

The Man who was Pecksniff Samuel Carter Hall (1800-1889)

There are lots of stories about Samuel Carter Hall. He knew everyone in the world of literature and the arts, and almost everyone knew him. He wrote ceaselessly, and was an unashamed self-publicist. Even at the time his work was, for the most part, dismissed as mediocre journalism, and his books are now almost completely forgotten, except as a mine of gossip about more interesting figures. As an editor and campaigning journalist, however, he played a part in the dissemination of culture, particularly the visual arts, among the growing middle-classes, to the benefit of both producers and consumers. But what has ensured his place in history is the idea that he was the model for one of the greatest of all comic characters, Pecksniff in *Martin Chuzzlewit*.

That there was a connection between Hall and Dickens's magnificent hypocrite is beyond dispute. Several of Dickens's close associates stated as a fact that Hall was the prototype, and people who knew Hall saw his mannerisms reproduced in Pecksniff. Dickens himself described Hall as Pecksniffian, and thought him a thorough humbug. 'I once asked Dickens whether Mr and Mrs S.C.H. ever imparted to one another their persuasion as to what humbugs they both were,' recorded George Augustus Sala. "Well," replied CD, "I fancy that on New Year's Day *they may exchange a wink*." This appears, along with some satirical verses, on the title-page of a book by Hall. At the same time Sala admitted: 'Sam Hall (he was not at all "a bad sort") gave me this book.'¹

A collaborator, Charles Osborne, recorded Hall's response to the suggestion that he was Pecksniff:

My dear boy, they say I am Pecksniff! What is there of Pecksniff about me? Do I resemble him in any way? Can any man say I have ever wronged him? Thank God, thank God, I have a clear conscience! The best of all possessions; believe me! ... I will not defend myself against such a charge. Every one who knows me knows I have tried to do good to my fellow-men; that I have been a good husband, a true friend, an industrious author – I have written and edited over four hundred volumes, and no line has ever come from my pen which as an old man I wish to blot out, no, not one.²

This defence is valid enough – he was all that he says he was – and yet he is convicted out of his own mouth. He just sounds so entirely Pecksniffian. 'For myself,' says Pecksniff, 'my conscience is my bank. I have a trifle invested there, a mere trifle ... but I prize it as a store of value, I assure you.'³

When people said that Hall was Pecksniff, what exactly did they mean, or think that Dickens meant? Pecksniff in the novel is a villain who attempts through flattery and lies to secure the goodwill and the fortune of his wealthy relation, Old Martin Chuzzlewit; full of professions of virtue and benevolence, he joins the great Anglo-Bengalee swindle; and when he thinks he can get away with it he ruthlessly betrays Young Martin and treats the estimable Tom Pinch cruelly and treacherously. When Hall's enemies said he was Pecksniff they didn't imagine that he was guilty of such obvious wrongs. It's unlikely that even Dickens thought the man was such an out and out rogue.

One element of Pecksniff's villainy, however, might just possibly be attributable to Dickens's personal experience of Hall. Pecksniff is an architect by profession, and makes his money by taking pupils, one of whom is Young Martin. In an episode that is, perhaps, not essential to the main plot, he appropriates Martin's design for a school, and wins an architectural prize by passing it off as his own. Dickens and Hall first met in 1826 when Dickens was a boy selling police-court stories to *The*

1 Sala's annotations are described in T O Mabbott, 'Dickens, Sala and S C Hall', *Notes & Queries*, 4 December 1943, p347. Another of Dickens's young friends, Edmund Yates, remembered the conversation slightly differently; in Yates's version he is the one who asks the question, and the day on which Dickens imagines the yearly wink taking place is Carter's birthday. (Reported by J Comyns Carr, *Some Eminent Victorians*, 1908, chapter 12 p 147.)

2 C C Osborne, 'Mr Pecksniff and his Prototype', *Independent Review*, 1906; quoted by Mary Moss in *The Bookman*, November 1906, volume 24 p 211.

3 *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Penguin Books, ch 20 p 393.

British Press while Hall was one of the paper's Parliamentary reporters,⁴ and it's possible that there was some incident in which the ambitious fifteen-year-old felt he had been double-crossed by his more experienced and smooth-tongued colleague. However, letters quoted by Hazel Morris in her book *Hand, Head and Heart: Samuel Carter Hall and the Art Journal* (2002) suggest that relations between Dickens and the Halls were cordial enough up until some point in the 1850s, and she suggests that Dickens's animosity was due to something they said about the state of his marriage.⁵

Hall's reference, in his own defence, to his industriousness, his four hundred volumes, might recall Pecksniff's allusion to his 'not dishonourable or useless career', but there is a difference: Pecksniff has done nothing either honourable or useful, living entirely off the work of others, whereas Hall, even if the figure of four hundred might be hard to justify, really was industrious. Tributes from admirers put the joint output of Hall and his wife at 350 volumes. An example of his youthful capacity for hard work is told in his *Retrospect*. In 1830 a colleague, William Jerdan, was 'in a fix', having promised to produce a history of France for Henry Colburn's 'Juvenile Library' series; if it didn't appear on time the series would collapse. Hall agreed to step in.

... there were but twenty-one days and nights in which to write, print, and publish a book of four hundred pages. ... I undertook the task, and occupied one day in collecting all the histories of France I could obtain. Surrounded by formidable array of volumes I began my task, working at it all night and all day during eighteen nights and days, without interruption. The result was that, within the stipulated time, a "History of France," condensed from perhaps a hundred volumes, was written, printed, bound, and, with six engravings, was in the hands of the public on the first of the month next ensuing. ... The overwork led to brain fever; I had not gone to bed for twelve nights; and the payment I received for it was very hardly, though very quickly, earned.⁶

It's tempting to follow Hall's penchant for the apt quotation and insert famous lines from *Henry V* about old men's recollection of their heroic past, but although there is some exaggeration – the book has 270, not 400 pages – this was undeniably a prodigious effort. Although he professed an improving purpose ('Pleasure should be at all times the handmaid of knowledge,' he wrote in the Preface) what Hall is particularly proud to recall is his professional determination not to shirk difficulties or miss an opportunity to advance his career. He had a wife to support by this time, and a mother-in-law. The 1820s and 30s saw innumerable short-lived annuals, newspapers, magazines and serials, and wherever an editor or contributor was needed, Hall was ready to sell his services.

Not that he considered himself a mere mercenary: he was a committed Tory and, following his marriage if not before, a committed Christian. When for a few months he was employed as *locum tenens* for the regular editor to write the leading articles for the Wesleyan newspaper *The Watchman*, he annoyed the Board by his 'Conservative tone'. He recalled with pride, however, that whatever the Methodists thought, his articles found favour with Robert Peel.⁷ He was partisan, but careful. Political extremes, whether Radical or Tory, were not good for sales, and could lead to serious trouble. At the end of 1829 he took over as editor of the extreme Protestant *Morning Journal*; his predecessor Robert Alexander was imprisoned for libels on Wellington and Peel after they had bowed to the inevitable over Catholic emancipation. From his prison, Alexander sent more and more libellous articles, which Hall refused to print. On this all-important Catholic Question he himself welcomed the emancipation.

He had a lifelong interest in Ireland, having been born in the Geneva barracks in County Waterford, and having married an Irish woman, Anna Maria Fielding (1880-81). Anna Maria was

4 Hall, *Retrospect of a Long Life* volume 1 p 111.

5 Hazel Morris, in *Hand, Head and Heart* p 56, says that Hall was editor of the magazine which published Dickens's first story, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk' (1833), but she seems to be confusing *The New Monthly*, where Hall was at different times editor and sub-editor, with *The Monthly*, which published Dickens's story. See a letter from Dickens to Henry Kolve, December 1833, quoted by Claire Tomalin, *Charles Dickens: A Life*, 2011, pp 48f.

6 *Retrospect* volume 1 p 311. The book, *Historic Anecdotes of France*, Bentley & Colburn, 1830, covers the history of France from Ancient Gaul to the political uncertainties current as it went to press.

7 *Retrospect* volume 1 p 326. Peel has also been suggested as a prototype for Pecksniff.

born in Dublin and brought up at Bannow, County Wexford. They met in London in 1823 and were married in 1824, Carter claiming that Anna Maria had rescued him from a life of aimlessness. Within a few years of their marriage Anna Maria had herself taken up a literary career. Her first book, *Sketches of Irish Character* (1829) grew out of stories she told Carter of people she had known during her childhood in Bannow. She went on to write more fully fictionalised accounts of Irish life, and wrote also on a wide range of religious and social topics, becoming a literary machine on the same scale as her husband. She wrote extensively for the magazines that Carter edited, and they collaborated on books, the most notable being their three volume guide-book, *Ireland, its Scenery, Character etc* (1840).

Hall's father Robert had returned to Ireland after leaving the army, so that his childhood was divided between Ireland and the family home in Devonshire. Robert Hall speculated repeatedly in mining ventures. Carter records the following incident:

While walking in the neighbourhood of his residence at Glandore ... my father noticed some fish-bones of a green hue among turf-ashes. His curiosity was excited to discover by what means they had become of so singular a colour, and on analyzing them, he found they contained copper. His next object was to ascertain where the copper came from. He speedily traced its source to the contact of the bones with the ashes of turf cut in a neighbouring bog, and known to the peasantry as "the stinking bog". he was told that neither dog nor cat would live in the cabin in which the turf was burned. Having gathered so much information, his path was plain.

