PART V

FINDINGS

i : The Man

From the pages of Collins's fiction emerges a true picture of Collins the man. Whatever the origin of his characters, they take from the writer something of himself; and in Collins's works we find revealed a man who could write of young gentlemen, usually rather unruly young gentlemen, with a conviction which suggests that he was painting a picture of himself. In Basil and his brother and in Zack from Hide and Seek, we find Wilkie Collins who was impulsive, intolerant of routine and of organised religion and who was attracted by the theatre.

Collins's novels have little reference to religion, apart from some few anti-Catholic outbursts. Some of his parsons are rather queer fish but, for the most part, they are drawn with sympathy.

Collins was attracted by the intricacies of the law and by legal men. This is in keeping with his interest in the unfolding of intricate plots. He read into wills and court trials the human drama that often lay hidden in dusty documents. His lawyers show an understanding of human nature which they could only have inherited from Collins. The lawyers' clerks, who so often have the duties of detectives laid upon them, show an acumen and an understanding of probable

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human reaction to a given set of circumstances, which pinpoints Collins's strength as a writer: his villains and his sleuths behave rationally, so rationally that, once Collins had explained their methods, subsequent writers found it difficult to depart from the pattern of behaviour which he had laid down.

Collins relied upon his own experience in writing about his characters, and we find that most of them come from the upper middle classes in London and seldom move very far from Hampstead Heath, unless they find themselves in some place where Collins has spent a vacation. If they travel abroad, they travel to places which Collins has visited: France, Italy, Germany - and to Scotland.

Collins was much influenced by the French theatre and the feuilleton; this is reflected in the character of his work, especially the tendency to melodrama and sentimentalism superimposed upon a basis of hard fact: inheritances, laws, death.

Much has been made of Collins's attitude to women, and some writers have done him scant justice. When he was in America, Collins was asked about Charles Dickens and Georgina Hogarth, and replied to this rather awkward question that "The impression seems to be that they were too intimate." Adrian comments that such a conjecture on Collins's part "would have been normal to one of his loose morals". [1.] Collins had, of course, good reason to believe that Charles and Georgina had been very intimate indeed.

Though Collins did seek adventures with women of a sort whom he could not marry, he did this before he took Caroline into his home. Whatever the reason

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1. Adrian A.A.: Georgina Hogarth and the Dickens Circle, p. 147.

for Collins's not marrying Caroline, he provided well for her, won the love of her daughter, and only took up with Martha Rudd at a time when Caroline was on the verge of marriage with Clow. When Caroline returned to him she had a place of honour in his home as great as his friends' wives would allow. The hurt Collins felt when Caroline and Harriet were not altogether accepted, is reflected in several scenes in his novels.

Though Martha Rudd seems to have been a woman with whom Collins could not consort on a social level, he maintained her and her children well.

The women in Collins's novels show that he understood well that women could be sweet and good, honest and natural. But he knew that women could also be cruel, selfish, sly, ruthless and hypocritical. He knew that gentlewomen could be foolish or evil, and that servants could be honest, noble and pure. Collins realised that the laws of the country protected men when they should not be protected and that the humblest woman, even one poorly endowed with intellect, could love and could be hurt. His interest in women and his honest portrayal of them, and his concern that justice be done them: this does much to reveal to us the inner Collins.

Seen through Collins's eyes, music, especially Mozart, was important - but he could not abide a hypocritical pretence of a love of music. He was equally quick to espy a feigned interest in art, which played an important part in his life.

Collins had a strange pre-occupation with physical deformity, and there is not a single novel in which at least one such character does not appear; but he always

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portrays such a character with sympathy, and often with great depth of understanding. Miserrimus Dexter and Ariel are shown as tragic - never comical.

Through the pages of his novels and short stories march a procession of minor characters drawn with a few telling phrases. Here we remember Mr Dark, the lawyer's clerk with his flair for sleuthing, Mr Boxious's errand-boy, the inn-keeper with the sardonic sense of humour who was possessed of a double-bedded room, Perugino Potts, that unheroic artist, the lugubrious Mr Heavisides and a number of others. Collins obviously liked cleverness in his men and abhorred pomposity.

