



Oliphant, Margaret. *At His Gates. The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant: The Pickering Masters Series, Part VI, Volume 23,*

Edited by Joanne Wilkes

London and New York: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2017.
l ii +335pp. ISBN 9781138763005

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The Selected Works of Margaret Oliphant, a 25-volume scholarly edition conducted by general editors Elisabeth Jay and Joanne Shattock, concludes with three novels, each chosen to represent one of the final three decades of Oliphant's career. The first of these, Joanne Wilkes's edition of *At His Gates* (1872), includes the text of the novel, a general introduction by the series editors, an introduction and headnote by Wilkes, a list of the illustrations that appeared in the novel's serial publication in *Good Words* (along with reproductions of some of the illustrations), and both explanatory and textual notes.

Placing *At His Gates* in the context of the other novels that conclude *The Selected Works* (*The Ladies Lindores*, 1883 and *Old Mr. Tredgold*, 1896), Jay and Shattock's general introduction treats Oliphant's shift in focus from the marriage plot to contemporary social issues and events (such as the bank crash that drives the storyline of *At His Gates*). Jay and Shattock also trace the books' varied publication histories, presenting them as examples of Oliphant's skillful navigation of the changing literary market.

Wilkes's introduction to *At His Gates* builds upon prior scholarship by Jay and Tamara S. Wagner. Arguing that *At His Gates* is "a novel that can be read as an exploration of various authorial identities, various ways in which [Oliphant] dealt with issues preoccupying her in the early 1870s" (xxiv), Wilkes highlights Oliphant's reckoning with the impact of financial and other pressures upon artistic achievement, including her own: Oliphant wrote the novel after her brother Frank's financial collapse, which left her supporting Frank and his children. Oliphant's depiction of journal editor Stephen Haldane and painter Robert Drummond (a pedestrian artist on the model of Browning's Andrea del Sarto) considers not only the limits of individual talent but the damaging effect of external factors, such as the vagaries of critical reception, upon the accomplishments and the psychological well-being of artists and writers. As Wilkes notes, Oliphant's plot merges sensationalism with the domestic realism for which she is known. Drummond's wife Helen, shamed by his mediocrity, inadvertently pressures him to accept a position at a bank for which he is unqualified. When Drummond is falsely blamed for the bank's failure, he attempts suicide; he is rescued, but goes into hiding in the United States, leaving his friends and family to assume he is dead. Within this sensational frame, Oliphant highlights Helen's internal struggle to come to terms with the loss of her husband and the role she played in his downfall, a struggle exacerbated by the temptation to seek vengeance against the bank managers whom she believes to be responsible for Drummond's death. Wilkes deftly elaborates the novel's religious themes, including the reference to Dives and Lazarus from which the title is drawn, and the crises of faith experienced by Helen and the other main characters. The quiet despair of Haldane, a dissenting minister disabled by a stroke, impoverished by the bank failure

and all but abandoned by his congregation, is especially compelling; Wilkes suggests that Haldane reflects the experiences of *Good Words*'s editor Norman MacLeod.

Wilkes's headnote explains the novel's publication history, focusing on its serialization in *Good Words* and *Scribner's Monthly* (both 1872), Tinsley's 1872 book, and an 1873 Scribner, Armstrong & Co. book printed from the same typesetting as *Scribner's Monthly*. Authorial intention governs editorial decisions for *The Selected Works*, with base texts for each volume "compared with relevant lifetime editions over which there is thought to have been authorial oversight" (xix). Wilkes's examination of the differences between the two periodical editions, and between *Good Words* and Tinsley's 1872 edition, provides no evidence for authorial involvement beyond *Good Words*; this, along with the aesthetic and interpretive value of the periodical's illustrations, guided her selection of *Good Words* as the edition's base text. There are no emendations to the text (except for some silent emendations listed before the textual notes).

Wilkes's presentation of the text's transmission is concise and illuminating. At the same time, her rationale for *Good Words* as base text would be more strongly supported if additional editions were collated and included in the textual notes, which are divided into two lists, one for British printings (*Good Words*, Tinsley's 1872 edition, and a Ward, Lock edition with an unclear publication date of 1885 or 1886), and one for the 1872 periodicals. The lists are intended to allow readers to evaluate the textual changes in editions after *Good Words*, but because they do not include the later Tinsley printings, they leave Wilkes's assumption that Oliphant was not involved in later printings untested and therefore unproven. While I believe that Wilkes probably made the right decision by selecting *Good Words* as the base text, it is a pity that the notes could not have been expanded, both to better support Wilkes's editorial choices and to provide a fuller representation of later printings.

At His Gates is an interesting novel that deserves to be read within and outside the academy, and Wilkes is to be praised for her efforts to enhance the novel's accessibility while offering scholars a starting point for further research. The only lapse in this respect is the decision to provide chapter numbers, but not page numbers, for the textual notes. Anyone who wishes to view one of the notes in context will discover that they must search through the chapter in which the note appears, a task made more difficult by the small font of the superscript letters with which the notes are designated. The lack of page numbers is puzzling, both because the explanatory notes do include page numbers, and because the needs of readers are so well supported in the other aspects of the edition's design and content. The explanatory notes are a case in point: while some of the notes might seem unnecessary for an academic audience (for example, explaining terms like "Dissenter," identifying Biblical quotations, or defining words such as "sybarite"), the notes have clearly – and, I think, wisely – been crafted to serve a wider audience.

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