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The Hughenden Papers: Mother Lode of Disraeliana

Onesime L. Piette

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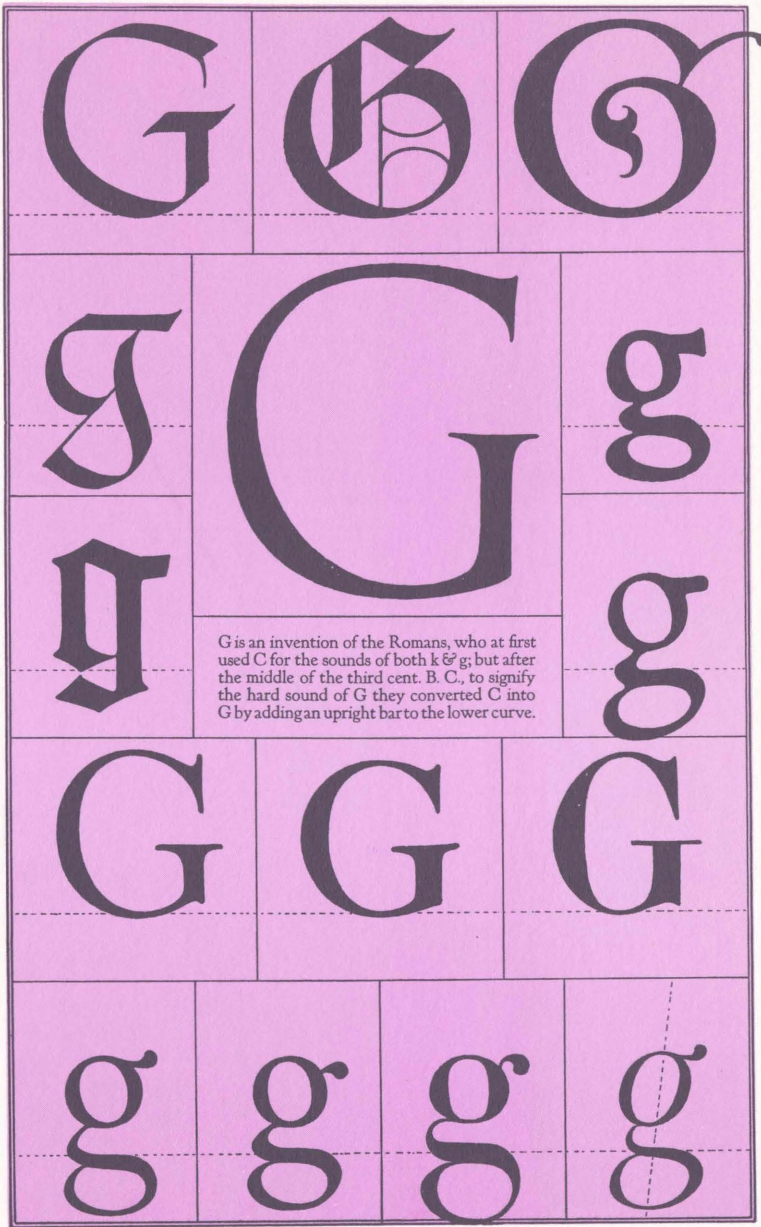


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The "G" page from Frederic W. Goudy's *The Alphabet*, 1936.

THE COURIER

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Frederic W. Goudy, "Type Man" Extraordinary	
Edmund C. Arnold	3
The Hughenden Papers: Mother Lode of Disraeliana	
Onesime L. Piette	13
The Role of Rare Books in a University Library	
Charles W. Mann	25
The A. E. Coppard Papers at Syracuse	
Arsiné Schmavonian	32
Open for Research . . . Notes on Collections	38
News of the Library and Library Associates	41

The Cover Illustration: The "G" page from Frederic W. Goudy's *The Alphabet*, 1936. Goudy used a whole 9½" x 12½" page in *The Alphabet* to illustrate each of its characters. Not only does this page seem appropriate as the designer's initial, it shows a Latin letterform with the most interesting lowercase. These fifteen g's show not only the wide variety of its forms but how the Goudy style is distinguishable even in designs of widely differing style.

