PART III

THE MAIN WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENCE

i : The Woman in White

In the preceding chapter I have tried to trace the way in which Collins acquired skills which were to make the writing of The Woman in White possible. Hard work is, however, not always a popular recipe; prospective writers prefer to imagine that all comes with a flash of inspiration. There were events in Collins's life which lent support to this second view.

In The Life of John Everett Millais (London,1899), his son, J.G. Millais, wrote:

"One night in the '50's Millais was returning home to 83 Gower Street from one of the many parties held under Mrs Collins's hospitable roof in Hanover Terrace, and, in accordance with the usual practice of the two brothers, Wilkie and Charles, they accompanied him on his homeward walk through the dimly-lit, and in those days semi-rural, roads and lanes of North London ..... It was a beautiful moonlight night in the summer time and as the three friends walked along chatting gaily together, they were suddenly arrested by a piercing scream coming from the garden of a villa close at hand. It was evidently the cry of a woman in distress; and while pausing to consider what they should do, the iron gate leading to the garden was dashed open, and from it came the figure of a young and very beautiful woman dressed in flowing white robes that shone in the moonlight. She seemed to float rather than run in their direction, and, on coming up to the three young men, she paused for a moment in an attitude of supplication and terror. Then, suddenly seeming to recollect herself, she suddenly moved on and vanished in the shadows cast upon the road.

'What a lovely woman!' was all Millais could say. 'I must see who she is, and what is the matter,' said

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Wilkie Collins, as, without a word, he dashed off after her. His two companions waited in vain for his return, and next day, when they met again, he seemed indisposed to talk of his adventure. They gathered from him, however, that he had come up with the lovely fugitive and had heard from her own lips the history of her life and the cause of her sudden flight. She was a young lady of good birth and position, who had accidentally fallen into the hands of a man living in a villa in Regent's Park. There for many months he kept her prisoner under threats and mesmeric influence of so alarming a character that she dared not attempt to escape, until, in sheer desperation, she fled from the brute, who, with a poker in his hand, threatened to dash her brains out. Her subsequent history, interesting as it is, is not for these pages." [1.]

Truth is indeed stranger than fiction. But if we stop to consider that the passage quoted above certainly loses nothing in the telling; that it was written more than forty years after the incident; that it is written on second-hand information; that John Everett Millais had died three years previous to the publication of the biography containing the passage above and that it was written after the publication of The Woman in White: then it would seem likely that a house of cards has been built upon a very slight foundation. Charles Allston Collins died in 1873, twenty-six years before the publication of this anecdote. What, at first sight, may appear to be corroboratory evidence, upon examination adds little: Kate Dickens, who had married Charles, Wilkie's brother, and who had lived to a great age, says: "Wilkie Collins had a mistress called Caroline, a young woman of gentle birth and the original of The Woman in White. [2.] She makes this comment, however, after quoting the passage from Millais. Her reminiscences were published in 1939 which was eighty years, at the very least, after the incident took place.

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1. Vol. I, p. 281.
2. Storey G.: Dickens and Daughter (London, 1939): The reminiscences of Kate Perugini (Dickens's daughter, Kate).

Davis places the time of Collins's meeting with Caroline Graves as the summer of 1854. This, if acceptable, clears away many difficulties: Elizabeth Harriet Graves, who was born in the early '50's, could be Collins's child and this would explain why he loved her so, took her into his home (which he did not do for his other children) and saw to it that she made a good match. It might also explain how she came to have the name of Harriet, the christian name of Collins's mother. It would explain Caroline's living in Collins's house, her travelling abroad with him, her leaving him to marry Clow when he took up with Martha Rudd; it would explain her being buried in his grave at last.

Davis comes to his conclusions on the following evidence:

> "Millais indicates only that the incident occurred on a summer night in the '50's. Fixing the date is not impossible. Millais says that he was walking home to his studio in Gower Street. A letter to him from Hunt, November 10, 1854, shows that Millais moved out of Gower Street at the time of his departure for Scotland in the fall of 1854. Since he never returned to Gower Street, the incident could not have occurred in any summer after 1854. In June of 1853 Millais went to Scotland while Wilkie was still sick, and he remained there until the late fall. The summer of 1852, while theoretically possible, is extremely unlikely. One reason is that Millais spent the summer of that year painting like a hermit at the remote village of Hayes with his brother, William. Wilkie's departure for Boulogne with Dickens on July 24, 1854 fixes the last possible date; the adventure probably occurred a week or so earlier." [1.]

In accepting this date, Davis comes to some interesting conclusions. He finds passages in The Dream Woman (1855) [2.] which were inspired by the meeting with the woman in white. Paradoxically enough, he also comes to the conclusion that this meeting was responsible for Collins's switch from novels dealing with

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1. Davis: op.cit., p.321.
2. The Ostler's Story. see Davis, op. cit., p. 179, for an amazing flight of critical fancy.

a father-son relationship to novels of another type; this in spite of Hide and Seek (1854) and A Rogue's Life (1856). On rather flimsy evidence [1]. Davis states that Collins went to live with Caroline before his trip to Paris with Dickens, that he returned to her when he was ill, and that there are disguised references to her in Laid up in Lodgings, Mrs Bullwinkle and Mrs Badgery. He finds that The Diary of Anne Rodway "reflects something of Caroline's history". If this is straining at a gnat, he, at least, does not hesitate to swallow the camel.

He ignores The Bachelor Bed-room, My Spinsters, Bold Words by a Bachelor and, taking A Journey in Search of Nothing and Sea Breezes with a London Smack at their face value, reads into them references to Caroline's living with him.[2]. Davis also holds that after living in lodgings for a few months in Howland Street with Caroline, Collins took her with him when he went to live in his mother's town house in Harley Street; his mother at this period spent most of her time living in the country.

It is time we came down to earth. Even if J.G. Millais's story is not the product of his imagination, there is a great deal of evidence to show that Collins, even if he had met Caroline before 1859, was living the life of a bachelor. His trip with Dickens to Paris in February, 1855 and the adventures they indulged in there cannot be considered as consistent with the behaviour of a man who has just become infatuated with a new mistress. In June we find him on a yachting

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1. Davis: op. cit., pp. 182, 183, 186, 187, 189, 199.
2. ibid.: pp. 199, 209, 325, 326.

trip to Cherbourg; early in 1856 he is with Dickens again in Paris; and much of his time was spent on amateur theatricals. In July, 1856, we find Collins in Boulogne with the Dickens family, and he returns only in September. He returns to a new post with Household Words; and in May, 1857 Dickens is still able to write: "any mad proposal you please will find a wildly insane response in Yours ever, C.D." [1.]

Then in 1857 came the trip to Manchester, followed by the Cumberland tour. In 1859 Collins set up house for himself at 124, Albany Street. From 1859 onwards there are references to Caroline in the letters which Dickens wrote to Collins. Collins also mentions her in a letter to Charles Ward.[2.] Collins was at this stage financially well off. After only one year on the staff of Household words he had been given a rise of fifty pounds per annum because there was a danger of losing him.[3.] Perhaps the most important evidence to be adduced in favour of taking circa 1859 as the date on which Collins took to living with Caroline, is provided by his changed way of life. When he goes to Paris on a short visit in October, 1860, Caroline and her daughter accompany him. In 1863 we find him in Aix-la-Chapelle - and once again he is accompanied by Caroline and Harriet. He moves on to Wildbad, returns to England, but in October, 1864 he is off with Caroline and Harriet on a three months' Grand Tour of the Continent. The pattern of his living has changed; and it has changed from 1859 or thereabouts. For these reasons I am inclined to discount Davis's interpretation of the

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1. Robinson: op. cit., p. 110.
2. ibid.: pp 132-133.
3. ibid. p. 117.

position, and accept Robinson's opinion as 1859 as being the year in which Collins took up with Caroline. It is not impossible that he knew her before this time; nor is it impossible that Harriet was indeed his child.

Nothing seems to be known of George Robert Graves, her husband; but Caroline Graves, née Courtenay, was about twenty-five years of age in 1859. It was in August, 1860, that Collins published The Woman in White.

