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Author(s): John O. Waller

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CHARLES DICKENS AND THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

By JOHN O. WALLER

Students of Charles Dickens' life and ideas have largely neglected the story of his attitude toward the American Civil War. His most thorough biographer states that he "had no sympathy with either side,"¹ but such an appraisal overlooks too much. As the hard-working editor of a popular weekly magazine, Dickens could not easily remain neutral toward a war which had quickly aroused a bitter debate in England. We shall see that for the first year after secession Dickens' policy was pro-Northern but thereafter was pro-Southern; and I think that we can trace the decisive influence in his personal and editorial changeover.

Of course, Dickens' attitude toward the Civil War was related to the often-rehearsed story of his long-standing emotional aversion to the United States: how he visited this country in 1842, was feted lavishly as well as endlessly gawked at wherever he went, involved himself in a controversy with the American press over international copyright, became disenchanted with many things American, returned to England to write a mildly uncomplimentary book, *American Notes for General Circulation*, for which he was mercilessly assailed in America and unfavorably reviewed in England, wrote a devastating counterblast into parts of *Martin Chuzzlewit*, was disappointed in the sales of this novel, was wounded in his pride as an analyst, and was ever afterward angry at the United States and quick to defend his earlier analyses of it. Robert B. Heilman has pointed out his life-long sensitiveness about attacks on his American books.² Ada B. Nisbet writes, "Being Dickens, he never accepted or forgot the criticism of the *American Notes*, nor did he ever forgive America for having been the cause of his humiliation."³

It would be misleading, however, to suggest that Dickens spent

¹ Edgar Johnson, *Charles Dickens: His Tragedy and Triumph* (New York, 1952), II, 1002.

² "The New World in Dickens' Writings," *The Trollopian*, Number 3 (September, 1946), pp. 32-38.

³ "The Mystery of Martin Chuzzlewit," *Essays Critical and Historical: Dedicated to Lily B. Campbell* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1950), p. 214.

the rest of his life in a prolonged anti-American crusade. Among his manifold preoccupations, America held a small enough place. The quality of his comments, not the quantity, affirms his life-long grievance.

In fact, Dickens personally published but one article commenting on the American Civil War, and that piece, "The Young Man from the Country," printed in his magazine, *All the Year Round*, consisted only of several controversial passages lifted verbatim from his *American Notes*, following which Dickens underlined his moral: "The foregoing was written in the year eighteen hundred and forty-two. It rests with the reader to decide whether it has received any confirmation, or assumed any colour of truth, in or about the year eighteen hundred and sixty-two."⁴ The article itself was neutral enough, implying disfavor toward both sides, and making the war seem most interesting as a vindication of Dickens' books. Dickens liked this article so well that he referred to it several months later in a footnote to an article by another writer.⁵

But Dickens' one piece by no means represents the performance of *All the Year Round*, which during the war years offered no fewer than twenty-five colorful articles about the war. Recent scholarship has revealed Dickens' editorial methods, which were so thorough that they almost tax belief.⁶ Dickens never relaxed his personal supervision of every weekly issue. His sub-editor, W. H. Wills, would work over manuscripts first, but had to send the material which he liked to Dickens, wherever Dickens might happen to be. Then Dickens would go through each manuscript with minute care, revising the writing, correcting the punctuation, adding characteristic Dickensian touches, until his writers were often unjustly taunted with being mere slavish imitators of their master.⁷ Gerald Grubb quotes Dickens' son that "Nothing was considered too small, no detail was too petty, for his personal attention," and

⁴ *AYR*, VI (March 1, 1862), 540-42.

⁵ *AYR*, VIII (November 1, 1862), 175n.

⁶ The most thorough study of this topic has been by Gerald Giles Grubb. See his articles, "Dickens' Editorial Methods," *SP*, XL (January, 1943), 79-100; "Dickens' Influence as an Editor," *SP*, XLII (October, 1945), 811-23; and "The Editorial Policies of Charles Dickens," *PMLA*, LVIII (December, 1943), 1110-24.

