that Millet was an artist in the mould of Michelangelo. From 1 November WEH becomes editor of the *Magazine of Art* at a salary of £300 per annum for three and a half hours per day. Anna has a miscarriage.

1882 Sells RLS's *New Arabian Nights* to Chatto and Windus. WEH in Bradford for the first performance of *Deacon Brodie* at Pullan's Theatre in December.

1883 Elected to the Savile Club. Reviews *Treasure Island.* Has small unspecified operation.

1884 In January visits RLS and Fanny in Hyères with Baxter. In May, with Baxter, takes control of the treatment of RLS's serious illness sending Dr. Mennell to Hyères. Visits RLS in Bournemouth and collaborates with him on the plays *Beau Austin* and *Admiral Guinea.* By November the Henleys are at 18 Camden Gardens, Shepherds Bush. *Deacon Brodie* staged at Prince's Theatre, London, on 2 July.

1885 WEH and RLS collaborate on their play *Macaire*. *Magazine of Art* salary reduced to £240 pa. Resigns as music critic of the *Saturday Review*.

1886 The Henleys visit Paris in August. WEH sits for his bust and introduces RLS to Rodin. Resigns from the *Magazine of Art* in the late summer or early autumn. Appointed consulting editor for the *Art Journal.*

1887 Visits RLS in Bournemouth in March and late June. WEH's only play *Mephisto* performed (unsuccessfully under the pseudonym Byron McGuiness) at the Royalty Theatre, London, on 14 June, with Edward Henley in the lead. RLS and Fanny leave for America in August. *Deacon Brodie* performed in America. The Henleys move to 1 Merton Place, High Road, Chiswick, in mid-October.

1888 WEH's letter of 9 March to RLS accusing Fanny of plagiarism in publishing under her own name a story based on an earlier one by Katharine de Mattos's precipitates the quarrel and estrangement between them. Baxter acts as mediator. WEH's *A Book of Verses* published in May. WEH and Anna's only child, Margaret Emma, born 4 September. His mother dies 25 October. RLS writes in memoriam verse. WEH becomes editor of the weekly *Scots Observer* in Edinburgh. WEH and Andrew Lang publish their *Pictures at Play or Dialogues of the Galleries by Two Art-Critics.* Produces the text to the *Memorial Catalogue of the French and Dutch Loan Collection* exhibition at Edinburgh, 1886. Stays with Hamilton Bruce in December.

1889 Publishes his first number of the *Scots Observer* on 19 January. Visits St Andrews in mid-January. The Henleys move to 11 Howard Place, Edinburgh, in April. Publishes Kipling's 'Barrack-Room Ballads'. Visits Lake Windermere in July. Rents Ivy Lodge, Levenhall, Musselburgh, as a second home. WEH visits London in October. Produces *A*

Century of Artists. A Memorial of the Glasgow International Exhibition, 1888.

1890 WEH's *Views and Reviews: Literature* published. He provides the introduction and notes for *Sir Henry Raeburn.* WEH begins his collaboration with John S. Farmer on *Slang.* Stays with Charles Whibley in London. Rents Seaforth, Levenhall, Musselburgh, in place of Ivy Lodge. *Scots Observer* publishes damning review of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray. Beau Austin* performed at the Haymarket Theatre, London, 3 November. *Scots Observer* becomes the *National Observer* on 22 November and is also published in London. Publishes Yeats's 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' 13 December.

1891 Begins work on the poetry anthology *Lyra Heroica.* Visits London in March. Spends most of May and June at Musselburgh. The *National Observer* survives financial crisis. *Lyra Heroica* published in October. Visits St Andrews in early December.

1892 WEH's *The Song of the Sword and Other Verses* published in April. Spends May at Musselburgh. The *National Observer* moves to London. Begins the *Tudor Translations.* WEH lives at 1 Great College Street, Westminster. Starts collaboration with Charles Whibley on *A Book of English Prose.* The Henleys settle at Ashburton Lodge, Addiscombe, Surrey. Holidays at Musselburgh in September.

1893 The *National Observer* again in financial trouble. Holidays in Eastbourne in April. Awarded LL.D of St Andrews University, 6 April. October in Musselburgh. Margaret ill in November.

1894 Fitzroy Bell decides to sell the *National Observer.* Margaret Henley dies of meningitis 11 February. WEH publishes H. G. Wells. He resigns the editorship of the *National Observer* on its sale in March. Moves to 3 James Street Mansions, Buckingham Gate, London, 22 March. Disagreement with Bell over financial settlement. The Henleys move to 9 The Terrace, Barnes in May. *A Book of English Prose* published. WEH becomes editor of the monthly *New Review.* Is commissioned to produce an edition of Burns with T. F. Henderson. RLS dies on 3 December.