Whatever the truth of Millais's story, the dramatic appearance of Anne Catherick to Walter Hartright does not explain the excellences of the novel. We have already come across several references to 'a white woman' in earlier work. At the time of his death Collins had in his possession La Dame Blanche by Scribe,[1] and the case of the Marquise de Drouhalt, taken from Maurice Mejan's Recuéil des Causes Célèbres, provided Collins with the germ of his story.

In 1784 the brother of the Marquise de Drouhalt wrongfully seized the greater portion of their father's estate. On her way to Paris to attempt to recover her property, the Marquise was drugged and, upon waking, found herself in the Saltpétrière in Paris. She tried without success to escape or communicate with her friends. It was only after six months that she obtained her her release, when the white dress that she had worn when she arrived at the Saltpétrière was returned to her. Her brother used every trick of the law to prevent her from recovering her property and she died a poor woman.

Collins drew on his knowledge of Hampstead Heath, where he had once lived, and on the tour of Cumberland to provide his setting for the novel. He was not at all reticent about the inspiration which culminated in (The

1. Puttick & Simpson's Catalogue: Library of the Late Wilkie Collins, Esq., Item 190. (vide Davis, op. cit. pp. 76 & 313).

The Woman in White. In How I Write my Books (1887) he told of how he started with the central theme of a person wrongly held in an asylum. The villain would have to be a foreigner, as he would be too ingenious for an Englishman. He was given eccentricities so that he would not appear to be commonplace. A second villain, as something of a foil to Fosco, was required. The heroine must be a lady of gentle birth and her double of poor parentage. Then, say Collins, he begins at the beginning, pays no attention to the requirements of serial publication and decides on the nature of the closing chapters.

The title, said Collins, came to him while he was at Broadstairs gazing at the North Foreland lighthouse:

"You are ugly and stiff and awkward; you know you are as stiff and as weird as my white woman .... White Woman ..... Woman in White ..... the title, by Jove!' 1.

Collins also referred to a visit by a stranger who asked for advice about obtaining the release of a friend who was being wrongfully held in an asylum: this, he said, was his starting point. But not once does he mention Maurice Mejan's volumes with reference to The Woman in White.

No one could possibly criticise Collins on the score that the plot of The Woman in White is not complex enough. No summary can do this story justice, as the most minor details turn out to be hinges upon which depend important events; the merest foible of character results in the turning of the course of the story; even the weather plays an important part. If a summary is to be justified, it must be on two scores: the plot is so intricate that its details must escape anyone who (has

1. Robinson: op. cit., p. 141.

has not just read the novel, and such a summary will spare the reader many references to details of plot which have been copied by hosts of later writers of sensation novels, thrillers and detective stories.

Walter Hartwright accepts an appointment as drawing master at Limmeridge House in Cumberland, to Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe, who are half-sisters. He and Laura fall in love with each other, but she will not break her promise to her dying father that she would marry Sir Perceval Glyde. Hartright tells Marian of a strange adventure he had had one night in London when he assisted a woman dressed all in white who had been pursued by two men. This young woman bore a strangely close resemblance to Laura, and had mentioned that as a child she had known great happiness in Limmeridge Village. Marian identifies the woman as Anne Catherick, whom her mother had taught in the village school. Laura has received an anonymous letter warning her against marrying Glyde, stating that he is an evil man. Hartright meets Anne Catherick, who has come in person to warn Laura against the marriage, and who confesses that she was responsible for the anonymous letter. She is always dressed in white as, in her simple-minded fashion, she remembers that Laura's mother had once said that she, Anne, looked best in white.

Mr Gilmore, the Fairlie's solicitor, now takes over the narrative and relates how Glyde becomes agitated out of all reason when he hears of Anne Catherick's visit and seeks to find her - but without success. Gilmore is not impressed with Glyde. Marian has sought information from Anne's mother but the reply is

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curt: her daughter had been placed in the asylum with the mother's approval. Laura is unhappy at the prospect of a marriage which only her sense of duty to her father can make her accept, and insists that Marian be allowed to stay with her. Glyde agrees readily to this. Gilmore then explains that Laura is her uncle's heir. He is a bachelor and not likely to marry. Upon his death she will inherit a life interest in the estate, worth three thousand pounds a year. Her first-born son would inherit the estate. If she married with a properly-drawn-up marriage settlement, upon her death, in the absence of a son, her husband would inherit a life interest in the estate. Laura would also inherit at the age of twenty-one a sum of £20,000 and a life interest in £10,000. Upon Laura's decease, this last sum would go to her Aunt Eleanor, who had married an Italian, Count Fosco.

In the settlement drawn up by Gilmore, the sum of £20,000 was to be disposed of upon Laura's death, in default of issue, according to her will. Glyde, through his lawyer, insists that he inherit this sum outright. Gilmore's protests are overridden by Laura's uncle who chooses always the easiest path. Glyde's stipulations are acceded to.

Marian Halcombe learns from Hartright that he is being followed in London, and believes that Glyde is under the impression that Hartright can guide him to Anne Catherick. In the meantime, Marian has been instrumental in finding a position for Hartright. He is to accompany a private expedition to South America to make excavations in the ruined cities. He goes

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in the capacity of draughtsman.

Six months later, Marian arrives at Blackwater Park. Glyde and Laura are expected back from Italy where they have spent the winter. Laura's letters have been non-committal, except that Marian has learned that Laura does not like Count Fosco, Glyde's friend. Blackwater Park, which is "stifled by trees", has a disused wing which is damp, dark, and rat-infested. Marian learns that Anne Catherick has been seen in the district.

When Laura arrives she is reticent and will say nothing against Glyde, but she cries out , "O Marian, promise you will never marry and leave me. It is selfish to say so, but you are so much better off as a single woman - unless - unless you are very fond of your husband."[1]. Marian, who hesitates at nothing when Laura's happiness is at stake, listens at a keyhole and learns that Glyde is facing financial ruin and that with Fosco's help he plans to persuade Laura to sign a certain document. In the meantime, Glyde has learned of Anne Catherick's presence in the district and rushes off in haste. Upon his return he tries to persuade Laura to sign the document, but she refuses to do so unless she is permitted to examine it first. Glyde in a passion turns first on Marian and then on Laura. In his desperate plight, he shows himself for what he is. Marian writes to the family solicitors and is certain that Fosco tampers with the letter before it is posted. Marian and Laura see the woman in white down near the lake, and Fosco suspects that they are hiding something. A letter arrives from Kyrle, the solicitor who has taken

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1. The Second Epoch, Section II.

over from Gilmore. The only construction he can place on the strange behaviour of Glyde, is that Laura is to be inveigled into a misappropriation of trust moneys, probably part of the £20,000. He advises her not to sign until she has been allowed to consult him. Fosco, however, has been fully aware of what has happened and persuades Glyde to drop this scheme.

Down at the lake Laura sees and speaks to Anne Catherick. Anne tells her that she is dying and that she must tell Laura the secret which Glyde fears to have exposed. Her mind wanders, however, (most exasperatingly for the reader) and all that Laura learns is that Anne's mother knows of the secret too. Laura's maid, whom she has brought with her from Limmeridge, is dismissed, and Marian is denied access to Laura by the new maid, the awkward, slatternly and obstinate Margaret Porcher who is loyal to Glyde. Marian confronts Glyde who is persuaded by Fosco to allow her to see Laura. From Laura she learns that Fosco had been aware of Laura's meeting with Anne Catherick and that Glyde had brutally forced her to tell him what she had learned from Anne. In a wild rage he had refused to believe that she had learned nothing more than she had told him.

Marian will not trust the post again and gives letters to Fanny, the maid who has been dismissed. One is to be delivered to their uncle, asking him to receive Laura: and the other posted to Kyrle. Fosco has his wife visit Fanny before she leaves. Fanny is drugged and the letters tampered with. The letter which Kyrle receives is addressed in Marian's handwriting, but contains only a blank sheet of paper.

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Frederick Fairlie receives his letter, but replies that he will do nothing until he has seen Marian.

