

“Dearest Susie Pye”: New Meredith Letters to Peacock’s Natural Daughter

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*This article provides full details of a recently discovered cache of letters from George Meredith and his first wife Mary Ellen to Susan Mary Abbott (1830–1921), who in 1858 married William Mayne Neill (1824–1913). The first section focuses on the biographical background of the letters, identifying the recipient as a previously unknown natural daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, and thus a half-sister of Mary Ellen Meredith. The second section provides annotated texts of the letters, which were written in 1854–55, while the Merediths were still living together, and in 1861, more than three years after their separation and just a few months before Mary Ellen’s death. Despite Meredith’s habitual reserve, these new letters are among the most revealing personal documents to have survived his efforts to suppress all written records of his family background and first marriage. They also throw new light on Meredith’s literary work, especially the composition, revision, and publication of his first novel, *The Shaving of Shagpat*.*

IN December 2009, the British novelist Jim Powell turned his attention for the first time to a large archive of family correspondence that he had retrieved from his parents’ house after their deaths two years earlier. Among the older letters, he discovered a crumpled brown envelope with the inscription “Destroy or burn | at my death | S. M. Neill” written in black ink, in an unsteady hand, over a faint pencil notation in which only the name “George Meredith” was legible. Obviously the instruction had been read and ignored, for the envelope had been opened at least once before. Inside it were seven letters from George Meredith to a woman he addressed as “Susie Pye” (or “Susie” or “Susan” or “Pye”), all dating from the period of his first marriage to Mary Ellen Nicolls, the eldest daughter of Thomas Love Peacock. Accompanying these letters in a larger cloth envelope inscribed “George Meredith’s | Letters

to | S." were several newspaper obituaries of Meredith and a rare autograph that he sent in 1906 to Eileen Neill, identifying her as "the Granddaughter of the Venerable Dame Susie Pye."

Eileen Neill was Jim Powell's maternal grandmother, and he soon found that her paternal grandmother was Susan Mary Abbott, who was born in 1830 and who married William Mayne Neill in 1858. Although Jim was fascinated to learn that his great-great-grandmother had known and corresponded with George Meredith, a seemingly insoluble puzzle arose when he considered what the letters revealed about their relationship. One of George's letters was a brief note appended to a letter from his wife Mary, in which she not only signed herself "Your affectionate sister" but also, writing on Susan's birthday, remarked that "Baby sends aunt Susan 'me love & a kiss for her nice day.'" This was evidently not just a whim on Mary's part, or the mark of a particularly close female friendship, for George, in his first two letters, referred to himself, respectively, as Susan's "sincere brother-in-law" and "your affectionate brother." Thus, it seemed certain that Mary and Susan believed themselves to be sisters, or at least half-sisters—despite the fact that Mary was baptized as a daughter of Thomas Love Peacock and his wife Jane Gryffyd, while Susan was baptized as a daughter of John Abbott and his wife Emmeline Spencer. Compounding the mystery was the fact that Meredith addressed Susan in his first letter as "Md^{le} Susie Pye, née Abbott"—an unmarried woman whose name was formerly, but no longer, Abbott.

Finding himself with more questions than answers, Jim decided to consult an academic specialist, and a search of the Internet identified me as someone who was writing a biography of Thomas Love Peacock as well as investigating the early life of George Meredith and his failed marriage to Peacock's daughter. Jim's first letter of inquiry led to a lengthy e-mail exchange, to meetings on both sides of the Atlantic, and to the collaborative research effort that resulted in our article "A Peacock in the Attic: Insights and Secrets from Newly Discovered Letters of George Meredith" in the *Times Literary Supplement* for 22 July 2011. The present article now provides complete and fully annotated texts of the newly discovered letters while also exploring their biographical background and significance in more detail and with more documentation than was possible in an account of the discovery for a general audience.¹

¹ I am deeply indebted to Jim Powell for permitting me to publish the full texts of the Merediths' letters, to quote from other manuscripts in his family collection, and to draw upon the results of his extensive genealogical and historical research. Unless otherwise

The first part will explore the life and family connections of Peacock's previously unknown natural daughter Susan Mary Abbott Neill, while the second part will focus on the new letters and what they reveal about George Meredith's early life and literary career.

WHO WAS "SUSIE PYE, NÉE ABBOTT"?

If Mary Ellen Peacock and Susan Mary Abbott were indeed sisters, or at least half-sisters, as the Merediths' letters to Susan indicate, it is obvious that existing biographical accounts of the Peacock family must be incomplete and that one of the sisters' baptismal records must have been falsified. In order to assess the likely possibilities, it will be helpful to review what little is known about Peacock's romantic vicissitudes and troubled domestic life, before proceeding to consider what can now be discovered about the Abbott family in which Susan was raised and the Neill family into which she married.

Because Peacock destroyed almost all his private papers and family correspondence, we have surprisingly little information about his early love affairs or his subsequent marriage and family life.² If Peacock did not marry until the age of thirty-four, it was not for want of trying but for want of an income sufficient to support a wife. In the summer of 1807, at the age of twenty-one, he was in love with a girl named Fanny Falkner, but their engagement was broken off by her family, and she died the next year, after marrying another man.³ In 1810, he met his future wife, Jane Gryffyd, in North Wales, but in her absence he consid-

noted, all Abbott and Neill family letters and papers are quoted from the original manuscripts in his possession. Further information about the Abbotts and the Neills, along with images of some of the items described here, can be found on the Family History pages of his personal website: www.jim-powell.net.

² The standard biographies are still Carl Van Doren's *The Life of Thomas Love Peacock* (London: Dent, 1911) and H. F. B. Brett-Smith's "Biographical Introduction" to *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. H. F. B. Brett-Smith and C. E. Jones, 10 vols. (London: Constable, 1924-34), 1:vii-ccxii (hereafter cited as *Works*). These can now be supplemented by my "Peacock before *Headlong Hall*: A New Look at His Early Years," *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 36 (1985): 1-40, as well as by my introduction and chronology in *The Letters of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. Nicholas A. Joukovsky, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 1:xxv-c and cxvii-cxxxvii (hereafter cited as *TLP Letters*). See also my brief life of Peacock in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

³ The story is told in Edith Nicolls's "Biographical Notice" of her grandfather in the first collected edition of *The Works of Thomas Love Peacock*, ed. Henry Cole, 3 vols. (London, 1875), 1:xxviii-xxix (hereafter cited as "Biographical Notice"). Peacock's memory of Fanny is enshrined in his lines on "Newark Abbey, August, 1842, with a Reminiscence of August, 1807," published in *Fraser's Magazine*, November 1860 (*Works*, 7:252-53).

ered running off to the Lake District with an unidentified "Caernarvonshire charmer," whom he soon found lacking in sincerity.⁴ During the next eight years, according to his cousin Harriet Love, he did not "pine in hopeless love" but was, like Miss Ilex's lover in *Gryll Grange*, "a sort of universal lover, making half declarations to half the young women he knew."⁵ In 1812–14, at Englefield Green, he appears to have been in love, by turns, with Clarinda and Cecilia Knowles, two sisters who both rejected his proposals.⁶ In the autumn of 1814, he was involved with Percy Bysshe Shelley, Mary Godwin, and Claire Clairmont in a "running away scheme" that would somehow have enabled him to marry Marianne de St. Croix, a sister of one of his closest friends.⁷ In the winter of 1814–15, much to Marianne's distress, he actually ran off with a supposed heiress named Charlotte and was imprisoned for debt in Liverpool when it turned out that her fortune was imaginary.⁸ In the spring of 1815, he talked of emigrating to Canada and taking Marianne, who had apparently forgiven him for his indiscretion with Charlotte.⁹ Early in 1818, he proposed marriage to Claire Clairmont, who had given birth to an illegitimate daughter by Lord Byron a year earlier.¹⁰ There were, of course, many other women in his life who remain unknown. Harriet Love recalled, "I remember once saying to him 'if ever I write a book it shall be on the plan of the Arabian Nights. — The thousand and one loves of Thomas Love Peacock.' — He laughed most heartily and replied 'Well, I don't think you would be very far out!'"¹¹

Early in 1819, Peacock's provisional appointment as one of the senior assistants to the Examiner of Indian Correspondence for the East India Company finally enabled him to think of marriage with the prospect of

⁴ See his letters to Thomas Forster of 28 July and 15 October 1810 (*TLP Letters*, 1:55–57 and 59–62).

⁵ MS notes on Peacock (now Bodleian Library MS Eng. lett. c. 582), quoted in *Works*, 1:civ. For Miss Ilex's description of her lover, see *Gryll Grange*, chap. 27 (*Works*, 5:271–76).

⁶ See my article "Peacock in Love: Reminiscences of Cecilia Jenkins, an Unknown Victorian Novelist," *Philological Quarterly* 85 (2006): 167–98.

⁷ See the journal entries for 30 September–3 October 1814, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley, 1814–1844*, ed. Paula R. Feldman and Diana Scott-Kilvert, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 1:30, and in *The Journals of Claire Clairmont*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968), 46–47.

⁸ See the entries for 3 and [?] January 1815, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, 1:58 and 60; and Peacock's letter to William Roscoe of 15 January 1815 (*TLP Letters*, 1:108–12).

⁹ See the entry for 17 April 1815, in *The Journals of Mary Shelley*, 1:75.

¹⁰ See *The Clairmont Correspondence: Letters of Claire Clairmont, Charles Clairmont, and Fanny Imlay Godwin*, ed. Marion Kingston Stocking, 2 vols. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 1:16, note 3.

¹¹ MS notes, quoted in *Works*, 1:civ.

financial stability. On 20 November, he proposed by letter to Jane Gryffydh (1789–1851), the Welsh parson's daughter whom he had neither seen nor written to since leaving Merionethshire in April 1811.¹² Although Jane initially expressed a reservation with regard to his reputed atheism, they were married at Eglwysfach Chapel, Cardiganshire, on 22 March 1820.¹³ At first their marriage appears to have been happy enough, and there is no reason to question the parentage of their first child, Mary Ellen, who was born in London on 29 July 1821 and baptized at Christ Church, Southwark, on 31 May 1822.¹⁴ Peacock told Shelley in a letter of [?11–16] October [1821], "We have a charming little girl (now eleven weeks old) who grows and flourishes delightfully in this fumose and cinereous atmosphere. She prevented Jane from accompanying me in my rustication."¹⁵ Toward the end of his "rustication" in Wales, he wrote to Jane from Maentwrog, Merionethshire, on 25 September: "I think of you night and day and long so much to be with you that I do not think I shall ever pass three weeks from you again."¹⁶

Three more children were born to the Peacocks over the next six years: Margaret Love (1823–26), Edward Gryffydh (1825–67), and Rosa Jane (1827–57). But after the death of their second daughter in January 1826, Jane is said to have been "inconsolable" and to have gradually become, in the words of her granddaughter Edith Nicolls, "a complete invalid."¹⁷ While the exact nature of her malady remains a mystery, she appears to have suffered from some kind of mental illness that left her unable to manage her household, to care for her children, or to take part in her husband's social life. Mary Shelley remarked in a letter to Maria

¹² For Peacock's letter and his wife's reply, see *TLP Letters*, 1:169–70. It is worth noting that Jane was not Peacock's first choice. According to Harriet Love, his letter of proposal was written under a "feeling of bitter disappointment" at the suggestion of "an old acquaintance" who called unexpectedly at the India House (MS notes, quoted in *Works*, 1:ciii–civ). Brett-Smith thinks the disappointment was likely to have been caused by "a rebuff from Marianne de St. Croix" (*Works*, 1:cvi). However, the woman who rejected Peacock's prior proposal might have been Harriet Love herself, who was living with Peacock and his mother in London during much of 1819.

¹³ Extract from the parish register in Bodleian MS Eng. misc. c. 435, fol. 1.

¹⁴ Mary Ellen's date of birth does not appear in the parish register and has hitherto been unknown to biographers, but it is recorded in a separate daybook of baptisms at Christ Church, Southwark. Both the register and the daybook are in the London Metropolitan Archives.

¹⁵ *TLP Letters*, 1:183.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 1:181.

¹⁷ Nicolls, "Biographical Notice," xxxix. The Peacocks' informal "adoption" of Mary Ann Rosewell (1823–83) some time in 1826 seems to have been an attempt to replace their dead daughter, but it is not clear whether Peacock or his wife initiated the process (see my introduction to *TLP Letters*, 1:xliv–xlvi).

