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I hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under my supervision by Dougald B. MacEachen
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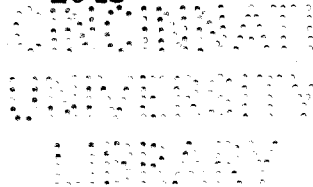
WILKIE COLLINS: VICTORIAN CRUSADER

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DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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WILKIE COLLINS, VICTORIAN CRUSADER

INTRODUCTION

The fame of Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) flashed across the Victorian sky with all the speed and evanescence of a meteor. During the decade of the 'sixties he was one of the greatest names in Victorian literature. He was read by all England and sought after by the leading British publishers of fiction. He moved in the most exclusive literary circles of the decade. After 1870, however, his literary abilities went into a marked decline, and his reputation gradually ebbed away, first with the critics, and then with the reading public. By the beginning of the twentieth century his name was almost forgotten. The reaction against Victorianism that characterized the first quarter of the twentieth century helped further to reduce his stature. One by one, with a few exceptions, his novels went out of print. The decay of his reputation was not halted to any considerable extent by Arthur Compton-Rickett's laudatory essay in The Bookman in 1912, by Walter C. Phillips's study of Collins as a 'sensation novelist' in 1919, nor by the appearance of Michael Sadleir's essay and partial bibliography in 1922. By the 'thirties Collins was known only as the author of a pair of 'thrillers,' The Woman in

White and The Moonstone.

Renewed interest in Collins dates from the first years of the 'thirties. In 1931 his literary art was studied in detail in a published dissertation by Hans Sehlbach, a German scholar; his place in the development of the English novel was discussed by Malcolm Elwin in The London Mercury, and an attempt at a biography was made by S. M. Ellis. The following year more interest in Collins was aroused by T. S. Eliot's discussion in his Selected Essays of the influence of Dickens and Collins on each other, by Walter de la Mare's study of Collins's early novels, and by the stimulating pages devoted to him in Lovett and Hughes's The History of the Novel in England. In 1939 his influence on Dickens and Trollope was investigated by H. J. W. Milley, and some interesting new biographical items were brought to light by Clyde K. Hyder. In 1940 extended bibliographies were made available by M. L. Parrish and by Dorothy Sayers; Miss Sayers also promised a book on Collins. In 1943 twelve pages were given to Collins by Edward Wagenknecht in his Cavalcade of the English Novel, and in 1945 the literary relations between Dickens and Collins were again investigated by Professor Earle Roscoe Davis. During the last few years several new editions of The Woman in White and The Moonstone have been published in Britain and America, and a movie version of The Woman in White is scheduled to appear in America in the near future. Wilkie Collins is definitely enjoying a revival.

Interest in Collins has been stimulated by the present-day vogue of the detective and mystery novel, in the development of which he is acknowledged to have played a leading part, by his intimate relations with Dickens and the Dickens circle, by the aura of romance and mystery that surrounds his personal life, and by a growing recognition of his influence on such a variety of writers as Dickens,¹ Trollope, Miss Braddon, Miss Bertha Clay, Mrs. Henry Wood, Miss Marie Corelli, Hall Caine, Hardy, Meredith, Stevenson,² Conrad, Conan Doyle, Edgar Wallace,³ Richard Blackmore and Arnold Bennett.⁴ The element of social and moral purpose in Collins's writings, however, has received scant attention and has been generally deplored. Yet this aspect of his work is an important one and without a consideration of it no picture of Collins as man and writer can be regarded as complete. Collins took himself quite seriously as a writer

¹
H.J.W. Milley, "Wilkie Collins and A Tale of Two Cities," Modern Language Review, Vol. 34 (Oct., 1939), pp. 525-34, and "The Eustace Diamonds and The Moonstone," Studies in Philology, Vol. 36, (Oct., 1939), pp. 651-63, and his unpublished Yale dissertation, The Achievement of Wilkie Collins and His Influence on Dickens and Trollope, 1941.

²
Robert Morse Lovett and Helen Sard Hughes, The History of the Novel in England, Boston, 1932, p. 227.

³
Malcolm Elwin, Victorian Wallflowers, London, 1934, p. 155.

⁴
Edward Wagenknecht, Cavalcade of the English Novel, N.Y., 1943, p. 243.

of fiction with a purpose, and the various social crusades he undertook were taken seriously by some contemporary reviewers. This study proposes to examine the element of social purpose in Collins's work, to relate it as far as possible to its background and its subsequent history, and will attempt to form a critical judgment of its worth and estimate its probable effect. The study is therefore primarily concerned with the social and moral ideas and attitudes of Collins's work, and only incidentally with his literary achievement. It is felt that such a study may not only be of interest to the student of the Victorian period, for Collins was one of the forces operating on the Victorian mind and at the same time he reflected characteristic reactions, but also a contribution, even if a small one, to the history of ideas in nineteenth-century life, and to the history of the social novel in England after Dickens. To a certain extent it is also a study of the profound influence of Dickens on his younger friend and companion.

The first chapter will be devoted to a general survey of Collins's various attempts to affect the feelings of his readers. Such a review will help to bring together his social propaganda and provide an opportunity for considering those aspects of it that occur only infrequently and briefly. In the chapters that follow the main features

of the didactic content of Collins's writing will be discussed under headings that best serve the interests of unity and order.

CHAPTER I

WILKIE COLLINS, SOCIAL CRITIC AND REFORMER

Wilkie Collins's career as a novelist began in 1850 when he published Antonina, a novel about Rome in the Fifth Century. The story, although not a financial success, received enough praise from the reviewers to encourage Collins in his ambition to be a writer. In the following year Collins became acquainted with Dickens, and the acquaintance rapidly ripened into a close friendship that lasted until Dickens's death in 1870. The influence of Dickens soon made itself manifest; Mr. Wray's Cash-Box,¹ a novelette published by Collins early in 1852, is thoroughly Dickensian in manner and characterization. With Mr. Wray's Cash-Box Collins abandoned the past as a source of fiction materials and devoted himself to the romance of contemporary life, the "romance of the here and now".² One of the special features of Dickens's "romance of the here and now" was social criticism and social propaganda. With the genre Collins adopted also the special feature. He became a critic of contemporary society as well as a novelist of

¹ W. Wilkie Collins, Mr. Wray's Cash-Box: Or, The Mask and the Mystery: A Xmas Sketch, Richard Bentley, London, 1852.

² The phrase is applied to the characteristic productions of the "school of Dickens" by Walter C. Phillips in his Dickens, Reade and Collins, Sensation Novelists, New York 1919. See Section III, "The School of Dickens".

contemporary life.

Of criticism of the age, of reformatory interest, of expression of social sympathies and antipathies, there is an abundance in Collins's work from first to last. Among the many essays and sketches which Collins contributed to Dickens's Household Words and All The Year Round there are several that seek to remedy minor abuses or to advocate some cause. In "Highly Proper!" he is critical of the snobbery of those private schools that refused to accept certain children, specifically the children of actors, because their background was not socially acceptable. He praises the British people for their victories "over the barbarous forces led by these three rampant commanders, General Ignorance, General Prejudice, and General Folly," but reminds them that much remains to be done. "Hardly a week passes," writes the earnestly progressive author, "without some event happening, which, for the moment, staggers the belief of Englishmen in their own progress, and warns them that they have not gained ground enough, even now, to warrant any slackening of their pace on the forward march."¹

In another article, boldly titled "Strike!" he

¹"Highly Proper!," Household Words, Vol. XVIII (Oct. 2, 1858), p. 361.

attempts to arouse that long-suffering, docile body, the general consuming public, into concerted action against a number of abuses:

"We travel every day in peril of being burnt to death (In the trains of that time no provision was made to keep sparks from the locomotive from flying into the coach cars.); we sit in theatres with aching neck and bones, and are fleeced in them by box-opening harpies after we have paid our admission money; we pay bi-annually for the teaching and boarding of two of our small children a sum which equals a year's income for a clerk and his family - whose fault is it, really and truly, that these grievances and dozens of others that might be mentioned, are not speedily and completely redressed? Has it actually come to this, that the English public has a capacity of common grumbling, but no capacity of common action for the promotion of social reforms? ... Public opinion, in these latter days, is apathetically satisfied with much talking and much writing; it shifts all doing to the shoulders of any chance deputy who may, ¹ or may not, turn up to accept practical responsibilities."

²
 "Sure to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise" exposes amusingly the kind of advertisements in the cheaper popular magazines

¹

"Strike!", Household Words, Vol. XVII, (Febr. 6, 1858), p. 172.

²

"Sure to be Healthy, Wealthy and Wise", All the Year Round, Vol. I (April 30, 1859). Collins returned to his attack on the methods and motives of contemporary advertising in his novel No Name, first published in All the Year Round in 1862. The swindler Captain Wragge has invented a cure-all pill, the sale of which he is pushing by means of the very newest advertising appeals:

"They can't get rid of me and my Pill - they must take us. There is not a single form of appeal in the whole range of human advertisement, which I am not making to the unfortunate public at this moment. Hire the last new novel - there I am, inside the boards of the book. Send for the last new song - the instant you open the leaves, I drop out of it. Take a cab - I fly in at the window in red. Buy a box of tooth-powder at the chemists - I wrap it up for you in blue. Show yourself at the theatre - I flutter

of the day that attempted to cheat the reader out of a few shillings by offering a complete psychological analysis of character from handwriting, or by guaranteeing a large weekly profit on the sale of certain products, or by offering to teach a sure method of finding the ideal husband or wife - in a word, the kind of advertisements still found in pulp magazines. In "A Petition to the Novel Writers"¹ Collins makes a humorous attack on the conventional heroes and heroines in current novels. "A Shockingly Rude Article"² pleads amusingly for a greater use of women as villains and bores in novels. "Give Us Room!"³ attacks crinolines in a similar jocular manner because of their inconvenience and expense, and satirizes the current custom of inviting too many to a party. "Dramatic Grub Street"⁴ attributes the low state of drama

down on you, in yellow. The mere titles of my advertisements are quite irresistible. Let me quote a few from last week's issue. Proverbial Title: - 'A Pill in Time, saves Nine.' Familiar Title: - 'Excuse me, how is your Stomach?' Patriotic Title: - 'What are the three characteristics of a true-born Englishman?' His Hearth, his Home, and His Pill. Title in the form of a nursery dialogue: - 'Mamma, I am not well.' 'What is the matter, my pet?' 'I want a little pill.' .."No Name, Vol. III, pp. 362-63.

¹ Wilkie Collins, My Miscellanies, Sampson, Low, London, 1863. "A Petition to the Novel Writers" was first published in Household Words, Dec. 6, 1856.

² Ibid. From Household Words, Aug. 28, 1858.

³ Ibid. From Household Words, Febr. 13, 1858.

⁴ Collins, My Miscellanies, "Dramatic Grub Street" was first published in Household Words, March 6, 1858.

in Collins's day to the producers' practice of paying small sums to dramatists and large sums to actors and managers. "To Think or Be Thought For"¹ is Collins's revolt against the incubus of traditional judgment in art criticism. In "Laid Up in Lodgings" he reflects sympathetically on the miserable lot of the maid of all work:

"Young as she is, she has drudged so long over the wickedest ways of this world, without one leisure moment to look up from the everlasting dirt on the road at the green landscape around, and the pure sky above, that she has become hardened to the saddest, surely, of all human lots before she is yet a woman grown. Life means dirty work, small wages, hard words, no holidays, no social station, no future, according to her experience of it. No human being ever was created for this. No state of society which composedly accepts this, in the cases of thousands, as one of the necessary conditions of its selfish comforts, can pass itself off as civilized, except under the most audacious of all false pretences."²

Behind the facade of pleasant humor in many of these essays in Household Words and All the Year Round there is evident a serious purpose, a desire to promote action and to bring about changes.

In the essays the social purpose is often direct and undisguised. In the novels, particularly in the earlier ones, it is sometimes only implicit and closely woven into the fabric of the story; in some of the later novels, the so-called 'purpose' novels, the criticism is all-important

¹
Ibid. "To Think or Be Thought For" was first published in Household Words, September 13, 1856.

²
Ibid., Vol. I, p. 129. ("Laid Up in Lodgings")

and the story becomes a mere vehicle for carrying it. The social propaganda in Mr. Wray's Cash-Box may not be immediately apparent but it is indisputably there. This little tale of a virtuous but impoverished, retired small-parts actor, his loving and dutiful daughter, and their faithful companion, the awkward carpenter, who are freed from their financial worries and made happy by a philanthropic squire is really an illustration of Dickensian benevolence in action. The moral is drawn unconsciously by each reader; the spectacle of sympathy, kindness and benevolence at work is expected to engender like virtues in the reader. On the other hand, Man and Wife, the first of Collins's avowedly 'purpose' novels, states in its preface that the book "aspires to afford what help it may towards hastening the reform of certain abuses which have been too long suffered to exist among us unchecked."¹ The propaganda is undisguised.

In Basil, Collins's second full-length novel, he satirizes the vulgar, socially ambitious tradesman that the Victorian age produced in such numbers, in the character of Mr. Sherwin. He is the type of the nouveau riche businessman, who, having advanced his material interests sufficiently, becomes ridiculously anxious to cut an impressive social

¹ Wilkie Collins, Man and Wife: A Novel, 3 Vols., F.S. Ellis, London, 1870, 3rd edition, p. vii. First published in Harper's Weekly, 1869-70. In England it appeared serially in Cassell's Magazine, 1870.

figure. He has sent his daughter to a school

"where it was a rule to take in nothing lower than the daughter of a professional man - they only waived the rule in my case - the most genteel school perhaps in all London! A drawing-room-department day once every week - the girls taught how to enter a room and leave a room with dignity and ease - a model of a carriage door and steps, in the back drawing-room, to practise the girls (with the footman of the establishment in attendance) in getting into a carriage and getting out again, in a lady-like, graceful manner!..."¹

He has a villa built for himself in one of the very newest London suburbs. In the villa,

"Everything was oppressively new. The brilliantly-varnished door cracked with a report like a pistol when it was opened; the paper on the walls, with its gaudy pattern of birds, trellis-work, and flowers, in gold, red, and green on a white ground, looked hardly dry yet; the showy window-curtains of white and sky-blue, and the still showier carpet of red and yellow, seemed as if they had come out of the shop yesterday; the round rosewood table was in a painfully high state of polish; the morocco-bound picture books that lay on it, looked as if they had never been moved or opened since they had been bought; not one leaf even of the music on the piano was dogs-eared or worn. Never was a richly-furnished room more thoroughly comfortless than this - the eye ached at looking round it. There was no repose anywhere. The print of the Queen, hanging lonely on the wall, in its heavy gilt frame, with a large crown at the top, glared on you; the paper, the curtains, the carpet, glared on you; the books, the wax-flowers in glass-cases, the chains in flaring chintz-covers, the china-plates on the door, the blue and pink glass vases and cups ranged on the chimney-piece, the over-ornamented chiffoniers with Tonbridge toys and long-necked smelling bottles on their upper shelves, all glared on you. There was no look of shadow, shelter, secrecy, or retirement in any one nook or corner of those four gaudy walls...."²

¹ W. Wilkie Collins, Basil: A Story of Modern Life, 3 Vols., Richard Bentley, London, 1852, I, p. 223.

² Collins, Basil, I, pp. 199-200.

Wealth without taste, social pretension without good breeding - that is what Mr. Sherwin represents.

In Hide and Seek, a novel dedicated to Dickens which Malcolm Elwin paradoxically calls "one of the most successful imitations of Dickens's own inimitable style,"¹ Collins attempted the achievement of a number of social and moral aims in the course of telling his story. In the opening chapter he campaigns for cheerful English Sundays by elaborately describing a cheerless Sunday in the household of Mr. Thorpe. The chief victim of the dismal Evangelical Sunday routine is Mr. Thorpe's six-year old son, Zack. The unfortunate Zack is forced to submit to a two-hour church service, listen to a sermon on justification by faith, and entertain himself for the rest of the day as best he can with Pilgrim's Progress and the Life of Moses. Secular works like Jack and the Bean Stalk are strictly forbidden to him, now^r may he even indulge in the frivolity of playing horse with a cane.

As the Puritanical father, Mr. Thorpe, whose somber religious system is responsible for the gloomy Sunday regimen carried out in his house, will be discussed in a later chapter, it will be sufficient to say here that as an individual he incorporates in himself all the unlovely

¹ Malcolm Elwin, Victorian Wallflowers, London, 1934, p. 215. ("Wallflower the Sixth: Wilkie Collins")

aspects of Victorian Evangelicalism carried to extremes and that as a father he thwarts all his son's natural aspirations and ambitions. Collins's descriptions of Mr. Thorpe and his Sabbatarianism are all the more effective as social criticism in that he leaves them without comment.

Collins's impatience with the social restrictions that the middle-class evangelical spirit had imposed on the English Sunday finds expression again, in a much later novel. This time he is speaking as author:

"But two of the occupations in which people may indulge on week days are regarded as harmless on Sunday by the obstinately anti-Christian tone of feeling which prevails in this matter, among the Anglo-Saxon race. It is not sinful to wrangle in religious controversy; and it is not sinful to slumber over a religious book."

He then goes on to describe briefly a Sunday evening in the household of Sir Patrick Lundie and to accuse the British people of moral cowardice:

"The ladies at Ham Farm practised the pious observance of the evening on this plan. The seniors of the sex wrangled in Sunday controversy; and the juniors of the sex slumbered over Sunday books. As for the men, it is unnecessary to say that the young ones smoked when they were not yawning and yawned when they were not smoking.... Every person in the house felt the oppression of the senseless social prohibitions which they had imposed on themselves. And yet every person would have been scandalized, if the plain question had been put: You know this is a tyranny of your own making, you know you really don't believe in it - you know you don't really like it - why do you submit? The freest people on the civilized earth are the only people on the civilized

¹ Dickens also campaigned against Sabbatarianism. See, for instance, his early Sunday Under Three Heads (1836).

earth who dare not face that question."¹

Mr. Thorpe and the cheerless Sunday are left to speak for themselves in Hide and Seek, but in his description of a new London suburb Collins steps forward and offers some author's comments on the keeping-up-with-the-Joneses spirit of the moderate-income middle-class group:

"To the looker-on at the system of life prevailing among the moderate incomes in England, the sort of existence which, with certain pleasant exceptions, that system embodies, seems in some aspects to be without a parallel in any other part of the civilized world. In what other country but ours is social enjoyment among the middle classes with small means, deliberately denuded of all genuine substance of its own, for the sake of making it the faint reflection of social enjoyment among the higher classes with large means? Is this done anywhere else but in England? And is it not obviously true - melancholy truth! - that, while the upper classes and the lower classes of our society have each their own characteristic and genuine recreations for leisure hours, adapted equally to their means and to their tastes, the middle classes, in general, have (to expose the sad reality) nothing of the sort?

"Life in the new suburb afforded proofs in plenty of this; as life does, indeed, everywhere else in England for the most part. To take an example from those eating and drinking recreations which absorb so large a portion of existence: - If the rich proprietors of the 'mansions' in the 'park', could give their grand dinners and be as prodigal as they pleased with their first-rate champagne, and their rare gastronomic delicacies; the poor tenants of the brick boxes could be just as happily and hospitably prodigal, in turn, with their porter-pot, their tea-pot, their plates of bread-and-butter, and their dishes of shrimps. On either side, these representatives of two pecuniary extremes in society, looked for what recreations they wanted with their own eyes, pursued those recreations within their own limits,

¹

Collins, Man and Wife, II, pp. 238-39.

and enjoyed themselves unreservedly in consequence. Not so with the moderate incomes: they, in their social moments, shrank absurdly far from the poor people's porter and shrimps; crawled contemptibly near to the rich people's rare wines and luxurious dishes; exposed their poverty in imitation by chemical champagne from second-rate wine merchants, by flabby salads and fetid oyster-patties from second-rate pastry-cooks; were, in no one of their festive arrangements, true to their incomes, to their order, or to themselves; and, therefore, never thoroughly enjoyed any hospitalities of their own affording - never really had any 'pleasure,' whatever notes of invitation might say to the contrary, in receiving their friends." 1

In Hide and Seek, too, Collins seeks to win from his readers sympathy for the artist, the physically handicapped, and the betrayed woman. His character study of a painter, Collins states in the preface, was

"done by a student who has had more opportunities than most men, out of the profession, of observing what the varieties of artist-life, and the eccentricities of artist-character, are really like, when they are looked at close. It may be necessary to mention this, by way of warning, as I have ventured on the startling novelty (in fiction) of trying to make an artist interesting, without representing him as friendless, consumptive, and penniless - to say nothing, of the more daring innovation of attempting to extract some amusement from his character, and yet not exhibiting him as a speaker of bad English, a reckless contractor of debts, and an utterly irreclaimable sot." 2

1
W. Wilkie Collins, Hide and Seek, 3 Vols., Richard Bentley, London, 1854, I, pp. 45-46.

2
Collins, Hide and Seek, p. viii. Collins continued his efforts to win sympathy for artists in later novels. The narrator of the stories reprinted in After Dark (1856) is a virtuous, itinerant portrait painter, while the heroes of The Woman in White (1860) and 'I Say No' (1884) are both drawing instructors. A tribute to his father, a coast-and-cottage painter, is slyly planted in a passage in The Black Robe (1881). Among the paintings in the gallery of the late Lady Berrick were "...masterly works of modern art. With few exceptions they had been produced by

Madonna, the deaf-and-dumb heroine of Hide and Seek, is there for a moral purpose, the author assures his readers in a note at the end of Volume I:

"I know of nothing which more firmly supports our faith in the better parts of human nature, than to see - as we all may - with what patience and cheerfulness the heavier bodily afflictions of humanity are borne, for the most part, by those afflicted; and also to note what elements of kindness and gentleness the spectacle of these afflictions constantly develops in the persons of the little circle by which the sufferer is surrounded. Here is the ever bright side, the ever noble and consoling aspect of all human calamity; and the object of presenting this to the view of others, as truly, as worthily, and as tenderly as in him lies, seems to me to be a fit object for any writer who desires to address himself to the best and readiest sympathies of his readers." ¹

Leonard Frankland, the hero of The Dead Secret (1857), and Lucilla, heroine of Poor Miss Finch (1872), who are blind, are similarly made the objects of humanitarian appeal.

The respectable Victorian middle-class reader of Hide and Seek must have been shocked when he (or, more likely, she) learned near the end of the story that the lovely and virtuous Madonna was born out of wedlock. Her mother, Mary Grice, is the first of a number of betrayed or wronged women for whom Collins asks sympathy. The pattern is usually the same: they are more sinned against than sinning, their family and friends have cast them off, and they have repented. Their sad story is told with all the pathos necessary to gain for them the reader's forgiveness and sympathy.

the matchless English landscape painters of half a century since... Turner, Constable, Collins, Danby, Callcott, Linell... the truest and finest landscape art that the world has yet seen." The Black Robe, II, p. 123.

¹ Ibid., Vol. I, p. 297.

Sarah Leeson in The Dead Secret (1857), like Mary Grice, had loved not wisely but too well. And her illegitimate daughter Rosamond, like Madonna, is the heroine of the story. Anne Sylvester in Man and Wife, who is illegitimate because the law has declared her parents' marriage null and void, has also stooped to folly. Collins pleads for her in words that should have smelled of the cant he professed to hate to even the most sentimental Victorian novel reader:

"Do your sympathies shrink from such a character as this?" [he asks the reader] "Follow her, good friends of virtue, on the pilgrimage that leads, by steep and thorny ways, to the purer atmosphere and the nobler life. Your fellow creature, who has sinned and has repented - you have the authority of the Divine Teacher for it - is your fellow-creature, purified and ennobled. A joy among the angels of Heaven - oh, my brothers and sisters of the earth, have I not laid my hand on a fit companion for You?"¹

2

In "The Parson's Scruple" it is for the woman who has been divorced from a brutal husband that Collins pleads. In The Two Destinies (1876) he comes to the defense of the woman who has unknowingly married a bigamist and has continued to live with him for their daughter's sake after she has discovered that her marriage is void. The two illegitimate Vanstone sisters in No Name (1862) have been

1

Collins, Man and Wife, I, p. 106.

2

In Wilkie Collins, The Queen of Hearts, 3 Vols., Hurst and Blackett, London, 1859. "The Parson's Scruple" was first published in Household Words, Jan. 1, 1859, as "A New Mind."

wronged by an English law that made it impossible for bastard children to inherit the property of parents who died intestate.¹

In The New Magdalen (1873) and The Fallen Leaves (1879), both 'purpose' novels, Collins took up the cause of the prostitute. In both cases it is society and circumstances that are to blame, rather than the individual. Mercy Merrick, the regenerated prostitute of The New Magdalen, says of herself, "Helplessly and hopelessly, without sin or choice of mine, I drifted, as thousands of other women have drifted, into the life which set a mark on me for the rest of my days."²

In these two novels Collins was publicizing his conviction that the prostitute was not irreclaimable, that if shown sympathy and given material assistance she could become a respectable member of society. The remedy for prostitution he suggested was a preventive one: society should take steps to advertise the sources of assistance,

¹

Collins's interest in 'unfortunate' women may have had its origin in a personal experience. He lived with a woman who was not his wife and had three children by her. See Clyde Hyder, "Wilkie Collins and The Woman in White," PMLA, Vol. 54, (March, 1939), pp. 297-303.

²

Wilkie Collins, The New Magdalen: A Novel, 2 Vols., Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1873. First published in Temple Bar, Oct., 1872-July, 1873.

such as Refuges, already available.¹ The potential prostitute did not know that society had help waiting for her: Mercy Merrick, who has been reclaimed for society by a Refuge, addresses society in behalf of her sisters:

"You, who have your solicitors to inform you of legal remedies, and your newspapers, circulars, and active friends, to sound the praises of charitable institutions continually in your ears - you, who possess these advantages, have no idea of the outer world of ignorance in which your fellow-creatures live. They know nothing (unless they are rogues accustomed to prey on society) of your benevolent schemes to help them. The purpose of public charities, and the way to discover and apply to them, ought to be posted at the corner of every street. What do we know of public dinners and eloquent sermons and neatly-printed circulars? Every now and then the case of some forlorn creature (generally of a woman), who has committed suicide, within five minutes' walk perhaps of an Institution which would have opened its doors to her, appears in the newspapers, shocks you dreadfully, and is then forgotten again. Take as much pains to make charities and asylums known among the people without money, as are taken to make a new play, a new journal, or a new medicine known among the people with money, and you will save many a lost creature who is perishing now." 2

In one of the episodes of A Rogue's Life,³ one of

1

In 1850 Dickens wrote a sympathetic leaflet "for distribution among women taken into police custody in the hope of directing them to a Home at Shepherd's Bush established by his friend Miss Coutts." Collected Papers I, Nonesuch Dickens, Bloomsbury, 1937, p. 79. The pamphlet, entitled An Appeal to Fallen Women and signed "Your Friend" is reprinted in Collected Papers I on pp. 79-81.

2

Collins, The New Magdalen, II, p. 210.

3

Wilkie Collins, A Rogue's Life, Richard Bentley and Son, London, 1879, pp. 64-65. First published in Household Words from March 1, 1856.

Collins's gayest novelettes, Collins suggests to his countrymen that all work and no play is making John Bull a very dull person. The Rogue, at this particular time the unconventional secretary of the Duskydale Literary and Scientific Institution, addresses his too serious fellow-Britons in this strain:

"My unhappy countrymen! (and thrice unhappy they of the poorer sort) - any man can preach to them, lecture to them, and form them into classes - but where is the man who can get them to amuse themselves? Anybody may cram their poor heads; but who will brighten their grave faces? Don't read story-books, don't go to plays, don't dance! Finish your long day's work and then intoxicate your minds with solid history, revel in the too-attractive luxury of the lecture-room, sink under the soft temptation of classes for mutual instruction! How many potent, grave and reverent tongues discourse to the popular ear in these siren strains, and how obediently and resignedly this same weary popular ear listens! What if a bold man spring up one day, crying aloud in our social wilderness, 'Play, for Heaven's sake, or you will work yourselves into a nation of automatons! Shake a loose leg to a lively fiddle! Women of England! drag the lecturer off the rostrum, and the male mutual instructor out of the class, and ease their poor addled heads of evenings by making them dance and sing with you. Accept no offer from any man who cannot be proved, for a year past, to have systematically lost his dignity at least three times a week, after office hours. You, daughters of Eve, who have that wholesome love of pleasure which is one of the greatest adornments of the female character, set up a society for the promotion of universal amusement, and save the British nation from the lamentable social consequences of its own gravity!' Imagine a voice crying lustily after this fashion - what sort of echoes would it find? - Groans?"

Evangelical cant, Evangelical tract distributing, and Evangelical social welfare activities are savagely satirized in The Moonstone in the character of Miss Clack, the self-righteous moral meddler. Miss Clack, with her

gospel of moral tidiness and her practice of moral interference, represents benevolence in its most undesirable form. The pseudo-philanthropist in The Moonstone, Godfrey Ablewhite, who practices philanthropy because it flatters his ego to do so, is the idol of busybody dispensers of organized charity like Miss Clack and receives even rougher treatment than she does. Here is the sarcastic description of him given by Gabriel Betteredge, the faithful steward:

"If you ever subscribed to a Ladies' Charity in London, you know Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite as well as I do. He was a barrister by profession; a ladies' man by temperament; and a good Samaritan by choice. Female benevolence and female destitution could do nothing without him. Maternal societies for confining poor women; Magdalen societies for rescuing poor women; strong-minded societies for putting poor women into poor men's places, and leaving the men to shift for themselves; - he was vice-president, manager, referee to them all. Whenever there was a table with a committee of ladies sitting round it in council, there was Mr. Godfrey at the bottom of the board, keeping the temper of the committee, and leading the dear creatures along the thorny ways of business, hat in hand. I do suppose this was the most accomplished philanthropist (on a small independence) that England ever produced. As a speaker at charitable meeting the like of him for drawing your tears and your money was not easy to find." 1

Collins is satisfied with letting Miss Clack make a fool of herself and with disappointing her of her legacy, but for Godfrey Ablewhite, the hero of Evangelical ladies' charitable organizations, he reserves the opprobrium of the

1
 Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone, 3 Vols., Tinsley Bros., London, 1868, I, pp. 108-09. First published in All the Year Round from Jan. 4, 1868.

villain's role. Under cover of his philanthropy Godfrey leads a life of dissipation and fraud that culminates in his theft of the fatal 'moonstone.'

In Man and Wife, the first of his unmistakably 'purpose' novels, Collins strove to mobilize public opinion against what he called "the recent unbridled development of physical cultivation in England,"¹ in other words, against athletic sports. Collins saw, or thought he saw, a connection between "the recent spread of grossness and brutality among certain classes of the English population"² and the growing interest in sports. In the novel he attempted to persuade his readers that the new emphasis on sports, particularly in the universities, was encouraging the neglect of moral training, and that the general interest in sports was promoting a coarsening of national manners, "a lessening regard for the gentler graces of civilized life, and a growing admiration for the virtues of the aboriginal Briton."³ The plot drove home with implacable Collins logic the thesis that a man whose moral development has been neglected because of too much interest in sports will, when faced by a strong temptation, be unable to resist it.

¹ Collins, Man and Wife, p. ix.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., I, p. 90.

Man and Wife was a 'purpose' novel with a vengeance. It sought not only to illustrate the evil moral, social and physical results of athleticism, but also to arouse sympathy for the repentant 'fallen woman,' to publicize the dangerous anomalies of the marriage laws of Great Britain and Ireland, and to expose the unfairness of the laws regulating a married woman's property rights.

The cause of the repentant 'fallen woman' he had taken up before. Legal reform had also been essayed, although inconspicuously, in an earlier novel, No Name, in which the two illegitimate daughters of the Vanstones are deprived of an inheritance because of the law's failure to safeguard the rights of children born out of wedlock when their parents had died intestate. In Man and Wife Collins showed the British public how, in certain cases, an unscrupulous, ambitious husband could take advantage of the inconsistencies of British marriage laws for Ireland to rid himself of his wife and marry another woman, and how the dangerous looseness of Scotch marriage laws, which recognized consent or the appearance of consent as sufficient for constituting a marriage, could lead to all kinds of complications and abuses. In the story of Hester Dethridge,¹ a particularly fine example of Collins's narrative skill, he showed how a worthless husband could lawfully deprive

¹ Collins, Man and Wife, Chapter 59.

his wife of her property and earnings without her being able to lift a finger against him, legally speaking.

Another legal injustice was exposed in The Law and the Lady (1875), this time the injustice of the Scotch court verdict of 'Not Proven.' In this novel, he showed how this peculiar verdict, a compromise between 'Guilty' and 'Not Guilty', left an innocent defendant's reputation under a shadow and seriously jeopardized his future happiness.

In "Fatal Fortune", a short story published in All the Year Round in October, 1874, Collins attacked the administration of England's lunacy laws, the alleged inadequacy of which made it possible for interested parties to have a sane person declared mad and confined in a private insane asylum. Charles Reade had already taken up this theme in his novel Hard Cash (1863) and in the press. In The Evil Genius (1886) Collins suggested that "sexual frailty" on the part of a husband was not a sufficient reason for divorce and that the wife ought to forgive an unfaithful husband "on the condition of true repentance" for the sake of keeping the family together. The Legacy of Cain (1888) was an illustration of the thesis that a good environment cancels out inherited bad tendencies.

In The Black Robe (1881) Collins undertook one of his less creditable crusades - an attempt to stir up English religious prejudice against the Jesuits. In this novel

the Jesuits were depicted as scheming, unscrupulous materialists whose primary object was to increase the power and wealth of the Roman Catholic Church. Once more the old slander that the Jesuits held the principle that the end justifies the means was taken from the dusty files of religious controversy and put to work in a story starring Father Benwell, an imaginary English Jesuit Provincial, as villain. Collins's readers were asked to believe that the English Jesuits of his day were willing to spend much time and money in an effort to restore to their Church an estate that had once been an abbey, and that they would not hesitate to descend to any kind of mean trickery in order to accomplish their ends.

Scarcely more creditable was Collins's effort in Heart and Science (1883) to discredit science and to brand physiologists who made experiments on living animals as heartless seekers after their own glory. The impression Collins wanted to leave with his reading public by means of this book was that science developed a spirit of intellectual pride and ostentation in its devotees rather than a spirit of humility, and that the pursuit of scientific studies killed the affections. As in Man and Wife, so in Heart and Science Collins created characters to demonstrate how his thesis works out in practice. Mrs. Gallilee, a devotee of science whose "scientific education left her

as completely in the dark, where questions of sentiment are concerned, as if her experience of humanity, in its relation to love, had been experience in the cannibal islands,"¹ degenerates progressively and devotes all her energy to schemes for the breaking up of a love affair between her son and her ward, whose inheritance she wants for herself. In a similar manner, Dr. Benjulia, the vivisectioning scientist, whose humanity has been stifled by the "habitual practice of cruelty," goes down the road to social isolation and suicide.

It would seem that as Collins grew older, he found less and less to please him in contemporary English life, and his criticism became correspondingly sharper. One of the characters in Armadale (1866), Mr. Pedgift, Sr., remarks in a letter to his son, Pedgift, Jr.,: "We live, Augustus, in an age eminently favorable to the growth of all roguery which is careful enough to keep up appearances."² In Man and Wife Collins accuses the age of egotism:

"One of the besetting aims of his time [the time of his elderly spokesman, Sir Patrick Lundie] was the habitual concealment of our better selves - upon the whole, a far less dangerous national error than the habitual advertisement of our better selves, which has

¹
 Wilkie Collins, Heart and Science: A Story of the Present Time, 3 Vols., Chatto and Windus, London, 1883, I, p. 68. First published serially in Belgravia, 1882.

²
 Wilkie Collins, Armadale, 2 Vols., Peter Fenelon Collier, New York, n.d., II, p. 565. First published serially in The Cornhill Magazine and Harper's Magazine, 1864-65.

Become the practice, publicly and privately, of society in this age." ¹

In the same book, in describing Julius Delamayn, athlete Geoffrey Delamayn's cultured brother, he attacks contemporary English taste with awkward irony:

"...This degenerate Briton could digest books - and couldn't digest beer. Could learn languages - and couldn't learn to row. Practiced the foreign vice of perfecting himself in the art of playing on a musical instrument - and couldn't learn the English virtue of knowing a good horse when he saw him. Got through life (Heaven only knows how!) without either a biceps or a betting-book. Had openly acknowledged, in English society, that he didn't think the barking of a pack of hounds the finest music in the world. Could go to foreign parts and see a mountain which nobody had ever got to the top of yet - and didn't instantly feel his honour as an Englishman involved in getting to the top of it himself. Such people may, and do, exist among the inferior races of the Continent. Let us thank Heaven, sir, that England never has been, and never will be, the right place for them!" ²

And the faithful old clerk's tirade against "the new ideas," in The Law and the Lady, sounds very much like the author of Heart and Science:

"'Oh, the new ideas! the new ideas! By all manner of means, Valeria, let us have the new ideas! The old morality's all wrong, the old ways are all worn out. Let's march with the age we live in. Nothing comes amiss to the age we live in....Let's go and get crammed with ready-made science at a lecture - let's hear the last new professor, the man who has been behind the scenes at Creation, and knows to a T how the world was made, and how long it took to make it. There's the other fellow too; mind we don't forget the modern Solomon who has left his proverbs behind him - the brand-new

¹ Collins, Man and Wife, I, pp. 215-16.

² Ibid., I, p. 279.

philosopher who considers the consolations of religion in the light of harmless playthings, and who is kind enough to say that he might have been all the happier if he could only have been childish enough to play with them himself. Oh, the new ideas, the new ideas, what consoling, elevating, beautiful discoveries have been made by the new ideas! We were all monkeys before we were men, and molecules before we were monkeys! And what does it matter? And what does anything matter to anybody?..."¹

Considering the role the industrial and agricultural laborer plays in Victorian social and economic history, it is odd that he occupies so small a place in Collins's novels. At one time or another Collins championed the cause of the 'fallen woman,' the street walker, illegitimate offspring, the artist, the actor, the maid of all work, the poor seamstress,² and even the animals, yet he showed little interest in the cause of the farm and factory wage earner. It is true that the reader learns that Julian Grey, the hero of The New Magdalen, has been working to improve the lot of the agricultural laborer during a short residence as a substitute rector in a country parish, yet the laborer himself remains well in the background; he is seen only at second-hand. The general impression left by a reading of Collins's novels is that his sympathies were all-embracing,

¹ Wilkie Collins, The Law and the Lady, 3 Vols., Chatto and Windus, London, 1875, I, pp. 148-49. First published in serial form in The London Graphic from March 13, 1875.

² Collins, The Queen of Hearts, "The Diary of Anne Rodway." This story appeared originally in Household Words, July 19-26, 1856.

that the author was always ready to espouse the cause of the poor and the underprivileged. However, in practice there were gaps in Collins's humanitarianism. His sympathies were special sympathies. He wrote no novel with a lower-class background and with a cast of characters drawn exclusively from the lower classes. His heroes are usually either gentlemen without money who acquire money (by a legacy or by marriage) before the novel is over, or gentlemen who have money to begin with.

Collins, the son of a successful and respectable painter, began and ended his career as a member of the middle classes, and he deliberately wrote for a rank-conscious, wealth-worshipping, middle-class reading public. Most of his main characters are the kind of people he and his readers were interested in, people whose ancestors had been given a baronetcy because of their money-making abilities, or whose wealth put them in the upper middle classes. Collins and his Victorian readers had a weakness for gentlemen, particularly the newer type of gentleman whose gentility came from wealth. His heroes and heroines, for the most part, do not work; they live pleasantly on inherited incomes. When they are said to be engaged in a gainful occupation, the reader rarely sees them actually at work.

Business, however, is perfectly respectable in

the Collins world, for business produces money and money is overwhelmingly important in a Collins story. ¹ Exact incomes are frequently given. Nearly everyone of his plots involves a struggle for property, and the reward of virtue is usually financial security. Collins's conscious or unconscious identification of himself with the interests of the middle-classes did not prevent him from ridiculing Victorian mammonism when he chose. Sir Joseph Graybrooke, for instance, deciding to reduce his daughter's dowry from £40,000 to £20,000 is unwittingly making fun of the middle-class love of money:

"'Half my fortune!' he repeated. 'It's parting with half of my life; it's saying good-bye for ever to my dearest friend! My money has been such a comfort to me, Richard; such a pleasant occupation for my mind. I know no reading so interesting and so instructive as the reading of one's Banker's Book. To watch the outgoings on one side,' said Sir Joseph, with a gentle and pathetic solemnity, 'and the incomings on the other - the sad lessenings of the balance at one time, and the cheering and delightful growth of it at another - what absorbing reading! The best novel, that was ever written isn't to be mentioned in a breath with it. I cannot, Richard, I really can not, see my nice round balance shrink up to half the figure that I have been used to for a lifetime. It may be weak of me,' proceeded Sir Joseph, evidently feeling that² was not weak of him at all, 'but we all have our tender place, and my Banker's Book is mine.'..." ²

1

Collins's association with Dickens, although it broadened his social consciousness, would not have made him less money-conscious. Dickens, generous as he was, wore himself out building up a fortune.

2

Wilkie Collins, Miss or Mrs.? And Other Stories in Outline, Richard Bentley, London, 1873. Miss or Mrs.? originally appeared in the Xmas Number of the Graphic Illustrated Newspaper, 1871.

It is the well-to-do middle classes who form the solid foundation of Collins's fictional world. There is a sprinkling of aristocrats in it too, usually represented by baronets and dowagers. The lower classes are also present, but as family servants, not as artisans or factory laborers or agricultural workers. It is from the solid middle-class center of this world that Collins launches his criticism of contemporary society and champions this various causes, but the cause of the teeming proletariat can hardly be said to be one of them. From where he stands, the proletariat can scarcely be seen.