Once again Marian, at great personal danger, eavesdrops and hears Fosco and Glyde discussing how they are to prevent their "going to the dogs". To their credit they reject any plan for getting rid of Frederick Fairlie. Glyde is desperate at not finding Anne Catherick and, at this juncture, Fosco learns of Anne's strong resemblance to Laura. The plan is born: as Anne is dying, she must be found, her death accelerated and she must be buried as Laura. Laura will then be placed in the asylum as Anne Catherick.. In this way £20,000 will become available to them.

Marian's ordeal results in her contracting a fever, and Fosco takes advantage of her illness to examine her diary. He has the effrontery to add a note congratulating her on what she has done to protect Laura, and expressing his great admiration for her.

Fosco now sets about putting his plan into operation. He visits Frederick Fairlie and informs him that Laura must come to Limmeridge for her health. Marian cannot accompany her as she is too ill. Fosco has taken a house in London and will meet the train, take Laura to his house and then send her on to Limmeridge. All the servants at Blackwater Park, with the exception of the housekeeper, Porcher and the gardener, are dismissed. The housekeeper is sent off on a wild goose chase. On her return she is told that Marian has gone to London with Fosco and his wife, but she later finds that Marian has been hidden in the disused wing. Anne Catherick has been run to ground and is taken to Fosco's house. She dies there, and her body is taken

to Limmeridge, where she is buried as Laura Fairlie. Laura is met in London at Fosco's instigation, is certified insane by two doctors and sent to an asylum.

After passing through many dangers, Hartright returns to England, only to learn from his mother of Laura's death. He makes a pilgrimage to her grave at Limmeridge. He sees two women approaching and recognises them as Marian and Laura. They are in great danger and he takes them to London where the three of them go into hiding. Marian tells him how, after learning that Fosco had told Frederick Fairlie that Anne Catherick was once again in the asylum and was suffering from the delusion that she was Laura, Marian had gained access to the asylum and had recognised Laura. She had effected Laura's escape by offering the nurse a handsome bribe and had taken Laura to her uncle. He had denied that she was Laura and in despair they had gone to the grave where they had met Hartright.

Hartright tells the family solicitor the story, but Kyrle says there is not the shadow of a case unless it can be proved that there is a discrepancy between the date on the death certificate and the date on Laura's arrival in London. Hartright is determined that Fosco and Glyde shall not go free. From Mrs Todd of Limmeridge, with whom Anne had stayed before Laura's marriage, he learns the address of Anne's friend. Through her he finds out where Mrs Catherick lives. Mrs Catherick will tell him nothing directly, but indirectly he learns that Glyde did have a secret to hide and that somehow the vestry at Old Welmington was involved. He goes there, discovers something suspicious in the entry in the marriage register

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concerning Glyde's parents. He learns that a copy of the original exists and sets out to consult it. By this time Glyde has set thugs on his trail; but, in spite of their efforts, he succeeds in establishing that the entry is a false one: Glyde is illegitimate and not heir to Blackwater Park. On Hartright's return to Old Welmington he is again attacked, but he manages to deal with his assailants. Upon arrival he learns that the parish clerk cannot find the keys. They go to the vestry and find that it is on fire. Glyde is inside but cannot escape, as the lock has jammed. When his body is recovered, Hartright sees him for the first time. Anne's likeness to Laura is explained when Hartright learns that Anne is Laura's illegitimate half-sister.

Hartright now marries Laura and sets about bringing Fosco to book. He decides that Fosco is a foreign spy and calls in Pesca to identify him. This Pesca fails to do, but it is obvious that Fosco fears Pesca. This is explained by Pesca, who says that he is a member of a secret Italian brotherhood and had been secretary to this body while in Italy. In this way members might know him though he would be unaware of their identity. Any member who has acted falsely is in mortal danger. Hartright writes a letter to Pesca with instructions that it is to be opened if not reclaimed before nine o'clock the next morning. It contains a denunciation of Fosco. Hartright now calls on Fosco who is only deterred from blowing out Hartright's brains because of the letter. They come to terms: Fosco supplies a confession and proof of the date of Laura's arrival in London. In return he is allowed

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to leave without interference, and the letter to Pesca is recovered.

Laura's position is now made regular and her name erased from the tombstone. Hartright has to go to Paris on business and takes Pesca with him. There Pesca is approached by a member of his brotherhood and he identifies Fosco. Later, while they are visiting the cathedral at Notre Dame, Hartright hears of a corpse in the morgue which is arousing great excitement; the description seems to fit Fosco. He enters the morgue and sees Fosco's body. There is the secret mark of the brotherhood on his arm and a wound over his heart. Over the secret mark were two slashes in the shape of a 'T', which Pesca said stood for 'Traditore', or traitor.

Frederick Fairlie dies soon after and Hartright's son is heir to Limmeridge.

We look for and find in The Woman in White many features employed in earlier work, yet in such work we find nothing which can remotely compare with this novel. It is the work of a man who has found himself. He knows his strength and his weakness; he has eliminated many of those weaknesses and has even made a virtue of some. The result is an assured piece of workmanship, compact of many excellences, so much so that, in its way, in spite of hosts of imitators, it has never been surpassed in its own genre. In one or more of its qualities it may have been equalled or even excelled - but not in all.

The framework of The Woman in White is based

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upon the multiple narrative, possibly suggested by the evidence in the cases in his "French Newgate Calendars". In Collins's hands, this method is used with the greatest skill. The fumbling of earlier days is absent. He draws from the method all the possible advantages, while avoiding skilfully the weaknesses of the technique. The epistolary mode has obvious advantages which Richardson used to good effect in his novels; but it is not easy to keep a story moving while using this technique. Collins uses letters sparingly, and they are short and to the point. Often we are informed of the gist of the letters only. His use of the diary form for Marian Halcombe provides a change from the series of narratives by other characters, and is especially effective in revealing the character of this unusual and admirable young woman.

Collins acquired skill in writing dialogue by dint of arduous practice, but in this novel his characters write in a self-revelatory fashion and speak according to their social position and individual nature - something new in Collins. The dialogue flows smoothly, naturally and convincingly; his creations say what they have to say without literary conventions.

Collins uses the multiple method as a device for making possible the fair-play technique. When he wishes to withhold from us the secret, he stops the narrative before the point of a further revelation and, quite justifiably, switches us to the testimony of another witness to this strange story; and this witness holds a fascination for us because we see events through other eyes, and forget for a moment that we are not much

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nearer the solution. Many of the narratives are kept down to a few lines or a few pages; and we experience a sensation of being present at a court case where evidence is being tabled. Characters are filled in by this method. We see a character through the eyes of friend and foe, and we judge him by his impact upon others, as well as by his deeds. This action and reaction of one character upon another, combined with suggestion, the creation of suspense and an atmosphere of foreboding, results in a novel of great dramatic power which we read with a ready suspense of disbelief - that suspense of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith - essential in a melodramatic novel of sensation. In this respect, there is nothing to equal The Woman in White.

It is not altogether correct to say that The Woman in White possesses a complicated plot: there are really a series of plots which unfold in rapid succession, one growing out of the other in such a way that the unravelling leaves us dissatisfied because, like the climbing of a mountain, the reaching of one point only reveals another to be striven after. There is one anti-climax only: if only the novel had ended with Fosco brought to his knees, agreeing to Hartright's terms and fleeing the country. This would have made for a strong ending in which Hartright was finally dominant. This would have been aesthetically satisfactory, as this novel of sensation possesses a quality which we hardly dare require of any novel of action: development of character. We usually find that character portrayal in a novel of this type is sacrificed to action. In The Woman in White, we have a number of important characters done in the round and a number of minor characters who live the

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small rôles allotted to them: and we have Walter Hartright. He opens the story as a timid drawing-master tied to his mother's home. He loves Laura, but makes no attempt to win her. It is only after his return from South America, where he has faced death from disease and death at the hands of attacking Indians, and after he has suffered shipwreck, that his heart hardens. When he learns of the wrongs that Marian and Laura have suffered, he changes in stature. There is about him a confidence, a self-reliance, and an unremitting relentlessness of purpose which drives Glyde to his own destruction. And he proves to be a match for Fosco. Up to the end Fosco has had the mastery. He was always one step ahead; he could always anticipate the steps which his opponents would take, and he could always checkmate them. Now Hartright has the advantage; without any of Fosco's vainglory he foils him at each turn. Fosco places the blame on the whim of fate which brought about the death of Anne Catherick a day before he, Fosco, had ordained it; but his collapse and his acceptance of Hartright's terms is an acknowledgement of his having met his master.