Gisborne of 13 October 1835 that Jane was "quite mad,"¹⁸ and George Meredith later told Edward Clodd: "Peacock's wife became mad, and so there was a family taint."¹⁹ Henry Cole, who lived in Peacock's house in Stamford Street from April 1826 to March 1831, commented in his journal for 3 December 1829: "If there ever existed a necessity for the dissolution of marriage on account of incompatibility of disposition this case is most strikingly in point."²⁰ One significant source of the Peacocks' incompatibility was noted many years later by Anne Ramsden Bennett in her manuscript reminiscence of Mary Ellen Meredith: "Of her mother she always spoke in terms of deep affection and I would imagine from what she said of her that she was a woman of fervent and severe religious feeling in that respect very different from her husband Mr Peacock who was not by many if by any degrees removed from being a Pagan of the old Greek and Roman days!"²¹ Hence it appears that Jane's alienation from her husband and neglect of her children might have been due to a manic-depressive condition that in the early nineteenth century would have been called "religious melancholy" or "religious mania." In any case, considering both her illness and her religiosity, it seems unlikely that she would have had an extramarital affair. Peacock, on the other hand, having been something of a "universal lover" in his early years, might well have sought sex and companionship outside his increasingly unsatisfactory marriage. He would have felt no religious compunction, and his poem *Rhododaphne; or, The Thessalian Spell* (1818) had adumbrated the philosophy of "free love" that Shelley expounded in *Epipsychidion* (1821).²²

What, then, can we learn about the parentage of the young woman Meredith regarded as his sister-in-law and addressed as "Susie Pye, née Abbott"? Although Abbott is a common name, the search is greatly simplified by a slip of paper preserved in a family Bible, listing "Susan Mary Abbott born Oct^r 12th 1830" below the names and vital dates of six children of a John Abbott who died on 26 April 1828: Charles (1788–89), Thomas (1790–[1870]), Cecilia Alice (1792–93), Alice Bunce

¹⁸ *The Letters of Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley*, ed. Betty T. Bennett, 3 vols. (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980–88), 2:258.

¹⁹ Clodd, "George Meredith (1828–1909)," in *Memories* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1916), 142.

²⁰ Cole, MS journal for 1829, National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum.

²¹ Bennett, "My Recollections of Mrs G. Meredith," in my article, "According to Mrs Bennett: A Document Sheds a New and Kinder Light on George Meredith's First Wife," *Times Literary Supplement*, 8 October 2004, 14.

²² Compare Peacock's *Rhododaphne*, canto 2, lines 1–12, with Shelley's *Epipsychidion*, lines 160–73.

(1793–[1852]), Mary Frances (1797–1820), and John (1799–1852). The information in this list is sufficient to establish that the senior John Abbott (1758–1828) was a London merchant born in Canterbury and the elder brother of Charles Abbott (1762–1832), who rose from humble beginnings as a hairdresser's son to become Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench in 1818 and first Baron Tenterden in 1827. It is also sufficient to identify Susan as the putative daughter of the younger John Abbott, who was born in Canterbury on 5 June 1799 and qualified as a solicitor in Easter Term 1825.²³ Born on 12 October 1830, she was undoubtedly the Susan Mary Abbott baptized at St. Pancras Old Church on 1 November as the daughter of John Abbott and Emmeline Spencer. The parish register gives her father's profession as "Attorney" and her parents' address as Ernest Street (the old name for what is now part of Robert Street), near Regent's Park.²⁴ However, the 1851 census for Thames Ditton, where Susan was then living with John Abbott, gives her place of birth as St. James Clerkenwell, nearer to John's chambers in Symonds Inn, Chancery Lane.

While there is abundant evidence that Susan was raised as John Abbott's daughter, his paternity is questionable, not only because there is no record that he was ever married but also because there is no record of Emmeline Spencer's existence other than her name as Susan's mother in the register of baptisms at St. Pancras Old Church. Even if Emmeline died in childbirth or shortly thereafter, the absence of any record of her birth, marriage, or death would be highly unlikely in that John Abbott was a solicitor whose uncle had recently been raised to the peerage. If we look instead for an unmarried woman in John Abbott's family who might have conceived a child by Peacock, the one likely candidate is John's older sister Alice Bunce Abbott. Born in Canterbury on 6 December 1793, Alice lived with her brother John for most, if not all, of Susan's first twenty-one years. In a large urban parish, Alice might have successfully pretended to be John's wife in order to establish Susan's legitimacy through baptism as his daughter. Later, Susan would presumably have grown up believing that John was her father, that the fictitious Emmeline was her long-dead mother, and that Alice was her aunt and foster mother. Although Peacock covered his tracks extremely well, further evidence suggests that he was indeed Susan's biological father and that he probably had a long-term relationship, rather than a casual affair, with Alice Abbott.

²³ Obituary notice in the *Legal Observer, and Solicitors' Journal* 48 (21 October 1854): 484.

²⁴ Parish register, in the London Metropolitan Archives.

While Alice's and John's uncle Charles achieved fame and fortune as a lawyer, their father John's success as a merchant was far more modest. But despite the difference in their circumstances, the two branches of the Abbott family apparently remained close after they left Canterbury for London. As Lord Chief Justice, Charles Abbott was able to obtain positions in the Court of King's Bench not only for his elder son John Henry, as Marshal and Associate to the Chief Justice, but also for his nephew Thomas, as Clerk of Nisi Prius in London and Middlesex. Indeed, it is likely that both of Alice's brothers were encouraged to become lawyers by the extraordinary success of their uncle.

At the time of his death, the elder John Abbott and his wife Susannah (who was also his first cousin) resided at 3 Upper Thornhaugh Street (now Huntley Street) in Bloomsbury—a respectable but by no means fashionable address. Unfortunately, his will—signed on 24 April 1828, just two days before he died, and perhaps drawn up rather hastily—fails to provide a clear indication of the size of his estate. Despite the fact that both of his sons were lawyers, he appointed his daughter Alice as one of his executors, along with his nephew John Henry Abbott. The bulk of his personal estate was to be invested for the benefit of his wife and daughter, while some other unidentified assets were left to his two sons, Thomas and John. Although John had borrowed a large but unspecified sum of money from his father, he was not required to repay the principal as long as he paid interest on it to the estate. Thomas's children were to share a legacy of £1,000.²⁵ Alice would presumably have received her mother's share of the income from the estate after Susannah's death in February 1833.²⁶

John Abbott's career as a solicitor appears to have been steady but unremarkable. For some fifteen years from 1833 to 1848, his law offices were located at 10 Charlotte Street, Bedford Square (the old name for the portion of Bloomsbury Street between Bedford Square and Great Russell Street). This would have been a substantial house of four stories, plus attic and basement, in a street containing the offices of various professional men, many of them medical practitioners. Number 10 was also the residence of Alice Abbott, and Alice's will, dated 10 March 1841, reveals that it was she, rather than her brother, who held a long-term

²⁵ PCC copy, in the National Archives, PROB 11/1741.

²⁶ Since Susannah was born on 18 October 1761, she was almost certainly the Susannah Abbott of John Street who died at the age of seventy-one and was buried in the parish of St. Andrew Holborn on 28 February 1833 (parish register, London Metropolitan Archives).

lease on the house, subject to a lien of £1,000 by her cousin John Henry Abbott, now second Baron Tenterden. This valuable leasehold was left in trust for her brother John during his lifetime, and after his death for his daughter Susan Mary, for her separate use, independently of any husband. After Susan's death, it would remain in trust for her children or, if she left none, for the children of Alice's brother Thomas.²⁷ If Peacock joined John Henry Abbott in helping Alice to purchase the lease of the house in Charlotte Street, Bedford Square—not only to provide a home for her and Susan but also to secure a reliable source of income for Susan in the event of her mother's death—then this heavy expense would help to explain the financial problems that we know he had in his later years, even with his East India Company salary of £2,000 a year.²⁸

John Abbott's will, dated 23 July 1846, left his entire estate in trust for his daughter Susan Mary, again for her separate use, independently of any husband. In the event of Susan's death, it would remain in trust, first for his sister Alice, then for the children of his brother Thomas, and then for Thomas himself. As executors of his will and guardians for Susan during her minority, John appointed Charles Saunders of the Middle Temple and Robert Garrod of Ipswich, Suffolk.²⁹ The father and grandfather of distinguished physicians, Robert Garrod (1793–1877) was a remarkable man who, after serving an apprenticeship in a brewery, went on to found a successful firm of auctioneers and estate agents that survived for more than a century after his death.³⁰ He was also one of Alice Abbott's executors and evidently a close family friend.

It was presumably due to the Abbotts' connection with the Garrod family that Susan was sent to the Ladies' Seminary at Elm House, in Elm Street, Ipswich, where she is listed as a pupil in the 1841 census.³¹ One memento that she preserved from her schooldays was a charming

²⁷ PCC copy, in the National Archives, PROB 11/2155.

²⁸ See my introduction to *TLP Letters*, where I suggested that Peacock might have kept what Victorians called a "separate establishment" (1:xlvi–xlvii). His depression over his financial situation is described by his daughter Mary Ellen in a letter to Sir John Cam Hobhouse of 8 October 1847 (*TLP Letters*, 2:302–3).

²⁹ PCC copy, in the National Archives, PROB 11/2155.

³⁰ A brief account of Robert Garrod and his family can be found in a book on his grandson by Alexander G. Bearn, *Archibald Garrod and the Individuality of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 197–200 (see also the family tree on the endpapers and the portrait of Robert, 2).

³¹ The schoolmistress was then Ann Clamp, whose husband, Robert Clamp, a private tutor, was presumably a relation of Garrod's wife, Sarah Enew Clamp. The census lists fifteen boarding pupils, ranging in age from nine to fifteen, plus three fifteen-year-olds who stayed on as teachers. Mrs. Clamp was succeeded by a Miss Foster in July 1842, according to advertisements in the *Ipswich Journal*, 28 May and 16 July 1842.

letter from John Abbott combining practical advice with professions of fatherly affection. It was dated from 10 Charlotte Street on 11 July 1842, when Susan was spending her summer vacation at Felixstowe, on the Suffolk coast:³²

My beloved Child—

I was very much pleased at receiving your little note, but it was a very little one, and I hope that your next will be longer, for it is always a source of much gratification to me to hear from my own Darling[.] Dartie tells me in her letter that it is not yet fixed when Miss Foster opens her School, so I shall hope to see my Dear Child again at Felix-tow, before she resumes those Studies, which are so essential to her future happiness and comfort, store your mind my dearly beloved, with all useful knowledge, at the same time do not neglect to cultivate that branch of your Education, which comes under the denomination of Ornamental, for Accomplishments are also necessary. You have abilities sufficient to acquire every thing, I hope neither whim or Idleness will deter you from profiting by the abilities that God has blessed you with and the opportunities, which your Affectionate Father affords you, as you grow in years, you will rejoice in the fond affection, of these that love you, it will be the means of happiness to yourself, and them, neglect no opportunity Child of my heart to deserve those Affections, that when you grow up, a young Woman, and your Father increases in years, you may be to him a comfort and a blessing.

And so you have made another Swing, and you and Hannah swing till your feet meet, God bless you. You laugh, and you play all day long, and you are well and happy, what a blessing!—ought you not to be grateful for all God's blessings. May you always be happy My Dear One, but you must embrace the means that are given you to deserve it, otherwise you will not, my dear Child.

If M^r Garrod comes up this week which I believe it is his intention to do, I hope to return with him, and then I shall see and kiss my beloved, till when may God bless, and protect you.

Your affectionate Father, | John Abbott

Even if he was not her natural father, there is no reason to doubt the genuineness of John Abbott's affection for Susan. As a lifelong bachelor, he might well have come to love his sister's child as if she were his own.

³² Since the address is simply "Miss Susan Abbott", the letter must have been either hand delivered or enclosed in a letter or packet sent to someone else. Above the address, Susan later wrote "for Eileen, from her grandmother."

Susan certainly followed John Abbott's advice and became a highly accomplished young woman. She was well read and could comfortably discuss literature with the Merediths. She was reputed to be an excellent pianist with a fine ear for music. Her own paintings do not survive, but her album of prints and drawings remains in her family.³³ Her notebook containing instructions for fine needlework has been preserved among Henry Wallis's papers.³⁴ If Peacock had a hand in directing her education as well as paying for it, this might explain the mystery of his relationship with Miss Jane Fotheringhame, whose services he retained in some unknown capacity for a number of years beginning in 1842—possibly as a governess and/or piano teacher for Susan.³⁵

In 1848, John and Alice Abbott left 10 Charlotte Street, Bedford Square, and took a house on Ditton Common at Thames Ditton, about five miles from Peacock's country house on the Thames at Lower Haliford. The 1851 census, taken on 30 March, shows Susan, at the age of twenty, living there with both of them. A year later, however, the family circle would be broken. On 27 March 1852, John Abbott died suddenly in his law chambers at 35 Lincoln's Inn Fields, from the "Rupture of a blood vessel in the Stomach."³⁶ Then, less than three weeks later, on 16 April, Alice Bunce Abbott died at Thames Ditton of "chronic bronchitis."³⁷ Although their wills left Susan financially independent, she must have been overwhelmed by the two deaths in such quick succession. At this point, Peacock evidently stepped in to help cushion the blow.³⁸ We can only speculate as to how well Susan knew Peacock previously, as to how much she knew about his relationship with Alice Abbott, and as to how and when she learned that he rather than John Abbott was her father. All we know for certain is that by October 1852,

³³ Two items from this album—drawings by Guercino of *Queen Esther Supported by Her Attendants* and *An Evangelist Writing, Seated at a Table*—were auctioned in Sotheby's New York sales of Old Master Drawings on 27 January 2010 (lot 32) and 26 January 2011 (lot 544).

