Morris to Louisa Baldwin: More Letters at Texas

by E.E. Stokes Jnr

On 7 July 1965 the University of Texas Library further enriched its Morris holdings by acquiring twelve autograph letters from Morris to Louisa (Mrs Alfred) Baldwin for £240 at a Sotheby's sale. As on a former occasion, the Honorary Secretary has requested me to act as representative of the Society in examining these letters.¹

Mrs Baldwin was one of the most distinguished of Morris' female correspondents. A daughter of the Rev. George Browne Macdonald, she was a sister of Lady Georgiana Burne-Jones. Alice, her eldest sister, was the wife of John Lockwood Kipling and the mother of Rudyard. Still another sister, Agnes, was the wife of Sir Edward John Poynter, P.R.A. Louisa Baldwin was

¹ I am grateful to the Manuscript Committee of the University of Texas Library for granting me permission to examine the letters. Circumstances made it impossible for me to visit the Texas Library and examine the letters in the original. I am therefore indebted to Mrs June Moll, Librarian of the Miriam Lutcher Stark Library, for her courtesy in arranging to have xerox facsimiles made and sent to me.
the wife of Alfred Baldwin, paternalistic businessman and philanthropist, and the mother of Stanley Baldwin, the Prime Minister. It was altogether a remarkable family, both in its connections and its accomplishments.

The dozen Morris letters to Louisa Baldwin at Texas range in date from June, 1871, to March, 1875. All are in Morris' autograph, signed, and ten of them are accompanied by their original envelopes. Nine of the letters were written from 26, Queen Square, Bloomsbury. As for the remaining three, one is from Reykjavik, Iceland, one from Kelmscott Manor, and the third from Horrington House, Turnham Green. The intimate footing on which Morris was with Mrs Baldwin is attested to by the salutations, all of which are either 'My dear Louie' or 'Dear Louie.' The letters are in Morris' characteristic, rapidly scrawled handwriting— not, alas, always easy to decipher! All are in ink.

Six of these letters have been published, either in part or in their entirety. A careful comparison of the published versions with the originals has revealed numerous minor inaccuracies, errors, and alternations— some, frankly, unaccountable— in the former, as well as a few interesting omissions. Since half of the letters are, however, available in readily accessible printed form, I shall, in the notes that follow, concentrate mainly on the as yet unpublished ones. The letters are arranged below in chronological order. I have indicated publication where appropriate.

1: June 1st 1871. From 26, Queen Square, Bloomsbury. 2 pp. (No envelope.) About a book. Discusses past times. Mentions cribbage lessons.

2: July 16th 1871. From Reykjavik, Iceland. 3 pp. (With envelope.) Written during Morris' first trip to Iceland. Asks her to write him 'Poste Restante, Reykjavik, Iceland.' Describes sailing along the coast.

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3 The dates are written as in the originals. I have written the months in full where Morris abbreviated them. In some instances he did not add the year, and it was necessary to determine it from the postmark on the envelope.
of Iceland. Discusses Reykjavik. Mentions that the next day he and his party are to begin a journey upcountry '...with the help of 20 horses and two guides.' Discusses the horses ('poneys') and the Icelandic people, who, he says, are lazy. Regrets that he cannot write a longer letter, but he has other letters to write and '...only a limited time of privacy' to write them in.

3: September 21st 1871. From Queen Square. 4 pp. (With envelope.) Published in part in Henderson, pp. 45-46, reprinted from Mackail, I, 273-4. Inaccuracies in punctuation and transcription. The first paragraph and the final two sentences of the letter, on trivial personal topics, are omitted in both Mackail and Henderson.

4: September 30th 1871. From Queen Square. 3 pp. (With envelope.) Concerns the MS of a story by Mrs Baldwin. (She had apparently rather diffidently offered to send it to him for his opinion.) Morris generously urges her to send it to him, though he makes no claims for himself as a critic, especially of a friend's work. He discusses his own expectations when friends read his work and his reactions to their criticisms. He thinks 'Georgie' (Lady Burne-Jones) is a better critic than he is. He promises to show the MS to his publisher friend Ellis, who at present is out of town.