Some of Collins's characters compare well with those of Dickens, but there is a significant difference: Dickens was interested in characters because they were interesting; Collins made use of his characters for the natural unfolding of his plots. They did not ever exist for him in their own right; there was always some ulterior motive behind his creation of character. When we remind ourselves that Collins's best novels were novels of action, we must admire not only his success in portraying character, but his skill in making these characters an essential part of the unfolding of his story.

Collins is sometimes blamed for introducing social criticism into his novels. It has been suggested that he had fallen into the error of slavishly trying to emulate Dickens or Reade in this respect; but that hardly does him justice. Even in his earliest novels he spoke up against what offended him. In later novels, what has been called social protest was, usually, not

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superimposed upon his story, but used as the theme from which emerged the wrongs made possible by cruel marriage laws, by condemnation of fallen women, and by the unduly strong position of a married man compared with that of his wife. Occasionally there is a personal criticism such as that against the piracy of his books and stories, and there are the unfortunate attacks on "athleticism" and vivisection; but usually Collins controls his protest as he does his characters, and makes it subservient to his plot.

We may take it then, that Collins reflects something of himself in his protests. His brother, Charles Allston Collins, tells us that he was "subject to periodical fits of disgust with the world round about him, and when one of these seizures came upon him, he would, if his purse happened to be full enough, betake himself to the Continent and there remain until the appetite for civilisation returned."[1].

The protests which Collins registers are of more importance to us as self-revelation than for the little effect they might have had on the state of affairs against which he rebelled. Though he often succeeded in pointing out abuses, his protests were never forceful enough to bring about any great changes. There is reason to suspect, however, that Collins was speaking of what he understood well when he protested aginst the non-acceptance of divorced women in society, against a woman's finding it impossible to rise from the gutter to which she had been forced by a situation beyond her control, and against the helplessness of a good woman married to an evil man. These situations

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1. Collins C.A.: A Cruise on Wheels, Vol.I., p. 96.

arise, in various forms, so often in Collins's work, that it seems likely that if the secret of his relationship with Caroline is ever uncovered, that secret will explain his preoccupation with this particular type of wrong. We know that Caroline married Clow, so it could not be that she was unable to marry; it is more likely that Collins had, in his younger days, contracted a mésalliance which prevented him from marrying. This is a position which occurs so often in his stories that it is more than an accident. [1.]

Collins's interest in the stage is reflected in many scenes in his work, and some of his stories are even more intimately concerned with the drama: thus Magdalen Vanstone becomes an amateur actress and a professional impersonator; Mr Wragge and Mr Wray coach actresses, and The Girl at the Gate is a short story built around the theme of a play. Shakespearen plays often served as a source of inspiration for Collins. In later years he chose as his friends people associated with the theatre, and he took a personal interest in the production of his plays.

The family from which he sprang and his own training gave him an eye for scenic effects which he used to good purpose.

Much has been made of Collins's addiction to laudanum. Some of the more hair-raising stories do not bear examination and must be taken as being apocryphal. There is the story of his mam-servant, George Hello, who was set down in Collins's will for a bequest of nineteen guineas. He did not live to receive this because, one day when his master was out, he decided to

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1. cf. No Name, The Black Robe, Man and Wife, An Old Maid's Husband and Your Money or Your Life.

try the laudanum to which his master was so addicted. Pouring himself out half of Collins's usual dose, he drank it - and the dose proved fatal. We are not told how anyone learned the exact amount Hello had taken. Then we are told that Collins, at a dinner party, told the company just how much laudanum he was in the habit of drinking - and a doctor present said that the dosage was enough to be lethal for the whole assembled company.