³⁴ Bodleian Library, MS Eng. e. 3401.

³⁵ For Peacock's and his daughters' brief, uninformative letters to Jane Fotheringhame, see *TLP Letters*, 2:305, 314–15, 324, 342–43, 350, and 352. There, knowing nothing about Susan, I speculated that Peacock might have hired Miss Fotheringhame as a companion or caregiver for his wife (2:305, note 1).

³⁶ Death certificate, General Record Office.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ This crisis probably accounts for the suspension of Peacock's series of "Horæ Dramaticæ" in *Fraser's Magazine* after the appearance of the first two numbers in March and April 1852. When the third and final number was published in October 1857, it contained the following explanation in a footnote to the title: "The first two numbers appeared in this Magazine for March and April 1852. The writer had not then leisure to work out his design" (*Works*, 10:325).

and probably for several months previously, Susan was living with the Merediths in Peacock's house at Lower Halliford. If Jane Fotheringhame had been Susan's teacher or governess, her attempt to find lodgings nearby in May 1852 might have been arranged by Peacock so that she could provide support and companionship for Susan during this time of loss and transition.³⁹ The death of Peacock's wife on 23 December 1851 may have made it easier than it would otherwise have been for him to acknowledge his paternity to his children and their spouses. To those outside his immediate family, Susan was apparently introduced only as a close friend of Mary's.

George Meredith would appear to have been alluding to the discovery of Susan's true parentage when he addressed her in his letter of Christmas 1854 first as "Dearest Susie Pye: | (née Abbott)" and then even more pointedly as "Md^{le} | Susie Pye | née Abbott"—an unmarried woman who had somehow acquired a new name. As a student and writer of ballad poetry, Meredith would have known that the original Susie Pye was the intrepid heroine of the popular ballad of "Young Beichan and Susie Pye," but in this case the name Pye seems more likely to have been a play on the Greek letter pi, hence the initial P for Peacock, whose friends called him Greeky-Peaky, and who occasionally used Greek letters or initials to sign his letters to classical correspondents.⁴⁰

Although biographical tradition has it that the Merediths' financial circumstances forced them to move into Peacock's house early in 1853, Thomas Jefferson Hogg's letters to Mary Ellen reveal that the Merediths lived at "the Wharf"—Hogg's name for Peacock's house on the Thames at Lower Halliford—from around November 1851 to around October 1853, when they moved to Vine Cottage, on the other side of the village green.⁴¹ Peacock's country residence was formed from two separate cottages, which he had improved and joined by a connecting passage. The addition of Susan to his household may have prompted him to make some significant changes in his domestic arrangements in the summer of 1852, giving the Merediths and Susan the large library wing, while retaining the main house for himself and his adopted daughter, Mary Ann "May" Rosewell. Catherine "Kate" Horne reported these develop-

³⁹ See Mary Ellen's and Peacock's letters to Jane Fotheringhame of 16 and 17 May 1852 (*TLP Letters*, 2:343).

⁴⁰ See his letters to Thomas Forster of 27 February 1812 and to Lord Broughton of 12 March 1857 (*TLP Letters*, 1:87 and 2:363).

⁴¹ See my article, "The Hoggs and the Peacocks: Some Later Correspondence," *Keats-Shelley Journal* 52 (2003): 179–90, esp. 180 and 187.

ments to her husband, the writer Richard Henry (later Hengist) Horne, who had left for the gold fields of Australia, in an unpublished letter of 18 July [1852]: "They [the Merediths] have now got the Library *end* (library included) of Halliford, quite distinct from M^r Peacock and Marianne. His books have most of them been taken to Torrington Street."⁴² (In 1850/51, Peacock had moved his London quarters to 1 Torrington Street—just a few hundred yards from Bedford Square, on what is now the site of London University.) In a long, gossipy letter of 18 November [1852], Kate Horne reported to her husband that Susan was living with the Merediths at Halliford when she paid them a three-week visit from late October to mid-November:

Miss Abbott (Mrs Bell's friend) has lost her father and is left without any near relation, so as Mrs Meredith is very fond of her she is at present living with them, and adds to the bad influence. She is more amiable but as practical as Mrs M. and always sides with her against 'George'. I fancy Mrs M. thought I had a bad influence in an opposite direction for she always carefully prevented our ever being alone together or taking walks alone, though she knew I liked long walks and neither she nor Miss Abbott did.⁴³

Susan's life with the Merediths must have often been uncomfortable on account of the couple's marital disharmony, though she was not present to witness the most violent of the quarrels described by Kate Horne, in the course of which Mary threatened to throw herself into the Thames.

While it is not clear how long Susan continued to live at Halliford, she is likely to have left by the autumn of 1853, when Peacock apparently gave up his London house in Torrington Street and took Vine Cottage for the Merediths. Susan may have been looking for a new place to live at this time, for Kate Horne told her husband in another unpublished letter, dated 1 September [1853]: "I have proposed to Miss Abbott, (the Merediths friend you know) to live with me in town in the Winter. Then she will keep house for me &c, and it will in all respects be much better than being alone. She plays very well and will help me."⁴⁴ Nothing came of this scheme, however, and the Merediths' letters suggest that over the

⁴² MS in the Huntington Library, quoted from the microfilm copy in the British Library: RP 800/4.

⁴³ *Selected Letters of George Meredith*, ed. Mohammad Shaheen (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 26–29 (hereafter cited as *Selected Letters*). This long and revealing letter, now in the Huntington Library, was first published, from a copy by Maurice Buxton Forman, in Shaheen's article "George Meredith's Early Life: Ordeal and Reticence," *Modern Language Review* 77 (1982): 273–75.

⁴⁴ MS in the Huntington Library, quoted from the microfilm copy in the British Library: RP 800/4.

next few years Susan lived alone but spent much of her time visiting various friends and relatives, including Peacock's other married daughter Rosa Collinson.⁴⁵ Since Susan had childhood connections with Felixstowe, she may have had something to do with the Merediths' decision to stay there in October 1853.⁴⁶ They also saw each other occasionally in London. In a letter of 12 April [1856], Mary informed Henry Cole that "Miss Abbott & myself propose to go & see M^{rs} Cole & all your circle on Tuesday next unless we hear that it will be inconvenient."⁴⁷ Rosa Collinson died on 5 October 1857, but Mary's correspondence with Susan is likely to have continued after her separation from George in September 1857 and the birth of her son by Henry Wallis on 18 April 1858.

It appears from the Merediths' letters that Susan was often lonely and that nothing came of her romantic interest in a soldier named Sidebottom, who was serving in the Crimea in the autumn of 1854, and who may have died in July 1855.⁴⁸ But shortly before her twenty-eighth birthday she met William Mayne Neill (1824–1913), a cotton merchant from Belfast, then resident in New York but on a business trip to Europe. The story of their whirlwind courtship can be partially reconstructed from his letters, many of which Susan preserved. They first met on 30 September 1858, probably through the agency of William's sister-in-law Catherine Ann Larmour "Kate" Neill (1825–85), who appears to have known Susan previously and to have arranged for him to accompany her on a journey from London to Belfast the following week. That very evening, after having spent a pleasant day with her, William wrote Susan a hasty proposal of marriage, which, upon reflection, he did not send. The next day, he left for Le Havre, and on 4 October, he wrote to her from Paris in the hope that they might spend more time together before leaving London: "You see like Oliver I am 'asking for more'—of your company."⁴⁹ On 8 October, after having seen her again in London, he wrote a substantially new epistolary proposal beginning, "Excuse me my dear friend if while in your presence my feelings so choke my

⁴⁵ A passage in a letter of 11 December 1859, from her future husband, William Mayne Neill, suggests that Susan may have lived for a time in Paris before her marriage: "If you are lonely or disconsolate now is not your life richer—less isolated—more happy than if still a 'spinster' . . . gadding about Paris as unprotected female."

⁴⁶ See my article, "New Correspondence of Mary Ellen Meredith," *Studies in Philology* 106 (2009): 490, n. 40.

⁴⁷ See my article, "George and Mary Meredith, the East India Company, and the Society of Arts: New Light on the Author's Early Career," *Studies in Philology* 97 (2000): 481.

⁴⁸ For the identity of Susan's "Black Sea Sidebottom," see note 87, below.

⁴⁹ The allusion is, of course, to Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1837–38), chapter 2.

utterance that I am forced to say what I have to say in writing—even though I may perhaps sit by & see you read.” One can only imagine Susan’s surprise and the mutual explanations that must have followed her reading of William’s hand-delivered letter, but by the end of their journey to Belfast on 9 October she had agreed to marry him.⁵⁰ After leaving her with his sister-in-law in Ireland, William wrote again on 12 October from Manchester, addressing her as “Dearest One” and reporting, “I have written M^r Garrod a long rigmarole”—presumably to assure her trustee that, as her husband, he would make no claim to her inheritance.⁵¹ Although he knew it was her birthday, he was under the impression that she was turning twenty-six rather than twenty-eight. Two days later, still in Manchester, he wrote to “My true hearted *English* girl!” telling her, “I have had no answer from Ipswich yet,—but can hardly expect it till tomorrow.”

By this time, Susan had agreed not only to marry William but to accompany him to New York—much to the surprise of her older friends Robert and Elizabeth Bell, who trusted her good sense, even in the face of her seemingly impulsive behavior. Robert Bell, a kindly radical journalist and man of letters, wrote for both of them from 14 York Street, Portman Square, London, on 15 October 1858:

My dear Susan,

Your news was, indeed, a surprise. Having left us only a few days before under an impression that you were going to settle down in Belfast, you may judge of our astonishment to learn that your destination was the United States—in a double sense too! I need not say to you how truly we desire that the change may be fraught with happiness to you. If your choice has really the approval of your now calm judgment, I have no fears for the issue. Your sound sense and dispassionate reason must have already satisfied you that he to whom you are about to entrust the guardianship of your future life, is everyway worthy of the trust; and under that conviction we anticipate for you all the happiness which your own most sanguine expectations can lead you to hope

⁵⁰ In a letter to Susan of 28 October 1859, William identified 9 October 1858 as the date of their engagement.

⁵¹ One of the character references that William provided for Robert Garrod was the prominent feminist Barbara Leigh Smith Bodichon, a strong advocate of married women’s property rights. Garrod later conveyed the news of Susan’s approaching marriage to her uncle John Henry Abbott, second Baron Tenterden, who replied on 12 November 1858, asking him to convey his congratulations and good wishes to Miss Abbott. It is not clear whether Peacock was consulted concerning the intended marriage.

for. We earnestly trust that many years of mutual confidence & security may crown your union.

M^{rs} Bell desires me to send you her kindest regards & anxious wishes. She says she is quite sure you will make a pattern wife; & I must be very much mistaken in my estimate of you if she is not quite right.

I am afraid we shall not have an opportunity of seeing you in London, as, having visitors engaged to come to us at Ramsgate, we are obliged to leave town. But you must accept this expression of our congratulations as being as much to the purpose as if it were delivered in person.

Pray present our united compliments & congratulations to M^r Neill, & with sincere wishes for your welfare, believe me,

My dear Susan, | Faithfully yours, | Robert Bell

William and Susan were married at All Souls, St. Marylebone, on 22 November 1858. The witnesses were Susan's uncle Thomas Abbott, Robert Garrod, Helen and Robert William Bennett (Garrod's daughter and son-in-law), Jane Cuthbert (a friend of Susan's), Edgar Flower (the youngest son of the Stratford-upon-Avon brewer and a friend of William's), and C. Neill (presumably William's sister-in-law Catherine, wife of his brother James and a close friend of Susan's).⁵² Shortly after the wedding, the couple sailed for New York.

