

Colby



Colby Quarterly

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Volume 3  
Issue 12 *November*

Article 4

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November 1953

## Letters from G. Lowes Dickinson to Vernon Lee

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### Recommended Citation

Colby Library Quarterly, series 3, no.12, November 1953, p.189-194

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opinion of modern novelists." Then Baldwin, whose voice is the author's, stated flatly that the change in the novel is not a matter for lamentation. The substitution of a psychological, sympathetic interest in people for a merely comic one, he said, is a gain over former callousness. The novel, not being a pure art form, should be important ethically and accurate socially and psychologically.

Vernon Lee had no fear of a return attack—either a published rebuttal or a letter full of detailed, indulgent criticism—for Karl Hillebrand had died October 16, 1884, almost a year before her article appeared.

A second edition of *Ottolie* was published in 1893.<sup>10</sup> Although the text was entirely reset, the corrections in chronology and other changes suggested by Hillebrand were not made.<sup>11</sup> Perhaps the author didn't bother to re-edit the novel. Perhaps she had forgotten Hillebrand's letter, or perhaps she was stubborn. The dedication, also, remained unchanged: "To my friend, Karl Hillebrand."



### LETTERS FROM G. LOWES DICKINSON TO VERNON LEE

By JOHN H. SUTHERLAND

WHEN President Harding pledged a "return to normalcy," he seems to have given ungrammatical voice to the wishes of most people in the twenties, both here and abroad. Unfortunately, most people implemented their desires much as Harding fulfilled his pledge: by pursuing their individual, selfish courses and ignoring, as best they

<sup>10</sup> No. 22 in T. Fisher Unwin's "Pseudonym Library," an inexpensive pocket series, tall 16mo with yellow paper or cloth binding.

<sup>11</sup> One change was made. Hillebrand suggested correcting the date 1782 (page 102) to 1773. In the second edition (page 93) this date is 1776. Since the change does not correct the error in chronology, it may have been a printer's slip.

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could, the large and painful economic and political problems by which the world was beset.

G. Lowes Dickinson had good reason to want to follow the same pattern. He was a Cambridge don to whose sensitive and rational spirit the war had been an abomination of unreason. Before 1914, his greatest achievements had taken the form of books, articles, poems, satires, and lectures on philosophical and aesthetic subjects. Dickinson gave up all this during the years of the fighting, and worked as hard as he could to analyze and publish the causes of the catastrophe. He may have been the first man to propose, in precise form, the establishment of a "League of Nations";<sup>1</sup> in all events, his labors to promote such an organization were courageous and untiring. When the war was over and the League was an awkward and imperfect reality, he would have liked nothing better than to retire to a life of the spirit—but his conscience would not let him.<sup>2</sup>

Dickinson's attitude toward the war was preëminently a rational one. He was neither a belligerent nationalist nor a pacifist. Dickinson's biographer and friend, E. M. Forster, explains this in terms of clear human relationships. He comments directly on Dickinson's position in the following summary of an extended discussion in which the attitudes of the warlike Rupert Brooke and the vehemently anti-military Miss Paget are presented in some detail. (This is, by the way, the only place Vernon Lee is mentioned in Forster's biography of Dickinson.)

Rupert Brooke and Vernon Lee had both abandoned the pursuit of reason, and the fact that they could respectively act nobly and were prepared to suffer for their faiths did not make his own course the less clear. He was condemned to follow the intellect in a world which had become emotional.<sup>3</sup>

There are two letters from Lowes Dickinson to Vernon

<sup>1</sup> See E. M. Forster, *Goldsworthy Lowes Dickinson* (London, 1934), p. 163.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 191 ff.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 159-160.

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Lee in the Colby collection. The letters are typewritten, and idiosyncrasies are numerous. E. M. Forster tells us that Dickinson was said to be "the only man who could make a Corona type upside down."<sup>4</sup> His typing, and his attempts at correcting it, are so unusual that they come close to being a stylistic device. Forster suggests that, on the typewriter, "the whimsicality and gaiety of his nature seemed to have found a new outlet. . ."<sup>5</sup> It would be useless to attempt to reproduce the effect of this in print. However, Dickinson's spelling and punctuation have been retained for the sake of accuracy, and for whatever amusement or insight they may provide:

Kings Coll. Cambridge Sept 23 [1928]

Dear Miss Paget

Its every good of you to send me such a generous appreciation of my book, and I much value your good opinion. You are right, of course, that I did not expect many readers. But I should not have written it unless I had hopes for a sprinkling of serious ones, and especially a few young men, through whom gradually the point of view might penetrate. Because, as you rightly devine, it was a naturally distasteful task to me—excatly like a pathologsist's studyof disease.I must also however confess that the morbid interest of it held me, and also the half mechanical work requiried which at least soothed one. I wonder whether really is is for ever a vain hope that men can become rational beings. Everything at present, including all the recent psychology, seems to be a conspiracy against reason. I remain obsinatly faithful, though admitting as everyone must what a slender ray it is in what a vast ignorance. It must be very distressing to<sup>6</sup>

\* \* \*

At this point I lapsed into indiscretion, and thought it better to cancel, since I do not know whether letters get through unopened.<sup>7</sup> If I should visit Italy I will hope to call upon you. It is not impossible that I might do so in the spring. Meantime let me thank you once more for your very understanding letter

yours very truly

G LOWES DICKINSON

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 205.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 206.