⁷ George Augustus Sala, *Things I Have Seen and People I Have Known* (London, 1894), I, 78-79; Percy Fitzgerald, *Recreations of a Literary Man* (London, 1883), pp. 29-59.

adds that Dickens continued this sort of editorial vigilance for the remainder of his life, except for his second trip to the United States in 1867-68.⁸

Furthermore, Dickens supervised the political sentiments as well as the writing. We have his own announcement to that effect, issued during the middle of the Civil War. Charles Reade had published in *All the Year Round* a serialized novel *Very Hard Cash*, in which he had attacked the Commissioners in Lunacy, which body included Dickens' close friend John Forster.⁹ Wishing to dissociate himself from Reade's opinions, Dickens spelled out his policy:

The statements and opinions of this Journal, generally are, of course, to be received as the statements and opinions of its Conductor. But this is not so, in the case of a work of fiction first published in these pages as a serial story, with the name of an eminent writer attached to it. When one of my literary brothers does me the honour to undertake such a task, I hold that he executes it on his own personal responsibility, and for the sustainment of his own reputation; and I do not consider myself at liberty to exercise that control over his text which I claim as to other contributors.¹⁰

It would seem, then, that Dickens' magazines, *All the Year Round* and its predecessor *Household Words*, are legitimate, though largely neglected, sources for Dickens' broad political beliefs.

All the Year Round did not pretend to any continuous commentary on news events, although it sensibly tailored its material to its readers' current interests. The most arresting items concerning the Civil War were not expository or argumentative articles, such as appeared in the conventional literary reviews, but anonymous first-person, "true adventure" narratives, in which stock American characters were put through melodramatic paces and left to illustrate the state of American affairs. With all their apparent enormities, these pieces have a surface verisimilitude that must have been convincing to many English readers. There were also several summaries, with selected anecdotes, of books by English and European travelers returned from the United States. All in all, the emphasis was heavily narrative.

⁸ *SP*, XL (January, 1943), 79, 83, quoting Charles Dickens, Jr., "Dickens as Editor," *The Critic*, XII (August 17, 1889), 81.

⁹ [John Camden Hotten,] *Charles Dickens, The Story of His Life* (London, ca. 1870), pp. 271-72.

¹⁰ *AYR*, X (December 26, 1863), 419.

The policy of *All the Year Round* concerning the Civil War underwent a decided change in the late winter of 1861. Articles appearing after Lincoln's election and before December, 1861, if not positively pro-Northern, leave an unfavorable impression of the South by emphasizing the evils of slavery and the arrogance of the Southern "King Cotton" policy. But articles appearing after December, 1861, leave an impression uniformly unfavorable to the North and frequently praise the South.

On December 29, 1860, appeared a summary-review of *A Journey Into the Back Country* by Frederick L. Olmsted, which described the least lovely aspects of slavery in one of the then least cultured of Southern areas, the Lower Mississippi Valley. The South was threatening the Union because its candidate was defeated and it favored extension of slavery. The article pictured unhospitable plantation owners, profligate pampered sons of planters, cruel overseers flogging their slaves, and dirty Southern cities with pigs running in public parks. Education was in a low state among the slaves, and religion was discouraged. An overseer boasts, "Why, sir, I wouldn't mind killing a nigger more than I would a dog." The South wished to reopen the African slave trade, a move which should never be permitted.¹¹

Another purported travel account appeared in the issue of May 18, 1861, describing the deep-seated sectional hatreds that alienated North from South. The deepest quarrel was trade jealousy; the South was jealous of the North's domination of manufacturing and commerce, while the North resented the South's superior soil. In a scene on an Ohio River steamer, an elderly Southern gentleman silenced a group of fuming fellow Southerners:

I tell you what, gentlemen . . . if we go out, what will *eventuate* will be that we shall be just *whipped back* again as we have been before. The North has the fleet and the army, the arsenals, the stores, the ports. How can we live without the North? It's all folly this big talk. What do we grow our cotton for? Why, to sell to the North. Who works it up for us? Why, the North. We can't move or breathe without the North, or they without us. We sell what they buy, we grow what they manufacture. It's so; we go, and they whip us back again. Good night, gentlemen all! ¹²

An article in the issue of July 13, 1861, denounced the South for

¹¹ *AYR*, IV (December 29, 1860), 269-73.

