# PART IV

## SUPPLEMENTARY EVIDENCE

### i : Man and Wife

Collins had settled down to a regular routine of work, living comfortably with Caroline, enjoying success, financial security, travel and the company of friends. A number of changes now came into his life. He suffered agonies from his rheumatic gout and became increasingly dependent upon larger and larger doses of laudanum, though he never became a drug addict in the accepted sense. The loss of his mother affected him deeply and he passed through a crisis in his domestic affairs which must have left its mark upon him. We know what happened, but we have little information as to the causes of this strange series of events. The little information we have is probably intelligent conjecture, but it has the merit of providing an entertainingly acceptable explanation of what happened.

We are told that Collins in his pain bellowed and groaned so, that his secretaries could not bear it and resigned one after another. Martha Rudd was the only one who could take his dictation under these circumstances, and a liaison developed. Caroline Graves, who had undertaken, in September 1868, the task of finding and moving to their new home at 90 Gloucester Place, was so busy moving and seeing to renovations

that Collins had ample opportunity for paying attention to Martha Rudd. When Caroline became aware of what had happened, she must have issued a fiat which Collins was unwilling to accept. The details are doubtful, but the result was that Caroline married Joseph Clow, an artisan, in October, 1868. It has been suggested that she met Clow while the renovations were in hand. Collins attended the wedding, kept Caroline's daughter with him, and nine months later (July, 1869) Martha Rudd gave birth to Collins's first child, a daughter, by her. The second child, born in May, 1871, bears the name of Harriet, a name common to Caroline's daughter and Collins's mother. Caroline Graves returned in 1871 to live with Collins and remained with him until his death. A third child, a son, was born to Martha Rudd, living under the name of Mrs Dawson, in December, 1874. He bore the name of William Charles Collins Dawson.

Collins had been drawn to Charles Reade because of their common struggle against the piracies of American publishing houses, and this friendship grew ever closer, until Reade eventually stood in a similar relationship to Collins as Collins had stood to Dickens. There had been a falling-off in the friendship with Dickens, caused possibly by jealousy on the part of Dickens at Collins's success, but mainly because of Dickens's pre-occupation with Ellen Ternan, with lecture tours in Britain and America and because Collins could or would no longer play the role of extravagant admirer.

In March, 1869, Black and White, a drama in three acts written in collaboration with Charles Fechter, ran for six weeks at the Adelphi and was followed by a short

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provincial tour. This playbwas presented in Boston by Fechter in January, 1871.

Much of Collins's correspondence at this time is concerned with the question of international copyright. His books were being regularly translated into French, German, Dutch, Polish, Italian and Russian, but he received fees only from some French publishers and Tauchnitz of Leipzig. He was also troubled with piracies in America and Canada, and developed the system of having serials published there ahead of publication in England. This did not, however, prevent unauthorised publication of his work in book form. When Harpers published their 'authorised' Moonstone, there were three other editions published simultaneously, and other publishers hastened to bring out editions of their own as public demand increased.

Man and Wife appeared in Harper's Weekly from December, 1869 to August, 1870 and in Cassell's Magazine from January to September, 1870. It must be considered a tragic failure. This has been variously attributed to Collins's state of health, his addiction to laudanum, his unsettled domestic affairs, the influence of Charles Reade, and a just providence which had at last caught up with a wicked man. There seems to be general agreement that Man and Wife is the work of a man whose powers are waning.

This does not seem to me to be a just view. Man and Wife is a failure, but it contains all the ingredients for success. It suffers from the deficiencies which we find in No Thoroughfare, but in even greater degree.

Man and Wife was clearly written with a view to

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production on the stage. Indeed, the construction, characterization and the dialogue indicate that this work was cast first as a play and then padded out into a novel. Looked at from this point of view, most of the objectionable features of the novel would make good contemporary theatre. Had Collins originally written Man and Wife as a novelette, it would have been a more powerful work.

