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Devoted Disciple: The Letters of
Mary Elizabeth Braddon to
Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, 1862-1873

Robert Lee Wolff

FOREWORD

IN OCTOBER 1862, a new novel called *Lady Audley's Secret* took the English public by storm, and its author, Mary Elizabeth Braddon (MEB), then twenty-seven years of age, became famous overnight. She had written a "sensation-novel," setting a Gothic romance of bigamy, crime, and passion in two familiar worlds: the luxurious Victorian country house and the seedy lodgings of the sort in which a young woman with her way to make in the world was forced to live. From 1862 until her death in 1915, MEB's name was a household word throughout the English-speaking world. She quickly improved her writing, learning to make incident flow from character. While satisfying the demand of her public for "sensation," she filled her novels with incisive but unobtrusive social commentary, which usually escaped the notice of her contemporaries. Moreover, as the decades passed, she wrote many novels without sensation: novels of *mœurs*, both English and French, in the best of which she displayed an astonishing and varied talent now forgotten. She was a keen-eyed and sardonic observer of the Victorian, Edwardian, and early Georgian scene, and her eighty novels record changing fashions and attitudes with a freshness and cynicism that delight the modern reader who rediscovers her. She was much more than a sensation-novelist; she was a novelist.

Attacked for immoral writing in the years of her earliest success, she was vulnerable to the charges, not because they were justified when levelled at her books, but because she had flouted Victorian convention in her own life. Her father, Henry Braddon, a London solicitor of old Cornish stock, was an unfaithful husband and unreliable in money-matters, and was separated from his beautiful and talented Irish wife

when MEB — their younger daughter and youngest child — was only four. Mrs. Braddon brought MEB up with deep maternal tenderness and care; but after the elder brother Edward had gone out to India and the elder sister Maggie had married an Italian, there was very little money. So in 1857, at the age of twenty-two, MEB became an actress under a stage-name, in order to support herself and her mother. Love of adventure also played its part in her decision. It effectively disgraced her in the eyes of the censorious mid-Victorians of her own class. Though she remained on the stage for only three years, the experience gave her rich material for her fiction.

Not long after she left acting to become a writer in 1860, she encountered John Maxwell, fifteen years older than she, an Irish-born London publisher of periodicals of all sorts, separated from his wife, who was in a mental home. Although he could not marry MEB, she lived with him, a loving stepmother to his five children, and a loving mother to their own. By 1870 she had borne Maxwell six, of whom five survived. He did not become free to marry her until 1874, when his first wife died. Mrs. Braddon lived with them until her death in 1868.

Between 1861, when the liaison with Maxwell began, and 1874, when they were married, the strain put upon MEB by the ambivalence of her social position was extreme. In 1864, when Maxwell and she said publicly that they were man and wife, relatives of the first Mrs. Maxwell publicly denied it. Although financial security came early, it could not relieve the tensions imposed by social insecurity and scandal. The pain she experienced until in 1874, at thirty-nine, she could be legally married sharpened MEB's satirical pen. And — naturally enough — it later made her extremely reticent about her early years.

Hitherto, it has not been possible to write her life, since the materials were not available. A series of fortunate discoveries and purchases during the 1960s put me in possession of, or gave me access to, many of the key documents, including an unpublished autobiographical memoir of her childhood, voluminous files of letters, note-books, play-bills, and manuscript plays and fiction published and unpublished. For her later years, an almost unbroken series of manuscript diaries extends from 1880 until her death in 1915. On the basis of this evidence I have tried to relate the events of her life to the fiction that she wrote, and to give her forgotten novels their first serious critical examination. In 1974, the book I have written will be published by Gambit, Incor-

porated, in Boston, as *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (hereafter referred to as *SV*).

Aside from the materials now in the Wolff Collection, and a valuable entry of four handwritten pages in an unpublished notebook of Charles Reade, which will appear in *SV*, the most significant single manuscript source for MEB's life and writing for the critically important decade that followed the appearance of *Lady Audley's Secret* is the series of thirty-seven letters that she wrote to Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton (1802-1873), after 1866 Lord Lytton. Still the property of his descendants, the letters are now on deposit in the Hertfordshire County Records Office, and are here published for the first time. Of Bulwer's side of the correspondence only two letters seem to have been preserved by MEB, who several times in her later years noted in her diaries that she had destroyed quantities of letters sent to her. The two surviving letters from Bulwer, both in the Wolff Collection, are also published here, each in its appropriate chronological position.

MEB had met Bulwer sometime in the early 1850s, when she was still a girl in her late teens, before she had become an actress. Then about fifty, Bulwer was regarded by the general public as the equal of Dickens and Thackeray, and ranked ahead of them by some critics. No other novelist — not the Brontës or Mrs. Gaskell or Disraeli — was considered to be in the same class. Since childhood MEB had steeped herself in his novels, which she deeply admired. As a romantic young girl, she had adored his heroes, and sketched his own profile in her sketch-book. Now he talked freely to her about the way novels ought to be written, and she listened eagerly to his advice. All we know about these early meetings is what we can find in the letters she wrote to him some years later: she saw him more than once; their last meeting took place in 1854.

Eight years later, in 1862, already the author of three novels, and about to publish *Lady Audley's Secret*, which appeared in book form in October, MEB asked Bulwer for permission to dedicate it to him, and he granted her request. Any letters she may have written to him between 1854 and late 1862 are not preserved; but beginning in December 1862 Bulwer seems to have kept them all. Four of the thirty-seven are now incomplete at the beginning or at the end. Sometimes they are dated completely, sometimes incompletely, and sometimes not at all; but it has proved possible from internal evidence to arrange the

series in chronological order, and to give at least approximate dates to those letters which lack them.

An eager and ambitious young woman, of extraordinary energy, MEB poured forth to Bulwer all her perplexities as a budding novelist. She confided in him the details of her business arrangements with her publishers, and told him what she had been earning, soliciting his advice when difficulties arose. He answered promptly and helpfully, giving counsel both literary and financial. While most of his answers have been lost, their drift can often be inferred from MEB's surviving responses to his replies. Except for a wish to be kind to a young admirer, and an appetite for flattery to which she could and did cater without hypocrisy, Bulwer had no particular motive for assisting her. Her letters provide a detailed picture of the Victorian best-seller industry in the sixties. They also show something of MEB's anguish at the rude onslaughts of her hostile critics.

She commented on her own reading, and inquired about Bulwer's opinion of Scott, Balzac, Trollope, and others. Striving to please him at every turn, she often included a deprecatory word or two about some writer for whom she thought he might have a low regard or whom he might enjoy hearing adversely criticized. To Bulwer's own writings — plays, poems, and essays as well as novels — MEB made constant reference, naming characters in her old favorites as if they were real people, referring to his great scenes, comparing others disparagingly to him, ranking him close to Shakespeare. Of course, she *was* buttering him up, but it was the best butter. She did honestly believe, and so did many of his contemporaries, that he was a very great novelist.

Perhaps they were more nearly right than most modern critics would admit. I have tried elsewhere ("Strange Stories: The Occult Fiction of Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton," *Strange Stories and Other Explorations in Victorian Fiction* [Boston: Gambit, 1971], pp. 143-366 — hereafter referred to as *SS*) to redress the balance. But surely MEB overdid it. Bulwer was often severely critical of her books, even at the risk of disappointing her; but it is also clear that he often greatly enjoyed them, and he was not chary of his praise.

Between December 1862 and November 3, 1868, MEB wrote him thirty letters, the last of which told him the news of her mother's death. This blow — combined with many other sufferings — precipitated a severe nervous breakdown, from which it took her more than



PLATE I

MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON

PORTRAIT PAINTED IN 1865 BY WILLIAM POWELL FRITH

*Reproduced by permission of
the National Portrait Gallery*



PLATE II
 LEAF FROM ONE OF MER'S GIRLHOOD SKETCHBOOKS,
 PROBABLY ABOUT 1852, SHOWING A PROFILE OF BULWER
 WITH HIS INITIALS "E.G.E.L.B.L." FOR EDWARD GEORGE EARLE LYTTON BULWER-
 LYTTON, AND BELOW, THE "DWELLER OF THE THRESHOLD," THE HORRIFYING AND
 DEPRESSING SPIRIT IN BULWER'S ZANOVI (1842)

Wolff collection

a year to recover. She did not write to Bulwer again until June 13, 1872, and then — even after the interval of more than three and a half years — she confided in him the details of her illness. Were it not for these two letters (Nos. 30 and 31) — further apart in time than any other two in the correspondence — we would not know about the tragic circumstances and family disagreements surrounding Mrs. Braddon's death (and some mystery still surrounds them), or about MEB's long illness; and would be at a loss to explain the sudden temporary cessation in 1869 and 1870 of the hitherto uninterrupted flow of novels from her pen. These two letters, then, rank as fundamental documents for MEB's biographer. They also demonstrate the degree of her affection for and trust in Bulwer.

The final seven letters in the series all belong to the last six months of 1872, the last of all having been written only about three weeks before Bulwer's death on January 18, 1873. Although MEB repeatedly invited him to come to see her, or offered to go to see him, they never met after 1854. It seems unlikely that he would have hesitated to visit her because of her irregular relationship with John Maxwell. Now in his last years, increasingly deaf and eccentric, Bulwer probably found himself disinclined to make the effort to see face to face once more the woman he had befriended at a critical stage in her career, when, among established novelists, only he and Charles Reade gave her professional encouragement or showed her kindness.