Along with Collins's lack of interest in the working classes went a kind of unconscious snobbery. It is true that there are characters in the novels who protest against class distinctions. Dame Dermody in The Two Destinies advises a young gentleman's mother: "...Dismiss from your mind, I implore you, the unworthy and unchristian prejudices of rank. Are we not all equal before God? Are we not all equal (even in this world) before disease and death?.." ¹ Sir Patrick Lundie, Collins's spokesman in Man and Wife, remarks to his servant Duncan:

"Am I in the habit of keeping any of my harmless fellow-creatures at a distance? I despise the cant of modern Liberalism - but it's not the less true that I

¹ Wilkie Collins, The Two Destinies, 2 Vols., Chatto and Windus, London, 1876. Originally published in Temple Bar, Jan.-Sept., 1876.

have, all my life, protested against the inhuman separation of classes in England. We are, in that respect, brag as we may of our national virtue, the most unchristian people in the civilized world!"¹

The launching of an occasional protest against class distinctions, however, did not keep Collins from being an unconscious snob. He is an unconscious snob when he suggests that there should be a lower order of clergy in the Established Church for the lower orders of society.² And he is either unconsciously a snob, or he is consciously catering to a snobbish public, when in My Lady's Money he reveals that Isabel, the poor but beautiful heroine, is really a clergyman's daughter and that Moody, the hero, a banker's son, and in The New Magdalen when he tells the reader that the mother of Mercy Merrick, the reformed prostitute, was a lady. At the most, he was opposed, not to rank or riches as such, but to the uncharitable distinctions they create.

As early as 1852, in the preface to Basil, Collins had made public his belief that it was "the novelist's vocation to do more than merely amuse" his readers.³ Although in this preface he was probably thinking primarily of the

¹
Collins, Man and Wife, II, p. 113.

²
W. Wilkie Collins, Rambles Beyond Railways: or, Notes in Cornwall Taken A-Foot, Richard Bentley, London, 1851, pp. 33-34.

³
Collins, Basil, p. xix.

moral purpose that Victorian standards demanded in a novel, his practice soon showed that he regarded the novel as a platform from which he might not only teach and preach morality but also scold, satirize and reform society. Collins was merely following a literary fashion of the time. The sobriety and earnestness of the prevailing Evangelical attitude toward life encouraged rather than discouraged the addition of serious purpose to fiction. Mrs. Trollope, Mrs. Gaskell, Charles Kingsley, Charles Reade, Charles Dickens, and a host of lesser authors used the novel for propaganda purposes. The mid-Victorian novel was pulpit, platform and editor's desk all in one. It was hardly possible for Collins to escape the influence of the general practice, especially when he was the close friend of both Dickens and Reade, the Victorian master-propagandists in the field of the novel. Nor had Collins any reason to fear that propaganda in a novel would keep it from being financially successful; novels with a purpose sold just as well as novels without one.

There were critics who did not regard it as a fault that Collins propagandized. W. J. Johnston thought it was one of Collins's virtues as a novelist that "nearly every one of his stories affects to teach some moral lesson or advocate some social reform."¹ Harry Quilter confessed

1 W. J. Johnston, "Wilkie Collins and the Novelists of the Day," Irish Monthly, Vol. 19 (April, 1891), p. 206.

that

"during my whole life his books have been to me the most enjoyable stories in the world, and what I have learned of sympathy and help for the weak, intolerance of pretense and Philistinism, compassion for the erring, and reverence for the good, has been taught me in no small measure by this sensation novelist." ¹

Swinburne, on the other hand, attributed the decline of Collins's powers after The Moonstone (1868) to the intrusion of purpose into his novels, and dismissed Collins's didacticism impatiently:

"And few will differ, I should think, from the suggestion that the inferiority or imperfection which we cannot ignore or deny in it [Collins's later work] was due to the lamentable illusion of which most unquestionably there are no traces in his earlier work - work which was always modestly, straightforwardly, and thoroughly loyal to the intellectual dictates of his instinct and the intelligent rules of his art. This illusion was the benevolent and maleficent fancy - the 'devout imagination' - that he might do good service as Dickens had done and was doing, in the lines of didactic fiction and reformatory romance. The shades of Mr. Bumble, Mr. Fang, Mr. Nupkins, Mr. Squers, Mr. Alderman Cute, Mr. Pecksniff, Mr. Creakle, Mr. Kenge, Mr. Vholes, Mr. Bounderby, Mr. Gradgrind, Mr. Merdle, and I know not how many more immortals, may well have disturbed the literary rest of their great creator's friend and disciple; but that was an evil day for his genius on which he bethought himself to try his hand at the correction of abuses, the castigation of follies, and the advocacy of reforms." ²

Swinburne was certainly wrong in declaring that there were no traces of didacticism in Collins's earlier novels. As has been shown, there are abundant traces of it from

¹
Harry Quilter, Preferences in Life, Art and Literature, London, 1892, pp. 247-48.

²
A. C. Swinburne, The Complete Works of, edited by Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, London, 1926, Vol. 15, pp. 298-99.

Mr. Wray's Cash-Box on; it is scattered throughout the earlier novels so unobtrusively, however, that a reader not looking for it could easily miss it. Swinburne was probably wrong too in laying the blame for the didacticism on Dickens exclusively. Collins did not write a novel with a sustained thesis until 1869, the year before Dickens's death. Malcolm Elwin says that in "Man and Wife," the manner, motive and style are absolutely Reade's; even his habit of adding a documentary appendix to a novel is imitated.¹"

Michael Sadleir attributes Collin's decline to over-writing and ill-health as well as to his decision to write propaganda novels, and he thinks that "as a novelist of indignation Collins is pathetic rather than blameworthy."² Malcolm Elwin compares Collins's propagandistic efforts unfavorably with those of Charles Reade:

"...Though Collins, like Reade, was inspired with the desire to 'put the world straight', he is frequently crabbed and conservative in his philosophy where Reade is liberal and progressive. Reade was the full-throated prophet, warming his hearers with genuine wisdom; Collins appears rather as a female reformer, vitiating good sense with sentiment and flirting her skirts in the faces of scoffers.... Too often Collins's indignation is of the 'gin-palace' variety; he dresses up as John the Baptist and succeeds only in looking like Mrs. Grundy with a beard. The truth is that he had no real inspiration

¹

Elwin, Victorian Wallflowers, p. 221.

²

Michael Sadleir, Excursions in Victorian Bibliography, London, 1922, p. 132.

to social reform, nor was he equipped with Reade's genius to sustain such encumbrances in the environment of a novel. His inability to create character was alone an insurmountable barrier to his success with the 'purpose' novel...." ¹

It is quite true that Collins had "no real inspiration to social reform." He took his inspiration at second-hand from Dickens and Reade. If he had not come under their influence he would in all likelihood have gone his own good-natured, broad-minded, pleasure-loving way and have confined himself to merely entertaining his readers with well told tales, leaving the ills of the age to others better fitted to cure them. The propaganda in Man and Wife, The New Magdalen, Heart and Science has a false ring because because its author is obviously attempting to whip himself into a state of righteous indignation. Furthermore, Collins's poor health and retired manner of life in his later years, isolated him from the close contact with the world that a reforming novelist needs. And lastly, Collins possessed neither the quality of mind nor the special talents necessary for making a successful blend of persuasive propaganda and interesting fiction.

It should not be forgotten, however, that Collins was aiming his propaganda at his contemporaries, not at posterity. Except for a number of his critics, his contemporaries did not seem to mind it. The Victorians had

¹

Elwin, Victorian Wallflowers, pp. 222-223.

as indiscriminating an appetite for moral and social purpose as for melodrama in their fiction. Collins's novels sold well to the last. In 1886, three years before his death, Collins was able to write to Wybert Reeve: "My new novel, now shortly to be published in book form, has appeared previously in various newspapers, and the speculator purchasing all serial rights in England and the colonies has given me the largest sum I have ever received for any of my books before."¹ Propaganda, it is clear, did not preclude continued financial success.

¹ Wybert Reeve, "Recollections of Wilkie Collins," Chambers's Journal, Vol. 83 (June, 1906), pp. 458-461, letter from Collins dated 1886.

CHAPTER II

COLLINS AND VICTORIAN MORAL CRITICISM

Wilkie Collins began his career as a novelist with the unstinted praise of the reviewers ringing in his ears. Few novelists have received more commendation for their first work than he received for Antonina (1850). Bentley's Miscellany devoted four pages of small print to reviewing the novel. "The author," it proclaimed soberly, "in his first work, has stepped into the first rank of romance writers."¹ The dignified Edinburgh² considered the historical novel worthy of two and a half pages of approving comment. The Dublin University Magazine found it "a very noble performance."³ The Gentleman's Magazine was as enthusiastic as Bentley's. It liked the history, lifted almost bodily from Gibbon, and it liked the sensational plot - murder, insanity, slaughter, famine and all. It thought the

¹ Bentley's Miscellany, Vol. XXVII, (1850), p. 378. The enthusiasm of the Miscellany is understandable as Bentley published the novel.

² Edinburgh Review, Vol. XCII (1850), pp. 483-486.

³ Dublin University Magazine, Vol. XXXV (1850), p. 662.

story" sufficient in itself to entitle its author to a place in the foremost rank."¹ None of these reviewers took any notice, it seemed, of Chapter V, Book Second, with its shockingly suggestive title, "The Bedchamber," and they made no mention of the meditated rape which it describes. Nor were they disturbed by the fact that Antonina, the heroine, is installed in a Roman farmhouse by her Gothic lover, Hermanric, and is there visited secretly by him every evening. There was no harm in these scenes, for not only were they described with due propriety, but they were represented as having happened in the fifth century and in Italy. The historical novel was in high favor with the reviewers at the time, and Collins had done a workmanlike, careful job in Antonina. So far as the reviews were concerned, he had started off on the right foot.

The winds that blew hot soon blew cold. Collins's second full-length novel, Basil, A Story of Modern Life (1852), received as much censure as Antonina had received praise. Basil is a rather morbid, sensational story of a young English gentleman who marries the daughter of a vulgar linen-draper but is kept apart from her for a year by the terms of an agreement made with the father. As the year draws to a close and Basil is about to take possession of his bride, he learns that she has left a party at her aunt's

¹

Gentleman's Magazine, N.S., Vol. XXXIII (1850), p. 408.

house in the company of Mannion, her father's chief clerk. He follows the two to an hotel, sees them enter, eavesdrops on their conversation and discovers that his beautiful bride has been debauched by the villainous Mannion. The rest of the story is concerned with the results of his attack on Mannion and the latter's diabolical campaign of revenge.

The 'seduction scene,' over which the Dublin University Magazine reviewer felt he had to drop a veil when he reached that point in his summary of the plot, is managed by Collins with what today seems the last word in discreetness:

"I listened; and through the thin partition, I heard voices - her voice, and his voice. I heard and I knew - knew my degradation in all its infamy, knew my wrongs in all their nameless [sic] horror. He was exulting in the satanic patience and secrecy which had brought success to the foul plot, foully hidden for months on months, foully matured on the very day before I was to have claimed as my loved and honoured wife, a wretch as guilty as himself!"¹

This passage, a later disclosure by Mannion himself of Margaret Sherwin's true nature and the conspiracy he had formed with her against Basil, and a number of casual references to Basil's brother's practice of keeping foreign mistresses shocked the reviewers. They proceeded to express their disapprobation in no ambiguous terms and to lecture the erring author. The Dublin University Magazine reviewer wrote:

"... [We] must confess that we would rather some

¹

Collins, Basil, II, p. 146.

catastrophe less startling had been selected as the turning-point...."

The novelist may use all of life for his purposes, except

sex:

"Fertile and comprehensive as is the domain of imaginative art, comprising the whole region of probabilities within its jurisdiction - all the different scenes in which man has been called upon to act or suffer, his power and his weakness, his wisdom and his folly, his struggles and vicissitudes, all in combinations infinitely diversified - it is not too much to expect that his vices, in the lowest abyss of their degradation, should not be selected as the subject of fiction."

The age has already decided what the true purpose of fiction

is:

"The taste of the age has settled the point, that its proper office is to elevate and purify, as well as to amuse; and unless the writer keep this object constantly before him, he can never hope to win a lasting popularity." 1

The Westminster Review is likewise scandalized by

Basil:

The incident which forms the foundation of the whole is absolutely disgusting; and it is kept so perseveringly before the eyes of the reader in all its hateful details, that all interest is destroyed in the loathing which it occasions....There are some subjects on which it is not possible to dwell without offence; and Mr. Collins having first chosen one which could neither please nor elevate, has rather increased the displeasure it excites by his resolution to spare us no revolting details." 2

And it likewise lets him know what is expected of him as a

novelist:

"The novelist has a high and holy mission, for his

1

Dublin University Magazine, Vol. XLI (1853), p. 78,79, and 77.

2

Westminster Review, American Edition, Vol. LX (N.S. IV, 1853), p. 196.

words frequently reach ears which will hear no others, and may convey a lesson to them which the preacher would enforce in vain; he should therefore be careful that, in his selection of subjects, he chooses such as may benefit rather than deteriorate his readers.... He must watch human nature in all its phases, - must acquaint himself with it both morally and physiologically - must know how to weigh the relative importance of events, and the effects of the same circumstances on different dispositions; and having learnt all this, he may then use the power he has gained to the noblest purposes, may beguile men into entertaining holier and juster thoughts than had ever before been theirs, and whilst apparently only ministering to the amusements of an idle hour, preach a sermon that may send his readers to their various walks of life with improved views and nobler aspirations." 1

The Athenaeum, a weekly that was to follow Collins's career with generally friendly interest, found Basil "painful and unpleasant." The Athenaeum, too, felt that Collins needed a little straightening out on the subject of art:

"Mr. Collins, as the son of an eminent painter, should know that the proper office of Art is to elevate and purify in pleasing....Basil is a tale of criminality, almost revolting from its domestic horrors. The vicious atmosphere in which the drama of the tale is enveloped, weighs on us like a nightmare. The jail, the gibbet, and the madhouse are the accessories of the story: - the adultery of a wife, the jealous torture of the injured husband, the ferocious thirst for revenge of the detected paramour, are its themes!" 2

In an interesting and revealing Dedication prefixed to Basil Collins had talked about his conception of his art

1

Ibid., p. 196.

2

Athenaeum, Dec. 4, 1852, p. 1323. The Athenaeum is not so much concerned with the morality of Basil as with its sensationalism. Collins has offended against good taste and the highest interests of civilization in making too extended a use of sensational incidents.

and had stated his position on morality in fiction somewhat belligerently. He evidently anticipated trouble, for he defended himself and attacked his enemies in advance. As the passage is important, it will be given in full:

"Nobody who admits that the business of fiction is to exhibit human life, can deny that scenes of misery and crime must of necessity, while human nature remains what it is, form part of that exhibition - nobody can assert that such scenes are either useless or immoral in their effect on the reader, when they are turned to a plainly and purely moral purpose. If I am asked why I have written certain scenes in this book, my answer is to be found in the universally-accepted truth which the preceding words express. I have a right to appeal to that truth; for I guided myself by it throughout. In deriving the moral lesson which the following pages contain, from those examples of error and crime which would most strikingly and naturally teach it, I determined to do justice to the honesty of my object by speaking out. In drawing the two characters, whose actions bring about the darker scenes of my story, I did not forget that it was my duty, while striving to pourtray them naturally, to put them to a good moral use; and at some sacrifices, in certain places, of dramatic effect (though I trust with no sacrifice of truth to Nature) I have shown the conduct of the vile, as always, in a greater or less degree, associated with something that is selfish, contemptible, or cruel in motive. Whether any of my better characters may succeed in endearing themselves to the reader, I know not; but this I do certainly know:- that I shall in no instance ever once cheat him out of his sympathies in favour of the bad.

"To those persons who dissent from the broad principles here adverted to; who deny that it is the novelist's vocation to do more than merely amuse them; who shrink from all honest and serious reference, in books, to subjects which they think of in private and talk of in public everywhere; who see covert implications where nothing is implied, and improper allusions where nothing improper is alluded to; whose innocence is in the word, and not in the thought; whose morality stops at the tongue, and never gets on to the heart - to those persons, I should consider it loss of time, and worse, to offer any further explanation of my motives, than the sufficient explanation which I have given already. I do not address myself to them in this book, and shall

never think of addressing myself to them in any other."¹

Collins, then, anticipated critical censure, and thereby invited it, by maintaining that, since "scenes of misery and crime" are part of life, they may have their place in fiction, provided they teach a moral lesson. Hoping to forestall charges of immorality, he declared his intention of teaching morality in his fiction, and he made the tactical error of branding as hypocrites those who disagreed with his theory of morality in art. It was really they who were immoral. In this Dedication Collins proclaimed himself a serious artist and moralist and declared war on moral criticism.

Not until ten years later, when he published a revised edition of Basil, did Collins answer those who found immorality in Basil. In an appendix to the Dedication, now considerably shortened, he contented himself with calling his critics prurient, and indulging in a little self-congratulation:

"Basil was the second work of fiction which I produced. On its appearance, it was condemned off-hand by a certain class of readers as an outrage on their sense of propriety. Conscious of having designed and written my story with the strictest regard to true delicacy, as distinguished from false, I allowed the prurient misinterpretation of certain perfectly innocent passages in this book to assert itself as offensively as it pleased, without troubling myself to protest against an expression of opinion which aroused in me no other feeling than a feeling of contempt. I knew that Basil had nothing to fear from

1

Collins, Basil, I, pp. xvii-xx.

pure-minded readers, and I left these pages to stand or fall on such merits as they possessed. Slowly and surely, my story forced its way, through all adverse criticism, to a place in the public favor which it has never lost since. Some of the most valued friends I now possess were made for me by Basil. Some of the most gratifying recognitions of my labors which I have received, from readers personally strangers to me, have been recognitions of the purity of this story, from the first page to the last." ¹

During the ten-year period between the first edition of Basil and the revised edition, Collins received both praise and blame from the reviewers, but none attacked him on the score of immorality. In reviewing The Woman in White in 1861 the Dublin University Magazine even noted "a pleasing purity of moral tone" in Collins's works. ² The Westminster Review gravely recommended Hide and Seek to serious families as offering a practical example of the evils of a restricting family life. ³ The British Quarterly Review, in a report on Collins's collection of reprinted stories called The Queen of Hearts, credited him with being a force for good. Although Collins did not aim to do more than amuse, the reviewer declared, "thanks to his sympathies with many of the better qualities of human nature, he

¹

Wilkie Collins, The Works of Wilkie Collins, Vol. 10, N.Y., Peter Fenelon Collier, n.d., pp. 7-8.

²

Dublin University Magazine, Vol. LVII (1861), p. 200.

³

Westminster Review, N.S., Vol. VI, (1854), p. 608.

achieves something much higher."¹

It is likely that Collins was a little frightened by the storm of protest Basil had raised among the reviewers. No novelist of the Victorian Age, no matter how daring, could afford to acquire the reputation of being an immoral writer, particularly at the beginning of his career, and no novelist could afford the continued hostility of the reviewers. Never again did Collins make seduction the catastrophe of a novel. He did not, however, omit seduction, bigamy or illegitimacy from his stories. He retained them in sly defiance of the moral reviewers, but until he had a secure reputation he gave them no prominence. The plot of Hide and Seek, Collins's third novel, involves a seduction that had occurred before the beginning of the story. Mary Grice's illegitimate child Madonna, is the deaf-and-dumb heroine of the novel. In order to forestall criticism on this point, and to show that he was really a very moral novelist Collins pointed out in a note on Chapter VIII the moral purpose Madonna served in the story. Such a character, he asked his readers to see, "enduring cheerfully the heavier bodily afflictions of humanity... supports our faith in the better parts of human nature."² His portrait of Mr. Thorpe in Hide and Seek, the narrow

¹
British Quarterly Review, Vol. XXXI (1860), p. 266.

²
Collins, Hide and Seek, I, p. 297.

Puritanical father whose strictness drives his son into secret vice, may have been aimed at the rigidly righteous reviewers.

Mr. 'Lorn' in "The Dean Hand," one of the stories in the collection The Queen of Hearts, is illegitimate and admits the fact in the form of a protest against the social ostracism it brought him: "I have no name and no father. The merciful law of Society tells me I am Nobody's son!"¹ In the same collection, in the story "A Plot in Private Life," James Smith attempts to seduce a merchant-captain's daughter and, failing in this, marries her bigamously. The incident is a relatively minor one and so escaped the wrath of the reviewers.

In The Dead Secret, Collins's fourth novel, Sarah Lesson is left with child by her deceased fiancé before the story begins. The illegitimate child, Rosamond, becomes the heroine of the novel. In The Woman in White, the novel that made Collins's fame and ensured the financial success of everything he wrote thereafter, two of the characters are illegitimate. Anne Catherick, the "woman in white," is the illegitimate daughter of the embittered Mrs. Catherick and Philip Fairlie. Sir Percival Glyde, who with Count Fosco supplies the villainy in the story, is the illegitimate son

¹
Collins, The Queen of Hearts, Vol. II, p. 213.

of Sir Felix Glyde and a married woman who lived with him as his wife. Mrs. Catherick, who reveals Sir Percival's parentage, is allowed by Collins to say, "It was not his fault that his father and mother were not married; and it was not his father's and mother's fault either,"¹ for Percival's mother, although deserted by her husband, was not able to get a divorce from him.

In the period, then, from 1852 to 1862, from Basil to No Name, Collins made a limited and unobtrusive use of aspects of reality that the criticism of the period objected to seeing in fiction. Taking himself seriously as a realistic novelist, therefore concerned with all phases of human life, Collins stubbornly but quietly employed the forbidden. Realism required it. Furthermore, his specialty, the melodramatic novel of suspense, was particularly concerned with the seamy side of life. Adultery, seduction, bigamy and illegitimacy were useful ingredients and were especially rich in interesting complications.

The ten-year peace between Collins and the reviewers came to an end when No Name, a novel embodying a protest against the law that disinherited the illegitimate children of a man who died intestate, appeared in book form in January, 1863. The plot of this complicated novel is briefly this: Andrew Vanstone when a young officer in Canada falls

¹ Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White, 3 Vols., London, Sampson Low, Son & Co., 1860, III, p. 203. First published serially in All the Year Round from Nov. 26, 1859.

in love with and marries a woman who, he later discovers, has led an infamous life prior to his acquaintance with her. Divorce being legally impossible, his code makes separation from her the only course open to him. He returns to London where he sinks into a life of dissipation from which he is rescued by the love of a girl of seventeen who agrees to live with him as his wife in order to save him from complete ruin.

From this union several children are born, only two of whom, Magdalen and Norah, survive. The father dies in a train accident without having made a will. Their mother's death in childbirth a few days afterwards leaves them orphans. As Norah and Magdalen are illegitimate, their parents' estate passes to the nearest heir, Andrew Vanstone's estranged brother Michael.

Norah accepts the situation resignedly, but the fiery, impulsive Magdalen resolves to devote her life to recovering the estate, by hook or by crook. Appeals to the uncle's sense of justice are in vain. He dies and his hostility to his brother's family and the Vanstone estate are inherited by his son Noel. With the help of a shrewd rascal, Capt. Wragge, and her own ingenuity, Magdalen succeeds in gaining the friendship of Noel. She passes herself off as Miss Bygrave, Capt. Wragge's niece. The foolish Noel is completely deceived and marries her, but

when he discovers how he has been duped by his cousin he makes a will cutting her off from all share in his estate. He dies soon after, and all of Magdalen's machinations have come to nothing. The remainder of the book details her further efforts to recover the estate by means of the most astounding deceits and subterfuges, all of which end in failure. She has a nervous breakdown, is cared for by a kindly sea-captain twice her age, recovers, and becomes his happy wife. The fortune has meanwhile dropped into her sister's lap by marriage with the latest heir.

This highly sensational story was presented to the public by Collins in the usual preface as a serious study of "the opposing influences of Good and Evil" in the character of Magdalen. The public might have been impressed, but the reviewers paid little attention to the claims of Collins's preface. The Quarterly Review lumped No Name together with twenty-three other "sensation novels" and attacked them for their lack of literary merit, their bad taste and their preoccupation with crime. The reviewer maintained that sensation novels "inculcate as a duty the first two or three stages towards vice - 'we first endure, then pity, then embrace'; and, in so doing, they have assisted in no small degree to prepare the way for the third."¹ In discussing No Name specifically, the reviewer

¹Quarterly Review, Vol. CXIII (1863), p. 495. ("Sensation Novels").

recognized the novel as "principally a protest against the law which determines the social position of illegitimate children," and far from sympathizing with Collins's point of view he argued that the situation pictured by Collins amounted to dangerous special pleading. He objected to the "stage-trick of exhibiting the virtuous concubine in contrast to the vicious wife."¹

The London Quarterly Review, in reviewing a later novel of Collins, stated the accusation against No Name in even stronger terms:

"Mr. Collins is a clever, and for a time is sure to be a popular, writer; and the moral tone of his books is, therefore, the more to be lamented. In No Name he has employed all his genius so to gild one of the greatest offenses a man can commit against the laws of morality and the well-being of society, as to hide its real character and excite sympathy for that which should be visited with stern reprobation. The tale is very powerful; the poison is distilled so subtly that the evil is wrought almost before suspicion is awakened; the art with which the whole is managed is so complete, that the mind unconsciously drifts on into an acquiescence in a state of things, which, were it free from the glamour which the author throws over the mental vision, it would at once condemn. There is no other of Mr. Collins's later books which is open to such serious exception; but we hesitate not to say that the tendency of all of them is to relax rather than to brace the moral tone of the reader."²

Collins, in short, these reviewers thought, was insidiously attacking the institution of marriage and the family. They objected to his picture of a happy family

¹
Quarterly Review, Ibid.

²
London Quarterly Review, Vol. XXVII (1866), p. 108.

held together without benefit of clergy and without the sanction of the civil law, to his showing sympathy for a man who found complete happiness in living with a woman who was not his wife, and for a woman who set aside the moral and civil law in order to give him that happiness.

Blackwood's, a consistent guardian of public morality, attacked No Name on another score. It resented the fact that Collins should think it quite right that Magdalen, "after all her endless deceptions and horrible marriage...should be restored to society, and have a good husband and a happy home."¹ Magdalen, even though she had come to see the error of her ways and had reformed, was not entitled to any happiness, much less a respectable position in society. The pharisaical moral attitude revealed here could only have strengthened Collins in his belief that his conception of morality was superior to that of his critics.

Nor were all the blows in the case of No Name given by the reviewers. After Magdalen goes on the stage in order to earn her living, Collins has her old governess write to her:

"Your way of life, however pure your conduct may be - and I will do you the justice to believe it pure - is a suspicious way of life to all respectable people. I have lived long enough in this world to know, that

¹

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. XCIV (1863), p. 170.

the Sense of Propriety, in nine Englishwomen out of ten, makes no allowance and feels no pity." ¹

Elsewhere in the story he indulges in a little irony at the expense of his more prudish critics. Mrs. Lecount, Noel Vanstone's housekeeper, suspects that his wife is not the former Miss Bygrave, but Magdalen Vanstone. If she really is Magdalen, she has two moles on her neck. She wants to ask Noel if he has observed two moles on his wife's neck, and she approaches the delicate subject in this way:

"I am old enough to be your mother, Mr. Noel. If the question is not indelicate - may I ask what the present state of your knowledge is, on the subject of your wife's neck?" ²

Collins's next novel, Armadale (1866), pleased some of the reviewers as little as No Name. He had practically invited their disapproval in a short preface addressed to readers in general and readers in particular, the latter being no doubt those who detected immorality in his novels. These readers, he thinks, will be offended

"by finding that Armadale oversteps in more than one direction, the narrow limits within which they are disposed to restrict the development of modern fiction - if they can.

"Nothing that I could say to these persons here would help me with them as Time will help me if my work lasts. I am not afraid of my design being

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Wilkie Collins, No Name, 3 Vols., London, Sampson Low, Son & Co., 1862. First published in All the Year Round from March 15, 1862. II, p. 12. Although dated 1862, the novel did not appear in book form until January, 1863.

²

Ibid., III, p. 104.

permanently misunderstood, provided the execution has done it any sort of justice. Estimated by the clap-trap morality of the present day, this may be a very daring book. Judged by the Christian morality which is of all time, it is only a book that is daring enough to speak the truth." ¹

The finely spun plot of Armada centers around the two Allen Armadales, one of whom also bears the alias of Ozias Midwinter, and Lydia Gwilt, a glamorous, gold-digging adventuress and full-fledged Victorian villainess. Lydia Gwilt attracts men as sugar does flies, and she is thoroughly unconventional and unscrupulous. While living on the Continent with a man-and-wife team of card sharks, she meets and marries the wealthy Mr. Waldron. Waldron dies of poisoning and Lydia is indicted, convicted of murder and sentenced to death, but the pressure of public sympathy for her constrains the Home Secretary to pardon her. She is, however, sentenced to prison for two years for taking jewelry belonging to her dead husband. She next appears as the wife of the already married Capt. Manuel, with whom she had formed a connection while Waldron was still alive. Deserted by Manuel, she sets her cap for the wealthy young Allan Armadale. It is at this point that she enters the story proper. Her earlier life is given in retrospective narrative. Foiled in her ambition to become Allan's wife, she marries privately his

¹ Collins, Armada, p. 3.

virtuous friend, Ozias Midwinter. She soon grows tired of the loving but too serious Ozias, plots with Capt. Manuel, who has gotten in contact with her again in order to blackmail her, to murder Armadale, now yachting in the Mediterranean; so that she can claim his estate as his supposed widow, and leaves her husband. The fact that Midwinter had married her under his real name of Allan Armadale provides her with a marriage license that she can use as evidence in pressing her claim. This highly ingenious plot runs into a snag when Allan appears in England safe and sound; the newspaper report of his death at sea was erroneous. The scheming Lydia meets the situation by tricking Allan into coming to the private sanatorium of her quack-doctor friend, Le Doux. There he is given a room with a special ventilating system. The situation is further complicated by the arrival of her husband who, by one of those accidents common in Collins, exchanges rooms with Allan. During the night Lydia fills the room with poison gas. She discovers that Ozias is the occupant of the room in time to save his life. Overcome at last by remorse and despair, she enters the death chamber and ends her life.

Collins would not have had to go far, in the 'sixties, to "overstep, in more than one direction," the limits within which many reviewers wanted to restrict fiction. The novel Collins thought might be daring, today seems merely sensational rather than daring, but when it appeared it violated the

critical canons of at least some of the reviewers. Collins had drawn a beautiful, wicked woman with sex appeal; he had said that "she had all the allurements that feast the eye, all the siren invitations that seduce the sense - a subtle suggestiveness in her silence, and a sexual sorcery in her smile."¹ He has shown young and old men succumbing to the physical charms of this evil woman, and by merely creating such a character he had implied that there might be such women in real life and in British society. The censure he expected was forthcoming.

The Athenaeum reviewer indignantly wrote of

Armadale:

"This time the interest of his tale centres upon one of the most hardened female villains whose devices and desires have ever blackened fiction - a forger, a convicted adulteress, murderess, and thief, aged 35, - a woman who deliberately, by the aid of a couple of wretches whose practices belong to the police-cells, but not to pages over which honest people should employ and enjoy their leisure, sits down to make her way to fortune and apparent respectability by imposture, deliberate murder and, lastly, by cold-blooded unfaithfulness to the man who had really loved her and rescued her from her bad life, and for whom she is said to have entertained her solitary feeling of real attachment."

Collins was warned that he was heading in the direction of decadence:

"Those who make plot their first consideration and humanity the second, - those, again, who represent the decencies of life as too often so many hypocrisies, - have placed themselves in a groove which goes, and must

¹ Collins, Armadale, II, p. 73. Except in its meaning of gender, Collins uses the word sex no more than a half dozen times in all his works.

go, in a downward direction, whether as regards fiction or morals." ¹

The Westminster Review confined itself to expressing disgust with his characters. Miss Gwilt is denounced as "a bigamist, thief, gaol-bird, forgeress, murderess and suicide". ² Armada is a typical product of Sensationalism in fiction, a new development which the Westminster considers it useless to inveigh against but which it hopes time and "the improvement of the public taste" will take care of.

The Saturday Review based its dislike of Armada on esthetic rather than moral principles. To Collins's challenge in the preface to Armada it replied that "the real objection to Armada is not

"that Miss Gwilt is too sinful to be drawn. The question is whether it is worth while drawing her, and what the picture comes to when it is painted. The chief flaw in it is not that it is pernicious, but that it is ugly." ³

The London Quarterly Review included Armada in a survey, "Recent Novels: their Moral and Religious Teaching." The article did not make specific moral charges against Armada, but contented itself with labeling it as one of a class of novels, namely, sensation novels, that

¹
The Athenaeum, June 2, 1866, p. 732.

²
Westminster Review, N.S., XXX (1866), p. 270.

³
Saturday Review, Vol. XXI (June 16, 1866), p. 727.

were having a pernicious influence. The reviewer began by asking himself the question: Do novels really influence the morals of their readers? Are they really so important? He concluded that they did influence morality, for they insinuated ideas into their readers when they were relaxed and off their guard. "These books of relaxation are, therefore, just those which need to be most carefully watched."¹

The sensation novel, for which the reviewer thought that the conditions of serial publication were chiefly responsible, and which Collins was doing more than any other to foster, was enjoying public favor at the moment, and the influence of the sensational novel was not a good one:

"Sensationalism is the crying literary vice of our times. It has invaded other departments of literature; even theology itself has not wholly escaped its influence, but it is in fiction that it has worked the greatest mischief. Quiet pictures of common everyday life, with their great struggles and practical lessons, are at a discount, and there is an incessant craving for excitement....

...[It] "is the moral tone of such books [sensational novels] which is especially objectionable. Their chief material consists of great crimes - crimes the very mention of which ought to revolt the moral feeling of the reader, but which with such accessories and surroundings as are, for the most part, to be found in these stories, are tolerably sure to lose something of their native repulsiveness. We have before referred to this point in these pages, but the evil has become so flagrant that we feel it necessary to enter a new and even more emphatic protest." ²

¹

London Quarterly Review, Vol. XXVII (1866), p. 109.

²

Ibid., p. 104.

Were there really such people as Lydia Gwilt?, the reviewer asked himself. He was not sure. The sensation novelists, however, would have him believe there were. And granted that they showed these evil characters overtaken by Nemesis,

"...it must still be felt that even this is insufficient to remove the impression produced by the continued reproduction of such characters. We go even further, and assert that the tendency of the multiplication of these tales is to create a class of such characters, if they do not already exist. We can well believe that the writers themselves little calculate the extent of the evil they are helping to produce... Not the less certainly, however, do they scatter impressions calculated to shake that mutual confidence by which societies and, above all, families are held together, to abate our love of simple unpretending virtue, in fact, almost to destroy our faith in its reality." ¹

In September, 1867, an article entitled "Novels" appeared in Blackwood's. Curiously enough, although it was concerned with the alleged harmfulness of some novels of the day, it made no mention of Collins. Indeed, it assigned to Miss Braddon, the authoress of the sensational Lady Audley's Secret, the place at the head of the sensational school of fiction given by other reviews to Collins. However, as the attitude toward English fiction which it revealed is representative of an influential body of critical opinion of the time and was the same attitude that found immorality in Collins, and as it offers illuminating and pertinent comment on Collins's reception by the moral

¹
Ibid., p. 108.

reviewers, reference to it will be helpful.

"English novels have for a long time," the writer began, "-from the days of Sir Walter Scott at least - held a very high reputation in the world, not so much perhaps for what critics would call the highest development of art, as for a certain sanity, wholesomeness, and cleanliness unknown to other literature of the same class." ¹

This reputation for wholesomeness has made a domestic censorship unnecessary and at the same time has put authors on their honor. There is, the writer thinks, an understanding between readers and authors that the latter will omit discussion of "the darker problems of the time" from their productions.

"The novel, which is the favorite reading of the young - which is one of the chief amusements of all secluded and most suffering people - which is precious to women and unoccupied persons, has been kept by this understanding, or by a natural impulse better than any understanding, to a great degree pure from all noxious topics....Men did not snatch the guilty volume out of sight when any innocent creature drew nigh, or mature women lock up the book with which they condescended to amuse themselves, as they do in France. Our novels were family reading; and the result has been a sense of freedom, an absence of all suggestion of evil, in the superficial studies of ordinary society, which it is impossible to overestimate." ²

Were this state of affairs to be altered, domestic habits would have to be altered also. Within the family parents and children would not be able to read the same books and share the same discussions.

¹

Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. CII (Sept., 1867), p. 256.

²

Ibid., pp. 257-58.

Families are faced with this problem already, the writer says, because, in fact, there has been a change.

"The change perhaps began at the time when Jane Eyre made what advanced critics call her 'protest' against the conventionalities in which the world clothes itself."¹

Now, young girls are reading and even writing books containing

"...unseemly references and exhibitions of forbidden knowledge....Writers who have no genius and little talent, make up for it by displaying their acquaintance with the accessories and surroundings of vice, with the means of seduction, and with what they set forth as the secret tendencies of the heart - tendencies which, according to this interpretation, all point one way. When the curate's daughter in Shirley burst forth into passionate lamentation over her own position and the absence of any man whom she could marry, it was a new sensation to the world in general. That men and women should marry we had all of us acknowledged as one of the laws of humanity; but up to the present generation most young women had been brought up in the belief that their own feelings on this subject should be religiously kept to themselves[Things] have gone very much further since the days of Shirley....Women driven wild with love for the man who leads them on to desperation before he accords that word of encouragement which carries them into the seventh heaven; women who marry their grooms in fits of sensual passion; women who pray their lovers to carry them off from husbands and homes they hate; women, at the very least of it, who give and receive burning kisses and frantic embraces, and live in a voluptuous dream, either waiting for or brooding over the inevitable lover, - such are the heroines who have been imported into modern fiction."²

And worse still, this picture is not contradicted. The young women of Britain make no protest against it; on the

¹
Ibid., p. 258.

²
Ibid., p. 259.

contrary, they seem to approve of it. Can it be true? On this point he is uncertain. But "the fact that this new and disgusting picture of what professes to be the female heart, comes from the hands of women, and is tacitly accepted by them as real, is not in any way to be laughed at."¹

Having sketched this outline of the lamentable state of popular fiction, the writer criticized a number of the novels of the kind he objected to, and scolded the women who produced and read them:

"It is a shame to women so to write; and it is a shame to the women who read and accept as a true representation of themselves and their ways the equivocal talk and fleshly inclinations herein attributed to them. Their patronage of such books is in reality an adoption and acceptance of them....[A] woman has one duty of invaluable importance to her country and her race which cannot be over-estimated - and that is the duty of being pure. There is perhaps nothing of such vital consequence to a nation....But all philosophy notwithstanding, and leaving the religious question untouched, there can be no possible doubt that the wickedness of man is less ruinous, less disastrous to the world in general, than the wickedness of women. That is the climax of all misfortunes to the race."²

It is no wonder that Lydia Gwilt was objected to. Her story did not make family reading. She was everything that a Victorian woman of fiction should not be - aggressive, passionate and immoral. Even though fictitious she was a corrupting influence; she was a threat to that ideal of

¹
Ibid., p. 260.

²
Ibid., p. 275.

womanly goodness and purity that the reviewers were striving to uphold. There were things that women not only ought not to do or say, but ought not to know. The Lydia Gwilts violated all the rules. It wasn't enough, as the London Quarterly reviewer had said, to show them overcome by a Nemesis; it was wrong to show them doing the things that invited a Nemesis.

On this social and literary ideal, Collins has the unscrupulous Doctor Le Doux make an ironical comment:

"The English novelist who enters my house (no foreign novelist will be admitted) must understand his art as the healthy-minded English reader understands it in our time. He must know that our purer modern taste, our higher modern morality, limits him to doing exactly two things for us, when he writes us a book. All we want of him is - occasionally to make us laugh and invariably to make us comfortable." ¹

There was nothing in The Moonstone, the novel that followed Armadale, that the most censorious reviewer could object to unless it were the uncircumstantial revelation at the end of the book of the fact that the Evangelical philanthropist, Godfrey Ablewhite, had had a kept woman in a villa in a suburb of London. If the item was considered objectionable, nothing was said by the reviewers.

In Man and Wife Collins appeared as a serious reforming novelist concerned with matters of public morality, and thus took the reviews by surprise. Through his portrait of Anne Silvester he appealed to his readers for justice

¹ Collins, Armadale, II, 507.

and charity for the 'fallen woman'. He attacked athletics and marriage laws because of their alleged immoral consequences. By propagandizing in the name of public morality he turned the tables on his critics. He did more than that; he attacked them through the character of Lady Lundie, the self-complacent, severely moral, proper and uncharitable type of person who persecuted moral weakness and worshiped propriety. At one point he presented her in bed, and made use of the occasion to irritate and challenge his critics:

"The scene opens on a bedroom - and discloses, in broad daylight, a lady in bed.

"Persons with an irritable sense of propriety, whose self-appointed duty it is to be always crying out, are warned to pause before they cry out on this occasion. The lady now presented to view being no less a person than Lady Lundie herself, it follows, as a matter of course, that the utmost demands of propriety are, by the mere assertion of that fact, abundantly and indisputably satisfied. To say that anything short of direct moral advantage could, by any possibility, accrue to any living creature by the presentation of her ladyship in a horizontal, instead of a perpendicular position, is to assert that Virtue is a question of posture, and that Respectability ceases to assert itself when it ceases to appear in morning or evening dress. Will anybody be bold enough to say that? Let nobody cry out, then, on the present occasion."¹

Collins's 'fallen woman' failed to draw fire from all the major periodicals that reviewed Man and Wife except Blackwood's. The Blackwood's reviewer objected that it was incredible that a woman such as Anne is represented to be

¹

Collins, Man and Wife, III, pp. 1-2.

could give herself to a stupid brute like Geoffrey, and that her downfall would have no effect on her character.

"His heroine is permitted to do that which, in a woman's code, is the last and vilest of all evils, without being the worse for it. More than that which cowardice or bad faith is to a gentleman - i.e., - total destruction of his character, breaking up of his principles, disruption from all the traditions in which he has been trained - impurity is to a woman." ¹

Yet Anne suffers "no loss of moral dignity, no injury to mind or being." ²

The reviewer goes on:

"Why do not artists see that all their admirable descriptions of perfection are stultified by their calm admittance of a blot which cannot but debase? Either the one is a delusion or the other....When lovely woman stoops to folly, is she only exposing herself to a temporary social punishment, the spite and envious malice of her 'sisters' (who, the inference is, would have been only too glad to do the same if they had had the chance), and the risk of some personal inconvenience? with the general sympathy and admiration of men, a noble sense of superior experience and trial in her own mind, an increased influence and improved character to console her? Surely this is the maddest as well as one of the most fatal delusions of fiction - an idea which would be miserable, indeed, were it current in common life." ³

The modern reviewer would also object to Collins's portrait of Anne Silvester, but principally on the score of lack of probability. Collins fails entirely to account for her fall. The kind of woman Collins represents Anne

¹ Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, Vol. CVIII (1870), p. 629.