1895 His first *New Review* published in January. Starts work on the short-lived *English Classics* series for Methuen. Publishes Wells's *The Time Machine* in the *New Review.* Visits Deal in May. WEH becomes an unsuccessful candidate for the Professorship of Rhetoric and English Literature at Edinburgh University. Edits *A London Garland.* Fails to become Poet

Laureate. Starts work on an edition of *Byron* for Heinemann.

1896 Moves to Stanley Lodge, Muswell Hill. Vol. I of *Burns* published.

1897 Takes a holiday in Sussex in February. Remaining three volumes of *Burns* published. WEH publishes Conrad's *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'* in the *New Review.* Holiday in Brighton. WEH's anthology *English Lyrics* published. T. E. Brown dies. *Admiral Guinea* performed 29 November at the Avenue Theatre, London. Resigns from the *New Review* in December.

1898 *Poems* published in January. Stays at The Ivy, Burwash, Sussex, late April — early May. Awarded Civil List pension of £225. He has an operation for piles. Writes thirteen quatorzains to William Nicholson's *London Types.* Stays at The Fishery, Wheathamstead, Herts, in July. Collaborates with George Wyndham on *The Poetry of Wilfrid Blunt.* Stays in Seaford, Sussex, with Anna, in late September and October. His actor brother Edward dies at Lake Placid, New York, on 16 October. WEH has another operation.

1899 The Henleys move to St George's Lodge, Chesswood Road, Worthing. Contributes regular column to the monthly *Pall Mall Magazine.* His fiftieth birthday, 23 August. Contributes his 'Hawthorn and Lavender' verses to the *North American Review,* November 1899 to September 1901. Edits the *Works of Tobias Smollett,* 1899-1901.

1900 Bob Stevenson dies 18 April. Co-edits the *Collected Poems of T. E. Brown.* Publishes his war poetry *For England's Sake.* Starts work on an edition of Shakespeare which is completed after his death by Walter Raleigh. William Nicholson paints his portrait.

1901 Nicholson's portrait exhibited in London. His *Hawthorn and Lavender* published. Contributes seven articles to the *Sphere* between November 1901 and March 1902. The Henleys take a flat at 19 Albert Mansions, Battersea. Return to Worthing in December. WEH contributes his controversial 'assassin' essay on RLS to the December *Pall Mall Magazine.*

1902 Most of February spent in Battersea. Spends last ten days of March in Battersea. Moves to Heather Brae, Maybury Hill, Woking. Severely shaken while attempting to board a train on 26 March. Introductions to the *Complete Works of Henry Fielding* and *Collected Works of William Hazlitt.* Rides in Alfred Harmsworth's car. Publishes *Views and Reviews: II Art.* Starts work on *A Song of Speed.*

1903 *A Song of Speed* published. Dies 11 July and is cremated at Woking and buried at Cockayne Hatley with his daughter.

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1. The Early Years: 1870-81

William Ernest Henley was born on 23 August 1849 at 47 Eastgate Street, Gloucester, the eldest of five sons of William Henley (1826-68), and Emma Morgan (1828-88). William Henley senior was born in Cheltenham and was listed as a bookseller in *Hunt's Cheltenham Directory, 1847*. By the time of William Ernest Henley's birth two years later he was in the same business in Gloucester. No record of his marriage to Emma Morgan, a Cheltenham girl, has been found but there is a suggestion of a previous marriage on 5 November 1844 to a Sarah Cox in Cheltenham.

Henley senior and his family were constantly on the move in Gloucester, a practice mirrored by young Henley in his early journalistic career in London. Henley's early education was at Suffolk House, Gloucester, and later Newark House, Gloucester. On leaving this school Henley went to the Crypt Grammar School, which had been founded in 1539. Here he was lucky to fall under the influence of Thomas Edward Brown, the Manx poet, who was Headmaster 1861-63. During this brief period Henley gained his first and lasting love of literature, a love that was to lead him to a life of a man of letters and the editorial chair of two major journals of the 1890s.

Henley suffered from tuberculosis in both legs and had his left leg amputated below the knee, but the date is uncertain. After leaving school in 1867 he went to London to try his luck as a journalist. He entered St Bartholomew's Hospital in June 1868 and left uncured in April 1869, though it is most probable that his left leg was amputated. Unfortunately there is no hospital record for this period.