5: February 13th 1872. From Kelmscott Manor. 3 pp. (With envelope.) Apologizes for not writing earlier about her MS ('tale'). He has been '...something more than busy.' Mentions difficulties with a work of his own that he is currently at work on (Love Is Enough?). Says he will delay commenting on her work until he has read all of it. He is at Kelmscott for a fortnight '...to see spring beginning; a sight I have seen little of for years, and am writing among the grey gables & rook-haunted trees, with a sense of the place being almost too beautiful to work in.' He invites her and her husband to visit him there later in the spring.

6: June 22nd 1872. From Queen Square. 3 pp. (With envelope.) Published in its entirety in Henderson, pp. 46-47, reprinted from Mackail, I, 287-8.

7: September 14th 1873. From Horrington House, Turnham Green. 9 pp. (With envelope.) Except for one phrase, published in its entirety in Mackail, Oxford World's Classics edition, I, 304-7, though with minor alterations and corrections. Written soon after Morris' return from his second trip to Iceland. (Not reprinted in Henderson.)

8: October 22nd 1873. From Queen Square. 6 pp. (With envelope.) Published in full in Henderson, pp. 59-60, reprinted from May Morris's introduction to vol. XXII of the Collected Works, pp. xxxii-xxxiv.

9: March 26th 1874. From Queen Square. 5 pp. (With envelope.) Published in part in Henderson, pp. 61-62, reprinted from Mackail, I, 300. A passage in the final paragraph on the forthcoming marriage of Lucy Madox Brown and William Michael Rossetti is printed only in part. Both Henderson and Mackail omit the names of the betrothed couple and an uncomplimentary personal reference to them as '...old boobies (for they are old Louie, I mean for that sort of folly) – No, I am going, woe work the while! Whence these tears!'
10: November 15th 1874. From Queen Square. 4 pp. (With envelope.) Discusses his translation 'Mother under the Mold' and mentions Longfellow's version of the same Anglo-Saxon poem, 'The Grave.' He is about to go to Cambridge to see a window of the firm's in Jesus College Chapel. He also expects to read Icelandic for a few hours with Magnússon and to attend two dinners, one at Jesus College and the other at Peterhouse. His host at Peterhouse will be 'an Irishman nomine Porter,' a great lover of giving hospitality. A friend of Porter's is a politician named Fawcett, who is blind. Morris has great respect for his politics, but doesn't find him agreeable as a man, as he candidly admits to Mrs Baldwin: 'I have a great respect for his courageous politics, and I believe he is really a good man: but—personally I don't find him a pleasure: a man must have a treasure of a soul to be agreeable if he is blind: that's a fact: not that he is sulky or morose—quite the contrary.' He mentions the German Romantic writer Jean Paul (Richter). He confesses discouragement over his drawing: '...so I keep it up dreading the model day like I used to dread Sunday when I was a little chap.'

11: March 25th 1875. From Queen Square. 5 pp. (With envelope.) Published in part in Henderson, pp. 67-68, reprinted from Mackail, I, 309-10. Both Henderson and Mackail omit the last two paragraphs of the letter, on personal matters of passing significance.

Little of real significance, perhaps, is added to our knowledge of Morris by the contents of the unpublished letters to Mrs Baldwin described above, or by the omissions noted in the already-published letters. The most interesting of the letters are those selected by Mackail and Henderson for inclusion in their books. Nevertheless, it is satisfying to have a fuller sense than before of the actual range of this correspondence. And surely Morris and Mrs Baldwin would never have dreamed that, some ninety years later, these letters would find their way to far-off Texas.

5 Henry Fawcett (1833-84), the celebrated Professor of Political Economy at Cambridge, influential radical politician, and member of Parliament. In 1880 Fawcett became Postmaster-General in Gladstone's government and proved to be a vigorous, innovative, and popular administrator. Leslie Stephen published his Life of Henry Fawcett in 1885.