The Hughenden Papers: Mother Lode of Disraeliana

by Onesime L. Piette

Benjamin Disraeli,¹ who served in Parliament for more than forty years and twice held each of the posts of Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer, was indisputably one of the most colorful and influential figures in nineteenth-century British history. Disraeli was also a literary craftsman who wrote several novels reflecting the social and political climate of his times, and he corresponded extensively and engagingly with a wide circle of persons of varying eminence. His speeches in Parliament and on public platforms underscored his political and phrasemaking talents.

Syracuse University Library has an exceptional collection of primary source materials on Disraeli in microreproduced form, the only positive microfilm copy of the Disraeli Papers outside of England. The papers are basic to serious research efforts undertaken on any or all phases of his multifaceted career, ranging from statesman to litterateur. The collection is usually identified as the Hughenden Papers—so styled after the name of his long-time residence—but it is alternatively referred to as the Disraeli, or Beaconsfield, Papers. It may be characterized as a voluminous mass of notes, memorabilia, letters, and various other forms of correspondence to and from Disraeli. The original collection is in the custody of the National Trust and is housed in the Hughenden Manor, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, England.²

Acquisition of the Hughenden Papers was made possible by a generous and timely benefaction of the Syracuse University Library Associates and by the negotiating efforts of Dr. Peter T. Marsh, Professor of History. After conducting extensive research on Disraeli at Hughenden Manor several years ago, Dr. Marsh sounded out the National Trust regarding the possibility of photographing the Hughenden Papers to make them available for scholars at a

Mr. Piette, a retired Foreign Service Officer, served as Asian Bibliographer in Syracuse University Library from 1967 to 1971. He is currently in London pursuing research for his doctoral dissertation. Mr. Piette holds a B.A. degree from the University of Denver, 1949, an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania, 1951, and an M.S. in Library Science from Syracuse University, 1966.

¹ Benjamin Disraeli became Lord Beaconsfield in August 1876 when Queen Victoria conferred a peerage on him. In the text, however, he is referred to only by his original name.

² The National Trust has granted permission to the author to use the references and quotations appearing in the text.



Benjamin Disraeli in 1852. From the portrait by Sir Francis Grant, P.R.A., at Hughenden Manor. Frontispiece in Vol. III of *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield* by William F. Monypenny and George E. Buckle. New York, The Macmillan Company, 1918.

site in the United States. This the National Trust graciously consented to do under the provisos that anyone publishing materials from the Hughenden collection (1) acknowledge the Trust's ownership of the Papers, (2) seek its permission to use references and quotations from them, and (3) send it a copy of any published work that might result.³ The expense of microphotography and shipping was underwritten by a member of Syracuse University Library Associates.

³ Anyone consulting the microfilmed Hughenden Papers at the Syracuse University Library must sign a form indicating his intention to comply with these stipulations.

For more than a half-century, anyone interested in conducting research on Disraeli but unable to consult the Hughenden Papers has had to rely heavily on an impressive six-volume biography prepared by William Flavelle Monypenny and George Earle Buckle,⁴ who were given direct access to the collection at an early date. Presumably because of a need to conserve space, however, Monypenny and Buckle often did not provide exact transcriptions of the letters and notes in the collection. Repeatedly, they resorted to elliptical renderings that tended to distort content if not meaning. Direct access to microreproductions of the Hughenden Papers at Syracuse University enables the local scholar to obtain a degree of precision that has previously been lacking. Compare, for example, a portion of the text of a letter Disraeli sent his sister Sarah to inform her of the untimely death of her fiancé while on a tour of the Near East in 1831:

The Hughenden Papers

My own Sa!