² Ibid., p. 629.

³ Ibid., p. 630.

as being would not have been likely to yield to the kind of man Geoffrey Delamayn, her seducer, is represented as being. Perhaps Collins could have shown how it was possible, if he had dared describe the circumstances leading up to the seduction. As he did not dare to go so far, he had to present his readers with a very improbable ¹ fait accompli.

If the reviewers could often find immorality in Collins, they could also find him too tame. The Athenaeum reviewer wrote contemptuously of Poor Miss Finch, Collins's next novel:

"The rhapsodist weaves his plot virginibus puerisque. The sanctifying influence of Cassell's Magazine - and, which is more, of Cassell's Magazine suffering from the intense reaction, consequent upon A Terrible Temptation - is feebly apparent in every chapter. It is, in short a sensation novel for Sunday reading, and, as such, can be confidently recommended to the notice of parents and guardians." ²

As an answer to this kind of criticism, Collins made an about-face and wrote The New Magdalen, a novel featuring Mercy Merrick, a reformed prostitute, as heroine. Whether or not the story was successful in calling the attention of Englishmen of the 'seventies to a perennial

¹
When Augustin Daly brought the stage version of Man and Wife to his New York theatre, Miss Ethel, one of his actresses, refused the part of Anne Sylvester, apparently considering it too indelicate. See Joseph Francis Daly, The Life of Augustin Daly, N.Y., 1917, p. 101.

²
Athenaeum, Feb. 17, 1872, p. 202.

problem, it is completely unsuccessful as a study of a prostitute, and mainly for two reasons. First, Collins was not free to employ the realism that would have made Mercy a convincing prostitute; in order to win sympathy for her, and to avoid the wrath of the moral guardians of Victorian womanhood, he had to pass over in a few lines the period of her prostitution and to make her a beautiful, noble and personally attractive woman. Mercy is one of the most unconvincing prostitutes, reformed or unreformed, in all literature. Secondly, Collins devotes most of the book to the complications arising from Mercy's yielding to the temptation to assume another woman's identity for the sake of a place in respectable society. As a treatment of prostitution, The New Magdalen is "as safe as sterilized gauze," as Willa Cather remarked of Defoe's Roxana.

Yet the Athenaeum, which had scornfully recommended Poor Miss Finch to virgins and boys, objected to Collins's treatment of Mercy on moral grounds:

"Worst fault of all, the forgiveness accorded to the sinner develops into absolute apotheosis. She is hailed by the clergyman, who, lover as he is, cannot divest himself of his character as an angel of light, and is told that the earthly joys accorded her are but a foretaste of those awaiting her in Paradise. Mercy Merrick is a penitent woman, it is true; but a lifetime of sustained repentance is needed to make amends for the life she has led, and not one spasm of virtue, however fierce. The preference awarded her over the representative of virtue, Grace Roseberry, is dangerous from the point of true morality as apart from any mere conventional standard. It is very well to preach that a penitent woman may be reclaimed, and may force all God-fearing people to acknowledge the worth of her

character - it is a more serious thing to hold before the young the idea that absolute purity and highest grace are the result rather of a fall into the gutter and a subsequent ablution than a course of consistent rectitude." ¹

In the United States, where moral criticism appears to have been far more Puritanical than in England, the New York Daily Tribune commented on Collins's story when it appeared as a play on the stage of Daly's theatre:

"Its subject is one that ladies and gentlemen cannot discuss....The theater is not a dissecting-room, nor a place for the examination of social problems....But if he means to say that society, organized on virtuous principles, ought to accept reformed courtesans as wives and mothers, and place them on the same footing with women of unblemished purity, he announces a doctrine that is false in itself and that may prove pernicious in its results." ²

No moral objections were made to The Law and the Lady, the novel that followed The New Magdalen, although it contains one character, Major Fitz-David, an elderly dandy and ladies' man, whose relations with women are at the very least, somewhat anomalous.

In The Two Destinies (1876), a poor novel that the Saturday Review unkindly but not incorrectly called an "amazingly silly book," Collins ventured on forbidden ground with impunity in introducing bigamy into his story and in asking for sympathy for the woman who has been deceived into marrying a man already married. Not only

¹
Athenaeum, May 24, 1873. The Athenaeum reviewed the play.

²
Quoted in Clyde K. Hyder, "Wilkie Collins in America," Studies in English, University of Kansas, 1940, p. 54.

did he treat her and her illegitimate child with sympathy but he rewarded her with a devoted legal husband as compensation for her sufferings. In telling the story of the youthful love-affair between George and Mary he even went so far as to assume that sex and love had something to do with each other, when he asked the rhetorical question: "What was the attraction that drew us so closely one to the other, at an age when the sexual sympathies lay dormant in her and in me?"¹ Yet the reviewers, for some reason, were not scandalized this time.

The fact that the stories that followed the publication of The New Magdalen had escaped moral censure may have encouraged Collins to believe that he might again try the theme of the repentant prostitute. At any rate, he returned to it in the unpleasantly sensational and effusively sentimental novel, The Fallen Leaves (1879). The title was intended to indicate its humanitarian aim, for the 'fallen leaves' are "the people who have toiled hard after happiness, and have gathered nothing but disappointment and sorrow; the friendless and the lonely, the wounded and the lost."²

¹ Collins, The Two Destinies, I, p. 29. In The Haunted Hotel he had dared to write: "Not one of them could call to mind the innumerable instances in which the sexual influence has proved irresistible in the persons of women without even the pretension to beauty." I, p. 24.

² Collins, The Fallen Leaves, I, p. 87.

The prostitute, and heroine of The Fallen Leaves, Simple Sally, is not introduced until the middle of the story, when she accosts the Christian-Socialist hero, Amelius Goldenheart, in the street. She is, of course, young and innocent, and wins Goldenheart's ready sympathy:

"She trembled as Amelius looked at her in silence, with compassionate wonder. But for the words in which she had accosted him, it would have been impossible to associate her with the lamentable life that she led. The appearance of the girl was artlessly virginal and innocent; she looked as if she had passed through the contamination of the streets without being touched by it, without fearing it, or feeling it, or understanding it. Robed in pure white, with her gentle blue eyes raised to heaven, a painter might have shown her on his canvas as a saint or an angel; and the critical world might have said, Here is the true ideal - Raphael himself might have painted this." ¹

Profoundly moved by the pathetic condition of this virginal young creature, the naive Goldenheart rescues her from the degradation of her life by taking her into his own house. Provided with good food and clean clothing, and given hope and confidence by Goldenheart's paternal solicitude, Sally rapidly develops into an admirable and beautiful woman. She and Goldenheart eventually fall in love, marry, and the regeneration of a girl of the streets is complete. Sally is restored to respectable society. Collins ends the story with a promise to narrate the married life of Goldenheart in a sequel.

The periodicals that reviewed the story - only

¹

Ibid., II, p. 165.

the weeklies followed Collins's career to the end - were not so shocked by The Fallen Leaves as might be expected. The Saturday Review found the story extravagant, absurd and grossly improbable, but made no specific charges of immorality against it. The British Quarterly Review even approved:

"Mr. Wilkie Collins...has touched on some very difficult problems, and has done it with delicacy.... Mr. Wilkie Collins has taken care to treat everything with such caution and reserve that he would be either a very sensitive or a very coarse person indeed who would feel any other than touched and elevated by the picture here presented." ¹

But the increasing liberalism of the periodicals was not shared by a section of the British public, for loud protests against the book were raised from some quarters. In a letter to Charles H. Willis Collins wrote:

"You can hardly form an idea of the astonishment and indignation with which the character of 'Simple Sally' has been received in certain prudish and prejudiced quarters. On this account I am waiting (with some confidence, inspired by previous experience) for the Verdict of the People." ²

The opposition to the book was sufficient to induce Collins ³ to give up the idea of a sequel.

¹
British Quarterly Review, Vol. 70 (1879), p. 533.

²
Quoted from Collins letter dated Aug. 8, 1881, in M. L. Parrish, and Eliz. V. Miller, Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade, London, 1940, p. 112.

³
Collins's plan was to show how the 'unchristian prejudices' of the world undermined the happiness of Amelius and Sally. See Clyde Hyder, "Wilkie Collins and The Woman in White", PMLA, March, 1939, p. 298, Note 10.

His next novel, then,-which, by the way, left matters of sex strictly alone, - was not the promised sequel but Jezebel's Daughter (1880), a sensational tale of love, intrigue and poisoning. In the preface, addressed to his Italian translator, he explained that he was waiting for The Fallen Leaves to reach its cheap-edition stage, in which it would be available to "the great audience of the English people," before writing a sequel. Then he lashed out bitterly at his censors:

"Your knowledge of English Literature...has long since informed you, that there are certain important social topics which are held to be forbidden to the English novelist (no matter how seriously and how delicately he may treat them), by a narrow-minded minority of readers, and by the critics who flatter their prejudices. You also know, having done me the honour to read my books, that I respect my art far too sincerely to permit limits to be wantonly assigned to it, which are imposed in no other civilised country on the face of the earth. When my work is undertaken with a pure purpose, I claim the same liberty which is accorded to a writer in a newspaper, or to a clergyman in a pulpit; knowing, by previous experience, that the increase of readers and the lapse of time will assuredly do me justice, if I have only written well enough to deserve it.

"In the prejudiced quarters to which I have alluded, one of the characters in The Fallen Leaves offended susceptibilities of the sort felt by Tartuffe, when he took out his handkerchief, and requested Dorine to cover her bosom. I not only decline to defend myself, under such circumstances as these - I say plainly, that I have never asserted a truer claim to the best and noblest sympathies of Christian readers than in presenting to them, in my last novel, the character of the innocent victim of infamy, rescued and purified from the contamination of the streets. I remember what the nasty posterity of Tartuffe, in this country, said of Basil, of Armadales, of The New Magdalen, and I know

that the wholesome audience of the nation at large has done liberal justice to those books. For this reason, I wait to write the second part of The Fallen Leaves, until the first part of the story has found its way to the people." ¹

The sequel to The Fallen Leaves never appeared. Collins was no Theodore Dreiser.

The reaction of the reviewers to Collins's preface was not sympathetic, as was to be expected. The Saturday Review ridiculed it and referred sarcastically to Collins as a 'moral' writer. ² The Academy teased him for showing so much irritation. ³ The Athenaeum reviewer told Collins that he should not have been irritated by the reception given to The Fallen Leaves, because he had known all along that "certain important social topics" were forbidden. Nevertheless, the reviewer conceded, some annoyance on Collins's part was excusable, for The Fallen Leaves "did treat a forbidden topic seriously and delicately," as Collins claimed. The Spectator remarked that Collins was "claiming a motive and a value for his work loftier and more abstract than satisfied him before because he is losing the pleasure of creation," and, "since he cannot afford to be neglected, he must needs strive to arrest

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Wilkie Collins, Jezebel's Daughter, 3 Vols., London, Chatto & Windus, 1880, pp. v-vii. First published in The Seaside Library, Jan., 1880.

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Saturday Review, Vol. XLIX (March 20, 1880), pp. 385-86.

³

Academy, Vol. XVII (May 1, 1880), pp. 318-19.

attention by blustering about his 'motives'.¹

There was nothing in Collins's next three novels, The Black Robe (1881), Heart and Science (1883), and 'I Say No' (1884), to offend moral sensibilities, and when he finally did take up a 'forbidden topic' again, in The Evil Genius (1886), there was no outcry. Times had changed; what would have outraged reviewers in the 'sixties was apparently inoffensive in the second half of the 'eighties. In The Evil Genius Herbert Linley, a wealthy married man, becomes enamoured of his daughter's governess, the homeless Sydney Westerfield. The love-starved Sydney responds to his advances, and the affair culminates in Linley's separation from his wife, who later obtains a divorce. For a time Sydney lives with Linley, but their 'guilty love' makes them miserable, instead of bringing them happiness. Remorse is followed by repentance; a reconciliation is effected between Linley and his divorced wife, and they remarry. The penitent Sydney finds a means of atonement in devoting her energies to the cause of rehabilitating 'lost' women of good birth.

The most daring scene in the story, a scene that would have caused indignation in the 'sixties, is the one describing the first kiss exchanged by Linley and the governess:

"He looked at the poor little tortured face, turned up towards him in the lovely moonlight. Again and again he had honourably restrained himself - he

¹Spectator, Vol. LIII (1880), pp. 627-28.

was^a man - in one mad moment it was done, hotly, passionately done - he kissed her.

"For the first time in her maiden life, a man's lips touched her lips. All that had been perplexing and strange, all that had been innocently wonderful to herself in the feeling that bound Sydney to her first friend was a mystery no more. Love lifted its veil, Nature revealed its secrets, in the one supreme moment of that kiss. She threw her arms round his neck with a low cry of delight - and returned his kiss.

"'Sydney,' he whispered, 'I love you.'

"She heard him in rapturous silence. Her kiss had answered for her." ¹

What terrible disclosures were made here! How the mid-Victorian reviewer would have raged, how the happily ignorant mid-Victorian daughter would have blushed! But the Athenaeum, the Spectator, the Saturday Review and the Academy found nothing disturbing in either the novel's theme or its love-scenes. The Academy went so far as to say, "The story of the sin and the repentance of a girl with a very quick and active conscience, which is for the moment overcome by the combined forces of passion and circumstance, is told with both power and pathos." ² Time had worked in favor of Collins. The day of Esther Waters was not far off.

This examination of Collins's efforts to use

¹
 Wilkie Collins, The Evil Genius: A Domestic Story, 3 Vols., London, Chatto & Windus, 1886, I, pp. 208-09. First published in the Leigh Journal and Times and several provincial newspapers, Dec. 11, 1885-May 11, 1886.

²
Academy, Vol. XXX (Oct. 2, 1886), p. 219.

'forbidden topics' and his conflicts with moral criticism offers a concrete illustration of the conditions under which the Victorian creative artist had to work. The artist, whether novelist, poet, painter or sculptor had to reckon with Victorian moral idealism, of which moral literary criticism was only one aspect. This idealism, which today is generally regarded with either amusement or scorn, but which cannot be condemned offhand as mere prudery or artificial convention, although it stimulated the growth of both and became allied with them, opposed the introduction into art of anything that could be considered prejudicial to the institutions of marriage and the family. "Never," writes Esme Wingfield Stratford, "was there a time, in European history, when married love was held in such honour, or when it was the theme of such lofty idealism."¹ Hence, the portrayal of marital infidelity, seduction, bigamy and prostitution in art was frowned upon, no matter how moral the purpose of the artist might be. It was part of this idealism that women, the moral leaven of society and the guardians of the home, and particularly young unmarried women, should remain ignorant of these things; if possible, should not so much as know they existed. If the virgin daughter were to become familiar with illicit love and the 'mysteries' of sex through fiction, she was in

¹ Esme Wingfield-Stratford, Those Earnest Victorians, N.Y., 1930, p. 165.

danger of losing her virtue, of becoming wicked, and the wickedness of woman, as the Blackwood's reviewer said, was more disastrous for the world than the wickedness of man. The only literature acceptable to Victorian moral idealism was one that the whole family might share together, one that did not require any embarrassing explanations from the parents. The artist who refused to cooperate with this ideal was apt to be labeled immoral and his productions boycotted. As a result, the Victorians might boast that no preceding age had produced a morally purer literature than theirs. They did not, or would not, see that they were encouraging the development of prudery, which finds sexual significance and immorality in everything. Nor did they see that they were promoting an inevitable reaction, the herald of which was Swinburne's Poems and Ballads in 1866, that would attempt to bring about a complete divorce between art and morality.

The artist, particularly the literary artist, somehow or other had to come to terms with this severe and all-powerful moral idealism. For the artists who shared in it there was little difficulty. For the artists who sympathized with it only partly or not at all the only course was compromise or open rebellion, and the latter made financial success doubtful. Dickens, Thackerary and Trollope adopted a course that would keep them out of

conflict with moral idealism. Others, like Charlotte Bronte, Reade and Collins, sacrificed realism in deference to moral idealism, but not to such an extent as to escape collision with it. ¹ Jane Eyre was subjected to moral censure in the Quarterly Review. Reade's Griffith Gaunt and A Terrible Temptation ² were accused of being immoral. Reade fought

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"Altogether the autobiography of Jane Eyre is pre-eminently an anti-Christian composition." The Quarterly Review, Dec., 1848. In Albert Mordell, editor, Notorious Literary Attacks, N.Y., 1926, p. 116.

²

Malcolm Elwin, Charles Reade: A Biography, London, 1931. Griffith Gaunt (1866) was charged with being indecent and immoral. In the United States, The Round Table, a New York weekly, published a letter from an anonymous reader which, in Reade's words, amounted to a declaration 'That the modesty and purity of women cannot survive the perusal of Griffith Gaunt.' Reade answered his detractors in a pamphlet called The Prurient Prude, and sued The Round Table. The case resulted in a verdict for Reade with damages of six cents. Collins was ready to give Reade every support in his defense of Griffith Gaunt, and asked Dickens if he would be willing to appear as a witness in the case. Dickens hedged, and replied in a letter stating what his frame of mind as a witness would be. If he were asked whether, as an editor, he would have passed certain passages, he would answer no for the reason that 'I should say that what was pure to an artist might be impurely suggestive to inferior minds (of which there must necessarily be many among a large mass of readers) and that I should have called the writer's attention to the likelihood of those passages being perverted in such quarters.' Then he mentioned a number of situations in the novel and commented: 'Hard pressed upon this point, I must infallibly say that I consider those relative situations extremely coarse and disagreeable.' Ch. 8, Section 2, passim.

A Terrible Temptation (1871) was also accused of being immoral, especially in America. One of its characters, Rhoda Somerset, was objected to as being a type of the 'scarlet woman'. By one American paper the novel was called 'a mass of brothel garbage'. Reade answered his attackers with letters to The Times and The Toronto Daily Globe. Pp. 218-222, passim.

back furiously with lawsuit, pamphlet and open letters to the press. How Collins was attacked has been seen. He answered his attackers by means of angry prefaces, occasional passages in his novels throwing ridicule on his opponents and by stubbornly continuing to use 'forbidden topics'. By his persistence in introducing in his stories forbidden aspects of life, although not by his handling of them, he was a crusader for artistic freedom and deserves to be ranked among those who worked for a larger measure of liberty of expression for the English literary artist.

In conclusion, it can be said that the effect of moral criticism on Collins's novels was threefold: (1) It made a genuinely realistic handling of sex impossible, supposing that to have been within Collins's power. (2) It drove Collins to emphasize the moral aspects of his stories, to inject into them a mawkishly sentimental morality, and to give them a happy ending. (3) It encouraged him to write novels of 'purpose' and thereby establish for himself the reputation of being a serious and high-minded novelist. From the point of view of artistry, the total effect of moral criticism on Collins's work was therefore bad.

CHAPTER III
RELIGION AND THE CLERGY

In the biographical obscurity that cloaks Wilkie Collins, the man, there is little information to be found concerning his personal religious beliefs. Wybert Reeve, a friend of Collins, maintains that he was a Materialist:

"The death [of his brother, in 1873] seemed to have made a strong impression on him, and led him to speak of a future state of existence, in which he had little belief. He was a Materialist, and urged that death meant a sleep of eternity; it was the natural end of all living things." ¹

Other memorialists are silent on the subject of Collins's religious creed.

A survey of Collins's literary output over a period of almost forty years reveals little in the way of spiritual autobiography. Collins is careful to hide his own religious beliefs, whatever they may have been. The average Victorian reader would not have thought that Collins's essential religious convictions were any different from his own. God and Christianity are rendered lip service. God's in His Heaven even when things are temporarily awry in the Collins make-believe world. Characters pray and go to church, listen to sermons and read the Bible, and some of them call on God at the hour of death. The Collins world, on the

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Wybert Reeve, op. cit., p. 460.

surface, seems a Christian world, and there is no hint that the man who creates it and sets it moving is anything other than a Christian like the majority of his readers.

There is more to be deduced about Collins's personal religious convictions from what is left out of his stories than from what is put into them.¹ Religion plays a significantly small part in the lives of the great majority of his characters. It is not one of the major phenomena of their world. If from the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh, religion was a matter of very small personal interest to Collins. It does not act as a creative force in his art. Both the Oxford Movement and the hot religious disputes that accompanied it, and the disastrous conflicts² in men's minds between the claims of science and those of

¹ With Dickens and Reade, for instance, a deathbed scene causes a spontaneous flow of religious emotion. Death is associated with God and immortality; it has a spiritual significance. In the case of Dickens one has only to recall the deaths of Jo in Bleak House or of Paul Dombey in Dombey and Son. Reade spends several paragraphs on the Christian death of Jane Hardie in Hard Cash. If Collins lingers over a deathbed, he does it in order to create suspense or arouse the reader's horror, and for no other reason. See, for example, the death of Mrs. Farnaby in The Fallen Leaves, Ch. VI, Bk. VII, or the death of Mrs. Treverton in The Dead Secret, Ch. I, or that of Midwinter's father in Armada, Prologue, Chs. I-II. Death seems to have no great religious significance for Collins.

² Mrs. Gallilee in Heart and Science illustrates the impact of science on religion. Science has banished religion from her mind. Her "religious convictions began and ended with the inorganic matter of the earth." (I, p. 107) But after she has fallen on evil days, religion re-asserts itself momentarily in the following way: Mrs. Gallilee "suddenly dropped on her knees. 'Will somebody pray for me?' she cried piteously.

religion find a very tiny echo in the writings of Collins. Here is no Arnold wandering helplessly between two worlds, no Ruskin cringing at the sound of the geologist's hammer at the end of every verse of the Bible. Athletics, vivisection, obsolete law, the 'fallen woman,' the Jesuits all occupy the center of his stage at one time or another, but not religion as such.

It is not to be inferred from what has been said above that, because Collins hides his own religious beliefs in his writings and because he allows small room for religion in his fictional world, he has no opinions on various kinds of religious practice and their official representatives. It will be seen that he has very definite opinions about both, and that he crusaded for or against them.

"By the beginning of the Victorian age," writes G. M. Young, "...Evangelicalism had imposed on society, even on classes which were indifferent to its religious basis and unaffected by its economic appeal, its code of Sabbath observance, responsibility, and philanthropy; of discipline in the home, regularity in affairs; it had created a most effective technique of agitation, of private persuasion and social persecution. On one of its sides, Victorian history is the story of the English mind employing the energy imparted by Evangelical conviction to rid itself of the restraints which Evangelicalism had laid on the senses and the intellect; on amusements, enjoyment, art; on curiosity, on criticism, on science." ¹

'I don't know how to pray for myself. Where is God?' (III, p. 199) This is the only indication Collins gives of a conflict within her mind. Presumably Dr. Benjulia's infidelity is attributable to science.

¹

G. M. Young, Victorian England, London, 1937, pp. 4-5.

Whether or not Dickens owed any part of his tremendous energy to "Evangelical conviction," he employed a great deal of it in crusading against the Evangelical spirit of severe self-discipline and hostility toward even the most innocent amusements. The "Christmas philosophy," to use M. Cazamian's term in its broadest sense, was the weapon he used to combat Evangelical austerity, and it is implicitly or explicitly present in most of his works: gayety, warm, genuine geniality, the pleasures of eating and drinking, laughter, the play of the affections, harmless amusements are persistently put forward as desirable things, while Sabbatarianism, religious gloom, the habit of looking on nearly all human diversions as 'carnal,' are persistently condemned.

By temperament alone,¹ Collins would have been opposed to the common Evangelical attitude² toward art and amusement, and the ordinary pleasures of life, but it was due to the force of Dickens's example that Collins was influenced to give literary expression to his instinctive feelings about the Evangelical ideal. Willingly and perhaps unconsciously he became Dickens's lieutenant

¹ See Holman Hunt's account of him in his Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, N.Y., 1906, II, Ch. 6.

² "The world is very evil. An unguarded look, a gesture, a picture, or a novel, might plant a seed of corruption in the most innocent heart...." Young, op. cit., p. 2.

in his crusade against cheerless religion and cheerless morality. How Collins opposed himself to Evangelical standards in general has been seen in Chapters I and II; his deliberate efforts to hold up to scorn certain types identifiable, or identified by him, as Evangelical, will be considered here.

The Rev. Daubeny Daker, a clergyman who has a small part in Mr. Wray's Cash-Box, one of Collins's earliest stories, is the first of Collins's Evangelical bogeymen. This clergyman objects to an advertisement put up in the village where he is rector, by Mr. Wray, a poor, retired actor, offering, among other things, to improve the elocution of clergymen at threepence an hour, and forces him to take it down. As described by the benevolent Squire Colebatch, the Rev. Daubeny Daker is

"a canting sneak - a sort of fellow who goes into poor people's cottages, asking what they've got for dinner, and when they tell him, he takes the cover off the saucepan and sniffs at it, to make sure that they've spoken the truth. That's what he calls doing his duty to the poor, and what I call being a canting sneak!" ¹

His worst offense in the eyes of the theater-loving Collins is that "he calls the theatres the devil's houses, and actors the devil's missionaries." ² Collins gives his readers just enough of Daubeny Daker to let them know that he violently dislikes the type.

¹

Collins, Mr. Wray's Cash-Box, p. 91

²

Ibid., p. 91

The Reverend Aaron Yollop, one of two minor clerical characters in Hide and Seek, is the "prime adviser" of the hero Zack's Puritanical father, Mr. Thorpe. Aaron Yollop, the reader is told, belongs to the Low Church. A man after Mr. Thorpe's own heart, he is cold, self-possessed and sadistic. When called in to effect the spiritual regeneration of the erring Zack, he takes an inhuman pleasure in rubbing Zack's hair the wrong way.

"He derived a grim encouragement," & writes Collins: "he gathered a melancholy fulness of enjoyment from the wildest explosions of Zack's fury at being interfered with by a man who had no claim of relationship over him, as a finely complicated case of spiritual disease." ¹

More important than these two minor characters, however, is Mr. Thorpe, in whom Collins deliberately attempts to personify Evangelicalism at its worst. Mr. Thorpe is an active Low Churchman:

"Possessing very strong religious feelings, belonging to that large and respectable congregation of devout persons who seem to look at their religion exclusively from a controversial point of view, and to prize it chiefly for the sake of enforcing its prohibitions, Mr. Thorpe was just the man to feel an active and conscientious interest in the theological politics of his day. He was warmly attached to that particular section of professing Christians which is technically described as containing the 'Low Church Party'; and liberally devoted his time, his energies, and his purse to the service of the enterprising community to which he belonged. He was an active member of more than one Alliance for propagating Protestantism and annihilating Popery; he was an influential and generous Director of a famous Tract Society; he was Secretary to a local School Establishment, organized for the express purpose of

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Collins, Hide and Seek, II, p. 45.

preventing the Romanists from getting any ignorant children to teach; he was head of one of the Branch-Home-Correspondence-Departments of a wealthy Missionary Corporation; he was president of a lay assembly of private gentlemen associated for the purpose of examining and interpreting Prophecy, - in short, he was always occupied in one way or another - controversially, proselytisingly, or theologically - in advancing with all his heart and might, the best interests of the powerful religious party to whose service he was attached." ¹

His household is a model of Evangelical order and regularity:

"Though in no sense of the word a domestic tyrant, he nevertheless reigned quietly and unobtrusively despotic over every member of his household, - always excepting the ever-graceless and revolutionary Zack. The housemaid never 'over-slept' herself, the cook was never unpunctual with dinner, and the page was always ready to answer the door....Winter and summer, spring and autumn, the whole domestic machine revolved always with the same unrelenting and ceaseless regularity. Morning and evening prayers were celebrated, the bell rang for breakfast at half-past eight, the front door was bolted for the night at eleven o'clock, never, in any instance, five minutes before, or five minutes after the appointed time. Accident, forgetfulness, hurry, delay were four words practically superfluous to the English language under Mr. Thorpe's roof." ²

At the heart of his religious zeal and his passion for order and regularity is a passion for respectability:

"His one worldly ambition was to preserve intact the character of a respectable man. His one moral weakness was the constant dread of accidentally compromising this character, if he deviated in the smallest degree from the established routine of his chosen opinions, employments, society, and daily habits. His standard of respectability was unlimited and uncompromising. That widely worshipped axiom of our commercial morality which asserts that any man (or rascal) is respectable who can 'pay his way,' was an axiom at which Mr. Thorpe shuddered.

¹

Ibid., I, pp. 3-4.

²

Ibid., II, p. 8.

His vigorous respectability - both in theory and practice - ascended incomparably higher and descended ineffably lower than the weakly respectabilities of most of his neighbors. It rose to the climax of the most Puritanical virtue and the most impossible moral perfection; it sank to the most humble and familiar of the manners and customs of everyday life. It embraced at once the strictest watchfulness in preserving the proprieties of temper and the proprieties of dress. It was equally vigilant in regulating the flow of his language and the length of his nails. It began with his behavior at church; it ended with his behavior at tea.

"If he worshipped respectability devoutly, he also worshipped it sincerely. If he anxiously washed the outside of the cup and platter, he did not forget to keep the inside clean too. He was not more virtuous in the broad glare of noonday than he was under cover of the darkest night. He was no such time-server, money-server, or rank-server with high moral principles, as may be seen among us every day. He was no hypocrite who secretly petted the sins that allured him and openly castigated the sins that were not to his taste. In grim, uncompromising, very truth, he was what he assumed to be; what he gloried in being; what he dreaded as the direst of degradations not to be - a respectable man. All the secret pulses of his moral and mental life hung together on the same thread (it is never more than a thread, in this world), which elevated his character above the reach of calumnies of every kind, great and small. As credit is prized by a merchant; as circulation is prized by an author; as reputation is prized by a woman - so was respectability prized by Mr. Thorpe." ¹

Mr. Thorpe is almost everything that a strict Evangelical father might be supposed to be. He keeps the Sabbath holy with a vengeance by eliminating all joy from that unfortunate day of the week. He attempts to squeeze his son Zack into a narrow mould of his own fashioning without any regard for his wishes or inclinations. His

¹

Ibid., II, pp. 14-16.

²

Mr. Thorpe's pedagogy will be discussed in Ch. VI.

severe, humorless personality reduces that of his wife to nothingness. He is suspicious of art and will not allow his son to take it up. He is opposed to the theater on principle. He is apt to believe the worst of his neighbor. Mr. Thorpe is, as it were, the Victorian Puritan put in the stocks. Collins does not satirize nor even explicitly condemn him. His method is to hold him up to public view and let the world see how unlovely he and all his works are.

In The Moonstone Collins returned to the attack on Evangelicalism. In Miss Drusilla Clack, whom Swinburne gleefully called an "Evangelical hag,"¹ Collins exposes the Evangelical tract distributor to ridicule. Distributing tracts of a religious and moral nature was a favorite activity of zealous Victorian Evangelicals. The widespread use of the short tract by the Evangelicals as a means of moral and religious instruction goes back to the days of the French Revolution when Hannah More wrote and distributed tracts intended to reform the morals of the poor and keep them contented with their lot. The Religious Tract Society was founded in 1799 to replace Hannah More's Cheap Repository Tracts. The Society¹ was established on an unsectarian

¹ Swinburne, op. cit., p. 295.

and evangelical basis."¹ The tracts were written in a simple, popular, narrative style meant to appeal to their readers. A few years after the Society was founded, the policy was adopted of selling the tracts to hawkers at less² than cost price in order to compete with secular works. This policy bore fruit. The number of tracts printed and distributed continued to increase. In 1844 alone, for instance, the Society printed a grand total of 15,367,676³ copies of tracts. There were other tract societies, of course, but none was so well known or had such a phenomenal success as the RTS. The zeal of the Evangelicals accounted for this success even more than the reader-appeal of the tracts:

"A contributor to the Evangelical Magazine wrote that he distributed tracts wherever he went and suggested that every godly person making a business or pleasure trip carry a supply to pass out on the journey. The Reverend Samuel Kilpin said that when he traveled he dispersed about a hundred tracts every five miles. His record was exceeded by another person, however, who purchased from the society over a period of years no fewer than 741,000 handbills and tracts. The members of the Religious Tract Society not only scattered their pamphlets along the highway, but distributed them in hospitals, prisons and army encampments."⁴

¹ F. W. Cornish, The English Church in the Nineteenth Century, London, 1910, Part I, p. 36.

² Maurice Quinlan, Victorian Prelude, N.Y., 1941, p. 124.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., pp. 124-25.

The Evangelical tract campaign prospered to such an extent that The New Monthly Magazine could report in 1881 that:

"The distribution of them goes on unceasingly from one end of the world to the other. Those engaged in this work are diligent, and everywhere and at all times at work. There are few of us who have not had thrust into our hands at one time or another one of these little pamphlets of half-a-dozen pages, written often in a graphic and always in an earnest style." ¹

Collins apparently resented having his religion and morals thrust upon him in a penny and took a rather cruel revenge in Miss Clack. He did not say that she was a member of the RTS, nor was it necessary, for readers would at once have associated her with the distributors of the tract society that was most familiar to them.

Miss Clack is an indefatigable colporteur. Wherever she goes, she carries a bag full of tracts with her. For a worldly maidservant she has one called "A Word With You On Your Cap-Ribbons." For the swearer, she has one titled "Hush, for Heaven's Sake!". For an ailing aunt she has a publication called "The Serpent at Home." The purpose of the pamphlet is "to show how the Evil One lies in wait for us in all the most apparently innocent actions of our daily lives." ² Some of the chapters of this golden tract are "Satan in the Hair Brush," "Satan behind the Looking Glass," "Satan under the Tea Table," "Satan out

¹ Anon., "The Religious Tract Society," The New Monthly Magazine, Vol. 169 (July-Dec., 1881), p. 176.

² Collins, The Moonstone, II, p. 129.

of the Windows," and "Satan among the Sofa Cushions."

Her persistence and zeal are without bounds. She forces her improving tracts on her neighbors every time an opportunity is offered, and is unmoved by the rebuffs she meets with. While she is living with her sick aunt, whose ailment she diagnoses as a moral one, she presses her tracts upon that poor lady with tireless importunity. She distributes them craftily over the house in places where they are most likely to come to her aunt's attention. She even leaves one in the bathroom. When, in spite of her perseverance, her aunt neglects to take advantage of the spiritual medicine offered to her, she has her co-workers copy extracts from the tracts which she then sends to her aunt in the form of "awakening" letters. Nothing daunts her, for:

"Once self-supported by conscience, once embarked on a career of manifest usefulness, the true Christian never yields. Neither public nor private influences produce the slightest effect on us, when we have once got our mission. Taxation may be the consequence of a mission; riots may be the consequence of a mission; wars may be the consequence of a mission; we go on with our work, irrespective of every human consideration which moves the world outside us. We are above reason, we are beyond ridicule; we see with nobody's eyes, we hear with nobody's ears, we feel with nobody's hearts, but our own. Glorious, glorious privilege! And how is it earned? Ah, my friend, you may spare yourselves the useless inquiry! We are the only people who can earn it - for we are the only people who are always right!"¹

On one occasion when she takes a cab, she gives the cabman a tract instead of a tip, as she candidly tells the

¹

Ibid., II, pp. 137-38.

reader:

"I paid the cabman exactly his fare. He received it with an oath; upon which I instantly gave him a tract. If I had presented a pistol at his head, this abandoned wretch could hardly have exhibited greater consternation. He jumped up on his box, and, with profane exclamations of dismay, drove off furiously. Quite useless, I am happy to say! I sowed the good seed, in spite of him, by throwing a second tract in at the window of the cab." ¹

The first principles of her form of religion are order, regularity, neatness, an obtrusive humility, severe judgment of others, and an unshakeable faith in her own righteousness and her moral superiority to others. "' Oh, be morally tidy!'" she exhorts her readers, "'Let your faith be as your stockings, and your stockings as your faith. Both ever spotless, and both ready to put on at a moment's notice!'" ²

She has a cant phrase for every occasion. The reader is constantly favored with her moral reflections. She is forever thinking and talking in terms of moral perversion, fallen nature, conversion and so on. She is convinced, as she says herself, that she is "brimful of comfort, charged to overflowing with seasonable and reviving words." ³

Miss Clack, besides being an industrious purveyor

¹
Ibid., II, p. 113.

²
Ibid., II, p. 74.

³
Ibid., II, p. 179.

of tracts, is an active member of two ladies' charitable societies, "The British-Ladies'-Servants'-Sunday-Sweetheart-Supervision Society" and "The Mothers'-Small-Clothes'-Conversion-Society." The object of this latter society is, she tells the reader,

"...as all serious people know - to rescue unredeemed fathers' trousers from the pawnbroker, and to prevent their resumption, on the part of the irreclaimable parent, by abridging them immediately to suit the proportions of the innocent son."¹

Here Collins was making fun of the numerous women's charitable associations of Evangelical origin that had sprung up in the early Victorian period. Dickens had already made them the butt of his humor in one of the Sketches by Boz called "The Ladies' Societies" (1835). The first couple of sentences of this will show who really fathered Collins's burlesqued societies:

"Our Parish is very prolific in ladies' charitable institutions. In winter, when wet feet are common, and colds not scarce, we have the ladies' soup distribution society, the ladies' coal distribution society, and the ladies' blanket distribution society; in summer, when stone fruits flourish and stomach aches prevail, we have the ladies' dispensary, and the ladies' sick visitation committee; and all the year round we have the ladies' child's examination society, the ladies' bible and prayer-book circulation society, and the ladies' childbed-linen monthly loan society."²

What Collins seems to want to expose to ridicule in his absurd societies is the "offensive busybody charity,"³ so

¹
Ibid., II, p. 71

²
Dickens's Works, Boston, 1894, Vol. III, p. 32.

³
Humphry House, The Dickens World, London, 1941, p. 88.

much hated by Dickens. The titles of his societies alone suggest this.

Collins takes another swinging blow at Evangelical organized charity in The Moonstone in the character of Godfrey Ablewhite, the darling of ladies' charities and an eloquent orator at Exeter Hall.¹ Godfrey is thought by his many admirers to be the epitome of disinterested philanthropy, but it turns out that he is a thorough hypocrite who has been concealing his moral degeneracy behind a facade of unselfish devotion to the cause of charity and evangelical religion.²

Collins's attack on Evangelicalism in The Moonstone does not seem to have been resented by the English novel-reading public, which would, in any case not have included many strict Evangelicals. Strait-laced Evangelicals and Dissenters did not approve of novel reading.³ Miss Clack proved to be very popular, and "her Narrative did much towards giving the book its great success."⁴

¹
Exeter Hall in London was an important meeting place for Evangelical, ultra-Protestant associations of all kinds.

²
See above, p. 17.

³
See Amy Cruse, The Victorians and Their Reading, Boston, 1936, Ch. IV, "The Chapel Folks." On p. 115 of Maurice Quinlan's Victorian Prelude there is a reproduction of a "spiritual barometer" that appeared in the Evangelical Magazine in December, 1800. "Love of novels" is placed 40 degrees below zero, 70 degrees being perdition. Novels had, of course, won a higher place by the 'sixties.

⁴
Cruse, op. cit., p. 323.

There is a suggestion of resentment, however, in Andrew Lang's remark that

"No one who has met, among people of that faith, the very best, most kindly, and, in spite of the gravest trials, the happiest of his friends, will charge the creed of Miss Clack and Mr. Thorpe with the vices of these two deplorable persons."¹

Yet, in spite of Lang's opinion, most modern students of Victorianism would agree that Evangelicalism, with its emphasis on moral conduct, was responsible for producing people like Mr. Thorpe. Maurice Quinlan has this to say of Victorian Evangelicalism:

"But Evangelicalism was more than a religious creed. For those who genuinely accepted its teachings it was a way of life. With its taboos and proscriptions, its pronouncements upon the minutest acts of the individual, Evangelicalism provided believers with a set of rules to guide them in almost every social situation. And that sort of instruction, no doubt, was welcomed by those who felt uncertain of the manners appropriate to their new rank. The code was extremely strict, but it was the code of an increasingly powerful social clique, and, according to Evangelical teaching, the only one that offered a surety of salvation."²

E. E. Kellett, describing, chiefly from his own experience, "the main features of the religious life of Evangelical³ people during the fifty years between 1830 and 1880," sketches a picture of family life according to Evangelical principles in which Mr. Thorpe would fit very easily:

"In the family the father ruled by divine right,

¹
Andrew Lang, "Mr. Wilkie Collins' Novels," Contemporary Review, Vol. 57 (January, 1890), p. 23.

²
Quinlan, op. cit., p. 108.

³
E. E. Kellett, Religion and Life in the Early Victorian Age, London, 1938, p. 15.

the mother, however dexterously she might contrive to be the real power behind the throne, openly supported his authority, and the children were kept in subjection.... Even in circles which had no reverence for John Wesley, Wesley's doctrine would have been approved, that the will of the children should be broken, and preferably before they could speak....The old method of breaking the 'subject' in by physical force was, it is true, being criticized by the more enlightened, and did, I think, show signs of being gradually disused; but the hardly less cogent system of subduing them by what I might call the atmospheric pressure of continuous suggestion was in full vigour. It was constantly emphasized that the will of the parent was the will of God, and that disturbance of the paternal convenience was a sin of the first magnitude. The more religious a father was, the more likely was he to make this confusion between his own inclinations and the divine purpose." 1

And Leonard Elliott-Binns, who may be called a sympathetic critic of Evangelicalism, in describing the characteristics of this creed, says:

"Lack of trust and a spirit of suspicion has been one of the gravest faults of Evangelicals throughout the whole history of the Movement....Much of the spirit of suspicion arises from a narrowness of mind which insists upon making its own spiritual experience the standard by which to test all mankind." 2

If the creed of Mr. Thorpe could not be charged with his vices, it could at least be charged with encouraging the development of spiritual and moral hardness in an individual naturally disposed to be severe. The Murdstones, the father of Edmund Gosse, Theobald Pontifex and Mr. Thorpe might all have been wiser parents if the faith to which

1

Ibid., pp. 68-69.