We know that Collins was not above telling a good story. If we are to take the above as proof of the quantity of laudanum he was taking, we may set over against it his statement to W.S. Collins, who had asked him about his use of stimulants:

> "I have been writing novels for the last five and thirty years, and I have been regularly in the habit of relieving the weariness which follows on the work of the brain - declared by George Sand to be the most depressing of all forms of mortal fatigue - by champagne at one time and brandy (old cognac) at another. If I live until January next, I shall be sixty-six years old, and I am writing another work of fiction. There is my experience."[1]

The truth seems to be that Collins resorted to the use of opium when he could not bear the pain caused by his gout, and that he found it of great help to him. It is only in his later years that, in his works, he mentions opium as an evil and gives us pictures of the mental tortures brought on by the drug.

ii : His Technique

Collins made the most of his gifts. It is useless to compare him with other novelists, because their gifts were not his. He could not portray character so that his creations became household words like Micawber,

(Pecksniff,

1. Letter to W.S. Collins, in the Illinois Library, quoted by Davis, op. cit., p. 302.

Pecksniff, Oliver Twist, Bill Sikes, Fagin and a host of Dickensian characters; he could not write with George Eliot's insight or Thackeray's satire. We have seen how hard he worked at improving his skill at writing dialogue, at creating humorous characters, at manipulating his material to his will He was not a fluent writer. An examination of his manuscripts supports his own claims that laboured efforts were required to write a single page. But he made the most of his gifts and turned them to such good account that he was flattered by a host of imitators. He lived well by his pen and his name was well-known in many countries.

Collins was a story-teller. His aim was to entertain, and he succeeded in bringing to the English language a new kind of story which has given pleasure to countless numbers of readers for nearly a century and which shows no signs of abating in popularity. His skill in the craft of writing is evident especially in those features which he introduced to the story of detection.

By means of careful experiment, Collins arrived at a high degree of skill in the use of the multiple-narrative technique. Indeed there are few who can unfold a complicated story, taking advantage of this method, as economically as can Collins. Likewise, his skill with the first-person narrative is paramount. He does not fumble with the difficulty of avoiding self-praise or overdone modesty in the main character. His narrators act naturally, and their personalities emerge from their actions and from the reactions of other

(characters.

characters.

His skill in telling a story is not to be minimised. When Collins wrote The Moonstone he had learned a great deal since his first attempt at a mystery novel, Hide and Seek.

Similarly, he acquired with difficulty a skill in the writing of humorous passages. In After Dark (1856) we find him writing:

> "'There's the title!' shouted the doctor, jumping out of his chair as if he had been shot.
> 'Where?' I cried, looking all round me in the surprise of the moment, as if I had expected to see the title magically inscribed for us an the walls of the room."

We have only to campare this with Zo in Heart and Science (1882) to see how much he has improved:

> "Zo was ready for the performance; her hat was cocked on one side; her plump little arms were set akimbo; her round eyes opened and closed facetiously in winks worthy of a low comedian. 'I'm Donald,' she announced; and burst out with the song:
>
> We're gayly yet, we're gayly yet;
> We're not very fou, but we're gayly yet;
> Then sit ye awhile, and tipple a bit;
> For we're not very fou, but we're gayly yet.
>
> She snatched up Carmina'a medicine glass, and waved it over her head with a Bacchanalian screech. 'Fill a brimmer, Tammie! Here's to Redshanks!
> 'And pray who is Redshanks?' asked a lady standing in the doorway.
> Zo turned round -, and instantly collapsed. A terrible figure, associated with lessons and punishments, stood before her. The convivial friend of Donald, the established missus of Lord Northlake, disappeared - and a polite pupil took their place. 'If you please, Miss Minerva, Redshanks is nickname for a Highlander."

Collins's style is usually pedestrian. He excels at personal description, a type of word-painting, often done with a few rapid strokes, and at scenic description combined with atmosphere; but all too often he is merely forging ahead along a set path. He writes carefully, correctly, and uses a wide choice of words; but his

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mind seems to be ever, not on his language, but on his effects in the way of suspense, sensation and unforeseen twists.

With the exception of Basil, Collins's novels all have a happy ending. In this he was conforming to a convention of his time. Nor should we criticise him for writing with less pace than Twentieth Century writers. He wrote as his readers expected him to write.