¹² *AYR*, V (May 18, 1861), 181-84.

its program of commissioning privateers to harry Northern shipping. England should strongly protest any such barbarous threat.¹³

The October 26, 1861, issue carried a sensational tale of an English physician in Morgantown, West Virginia, called upon to treat a runaway slave. Suspicious Southerners, a ruffianly ex-convict slave hunter, and bloodhounds populate the story. The physician remarked on how "wonderfully" the consciences of the whites had been warped by slavery. A West Virginian declared his opinion of abolitionists: "I only wish that we could lay a hand on them philanthropists! We'd make 'em a caution to all the rest of their breed. 'Taint tar and feathers will serve their turn, I reckon; no, nor yet flogging, nor railriding. A load of brushwood and a lucifer-match will be about their mark, I calculate."¹⁴

A story, November 2, 1861, presented an arrogant Southerner arguing with an Englishman over England's dependence on Southern cotton. The writer pictured England's widespread misery if it did not develop its own cotton fields somewhere and release itself from the failing Southern market.¹⁵

With this article, the pro-Northern policy abruptly ended. There was silence concerning America for a month, and beginning with the December 7 issue, the magazine became pro-Southern.

To what may we attribute Dickens' change? Possibly to a number of factors, but I am convinced that a determining one was a highly persuasive pro-Southern book which, as his letters show, he was reading just at this time. It was *The American Union, Its Effects on National Character and Policy, With an Inquiry Into Secession as a Constitutional Right, and the Causes of Disruption*, published late in 1861 by a Liverpool merchant, James Spence,¹⁶ who for a time was perhaps the most effective English pro-Southern propagandist. The Southern historian Frank Lawrence Owsley calls the book, "the most effective propaganda of all by either native or Confederate agent."¹⁷ (Later Spence became active in agitating for the South among the English laboring classes, organizing mass meetings to compete with the pro-Northern rallies of the Forster-Bright faction. He worked closely with James

¹³ *AYR*, V (July 13, 1861), 382-84.

¹⁴ *AYR*, VI (October 26, 1861), 382-84.

¹⁵ *AYR*, VI (November 2, 1861), 125-28.

¹⁶ Citations are to fourth edition (London, 1862).

¹⁷ *King Cotton Diplomacy* (Chicago, 1931), pp. 186-87.

Mason, Confederate envoy, and himself finally became a paid Confederate agent. In time he broke with his Confederate associates because he insisted upon talking about ultimate emancipation.¹⁸)

Dickens' copy of *The American Union* had been sent by Spence himself and inscribed "Charles Dickens, from an old unknown friend, the Author."¹⁹ Dickens became so anxious that the book be adequately reviewed in his previously pro-Northern magazine that he twice mentioned the matter in letters to Wills and in a third letter expressed dissatisfaction with the finished review,²⁰ although as we shall see, this review launched the magazine on its new pro-Southern policy.

Dickens' fully developed opinion of the war is neatly stated in a letter to his Swiss friend, W. F. de Cerjat, dated March 16, 1862.²¹ Every idea but one in the letter may be found explicitly presented by Spence, and its important ideas are given complete chapters in the book. A brief idea-by-idea comparison will demonstrate. Dickens: Slavery had "in reality nothing on earth to do" with the Northern war effort, at least not "in any kind of association with any generous or chivalrous sentiment on the part of the North." Abolition was only a pretext to cloak less admirable designs. Spence opens a chapter with this idea (p. 119) and develops it through most of the chapter (pp. 119-65). Dickens: The real grievance of the South was that the North had gradually seized the balance of political power. This topic also is given an entire chapter in Spence (pp. 83-118). Dickens: The North had used its advantage to pass tariffs injurious to the South and to tax "the South most abominably for its own advantage." This idea, too, gets a whole chapter (pp. 166-97), in which Spence argues that the tariff question, of all "the causes of convulsion . . . probably had the greatest weight upon the mind of the Southern people, although the other causes . . . have had much more influence in exciting their feeling." Dickens: Now the North had seen that unless it could limit the extension of slave territory, "the South would necessarily recover its old political power, and be able to help itself

¹⁸ Owsley, pp. 186-94.