2

Leonard Elliott-Binns, The Evangelical Movement in the English Church, London, 1928, p. 79.

they held had been more liberal and cheerful than it was. The case with Miss Clack is somewhat different. Mr. Thorpe represents an obvious effort to draw an Evangelical parent from life, while Miss Clack is a burlesque; her characteristics have been exaggerated for the sake of comedy. Yet she is symbolic; she has a propagandistic value. The attack on Evangelicalism Collins made through her was not quite fair, for his picture of Evangelicalism is one-sided. Diligent as the Evangelicals were in spreading their "good words" on the pomps and vanities of the world, they never made themselves as nauseatingly persistent as Miss Clack is. If she talks cant, "canting had become a habit of the times,"¹ not the exclusive possession of the Evangelicals. If the charitable societies often enough were not genuinely altruistic,² and were meddling, for a long time they were the chief means of bringing relief to poverty outside of the Workhouse. Miss Clack is a satire, and satire usually gives only the shadows without the lights.³

Julian Gray is the only clergyman Collins elected to be the hero of one of his novels. That fact alone gives Julian a special significance. He is evidently Collins's

¹ Quinlan, op. cit., p. 201

² Ibid., pp. 133-38.

³ Collins's antipathy for Evangelicalism may have been dependent upon his association with Dickens. At any rate, it does not appear after Dickens's death.

ideal clergyman.

As the hero of The New Magdalen (1873), Julian Gray is the spiritual guide, consoler, friend, lover and, in the end, husband of Mercy Merrick, the reformed prostitute and heroine of the novel.

As a clergyman, Julian is regarded by his friends as being decidedly unconventional and unclerical.

"Julian, (a friend says of him) is a lost sheep among the parsons, and a thorn in the side of his bishop. Preaches, if they ask him, in Dissenters' chapels. Declines to set up any pretensions to priestly power. Goes about doing good on a plan of his own. Is quite resigned never to rise to the high places in his profession. Says it's rising high enough for him to be the Archdeacon of the afflicted, the Dean of the hungry, and the Bishop of the poor. With all his oddities, as good a fellow as ever lived." ¹

One of Julian's "oddities" is his dislike of anything clerical in his dress or manner. He dressed "with a studious avoidance of anything specially clerical in the make and form of his clothes." ² It was one of his convictions, as his friend Horace remarked in the passage just quoted from, that the clergyman ought to be as much like the layman as possible.

"I have never been able (he tells Mercy, rather self-consciously) to see why we should assert ourselves among other men as belonging to a particular caste, and as being forbidden, in any harmless thing, to do as other people do. The disciples of old set us no such

¹ Collins, The New Magdalen, I, pp. 123-24.

² Ibid., I, p. 132.

example; they were wiser and better than we are. I venture to say, that one of the worst obstacles in the way of our doing good among our fellow creatures is raised by the mere assumption of the clerical manner and the clerical voice. For my part, I set up no claim to be more sacred and more reverend than any other Christian man who does what good he can." ¹

This unclerical clergyman does not seem to be overburdened with theological doctrines. A broad sympathy for humanity is, as Collins writes, "the steady principle which guided his modest and noble life." ² Don't say I am good, Julian tells Mercy, "Say that I try to love my neighbour as myself." ³ Love of neighbor seems to be the sum of Julian's theology.

Julian Gray is, in fact, much more a humanitarian and a would-be social and economic reformer than he is a clergyman. His efforts at economic reform, however, are not merely misunderstood but arouse violent opposition, a fact which gives Collins his chance to hurl a small and rather belated stone at what he is pleased to call Political Economy.

"Public opinion has called me by harder names than the name of 'Radical'. I have been spending my time lately (he tells Mercy)...in an agricultural district. My business there was to perform the duty for the rector of the place, who wanted a holiday. How do you think the experiment has ended? The Squire of the parish calls me a Communist; the farmers denounce

¹
Ibid., I, p. 138.

²
Ibid., I, p. 285.

³
Ibid.

me as an Incendiary; my friend the rector has been recalled in a hurry; and I have now the honour of speaking to you in the character of a banished man, who has made a respectable neighbourhood too hot to hold him.'

"...I had no idea,' he resumed, 'of what the life of a farm-labourer really was, in some parts of England, until I undertook the rector's duties. Never before had I seen such dire wretchedness as I saw in the cottages. Never before had I met with such noble patience under suffering as I found among the people. The martyrs of old could endure, and die. I asked myself if they could endure, and live, like the martyrs whom I saw round me? - live, week after week, month after month, year after year, on the brink of starvation; live, and see their pining children growing up round them, to work and wait in their turn; live, with the poor man's parish-prison to look to as the end, when hunger and labour have done their worst! Was God's beautiful earth made to hold such misery as this? I can hardly speak of it, even now, with dry eyes!'

"...I did all I could to plead for the helpless ones,' he resumed. 'I went around among the holders of the land to say a word for the tillers of the land. "These patient people don't want much," (I said); "in the name of Christ, give them enough to live on!" Political Economy shrieked at the horrid proposal; the Laws of Supply and Demand veiled their majestic faces in dismay. Starvation wages were the right wages, I was told. And why? Because the labourer was obliged to accept them! I determined, so far as one man could do it, that the labourer should not be obliged to accept them. I collected my own resources - I wrote to my friends - and I removed some of the poor fellows to parts of England where their work was better paid. Such was the conduct which made the neighbourhood too hot to hold me. So let it be! I mean to go on. I am known in London. I can raise subscriptions. The vile Laws of Supply and Demand shall find labour scarce in that agricultural district; and pitiless Political Economy shall spend a few extra shillings on the poor, as certainly as I am that Radical, Communist, and Incendiary - Julian Gray!" 1

1

Ibid., I, pp. 141-43.

Charity and sympathy for the poor and underprivileged, understanding and sympathy for the sinner, then, are Julian's guiding principles as a clergyman. And because he sees poverty and sin against their background of social injustice and temptation, he is charitable and sympathetic in the truest and deepest sense. The poor this Kingsleyan clergyman attempts to help in a practical way, the sinner he understands, forgives and encourages.

Julian plays a threefold role in The New Magdalen:

(1) He is the spokesman for some of Collins's social propaganda; (2) he is Collins's ideal clergyman; and (3) he is the hero of the novel and the lover of Mercy Merrick. As Collins's mouthpiece he is too preachy and too self-conscious. As a clergyman he is too goody-goody, too unctuous, and too verbose. As hero and lover he tends to confuse his professional ideals with his personal feelings. When Mercy at first refuses to marry him, in despair he resigns his curacy and volunteers for a West African mission with the hope that the pestilential climate of West Africa will soon put an end to his sufferings. Having been rejected on account of his delicate constitution, he devotes himself to improving the condition of the poor in one of London's worst slums, thus anticipating Mrs. Humphry Ward's Robert Elsmere, until he contracts a fever. While being nursed back to health by Mercy, he persuades her to marry him. When society tacitly refuses to accept his wife, he emigrates with her to the New World, leaving his suffering

agricultural laborers and slum dwellers behind.

It would be interesting to know what Victorian readers thought of Collins's ideal clergyman, but unfortunately they have not recorded their reactions to him. The New Magdalen, because it treated of a forbidden subject, was met with a conspiracy of silence on the part of the reviewers. Only the drama critic of the Saturday Review,¹ when reviewing The New Magdalen in its stage version, took notice of Julian, and his comment was sarcastic. He professed to be unable to tell whether Collins's clergyman belonged to the High, Low or Broad Church. The task of determining Julian's place in the Establishment is certainly not easier today, for Collins gave him no traits that would definitely identify him ecclesiastically, but it appears that he would fit better in the Broad than in the High or Low Church. His emphasis on Christian morality rather than on Christian doctrine, and his zeal for social amelioration, as has been intimated above, suggests that he might have been patterned on a clergyman like Kingsley.

Amelius Goldenheart of The Fallen Leaves is the lay counterpart of Julian. Amelius, like Julian, befriends and marries a reformed prostitute. Like Julian he emphasizes the moral aspects of Christianity. And, like Julian, he is greatly interested in the social and economic welfare of

¹Saturday Review, Vol. XXV (May 24, 1873), pp. 683-84.

the lower classes. Amelius is far more radical than Julian, however, in that he is a member of an American Christian Socialist group who believe that society can be re-established on collectivistic Christian principles. Rejecting all doctrines derived from the New Testament, they accept the ideal of social justice and mutual charity to be found there. Their rule of life is simple:

"We are to love our enemies; we are to forgive injuries; we are to help the needy; we are to be pitiful and courteous, slow to judge others, ashamed to exalt ourselves. That teaching doesn't lead to tortures, massacres, and wars; to envy, hatred, and malice - and for that reason it stands revealed to us as the teaching that we can trust." ¹

The question naturally arises in connection with The Fallen Leaves whether Collins himself believed in a paternalistic, collectivist Christian Socialist society of the kind described in this novel and whether the novel was meant to be propaganda in favor of such a form of society. He undeniably intended to offer a moral ideal in the character of Amelius, but was the collectivist Christian Socialism, sympathetically described, intended to be part of the ideal? Since he does not identify Amelius's opinions with his own, and since so little is known about his views apart from what his books reveal, it is impossible to answer the question definitely. The promised sequel to The Fallen Leaves, had it been written,

¹

Collins, The Fallen Leaves, I, p. 76.

might have given the answer.¹

In The Black Robe Collins expanded a situation he had used in "The Yellow Mask," an early short story, into a full-scale attack on the Jesuits. As pictured in this novel the Jesuits are scheming, cunning, subtle and insincere. They are capable of any dishonest stratagem or subterfuge. They make conversions not from religious conviction but to further the material interests of the Roman Catholic Church. They hold and practice the wicked principle that the end justifies the means.

The plot of the story, briefly, is as follows: The superiors of the Jesuit Order, sitting in council at Rome, make the return of an English estate that had once been an abbey one of their prime objectives. This sentimental project is so important that they give its direction to an English Jesuit Provincial, Father Benwell, and provide him with funds to carry it out. In creating the character of Father Benwell, Collins borrows from himself again. Benwell is modeled on Count Fosco of The Woman in White. Like Fosco he is suave, sociable, astute, resourceful, devious, cunning and keenly intelligent. In order to make the acquaintance of Lewis Romaine, the wealthy and aristocratic owner of

¹ Another character who has a role similar to that of Julian and Amelius is Captain Bennydeck in The Evil Genius. He is a sincere, unselfish philanthropist. Sydney Westerfield, the 'fallen woman' of the story, becomes his secretary and helps him in running his Home for wayward women of good birth. Collins ends the novel with a promise that wedding bells will ring for them too.

Vange Abbey, the coveted property, Father Benwell disguises himself as a simple priest and becomes the chaplain of the Catholic Loring family, who are friends of Romaine. Once he makes the acquaintance of Romaine, Father Benwell introduces him to Father Penrose, another Jesuit disguised as a layman. Father Penrose's role is to bring about Romaine's conversion and thereby secure the estate for the Church. Romaine is maneuvered into accepting the young, likable Father Penrose as his amanuensis and companion. All goes well until Romaine falls in love. As marriage and the possibility of an heir might bring the Jesuit design to naught, Father Benwell works night and day to forestall such a calamity. He is unsuccessful. He then works to break up the marriage. He meets with an unexpected check when Father Penrose, who turns out to be what Collins calls a "Christian Jesuit," gives up his attempts to convert Romaine because he realizes that the success of his endeavor might bring about an estrangement between Romaine and his strongly Protestant wife. After Penrose's defection, Benwell succeeds in effecting the hoped-for estrangement by opening private correspondence, by having inquiries made into the wife's past and by a neat management of events. Romaine becomes a Catholic. Father Benwell then shows him documents that prove he is not married, for his wife had made an earlier private marriage, which, though annulled

by the English courts, is recognized as valid by the Catholic Church. The way to the priesthood is now open to Romaine. He becomes a priest. Fasting and hard work soon ruin his health. The news that his forsaken wife has given birth to a son is a severe shock to him and makes him repent his course. On his deathbed he sends for his wife and son, and there is a reconciliation. The story ends in typical Victorian melodramatic fashion. As Romaine is dying, Father Benwell enters with his will and a lawyer to get the victim to write a codicil assuring the proper disposition of Vange Abbey. The wording of the will, he fears, may give rise to litigation after Romaine's death. The little son is amusing himself throwing sticks into the fire. When all the sticks are gone he asks his father for more. The father hands him the will. Father Benwell moves to take the will from the child, but a faithful friend of the Romaine family grasps him by the throat and prevents him. The boy burns the will.

"The baffled Jesuit turned furiously on the dying man. They looked at each other....'What did you do it for?'... 'Wife and child.'...With those sacred words on his lips, Romaine died." ¹

Father Benwell is a thoroughgoing clerical villain.

¹
 Wilkie Collins, The Black Robe, 3 Vols., London, Chatto & Windus, 1881, III, p. 261. This novel first appeared serially in The Canadian Monthly in 1880.

He callously sows the seeds of discord; he is untruthful and hypocritical. He is an enemy of marriage and the family. He is cynically indifferent to the salvation of souls. His sole aim is the promotion of the political and material power of the Catholic Church in the England of the 'sixties. Like Count Fosco, he is not ashamed to commit his own wickedness to paper, for he writes to his superiors in Rome: "I make no attempt to excuse myself. You know our motto: THE END JUSTIFIES THE MEANS."¹

Until late in the nineteenth century a deep-rooted prejudice against the Jesuits was as native to the average John Bull as the conviction that all Spaniards were cruel and bloodthirsty or that one Englishman was equal to ten Frenchmen. He could no more help hating and slandering Jesuits than he could help being an Englishman. The Jesuit myth was part of common knowledge; it was in his literature and in his education; it was part of the stock-in-trade of his clergy. It had its origin during the Reformation when the Jesuit Order was founded to lead the counter-attack against Protestantism. The Jesuits had been seen by the Englishman as through the eyes of an enemy from the very beginning.

To the average Englishman the Jesuit was an unscrupulous plotter, a perverter of the truth, and capable

¹
Ibid., II, p. 190.

of no good whatsoever:

"He borrows any shape and plays every part with equal readiness. He gives his outward adherence to any form of worship that suits his purpose, and even contrives with a malignity peculiar to himself, to have been born into that precise communion....[He] is supposed to incline more particularly to framing marriage brokerage contracts, or catching bargains with expectant heirs." 1

The Dublin Review found that the Jesuit had become a stereotyped character in English fiction by the middle 'fifties:

"Accordingly Mrs. Gore, Mrs. Trollope, Mrs. Maberly, Miss Sinclair, Charles Lever, Ainsworth and even Thackeray, have all introduced him with great effect....It is amusing, too, to observe how faithfully the established model is followed by them all. For the Jesuit of the novel, as for his brother of the stage, there is a traditional mode of treatment. He of the novel deals more in speeches than in action. He delivers long harangues about his order, and about the end justifying the means. These are all generally for the special behoof of some rich and romantic devotee, whom 'the wily priest' is trying to bring over to leave her property to 'The Order.' The Provincial and even the General are often brought upon the scene. Some of them, like Mr. Ainsworth's impersonation, are familiar with the poisoned draught; while Thackeray's Father Holt draws a pistol from his holster and shoots a man dead upon the spot." 2

The Black Robe follows the general pattern very faithfully.

Periodically the Englishman was reminded of the

1

Anon., "Theory of Jesuit History," Dublin Review, Vol. XXXVI (March-July, 1854), pp. 452-53.

2

Anon., "Curiosities of the Anti-Jesuit Crusade," Dublin Review, Vol. XLI (Sept., 1856), pp. 69-70. The Dublin Review could also have included Kingsley, whose Westward Ho! is violently anti-Jesuit.

malignity of the Jesuits. A spurious work called Secret Instructions of the Jesuits, purporting to be the iniquitous secret orders given to all Jesuits, appeared in England in 1848 to strengthen the general feeling about them. Anti-Jesuit prejudice was particularly strong in Britain from some time after 1850 because of the re-establishment of the English Roman Catholic hierarchy, and anti-Catholic and anti-Jesuit publications poured from the press.¹ The Jesuits were somehow felt to have had something to do with this example of 'Papal aggression.' A pamphlet that carried on the crusade was published by the Religious Tract Society in 1856. In 1861 Dickens's All the Year Round printed, in the same number with the last chapter of Great Expectations, an analysis, with excerpts, of the Secret Instructions. Ignoring all denials of the authenticity of this attack on the Jesuits, All the Year Round professed to see that history demonstrated that the Jesuits actually had such instructions to carry out, and thereby identified its position with that of the slanderous work.² As Dickens was very particular about what appeared in his magazines, it is almost certain that the misrepresenting article had his approval.

In fiction the familiar stereotyped figure of the

¹

S. M. Ellis, Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others, N.Y., 1931, p. 50.

²

"Secret Instructions of the Jesuits," All the Year Round, Vol. V, (July 20, 1861), p. 397.

intriguing Jesuit who acted on the theory that the end justified the means under all circumstances was perpetuated in a series of novels by obscure or anonymous authors.

Among these were two anonymous works, Magdalen Havering and Elfie in Sicily, both of which were published in 1860; James Allan's Father Stirling (1864); Mrs. Henry Paul's The Means and the End (1867); Lady Georgiana Fullerton's The Gain of a Loss (1869); W. Braunston Jones's Mithazan (1872); E. C. S.'s Agnes Ingold's Money (1874); and Mrs. Randolph's No Love Lost (1876).¹ The anti-Jesuit theme was therefore a popular one, and, when combined with other salable ingredients, was assured of financial success.

The Black Robe, then, was in a tradition that was still possessed of life. Collins may have been "a little late in his campaign against Roman aggression,"² as S. M. Ellis suggests, but he was not too late to find a good market for a product of the character of The Black Robe. In appealing to anti-Jesuit prejudice Collins was on pretty safe commercial ground. One may be permitted to doubt that he had any strong personal feelings about the Jesuits.

Among the liberal and the informed the violent prejudice that could find nothing good to say about the

¹ Leo J. Henkin, "Problems and Digressions in the Victorian Novel," Bulletin of Bibliography, Vol. 18, (Jan-Apr., 1944), pp. 58-59.

² Ellis, op. cit., p. 50.

Jesuits lost its strength as the century went on. The common "intriguers" view is found in the British Quarterly Review in 1851.¹ The Rev. J. M. Capes in the Contemporary in 1872, while showing no great love for the Jesuits, disassociated himself from "the common theory, which regards the Jesuits as a body of unscrupulous intriguers, banded together for the attainment of unholy ends by any means, fair or foul...."² The Quarterly in 1873 shows a more detached attitude than was customary earlier. It rejects the claims of the Secret Instructions to be a genuine Jesuit document.³ The Saturday Review in 1875 shows the new attitude and ridicules the popular conception of Jesuits, "the familiar scarecrows of the Protestant platform and the sensational novel...."⁴ The same periodical in 1881 shows a willingness to admit the good qualities of the Jesuits as educators.⁵ The Edinburgh Review, in 1891, is still far from having unbiased feelings toward the Jesuits, and is inclined to emphasize all that can be said against them,

¹
Anon., "Jesuitism as It Is," British Quarterly Review, Vol. XIII (Febr. & May, 1851), pp. 497-524.

²
Rev. J.M. Capes, "The Jesuits in England," Contemporary Review, Vol. XXI (Dec., 1872), p. 42.

³
Anon., "The Jesuits," Quarterly Review, Vol. 137 (Oct., 1874), pp. 283-313.

⁴
Anon., "Jesuit Teaching," Saturday Review, Vol. 39 (Jan. 30, 1875), p. 146.

⁵
Ibid., Anon., Vol. 51 (Febr. 19, 1881), pp. 233-34.

yet anti-Jesuit prejudice can be seen here to be weakening before the erosive forces of scientific historical scholarship. In the early twentieth century the wheel has come almost full circle; a Jesuit is allowed to speak for the Jesuits in an important national journal.¹ An enormous change has taken place in the English mind. And the evolution of feeling has gone as far as it can go when an English non-Catholic admits in the Quarterly that "apart from their example of devotion and thoroughness, despite, perhaps, their unscrupulousness, European society owes the Jesuits a heavy debt."² The Encyclopaedia Britannica illustrates the change rather amusingly. The article on the Jesuits in the ninth edition, written by the Rev. Richard Littledale, an Anglican clergyman, tends to be critical of them. "The influence of the society since its revival in Latin Christendom," he writes, "has not been beneficial."³ In the eleventh edition the same article appears with revisions by the Rev. Ethelred Taunton, also an Anglican clergyman. The sentence corresponding to the one quoted now reads: "The influence

1

Bernard Vaughan, S. J., "The Jesuit in Fact and Fiction," Nineteenth Century, Vol. 75 (June, 1914), pp. 1275-1293.

2

Sidney Dark, "The Jesuits," Quarterly Review, Vol. 255 (July, 1930), p. 293.

3

Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ninth Edition, 1881, Vol. XIII, p. 652.

of the Society since its restoration in 1814 has not been marked with greater success than in its previous history."¹ In the latest editions of the Britannica the article on the Jesuits is written by a Jesuit, and the troublesome sentence, needless to say, has disappeared altogether.

It was not with this evolutionary development of opinion that Collins chose to take his stand in 1881. The Black Robe belongs to the old, illiberal tradition, the 'scarecrow' tradition. It catered to the die-hard religious prejudices of those whose opinions were formed by their emotions rather than by their reason. In writing The Black Robe Collins demonstrated to his readers the unity of feeling that existed between him and them, and at the same time, by appealing to religious bigotry, suffered a serious loss of dignity as a writer. Those who wished him well, like Swinburne, ignored The Black Robe when discussing his work. Punch rallied him by printing a cartoon entitled "Wilkie Collins, as the Man in White doing Ink-and-Penance for having Written the Black Robe," which showed him wearing slippers and a housemaid's nightcap, and robed in a white sheet, holding a candle marked 'Roman' in his hand.² The Saturday Review savagely tore The Black Robe to pieces

¹ Ibid., Eleventh Edition, 1910-11, Vol. XV, p. 342.

² Punch, Vols. 82-83 (January 14, 1882), p. 22.

and ridiculed Collins for stooping to the tactics of a
 professed Jesuit-baiter.¹

In regard to Collins's attitude toward the clergy in general, it is clear that he had no particular respect for 'the cloth' as such, and did not greatly concern himself about any loss of regard for the clergy or for religion on the part of his readers that might derive from his handling of them. The Victorian English clergy, both in and out of the Establishment, would have had reason to complain of his treatment of his clerical characters, and would have had some cause to accuse him of anti-clericalism. Mr. Walter Crotch's opinion to the contrary notwithstanding, in Collins's stories there are only two of

"...those clergymen whom both Collins and Reade were fond of depicting - virile, aggressive, hard-working, and indomitable men, who have heard the cry of suffering, and whose lives are consecrated to its relief - men with more passion for humanity than even Dickens's Minor Canon Crisparkle, and more softened than Kingsley's Spiritual Guides, whose muscles seem sometimes to have developed at the expense of their faith."²

The only two who fit this description are Brother Owen in The Queen of Hearts who, until his retirement had worked "unremittingly, in defiance of failing health and adverse fortune, amid the multitudinous misery of the London poor,"³

¹
Saturday Review, Vol. 51 (May 28, 1881), pp. 697-98.

²
 W. Walter Crotch, The Secret of Dickens, London, 1919, p. 169.

³
 Collins, Queen of Hearts, I, p. 2.

and Julian Gray. Dr. Joyce in Hide and Seek, Decimus Brock in Armadale, Abel Gracedieu in The Legacy of Cain, and Father Paul in "Gabriel's Marriage" (After Dark) are good and charitable clergymen but hardly "virile, aggressive, hard-working, and indomitable men." More than half of Collins's clergymen are presented unsympathetically or are satirized. His general attitude toward the clergy contrasts with his attitude toward doctors and lawyers of whom there are a multitude in his stories. If it can be said that Collins applied any test to his clerical characters, it was that of good works. The clergyman who busied himself working for the good of others in an unselfish and sincere manner bore the stamp of Collins's approval. His ideal makes the clergyman no more than a social worker with a special Collins brand of cant.

The kind of Christianity which Collins favored and for which he propagandized was the kind that concerned itself not with ritual, religious experience or doctrinal matters, but with philanthropy. Evangelical Christianity

I
 For instance, Daubeny Daker in Mr. Wray's Cash-Box, Aaron Yollop in Hide and Seek, Alfred Carling in "The Parson's Scruple" (Queen of Hearts), Dr. Chennery in The Dead Secret, Mr. Meeke in "A Plot in Private Life" (Queen of Hearts), Tertius Finch in Poor Miss Finch, Miles Mirabel in 'I Say No,' Father Rocco in "The Yellow Mask" (After Dark), and Father Benwell in The Black Robe.

is represented as lacking in liberal culture and its social action is misguided and meddling; the Christianity of the Jesuits is hypocrisy. Religion in Collins's stories is not so much a bond between man and God as a bond between man and man. With him, as with Dickens, Reade, Kingsley, Arnold, Samuel Butler and other Victorian writers, religion tends to find its center in humanity, and its typical form of expression is in moral decency and benevolence. For Collins, as for the conscious disciples of Comte, the true religion is the religion of humanity.

CHAPTER IV

COLLINS AND THE LAW

Wilkie Collins, like his friend and fellow-crusader in fiction, Charles Reade, was a lawyer who preferred writing to practising the law; both Collins and Reade had their legal training at Lincoln's Inn, the latter between 1835 and 1842, the former from 1846 to 1851. Neither one of them practised the law after being called to the bar. For neither one, however, were the years spent in the study of the law a waste of time. The litigious Reade found his knowledge of law useful in his many legal disputes. Collins's knowledge of the law served him in good stead in weaving many a complicated plot. What effect his legal training had on his intellectual habits is a matter for speculation, but quite possibly it contributed to him the habit of attention to detail in plotting and the passion for orderly structure that characterize him and that make his romantic sensationalism different from that of Reade or Dickens. When Collins was writing a serial he did not wait for the inspiration of the printer's boy knocking on his door and asking for the next installment; he worked out his plots in advance with the painstaking care of a lawyer making a brief for an important case. Thus, when his last illness made it impossible for him to finish Blind Love, then

running serially in the Illustrated London News, Walter Besant was able to complete the story without difficulty from Collins's detailed notes.

If Collins's treatment of lawyers is any criterion, his experiences at Lincoln's Inn were pleasant. The legal profession is a favored one in his novels. Very rarely does he have a satirical word to say about a lawyer, and the 'crooked lawyer' is almost unknown in the Collins world. The Collins lawyer is a faithful family friend, banker, investment broker, and confidential adviser on every subject. He is quiet, dignified, respectable, sensible and reliable. There are no Conversation Kengeses, Vholeses or Tulkinghorns in Collins. Nearly all Collins's lawyers are cut from the same piece of respectable dark cloth, with very little difference among them. Messers. Gilmore and Kyrle in The Woman in White, Mr. Pendril in No Name, Mr. Pedgift, Sr., in Armadale, Mr. Bruff in The Moonstone, Sir Patrick Lundie in Man and Wife, Mr. Playmore in The Law and the Lady, Mr. Moore in Heart and Science, and Samuel Sarrazin in The Evil Genius, to mention a few of Collins's legal characters, have much the same characteristics and play much the same role. Collins usually put his attacks on the law in the mouth of a lawyer in order to give them more authority and impressiveness.

Collins made extensive use of his legal knowledge in his stories. They definitely bear the stamp of a lawyer

turned novelist. His knowledge of the legal value of wills and marriage settlements - so important for wives before the passing of the Married Women's Property Act in 1870 - of marriage and inheritance law and court procedure manifests itself repeatedly. Complicated and complicating wills are of especially frequent occurrence. Collins particularly likes to make a will a starting point for a plot. In The Woman in White, on a will plus a marriage settlement, to the terms of which the perplexed reader must keep turning back mentally, depends the whole plot of the story. If Laura's curious marriage settlement and the terms of her father's will had not made her more valuable dead than alive to her husband and Count Fosco, there would have been no story. The same novel offers an example of the influence of Collins's legal background on his technique. The structure of the novel is an imitation of trial procedure; the story is told by a series of 'witnesses'. Walter Hartright, the first witness, informs the reader that

"...the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in court by more than one witness - with the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in its most direct and intelligible aspect; and to trace the course of one complete series of events, by making the persons who have been most closely connected with them, at each successive stage, relate their own experience, word for word."¹

Collins used the same court-trial technique, which may also be considered a development of the epistolary method, even

¹

Collins, Woman in White, I, p. 4.

more successfully in The Moonstone by attempting to adapt the manner to the character of the narrator. Browning's The Ring and the Book, which uses a similar technique, appeared by a coincidence in the same year as The Moonstone. As The Woman in White, however, had appeared in 1860 Collins anticipated Browning in the use of this device.

Collins's first attempt to draw the attention of the British public to an injustice in the English legal system was made in No Name.¹ In 1862 an illegitimate offspring in England had no claim to any part of the estate of either of his parents. A bastard could be provided for by the will of his parents, of course, but if they happened to die intestate their property passed on to the nearest legitimate heir and not to the bastard. The bastard was legally nobody's son (nullius filius),² as Collins had pointed out in an earlier story. By law he had no surname of his own.³ Moreover, by English law illegitimate children could not be legitimated by the subsequent marriage of the parents, contrary to the legal practice of almost every other European country. The bastard was legally an outcast. Only a special act of Parliament could make him legitimate,

¹

For summary of plot, see above, pp. 38-39.

²

See above, p. 37.

³

This is the significance of Collins's title, No Name.

and this very rarely happened. In respect to bastardy, the English law had remained unchanged since the Middle Ages.¹ In No Name Collins blended purpose and story with far more skill than in the later Man and Wife and Heart and Science. He did not tell his readers in his preface that he wanted them to meditate on the injustice of the English law of illegitimacy, although he hinted that he was tempted to tell them that, for he ended the preface with the words: "What I might otherwise have wished to say in this place, I have endeavoured to make the book say for me."² Nor did he interrupt the flow of the story by stopping from time to time to indoctrinate the reader with his ideas. Only once did he let the reader know that he wanted to do more in No Name than tell an interesting story. After the death of Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone, when the family lawyer, Mr. Pendril and the governess, Miss Garth, are discussing the Vanstone estate, Mr. Pendril informs her that

"Mr. Vanstone's daughters are Nobody's Children; and the law leaves them helpless at their uncle's mercy."
"A cruel law, Mr. Pendril - a cruel law in a

¹
See Halsbury's Laws of England, 2nd Ed., London, 1931, Vol. II, ("Bastardy and Legitimation"), pp. 557-597; Wilfrid Hooper, The Law of Illegitimacy, London, 1911; Wharton's Law Lexicon, 14th Ed., London, 1938, "Bastard," pp. 116-17; and D. F. Hannigan, "The Legitimacy of Children," Westminster Review, Vol. 133 (Jan.-June, 1890), pp. 619-24. (This article recommends the legal abolition of bastardy.)

²

Collins, No Name, I, p. ix.

Christian country.'

"'Cruel as it is, Miss Garth, it stands excused by a shocking peculiarity in this case. I am far from defending the law of England, as it affects illegitimate offspring. On the contrary, I think it a disgrace to the nation. It visits the sins of the parents on the children; it encourages vice by depriving fathers and mothers of the strongest of all motives for making the atonement of marriage; and it claims to produce these two abominable results in the names of morality and religion. But it has no extraordinary oppression to answer for, in the case of these unhappy girls. The more merciful and Christian law of other countries, which allows the marriage of the parents to make the children legitimate, has no mercy on these children. The accident of their father having been married, when he first met with their mother, has made them the outcasts of the whole social community: it has placed them out of the pale of the Civil Law of Europe!"¹

With the exception of this one speech by Mr. Pendril, who here acts as his mouthpiece, Collins allowed the story to drive home its lesson by itself.

And as an illustration of the injustice of the English law of illegitimacy, the story of Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone and their two children, Norah and Magdalen, is unmistakable and convincing. As Mr. and Mrs. Vanstone had not been married until long after the birth of the two children, Norah and Magdalen are, of course, illegitimate and their legal status can not be affected by their parents' marriage. On his way to London to draw up a will with his lawyer, Andrew Vanstone is killed in a railway accident. He dies intestate, and his children have therefore no legal claim on his estate amounting to more than £80,000. His wife,

¹
Ibid., I, p. 196.

however, is legally entitled to a third of it. But before she can make a will bequeathing her share of the Vanstone estate to her daughters she dies in childbirth. Since both their parents die intestate, Norah and Magdalen are left penniless by the English law of illegitimacy. The whole estate goes to Michael Vanstone, their father's brother and bitterest enemy, who callously offers them £100 apiece. The two young women are turned out into the world. Norah becomes a governess and experiences many hardships. Magdalen, bent on recovering the lost estate, becomes involved in a long series of painful adventures and for a time lives a life of sinful deceit. That Norah's unhappiness and Magdalen's moral degeneration are the consequences of an unjust law is a conclusion that Collins expected the reader to draw for himself.

There was to be no change in the law that visited the sins of the parents on the heads of the children during the lifetime of Collins. Not until 1926 was a law passed altering the legal status of illegitimate children. By the

¹
By the terms of the Legitimacy Act (16 & 17 Geo. 5, c. 60) a child born out of wedlock was legitimated on the marriage of his parents, provided they were domiciled in England or Wales at the date of marriage and provided that neither one of them was married at the date of the child's birth. By this Act also, legitimated children were entitled to a claim on their parents' estate, and an illegitimate offspring could succeed to the intestate estate of his mother provided there were no legitimate issue; "A legitimated person and his spouse, children, or more remote issue are entitled to take any interest in the estate of an intestate dying after the date of legitimation or under a disposition coming into operation after that date or by descent under an entailed interest created after that date in like manner as if the legitimated persons had been born legitimate." Halsbury's Laws of England, Vol. II, p. 567.

passing of this Act the two grievances which Collins brought to the attention of the English public in No Name¹ in 1862 were finally remedied.

In Man and Wife (1870) Collins devoted his prestige, which at that time was very great, and his talent to the cause of further legal reforms. In a single novel he attacked English marriage laws for Ireland, Scotch irregular marriages, and the legal status of a married woman in England. Man and Wife was really undisguised and unashamed social propoganda, differing from fiction like Harriet Martineau's Stories in Illustration of Political Economy² only in quality. In an appendix Collins informed the reader, exactly in the manner of his friend Charles Reade, that the idea of writing the novel had been suggested to him by The Report of the Royal Commissioners on the Laws of Marriage of 1868. Collins might have given Man and Wife the subtitle of A Story in Illustration of the Report of the Royal Commissioners on the Laws of Marriage. In the appendix the reader was offered a list of exact citations from the report so that he might check on Collins's sources for himself.

¹
Collins took care of his own three illegitimate offspring, Marian, born 1869, Harriet, born 1871, and William, born 1874, in his will. See Hyder, op. cit., pp. 297-98.

²
The novel also attacked athleticism, Sabbatarianism, English social snobbery and national pride, severity toward the 'fallen woman,' prudery, betting, hunting, et cet.

Collins worked out a characteristically ingenious and melodramatic plot to give concrete illustration to the evils he wanted remedied. By an old English statute (19 Geo. 2, c. 13) marriages performed in Ireland by a Roman Catholic priest between a Roman Catholic and a person who had been a Protestant within twelve months of the date of the marriage were declared null and void, and by a later statute (5 & 6 Vic., c. 28) a Roman Catholic priest performing such a marriage was liable to transportation for seven years. Such a marriage, however, could be performed by a Protestant Episcopal clergyman. This was the law when Collins was writing Man and Wife.

1

The Prologue of Man and Wife shows how an unscrupulous man might use this law to rid himself of an unwanted wife. John Vanborough, a rich merchant, has been married for thirteen years to a beautiful woman who had once been a prominent actress. The Vanboroughs have one child, Anne. Mr. Vanborough, however, has grown tired of his virtuous wife and has become increasingly ambitious to rise in the social and political world. A marriage with the socially prominent and influential Lady Jane Parnell would further his ambitions considerably. He brings his problem to a clever lawyer, Mr. Delamayn, who is also pushing his way up in the world. The lawyer questions him on the circumstances of his marriage to Mrs. Vanborough, discovers that Man and Wife is divided into a prologue, 16 scenes, and an epilogue.

the marriage has taken place in Ireland, that it was performed by a Roman Catholic priest, and that Vanborough had become a Roman Catholic only six weeks before his marriage in order to overcome the religious objections of his Catholic fiancée. Mr. Delamayn then informs him that his marriage was no marriage at all because it was contrary to law, that he is a single man, and that his daughter is illegitimate. Three months later Mr. Vanborough marries Lady Jane Parnell. In this fashion, an unjust law aids a scoundrel and punishes a noble and innocent woman.

The story then advances into the thorny problem of Scotch irregular marriages. Two types of marriages were recognized by Scotch law, regular and irregular. Regular marriages were those which were performed by clergymen or other persons authorized to perform marriages and which were officially registered. The irregular marriage could be a mere interchange of consent, either verbal or written, before a witness or witnesses, or secretly; or it could consist of a promise of marriage in the future followed by cohabitation.¹ Scotch law recognized consent as the essence of marriage; forms were accidents.

¹ According to some Scotch legal authorities it was not clear whether a promise of marriage followed by cohabitation amounted to marriage or was merely ground for a suit to declare marriage. See J. A. Lovat-Fraser, "Difference between English and Scotch Law," The Law Quarterly Review (London), Vol. X (Oct., 1894), pp. 340-47.

The looseness of Scotch marriage law, so far as irregular marriages were concerned, sometimes led to disagreement among the legal authorities as to what was and what was not a marriage. It was even held by some that inference could establish a marriage.

Having finished with his Irish marriage episode Collins moves the story ahead thirteen years and reopens it in Scotland at the estate of Lady Lundie. Among Lady Lundie's guests are Sir Patrick Lundie, her brother, Blanche Lundie, her step-daughter, Arnold Brinkworth, Blanche's betrothed, Geoffrey Delamayn, son of the solicitor, now Lord Holchester, who had explained the law to Mr. Vanborough, and Anne Silvester, the grown daughter of the unfortunate Mrs. Vanborough. It seems that Anne, who is infatuated with Geoffrey, has allowed herself to be seduced by him, and that he is reluctant to keep the promise of marriage he has made to her. She finally persuades him to agree to meet her at an isolated inn where they will become husband and wife by exchanging consent, as Scotch law permitted. Anne goes to the inn and, in order to be given lodging there by the respectable landlady, pretends that she is a married woman who is waiting for her husband to join her. Meantime Geoffrey is summoned to London to the bedside of his ailing father. He asks his friend Arnold Brinkworth to carry a letter from him to Anne. When Arnold arrives at the inn he allows the innkeeper and the

waiter to assume that he is Anne's husband, for the sake of Anne's reputation. Furthermore, a severe rainstorm makes it impossible for him to leave the inn that night and, again for the sake of appearances, he determines to sleep on a couch in Anne's sitting room. "Neither of them had any adequate idea (few people have) of the infamous absence of all needful warning, of all decent precaution and restraint, which makes the marriage law of Scotland a trap to catch unmarried men and women, to this day."¹ The next morning Arnold leaves, but the damage has been done.

Some time later Arnold and his fiancée, Blanche Lundie, are married. Geoffrey has in the meantime not only failed to fulfill his promise to Anne but has made up his mind to marry the rich widow, Mrs. Glenarm, by fair means or foul. To prevent action of any kind on Anne's part he spreads the report that she is an adventuress who is trying to get a hold on him and that she is, moreover, already married to Arnold. When the report come to Lady Lundie, the scandalized stepmother hastens to take Blanche out of her husband's keeping. Arnold's marriage is temporarily broken up. The parties concerned then agree to try to settle the matter out of court. Lady Lundie, Geoffrey, Blanche, Mrs. Glenarm, the two witnesses from the

¹ Collins, Man and Wife, I, p. 196.

inn and their lawyer meet with Anne, Arnold and his lawyer, Sir Patrick Lundie, at Lady Lundie's London residence. At this sitting, Sir Patrick triumphantly produces his trump card, the message sent by Geoffrey to Anne through Arnold. It had been written on the last page of one of Anne's letters to him. In the letter she had called herself his wife; in his note Geoffrey had called himself Anne's husband. Anne was, therefore, according to Scotch law, Geoffrey's wife at the time Arnold came to the inn. In Sir Patrick's words, "A written promise of marriage exchanged between a man and a woman, in Scotland, marries that man and woman by Scotch law."¹ So the Scotch law saved the marriage of Arnold and Blanche but makes Anne the wife of a man who now hates her.

It is doubtful whether a Scotch court would have established a marriage in the fictitious case that Collins presents, for both Anne and Brinkworth, the parties to the alleged Scotch marriage at the inn, would have denied that they had exchanged consent, but the episode was sufficiently plausible to show Collins's readers how dangerously loose Scotch marriage laws were. Collins's Silvester-Delamayn Scotch-marriage episode was in greater danger of misfiring, for the reader might have felt inclined to see some advantage in a law that trapped a profligate into keeping a promise

¹
Ibid., III, p. 141.

of marriage from which he was trying to escape. At any rate, Collins was causing confusion in the reader's mind by cancelling out a seeming Scotch marriage by means of a real one. After all, one of the arguments the Scotch used to defend their irregular marriage was the fact that they acted, to use Collins's own words, "in the capacity of a moral trap to catch a profligate man."¹

When Collins denounced the state of the Scotch and Irish marriage laws in Man and Wife, he was merely publicizing a situation that had been before the British public for some time. Easy Scotch marriages had been a source of irritation to the English ever since the passing of Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act in 1753. This act, directed particularly against marriages by minors without the consent of their parents or guardians, laid down stringent conditions for English marriages. To avoid the provisions of this law, English couples who wanted to be married in a hurry slipped across the border into Scotland where they could be married at once and with no questions asked. Gretna Green, a village on the Scotch border, became famous for tying the knot quickly and cheaply. It is said that for a

¹ Ibid., III, Appendix, p. 348. Besides the illustrations of the working of the Scotch marriage law, there is a tireade against it delivered by Collins's spokesman, Sir Patrick Lundie. See Vol. II, pp. 9-11.

long time the village blacksmith at Gretna Green did a thriving business in performing marriages. Gretna Green became a synonym for a hasty marriage.¹

In the 'forties Lord Brougham sponsored a bill that would eliminate Scotch irregular marriages. The Scotch people were opposed to any interference with their marriage laws. Blackwood's, which threw its influence against the bill, reflected the attitude of the Scotch nation. It resented English efforts to reform Scotch laws. It defended irregular marriages by maintaining that the law which allowed these marriages promoted morality, for, as cohabitation so easily established marriage, concubinage was effectively discouraged in Scotland. In any case, Scotch irregular marriages were rare and were discounted by the clergy.²

An act was finally passed in 1856 requiring that one of the parties about to be married in Scotland should have resided there for twenty-one days before the marriage took place. This act put an end to quick Gretna-Green marriages, but otherwise left the Scotch law on irregular marriages

1

In an early story, A Rogue's Life, Collins found it convenient to unite his hero and heroine in a Scotch irregular marriage. In this case he voiced no disapproval. See A Rogue's Life, pp. 171-172.