Other writers have attempted a novel in which character and event are balanced, and their efforts are witness to their lack of success. Robert Louis Stevenson attempted it in Ebb-Tide and The Wrecker - and fell between two stools. The Woman in White is an example of such an attempt and achievement.

Everything turns upon the terms of the wills by which Laura is to gain her inheritance. Collins did not trust to his own rather shaky legal training. In his preface he writes:

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"A solicitor of great experience in his profession most kindly and carefully guided my steps whenever the course of the narrative led me into the labyrinth of the Law..... The 'law' in these books has been discussed, since its publication, by more than one competent tribunal, and has been decided to be sound."

Baker criticises the construction of The Woman in White on two scores: [1]. He cannot accept Glyde's wild spending when on the verge of bankruptcy; and he cannot accept Frederick Fairlie's refusal to acknowledge his niece.

These objections do not seem to me to be valid. Glyde's wild tempestuous behaviour is consistent with that of a man on the verge of bankruptcy. Indeed, I feel that Collins has brought it out clearly that it was because of his wastefulness that he was on the verge of bankruptcy. A careful spender would not have found himself in such a predicament, certainly not with Glyde's assets; and I feel that it is consistent with the character of such a man that he should spend even more rashly when in financial difficulties. In the newspapers we read repeatedly of business men who have become insolvent; we seldom read of their attempting to live within their means.

On the second score, I think he is at much at fault. Collins is a good psychologist. When a hypochondriac and egocentric so arranges his life that his comfort and his privacy become all-important, he has chosen a path from which there is no turning back. The achievement of his selfish aim becomes all-important, and the duties and responsibilities from which he shrinks, gather like a snowball until he is no longer a rational being. We saw early signs of this in Fairlie. He

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1. Baker E.: The History of the English Novel, Vol. VIII, P. 197.

provided shelter for his wards, he provided for them in other respects which did not interfere with his life; but he shrank from his duty to Laura before her marriage to Glyde, and again and again after that. We can imagine his horror at the thought of his being implicated in the toils of legal proceedings, all necessary before Laura's position could be made regular.

There is, the anti-climax of the ending excepted, one small weakness in this novel; and it is not so much Collins who is to blame, but the inadequacy of medical knowledge at that time. I am referring to Marian's fever which, we are told, turned to typhus because of neglect.

Upon first consideration it might seem that Collins has failed in his portrayal of his 'Woman in White'; but upon second thought, it will be clear that her mental deficiency is in keeping with the rôle she had to play. A girl with a lively intellect would have acted differently, and the whole course of the novel would have been changed, to our great loss. Her ineffectuality and obtuseness serve another purpose. Had she been so portrayed as to win our sympathy to the fullest possible extent, our antagonisms against her ill-treatment at the hands of Glyde, Fosco and her mother would have interfered with our enjoyment of the unravelling of the mystery. Collins drew Anne Catherick with a keen sense of the part she was required to play in his novel and of the impression he desired her to make upon his readers.

Laura is a puppet. Throughout the novel she does nothing in the least constructive, does not learn anything material to her welfare or offer any sensible suggestion.

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Without Marian and Hartright, she would have suffered much and would have almost merited it. If she has a virtue it is honesty: she explained to Glyde before the marriage that she could not love him and she remained constant to Hartright: she is a paragon of Victorian virtue - Collins's tribute to his reading public.

Yet The Woman in White does not fail. Marian Halcombe makes up admirable for Laura's deficiencies. She is one of Collins's triumphs: forthright, resolute, able to love and hate, resourceful, intelligent and scrupulous, she is far above the conventional Victorian heroine and Arnold Bennett possibly owes something to her for Hilda Lessways. Collins endows Marian with a shapely figure and a plain face, yet in our estimation she stands ineffably higher than Laura with her feminine attractiveness. There are hosts of Laura's, but there is only one Marian Halcombe. Her looks do not matter once we have seen her match her wits against Fosco. We are not surprised to learn that Collins was inundated with letters from eligible bachelors begging him to divulge her real name and identity. [1.]

"Her figure was tall, yet not too tall; comely and well-developed, yet not fat; her head sat on her shoulders with an easy pliant firmness; her waist, perfection in the eyes of a man, for it occupied its natural place, it filled out its natural circle, it was visibly and delightfully undeformed by stays ..... The easy elegance of every movement of her limbs and body, as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room, set me in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly. She left the window; and I said to myself, The lady is dark. She moved forward a few steps, and I said to myself, The lady is young. She approached nearer; and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express), The lady is ugly! ..... The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead." [1.]

(Collins

1. The First Epoch, Section VI.

Collins has laid down a challenge: that he will make us admire this woman so devoid of what is usually understood to be feminine charm Upon our introduction to Marian it is difficult to believe that our interest in her can be won, unless she is to turn out to be some sort of Jezebel. Yet, within a few pages we are victims to the charm of her personality and are soon to admire her.

Mannion, in Basil, suffered from not having an opponent worthy of his mettle: Fosco has two opponents, Marian and Hartright, who are a match for him; and yet he is a villain to win respect. His qualities are thrown into relief by Glyde's impetuous, wild and unconsidered actions. We understand Glyde's frustrations and his hasty indiscretions; but we cannot trust or fathom Fosco. His open admiration for and support of Marian make us trust him all the less. He is preoccupied with the fortunes of his mice and canaries while he considers the advisability of doing away with Laura; he is moved to raptures by music, in a Teutonic rather than a Latin fashion:

> "There was something horrible - something fierce and devilish - in the outburst of his delight at his own singing and playing, and in the triumph with which he watched its effect upon me as I shrank nearer and nearer to the door." [1]

He puts into practice his theory of the power of a knowledge of chemistry and drugs:

> "Mind, they say, rules the world. But what rules the mind? The body (follow me closely here) lies at the mercy of the most omnipotent of all potentates - the chemist. Give me - Fosco - chemistry! and when Shakespeare has conceived Hamlet, and sits down to execute the conception, with a few grains of powder dropped into his daily food, I will reduce his mind, by the action of his body, till his pen pours out the most abject drivel that has ever degraded paper." [2]

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1. The Second Epoch, Section VIII.
2. The Count's Narrative in Section VIII of the Third Epoch. This attitude foreshadows Aldous Huxley's theme in Heaven and Hell (1956).

The suave Fosco has great personal charm, a confidence in himself, an admiration for Marian, a disdain-contempt for Glyde; and these win from us a grudging respect. It is interesting to note that, though we cannot forget Fosco, Collins has given us no pen-portrait of him. We are told of his size and his corpulence, but his character emerges from his subjugation of his wife, his treatment of Glyde, Marian's reactions to him, and his own exuberant self-revelation, for he loves to explain just how astute he is being. Had he been more reticent, Marian would have profited less from her eavesdropping.

Sir Perceval Glyde owes something to the Brontë sisters: he is the stock villain. But in The Woman in White Collins has used him as a foil to Fosco. Fosco gains by showing up the folly of Glyde's desperate dashing hither and thither in search of Anne Catherick, while Fosco quietly arranges his plans in comfort at Blackwater Park.

Frederick Fairlie is the effete dilettante, egocentric and a hypochondriac. A clever study, a descendant of Mr Phippen of The Dead Secret, he rings true.

We have already noticed Collins's gift for creating character with a few skilful words; he uses this gift to good effect in this novel. Mrs Catherick appears in a few pages only, but the picture of the woman who has struggled through the years to live down the whispers against her character, and who prides herself on the fact that the parson must greet her when he passes, lives in our memory. There are clear pictures of Mr Gilmore, the family solicitor who upholds the dignity

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of his profession; of Fanny, Laura's maid; of Pesca, Hartright's volatile friend possessed of a strange idiom; of the verger at Wemmeridge; of Mrs Michelson, the housekeeper at Blackwater Park; of Mr Dawson, the bluff doctor; and of Porcher, the slatternly and insensitive maid whi is put in charge of Laura. Even such minor characters as the owner of the asylum, the nurse there, Rubelle, the servants in Fosco's London House, and Mrs Clements, Anne's friend, all act in character as they make their exits and their entrances.