It has been criticised as a novel overburdened with two theses: marriage laws and athleticism. Yet Collins has shown that he can successfully embody social protest in a novel. There is little evidence for the assumption that it was Reade's influence and example that set Collins on the path of social criticism. Indeed, the evidence points the other way. It was Reade who admired Collins and who submitted his work to Collins for criticism.[1] Collins had come a long way since his early adulation of Dickens and, in spite of Dickens's adverse comment on The Moonstone, it is significant that Edwin Drood (1870) relies on plot, mystery and suspense in the Moonstone manner.

Since the publication of Basil in 1852, Collins had embodied in his novels protest against social evils. Contemporary critics had complained that Armadale and The Moonstone were sensational without being significant. Collins had always taken up the cudgels against the critics, but he nevertheless took care not to offend in subsequent work; this in spite of the most vehement protests that he cared more for the response of his readers than for anything the critics might say.

It seems likely he intended that Man and Wife should satisfy the critics in respect of depth and

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1. For further information on the relationship between Collins and Reade see Kenneth Robinson: Wilkie Collins, p. 278.

significance; and, whatever the faults of Man and Wife, it must be granted that the sections concerned with the wrongs made possible by the Irish, Scottish and English marriage laws are the most powerful in this novel.

The terms of the Irish marriage law which permitted a man to cast away his wife because he had been married by a Roman Catholic priest and had been converted to Catholicism for a period of less than twelve months, are shown to be iniquitous. The Scottish form of Irregular Marriage, or Marriage by Consent, whereby a couple may find themselves married without intending it, is shown to lend itself to anomaly and abuse. Collins also attacks the English position, whereby a woman is at the mercy of a rogue of a husband and is without redress when he squanders everything she has brought to the marriage and leaves her in destitution.

It is important to note that this multiple protest is not superimposed upon the novel, but is an integral part of the plot. The treatment of the law is sound, and the unfolding of the complications, the handling of the evidence and the twists and turns of the story are done with Collins's characteristic skill. These parts of Man and Wife make fascinating reading and account for its popularity with contemporary critics and readers.

Unfortunately, Collins's attack on athleticism is so outrageously exaggerated that it loses all conviction. The most extravagant and ridiculous passages are those in which the drama has been padded out to make a novel of three volumes.

In spite of this, Collins succeeds in lampooning the extravagances of the subscribers to this cult and in

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bringing home his point that body-worship can lead to a dulling of the higher sensibilities.

He fails miserably, however, in his attempts to show that Geoffrey is a rogue because of his preoccupation with Athleticism.

This novel contains no passages in which scenic description contributes to the creation of atmosphere. It is true that lightning flashes and that thunder rolls, but these are sound-effects intended for use on the stage. The characters too, with one or two exceptions, are stage characters, and suitably conceived for this purpose, but they do not come to life in the novel. Their task is to create dramatic suspense and, visualised as characters on a stage, they are skilfully portrayed; but they have no place in a novel.

Finally, any who would condemn Collins as having passed the peak of his career, would have a difficult task in explaining away the sheer ingenuity of Hester Dethridge's homicidal methods. This is the "hole-in-the-wall" method at its very best. He has done nothing more brilliant. Both on the stage and in the novel, the murder scene is written with characteristic care and attention to relevant detail.

The story is soon told: Mr Vanborough deserts his wife and daughter on the grounds of invalidity of the marriage when it suits him to marry Lady Jane Parnell for money and position. The daughter he had deserted is seduced by Geoffrey Delamayne, who ungraciously agrees to a Scottish marriage by consent. Geoffrey does not keep to his agreement but tries to compromise his friend, Arnold Brinkworth, who has seen Anne on

(Geoffrey's

Geoffrey's behalf, and have the friend's marriage to Blanche annulled on the grounds that he has unwittingly contracted an "Irregular Marriage" with Anne. It is proved that Geoffrey had promised to marry Anne at an earlier date, and Anne is acknowledged as his wife. He attempts to murder her but is, in turn, attacked in a mad frenzy by his accomplice, Hester, and suffers a fatal paralytic stroke.

Interest is maintained at a high level by means of interesting twists given to the interpretation of the Scottish Marriage Law and by the cleverness with which Geoffrey involves Hester Dethridge as an accomplice acquainted with a foolproof method for murder - a method which she had successfully tried out on her husband.