NOTE

For permission to publish his grandmother's letters, and for uncounted other kindnesses, I am indebted to Henry Maxwell, Esquire, of Coddanham, Suffolk. For permission to publish the letters of the first Lord Lytton, I am indebted to Lady Hermione Cobbold and her son, the Honourable David Lytton-Cobbold, who also kindly consented to my use of the MEB letters, which belong to them. Peter Walne, Esquire, County Archivist of Hertfordshire, and his staff kindly supplied me with photocopies, and answered my questions with unfailing patience and courtesy. The code number at the head of each letter is its identification number in the Archives. The chronological arrangement of the letters is my own. Where I have supplied a conjectural date or an approximate date, I have usually indicated in the footnotes what internal evidence I am relying upon. The footnotes have been kept to the minimum in number and the maximum in concision, since virtually every point in them is more thoroughly treated in *SV*. The only writer known to me to have used any of these letters hitherto is Michael Sadleir, in his essay "Mary Elizabeth Braddon," *Things Past* (London: Constable, 1944), pp. 69-83. In *SV*, Chapter IV, I have given my

reasons for thinking that he misinterpreted what he read. (See below, Letter No. 20 and notes 98 and 104.)

Letter No. 1 D/EK C12/119

26 Mecklenburgh Square, W.C. Monday. [n.d. — December 1862]

My dear Sir Edward

At the hazard of boring you, I must write a few lines to thank you for your very kind letter received this morning.

I can scarcely tell you how much it flatters & pleases me to think that *you* will take the trouble to read my very feeble attempts in that rank of literature which you have led so long & gloriously. If you *can* take *any* interest in my books, I fancy it might arise from the fact that I owe so much, directly & indirectly, to yourself. I have never forgotten a word you said to me, & the hints dropped so kindly for my benefit, but I dare say forgotten by yourself, have been my guiding principles in almost every thing I have written. I venture to hope that you will like "Aurora Floyd," (which I am to finish this month)¹ better than "Lady Audley,"² as it is more boldly written, & less artificial than the latter. I know that my writing teems with errors, absurdities, contradictions, & inconsistencies [*sic*]; but I have never written a line that has not been written against time — sometimes with the printer waiting outside the door. I have written as conscientiously as I could; but more with a view to the interests of my publishers than with any great regard to my own reputation. The curse of serial writing & hand to mouth composition has set its seal upon me, & I have had to write a lot of things together.

Believe me I appreciate the delicacy & kindness of your advice about prudence in money matters; & will observe it to the letter. I hope to save *all* I have received for my two copyrights; as my serial work pays all current expenses, & then leaves a margin for saving. I have very little inclination for spending money, & positively no time to be extravagant, if I wished to be so. I go no where where I require fine dress. I can't drink wine. I am not free to stir from London, or would spend my money in travelling; but am altogether bound hand & foot by hard work; & am *very very* nervous about my next book; respecting which I have only a week allowed me for consideration. You say I "no longer need" your literary hints! Believe me, my dear Sir Edward, that I now more than ever need them, & if I cannot get them *directly* from yourself, I can at least gain immensely from your books, & try patiently to improve my style by an earnest study of one of the first masters of the English language, & *the* first master of the art of construction.

You are, I suppose, on your way to some more southern retreat than Paris.

¹ *Aurora Floyd* was published serially in *Temple Bar* from January 1862 through January 1863. Since MEB was finishing the last instalment in the month of the letter, that month was December 1862.

² MEB's first great success, *Lady Audley's Secret*, after an unusual double serialization (see below, note 10, and full discussion in *SV*, Prologue), was published in three volumes in October 1862 by Tinsley Brothers.

I shall look forward to February³ & to the pleasure of sending you both the books, & if you should really have time to read them, I shall most humbly & thankfully accept any criticism, however severe. I have the honour to be My dear Sir Edward,

Most gratefully & sincerely yours,
Mary Elizabeth Braddon.

P.S. I do an immense deal of work which nobody ever hears of, for Half penny & penny journals. This work is most piratical stuff, & would make your hair stand on end, if you were to see it. The amount of crime, treachery, murder, slow poisoning, & general infamy required by the Half penny reader is something terrible. I am just going to do a little paracide [*sic*] for this week's supply.⁴

Letter No. 2 D/EK C12/116

26 Mecklenburgh Square, W.C. March 30/63.

My dear Sir Edward,

About two months since, that is to say at the beginning of February, I called at yr house in Park Lane, carrying with me a parcel of novels. I need not say I was disappointed by finding No. 1. in the possession of strangers. I have kept the books packed & directed to you ever since. Shall I send them to Knobworth,⁵ or to any *pied à terre* — do I spell it right — which you may have in London?

A most mischievous & absurd attack has been made upon my honesty in the Standard of last Wednesday & Thursday. I never heard of either Mr. Fullom⁶ or his book, until that gentleman's letters appeared: & on reading the book since the publication of those letters I find that nothing could be more unlike "Lady Audley's Secret," than the romance to which it is compared.

Mr. Fullom appears to claim copyright in the English language, & because a *large dog*, a *turnstile*, & a *portrait* are alluded to in his book, & in mine, jumps boldly at the conclusion that I am indebted to his genius for a story, which in plot, plan & treatment differs as widely from his novel as one book can well differ from another. Forgive me, my dear Sir Edward, if I venture to bore you upon this subject, but you so very kindly allowed your name to appear upon the dedication page of my book⁷ that I should be sorry were you led to believe you had by that act of generosity unconsciously become the receiver of stolen goods. I will send you a copy of Mr. Fullom's book with "Lady Audley's Secret," & if you could find time to glance at both, you would

³ She was planning to wait until February 1863, when *Aurora Floyd* would be available in three-volume form also, and send Bulwer both novels together.

⁴ On the details of MEB's halfpenny and penny fiction, see *SV*, Chapter IV.

⁵ Bulwer's country house in Hertfordshire, now the seat of his great-granddaughter, Lady Hermione Cobbold and her family.

⁶ S. W. Fullom had accused MEB of plagiarizing from his novel, *The Man of the World; or, Vanities of the Day* (3 vols., London: Charles Joseph Skeet, 1856), in both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*. For details see *SV*, Chapter VI.

⁷ MEB had dedicated *Lady Audley's Secret* to Bulwer.

discover the utter absurdity of any parallel between them. Trusting that you are well, I have the honour to be, dear Sir Edward,

Very faithfully yours,
M. E. Braddon.

Letter No. 3 D/EK C12/122

26 Mecklenburgh Square Monday April 13th, 63 [dated at end]

My dear Sir Edward,

When I tell you that I do not know how to thank you for your letter, I only write the plain, unvarnished truth. I *cannot* express how much I feel all the kindness shown towards me in that most delightful letter, & how great a value I set upon every word in it.

Imprimis, as to what I owe you in a literary point of view. Setting aside all I have learnt from your books, which are of course open to every one, I daresay you quite forget how much I learnt from your own lips.

You do not perhaps remember telling me that the strongest & safest point in a story or a play is domestic interest — that is to say the position of a man & wife as compared to that of lovers — yet every story I have hitherto written has been built more or less with this idea in my mind. I do not know *how* much I owe you, but I *do* know that I have never forgotten any thing you have told me. Believe me I feel very little elated by the superficial success of my pair of Bigamy novels,⁸ & the hardest things the critics say of me never strike me as unjust. I know that I have *everything* to do yet; but it has been my good or bad fortune to be flung into a very rapid market, & to have every thing printed & published almost before the ink with which it was written was dry. This *may* have been an advantage to me, for my temperament is unfortunately so terribly lymphatic, that I doubt if I should ever write at all but for the pressure of what racing men call "heavy engagements."

I wrote the third & some part of the second vol of "Lady A." in less than a fortnight, & had the printer at me all the time. I had no one to consult about "Maisons de Santé"⁹ & it was only when the book was printed that I heard from a lady whose husband was an inmate of such a house, that what I had done abroad was more impossible than it would have been at home. I doubt if you will like "Aurora Floyd" any better than her predecessor. When I began her I didn't mean to finish "Lady A."¹⁰ but I venture to hope you will think "John Marchmont's Legacy," the novel now running in Temple Bar¹¹ better written than the other two.

⁸ Both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* dealt with bigamy.

⁹ The wicked Lady Audley, whose crimes were due to hereditary insanity, was eventually inured for life in a Belgian *maison de santé*.

¹⁰ The initial serialization of *Lady Audley's Secret* was interrupted by the demise of *Robin Goodfellow*, the ephemeral publication where it had begun. It was only insistent public curiosity that decided MEB to return to it. The *Robin Goodfellow* instalments were republished serially in *Ward and Lock's Sixpenny Magazine*, where the novel was completed before book publication.

¹¹ *John Marchmont's Legacy* ran in *Temple Bar* from December 1862 through January 1864.

I need scarcely say that I shall take good care to avail myself of yr kind offer of advice as to the commercial value of my next novel — if I ever live to write another. The two¹² I am now doing are both sold, I think at the highest rate to be screwed out of a publisher for the class of book I can write — but if I live to complete these two I shall have earned enough money to keep me & my mother for the rest of our lives, & I will *then* try & write for Fame, & do something more worthy to be laid upon your altar. The Messrs Tinsley, who are young people quite new in the trade, are to give me £2,000 for a two years *license to print* each of the novels, after which time the copyrights are to revert to me. I don't think they *could* give me more with any chance of obtaining a profit themselves.¹³

I fear I shall never write a *genial* novel. The minute I abandon melodrama, & strong, coarse painting in blacks & whites, I seem quite lost & at sea. Perhaps this is because I have written nothing but serials, which force one into overstrained action in the desire to sustain the interest. I will send the books¹⁴ tomorrow, and will not bore you with a longer letter at present, as I am going out of town early this afternoon, but I have not said half that I wish to say, & shall avail myself of the privilege of writing to you, now & then, while you are in Town, but will only expect an answer when quite convenient to yourself. Once more a thousand thanks for your letter, & believe me to be ever,

Your devoted disciple
Mary Elizabeth Braddon

26 Mecklenburgh Sq. Monday, April 13th/63.

Letter No. 4 D/EK C12/124

26 Mecklenburgh Sq. W.C. [n.d. — May 1863]

My dear Sir Edward,

I was out of town when your *more than kind* letter reached me; & I have delayed replying to it until now, because I have had no opportunity of doing so with any degree of quiet or comfort.