The Woman in White is remarkable for having no Jezebel; for not having characters in which physical deformity is stressed; and for the way in which the motifs of Dead-alive and double identity are subjugated to the major concern of the unravelling of the secret. Even Blackwater Park as a sinister house is done with artistic reticence.

In How I Write My Books Collins says that he paid no attention to the requirements of the serial instalments. This statement may be discredited. It is not necessary to quote: a cursory glance at the ends of sections will show his mastery in the art of arousing the curiosity of the reader.

His skill in creating suspense goes far beyond this formal trick. We have already seen how Collins makes use of scenic description and atmosphere for the creation of suspense. To this he adds suggestion and a reflection of the situation in the actions of his characters.

Section VI of The Second Epoch ends:

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"We separated that evening later than usual. Towards midnight the summer silence was broken by the shuddering of a low, melancholy wind among the trees. We all felt the sudden chill in the atmosphere, but the Count was the first to notice the stealthy rising of the wind. He stopped while he was lighting my candle for me, and held up his hand warningly, -

'Listen!' he said. 'There will be a change tomorrow.'"

Collins's choice of words rich in emotional colour, indicates an extraordinary capacity in a writer unacquainted with modern semantics. Marian sees the lake at Blackwater Park, the lake near which Laura is to meet Anne Catherick:

"As I walked down to the lake, I saw that the ground on its farther side was damp and marshy, overgrown with rank grass and dismal willows. The water, which was clear enough on the open sandy side, where the sun shone, looked black and poisonous opposite me, where it lay deeper under the shade of the spongy banks, and the rank overhanging thickets and tangled trees. The frogs were croaking, and the rats were slipping in and out of the shadowy water, like live shadows themselves, as I got nearer to the marshy side of the lake. I saw here, lying half in and half out of the water, the rotten wreck of an old overturned boat, with a sickly spot of sunlight glimmering through a gap in the trees on its dry surface, and a snake basking in the midst of the spot, fantastically coiled, and treacherously still. Far and near, the view suggested the same dreary impressions of solitude and decay; and the glorious brightness of of the summer sky overhead, seemed only to deepen and harden the gloom and barrenness of the wildness on which it shone."[1]

This quotation indicates the increasing use Collins makes not only of scenic description to stress atmosphere and to foreshadow event, but the use of contrast to heighten these same effects. Collins does not limit his use of scenic description for the augury of tense or tragic moments. On the morning of Hartright's meeting with Marian for the first time,

"the sea opened before me joyously under the broad August sunlight, and the distant coast of Scotland fringed the horizon with its lines of melting blue."

When Hartright has learned of Laura's death and goes to

(Limmeridge

1. The Second Epoch, Section I.

Limmeridge, we understand that matters have taken a turn for the good, and this is because of the description of the day:

"It was a quiet autumn afternoon when I stopped at the solitary station, and set forth alone of foot by the well-remembered road. The waning sun was shining faintly through the thin white clouds - the air was warm and still - the peacefulness of the lonely country was overshadowed and saddened by the influence of the falling year." [1.]

And then he sees Laura in the flesh:

"The sunset was near at hand. The clouds had parted - the slanting light fell mellow over the hills." [1.]

Though Collins realised the value of this device in melodrama, he does not fall into the error of thinking that Nature is concerned with the fortunes of man. These are the words he puts into Hartright's mouth:

"We go to Nature for comfort in trouble, and sympathy in joy only in books. Admiration of those beauties of the inanimate world which modern poetry so largely and so eloquently describes is not, even in the best of us, one of the original instincts of our nature. As children, we none of us possess it. No uninstructed man or woman possesses it. Those whose lives are most exclusively passed amid the ever-changing wonders of sea and land are also those who are most universally insensible to every aspect of Nature not directly associated with the human interest of their calling. Our capacity of appreciating the beauties of the earth we live on is, in truth, one of the civilised accomplishments which we all learn as an Art; and more, that very capacity is rarely practised by any of us except when our minds are most indolent and most unoccupied. How much share have the attractions of Nature ever had in the pleasurable or painful interests and emotions of ourselves or our friends? What space do they ever occupy in the thousands of little narratives of personal experience which pass every day by word of mouth from one of us to the other? All that our minds can compass, all that our hearts can learn, can be accomplished with equal certainty, equal profit, and equal satisfaction to ourselves, in the poorest as in the richest prospect that the face of the earth can show. There is surely a reason for this want of inborn sympathy between the creature and the creation around it - a reason which may perhaps be found in the widely differing destinies of man and his earthly sphere. The grandest mountain prospect that the eye can range over is appointed to annihilation; the smallest human interest that the pure heart can feel is appointed to immortality."

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1. From the last three pages of the Second Epoch.
2. The First Epoch, Section VIII.

The Woman in White was an immediate success and was the making of All the Year Round. Crowds thronged the street outside the offices waiting for the first copies of a new issue. The novel ran into five editions in two months, and a seventh was brought out within six months. Some critics failed to realise that it was a masterpiece of its kind, but the public made up for that. [1] There was a vogue for merchandise labelled "Woman in White"; white became a popular colour for women's dresses. Quilter informs us that Thackeray sat up all night to read The Woman In White. [2]

Collins was famous almost overnight, and he reaped a rich harvest. He achieved financial security and lived happily with his unorthodox family. This was a happy time for him. He did not overwork, was lionised, travelled with Caroline and Harriet, and enjoyed reasonably good health. He collaborated with Dickens on The Haunted House for the Christmas Number of 1859; and published nothing during 1860 until he again collaborated with Dickens in the production of A Message from the Sea, for the Christmas Number of All the Year Round for 1860. He had a share in Tom Tiddler's Ground, the Christmas Number of All the Year Round for 1861. These efforts excepted, and also two articles for All the Year Round, he published nothing more until the appearance of No Name in March, 1862.

(But

1. For instance the review in The Times (30th Oct., 1860) appeared only after the third edition had been published and the reviewer thought it not worth a second reading. He thought that too little attention had been devoted to character (vide Robinson, op. cit., p. 148).
2. Preferences in Art, Life and Literature, p. 275.

But now the pattern of his work had changed. In January, 1861, he resigned from the staff of All the Year Round and after that date the only non-fiction he was to write consisted of a few articles on himself and his work, an odd article or so on the theatre, the question of copyright [1] and some reminiscences. His main efforts were to be directed to the writing of novels, and the adaptation of these as plays. He also wrote many short stories, and these fall into two categories: slight, and more worthy. It would seem that he felt that a story intended for consumption by readers of popular magazines which were gaining hold of the public, should be written down to this public - a point of view which Dr Johnson would have commended.

His success brought with it several problems which were to cause him great exasperation: the unauthorised adaptation of his novels for the theatre, the unauthorised translation of his work without payment of copyright, and the pirated editions of anything he published which flooded America, a country where he was immensely popular. He was to undertake many skirmishes against these "plunderers of other men's brains", and succeeded as far as the theatre was concerned by registering dramatic versions of his novels even when he had no intention of having them produced. He coped with the American pirates to some extent by arranging that Harper's, his American publishers, should have instalments published concurrently with, or sometimes earlier than publication in London. Some of the Continental publishing houses

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1. Collins took up the cudgels on this question where Thomas Hood had left off in Copyright and Copywrong, (The Works of Thomas Hood, Comic and Serious, in prose and verse, edited with notes, by his son.) (Edward Moxon, London, 1862), Vol. VI, pp. 91-103.

made him voluntary payments.

The Haunted House (December, 1859) reverted to the pattern for the earlier Christmas Numbers of Household Words. The general framework, for which Dickens was responsible, is written in the first person. The writer takes a house which is reputed to be haunted; and it proves that rumour has not lied. An owl hoots, bells ring in the night and there are reports of a hooded ghost. When the servants leave, the writer and his sister decide to ask some friends to come and stay with them. The guests agree that on Twelfth Night they will tell of their experiences. Seven ghost stories follow. They are unrelated to one another, and, apart from a connecting paragraph for each, are unrelated to the ghost of the hooded woman, the barking hound, the hooting owl or the ringing bells.