Anne is a big improvement on earlier Collins heroines; Arnold is portrayed with conviction and compares to advantage with Hartwright and Allan Armadale. The most striking character is the urbane, yet sharp, Sir Patrick. He is club-footed - yet another instance of physical disability in Collins. He copes easily with his vixenish sister-in-law and with Geoffrey's schemes; and so controls affairs that Anne becomes his wife, and Arnold and his niece are secure in their marriage.

The most serious criticism of the novel must be on the score of padding. The Prologue serves little purpose other than to acquaint us with Delamayn's casting away of his wife on the grounds of invalidity of the marriage In Irish law. These two chapters stand divorced from the rest of the novel. For the rest we are treated to many digressions dealing with the fortunes of persons who, play no significant part in the

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story , descriptions of garden parties, dinner parties and discussions with muscular young men ill-equipped to discuss anything. We are treated to humorous exchanges between stock Scottish comic characters, and every now and again Hester Dethridge appears ominously, though she plays no significant part until the closing chapters.

Much of the novel is unacceptable because it employs stage conventions which are out of place in a novel. For instance, in the Prologue we have the impossible scene where Lady Jane appears in Vanborough's home, mistakes his wife for the wife of a visitor, and will not accept the evidence of a marriage certificate. Regularly throughout the story characters die at conveniently dramatic moments and leave wills which complicate matters. Characters are described in terms more suited to a play than a novel:

"On the evening on which this scene opens, a lady and two gentlemen were seated at the dinner-table. The lady had reached the mature age of forty-two. She was still a rarely beautiful woman. Her husband, some years younger than herself, faced her at the table; sitting, silent and constrained, and never, even by accident, looking at his wife. The third person was a guest. The husband's name was Vanborough. The guest's name was Kendrew."[1]

There are numerous exits and entrances, asides and overheard conversations. The dialogue generally, owes much to stage technique:

"'Go on,' she said - with an effort.
'Try not to be angry with me, Miss Sylvester. Geoffrey and I are friends. Geoffrey knows he can trust me --
'Trust you?' she interposed. 'Stop!'
Arnold waited. She went on, speaking to herself, - not to him.
'When I was in the other room, I asked if Geoffrey was there. And this man answered for him.' She sprang forward with a cry of horror.
'Has he told you ----?'
'For God's sake, read his letter!'
She violently pushed back the hand with which Arnold once more offered the letter. 'You don't look at me! He has told you!'
'Read this letter,' persisted Arnold. 'In justice to him, if you won't in justice to me!'"[2]

(Geoffrey

1. The Prologue, Part 1.
2. The Second Scene, Chap. 9.

Geoffrey is a villain of the deepest Victorian dye. In one scene only does he show sentimentality of any sort: this is as he looks down upon the worn-out but peacefully sleeping Anne before he proceeds to smother her. One short quotation will serve to show what extravagances Collins could commit. Quite unnecessarily, we have been treated to page after page of details of Geoffrey's training for the great race, the meeting of the athletes, and the progress of the race itself over each of fourteen laps. And then Geoffrey collapses, as we have been warned he would:

"He rallied, and ran another step or two -swerved again - staggered - lifted his arm to his mouth with a hoarse cry of rage - fastened his own teeth in his flesh like a wild beast - and fell senseless on the course." [1].

In spite of its weaknesses, this novel is, in parts, as good as anything as Collins has written. Arnold's proposal to Blanche is most refreshing and natural, and far superior to most proposals found perennially in novels.[2].

Collins has not lost his skill in capturing humour in a few sentences. Here is a doctor prescribing a placebo:

"'Nerves, Lady Lundie. Repose in bed is essentially necessary. I will write a prescription.' He prescribed, with perfect gravity:- Aromatic Spirits of Ammonia - 15 drops. Spirits of Red Lavender - 10 drops. Syrup of Orange Peel - 2 drachms. Camphor Julep - 1 ounce. When he had written, Misce fiat Haustus (instead of Mix a draught) - when he had added, Ter die Sumendus (instead of to be taken three times a day) - and when he had certified to his own Latin, by putting his initials at the end, he had only to make his bow; to slip two guineas into his pocket; and to go his way, with an approving professional conscience, in the character of a physician who had done his duty." [3].

