

this friendship, the letters are perhaps worth reading; but they will add nothing to the fame of Dickens, and we fancy that only those interested in the trade of literature will care to read the collection through.

LETTERS OF CHARLES DICKENS TO WILKIE COLLINS.*

THE title of this book will attract many readers who will suppose, as Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins were brilliant men, that their correspondence must be worth reading. We know what entertaining letters Dickens could write when he had the time for it; but these epistles were written when he was the overworked editor of *Household Words*, and when every spare moment had to be given to writing *Little Dorrit* and other long novels. He was also giving readings and getting up plays; so that these letters are, for the most part, only hasty business notes dealing with the editorial work which they shared together:

MY DEAR COLLINS: I am very sorry that we shall not have you tomorrow. Think you would get on better if you were to come after all. Yes, sir; thank God, I have finished *Little Dorrit*. On Sunday last I wrote the two little words of three letters each. Any mad proposal you please will find a wildly insane response in

Yours ever, C. D.

This is a fair example of the average style of the letters. They have an interest as showing Dickens' methods of work and his dependence on the society and sympathy of his friends; occasionally, too, we see the great novelist playing with his thoughts in his own peculiarly humorous way; but generally the letters are so brief that it scarcely seems worth while to publish them. Among the exceptions is a letter to Collins asking him to go on a trip:

Partly in the grim despair and restlessness of this subsidence from excitement, and partly for the sake of *Household Words*, I want to cast about whether you and I can go anywhere, take any journey, see anything, whereon we could write something together. Have you any idea tending to any place in the world? Will you rattle your head and see if there is any pebble in it which we could wander away and play at marbles with? We want something for *Household Words*, and I want to escape from myself. For when I do start up and stare myself seedily in the face, as happens to be my case at present, my blankness is indescribable — my misery amazing.

Another excellent bit is an imitation of Carlyle:

Glad to hear of our friend Regnier. As Carlyle would put it: "A deft and shifty little man, brisk and sudden, of most ingenious carpentering faculty, and not without constructive qualities of a higher than the Beaver sort. Withal an actor, though of a somewhat hard tone. Think pleasantly of him, O ye children of men!"

The friendship between Dickens and Wilkie Collins was sincere and generous. Dickens criticised Collins' literary work, and Collins accepted his criticisms in the spirit in which they were given. As a proof of

* Letters of Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins. Edited by Laurence Hutton. Harper & Brothers.