On this occasion Hall senior made a success of exploiting the copper, extracting hundreds of tons and shipping them to Swansea where they fetched '£8 or £9 a ton – a remunerative price'. But other enterprises were less profitable; mining was a risky business. He took a lease on a cobalt mine, for example, just at the point when cobalt had been superseded in most of its applications by a cheaper substitute. In the end he lost everything, and the family of twelve children was left dependent on a business run by Mrs Hall in Cork.⁸

It's hard to say what effect the insecurity of his family background had on Carter's development. It may have fixed his determination to achieve respectability through hard work, but at the same time it may have left him with a reckless speculative streak. What he says about his early years is too generalised to help. The format of his *Retrospect of a Long Life* is such that he avoids giving a coherent account of his own life and background, although there are many autobiographical episodes introduced into what he is writing about his work and colleagues. He talks a great deal about his 'heart, mind and soul', but we get no insight into what really drove him in those early years. He professes pious admiration for both his parents, and records his gratitude to his wife for saving him from 'sirens', the 'ever-potent source of danger to youth'. He is grateful also for being saved from the atheistic influence of his first London employer, the Italian poet and patriot Ugo Foscolo.⁹

His connection with Foscolo brought him into contact not only with atheism and sirens, but with revolutionary politics. In 1823 he was secretary to a committee based at The Crown and Anchor to support the proposed foreign legion raised by Sir Robert Wilson to fight for the Spanish Cortes against the invading French. Remembering the incident sixty years later he wrote that the Cortes were 'rightly or wrongly, supposed to be the advocates of freedom'. It's not clear whether at the time he felt the same ambivalence towards the undertaking. His political stance throughout his life was conservative and habitually cautious, but he had enthusiasms. A romantic cause always appealed to him. He admired Wilson for his support for Queen Caroline, whose treatment by George IV and the political establishment he still describes in *Retrospect* as 'a dark blot on the page of English history'. As for the Spanish expedition, it came for nothing, Hall's position as secretary

8 *Retrospect* volume 2 pp481-485. A brief account of Colonel Hall's various mining undertakings is given in Thomas Crofton Croker, *Researches in the south of Ireland: illustrative of the scenery, architectural remains, and the manners and superstitions of the peasantry; with an appendix containing a private narrative of the Rebellion of 1798*, London (1824) [Electronic edition at: <http://www.ucc.ie/celt/online/E820000-001.html> Retrieved 26 June 2014.]

9 *Retrospect* volume 2 pp485f; volume 1 pp 103ff.

came to an end, and the funds raised were, 'if I remember rightly, handed to the Greeks, then in insurrection'. This was the first of many voluntary secretarial positions to be held by Hall over the years.¹⁰

Although his father lost all his money, Carter insists that it was not wasted. The mining speculations were justified, but unlucky; his father was a pioneer, whose efforts benefited the nation. In his own travels in Ireland Carter was always on the look out for locations that were ripe for development, whether by mining or improved agriculture, but so far as one can tell he was not tempted to back his hunches with his own money. In his own sphere, however, he was inclined to be as enterprising as his father. He joined in all sorts of literary ventures, including an annual called *The Amulet* which he edited from 1826 to 1836 on the basis of sharing the profits and liabilities. Tastes changed, and in the end the liabilities were greater than the profits and when the publishers Westley and Davis went bankrupt in April 1837 Hall was left to pick up the debts. In May he also was declared bankrupt. 'The terrible event utterly ruined me,' he wrote, 'and I had to begin life again. ... I will not dwell upon this dismal passage in my life's history.'¹¹ This blow came shortly after he had lost the position he had held for some five or six years on the *New Monthly*.

In 1839 Hall's career took a decisive turn for the better when he became editor of the magazine *The Art Union*. As the name suggests the magazine was associated with the art union movement which had recently arrived in Britain from the Continent, although there doesn't seem to have been a formal link, and eventually the name was changed to *The Art Journal*. Art unions were set up in London and other cities with the twin aims of creating a market for art objects and elevating the public appreciation of the visual arts. Subscribers to the London union received each year a specially commissioned engraving and also the chance of winning either a chromo-lithograph, a volume of etchings or a vase or bust, or else a voucher valued at between £10 and £200 for purchasing works from public galleries. A consolation prize of a figure in Parian ware was given to those who had subscribed for ten years without winning.¹² Art Unions had their critics. The works of art chosen by or for subscribers tended, it was said, to be of poor quality. Members liked to have a painting, no matter how maudlin and inept, rather than an engraving of a superior work, and so the system favoured mediocrity. Unions were also said to be hostile to foreign artists. But for the first few decades of their existence they were an important institution, with powerful backing from political as well as cultural figures. They pursued their aims, which were social as well as artistic, with confidence and optimism.

The social as well as artistic intentions of the Art Union movement are illustrated by this passage from the 1865 report of the London union:

The various pictures and other works of art selected by the prizeholders last year were exhibited as usual ... in the Suffolk-street Galleries, and for a certain time were open to the public and without the slightest limitation. This course, which has now been pursued by the Art-Union for more than a quarter of a century, affording pleasure to all classes, without any instances of misconduct or inconvenience, although on some occasions availed of by many thousands of persons, has aided materially to remove an impression at one time general that such freedom of ingress could not be permitted with safety, which long injuriously operated in shutting out the working classes of this country from our cathedrals, museums, and picture-galleries.¹³

Without the slightest limitation presumably means that there was, at least on some days, free admission; at most galleries charges were imposed in order to exclude the working classes. Samuel Carter Hall was on hand to second the resolution approving the report. He congratulated the society and artists on their work, and drew a comparison between the lamentable state of British art in 1835 and its flourishing condition thirty years later. On this occasion he was pointing to the

10 *Retrospect* volume 1 pp 106f.

11 *London Gazette* 4 April and 12 May 1837. *Retrospect* volume 1 pp 306f.

12 These were the arrangements in 1865; they varied over time.

13 Reported in *Morning Post* 25 April 1865. The Art Union of London was unusual in giving vouchers; other Art Unions tended to give actual works of art as lottery prizes. See Joy Sperling, "Art, Cheap and Good": The Art Union in England and the United States, 1840-1860', *Nineteenth-Century Art Worldwide* Volume 1 issue 1, Spring 2002 (<http://19thc-artworldwide.org/> Retrieved 24 June 2014).

influence of the Art Union, but usually when he made such remarks he had in mind the achievements over the same period of his *Journal*.

The *Art Journal* was as risky as any of Hall's other speculations, and he says that in its first ten years it made no profit. After a year or so he bought out the publishers and became sole proprietor, only to sell his interest back to a new publisher, George Virtue, when he lost money on the production of the *Journal's* own catalogue to the 1851 Great Exhibition. At the outset, he said, he had had to create a public for art. This he achieved by providing good quality engravings of good pictures alongside easily readable texts. These included his wife's series *Pilgrimages to English Shrines*, short, highly moralistic accounts of English notables illustrated with excellent wood-cuts of their homes, neighbourhoods and graves by Frederick William Fairholt.¹⁴ He also broadened the magazine's coverage to embrace what he called art-manufactures – mass-produced objects, including those with which the poor could adorn their homes. He saw no reason why industrial products should not be beautiful, and he offered what was in effect free advertisements for manufacturers who were willing to incorporate what he regarded as good design into their processes. This was, within its limits, an enlightened programme, even if Hall's critics were right when they deplored his taste and derided his qualifications to talk about art.

He was determined to generate a market for modern British art, and believed that the wealthy classes should patronise the living artists of their own country. He claimed that as a result of his efforts the prices paid to British artists rose, as those paid for so-called Old Masters fell. In the 1830s the leading British sculptors were paid at journeyman rates, and when he considered the advances made in British art it was the progress in sculpture that he felt was most striking. Taking it for granted that increased prices and prestige reflected advances in skill and quality, *The Art Journal* was indignant when the jury at the Great Exhibition awarded the prize to the *Phryne* of the Parisian James Pradier, whose renown, it said, was 'derived principally, if not exclusively, from indecencies in Art, which are tolerated in France only.'¹⁵

Elsewhere Hall enlarges on his disapproval of French sculpture:

The difference between French and Greek art seems to me simply this – the Frenchman pictures a woman as if she has taken off her clothes to be looked at; the Greek represents one who has never known clothes at all, who is naked but not ashamed, and who thinks it no more wrong to let her whole form be seen than she does to show ungloved hands. I consider British sculptors have followed the examples of the Greek, and not the French, professors of the art.¹⁶

The casual word *ungloved* illustrates Hall's facility for pronouncing confidently on matters he only half understood. He wanted the public to accept nude figures, deriding those purity campaigners who demanded aprons for statues, and what better way to do so than by claiming affinity with the Greeks? Like the great Victorian engineers who built bridges and ships in ignorance of all the things that might make them fall down or sink, he appropriated Classical culture for the British without a glance at the complexity of the issues – issues of class, aesthetics and sexuality which are still contested after a century and a half. How can British sculptors be following the Greeks in their attitude to the unclothed figure, when they are working in a society where the women who are valued most highly may not appear in public with ungloved hands, and where the women whose naked form can be displayed in art invariably belong to the ungloved classes?

For all his talk about classical form and beauty (he was keen on the Elgin Marbles) Hall had no strong or precise aesthetic agenda. What he was clear about was the commercial side of art. As well as supporting British painters and sculptors he was indefatigable in his support of art-manufactures. He didn't dispute Prince Albert's glory as the originator of the Great Exhibition, but he (rightly) pointed out that he had himself been calling for such an event at least since the Paris Exposition of 1844. He published illustrations of exhibits in Paris, and at the Chelsea Bazaar of 1845 and the Manchester Exhibition of 1846, while for the Great Exhibition he over-extended

14 Published in book form in 1853.

15 *Art Journal* 1 November 1851.

16 *Retrospect* volume 1 p 342

himself in order to produce a rival to the official catalogue. In all, he claimed, between 1844 and 1878, the year of another Paris Exposition, the magazine contained engravings of between 40,000 and 50,000 exhibits.¹⁷

Despite Hall's determined championship of British Art, and his limited contact with foreign artists, we should not exaggerate his insularity. He travelled on the continent, and visited artists in their *ateliers*. There are fine portraits of him by the Frenchman Paul Delaroche, and the German Carl Christian Vogel von Vogelstein (both of them showing a strikingly good-looking man, and both featuring his high collars, like Phiz's Pecksniff). On their German journey he and Anna Maria found themselves without a room when they arrived in the town of Hof on the way to Nuremberg. Then Hall gave a masonic sign, at which point the landlord immediately turned another guest out of his room to make way for them.

At the time of the Great Exhibition *The Art Journal* was prepared to admit to British weaknesses in comparison with Continental rivals – in the application of the physical sciences to art and manufacture, for example, and also in the matter of 'taste', where, it said, the English 'have not a thought we can call our own.'¹⁸ But all the *Art Journal's* major series of engravings (the Vernon Collection, the Royal Pictures and Pictures from Galleries and Private Collections) concentrated overwhelmingly on British artists. There were more articles on British provincial towns than on Continental cities, but this reflected not only a prejudice against the foreign (although such a prejudice probably operated to some extent) but also the need to encourage an interest in art in the new centres of wealth and inform the London readership about what was going on in the provinces.