Collins's belief that the novel was "a drama narrated" was unfortunate. It resulted in many novels which bore far too close a resemblance to the plays from which they were adapted, or to the plays into which they were destined to be re-cast.

Ingenuity, economy of expression and complexity of plot were his strength. With these he combined a careful attention to correctness of detail, an honest and natural approach to his work, and a very special gift for making important events hinge upon the most trivial incidents.

iii : Collins's Debt to Other Writers

When Collins tells us that he admired Scott above all as a writer of novels, we are not surprised. There is a similarity of approach in Antonina, his first novel, though this was his only historical piece, unless we except the novelette, Sister Rose, with its cleverly captured background of the French Revolution. But Sister Rose was written primarily as a story, and the background chosen because it was suitable to rapid c changes of fortune in the characters. There is in Sister Rose little direct political or social comment.

Collins also informs us of his admiration for Balzac, Dumas senior, Victor Hugo and Fenimore Cooper; and in the earlier novels, especially, we can trace their influence. The influence of Bulwer Lytton seems to have ended with Antonina.

Collins does on occasion cry out against the women novelists and puts disparaging remarks on their works into the mouths of his characters; but there can be little doubt that Sir Perceval Glyde owes something to Wuthering Heights (1847). Some of his later novels, where plot and action play an insignificant part, seem to be poor attempts at capturing something of the spirit of Jane Austen or Maria Edgeworth.

Though Collins did not care to give the fact too much prominence, he depended largely upon Maurice Mejan's Recueil des Causes Célèbres (1808), M. Richer's Causes Célébres et Interessantes and Jacques Peuchet's Memoires Tirées des Archives de la Police de Paris for plots, information upon criminal court procedure and the methods employed by detectives. Haycraft suggests Vidocq's Mémoires also served Collins well.[1.]

The influence of Edgar Allen Poe and Emile Gaboriau I intend to discuss in more detail in the next section but one. The influence of Reade upon Collins has, I feel, been greatly exaggerated. It was Reade who submitted his work to Collins for criticism and who was fulsome in his praise of Collins's work. Elwin refers to Man and Wife, and particularly to the appendix supplying documentary evidence, as proof of Reade's influence, [2.] but as early as 1850, in Antonina, we find

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1.Haycraft H.: Murder for Pleasure, p. 29.
2. Elwin M.: Victorian Wallflowers, p. 221.

Collins making considerable use of footnotes from Gibbon. Hide and Seek (1854) has an appendix justifying Collins's approach to Madonna's deformity and quoting Doctor Kitto's The Lost Senses as his authority. Reade is usually credited with leading Collins to the purpose novel, but Collins at no time approached social criticism with the strength and vehemence of Reade; if he was influenced in this direction by anybody, then it sprang from a desire to emulate Dickens. But we know that even in his early novels, Basil for instance, Collins expressed himself strongly against jerry-builders, poor conditions in hospitals and cruelty arising from hypocrisy. Any influence Reade had on Collins is limited to the pages devoted to "Athleticism" in Man and Wife and vivisection in Heart and Science. Much has been made of a common love of the theatre, of their contempt for the conventions of the time and for their irregular domestic life. It seems that these points in common drew them together in a close bond of friendship, but there is little to show thar Reade influenced Collins's work unduly. Collins's style and his general approach did not undergo any change attributable to Reade.

The influence of Charles Dickens is clear from the very early days, even before Collins joined the staff of Household Words. Mr Wray's Cash-Box is obviously a conscious imitation of Dickens's Christmas story style. Close collaboration with, and great admiration for Dickens had the result that Collins was able, in time, to imitate Dickens's tricks so successfully that the unwary could be easily trapped into attributing to Dickens what had been written by Collins.