The method by means of which Anne is to be murdered without suspicion falling on the murderers, is worthy

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1. The Thirteenth Scene, Chap. 50.
2. The First Scene, Chap. 3.
3. The Tenth Scene, Chap. 46.

of attention because it shows Collins at his best and because so many successors have used variations on this method. In essence, the plan is foolproof because the door of the room in which the murdered body is to be found is locked from the inside. Egress by means of window, chimney or trapdoor in the ceiling is impossible. The body bears no wounds. Ergo: death must be from natural causes or suicide. Geoffrey has enlisted the aid of Hester Bethridge and a room has been specially prepared. In the adjoining room the lath and plaster has been removed in such a way that the lath, complete with wallpaper can be replaced without leaving any trace. Similarly, the paper next the bed in which the victim is to sleep has been tampered with so that it can be removed without a sound, the victim smothered, the paper replaced, and all traces hidden.

It is difficult to understand the subsequent outright condemnation of Man and Wife. It contains much that compares favourably with anything Collins had written, and should certainly not be condemned on the score of its protest against the marriage laws. Such criticism would be as valid as criticism of The Woman in White because it is concerned with the abuse of asylums. The contemporary critics dealt kindly with it and Collins himself said that it came after The Woman in White and The Moonstone in terms of popularity.

Man and Wife was published as a play in 1870, and produced at The Prince of Wales' Theatre in 1873.

(No Name

No Name was re-written in 1870 as a drama in four acts and was produced at the Fifth Avenue Theatre, New York, in June 1871. Apart from these plays, Collins published nothing until Poor Miss Finch appeared in Cassell's Magazine, beginning in October, 1871.

## ii : Poor Miss Finch and The New Magdalen

Poor Miss Finch is a most readable novel. While it must be classed with Basil and Hide and Seek as regards type, it is written with a skill and confidence which make it most refreshing. The dialogue is natural and the character portrayal convincing as far as it goes, though it is not to be compared with Collin's best. In character it has a pleasant lightness of touch, has good tempo, the occasional humour is most effective.

Although it contains nothing which is an advance on anything Collins had previously accomplished, it can stand on its own merits as a readable novel. It is neither a purpose novel nor a mystery story, but unfolds simply the tale of a lovable girl who has been blind from birth. She is beautiful and unaffected, and loves Oscar Dubourg, a young man who suffers from epilepsy as a result of a brutal attack by thieves. Oscar resorts to taking silver nitrate as a cure for his epilepsy. He knows that it will turn his face blue, but feels that it will not matter as Lucilla Finch is blind. He learns, however, of her antipathy to people with dark faces and fears to tell her of the change in him. His twin brother, Nugent, returns from America, having run through his fortune, and immediately

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falls in love with Lucilla. Collins handles the theme of mistaken identity with an adroitness which shows clearly that he has learned much about his craft since he so miserably fumbled The Twin Sisters.

After a brilliant operation Lucilla recovers her eyesight, and Collins makes the most of the complications arising out of the likeness of the twins - they even possess voices which are indistinguishable. Collins steers his novel to a happy ending when Lucilla loses her sight again, thus satisfying Collins's claim in his preface that "the conditions of human happiness are independent of bodily affliction, and that it is even possible for bodily affliction itself to take its place among the ingredients for happiness." Collins's treatment of Lucilla's blindness is done with conviction.

Poor Miss Finch is written in the first person, and the narrator is Madame Pratolungo, companion to Miss Finch. She has a ready sense of humour, and a fund of common sense and cheerfulness blended with enthusiastic political beliefs acquired from her deceased husband, Doctor Pratolungo, a South American patriot.

Herr Grosse, the eminent surgeon who restores Lucilla's sight, may seem overdone to us but, with his eccentricities and his queer idiom inherited, it would seem, from Uncle Joseph, the Victorians accepted him. Indeed, Collins was able to write in a note to the 1872 edition that the German oculist

> " ... has impressed himself so strongly as a real personage on the minds of some of my readers afflicted with blindness, or suffering from diseases of the eye, that I have received several written applications requesting me to communicate his present address to patients desirous of consulting him!" [1]

(Jicks

1. This type of caricature of the Teuton was popular at this time. In Lytton Strachey's Queen Victoria we learn that the English placed Prince Albert in a very similar category. His Teutonic heaviness and horror of blood sports made him the butt of many a joke.