Another commercial question that he addressed in the *Art Journal* was the trade in forged Old Masters. So long as the new rich could get what they believed were the great art-works of the past, they would not pay good money for modern British art. Hall claimed that the Custom House returns showed more Titians, Raphaels and Rubenses being imported in a year than the artists had painted in their lives. He estimated that not one in 400 canvases brought over from the Continent were by the masters to whom they were attributed. In addition, he said, he had been shown a house in Richmond where eighty Canalettis had been 'baked'.¹⁹

At first his campaign against fraudulent art-dealers proceeded cautiously, not naming names, but he grew bolder or more exasperated, and in 1855 he was sued by the dealer Louis Hart who claimed damages of £1000.²⁰ By then Hart had moved on to selling modern masters, but Hall believed he was still attributing works by obscure artists to more famous and saleworthy names, and imprudently said so in the *Art Journal*. The case was tried at Warwick assizes before a judge who was known to disapprove of the irresponsible press and who strongly hinted to the jury that they should find for the plaintiff. Although they found that in this case Hall had got his facts wrong they awarded only 40 shillings damages. After what they had heard of Hart's commercial practices they probably suspected that he had got away with fraud in the past. Regarding it as a moral victory, Hall thanked the jury and said he had received more justice from them than from the judge. He was obliged to sell the *Journal's* collection of art objects in order to defray the costs of the case, and several leading artists launched a fund to help him.²¹

Whenever his claims about the vast progress of Art during his lifetime were challenged, Hall would recall with horror the ugliness of every day objects such as earthenware, curtains and paperhangings in the 1830s, and repeat his motto *beauty is cheaper than deformity*. His defence of his own contribution would bristle with statistics about the number of engravings he had published, the increased prices paid to British artists, the numbers of schools of art and design, and

17 Hall discusses the progress of Art manufacture in *Retrospect* Volume 1 pp 364-388.

18 *Art Journal*, 'The Science of the Industrial Exhibition', 1 april 1851; 'Wanderings in the Crystal Palace IV', 1 November 1851.

19 *Retrospect* volume 1 pp 343ff.

20 Hall repeatedly referred to Hart as 'Moses Hart' and Anna Maria, in a letter quoted (p 106) calls him 'that picture dealing Jew'. Both Halls could write movingly about the prejudice against the Jews (see for example the chapters on Grace Aguilar in both Anna Maria's *English Shrines* and Carter's *Memories*) but they also exhibited the casual anti-semiticism of the age.

21 *Retrospect* volume 1 pp 349-352. *The Times* 30 March 1855; *Morning Post* 12 April 1855. See also *Hand, Head and Heart*, p 40.

the number of artists employed to meet the needs of large carpet and textile firms. He sometimes sounds more like Gradgrind of *Hard Times* than Pecksniff.²² He was right in a sense. Whatever we might think of mid-Victorian taste, the importance of art and design was more widely recognised in 1880 than it had been in 1840; art schools were established in towns all over the country. How far this was due to his magazine's influence is doubtful, but if he didn't create the wave, he nonetheless rode it skilfully. The success of the *Art Journal* over the years was part of a trend towards greater awareness of aesthetic issues among the spreading middle-class – spreading in both directions, at the top the wealthy industrialists, and at the bottom those for whom mass-produced adornments for the home were part of the reward of hard-won respectability.

When he retired as editor of *The Art Journal* an article in the *Illustrated London News* quoted him as saying: 'I do not think the history of literature supplies a parallel case – that of an editor commencing a publication, continuing to edit it during 42 years, and retiring from it when it had attained vigorous age, its value augmented and not deteriorated by time.' He was, the article added, 'justified in his complacency'.²³ *The Art Journal* continued publication for a further three decades, but was no longer alone in the field. Technology and ideas changed and the magazine fell behind its rivals before ceasing publication in 1912.

In addition to his work for the arts Hall was an indefatigable supporter of schemes for social improvement: benevolent societies for governesses, orphans of artists and literary men, or impoverished ladies who had been born to a superior station in life; the temperance movement, Ragged schools, the National Thrift Society, the reclamation of prostitutes; campaigns against excise duty on paper and in favour of early closing for shops – he was always ready to join a committee, propose a motion or act as steward at a fund-raising dinner. 'I soon got a committee formed, and, as its honorary secretary, I set to work to obtain important results,' he wrote in connection with a proposed fund-raising concert by Jenny Lind in aid of the hospital for consumptives. The singer was surprised that 900 people were prepared to pay two guineas to attend, and Hall's response shows how well he understood the combination of altruism and hypocrisy that goes to make up the charitable impulse in many of us. He said that one reason for the concert's success was that it gave those an opportunity to hear the famous singer who would not on any account go to a theatre; while the other was that people were willing to pay money 'to assist a valuable institution' that they would not give for their own private purposes.²⁴ It's easy to laugh at all this activity, which puts one in mind of the friends of Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House*, each with his or her own mission, endlessly writing letters, proposing testimonials and addressing meetings, but it seems that this was how things got done. Some, if not all, of Hall's causes were as important as he said they were.

In 1878, while he was still active on *The Art Journal* he was persuaded by a co-worker in the social improvement line, Lord Townshend, to become editor of a new periodical, *Social Notes*. To assist in the editorial work Hall and Townshend employed a former Methodist minister called William Pepperell. Within weeks they realised that this was a mistake. There were arguments about the way in which Pepperell carried out his duties, and the last straw was when he turned up drunk. Hall dismissed him, and he brought an action against Townshend for wrongful dismissal, which he won, although the jury's verdict was later set aside and a new trial ordered. Before the new trial came on, Hall published an article in *Social Notes* giving his side of the story, and Pepperell sued him and the printers, Virtue & Co, for libel. After a day in court the parties came to an agreement, Pepperell being paid £200 on condition that he dropped all litigation against Hall, the printers, and Lord Townshend. In 1880 Pepperell tried unsuccessfully to take out a writ against Hall for perjury; he pointed angrily at Hall in court, saying 'that old man' had ruined him. Hall defended himself, saying he had tried to be good to Pepperell, had taken him on because he had found him in abject poverty, and had looked after his sick daughter. Finally, in 1881, when the bound volume of *Social*

²² Referring somewhat vaguely to aesthetic criticisms from E J Poynter of the South Kensington Museum and Mark Pattison of Lincoln College, Oxford, Hall complained that their views were 'directly at variance with evidence and fact'. *Retrospect* volume 1 p 367.

²³ *Illustrated London News*, 13 November 1880. According to an (undated) letter from Anna Maria, quoted in *Hand, Head and Heart*, p 86, the *Illustrated London News* had not always been favourable to the Halls.

²⁴ *Retrospect* volume 1 p 421.

Notes appeared reproducing the obnoxious article, Pepperell sued the new publishers for libel, and lost.²⁵

Hall's social reform activities brought him into contact with MPs and peers, but he doesn't seem to have had serious parliamentary ambitions of his own. He was a candidate at an election in Wexford in 1841, but only on paper, it was said, in order to ensure there were two Tories on the ballot for what was a safe Liberal county.²⁶ He may have had thoughts of escaping from the literary treadmill around this time, because he also completed his legal studies and was called to the bar in May of the same year.²⁷ In the event, however, the only use he made of his legal qualification was to put 'Barrister-at-Law' under his name on the title-page of his books. In his *Retrospect* he added, in smaller type, 'A man of letters by profession'. He was also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, in recognition of his work on pre-historic sites in Ireland.

Although he seems not to have practised as a barrister, Hall found himself in court on a number of occasions. Apart from the Hart and Pepperell cases, we'll see later that he was involved as witness in a case involving Spiritualism. In 1839, he was foreman of a coroner's jury which, contrary to the advice of the coroner, gave a verdict of natural death without permitting an autopsy. We don't know why this was done, but it draws attention to Hall's stubborn streak. At the time of the Exhibition, with London full of tourists, there was concern that cab-drivers were overcharging, so-called 'cab-ruffianism'. Hall officiously brought a prosecution, claiming to have been charged fourpence more than the right fare.²⁸

In the press account of his Wexford candidature he was described as 'husband of Mrs Hall the novelist', which was appropriate because it was through his wife that he maintained his strong interest in Ireland. The Halls' views were such that he was unlikely to make any progress in Irish politics. They were firm Unionists, but professed strong sympathies with the Catholic people of Ireland. In theory this was a coherent position, but in practice it put him at odds with all parties, and Hall was a man who tended to arouse strong antipathy in those he disagreed with. In 1843 the *Dublin University Magazine* published an attack on his pamphlet 'A Letter to Irish Temperance Societies concerning the present state of Ireland, and its connexion with England.'²⁹ Without having seen what Hall wrote³⁰, and without an intimate knowledge of the terms of the debate in 1843, it's hard to judge the article's claim that his Letter amounted to an incitement to sedition, but the attack on Hall is undoubtedly intemperate, accusing him of having been paid to write his pamphlet. Hall wrote complaining that the criticism showed 'conclusive evidence of a spirit unbecoming a gentleman and a man of letters', which the magazine's editor, the novelist Charles Lever, construed as an attack on his honour. He hurried to London and challenged Hall to a duel, but in the end an accommodation was found.³¹

The arbitrator was Lord Ranelagh, who commented of himself, Lever and (presumably) the two seconds that this was 'the first time four Irishmen met to shoot an Englishman and didn't do it.' The remark, and the whole incident, suggest that Hall was out of his depth when he meddled in Irish affairs. He looks forward to a time when Ireland would settled down to become a useful part of the Empire, supplying endless raw materials for English and Scottish factories. In his hopeful vision, the personal trumped the political. Charmed by what he saw as the national character and

25 *The Times* 12 November 1878 and 13-17 May 1881; *The Standard*, 3 January 1880.

26 *Bristol Mercury*, 31 July 1841. Two Liberals were elected.

27 *Examiner*, 2 May 1841.

28 *The Charter*, 13 October 1839; *The Standard*, 5 July 1851.

29 Perhaps because of the national prestige of the Temperance leader, Father Mathew, the Temperance Societies seem to have been influential in wider Irish politics.