Ere you open this page, our beloved father will have imparted to you with all the tenderness of parental love the terrible intelligence which I have scarcely found courage enough to communicate to him. It is indeed true. Yes! our friend of many years, our life, & joy, & consolation, is in this world lost to us for ever. He has yielded to his Creator without a bodily, or mental, pang, that pure & honorable & upright soul, which we all so honored, & so esteemed; he has suddenly closed a life unsullied by a vice, scarcely by a weakness. Such a death is too awful but for those who are virtuous as himself, & if we regret, that the unconsciousness of his approaching fate has occasioned him to quit us without leaving some last memento of his affection, let us console ourselves by the recollection of the anguish that the same cause has spared him.⁵

Monypenny and Buckle

My own Sa!

Ere you open this page, our beloved father will have imparted to you with all the tenderness of parental love the terrible intelligence which I have scarcely found energy enough to communicate to him. It is indeed true. Yes! our friend of many years, our hope and joy and consolation, is lost to us for ever. He has yielded to his Creator without a bodily or mental pang that pure, and honorable, and upright soul which we all so honored and esteemed. He has suddenly closed a life unsullied by a crime, scarcely by a weakness.

(The last sentence in the original is entirely omitted.)⁶

⁴William Flavelle Monypenny and George Earle Buckle, *The Life of Benjamin Disraeli, Earl of Beaconsfield*, 6 vols. London: John Murray, 1910–20. A revised edition of the work, condensed into two volumes, appeared in 1929. Both versions are available in the Syracuse University Library.

⁵Hughenden Papers, Reel 2, A/1/B/1, undated but known to have been written in August 1831.

⁶Monypenny, I, 178.

In another letter to Sarah, Disraeli wrote triumphantly if hurriedly about the progress of his campaign for a seat in Parliament:

The Hughenden Papers

The clouds have at length dispelled, & my prospects seem as bright as the day. At 6 o'ck this evening I start for Maidstone with Wyndham Lewis, who tells me that he can command 750 plumpers alone out of the 1400 votes.

I suppose by Wednesday I shall have completed my canvass.

I write in the greatest haste and with my love to all,

I am
BD⁷

Monypenny and Buckle

The clouds have at length dispelled, and my prospects seem as bright as the day. At six o'clock this evening I start for Maidstone with Wyndham Lewis, and I suppose by Wednesday I shall have completed my canvass. I doubt whether there will be a contest.⁸

Little wonder that Disraeli regarded his prospects for election "as bright as the day" in the light of assurances from his running mate and mentor, Mr. Wyndham Lewis, that he would command an automatic majority. The Monypenny citation reflects Disraeli's mood of jubilation but does not reveal fully the reason for it.

In his autobiographical notes, Disraeli included a number of items likely to appeal to bibliophiles. Consider the following short comment, written in 1863:

I have a passion for books & trees. I like to look at them. When I come down to Hughenden, I pass the first week in sauntering about my park and examining all the trees, & then I saunter in the library, & survey the books. My collection is limited to Theology, the Classics, & History. Anything miscellaneous in it is the remains of the Bradenham Collection; but the great bulk of the Belles Lettres, I parted with after my father's death. It was sold by Sotheby.⁹

⁷ Hughenden Papers, Reel 2, A/I/B/135, undated but known to be on or about June 30, 1837.

⁸ Monypenny, I, 372. The last sentence, "I doubt whether there will be a contest," was taken from another letter (A/I/B/134).

⁹ Hughenden Papers, Reel 10, A/X/A/68, p. 4. The Bradenham Collection was, as may be inferred, the library of Isaac D'Israeli, Benjamin's father, who in 1829 moved his family from London to an old manor house called Bradenham located a few miles away from the town of High Wycombe. Sotheby refers to the prominent firm of auctioneers in London which has been in business for over 200 years.

I have a passion for books & trees - I like
to look at them - When I come down to Hughenden
I pass the first week in sauntering about
my park & examining all the trees & then
I wander in the library & survey the books.
My collection is limited to Theology, the Classics
& History - chiefly miscellaneous, in it is the
remains of the Madamham Collection, but
the great bulk of the Keller library, I parted
with after my ^{father's} death. Henry Colley's library

A portion of Disraeli's journal (see text, p. 16). Reproduced by permission of The National Trust, Hughenden Manor, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.