He managed to contribute some verses to the short-lived weekly *The Period* and also to the *Belgravia*. He aspired to being a poet and wrote to men of fame and influence, Swinburne and the publisher John Murray III being the two known examples. It was during his stay in London that he met Harry Nichols, a coffee-house keeper in the Commercial Road, who introduced him to the Bohemian life of East London. The closeness of the friendship and style of life can be gauged from the surviving letters to Nichols. They seem to have had a fairly intimate relationship based on drink, smoking, and the music hall. Here, too, he met a Miss Page, with whom he corresponded for a short period in the early 1870s though nothing is known about her. A stay in Margate at the Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary in 1873 failed to halt the tuberculosis and he went to the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh in August 1873 to seek the help of Joseph Lister. There has been speculation as to how Henley was able to obtain an introduction to Lister at the Edinburgh Infirmary and how he was able to pay for his stay. Richard B. Fisher, in his *Joseph Lister 1827-1912* (1977), strongly suggests that Henley was recommended to Lister by 'a Lady in the South of England of very

considerable influence in London Society'. In view of Henley's Bohemian way of life in east London it is very unlikely that he would be in contact with anyone of such standing. Nevertheless, the possibility exists that he may have met such a person while at Margate Sea-Bathing Infirmary. Henley, himself, would seem to refute any suggestion of patronage in a letter to J. M. Barrie for he says that he 'had heard of Lister & Listerism, & went to Edinburgh, as a sort of forlorn hope, on the chance of saving my foot' (28 May 1888). A stay of twenty-two months was to be the turning point of his life and launch him firmly into the world of letters. Lister saved his right leg. Henley immersed himself in self-education, making up for the time lost at school due to illness. He read French, German, Portuguese and Italian and wrote verses. Here he wrote what was arguably his best poetry and certainly his best known, the 'In Hospital' sequence, a collection of verses describing his experiences in a Victorian hospital. Leslie Stephen introduced Robert Louis Stevenson to Henley in February 1875.

Here, too, Henley met his future wife, Anna: his growing love for her and his desire to marry, against opposition from her parents, are clear in his love letters. How could a penniless journalist hope to marry and to marry a Catholic at that? But they did marry in January 1878 and Henley never regretted it though he was later to lament the marriages of two of his friends, Stevenson and Kipling. What was right for him was not right for them.

After his discharge from Edinburgh Infirmary he managed to find employment writing entries for the ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, but he was sacked for incompetence after writing an article on Christopher Columbus.

Through his friendship with Stevenson Henley was introduced to a small but influential Edinburgh literary and financial coterie, which included the lawyer Charles Baxter, later to play an important role in the quarrel between Stevenson and Henley, and the art critic Sidney Colvin. These friendships later helped Henley with literary contacts. Stevenson's university friend Robert Glasgow Brown founded and funded the weekly journal *London* with Henley and Stevenson being the main contributors. This was an exciting time for Henley and he eventually became the editor in 1877 living in London. As the friendship with Stevenson progressed they began to collaborate on plays, the first being *Deacon Brodie* and their letters are full of plots and ideas with Henley being the more enthusiastic, whereas Stevenson was the more realistic. Henley was still writing verse but he was generally unsuccessful in publication apart from the poems he printed in *London*, many of them being 'fillers'. In 1879 he was asked to contribute some selections and comments to T. H. Ward's *The English Poets*. After the closure of *London* in April 1879 Henley continued to contribute book reviews to many of the major journals, including the *Athenaeum*, *Academy, Saturday Review* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Henley's great interest in art led to his meeting Rodin in 1881 in London and there began a friendship that lasted until Henley's death. He recognised the

genius of the sculptor and championed his cause in England. In the same year Henley published his first work on art, *Jean-François Millet. Twenty Etchings and Woodcuts*. Henley's interest in, and knowledge of, art led to his being appointed as editor of the *Magazine of Art* from November 1881.

To A. C. Swinburne,[1] 20/70 [March-May 1870]
ALS: Berg. Published Cohen.

17 Richmond Gardens, Shepherds Bush, W. [London]

Sir,

In addressing you without being in anywise known to you, I am conscious that I commit both a fault and a breach of etiquette. Perhaps, however, after the lecture of this letter you will be good enough to pardon both of these and receive in good faith the apology that I offer you with all the assurance of sincerity and necessity.

It is impossible for me to explain the purpose wherewith I venture to write to you, without running the risk of being considered *un peu egoiste* by talking of myself. However, I shall take the liberty of sparing you as much troublesome detail as possible and commence at once by telling you that, not yet twenty-one years of age, I find myself as trouble-scared and as unfit to struggle with life as a soldier after a Beresina and a new Russian retreat.[2] The terrible misfortunes through which I have passed — I will detail them to you fully if such be your future desire — have obliged me to take the only career left open to me, the only one I am bound also to say that, troubles apart, I should have chosen, the career of letters. I have attempted this alone and unaided with success both encouraging and discouraging at once. I have been connected with a certain satirical journal, whose untimely decease put an end to the first connection I had formed, and in this I was allowed to say pretty much what I thought without any fear of evil consequences arising from an outburst of British *begueulisme*. The eight 'copies of verse' forming a series of 'Bohemian Ballads'[3] were indeed but the commencement of a design I had formed of

[1] WEH's early attempts at poetry owe much to his reading of Swinburne.