30 Two passages quoted in *Hand, Head and Heart* (pp 45f) suggest that the letter trod Hall's usual delicate line, arguing for the Union (and so irritating the Repealers) but also attacking the past behaviour of the English in using violence and repression against the Catholic population – which plainly angered the Unionists.

31 William John Fitzpatrick, *The Life of Charles Lever*, 1884, chapter 13; Edmund Downey, *Charles Lever, his Life in his Letters*, 1906, volume 1 chapter 6. Nathaniel Hawthorne heard the story from Hall (reported by his son Julian in *Hawthorne and his Circle* chapter 11); he placed the duel in 1846/7 and also said it was Hall who issued the challenge. Julian Hawthorne suspected that Hall had appropriated someone else's adventure – a trick that Hall had been detected in on another occasion.

overwhelmed by the friendliness of the people, he didn't grasp the violence and depth of the political animosity between the two sides in Ireland.

Of his father's part in the suppression of the Rebellion of the United Irishmen in 1798, Hall wrote:

I know it was with him, all his life, a subject of earnest thankfulness to God, that while he held military command in disaffected Kerry, with the peasantry everywhere ready and willing to rebel, and with civil war actually raging in other parts of Ireland, he had maintained order *without spilling a drop of blood*.³²

There is no reason to dispute the genuineness of Colonel Hall's thankfulness, and his claim to have avoided spilling blood in Kerry may be substantially correct, but there is a tone about this passage which, whether it comes from the father or the son, recalls the 'justified complacency' with which Carter looked back on his editorial career. Quite apart from the automatic Unionist perspective of words like 'disaffected' and 'rebel', there is a blindness which is to be found in much of Hall's writing on Ireland. He records that he was born in the Geneva Barracks, and tells us that reveille was sounding as he emerged from the womb, but does not mention that as well as being an army base, the same Geneva settlement³³ housed a notorious prison where those captured during the Rebellion were tortured and killed.

In a lecture on Irish fairy legends delivered in aid of the Tothill Ragged School in 1858, Hall concluded with a long peroration on the 'natural qualities' of the Irish, 'their genuine hospitality, their keen sensibilities, their honesty, unyielding under any pressure of personal want.' Persuading the English to acknowledge all that was good and attractive in the Irish character had long been part of the message of Liberal Unionists like Hall.³⁴ Frequent intercourse between the people of England and Ireland would lead to 'kindlier feeling towards one another', and from this he foretold great advantages would follow:

... bigotry losing its hold, the undue or baneful influence of one mind over another mind ceasing, habits of thrift and forethought becoming constitutional, industry receiving its full recompense, cultivation passing over the bogs and up the mountains, the law recognised as a guardian and protector, the rights and duties of property fully understood and acknowledged, the rich trusting the poor and the poor confiding in the rich, absenteeism no longer a weighty evil; in a word, capital circulating freely and securely, so as to render the great natural resources of Ireland available to the commercial, the agricultural, and the manufacturing interests of the united kingdoms of England, Ireland and Scotland.³⁵

This is the perennial hope of the English, that the Irish might become more like them – the peasants becoming more thrifty, less superstitious, more respectful of property, and the landlords becoming more respectful and responsible towards their tenants – so that all animosity between the two nations would cease. In the 1840s when the Halls were travelling around Ireland for their book *Ireland, its Scenery, Character etc.*³⁶, this vision seemed a long way off. They experienced the discomfort of affluent tourists moving about amidst absolute destitution, running out of shillings to relieve the distress they encountered. They write of the starving season, returning year after year, that period at the end of the summer when the previous year's potatoes are all gone and the new crop is not yet ready. They describe the workhouses being constructed under the newly introduced Poor Law, and discuss the question in familiar terms of the sturdy beggar and the fallacy of giving charity to those who will not work. By way of illustration of the theory they present a dialogue between a Poor Law guardian and a life-long beggar called Kitty. The guardian tells her that to get relief she must enter the workhouse, and once there she would get no whiskey, tea or tobacco. With difficulty Kitty is made to believe that this really is the way things are to be under the new law,

³² *Retrospect* volume 2 p 494.

³³ New Geneva had originally been built to accommodate Protestants from Geneva, but the refugees soon decided to go home rather than stay there.

³⁴ A notable example was a famous sermon preached by the Scottish minister Thomas Chalmers on his visit to London in 1817.

³⁵ *Standard*, 1 March 1858.

³⁶ Three volumes, published 1840-43. Quotations given here are from the 1850 edition.

upon which she throws away her beggar's wallet and declares: 'Tatteration to me, colonel dear, *but I'll work first!*'³⁷

Beggars feature largely in the Halls' book, which makes much of the power of endurance among the Irish poor, comparing them favourably with their English counterparts:

The English pauper is at once bowed down by misery, and murmurs and complains under its endurance from first to last. The Irish beggar wrestles with distress; he can exist upon so little food as to seem almost able to live without it; but he cannot do without his jest; – there are moments when the heart beats lightly, even in his starving bosom. The poverty of the English, except at stated times, is sullen; the poverty of the Irish is garrulous: the Englishman takes relief as a right; the Irishman accepts it as a boon. You may aid half a dozen English paupers without receiving thanks; you cannot relieve an Irish beggar without being paid in blessings.³⁸

Events may have made the Halls revise this breezy view of the Irish capacity for doing without food. In the 1850 edition of their book they included a brief reference to the Great Famine of the late 1840s.

It belongs to the historian to record, and to the political economist to study, the phenomenon of a whole nation reduced to pauperism – of a Christian country, in the nineteenth century, suffering from all the horrors of a famine almost unequalled in its duration and intensity, attended by its inseparable companions – pestilence and death. To meet such a calamity no system of Poor Laws could be framed; compulsory rates and voluntary gifts, national loans of millions and private subscriptions, amounting in the aggregate to hundreds of thousands, were alike insufficient. Mitigate the evil they certainly did; but all was far too little to prevent thousands from perishing of absolute want. We feel bound to spare our readers the perusal of such a sickening chronicle of human misery. To many of them its details must be sufficiently familiar; and to others they would offer no inviting object of contemplation. It is a subject which could not be wholly passed over in silence; but it is also one upon which we are not bound to enter at length; and we feel a satisfaction in the indulgence of the hope, that the darkest hour of Ireland's tribulation has now passed, and that the visitation, though severe, has been a lesson to both people and rulers; that it has opened the eyes of many to the necessity of a legislative provision for the poor, and laid the foundation of a well-organized system of relief, capable of indefinite extension, in seasons of extraordinary suffering.³⁹

The language is pedestrian enough, and the events are packed away in the cotton-wool of clichés, but there is a tension here between an obligation to speak out honestly about what they had seen and an instinct to seek comfort in the 'indulgence of hope'.

Bigoted anti-Catholicism in the established Church in Ireland and virulent anti-Irish feeling in England were seen by the Halls as the biggest obstacles to a stable Unionist settlement. Their book, mainly addressed as it is to the English, is full of portraits of cheerful, generous, resourceful, witty, kind-hearted Irishmen and, particularly, Irishwomen. These are, no doubt, stereotypes, and the Halls' approach is often patronising, but they make a well-meaning attempt to be honest. It has been argued that their appearance of neutrality and objectivity is carefully cultivated in order to present a justification of the Union at a time when the movement for its repeal was gathering strength.⁴⁰ The Halls are not neutral between Unionists and Repealers, but they locate themselves between the *extreme* Unionists and the Repealers, and think that this is neutrality. They never fail to speak with horror of the Penal Laws of the past, including the law in force for much of the previous century making it illegal for a Catholic to become a teacher in any school.

They address at some length the problems caused by the lack of any officially sanctioned schools for the poor in Ireland. The problem was complicated by Catholic fears of Protestant proselytising,

37 *Ireland* volume 3 p 351n.

38 *Ireland* volume 2 p350.

39 *Ireland* volume 3 pp 358f.

40 Amélie Dochy, 'Mr and Mrs Hall's Tour of Ireland in the 1840s, More than a Unionist Guidebook, an Illustrated Definition of Ireland made to Convince', *Miranda* issue 9, March 2014, <http://miranda.revues.org/5917> Retrieved 18 June 2014.

which the Halls firmly opposed.⁴¹ They criticised the programme of educational societies such as the Hibernian Society, which was to teach children to read the Scriptures without any interpretation. This sounds neutral, but of course it isn't, both because there was an assumption that unmediated access to the word of God would lead children to adopt the true (Protestant) faith, and because it is against the practice of the Catholic Church to read the Bible without priestly interpretation. For this reason, the schools established by such societies were incapable of attracting more than a few Catholic children. The Halls gave cautious approval to the new Board for the Superintendence of a System of National Education in Ireland, set up by Parliament in 1831. They deprecated the attitude of Protestants, both in and outside the established church, who refused to co-operate because too much influence had been accorded to the Catholic hierarchy.⁴² The Board's schools were non-denominational with no religious instruction given to pupils without the consent of their parents.⁴³

The Halls hesitantly put forward their own view that the readiest way to overcome the difficulties encountered by the Board was 'to exclude all direct religious education from the schools, and to intrust that most essential part of the training of youth to the pastors and teachers of the pupils, either at their own homes or in their own places of worship.'⁴⁴ We might wish that such a policy had been adopted, in both Ireland and Britain, but it's possible that the Halls were not quite as neutral as they hoped. They approved of placards which they saw on their visits to National schools, which inculcated a 'code of wisdom'. The sentiments expressed on these cards are excellent, but they are re-inforced by scriptural quotations from the Bible, which are themselves unexceptionable but which, perhaps unintentionally, give weight to the Protestant view of the Bible as the ultimate authority.

It would be wrong to criticise the Halls too severely. They seem to have been painstaking in their approach, visiting National schools in the south, east and north of Ireland, and inspecting 'somewhat minutely' at least a hundred.