Dickens wrote the first part, The Mortals in the House and The Ghost in the Corner Room. Collins was responsible for The Ghost in the Cupboard Room which occupies six pages in All the Year Round. The other stories are by other writers. [1] Collins's contribution is best known as Blow up with the Brig!, the title under which it was published in Miss or Mrs? (1871), and where it occupies twelve pages.

Nat Beaver, a naval officer, relates how he is haunted by the ghost of a bedroom candle-stick. It all came about when he joined a ship with a cargo of gun-powder for Bolivar during the time of the revolutions

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1. Details of authorship are given in The Nine Christmas Numbers of "All the Year Round", conducted by Charles Dickens (Chapman & Hall, London, n.d.).

in South America. When the ship heaves to at a point off the coast which has been pre-arranged, the mate has a difference with the pilot, an ill-looking vagabond, "a skinny, cowardly, quarrelsome mongrel". He wakes during the night to find himself bound and gagged. The captain had been killed and the crew thrown overboard; only the mate is left alive. The pilot takes the captain's candle-stick, some yarn and an awl. He drills a hole in a barrel of gunpowder, makes a slow match with some of the gunpowder and the yarn, and inserts this fuse into the barrel. The other end is tied to the candle about one-third of the way down. The pilot whispers into the mate's ear "Blow up with the brig!", and he and his confederates leave the ship to its fate. The mate calculates that it will take about two hours for the flame to burn down to the slow match.

Here follows one of Collins's best exercises in the creation of suspense. The sufferings of the mate are detailed. In his frantic efforts to free his hands he succeeds only in torturing himself until the blood flows from his frantic wrists. Then ensue futile and febrile efforts to blow out the flame. The mate tries to pray - but the prayers, like those of Claudius or the Ancient Mariner, will not come. In his frenzy he is in danger of losing his mind; and then he realises that he is on the brink of oblivion.

He wakes to learn that he has been rescued in the nick of time by the crew of an American ship becalmed nearby.

This is the most powerful short story ever written by Collins and compares well with the best of Poe's Tales of Mystery and Imagination.

(In

In November, 1860, Collins accompanied Dickens on a short trip to the West Country in search of local colour. The result was A Message from the Sea, the Christmas Number for All the Year Round for 1860. This number seems to have caused Collins's biographers a great deal of trouble. Parrish [1.] says that parts of Chapter III (The Club Night) and Chapter IV (The Sea-Faring Man) are by Collins. Davis [2.] contends that "he (Collins) whipped out an opening chapter for A Message from the Sea. In it he contrived to stamp the trademark of his unique new style unmistakably on the whole number." Robinson writes [3.]:

"Their collaboration in this story is more closely knit that usual, and it is hard to detect the precise division of labour. The opening chapter seems unmistakably Dickens, and Chapter IV 'The Seafaring Man', can be attributed with reasonable certainty to Wilkie; both writers shared in the remaining chapters. It would be a bold critic who asserted the authorship of any particular paragraph, since they deliberately attempted, from time to time, to imitate each other's style. 'It is amusing,' declared Wilkie on one occasiom, 'to see reviewers point out a passage of mine as an example of Dickens's peculiar vein, and in the next sentence comment on a paragraph of Dickens's as a sample of Wilkie Collins's sensational style.'"

The difficulty is resolved by reference to The Nine Christmas Numbers of 'All the Year Round', conducted by Charles Dickens. This volume was published by Chapman and Hall, Dickens's publishers, and consists of reprints from the original mats with the addition of a contents page with details of the contributors. This information must be taken as reliable because Chapman and Hall would have available the account books which would record payments for contributors to the number.

(This

1. Parrish: op. cit., p. 45.
2. Davis: op. cit., p. 223.
3. Robinson: op. cit., p. 158.

This story consists of forty-eight pages made up as follows:

Chapter I, The Village, four pages, is by Dickens. Chapter II, The Money, five pages, is the result of collaboration between Dickens and Collins. Wilkie Collins had no part in Chapter III, The Club Night, which is twenty-two pages in length. The contributors were:

Section I	:	Charles Dickens
Section II	:	Charles Allston Collins
Section III	:	Harriet Parr
Section IV	:	H.A. Chorley
Section V	:	Amelia B. Edwards

Chapter IV, The Sea-Faring Man, is by Wilkie Collins. This is thirteen pages in length. Chapter V, The Restitution, four pages, is by Dickens and Wilkie Collins in collaboration.

A Message from the Sea is not put together with Dickens's customary care. There are a number of loose threads. Nevertheless, this proved to be one of the most popular Christmas Numbers, over a quarter of a million copies being sold. This was probably because of Dickens's charming opening chapter, and his contribution to The Club Night which reminds us of Pickwick days. The number is much closer to the original conception of the Christmas story than The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices or The Perils of Certain English Prisoners.

Dickens opens the story with a picture of Steepways, which is readily recognisable as Clovelly.

Jorgan, an American sea-captain, meets Alfred Raybrock, a young fisherman who is soon to be married.

(Alfred's

Alfred's brother, Hugh, is presumed lost at sea, as he has not been heard of for three years. The mother was left five hundred pounds at the death of the father. This money is to be used to buy Alfred a share in a neighbouring fishery.

In Chapter II, The Money, Jorgan tells of how he had found, on a desert island in the Pacific, a bottle containing a message for Alfred. Alfred opens the letter, which is from his brother Hugh, and learns that the five hundred pounds which his father had left was stolen money. Part of the writing is indecipherable, but further information is only to be gained from the old men of Lanrean, a nearby village. Alfred finds it difficult to believe that his father was a thief, but he is determined to repay the money to clear his father's name, even though it means that he will now not be able to marry.

Chapter III, in which Collins has no part, is The Club Night. Jorgan and Alfred, on their way to the nearby village of Lanrean, take shelter at an inn and find the strangest club, The Gentlemen of King Arthur, in session. Each member has to tell a story. Upon their retiring, Alfred learns that he has to share a double-bedded room with a 'sea-faring man'. The important link in the story, Alfred's recognition of his brother, Hugh, is strangely omitted.

Chapter IV, The Sea-Faring Man, is by Collins. Hugh Raybrock tells of how he had found himself on a desert island with the only other survivor from their ship which had gone down in a storm. This man, Clissold, tells Hugh that he had borrowed money from Hugh's father

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which he had not been able to repay on the due date. He had stolen the money from the shipping firm for which both worked to repay Hugh's father. Tregarthen, Alfred Raybrock's prospective father-in-law, who had worked for the same firm, had been dismissed for the theft. Clissold died on the island, but Hugh was saved by savages who held him captive until a ship put in for fresh water and he was rescued. Collins's savages regularly behave in this strange way: they save their victims from death, hold them till their loved ones believe them to be lost, and then permit them to escape and return to England.

Chapter V, The Restitution, by Dickens and Collins in collaboration, contains what must be one of the most amazing examples of coincidence in the whole of English literature. Clissold had explained to Hugh that he had not had an opportunity of destroying the incriminating leaf torn from the ledger and so had slipped it into a crack in one of the office desks. It would seem that the allowance of forty-eight pages, "containing the amount of two ordinary numbers", did not permit of the proper rounding off of this story. The dénouement is cramped into four pages.

While Jorgan and the Raybrocks are wondering how they will ever be able to trace this desk after all these years, Captain Jorgan idly picks up the hat of Tom Pettifer, his steward. The hat is lined with paper, as Pettifer suffers from an exaggerated eccentric fear of sunstroke. Pettifer now informs them that when he had been in 'the broking business' in former days, he had bought some old office furniture from the very shipping firm for which Raybrock, Clissold and Tregarthen had

(worked.

worked. In repairing the desk he had removed a sheet of paper from it and used this paper to serve as a lining for his hat - of course, it is the missing page from the ledger.

