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3rd January 1968

Dear Lucy

I have now had a chance to check the George Eliot letters against the standard collected edition edited by Gordon Haight and published by Oxford University Press, with the operative final volume dated 1956, and although you are undoubtedly right in your guess that this little package had not itself been available to the Eliot experts, the unfinished letter of 19th December 1880 is printed in the collection, the text being taken from the third volume of J.W. Cross's final Life and Letters (the text corresponds exactly except for minimal changes in punctuation).

This I am afraid takes a considerable chunk of gilt off the gingerbread even though the autograph letter remains of high sentimental value for the George Eliot fans; and the other GE letters do appear to be unpublished, as well as J.W. Cross's two affecting epistles to Mrs. Strachey, so that it is still an attractive docket. But its commercial value would I suppose be more like £300 than £500, though it is insured for the higher figure for your and my protection during the next few days.

My slightly more considered thought on the alternative procedure would be this. I have had a word privately with the Editor of The Times Literary Supplement - a much more widely read periodical than The Cornhill and a very suitable one I think for this purpose - who would welcome an article based on this collection of letters and quoting as freely from them as might be, and he is quite prepared for something running to 2000 or 3000 words or more if necessary. He also reminded me that the leading George Eliot authority in this country is Mrs. Stanley Bennett, who has written several books about her under the name of Joan Bennett and who lives at Cambridge: a now elderly but still active lady who would we both think welcome the assignment and could find time for it.

If you and Miss Philippa thought well of this idea in principle, I suggest that you should write to her on Miss P's behalf and suggest it: by all means using Arthur Crook's name and/or mine in support of it if you think it would help.

/TLS

Miss Lucy Norton,
81 Oakwood Court,
London, W.14.

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TLS pays a little better than it used to but not much even now - ten guineas a thousand words I think, and this would presumably have to go to the writer-editor. But there is no reason why, subsequent to such an article, the collection should not be either offered for sale, if Miss Philippa so wished, or, which I would rather hope, she could either present it to the British Museum or I could probably negotiate a private sale to them which they ought to be glad to make.

One technical snag will have to be got over, and that is to find out who controls the copyright in George Eliot, not to mention J.W. Cross and G.H. Lewis; but this I think TLS could take care of by enquiry of OUP who must have gone through all these hoops in connection with Gordon Haight's Collected Letters.

I will keep the packet here until I hear from you, and if you and Miss Philippa would feel more comfortable that your designated editor should work from photostats, at least in the first instance, in order to minimise risk to the originals, I could have that done here for you.

Yours

John

JOHN CARTER