We confess that conviction as to their unobjectionable character forced itself slowly upon our minds; that we commenced our examination pre-disposed to condemn them ... and that our prejudices have been overcome only by repeated proofs of the great good they are achieving – good that might be largely multiplied if all their opponents would ascertain, as we did, the actual and practical working of the system; and join – as we fervently hope and confidently expect they will – “heart and hand” in rendering them effective for the great and high purpose for which the state endows them.⁴⁵

We might suspect that their hopes have coloured their view of the actual success of these schools, but a more important point is that although they are carefully neutral between Catholic and Protestant, they are, once again, not neutral between Unionists and Repealers. The starting point of their whole discussion of education is the inadequacy of the education of the poor in Ireland prior to the intervention of the state. It was not that there were no schools for the mass of the population, but that they were in the wrong hands. Here the Halls unashamedly adopt the hostile stereotype of the hedge school.

41 The Halls encountered a Protestant colony on the island of Achill, and were bitter in their denunciation of it and its bigoted leader, Rev Nangle. (*Ireland* volume 3 pp 395f)

42 According to the Halls the National Board when set up consisted of three members of the Established Church (including a duke and an archbishop), two Roman Catholics (an archbishop and a layman), a Presbyterian and a Unitarian. They quote the Dean of Ardagh as saying there was 'not a single member of the Board in whom the Protestants of Ireland had the least reliance'. (*Ireland*, volume 2 p 365.)

43 Although arguably in areas where all pupils were Catholics the school became *de facto* denominational, the non-denominational provision remained in force in the Republic until changes introduced in the 1960s. (Áine Hyland, 'The multi-denominational experience', *Irish Educational Studies*, 8, 1:1, reproduced on the website of the campaign for secular education: www.teachdontpreach.ie/2011/09/a-history-of-the-irish-education-system-2 Retrieved 27 June 2014.)

44 *Ireland* volume 2 p 370. Hall adds that this is the practice in schools attended by the upper and middle classes, such as his own school, run by a Quaker, and containing boys from various denominations.

45 *Ireland* volume 2 pp 369f.

The 'Irish schoolmaster' has been pictured by nearly every writer of fiction, who has dealt with Irish character; and although commonly represented as odious and dangerous, the portrait has seldom been overdrawn. ... there is abundant evidence by which the origin of nearly every illegal association may be traced to the cabin of the village schoolmaster. The 'school-houses' were, for the most part, wretched hovels, in which the boys and girls mixed indiscriminately; usually damp, and always unhealthy; so dark that it was a common practice for the pupils to learn their lessons among the adjacent hedges; and if they acquired knowledge, it was, not infrequently, knowledge that led to evil rather than to good.

They give is a list of the books that were in common use in these schools, which included *History of Fair Rosamond and Jane Shore*, Ovid's *Art of Love*, *Irish Rogues and Rapparees* and *Moll Flanders*. As for the collections of ballads, 'a large proportion of them are political, filled with the very worst sentiments; others contain expressions of sympathy for men who have died on the gallows; and all are pregnant with danger.'⁴⁶

By contrast the books in the National Schools are such as may be 'safely recommended to schools generally, of any grade, and to families of any rank.' While concentrating on the divisions between Catholic and Protestant the Halls have taken for granted that the hedge schools, as centres of anti-Union sedition (and sexual licence), must be done away with. Perhaps the most important point is one they do not mention, the position of the Irish language, which had been part of the curriculum (and presumably also the language of instruction) at the hedge schools. The 'unexceptionable' books that replaced the 'deleterious publications' of the past are in English. The 'Introduction to the Art of Reading' with its guidance on 'suitable accentuation and intonation' not only provided safe material by standard authors, but also, it seems, encouraged standard English pronunciation.⁴⁷

It's not clear how Carter and Anna Maria divided up the work when collaborating. It is reasonable to suppose that she wrote about the people and domestic matters, while he concentrated on politics, industry, topography and the like. He may have insisted on the last word in matters of style and presentation, his editorial experience giving him confidence in his own judgement of what would go down well with readers. A contributor to *The Art Journal*, William Linton, alludes to Hall's editorial practice, accusing him of being unscrupulous about altering and cutting other people's work.⁴⁸ Accusations of altering and cutting contributors' work are made against most editors. As Hall insisted, the editor is responsible for the magazine and must have the last word; cutting is legitimate, adding material is not.⁴⁹

A more serious charge was that Hall was influenced in his editorial decisions by mercenary motives. To some extent such considerations are inevitable. Hall had seen many magazines come and go over the years, and had suffered when they came to grief; he had to be careful, had to keep his proprietor, readers and advertisers reasonably happy. For this reason the art critic J Comyns Carr did not at first protest when Hall's 'sanctity of manner' gave way to 'very pointed suggestions that the mercantile interest of the Journal must not be wholly sacrificed to my independent views upon Art.' Eventually he found the interference too galling and he severed his connection with the *Journal*.⁵⁰

More serious still was the claim made by Henry Vizetelly, that Hall accepted bribes from artists and manufacturers:

Those who made offerings in oil or water colour, or choice examples of ceramic ware, were pretty certain to be belauded. And yet, with all this perfectly well known and openly talked

⁴⁶ *Ireland* volume 2 p 363. Indiscriminate mixing of boys and girls was a regular trigger for moral panic when middle class Victorians contemplated the lives of the poor.

⁴⁷ *Ireland* volume 2 p 368.

⁴⁸ W J Linton, *Memories*, 1895, pp 66f. Linton was partner in the firm of Smith & Linton which published Hall's *Book of Ballads* and was damaged by the losses they incurred on the book.

⁴⁹ *Retrospect* volume 1 p 313.

⁵⁰ *Some Eminent Victorians* p 148. Carr seems to have been disappointed when Hall replied accepting resignation with such 'unflinching urbanity' that he couldn't continue the controversy.

about, Carter Hall had the coolness to expatiate upon the serious obligation entailed by his position in [his] impudent and Pecksniffian fashion ...⁵¹

The Halls certainly had a collection of pictures that they could hardly have afforded to buy themselves. When short of ready money to finance engravings for the magazine they considered selling them off, and when they needed to raise the costs of *Hart v Hall* they actually advertised the entire collection for sale.⁵² Some were presents from friends, but perhaps not all. For someone in Hall's position to accept gifts from artists, friends or not, may have been unwise; it may have been worse than unwise.⁵³

Both Linton and Vizetelly were careful to exclude Anna Maria from their strictures on her husband. Linton describes her as 'amiable and clever'.⁵⁴ Vizetelly expressed surprise at her meek acceptance in public of her husband's foolish talk: 'He assumed an intellectual superiority over her, and she blandly accepted the false position, but no one was taken in by this.'⁵⁵ A salesman drumming up business for the *Art Journal* was reported to have said that when they collaborated on their articles on Wales it was Mrs Hall who did everything. Hall, the salesman said, was 'an umbug.' This anecdote appears in an obituary piece by Thomas Purnell in *The Athenaeum*, and is mentioned only to be contradicted. Purnell admits that the allegation was often made by those who should have known better, but insists that he could say from knowledge 'that the husband was the guide and counsellor even in the wife's charming tales and novels.'⁵⁶ It's possible that the knowledge from which Purnell wrote was no more than the word of Hall himself. He said that his wife rarely read over what she had written, leaving it for him to prepare the manuscript and correct the proofs; she never questioned any changes he thought good to make. On occasion she didn't recognise a published story as her own, although this may have been because she wrote so fast rather than because he had changed it.

Anna Maria joined with her husband in his social work as well as his literary enterprises. She seems to have been a kind woman who took great pains to help the young, the unfortunate and the repentant sinner. She may have had more down-to-earth common sense than Carter, and occasionally deflated his pomposity. She was also less inhibited than he was in asking friends for help. One friend in particular seems to have been the target for numerous requests for loans, sometimes artfully disguised as requests for advice. This was Francis Bennock, a City businessman and devotee of literature. Most of what Hazel Morris was able to learn about the Halls' always precarious financial circumstances comes from Anna Maria's letters to Bennock; the following (dated 8 September, with no year, but presumably the early 1850s) is a typical example of those quoted in her book. It deals with the financial arrangements for engraving the Queen's Pictures, the cost of which was to be shared by Hall and his publisher, George Virtue, Virtue's contribution not falling due immediately. Bennock had assisted the arrangements in some way, and Anna Maria now wants him to intervene further.⁵⁷

I grieve to tell you that Carter is far from well – indeed so unwell last week that I wanted him to have advice – the simple fact is – that he is worried about the means to wind up the year until the next brings Mr Virtue's agreement into full work – I tell you this because you are not only our friend but our wise friend – you have not only a heart but a head – and your knowledge of the agreement *you* procured – and of the drawings, might make you to suggest

51 Henry Vizetelly, *Glances Back through Seventy Years*, 1893, volume 1 p 305.

52 Letter of 1854 from Anna Maria, quoted in *Hand, Head and Heart*, p 105; *Morning Post*, 12 April 1855.

53 The independence or otherwise of critics was seen as an important issue. Punch's theatre critic signed his column 'One who pays', claiming by implication that others accepted free seats from the theatre management.

54 *Memories*, p 74.

55 *Glances Back through Seventy Years*, volume 1 p 305.

56 Thomas Purnell, 'Mr S.C. Hall', *The Athenaeum*, 23 March 1889. Purnell acknowledged the assistance and encouragement which, as a young writer, he had received from Hall.

57 See *Hand, Head and Heart*, pp 102f. These letters are now held by the University of Iowa, which has a small collection of the Halls' papers. Bennock is presumably the same Francis Bennock who, in the course of a trip to Hull, paid an unwanted visit on Charlotte Brontë in September 1853. (*Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, 1997, letter 166.) He is also presumably the same as the Francis Bennock who appears in Julian Hawthorne's anecdotes (see below).

some means by which he could borrow six or eight hundred ppounds – a thousand pounds would more than set him at ease until his return comes – and he would offer the drawings (for which he has paid over two – and which are worth more than he paid) as security – My poor husband is literally *breaking down* for want of the means which a few months would give! – this is painfully disquieting to me, his sanguine temperament puts him either up or down, and he is now so *down* that I don't know what to do – if he finds it impossible to borrow the money (which I hope it is not) he will be obliged to ask Virtue for help – or perhaps be forced to sell him the copies of the Royal Pictures for half, or little more than half their Value! Either of these alternatives is full of sorrow and anxiety to him – it will humble him in a way he does not deserve, ultimately he does intend to sell the drawings – but not yet – I am sure they would be a profitable speculation as a *whole* hereafter but that is a long look out.