¹⁹ J. H. Stonehouse, ed., *Reprints of the Catalogues of Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray* (London, 1935), p. 104.

²⁰ Walter Dexter, ed., *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (London, 1938), III, 263, 265, 266. Hereafter cited as *Letters*.

²¹ *Letters*, III, 288-89.

a little in the adjustment of commercial affairs." Spence emphasizes this (pp. 108-09): the struggle over slave territory was really a fight for Senate seats. Dickens: "Any reasonable creature may know, if willing, that the North hates the Negro, and that until it was convenient to make a pretence that sympathy with him was the cause of the war, it hated the abolitionists and derided them up hill and down dale." Martin Chuzzlewit had discovered for himself that Northerners hated Negroes, but Spence emphasized the point, too (p. 150). And Spence had said of the abolitionists (p. 136), "By the mass of the people of the North they were avoided and ridiculed." Dickens: North and South would both "rant and lie and fight until they come to a compromise." The slave might be "thrown into that compromise or thrown out of it, just as it happens." Aside from the political issues already mentioned, there was "not a pin to choose between the two parties." Spence was too partial to the South to denounce both parties or predict a compromise, but ranting and lying were among the national characteristics which he attributed to Americans as a result of the damning effect of the federal Union (pp. 46-82).

Dickens' final points seem so obviously drawn from Spence as to remove all uncertainty from the comparison. Dickens: Secession might not be rebellion at all; at any rate it was "distinctly possible," on the evidence of "state papers, that [George] Washington considered it no such thing—that Massachusetts, now loudest against it, has itself asserted its right to secede, again and again." The contention that secession was not rebellion but a constitutional right was given a chapter by Spence (pp. 198-246), but most significantly, Spence, too, had made the point concerning George Washington (pp. 207-08):

. . . when Washington expressed reluctance to be elected as president for a second term, Jefferson wrote to urge his assent; and the weightiest reason he assigned, in proof that the country required experience at the head of affairs, was this,—that the coming election would involve great danger of a "secession from the Union" of those who should be defeated. It can hardly be supposed that this right would have been openly declared by members of Congress, or that the probability of the event would have been thus urged on Washington, had it been regarded by public opinion as an illegal or treasonable act.

And concerning Massachusetts, Spence had written (p. 209): "The State of Massachusetts has threatened, indeed, on four

separate occasions to secede from the Union." These two specific points, in concurrence with all the others, seem clinching evidence that Dickens had found in Spence the interpretation of the Civil War most compatible to his feelings. In fact, the letter to Cerjat in fewer than three hundred words did a fairly creditable job of summarizing Spence's book.

Few, if any, of Spence's ideas were original or confined only to his book, but the impressive compilation of apparent fact and persuasive argument under one cover must have been hard for the busy Dickens, with his initial dislike of America, to resist. His aversion to slavery had kept him away from the Southern camp until Spence provided him with a convincing rationalization that the Northern case had nothing truly to do with slavery. After that, he could follow his feelings and act against the Union.

As we have seen, however, one idea in Dickens' letter cannot be found in Spence, nor was it common in pro-Southern propaganda. It was the flat prediction that eventually the conflict would end in some sort of shameful compromise. This, it happens, was an early and persistent idea with Dickens. Before fighting even started, he predicted in a letter to Cerjat, February 1, 1861, that "the struggle of violence will be a short one, and will soon be succeeded by some new compact."²² After Bull Run, he wrote to Wills, August 31, 1861: "I stick to my prediction that the people of the North (in America) will neither raise the money nor the men required by the Government; and that an ignoble and contemptible compromise will be made soon."²³ As late as May 21, 1863, six weeks before Gettysburg, Dickens was still predicting to Cerjat that the North would fail to provide enough soldiers and thus "the war will finish. . . . We shall see. The more they brag the more I don't believe in them."²⁴

Other private letters confirm Dickens' disdain for the North. When his friend Frederick Lehmann (himself pro-Northern) took a business trip to America in the summer of 1862, Dickens wrote: "Heaven speed you in that distracted land of troublesome vagabonds."²⁵ When Lehmann returned in the spring of 1863, confident that the North would ultimately win, Dickens treated his opinion "as a harmless hallucination."²⁶ When the war was

²² *Letters*, III, 209.