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But the imitation remained an imitation. Some of Collins's grotesques and eccentric characters compare well with many of Dickens's characters, but not with his best. Captain Wragge in No Name is Collins's most successful effort in this direction. Under Dickens, Collins acquired a sense of the dramatic, an improved skill at writing dialogue, an eye for character, and the technique necessary for moulding his material into a succession of climaxes suitable for serial publication.

iv : Collins's Influence upon Contemporary and Subsequent Writers

It is hardly possible to assess the extent of Collins's influence upon his contemporaries. Most important, perhaps, was his creation of female characters who were not insipid, but who were individual, strong-minded and attractive in spite of a lack of conventional beauty. Collins's greatest achievement, to my mind, was the number of letters he received asking for the address on the counterpart in real life of Marian Halcombe. Next, he taught us that servants need not be comic characters; and he showed us a new delight in unravelling a plot so devious in its unfolding that our wildest conjectures failed to prove a match for Collins's ingenuity. Collins paved the way for a new type of heroine and started a movement which made possible Arnold Bennett's Clayhanger series. In Bram Stoker's Dracula the epistolary method and the school-room scene in which the children talk of a beautiful lady in the cemetery are obviously derivative from The Woman in

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White. Mark Twain's dead-house in Life on the Mississippi was probably inspired by Jezebel's Daughter, and Shaw's Mrs Warren's Profession and Pygmalion owe something to Collins's daring introduction of the subject of fallen women in The New Magdalen and The Fallen Leaves. J.S. LeFanu's The Rose and the Key which appeared in All the Year Round in 1871 owes much to The Woman in White as regards technique. In 1865 Charlotte Yonge departed from her usual didactic and moral style to write The Clever Woman of the Family. The discovery of the fraud, and the method of its unmasking, and the handling of the suspense indicate her indebtedness to Collins.

Anthony Trollope's Eustace Diamonds is a comedy of manners, but there is nevertheless a marked similarity in the plot to that of The Moonstone. A Terribly Strange Bed probably provided Joseph Conrad with the germ of an idea which led to the writing of The Inn of the Two Witches.

Collins's influence upon writers of detective fiction deserves to be considered on its own; but before proceeding to that, we must pause for a moment to consider what Charles Dickens learned from Collins.

Collins was of great value to Dickens in teaching him how to portray the upper and middle classes, in teaching him the value of a mystery and the importance of a good plot. Our Mutual Friend, with its intricate plot, the plan of A Tale of Two Cities, the sinister house in Great Expectations, the story of a child being reared in a circus by acrobats and animal trainers, which appeared in Hard Times a year after something similar

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had been used by Collins in Hide and Seek, the legal mystery in Bleak House and the similarity in construction of The Mystery of Edwin Drood to that of The Moonstone: all speak eloquently of Dickens's debt to Collins.

v : Mystery and Detection

The detective story has its origins in the dim past. Man has always been challenged by the inexplicable, and this interest has found its way into literature in various forms. Stories such as those of the oracles, Alexander and the Gordian knot, the Tales of a Thousand and One Nights, some of Aesop's Fables [1.], riddles, the Scripture stories of Bel and the Dragon, Susanna and the Elders, and Solomon and the Two Mothers, all contain an element of detection.

de Vries [2.] tells us that the detective story has existed in China for over a thousand years, and that the longer detective novel was written in China in the Sixteenth Century and reached its height in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries. Owing to the constitution of the Chinese government, with the judge being at the same time the chief administrator and chief of police, the stories take on a form different from ours.

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1. Miss Dorothy L. Sayers in her introduction to Great Short Stories of Detection, Mystery and Horror (p.10), refers to the story of The Lion and the Fox in which the fox says: "I beg your majesty's pardon, but I noticed the tracks of the animals that have already come to see you and, while I see many many hoofmarks going in, I see none coming out."
2. de Vries P.H.: Poe and After : The Detective Story Investigated, p. 151.

Miss Dorothy L. Sayers has pointed out that Aristotle in a discussion "Paralogismos", shows that we are inclined to assume that, if B always follows A, then when B has happened, we are inclined to assume that A has preceded it. [1] This piece if false logic is the basis of the red herring and the fair-play rule upon which all good stories of detection depend. The reader must be led to a wrong conclusion, but the blame must rest with the reader and not the author.