I *cannot* tell you how much I feel yr goodness, first in reading my books — & you will see from the fact that I was very slow in sending them to you that I really never expected you would take the trouble to wade through two three vol novels for my sake — & secondly for your invaluable criticism. Believe me there is not a word you have ever said, or a hint you have ever given me in the past or in the present, that is not treasured in my mind, & constantly before me in my thoughts, however far I fall short of reaching the point to which your words & your example direct me. It is so easy to understand what is beautiful & pure in art, but so difficult to attain to it. I think when I first knew you I was

¹² MEB's *Eleanor's Victory* ran in *Once A Week* from March 7 to October 3, 1863, inclusive, overlapping the monthly numbers of *John Marchmont's Legacy* in *Temple Bar*.

¹³ For full details on MEB's financial arrangements and rewards, see *SV*, Chapter IV.

¹⁴ This still refers to *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, which MEB had not yet succeeded in getting into Bulwer's hands.

far nearer the artistic, that is to say a far worthier pupil for so great a master than I am now. *Then* I could have sat at yr feet for ever, content to waste years upon patient work which should never have seen the light, with the far away hope of yr saying some day as the great music master said to his pupil "Go, my son, I can teach you no more. You can now write a great novel."

The "behind the scenes" of literature has in a manner demoralised me. I have learnt to look at everything in a mercantile sense, & to write solely for the circulating library reader, whose palette [*sic*] requires strong meat, & is not very particular as to the quality thereof. Now, *your* kind interest arouses an ambition which was until my receipt of your letter from Paris utterly dead, but now that interest which elevates me as if with an almost magical power cannot undo the lessons of the past year (that is to say Dundreary & "Lady Audley.")¹⁵ I want to serve two masters. I want to be artistic & to please *you*. I want to be sensational, & to please Mudie's subscribers.

Are these two things possible, or is the stern scriptural dictum not to be got over, "Thou canst not serve God & Mammon." Can the sensational be elevated by art, & redeemed from all its [*sic*] coarseness. I think you have answered that question in "Lucretia," which is as intensely interesting as it is sublimely grand, in *Pelham*, in *Night & Morning*, in *Paul Clifford* — but I doubt if you value these glorious stories as much as you do "The Caxtons,"¹⁶ which is a book to be read for ever & for ever, like the New Testament & Shakespeare. I am in hopes you will like "John Marchmont," the story I am now doing in "Temple Bar" better than "Aurora." I have tried to draw more original characters, or at least one character more original than any of my usual run of heroes & heroines.

I know that I must bore you with all this rambling talk about myself, but I cannot tell you how much good yr two letters have done me. I have been reading very little lately — only a few French novels, Balzac & Soulié,¹⁷ & shall go back to your books with a new zest, & it will be hard if my style does not profit by another long & strong pull at that Picrian Spring. I will get this Blackwood & the back numbers, if possible, for I am ashamed to confess that I have all your Essays to read.¹⁸ My work has been so continuous that I have not dared to have books in the house that were likely to beguile me away from it. I go on grinding & grinding until I feel as if there was nothing left in me but the stalest & most hacknied [*sic*] of ideas.

¹⁵ MEB refers here to the staggering success not only of her own novel, *Lady Audley's Secret*, but of Tom Taylor's play, *Our American Cousin*, in which F. H. Sothorn had been playing the famous part of Lord Dundreary. How could she make money and also be a great artist? See *SV*, Chapter V.

¹⁶ In *Lucretia* (1846), Bulwer had fictionalized the sensational Wainwright poisoning case; *Pelham* (1828) had some sensational themes; in *Night and Morning* (1841) the criminals were attractive, the honest characters repulsive; *Paul Clifford* (1830) was the first of his "Newgate" novels. *The Caxtons* (1849) was a quiet, domestic, witty, reflective novel in a completely different genre, and MEB's favorite.

¹⁷ Frédéric Soulié (1800–1847), popular French author of sensational romances and plays. See below, Letters Nos. 13-A and 14 and note 70.

¹⁸ Bulwer's essays, published in two volumes later in the year as *Caxtoniana*, were appearing in *Blackwood's Magazine*.

I shall indeed be delighted to see you once more. Mama is in the seventh Heaven at the very idea of such a happiness.¹⁹ May we come to you some time *after* the tenth of June²⁰ as I am going into the country until then to work at "Eleanor's Victory," which must be finished by a certain date. After then I shall be in town all the summer & equally delighted to see you in the country or in town, but I should be very, *very* much charmed to see yr new place, as I have no doubt it must be something very pretty that would tempt you to buy another country house. Will your picture be there? the picture by Landseer. You know I never saw the original painting. Will you, when you have a spare hour after dinner, drop into the St. James's & see Miss Herbert as Lady Audley. She is very good. Shall I send you a box *undated*? They would all be so honoured by your going.²¹ I am, my dear Sir Edward,

Ever gratefully yours,

M. E. Braddon.

P.S. I think I go to Leamington but letters addressed here will be immediately forwarded to me.

Letter No. 5 D/EK C12/117

Clarendon Hotel, Leamington [n.d. — May 1863]

My dear Sir Edward,

There was so much which I wished to say to you that I left unsaid in my last that I must bore you with a second letter as a sort of post scriptum to the first.²² I am down here trying to get rest, & if possible a little inspiration from the green leaves & the sound of the water brooks. I was at Stratford yesterday for the second time in my life, and was shown Dickens's name & many minor ones, but *not* yours. I dare say you came quietly & kept the secret of your identity, & amused yourself by hearing what people had to say without violating the sanctity of your own individuality.

I cannot tell you how much I think of the letter you so kindly wrote to me. All you have ever said or written to me has *grown upon* me as it were, not decreasing, but increasing, as an ever present influence by the lapse of time. I *will* try & write a better book upon the principle suggested by your beautiful letter — but I am such weary miles away from you now in the wide realms of

¹⁹ MEB and Bulwer had last met in 1854 (see below, Letter No. 31 and note 164); but her mother, Mrs. Braddon, with whom she lived, had never met him (see below, Letter No. 30).

²⁰ This passage suggests the date of May 1863 for the letter. It is probable that MEB was pregnant with her second child by Maxwell, and wished to avoid a meeting with Bulwer until after her *accouchement*.

²¹ A dramatic version of *Lady Audley's Secret*, with Louisa Herbert as Lady Audley, opened at the St. James's Theatre on February 28, 1863. It was adapted by Robert Walters, whose pen-name was George Roberts, and the manager of the theatre, Frank Matthews, was also in the cast. There were at least three competing versions, all pirated, and later MEB's publishers sued the publisher of one of these. See *SV*, Chapter IV, for all details.

²² Written from Leamington, where the postscript to the preceding letter had said she was going; and so to be dated soon after, still in May 1863. See below, note 30.

thought, that I feel as if *rapprochement* was impossible. I am an/a [*sic*] patcher up of sham antiquities as compared to a Grecian sculptor: ²⁸ a dauber of pantomime scenes, all Dutch metal, glue & spangles, as compared to a great painter. There has arisen in my mind of late a kind of infidelity — not as to religion, *there* I cling to the simplest faith, & have no wish to question anything so harmonious & beautiful as Christianity — but as to this lower life, & the trouble we give ourselves in living it. I have begun to question the expediency of very deep emotion, & I think when one does that one must have pretty well passed beyond the power of feeling it. It is this feeling, or rather this incapacity for any strong feeling, that, I believe, causes the slippancy of tone which jars upon your sense of the dignity of art. I can't help looking down upon my heroes when they suffer, because I always have in my mind the memory of wasted suffering of my own. I look down upon Othello because he suffered so much, when by packing his portmanteau & writing a few lines to Desdemona to the effect that he had reason to believe her a very wicked woman, & that, in that belief, he had sold his commission & made arrangements for leaving Cyprus, & also for the payment of an adequate income to her, through the hands of his solicitor &c — he might have avoided all the bolster & pillow & subsequent dagger business & lived down his sorrow; lived perhaps to wonder what he had ever seen in Brabantio's whey-faced daughter.²⁴ Is anybody ever constant to any emotion? You let Pistratus Caxton forget Fanny & marry Blanche. You suffer Ernest Maltravers to go through a great many vagaries & only to come back to Alice as a penitent rather than a lover. "What does it matter," he says, "there is no game we can play that will really be worth the expense of illumination. I may as well marry Alice, & shake hands with myself as a good Christian, & go to Church twice on a Sunday. The banker's widow won't want a settlement, & has a very comfortable little fortune of her own into the bargain."²⁵

I think I like Eugene Aram best of all your heroes *in re* the tender passion, because he loves when he comes to years of discretion & loves once & forever. & Zanoni too, he is something like a lover, but I fear the halter and the guillotine must have had something to do with this constancy.²⁶ Happy the Amy Robsarts & the Haidées²⁷ who die before their first illusions are worn threadbare! I think the faculty of writing a love story must die out with the first death of love. We cease to believe in the God when we find that he is not immortal. I fear I am writing a great deal of nonsense, but I am trying to explain why I failed to reach a higher tone in Bulstrode & Mellish, & why I am compelled

²⁸ For Bulwer and Greek sculpture, see SS, pp. 159 ff., 211 ff.

²⁴ MEB's *Aurora Floyd* was in part a re-working of *Othello*.

²⁵ The references here are to Bulwer's *Caxtons* (1849), and to *Alice; or, the Mysteries* (1838), the sequel to *Ernest Maltravers* (1837), in which the hero returns to marry the mistress of his youth after she has been widowed.

²⁶ Eugene Aram, hero of Bulwer's novel of 1832, was hanged for murder ("the halter"), and Zanoni, the great magus of his novel of 1842, went to the guillotine during the French Revolution.

²⁷ Amy Robsart in Scott's *Kenilworth*; Haidée in Byron's *Don Juan*.

to resort to broad & coarse blacks & whites, & to get *sensation* in lieu of *poetry* or *truth*.²⁸

I am dreadfully ashamed of this long rambling letter, but I let my pen run away with me, & I fear abuse the privilege of writing to you. I haven't yet read the Blackwood Essays,²⁹ but hope to get them in the course of this week. I leave here tomorrow & return to town early in June.³⁰ I need scarcely say how I shall look forward to the conversation you promised me, but I hope before that time yr voice will be heard from the Opposition Benches.