Jicks, christened Selina Finch, one of the younger members of the family of Finches, is three years old. She is refreshingly natural in her placing food before all else and in her propensity for getting lost. She is quite unlike any other child to be found in the pages of a Victorian novel. Remembering that Collins's own daughter, Marian, was just three years old at the time of writing this novel, we feel free to wonder whether Jicks was a portrait of Marian. It is at any rate significant that Collins introduces a young child into a novel for the first time.

The story of Oscar's trial and how he was almost hanged on the false testimony of a clock is a digression; but shows that Collins had not lost the ability to weave his way through the intricacies of conflicting evidence in such a manner as to capture the full attention of the reader. Poor Miss Finch adds nothing to Collins's stature as a writer, but is certainly not the work of a man who is failing in any way. It is compounded of tested ingredients and makes entertaining reading.

Miss or Mrs?, a novelette which was first published as a Christmas story in The London Graphic Illustrated Newspaper on the 13th December, 1871, contains a plot almost as complex as that of Armadale, though it cannot compare in scope. It has been strangely neglected by Collins's biographers and critics. It was written for easy adaptation as a drama, but there is no record of its ever having been published as a play or produced at any theatre.

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Though this story is wildly melodramatic in parts, it is exciting and takes the reader along many unexpected paths as the plot unfolds. The characterization is poor, and no character rings altogether true.

Lancelot Linzie loves his cousin Natalie, but her father, Sir Joseph, wishes her to marry Turlington, a man reputed to have risen from the lower classes to a position of great wealth. The marriage is arranged for a week after her next birthday. Turlington finds himself in financial difficulties and borrows money on false security, expecting to be able to meet his debts from Natalie's dowry once they are married.

In the meantime Lancelot and Natalie are married in secret, but she returns home to her father, as otherwise Lancelot will be held guilty of abduction. After her birthday, when Natalie will turn sixteen, she may go to Lancelot, as in the eyes of the law that will be an elopement. Turlington has reason to be suspicious and insists that Natalie and her father move to his home in the country and that the marriage take place there. By means of a strange series of interlocking coincidences Turlington learns of the secret marriage and decides that the only way out of his difficulties is that Sir Joseph must die. Turlington has been made executor to Sir Joesph's estate anf hopes to solve his financial troubles by diverting Natalie's fortune into his hands.

He goes to Green Anchor Lane, "infamous to this day as the chosen resort of the most abandoned wretches whom London can produce", and enlists the aid of Wildfang, a former accomplice:

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"On the miserable bed lay a grey-headed old man, of gigantic stature, with nothing on him but a ragged shirt and a pair of patched filthy trousers. At the side of the bed, with a bottle of gin on the ricketty table between them, sat two hideous, leering, painted monsters, wearing the dress of women. The smell of opium was in the room, as well as the smell of spirits."[1]

Wildfang asks laconically:

"Another man in the way?"

The killing is carefully planned. Sir Joseph is to be persuaded to take a walk in the evening. Wildfang is to kill and rob him. In the malthouse, Wildfang will find a change of clothing and a cauldron containing quicklime in which his old clothes may be destroyed.

"Wildfang brandished his cudgel, and struck a heavy blow with it on one of the turf-mounds near them. 'Will that drop him, Captain?' he asked."[2]

Sir Joseph survives the attack and is taken by Natalie into the house. Turlington is desperate and sends the footman to the stables while he locks Natalie and her father in the house. The footman returns with a message from Lancelot. He has discovered Wildfang with Sir Joseph's property on him and forced a confession from him.