[2] The French army retreated across the river Beresina in Russia after being defeated in November 1812 during the Napoleonic war.

[3] WEH had been writing for the *Period*, a small London weekly which ran from 30 October 1869 to 26 February 1870 with a new series from 14 May 1870 to 18 February 1871. It was edited by the writer, engraver and publisher Henry Vizetelly (1820-94), who first published Zola in England. Vizetelly was a co-founder of the *Illustrated London News* in 1842. WEH's eight 'Bohemian Ballads' were published in the *Period* between 18 December 1869 and 26 February 1870.

delineating the lights and shadows of the *Vie de Boheme* of Henri Murger:[4] the paper stopped, however, as I have already had the honour of telling you and elsewhere I have been so unsuccessful that but for a certain blind love for, and confused idea of the glorious beauty of Art, I should perhaps have pitched away ink and pen and learnt to sew nethersocks or their modern equivalents to procure myself the luxuries of life which are verily, ill as I am, necessities to me.

I do not think I have failed for lack of power: (literary variety is, doubtless, so well known to you that you will pardon, I hope, this seeming conceit) I rather choose to believe that I have failed through my peculiar education. Knowing scarcely enough Latin to stumble through an Ilyhphallic of Cattulus, I have thrown myself body and soul into French sentiment and art as represented by Balzac and Alfred de Musset.[6] Ill and alone I have mused and dreamed over their words until a reproduction, an invitation, a corresponding vein of though had become almost second nature with me. One English author only has exercised a power over me perhaps — nay certainly — superior to theirs: and such is the passionate admiration I entertain for the writings of this last that I can give you no greater proof of my embarrassment than by confessing to you that I have only been able to become possessed of two of his books; viz the *Poems and Ballads* and the *Atlanta in Calydon.*[7]

It is perhaps this peculiar vein of reading and expression that is one of the causes of my want of success: and certainly this why I venture to apply for counsel to a man whose position as an artist is so high that my poor tribute of admiration, though it be sincere, cannot add one whit to his glory though it may reflect some credit on my own taste. I have been of such length in my explanations that I fear I have wearied you — if indeed you have read thus far — and with this thought I hasten to the real end of my letter in order to bring it to a speedy conclusion.

I ask then permission to submit to you for your consideration a poem that I have at present in my desk. I do this because, without friends or advisers of any kind, almost alone in the world in fact, I am unable to form any judgement as to my own productions: A boy of twenty, if he possesses any critical faculty, is quite unable to exercise it on his own works. And furthermore I beg of you, should you judge it to have any merit, to help me with the advice and encouragement I so sorely need. If by introduction & counsel you could aid me to make a creditable appearance in the pages of any review or magazine wherewith you may be connected, believe me that the sweetest reflection of all to me would be that I had won my spurs under the conduct of a leader whose notice would be my pride as his works have been my delight.

[4] The French writer Henri Murger (1822-61) author of *Scènes de la Vie de Bohème* (Paris 1851).

[6] The French poet, playwright and novelist Alfred de Mussett (1810-57).

[7] *Poems and Ballads* (1866) and *Atlanta in Calydon. A Tragedy* (1865).

I am at present very ill and this letter to you stands in the position of a forlorn hope. Written with the hope of interesting you, you will pardon me the faults of composition, the wearisome detail, the expression of admiration in which I have indulged. Believe me, Sir, that I have written with perfect sincerity, and that, knowing the many applications of the same sort men of genius are pestered withal, I am sorry to find myself obliged to rank with the other privates in the ragged regiment of literature. That I have had no choice, however, you may know by the knowledge of my position, by, the peculiar nature of the poem itself and by the account of the circumstances under which it was written which I shall not fail to send you with it should you incline to its perusal. In a worse position that that of Chatterton[8] I appeal to you for counsel: it is for you to say whether in doing this I have done well.

I am, Sir,
Yours most obediently,
W. E. Henley

A. C. Swinburne Esquire.

[8] The poet Thomas Chatterton (1752-70), who in despair at the lack of success of his poetry, killed himself.

To John Murray,[1] [?May 1870]
ALS: Murray

17 Richmond Terrace, Shepherds Bush

Dear Sir,

You have been kind enough to assist me in many ways with counsel and material,[2] several times, and therefore I am emboldened to apply to you once more for assistance, at a period when I need it more that I have ever done before, precarious as my existence hitherto has been.