Dear Mr Bennock – will you who think for so many think for us in this matter! We know no one like you! If there is no possibility of borrowing a sum of money until his return comes – I would hope that you would kindly give him the benefit of your advice and council as how best to obtain from Mr Virtue the necessary supply – and what terms – it is certainly not much to ask a publisher for, who has the *Means of Remuneration in his hands* and I do not see the objection to it that dear Carter does – it is a matter of feeling with him – and a fear of being imposed on – he does not know I am writing to you.

She often says she is writing her pleas for help without Carter's knowledge, giving his pride and his low spirits as reasons for secrecy. While we have no reason to doubt her truthfulness here, those who, like Dickens, picture the Halls as a pair of humbugs winking conspiratorially at each other might speculate that perhaps Carter found a way of hinting to her that she might do something to get her friend Bennock to help him in his difficulties. However they came about, the letters show Anna Maria to have a good grasp of business, and to be prepared to differ from her husband's view of it – even if she does put on a show of being a poor helpless wife looking to Dear Mr Bennock for advice.

Practical and shrewd though she was, and active in many social causes, Anna Maria was firmly opposed to the 'monstrous project' of women's rights, believing that the place for a woman to exercise her 'immense power' was in the home, where, 'in the quiet circle of her domestic duties, [she] has more to do with the future characters of empires than man, whose bolder brain and stronger muscle must fight life's battle till life is done.' Reflecting on her own life she said she had found it 'possible to combine a perfect fulfilment of arduous literary or other labour with the devout and fitting attention to the more pleasing duties of a home-cherishing life.'⁵⁸ A generation like ours for whom this line of thought is arrant nonsense tends to assume that it must be humbug, that an intelligent woman like Mrs Hall cannot have taken it seriously, that it must have been just the line she spun in order to satisfy her husband and her husband's world. We are tempted to assume that, on New Year's Day, she privately winked at herself as she recalled Carter's anxiety at the beginning of her career that authorship would take her away from her domestic duties.⁵⁹ This may, at some level, be true. There may have been some suppressed feeling of revolt against this sophistry, which longed to throw off the disguise and denounce the humbug. But if there was this inner rebel, we never see it in Anna Maria. It's worth adding that most of the (men) who mocked the Halls, though they may have disliked the religiosity with which Anna Maria decked out her view of women's place, would not have regarded this particular opinion as humbug.

The novels of Irish life which developed out of Anna Maria's *Sketches* have been compared (not usually favourably) with those of Maria Edgeworth. Anna Maria recorded a conversation between the two authors.

⁵⁸ The quotations are from an extended passage from her writings quoted in Hall's memoir of his wife in *Retrospect*, volume 2 pp437ff. It's perhaps worth mentioning that Anna Maria had several miscarriages and still-births, and one daughter who died in early infancy. The Halls adopted a daughter, Fanny, about whom little seems to be known. Nathaniel Hawthorne says she had auburn hair. She married Carter's nephew Sandford Rochat. (*Hand, Head and Heart*, p 132.)

⁵⁹ She mentions this, apparently without any irony, in the introduction to the fifth edition of her *Sketches of Irish Character*.

[Maria Edgeworth] did not see, so clearly as I saw, the value of the imaginative in literature for the young, and was almost angry when she discovered that a sketch I had written of a supposititious scene at Killarney was pure invention. She told me, indeed, that she had been so deceived by my picture as actually to have inquired for, and tried to find out, the hero of it; and argued strongly for truth in fiction. I ... endeavoured to convince her that to call imagination to the aid of reason – to mingle the ideal with the real – was not only permissible but laudable as a means of impressing truth. I think so still. I believe the author who does what I suggest may be, and ought to be, done, is no more guilty of wrong than was He who 'spake in Parables'.⁶⁰

I have not identified the sketch that Maria Edgeworth was objecting to, and it's not certain whether it was presented to the world as fiction or as reportage, but this passage reveals something about Anna Maria's attitude to writing. She identifies imagination with idealisation, and with speaking in parables, and all three with 'truth'. It's not likely that Maria Edgeworth seriously demanded that there should be a real individual corresponding exactly to the character in the sketch, but she may have thought that 'truth in fiction' required that the sketch should resemble the sort of people one might meet in life. By eliding the differences between imagination and parables, Anna Maria allows herself to detach her characters from reality and substitute mere idealisations.

Carter characterised his wife's writing as 'fertile of sympathy, generous, considerate, loving and kind; pregnant with true wisdom, and indulgent as to faults on both sides – perhaps to excess.' Here, as always when Ireland is involved, he naturally speaks of 'both sides'. Part of the 'truth' Anna Maria wants to impress upon her readers is the ideal of tolerance and respect between Protestant and Catholic, which leads her, Carter thought, to be excessively indulgent towards the Catholic clergy. A passage he quotes from her novel *The Whiteboy* is an idealised evocation of 'the respect and affection that subsist between the Roman Catholic priest and his flock'. The priest, she writes, is the peasant's 'judge, his advocate, his punisher, he is also his protector – very, very rarely his tyrant.' Carter adds that 'her freedom in writing of her old friends of the humbler classes gave them dire offence', but in case we should think that this means they objected to her falsifying their lives, he proceeds to tell a story of an Irish cook who gave warning with the words, 'Arrah, ma'am, lave me alone! *Ye know ye're going to put me into a book!*'⁶¹ The cook's response is made into a joke, to deflect our doubts concerning Anna Maria's accounts of the experiences of the poor.

This discussion of the honesty or otherwise of the Halls' writing brings us back to the Pecksniff question. Was Carter nothing but a humbug? It is easy to see why people thought so. He wrote with confidence about art without understanding beauty, about literature without understanding the imagination, and about Ireland without understanding nationalism. To say that he was not alone in this is beside the point; indeed the animosity felt towards him may have been all the greater because he was not just an unlikeable individual, but a representative of an objectionable type of thinking and writing.

It's partly a matter of age. Among those who disliked him, Dickens and William Linton were only eleven or twelve years younger, but it was an important gap. Hall was on the verge of middle-age when Victoria came to the throne, his tastes and manner were formed in an earlier period. More than that, his education was provincial and the events of his childhood belonged to a world that the younger men had not known – the aftermath of the 1798 Rebellion, memories of Trafalgar, his eldest brother dying at the battle of Albuera in 1811. He reported Canning's speeches in the 1820s, and the influence of that older style of rhetoric is discernible in his own writing, although he did not have sufficient command of words to carry it off. Others who found Hall's style of speaking absurd, such as Vizetelly and Comyns Carr, were younger still, but it would be wrong to make too much of this – Douglas Jerrold of *Punch*, one of Hall's most merciless critics in the 1840s, was only three years his junior. But certainly by the mid-century Hall fell on the wrong side of a great generational divide, as exemplified in a *Punch* cartoon of 1861.⁶² An 'enthusiastic artist', hatless, with a soft collar and a baggy jacket, his legs crossed, sits opposite a man in a tall hat and high collar, who is sitting bolt upright, an umbrella between his knees, eyes staring straight ahead,

⁶⁰ Quoted in *Retrospect* volume 2 pp 426f.

⁶¹ *Retrospect* volume 2 p 428.

⁶² *Punch*, volume 40 p 246, 15 June 1861.

mouth tight shut. 'My dear sir,' says the artist holding out his hand, 'keep that Expression for one moment! You've got such a splendid Head for my Picture of the "Canting Hypocrite"!' The top-hatted man looks somewhat older than the artist, but perhaps he seems older than he is, while the artist affects a youthful manner.

Two of Hall's particular interests, shared with his wife, were temperance and spiritualism, both of them movements that attracted charges of cant and hypocrisy. Both Halls wrote tracts, in prose and verse, for children and for adults, to promote temperance, securing distinguished artists to provide illustrations – George Cruikshank was one of them, himself a convinced teetotaler. These books were produced and distributed (in French, Dutch and Welsh as well as English) at serious loss, but, Hall wrote, 'we had the reward we most prized – in the belief that by our labour in writing, and our sacrifices in publishing, these works we had advanced and strengthened the sacred cause of Temperance.' In acknowledgement of their work, the Band of Hope, when marching through Kensington, would stop outside the Halls' house and give 'a cheer of grateful recognition'.⁶³

Despite their commitment to Temperance, and their warnings of the easy descent from moderate drinking to habitual drunkenness, the Halls did not impose total abstinence on their guests. William Linton, however, described soirées at their house The Rosery (known irreverently as the Posery or the Roguery) as providing 'small talk and smaller Marsala'; he said that guests would go on to other haunts where they could get stronger fare.⁶⁴ Dickens too recalled an invitation to take a 'convivial glass of port wine' with Carter, an expression which he professed not to understand.⁶⁵ The fact that he quibbled at this not particularly startling transferred epithet suggests that what he really found puzzling was the idea of conviviality in connection with the Halls. Their hospitable aspirations were beyond their means. Nathaniel Hawthorne describes a soirée in their London apartment where he and Jenny Lind were the two 'lions' who had attracted an immense crowd, too great for the two drawing rooms and so numerous that, as a latecomer to the supper table, he found only sponge cake and champagne.⁶⁶

But Hall was a keen attender at convivial gatherings. He was a big man, not stout, but tall and well-built with the sleekness and solidity of one who ate well, but it was the company that he most prized. He liked an audience and he liked to meet celebrities. In the literary world of London he had met almost everyone, although there are some notable gaps in his *Memories*, such as George Eliot and G H Lewes. He makes a revealing comment on fellow editor William Jerdan's *Autobiography* and book *The Men I have Known*:

I confess I have wondered how it was that [Jerdan's] works contain so little: no man has lived who had so many opportunities of personal intercourse with the leading authors and artists of his age. He seems to have neglected such opportunities strangely; probably he never contemplated being called upon to write concerning them; and it is certain that he was not of those who sow seed for an anticipated harvest.⁶⁷

Hall was certainly not guilty of neglecting opportunities to sow this sort of seed. In the 1840s he was a regular at Lady Blessington's evenings in Gore House, Kensington.⁶⁸ There he met the exiled Louis Napoleon and exchanged small talk with him. Two decades later he 'obtained the sanction of

63 *Retrospect* volume 2, pp 432f.

64 *Memories* p 74.