Also included in his autobiographical commentary in 1863 is the following passage concerning Queen Victoria's request to Disraeli for an appraisal of Antonio Panizzi, Principal Librarian of the British Museum at the time:

In my first audience of the Queen this year after the death of the Prince Consort, the Queen among other things spoke to me of the state of the Brit: Mus: of wh: I had just been elected a trustee in succession to Lord Lansdowne. H.M. asked me what I thought of Panizzi? and whether he were equal to the post.

I replied that my official experience was too slight to permit me to offer a personal opinion, but that he was much esteemed by my colleagues. H.M. thought it strange that a foreigner shd be at the head of an Institution so peculiarly national.

I observed that the post had been frequently filled by foreigners; that when I was a boy it was filled by Mr. Planta, a Swiss, & the father of a gentleman who had served her Majesty's uncles as U.S. of State for Foreign Affairs; that in older days Dr. Maty, who I believe, was a Frenchman had been in high office at the Museum, & I mentioned also Baber, tho' I was not so clear

about him. I mentioned also that Mr. Hallam thought very highly of Panizzi, & that my father, a great authority on vernacular literature had been astonished by his intimate acquaintance with English books.¹⁰

During his courtship of the widow of Wyndham Lewis, Mary Anne, whom he married in 1839, Disraeli wrote sentimental prose and verse; two examples of his love-inspired outpourings follow:

Soft dove, and my sweet heart—

One little line to tell you that I love you. The sun shines & Bradenham looks beautiful; most green & fresh, & today even bright. But *you* are not here. Come & prithee quickly; for tho' these people are kind & good, & as amusing as any other honest folk in the shires, their talk is insipid after all that bright play of fancy & affection which welcomes me daily with such vivacious sweetness.

Tomorrow *she* will come, yes! tomorrow, as I pray. And until then I must dream of her & muse of her, & chew the cud of sweet & bitter fancy over the delicious past.

I depend on a letter tomorrow; if only a line.

I hope that you were fortunate this morning. My heart misgives me.

He left his chain & seal as well as his watch in Grosvenor St.

Adieu sweetest—I know you have thought of me, by the assurance of my own heart.

Thine own¹¹

Her step sounds in my father's hall, her voice
Echoes within the chambers of my youth;
And for a moment if my heart rejoice,
Lonely so long, & where I deemed, in sooth,
The sunshine of soft thoughts no more should dwell,
Have I not cause? For is there not a spell
Of rare enchantment on my raptured life,
Tinging all things with its immortal light,

¹⁰ Hughenden Papers, Reel 10, A/X/A/48, pp. 3–4. Of the individuals mentioned by Disraeli, Joseph Planta was Principal Librarian of the British Museum from 1799 to 1827; Matthew Maty served also as Principal Librarian, 1772–1776; Henry Hervey Baber, a clergyman, held the post of Keeper of Printed Books, 1812–1837; and Henry Hallam, a historian, became a trustee of the British Museum in 1837. Planta was born in Switzerland, but came to London as a child; Maty, the son of a Frenchman, was reared in Holland; Baber, however, was a native of England.

¹¹ Hughenden Papers, Reel 1, A/I/A/32, August 20, 1838. Historians and others interested in Disraeli owe a considerable debt to his wife, who preserved virtually every letter Disraeli wrote to her before and after their marriage. See Monypenny, II, 70. All italicized words in the letters indicate underlined words in the originals.