After a great deal of trouble, the *Period*, the journal to which I was in the habit of contributing, has started a second series, the first having dropped by reason of a series of misfortunes, and the Editor reclaims my services. I have been very ill in fact I have not left the house for nearly three months, as much

[1] John Murray III (1808-92), grandson of the founder of the publishing firm. He took control of the firm on the death of his father in 1842.

[2] This was not the first letter from WEH to Murray. In an earlier letter (5 January 1869, John Murray Archives) WEH writes: 'The trifles you were so kind as to read have so many faults notably those of hasty composition and non-revision that I should have certainly been ashamed to place them in your hands: they were written for my own amusement and for that of — to quote a sarcastic writer in the *Daily News* — "admiring female relatives".'

on account of poverty as ill health — and I find my[self] exceedingly ill-placed for the collection of those subjects necessary for the subject-matter of a funeral to be as caustic & high class as possible. I am, therefore, straining every nerve to get together a sum which shall enable me to appear once more in London, since country air seems neither beneficial to my body nor to my mind. And it is to this end, that I make so bold as to ask help of you. Believe me, that nothing but the very strongest necessity for immediate action on my part, would make me write thus to you: and that had I no hope of success, I should not presume to ask aid for a fruitless undertaking. However, that I have done so, is entirely owing to the fact of your having helped me unbeknown to you, several times before. I have only to beg you to consider this note as I have marked upon the envelope and to request an answer of you at your earliest convenience and I have done.

I am, Sir,
Yours most obediently,
W. E. Henley.

Jno. Murray Esquire.

Harry Nichols,[1] [October 1872]
ALS: Huntington

3 Victoria Terrace, Marine Terrace, Margate[2]

My son,

Here's no end of a letter to thee. I have nothing particular to say, but I doubt not I shall manage to fill four quartos, for all that. The sky is heavy with rain: the sea is grey and desolate: there is a bold & bitter wind afoot. Decidedly I am for in-doors this afternoon! — I feel just now a strong objection to any conversation with Dr. Alun respecting the Italian verbs; & I have no book to dip into and no money to exchange for Irish, *Hot*; while I am sick of the very name of tobacco. Can you blame me that I write to you?

Margate is empty. The terrace is deserted: the bathing-machines have retired

[1] Harry Nichols (1840/41-?) kept a coffee-house at 11 Crombies Row, Commercial Road, Whitechapel, London, which by 1881 had become 329 Commercial Road East, although Nichols had moved by then. Here WEH and Nichols spent many hours in talk and drink. This was WEH's first close friendship.

[2] Presumably WEH moved here from Richmond Terrace, though it is far from certain as the location and chronology of his early lodgings can not be fully established. He moved to Margate in an attempt to save his right foot from amputation due to tuberculosis of the bone. Subsequently he entered the Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary, Margate, in late February 1873 and left in August for Edinburgh. He gave his address as 19 Portland Road, Notting Hill, on entry to the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary.

into private life: the basket chairs are laid up in ordinary. The strict, but meritorious, Matrons have sought the domestic hearth: the idiotic, but not altogether objectionable, misses have started — I hope! — for heaven: the itinerant minstrels have departed — I trust! — for the opposite extremity of creation. There are but a few nurse-maids, & no flymen to flirt with them: these latter being occupied with getting up their strength against next season. The lodging-house keepers have nought to do but hunt for those peculiar 'Gentlemen in Brown'[3] whom Nature has apparently intended to reside in Furnished Apartments. Encouraged by the near approach of perfect rest, the very donkies have taken heart of grace, and are rebellious: for did I not march an antient jackass on the sands this morning, who bore upon the back of him an infant? at whose legs were firmly planted in the sand, at whose jaw the proprietor of him tugged & wrenched in vain, and at whose hind-quarters the male & female to whose charge the infant freight might be laid, were making vigorous manual application? — Margate is empty, my son, & such little scenes are a consequence.

Among the doves, soiled & smirchless, who have long since flown elsewhither, my sweet Unknown must, alas! be numbered. I was inconsolable, as you may well believe, for several days, during which I finished her Cycle of Songs,[4] & made several important discoveries concerning Irish Whiskey.

Irish Whiskey, otherwise Potheen, otherwise Fenian, is a fluid possessed of extraordinary properties. I shall not stop to communicate any other than this; Taken Hot, with Sugar & a thin shaving of Lemon-peel, it encourages, in him who imbibes, a tendency to stand for many hours over a bar, while it imparts to him an unusual facility of agreeable & audacious speech. I can vouch for this, which is indeed a result of long & patient observation on my part. Miss Crump is of the same opinion.