No story ever ended on a stronger melodramatic note than does Miss or Mrs? . Lancelot comes to Natalie's aid and enters the upper room by means of a ladder. Natalie begs him to return to safety, but Turlington removes the ladder. This rogue then rushes into the house and demands that Lancelot unlock the door to the room. Upon receiving a refusal, Turlington fires a shot at the door. The bullet, contrary to almost every law of ballistics, crashes through the door, grazes Lancelot's arm and buries itself, spent at last,

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1. The Tenth Scene.
2. The Eleventh Scene.

in the pillow at the very spot where Sir Joseph's head had rested a moment before. It was fortunate indeed that Lancelot had realised that the bed was in the direct line of fire and had dragged the old man to safety on the floor! Turlington's pistol has four barrels. He fires a bullet through the wall:

> "'I hear you,' cried the voice of the miscreant on the other side of the door. 'I'll have you yet - through the wall.'
> There was a pause. They heard his hand sounding the wall, to find out where there was solid wood in the material of which it was built, and where there was plaster only. At that dreadful moment Launce's composure never left him. He laid Sir Joseph softly on the floor, and signed to Natalie and her aunt to lie down by him in silence. Their lives depended now on neither their voices nor their movements telling the murderer where to fire. He chose his place. The barrel of the revolver grated as he laid it against the wall. He touched the hair-trigger. A faint click was the only sound that followed. The third barrel had missed fire.
> They heard him ask himself, with an oath, 'What's wrong with it now?'
> There was a pause of silence.
> Was he examining the weapon?" [1].

It turns out that he was indeed examining the weapon. While he was looking in a puzzled manner down the third barrel to see why it has misfired, the fourth barrel took upon itself the duty of discharging a bullet into his mouth, killing him on the spot.

Miss or Mrs? makes interesting reading and in it we recognise a repetition of the Basil theme and that section of Rambles Beyond Railways where Collins and Brandling were thought to be surveyors in disguise. With all its melodramatic excess, Miss or Mrs? is not the work of a man whose powers are on the wane.

The New Magdalen first appeared in Temple Bar from January to December, 1872. Whatever view we may (take

1. The Twelfth Scene.

take of this novel, and it is classed variously as "merely feeble, false and silly in its sentimental cleverness" [1], "among his least satisfactory novels" [2], "a favourite tale of Matthew Arnold's, though as a rule he was not addicted to the reading of sensational fiction" [3] and "the best novel of its class .... and not far below the highest level ever attained by the author" [4]; its claim to our attention rests particularly on one passage: the description of a plain-clothes policeman which has stood many a subsequent writer of detective stories in good stead:

> "A man appeared in the open doorway. He was not a gentleman; he was not a workman; he was not a servant. He was vilely dressed, in glossy black broadcloth. His frock coat hung on him instead of fitting him. His waistcoat was too short and too tight over the chest. His trousers were a pair of shapeless bags. His gloves were too large for him. His highly-polished boots creaked detestably whenever he moved. He had odiously watchful eyes - eyes that looked skilled in peeping through keyholes. His large ears, set forward like the ears of a monkey, pleaded guilty to meanly listening behind other people's doors. His manner was quietly confidential, when he spoke: impenetrably self-possessed when he was silent. A lurking air of secret-service enveloped the fellow, like an atmosphere of his own, from head to foot. He looked all round the magnificent room, without betraying either surprise or admiration. He closely investigated every person in it with one glance of his cunningly-watchful eyes. Making his bow to Lady Janet, he silently showed her, as his introduction, the card that had summoned him. And then he stood at ease, self-revealed in his own sinister identity - a police-officer in plain clothes." [5]

A New Magdalen is the story of Mercy Merrick, daughter of an actress and a gentleman who deserted his mistress when Mercy was a baby. Mercy continued with the strolling players after her mother's death but ran away at the age of ten when the new manager started

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1. Swinburne A.C.: Studies in Prose and Poetry, p. 122.
2. Robinson K.: Wilkie Collins, p. 261.
3. Ellis S.M.: Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others, p.47.
4. Sadleir M.: Excursions in Victorian Bibliography, p. 133.
5. The New Magdalen, Second Scene, Chap. 20.