Dickens now takes over in the best Dickensian spirit. The money is returned to Tregarthen who gives it to his daughter as her dowry, and the share in the fishery is bought after all. Hugh returns to his mother and wife and child - and everyone is happy.

While we can recognise Collins's hand in the details of the plot and the systematic working out of these details, this story contributes nothing to raising his stature as a writer. It is likely that he was resting on his laurels after The Woman in White, and that he devoted but little time to this piece. We know that he was tiring of his association with All the Year Round, that his contribution of articles had almost dried up, and that in just over a month (January, 1861) he was to resign as a member of Dickens's staff. Furthermore, the circulation of All the Year Round had dropped considerably and Dickens was looking to Collins for a new novel. Both knew that Collins could not turn out anything worth while in a hurry, so he was left free to devote his attentions to No Name (1862).

To the Christmas Number of All the Year Round for 1861, Tom Tiddler's Ground, Collins contributed one short story only. This comprised Chapter IV, Picking up Waifs at Sea, and occupied eight pages. In Miss or Mrs?, and Other Stories in Outline (1873), it appeared as The Fatal Cradle: Otherwise, The Heart-rending Story of Mr Heavisides. It is of interest to note that this is Collins's last contribution to a Christmas Number, except for No Thoroughfare (1867).

(Dickens

Dickens was responsible, in Tom Tiddler's Ground, for Chapters I, VI, and VII. Chapters II, III and V are by other contributors. The Christmas Number follows a familiar pattern: Tom Tiddler is an eccentric who has a habit of scattering halfpence 'to tramps and suchlike'. Mr Mopes, the hermit, is a local curiosity, whom many people throng to see. It is suggested that each visitor should tell a story to cheer him up. Mr Heavisides is introduced by Dickens:

"There sauntered in slowly a light-haired melancholy man; very tall and very stout; miserably dressed in cast-off garments; carrying a carpenter's basket, and looking as if he never expected any such windfall of luck as a chance of using the tools inside it."

Mr Heavisides looks at the hermit and thinks "Whatever his grievance, I could match it, I think." Without delay and without encouragement he proceeds with his sad tale.

In Miss or Mrs? and Other Stories in Outline (1873), Collins re-writes the first paragraph so as to provide the necessary introduction for Mr Heavisides. This introduction is competent, but lacks the Dickensian charm of the original introduction.

This story is of interest because of Collins's light humorous touch which he manages to sustain throughout. There is full exploitation of the possibilities inherent in the predicament and his story progresses smoothly, with economy, and to the delight of the reader. The dialogue is natural and reveals character. Of interest is the evidence of Collins's new-found familiarity with sea-faring matters. He has not wasted his experience gained while on yachting trips or crossing to the Continent.

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The merchant ship, "Adventure", of "five hundred tons burden, coppered, and carrying an experienced surgeon", is crowded with immigrants bound for Australia.

Mr Jolly, the surgeon, gleefully informs the harassed captain that he is to have another passenger: Mr and Mrs Smallchild, people of some account, are about to become parents. Before the captain has had time to reconcile himself to this new difficulty, Mr Jolly is back again. Mrs Heavisides, a steerage passenger, is "taken bad". The Captain demands to see Mr Smallchild, but can obtain no satisfaction from him as he is completely dazed at the news. Simon Heavisides, a carpenter who already has seven children and is expecting the eighth, affords him as little satisfaction. In desperation the Captain falls in with the suggestion made by Mr Jolly that the two women be moved to two adjacent cabins in the only part of the ship which is not overcrowded. This plan is soon put into effect and Mrs Drabble, the stewardess, is enlisted as midwife. The babies arrive almost simultaneously and, in the confusion, Mr Jolly and Mrs Drabble are unable to say which is which.

They cannot identify the babies: there are no distinguishing marks; both are boys; neither is deformed in any way; both take after the fathers in that both have fair hair and light eyes. A reconstruction of exactly what occurred does not assist them:

"'Listen to me,' said Mr Jolly coaxingly (to Mrs Drabble). 'I'll put the whole case to you over again, in a few plain questions. You'll find it all come back to your memory, if you'll only follow me attentively, and if you take time to think and collect yourself before you attempt to answer.'

Mrs Drabble Bowed her head in speechless submission - and listened .....

('Now,

'Now, ma'am!' said the doctor. 'Our troubles began in Mrs Heavisides' cabin which is situated on the starboard side of the ship?'

'They did, sir,' replied Mrs Drabble.

'Good! we went backwards and forwards, an infinite number of times, between Mrs Heavisides (starboard) and Mrs Smallchild (larboard) - but we found that Mrs Heavisides, having got the start, kept it - and when I called out, "Mrs Drabble! here's a chopping boy for you: come and take him!" - I called out starboard, didn't I?'

'Starboard, sir - I'll take my oath of it,' said Mrs Drabble.

'Good, again! "Here's a chopping boy," i said. "Take him, ma'am, and make him comfortable in the cradle." And you took him, and made him comfortable in the cradle, accordingly? Now, where was the cradle?'

'In the main cabin, sir' replied Mrs Drabble.

'Just so! In the main cabin, because we hadn't got room for it in either of the sleeping cabins. You put the starboard baby (otherwise Heavisides) in the clothes-basket cradle in the main cabin. Good, once more. How was the cradle placed?'

'Crosswise to the ship,sir,' said Mrs Drabble.

'Crosswise to the ship? That is to say, with one side longwise towards the stern of the vessel, and one side longwise to the bows. Bear that in mind - and follow me a little further. No! No! don't say you can't, and your head's in a whirl. My next question will steady it. Carry your mind on half an hour, Mrs Drabble. At the end of half an hour, you heard my voice again; and my voice called out - "Mrs Drabble! here's another chopping boy for you: come and take him!" - and you came and took him larboard, didn't you?'

'Larboard, sir, I don't deny it,' answered Mrs Drabble.

'Better and better! "Here is another chopping boy," I said, "take him, ma'am, and make him comfortable in the cradle, along with number one." And you took the larboard baby (otherwise Smallchild), and made him comfortable in the cradle along with the starboard baby (otherwise Heavisides), accordingly? Now what happened after that?'

'Don't ask me, sir!' exclaimed Mrs Drabble, losing her self-control, and wringing her hands desperately.'"

Next they resort to "the voice of nature". The babies are placed first with one mother and then the other, in the hope that the mother will instinctively know which child is hers. Unfortunately the mothers seem to be perfectly happy with either child.

When the husbands are consulted, Mr Heavisides, who is in a position to be generous, suggests that it is most important that Mr Smallchild be certain that he has his first-born: so he had better take both

(babies.

babies. Upon being persuaded that his wife will in all probability not agree to this plan, Mr Heavisides agrees to abide by the Captain's decision. Upon careful examination of the babies, the Captain ascertains that one is two-and-a-half ounces heavier than the other: this baby is awarded to Mrs Heavisides. But after all this, the mothers will not hear of parting with the babies in their possession.

Mr Heavisides increased his family and died in the workhouse; Mr Smallchild increased his fortune, but not his family.

> "'Yes! I was the bald baby of that memorable period. My excess in weight settled my destiny in life ..... Make what you can of that! You will find it come in the end to the same thing. Smallchild, junior, prospers in the world, because he weighed six pounds fourteen ounces, and three-quarters. Heavisides, junior, fails in the world, because he weighed seven pounds, one ounce, and a quarter.'"

This was the work of a man who had found himself and who had full confidence in his skill at the craft of writing.

Collins took seriously the matter of the novel which was to succeed The Woman in White.

> "I think I can hold the public fast with an interest quite as strong as in The Woman in White, and with a totally different story", he wrote in July, 1861.[1]

To his well-known formula he now added "Make 'em think", and so No Name, his first and most successful thesis novel, made its appearance in All the Year Round in March, 1862.

ii : No Name

Why The Woman in White should be the novel above others by which Collins is remembered, remains to some (extent

1. Robinson: op. cit., p. 160.

extent a puzzle. The Moonstone is still acclaimed as his best story of detection; and with these two titles most modern readers come to the end of their knowledge of Collins's work. Yet No Name (1862) is in many respects superior to The Woman in White. It is different in that it is not nearly as melodramatic. It is different in that it does not depend on a secret for maintaining interest: such secret as there is, is soon revealed. This does not mean that No Name is to be placed on a par with The Dead Secret. In The Dead Secret Collins failed because we knew of the secret long before it was officially revealed, and we knew that it was not material to those concerned. This is not so in No Name. The secret merely sets the stage: the story moves on from there. In The Dead Secret there are no real antagonists; in The Woman in White there are, and it is because they are well-matched that we follow their fortunes so closely. In No Name we have Captain Wragge so well matched against Mrs Lecount that the outcome of their encounters remains in doubt till the very last chapters.