Miss Crump — Mary Ellen — hath 19 years, a rich brown skin, a spare but hugable shape, & the brightest, clearest, honestest black eyes in the world. She & I are excellent friends. We amuse each other dreadfully. She flirts, & coquettes, & smiles, & looks disdain, & delight, *en coulisse*, and full front: while I — well! — I do my best to credit my dear Balzac. *Certes*, I don't think that anyone has talked to Miss Crump as *I* have talked: I say all that comes into my head, and it amuses us both: I don't believe she understands one half of it, but she likes it none the worse for *that*. From certain indications, I am sometimes inclined to believe — when I consider things *en fat* — that she would have no objection to fall in with my views: the pity of it is that she is honest. If she were not! — my imagination refuses to paint the probabilities. Yours may be more audacious.

King John is very bad: a terrible skin-wound across the shoulders.[5] As he

[3] Bedbugs.
[4] The history of this cycle is vague though some poems have been identified; see Cohen.
[5] A fellow patient later referred to as 'Majesty'.

has nobody to take care of him, I amuse myself by dressing it for him (*this is a secret: you will see why.*): much against his will. I am so cool & dexterous over it, that I believe I should have made a good surgeon. It is not exactly what I should like; but — *on fait ce qu'on peut!* — If your French will carry you triumphant through that phrase, you will find that Life is summed up in it.

You will receive, in a day or two, the *Professor at the Breakfast Table*:[6] a sort of sequel to our old friend, the *Autocrat* of that Ilk. It is very good, though not so good as its predecessor; a little lecture-room-ified but still very readable, and full of science made easy: the sort of matter your soul delighteth it. Read it carefully, & you will not regret.

I had a very kind letter from Cadman[7] the other day. He regrets that you don't visit him oftener: (this *entre nous*). I have had, too, wild billets from Felix:[8] and an astonishing romance, *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*,[9] of which more in my next. Also several severely enthusiastic epistolary trumpet-blasts from Jim.[10] I wrote to Tom Hallam[11] some time ago: the address was a *chef-d'oeuvre* of orthography: the villain has not yet answered me. His condition, I take it, may be summed up in one (French) word: *Basé*!

Have you got a spare crown to dispose of? — I suffer much from impecuniosity — the old ailment! And I owe my respected landlady a few shillings. If you have, overcome your dislike to letter-writing so far as to P.O.O. me to that amount.

I am wonderfully better: must not walk, though, yet! — My love to Lawrence.[12] — Yours, old man,

W.E.H.

[6] The American medical professor and writer Oliver Wendell Holmes (1809-94), author of *The Professor at the Breakfast-Table* (1860) and *The Autocrat at the Breakfast-Table* (1858).

[7] One of many unidentified friends and acquaintances.

[8] Another unidentified friend.

[9] A novel by Pierre [Ambrose François] Choderlos de Laclos (1714-1803), French general and novelist, published in 1782.

[10] James Runciman (1852-91), schoolteacher in the East End of London and later journalist and writer. He worked mainly for the weekly journal *Vanity Fair* and the *St James's Gazette*. He and WEH eventually quarrelled.

[11] Thomas Hallam (?1849-1932), relation of Nichols and a schoolteacher. At this time he had started his teaching career at Waltham Abbey Board School after training at The British and Foreign School Society, Borough Road, London.

[12] Another friend.

To Miss Page,[1] 16 March 1873
ALS: Hayward. Published in Glines, 340-41.

Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary, Margate

Dear Miss Page,

My conscience has oftimes smitten me sore for my unpardonable neglect of you which I am at a loss either to explain or to excuse. I have been many times on the point of writing, but some trifle has always occurred to defer the good action, or I needed no less a stimulus than your kind letter to oblige me to instant & practical repentance. Accordingly, I sent you, on Friday last, a packet of *MSS.* — & to-day, Sunday, after having yawned my head off, I feel that I can't do better than pay my debt to you: which I does.

I am really seriously ill. That is to say, my right & only foot is in a parlous state of disease. I do not think it will need amputation; in fact I am doubtful whether a simple incision will be required: but it is bad, & many months must elapse before it can be to me half so useful as you knew it. Where these months will be passed, I have really no idea: here, I suppose, or in the workhouse; but certainly not in Bohemia, nor in any adjacent regions.

I have been an inmate of this admirable institution some three weeks. I am very uncomfortable: as yet I have a good straw bed, plenty of sheets & blankets, and as much milk & meat as is good for me; also a nice young person, of the severest virtue, to wake me in the mornings. I smoke a good deal, read a little, write not much, play occasional Whist & Euchre, & see the surgeon once a week. I have sent Pegasus out to grass,[2] abandoned the imbibition of deleterious mixtures, & forgotten the black eyes that caused me (at least a month ago) so much sorrow, anxiety, & lyrical agitation. The past is dead & buried, the Present is not altogether discouraging, & the Future is of no consequence nor interest to me. Ought I not to be happy?