Unlike Susan, who grew up as an only child, William came from a large and close-knit Irish Presbyterian family, with at least four brothers and four sisters. Although the Neill genealogy can be puzzling because there were two Robert Neills in Belfast, it is clear that William's parents were the High Street watchmaker, silversmith, and jeweler Robert Neill (1775–1857) and his wife Letitia Ireland (1787/88–1845), whose children included John Ross (1812–91), Robert (1816/17–49), Mary Anne (1818–67), James (1819–1902), Letitia (1822–1916), William Mayne (1824–1913), Henry Montgomery (1828–1906), Eliza (ca. 1830–1912), and Dora (ca. 1832–1921).⁵³ Robert Neill “was a strong antislavery man, and numbered amongst his American friends William Lloyd Garrison, Henry C. Wright, and Frederick Douglass, who had all been his guests.”⁵⁴ In the summer of 1850, his family welcomed three young Americans on

⁵² Marriage certificate, General Record Office.

⁵³ The Margaret Neill who married (Sir) Charles Henry Brett, the nephew and law partner of Peacock's correspondent Thomas L'Estrange, was a daughter of the wholesale grocery and tobacco merchant Robert Neill (1804–54) and his wife Margaret Riddell (1809/10–92).

⁵⁴ Emma Brace, *The Life of Charles Loring Brace, Chiefly Told in His Own Letters* (New York, 1894), 90.

a walking tour of England, Ireland, and Europe: Frederick Law Olmsted, his younger brother John Hull Olmsted, and Charles Loring Brace, afterward executive secretary of the Children's Aid Society of New York and founder of the Orphan Train movement. Frederick Olmsted and Charles Brace were both attracted to the Neill daughters, and Brace eventually returned to marry Letitia on 21 August 1854.⁵⁵ Brace later wrote to one of his sons: "You must remember that you get from the Neill women a disinterestedness beyond compare, sincerity, and a wonderful devotion to ideal things, such as friendship, religion, music, art, poetry, and the like, besides sweetness, patience, and love. The best has all come from your grandmother (Neill)."⁵⁶

William attended the Royal Belfast Academical Institution from 1832 to 1836 and may have worked in his father's business, Robert Neill & Sons, before beginning to trade various commodities on his own account around 1846, at first in Belfast, then in Liverpool and London. He was involved in bankruptcy proceedings when a partner absconded in 1851, but his bankruptcy was annulled in 1854.⁵⁷ In that year William and his younger brother Henry founded the firm of Neill Brothers & Co., cotton and general commission merchants, of New York, Mobile, and New Orleans, whose circular on the state of the cotton market and trade was highly respected and widely quoted in the press on both sides of the Atlantic for more than half a century.⁵⁸ The firm later had offices in London, Manchester, and Liverpool. Although the Civil War drastically disrupted the American cotton trade, Neill Brothers & Co. managed to survive bankruptcy proceedings in 1865.⁵⁹ While remaining senior partner, William also had business interests of his own, sometimes as far away as California and British Columbia. Having traveled extensively in the course of his career, he was elected to membership in the Royal Geographical Society in 1890.⁶⁰

During the late 1850s, William owned a house on 23rd Street in New York and was actively involved in the city's social and cultural life.

⁵⁵ *Belfast News-Letter*, 25 August 1854.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Emma Brace's *Life of Charles Loring Brace*, 435.

⁵⁷ See the *Belfast News-Letter*, 12 December 1851, and the *Liverpool Mercury*, 5 December 1851, 21 May 1852, and 21 July 1854.

⁵⁸ According to an obituary notice in the *New York Times*, 13 September 1906, Henry M. Neill was reputed to be "the greatest cotton crop estimate expert in the world." Although the obituary states that Neill Brothers & Co. was founded in 1857, its circular was cited in the *Manchester Examiner and Times* as early as 20 and 27 December 1854.

⁵⁹ See the *London Gazette*, 15 September 1865.

⁶⁰ *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, and Record of Geography* 12 (April 1890): 12.

His connections with Charles Brace and Frederick Olmsted presumably opened many doors for him.⁶¹ During these years, he cultivated the friendship of Washington Irving, Nathaniel Parker Willis, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow⁶² as well as the abolitionist writers Eliza Lee Cabot Follen and Mattie Griffith.⁶³ Although Susan shared William's interests in literature, art, and music, along with his anti-slavery views and radical politics, she did not like living in New York. In September 1859, he took her to stay with his sister-in-law Kate at Holywood, near Belfast, where she gave birth to their son Harold Henry on 4 November.⁶⁴ However, business matters compelled him to return to New York in October, and he was unable to rejoin her until February 1860, by which time they had decided to reside in England, perhaps initially in Liverpool. William's letters to Susan during their months apart in 1859–60 and during his later travels provide a good deal of insight into their marriage, in which they managed to negotiate their differences in

⁶¹ William's connections also provided benefits for a family friend of the Neills from Ireland, the journalist Edwin Lawrence Godkin, who helped to found *The Nation* in 1865 and continued to serve as its editor until 1899. William had shared rooms with Godkin at Richmond upon Thames in the summer of 1851, and he helped Godkin immigrate to the United States in the autumn of 1856. In return, Godkin undertook to report on the cotton crop for Neill Brothers & Co. while riding through the Southern states and writing descriptive travel letters for the London *Daily News* in 1856–57, as Olmsted had done, more memorably, for the *New-York Daily Times* in 1852 and 1853. See Rollo Ogden, *The Life and Letters of Edwin Lawrence Godkin*, 2 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 1:13–14 and 110–14.

⁶² Longfellow wrote to Charles Sumner from Cambridge on 29 December 1854: "Brace and his wife, an Irish lady, are here; . . . His brother in law, Mr. Neil, brings me a charming daguerreotype of Marshall Wood's statue of 'Evangeline.' It is a beautiful thing" (*The Letters of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*, ed. Andrew Hilen, 6 vols. [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966–82], 3:459). Longfellow also commented on Wood's statue in an unpublished letter to William Neill, dated 18 January 1855:

"I must thank you again, also, for the photograph of Mr Wood's 'Evangeline'. The more I look at it, the more beautiful it seems. The attitude is exceedingly graceful, and as well as the face, represents her longing and wasting of the heart, her resignation of sorrow, 'the constant anguish of patience'.

"I like Mr Clarence Cook's notice of it, in the paper you were so kind as to send. It must be regarded as a great success of the young artist; and he and his friends have every reason to be proud of it."

⁶³ Since William told Susan in a letter of 11 December 1859 that he had invited Mattie Griffith "for a good long visit," the Neills are likely to have been among the abolitionist friends she visited in England in 1860–61.

⁶⁴ It is curious that Susan and William's son was given the same names as Mary Ellen Meredith's son Harold, born some eighteen months earlier on 18 April 1858, and her lover Henry Wallis. The choice seems to have been entirely Susan's, for William, after suggesting several other names in letters of 28 November and 6 December 1859, finally wrote on 17 January 1860: "Call baby what you like—you have the best right to name him—but not more than one name."

a number of areas, including religion (he was Unitarian while she was Trinitarian, presumably Anglican).

After residing for a year or two at Avenham Tower, Preston, the Neills settled in 1863 at Belsize Lodge, on Hampstead Heath, which often served as a temporary London home for the Braces and other members of William's widely scattered family.⁶⁵ After the abolition of slavery in the United States, the Neills began to focus more on the issue of women's suffrage in England. Susan and her sister-in-law Dora Neill were both among the 1,499 women who signed the Kensington Society's women's suffrage petition presented to Parliament by John Stuart Mill on 7 June 1866.⁶⁶ Susan's subsequent service as a local organizer in Elizabeth Garrett's landmark campaign for election to the London School Board was gratefully acknowledged in a letter from the successful candidate dated 1 December [1870]:

Dear M^{rs} Neill

So many thanks to you, M^r Neill & Shattie for your kind congratulations.

It is indeed a splendid victory. You will like to know that Hampstead gave me 4,364, Marshall 1,664, Huxley & Angus each about 1,100. It tells volumes for the work my friends did for me that I sh^d have had such a majority in the centre of Toryism & Churchism.

Will you please make a complete list of all the canvassers & other workers in your district, & let me have it as soon as you can. Perhaps you c^d talk it over with D^r Anderson & if possible guard against omissions. I should like to send one cordial word at least to each of them.

Remember me very kindly & gratefully to M^r Flemming & M^r & M^{rs} Maitland. I hope to have time to write to them this evening.

Yours most truly | Elizabeth Garrett

⁶⁵ Their London friends included the American abolitionist and Unitarian clergyman Moncure Daniel Conway, who later recalled that when he and his wife Ellen arrived at Ostend at the end of August 1864, "Finding our London friends, Mr. and Mrs. William Neill and their little son Harold for our child to play with, we remained a week at Ostend" (*Autobiography: Memories and Experiences of Moncure Daniel Conway*, 2 vols. [Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1904], 2:13-14).

⁶⁶ Although the original signed petition was destroyed, a version with the signatories' names and addresses in alphabetical order was privately printed on the initiative of Emily Davies: *To the Honourable the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, in Parliament Assembled* [A petition praying the Commons to consider the expediency of providing for the representation of all householders, without distinction of sex] [London, 1866].

William and Susan had known Elizabeth Garrett (afterward Anderson) since their early days in London, and they later supported her campaign to open the medical profession to women.

The Neills' only son, Harold Henry Neill (1859–1945), attended Clifton College, Bristol⁶⁷ and became a successful journalist as well as a Fellow of the Royal Colonial Institute. He married Louisa Buchanan Holton (1864–1942), with whom he had two children: Eileen Buchanan Njal Neill, afterward Michell-Clarke (1892–1942), and Rolfe Mayne Neill (1898–1917), who was educated at Westminster School before being killed in action as a second lieutenant in the Royal Flying Corps.⁶⁸ Harold was an early patron of the Australian painter (Sir) John Longstaff, from whom he commissioned portraits of his mother, wife, and daughter.⁶⁹ Louisa adapted an illustrated French children's book under the title *Living Toys*.⁷⁰

As a companion for their natural son, the Neills adopted an American child, Charlotte Augusta Edings (1860–1962), whose parents, Joseph David Edings and his second wife Adeline Fripp, were both members of slave-owning planter families on St. Helena Island, South Carolina, forced to flee the island after the Battle of Port Royal on 7 November 1861.⁷¹ Although the circumstances of Charlotte's adoption remain a mystery, it appears that William and Susan brought her to England themselves in May 1867.⁷² Known as "Shattie" in the family, she studied at the Slade School of Fine Art and married (Sir) Lewis Beard (1858–1933), the son and grandson of prominent Unitarian ministers, who became Town Clerk, successively, of Coventry and Blackburn and was

⁶⁷ *Clifton College Annals and Register, 1860–1897* (Bristol, 1897), 173.

⁶⁸ *The Record of Old Westminster: A Biographical List of . . . Westminster School from the Earliest Times to 1927*, comp. G. F. Russell Barker and Alan H. Stenning, 2 vols. (London: Chiswick Press, 1928), 2:686.

⁶⁹ The portrait of Susan, probably painted in 1893–94, has recently been restored for Jim Powell. The portrait of Louisa was reproduced in the *West End* in May 1899 and the one of Eileen was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1913, but neither of these has been located.

⁷⁰ *Living Toys: A Wonder Book for Girls and Boys*, adapted from the French of G. Montorgueil by Mrs. Harold Neill, the Illustrations by Job [Jacques-Marie-Gaston Onfray de Breuille] (London: T. Sealey Clark, 1905).

⁷¹ For details of the Edings family, see *Norwich University, 1819–1911: Her History, Her Graduates, Her Roll of Honor*, ed. William Arba Ellis, 3 vols. (Montpelier, Vermont: Capital City Press, 1911), 2:106–7.

⁷² According to an obituary notice in *The Times*, 3 January 1962, Charlotte "was brought to England in 1866." However, a manuscript account of her early life by her son-in-law Joseph Eccles quotes a letter from William to his sister Mary Anne describing the voyage to England with Charlotte in May 1867 (MS in the possession of one of Charlotte's descendants).

knighted in 1919, "for public and local services."⁷³ After a long widowhood, Charlotte died in 1962 at the advanced age of 102.

William Neill died at 11A Palace Gardens Mansions, Notting Hill Gate, on 18 March 1913, leaving his entire estate valued at £4,528 to Susan, trusting that she would look after the interests of their children.⁷⁴ Susan presumably managed to transfer most of their assets to their children before she died at the age of ninety, from "senile decay" and bronchitis, at 1 Astwood Mews, Kensington, on 4 March 1921, leaving an estate valued at only £409. Since she died intestate, administration was granted to her son Harold, who was living nearby, at 22 Eldon Road, Kensington.⁷⁵

Although we know a good deal about Susan's life and family connections, she herself remains something of an enigma. While she privately acknowledged her relationship to the Peacocks, she always maintained her public identity as an Abbott, and it remains unclear how she felt about her natural father and how closely she guarded the secret of her paternity. In any case, that secret might have gone to the grave with her if she had not preserved the Merediths' letters and left them in an envelope provocatively labeled "Destroy or burn at my death."