Superficially examined, the plot of No Name may seem to be simple compared with that of The Woman in White, but upon closer acquaintance it becomes clear that there is much more to the plot than the setting to rights of an injustice to an illegitimate child. Magdalen's fortunes pass through many vicissitudes; she acts, first on her own, in conjunction with Wragge, and then on her own again. Her adventures depend, not upon the disentangling of the terms of one will, but of three wills.

As far as Mrs Lecount, on the one hand, and Wragge and Magdalen on the other, are concerned, the story is

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a series of moves and countermoves, plot and counterplot, each unsuspected, audacious and effectively executed. No effect is wasted: there is nothing of the temperamental and often purposeless dashing about the countryo of Perceval Glyde in The Woman in White. Each action, particularly on the part of Lecount or Wragge, is made with the deliberation and purpose typical of a move in a game of chess. In some ways this novel is not so much a novel of action as a contest of wits. No hand is raised in anger, no poisons are employed (though Magdalen is accused by Lecount of having intended to resort to poison to rid herself of Noel Vanstone), no one is locked up in a sinister house,and, when Magdalen is quite justifiably held prisoner by Mazey, he relents and lets her go. The players know when a move has gone against them and do not wait for the reslut of that move to affect them before taking the initiative into their own hands. Indeed, their acts are often determined by what they anticipate the opposing party is going to do.

Marian Halcombe in The Woman in White had charm, and she wins our admiration for her forthrightness, individual character, her loyalty and courage - but, in spite of her figure, she is not truly feminine. The critics who have praised her have all been men. She had no lovers, unless we accept Fosco in this role. Dorothy L. Sayers has this to say of Collins's women characters:

"The women of Collins are strong, resolute, intellectual; they move actively towards a purpose, which is not always, nor indeed usually, conditioned by their attitude to a husband or a lover. They are not unfeminine; yet they are capable, like men, of desiring knowledge or action for its own sake, rather than for

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its personal implications. Marian Halcombe in The Woman in White, Magdalen Vanstone in No Name, Madame Pratolungo in Poor Miss Finch cannot be classed as 'female characters'; they are simply characters, for whom other things than passion guide the plot." [1.]

This is, of course, a generalisation, but it contains an important truth. Marian Halcombe is a man's woman. In Magdalen Vanstone we find resolution, hardness, a ruthlessness even, but she is a womanly woman for all that. She evinces feminine qualities which we seek for in vain in Marian Halcombe. The early scenes with Clare show Magdalen as a lively and impetuous young girl blindly and irresponsibly in love. It is the injustice of her position after her father's death which makes her harden her heart, but even then, when success is within her grasp, she wavers weakly and lets chance decide the issue.

No Name has been adversely criticised because of the weakness of its ending - and this criticism is justified. But paradoxically - it is an indication of the greatness of this novel. No Name is not to be judged merely as a story in which characters play out their parts to an appointed end. Many good authors have found themselves faced with a similar problem. [2.] When their characters come to life and act like people in real life, these characters become stubborn and will not allow themselves to be moved according to the original intentions of the author. Because we come to know Magdalen, Wragge and Lecount so well, we cannot believe in their retiring prettily from the stage. It is significant that we do not object when Frank Clare, Norah Vanstone and George Barton are manipulated at Collins's pleasure.

1. Dorothy L. Sayers: Introduction to The Moonstone (Wragge (Dent, London, 1944).
2. cf. J.B. Priestley's The Good Companions and several of Thomas Hardy's novels.

Wragge and Lecount, villains both, are superior to anything in The Woman in White. Lecount has an eccentricity, as has Fosco; but Fosco's quaintness is superimposed while in Lecount we sympathise with her in her love for the reptiles which symbolise the status and meaning to life lost the day she became a widow. Wragge is a complex of eccentricities, but these are essential in the make-up of a man who is to work with Magdalen to a common end in her strange aim, and yet be a match for Lecount. Not a single foible or characteristic is introduced needlessly. Even Wragge's treatment of his dull-witted wife establishes her position, so that she may be as clay in Lecount's hands.

Noel Vanstone may be thought to be a repetition of characters such as Mr Phippen in The Dead Secret or Frederick Fairlie, but in fact he plays a much subtler part. His weakness makes him compliant with Lecount's will and so he becomes a worthy ally. He aids her in this way as Glyde certainly did not aid Fosco. Then too, this weakling makes a formidable opponent as he will not face an issue, but adopts evasive action. It is only because Wragge sees Noel's value to Lecount that he plays her at her own game, and wins Noel Vanstone to his side. It is part of the charm of the novel that thi ally is so easily persuaded to cross over to the enemy again.

No Name is Collins's most successful thesis novel because the purpose is subordinate to the story. His protest is secondary to his main purpose and emerges naturally from the situation in which Norah and Magdalen find themselves. Collins was much criticised for

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pleading the cause of illegitimates. Mrs Oliphant took him to task for writing of "the accident of their father having been married when he first met their mother" and had this to say:

> "We have often heard of an illegal connexion and its result euphemistically designated as 'misfortune'; but this is the first time, so far as we are aware, in which a lawful marriage has been denominated an 'accident'."[1]

It is possible that this adverse criticism had something to do with the minor position to which No Name has been relegated by the critics, but Collins's publishers and readers did not react adversely to this work. Nearly four thousand copies were sold on the day of publication. Sampson Low paid Collins three thousand pounds for the first edition. Serial rights in America netted him over fifteen hundred pounds. His reputation certainly did not suffer from the writing of No Name: Smith Elder and Sons paid Collins five thousand guineas for his next novel before he had written one word.

If the plot were as simple as some critics would have us believe, we could summarise the story by saying that it relates the efforts of Magdalen to recover the fortune denied her because she was not legitimate. But this would not at all reflect the content and character of No Name.

Andrew Vanstone contracts a mésalliance with a woman in Canada from whom he cannot obtain a divorce. On his return to England he cannot pick up the threads of his wrecked life until Miss Blake and he fall in love. With full knowledge of the position, she lives with him

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1. Mrs Oliphant in an article, Sensation Novels, contributed to The Quarterly Review, vide Robinson, op. cit., p. 170.

as his wife. The only person who knows of the true position is Mr Wragge, a relative by marriage, who regularly obtains money from Mrs Vanstone on this score. Mr Vanstone had inherited from his father to the exclusion of his elder brother, of whom his father had disapproved. He had generously offered to share his inheritance with his brother, but the offer had been ungraciously received and had then been withdrawn. Andrew Vanstone's children were adequately provided for in his will. Then he learns of his wife's death in Canada, and tries to protect his daughters by marrying their mother in secret. Magdalen falls in love with Frank Clare and, while trying to arrange a marriage settlement, her father learns that his will, drawn up before his marriage, is now invalid. He sets about drawing up a new will, but is killed in a railway accident before this is effected. His wife is taken seriously ill in childbirth, and is too ill to make a will. She dies, and her new-born son outlives her by a few hours. As this son is the legitimate heir, and has died intestate, his fortune reverts to his next of kin. So Magdalen and Norah are entitled to nothing; and the estate, worth eighty thousand pounds, goes to Michael Vanstone. His hatred of his brother is reflected in his offer of a hundred pounds to each girl to start them off in life. Norah is at her wits' end; but Magdalen adopts a different attitude:

> "Tell him on my part, to think again, before he starts me in life with a hundred pounds." [1]

Magdalen leaves home to become an actress in a touring company and plans to avenge herself on her uncle. At this point Mr Wragge comes into her life. He has

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1. The First Scene, Chap.15.