2

See Blackwood's, Vol. 61 (1847), "The Scotch Marriage Bill," pp. 646-652, and Vol. 66 (1849), "The Scottish Marriage and Registration Bills," pp. 263-276.

essentially unchanged.

In the 'sixties there were further efforts to amend the marriage laws for Scotland and Ireland. The Westminster Review, which, as the organ of the Benthamites, stood for all kinds of legislative reform, discussed the state of the marriage laws of the United Kingdom and advocated a reform.¹ The Cornhill likewise exposed the anomalies of Great Britain's marriage laws.² A writer in the Fortnightly³ came to the defense of Scotch irregular marriages. In 1865 a Royal Commission was appointed to inquire into the state of marriage law in Great Britain; its report, which inspired Collins to write Man and Wife, was published in 1868.

Among the causes célèbres that helped to bring before the British public the features of British marriage law that Collins denounced were the marriage trials of Dalrymple vs. Dalrymple early in the century and of Longworth vs. Yelverton in the 'sixties. While Mr. Dalrymple, the heir to the earldom of Stair, was quartered in Edinburgh as a cornet in the Dragoon Guards in 1804, he formed a close

¹
See Westminster Review, N.S., Vol. 26 (July-Oct., 1864), "The Laws of Marriage and Divorce," pp. 442-469, and Vol. 34 (July-Oct., 1868), "The Marriage Laws of the United Kingdom," pp. 104-117.

²
Cornhill, Vol. XVI (Oct., 1867), "The Marriage Laws of the Three Kingdoms," pp. 432-439.

³
J. Campbell Smith, "The Marriage Laws of Scotland," Fortnightly Review, Vol. VIII (Dec., 1867), pp. 673-687.

association with a Miss Joanna Gordon, the daughter of a respectable Edinburgh gentleman. In 1808 Dalrymple returned to Britain from Malta and married the sister of the Duchess of St. Albans. Miss Gordon thereupon produced written promises of marriage from Dalrymple and appealed to the Consistorial Court in London. The case dragged on until 1811, when the Scotch irregular marriage was declared valid and the English one null and void.¹

The case of Longworth vs. Yelverton, which touched upon both Scotch and Irish marriage laws, furnished a whole decade with a subject for gossip, and must have been well known to Collins.² In 1857 an Army officer, Major Charles Yelverton, became the husband of Maria Theresa Longworth by a Scotch irregular marriage. In the same year the couple went through a marriage ceremony in Ireland according to the forms of the Roman Catholic Church. The following year Major Yelverton left his wife and married another woman. Mrs. Longworth-Yelverton then brought a suit against the major for "restitution of her conjugal rights." The Scotch Court of Session declared her Scotch marriage valid. Sometime later, in Ireland, a suit was brought against Major Yelverton for debts contracted by his

1

For summaries of this case, see the Cornhill, Vol. XVI, pp. 435-36, and the Westminster, N.S., Vol. 26, pp. 455-56.

2

The heroine of the connecting narrative of The Queen of Hearts (1859) is Jessie Yelverton.

wife with a tradesman. In the course of the action the Irish marriage of the Yelvertons was declared to be valid. Major Yelverton was charged with the debts contracted by his wife. The decision of the Irish court was considered a national triumph by the Irish people, and Mrs. Yelverton was acclaimed as a heroine. "Over fifty thousand people frantic with joy proceeded to bid her welcome as she issued from the hall."¹ Major Yelverton then appealed his case before the House of Lords in its "supreme appellate capacity," and this court, on July 28, 1864, rendered a decision in his favor. For several years Mrs. Longworth-Yelverton continued her vain efforts to obtain a judgment favorable to her.² The case served to open the eyes of the British public to the perilous inconsistencies of the marriage laws of the United Kingdom; what was a marriage in the Scotch courts and what was a marriage in the Irish courts might be no marriage at all in the supreme court of the land. Collins's

¹

The Yelverton Marriage Case, Thelwall v. Yelverton, comprising an Authentic and Unabridged Account of the Most Extraordinary Trial of Modern Times, with all its Revelations, Incidents and Details Specially Reported, London, n.d., p. 190. This is a detailed, illustrated, tiny-print version of the Irish trial in 191 pages, evidently published immediately after the trial.

²

For the Yelverton case, see the Westminster, N.S., Vol. 26, pp. 443-44, and The Yelverton Marriage Case. The case is also referred to in the Cornhill, Vol. XVI, pp. 432-39, and in the Fortnightly, Vol. VIII, pp. 673-687.

attack enjoyed the great advantage of timeliness.

The Scotch people, however, Collins to the contrary notwithstanding, held on to their irregular marriages and there was no reform in their laws on that point until 1939.¹ On the other hand, "The Matrimonial Causes and Marriage Law (Ireland) Amendment Act, 1870"² made impossible a situation such as Collins had pictured in the story of Mr. Vanborough's repudiation of his marriage vows by permitting marriages between Roman Catholics and persons who had been Protestant within twelve months of the date of marriage and by repealing the old law making the performance of such a marriage a felony. The speedy removal of one of

1

In 1878 there was passed "An Act to encourage Regular Marriages in Scotland" (41 & 42 Vict. Ch. 43) by which a registrar's certificate was allowed to replace the proclamation of banns customary in regular marriages. The fee to the registrar was set at one shilling and sixpence. Law Reports-Statutes, 41-42 Vict., London, 1878. This official attempt to discourage irregular marriages by making regular marriages easier to contract would certainly have made Collins think his crusade had not been in vain.

The Marriage (Scotland) Act (2 & 3 Geo. 6, Ch. 34), dated July 13, 1939, abolished irregular marriages as of January, 1940, in Sec. 5: "No irregular marriages by declaration de presenti or by promise subsequente copula after the commencement of this Act shall be valid." Because of the war, however, the coming into effect of this act was postponed by the "Postponement of Enactments Act" of December 14, 1939.

2

The marriage laws for Ireland were further liberalized by the "Marriage Law (Ireland) Amendment Act," July 13, 1871 (34 & 35 Vict., Ch. 49) and by 36 Vict., Ch. 16.

the injustices he had denounced must have given Collins great satisfaction.

In the story of Hester Dethridge in Man and Wife Collins appealed for legislation granting property rights to married women. The story is brought into Man and Wife as a written confession of a murder committed by Hester, Lady Lundie's eccentric cook. According to this manuscript, Hester finds out soon after her marriage that her husband is a hopeless drunkard. At the end of their first year of marriage all their ready money is gone; while his wife is absent Dethridge sells all the furniture which had been paid for with her money. On her return home there is a quarrel and he strikes her. She resolves to have recourse to legal action;

"Having a spirit of my own, I was resolved not to endure it. I ran out to the Police Court, hard by.'

"My money had not only bought the furniture - it had kept the house going as well; paying the taxes which the Queen and the Parliament asked for, among other things. I now went to the magistrate to see what the Queen and the Parliament, in return for the taxes, would do for me.'

"'Is your furniture settled on yourself?" he says, when I told him what had happened.'

"I didn't understand what he meant. He turned to some person who was sitting on the bench with him. "This is a hard case," he says. "Poor people in this condition of life don't even know what a marriage settlement means. And, if they did, how many of them could afford to pay the lawyer's charges?" Upon that he turned to me. "Yours is a common case," he said. "In the present state of the law, I can do nothing for you."

"It was impossible to believe that. Common or not, I put my case to him over again.'

"I have bought the furniture with my own money, sir," I says. "It's mine, honestly come by with bill and receipt to prove it. They are taking it away from me, by force, to sell it against my will. Don't tell me that's

the law. This is a Christian country. It can't be." "My good creature, says he, "you are a married woman. The law doesn't allow a married woman to call anything her own - unless she has previously (with a lawyer's help) made a bargain to that effect with her husband, before marrying him. You have made no bargain. Your husband has a right to sell your furniture if he likes. I am sorry for you; I can't hinder him!"¹

Things go from bad to worse with Hester. What money she is able to earn as a cook her husband spends on drink, and the disturbances he causes lead to the loss of her position. She tries running away, but each time he tracks her down and settles himself on her again, like an incubus. Finally, in desperation, she suffocates him in his drunken sleep. Murder is able to do for her what the law cannot do. Murder, Collins suggests, is the consequence of the law's failure to protect the wife.

Collins pictures an extreme case, knowing that by so doing he would make the deepest impression on the popular imagination. To represent the evils that they wished removed in the strongest possible terms was a common characteristic of Dickens, Reade, and Collins. They realized that the presentation of an emotionally stirring 'case history' was a far more potent means of reform, so far as the average, uncritical reader was concerned, than either satire or denunciation.

Collins stated the law correctly in the story of

¹

Collins, Man and Wife, III, pp. 250-251.

Hester Dethridge. In England, until 1870, the common law gave almost complete control of the wife and her property and earnings to her husband. Legal custom, however, provided a certain amount of protection for the property of a wife who had made a marriage settlement. The practice of making marriage settlements was confined almost exclusively to the wealthy classes, for a marriage settlement presupposed a knowledge of the law and the employment of expensive legal assistance. Hence, wives of the upper classes enjoyed rights that wives of the lower classes were entirely ignorant of. Here, as in other cases, there was one law for the rich and another for the poor.¹ A. V. Dicey provides a convenient summary of the legal status of the married woman in England up to 1870 in language that is not too technical:

"...A married woman's position in regard to her property was the natural result, worked out by successive generations of lawyers with logical thoroughness, of the principle that, in the words of Blackstone, 'by marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband.'

"...A husband on marriage became for most purposes the almost absolute master of his wife's property. The whole of her income, from whatever source it came (even if it were the earnings of her own work or professional skill), belonged to her husband. Then, too, a married woman, because her personality was merged in that of her husband, had no contractual capacity, i.e. she could not bind herself by a contract. Her testamentary capacity was extremely limited; she could not make a devise of her freehold property, and such testamentary

¹

See A. V. Dicey, Lectures on the Relation Between Law and Public Opinion in England During the Nineteenth Century, London, 1914, pp. 382-83.

power as she possessed with regard to personal property could be exercised only with the consent of her husband, and this consent, when given, might be at any time revoked. If she died intestate the whole of her personal estate either remained her husband's or became his on her death. The way in which the rules of the common law might, occasionally at any rate, deprive a rich woman of the whole of her wealth may be seen by the following illustration. A lady is possessed of a large fortune; it consists of household furniture, pictures, a large sum in money and bank notes, as well as £10,000 deposited at her bankers, of leasehold estates in London, and of freehold estates in the country. She is induced, in 1850, to marry, without having made any settlement whatever, an adventurer, such as the Barry Lyndon of fiction, or the Mr. Bowes of historical reality, who supplied, it is said, the original for Thackeray's picture of Barry Lyndon's married life. He at once becomes the actual owner of all the goods and money in the possession of his wife. He can, by taking the proper steps, with or without her consent, obtain possession for his own use of the money at her bankers, and exact payment to himself of every debt due to her. He can sell her leaseholds and put the proceeds in his own pocket. Her freehold estate, indeed he cannot sell out and out, but he can charge it to the extent of his own interest therein at any rate during coverture, and if under the curtesy of England he acquires a life interest in the freehold estate after the death of his wife, he can charge the estate for the term of his natural life. In any case he can spend as he pleases the whole of his wife's income. He turns out a confirmed gambler. In the course of a few years he has got rid of the whole of his wife's property, except the freehold estate, but though it has not been sold, he has charged it with the payment of all his debts up to the very utmost of his power. If he outlives his wife she will never receive a penny of rent from the estate. He and his wife are in truth penniless; she earns, however, £1000 a year as a musician or an actress. This is a piece of rare good luck - for her husband. He is master of the money she earns. Let him allow her enough, say £200 a year, to induce her to exert her talents, and he may live in idleness and modest comfort on the remaining £800. Under this state of things, which up to 1870 was possible, though, of course, not common, it is surely substantially true to say that marriage transferred the property of a wife to her husband. ¹

¹

Ibid., pp. 371-73.

The question of married women's property rights had been thoroughly agitated by the time Collins took it up, and this fact probably explains the subordinate position he gave to it in Man and Wife. The property rights of wives had become a matter of increasing importance with the increasing employment of married women outside of the home, and were a part of the larger question of women's emancipation. Lady Caroline Norton, the granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, had used her literary talents to further the cause of female emancipation, and her quarrels with her husband, aired in court and in the daily press, had done much to focus the attention of the public on married women's legal rights. The "Byron of poetesses" learned from bitter personal experience how few were the legal rights a married woman possessed in England. When she wanted to bring a suit against a reviewer who had insulted her, she discovered that as a wife she had no legal right to sue. She learned from experience that when a wife separated from a brutal husband, the law would not allow her the custody of her own children. When her husband "assumed possession of all her contracts with her publishers, to help him calculate the amount of her income,"¹ and when he had her bank books delivered to him by her bankers, there was nothing she could legally do to protect her own earnings. Her experience became

¹

J. G. Perkins, The Life of Mrs. Norton, London, 1909, p. 238.

reform pamphlets.

While Collins was writing his preface to Man and Wife in June, 1870, he heard that Parliament was "bestirring itself to remedy the cruel abuses which are here exposed in the story of 'Hester Dethridge'."¹ The first Married Women's Property Act was passed on August 9th, 1870. It provided that the earnings of a married woman should be considered her separate property, that she might make certain investments, and it gave her "the right to the income of real estate which might descend upon her during marriage."² This Act was amended by the Act of 1882, which made all property brought by a woman into marriage or acquired after marriage her personal property, and gave the wife contractual and testamentary powers. Later Acts (1893; 1935) have further expanded and defined a married woman's property rights and liabilities. So far as property is concerned, the married Englishwoman now possesses all the legal rights of a single woman. Here again, one of Collins's aims has been completely realized.

Collins's last attempt to bring about a legal change was made in The Law and the Lady in 1875. This time the attack was on the Scotch court verdict of 'Not Proven' in criminal cases. A mid-century historian of trial by jury

¹

Collins, Man and Wife, I, p. viii.

²

Dicey, op. cit., p. 390.

furnishes the following explanation of this peculiar Scotch verdict:

"It is a peculiarity of the Scotch jury system in criminal trials that it admits a verdict of Not Proven, corresponding to the Non Liquet of the Roman law. The legal effect of this is equivalent to Not Guilty; for a prisoner in whose case it is pronounced cannot be tried again....It is in fact a sort of compromise between conflicting opinions, and affords a convenient refuge where the mind is in doubt as to the effect of evidence." ¹

The objections he makes to this verdict are very much the same as Collins's:

"In the first place, it favors too much the natural indolence of the human mind, which thus escapes the necessity of coming to a definite conclusion upon doubtful facts. There must be always a strong temptation to adopt it where there is much suspicion, but a deficiency of legal proof. But is this fair towards the accused? Surely if the evidence does not establish the charge against him, he is entitled to an absolute acquittal. But although the verdict of 'Not Proven' is so far tantamount to an acquittal, that the party cannot be tried a second time, it falls very far short of it with regard to the effect upon his reputation and character. He goes away from the bar of the court with an indelible stigma upon his fame. One hardly sees how he can afterwards hold up his head amongst his fellow-men, when there stands against him in the opinion of a jury, that the evidence respecting his guilt was so strong that they did not dare to pronounce a verdict of acquittal. So that many of the evil consequences of a conviction follow, although the jury refuse to convict....This is a state of things which ought not to exist." ²

Why Collins decided to undertake a second tilt with the windmill of Scotch law is still his own secret, but the

¹ William Forsyth, History of Trial by Jury, London, 1852, pp. 334-35.

² Ibid., p. 337.

idea of putting into fiction an attack on the verdict of 'Not Proven' could have been suggested by the trial of Madeleine Smith for the murder of L'Angelier, her paramour, in July, 1857. "The case lasted for nine days, and caused perhaps more excitement, both in Scotland and elsewhere, than any other murder trial of the century."¹ L'Angelier, who refused to return to Miss Smith certain damaging letters which she had written to him and which he furthermore threatened to show to her father, died of arsenic poisoning. Miss Smith was accused of having poisoned him. It was proved that she had bought arsenic on false pretenses, but it could not be proved that she had administered the poison to L'Angelier. The jury brought in a verdict of "Not Proven."² "She was not restored to her place in society," says Lord Moncreiff laconically.

There are no close parallels between this historical case and Collins's fictional one except that in both cases the victim dies of arsenic that has been bought ostensibly for cosmetic purposes, and that in both cases the verdict is 'Not Proven'. What is of interest is the fact that there had been a sensational murder trial within the memory of many of Collins's readers which had ended with a verdict of 'Not Proven' and which, by leading Collins to reflect on the

¹
 Lord Moncreiff, "The Verdict 'Not Proven,'" Blackwood's Magazine, Vol. 179 (June, 1906), p. 767.

²
Ibid., p. 770.

after-effects of such a verdict, could have provided him with a 'Purpose' as well as some suggestions for a crime-and-detection novel which that 'purpose' could dignify.

Collins's objection to 'Not Proven' is that this verdict, by neither clearing an innocent man of a criminal charge nor finding him guilty of it, leaves his reputation under a cloud and undermines his peace of mind. The Law and the Lady demonstrates how this verdict affects people's lives. Eustace Macallan has been tried in a Scotch court for the murder of his wife. The verdict of the jury was 'Not Proven'. For three years Eustace has lived in depressed spirits, but at last he makes up his mind to seek happiness in a marriage with a woman who is ignorant of his past. Various circumstances soon lead his new wife, Valeria, to discover that her husband has a secret that depresses him. As her love for him makes it impossible for her to live with him in an atmosphere of doubt, she determines to find out what the secret is and remove a barrier to mutual confidence between her husband and herself. Valeria discovers her husband's secret, but the sensitive Eustace, now convinced that his wife's confidence in him is irreparably shattered and that happiness together is no longer possible for them, leaves her. Against the advice of all her friends, the intrepid Valeria, firmly believing in her husband's innocence, resolves to set about bringing to light the facts that had not been revealed at Eustace's trial and "change that underhand

Scotch Verdict of Not Proven, into an honest English verdict of Not Guilty."¹ Needless to say, she is successful; she collects enough evidence to prove to the world that the first Mrs. Macallan was not murdered at all but committed suicide. Eustace returns to her, his reputation cleared and his self-respect restored.²

Collins's onslaught against the Scotch verdict of 'Not Proven' was no more immediately successful than his attack on irregular Scotch marriages.³ The Law and the Lady⁴ was not well received by the reviewers, although it is the most lively and interesting novel in the weary waste of Collins's work from Man and Wife to Blind Love,

¹
Collins, The Law and the Lady, I, p. 230.

²
The Law and the Lady makes it appear that 'Not Proven' is harmful because it attaches a stigma to the reputation of an innocent man. Lord Moncreiff's attack is based on different grounds: "'Not Proven' is a verdict favorable to a criminal, and there are many cases in which, if the jury were driven to choose between the verdicts of 'Guilty' and 'Not Guilty', they would probably find the prisoner guilty....Generally speaking, the verdict 'Not Proven' simply means that the jury think that the prisoner is guilty, but that being of opinion...that the evidence is not sufficient, that they will not take the responsibility of convicting....It gives a timid jury a loophole for acquitting when they ought to convict." Op. Cit., pp. 765 and 777.

³
In British law encyclopedias 'Not Proven' is still given as part of contemporary Scotch criminal-court law.

⁴
The Saturday Review, Vol. 39 (March 13, 1875) devoted two and a half columns to tearing the novel to pieces in the most brutal manner.

and it has reached only three editions up to the present time. Its chief weakness as a novel of 'purpose' was that it failed to make Eustace Macallan, the pivotal character, a person worthy of the reader's sympathy. Eustace is too passive, weak and selfish to be worthy of Valeria's efforts in his behalf. By concealing his true identity he had deceived her into marrying him. By showing his preference for another woman and his indifference to Mrs. Macallan, he had been partly responsible for his first wife's suicide.¹ As usual, Collins paid so much attention to his plot in The Law and the Lady that he failed to see the damage his plot was doing to his most important character. The reader could hardly be expected to see any great injustice in the verdict of 'Not Proven' when it was associated with the kind of person Eustace Macallan is.

Four of the five legal reforms that Collins supported were actually effected. 'Not proven' remained immune to his attacks. How much influence his support may have had in bringing about these reforms is largely a matter of conjecture. One may note that No Name went into seven editions in England between 1862 and 1926, and that the legal injustice it denounced was finally removed, although not until more than sixty years after the novel was published. So long as No Name was read by Englishmen, they were reminded that a reform was

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For the sake of story interest, Collins deceives his readers into believing that the first Mrs. Macallan has been murdered; to explain her suicide, he falls back on domestic unhappiness.

needed in the laws of illegitimacy. The time interval between the publication of Man and Wife and the achievement of two of the reforms that it advocated was only a matter of months. One of these two legal reforms was in preparation at the time Collins was writing a preface for this novel, and the other, the reform of British marriage laws for Ireland, which the disestablishment of the "National" Church of Ireland in 1869 had made inevitable, was probably being contemplated at the time. Nevertheless, Man and Wife, which was widely read, could have speeded up these reforms. Collins himself would certainly have thought so.

Enough of the contemporary background of Collins's law-reform efforts has been given to show that Collins as a legal reformer was not in advance of his age. A popular novelist rarely is. In campaigning for a reform of the marriage laws of Scotland and Ireland, for property rights for wives, and for the abolition of the verdict of 'Not Proven' he was far from adventuring where none had gone before. Only insofar as he discreetly crusaded for a reform of the laws of illegitimacy can he be considered an advanced reformer. Here he was in opposition to the temper of his age; to the typical conservative Victorian, doing justice to the unfortunate bastard was tantamount to an encouragement to sin. Dickens had followed the example of Fielding in Tom Jones and Smollett in Humphry Clinker of elevating an illegitimate offspring to the dignity of hero by occasionally giving bastards prominent roles. Oliver Twist is illegitimate

and so is Esther Summerson in Bleak House. Dickens handled Esther as lovingly and generously as if she had been his own real child, and by his tenderness to her showed society how the accident of illegitimate birth should be regarded. Collins, however, besides doing what Dickens had done, went farther by demanding that discriminatory legislation against bastards be abolished.

As a legal reformer Collins was both liberal and conservative. In supporting property rights for women, legitimation legislation, and the reform of Irish marriage laws, he was a liberal. In condemning the already sufficiently liberal Scotch irregular marriages and a verdict that provided criminals with a legal means of avoiding punishment, he was conservative. His reform efforts were prompted neither by his liberalism nor by his conservatism, but by his humanitarianism. All the laws he attacked did or could hurt innocent people, even if only a small minority of people, and for that reason he thought they ought to be changed. Like Dickens, he united humanitarianism with Benthamite reformism.

In using the popular novel as an instrument of legal reform, Collins recognized the growing legislative power inherent in the new English middle classes. By appealing to them he was indirectly appealing to the legislature by which alone legal reforms could be effected. The presence of efforts to change the law in Collins's novels becomes a recognition of the existence of democracy in Britain.

CHAPTER V

COLLINS AND SCIENCE

A.

"This was the era of Spencer, Darwin, and Buckle, and of the critical, analytical spirit which so profoundly influenced Mid-Victorian Literature; when in 1858 Spencer's Essays rubbed shoulders with George Eliot's Scenes of Clerical Life; and when in 1861 there appeared the second volume of Buckle's Civilization - and Evan Harrington.

"Meanwhile, in 1860, a story-teller in the other camp seems to have said to himself: 'Science then is the magic password of the day: poetry is scientific; the character story is scientific; then I, standing for the story of incident, must make that scientific also - to keep up with the times. Very well, I will show them that you can get thrills as well as analytical psychology, out of Science. And so Wilkie Collins gave us The Woman in White, which a guileless public swallowed as a straight-forward piece of sensational fiction; but which was, from one point of view, a nice point in mental pathology placed in a brave romantic setting. Soon afterwards he dressed up heredity in a fantastic garb in Armadale; and, finally, put the finishing touch to his reputation by his famous mystery story, The Moonstone, in which, after all, the entire tale hinges on the irregular action of a narcotic. It is Science, Science all the way." 1

Science was indeed firmly entrenched in Mid-Victorian life, and Collins was a shrewd enough judge of what pleased the public to realize that in science popular fiction might have a valuable ally. The Great Exhibition of 1851 had quickened general interest in science, and every day the Victorians saw the practical results of science all around them: steam engines in their factories, locomotives on their railways, gas lights in their streets, steamers on their rivers.

1

Arthur Compton-Rickett, "Wilkie Collins," The Bookman (London), Vol. XLI (June, 1912), p. 107.

The wonders of faraway places were being brought home to them by photography, and distance was being annihilated by the telegraph. By the 'sixties messages were being sent underwater to America. The long-forbidden region of the air was being invaded by balloons. Everyday experience showed that life was being transformed by the wonderful thing called science. Everyone wanted to know more about it; everyone had to know something about it or suffer the penalty of being behind the times, of being unprogressive. Mechanics' institutes for workmen, associations like the Duskydale Literary and Scientific Institution in Collins's A Rogue's Life for the middle classes, and science soirées for the upper classes, like those given by Mrs. Gallilee in Heart and Science, helped to spread scientific knowledge. Newspaper readers became familiar with the latest facts and fancies of higher science by pondering over reports on the sittings of august bodies like the British Association for the Advancement of Science or the Royal Society. The appetite for scientific knowledge was satisfied by lecturers, and by almost all the periodicals that supplied the Victorians with entertainment and instruction at the same time. In magazines like Chambers's Edinburgh Journal, Bentley's Miscellany, The Cornhill and Macmillan's Magazine, the reader could turn from a piece of fiction to an article on some phase of science. The reader who was following Collins's Moonstone avidly in All the Year Round could, for instance, on April 4, 1868,

finish the latest installment of that thriller and go on to an article on the scientific achievements of Faraday. Book publishers helped feed the hunger for scientific knowledge with works like John Kitto's The Lost Senses (Deafness, Blindness), John Elliotson's Human Physiology, William Carpenter's Principles of Human Physiology, books to which Collins referred readers who should wish to verify his scientific data. Those anxious to impress with a smattering of science could purchase a cheap copy of Joyce's Scientific Dialogues, a work that went into numerous revised editions between 1808 and 1868. It was this popular purveyor of science that Captain Wragge, the cunning rogue in No Name, dipped into to fit himself for the society of Mrs. Lecount, the widow of a Swiss naturalist.

Everything that was contemporary and of general interest was grist for Collin's fiction mill. He gave his readers an up-to-date world in his books, the kind of physical world they were familiar with. The newest inventions were made use of, and recent events were often alluded to. If it was science that was the absorbing interest of the day, Collins would give his readers science. They would not only find it in the same magazine with the fiction; they would find it in the fiction itself, properly diluted and adapted to the purposes of the fiction, but as accurate as the novelist could make it. He would show his readers that exact science was not incompatible with romantic mysteriousness.

Collins, like his successors of today, the detective-story writers, found medical science, particularly psychiatry, and chemistry must useful for his purposes. His attitude toward medicine is respectful, even reverent - quite the opposite of that of Charles Reade, who persistently ridiculed conventional medical practice in his novels. Medicine, like law, is a protected profession in Collins, and is rarely subjected to criticism, perhaps because Collins's poor health made him so dependent on doctors. A typical Collins novel is a struggle between two groups of characters, one good, the other evil. Doctors are nearly always aligned on the side of the good. Doctors who are on the side of the evil characters, like Dr. Le Doux in Armada, Dr. Benjulia in Heart and Science and Dr. Vimpany in Blind Love, are there because they are unworthy of their profession. Dr. Le Doux is really a quack, not a genuine doctor, Dr. Benjulia has given up the practice of medicine for vivisectional research, and Dr. Vimpany had entered medicine without a true vocation for it. Doctors are even more numerous in Collins than lawyers; they are little differentiated, and they are wearisomely refusing to answer for the consequence, if such and such is or is not done by or for the patient.

Madness in varying degrees, brain fever, and amnesia resulting from it, are employed frequently in Collins's fiction and their symptoms are described with at least an appearance of scientific accuracy. Ulpius, the madman in

Antonina, has lost his sanity through a shock. He has no consciousness of the future, but possesses a fragmentary memory of the past. At moments he relives his most triumphant experiences; at other times his mind carries him back to his childhood. The great ambition of his life, the restoration of paganism in Rome, remains with him as a fixed idea. A shock is also the cause of Mr. Wray's temporary madness in Mr. Wray's Cash-Box. The doctor who attends him is of the opinion that a second shock of an opposite character may restore his patient's sanity, and this is what actually happens. Mr. Wray too has a fixed idea. His temporary insanity takes the form of manic depression. When he recovers he has no memory of his period of madness. In "The Yellow Mask" Count Fabio's mental illness is caused by an emotional shock. He has a "fixed delusion" that keeps him in a state of depression, but he is rational in other respects. His doctor cures him by supplying him with physical proofs that his delusion is groundless. Mrs. Carling in "The Parson's Scruple" and Mrs. Gallilee and Carmina in Heart and Science are cured of brain fever by medical science. In "Mad Monkton" Collins combines heredity, a subject that greatly interested the mid-Victorians, with madness. There is a strain of insanity in the Monkton family of which Alfred Monkton gradually becomes the victim. Like the rest of Collins's psychopathic characters, he has a fixed obsession which his doctor tries to remove. An attack of brain fever destroys his memory of

the recent past. In The Law and the Lady Collins offered his readers a variation in insanity in the character of the brilliant megalomaniac, Miserrimus Dexter, and imbecility in Ariel, the faithful servant whom Dexter "found quite a psychological study".¹ In Jack Straw Collins showed that he knew something of the newer methods of treating insanity that were replacing the chain and whip. Mrs. Wagner, who removes Jack from an asylum and puts him to work for her, is a firm believer in "the treatment of insanity by moral influence."² Anne Catherick, "the woman in white," is Collins's most successful combination of science and art so far as mental weakness is concerned. She is, in fact, a stroke of genius, a will-o'-the-wisp who draws the reader's interest after her in a mad chase that ends nowhere. She is an excellent example of Collins's skill in giving the reader false leads. Pathological science provides her with the two characteristics that are, so to speak, her trump cards in the story. She has a fixed delusion, and she clings obstinately to any notion once planted firmly in her mind. The first characteristic accounts for her conviction that

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Collins, The Law and the Lady, III, p. 173.

²

Collins, Jezebel's Daughter, I, p. 104.

she holds an important secret, when she doesn't; the second, for her strange habit of wearing only white, a color in which a benefactress had delighted to dress her as a child.

Collins's lunatic characters are by no means profound studies of mental aberration, and would scarcely satisfy a psychiatrist, but they are an improvement over the heavily sentimentalized lunatics of eighteenth-century fiction.

The Victorian reader interested in science would have recognized that the conception of these lunatics owed something to science, and that would have satisfied Collins.

Chemistry is called upon to lend its assistance in "Sister Rose," A Rogue's Life, The Woman in White, Armadale and elsewhere. In "Sister Rose," the chemist Louis Trudaine, condemned to death with his sister during the French Revolution, uses his scientific knowledge to save their lives. By means of a chemical compound which Trudaine has prepared, Lomaque, a former servant of the Trudaines, is able to remove their names from a prison death-list. Dr. Dulcifer in A Rogue's Life turns his chemical knowledge to good account in making counterfeit money. Count Fosco, arch-villain of The Woman in White, is an amateur chemist who uses his knowledge of chemistry for evil purposes. "Chemistry," the Count confesses, "especially has always had irresistible attractions for me, from the enormous, the illimitable power which the knowledge of it confers. Chemists, I assert it emphatically, might sway, if they pleased, the destinies of humanity."¹ Collins's

¹
Collins, The Woman in White, III, p. 324.

most notable employment of chemistry for sensational effect occurs in Armada when Miss Gwilt plans to kill Allan Armadale in Dr. Le Doux's ultra-modern, scientifically planned Sanatorium for persons suffering from nervous diseases. Guided by the technical knowledge of the infamous Dr. Le Doux, she fills the room in which Allan Armadale is supposed to be sleeping with a poison gas formed by the interaction of a solid and a liquid substance, the names of which Collins does not give.¹ The poison gas, as it is formed, enters the room by means of a modernistic fumigating system installed in the wall of the room. Discovering in time that the sleeping man in the room is not Allan Armadale but her own husband, she rescues him and then commits suicide in the improvised gas chamber. Thus, chemical science is employed to give a spectacular climax to the wicked career of Lydia Gwilt, in a way that recalls the spectacular death of Dickens's gin-saturated Krook by spontaneous combustion.

Collins resorts to medical science to punish Margaret Sherwin in Basil. Margaret, when looking for her paramour in a hospital, contracts typhus by bending over a patient who has the disease. Dr. Bernard, the physician who attends her, explains to a friend his theory of typhus infection:

"My notion," he said, "is that infection is taken through the lungs; one breath inhaled from the infected atmosphere hanging immediately around the diseased person, and generally extending about a foot from him being enough

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Collins assures the reader in an appendix that he has consulted men of science before venturing to describe this chemical process.

to communicate his malady to the breather - provided there exists, at the time, in the individual exposed to catch the malady, a constitutional predisposition to infection." 1

Dr. Bernard holds a mistaken theory, but Collins could not have been expected to know in 1852 that typhus is communicated by lice, not by exhalations. The medical authority who wrote on typhus for the Ninth Edition of the Britannica said that

"The disease appears to be communicated by the exhalations given off from the bodies of those suffering from the fever, and those most closely in contact with the sick are most apt to suffer." 2

Collins was merely erring with the authorities whom he had consulted. He errs again in The Woman in White when he has Marian Halcombe contract typhus from exposure to the rains.

The findings of science in regard to blindness, deafness and dumbness are applied to characters in Hide and Seek, The Dead Secret, and Poor Miss Finch. As Collins informed the readers of Hide and Seek, The Lost Senses by John Kitto was made use of in his attempt to "exhibit the peculiar effects produced by the loss of the senses of hearing and speaking on the disposition of the person so afflicted." 3 Madonna, the beautiful deaf-and-dumb girl is, for instance, "acutely sensitive to the influence of percussion." 4 She has formed a habit of describing people

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Collins, Basil, III, p. 150.

2

Encyclopaedia Britannica, Ninth Edition, N.Y., 1888, Vol. XXIII, article "Typhus".

3

Collins, Hide and Seek, I, p. 296, Note.

4

Collins, Ibid., I, p. 258.

by imitating their gestures. She is abnormally afraid of the darkness, because in the dark her most useful remaining sense, sight, is of no help to her. This fear of darkness Collins uses effectively in the scene in which Marksman, to prevent Madonna from recognizing him, blows out her candle. The loss of her means of vision brings on a "paroxysm of terror." The Dictionary of National Biography calls The Dead Secret "a study of blindness,"¹ but it is hardly that. Leonard Frankland is blind, but there is little about him that points to a scientific study of blindness in his case, except perhaps the fact that in his dreams he walks about freely with seeing eyes and not as a blind man. Poor Miss Finch may more truly be called "a study of blindness," for in this novel Collins makes a deliberate effort, based on scientific data, to show how a blind girl acts and thinks. In a preface very similar in manner to the "Note to Chapter VIII" in Hide and Seek, in which he pointed to his scientific treatment of deafness and dumbness, Collins informed the readers of Poor Miss Finch that he felt he was doing something novel in handling blindness in a character from a scientific point of view:

"More than one charming blind girl, in fiction and in drama, has preceded Poor Miss Finch. But, so far as I know, blindness in these cases has always been exhibited, more or less exclusively, from the ideal and the sentimental point of view. The attempt here made is to appeal to an interest of another kind, by exhibiting blindness as it

¹
 "William Wilkie Collins," Dictionary of National Biography, Vol. II, Supplement, N. Y., 1901, p. 48.

really is. I have carefully gathered the information necessary to the execution of this purpose from competent authorities of all sorts. Whenever 'Lucilla' acts or speaks in these pages, with reference to her blindness, she is doing or saying what persons afflicted as she is have done or said before her." ¹

Thus, Lucilla's hearing is extraordinarily keen. Her sense of touch is extraordinarily developed. Her arms come to mean so much to her that she wishes she could stretch them out to the planets. She can judge character by voice. She is not bashful, for bashfulness comes from a consciousness of others' eyes upon us. Being blind she is suspicious. She lives in her imagination.

To this scientific presentation of blindness Collins adds a phenomenon taken from medical science, namely, the darkening effect of nitrate of silver on the skin when used as a treatment for epilepsy. Oscar Dubourg, Lucilla's lover, is cured of epilepsy by this old-fashioned treatment but the color of his skin becomes blue-black. Lucilla is operated on for cataracts and her vision is restored, but blindness has developed in her a horror of dark colors. The conflict that then ensues forms the main interest of the last third of the novel. There is a surprising amount of medical science in Poor Miss Finch, much more than need be indicated here. If it impressed readers, it annoyed reviewers. Collins liked to parade his science with a rather naive pedantry.

Heredity is very lightly touched upon in "Mad Monkton,"

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Collins, Poor Miss Finch, I, Preface, iii-iv.

the super-sensational story of a young man afflicted with hereditary insanity. Ozias Midwinter in Armada is bediviled by a supposedly inherited fatalism. Collins uses this "hereditary superstition" to account for behavior otherwise inexplicable and as a source of easy sensational effects. In The Legacy of Cain, a very late novel (1888), he takes up the subject more extensively and makes the story an illumination of the thesis that a good environment, personal virtue and love can effectively counteract and control inherited tendencies to vice. Eunice, the daughter of a murderess, has inherited evil moral tendencies from her mother. She has the good fortune, however, to be adopted by a kindly Congregational minister by whom she is provided with an excellent religious education as well as love and tenderness. Eunice grows up to^{be} a model young woman and the evil tendencies do not appear until after her sweetheart has been stolen from her by her foster-sister, Helena. Then she becomes conscious of murderous impulses, the origin of which puzzles her, for she is ignorant of her true parentage. A family friend who knows her history reveals the source of these impulses to her. Eunice, because of the atmosphere of love in which she has developed and because of inherent good qualities in herself that owe nothing to heredity, is able to overcome her inherited evil impulses and to regain her former serenity. In this novel the disquisitions on heredity are supplied by a doctor and a prison governor, both of whom have made a close study of the subject.

The governor states the conclusion that the story illustrates:

"...Moral resemblances have been traced between parents and children. While, however, I admit this, I doubt the conclusion which sees, in inheritance of moral qualities, a positive influence exercised on mortal destiny. There are inherent emotional forces in humanity to which the inherited influences must submit; they are essentially influences under control - influences which can be countered and forced back." ¹

Collins's most effective application of science to fiction is in The Moonstone. Here he makes use of his studies of the subconscious and of the effects of narcotics on the mind. The idea of having Franklin Blake remove the diamond from Rachel Verinder's room in a state of trance induced by opium is a good one insofar as it makes the mystery of the missing diamond absolutely impenetrable to the reader, but at the same time, because of an absence of clues, it deprives the reader of the pleasure of arriving at the identity of the thief by a process of induction. The elaborate experiment performed by Dr. Ezra Jennings to prove to Blake's friends that Blake had removed the diamond subconsciously prompted by his concern for the owner of the dangerous stone gives Collins a chance to show his scientific knowledge. This experiment consists in restoring as closely as possible the conditions under which the stone had been stolen the year previously on the theory that the same set of circumstances will always produce the same reaction. To carry out his part in the experiment, Blake, in a physical and psychological state similar to that in which he was at the time he took

¹ Collins, The Legacy of Cain, II, p. 224.

the diamond, swallows opium, and gets into a condition of "spiritualized intoxication,"; the experiment is successful, for Blake behaves as he had behaved the year before. Readers who might be inclined to doubt that such a thing could happen are referred by Collins, speaking through Ezra Jennings, to two contemporary science writers, Dr. Carpenter and Dr. Elliotson, two of whose works have been already mentioned.

From this quick review of Collins's employment of the results of science in his fiction it is amply clear that he was interested in science, that he was proud of his own scientific attainments, and that he was aware, not only in 1860, but from the beginning of his career as a novelist, of the usefulness of applying science to fiction, particularly as a means of obtaining sensational effects. Nevertheless, when the antagonism between science and religion and humanism, apparent in English literature since the Renaissance, flared up into open and violent combat after the publication of Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859, Collins was found "on the side of the angels," as were the majority of his middle-class readers. Benjamin's tirade¹ in The Law and the Lady against the new evolutionary science was a forecast of what was to come in Heart and Science in 1883.

Heart and Science denounced the dehumanizing effects of an all-absorbing devotion to science, the alleged arrogance

¹ See above, pp. 28-29.

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and presumption of scientific theorists, the faddish cultivation of science by dilettantes, and the use of vivisection by scientists. Like Man and Wife, Heart and Science is introduced by a lengthy preface explaining Collins's aims and assuring his readers of the accuracy of his facts. As in Man and Wife Geoffrey Delamayn illustrates the moral and physical evils of an excessive devotion to athletics, so does Mrs. Gallilee in Heart and Science illustrate the deplorable consequences of an exclusively scientific training.

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The temerity of the publicists of science is rebuked in this address to Mrs. Gallilee: "Look at your library table, learned lady, and take the appropriate means of relief that it offers. See the lively modern parasites that infest Science, eager to invite your attention to their little crawling selves. Follow scientific inquiry, rushing into print to proclaim its own importance, and to declare any human being, who ventures to doubt or differ, a fanatic or a fool. Respect the leaders of public opinion, writing notices of professors, who have made discoveries not yet tried by time, not yet universally accepted even by their brethren, in terms which would be exaggerated if they were applied to Newton or to Bacon. Submit to lectures and addresses by dozens which, if they prove nothing else, prove that what was scientific knowledge some years since, is scientific ignorance now - and that what is scientific knowledge now, may be scientific ignorance in some years more. Absorb your mind in controversies and discussions, in which Mr. Always Right and Mr. Never Wrong exhibit the natural tendency of man to believe in himself, in the most rampant stage of development that the world has yet seen. And when you have done all this, doubt not that you have made a good use of your time. You have discovered what the gentle wisdom of Faraday saw and deplored, when he warned the science of his day in words which should live for ever: 'The first and last step in the education of the judgment is - Humility.'" III, pp. 170-72.