I should be, I think, if I were turfed: but I don't see any chance of that desirable consummation just yet. So I must e'en make the best of that bad bargain, my life, a while longer. Till the end, then, as I am, I shall be. Healthy, isn't it?

You will be surprized to hear that, short as has been my sojourn, I enjoy a most villainous reputation here. With such a character as mine, the least I could do, if I wished to act up to it, would be to seduce all the nurses on the establishment. As, however, such is not my desire, I have formed, solely with the idea of rehabilitating my reputation, an Anti-Female League, under my own

[1] Miss Page has not been identified but it seems she and her family were well known to WEH who corresponded with her between 1870 and 1873. She appears to have had a brother Frank. There is a similarity of content in WEH's letters to both Miss Page and Nichols but his approach to Nichols is more masculine and personal.
[2] Abandoned writing poetry.

presidency, the members of which bind themselves by fearful oaths never to look kindly on woman more, & never to miss an opportunity of telling the truth (in other words, of spreading ill) of her. I regret to say that my efforts in the cause of the idea have hitherto met with but scant success, my following being divided as to how far the principle should be carried out, while the womankind do their best, by abstraction of creature comforts, to compel the enlightened back to darkness. But I don't despair.

I am sorry to say they have been but badly off at home of late. The address is 19 Portland Rd. Notting Hill.[3] You must make your own excuses.

I rejoice greatly for Fid's success: he has the ball at his foot now, & I hope he'll keep it. Give Frank my blessing & tell him that, if he wishes to retain my regard, he must altogether abandon the society of everything in petticoats, his relatives excepted. My kindest regards to Papa & Mama, & I do hope Papa will soon hit the mark. My most distinguished compliments to yourself & the Chief Justice: we shall no doubt meet again someday. Till then, farewell!

W.E.H.

P.S. — Miss Turner! Uh, but! Return *MS.* when you have read & admired & don't fail to criticize. I enclose the Valentine I was fool enough to waste on — but no matter! It is good!

[3] According to the 1871 census a commission agent Mr Baynes and his family were living there. *Kelly's Post Office Directory* for 1873 shows a William Pilling, tailor, as resident. WEH's mother and brothers were living here.

To Harry Nichols, 18 April 1873

ALS: Huntington. Part published in Hallam, 203.

Royal Sea-Bathing Infirmary, Margate

I ought to have replied to you ere this, old man, to have acknowledged your kindness with the promptitude it deserves. But the fact is, I have been so elated during the last few days with the unwanted chinking of silver, that I have not been able even to smoke steadily. I thank you indeed for your goodness & loving kindness, which have relieved me from a very nasty state of things: from a more abject impecuniosity than I ever remember to have undergone. To you then be all thanks! — If I *can* do anything for you, command me, my emperor, for I'm yours to the shoe-string.

I don't suppose I shall write you a very lively letter; for it is raining, & I have just been prayed over for upwards of ten minutes: which circumstances would, I think be sufficient to excuse even absolute flatness, staleness, &

unprofitableness.[1] It is a sorrowful business for me, my boy, this morning prayers. I sit among the crowd, dreaming vaguely of far other matters: of yourself, perhaps — of my beloved London, of the girl who might have been so much to me & who is so little: & our esteemed pastor is all while babbling monotonously of — you know the cant of his clique? — And presently the hymn wakes me, & I sit & shudder at the horrible cacophony; for piety & harmony, my boy are by no means synonymous. And then follows another specimen of ministerial faith & eloquence, which completes my frustration: till, when we emerge, I feel as abject & spiritless a thing as an onanist of ten years' practise. I am afraid I am one of the wicked, an irreclaimable scoundrel, my son! — For I am beginning to hate with a mortal unquenchable hatred the whole superstructure that ecclesiasticism has builded on the teaching of the Son of Man. I enclose you an extract from Shelley, which will, in some sort, explain my sentiments. I am not quite so far gone yet, but I am getting rapidly on that way. I expect another doing shortly: in the wards. The weather has delivered me into his hand: there is no escape.

(Interval of ten minutes: Mrs Jones)[2]

The ten minutes in question have expanded into fifty: I have had a satisfactory interview with Mrs. J. & I dodged the chaplain; consequently I feel much better. A little lotion now, & I should be right as a trivet.