²⁴ *Letters*, III, 353.

²³ *Letters*, III, 233.

²⁵ *Letters*, III, 300.

²⁶ R. C. Lehmann, ed., *Memories of Half a Century* (London, 1908), p. 43.

nearly over, March 1, 1865, Dickens again declared himself "a Southern sympathizer to this extent" that he could never believe "in the Northern love of the black man, or in the Northern horror of slavery having anything to do with the beginning of the war, save as a pretence."²⁷

The war over, Dickens, hearing anti-English rumblings in the victorious North, was ready to go even farther and express regret that England had not actively intervened to split the Union. Much as he disliked "the French Usurper," he wrote Cerjat on November 30, 1865, he believed "him to have always been sound in his desire to divide the States against themselves, and that we were unsound and wrong in 'letting I dare not wait upon I would!'"²⁸

But to return to *All the Year Round*—on December 7, 1861, had appeared the first hint of its changed editorial position. An article about the English cotton supply called the war undoubtedly "a war of tariffs . . . slavery as its cause being a false issue and a Northern pretext,"²⁹ an opinion which agrees, of course, with Spence. In these same early days of December, 1861, Dickens was prodding Wills to make sure that Henry Morley's review of Spence's book was prepared to appear on schedule.³⁰ He may himself have interpolated the statement that slavery was only a false Northern pretext.

When Morley's review of Spence's book finally reached Dickens, it failed to satisfy him. "It is scarcely possible," he complained to Wills, "to make less of Mr. Spence's book than Morley has done."³¹ Whatever its shortcomings, the review, running in two issues, tore into the Northern cause and committed *All the Year Round* effectively enough to an open pro-Southern policy. With Spence

²⁷ *Letters*, III, 416.

²⁸ *Letters*, III, 445. But we must note that Dickens had not always spoken favorably of Louis Napoleon's intervention schemes. On August 1, 1863, he had written to the American William Wetmore Story: "France will involve us, I very much fear, in general War and Uproar. The Adventurer on that Throne has no chance but in the distraction of his people's minds, and in the jingle and glitter of theatrical glory. The deference to him that has been the low policy of the English Government is, to my thinking, as blind as it is base;—I can't express its wants or write more strongly" (*Letters*, III, 358).

²⁹ *AYR*, VI (December 7, 1861), 256-70.

³⁰ See my note 20.

³¹ *Letters*, III, 266.

it contended that the United States had grown too big and unwieldy for efficient and honest administration. Two American nations were natural and desirable, considering conflicting sectional interests and characters. Only the blindness and wrong-headedness of Northern statesmen made them resist. Nobody in England admired slavery, but the North was not fighting to destroy slavery or even to confine it to boundaries. The North was really fighting to "claim its right of continued participation" in the evil benefits of slavery. Actually (and all these points had been made by Spence), slavery was safer with the power of the entire Union behind it.³² Morley carried on his argument in the following issue, quoting Spence to prove that the fight was really one of tariffs.³³

In the same issue with Morley's first article was a purely topical piece, growing out of the American boarding of the *Trent*. It depicted a sea battle in the War of 1812, in which an English ship had defeated an American ship. Such victories might well be repeated soon:

The fact is, the Americans are like a party of overbearing schoolboys, who want a sound thrashing and to be turned down to the lower forms before they can be said to be rebuked. Apparently they are exceedingly ambitious that we should hold the rod, when they may be sure we shall not spare the stripes. . . . It is not unlikely that the affair of the *Trent* and San Jacinto may have other and sterner outgrowths . . . which will bear the mark of England's shaping hand and the impress of her conquering foot; the thin gay flags, torn and soiled with blood, hauled down, and the Union Jack floating from the top.³⁴

On March 1, 1862, appeared Dickens' own article, previously described, "The Young Man from the Country." Next, in April, came a melodramatic confession of a slaveowner's daughter who was stunned to learn that her mother had been a slave. This narrative had most of the characteristics of sensational abolitionist fiction, but it did not mean that the magazine was reverting to the North. The writer (or perhaps the editor) was careful to have the heroine escape to England, not to the North, where she might "have been free, and yet have lived degraded."³⁵ And the next seven American articles, at least, were anti-Northern or pro-Southern.