Mrs. Gallilee, the reader learns, has devoted herself to science since she was a young woman, and the acquisition of scientific knowledge remains the ruling passion of her life. She reads only scientific literature, and despises belles lettres. She is a zealous supporter of lectures on science, and delights to hold science conversations, to which eminent scientists are invited, in her home, and so promote her ambition to shine in the social world as a patron and devotee of science. In the pursuit of science she neglects her husband and children.

As a result of her passionate devotion to science she has lost her humanity. She has "starved her imagination, and emptied her heart of any tenderness of feeling which it might once have possessed."¹ Her "religious convictions began and ended with the inorganic matter of the earth."² She knew, says Collins sarcastically, "on the best scientific authority, that the world had created itself...."³

Science has made Mrs. Gallilee a soulless creature. It is not surprising, therefore, that she plots against the health and happiness of her niece and ward, Carmina, whose inheritance she covets. When her heartlessness is at length clearly exposed, she loses her last claims to

¹ Collins, Heart and Science, I, p. 68.

² Ibid., I, p. 107.

³ Ibid., III, p. 176.

the affection of her household. Abandoned by her husband and children, she has left only the cold comfort of science. Collins dismisses her from the stage in a scene that he attempts to make humorously satirical:

"Mrs. Gallilee was At Home to Science. The Professors of the civilised universe rallied round their fair friend. France, Italy, and Germany bewildered the announcing servants with a perfect Babel of names - and Great Britain was grandly represented. Those three superhuman men, who had each had a peep behind the veil of creation, and discovered the mystery of life, attended the party and became centres of three circles - the circle that believed in 'protoplasm,' the circle that believed in 'bioplasm,' and the circle that believed in 'atomised charges of electricity, conducted into the system by the oxygen of respiration.' Lectures and demonstrations went on all through the evening, all over the magnificent room engaged for the occasion. In one corner, a fair philosopher in blue velvet and point lace, took the Sun in hand facetiously. 'The sun's life, my friends, begins with a nebulous infancy and a gaseous childhood.' In another corner, a gentleman of shy and retiring manners converted 'radiant energy into sonorous vibrations' - themselves converted into sonorous poppings by waiters and champagne bottles at the supper table. In the centre of the room, the hostess solved the serious problem of diet; viewed as a method of assisting tadpoles to develop themselves into frogs - with such cheering results that these last lively beings joined the guests on the carpet, and gratified intelligent curiosity by explorations on the stairs. Within the space of one remarkable evening, three hundred illustrious people were charmed, surprised, instructed, and amused; and when Science went home, it left a *conversazione* (for once) with its stomach well filled. At two in the morning, Mrs. Gallilee sat down in the empty room, and said to the learned friend who lived with her,

"At last, I'm a happy woman!"¹

¹

Ibid., III, pp. 300-02. The sittings of Dickens's "Mudfog Association for the Advancement of Everything" end with a banquet of which Professor Woodensconce says: "...this is the spread of science, and a glorious spread it is." Dickens's Works, Vol. XXVIII, Boston, 1894, p. 203.

The chief aim of Heart and Science, however, was not to indict the arrogance of the publicists of science nor to demonstrate the evil effects of a one-sided devotion to science, but to expose the iniquities of vivisection. Heart and Science is essentially an anti-vivisection pamphlet.

Vivisection became a household word in England during the 'sixties and 'seventies. To scientific inquirers in the field of physiology, vivisection meant the practice of experiments on living animals; to the Victorian public, it meant the wanton cutting up of live dogs and cats and laboratory cruelty towards animals in general. Vivisection as a method of scientific inquiry used by physiologists and medical men had come into fairly general use in England along with the great advance in medical science achieved during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. The great vivisection controversy, which engaged the attention of most of the Victorians, had its beginning, according

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The practice of using animals for scientific experimentation is very old. Bacon's institution for scientific research in The New Atlantis is provided with animals for experimental purposes. It is worth noting that the youthful Dickens satirized vivisection in "The Mudfog Papers" written for Bentley's Miscellany in 1837. See Dickens's Works, Vol. XXVIII, pp. 165-67.

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to Frances Power Cobbe, the standard-bearer of the anti-vivisectionists, in 1863 when reports of the practices of the Veterinary Schools at Alfort, France, got into the English newspapers and magazines. As a result of the appearance of these reports the English humanitarian reading public became aware that vivisection not only existed, but existed in England. From this time on the pros and cons of vivisection were increasingly debated in the English press, nor is the controversy settled to this day.

2

As early as 1866 the anonymous writer of a carefully reasoned article in The Westminster Review foresaw what was

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1
See Life of Frances Power Cobbe as Told by Herself, London, 1904, "The Claims of Brutes" (pp. 615-692). Miss Cobbe (1822-1904) English philanthropist, journalist, and Unitarian religious writer, interested herself in reform schools, workhouses, women's political and legal rights, vivisection, and other questions of her time. Some of her anti-vivisectional writings are gathered together in The Modern Rack, London, 1889. The Hon. Stephen Coleridge, an ardent anti-vivisectionist and admirer of Miss Cobbe, writes of her: "She was masterful in temperament, not always ready to listen with urbanity to opinions she did not share, or to admit that her conclusions could even conceivably have their foundations in doubtful premises. But these very human characteristics in no way diminished the personal affection she inspired in those among whom she moved. She lived a fine courageous life, and when she died, by an appropriate and beautiful coincidence, a dog was the only witness of her last breath."(!) The Hon. Stephen Coleridge, Great Testimony, London and New York, 1918, p. 11.

2

See Spectator, 166:476, May 2, 1941; 166:554 and 583, May 23-30, 1941, and Nineteenth Century, 106:197, August, 1929; 106:356, September, 1929, and 106:649, November, 1929.

3

"Physiological Experiments: Vivisection," Westminster Review, N.S., Vol. xxix (Jan., 1866), p. 146 and pp. 154-55.

in store for the English physiologists. After a lengthy examination of the question of the value of vivisection, he concludes:

"We arrive thus, however unwillingly, at the conclusion that vivisection is necessary for the general purposes of science; and if, as we most undoubtedly believe, the advancement of science, and more especially of physiology, is of very great importance to the interests of mankind, it follows that vivisection must be permitted to go on. It is doubtless a sorry necessity, but not on that account to be ignored."

Vivisection is necessary, therefore, if the beneficial science of physiology is to advance, and it ought not to be brought under government control:

"...it would be the very height of absurdity to endeavour to check by legislative enactment its [suffering's] infliction by a small class of enlightened and laborious men by whom it is practised but rarely and even then not wantonly or for amusement, but with care and pains, and for no less a purpose than to extend the empire of human knowledge, and to diminish the amount of human suffering. Surely, to make any such attempt were indeed to begin our reforms at the wrong end of our social system, to strain at a gnat after swallowing innumerable camels."

In the eighteen-seventies the volume of printed discussion of vivisection was particularly large. All shades of opinion on the burning question, from advocacy of free, untrammelled experimentation on animals to total prohibition of vivisection, found expression in pamphlets and in articles in newspapers and journals. An anonymous writer in The Cornhill Magazine, for example, condemns vivisection on ethical grounds and is for passing a bill making the practice punishable by law. ¹ More moderate is the position of Richard Congreve and J. H. Bridges in an essay in the learned Fortnightly.

I

"The Ethics of Vivisection," Cornhill Magazine, Vol. XXXIII, (April, 1876), pp. 468-478.

They do not argue for prohibition of vivisection, but for its control, not by legislation but by public opinion:

"Sharing in the feeling against vivisection, which is strong and general, we wish to take part in the movement against it and on the following grounds.

"The practice is supported on the plea that it is essential to sound physiological teaching; and secondly, that it is a necessary instrument of original research - that biology, as an experimental science, requires a large use of experiment.

"The first plea we reject as untenable....

"As an instrument of original research vivisection stands on a somewhat different footing. It has unquestionably been useful in the past. We think that, under most careful restrictions, it may on rare occasions be needed in the future. But the results already attained in biology ought to render its employment more and more infrequent....

"We object to it as an abuse of our power over the animals whose chief man has gradually risen to be - a power which is limited both by our own moral nature and by the kindred nature of these animals. ²

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Hardy likewise based his opposition to vivisection on evolutionary grounds. "About this time (June, 1909) he wrote to a lady in New York in answer to an inquiry she made: "The discovery of the law of evolution, which revealed that all organic creatures are of one family, shifted the centre of altruism from humanity to the whole conscious world collectively. Therefore the practice of vivisection, which might have been defended while the belief ruled that men and animals are essentially different, has been left by that discovery without any logical argument in its favor. And if the practice, to the extent merely of inflicting slight discomfort now and then, be defended (as I sometimes hold it may) on grounds of it being good policy for animals as well as men, it is nevertheless in strictness a wrong, and stands precisely in the same category as would stand its practice on men themselves." Florence Emily Hardy, The Later Years of Thomas Hardy (1892-1928), New York, 1930, pp. 138-139.

²
Richard Congreve and J. H. Bridges, "Vivisection," Fortnightly Review, Vol. XVII, N.S. (March 1, 1875), pp. 435-36.

"Lewis Carroll" added his share of fuel to the fire by attacking thirteen so-called fallacious propositions advanced by the vivisectionists. Having disposed of these fallacies he states his own position:

"That while we do not deny the absolute right of man to end the lives of the lower animals by a painless death, we require good and sufficient cause to be shown for all infliction of pain.

"That the prevention of suffering to a human being does not justify the infliction of a greater amount of suffering on an animal. ¹

"That the chief evil of the practice of vivisection consists in its effect on the moral character of the operator; and that this effect is distinctly demoralising and brutalising. ²

He ends his article prophetically with a grim warning that the time may come when man may be the subject of vivisection:

"And surely the easy-going Levites of our own time would take an altogether new interest in the matter, could they only realise the possible advent of a day when anatomy shall claim, as legitimate subjects for experiment, first, our condemned criminals - next, perhaps, the inmates of our refuges for incurables - then the hopeless lunatic, the pauper hospital patient, and generally 'him that hath

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Browning, an active opponent of vivisection, wrote Miss Cobbe in 1874: "...You have heard 'I take an equal interest with yourself in the effort to suppress vivisection.' I dare not so honor my mere wishes and prayers as to put them for a moment beside your noble acts; but this I know: I would rather submit to the worst of the deaths, so far as pain goes, than have a single dog or cat tortured on the pretence of sparing me a twinge or two...." Edward Berdoe, Browning's Message to His Time, New York, 1891, pp. 173-74. He also became a patron "of a projected hospital to be called the Shaftesbury, and intended for the treatment of patients on principles which exclude vivisection." Ibid., p. 175. Browning wrote two short poems attacking vivisection, "Tray" and "Arcades Ambo". The latter argues that it is cowardice to torture animals in order to prolong man's life.

²

Lewis Carroll, "Some Popular Fallacies about Vivisection," Fortnightly Review, Vol. XVII, N.S. (June 1, 1875), p. 853.

no helper,' - a day when successive generations of students, trained from their earliest years to the repression of all human sympathies, shall have developed a new and more hideous Frankenstein - a soulless being to whom science shall be all in all." ¹

In the Fortnightly number just quoted from the eminent historian, Edward Freeman joins the vivisection battle. Off and on since 1869 he had been engaged in a controversy on the ethics of field sports in the pages of the Fortnightly. In 1874 the field sports question, in which the fox-hunting Anthony Trollope had been his chief adversary, becomes lost in the larger question of vivisection. A few quotations will serve to give Freeman's point of view:

"I would not take upon myself to say that vivisection must in all cases be blameworthy. There may be a reasonable prospect that, by cutting up one animal alive, some scientific truth may be found out which is likely to relieve the diseases or otherwise lessen the sufferings of many animals or of many men. In such a case I should say, Cut up your animal boldly....

"It is the mystery in which this matter of vivisection is wrapped up, and the grand tone which scientific men take up towards the rest of mankind, which make people who have no guides but common sense and common humanity look with suspicion on vivisection and all who practise it. The thing looks cruel on the face of it; it looks so cruel that the burthen of proof certainly lies on those who say that it is not cruel....

"The sum of the whole matter seems to be that, as there are times and places when hunting is lawful and praiseworthy so there probably are cases in which vivisection is lawful and praiseworthy. But the matter is one about which it is so hard for any indifferent person to judge of particular cases, that scientific men must not be surprised if the general public looks on their doings in this way with a good deal of suspicion." ²

¹
Ibid., p. 854.

²
Edward A. Freeman, "Field Sports and Vivisection," Fortnightly Review, Vol. XV, N.S. (May 1, 1874), pp. 624, 626 and 629.

Now that a few examples have been offered to illustrate the vivisection controversy on the plane of discussion, and to show that all the ideas used by Collins in his attack were in the air, it will be useful to turn for a moment to the plane of action. In 1874 Frances Power Cobbe decided that the practice of vivisection in England had gone so far that there ought to be a law to curb it. Accordingly, she and some like-minded friends drew up a memorial addressed to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (founded in 1824) with the hope of inducing the Society to bring into Parliament a bill restricting vivisection. The memorial was accompanied by six hundred signatures, among which were those of Carlyle, Tennyson, Browning, Ruskin,¹ Lecky, the Archbishop of York, Cardinal Manning and seventy-eight medical men. As the R.S.P.C.A., however, showed itself unwilling to take action at the time, Miss Cobbe sought the help of a number of sympathetic members of Parliament, and a bill was actually introduced into the House of Lords on May 4th, 1875, "for² Regulating the Practice of Vivisection." Another bill "to³ prevent Abuse in Experiments on Animals" was introduced into the House of Commons on May 12. The Government, which had sanctioned the first bill, then appointed a Royal Commission

¹ Ruskin gave up his Slade professorship of art at Oxford in 1884 when that university voted to establish a laboratory in which Ruskin anticipated vivisection would be practised. See Frederic Harrison, John Ruskin, N.Y., 1902, p. 143.

² Cobbe, Autobiography, p. 640.

³ Ibid., p. 640.

of Enquiry to draw up a report on the subject of vivisection. The report of the commission appeared on January 8th, 1876. The commission was in favor of a legislative enactment restricting vivisection.

In the meantime, Miss Cobbe, at the suggestion of one of her medical friends, a Dr. Hoggan, founded in December, 1875, a society to carry on her anti-vivisection work. Officially "The Society for the Protection of Animals liable to Vivisection," it came to be popularly called "The Victoria Street Society." One of the first acts of the new society was to offer suggestions to the Government for a vivisection bill. The suggestions were temporarily adopted. At the last moment, however, a memorial signed by three thousand doctors was presented to the Home Secretary, Mr. Cross, by a deputation "variously estimated at 300 and 800 doctors, who, in either case, were sufficiently numerous to overflow the purlieus of the Home Office and to overawe Mr. Cross. On the 10th of August the Bill - essentially altered in submission to the medical memorialists - was brought by Mr. Cross into the House of Commons, and was read a second time. On the 15th of August 1876, it received the Royal Assent and became the Act 39-40 Vict., c. 77, commonly called the 'Vivisection Act.'" Had Miss Cobbe's suggestions become part of the Act no experiments, under any circumstances,

¹ Cobbe, Autobiography, p. 653.

would have been"permitted on a dog, cat, horse, ass or mule; nor any on any other animals except under conditions of complete anaesthesia from beginning to end." ¹ According to the terms of the Act, experiments on animals, including cats, horses and mules, could be performed "(1) by a duly licensed person; (2) in an approved and registered place of research; (3) for an approved specific purpose; (4) on specific kinds of vertebrate animals (the Act not applying to invertebrates); (5) within a specified period, or on a specified number of animals; (6) the word 'experiment' is not allowed to cover more than one animal." ²

The "Vivisection Act" was a typical British compromise and failed to please either the scientists or the anti-vivisectionists. Miss Cobbe was particularly cast down. In her Autobiography she writes:

"The world has never seemed to me quite the same since that dreadful time. My hopes had been raised so high to be dashed down so low as even to make me fear that I had done harm instead of good, and brought fresh danger to the hapless brutes for whose sake, as I realized more and more their agonies, I would have gladly died....Justice and Mercy seemed to have gone from the earth." ³

Instead of dying for the hapless brutes, however, Miss Cobbe

¹

Ibid., p. 652.

²

Stephen Paget and Walter Lazarus-Barlow, "Experiments on Animals," Encyclopedia Britannica, Vol. 1 (1944).

³

Cobbe, Autobiography, p. 654.

adopted the more practical course of spending the rest of her life in an unsuccessful effort to bring about total prohibition of vivisection.

The physiologists and the friends of scientific progress (in the vivisection question scientific and humanitarian progress came into violent conflict) were, of course, affronted by the bill. Robert Lowe, a member of the House of Commons who had made a strong stand against the Vivisection Act, in an analysis of the bill in the Contemporary Review, refers with biting sarcasm to the partisan zeal of the anti-vivisectionists:

"A very considerable sensation had been created by the efforts of a number of benevolent persons who interested themselves in the supposed tortures endured by animals subjected to physiological experiments. As it was a matter of feeling and compassion, of course no mercy was shown to the supposed delinquents -

'And every woe a tear can claim
Except a vivisector's shame.' ¹

He condemns the Act as "a sickly and sentimental eclecticism". ²

In 1881, when the Act had been in effect for over ³ five years, Samuel Wilks complained in The Nineteenth Century that the Act was seriously crippling science by interfering with the experimental work of important scientists like Lister,

¹
Robert Lowe, M.P., "The Vivisection Act," Contemporary Review, Vol. XXVIII (Oct., 1876), p. 715.

²
Ibid., p. 718.

³
See Rev. George Greenwood, "Vivisection," Macmillan's, Vol. XL (Oct., 1879), pp. 523-530. He complains of the Act because it does not adequately restrict vivisection.

and that he himself as a lecturer now found it more difficult to collect data for his science lectures.

"...I confess [he writes] that it is with shame and bitterness that on many points I can no longer look to my countrymen for information, but have to turn abroad for all that is new and valuable. It is but five years ago that I could take up the report of the medical officer of the Privy Council and instruct my students in the latest facts concerning fever, the contagious diseases, and the inoculation of tubercle, as discovered by Sanderson, Klein, and Crieghton; observations and experiments which bear upon the use of the clinical thermometer, the treatment of fever by baths, and the probable spread of consumption. But the government thought fit to put an end to the work. Since this time I have had to learn exclusively from observations made at Paris or Berlin, or wherever else science is still left free." ¹

Miss Cobbe, as has been mentioned, having failed to obtain the passage of a satisfactory bill restricting the use of vivisection, roused herself from her despair and began to devote her inexhaustible energies to the cause of total prohibition of vivisection. In February, 1877, the committee of her society "unanimously agreed to support Mr. Holt's Bill for total prohibition; and in aid thereof exhibited on the hoardings of London 1700 handbills and 300 posters, which were enlarged reproductions of the illustrations of vivisection from the Physiological Hand-books." ²

The three other anti-vivisection societies existent in London at this time worked for the same end. In May, 1878,

¹
Samuel Wilks, "Vivisection: Its Pains and its Uses," Part III, Nineteenth Century, Vol. 10 (Dec., 1881), p. 939.

²
Cobbe, Autobiography, p. 657.

the Holt bill was debated in the House of Commons and found little support. In 1879 a total prohibition bill was introduced into the House of Lords, not promoted by Miss Cobbe's society but supported by it. As Miss Cobbe sadly reports, "Only 16 Peers voted for the Bill, 97¹ against it." The Victoria Street Society then backed another bill, which was read in the House of Commons on February 3, 1881, but was not debated until April 4, 1883.

Besides campaigning on the political front, Miss Cobbe and her society started in 1881 an anti-vivisectionist magazine called The Zoophilist to carry on the fight on the propaganda front. The society also, Miss Cobbe rejoices to say, "issued an almost incredible multitude of pamphlets and leaflets. I should be afraid to make any calculation of the number of them and the thousands of copies sent into circulation. My own share must have exceeded four hundred."²

On the legal front, the campaign against vivisection turned into a fiasco that filled the scientists with glee. In 1881 a suit was brought by the Victoria Street Society against Professor David Ferrier (1843-1928), an eminent British scientist and authority on brain functions, on the ground that he had performed experiments on animals without a license. The case fell through because no proof could be offered that he had actually performed the alleged³ experiments.

¹
Ibid., p. 669.

²
Cobbe, Autobiography, p. 671.

³Ibid., pp. 654-674.

This brief survey of the vivisection controversy up to the time of the appearance of Wilkie Collins's Heart and Science will, it is hoped, serve to put that novel in proper perspective, and to show that when Collins made his attack on vivisection, he was not just beating a dead horse, for, although the controversy had declined from the height reached in 1874-75, it was far from being over; and that, furthermore, it was possible, in Collins's mind at least, for Heart and Science to have a practical influence on the fate of the total abolition bill then being promoted by the anti-vivisectionists.

There are indications in several of Collins's stories published previously to Heart and Science that he had a great tenderness for animals, particularly for dogs, and that he abhorred cruelty toward them in any form. In 1877 he had written a heavily sentimental novelette, My Lady's Money,¹ in which a dog is one of the main "characters." Tommie, a Scotch terrier, solves a theft case and clears the name of an innocent girl by turning up at the right moment with a missing pocket-book in his jaws. Tommie, modeled from life - his original was Collins's own Scotch terrier - is drawn con amore. It is also significant that one of the redeeming traits in Count Fosco, the chief villain of The Woman in White

¹
 Wilkie Collins, The Haunted Hotel: A Mystery of Modern Venice, to which is added My Lady's Money, 2 vols., 1879, London, Chatto and Windus. My Lady's Money was originally published in the Christmas number of The Illustrated London News, 1877.

is his love of pets.

Collins's dislike of hunting appeared in Armadale.¹
 Armadale, the unconventional young hero, inherits a country estate and is advised by his friends to make the acquaintance of the neighboring country gentlemen. On his return from a round of visits, he related his experiences to his friend Midwinter:

"...the men, to my unutterable astonishment, all began to condole with me. I shouldn't be able to find a pack of hounds, they said, within twenty miles of my house; and they thought it only right to prepare me for the disgracefully careless manner in which the Thorpe-Ambrose covers had been preserved. I let them go on condoling with me, and then what do you think I did? I put my foot in it again. 'Oh, don't take that to heart!' I said; 'I don't care two straws about hunting or shooting, either. When I meet with a bird in my walk, I can't for the life of me feel eager to kill it - I rather like to see the bird flying about and enjoying itself.' You should have seen their faces! They had thought me a sort of outlaw before; now they evidently thought me mad." 2

One of the "good" characters in Heart and Science, Robert Graywell, shares Armadale's disapproval of hunting. Collins writes of him;

"Taking possession of his country house, the new squire was invited to contribute towards the expense of a pack of hounds kept by subscription in the neighbourhood, and was advised to make acquaintance with his fellow-sportsmen by giving a hunt-breakfast. He answered very politely; but the fact was not to be concealed - the new man refused to encourage hunting; he thought that noble amusement stupid and cruel. For the same reason, he refused to preserve game." 3

¹ Wilkie Collins, Armadale, 2 Vols., 1866, London, Smith, Elder, I, p. 195.

² Collins, Armadale, Vol. I, p. 195.

³ Collins, Heart and Science, I, pp. 81-82.

On the negative side, it is not without significance that none of the many virtuous country gentlemen in Collins's stories indulge in the pastime of hunting, nor is there a single description of a hunt in all his writings.

It is also worth noting that Gabriel Betteredge, the Robinson-Crusoe-quoting steward in The Moonstone anticipates on a small scale Collins's later full-scale attack on vivisection in Heart and Science. While narrating his share in the circumstances surrounding the disappearance of the valuable diamond, he goes out of his way to rebuke the idle "gentlefolks" who dissect insects and frogs as a hobby:

"Gentlefolks in general have a very awkward rock ahead in life - the rock ahead of their own idleness. Their lives being, for the most part, passed in looking about them for something to do, it is curious to see - especially when their tastes are of what is called the intellectual sort - how often they drift blindfold into some nasty pursuit. Nine times out of ten they take to torturing something, or to spoiling something - and they firmly believe they are improving their minds, when the plain truth is, they are only making a mess in the house. I have seen them (ladies, I am sorry to say, as well as gentlemen) go out, day after day, for example, with empty pill-boxes, and catch newts, and beetles, and spiders and frogs, and come home and stick pins through the miserable wretches, or out them up, without a pang of remorse, into little pieces. You see my young master, or my young mistress, poring over one of their spiders' insides with a magnifying-glass; or you meet one of their frogs walking downstairs without his head - and when you wonder what this cruel nastiness means, you are told that it means a taste in my young master or my young mistress for natural history."¹

In the light of this evidence of Collins's fondness for animals and of his abhorrence of any kind of cruelty

¹

Collins, The Moonstone, Vol. I, p. 99.

to them it is understandable that when looking for a subject for a new novel in 1882, he should come to choose vivisection. Vivisection was still a live issue; it was one that aroused his deepest sympathies, and it offered an opportunity for the expression of his reforming urge. Moreover, the subject, being one of strong general interest, had potential sales-appeal. Collins was ever a good businessman and a market-conscious novelist. Although often at war with the critics, he was at peace with his public and strove to give it what it wanted.

As he indicates in the first section of the two-part preface to Heart and Science, he appealed to the high-priestess of anti-vivisection, Frances Power Cobbe, for assistance in preparing his indictment of "the Wretches who are called vivisectors."¹ Miss Cobbe, as she relates in her Autobiography, sent him some of her pamphlets and exchanged a number of letters with him. Unfortunately, she has not a single word to say about Heart and Science as a contribution to the vivisection question. The one letter from Collins that she reproduces is of special interest as stating in detail how he intends to carry out his attack on vivisection:

"90, Gloucester Place, Portman
Square, W.
23rd June, 1882

"Dear Madam,

...You have given me exactly what I most wanted for

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Quoted from a letter written by Wilkie Collins in August, 1882, to his friend Wybert Reeve, in Reeve, op. cit., p. 459.

the purpose that I have in view - and you have spared me time and trouble in the best and kindest of ways. If I require further help, you shall see that I am gratefully sensible of the help that has been already given.

"I am writing to a very large public both at home and abroad; and it is quite needless (when I am writing to you) to dwell on the importance of producing the right impression by means which keep clear of terrifying and revolting the ordinary reader. I shall leave the detestable cruelties of the laboratory to be merely inferred, and, in tracing the moral influences of those cruelties on the nature of the man who practices them, and the result as to his social relations with the persons about him, I shall be careful to present him to the reader as a man not infinitely wicked and cruel, and to show the efforts made by his better instincts to resist the inevitable hardening of the heart, the fatal stupefying of all the finer sensibilities, produced by the deliberately merciless occupations of his life. If I can succeed in making him, in some degree, an object of compassion as well as of horror, my experience of readers of fiction tells me that the right effect will be produced by the right means.

"Believe me, very truly yours,

1
"Wilkie Collins."

Collins is careful to point out the contemporary significance of Heart and Science by giving it a sub-title: A Story of the Present Time. The main title itself, of course, is a key to the lessons to be drawn by the reader. If he had been a less skilled novelist he might have called the story Humanitarianism Versus the Inhumanity of Science or something similar. Then, to be sure that the anti-vivisectionist aspect of the book would not be overlooked, in Part I of his preface, he tells his readers he is

I

Cobbe, Autobiography, pp. 558-59.

"pleading the cause of the harmless beings of God's creation."¹
 This he will achieve in an artistic manner by means of plot and character, not by obtruding his own person into the story.

I trace (he informs his readers) in one of my characters, the result of the habitual practice of cruelty (no matter under what pretence) in fatally deteriorating the nature of man - and I leave the picture to speak for itself. My own personal feeling has throughout been held in check."²

This is essentially what he had told Miss Cobbe he intended to do.

Dr. Benjulia is the character whose nature has been fatally marred by the habitual practice of cruelty, in his case, the cruelty of vivisection. Collins had learned from Dickens the trick of giving his characters odd and picturesque names. The name "Benjulia" was much more likely to impress itself on the attention of his readers than, say, Smith. Furthermore, it had a foreign sound, the implication being that vivisection was a foreign method of research and so, un-English and un-patriotic. As a matter of fact, vivisection as a mode of research did first come into prominence on the Continent. The general public in England, as has been shown, first became acquainted with it through the publicity given in the English press to the method of instruction practised at the veterinarians' schools at Alfort, France. Miss Cobbe's

¹
 Collins, Heart and Science, I, p. xi.

²
Ibid., I, p. xi.

"first brush with the demon of Vivisection" occurred in Florence after she heard that a Professor Schiff performed experiments on living animals in his laboratory there. And lastly, the gruesome diagrams of presumably suffering animals in Miss Cobbe's pamphlet "Light in Dark Places"¹ (the same diagrams probably appeared on the bills and posters that Miss Cobbe's society had put up on the hoardings of London) are, with one exception, taken from the manuals of physiology by Continental scientists. Hence it is not at all unlikely that the average reader of a Collins novel would be apt to consider vivisection a diabolic importation.

Dr. Benjulia is not introduced until the very end of Chapter XI of Heart and Science, and then he is introduced suddenly in typical Collins fashion. His voice is heard unexpectedly; the reader's attention is focused on him exclusively as he, like Teresa, the Italian duenna, turns and finds himself "in the presence of a remarkable man."² And then, to impress him indelibly on the reader's memory, Collins begins the next chapter with a detailed physical description of this vivisectionist:

"In the first place, the stranger was almost tall enough to be shown as a giant; he towered to a stature of six feet six inches, English measure. If his immense

¹

Frances Power Cobbe, The Modern Rack, pp. 181-211.

²

Collins, Heart and Science, I, p. 151.

bones had been properly covered with flesh, he might have presented the rare combination of fine proportions with great height. He was so miserably - it might almost be said, so hideously - thin that his enemies spoke of him as 'the living skeleton.' His massive forehead, his great gloomy gray eyes, his protuberant cheek-bones, overhung a fleshless lower face naked of beard, whiskers, and moustache. His complexion added to the startling effect which his personal appearance produced on strangers. It was of the true gipsy-brown, and, being darker in tone than his eyes, added remarkably to the weird look, the dismal thoughtful scrutiny, which it was his habit to fix on persons talking with him, no matter whether they were worthy of attention or not. His straight black hair hung as gracelessly on either side of his hollow face as the hair of an American Indian. His great dusky hands, never covered by gloves in the summer time, showed amber-coloured nails on bluntly-pointed fingers, turned up at the tips. Those tips felt like satin when they touched you. When he wished to be careful, he could handle the frailest objects with the most exquisite delicacy. His dress was of the recklessly loose and easy kind. His long frock-coat descended below his knees; his flowing trousers were veritable bags; his lean and wrinkled throat turned about in a widely-opened shirt-collar, unconfined by any sort of neck-tie. He had a theory that a headdress should be solid enough to resist a chance blow - a fall from a horse, or the dropping of a loose brick from a house under repair. His hard black hat, broad and curly at the brim, might have graced the head of a bishop, if it had not been secularised by a queer resemblance to the bell-shaped hat worn by dandies in the early years of the present century. In one word he was, both in himself and in his dress, the sort of man whom no stranger is careless enough to pass without turning round for a second look." ¹

It would seem that such a creature would cause children to run away screaming. Dr. Benjulia, sinister as he looks, apparently does not have this effect on them. Little Zoe, the half-sister of his professional friend Dr. Ovid Vere, the hero of the novel, is on familiar terms with Benjulia. She is not all shy with him; she even allows him to tickle

¹

Heart and Science, I, pp. 152-54.

her. When he gives her a command, however, she obeys with a "curious appearance of reluctant submission,"¹ as if she were obeying against her will. There is enough good in Benjulia to enable him to be on good terms with the child, but the latent evil in him prevents him from winning her entire confidence.

To others Dr. Benjulia is either "gloomily indifferent" or "politely cold." Ordinary social contacts mean nothing to him. He rarely smiles; his gloomy gray eyes rest on people "as they might have rested on any inanimate object near him."² He is evidently in the advanced stages of vivisectional degeneration.

The reader is not told at once that Dr. Benjulia is a vivisectionist, nor do the other characters in the story know it. He is a recluse said to be conducting chemical experiments. Once a prominent nerve and brain specialist, he now lives "in a house in a desolate field - in some lost suburban neighbourhood that nobody can discover."³ What his experiments are nobody knows. Those who tried to find out were baffled. A servant who peered into the laboratory through the skylight saw only "a large white blind, drawn under the skylight, and hiding the whole room from view."⁴

¹
Ibid., I, p. 156.

²
Ibid., I, p. 157.

³
Heart and Science, I, p. 159.

⁴
Ibid., I, p. 161.

Even his "friend" Ovid has to plead ignorance when questioned about his activities.

"Of course there are reports (says Ovid) which explain the mystery of the doctor and his laboratory. One report says that he is trying to find a way of turning common metals into gold. Another declares that he is inventing some explosive compound, so horribly destructive that it will put an end to war. All I can tell you is, that his mind (when I happen to meet him) seems to be as completely absorbed as ever in brains and nerves. But, what they can have to do with chemical experiments, secretly pursued in a lonely field, is a riddle to which I have thus far found no answer." ¹

At the end of Chapter XII, however, the reader is given a hint. He is told that Dr. Benjulia is interested in monkeys - provided they have brain disease.

His utter indifference to insect life is unfavorably contrasted with the tender sensitiveness of Dr. Vere, who is his foil and who therefore is presented to the readers of Heart and Science as the ideal doctor, a doctor who is kind, humane, full of tender feeling. The two doctors are walking together in the London Zoological Gardens:

"He (Dr. Vere) started, and seized Benjulia by the arm. 'Stop!' he cried, with a sudden outburst of alarm.

"'Well?' asked the doctor, stopping directly. 'What is it?'

"'Nothing,' said Ovid, recoiling from a stain on the gravel walk, caused by the remains of an unlucky

¹

Ibid., I, pp. 161-62.

beetle, crushed under his friend's heavy foot. 'You trod on the beetle before I could stop you.'

"Benjulia's astonishment at finding an adult male human being (not in a lunatic asylum) anxious to spare the life of a beetle, literally struck him speechless....He turned over the remains of the beetle with the end of his stick. 'The common beetle,' he said; 'I haven't damaged a Specimen.'" ¹

Further on in the story, in Chapter XVII, the reader is given another little hint of the nature of Benjulia's experiments. Carmina, the heroine of Heart and Science and the betrothed of Ovid Vere, remarks to him that, although Dr. Benjulia is supposed to be busy with chemical experiment, his hands are remarkably unstained. Ovid is startled.

"His unacknowledged doubts of Benjulia troubled him as they had never troubled him yet." ²

Dr. Benjulia and his mysterious experiments then drop out of sight and do not reappear until Chapter XIX. At this point in the story Dr. Vere is preparing to go to Canada for a rest. As Benjulia has medical friends in Montreal, Dr. Vere goes to his residence to ask him for a letter of introduction to one of them. Half a mile from his destination he descends from his coach and makes the rest of the trip on foot.

"He arrived at an iron gate, opening out of a lonely lane.

"There, in the middle of a barren little field, he saw Benjulia's house - a hideous square building of yellow brick, with a slate roof. A low wall surrounded the place, having another iron gate at the entrance. The enclosure within was as barren as the field without;

¹

Heart and Science, I, pp. 177-78.

²

Ibid., I, p. 245.

not even an attempt at flower-garden or kitchen-garden was visible. At a distance of some two hundred yards from the house stood a second and smaller building, with a skylight in the roof, which Ovid recognised (from description) as the famous laboratory. Behind it was the hedge which parted Benjulia's morsel of land from the land of his neighbour. Here, the trees rose again, and the fields beyond were cultivated. No dwellings, and no living creatures appeared. So near to London - and yet, in its loneliness, so far away - there was something unnatural in the solitude of the place.

"Led by a feeling of curiosity, which was fast degenerating into suspicion, Ovid approached the laboratory, without showing himself in front of the house....It was a breezy summer-day; the leaves of the trees near him rustled cheerfully. Was there another sound audible? Yes - low and faint, there rose through the sweet woodland melody a moaning cry. It paused; it was repeated; it stopped...." ¹

The nature of Benjulia's experiments should have been obvious to any reader by now, particularly one who had read the preface. Not having had that advantage, Dr. Vere merely has his suspicions aroused by these sights and sounds. He finally enters the house. It is as bare and grim on the inside as on the outside. It is entirely undecorated, and has only the essential articles of furniture. In the room in which Dr. Benjulia receives him, "there were no curtains on the window, and no pictures or prints on the drab-coloured walls." ² This is the house of a man whose moral and social nature has been fatally debased by the habitual practice of cruelty.

During the conversation between the two doctors more

¹
Heart and Science, I, pp. 261-62.

²
Ibid., I, p. 266.

hints are given about Benjulia's activities. Dr. Vere asks him why he doesn't keep a watch-dog. Benjulia explains:

"I don't like dogs. They bark."

"He had apparently some other disagreeable association with dogs, which he was not disposed to communicate. His hollow eyes stared gloomily into vacancy...." ¹

There is considerable verbal fencing between the two on this occasion, and by the time the conversation is over Dr. Vere's - and the benighted reader's - suspicions that Benjulia is a vivisectionist are practically confirmed. The word 'vivisection' even occurs in the conversation.

After this episode in Chapter XIX Dr. Benjulia is allowed to disappear from view until Chapter XXXI. Up to that point Collins has been mindful of his responsibility toward his Art ² by enshrouding Benjulia and his activities in a haze of mystery. In doing so he achieves two aims: (1) he excites the reader's interest and builds up suspense and (2) he attaches the stigma of sinister mysteriousness to the vivisectioning physiologist. ³ In Chapter XXI Benjulia's vivisection comes out into the open. Benjulia and his brother Lemuel are in the doctor's reception room.

"The distant barking of a dog became audible from the lane by which the house was approached. The sound seemed to annoy Benjulia. 'What's that?' he asked.

"Lemuel saw his way to making some return for his brother's reception of him.

¹

Ibid., I, p. 270.

²

See Preface, Heart and Science, p. ix and p. xi.

³

One of the aspects of vivisection that Freeman disliked was the mystery surrounding it. See quotation, p. 172, second paragraph.

"It's my dog," he said; "and it's lucky for you that I have left him in the cab."

"Why?"

"Well, he's as sweet-tempered a dog as ever lived. But he has one fault. He doesn't take kindly to scientific gentlemen in your line of business." Lemuel paused, and pointed to his brother's hands. "If he smelt that, he might try his teeth at vivisectioning You."

"The spots of blood which Ovid had once seen on Benjulia's stick, were on his hands now. With unruffled composure he looked at the horrid stains, silently telling their tale of torture." ¹

The secret is now out. The reader who has not surmised the fact now knows that Benjulia is a horrible vivisectionist. He is now ready to hear the arguments against vivisection. Collins keeps up the fiction of detachment and objectivity by assigning to Lemuel the arguments he wants to use. Lemuel advances the arguments not as his own but as those of a doctor friend of his. The first argument is a legal one. The law, argues Collins, protects a living man from vivisection. Why then, does it not give a living dog the same protection? Because a dog is an animal? But a man is an animal too. Because a dog is inferior in intellect to man? But dogs are superior in intellect to some men, such as "the lower order of savage, or the lower order of lunatic."² Because a man has a soul and a dog has none? But how do you know that a dog has no soul? Therefore, if the law "asserts a right "to protect any living creature, it is

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Heart and Science, II, pp. 141-42.

²

Ibid., p. 150.

bound, in reason and in justice, to protect all."¹ Benjulia finds this reasoning unanswerable.²

The second argument is the alleged uselessness of vivisection as a source of medical discoveries. Three examples are offered: (1) Experimenting with poisons on animals proves nothing, for what is poisonous for a man may be harmless for an animal, and vice versa. (2) Vivisectional experiments on living animals in the hope of improving surgical practice prove nothing, for men and animals differ physiologically. (3) The baking of dogs in ovens in the hope of making discoveries in treating fever has not produced any useful results.

Benjulia has no answer to this. He casts off all

¹

Ibid., II, p. 151.

²

Collins's argument tends to put men and brute animals on the same plane. Miss Cobbe even postulates an animal heaven. She writes: "It is with great diffidence that anyone should presume to speak on such a subject, but, as it is often helpful to know what others think, the present writer will venture to say plainly that so far as appears, there is no possible solution of this heart-wearing question save the bold assumption that the existence of the vivisected animal [italics here] (and of course, as a consequence, of other creatures of the same rank in nature) does not end at death. It is absolutely necessary to postulate a future life for the tortured dog or horse or monkey, if we would escape the unbearable conclusion that a sentient creature, unoffending, - nay, incapable of offence, - has been given by the creator AN EXISTENCE WHICH ON THE WHOLE HAS BEEN A CURSE. That conclusion would be blasphemy. Rejecting it with all the energy of our souls, we find ourselves logically driven to assume the future life of (some, at least, among) the lower animals." Frances Power Cobbe, The Modern Rack, p. 259, ("The Future of the Lower Animals").

pretence and reveals himself as a ruthless seeker of scientific knowledge for his own glory - what Collins himself may have believed, and what he certainly wanted his public to believe of every vivisectionist.