THE MEREDITHS' LETTERS TO "SUSIE PYE"

The Merediths' extant letters to Susan Mary Abbott Neill fall into two distinct groups, the first preceding and the second following the couple's separation in September 1857. The first four letters were written between Christmas 1854 and 12 October 1855, which was Susan's twenty-fifth birthday. George's Christmas letter was enclosed with a missing one from Mary, while the birthday letter was mainly from Mary, with a brief note from George appended on the same sheet of stationery. George's two intervening letters were written in March and April 1855, when he was away from home. The second group of letters consists of three from George, all written in May and June 1861, when Susan, now married to William Neill, was visiting London and trying unsuccessfully to arrange a meeting with her brother-in-law, probably

⁷³ See Herbert McLachlan, *Records of a Family, 1800–1933: Pioneers in Education, Social Service, and Liberal Religion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1935), 86–94.

⁷⁴ Probate copy of William Neill's will, signed in San Francisco and dated 19 May 1876, with a codicil dated 23 August 1894, Principal Registry of the Family Division.

⁷⁵ Death certificate, General Record Office. Letters of administration, granted 30 November 1925, Principal Registry of the Family Division.

for the first time since his separation from Mary. The four earlier letters must have been part of a much larger correspondence carried on mainly between Mary and Susan while the Merediths were still living together, and presumably continued by the two sisters after the couple's separation. Since Susan apparently destroyed all of Mary's other letters, it seems likely that her sister's birthday letter was preserved only for the sake of George's note on the last page. And since she seems to have treasured George's letters, it is possible that the seven she preserved were the only ones that he wrote to her.

These new letters are valuable for many reasons, not least because they are among the most revealing personal documents now known to have survived George Meredith's efforts to suppress all written records of his family background and first marriage.⁷⁶ Although Mary may have attempted to enlist Susan as an ally in her quarrels with her husband, George's letters indicate that he not only liked and admired his sister-in-law but also trusted her to be reasonably impartial in any assessment of blame for their marital problems. While the Merediths' letters to Susan do not explain the failure of their marriage, they do provide interesting glimpses of the couple's family life and circumstances in 1854–55, including their financial struggles, Mary's chronic illness, and George's intense devotion to their son Arthur. One significant revelation is the fact that for some six weeks in March and April 1855—almost immediately following the funeral of Charles Mansfield, who appears to have been Mary's lover as well as George's friend—George was living alone in London while Mary remained at Lower Halliford, suffering from an unspecified illness that he believed to be at least partly psychosomatic. George's 1861 letters, though terse and guarded, contain some of his earliest recorded comments on the failure of his first marriage. Writing to a sister-in-law who may have known as much as anyone about the circumstances, he characterized himself in one letter as "just wise enough to see what a fool he has been," then asked in the next, "was I not an ass?"

The interest of the letters to Susan is literary as well as biographical. George's 1854–55 letters contain critical remarks on the work of sev-

⁷⁶ Of the more than 2,800 Meredith letters published to date, fewer than fifty were written prior to his separation from Mary Ellen in September 1857. Most of these early letters are available in *The Letters of George Meredith*, ed. C. L. Cline, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 1:1–32 and 3:1701 (hereafter cited as *GM Letters*). A few more have since been collected by Mohammad Shaheen, in *Selected Letters*, 17–32. However, Shaheen's biographical speculations concerning Meredith's first marriage are often unwarranted, as are many of his introductory strictures on Cline's editing (1–15).

eral contemporary writers, including Charlotte Brontë, Alfred Tennyson, and the working-class poet Gerald Massey. They also provide valuable information about the composition, revision, and publication of his first work of fiction, *The Shaving of Shagpat*, whose pre-publication history has hitherto been a complete blank. It now appears that the writing of his "Arabian Entertainment" was well advanced by Christmas 1854, and that even before the completion of the manuscript Chapman & Hall had shown a serious interest in publishing the book with illustrations. By the middle of March 1855, the title and subtitle having been chosen, George could report that Edward Chapman had received "a very favourable opinion of my MSS" from the firm's Reader, John Forster, and that "an offer for the first edition of a thousand copies" would soon be forthcoming. Publication would, however, be delayed because Chapman wanted to have the volume illustrated as a "Christmas book," despite the fact that Richard Doyle was too busy to undertake the task. By 21 April, Chapman had accepted George's terms and agreed to pay in advance, though there is no further reference to illustrations. On 12 October, George told Susan that he had rewritten much of the book and that he expected it to appear in the first week of November. After further delays, it was finally published, without illustrations, on 19 December. George's 1861 letters also contain information about various works in progress or in contemplation, including three novels as well as a projected volume of poems that would eventually be expanded, after Mary's death on 22 October, to include *Modern Love*.

GEORGE MEREDITH TO SUSAN MARY ABBOTT,
[24 OR 25 DECEMBER 1854]

Lower Halliford⁷⁷

Dearest Susie Pye: | (née Abbott)

I cannot let this occasion pass without giving you the greatest existing proof in my power (viz, by writing a letter) of my good wishes for your happiness now, as at all times. I am too busy to scrawl much, being now in the very heat of composing and concluding one of my 'Arabian Nights': not of those that you have heard, but original altogether, and which I have every reason to think will be accepted by Chapman &

⁷⁷ Meredith's references to the Crimean War and the Enlistment of Foreigners Bill clearly indicate that this Christmas letter was written in 1854. The Merediths were then living at Vine Cottage, across the village green from Peacock's house at Lower Halliford. An accompanying letter from Mary has not been preserved.

Hall & published with Illustrations.⁷⁸ Indeed I have just broken off to pen this to you, Mary having said in her usual solemn uncompromising manner

—“George! you have asked me to tell you when I write to Susan, thereby you may send an accompanying Autograph: George!—I write to day!”⁷⁹

consequently my Genies, and enchanted Damsels, and gazelles, and camels, and magical adventures, must remain postured where I left them till SUSIE PYE is disposed of, and ‘Merry Christmases’ and Compliments of the Season be uttered heartily. And yet, O my SUSIE! Where is Merry Christmas this year in England? What Compliments of the Season can one of English blood speak to another, while Britons sink in the ghastly trench, British mothers, wives, brides, sob for the beloved ones fallen to rise no more: while the whole heart of our England is beating with throbs of doubt,—uncertainty whether the next morning it shall exult with such an exultation as nation never yet knew—or break. Methinks, O my SUSIE! ‘twere well if we could all just meet, clasp a hand—perchance breathe a prayer—and be quiet. - - - - -

Not that your George desponds! O my Susie, no! He is of them that believe if England be true to herself she must triumph. He rejoices in the French Alliance:⁸⁰ detests the Foreign Mercenary Bill:⁸¹ and even has some idea that if nothing else offers, he, too, may possibly don red and put left leg forward.⁸² - - - - -

So Parker⁸³ has been knocked off his Pedestal! He that stood so much

⁷⁸ This is the earliest known reference to Meredith’s first work of fiction, *The Shaving of Shagpat: An Arabian Entertainment*, which would eventually be published by Chapman & Hall without illustrations. Meredith’s insistence on the work’s originality anticipates his prefatory note to the first edition, dated 8 December 1855: “It has seemed to me that the only way to tell an Arabian Story was by imitating the style and manner of Oriental Story-tellers. But such an attempt, whether successful or not, may read like a translation: I therefore think it better to prelude this Entertainment by an avowal that it springs from no Eastern source, and is in every sense an original Work.”

⁷⁹ This would appear to be an example of what Kate Horne described, in a letter of 18 November 1852 to her husband Richard Henry Horne, as Mary’s practice of “speaking at” George (*Selected Letters*, 27).

⁸⁰ On 28 March 1854, Britain and France jointly declared war on Russia, joining Turkey in the Crimean War.

⁸¹ The Enlistment of Foreigners Bill, passed on 22 December 1854.

⁸² This is the only indication that Meredith considered volunteering for military service, though he is known to have written a volume of “British Songs,” which he offered to John William Parker, Jr., in July 1855 (*GM Letters*, 1:21–22).

⁸³ John William Parker, Jr. (1820–60) was a friend of the Merediths as well as a partner in the publishing firm of John W. Parker & Son, and editor of *Fraser’s Magazine* from 1843 until his death. I have not discovered the nature of the setback or embarrassment that he had recently suffered.

above us! It sufficed simply for a penny stamp and a dab of ink to do this! Such is greatness! As for me I humbly pray I may always be allowed to walk an even path; that I may not taste humiliation, O my Susie! — One must feel kindly to Parker, notwithstanding the peculiar meanness, smallness, pettiness, of his conduct to Mary — the silly, stupid letters he writes, and the complaints below contempt he indulges her with.⁸⁴

I have read *Villette*⁸⁵ with Mary. A most charming work! I like Lucy Snowe, moreover, who hath some points wherein to be compared to my SUSIE. But above all, and beyond all special *characters* in fiction that I wot of, there is no one to me so life-like and delightful in simplicity, uniqueness, and distinct drawing, as Paul Emmanuel. More of him when we meet, O my Susie! - - - When? ah! what may hap 'twixt now & then?⁸⁶ Your George and your Black Sea Sidebottom⁸⁷ — of whom dear Mary is talking to everyone here as 'Susan's Sidebottom' who was stunned by the cannonade: She calling him, in consequence 'Susan's Stunner',⁸⁸ irreverently as I think — these two may be Russian earth! . . .⁸⁹

Kate Horne⁹⁰ came over from the Gillies' at Weybridge⁹¹ the other day,

⁸⁴ Parker had been making difficulties over Mary's manuscript revisions for a projected new edition of William Kitchiner's *Apicius Redivivus; or, The Cook's Oracle* (1817). See her letters to Parker of 7 June 1853 and 14 October [1853], in my article, "New Correspondence of Mary Ellen Meredith," 508–10.

⁸⁵ Charlotte Brontë's novel *Villette* was published in late January 1853. Meredith had sent her a copy of his *Poems* (1851) inscribed "To The Author of 'Jane Eyre' with Geo. Meredith's respects" (Parrish Collection, Princeton).

⁸⁶ Meredith is echoing Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Youth and Age" (1828), lines 6–7: "When I was young?—Ah, woful WHEN! / Ah for the Change 'twixt Now and Then!" (*Poetical Works*, ed. J. C. C. Mays, 3 vols. in 6 [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001], 1/2:1012).

⁸⁷ Meredith is evidently referring to a soldier in the Crimea with whom Susan was romantically involved — possibly Captain George Kershaw Sidebottom, of Mottram, near Manchester, who might have been "stunned by the cannonade" when serving with the 5th Dragoon Guards as part of the Heavy Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava on 25 October 1854. He died at sea on his return voyage to England and was buried at Gibraltar on 22 July 1855. See Ralph Legge Pomeroy, *The Story of a Regiment of Horse, Being the Regimental History from 1685 to 1922 of the 5th Princess Charlotte of Wales' Dragoon Guards*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1924), 2:172 and 262. (Lieutenant Leonard Sidebottom, of Worcester, served as adjutant of the Buffs during the siege of Sevastopol, but his regiment did not reach the Crimea until 1855.)

⁸⁸ The colloquial term "stunner" was more commonly applied to a strikingly attractive woman, especially by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and his circle of Pre-Raphaelite painters.

⁸⁹ The ellipsis points are Meredith's.

⁹⁰ Catherine Clare St. George Foggo (born ca. 1825), who had married the writer Richard Henry (later Hengist) Horne (1802–84) in June 1847.

⁹¹ The writer Mary Gillies (1800–70) and her sister the painter Margaret Gillies (1803–87) moved to The Pines at Weybridge in September 1854 with Margaret's long-time partner, the physician and sanitary reformer (Thomas) Southwood Smith (1788–1861). All three were radical Unitarians and close friends of Kate's husband.

and saw our young Arthur. What she said of him, let her say to you. She said of Horne that she has not heard from him, or of, for six unpoetic months!⁹² But of my boy let me say of him that so dear, gentle, intelligent a spirit, & so bluff, hearty, and jovial a nature, as young Arthur's would with difficulty be found among the rising generation. He is my star—my spring of life—my pride—But enough! and to Arabia once more: Felix, or the Desert,⁹³ as Chapman & Hall decide: Even thus do Publishers settle vast Continents: and confound geography to poor Authors! No news. You shall hear more of my⁹⁴ book when it is out. T. T.⁹⁵ has been very kind. Alack! Alack! I have no gossip for my SUSIE, to cheer her droned-out life:⁹⁶ but God bless her! says her sincere brother in-law

George Meredith

To Md^{lle} | Susie Pye | née Abbott.⁹⁷

Dozon⁹⁸ is at Belgrade as you, perhaps, know. No news of him, or whether he is cured of his extraordinary passion for 'meesuntar'.⁹⁹

I don't know if Mary will do so, but I consider myself in duty bound to wish you an appetite for your Beef: your Ale: your Turkey: your Port-Wine: and your Pudding. Also, after it, a good digestion!—O my Susie! I have been dealing with Eastern abstractions & rejoice to write of these things to a real British damsel! Wherefore, misunderstand me not, nor

⁹² In June 1852, Horne had sailed for the gold fields of Australia, leaving Kate without adequate financial provision. In January 1854, she had written to request a permanent separation, which was eventually granted.