I have heard of Mr. Arthur Creighton:[3] in fact, I know all about him. But I have not heard that he shines as a composer. I don't know that it is much use to send him any of my songs: but however, I shall post you the Song-Cycle I told you of. You can — & will, I hope! — read it yourself; & if any of the numbers please him he is welcome to try his hand upon them. I must, however, hear the setting before the public is so honoured. Writing a song, my boy, is not an easy art, whatever you may think to the contrary: & rather than anything of my begetting should appear coupled to such rot as Claribel[4] was wont to engender, they should all remain unheard till the end of time.

Majesty is tolerably well — as well, that is to say, as he is ever likely to be, without attendance & good grub. But horrid poor! I shall see him to-morrow & will then give him your message. But as he is mediating a journey to London, it is more than possible that you will soon have the honour of entertaining his Kingship in person. If you do, I adjure you, think of his anxious mother, & don't pour too much Irish into his manly guts. He has enormous capacities for

[1] 'How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable / Seem to me all the uses of this world!' *Hamlet*, I. ii. 33-4.
[2] Mrs Jones may have been the Almoner.
[3] Probably the composer Arthur W. Creighton.
[4] Pseudonym of Charlotte Alington Barnard (1830-69), ballad writer and poet.

consumption, but he lushes then, by instinct, till he cannot even fart. So pray be careful!

Excellent good is very excellent Shakespearean English: but it is *not* modern grammar.

I had intended to say something about my life here, but, on second thoughts, it will come better from my very lips over a pipe & some 'Hirish 'ot. I shall content myself with observing that it goes on with a sameness & facility that are absolutely demoralising. I suffer much from want of books; all these that I have with me having been sucked dry long ago. And I find composition quite an impossibility. I have not written a line since Valentine's Eve, when I engendered the lyric which you will find on the last page: it is not bad. I seem quite worked out: no energy, no will, no guts: since Molly Crump turned me up for good and all. If I ever write again, it will be something very different to all that I have hitherto done. All that I now do, is to absorb sun & sea-air: my verses will be none the worse for *their* presence, eh?

Apropos of the said Molly, as I foretold you, she has never been to see me, & I do not fancy she will ever come. She belongs already to the past, & though I have suffered much, though I shall suffer yet, I am wearing regret every day. I suppose I ought to confess that she was wiser than I, & that what has happened is the best for both of us. Also to own that I was thoroughly licked! — How is this? — She is just nineteen, not witty, not learned in books or the world: & I — well you know *me*! — And yet if I had been a schoolboy in the hands of a woman of forty, I could not have been more perfectly *flambé*! — However, I have bought & paid for my experience: I doubt not that it will serve me. I intend making another attempt presently. You shall be advised how I fare: in due course.

Have you heard *Fleur de Leys* yet?[5] Are you going to do the *Wandering Jew*?[6] Did you watch that lying version of the arch-liar *Charles I*?[7] Are you going for *Eugene Aram*?[8] — I am glad you don't get tight so often: I shall make a man of you yet. As for your helps, to parody Artemus,[9] helps is a poison:

[5] A three act *opéra-bouffe* by Henry Brougham Farnie (?1837-89) with music from the opera of the same name by Leo Delibes (1836-91), had its first English performance on Saturday 5 April 1873 at the Philharmonic Theatre, London, and closed on 14 June 1873.

[6] A romantic drama by Leopold David Lewis (1828-90), opened on Monday 14 April 1873 at the Royal Adelphi Theatre, London, and closed on 1 October 1873.

[7] A play by William Gorman Wills (1828-91), which opened on 28 September 1872 and closed on 28 September 1873.

[8] *The Fate of Eugene Aram*, a play by Wills, opened on 19 April 1873 at the Lyceum Theatre, London, and closed on 20 June 1873.

[9] Artemus Ward, pen-name of the American journalist and humorist Charles Farrar Browne (1834-67). He was editor of the New York *Vanity Fair* and later a contributor to *Punch*.

however, if you don't deprive too many of them of their *virtue*, you will do well in course of time. I will report on Osbourne.[10] A double health to thee!

Thine ever,
W.E.H.

A Valentine

=1=
Up, my Song! — Unfold me thy wings
Brilliant & broad as a marvellous bird's;
Feed thee with fancies of exquisite things,
Robe thee in raiment of passionate words:
Forget for a while that thy master weeps
The glad sweet thing that may hardly be;
Seek me the spot where my Lady sleeps,
And bear her a message from Love & me.

=2=
Breathe me a sigh in her innocent ear,
Look me a smile in her bright bland eyes;
A sigh & a smile, & a word & a tear
For the dream that lives & the hope that dies;
Lay me a kiss on her flower-like lips,
And tell her that long as our blood shall beat,
Our life lives to be laid at her feet.

W. E. H.

[10] Presumably another friend.