<sup>6</sup> Here the bottom of the page is torn away.

<sup>7</sup> This seems to be a reference to the possibility of censorship by the government.

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The book that Vernon Lee praised must be *The International Anarchy, 1904-1914*. It is Dickinson's major work on the causes of the war, and was published in New York and London in 1926. In spite of its author's complaints about its slow sale, the thoroughness and accuracy of its analysis have made it a standard reference in its field. The Colby Library acquired two copies of the book shortly after it was published. One of these copies has been lost or stolen; the remaining copy shows signs of considerable use. Dickinson was very much discouraged by the poor reception of his book. He was not at all egotistical (and was almost certainly accurate) in feeling that it augured ill for the future of the world. He expressed his feelings this way in a note written in 1927:

I have published (last November) my big book on the origins of the war. I know that this is a good book. I believe it to be possibly the best book on the subject, because it is the only one I know which stresses the only important fact—that it is not this or that nation nor its policy, but the anarchy that causes wars. The book was considerably and favourably reviewed, but it has not sold as much as a thousand copies, another testimony to the general truth that truth is the last thing people care about.<sup>8</sup>

Although wars and threats of wars have beset us since Dickinson made this sad comment, the cause of world government—to which he contributed so much—has made some progress in the world.

Dickinson's second letter to Vernon Lee may well have been written during the visit to Italy that he projected in the first letter. At any rate, its content shows that it was written in Florence sometime subsequent to the completion of his series of books about the war—that is, subsequent to 1926 and the publication of *The International Anarchy*.

E. M. Forster does not attempt, in his life of Dickinson, to give a strict chronological account of his friend's move-

<sup>8</sup> Quoted in Forster, p. 194.

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ments. He tells enough, however, to make it possible, by means of the elimination of alternatives, to arrive at 1929 as the most likely year for Dickinson to have been in Florence in the spring. This would serve to date the letter April 29, 1929, and, if we may assume a connection between the letters, would date the first one September 23, 1928.

Here is the second letter:

casa Boccaccio April 29 [1929]

Dear Miss Paget

Miss Cooper Willis<sup>9</sup> write to me about your idea of a series of books dealing with the "psychological preparations for the war" in various countries. I think it probably that some thing quite interesting and important might be done on those lines, to which you yourself would best contribute so far as France is concerned. But I am myself for the time being quite put off any books on the war by the complete failure of the series I have attempted. It appears that at present people will read anything rather than what bears on that subject. So that my own feeling is it would be better for you, if you feel the impulse, to try as an independent book, what you have to say about France; first, however, if you can interest a publisher. I fear my credit, such as it was, is at too low an ebb for me to approach the idea with much hope at present. I shall hope to call on you before I leave Florence and we might then discuss the matter further. But my present feeling is as I have put it

Yours very truly

G LOWES DICKINSON

Perhaps the most interesting thing about this letter is that it shows that Vernon Lee was still very much concerned to do something about the problem of war—that she was not adrift in the moral doldrums of the twenties. In 1921, Dickinson had felt himself almost entirely alone when he wrote this unhappy memorandum:

Every one around me, all my best friends even, seem to have settled down to live as before, pleasantly, cynically, or whatever may be their attitude. I almost alone arise and go to bed with the constant obses-

<sup>9</sup> Miss Irene Cooper Willis was a friend of Vernon Lee's and is now her literary executrix. She is the author of books on the Brontës, Mrs. Browning, Montaigne, and others, as well as critical studies of liberal idealism and press propaganda during the first world war.

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sion, is there to be a continuance of the old to the new war, or a radical transformation? The pain becomes almost unendurable, and I can only stave it off by plunging into some kind of work, which yet must bear upon it.<sup>10</sup>

The work he plunged into was, of course, the writing of *The International Anarchy*.

Vernon Lee does not seem to have been able to publish anything of consequence on the subject of peace and war at this time. Dickinson's letters to her show, however, that the fault (if it was a fault) may well have been the publishers', not hers. The letters reflect her intelligent sympathy with Dickinson's achievement, and the fact that she was genuinely interested in working for the same good cause.



### OF TYPOGRAPHY AND THE HARMONY OF THE PRINTED PAGE

translated\* from the French of Charles Ricketts

By RICHARD K. KELLENBERGER

**I**N a renewal of interest in handicrafts, the art of book-making would, at first sight, appear to be the easiest to revitalize. Its limited technique, the placing a black line on white paper, the relationship of this line to the stroke of a pen, adjusted merely to the work of the engraver (both in printing and in wood-engraving), this

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Forster, p. 192.

\* In our issue for November 1951, Librarian James Humphry III announced Colby's acquisition of a copy—the only copy in the State of Maine (and one of only five copies in New England)—of *De la Typographie et l'harmonie de la Page imprimée* by Lucien Pizzarro and Charles Ricketts. This work was to have been printed by Pizzarro for a French publisher, Floury, of Paris, but because of Pizzarro's ill health only the first eight pages of the book were set up by him at his Eragny Press and it was accordingly produced by Charles Ricketts at the Vale Press. So far as we know, *De la Typographie* has never until now appeared in English. It supplements Professor Kellenberger's similar translation of Ricketts' *William Morris et son Influence* (1898) which we printed in February 1952.