⁹³ Playing on the Roman names for portions of the Arabian peninsula: the relatively fertile region in the southwest known as Arabia Felix ("Fruitful" or "Fortunate") and the vast central desert known as Arabia Deserta.

⁹⁴ The rest of the letter, except for the two postscripts, is written at the top of the first page.

⁹⁵ Tom Taylor (1817–80), the playwright and comic writer, was a leading contributor to *Punch* and later its editor. The Merediths had met him when they were boarding at The Limes in Weybridge in 1850.

⁹⁶ *OED* does not record any use of "droned-out" as an adjective.

⁹⁷ This inside address is squeezed in immediately above the salutation, apparently to emphasize, through its redundancy, the playful allusion to the discovery of Susan's true parentage.

⁹⁸ Auguste Dozon (1822–91), a French diplomat at Belgrade, who later published translations of Serbian and Bulgarian popular poetry. Meredith gave him a copy of his *Poems* (1851) inscribed "M. Auguste Dozon—from George Meredith" (Parrish Collection, Princeton University).

⁹⁹ This postscript is written up the left margin of the first page. The puzzling "meesuntar" may have been an attempt to render Dozon's French pronunciation of "Miss Hunter."

snarl at me for thinking you other than eyes & toes. I would we might eat & drink together! 'Tis a holy occupation!¹⁰⁰

GEORGE MEREDITH TO SUSAN MARY ABBOTT, [?15] MARCH 1855

Date: Thursday: somewhere in March 1855.¹⁰¹

Dearest Susie

You are not one to care for smart writing: too sensible is my Pye for that, or I should not just yet take pen in hand, being for a while both physically & mentally prostrated. Nevertheless, for I know her dull where she is in the wilds bordering on Manchester,¹⁰² I begin at the top of the page, meaning conscienciously to fill up for her a true pennyworth of post. You have heard of our dear Charles Mansfield's death.¹⁰³ That has given us a great shock. I say, you have heard, for I doubt not one of your correspondents¹⁰⁴ has stated to you the sad accident which befel that noble fellow, one of the noblest & best of the men of this earth:—now otherwhere, and I hesitate not to think in better case: better even tho' he be but the inanimate dust he was fast becoming when I last beheld him in this life. Yet life is lovely, very lovely! I am inscribing from a heart-ache. Enough that all is now well with him; and for us, why, we must go on in our allotted course as we may. Our time is short; and as things are with most of us, the duties of existence rather than its delights, become the chief bonds of being. So let those duties light thee and me onward till we alike are lowered slowly down into the dark vault—amid tears? Ah! if they be as plenteous, as precious, as those which fell with my dear friend, 'twill be indeed a consolation for strenuous endeavours in a right path this side the grave. But few will pass away regretted like Charles Mansfield. I with some thirty other

¹⁰⁰ This postscript is written up the left margins of the second and third pages.

¹⁰¹ The date was inserted as an addendum, presumably when the letter was finished, some time after the funeral of Charles Mansfield on 5 March (see note 105, below). Meredith's lack of precision suggests a Thursday around the middle of the month, probably the 15th. In any case, George was living in lodgings at 25 Lower Belgrave Street, Eaton Square, while Mary remained with Arthur at Halliford.

¹⁰² Susan may have been visiting Robert Garrod's daughter Helen and her husband Robert William Bennett, a Manchester solicitor. Both of the Bennetts would later be among the witnesses at Susan's marriage to William Mayne Neill.

¹⁰³ The distinguished chemist and social reformer Charles Blachford Mansfield (1819–55) died at the Middlesex Hospital on 26 February from burns incurred in a laboratory accident on 17 February.

¹⁰⁴ George is referring to Mary, who apparently had an affair with Mansfield in 1853–54. See my article, "Mary Ellen's First Affair: New Light on the Biographical Background to *Modern Love*," *Times Literary Supplement*, 15 June 2007, 13–15.

friends stood over him there: he was buried at Weybridge:¹⁰⁵ I think there was not a dry face among us.¹⁰⁶

No one can say clearly how the accident happened. He was distilling from Naptha a spirit called Benzole.¹⁰⁷ His assistant, a youth, did not properly execute his orders, and when Charles entered the laboratory (situate somewhere near King's Cross),¹⁰⁸ he saw the danger and caught up the crucible (or whatever it was that contained the Naptha), and tried to save the house from flames by bearing the stuff away thro' the door—but that was locked. He then attempted the window, and the wind sent the flames back on him & the youth, burning them terribly. He had strength to jump into a cab & drive to the Middlesex Hospital,¹⁰⁹ where, at first, strong hopes were entertained of his recovery, but after lying there ten days he sunk. The shock sustained by his nervous system was the cause of his death. His face was severely burnt: he would not have had the use of his hands again, even if he had lived. He did not suffer much: that was merciful, tho' he was one to bear all with fortitude. I watched with him some time, and was alone with him the Sunday morning when his life was pronounced in danger. Poor Robert¹¹⁰ is much cut up, as who would not be. In him his friends have lost a brother, and we feel that one is gone whose place will not be filled up.

And now, Susie, for a reply to your elaborate queries. If I had not them to fall back upon, I should close this epistle, for I am awearry,¹¹¹ and turn to few subjects healthfully after that sad one.

^{1st} The Bells.¹¹² Answer: I chime with them both. M^{rs} Bell is that best

¹⁰⁵ Mansfield was buried in the churchyard of St. James, Weybridge, on 5 March 1855 (parish register, Surrey History Centre). The service, performed by Frederick Denison Maurice, was attended by many of the leading Christian Socialists. After the funeral, Meredith wrote two notebook poems titled "C B M" and "Dirge," first printed in *The Poems of George Meredith*, ed. Phyllis B. Bartlett, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1978), 2:1004–6 (hereafter cited as *Poems*).

¹⁰⁶ Compare the final lines of Meredith's "C B M": "Forty young men stood round his bier, / In every eye there was a tear!" (*Poems*, 2:1005).

¹⁰⁷ "The name given by Liebig in 1834 to what had at first been called *benzine*; generally used in chemistry till recent times, when it has been largely superseded by Hofmann's name *benzene*" (*OED*, s.v. Benzol/Benzole).

¹⁰⁸ Other accounts indicate that Mansfield's laboratory was located on or near the Regent's Canal, which passes just north of King's Cross.

¹⁰⁹ The Middlesex Hospital was located on Mortimer Street, in the neighborhood now known as Fitzrovia.

¹¹⁰ Charles's brother Robert Blachford Mansfield (1824–1908), a writer and sportsman.

¹¹¹ Meredith is echoing the refrain of Alfred Tennyson's "Mariana" (1830): "She said, 'I am awearry, awearry, / I would that I were dead!'" (*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks [London: Longmans, 1969], 187–90).

¹¹² The radical Irish journalist, editor, and miscellaneous writer Robert Bell (1800–67)

order of spouse who cleaves to her husband. They are one, in consequence—a rare sight! So you may imagine I had an appetite for dinner—which I have not when the reverse is perceptible in host & hostess. I did not read my Arabian Story to Bell, as the MSS was then lying with Doyle:¹¹³ but I stated the plot to him, & he expressed himself pleased therewith¹¹⁴—I know not with how much truth, and my Pye may learn that sooner than her poet.

^{2nd} “Tears, idle Tears.” Answer. They occur in the Princess. The lines like everything in Tennyson are *pictorial* in their emotion.¹¹⁵

“Sad as the last that reddens over one

That sinks &c — — —”

that is to say:

“Sad as the last beam of sunset splendour *looks* to us who see it reddening over a *sail* which is (apparently) *sinking* with its freight of loved beings¹¹⁶ *below* the *horizon verge*”. He speaks, if I remember rightly in a previous stanza of a sail bringing up friends from the *underworld*. Meaning thereby, *not* the abode of Satan, but the other side of our earthly ball.

^{3rd} Thomas Ingoldsby:¹¹⁷ Was, I believe, a Canon of St Paul’s: became famous as a doggrel versifier and desperate rhymer, as for instance:

“Henry Plantagenet

Wore a hat with a badge in it.”¹¹⁸

and his wife Elizabeth were friends of Susan’s. Meredith had reviewed Bell’s edition of *Songs of the Dramatists* in *Fraser’s Magazine* for November 1854.

¹¹³ The prominent illustrator Richard Doyle (see note 126, below).

¹¹⁴ Bell subsequently arranged for Meredith to read “the first part of my ‘Arabian Night’” at the chambers of John William Parker, Jr. See Meredith’s letter to Parker dated from Lower Halliford, on “Monday Morning” (*GM Letters*, 1:22).

¹¹⁵ Meredith proceeds to quote from memory, slightly inaccurately and out of order, two passages from the second stanza of Tennyson’s blank-verse lyric “Tears, idle tears,” in *The Princess* (1847), 4.26–30:

Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail,
That brings our friends up from the underworld,
Sad as the last which reddens over one
That sinks with all we love below the verge;
So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more.

(*Poems*, ed. Ricks, 785)

¹¹⁶ The words “of loved beings” are inserted above the line.

¹¹⁷ This was the pseudonym of Richard Harris Barham (1788–1845), a minor canon of St. Paul’s Cathedral, whose comically grotesque metrical tales were published in *Bentley’s Miscellany* and the *New Monthly Magazine* from 1837 to 1845 and collected in three series as *The Ingoldsby Legends; or, Mirth and Marvels* (1840, 1842, and 1847).

¹¹⁸ These lines recall a comic rhyme in “The Brothers of Birchington: A Lay of St. Thomas à Becket,” published in the *New Monthly Magazine* 74 (June 1845): 145–55: “A very

Author of "My Lord Tomnoddy?"¹¹⁹ Man of talent, and all's said. "I laye a thynkyngye"¹²⁰ very pretty & quaint.

4th Gerald Massey.¹²¹ Worth reading. Remains to be seen what he will do. Has fire: is excessively imitative; but that's youth. Is not, I think, sufficiently certain of himself. Has not yet done aught that will stand against Time five years. So far very like your humble servant, who, nevertheless, has that by him which will arrest memory for many years. I fancy I perceive in Massey too feverish a desire for Fame: hence a frequent unreal fire—a fire blown into flame by frantic puffs, swollen cheeks, starting eyes &c. This may be a consequence of his position, which is obscure, and he's a young man, and youth is sensitive and loves conspicuousness. Massey has more in him than three fourths of the present generation of poetasters—that despised race. His last volume of *War Songs*¹²² is a decided improvement in versification—that is much to say. Lyric poets must never be excused for ruggedness. They are lyrists, or nothing. The lyre is an *instrument*. If they cannot play it they are not what they pretend to be. A monkey may 'sweep the chords',¹²³ and so may a master, but one makes discord & devilry, the other awakes divine sweetness. My Pye knows well when one sits down to her piano what the hand is worth, after hearing one touch.

I think now all is said? Yet something lingers reluctantly behind. Georgium Sidus.¹²⁴ Is it that he has been affecting reluctance to speak of himself?

great king who'd an Angevin Hat, / With a great sprig of broom, which he wore as a badge in it, / Named from this circumstance, Henry Plantagenet" (3–5).

¹¹⁹ My Lord Tomnoddy was the name of the jaded aristocrat in "The Execution: A Sporting Anecdote," published under the heading "Family Stories.—No. V.—Hon. Mr. Sucklethumbkin's Story" in *Bentley's Miscellany* 1 (June 1837): 561–64. Barham's poem was sometimes reprinted under the title "My Lord Tomnoddy," but it is just possible that Meredith had some knowledge of Robert Barnabas Brough's scathing radical satire "My Lord Tomnoddy," in *Songs of the Governing Classes*, which was not published until the summer of 1855 (the Preface is dated 22 June 1855). Brough's slim volume was published by James Vizetelly, the printer of Meredith's *Poems* (1851).

¹²⁰ "As I laye a-thynkyngye": The Last Lines of Thomas Ingoldsby," published in *Bentley's Miscellany* 18 (August 1845), 201–2.