"Am I working myself into my grave, in the medical interests of humanity?" Benjulia asks his brother rhetorically. "That for humanity! I am working for my own satisfaction - for my own pride - for my own unutterable pleasure in beating other men - for the fame that will keep my name living hundreds of years hence. Humanity! I say with my foreign brethren - Knowledge for its own sake, is the one god I worship. Knowledge is its own justification and its own reward. The roaring mob follows us with its cry of Cruelty. We pity their ignorance. Knowledge sanctifies cruelty. The old anatomist stole dead bodies for Knowledge. In that sacred cause, if I could steal a living man without being found out, I would tie him on my table, and grasp my grand discovery in days, instead of months. Where are you going? What? You're afraid to be in the same room with me? A man who can talk as I do, is a man who would stick at nothing? Is that the light in which you lower order of creatures look at us? Look a little higher - and you will see that a man who talks as I do is a man set above you by Knowledge. Exert yourself, and try to understand me. Have I no virtues, even from your point of view? Am I not a good citizen? Don't I pay my debts? Don't I serve my friends?...Have I no feeling, as you call it? My last experiments on a monkey horrified me. His cries of suffering, his gestures of entreaty, were like the cries and gestures of a child. I would have given the world to put him out of his misery. But I went on. In the glorious cause I went on. My hands turned cold - my heart ached - I thought of a child I sometimes play with - I suffered - I resisted - I went on. All for Knowledge! all for Knowledge." 1

Collins gives the final touches to his portrait of the vivisectionist in Chapter LXII, the next to last chapter in the novel. But before that point in Benjulia's story is reached, Dr. Vere returns from Canada where he has

1
Heart and Science, II, pp. 156-159.

acquired from a mulatto doctor whom he had attended in his last moments a manuscript work on brain disease that will prove research by vivisection to be vain and useless.

From this manuscript Dr. Vere learns a new method for treating brain disease. He applies it to his cousin and sweetheart, Carmina, who has had a nervous breakdown in his absence. Her incompetent physician, Dr. Null, has been giving her the wrong treatment, encouraged by Dr. Benjulia, who, although he knew the treatment to be wrong, had allowed it to continue because he wanted to observe the progress of the case for his own purposes. The conclusions to be drawn from his observations are more important to him than the recovery of a sick human being. To this doctor perverted by vivisection Carmina is only a subject of experiment.

When Dr. Vere discovers what has been going on, he confronts Benjulia, calls him a villain, and threatens him with death should Carmina die. It is not necessary for him to carry out his threat, however, for the method of treating brain disease developed by the mulatto doctor through non-vivisectional research and experience works a
¹
 complete cure.

¹
 This whole "brain disease" episode - Carmina's illness and its cure by means (Collins is silent as to their nature) which owe nothing to vivisection is intended to show that vivisectional experiments such as were made by pioneering physiologists like Professor David Ferrier are unnecessary. Professor Ferrier made important experiments on the brains of monkeys and apes. In 1878 he published The Localisation of Cerebral Disease, a book which Collins claims he made use of in planning his novel. See Heart and Science, I, p. xiv. This is the same Professor Ferrier who was unsuccessfully attacked by the Victoria Street Society in 1881.

In almost all Collins's stories the good characters are rewarded in this world for their virtues and the evil characters are punished for their vices. That was the way the Victorians wanted their stories to end. With Collins the punishment of the villain is usually highly melodramatic.¹ There is only one end possible for a physician like Benjulia who has grown so callous to suffering while cutting up living animals that he has become indifferent to the suffering of human beings - a violent death. This Collins provides in Chapter LXII.

Benjulia, motivated solely by desire for personal glory in his pursuit of knowledge, is haunted by a fear that someone will anticipate the discoveries he hopes to make. He subscribes to all the current medical journals to check on possible rivals. One evening, while paging through his periodicals, he finds a review of a book. The book is, of course, the published manuscript that Ovid Vere brought from Montreal. Benjulia drives to London for a copy of the book, reads it through, and finds that his work has been nullified. The next day he returns to his house, calls his servants together and has them witness his will. Little Zoe is the sole legatee. This done, he retires to his laboratory. A servant is the witness to the rest:

"The door was opened again; the flood of light streamed out on the darkness. Suddenly the yellow glow

1

Compare the death of Mannion in Basil and of Percival Clyde in The Woman in White.

was spotted by the black figures of small swiftly-running creatures - perhaps cats, perhaps rabbits - escaping from the laboratory. The tall form of the master followed slowly, and stood revealed watching the flight of the animals. In a moment more, the last of the liberated creatures came out - a large dog, limping as if one of its legs was injured. It stopped as it passed the master, and tried to fawn on him. He threatened it with his hand. 'Be off with you, like the rest!' he said. The dog slowly¹ crossed the flow of light, and was swallowed up in darkness.

This last act of mercy performed, Benjulia locks himself in his laboratory, takes poison and sets fire to his workshop.

"The hideous remains of what had once been Benjulia, found Christian burial. His brethren of the torture-table, attended the funeral in large numbers. Vivisection had been beaten on its own field of discovery. They honoured the martyr who had fallen in their cause."²

To the reader of today Benjulia is merely a melodramatic monster, a kind of scientific bogeyman. He is incredible in spite of Collins's best efforts to make him human and "an object of compassion as well as of horror."³ We find it hard to believe that a scientist who performed experiments on living animals could develop into a creature like Dr. Benjulia. Benjulia is no more than a hideous caricature of an experimental physiologist and an insult to the earnest, hard-working

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Heart and Science, III, pp. 287-88.

²

Ibid., III, p. 292.

³

See Collins's letter to Miss Cobbe, p. 183.

searchers for scientific knowledge in the field of physiology. He is the vivisectionist spitefully burned in effigy. He is a gross impertinence. As a sensation novelist with an incapacity for character drawing, Collins could do no better.

The facts that would permit an accurate evaluation of the effects of Collins's attack on vivisection are not available. No doubt Heart and Science made converts to the anti-vivisectionist cause. It did not, however, arouse public feeling to the extent of bringing about the abolition of vivisection in Britain, which was what Collins probably aimed at. He may even have hoped that Heart and Science would be the Uncle Tom's Cabin of vivisection.

One contemporary reviewer who liked the novel thought that Heart and Science would help the anti-vivisectionists "in the noble crusade against scientific cruelty."¹ The Athenaeum reviewer was inclined to ignore the vivisection element altogether:

"The reader who has read the prefaces soon forgets them and the threatened anti-vivisection and science when he finds himself quickly launched into the midst of a story which opens in the author's best manner....The novel is good enough to make one almost fail to notice that it was written against vivisection."²

¹

"Heart and Science," British Quarterly Review, Vol. LXXVIII (1883), p. 232.

²

"Heart and Science," Athenaeum, (April 28, 1883), pp. 538-539.

James Ashcroft Noble, the Academy reviewer, while regarding Heart and Science as "an anti-vivisection manifesto," found the book interesting but not convincing:

"That he [Collins] is wholly successful ["In the difficult art of mixing art and argument"] cannot be said, for Heart and Science will be found more entertaining than convincing, save by those who do not need to be convinced. The vivisectioning Dr. Benjulia is certainly repulsive enough, and it is quite possible that he may have his original in real life. But neither he nor the scientific Mrs. Gallilee, with her talk of 'radiant energy' and 'sonorous vibrations' can be accepted as a type; and therefore the conception, though interesting enough as an artistic product, has really no polemical value."¹

Apart from its success or unsuccess as a novel with a purpose, Heart and Science is interesting as evidence of the passionate hostility that vivisection as a research method met with in England in the 'seventies and 'eighties. With some, this hostility was only part of what George Henry Lewes called "the dread and dislike of science." With many others, it was rooted in a widely prevalent vicious sentimentalism that tended to put animals on an equal footing with man. With still others, it was traceable to a broad humanitarianism that looked toward the elimination of all forms of cruelty to man and animals alike. Frances Power Cobbe, for instance, looked forward to such an "age of joy".

"The influences of civilisation, of religion, of cultivation of all kinds, mental and moral, have softened, like the rain of heaven, the crust of our dry, hard world; and there is every reason to hope that, unless arrested and perverted, they will trickle downwards and permeate

¹"Heart and Science," The Academy, Vol. XXIII (April 28, 1883), p. 290.

the whole soil of human society, till the 'desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose'. When we think of what earth might become were the tiger passions within our race to be bred out at last, and the divine faculty of love and sympathy to attain its obviously-intended development, it would seem as if efforts for the improvement of our physical or sanitary conditions, or for the advance of arts, science, or laws, were scarcely worth making in comparison of any step which should bring us nearer to such an age of joy." ¹

Whatever the source of the hostility toward vivisection might be in different individuals, the whole anti-vivisectionist movement tended toward obscurantism, and, had it been successful in abolishing experiments on living animals as a means of research, the development of the physiological sciences would have been completely arrested in Britain. On the other hand, there can be no doubt that anti-vivisection had good results in that it put an end to much needless cruelty to animals in laboratories.

It has been said that a "further element of purpose discernible in Collins is the effort to counteract the influence of science by emphasizing the unknown which surrounds us, and which seems at times to give strange intimations through coincidence" ²; this, however, is an ingenious but gratuitous assertion. There is no evidence in Collins's works to show that he meant to "counteract the influence of science by emphasizing the unknown." As a teller of tales of terror it was perfectly natural for Collins to try his hand from time to time at a tale of the supernatural and

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Frances Power Cobbe, The Modern Rack, pp. 1-2 ("The Moral Aspects of Vivisection").

²

Lovett and Hughes, op. cit., p. 254.

to make free use of the occult. But nowhere were the supernatural or the unknown and science brought into conflict. However, if merely to tell a ghost or mystery story is to combat the influence of science, then Collins opposed himself to science, and so does every other writer who seeks to thrill by means of the supernatural.

Up to the time of writing The Law and the Lady (1875) the attitude of Collins toward science remained that of the interested amateur and popular writer who saw that science could be a useful handmaid to fiction, both in providing an element of novelty and in producing thrilling effects. He borrowed liberally from the findings or facts of science as the need arose. The change came when science began to theorize on the origin of the universe and on the ancestry and essential nature of man. Darwin's The Descent of Man (1871) was obviously too much for Collins, just as it was for the majority of his readers. Science was no longer a

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Among those who condemned evolution were "most of the ranking fiction writers of the age: Disraeli, Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, Blackmore, Bulwer Lytton, Corelli, Mallock, Davidson." Leo J. Henkin, Darwinism in the English Novel, N.Y., 1940, p. 93. For Victorian attacks in fiction on evolution, see especially chapters 5 and 6 of this study. Madeleine Cazamian, in her excellent study of ideas in the mid-Victorian novel, notices Collins's sneers at evolutionary science, but not his frequent introduction of scientific data into his novels for the sake of realism or sensational effects. Nor does she note that he contributed to the advance of realism by employing 'forbidden' topics and by his recourse to science. See Madeleine L. Cazamain, Le Roman et les Idées en Angleterre: L'Influence de la Science (1860-90), Strasburg, 1923, Ch. I, sections 6 and 7.

mere accumulation of exact observations and discoveries but a philosophy that required a complete change of outlook on the part of the individual. Collins refused to make the adjustments demanded by science. The interested amateur became an enemy who condemned the new science without discussion. In doing so he expressed his own instinctive conservatism and again gave proof of the existence of an identity of interests between him and his readers.

CHAPTER VI

COLLINS AND EDUCATION

Although Collins, like Dickens, did not have much formal education and was not a university man, the consciousness of this fact did not breed in him an unconquerable reluctance to share with the reading public his views on educational matters from time to time. On education, as well as on other important subjects, Collins felt that he occasionally had an important message to deliver to his contemporaries.

As already mentioned,¹ Collins poured out the vials of his wrath on the headmasters of snobbish private schools in an article written for Household Words in 1858. The headmaster of a school that rejects certain children because their social background is thought undesirable is, he says, really a "small tradesman who keeps not a school, but a little knowledge shop, and who is horribly afraid of offending, not his connection but his customers."² He contrasts unfavorably the attitude of these private schools with the liberal attitude of the great public schools, and suggests as a means of reform "a general extension of that sound, liberal and thoroughly independent system"³ (the public school

¹ Chapter I, p. 7.

² Collins, "Highly Proper!," p. 362.

³ Ibid., p. 363.

system) to the private schools.

Schools are used as part of the setting or are mentioned in Basil, Armada, 'I Say No', The Evil Genius and The Legacy of Cain, but only in the case of the school in The Evil Genius can it be said that there is a definite didactic purpose connected with their presence. The school which Margaret Sherwin attended is described by her nouveau riche father as "'a school, Sir, where it was a rule to take in nothing lower than the daughter of a professional man - they only waived the rule in my case - the most genteel school perhaps in all London!'"¹ The cheap school in Scotland at which Ozias Midwinter spent some time is mentioned very briefly; the reader learns that Ozias was treated cruelly at this Scotch Dotheboys Hall, and that is all. Part of the setting of 'I Say No' is Miss Ladd's School, which furnishes girls from the upper middle classes with a "fashionable education,"² Miss Ladd is apparently a very competent headmistress and her school is well conducted. The Rev. Gracedieu heads a girls' school that is the setting for one scene in The Legacy of Cain. Little is said of this school, except that it is made clear that it is operated on narrow Non-conformist principles. In The Evil Genius the cheap girls'

¹ Collins, Basil, I, p. 223.

² Collins, 'I Say No,' 3 Vols., London, Chatto & Windus, 1884, I p. 23.

school which Sydney Westerfield had attended is made to account partly for her fall. She has spent six years in a "place of earthly torment, kept by Miss Wigger under the name of a school."¹ Since Miss Wigger was a cold, mean, domineering woman, Sydney experienced only harshness and lovelessness in her school. As a consequence, soon after she is released from the school, she falls in love with the first man who is kind to her - her married employer. Schools like Miss Wigger's, Collins implies, by failing to supply their pupils with sympathy and affection, leave them emotionally unbalanced and therefore do them a great harm. In general, Collins spends very little time on his schools, and one could not learn very much about nineteenth-century school life from them.

Collins's first formal attempt in fiction to express himself on the subject of education was in Hide and Seek, a novel which shows clearly what an apt pupil Collins was in the school of Dickens. The educational practices condemned there had been already condemned by Dickens, particularly in the character of Mr. Murdstone in David Copperfield.² In its educational aspects Hide and Seek was a small gun fired in support of Dickens's persistent campaign to reform English educational practice. Collins's Mr. Thorpe is a

¹ Collins, The Evil Genius, I, p. 93.

² See James L. Hughes, Dickens as an Educator, N.Y., 1913, Ch. III, "The Overthrow of Coercion."

modified Mr. Murdstone, without the latter's brutality and heartlessness, but with his severe austerity, his practice of child repression, his Sabbatarianism. He is another father of the "Mr. Fairchild" class of which Victorian life and literature produced a goodly number.¹

The Thorpe system of education is based on discipline and repression, and it issues from a narrow Evangelicalism. When Mr. Thorpe's son Zack is only six years old, he is forced to attend long Sunday services. Being a normal child, Zack is naturally fidgety, and as a punishment is locked up in his father's dressing room where he must learn three verses from the Select Bible Texts for Children. As any kind of amusement on the Sabbath is considered by Mr. Thorpe to be impious levity, Zack may not look at his story books or play games on Sunday. He is allowed to do nothing that he wants to do, and is compelled to do all that he is disinclined to do. The Thorpe pedagogical system, however, instead of making an obedient, pious child out of Zack, merely develops his instinct of self-preservation. The more he is suppressed, the more rebellious he becomes.

Zack's grandfather expounds Collins's common-sense notions on child training in a conversation with the immovable Mr. Thorpe:

"I'm not praising Zack's conduct, but I am blaming

¹ See Esme Wingfield-Stratford, op. cit., pp. 72-75; E. E. Kellett, op. cit., pp. 65-85; and Maurice Quinlan, op. cit., pp. 198-201.

yours. Here it is in plain words:- You keep on cramming church down his throat; and he keeps on puking at it as if it was physic, because he don't know any better and can't know any better at his age. Is that the way to make him take kindly to religious teaching? I know as well as you do, that he fidgeted and roared like a young Turk at the sermon. And pray what was the subject of the sermon? Justification by faith. Do you mean to tell me that he, or any other child at his time of life, could understand anything of such a subject as that; or get an atom of good out of it? You can't - you know you can't! So, I say again, it's no use taking him to church yet; and what's more, it's worse than no use, for it's only associating his first ideas of religious instruction with everything in the way of restraint and discipline and punishment that can be most irksome to him.

"...You would do much better to take my advice, and let Zack go to church, for the present, at his mother's knees. Let his Morning Service be about ten minutes long; let your wife tell him out of the New Testament, about Our Saviour's goodness and gentleness to little children; and then, let her teach him, from the Sermon on the Mount, to be loving and truthful and forbearing and forgiving, for Our Saviour's sake. If such precepts as those are enforced - as they may be in one way or another - by examples drawn from his own daily life; from people around him, from what he meets with and notices and asks about, out of doors and in - mark my words, he'll take kindly to his religious instruction; he'll understand it; he'll often come and ask for it of his own accord, as a reward for being a good boy.

"...But now I am at it, I'll just say this one thing more before I've done:- your way of punishing the boy for his behaviour in church is, in my opinion, about as bad and dangerous a one - not to mince matters - as could possibly be devised. Why not give him a thrashing? if you must punish the miserable little urchin severely for what's his misfortune as much as his fault. Why not stop his pudding, or something of that sort? Here you are associating verses in the Bible, in his mind, with the idea of punishment and being locked up in the cold! You may make him get his texts by heart, I dare say, by fairly tiring him out; but I tell you what I'm afraid you'll make him learn too, if you don't mind - you'll make him learn to dislike the Bible as much as other boys dislike the birch-rod!"¹

¹
Collins, Hide and Seek, I, pp. 15-17.

Mr. Thorpe and Zack appear again in the story when Zack is 19. Mr. Thorpe has not changed his ideas on education one iota. He still believes in coercion and repressive discipline. He still does not realize that he can get better results from Zack by offering him love, sympathy and companionship than he can by attempting to impose a strict regimen on him. He will not allow Zack to attend the theatre or indulge in other innocent pastimes. When the time comes for Zack to enter a trade or a profession, he is not encouraged to follow his own natural inclinations but is forced into the tea business, although he has no liking or aptitude for it. Mr. Thorpe and only Mr. Thorpe knows what is good for Zack. "My son requires the most unremitting parental discipline and control,"¹ he is accustomed to tell friends who suggest that Zack should be allowed to follow his own bent.

The evil consequences of Mr. Thorpe's perverse pedagogical system make their inevitable appearance. Zack secretly does all he is forbidden to do. He smokes cigars against his father's orders. He attends the theatre in defiance of his father, returning home before the house is locked up for the night. Later on, he forms a practice of sneaking out of the house after eleven o'clock, when his parents believe he has retired to his room, and frequents

¹
Ibid., II, p. 31.

disreputable places where he mixes with bad company and drinks more than is good for him.

Affairs reach a critical stage one night when Zack returns home somewhat intoxicated and with his face showing the marks left by a tavern brawl, and is discovered in this condition by his father, who calls him a "degraded beast." The shock of the discovery of Zack's secret delinquency causes Mr. Thorpe to have a nervous breakdown. Zack, on his part, disgusted by his father's lack of understanding and sympathy, quits the paternal roof and becomes his own master.

It is not necessary for our present purposes to follow the fate of Zack and his father after they separate, for new elements enter into the story. Collins achieves his pedagogical purpose by showing how Mr. Thorpe's mistaken, repressive tactics have driven a naturally candid young man to dissimulation and disobedience, have brought about an estrangement between him and his father, and have led to a breakdown in the father's health.

The novel, as already mentioned, was well received by the reviewers, but it must have been especially gratifying to the young recruit fighting under Dickens's banners that the sober Westminster recommended Hide and Seek to too-serious parents for the sake of the lesson it taught:

"Hide and Seek by Mr. W. Collins, is a well-intentioned novel, exposing the dreariness of the existence of a religious

family of the middle class, in England, and the evil influences of a 'sound and serious' education on an impetuous and warm-hearted youth....We recommend it to the notice of the fathers and mothers of serious families, and we think to such it is likely to be of use. They may learn that, if they keep their young Zacks from all rational and cheerful amusement, they will be oiling the lock and hinges of the street door, and become nocturnal roysterers, carousing on

'Brandy at the Cider Cellars, kidneys scorching hot at Evan's' while the mothers and fathers of serious families are in bed." ¹

In that primer of social criticism, Man and Wife, Collins adopted a very unequivocal position with regard to a most important problem: the place and value of athletics in education. As far as he was concerned, athletics in England in 1869-70 had become an almost unmitigated evil, a physical and moral menace. The place that athletics holds in modern life is another of the doubtful bequests made to us by the nineteenth century. Sports had always been cultivated in England both as a means of recreation and as a preparation for war. Interest in sports ebbed and flowed and apparently reached its lowest point in the intellectual eighteenth century. The Napoleonic Wars, however, gave a new impulse to the pursuit of sports and the cultivation of the body. War, as always, destroyed the balance of society and tipped the scales in favor of the physical. Games that developed and strengthened the body appeared in a new light. And Wellington fixed the connection between war and sports once and for all by declaring that the battle of Waterloo had been won^{on}/the

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Westminster Review, N.S. Vol. VI, p. 608.

playing fields of Eton; sports received the sanction of patriotism.

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Athleticism, the universal interest in and cultivation of athletics that characterizes our times, developed slowly in England during the first half of the century. As might be expected, a military institution, the Royal Military College at Sandhurst, was the first school to have regular athletic sports. The first regular sports meet was held by the Royal Military Academy at Woolwich in 1849. Exeter College, Oxford, in 1850 held the first organized sports meet in an English university. Other Oxford colleges followed the example of Exeter during the 'fifties. A sports meet was instituted at Cambridge in 1857, and a similar university-wide meet was held at Oxford in 1860. Annual sports contests at the public schools during the 'fifties gave proof of the flourishing state of athletics on the secondary-school level. In 1864, a date "which must ever be regarded as the most important in the annals of English athletic history,"² the first annual Oxford-Cambridge athletic meeting was held. "In the space of the next two years the cult of athletics and the custom of holding athletic sports meetings spread like wildfire throughout the kingdom."³ In

¹
According to the Oxford English Dictionary the word dates from 1870.

²
F.A.M. Webster, Athletics of Today, London, 1929, p. 11.

³
Ibid., p. 12.

1866 the London Athletic Club and the Amateur Athletic Club were founded for the purpose of promoting and organizing amateur athletic sports. It was also during the 'sixties that magazines with the word athlete or athletic in their titles made their first appearance in the English publishing world. Both The Athlete and The Athletic Review and Journal of Physical Education came out in 1867. Most of the periodical literature devoted partly or wholly to athletics, however, did not make its appearance until later.

The amazing development of athletic sports that marks the Victorian period was noted with surprise by mid-Victorian writers. Looking back over the first half of the century, a writer in the Contemporary Review in 1866 remarked that:

"It would be difficult to point to any part of daily life in which the last half-century has brought about a greater change than in outdoor exercises. Fifty or sixty years ago cricket was rare, boating scarcely known beyond the Thames or the Tyne, and as for what are called par excellence athletic exercises, they seem to have been pretty nearly unheard of except in the Highlands of Scotland." ¹

Another writer who was evidently not very well informed about the development of athletics in his country maintained that "A dozen years ago athletic sports were almost unknown in this country; now they are celebrated over the length and breadth of the land." ² It is true that it was not until the 'fifties

¹
Anon., "Athletics," Contemporary Review, Vol. III (Sept.-Dec., 1866), p. 374.

²
Anon., "Athletics," Saturday Review, Vol. XXVII (March 27, 1869), p. 413.

and 'sixties that athletic sports became a matter of public interest, although it was an exaggeration to say that sports were "almost unknown" in England in 1854. Edward Lyttleton, writing in 1880, also noted that a widespread interest in sports coincided with the early decades of the second half of the nineteenth century:

"Any one who played in the Oxford and Cambridge and Harrow cricket matches thirty years ago can testify that there were scarcely enough spectators to form a continuous line round Lord's cricket-ground. In the latter match it was not found necessary to use ropes till 1864, while now such is the importance of the annual pageant that it affects the duration of the London season. At about the same date a few keen partisans gathered together to see the Universities contend in rowing. Little was said about it, scarcely anything written. Nowadays the crowd assembled to see the practice of the crews equals the number of those who used to watch the actual race...." ¹

From about the 'fifties interest in gymnastics advanced side by side with interest in outdoor sports. Archibald Maclaren, who established the University Gymnasium at Oxford in 1858, was chiefly responsible for introducing scientific physical training from the Continent to England. ²

His most important work was perhaps the system of physical training which he set up for the British Army, but his book, A System of Physical Education, Theoretical and Practical

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Edward Lyttleton, "Athletics in Public Schools," Nineteenth Century, Vol. VII (Jan-June, 1880), p. 45.

²

Fred E. Leonard, A Guide to the History of Physical Education, Revised by George B. Affleck, Phila., 1947, pp. 204-210.

(1869), which was enthusiastically reviewed in Macmillan's¹ by J. C. Morison, did much to promote physical education in English schools. Principally because of the influence of Maclaren, gymnastics grew to be a rival, although never a formidable one, of athletics in England.

The amount of printed general discussion of athletics before 1870 is not large. In 1858 Fitzjames Stephen, the brother of Leslie Stephen, reviewed Tom Brown's School Days for the Edinburgh, and for the first time the growing devotion to athletic sports was under attack from an important source. In this review Stephen made no general condemnation of sports but pointed out some of the dangers underlying the glorification of physical prowess in Kingsley and in Tom Brown's School Days. It was this article that gave currency to the term 'muscular Christianity.'

Although "Tom Hughes was the first in literature to glorify athletics as moral discipline,"² Charles Kingsley had consistently held up an ideal of physical prowess from the beginning of his career as a novelist.³ He associated physical with moral perfection. It is significant that he engaged actively in sports while he was at Cambridge, which he entered

¹
J. C. Morison, "Physical Education," Macmillan's Magazine, Vol. XIX (Nov., 1868-Apr., 1869), pp. 511-516.

²
Edward C. Mack, Public Schools and British Opinion (1780-1860), N.Y., 1939, p. 351.

³
For a discussion of 'muscular Christianity' in fiction, see Ernest A. Baker, The History of the English Novel, Vol. VIII, London, 1937, Ch. V.

in 1838, - he even learned boxing there - and that he had many friends among the officers at Aldershot and Sandhurst. The 'muscular Christianity' which he held up as an ideal came partly from his own love of physical activity, partly from his violent reaction against the asceticism which he saw involved in the ideals of the Oxford Movement, and partly from his desire to make the figure of the 'pale Galilean' attractive to rough and tough workingmen - to accomodate Christianity to the standards of a group who readily understood and admired physical excellence. The Kingsleyan 'muscular Christianity' found a characteristic expression in Thomas Hughes's The Manliness of Christ (1894),¹ and a final resting place in the YMCA.

Neither Kingsley nor his friend Hughes nor Hughes's hero, Arnold of Rugby, who is often erroneously thought to have fostered the development of athletics, played an important part in the actual growth of outdoor sports. But it was Kingsley and Hughes who, in literature, were primarily responsible for bringing about, in the popular mind, the association of athletics with moral idealism. Fitzjames Stephen, in his review of Tom Brown's School Days, pointed out this association and attached to it the term 'muscular Christianity.' Thereafter writers were wont to think of physical training and 'muscular Christianity' as one and the same thing. Man and Wife was regarded by some reviewers as

¹
Mack, op. cit., p. 327.

an attack on 'muscular Christianity' even though Collins did not use the term at all, because he attacked athleticism on moral as well as on physical grounds. Thus Spencer, in an article which he wrote for the British Quarterly Review in 1859, referred to Kingsley as an illustration of contemporary interest in physical education:

"The writings of Mr. Kingsley indicate a reaction against over-culture - carried, as reactions usually are, somewhat too far. Occasional letters and leaders in the newspapers have shown an awakening interest in physical training. And the formation of a school, significantly nicknamed that of 'muscular Christianity,' implies a growing opinion that our present methods of bringing up children do not sufficiently regard the welfare of the body." ¹

The gist of Spencer's article was that the physical training of the young ought to receive much more attention. "Instead of respecting the body and ignoring the mind, we now respect the mind and ignore the body," ² he wrote. Spencer's claim that physical education was being neglected was apparently based on his observation of a few private schools, and it was certainly not true as far as the public ³ schools and universities were concerned.

In 1866 the Contemporary Review printed a long article on athletics that considered both sides of the question. The

¹
Herbert Spencer, Education, N.Y., 1892, p. 176. Chapter IV, "Physical Education," appeared in the British Quarterly Review, April, 1859, as "Physical Training."

²
Spencer, op. cit., p. 226.

³
Edward C. Mack, Public Schools and British Opinion Since 1860, N.Y., 1941, p. 53.

writer was not at all hostile to sports; he even maintained that sports were "capable of being made a main element in teaching a youth to fulfil his baptismal vow by keeping his body in temperance, soberness and chastity."¹ The three evils that he saw in contemporary sports were the gambling that accompanied them, the injury to health that sometimes resulted from them and the folly of parents and teachers in placing too much emphasis on success in them.

The Saturday Review also took note of the growing cult of athletics, and, while not assuming an attitude of disapproval, it expressed the opinion that the whole thing was being overdone.² The other important periodicals of the 'sixties took little notice of athletics, but their silence does not mean that there was no large body of opinion critical of the new cult of athletics. Most of it evidently found ephemeral expression in newspapers and in school and club discussions. Collins would not have made his onslaught on athleticism if he had felt that he was alone in his opposition to it.

When Man and Wife appeared, then, athletics occupied a place in British national life different only in degree from that which it occupies today. Sports were actively

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Contemporary Review, Vol. III, p. 377.

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Saturday Review, "Oxford and Cambridge Athletic Sports," Vol. XIX (April 1, 1865), pp. 376-77, and Vol. XXVII, pp. 413-14.

pursued in school and university and were well organized. Sports meets had become matters of national interest. All the adjuncts of athletics, such as athletic clubs and fields, gymnasiums, professional coaches, trophies, fans, betting and so forth were in existence. Athletic sports had become an important source of entertainment for the public as well as a means of acquiring prestige and glory for the participants. And lastly, athletics had become a source of concern to educators, parents and those who sought to guide public opinion by means of the press.

The lack of biographical material on Wilkie Collins makes it impossible to determine just what inspired him to make his attack on athletics. It may have been a constitutional dislike of violent physical activity. A description of him about the time Man and Wife was published indicates that a little judicious exercise might have done him good:

"Though the England of his prime had been a cricketing, outdoor England, Wilkie had ever slumped at his desk and breathed only indoor air. He was soft, plump, and pale, suffered from various ailments, his liver was wrong, his heart weak, his lungs faint, his stomach incompetent, he ate too much and the wrong things." ¹

This was hardly the man to have unbiased opinions on athletics. That he was not always opposed to the athletic type as such, however, is shown by the fact that Zack, the hero of Hide and Seek, becomes an athletic young man who is fond of

¹
Ellis, op. cit., pp. 46-47. Quoted from Julian Hawthorne's Shapes that Pass.

boxing, rowing and strenuous, early-morning walks. It may have been that he wanted to provide an answer in fiction to the ideal held up in Tom Brown's School Days. The immediate stimulus to attack athletics undoubtedly came from reading or hearing opinions critical of athletics.

By means of preface and appendix Collins made it appear that a number of recent instances of rowdyism on the part of young men of good family had led him to meditate on the probable causes of this undisciplined behavior. Two of these instances as reported in the London Times, preceded by a note in which Collins sharply criticized discipline at Oxford university, were included in the appendix to Man and Wife in an abridged form. The first concerned the unruly behavior of the undergraduates at the Oxford Commemoration of 1869; the second, the removal of some sculptures from Christ Church Library and their destruction in a bonfire in the spring of 1870.¹ Those who took part in these incidents, Collins claimed, were "largely represented among the patrons,² and sometimes among the heroes, of Athletic Sports." Athletic sports, therefore, Collins concluded, were responsible for producing these undisciplined young roughs from the middle and upper classes. The preface and appendix, besides

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This particular incident did not occur until Man and Wife was in the last stages of serial publication in Harper's Weekly.

²

Collins, Man and Wife, Preface, p. xi.

supplying documentation, gave the impression that Man and Wife was the product of an independent study of social phenomena rather than the reflection and expression of others' views or a deliberate attack on a prevailing theory.

Collins creates the character of Geoffrey Delamayn to represent these young roughs and to be the scapegoat of athleticism. Sir Patrick Lundie, who also directs the attack against Scotch irregular marriages in Man and Wife, delivers Collins's moral arguments against the extravagant cultivation of athletics. Sir Patrick, while admitting that mental and physical exercise should go together, asserts that physical training is getting out of hand:

"... 'Popular opinion, in England, seems to me to be, not only getting to consider the cultivation of the muscles as of equal importance with the cultivation of the mind, but to be actually extending - in practice, if not in theory - to the absurd and dangerous length of putting bodily training in the first place of importance, and mental training in the second. To take a case in point:- I can discover no enthusiasm in the nation anything like so genuine and anything like so general, as the enthusiasm excited by your University boat-race.'"¹

He then challenges his auditors to prove that this new enthusiasm is an influence for good:

"'Very good,' pursued Sir Patrick. 'We are all of one mind as to which way the public feeling sets. If it is a feeling to be respected and encouraged, show me the national advantage which has resulted from it. Where is the influence of this modern outburst of manly enthusiasm, on the serious concerns of life? and how has it improved the character of the people at large? Are we any of us individually readier than we ever were to sacrifice our own little private interests to the public good? Are we dealing with the serious social questions of our time, in a conspicuously determined, downright, and definite way?

¹

Collins, Man and Wife, I, p. 329.

Are we becoming a visibly and indisputably purer people in our code of commercial morals? Is there a healthier and higher tone in those public amusements which faithfully reflect in all countries, the public taste? Produce me affirmative answers to those questions, which rest on solid proof - and I'll accept the present mania for athletic sports as something better than an outbreak of our insular boastfulness and our insular barbarity, in a new form.'" 1

Sir Patrick continues:

"... 'I won't point, gentlemen, by way of answer, to the coarseness which I can see growing on our national manners, or to the deterioration which appears to me to be spreading more and more widely in our national tastes.... We will try the issue, as it now stands between us, on its abstract merits only. I assert that a state of public feeling which does practically place physical training in its estimation, above moral and mental training, is a positively bad and dangerous state of feeling in this - that it encourages the inbred reluctance in humanity to submit to the demands which moral and mental cultivation must inevitably make on it. What am I, as a boy, naturally most ready to do - to try how high I can jump? or to try how much I can learn? Which training comes easiest to me, as a young man? The training which teaches me to handle an oar? or the training which teaches me to return good for evil, and to love my neighbour as myself? Of those two experiments, of those two trainings, which ought society in England to meet with the warmest encouragement? And which does society in England practically encourage, as a matter of fact?'

"... 'But when public feeling enters into the question, and directly exalts the bodily exercises above the books - then I say public feeling is in a dangerous extreme. The bodily exercises in that case, will be the uppermost in the youth's thoughts, will have the strongest hold on his interest, will take the lion's share of his time, and will by those means - barring the few purely exceptional instances - slowly and surely end in leaving him, to all good moral and mental purpose, certainly an uncultivated, and possibly a dangerous man.'" 2

1

Ibid., I, p. 330.

2

Man and Wife, I, p. 331-32.

Such a person, when faced by a special temptation, will have no resources within himself to resist that temptation:

"... 'Let this man be tried by a temptation which insidiously calls into action, in his own interests, the savage instincts latent in humanity - the instincts of self-seeking and cruelty which are at the bottom of all crime. Let this person be placed towards some other person, guiltless of injuring him, in a position which demands one of two sacrifices: the sacrifice of the other person, or the sacrifice of his own interests and his own desires. His Neighbour's happiness, or his neighbour's life, stands, let us say, between him and the attainment of something that he wants. He can wreck the happiness, or strike down the life, without, to his knowledge, any fear of suffering for it himself. What is to prevent him, being the man he is, from going straight to his end, on those conditions? Will the skill in rowing, the swiftness in running, the admirable capacity and endurance in other physical exercises, which he has attained, by a strenuous cultivation in other kinds - will these physical attainments help him to win a purely moral victory over his own selfishness and his own cruelty? They won't even help him to see that it is selfishness, and that it is cruelty. The essential principle of his rowing and racing (a harmless principle enough, if you can be sure of applying it to rowing and racing, only), has taught him to take every advantage of another man that his superior strength and superior cunning can suggest. There has been nothing in his training to soften the barbarous hardness in his heart, and to enlighten the barbarous darkness in his mind. Temptation finds this man defenceless, when temptation passes his way. I don't care who he is, or how high he stands accidentally in the social scale - he is to all moral intents and purposes, an Animal, and nothing more. If my happiness stands in his way - and if he can do it with impunity to himself - he will trample down my happiness. If my life happens to be the next obstacle he encounters - and if he can do it with impunity to himself - he will trample down my life.... That is the case which I put, as an extreme case only... but as a perfectly possible case, at the same time....' " 1

A surgeon then states the physiological objections to excessive indulgence in athletics:

¹
Ibid., I, pp.334-37.

"...I can tell you, as a medical man, that a proportion, and not by any means a small one, of the young men who are now putting themselves to violent athletic tests of their strength and endurance, are taking that course to the serious and permanent injury of their own health....There are households in England - miserable households, to be counted...by more than ones and twos - in which there are young men who have to thank the strain laid on their constitutions by the popular physical displays of the present time, for being broken men, and invalided men, for the rest of their lives.'

"I can see no remedy for this sad state of things,... as long as the public feeling remains what the public feeling is now. A fine healthy-looking young man, with a superb muscular development, longs (naturally enough) to distinguish himself like others. The training-authorities at his college, or elsewhere take him in hand (naturally enough again) on the strength of outward appearances. And whether they have been right or wrong in choosing him, is more than they can say, until the experiment has been tried and the mischief has been, in many cases, irretrievably done. How many of them are aware of the important physiological truth, that the muscular power of a man is no fair guarantee of his vital power? How many of them know that we all have (as a great French writer puts it) two lives in us - the surface-life of the muscles, and the inner life of the heart, lungs, and brain. Even if they did know this - even with medical men to help them - it would be in the last degree doubtful in most cases, whether any previous examination would result in any reliable discovery of the vital fitness of the man to undergo the stress of muscular exertion laid on him. Apply to any of my brethren, and they will tell you, as a result of their own professional observation, that I am, in no sense, overstating this serious evil, or exaggerating the deplorable and dangerous consequences to which it leads...." ¹

The Honorable Geoffrey Delamayn, university man and second son of the socially prominent Lord Holchester, illustrates the moral and physical consequences of over-indulgence in athletics. Geoffrey is big, handsome, well developed physically, but unintelligent, and uncultivated

¹
Man and Wife, I, pp. 344-45.

mentally and morally. He had "won the highest popular distinction which the educational system of modern England can bestow - he had pulled the stroke-oar, in a University boat-race."¹ His language is ungrammatical and coarse, his instincts are low and his behavior is rough. He associates with trainers, pugilists and tavern habitués. He is ignorant of poetry;² the name of Dryden only suggests to him an Oxford oarsman whom he had trained with. He kicks helpless dogs. He is more concerned about the health of a favorite horse than about the health of his father. He is utterly selfish and vain. Geoffrey is the type of young man Collins thinks, or would have his readers think, is the result of athleticism. As Sir Patrick says, he is

"the model young Briton of the present time. I don't like the model young Briton. I don't see the sense of crowing over him as a superb national production, because he is big and strong, and drinks beer with impunity, and takes a cold shower bath all the year round. There is far too much glorification in England, just now, of the mere physical qualities which an Englishman shares with the savage and the brute. And the ill results are beginning to show themselves already! We are readier

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Ibid., I, p. 77.

²

When his brother Julius, who is his foil, finds him reading The Newgate Calendar, into which Collins himself dipped occasionally for materials, and reminds him that that compilation of sensational crimes won't cultivate his mind, Geoffrey answers that he doesn't care, and that he doesn't know good English when he sees it. Collins adds that "the great majority of his companions at school and college might have subscribed, without doing the slightest injustice to the present state of English education" to that frank acknowledgement. III, p. 210.

than we ever were to practice all that is rough in our national customs, and to excuse all that is violent and brutish in our national acts. Read the popular books; attend the popular amusements - and you will find at the bottom of them all, a lessening regard for the gentler graces of civilized life, and a growing admiration for the virtues of the aboriginal Britons.'

"'...It's the cant of the day...to take these physically-wholesome men for granted, as being morally-wholesome men into the bargain. Time will show whether the cant of the day is right....'"¹

Let Geoffrey be faced with an unusual temptation and he will show the effects predicted by Sir Patrick. Let him continue on his muscular way and the inevitable physical breakdown foreseen by the surgeon will become a reality.

The temptation is the life of ease and affluence promised by marriage to the rich and attractive young widow, Mrs. Glenarm. Geoffrey has already given his pledged word to the poor governess, Anne Silvester, whom he has seduced. The temptation is too much; Geoffrey's training has not prepared him to resist it. He abandons Anne and, to forestall any claims she may make on him, attempts to prove that she is already married according to Scotch law to his friend, Arnold Brinkworth. The breaking of his word, the betrayal of his friend, the destruction of the happiness of three persons mean nothing to him. And finally, when it becomes clear to him that he is caught in his own trap, that he is the one who is married to Anne, he decides to murder her. At this point the dire physical consequences of his over-indulgence in muscular

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Man and Wife, I, pp. 90-91.

exercises become disastrously evident.

Geoffrey, while running in the foot-race at Fulham as the champion of the South, had suddenly collapsed. The doctor's laconic verdict was "Athletic Sports." The strain had been too much for "the inner life of the heart, lungs and brain." Later, just as he is about to suffocate the sleeping Anne in his lodgings at Fulham he is attacked by the crazed Hester Dethridge; he collapses again, and is strangled by her while he is unconscious.

Sensational and melodramatic as the attack on athleticism was, Man and Wife had the success Collins hoped it would have when he wrote to his friend Frederick Lehmann to tell him that he was busy "writing an unpopular book that may possibly make a hit, from the mere oddity of a modern writer running full tilt against the popular sentiment instead of cringing to it."¹ When Blackwood's reviewed it in November, 1870 (Man and Wife appeared in book form in June, 1870), the reviewer assumed it had "probably by this time been read by most readers of fiction."² The story created something of a sensation. At least three editions appeared in 1870, and several more in the next decade. When Collins made the novel into a play and had it produced at the Prince of Wales's Theatre in London, it enjoyed a run of 136 performances, and in 1889 it was revived by the Haymarket

¹ [The Lehmanns], "Some Letters and Recollections," Cornhill, Vol. 65 (April, 1892), Collins letter of Oct. 25, 1869.

² Blackwood's, Vol. 108 (July-Dec., 1870), p. 628.

¹
Theatre.