While images of sorrow and of strife
Before it fade, & all is sweet and bright
As her own face. Ah! sweet one, once to sigh
That such a face might love me, was a dream
Might well become a poet's fantasy;
And on me now, say, can it deign to beam?^{1 2}

Disraeli's letters to and from the women in his life—notably wife Mary Anne and sister Sarah—constitute a source of much fascination, but none of the correspondence is more interesting than his exchanges with Queen Victoria. Although he honored scrupulously the convention of writing to the monarch in the third person, Disraeli managed to bring life and verve into his formal letters to the Queen. One much-quoted example of his interesting style may be found in the second paragraph of the following excerpt from a long letter he sent to her in 1868, at the outset of his first Ministry:

Although Mr. Disraeli is aware that your Majesty is naturally disinclined to the entrance of strangers into your Majesty's service, he is nevertheless much inclined to bring before your Majesty the claims of Mr. Ward Hunt, the present Secretary of the Treasury, to the post. Mr. Disraeli would be much mistaken if Mr. Ward Hunt would not prove a very distinguished Minister of Finance. He is a gentleman by birth, and Member for his County of Northampton, but being a younger son, who succeeded to the estate by the unexpected death of his brother, has had the advantage of a legal training for the Bar.

Mr. Disraeli ought to observe to your Majesty, that Mr. Ward Hunt's appearance is rather remarkable, but anything but displeasing. He is more than six feet four inches in stature, but does not look so tall from his proportionate breadth; like St. Peter's, no one is at first aware of his dimensions. But he has the sagacity of the elephant, as well as the form. The most simple, straightforward, and truthful man Mr. Disraeli ever met; and of a very pleasing and amiable expression of countenance.^{1 3}

^{1 2} Hughenden Papers, Reel 1, A/I/A/33, August 23, 1838. During the time Disraeli courted Mary Anne, his penmanship improved markedly in legibility only to lapse into its usual middling quality after the object of his affections had been won!

^{1 3} Victoria, Queen of Great Britain, *The Letters of Queen Victoria: A Selection from Her Majesty's Correspondence and Journal between the Years 1862 and 1878* [but third volume reads *1862 and 1885*], 2d ser., ed. George Earle Buckle. 3 vols. New York: Longmans Green, 1926–28, I, 507. Two additional three-volume sets, identified as the first and the third series, contain selected letters from Queen Victoria's correspondence during the years 1837 through 1861 and 1886 through 1901 respectively. The three companion sets, totalling nine volumes, are in the holdings of the Syracuse University Library.

In another notable letter to the Queen, dated November 24, 1875, Disraeli announced in elated tones that he had succeeded in buying a sizable block of shares in the Suez Canal:

Mr. Disraeli with his humble duty to your Majesty:

It is just settled: you have it, Madam. The French Government has been out-generaled. They tried too much, offering loans at an usurious rate, and with conditions, which would have virtually given them the government of Egypt.

The Khedive, in despair and disgust, offered your Majesty's Government to purchase his shares outright. He never would listen to such a proposition before.

Four millions sterling! and almost immediately. There was only one firm that could do it—Rothschilds. They behaved admirably; advanced the money at a low rate, and the entire interest of the Khedive is now yours, Madam.

Yesterday the Cabinet sate [sic] four hours and more on this, and Mr. Disraeli has not had one moment's rest to-day; therefore this despatch must be pardoned, as his head is rather weak. He will tell the whole wondrous tale to-morrow.

He was in Cabinet to-day, when your Majesty's second telegram arrived, which must be his excuse for his brief and stupid answer: but it was 'the crisis.'

The Government and Rothschilds agreed to keep it secret, but there is little doubt it will be known to-morrow from Cairo.¹⁴

Disraeli's purchase of the Canal shares, as recounted in his breathtaking message, drew an enthusiastic response from Victoria:

This is indeed a great & important event—which when known will, the Queen feels sure, be most popular in the country. The great sum is the only disadvantage.

The Queen will be anxious to know all about it from Mr. Disraeli, when she sees him today.¹⁵

At about the same time, the Queen made the following glowing entry in her journal:

Received a box from Mr. Disraeli, with the very important news that the Government has purchased the Viceroy of Egypt's shares in the Suez Canal for four millions, which gives us complete security for India, and altogether places us in a very safe

¹⁴ As quoted in Monypenny, V, 448–49. Disraeli frequently used the archaic form, sate, as the past tense and past participle of sit.