Always most faithfully yrs
Mary Elizabeth Braddon.

Letter No. 6 D/EK C12/133

26 Mecklenburgh Square Saturday [n.d. — September 19, 1863]

My dear Sir Edward

I have been expecting to hear from you for some time past, but can scarcely wonder that you have forgotten all about me in the manifold duties of your life. I write now to ask if I may send you my last cargo of romantic fiction, in the shape of "Eleanor's Victory,"³¹ & *whither* I shall send the same. I don't think you will like "Eleanor" as I always felt a kind of depression in writing it. I couldn't rise to the Archetype hovering dimly before me. The story is not what I meant it to be, & I feel bitterly disappointed in it, in spite of the very great indulgence of some of my kind critics—the "Saturday" "Times" & "Star" of today,³² especially. I venture to hope you may think "John Marchmont,"³³ when it appears, some small advance upon the past, & believe me I have never for a moment lost sight of yr most delightful advice. I have tried to rise & already the "Dweller on the Threshold"³⁴ appears to me, in the form of a very friendly and kindly meant letter from Edmund Yates the Editor of "T. Bar" which I will enclose with this.³⁵ I know that I have been working

²⁸ Bulstrode was Aurora Floyd's first suitor, and Mellish was her husband; both suffered torments of jealousy because of her earlier love affair. See *SV*, Chapter V. These passages are important for an understanding of MEB's own relationship with her lover, John Maxwell. See *SV*, Chapters III, V, VII.

²⁹ Bulwer's *Cantoniana*, as above, note 18.

³⁰ It is this passage that leads me to date this letter in May 1863. See above, note 22.

³¹ *Eleanor's Victory* (see above, note 12) was now published in three volumes by Tinsley.

³² This passage dates the letter precisely, as the reviews appeared on Saturday, September 19, 1863.

³³ For *John Marchmont's Legacy* see above, note 11, and below Letter No. 7; cf. *SV*, Chapter V.

³⁴ The "Dweller on the Threshold" refers to the ghastly phantom in Bulwer's *Zanoni* (1842) — there called the "Dweller of the Threshold" — that appears to Glyndon, the neophyte in the occult, when he impatiently tries to hurry his training. See *SS*, pp. 185 ff. Here MEB is using the term only as equivalent for "temptation." She once sketched the apparition in her sketchbook.

³⁵ Edmund Yates (1831–1894), editor of *Temple Bar*, journalist (who wrote the squib about Thackeray that caused all the trouble at the Garrick Club), novelist,

too hard & can scarcely hope to improve while my work is so close that I dare not throw away a page of copy, though it may be the veriest bosh in Christendom.

My dear Sir Edward, I am ashamed to write so much about myself but it is such a pleasure to tell you all my troubles & fears & aspirations. I shall always consider myself in a manner your pupil. It was your encouragement that first kindled the flame of ambition in my breast. It was your example that made me wish to be a novelist.

I must tell you one of my troubles for I want to know if it is a natural literary symptom. I am terribly apt to take a disgust to the novel I am writing, & to devote all my thoughts to a novel I *mean* to write when free of present engagements. This unwritten novel always seems to me destined to become my magnum opus. *Je le couve*, as Michelet would say. I brood upon it night & day. I can *see* the scenes. I compose the dialogue, oh, such lovely passionate outbreaks—I can never *write* anything half as good, for that Archetype is a perfect eel in the matter of slipperiness. There he goes gliding through the turbid waters of the brain, such a beautiful shining rainbow-hued creature. You try to grasp him, and Lo he is gone. He has a rooted antipathy to pen & ink. Out walking in the dismal London streets, sitting in a railway carriage, reading other people's books, playing the piano, lying in bed, there he is always, my perpetual companion. I sit down to my desk, & hey presto, the creature is gone, not so much as a quarter of an inch of his silvery tail remains. If some new Dircks & Pepper would only invent an intellectual photographic apparatus — by means of which the Ghost of the Ideal could be siezed [*sic*] upon.²⁶

And now, dear Sir Edward, I have bored you with a very long letter, which is taking a very selfish advantage of your indulgence, but I hope you will forgive me, as you have always done, & ever believe me,

Sincerely yours
M.E.B.

26 Mecklenburgh Square. Saturday.

Letter No. 7 D/EK C12/136

26 Mecklenburgh Square, January 17th 1864.

My dear Sir Edward

In all your most kind letter, received so long ago that I really blush to name the date, there was only one word that I could not decipher, and that was the name of the place whither you were going & where I was to send my books.

and close friend of MEB. In his *Recollections and Experiences* (London: Bentley, 1884), II, 171 ff., he published what was in all probability MEB's answer to his invitation (see *SV*, Chapter IV), which led her to write *Sir Jasper's Tenant*.

²⁶ Henry Dircks (1806-1873) invented, as an illustration to Dickens' "Haunted Man" (1848), an optical illusion exhibited at the Polytechnic under the name of "Pepper's Ghost." In 1858, he read a paper on it before the British Association, and in 1863 — the year of this letter — published *The Ghost, as produced in the Spectre Drama, popularly illustrating the Marvellous Optical Illusion obtained by the Apparatus called the Dircksian Phantasmagoria*.

No arrowhead inscription that ever baffled a Bunsen³⁷ was more closely examined than that hieroglyphic by your humble servant, but in vain, & ever since then I have been waiting until I could write to thank you for the kind advice contained in your last letter. I have waited because I would not write to you as I write to other people, hurriedly, with my mind distracted by all manner of botherations. I fear I must have seemed very ungrateful for all the valuable counsel which yr letters always give me, but I think you must know how much I estimate any hint from you.

I have thought very much over what you said in your last letter with regard to a novel in which the story arises naturally out of the characters of the actors in it, as contrasted with a novel in which the actors are only marionettes, the slaves of the story. I fancied that in "John Marchmont" the story was made subordinate to the characters but even my kindest reviewers tell me that it is not so and that the characters break down when the story begins. I will send both the books to Knebworth, & take my chance of their finding you there.

I venture to think you will like my new story "The Doctor's Wife"³⁸ (this is not a title of my own choosing) better than anything I have yet done, because I am going in a little for the subjective, & for the first time am going to try to infuse a dash of poetry into my hero. Did I tell you how delighted I was with your portrait in Mr. Philip's [*sic*] picture of the House of Commons.³⁹ I would have given a big price — for me — for that picture, had it been in the market, & in any way within the reach of a Sensationist. I have been very, very sorry for poor Thackeray's death,⁴⁰ although I never spoke to him in my life, but there is a star gone out of the literary firmament and you and Dickens stand alone now in all the width of the Heavens. When are you going to write a new novel — I long for another, another "Caxtons" if that "pure and entire chrystal" [? paper torn] can ever have a parallel. Since I have been writing so much, I have scarcely read at all, except a French novel now & then, by snatches. I write in the morning, and in the evening my mother, & other people talk to me, and think me a bear if I read.

I have been sharply urged to produce "The May Fair Magazine,"⁴¹ and I would engage in the enterprise if I could secure cooperation such as yours —

³⁷ Presumably the learned scholar, theologian, and diplomat, Christian Karl Josias, Freiherr von Bunsen (1791–1860), Prussian Minister to the Court of St. James's, whose *Egypt's Place in Universal History* (5 vols., London: Longmans, 1848–1867) was still in the course of publication.

³⁸ *The Doctor's Wife*, on which MEB was pinning her hopes for recognition as an artist, and which proved to be by far the best novel she had yet written, appeared monthly in *Temple Bar* from January through December 1864.

³⁹ MEB was here referring to the painting of the House of Commons by the Scot, John Phillip (1817–1867), for the Speaker, Mr. Denison, later Viscount Ossington, representing a debate in 1860 on the French Treaty, and exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1863.

⁴⁰ Thackeray had died on December 24, 1863.

⁴¹ It was not until the end of 1866 that MEB actually did begin to "conduct" her own monthly magazine: *Belgravia*. See *SV*, Chapter V.

but that I suppose is beyond my hopes. Believe me I think much of what you say concerning the pouring out of novels at too rapid a rate, but then there is that vulgar old farmer's proverb about getting yr hay in while the sun shines, and my sun may not shine long. Writing novels has become now a sort of second nature to me. I live for little else, & try to shut away all thought of trouble by plunging into pen & ink [*sic*]. I am dreadfully jealous of that happy Madame Ernst⁴² who had so much of yr society, and heard you talk night after night, wandering away into all manner of dreamlands no doubt, whither scarcely any but Germans would have strength of wing to follow you. All the poetry has gone out of my life within the last five or six years, and I fear when I try to call it back for my new story, it will scarcely come. Have you read anything of Gustave Flaubert's,⁴³ & do you like that extraordinary Pre-Raphaelite style. I have been wonderfully fascinated by it, but I suppose all that unvarnished realism is the very reverse of poetry. I was disappointed in Renan's *Life*. I expected something more — a little mysticism — it disappointed and chilled me somehow and I did not read half the book. But I must not bore you with an interminable letter. Therefore with a thousand thanks for your last, I will bring this to a close, & remain, dear Sir Edward,

Very faithfully yours
M. E. B.

Letter No. 8 D/EK C12/115

26 Mecklenburgh Sq. June 24th [n.y. — 1864]

My dear Sir Edward

I scarcely know how to thank you for yr most kind note, or to tell you how much pleasure it gave me. I ordered "Dunbar"⁴⁴ to be sent to you, only as tribute to the Great Master of my art, and I was quite reconciled to its being cast aside into any limbo which you may reserve for such tribute. Judge then how pleased I am to think you should have read the book and derived an hour or two's amusement from it. I cannot but think that your having done so is a proof, not of any merit in my story, but of the freshness of your mind, which after a long literary & political career, is boyish enough to be interested in the sloppily told story of a murderer's adventures. I must tell you that to my surprise I found the Parisians like "Dunbar" better than anything I have done, & the translator has doubled his terms (which even when doubled are very small) on the strength of its success. Here critics turn up their noses, say the plot is impossible, the story badly told, & so on. But your letter sent me at once into

⁴² I have not succeeded in identifying Madame Ernst, Bulwer's mystical German friend.