¹²¹ (Thomas) Gerald Massey (1828–1907), a self-educated working-class poet with ties to the Chartists and the Christian Socialists. His third volume, *The Ballad of Babe Christabel, with Other Lyrical Poems* (1854), had been highly acclaimed and had run to five editions within a year.

¹²² *War Waits*, a slim volume of poems on the Crimean War, published in January 1855.

¹²³ "Sweeping the chords" was a poetic commonplace that Peacock had used in *The Genius of the Thames* (1810), and that Meredith himself had used in "The Flower in the Ruins," published in *Poems* (1851).

¹²⁴ "George's Star" was the name given by the astronomer Sir William Herschel to the planet Uranus in 1791, in honor of his patron, George III.

Well then, "The Shaving of Shagpat" an Arabian Entertainment, by George Meredith—is in the hands of Chapman & Hall, and they are this week to make me an offer for the first Edition of a thousand Copies. I don't sell the Copyright—being so advised.¹²⁵ Doyle has not time to illustrate it:¹²⁶ but Chapman insanely insists on illustrations, which will delay the bringing out of the book.¹²⁷ Indeed Chapman wants to make it a Christmas book¹²⁸—provoking, but such is the race of publishers from small Parker downwards, but he, poor fellow, I fancy to have a diseased brain. We meet no more, he & I. Should we meet, 'tis not as once we met.¹²⁹

I will not omit to say, that Chapman has had from his "Reader", (a species of literary Invisible in the pay of publishers),¹³⁰ a very favourable opinion of my MSS, which is so far satisfactory.

I am sorry to say my prospects of an Appointment in the E. I. H.¹³¹ look bad. I fear I shall have to look to Literature altogether. Bell said he would try and get me an engagement on a weekly publication of some sort—which I hope he'll not forget. I must repeat, he was exceedingly kind. Employment of that specific & regular order¹³² is what I want—myself will do the rest. That is to say, I have faith in the ultimate product of my own powers, but they're of slow growth & present a distant harvest. Mary frets, and will never get thoroughly well while our pros-

¹²⁵ Meredith told his agent William M. Coles in a letter of 15 April 1893: "As to *Shagpat*, this was the case. I sold to Edward Chapman, then head of the Firm, the original first Edition of it: only the Edition, for £80. No agreement of any kind was written" (*GM Letters*, 2:1129).

¹²⁶ Richard "Dicky" Doyle (1824–83) had recently illustrated *The Foreign Tour of Brown, Jones and Robinson* (1854), based on his travels in Europe with his friends Tom Taylor and Watts Phillips in 1850. He was currently illustrating Thackeray's *The Newcomes*, serialized from October 1853 to August 1855.

¹²⁷ *The Shaving of Shagpat* was eventually published without illustrations, but Meredith later expressed an interest in having a second edition illustrated by (Sir) John Tenniel. See his letter to Samuel Lucas, ca. 31 October 1859 (*GM Letters*, 1:44).

¹²⁸ Chapman & Hall had published Dickens's first two "Christmas Books," *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *The Chimes* (1844), as well as Thackeray's first three, *Mrs. Perkins's Ball* (1847), *Our Street* (1848), and *Doctor Birch and His Young Friends* (1849).

¹²⁹ Meredith is apparently echoing the first line of the lyric that concludes Thomas Kibble Hervey's "Floranthe," in *The Poetical Sketch-Book, Including a Third Edition of Australia* (London, 1829), 6: "We meet!—but not as, once, we met!"

¹³⁰ The "Reader" was John Forster (1804–80), who served as literary advisor to Dickens as well as to Chapman & Hall. Ironically, in view of this comment, Meredith himself would succeed Forster as "Reader" for Chapman & Hall in 1860.

¹³¹ East India House, where Peacock, as Examiner of Indian Correspondence, was trying to get Meredith a clerical appointment. See my article, "George and Mary Meredith, the East India Company, and the Society of Arts," esp. 473–81.

¹³² The word "order" is written through "kind".

pects are so uncertain. For her sake & and¹³³ my darling boy's—for their sakes alone—I suffer anxiety. Edith is provided for,¹³⁴ and I think I can see success for me in the main—meantime, however, the main may engulf me. Arthur has been very ill—an abscess, but is now much improved—thank Heaven! bright again as of old. Such brightness there is in this dear little fellow! Only I hope he will not be too precocious, & against that I guard. Mary is very judicious with him. I never saw so imitative a mortal. By the way, Bell sought to tantalize me by decrying the race of babies “nasty, soft, blubbering, eugh! horrible little monsters!” I think he'd not speak so of Arthur. He shall see the darling, & take shame to himself.

Mary has been very unwell again. Writes to me this morning that she's a little better. I know the specific for her—but cannot set it—the knowledge of that wrenches health & rest from me. I am in town—address, 25 Lower Belgrave St, Eaton Square, if you have a desire to write. I shall be here¹³⁵ a week or fortnight longer—perchance longer still. I dined with Rosa¹³⁶ yesterday. She's perfect medicine for an unquiet heart & brain—presides undisputed Empress of the dominions of Pure Calm. Howes¹³⁷ dined there with me the other day: took Rosa down to dinner: sat beside her all the evening: seized the hot kettle without holder to assist her sainted Tea-pot to boiling water. To see him smirk & chuckle with innocent satisfaction was a wondrous sight. He is an excellent fellow, & realizes the old legend of the faithful swain in these degenerate days of Cockneyism.¹³⁸ Henry¹³⁹ is roseate with prosperity: so is Dodie:¹⁴⁰ & little Margaret¹⁴¹ is proving a pretty child—much more after the mother than Dodie, who bounced off direct in the Collinson line from her birth.

F i n i s.¹⁴²

¹³³ The word “and” is accidentally repeated at the beginning of a new line.

¹³⁴ Mary's daughter Edith Nicolls was presumably provided for by her paternal grandparents, General Sir Edward and Lady Nicolls.

¹³⁵ The word “here” has been altered from “hear”.

¹³⁶ Peacock's daughter Rosa Jane, whose family had recently moved to a new house at 31 Inverness Road, Paddington (see *TLP Letters*, 2:352n).

¹³⁷ Henry Howes was a clerk in the Adjutant General's Office at the Horse Guards, who had collaborated with George and Mary in producing “The Monthly Observer” in 1848–49. He was the “Mr Howse” mentioned by George's cousin S. M. Ellis as one of the three people who attended Mary's funeral (*George Meredith: His Life and Friends in Relation to His Work* [London: Grant Richards, 1919], 87).

¹³⁸ Meredith appears to associate “Cockneyism” with sexual laxity as well as social vulgarity.

¹³⁹ Rosa's husband, Henry Collinson (1811–77), a barrister turned merchant.

¹⁴⁰ Evidently a pet name for the Collinsons' eldest daughter, Rosa (1850–99).

¹⁴¹ The Collinsons' second daughter, Margaret Ellen (1854–57).

¹⁴² This word is written in oversized, spaced letters.

Am I a good Correspondent? But when shall I write again? To say the truth, I am never certain of my constancy as a Correspondent—'tis fitful—now it rages—now droops. Boreas¹⁴³ for an hour, it may possibly be tropical calm for years.

Still ever your affectionate brother,
George Meredith.

The Thames was frozen over at Halliford: and a sheep roasted on it to celebrate the event. Old Tilliard¹⁴⁴ fell in and was dried & scoured by virgins. After that he was constantly looking for another hole.¹⁴⁵

GEORGE MEREDITH TO SUSAN MARY ABBOTT,

[21 APRIL 1855]

25 Lower Belgrave Street¹⁴⁶

Dear Susie Pye

I will endeavour to arrange for Mary to be in Town by Wednesday next. The only difficulty is that *I* must be in Town the morning of that day (having an appointment with a policeman at Bow St regarding a letter stolen by a postman of unhappy birth),¹⁴⁷ — and who to leave with my dear boy becomes a question of importance. At all events she will be here on the following day. I will tell her your wish, and perhaps she may arrange for someone to spend the day (Wednesday)¹⁴⁸ with Arthur till I can get down to him. I am quite as anxious as you for her to get away from Halliford, and it is not owing to want of exertion on my part that she is not here now. There is in this House no second room. You might, 'tis possible, get a room close by. Shall I look for one? Write, and I will do so. I do not want her to remain long in Town as a fortnight's sea air will do her more good than London. Nor can I write while I know her to be fretting & ill. It is a constant fever to me. Chapman has accepted my terms & is going to pay in advance next week. In two months

¹⁴³ The blustery north wind of Greek mythology.

¹⁴⁴ Probably Thomas Tilliard, a rope maker at Lower Halliford, whose premises were insured by the Sun Fire Office in 1833 (Guildhall Library MS 11936/539/1163665).

¹⁴⁵ This postscript is written up the left margin of the first page.

¹⁴⁶ This letter appears to have been written shortly before Meredith's letter to Tom Taylor of 24 April 1855, dated from "25 Lower Belgrave Square" and mentioning Mary's coming to London: "Mary is coming to Town this week and then going to the sea-side" (*GM Letters*, 1:21). Since Meredith was writing on a Saturday, the date was almost certainly 21 April. Susan was apparently staying with Peacock's daughter Rosa Collinson at Paddington.

¹⁴⁷ Meredith's appointment was probably at the Metropolitan Police Service station house in Bow Street, rather than at the Bow Street Magistrates' Court.

¹⁴⁸ "(Wednesday)" is inserted above the line.

more, if Mary gets better and all's smooth, I shall have finished something else¹⁴⁹—not 'fairy' which you sneer at, my Susie!

Give my warm love to my dear Rosa. Thank her from me for her kindness.¹⁵⁰ Tell me how she is when you write. I called on Henry in the City yesterday to enquire¹⁵¹ . . . but he was out and a fable written on paper 'Return in 3 minutes', more than which time I waited, and, he not being a Genie, could not summon him from space, & so departed.

Trusting the chicks are well in the House¹⁵²

I am your affectionate

GM——

Saturday.

Miss S. Pye¹⁵³

MARY ELLEN AND GEORGE MEREDITH TO
SUSAN MARY ABBOTT, 12 OCTOBER [1855]

Seaford: Sussex. October 12.¹⁵⁴

My dearest Susan

I cannot let your birthday pass without a word of congratulation: yes *congratulation* dear Susan, not for its lonely anniversary but because it renews the term of a good true life that is worth living, that is *wealth* to you & to your friends. I hope this may be its last¹⁵⁵ lonely year, but there is comfort by comparison in a lonely birthday, it is better than one passed with jarring relatives, for if the day is not wealth to them it is poor indeed to you, while the disregard of strangers is no loss, no pain. And you are left free in your loneliness to commune with high & holy thoughts, & get strength, pure & un-hindered, from the fountain head.¹⁵⁶ Baby sends aunt Susan "me love & a kiss for her nice day".

¹⁴⁹ This unidentified work may not have progressed very far, for Meredith says in his next letter to Susan that he has rewritten much of *The Shaving of Shagpat*.

¹⁵⁰ Rosa's kindness may have included some sort of financial assistance to the Merediths.

¹⁵¹ The ellipsis points are Meredith's.

¹⁵² The chicks were presumably the Collinsons' children in their house at Paddington.

¹⁵³ "Miss S. Pye" is written in the bottom left corner of the first page.

¹⁵⁴ Mary's reference to "A Wife's Story" and George's reference to the approaching publication of *The Shaving of Shagpat* clearly establish 1855 as the year of this joint birthday letter. This is the earliest period that the Merediths are known to have visited Seaford, where they usually lodged with the village carpenter and wheelwright Richard Oxenden and his wife.

¹⁵⁵ The word "last" is inserted above the line.

¹⁵⁶ Susan's loneliness at this time may have been due to the death of Captain George Kershaw Sidebottom twelve weeks earlier (see note 87, above).

Edith who is here since Saturday for her Michaelmas Holidays¹⁵⁷ sends her best love & wishes you many happy returns of the day.

Our plans are again changed, Ted¹⁵⁸ has taken the cottage only to the 1st of December, so M^{rs} Adams¹⁵⁹ will go there with us for three months if she is not confined before that time which I rather expect, I don't much think she will go over the 7 months. I shall get the wife's story when I go to Town, I hear it is written by a Miss Emily Jolly, a girl.¹⁶⁰ I have never heard from Jane Cuthbert¹⁶¹ what is her address now, I shall be at Blackheath¹⁶² next Saturday week & would go & see her if I knew where. I hope your discomforts are lessened by this time, tell me dear & write soon. George is in daily expectation of the Ordonance Money,¹⁶³ if it comes soon we shall be all right, if not I shall perhaps be¹⁶⁴ glad to be able to borrow again of you—but I hope not to need it.