³² *AYR*, VI (December 21, 1861), 295-300.

³³ *AYR*, VI (December 28, 1861), 328-31.

³⁴ *AYR*, VI (December 21, 1861), 310-12.

³⁵ *AYR*, VII (April 26, 1862), 155-63.

Three of those articles were anecdotes from published accounts of Prince Napoleon's and Princess Clotilde's visit to the United States in the summer of 1861.³⁶ The stories cast disfavor on the North and democracy, displaying Northern demonstrations honoring "runaways" from Bull Run, shabby recruiting techniques attracting unemployed immigrants into the Northern armies, the awkwardness of Abraham Lincoln, the poorly disciplined Northern troops as compared with the smartness of the Confederate Army. The last real American statesmen had died, Clay, Webster, Calhoun; a very few public men were intelligent, patriotic, and moral (but Lincoln was not included). The last of the three French articles, on September 12, 1863, two full years after the Prince's visit, was still described as "a faithful picture of Transatlantic ways and doings."

Other articles in those years told various stories hostile to the North: about a poor Confederate boy killed in battle;³⁷ about the tribulations of an Englishman who was plied with drugged liquor and forced into the Federal army;³⁸ about the ruffianly conduct of a Union naval party stopping a blockade runner;³⁹ and about an unprincipled Northern profiteering river boat outwitted and boarded by a small band of patriotic Southerners.⁴⁰

A sketch, October 29, 1864, described a packet of Mobile newspapers which had reached England through the blockade. They told an arresting human interest story about the "brave defenders of Mobile," including a Southern belle calling in impassioned verse for more belligerence from her swain; she would be the bride of a hero:

Now, now, while Freedom's trumpets blow,
While Freedom's banners wave,
And call on all to meet the foe,
Shrink not, thou Southern brave. . . .
Our hearts are only for the brave,
Our hands are for the free.

A newspaper item revealed that Mobile had a "British Guard,

³⁶ *AYR*, VII (September 6, 1862), 612-16; VIII (November 1, 1862), 174-80; X (September 12, 1863), 69-72.

³⁷ *AYR*, VII (May 17, 1862), 224-30.

³⁸ *AYR*, X (January 23, 1864), 512-16.

³⁹ *AYR*, XI (July 2, 1864), 497-504.

⁴⁰ *AYR*, XII (October 15, 1864), 235-40.

Co. B," upon which Dickens' writer dilated joyfully: "Here is an item now, coming through the blockade. Who of us, I wonder, knew that there was a British guard among the defenders of Mobile, with two companies at least, for B supposes A, and may be followed by C, D, and E, up to a full regiment. Is there such a corps as a "British Guard" in the Federal Army? It is probably the only organised nationality that could not be found embodied on the side of the Union."⁴¹ There was a note of requiem, however; it was late in the day for the Confederate cause. The writer paid tribute to Southern bravery, patience, and persistence as a surprise to friend and foe alike, but ended on a strain of pessimistic praise: "Whatever the termination of the great struggle for empire or independence, no one can deny to the Southern people the qualities they have manifested in four years of privation and war. . . ." This was the final substantial comment published on either side of the question by Dickens' weekly.

Dickens' letters allow us to trace the authorship of three other magazine stories, from which I must resist the temptation to quote, a melodramatic series, bitterly anti-Northern, entitled "A Trip to the Unholy Land," posing as the true experiences of an Englishman visiting wartime America.⁴² They were written not by an Englishman, not by any man, but by an enterprising American woman, Mary Sargeant Gove Nichols, a Southern sympathizer from New Hampshire who, with her husband, Dr. Thomas L. Nichols, a former New York newspaperman, had come to England. Settling in London, Dr. Nichols published a two-volume work, *Forty Years of American Life*, bitterly denouncing the United States.⁴³ Mrs.