65 The artist Charles Martin recalled that while sitting for his portrait Dickens asked him what the phrase could mean. Reported in *Pall Mall Gazette*, 18 November 1898.

66 Nathaniel Hawthorne, *English Notebooks*, ed Randall Stewart, 1941. Hazel Morris in *Hand, Head and Heart* quotes passages from this edition. The earlier edition (1873/1880), severely censored by Hawthorne's wife, is available on-line, and I have used that for the account of the Jenny Lind evening, 9 July 1856. (<http://www.eldritchpress.org/nh/pfenb01.html> Retrieved 9 July 2014)

67 *Memories* p 286. And yet Nathaniel Hawthorne describes Jerdan's *Autobiography* as full of his 'constant and apparently intimate intercourse with distinguished people'. (*English Notebooks*, 10 July 1856, 1880 edition)

68 *Retrospect* volume 2 pp110f. Knowing that Lady Blessington was someone whom fastidious ladies were unwilling to visit, Hall may have feared that his attendance at her evenings would attract adverse comment. He records his wife's view of Lady Blessington that 'whatever the faults and errors of her life ... God intended her to be good.'

the Emperor of the French' to dedicate a catalogue of the International Exposition to him, and let it be known that this gracious patronage was in gratitude for many kindnesses while Napoleon was living in two rooms in London.⁶⁹ Another Kensington neighbour whose acquaintance the Halls cultivated was the singer Jenny Lind. Before the grand charity concert mentioned earlier she had sung to the Chelsea Pensioners at a bazaar in the grounds of Chelsea Hospital in aid of the Hospital for Consumptives.⁷⁰ He succeeded in interesting her in another of his charities, the Governesses' Benevolent Institution, at whose dinner in 1849 he presented on her behalf a donation of £200.⁷¹

Nathaniel Hawthorne's son Julian has left a description of Hall in society, a dinner-party in the 1870s. Hawthorne says that Hall appropriated someone else's adventure and told the story as though he were himself the hero of it. The actual protagonist was present at the dinner which tends to support Hawthorne's view of Hall, that at least at this late stage in his career he was an 'ingenuous humbug', unconscious of his various pretences. At parting, Hall rather astonished the other guests by making the following speech:

'And, my dear friends – my very dear friends,' he went on, resting his finger-ends upon the table, and inclining his body affectionately towards his auditors, 'may I, as an old man – I think the oldest of any of you here present – conclude by asking your indulgence for an illustration from the personal experience and custom of one who may, I think – who at least has ever striven to be, a humble Christian gentleman – may I, my dear friends, cite this simple example of what I have been attempting to inculcate from my own personal practice, and that of my very dear and valued wife, Mrs. Hall? It has for very many years been our constant habit, before seeking rest at night, to kneel down together at our bedside, and to implore, together, the Divine blessing upon the efforts and labors of the foregoing day. And before offering up that petition to the Throne of Grace, my friends' – here the orator's voice vibrated a little with emotion – 'we have ever been sedulous to ask each other, and to question our own hearts, as to whether, during that day, some human fellow-creature had been made better, or happier, because we had lived. And very seldom has it happened – very seldom, indeed, my dear friends, has it happened – that we were unable to say to ourselves, and to each other, that, during that day, some fellow-creature, if not more than one, had had cause for thankfulness because we had lived. And now I will beg of you, my dear friends,' added Mr. Hall, producing his large, white pocket-handkerchief and patting his eyes with it, 'to pardon a personal allusion, made in fulness of heart and brotherly feeling, and if there be found in it anything calculated to assist any of you towards a right comprehension of our Christian responsibilities towards our fellow-man, I entreat that you take it into your hearts and bosoms, and may it be sanctified unto you. I have done.'⁷²

Hawthorne claims to have noted down Hall's words immediately after the event, but still we have to allow for the possibility that he has touched up the speech for dramatic effect. Even so, his account gives a clear impression of how Hall appeared, particularly to younger contemporaries, the pieties sliding smoothly off his tongue as he demands attention by virtue of his age and, by implication, his superior wisdom.

Nathaniel Hawthorne himself took a harsh view of Hall on first meeting him in the company of Francis Bennoch. Hall presented Hawthorne with a camellia and expressed his admiration in 'a most fluent, irrepressible, and yet quiet way with a volubility of fine phrases and with a calm benignity of face. I have never met so smooth an Englishman as Mr S C Hall.' Hawthorne records Bennoch's high opinion of Hall ('a good and honest man, though with some absurdities of manner') but also notes that Douglas Jerrold and Dr Mackay (of the *Illustrated London News*) 'think him an

69 The story of the dedication and Hall's past connection with the Emperor is recorded in the 'London Sayings and Doings' column in *The Wrexham Advertiser* 26 May 1866. I have not seen the dedication, and Hall, in his brief account of the 1867 Exposition in *Retrospect* (volume 1 p 400) doesn't mention it, although he does say he had an audience with the Emperor, then in the 'zenith of his glory'.

70 *Retrospect* volume 1 pp 421f. At the Chelsea Hospital bazaar, Mrs Hall ran a stall which raised £450, and at which she was assisted by the sons of the rector of Chelsea, Charles and Henry Kingsley. She also won a magnificent papier-maché easy chair in a raffle.

71 *Morning Post*, 26 April 1849.

72 Julian Hawthorne *Hawthorne and his Circle* chapter 11. (Gutenberg, retrieved 29 June 2014)

arrant humbug'. After visiting the Halls at their country home in Addlestone, and after being shown round Oxford by them, Hawthorne came to agree with Bennoch:

I repent the harsh view which I took of his character, when we first became acquainted. I now acknowledge him to be a thoroughly genuine man, of kind heart and true affections, a gentleman of taste and refinement; not a very wise person, perhaps, too vain of his wife (though she is certainly a wife to be proud of) and of himself; saying many things that he had better hold his tongue about, talking too much about himself, his affairs and his achievements; telling his Irish stories over too often to the same auditors, though he tells them well; but still a most estimable man, and full of honour. ⁷³

Anna Maria Hall died in 1881. In his *Retrospect* Carter records her death, and then proceeds immediately to a discussion of Spiritualism: 'I know that those who are called "the dead" do not die,' he begins.⁷⁴ The couple had been active and convinced spiritualists for many decades. One of his own obituaries recalled that through communication with his wife Carter had acquired intimate and detailed knowledge of the 'circles' in the other world, which, we can imagine, he was not slow to pass on to his dear friends.⁷⁵ Spiritualists were keen to gain recognition from the established Church, and Hall's case was used in an address to the Archbishop of Canterbury: he had, it was said, 'thanked God in the middle of Fleet Street that he had been "brought through Spiritualism to accept the doctrine of Atonement"'.⁷⁶

The evidence for and against the doctrines of the Spiritualists seemed at the time more finely balanced than it does with hindsight, and there were intelligent and conscientious people who believed in the phenomena, or at least accepted there might be something in them. But even at the time, and even among those who were prepared to suspend judgement, it was common knowledge that there were phoney mediums and rigged séances. The Halls's adherence to the cult, therefore, can only have intensified the feeling in some circles that they were humbugs.

Their spiritualist connection brought them into contact with some dubious characters. Through a mixture of kindness, gullibility and, probably, love of meddling, they became embroiled with a medium called Home and one of his victims, a foolish woman called Mrs Lyon. In the end Mrs Lyon sued Home for the return of a large sum of money, and the Halls were called as defence witnesses because some of the dealings between Home and Mrs Lyon had taken place at their house. From newspaper accounts of the case it is hard to work out exactly what happened, but it must have been an embarrassment for the Halls. It emerged that Hall had advised Mrs Lyon and himself had received money from her, although he claimed that he she had forced it on him and he had been most reluctant to take it; he returned it without paying interest. From Hall's evidence it seemed that he first tried to persuade Mrs Lyon not to make the large gift to Home, but when she persisted he gave her advice on how to proceed. Home was found to have lied in some parts of his testimony and was required to make a full repayment, because Mrs Lyon had plainly been under undue influence when she signed the documents transferring the money, but the judge made it clear that he regarded her as partly at fault, and criticised her evidence as false on many counts. Home's associates, therefore, including the Halls, avoided attracting too much odium on account of their involvement.⁷⁷ The evidence in the case gave the wags of the day some new jokes about table-rapping, and Hall may have been the victim of remarks on a strange incident in which a gold snuff-box was mysteriously transferred during a séance from Mrs Lyons's hands to his.

Having looked at some of Samuel Carter Hall's writings, traced his career, considered the comments made by some of those who knew him, and looked at a few occasions when his actions surfaced in the public prints, what impression are we left with? Many will agree with the TLS review of Hazel Morris's book, when it concluded that 'Hard as [Morris] strives, she cannot make Samuel Carter Hall sympathetic.'⁷⁸ Rather than speculating further whether Hall was as unlikeable

⁷³ *English Notebooks*, 4 April 1856, quoted in *Hand, Head and Heart*, pp 54f. The earlier harsh judgement is omitted from the 1880 edition.

⁷⁴ *Retrospect* volume 2 pp 464ff.

⁷⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 21 March 1889.

⁷⁶ Reported in the *Isle of Wight Observer*, 2 April 1881.

⁷⁷ *Morning Post*, 29 April and 23 May 1868.

⁷⁸ *TLS*, 13 December 2002.

as he seems, we'll return to the question we started with: how fair is it to link him always with Pecksniff? This is important less for what it might tell us about Hall, than for what it can tell us about Pecksniff, and about the treatment of humbugs in Dickens's novels.

Whatever we say about Hall he clearly was not a villain in the sense that Pecksniff in the novel is a villain. Exasperated by his self-satisfaction, people may have longed to knock him down with a stick, as Old Martin Chuzzlewit does to Pecksniff, but nothing has surfaced in Hall's record that bad enough to justify such punishment. He didn't steal, or seek to gain an inheritance by destroying the character of an innocent person, and if, as an unscrupulous editor, he altered other people's work or even passed it off as his own, he did it more subtly and less blatantly than Pecksniff, without leaving himself open to charges of direct plagiarism. But if Dickens was not drawing up an indictment of Hall's misdemeanours, what exactly does it mean to say Hall was Pecksniff?