Ever dearest Susan | Your affectionate sister

Mary Meredith

My dear Pye

Mary leaves me a little space for a few words.¹⁶⁵ Having no room to dilate, therefore, I must positively be serious, and leave aside farce. So I wish you all happiness, my dear girl! Life is an odd riddle, which you seem to be quietly solving for yourself in a manner to shame noisier ones. We wish you were with us. Of myself I have nothing new, or I would tell you a tale, knowing you care to listen. Mary is really & thoroughly better, her voice clear, appetite constantly good; in a fair way;

¹⁵⁷ Edith's private school has not been identified. The previous Saturday was 6 October.

¹⁵⁸ Unidentified, but possibly the oarsman Ted whose words are recorded in Meredith's manuscript quatrain headed "The Bells of Ouseley," which was the name of a riverside pub at Old Windsor (*Poems*, 2:1121).

¹⁵⁹ Probably Ellen Rendall, third wife of the radical journalist, inventor, and railway engineer William Bridges Adams (1797–1872). Their daughter Hope Bridges Adams was born at Halliford on 17 December 1855 (International Genealogical Index).

¹⁶⁰ Emily Jolly's "A Wife's Story" was serialized, anonymously, by Dickens in *Household Words* for 1, 8, 15, and 22 September 1855, and later included in *A Wife's Story, and Other Tales*, 3 vols. (London, 1875).

¹⁶¹ An unidentified friend of Susan's who would later be one of the witnesses at her marriage to William Mayne Neill.

¹⁶² Mary would probably be visiting her doctor, Joseph Kidd, who practiced at Blackheath.

¹⁶³ The reading "Ordonance" is probable but not absolutely certain. If correct, it may be an old spelling of "ordonnance" in the sense of "Systematic arrangement, esp. of literary material . . . or the details of any work of art" (*OED*). The "Ordonance Money" might have been a payment due on delivery of the revised manuscript of *The Shaving of Shagpat* to Chapman & Hall, or perhaps a payment for some other literary or journalistic work.

¹⁶⁴ The word "be" is written through "to".

¹⁶⁵ George's note is squeezed in below Mary's subscription and signature on the last page of a double sheet of octavo letter paper.

but her body is the slave of her mind, and when the latter goes a moment wrong, the other unhappy machine requires terrible amount of mending. Arthur is advancing as my best prayers would have him. Edith also. She this day proved her courage by fighting a dog that worried a ram. Arthur is the most fascinating little fellow conceivable, the joy of our household. You have seen Dickens' new work advertised?¹⁶⁶ My book should be out the first week in Nov^r.¹⁶⁷ I have re-written much of it.¹⁶⁸ God bless you, dearest Susie, this day and the others of your life! Now & always know me

Your constantly affectionate

George Meredith

To, | Miss S. Pye, on her birthday.

GEORGE MEREDITH TO SUSAN MARY NEILL, [?21 MAY 1861]

Copsham Cottage, | Esher | Tuesday¹⁶⁹

My dear Susie Pye!

I have been running away from your letter (knapsack on back) over the Surrey hills, & now find it here to astonish me. You know Esher, I think?¹⁷⁰ I am beyond Claremont, on a wild common, with my son. That sweet man you are most welcome to come & see if you like. It's better to presume (& quite safe) that all the world knows of one's domestic miseries. He & I are alone, & very happy. I needn't add more. I am in town on Thursdays, but so engaged all day that I should never be able to reach you, unless by some special appointment. Why not come & do me the favour to introduce your husband to me, & dine, & walk through the woods, & talk (you shall have the lead), & then sleep here, if you please. This is open to you, if you will.

But at all events write what hours you are at home, how long you will

¹⁶⁶ The serial version of Dickens's *Little Dorrit*, in twenty monthly numbers, was advertised by Bradbury & Evans in the *Morning Chronicle* for 10 October 1855.

¹⁶⁷ *The Shaving of Shagpat* was published on 19 December 1855, with a prefatory note dated 8 December 1855 and a title page postdated 1856.

¹⁶⁸ The ellipsis points are Meredith's.

¹⁶⁹ Meredith's three letters to Susan from Copsham Cottage are closely related in content and all written on the same stationery, embossed "IVORY". This one, expressing his surprise at hearing from Susan, evidently preceded the other two, which were both written in June 1861, when, on doctor's orders, he was preparing for a trip to the Continent. The most likely Tuesday would be 21 May, when he had just returned from a "walk with Maxse into Hampshire and Sussex," mentioned in letters to W. C. Bonaparte Wyse of 17 May and [ca. 21 or 22] May (*GM Letters*, 1:82–83).

¹⁷⁰ From 1848 to 1852, Susan had lived with John and Alice Abbott on Ditton Common, which marked the boundary between Thames Ditton and Esher.

be in town &c And don't make *any* special appointment for me in town, (I mean without my complicity)¹⁷¹ as I am never my own master there, being the slave of three that same day,—bright in the roll of days, you may believe

Your ever faithful

George Meredith

N.B. I thought you had become a Yankee!¹⁷² Is it so?

GEORGE MEREDITH TO SUSAN MARY NEILL,

[?4, 11, OR 18 JUNE 1861]

Esher, Tuesday.¹⁷³

My dear S. Pye!

I would if I could, but I think I can't.¹⁷⁴ It's too true. But you can write to me, & I dare say I shall see you when you next come. I must tell you plainly that it is impossible for me to see anyone who is in the habit of seeing, or is on familiar terms with, the "opposite party":¹⁷⁵— simply because it is not right. You understand that I don't prescribe conditions.

And O, my dear! how disappointed you'd be with me. For I don't gossip a bit, & I hate old times and drop a veil between them & me, and never talk of them, & am as one just wise enough to see what a fool he has been. Peace will come some forty years hence, & then we'll talk & laugh over it. I should have been glad to shake your hand. Tell me how many children you have, & draw me a portrait of your husband. Three lines of description quite suffice to show how my lady feels towards him.

I think of taking Arthur to Germany next year to commence schooling.¹⁷⁶ I am going off for a month or so immediately. The Doctor inter-

¹⁷¹ The parenthetical remark is inserted above the line.

¹⁷² Meredith presumably means that Susan has become a supporter of the North in the U.S. Civil War. Susan shared her husband's passionate opposition to American slavery.

¹⁷³ Since the doctor's orders that prompted Meredith's trip to the Continent in July and August 1861 were received on 30 May and his next letter to Susan was written on 25 June, this letter must have been written on one of the intervening Tuesdays (see notes 177 and 178, below).

¹⁷⁴ Meredith was evidently declining Susan's invitation to some sort of gathering in London that would be attended by an unidentified old acquaintance who had remained on friendly terms with his wife and/or her lover Henry Wallis (see next note).

¹⁷⁵ The quotation marks suggest that Meredith was using this term in a legal sense, but it is not clear whether he was thinking of a divorce case, in which the opposite party would be his wife, or a criminal conversation case, in which the opposite party would be her lover. Criminal conversation was abolished as a tort by the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857.

¹⁷⁶ At the end of August 1862, Meredith enrolled Arthur in a school in Norwich con-

dicts work for a quarter of a year.¹⁷⁷ I have worked 3 years day after day without a single halt. Let me hear that you prosper & you will please me

Faithfully yours

George Meredith

GEORGE MEREDITH TO SUSAN MARY NEILL, 25 [JUNE 1861]

Copsham Cottage | Esher. | Tuesday 25th.¹⁷⁸

My dear Susan

Pray don't suppose me so lofty. For, my dear, was I not an ass?¹⁷⁹ And by all my hopes (deep, fervent, unalterable) that I am one no more, but have grown to be something very very very different, I am bound to presume that Time has had, will have, must have, an equally beneficent influence on others. I did not think my dear Susan wished to "set in" for a gossip.¹⁸⁰ I simply wished to say that I never touched that subject.

I'm really pleased to hear a woman praise her husband as you do. Talk in that way to me as much as you like. I have been latterly led to think the world was getting old.

As to me, I agree with you that the main thing for me is health. Composition causes a nervous excitement that, when long continued, quite prostrates the stomach. Feeling ill, I work harder, thinking my hours numbered, & then I may as well provide as well as I can for Boy. I am now resting after a fashion:—preparing a volume of Songs Ballads &

ducted by Augustus Jessop. In 1867, he sent him to Hofwyl School, near Bern, Switzerland, and in 1869, he transferred him to a gymnasium in Stuttgart, Germany.

¹⁷⁷ The doctor's orders were received on 30 May and explained in a letter to W. C. Bonaparte Wyse of [31 May 1861]: "I saw the doctor yesterday, who says that the 'knot of the nerves' is irritated and has been long so. I must not smoke, I must not work; I must go to the college of the sunny Lazzaroni and live as the ephemerae live that I may not die like them. He says also that at the end of six weeks I must pack my knapsack and away to Switzerland or Tyrol" (*GM Letters*, 1:85).

¹⁷⁸ The 25th of June was a Tuesday in 1861. Susan had probably left London by this time.

¹⁷⁹ Meredith posed a similar rhetorical question in an undated letter to W. C. Bonaparte Wyse, containing some cynical reflections on the nature of women: "If I thought myself superior, I who looked at them loftily, and drank more wine than was good for me that night, was I not an ass?" (*GM Letters*, 1:125). Although Cline conjecturally assigned this fragmentary letter to January 1862, it may have been written some months earlier, perhaps in May or June 1861.

¹⁸⁰ Meredith's quotation marks suggest that he was consciously using a vulgar idiom. Compare Hal Willis (pseudonym of Charles Robert Forrester), "The Mump," *Bentley's Miscellany* 9 (May 1841), 458: "One evening . . . Mrs. Diggs had the infinite pleasure of having Mrs. Wrigglesby all to herself; . . . the bottle labelled with 'brandy' was produced with the accompaniments of hot water and sugar, and the two ladies set in for a gossip."

Poems¹⁸¹ which will absolutely be bought and paid for,¹⁸² Susan! I have two novels in hand,¹⁸³ & an Autobiography in head.¹⁸⁴ The latter will probably appear as a serial in "Once a Week."¹⁸⁵ I hate serials, but they pay.

I take my dear little man & leave him, I think, with a friend:—a lady, who will look after him like a mother.¹⁸⁶ Here he is in the heart of friends: for the people here are as good as they can be. He is full of promise, with a fine nature.

God bless you! Your faithful
George Meredith

GEORGE MEREDITH TO EILEEN NEILL, 6 JANUARY 1906

January 6—1906¹⁸⁷

To the Grand-daughter | of the Venerable | Dame Susie Pye, | this auto-
graph, | refused to all other | applicants.¹⁸⁸

George Meredith

Pennsylvania State University

¹⁸¹ This is the earliest known reference to the volume that would eventually be published almost a year later, in greatly expanded form, as *Modern Love and Poems of the English Roadside, with Poems and Ballads* (1862).

¹⁸² Unlike Meredith's first volume of *Poems* (1851), which was published at his own expense and sold very poorly.

¹⁸³ These novels were probably "Emilia Belloni," an early version of *Emilia in England* (1864), and "A Woman's Battle," which may have been an early version of *Rhoda Fleming* (1865). See Meredith's letter to Janet Ross of 17 May 1861 (*GM Letters*, 1:80–81 and notes 13–16).

¹⁸⁴ This was the germ for *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* (1871), which Meredith referred to as "an autobiographical story for O[nce] a W[ee]k," in a letter to F. M. Evans of 5 July [error for 5 August] 1861, and as "an Autobiography," in letters to Frederick A. Maxse of [26 March 1864] and to Augustus Jessop of 18 May 1864 (*GM Letters*, 1:95 and note 3, 250 and note 4, 255 and note 4).

¹⁸⁵ Meredith's *Evan Harrington* had appeared as a serial in *Once a Week* from 11 February to 13 October 1860. *The Adventures of Harry Richmond* would eventually be serialized in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1870–71.

¹⁸⁶ This unidentified lady may have been Mrs. Edward Chapman, with whom Meredith is known to have left Arthur on other occasions. In any case, he subsequently decided to take Arthur with him.

¹⁸⁷ The date is written above the printed address "BOX HILL, | DORKING." The accompanying envelope, with an embossed penny stamp, is addressed in Meredith's hand, "Miss Eileen Neill | 22 Eldon Road | Kensington | London S.W." and postmarked "DORKING | 7:45PM | JA 7 | 06". Eileen Buchanan Njal Neill, afterward Michell-Clarke (1892–1942), was the thirteen-year-old daughter of Susan's son Harold Henry Neill and his wife Louisa Buchanan Holton.

¹⁸⁸ Besieged by autograph seekers in his later years, Meredith almost always refused their requests, though he did make an exception for a Miss Nora Senior on 15 May 1904 (*GM Letters*, 3:1496–97).