¹⁵ Hughenden Papers, Reel 38, B/XIX/B/393, November 25, 1875.

position! An immense thing. It is entirely Mr. Disraeli's doing. Only three or four days ago I heard of the offer and at once supported and encouraged him, when at that moment it seemed doubtful, and then to-day all has been satisfactorily settled.¹⁶

The Queen and her favorite Prime Minister wrote to one another on a truly massive scale while he was in office. Not all of this correspondence related to affairs of state, however. Victoria frequently sent him presents and good wishes, and he reciprocated in full measure. As a result, many of their letters contain extraordinarily charming passages, of which a few samples of Disraeli origin appear below:

Mr. Disraeli with his humble duty to your Majesty.

He gratefully thanks your Majesty for your Majesty's delightful present. He likes the primroses so much better for their being wild: they seem an offering from the Fauns and Dryads of the woods of Osborne; and camellias, blooming in the natural air, become your Majesty's Faery Isle. . . .¹⁷

Lord Beaconsfield offers his grateful acknowledgments for the gracious wishes received this morning, from one, whose words always sustain, and inspire him.

May the succeeding years be many, and worthy of the brightness of Her fate and mind.

For himself, he will be content, if he be spared long enough to vindicate, the honor of his country, and to prove his fealty to a beloved sovereign, to whom, with humble duty, he ventures, this day, to offer the homage of his respectful affection.¹⁸

Lord Beaconsfield with his humble duty to Your Majesty.

He has received this morning Y^I Majesty's gracious letter. He cannot have a happy Xmas when Y^I Majesty is in grief. . . . Ever since he has been intimately connected with Y^I Majesty, Your Majesty has been to him a guardian Angel, & much that he has done that is right, is due to you, Madam. He often thinks how he can repay Y^I Majesty, but he has nothing more to give, having given to Y^I Majesty his hand and *his heart*.¹⁹

¹⁶ Victoria, *Letters*, 2d ser., II, 427–28.

¹⁷ Hughenden Papers, Reel 150, R/I/A/Unnumbered, April 21, 1875 (letter is typed copy and not in original handwriting).

¹⁸ Hughenden Papers, Reel 41, B/XIX/C/383, January 1, 1878.

¹⁹ Hughenden Papers, Reel 41, B/XIX/C/106, December 26, 1878.

He wishes he could repose on a sunny bank, like Valentine in the pretty picture, that fell from a rosy cloud this morn, but the reverie of the happy youth would be rather different from his. Valentine would dream of the future, & youthful loves, & all under the inspiration of a beautiful clime! Ld. Beaconsfield no longer in the sunset, but the twilight, of existence, must encounter a life of anxiety, & toil; but this too, has, its romance, when he remembers that he labors, for the most gracious of beings.²⁰

As Prime Minister, Disraeli rarely missed an opportunity to send greetings to the Queen on special days. His gracious gestures drew equally gracious responses from Victoria. There follows a typical exchange, on the occasion of an anniversary of the Queen's birthday:

On this day, the writer withdraws for a moment, from the heat of party conflict, to breathe a wish, that this New Year in your Majesty's existence, may be serene; and though, when he remembers all your Majesty's trials, and all your sorrows, he will not speak of happiness, he trusts that You will be sustained by the recollection, that You live in the hearts and thoughts of many millions, though in none more deeply, or more fervently, than in the heart of him, who, with humble duty, pens these spontaneous lines.²¹

The Queen is very much touched by the extreme kindness of Mr. Disraeli's letter on the occasion of her birthday. At her age, & with the *chief* light, happiness and blessing of life gone, & so many anxieties, & the loss of so many friends to deplore, *great happiness* can hardly be hers any more. But she has much, very much, to be thankful for, & for wh̄ she trusts she is deeply grateful. She knows how to appreciate Mr. Disraeli's unvarying kindness & devotion wh̄ is a great help to her in her many trials & difficulties.²²

Not infrequently, Queen Victoria expressed her appreciation of Disraeli in highly laudatory terms. In the final paragraph of a letter she sent him during an international crisis, Victoria stated that "Lord Beaconsfield's career is one of the most remarkable in the Annals of her Empire & none of her Ministers have ever shown *her* more consideration & kindness than he has!"²³

²⁰ Hughenden Papers, Reel 41, B/XIX/C/269, February 14, 1880.