⁴¹ *AYR*, XII (October 29, 1864), 281-82. See Ella Lonn, *Foreigners in the Confederacy* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina, 1940), pp. 98-99, for ironical confirmation that there were, indeed, two companies of British Guards in Mobile. But they were not part of the Confederate Army. They had volunteered with the express stipulation that they were not liable for duty outside the Mobile area. Writes the historian: "Until called out for service they were not liable to the rules of war, the orders of military authorities, or the army regulations, and they were not to be called into actual service until the enemy advanced on the city. . . . The purpose of the foreigners in tendering their services may have been to evade conscription."

⁴² *AYR*, IX (July 18, 1863), 500-04; XI (July 25, 1863), 524-28; XII (August 27, 1864), 58-62.

⁴³ *Forty Years of American Life* (London, 1864). A second edition

Nichols, as we can see from Dickens' replies to her letters, set about systematically to make a conquest of England's most prominent novelist—and also one of its best-paying editors. Her first proffered contribution was a laudatory appreciation of Dickens himself. Dickens sensibly declined to buy it for his journal, but he gladly received her at his editorial offices, an act of hospitality which he may have later come to regret.⁴⁴ In the ensuing year and a half, Dickens wrote her no fewer than twenty letters, most of them courteously rejecting some unusable manuscript or regretfully refusing various favors she had asked of him all the way from securing theater passes for her daughter to accompanying her herself to a spiritualist seance. Finally, he rejected one manuscript too many and she brought their friendship to an end.⁴⁵

In rejecting one of Mrs. Nichols' manuscripts in the summer of 1864, Dickens gave an editorial reason that may partially explain why, although he made his journal moderately pro-Southern, he did not make it more so: "I believe your countrymen are not now in the mood to be told anything *from this side of the water* concerning themselves, and that they would unconsciously misrepresent the intention, and that we should do more harm than good."⁴⁶ Most English periodicals which commented on the war obviously aimed primarily at an English, not an American, audience. This one sentence is hardly proof that Dickens did otherwise. He was addressing an American and may have only used the appeal which seemed likely to mean most to her. It may, however, indicate that Dickens, when he accepted anti-Northern material was, as in his "Young Man from the Country" article, thinking first of that American audience which had given him the lie in 1842.

The whole matter, though, may be easily exaggerated. One need only compare the mere two dozen or so American items appearing

(1874) was printed with an introduction proudly citing (p. vii) the reviews of the earlier edition in various pro-Southern English journals. Nichols was especially gratified by the puff given him in *The Index*, official Confederate government propaganda sheet: "We can scarcely recall a case since Washington Irving in which an American author has received a warmer or more unanimous welcome in England. When an author has satisfied the *Quarterly*, the *Examiner*, and the *Saturday Review*, he may well be content."

⁴⁴ *Letters*, III, 349-50.

⁴⁵ *Letters*, III, 349-404, *passim*.

⁴⁶ *Letters*, III, 395.

in *All the Year Round* during the whole war with the almost weekly leading articles in such a truly active pro-Southern journal as the *Saturday Review* to see that Dickens never became very heavily involved. A popular weekly magazine during those years of American excitement could hardly run fewer American articles and maintain any show of topicality. The American journalist George A. Townsend, a resident of England during the war years, kept his perspective when he casually remarked, "*All the Year Round* gave us a shot now and then."⁴⁷

Yet it is blunting the point too much to say that Dickens sympathized with neither side. He was certainly not transported with zeal for either side, but a truly impartial observer in a great public controversy is almost impossible to find, and one would scarcely look for him in such an emotionally impelled and decisive man as Dickens. Any support from *All the Year Round* in those years was an asset not to be overlooked. The magazine was immensely popular, enjoying a circulation in excess of that of the *London Times*,⁴⁸ having behind it the name of one of the most popular of living Englishmen, a man fully conscious of the influence he wielded. Finally, as we have seen, Dickens himself came so to regret that the Union had not been dissolved that he blamed England for not risking war to bring about that end.

*Andrews University,
Berrien Springs, Michigan*

⁴⁷ "An American Correspondent in England," *Harper's Monthly*, XXX (January, 1865), 234.

⁴⁸ Grubb, "The Editorial Policies of Charles Dickens," *PMLA*, LVIII (December, 1943), 1110.