⁴³ MEB's *Doctor's Wife* was in part an "adaptation" of *Madame Bovary*; so she had Flaubert much on her mind. See *SV*, Chapter V.

⁴⁴ *Henry Dunbar, The Story of an Outcast* appeared serially as *The Outcasts* in *The London Journal* from September 12, 1863 through March 26, 1864. After the excision of an under-plot, later published separately as *Lost and Found* (in *Ralph the Bailiff and Other Tales* [London: Ward, Lock, and Tyler, 1867]), it appeared in three volumes, published by John Maxwell in March 1864.

the Seventh Heaven of delight. If you are pleased, that — meaning the airiest snap that a Parisian grisette ever gave her fingers in Carnival time — for the critics.

It is so kind of you to take the trouble to point out my misdemeanour against the perpetually ill used Lindley Murray,⁴⁵ and I am so intolerably stupid as not to take advantage of yr kindness. You told me after "John Marchmont" that I mustn't say "frightened at," whereupon, turning the matter over in my mind à la Dundreary,⁴⁶ I concluded it should be "frightened of," afraid of, frightened of. Since your last note it dawns upon me that there's still another preposition, & I suppose it ought to be "frightened by" and so it shall be in future, unless I hear from you to the contrary. I venture to hope that you will like "The Doctor's Wife," which I shall have the pleasure of sending you before the end of October⁴⁷ better than anything I have yet done — though still unutterably far away from what I want to do, when I read your books, & a few others of the same calibre. There is more attempt at character painting in it, and I have given it more thought than anything else. I have been reading your essays from Blackwood⁴⁸ with intense delight, & have got the book by me as a textbook. That Essay on the uses of money is most delicious, and something you say apropos to tiresome aspirants for literary fame makes me laugh every time I think of it, & how much more when I read it. How I wonder at your extraordinary versatility as I read these essays, in which you appear strong alike as artist, critic, philosopher, metaphysician, & even *man of business*. I must not bore you with a long letter, but I feel like Tennyson's brook when I write to you, and could go on for ever. When shall we have a new novel from you? I hope your mind is not altogether absorbed in the Conservative interest, & that we shall have something soon, though all we poor little craft must hang back in drydock when you sail out, or go down like a galley of eggshells before the Monitor.⁴⁹

I remain, dear Sir Edward,

Always gratefully & truly yrs
M. E. Braddon.

Letter No. 9 D/EK C12/129

[n.pl., n.d. — summer, 1864]

My dear Sir Edward

I am about to ask you a great favour which I am emboldened to demand from the kindness with which you have criticised my published books. I send you my current novel, "The Doctor's Wife," so far as it has hitherto appeared, &

⁴⁵Lindley Murray (1745-1826), who was born in Pennsylvania and worked in England, wrote an often reissued English grammar, regarded as standard in its day.

⁴⁶See above, note 15.

⁴⁷But she could not wait: see Letter No. 9.

⁴⁸*Caxtoniana*: see above, note 18.

⁴⁹John Ericsson's "Yankee cheese-box on a raft," which defeated the Confederate ironclad, "Merrimac."

shall be much indebted to you if you can find time to read it — at yr leisure — & to give me the incalculable advantage of your opinion upon it, before it appears in a complete form. I would not ask this favour for *any* novel, written carelessly; but I have done my best with *this* book, & the writing of it has been a labour of love. I know how infinitely it falls short of what I wanted it to be; how infinitely full of faults it must appear to *you*; but such as it is I submit it to you in all humility as the most conscientious work I have done.

I must tell you once more how those dear little Essays delight me. I have the volumes on my table now as I write, and stop when I am idle to read a page here & there wherever the book opens. I opened it just now upon a most exquisite little bit about plagiarism, the most perfect definition of what original genius is, and the power it has to sublimate and refine, to transform a vulgar statue of clay into a marble demigod. I fancy I know an infinitely grander instance of this power, than Sterne ever displayed in his appropriation of Burton.

I opened a volume of Scott yesterday, & read haphazard a few sentences of the "Bride of Lammermoor," which used to be my favourite novel when I was very young. I cannot tell you how tame & poor the language seemed to me. Was the cause my vicious taste — or is the Wizard of the North a trifle dull & commonplace, for modern readers.

Have you read *Salambô* [*sic*]?⁵⁰ I should so like to know what you think of it. To me it seems a triumph of genius, but people in Paris told me it was a most stupendous failure there, & I never lent the book to anyone who didn't stick in the middle of it.

I remain, dear Sir Edward

Always truly yours,
M. E. B.

Letter No. 10 D/EK C12/128 [incomplete]

[n.pl., n.d. — summer, 1864]

My dear Sir Edward

A thousand & a thousand thanks for your most kind letter, which has given me more pleasure, & inspired me with more real earnestness than I can possibly express. You are indeed good & generous to give me your valuable time at a period when as I imagine your mind must be fully absorbed by matters of vital interest. I never expected for a moment to hear from you so soon, & I do most heartily thank you for your kind sympathy with my work. The idea of the Doctor's Wife is founded on "Madame Bovary"⁵¹ the style of which book struck me immensely in spite of its [*sic*] hideous immorality. There seems an extraordinary Pre-Raphaelite power of description — a power to make manifest a scene & an atmosphere in a few lines — almost a few words — that very few writers possess — & a grim kind of humour equal to Balzac in its way. (I've

⁵⁰ Still dwelling on Flaubert: see above, note 43, and below, Letter No. 10.

⁵¹ As soon as he read the still incomplete *The Doctor's Wife*, Bulwer realized its indebtedness to *Madame Bovary*, and MEB here acknowledged it.

made perfect nonsense of this sentence but my excuse is a man beating carpets in the yard on which "my den" gives, & who seems to have been pummelling my head instead of his carpets. [no close parenthesis]

I do dread the things that will be said of "The Doctor's Wife," but I can most solemnly vouch for the purity of my own intention which was to show the fatal error of an inconsiderate⁵² marriage — & in Lansdell⁵³ the utter uselessness, or barrenness of all gifts that are not supported by the power of faith. This part of my subject I feel is above me, & I seem to stop short on the threshold of it. I have made my hero weak & vacillating — always oscillating between good & evil, because a better man would not suit my purpose as well.

As regards the critics, the minor ones especially, I am in the position of a man who is sure to be hung, & I may as well suffer this time for a larger mutton than usual. They can only repeat some of the good natured things they have accustomed themselves to write of me. I speak now of that set of critics who have pelted me with the word "sensational," & who will gird at me so long as I write a line.⁵⁴

My story gets very critical in the August number & the scenes which should be the best & most powerful are I fear weak. I am so afraid of making Roland Lansdell unmanly, or ungentlemanly. I want him to be a gentleman whatever he is — but I want also to show the wide difference between a man's love & a woman's sentimental fancy, which is utterly out of the region of a man's comprehension *unless* he is the author of Zanoni or David Copperfield. I include Dickens though I don't think he has ever described a purely sentimental woman. I know that is a slip of the pen about the great authors in Roland's library — & yet I mean what I say. Hitherto Isabel⁵⁵ has been reading the works of great men, but they have been all in the region of romance, & unbalanced by *graver* books, they have produced the exaltation which poetry must always produce. You remember what Augustine Caxton says to his son, when he sends him to Robert Hall's biography.⁵⁶ Isabel has been revelling in light & colour & music, & it is the calm gray twilight of biography & history, & philosophy that I fancy lulling that eager sentimental nature to repose. I cannot express what I mean, but I think you will understand me. When I read your Essays, I get quite a different tone of mind from that which arises out of Zanoni. Poetry seems to lift one *too much* off the dull level, to which we *must*

⁵² I.e., "ill-considered."

⁵³ Roland Lansdell is the poetic man of the world with whom the heroine, married to an unromantic country doctor, falls in love. See *SV*, Chapter V.

⁵⁴ MEB was already exposed to a drumfire of hostile criticism as an immoral writer. It would soon intensify. See *SV*, Chapter VI.

⁵⁵ Isabel is the heroine of *The Doctor's Wife*.

⁵⁶ Augustine Caxton had a theory that certain kinds of books were suitable remedies for certain kinds of diseases. Biography was good for deep sorrow, and that of the Reverend Robert Hall, a Dissenter and soldier, cured the melancholy of both Augustine's son Pisistratus and his brother Roland. *Caxtons*, Part Ninth, Chapters V and VI.

reconcile ourselves. Augustine Caxton's discourse is a kind of modern Gospel, second only in perfection to the Gospel of Inspiration itself.

I went back to Scott yesterday, & was charmed with the quiet grace of the level writing — which you so praise — *but* so far as I have gone I hold to my opinion that he cannot describe a catastrophe. The brief description of the bridal night catastrophe seems to me little above the writing of a first class newspaper reporter. The writer doesn't seem to rise with his subject. I think of the great scene in Pelham, where one holds one's breath from page to page, the Inn scene in the Caxtons where Roland finds his son, the journey of Jonas Chuzzlewit when he goes into Wiltshire to murder Tigg — the description of Louis the sixteenth's drive through Paris on the morning of his death, by Carlyle; & by comparison my dear old Bride of Lammermuir [*sic*] seems tame & feeble. A very exquisite story told by a dear sensible high minded & even poetical elderly gentleman; but *not* all ablaze with the Promethean fire which a few writers substitute now & then for printer's ink. I must not bore you any longer, though there are lots of things I should very much like to say. By the bye about Thackeray, don't you think it was from Balzac he got that habit of looking down on his characters. Becky Sharp is only Valerie de Marnesse⁶⁷ in an English dress. I was looking at the Quarterly Review on Vanity Fair yesterday, & the critic there says Becky has only one fault — she is French! might he not have gone a little further & put his finger on the original Becky, who flings herself on her knees one minute with uplifted eyes & streaming hair, & [incomplete]

Letter No. 11 D/EK C12/137

26 Mecklenburgh Square September 7, 1864 [dated at end]

My dear Sir Edward

A thousand thanks for your most kind letter which greeted me early this morning, & almost atoned for the dismality upon which Londoners open their eyes. Pray do not give yrself any trouble about the "D.W." I have plenty of copy for the printers, & was only anxious to secure any chance queries or corrections you might have happened to jot down, had you a pencil within reach at the time — which I *never* have when I want to jot anything down. I have had so much editing work for the last year or two that, when I am in church, I almost want to edit the Liturgy.