Reviewers, on the whole, approved of his crusade to turn public feeling against athleticism. The Athenaeum, while doubting the propriety of using fiction to attack social abuses and while not being convinced that "there is any direct connexion 'between the recent unbridled development of physical cultivation in England and the recent spread of grossness and brutality among certain classes of the English population,'" wished Collins "all success in his crusade."² Blackwood's only mentioned the purpose elements of Man and Wife and made no comment. The Contemporary Review limited itself to saying that Collins was more successful "with respect to the vicious effects of muscularity"³ than in his handling of Scotch customs and manners. The Westminster thought that he denounced "with vehemence, and in part with reason, the cherished love of athletic sports," but was inclined to feel that he had handled too severely "those who enjoy athletic sports, but take a higher view of their utility than does Mr. Wilkie Collins."⁴ The Saturday Review, in its review of the book, agreed that "athleticism is greatly in want of ridicule, and no harm will be done even

¹
Ellis, op. cit., pp. 44-45.

²
Athenaeum, July 9, 1870, pp. 45-46.

³
Contemporary Review, Vol. XV (Aug.-Nov., 1870), p. 318.

⁴
Westminster Review, N.S. Vol. XXXVIII (July-Oct., 1870), p.521.

by a little more ferocious satire."¹ However, when it came to review Man and Wife in its dramatic form in 1873, the Saturday Review was not so sympathetic. In fact, the drama reviewer was more inclined to feel that Collins's attack, rather than athleticism, was in want of ridicule:

"...Undergraduates of Oxford and Cambridge who visit this theatre may console themselves by remembering that the dislike which Miss Blanche Lundie expresses for University oars is not shared by the majority of her sex. The lugubrious warning of the surgeon may perhaps be balanced by observing that some distinguished oarsmen live long enough to attain eminence in other than athletic pursuits, as is witnessed by the fact that two of the best performers of their time at Cambridge are now judges of the Court of Common Pleas. Youthful hearers of this play are likely to be more strongly impressed by the fact that the public put their money on Geoffrey Delamayn for the footrace at 5 to 4 than by his early death. We have not the least expectation that Mr. Wilkie Collins will succeed either in abolishing athletics or in reforming the Scotch law of marriage....A great deal of nonsense is written in glorification of athletics, and it is pardonable that one author should write nonsense on the other side."²

On this side of the Atlantic Man and Wife inspired an anonymous writer to discuss athleticism in England under the heading of "The Morality of Muscularity." In this article the writer reviews the athletic aspects of Man and Wife and then goes on to note sympathetically other signs of a reaction against athletics, which, he thinks, is at last "fairly set in." Parents are beginning to complain about the waste of time involved in athletic sports; teachers

¹ Saturday Review, Vol. XXX (July 9, 1870), p. 53.

² Ibid., Vol. XXXV (March 1, 1873), p. 283.

admit that "the muscles are trained to perfection at the expense of the mind."

"Doctors are beginning also to protest against over-exertion; philosophers to argue that the perfection of health is inconsistent with great mental exertion - the supply of nervous force being inadequate to meet the double drain - while women protest that sports inspire their boys with a fondness for low company, betting and minor immoralities." ¹

In England Man and Wife had the further success of inspiring so distinguished a thinker and writer as Leslie Stephen, himself a keen athlete and patron of sports in his university days, to write a long discussion of sports and their relation to university studies for Fraser's. While not inclined to take Geoffrey too seriously, and while tending to regard Man and Wife as "an onslaught upon the sect who were formerly known as 'muscular Christians,' but who seem inclined to drop the substantive form from their title," ² he admitted that "Mr. Collins is quite justified in painting a very hideous caricature in order to arouse us from our lethargy." ³ He contrasted Collins's athletic university man with the type as he knew it from his own experience, and concluded that the real Geoffrey Delamayn, while decidedly uninterested in intellectual activity, was rather a good-natured, beefy animal than a savage brute like Collins's Geoffrey. The largest part of the article was devoted to criticism of university studies. The "intellectual standard

¹ Anon., "The Morality of Muscularity," Every Saturday, Vol. I, (Aug. 13, 1870), p. 525.

² Leslie Stephen, "Athletic Sports and University Studies," Fraser's Magazine, Vol. 82 (July-Dec. 1870), p. 691.

³ Ibid., p. 692.

of our young men," he thought, should be elevated rather than their physical energies depressed. If the curriculum and the teaching methods used in the universities were improved and studies made more practical and attractive, boys would not be so strongly tempted to release their energies in muscular activity.

Man and Wife could not halt the development of athletics in English national life any more than King Canute could make the waves obey by a mere command. The passion for sports, writes Edward C. Mack

"fairly swept through the older public schools. By 1880 or thereabouts it had come to dominate all the schools, including the once-studious Shrewsbury, where compulsory football for all had already become a torture to the younger boys. At Harrow the government of the houses was passing from boys high in studies to those high in athletics; at Rugby, where the athlete did not officially rule, he began to do so unofficially, as the monitorial system began to decay." ¹

In 1880 too, only ten years after the appearance of Man and Wife, a high-water mark in the history of the development of organized sports in England was reached when the Amateur Athletic Association was founded and "given jurisdiction over all British sports." ²

Man and Wife is historically important, however, because it was the first widely read protest against the encroachments of athletics in education. When Kingsley and Hughes were preaching that physical development fostered

¹

Edward C. Mack, Public Schools and British Opinion Since 1860, p. 124.

²

D.G.A. Lowe and A.E. Porritt, Athletics, London & N.Y., 1929, p. 12.

moral development, and were thus giving to athletics the sanction of morality, Collins stood up and said that exactly the opposite was likely to be true. He forced his generation to look at the problem of athletics from various angles and to admit that sports might not be an unmixed blessing in education. He stimulated thought and discussion on the subject even though his attack was a failure so far as practical results were concerned. He did not succeed in turning public feeling against athletics. The problem of the place of athletics remains with us and must be perennially tackled by educators in every school in the Anglo-Saxon world, with more or less success.

It is true that Geoffrey Delamayn is a caricature, as Leslie Stephen said, and that he is not to be taken too seriously. The thesis which Collins develops through him is a very extreme one, and is all but destroyed by his conceding that a Geoffrey would become a criminal only when faced with a strong temptation. Experience shows that any man, no matter what his training has been, may succumb to a strong temptation. Athletes are no exceptions to the general frailty of humanity. A further weakness in the story is Collins's ignorance of sporting life. His description of a foot race is unconvincing and dull compared with Reade's vivid description of Oxford rowing contests in Hard Cash, contests in which, by the way, the very moral and intellectual Alfred Hardie wins several of the laurels. Man and Wife is a

dead book and probably will never come to life again, although the essence of its message on athletics is still alive. Its warning against making a hero out of the successful athlete, merely because he is a successful athlete, and against putting physical training on a par with mental and moral training, remains as applicable now as it was in 1870.

In Heart and Science Collins used two characters, Mrs. Gallilee and her twelve-year-old daughter Maria to illustrate the effects of an education "directed to scientific pursuits."¹ As enough has been said about Mrs. Gallilee in the preceding chapter to show what kind of person that lady of science was, it need only be added here that Collins makes it clear that absorption in science is chiefly responsible for her defects. Her scientific education, which is complete by the time the reader meets her, by failing to develop counter-balancing good instincts in her, has allowed her bad instincts to become preponderant. In other words, an exclusively scientific education is non-moral and does not promote the growth of good character traits. Secondly, Mrs. Gallilee was ignorant of the human affections because her scientific education had left her completely in the dark about such things.

Young Maria is only beginning her scientific education, which, like the utilitarian education offered to the pupils

¹ Collins, Heart and Science, III, p. 173.

of M'Choakumchild's school in Dickens's Hard Times, apparently consists of facts only. Maria is developing into an unnatural child, an inhibited young pedant:

"She called everybody 'dear;' she knew to a nicety how much oxygen she wanted in the composition of her native air; and - alas, poor wretch! she had never wetted her shoes or dirtied her face since the day when she was born." ¹

She is "insatiably eager for useful information," ² and loves to parade what she has learned. She will, of course, come to no good end if allowed to grow up under her mother's influence. Her little sister Zoe, fortunately for her, is too dull to collect scientific facts, and therefore remains a natural and presumably lovable child. Readers of Hard Times will recall that 'Sissy' Jupe, who is unable to give a scientific definition of a horse, owes her educational salvation to her scholarly inaptitude, while Bitzer, who is a pupil after Mr. Gradgrind's utilitarian heart, collects hard facts zealously and becomes a very unpleasant young man.

By 1886 the impression must have existed among those who were interested in the matter, that Collins was something of an authority on the subject of education. At any rate, in that year the Pall Mall Gazette, in whose columns Matthew Arnold sometimes appeared, asked Collins to submit to them for publication a list of books necessary for a liberal

¹ Collins, Heart and Science, I, p. 54.

² Ibid., I, p. 137.

education. His list of great books was to follow one contri-
 1
 buted by Sir John Lubbock, banker, scientist and popular
 writer. Collins reacted to this invitation with characteristic
 diffidence and frankness:

"I am sincerely sensible of the compliment to myself which is implied in your suggestion; but I am at the same time afraid that you have addressed yourself to the wrong man. Let me own the truth. I add one more to the number of reckless people who astonish Sir John Lubbock by devoting little care to the selection of what they read. I pick up the literature that happens to fall in my way, and live upon it as well as I can - like the sparrows who are picking up the crumbs outside my window while I write. If I may still quote my experience of myself, let me add that I have never got any good out of a book unless the book interested me in the first instance. When I find that reading becomes an effort instead of a pleasure, I shut up the volume, respecting the eminent author, and admiring my enviable fellow-creatures who have succeeded where I have failed. These sentiments have been especially lively in me (to give an example) when I have laid aside in despair Clarissa Harlowe, La Nouvelle Heloise, the plays of Ben Jonson, Burke on The Sublime and Beautiful, Hallam's Middle Ages, and Roscoe's Life of Leo the Tenth. Is a person with this good reason to blush for himself (if he was only young enough to do it) the right sort of person to produce a list of books for readers in search of a liberal education? You will agree with me that he is capable of seriously recommending Sterne's Sentimental Journey as the best book of travels that has ever been written, and Byron's Childe Harold as the grandest poem which the world has seen since the first publication of Paradise Lost!"²

Having made this extraordinary but honest confession,

1

Lubbock's list is given in the chapter entitled "The Choice of Books" in his The Pleasures of Life, London, 1889. He includes such weighty works as Aristotle's Ethics, Bacon's Novum Organum and Gibbon's Decline and Fall.

2

Wilkie Collins, "Books Necessary for a Liberal Education," Pall Mall Gazette, Feb. 11, 1886, p. 2. The whole article appears on one page.

Collins goes on to say that he recognizes as liberal "any system of education the direct tendency of which is to make us better Christians," a statement which he clarifies somewhat by adding that he assumes "that the production of a good citizen represents the most valuable result of a liberal education." For the production of good citizens he thinks that Goldsmith's The Vicar of Wakefield is the most valuable book in Sir John's list, "and of the many excellent schoolmasters (judging them by their works) in whose capacity for useful teaching he believes, the two in whom I for my part most implicitly trust, are Walter Scott and Charles Dickens." He then recommends Lockhart's Life of Scott to the reader:

"Let the general reader follow my advice, and he will find himself not only introduced to the greatest genius that has ever written novels, but provided with the example of a man modest, just, generous, resolute, and merciful; a man whose very faults and failings have been transformed into virtues through the noble atonement that he offered, at the peril and the sacrifice of his life."

He next recommends Moore's Life of Byron for the reason that it contains "the most perfect letters in the English language." In the literature of travel his choices are William Beckford's Italy; with Sketches of Spain and Portugal (1834), Alexander Kinglake's Eothen (1844), Elisha Kane's Arctic Exploration (1856) and George Melville's In the Lena Delta (1885). The first two may still be regarded as minor classics of travel and in their own day enjoyed a considerable vogue; today, however, only those who enjoy wandering in the shadowy byways of literature read them. Beckford's records of travel on the Continent, recently edited by Guy Chapman as The Travel Diaries of William

Beckford, are written in a self-conscious, precious, enameled style, quite the opposite of Collins's own simple style. But Beckford had a keen eye for the unusual and the colorful; in Italy as in Vathek he was a thoroughgoing romantic, and that alone would have been enough to win Collins's approval. Eothen, a book that served to bring the romance of the near-East to the Victorians, is also distinguished by its literary qualities; F. A. Kirkpatrick goes so far as to say that it "is, perhaps, the best book of travel in the English language."¹ Its great merit, in Collins's mind was that it presented a little-known part of the world interestingly. Probably only students of Arctic exploration now read Kane and Melville, especially the latter. The nineteenth century saw a great recrudescence of interest in polar exploration and it became par excellence the century of Arctic discovery. The zest with which the Victorians pursued polar exploration is another link between the Victorian and the Elizabethan ages. Public interest in the Arctic was at a feverish height especially between 1845 and 1855 because of the stir caused by Sir John Franklin's great expedition, its tragic disappearance, and the various efforts made to find traces of the exploring party. Arctic exploration, involving as it did a tremendous struggle for existence in a fantastic region of the earth, was sensational

¹
Cambridge History of English Literature, Vol. XIV, Cambr., 1922, p. 251.

from its very nature and inflamed romantic imaginations. Dickens and Collins were both interested in polar discovery, and Collins's The Frozen Deep, an Arctic melodramatic play presented at Tavistock House on January 6, 1857, with Dickens and Collins taking the main roles, is a reflection of this interest. Kane's book could have supplied the Arctic background of the play. Collins's suggestions in travel literature are, therefore, easily accounted for by his own temperament and interests.

In fiction, Collins recommends Mrs. Inchbald's A Simple Story, a sentimental, melodramatic novel that belongs to the late eighteenth century school of sensibility in fiction; Marryat's Peter Simple and Midshipman Easy; Dumas's Count of Monte Cristo; Balzac's Père Goriot; and Cooper's The Pilot, Jack Tier, The Deerslayer and The Pathfinder. His choice of Marryat, Dumas and Cooper are understandable; they are novelists of action and adventure. A Simple Story and Père Goriot appealed to Collins because of their pathos, spurious in the first, genuine in the second. He had early shown an interest in Balzac, as his biographical essay on him for All the Year Round² demonstrates.

1

For this 'Arctic' episode in the lives of Dickens and Collins, see Thomas Wright, The Life of Charles Dickens, N.Y., 1936, pp. 245-48. The Frozen Deep appeared serially as a novelette in Temple Bar in 1874, and in book form in the same year.

2

Wilkie Collins, "Portrait of an Author, Painted by his Publisher," All the Year Round, June 18-25, 1859. Reprinted in My Miscellanies.

It would not be fair to Collins to be too critical of his list of books necessary for a liberal education, for he himself, as has been seen, did not think he was specially fitted to make such a list. He read only what interested him, and what interested him belonged to the literature of romance and of sensibility, which was also the kind of literature he wrote. He loved the romantic tales of Scott, Cooper, Dumas and Marryat and, when asked to recommend books for others, naturally recommended his own favorites. All his selections, with the exception of Père Goriot, may be classified with the literature of romanticism. Eothen, Arctic Explorations, and In the Lena Delta may not have been written by men of particularly romantic temperament, but to readers who, like Collins, delight in the far-away and the strange for its own sake, they are the very stuff of romance. Collins forgot the little he had to say about a liberal education almost as soon as he had said it and proceeded to recommend what he liked. It is difficult to see how any of the books he suggests for reading would make the reader a better Christian or a good citizen any more than any other books he might have mentioned. Collins's list of "great books" is not to be taken very seriously, but it is somehow refreshing to find a confirmed romantic frankly recommending

¹ His literary preferences are mentioned by Hall Caine, My Story, London, 1908, p. 333, and by William Winter, Old Friends, N.Y., 1909, p. 17 and p. 219.

romantic literature at a date when English literature was becoming increasingly impregnated with the scientific and critical spirit.

Looked at in their ensemble, Collins's educational ideas are seen to be largely negative, and his efforts to be limited to condemning and illustrating the bad moral and social effects of the wrong kind of education. As an educator Collins is not profound, systematic or important. There is no evidence in his writings to show that he interested himself in any of the technical problems of theory or practice in England during his lifetime or that he was at all conscious of the transformation that was taking place in English education during the Victorian age. The efforts that culminated in a national, compulsory system of education, that led to the founding of technical schools of every description, that made higher education available for women, that swept away time-honored curricula and teaching methods, that, in brief, completely changed in one century the course of English education, find little reflection in his fiction. He is out of the main stream of English educational endeavor during the nineteenth century. This is said, not to censure him, but to indicate that he was scarcely in a position to speak with authority when he spoke on the subject of education. It was certainly the example of his master Dickens, who admittedly exercised considerable influence on English education through his novels, and who

knew something of the theory of education, that impelled him to express himself upon the subject of education.

At the same time, Collins's educational opinions are of interest in a study that seeks to show how he applied the novel to serious purposes. Whether or not he was qualified to speak on education, Collins did attempt to instil certain educational ideas in the minds of his contemporaries, and, moreover, his ideas were not rejected with contempt. The flattering request of a newspaper with such high standards as the Pall Mall Gazette is proof of that.

CONCLUSION

It is sufficiently clear by now that Wilkie Collins was not satisfied with being only a clever story-teller, and that he became convinced that he had serious moral and social, as well as artistic, responsibilities toward society. Acting on this conviction, he dedicated his fiction, in a greater or lesser degree, to a variety of causes. During the first half of his career as a writer he was content to carry out his self-assumed responsibilities by means of occasional satire, exhortation, and direct or indirect appeals to the reader's sympathy. During the second half of his career, the element of extraneous purpose in his fiction came to the fore and in two novels, Man and Wife and Heart and Science, was allowed to dominate the fiction. It is particularly because of the reformism in which he engaged during the last twenty years of his life that Collins deserves to be called a crusader in fiction.

The reform efforts of Collins belong to the end of the movement in English fiction studied by Louis Cazamian in his Le roman social en Angleterre (1830-1850). The chief figures in this phase of the history of the didactic novel in England are Dickens, Disraeli, Mrs. Gaskell and Charles Kingsley. In a time of social stress they had used fiction in an attempt to bring about certain urgently needed reforms,

to expose the terrible lot of the working classes, and, in general, to awaken the social conscience of England. By the time both Collins and Charles Reade entered the literary field as disciples of Dickens, social and economic conditions in England had changed for the better and the great task of rousing England from social apathy was achieved. Consequently, the Dickens tradition of social reform is transformed and particularized in Reade and Collins, as Madeleine Cazamian has pointed out:

"The abuses which the successors of Dickens draw attention to are anomalies, isolated or very special cases, in flagrant contradiction to the spirit of the times....Neither one nor the other [Reade nor Collins] had to fight against a general obduracy created by habit and apathy of mind, encouraged by a dogmatic and all-powerful economic fatalism. The immense industrial misery, the fundamental injustices of civilization were no longer ignored; certain measures had remedied them; others were to follow; the evil was known, and the public conscience informed." ¹

Collins, then, inherited a literary tradition that had lost its original inspiration and was living on by drawing public attention to special abuses and by endeavoring to broaden the scope of sentimental humanitarianism. There is not the slightest doubt that Collins derived this tradition directly from Dickens. He began to contribute to Household Words in 1852, and was taken on the staff of this magazine in 1856. When Collins met Dickens in 1851 he had published a biography, an historical novel and a book of travels, but he

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Translated from Madeleine Cazamian, op. cit., p. 3.

had not as yet acquired any position in the world of letters. Dickens, however, was the foremost novelist in England. Soon the two were dining together, traveling together, discussing literary problems together. The association remained close and unbroken for nineteen years. The influence of the older and far greater writer on the younger was bound to be profound. Most of Dickens's ideas must have become known to Collins, and evidently, they were infectious. In 1856 Dickens wrote of Collins to his editor, W. H. Wills: "He is very suggestive, and exceedingly quick to take my notions."¹ It is possible that Dickens only meant here that Collins showed a quick comprehension, but when the comment is considered in relation to Collins's efforts to follow Dickens's example, it is more likely that he meant that Collins was an apt disciple. How enthusiastically Collins took up a cause suggested to him by Dickens is illustrated by a letter written by Dickens to Wills in September, 1858, relative to Collins's article for Household Words, "Highly Proper!"² The master feels that he has to restrain the righteous indignation of the over-zealous pupil:

"I particularly wish you to look well to Wilkie's article about the Wigan schoolmaster, and not to leave anything in it that may be sweeping and unnecessarily

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Walter Dexter, editor, The Letters of Charles Dickens, 3 Vols., Nonesuch Dickens, Bloomsbury, 1938, II, p. 800.

²

See above, p. 7.

offensive to the middle class. He has always a tendency to overdo that - and such a subject gives him a fresh temptation. Don't be afraid of the Truth, in the least; but don't be unjust." ¹

Dickens, it is evident, gave Collins not only encouragement and confidence in himself, but something of his own zeal for social justice as well. To transfer this crusading spirit to the novel was only to follow Dickens's example. At the time of Dickens's death, Collins, in Man and Wife, had just begun to go in for Dickensian didacticism on a large scale, while Dickens, by a curious irony, was trying to outdo Collins in suspense-filled melodrama in Edwin Drood. The two writers had exchanged roles. It is also significant that Collins's literary decline began immediately after the death of Dickens. The stimulating friendship of Dickens had provided Collins with an inspiration that nothing could replace.

It has been suggested by Malcolm Elwin in his essay on Collins that Charles Reade was largely responsible for Collins's decision to become a crusader in fiction. ² Although little is known about the relationship that existed between the two writers, it is certain that they held each other in high esteem. They were drawn together by a common admiration for Dickens, by a common literary creed, and by a common love

¹
Dexter, op. cit., III, p. 58.

²
Elwin, Victorian Wallflowers, p. 221.

of the theater. Reade was a firm believer in the efficacy of fiction as a means of bringing about reforms, and a militant champion of causes of all kinds. He believed that "Justice is the daughter of publicity,"¹ and that the popular novel assured the greatest possible publicity. Acting on this principle he exposed abuses prevailing in English prisons in It Is Never Too Late to Mend (1856), and abuses in private lunatic asylums in Hard Cash (1863); in Foul Play (1868) the practice of scuttling old ships in order to collect the insurance on them was given publicity; in Put Yourself in His Place (1870) he attacked the evils of trade unionism, and in A Woman-Hater (1877) he came to the defence of women doctors against popular prejudice. He was convinced that the novelist, by creating sympathy for those who suffered under injustices, was a potent healer of social ills:

"Now, the class 'authors' may be said to rain sympathy. That class has produced the great Apostle of Sympathy in this age; and many of us writers follow in his steps, though we cannot keep up with his stride. In the last fifty years legislation and public opinion have purged the nation of many unjust and cruel things; but who began the cure? In most cases it can be traced to the writer's pen, and his singular power and habit of sympathizing with men whose hard case is not his own."²

Collins could hardly fail to have been impressed by Reade's aggressive zeal for justice and by his superior learning and intellectual ability. It is certainly probable that

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Charles Reade, Hard Cash, London, 1927, p. 528.

²

Charles Reade, Readiana, London, 1883, p. 127.

Reade helped to keep alive in Collins the stimulus originally received from Dickens and that he inspired him with his own view of the social function of fiction.

The influence of two such dominating personalities as those of Dickens and Reade would alone have been enough to deflect Collins from a purely artistic goal, but there was another influence working on him, and that was the moralistic criticism he was subjected to. An outburst from the heroine of the frame-narrative of The Queen of Hearts (1859), one of several defenses Collins made of his own ideal of fictional art, shows that at that time at least, in spite of his own occasional practice, he was opposed to using fiction for propagandistic purposes:

"I'm sick to death of novels with an earnest purpose. I'm sick to death of outbursts of eloquence, and large-minded philanthropy, and graphic descriptions, and unsparing anatomy of the human heart, and all that sort of thing. Good gracious me! isn't it the original intention or purpose, or whatever you call it, of a work of fiction to set out distinctly by telling a story? ...Oh, dear me! what I want is something that seizes hold of my interest, and makes me forget when it is time to dress for dinner; something that keeps me reading, reading, reading, in a breathless state to find out the end." ¹

Continued moralistic criticism, however, helped to push Collins toward "earnest purpose" in creating the impression that his stories were not quite respectable. An anonymous writer who came to Collins's defence in the Spectator in 1877 admitted that "in the opinion of many readers" Collins's

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Collins, The Queen of Hearts, I, pp. 95-96.

novels were "not nice," and added that "as an almost necessary consequence, he has been systematically under-rated by reviewers and the public generally."¹

What better means was there to counteract this opinion than to champion worthy causes or give a moral or humanitarian slant to material that was likely to offend Victorian propriety? From his own experience Collins understood the psychological effects of a loss of respectability, and from the critical reception given to some of his novels he was made to understand the meaning of a loss of moral reputation as a writer; he also understood the drive to recover respectability that followed such a loss, for he gave it to Mrs. Catherick, the mother of the illegitimate "woman in white." Like Mrs. Catherick, for whom a bow from the local clergyman represented an important step in the recovery of her reputation, Collins sought to make up for his loss of respectability by making himself known as an "apostle of sympathy." Thus, this aspect of his reaction to unfavorable criticism became united to the example of his friends Dickens and Reade in inducing Collins to turn propagandist.

As a novelist of serious purpose Collins is distinctly inferior to either Dickens or Reade. Their appeals to the

¹ Anon., "Wilkie Collins: A Literary Estimate," The Spectator, Vol. 50 (Aug. 11, 1877), p. 1008.

sympathy of their readers in behalf of needed reforms are still often impressive and moving, even when they are felt to be an intrusion. Their sincerity is unquestionable and their eloquence nearly always persuasive. They write as men filled with a passion for justice who are driven by an interior compulsion to protest against social wrongs. Their humanitarianism springs from their personalities and their experiences and extends beyond their books into the actions of their lives; it is an integral part of their beings. While it would be grossly unfair to Collins to imply that he was not a kindly and generous man, yet he did not, so far as is known, actively engage in philanthropic work. His humanitarianism appears to have been an expression of his literary self rather than of his whole self. This fact alone makes it less interesting than that of Dickens and Reade. As a novelist of purpose Collins is not seldom clumsy and unconvincing. His diatribes are often feeble and hollow, and his exhortations have a falsetto sound. The elaborate plots which he constructs to illustrate his themes often contain serious weaknesses. His reformism appears rather as an excrescence on his work than as an essential part of it, and it is for this reason that so many critics have objected to it. Furthermore, the reader of today cannot help feeling that Collins's sincerity as an advocate is sometimes questionable, that ulterior motives are hidden somewhere in the background.

Did Collins have any influence as a moral and social guide? This is a particularly difficult question to answer because of the scarcity of any real evidence, such as contemporary avowals of his influence on his readers in the form of private letters or published statements. The favorable or unfavorable reactions of the reviewers to his crusading efforts have been noted in the course of this study, yet even the approval of reviewers can not be considered as being an indication of influence. The acknowledgement of Harry Quilter¹ that he had learned moral lessons from the novels of Wilkie Collins counts for something, but it stands in isolation. It can perhaps be safely assumed that there must have been many more acknowledgements of this kind communicated to Collins by his readers, as otherwise he would hardly have felt encouraged to continue his efforts to mould public opinion.

It is similarly difficult to establish any connection between the ultimate achievement of specific reforms recommended by Collins and his possible influence on the British public. Some of his crusades, such as his attacks on the practice of vivisection and on the Jesuits, were illiberal and quixotic, and could scarcely have had more than a small and passing effect. Of the legal reforms that he sought, however, all but one have been effected, and surely the publicity which

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See above, p. 35.

he provided for them counted for something. Reade uttered an important truth when he said that justice was the daughter of publicity. Time has brought about radical changes with regard to other causes which Collins pleaded before the bar of British public opinion. English Sabbatarianism is largely a thing of the past; the literary artist enjoys as much freedom of expression as he needs; the 'fallen woman' is regarded with more tolerance than in the past; and illegitimate children are no longer social and legal pariahs. Many things have contributed to bring about these changes, and, while it is impossible to prove that Collins's work had anything to do with bringing them about, yet it can be regarded as a contributing factor. It may be concluded, then, that Collins's efforts to influence the English reading public of his time were not entirely in vain. Time has brought to maturity the seed that Collins helped to plant.

APPENDIXCOLLINS AND INTERNATIONAL COPYRIGHT¹

Until 1891, when the American Congress passed an international-copyright law recognizing the literary property-rights of foreign authors in the United States, American publishers could legally issue without payment or acknowledgment the works of any author not resident in the United States. The foreign author was entirely at the mercy of the American publisher. If the latter conducted his business according to ethical standards, he might allow the foreign author a certain amount of money for his book; if not, he simply published the book, pocketed his gains and let the matter end there. The ethical publisher, in return for his outlay of money, generally required advance sheets from the foreign author so that he might have the advantage over a rival of a few days' advance publication. Since Britain was the main producer of literature written in English during the nineteenth century, British authors suffered the most from American literary piracy. The great Victorian writers were pirated freely in the United States, and were thus deprived of thousands of dollars that would

¹ This phase of Collins's reformism is relegated to an appendix because it occupies only a tiny place in his fiction.

have been theirs had an international-copyright law existed here. Pirated popular authors were naturally filled with moral indignation at the callousness of unscrupulous publishers, and felt understandable twinges of mental pain at the thought of the sizeable potential income that they were losing.¹

The British victims of American literary piracy did not, of course, suffer in silence. Beginning with the year 1837, various efforts were made by British writers to influence the American legislature directly or indirectly to pass a law of international copyright.² Their efforts, coupled with those of American publishers, writers, politicians and others eventually succeeded in awakening the American social conscience, so far as the rights of foreign authors were concerned, but it took fifty-four years to do it. The first British effort to persuade the American legislature was the British Authors' Petition to Congress of 1837, "signed by fifty-six of the foremost English writers, including Bulwer-Lytton, Carlyle, Harriet Martineau, Southey, and Thomas Moore,"³ and presented to the Senate by Henry Clay.

¹
For literary piracy in America, see B.D. Cutler, "The Great Victorians Come to America," Publisher's Weekly, Vol. 122 (Nov. 10 & Dec. 17, 1932), pp. 1928-30 and pp. 2255-2257. For piracy of American productions by British publishers, see Algernon Tassin, "American Authors and British Publishers," The Bookman (N.Y.), Vol. XXXV (Aug., 1912), pp. 592-99.

²
Only the Authors' Petition and the contributions of the three best-selling 'sensation' novelists, Dickens, Reade and Collins, will be considered here.

³
Andrew J. Eaton, "The American Movement for International Copyright, 1837-60," Library Quarterly, Vol. 15 (April, 1945), p. 102.

The authors of the petition

"pointed out that, in the absence of an international copyright law giving them exclusive rights to their publications in the United States, they not only were deprived of their property but also were injured in their reputations by the mutilation of their writings at the hands of American publishers. At the same time, they said, American authors were injured by being forced to compete with foreign works which American publishers secured from abroad without payment." ¹

The Petition also appealed to the sympathy of the Americans by stating that if Scott, who by 1847 had 16 American publishers, had received what was due him from the American public, his life might have been prolonged or his last days made easier. ²

The next important plea on the part of a British author for an American international-copyright law was made by Dickens on his visit to the United States in 1842. Dickens felt very keenly on the subject of copyright because he was so sensitive to every form of injustice and because he himself was the greatest loser of all through the absence of protection in America for the literary property of a foreign author. In America he campaigned for a copyright law with his customary zeal for a good cause. He brought up the subject of international copyright in his speeches in Boston, Hartford and New York. It became the character of a great country like America, he told the Americans, to have an

¹
Ibid., p. 102.

²
Cutler, op. cit., p. 1928.

international-copyright law, first, because it was just, and, second, because without it America could never have a literature of her own.¹ While in the United States he had sent to him from England a letter and an address signed by twelve prominent British writers among whom were Bulwer-Lytton, Tennyson, Hood, Leigh Hunt and Sydney Smith, and a personal letter from Carlyle, supporting him in his campaign.² The address and the letters Dickens had published in several American newspapers to give them the utmost publicity. He also interested a group of American authors, the chief among whom was Washington Irving, in drawing up a petition to Congress;³ the petition containing twenty-five signatures passed from the hands of Clay to a select committee and then received a quiet burial in governmental files. The time was not ripe for an international-copyright law in 1842 and Dickens abandoned public efforts to influence American lawmakers. Back in England again, he addressed an open letter to the English press summarizing his efforts in behalf of a copyright law and declaring his firm resolution never "to enter into any negotiation with any person for the transmission,

¹
Bernard Darwin, ed., The Speeches of Charles Dickens, London, n.d., p. 68.

²
Wm. Glyde Wilkins, Charles Dickens in America, London, 1911,

³
Charles Dickens, "International Copyright," (July 16, 1842), Collected Papers I, The Nonesuch Dickens, Bloomsbury, 1937, p. 142, and Lawrence H. Houtchens, "Charles Dickens and International Copyright," American Literature, Vol. XIII (March, 1941), pp. 20-22.

across the Atlantic, of early proofs of anything I may write,"¹
 and of foregoing all profit "derivable from such a source."¹
 He came to think better of this resolution, it would seem,
 for The House of Harper² offers abundant evidence that he did
 receive money after 1842 for early sheets sent across the
 Atlantic. Dickens "succeeded in stirring up an unparalled
 interest in the copyright question"³ in the United States,
 yet it is possible that his active intervention, by arousing
 so much journalistic opposition, may have delayed rather
 than furthered a copyright law.⁴

The most important British author after Dickens to
 intervene in the American copyright question was Dickens's
 most ardent disciple, Charles Reade. In 1875 he had published
 in the Pall Mall Gazette and the New York Tribune "a classic
 historical document - the series of thirteen letters entitled
The Rights and Wrongs of Authors."⁵ In this series of letters
 Reade argued the whole subject of copyright with more learning

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Dickens, op. cit., p. 143.

²

J. Henry Harper, The House of Harper, N.Y. & London, 1912,
 p. 114, p. 262, and passim.

³

Eaton, op. cit., p. 98.

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Hutchens, op. cit., p. 27.

⁵

Elwin, Charles Reade, p. 281. The letters - they take up 97
 pages of small print - together with a letter of 1880 on
 international copyright addressed to J. R. Lowell, then U. S.
 minister in London, are reprinted in Readiana.

and thoroughness than had ever been given to it before. These letters did not succeed in persuading the United States to enact an international-copyright law, but they evidently won for their author the reputation of being an expert on international copyright, for Lowell, when appointed minister to London, wrote to him for his opinion on "a proposed Copyright Treaty between the United States and Great Britain."¹ Besides using the press to influence the American legislature Reade had private agents collect statements from American authors interested in copyright reform.² What he did with the statements and signatures he collected, his latest biographer, Malcolm Elwin, does not say, but he presumably had them sent to the American Congress.

Not so important a social force as Dickens or even Reade, Collins nevertheless had a name in America that secured attention for anything he wrote. One American periodical³ claimed in 1869 that after Dickens he was far and away the most popular writer in America. His novels, even the poorest of them,⁴ quickly found publishers in the

¹ Reade, Readiana, p. 225.

² Elwin, op. cit., p. 282.

³ The Citizen and Round Table, Nov. 13, 1869, p. 357. Quoted in Frank Luther Mott, A History of American Magazines, Vol. III, Boston, 1938, p. 251.

⁴ Cutler, op. cit., p. 256.

United States.¹ His great popularity here, however, brought him prestige rather than financial rewards, for, to judge from his complaints in "Considerations on the Copyright Question," he secured very little money from his American² editions. He had every reason to be indignant over the lack of a law of international copyright in America.

If Collins brought up the matter of international copyright while in America on a reading tour in 1873-74, his remarks evidently did not reach the press, for Clyde³ Hyder, who has examined the press records of his visit, records no comment on the subject either by Collins or by the American press. Collins came to America to make money by reading to American audiences and was too prudent to jeopardize his chances of success by inviting attention to his opinions on a very controversial topic. The criticism that the American press had heaped on Dickens when he had agitated for copyright legislation in the United States during his 1842 visit had taught Collins the wisdom of a tactful silence while engaged in business with the public in this country.

Collins's attempt to stir up feeling in America

¹ Wilkie Collins, "Considerations on the Copyright Question Addressed to an American Friend." International Review, Vol. VIII (June, 1880) p. 618.

² Collins, op. cit., pp. 617-18. According to J. Henry Harper, op. cit., Harper's were the only American publishers who, at least until 1873, paid him royalties. By February, 1879, he had received from them nearly £6000 for advance sheets. Pp. 347 & 446.

³ Clyde K. Hyder, "Wilkie Collins in America."

with regard to the need of international-copyright legislation did not come until 1880 when he published the "Considerations on the Copyright Question" referred to above. This strong but, on the whole, good-natured protest to the American people appeared in The International Review,¹ a New York literary magazine of small circulation. The "Considerations" are in the form of an address to an American friend who is simply styled 'Colonel.' Clear and plainly written, Collins's expostulations are moderate in tone but nevertheless full of controlled indignation at the moral lassitude of the American legislature. The President and Congress, he charged, were content to "contemplate the habitual perpetration, by American citizens,² of the act of theft."

The article dealt at length with what Collins regarded as two delusions: (1) that the American people had anything to do with the copyright question, and (2) "that international copyright would raise the price of American books to the inordinately high level of the English market."³ The American public, Collins argued, was not responsible for the lack of an adequate copyright law. "It is simply ridiculous to mention the American people in connection with the copyright question. The entire responsibility of honorably settling that question,

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The article was published as a pamphlet by Trübner & Co., London, in 1880.

²

Collins, op. cit., p. 611.

³

Ibid., p. 614.

in any country, rests with the legislature."¹ Collins's anxiety not to offend the American people showed a lively sense of gratitude in him for the kindness shown to him by Americans during his visit to the United States, yet there is an inconsistency between addressing a letter on copyright to American readers in general - for such an action implied a desire to influence the people to change the law and a recognition of their ability to do so - and a denial of their connection with the copyright question.

International copyright, Collins claimed, would not raise American book prices to the allegedly "inordinately high level of the English market." His argument against this assertion was that books were actually no more expensive in England than in America. Only the circulating libraries ever paid a guinea and a half for a three-volume novel. English readers borrowed the novel from the library at a small rental, and if they wanted a copy of their own they waited for the cheap five- or six-shilling edition which appeared in a year or so after the three-volume edition. As for special books, they cost no more in England than in America.

"To sum it up, literature which addresses all classes of the population is as cheap in England as it is in America; literature which addresses special classes only will, on that very account, always be published at special prices (with or without international copyright) on both sides of the Atlantic."²

¹
Ibid., pp. 614-15.

²
Ibid., p. 615.

Thus he sought to answer the arguments of those who maintained that the absence of international copyright kept book prices lower in America than elsewhere.

He then turned his attention to those American publishers who were willing to grant to English authors the moral right of property in their books but who feared that under international copyright they would suffer from British competition in America. Collins was full of scorn for these businessmen who feared that morality, in this case, would cost them money. It was no use arguing with these people, he said, but before he turned away from them he quoted the opinion of an English publisher, Mr. Marston of Sampson, Low, that the restrictions proposed by these American publishers arose out of "a most unfounded and unnecessary fear of competition by English publishers,"¹ and the opinion of George Haven Putnam of the American firm of Putnam that "if English publishers settling in America can excel the Americans...it would be for the interest of the public that no hindrance should be placed in their way."²

In conclusion Collins gave his readers some idea of the financial losses suffered by English writers in America because of the absence of international copyright. Dickens, he said, was offered £7500 by his English publishers

¹
Ibid., p. 617.

²
Ibid., p. 617.

for Edwin Drood. In America, however, he was able to get only £1000 for the advance sheets. He himself got considerably less than £1000 for his best-seller, The Woman in White, and not a sixpence from one piratical American publisher who had sold 120,000 copies of the novel.¹ The article ended with the bitter remark that the author had to go back to his work "and make money for American robbers, under the sanction of Congress."²

The only other public utterance made by Collins on the subject of copyright in America was in the form of a little dialogue in The Evil Genius (1886). Mr. Sarrazin, a lawyer, is talking to Randall Linley who has just returned to England from the United States:

"... 'What made you go to America? You haven't been delivering lectures, have you?'

" 'I have been enjoying myself among the most hospitable people in the world.'

"Mr. Sarrazin shook his head; he had a case of copyright in hand just then. 'A people to be pitied,' he said.

" 'Why?'

" 'Because their Government forgets what is due to the honour of the nation.'

" 'How?'

" 'In this way. The honour of a nation which confers rights of property in works of art, produced by its own citizens, is surely concerned in protecting from theft works of art produced by other citizens.'

" 'That's not the fault of the people.'

" 'Certainly not. I have already said it's the fault of the Government.' "³

¹

Ibid., p. 618.

²

Ibid., p. 618.

³

Collins, The Evil Genius, II, pp. 152-53.

The appeal to the honor of the American people and the anxiety not to offend them are characteristic.

Collins's contribution to the copyright question apparently caused no stir in the American press. It aroused no controversy, occasioned no comment. This does not mean that his efforts, modest as they were, were lost, for in the copyright-reform movement, as in every other reform movement, every little helped. He influenced at least a handful of readers through the article in the International Review and so helped to keep the movement going. Collins was not to share in the victory that finally came to the advocates of an international-copyright law in the United States, for he died two years before legal protection for the works of foreign artists was finally granted by Congress and a national ¹disgrace removed.

¹ He did, however, once 'beat the Dutch.' The story is told in a group of Collins's letters to Cassell's edited by Desmond Flower. According to this correspondence, which Collins had published in an English newspaper called The Echo, Belinfante Bros. of Holland wrote to Collins and his English publishers asking for the electrotypes of the illustrations for the book. They were ready to pay for the illustrations but not for the story. This act of audacity so irritated Collins that he wrote Belinfante Bros. a highly indignant letter in which he told them that he considered any publisher who brought out his book without his permission and without giving him a share of the profits to be guilty of theft. Collins's letter, plus the exposure of their unethical business principles in the English press, had the effect of shaming the Dutch publishers into sending Collins the royalties due him. Holland ultimately signed the Berne Convention on international copyright. See Desmond Flower, "Authors and Copyright in the Nineteenth Century," The Book Collector's Quarterly, Vol. II (July-Sept., 1932), pp. 1-35.

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