This particular type of mystery omly became possible with the advent of a stable police force and, more especially, a body of trained detectives. In his early works, Collins makes use of Bow Street runners, but he was hampered by their limitations. He fell back upon lawyers' clerks - and some of his most successful detectives come from this group of men who have been so strangely neglected by later writers.

Because the French were so far ahead of the English in the matter of detection and trained personnel, we should not be surprised to find that Collins drew upon Gaboriau for inspiration.

Èmile Gaboriau was born in 1833 and wrote his stories of detection contemporaneously with Collins. L'Affaire Lerouge was written in 1866, two years before the appearance of The Moonstone. This was the first novel in which detection played an important part, but detection does not occupy Gaboriau for the whole length of his novel. It has been suggested that Gaboriau's Monsieur Lecoq influenced Collins greatly, but this novel appeared only in 1869. Nor should we forget that before then Collins had written The Monkstons of

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1. Miss Dorothy L. Sayers in Aristotle on Detective Fiction, an article which appeared in English, the magazine of The English Association, Vol. i, p. 31. (1936).

Wincot Abbey (1852), Sister Rose (1855), The Lady of Glenwith Grange (1856), The Diary of Anne Rodway (1856), The Yellow Tiger (1857), A Marriage Tragedy (1858) and Who is the Thief? (1858), all stories contributing something to the development of the detective story.

Collins was almost certainly influenced by Edgar Allan Poe who produced five stories of detection between 1840 and 1845. From The Murders in the Rue Morgue, The Mystery of Marie Roget, which are true stories of detection, from The Gold Bug, which is a mystery or a puzzle, and from The Purloined Letter and Thou Art the Man, emerged the pattern of a detective who used deduction to solve a mystery, who succeeded where the police had failed, who was fortunate in being possessed of a faithful chronicler, who was eccentric and who refused to be misled by a "paralogismos". That Collins employed all these methods at one time or another was no accident.

It is strange that, though the French were so far ahead in the matter of detectives, they lagged behind in the writing of the detective story. de Vries says that the detective story has never really caught on in France, Holland, or Germany, where true stories of crime are preferred. [1] Its popularity has been limited to the Anglo-Saxon world, and de Vries believes that a personal acceptance of the principle of law and order rather than respect for power; a respect or admiration for the officers of the law rather than fear; and a need to sublimate the humdrumness of everyday life, are the reasons for the success of the detective story in

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1. de Vries P.H.: op. cit. , p. 41.

the English-speaking world.

It was Collins's special virtue that he took the germ of the idea from Poe and applied and amplified it until he made of it a delectable game played by author and reader; and so well did Collins develop this game, that an analysis of the detective story as genre reveals that Collins almost exhausted the possibilities and left his successors little to do but follow.

de Vries tells us that the elements of the detective story are:

i. The species of crime: against society, property
ii. The time of committal: alibi or evidence.
iii. Place of committal of crime.
iv. Method of committal of crime.
v. Motive for committal of crime.
vi. Discovery.
vii. Personality of victim.
viii. Personality of detective.
ix. Corpus delicti: a body is usually necessary.
x. Witnesses: true, false, exposed, mistaken.
xi. Material clues.
xii. Immaterial clues.
xiii. Method of investigation.
xiv. Results, including proof of guilt.
xv. Personality of criminal. 1.

A perusal of the points enumerated above will make it obvious that Collins, in The Moonstone for instance, saw the importance of all, except the need for a body.

On the question of clues, we have found Collins using prints of the hand, torn scraps of writing, articles pawned and footprints; but Collins usually relies on verbal evidence, upon reconstruction and upon the setting of traps for the unwary to help him towards a solution. He set the example for correctness of detail, and modern writers of stories of detection are expected to be knowledgeable upon matters of court procedure, forensic medicine, and many other by-paths of criminology.