I am so pleased to get your noble criticism on Scott; but you must not despise me if I am slow to appreciate him correctly. Consider that I read *your* prose, & Byron's poetry at a very early age; & I miss the fiery glow of both in the Northern Wizard's smooth harmonies. Mendlesohn's [*sic*] songs without words are very delicious; but I prefer the grand thunder of Handel's Hallelujah Chorus, to all the music Mendlesohn [*sic*] ever wrote. But I only looked — promiscuously as Mrs. Gamp would say — into Scott the other day — I will now read him by the light of yr criticism. Carlyle seems to me to have a very low estimate of him; lower than he cares to acknowledge.

⁶⁷ In Balzac's *La Cousine Bette* (1846).

I picked up 4 Vols of Jeffrey's reviews, reprinted from the *Edinbro'*, the other day, & am delighted with them — especially with his criticisms upon Wordsworth. It has been so much the fashion lately to cry up that *dreadful man*. Speaking of Richardson's model letters, written for the use of the common people, Jeffrey's [*sic*] says they might be infinitely useful to Mr. Wordsworth & those other gentlemen who are bent upon turning all our poetry into the language of the lower classes, or something to that effect.

It is very, very kind of you to give me a good word about the "D.'s Wife," and I full well know how valuable any such word must be. I am especially anxious about this novel; as it seems to me a kind of turning point in my life, on the issue of which it must depend whether I sink or swim. I am not a bit tired of writing, & feel rather as if I had scarcely begun yet in real earnest, but had been only squaring my elbows — very inelegant by the by [*sic*] — and trying my pens, with just a few false starts. *But* I feel every day more ignorant & life seems so short, & literature so long. And again I am always divided between a noble desire to attain something like excellence — and a very ignoble wish to earn plenty of money — & so on & so on. But how do I dare to bore you with all this? It is such a pleasure to write tiresome letters to the greatest man of his age, & I suppose you are bored with whole postbags full of such lucubrations. Have you read Taine's English literature, & do you like him? I am looking cagerly forward to his *Contemporary Writers*, amongst whom I presume you will occupy the chief place.

I am, dear Sir Edward

Very truly yours,
M. E. Braddon.

26 Mecklenburgh Sq.
Sept. 7th 64

Letter No. 12 D/EK C12/123

26 Mecklenburgh Sq. Saturday [dated at end. November or December 1864]
My dear Sir Edward

How good you are to me, & how can I ever thank you sufficiently for yr kindness. Pray do not for one moment imagine that any word of advice or criticism from you is wasted upon me; even though I may not seem as yet to profit much by your kindness. Your letters have a magical power over my mind, & seem always to arouse in me the very quality I most need — enthusiasm. After receiving a letter from you my ideas seem to soar into a new region — far away from all sordid & business like calculations of what I can *make* by my work — and for a time at least I think of my art *as* an art. I most entirely concur in all you say about the close of the "D.W." I was cruelly hurried in writing it, and only towards the last decided upon what I should do with George & Isabel. I always meant Sleaford to kill Roland, but to the last I was uncertain what to do with George. My original intention was to have left him alive, & Isabel reconciled to a commonplace life doing her duty bravely, and sup-

pressing all outward evidence of her deep grief for Roland.⁵⁸ Thus the love story would have only been an episode in a woman's life — succeeded by an after existence of quiet work and duty. I think, now it is too late, I might have done much better with the story in this way, but I am so apt to be influenced by little scraps of newspaper criticism, & by what people say to me. And I sometimes fancy I am rather like one of those most unprofitable race horses that "shut up at the finish."

A thousand thanks for that most valuable hint about the third volume.⁵⁹ I saw at once what an advantage it would be to write a novel in that manner — and if I can *possibly* get time in advance for the work, I will write my very next story in that way. I feel inexpressibly flattered by your advising me to write a novel of character, for it has been the fashion with most of my critics to say that I can *only* tell a story & have no notion of character. That question about the inadmissibility of accident in art is always terribly perplexing to me. Why not admit accident in a story when almost all the great tragedies of real life hinge upon accident. My uncle — the best & most benevolent of men — was murdered in his bed because he refused to give a false character to a Swiss butler, & the merest accident closed an existence that had survived five & thirty years of labour at the Indian bar.⁶⁰ I know of so many tragedies that seem to have arisen out of accident, and yet I feel that you are right, & that art must be something above the experience of real life. What a *magnificent* story for a magazine "Lucretia"⁶¹ would have been: it seems quite a matter to [be] regretted that people should have had it all in one lump of excitement & delight, instead of being put to slow torture month after month as the drama unrolled itself.

My next story is to begin in Temple Bar in January,⁶² if I live — & is to be sensational, for Wilkie Collins in Cornhill⁶³ will be a most powerful opponent [*sic*] & I can only fight him with his own weapons — mystery, crime, &c. You see I am obliged to sink my own inclinations in deference to the interests of the magazine. If I should not become an intolerable bore to you by so doing, I should like very much to send you a *charpente* of my plot before I begin; though I am by no means a good hand at putting a rough idea upon paper.

⁵⁸ George Gilbert is the country doctor to whom Isabel is unhappily married; Steaford her father, who kills her suitor, Roland Lansdell; George dies of typhoid. See *SV*, Chapter V. Bulwer had now read the whole novel, which dates the letter in November or December 1864.

⁵⁹ Bulwer had advised MEB to write the third volume immediately after the first, and then return and finish the second. Although his letter is lost, MEB many years later told an interviewer what the advice had been. See Mary Angela Dickens, "Miss Braddon at Home," *The Windsor Magazine*, VI:33 (September 1897), 418.

⁶⁰ This was William Braddon, elder brother of MEB's father, Henry Braddon. He had been a judge in Bengal (*SV*, Chapter I).

⁶¹ For Bulwer's *Lucretia*, see above, note 16.

⁶² This was to be *Sir Jasper's Tenant*. The date shows that this letter was written before 1 January 1865.

⁶³ See below, Letter No. 14 and note 75.

I am now doing a story in the "St. James's" "Only a Clod,"⁶⁴ but it is quite a from hand to mouth affair, & done to keep my hand in & earn money.

What must you think of this long dreary letter all full of "I"s? but you are so kind in giving me advice that I feel tempted to write about myself, as I would write to no one else in the world. I cannot tell you how much I feel the subtlety & wisdom of your criticism, or how anxious I am to be worthy of the trouble you have taken with me. I shall devote myself to a course of your books, & Balzac's for the next three months, & it will go hard with me if I do not make some little progress under the two masters of style — not that I place Balzac beside you for a moment, since in construction, poetry, dramatic power, the whole art of the story teller in short he is entirely deficient where you are so inimitably great, but I *suppose* in style no Frenchman has ever approached him. I should like so much to know what you think of him, if ever you have time, or inclination, to tell me.

With a thousand thanks, for yr letter, always believe me

Admiringly & gratefully yrs.
M. E. Braddon.

26 Mecklenburgh Sq. Saturday.

Letter No. 13 D/EK C12/120

26 Mecklenburgh Square, December 9th, 1864 [dated at end]

My dear Sir Edward

I can scarcely tell you how much delight the receipt of your last letter, from Hastings, gave me. I so little expected so speedy a reply to my long rambling epistle — and I feel so unworthy of such a slice of yr valuable time. I have been going to write every day — and have had a thousand things in my mind to say to you — it is such a privilege to be allowed to write one's random thoughts & doubts to the Creator of Augustine Caxton — but every day the inexorable printer's devil, that dirty half-brother of the leech's daughters, comes to loll with his greasy little back against the wall, & to demand "more copy." A thousand thanks for yr criticism on Balzac. I have taken all his fine descriptions of Parisian life *au pied de la lettre*, but enlightened by your criticism I seem to see the false flash & glitter, the impossibly elegant Madame de Beauséants, the incredibly supine husbands. You say that the feelings excited by "Lucretia" are too entirely painful. To me the sense of pain seems lost in the tragic grandeur of the whole — and yet one does suffer — but then I think a reader likes to have his feelings harrowed. Don't you think that Balzac's stories — if stories they can be called — are *all* painful — so many studies in morbid anatomy. How excruciated one is by the Père Goriot, disfiguring his cherished plate in the dead of the night. The Baroness Hulot seized with that trembling which never leaves her — Cousin Pons,⁶⁵ exposed to the galling

⁶⁴ MEB's *Only a Clod* was serialized in *The St. James's Magazine* before three-volume publication by Maxwell in 1865.

⁶⁵ Balzac's Mme de Beauséant appears chiefly in his *La Femme abandonnée* (1832), *Père Goriot* (1834-1835), and *Albert Savarus* (1842); Baroness Hulot in *La Cousine*

insolence of the relations who grudge him a dinner! Balzac seems to have been always peering into the most hideous sores in the social body — so that his novels seem so many *preparations*. But for a certain grim & ghastly humour he appears to me unrivalled, almost Shakespearian, if I dare say so. Père Goriot for instance gives me *exactly* the idea of what King Lear might have been — must have been, had destiny made him a city tradesman instead of an early British King.

I am so glad you find George Sand heavy. Some of her novels I have been able to read but there are others before whose long dreary pages of poetry or philosophy or whatever it may be I shrink aghast. I liked her last — *Mademoiselle de* — some name beginning with an M,⁶⁶ or rather I liked little bits in it here & there; but the subject is dreariness itself. What is to become of a writer for popular periodicals if the French take to writing only character novels.