²¹ Hughenden Papers, Reel 150, R/I/A/Unnumbered, May 24, 1875 (copy of original).

²² Hughenden Papers, Reel 37, B/XIX/B/282, May 26, 1875.

²³ Hughenden Papers, Reel 38, B/XIX/B/735, March 29, 1877.

The defeat of Disraeli's party at the polls in 1880 was an especially severe blow to Queen Victoria. When the results of the election indicated that she might lose his services as Prime Minister, Victoria sent him the following telegram:

Very grateful for your kindness. What your loss to me as a Minister would be it is impossible to estimate but I trust you will always remain my friend to whom I can turn and on whom I can rely. Hope you will come to Windsor on Sunday in the forenoon and stop all day and dine and sleep.²⁴

Two days later, after Disraeli had notified her formally of the defeat of his party and the consequent need for him to resign the premiership, the Queen suggested that they correspond henceforth on a personal basis. In a letter marked "very private and confidential," she began:

Dear Lord Beaconsfield,

I cannot thank you for your most kind letter, wh^{ch} affected me much—in the 3^d person. It is too formal—& when we correspond wh^{ch} I hope we shall on many a *private* subject & without any one being astonished or offended—and even more without any one knowing abt^t it,—I hope it will be in this more easy form. . . .²⁵

The Queen and the deposed Prime Minister did indeed dispense with the third-person convention in their letters with one another until Disraeli died about a year later. During his terminal illness, Victoria wrote movingly in what was to be her last letter to Disraeli:

Dearest Lord Beaconsfield,

I send you a few of your favourite spring flowers, *this* time from the slopes here. I will send more from Osborne. I wd^d have preferred to come to see you but I think it is far better you sh^d be quite quiet & that I may then have the great pleasure of coming to see you when we come back from Osborne, wh^{ch} wont be long. You are very constantly in my thoughts, & I wish I could do any thing to cheer you & be of the slightest use or comfort. With earnest wishes for your uninterrupted progress in recovery.
Ever yours afftely²⁶

²⁴ Hughenden Papers, Reel 40, B/XIX/B/1649, April 7, 1880.

²⁵ Hughenden Papers, Reel 40, B/XIX/B/1651, April 9, 1880.

²⁶ Hughenden Papers, Reel 40, B/XIX/B/1717, April 5, 1881.

The Queen gave expression to her grief over Disraeli's death by the following entry in her journal on April 19, 1881:

Received the sad news that dear Lord Beaconsfield had passed away. I am most terribly shocked and grieved, for dear Lord Beaconsfield was one of my best, most devoted, and kindest of friends, as well as wisest of counsellors. His loss is irreparable to me and the country. To lose such a pillar of strength, at such a moment, is dreadful! Just this day year, Lord Beaconsfield left Windsor, having resigned, which he felt so much, and so did I, but I was full of hope he might be my Minister again. Received a most affecting letter from Lord Barrington. The end was a blessed one, but oh! that it should have come. Have asked Lord Rowton to come here as soon as he can, and he will do so to-morrow.²⁷

The microfilmed Hughenden collection appears on more than 150 reels, with the principal sections arranged in the following lettering sequence: A) Family, Domestic and Personal; B) Political; C) Honors and Titles; D) Mrs. Disraeli's Papers; E) Literary; F) Benjamin D'Israeli the Edler's Papers; G) Isaac D'Israeli's Papers; and H) Monypenny and Buckle's Papers.²⁸ Numerous subsections flesh out these broad categories. The Political section fills 65 reels and is regarded by many researchers as the most important, but all sections of the collection are valuable.

²⁷ Victoria, *Letters*, 2d ser., III, 210–11. Lord Rowton was at the bedside of Disraeli when he died.

²⁸ With the receipt of Section H of the collection during the autumn of 1971, the total number of reels rose to 155.