Collins has taught us the importance of the fair-play rule, the most-unlikely-person motif, a true

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1. de Vries P.H.: op.cit., p. 72.

picture of the society in which the crime was committed, event emerging from character and the judicious use of the red herring.

Miss Sayers's The Documents in the Case is clearly derived from The Moonstone; Michael Innes's Lament for a Maker owes its inspiration to the same source; Sherlock Holmes's methods, his interest in Oriental poisons, in opium, and his possession of a Dr Watson: all seem to come from Collins. Daphne Du Maurier's Rebecca is derivative from The Law and the Lady, and The Diary of Anne Rodway is an interesting version of a theme employed in Grahame Greene's Brighton Rock.

Poisons, asylums, sanatoria, jewels, wills, alibis, court scenes amd cryptograms, private detectives and plain clothes policemen, eccentrics who become criminals and eccentrics who become criminologists: Collins wrote about all these and so do his successors. Our collection of detectives, from Sherlock Holmes and Father Brown to Peter Wimsey and Hercule Poirot, are essentially the detectives created first by Collins: some may like blue silk pyjamas and vintage wines, others may prefer violin solos and opium; some may be amateurs, others may be members of Scotland Yard; some are of humble origin, others are aristocratic; but all owe much to Mr Boxious, Sergeant Cuff, Mr Dark and Valeria Macallan.

vi : The Verdict

It is difficult to understand the neglect of Collins and the acknowledgement of the worth of only a few of his novels. It is difficult to understand how he has not been credited with the invention of the English detective novel, the woman detective and the humorous detective story. Collins was doubly unfortunate in living contemporaneously with our greatest novelists, and in having incurred the enmity of John Forster. Not only were his talents lost in the brilliance of Dickens and Thackeray, but Collins was shamefully ignored in Forster's Life of Charles Dickens. Forster had never forgiven Collins for ousting him as Dickens's best friend, and this was his way of punishing the young man who had led Dickens astray. Robinson tells us that Collins used to refer to Forster's work as "The Life of John Forster with occasional anecdotes of Charles Dickens". [1].

Much of our failure to appreciate the worth of Collins's later work comes from the excellence of The Woman in White, No Name, The Moonstone, Armadale and The Law and the Lady. In spite of imperfections, however, there is much that is worthy of high praise in novels such as The Black Robe and Heart and Science. Nor has justice been done to his novelettes and short stories. There are a round dozen which stand out as models of ingenuity and readability.

Collins suffered ill-health and much pain. When free of pain he could write with much of his earlier excellence: Heart and Science (1882) is the best example of this. At the age of sixty he could still (write

1. Robinson K.: op. cit., p. 260.

write the skilfully constructed Girl at the Gate and Royal Love. He lived to the age of sixty-five, six years longer than did his abstemious father and twenty years longer than his pure-living and ascetic brother, Charles.

We may fail to give him credit for his accurate portrayal of women, for his daring approach to social themes which had previously been taboo, and for his spade-work in the way of construction: and all because we have come to accept these attributes in a novel, forgetting that it was Collins who broke the new ground. From his pages comes a sincere and authentic picture of Victorian life, upon which is built a number of thrilling stories. He was without a peer in the art of creating mystery and suspense and sensation. Though his portrayal of character was not always sure, there is a long list of characters who remain in our memories: Mannion, Perugino Potts, Mr Boxious, Mr Dark, Matthew Sharpin, Fosco and Marian Halcombe, Magdalen Vanstone and Captain Wragge, Miserrimus Dexter and Ariel, Mr Pedgift, Miss Clack, Dr Benjulia and Sergeant Cuff.

Finally, the interest in Collins and Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd has unfortunately taken a turn which overshadows altogether the main truth of Collins's life: with all his weaknesses he could but seldom be accused of meanness to others. He had a ready and sympathetic understanding of the poor and treated Caroline and Martha better than did many a lawfully wedded Victorian husband his acknowledged wife. His outbursts of anger, apart from those caused by piracy of his work, were directed to injustice perpetrated upon others and the selfish spoliation of natural beauty.