I am to begin my next story in Temple Bar for February⁶⁷ — and have had very little leisure for the concoction of my plot. I fear there is no new material in it, but I must do my best to build a decent house out of secondhand bricks. I want if possible to make the story one of character — & incident also — but I must write for my own public which demands strong meat, & which — so far — has bought — in due proportion as to time — quite as many copies of "Henry Dunbar" which I wrote off the reel for the "London Journal" as of the "Doctor's Wife" to which I gave my best thoughts — such as they are.

I trust you are well, and enjoying this mild — if not altogether agreeable — weather. How about the Davenport Brothers? Is there really anything in this flying about of fiddles and changing great coats. I cannot understand these spirits or the manner of their demonstrations. I can fancy Edgar Poe's Raven — or any spirit coming to a lonely watcher in the dead of the night — but I *cannot* imagine Dark Séances at so much a head or spirit hands which are peculiarly averse to the neighbourhood of a Sheffield knife, or a revolver.⁶⁸ I am afraid I am writing flippant nonsense that will disgust you, but there have been people talking in the room & bewildering me terribly for the last ten minutes.

Once more accept my heartfelt thanks for the last delightful letter, & believe me to be

Most truly yr
disciple & admirer,
M. E. Braddon

26 Mecklenburgh Square, December 9th 1864

Bette (1846). *Le Cousin Pons* belongs to 1847. It is quite possible that when Bulwer, in his lost letter to MEB, referred to the "too entirely painful feelings" excited by *Lucretia*, he was thinking not of the pain caused the reader but of his own painful memories of the harsh treatment the critics had accorded the book when it appeared in 1846. He almost challenged Thackeray to a duel at the time (Keith Hollingsworth, *The Newgate Novel* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1963]); but MEB knew nothing of this episode.

⁶⁶ George Sand's *Mlle de M?* is presumably *Mademoiselle Merquem*.

⁶⁷ This is *Sir Jasper's Tenant*. See above, note 62.

⁶⁸ For Bulwer and spiritualism, see SS, pp. 244 ff.

Letter No. 13-A

Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton to MEB⁶⁹

Queens Hotel, Naseby, December 13, 1864

Dear Miss Braddon:

In common with all your readers I must be glad to hear you are going to launch another Novel. Of course you do well to consult the Element of popularity with your own public. But that Public is a large one and comprises intellectual readers. I do not doubt that whatever you do will carry with it the increased [illegible] of confidence you have acquired and that with the incidents given to strong interest or as it is stupidly called sensation, you will find yourself perforce combining improved views of character and graces of style.

A great novel writer must necessarily be a popular writer — with or without striving for it. And nowadays in England it seems hopeless to expect aid from critics if one sacrifices a certain portion of the popular element for the sake of choicer merits. But so long as invention does not flag an author like you will keep up the high standards of that perhaps without knowing it. What you say about Balzac is very true. He is disagreeable because he is cynical — and that fault prevents one's reading him again and again. But despite that fault he is a very great novelist in his best books. He owes much to his patience in detail. Have you read Soulié's novels?⁷⁰ They are worth studying for the sake of their extraordinary ingenuity in plot. They used to interest me much in spite of improbabilities. Murray is bringing out a revised edition of my smaller poems.⁷¹ I shall send you a copy and if in the periodicals which you influence⁷² you can get some sort of review I should feel obliged. I have a desire to see my poetry criticised even if censured.

Yours truly,
E. L. B. Lytton

Letter No. 14 D/EK C12/121

[n.pl., n.d. — December 1864, after the 13th]

My dear Sir Edward

Once more a thousand thanks for your always kind letter, and for the promise of the poems which I shall be delighted to get. I will use my utmost endeavours to get a *good* review of them done for the *St. James's Magazine*. Robert Browning, & Tennyson (Enoch Arden) have been reviewed in that Mag: the latter I thought in a very insolent & inadequate tone, but I did not see the article till it was just going to press — and had no time to make objections or suggest

⁶⁹ This is the first of the two letters from Bulwer to MEB that survive. After her husband's death in 1895, she burned many of the letters she had received. Both survivors are in the Wolff Collection.

⁷⁰ For Soulié, see above, note 17. Harold March, *Frédéric Soulié* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1931 — *Yale Romanic Studies*, III), is a useful monograph about him.

⁷¹ *Poems by the Right Hon. Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, Bart., M.P.*, A New Edition (London: John Murray, 1865).

⁷² MEB worked part time in the editorial offices of *The St. James's Magazine*, which belonged to her lover and publisher, John Maxwell.

alterations. The proprietor of the *St. J.* has since had some disagreement with the young man who wrote these two reviews (Robert Williams Buchanan whose poems "Undertones" were lately published by Moxon), & I don't suppose he is available. But there is a Mr. Rans or Rauns who writes for the *Illustrated Times*, & who would, I think, write a nice review — I will see about it directly I get the book. I only wish I were capable of reviewing it myself, but I fear my knowledge of poetry is too limited to enable me to be critical & I should only be able to write panegyric about what I so ardently admire.⁷³ I have read Soulié, at least many of his stories, & have helped myself very freely to some of them for my Anonymous work. He is certainly magnificent for continuous flow of invention — incident arising out of incident.⁷⁴ I have so little time for reading, & above all so very little quiet time that I am apt to begin a lot of books & never finish any of them — taking up any book I find in the room I happen to be in — and opening the volume anywhere. I read Taine's *English Literature* in this manner, but I have not yet seen the last volume, containing his criticism on contemporary writers. Do you think an English translation of the book would pay a publisher? I fancied not, and advised against it. The French publisher wants a good deal of money for the right of reproduction.

Have you read the two first numbers of Wilkie Collins's new story? ⁷⁵ I do not fancy that so far it is anything equal to "The Woman in White." He seems to be too openly & inartistically sensational & he is telling his story rapidly, whereas his peculiar art heretofore has been the slow & gradual development of his plot. Do you read "Our Mutual Friend?" ⁷⁶ I am one of Dickens's most enthusiastic admirers, but I cannot help thinking that he is getting into a muddle with this story, & that it will be below "Little Dorrit." I cannot *believe* in any of the characters and I can perceive in this book the force of what you said about the very wealth of Dickens's imagination sometimes carrying him too far, into regions whither his more practical readers refuse to follow or are unable to follow him.

In haste, dear Sir Edward,

Always truly yours
M. E. B.

Letter No. 15 D/EK C12/118

[n.pl., n.d. — January 1865]

Dear Sir Edward,

The delicious looking volume of poems arrived early last week but I am sorry to say too late for the review to appear in the February No. of the *St.*

⁷³ Robert Buchanan's relations with John Maxwell and MEB are discussed in *SV*, Chapter III. By "Mr. Rans or Rauns" MEB meant William Beachy Rands.

⁷⁴ Here is MEB's admission that she *had* taken material from Soulié for her penny fiction. See above, notes 17 and 70, and *SV*, Chapter IV.

⁷⁵ *Armada* was appearing in *The Cornhill Magazine*. MEB was deliberately competing against it with *Sir Jasper's Tenant* in *Temple Bar*.

⁷⁶ *Our Mutual Friend* was appearing in monthly parts.

James's, as you will see by the enclosed note from Mr. Rands, who was asked to write the article. He has been since written to with a request to do a good review in time for the March number.⁷⁷ I will send you the proof in order that you may knock out anything you disapprove, and if you think it worth while to make any corrections — or additions — I will copy them on a duplicate proof for the printer. I sent the book away immediately on receiving it, & had not even time to read "The Boatman," of which I have seen so much praise in many quarters, but the volume is to come back to me when done with, & will be treasured amongst my pet books, for constant reference — more especially when I want an elegant line for a chapter heading. I have never forgotten a little poem of yours in "Ernest Maltravers" — beginning "When stars are in the quiet skies —" which goes beautifully to that sweetest of all serenades "The Carnival of Venice." I am working very hard, and have just finished the first 30 pages of my eighth 3 Vol. novel — "Sir Jasper's Tenant." I know it is not a good title, but I really hadn't time to wait for a better. It is to be all the old sort of thing mystery, & murder & so on, written with a view to the popular market. Wilkie Collins *is* on the wrong track, isn't he? That woman in the red Paisley shawl — the sudden & most inartistic deaths of a small family that need never have been born so far as the book is concerned strike me as unworthy the hand that so neatly put together that delicious puzzle "The Woman in White." Three numbers & *no* female interest — surely a mistake so far as Mr. Mudie's constituency is/are concerned.⁷⁸ I shall try to observe your canon as to the exclusion of accidental agency in "Sir J. T." but I have no very clear plans about that gentleman's career at present. When one has two sets of *Dramatis Personae* to keep moving from month to month the mind is apt to get rather foggy.⁷⁹ Dickens seems to have let his sensational cat completely out of the bag, but I hear he has plenty more of his story to tell.⁸⁰ It seems to me very far below "Great Expectations" as a work of art and has yet been unilluminated by any such genial light as Joe Gargery shed over all *that* picture. Have you been to see the "Hidden Hand?" It is a very weak rendering of Lucretia — but still a very strong drama, magnificently acted by Kate Verny who would make a most divine "Pauline."⁸¹ Is the first Vol of the Emperor's Caesar⁸² worth £1,000 to an English publisher, for right of production *only*?

⁷⁷ See Letter No. 14 and notes 71-73.

⁷⁸ She is still carping at *Armada*. Mudie was the proprietor of the leading circulating library, where most of the novel-reading public rented their fiction.

⁷⁹ She was writing *Only a Clod* simultaneously.

⁸⁰ *Our Mutual Friend* again.

⁸¹ Tom Taylor's play, *The Hidden Hand*, which opened at the Olympia Theatre on November 2, 1864, did indeed involve poisoning, like Bulwer's *Lucretia*, but was based, like so many of his other plays, on French originals, this time on *L'aieule*, by Dennery and Edmond. Pauline was the heroine of Bulwer's own *Lady of Lyons* (1838), an immensely popular play.