Every one of Dickens's novels features a consummate hypocrite, from Stiggins in *Pickwick Papers* and Bumble in *Oliver Twist*, to Pumblechook in *Great Expectations* and Podsnap in *Our Mutual Friend*. Several of them betray something of Samuel Carter Hall – Pumblechook's predilection for delivering uninvited sermons, for instance, or Podsnap's preference for all things British over all things foreign. Many of them concoct their hypocritical disguise for mercenary, and sometimes criminal purposes. Wackford Squeers pretends to be a kindly and effective schoolmaster in order to secure customers. Dissenting clergymen like Stiggins, and Chadband in *Bleak House*, pretend to be holy in order to make a living for themselves out of their gullible flocks. Mr Veneering in *Our Mutual Friend* pretends to be a man of substance, with his bran new house and fittings, because that is how he attracts investors to his fraudulent businesses. But not all Dickens's humbugs are, in this straightforward sense, confidence tricksters. Uriah Heep, for example, uses his parade of humility in order to work his way into his employer's confidence, but at least in the early part of the book his being so umble is more than a pretence; it's an ingrained character trait, the product of a dismal upbringing, twisted class-consciousness, and a sense of being cut off from the comfortable world he aspires to join.⁷⁹ He is more obsequious than he needs to be in order to gain his ends; it's a compulsion rather than, or as well as, a deliberate deception. In the cases of Pumblechook and Podsnap, too, the scale of the falsity is out of all proportion to anything they might have hoped to gain from the deception.

So what is it that is so appalling about these hypocrites? This question brings us back to Dickens's reported speculation about Carter and Anna Maria Hall winking at each other as the sign that they were, intermittently at least, conscious of the great deception they were perpetrating on the world. Did Uriah and his mother wink at each other? Did Mr and Mrs Podsnap? G K Chesterton, explaining why it is that although Dickens catches precisely the tone and manner of humbug, there's no hint as to what it feels like to be Pecksniff, points out that Pecksniff never muses on his actions or reflects on his schemes, we never catch him colluding with himself, because 'the thoughts of Pecksniff would be too frightful'.⁸⁰

We are quite familiar with the idea that real motives might be different from apparent motives, and that we might be at least as much in the dark about our real motives as any outsider observing us. In pre-Freudian times people were well aware of the phenomenon, but before the apparatus of the unconscious mind became commonplace it was harder to explain or even describe it. The character of the conscious hypocrite, the man whose true motives are artfully disguised by his professed intentions, is one way of making sense of the phenomenon.

Dickens follows this model in his early novels, such as *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and presents Pecksniff as one whose hypocrisy is strategic, a means to an end. But the crimes it enables him to perpetrate are thin stuff compared with the grotesque awfulness of his character. *Martin Chuzzlewit* is a novel that is remembered for its characters rather than its plot. We know Pecksniff is an appalling man long before we know about his crimes, and the memory stays with us long after we have forgotten how the story works itself out with his comeuppance at the hands of Old Martin. If we

79 At the end of the book Uriah is in prison, where he successfully imposes on the authorities with a parade of contrition. This is a more superficial picture than the portrait of his early days and his troublesome relationship with David.

80 G K Chesterton, *Appreciations and Criticisms of the Works of Charles Dickens*, 1911, p 102 (Gutenberg, Retrieved 4 January 2014)

could believe that his falsity was merely a gambit to worm his way into Old Martin's good graces, it would be a relief.⁸¹ It's much easier to deal with a plausible confidence trickster, who might be bought off if he can get what he wants some other way, than with someone so thoroughly false as Pecksniff.

As he returns again and again to explore the character of the hypocrite, Dickens becomes less satisfied with the model of the conscious hypocrite, and is increasingly intrigued by the mystery of self-deception. How does it come about? In Mr Podsnap, Dickens captures the language and behaviour of the man who is in the process of deceiving himself:

Thus happily acquainted with his own merit and importance, Mr Podsnap settled that whatever he put behind him he put out of existence. There was a dignified conclusiveness – not to add a grand convenience – in this way of getting rid of disagreeables which had done much towards establishing Mr Podsnap in his lofty place in Mr Podsnap's satisfaction. 'I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!' Mr Podsnap had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. For they affronted him.⁸²

It is in *Great Expectations* that Dickens gives his most sustained consideration to the mystery of self-deception, a curious thing. Pip poses the question like this:

[I] began to invent reasons and make excuses for putting up at the Blue Boar. I should be an inconvenience at Joe's; I was not expected, and my bed would not be ready; I should be too far from Miss Havisham's, and she was exacting and mightn't like it. All other swindlers upon earth are nothing to the self-swindlers, and with such pretences did I cheat myself. Surely a curious thing. That I should innocently take a bad half-crown of somebody else's manufacture is reasonable enough; but that I should knowingly reckon the spurious coin of my own make as good money! An obliging stranger, under pretence of compactly folding up my bank-notes for security's sake, abstracts the notes and gives me nutshells; but what is his sleight of hand to mine, when I fold up my own nutshells and pass them on myself as notes!⁸³

Pip follows a painful path to self-knowledge, and while we follow his delicately charted inner struggle, we are offered a grotesque magnification of his hypocrisy in the character of Pumblechook. Pip loathes Pumblechook. His feelings are understandable in view of the torments of arithmetic and pompous moral lectures inflicted on him by Pumblechook in his childhood, but Dickens endorses his hatred, devising a suitably comic and humiliating punishment: Pumblechook's house is broken into and his mouth is stopped with a bunch of flowering annuals to 'perwent his crying out,' as Joe puts it. But Pumblechook could be seen as just a pompous old fool, completely lacking in self-awareness, not an evil man (one thinks of Sala's verdict on Hall – not a bad sort) and the vindictiveness manifested towards him by Pip, and more particularly, Dickens would then be out of all proportion. But Dickens loathes him, not for any premeditated harm that he does, nor even because he's nasty to children, but because of what he is, his lack of integrity – not because he swindles anyone, but because he is himself a swindle, a man who 'reckons the spurious coin of [his] own make as good money'.

There is nothing to suggest that Samuel Carter Hall was an active villain like Pecksniff. There is not even any reason to suspect him of that New Years Day wink that Dickens hinted at to Sala. The conclusion of Julian Hawthorne, whose record of Hall's after-dinner homily was quoted earlier, is probably right, that Hall was an 'ingenuous' hypocrite, unaware that he was a humbug, victim and perpetrator of a completely watertight self-deception. His hypocrisy, unlike Pecksniff's, was without ulterior motive. But this is beside the point if the hypocrite is obnoxious not for what he

81 A similar argument can be made about Dickens's treatment of another kind of evil, Fagin's attempts to corrupt Oliver Twist; the wickedness is explained, and somehow tamed and contained, by the complicated plot – or at least it would be if we took any notice of how things are worked out, but like Pecksniff Fagin is bigger and more vivid than the plot.

82 *Our Mutual Friend*, I 11.

83 *Great Expectations* chapter 28. The context requires *nutshells* to refer to something that might be taken for a bank-note; presumably they were slips of paper containing aphorisms.

does but for what he is. To claim that Hall is the prototype of Pecksniff is to say that it was his inauthenticity, manifest in his every word and action, that brought the character of Pecksniff alive in Dickens's mind.

Self-deception implies the co-existence of a self that deceives and a self that is deceived; the self-deceiver is one kind of divided self, a topic that fascinated Dickens. Not all divided selves, nor indeed all self-deceivers are evil characters like Pecksniff, or even unsympathetic characters like Pumblechook. In *Bleak House* John Jarndyce and Esther Summerson, both of them virtuous and attractive characters, are self-deceivers.⁸⁴ Some would question whether Esther is an attractive character, virtuous, yes, but irritating; some might even think her morally uplifting small-talk was not too far removed from Pecksniff's. This is plainly an area where judgement is difficult. It's difficult, for instance, to distinguish Esther's description of John Jarndyce –

I have often spoken of his bright face, but I thought I had never seen it looks so bright and good. There was a high happiness upon it, which made me think, 'he has been doing some great kindness this morning.

– from Mrs Lupin's impression of Pecksniff –

... so radiant with ingenuous honesty, that Mrs Lupin almost wondered not to see a stained-glass Glory, such as the Saint wore in Church, shining about his head.⁸⁵

There are clear differences between the two cases, not least the fact that Esther's judgement is that of an informed and close observer, whereas Mrs Lupin doesn't know Pecksniff except as a patron of her inn. The similarities, however, are strong enough to underline the complexities and ambiguities of the moral judgements Dickens invites us to make concerning some of his characters.

As Dickens's treatment of hypocrites becomes subtler, so too does his treatment of another of his recurring characters, the benefactor. In early novels benefactors such as the Cheeryble brothers in *Nicholas Nickleby* and Mr Brownlow in *Oliver Twist* are straightforwardly benevolent; later novels show the role in a more ambivalent light, with troubled characters like Meagles in *Little Dorrit* and Gradgrind in *Hard Times*. What sabotages the charitable attempts of Meagles and Gradgrind is that they have misunderstood the objects of their benevolence. Jarndyce is likewise a troubled benefactor. His charitable impulses lead him to make mistakes, comparatively trivial mistakes over Mrs Jellyby and her mission or the feckless Skimpole, more serious when he proposes marriage to Esther. In addition to these misapprehensions about others, he is unsure of himself. We hear none of his inner dialogue (perhaps his thoughts, like Pecksniff's, are too frightful), so we have to deduce the nature of his doubts from what we are told of his behaviour. His two cardinal eccentricities are his refusal to be thanked and his reluctance to believe ill of others, insisting always that his feelings of disapproval are due to the East wind. It's as though he knows how close the benefactor is to the hypocrite; how easy it is for the great kindness to be done for the sake of thanks, and for the man who does good to pride himself on not being as others are. What seem to be arbitrary eccentricities are in fact the mental discipline (the equivalent of his cold bath) by which he repudiates the stained-glass Glory, and guards against the risk that we all run of being Pecksniff or Samuel Carter Hall.

⁸⁴ Also, some good characters go in for systematic and deliberate deception – Old Martin Chuzzlewit, for example, or Mr Boffin in *Our Mutual Friend*. Both pretend to be worse than they are in order to prove the worth of other characters.

⁸⁵ *Bleak House* chapter 62; *Martin Chuzzlewit* chapter 3.