⁸² "The Emperor's Caesar" is Napoléon III, *Histoire de Jules César* (2 vols., Paris: Plon, 1865-1866); Cassell, Petter, and Galpin published an English translation in 1866.

I say *no*, and said so boldly when asked the question. Do you think I am wrong? I should fancy the class of people who will want to read it are just those who would only read it in the original. Don't trouble yrself to reply to any question I ask you unless you happen to be writing. I have no right to impose on your kindness by asking foolish questions, & expressing inane opinions.

Always truly yours

M. F. Braddon

P.S. I have bought a house; freehold, with a tiny garden on *part* of the site of Pope's Villa,⁸³ very compact, but small — but I mean to let it for some time — as London suits me best while I work against time, & I am here close to the Brit. Mus. if ever I can get time to read. I see from the papers that you are enjoying good health at Hastings. Did you ever stop at Herne Bay, the dullest, quietest place, but with a gray, sleepy sort of calm about it.

Letter No. 16 D/EK C12/125 [incomplete]

26 Mecklenburgh Square, London. February 28th 65

My dear Sir Edward

I have substituted another article for the review and shall be much pleased if you will do as you kindly promise, only *not* laying any embargo on the writer, as no one who admired & appreciated you could write under such a condition. I shall gladly receive any paper, not exceeding ten or twelve pages, as I am restricted in my powers with regard to the contents of the magazine.

If you know how entirely my life is absorbed by daily labour and how few literary people I see you would not be astonished at the difficulty I had in finding anyone able to write the paper I wanted. The "stuff" for the Mag: is all found for me, & I am not in communication with any of the writers. Indeed anything like the responsibilities of Editorship would speedily render me a suitable inmate for that big house with the dome on the top of it, out Lambeth way. If I *am* entrusted with an M.S. I generally lose it, and, if I attempt to *suggest* any subject, from the plot of a novel to a treatise on hashed mutton, the writer and I invariably come to grief. I say this in order that you may understand how I failed in procuring that which seemed to me the easiest thing in the world to obtain, a clever review of your very beautiful poems, which I as yet know chiefly from the extracts selected by different critics.⁸⁴

But though I have not been reading your poems, I have been reading the only one of yr books which I have not read four or five times. The third volume of "What will he do with it" ⁸⁵ lies open by my side, as I write, & I have been sitting reading it in the flare of three gas-burners until I am half blind. I cannot tell you how charmed I am, with this book, which is the first book of yours that I have read since I have been working very hard myself, and I fancy that much as I enjoyed your writings of old I have even a keener relish for them

⁸³ In Twickenham, on the Thames. MEB never lived in it.

⁸⁴ Bulwer had obviously been displeased by Rands's review of his *Poems*, and MEB was making excuses.

⁸⁵ *What Will He Do With It* (1859) Bulwer published, like *My Novel* (1853), as by Pistratus Caxton, narrator of *The Caxtons*.

now. I suppose a cabinet-maker in Tottenham Court Road would have a sharper appreciation for a sideboard of Gillow's make than the most refined of purchasers. I am reading this novel with an intense delight, the first thing that struck me in it, before I had read a couple of the introductory chapters, was the extraordinary lightness, the brightness, the airiness of the style, so exquisitely playful, like the capricious sportiveness of a giant who plays at ball with granite rocks or tiny sea shells as the whim of the moment moves him. Then as I got deeper into the book I felt all the old interest in the plot, the old sympathy with the characters. Tonight I have been reading that wonderful scene between Lady Montfort & Daniell, & I am torn to pieces by contending [incomplete]

Letter No. 17 D/EK C12/126 [incomplete]

[n.pl., n.d. — April 1865]

My dear Sir Edward

What must you think of me for my delay in thanking you for *two* most kind notes? I wait day after day in the hope of writing at leisure, & the leisure never comes. I wanted so much to write about the article in the St. J. because I had a little point to explain. A long quotation from "Milton" was deleted from the M.S. but not by *me*. It was cut out by the Proprietor of the mag: who with all admiration & appreciation of yr genius — equal perhaps to any of yr most romantic admirers — was anxious to avoid any thing beyond the ordinary length of articles in the St. J. My editorial powers are very limited & my pay small, but I like the work, as it teaches one the mechanical part of one's profession.⁸⁶ I am working as much as ever against time — but on one of the only holidays I have had lately went to Totteridge to see some boys⁸⁷ at a school there, and when paraded by the chief dignitary over very large grounds was told all at once that I was on the scene of the "Last of the Barons" treading the very soil on which the hoofs of the King Maker's steed may have scattered the turf.⁸⁸ Of course, *your* name was mentioned, oh, privilege of genius to haunt every spot its sceptre has ever made royal, & then I heard you lived — or had a house — for great people seem [incomplete]

Letter No. 18 D/EK C12/131

[n.pl., n.d. — mid-October 1865]

My dear Sir Edward

How shall I thank you sufficiently for the valuable advice you have given me, the delicate kindness of your letter? I cannot tell you how deeply I appre-

⁸⁶ The review of Bulwer's *Poems* appeared in *The St. James's Magazine* XII:1 (April 1865), 26–36. MEB was putting upon the proprietor, John Maxwell, her lover, the onus for cutting the review.

⁸⁷ These were John and Robert Maxwell, John Maxwell's sons by his wife, who was in a mental home in Ireland, and from whom he was separated. He could not marry MEB until his wife died in 1874; but between 1862 and 1870, MEB had six children by him, of whom five survived (*SV*, Chapter III). Bulwer owned a house near Totteridge.

⁸⁸ Bulwer's *Last of the Barons* (1843), in which the Earl of Warwick, the "King-Maker," was a character.

ciate the goodness which induced you to take so much trouble on my account. But I *know* that I cannot give you a better proof of my gratitude than by earnestly striving to profit by your counsel. I will make an earnest effort to prove to you that so much considerate kindness has not been utterly thrown away — but whether that effort will be successful while I am still compelled to write against time I know not.

I heartily concur in all your objections — and I feel now that Pauncefort's letter was an entire mistake from the first word to the last. It was a departure from my original plan — in which I had intended that P. should *tell* his story in a few broken sentences. But then I wanted to throw some light upon the past — and in writing my letter I did *not* think sufficiently that the story was told by the man himself. In fact it is altogether a case of inexcusable carelessness — and I hope it will be a warning to me in the future. I much regret the error, for I had hoped Pauncefort might have pleased you — Though I knew he was the most shadowy reflection of one of yr own characters — and I felt my hand too weak to hold him — even for a moment.

I begin to see the weaknesses of my mind. I fear I shall never describe — much less create a great or good man — and yet Heaven knows I admire the great & the noble in the works of others — and am deeply touched by all grand & beautiful pictures — But my pen is most at home in painting a character of the Sir Jasper or Holroyde stamp.⁸⁰ I can write about villains & villainesses by the mile — with what my critics would call “a fatal facility.” Then again I am impressed too much by externals and in thinking of any of my characters I see their attitudes — the scenery & atmosphere about them — every detail of pictorial effect — and perhaps forget altogether the subjective side of the question. I doubt if I shall ever write an artistic novel — or a novel that will *satisfy* you — But I hope and believe I may write a much better novel than any I have written yet — and succeed in *pleasing* you.

“Only a Clod” was more successful in a pecuniary sense than the “Doctor's Wife.” “Sir Jasper” bids fair to sell better than “Only a Clod,” but I want to please you as well as to “put money in my purse,” for if I can once succeed in pleasing you I shall feel that I have reached a far higher region than that of “circulating library success.” I am doing a light social life novel, “The Lady's Mile,”⁸⁰ but I doubt whether it will please you — though I shall bring to bear upon it all the force of yr kind advice, but the subject is flimsy — and can only be elevated by touches of domestic pathos which I fear may prove beyond my reach.

⁸⁰ MEB is here responding to Bulwer's adverse criticism of *Sir Jasper's Tenant* published early in October 1865. Pauncefort, the hero, tells the girl he loves the entire history of his early life in a long letter, occupying more than a third of Volume II. Sir Jasper is a fussy hypochondriac, Holroyde a deep-dyed villain. See *SV*, Chapter V.

⁸⁰ The first mention of her new novel, which was her first without any crime in it (*SV*, Chapter V).

When are *you* going to write again — and why are you so long silent — master of all other masters?

Charles Reade was dining with us a few nights ago — and spoke of you with unqualified admiration and delightful enthusiasm. Have you read "Hard Cash."? To me it seems wonderfully powerful & brilliant, running over with wild unfettered genius. I read your poems constantly — and delight in them — "The Boatman" is to me the most delicious piece of music — with all the metaphysical depth of Tennyson, who never made *such music*, and all the harmonious grace of Hood. Next to the "Boatman" my grand favourite is the dialogue between "Mind & Body." It is unspeakably delightful. I lay awake this morning thinking of all your books, and I was struck with wonder when I remembered their extent and their variety — and the equal power which makes each stand alone, a masterpiece of art. I reread passages of the "Bride of Lammermuir," [*sic*] and was struck with its beauty — the exquisite grace of the style — but I *still* think the catastrophe is weakly told, and painfully hurried — and I am *still* inclined to think with the Westminster reviewer, that with all the great gifts of that good & great master, there was yet a want of depth — or rather fire & force — in passionate declination.

I have been improving my library — and amongst other books have secured a fine edition of the "Spectator", "Tatler" & "Guardian." Am I right in preferring — so far as I have read — the style of Steele to that of Addison — There seems to me an airy grace about Sir Richard's diction that is even more charming than the polished even-ness of Addison.

Again & again I thank you for your kind & candid letter, & once more I assure you that I will most heartily strive to profit by the counsel of the greatest writer of the age. I hope my next cargo of goods may be an improvement on the last consignment, and in the meantime remain always

Sincerely & admiringly yours
M. F. Braddon.

(*To be concluded*)

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