beating her brutally. By the time she was fifteen she had lived with gipsies, had known starvation, had sold matches in the streets, had been in prison and had earned her living as a needlewoman, ruining her health in the process. After fainting in a street she comes to in a brothel and finds that she has been drugged. She becomes accustomed to this way of life, but is one day falsely accused of theft and sent to prison. Good behaviour wins her admission to a refuge for fallen women and she is given an opportunity to rehabilitate herself. Time and again, however, she is dismissed as soon as her past catches up with her. Eventually, at the time of the Franco-Prussian War, she obtains a position as a Red Cross nurse. She assists Grace Roseberry, a young gentlewoman who has lost her father and is trying to get to England where she has been promised a position as companion to Lady Janet, a friend of her father's whom she has never seen. A piece of shrapnel wounds Grace and the French doctor pronounces her dead. The French retire from the position they have been holding, but Mercy remains with the wounded. She decides to wear Grace's clothes and present herself for the position as companion to Lady Janet.

Horace Holmcroft, a newspaper correspondent, arrives with the Prussian forces and assists Mercy through the lines and to England. He is acquainted with Lady Janet and soon falls in love with Mercy. Julian Grey, a parson, is Lady Janet's nephew. He arrives with the news that a woman by the name of Grace Roseberry was found by a German surgeon; she had been left for dead by the French, but the surgeon had performed an operation which had saved her life. The

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marks on her clothes declared her to be Mercy Merrick, but she claimed that her name was Grace Roseberry.

Julian, who has fallen in love at first sight with Mercy, and Lady Janet will not credit Grace's story even after she has arrived in person.

Mercy asks Julian to advise her and his advice is that she should confess. Grace Roseberry arrives and is so high-handed in her manner that Mercy changes her mind and announces that Grace is an imposter. Julian says nothing but sends for a police-officer to have Grace arrested and certified insane. When Mercy realises that Grace will be sent to a mad-house, she has the police-officer sent away and says that she will produce the real Mercy Merrick. Lady Janet realises the truth and begs Mercy to say no more. She has grown to love Mercy and pays Grace to return to Canada. Though she is willing to keep Mercy's secret, she is not willing to have her marry Horace and persuades Horace to break off the engagement.

Mercy insists on confessing everything to Horace, but this turns Lady Janet against her and Mercy returns to the Refuge in the position of nurse. Julian has begged her to marry him, but she refuses to ruin his career. He resigns his curacy and serves in a mission in a London slum. He takes a fever and his life is in danger. In his delirium he keeps calling for Mercy and she is sent for. He recovers and they are married.

The New Magdalen suffers from serious weaknesses. It was written with a view to stage adaptation, and the stage version was produced within a few months of the appearance of the first parts of the serial in Temple Bar.

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The characters suffer from this treatment. In one scene only do two characters come to life: the battle of wits between Grace and Lady Jane. For the rest, all are smothered in conventional sentimentality.

Collins preserves his skill in the manipulation of such plot as there is, but is guilty of much padding out to produce two volumes. This endows the work with an air of theatricality which weakens any dramatic quality it may possess. The New Magdalen possesses a daring theme, and both the novel and the play were popular; but its weakness lies in Collins's reticence as regards the depravity into which Mercy fell. She is not at all a tragic figure: she seems to have come out of it all strangely unscathed and has really been rather a lucky girl. It is on this score that it must be considered a failure. In other respects it is readable: the theme and construction are capably dealt with, and Collins succeeds remarkably well in steering clear of [illegible] turning Julian Grey into a pious ass alight with missionary fervour and over-flowing with second-hand religious platitudes.

The New Magdalen, unlike The Moonstone, contains twists and turns introduced, not to make a better story, but merely to spin it out to the desired length.

Collins must at this time have been suffering at the hands of the doctors, because he returns to disparaging remarks about their ability, an attitude which we noticed for the first time in Man and Wife:

"'The doctor!' she repeated disdainfully. 'I brought Grace back last night in sheer despair, and I sent for the doctor this morning. He is at the head of his profession; he is said to be making ten thousand a year - and he knows no more about it that I do. I am quite serious. The great physician has just gone

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away with two guineas in his pocket. One guinea for advising me to keep her quiet; another guinea for telling me to trust to time. Do you wonder how he gets on at this rate? My dear boy, they all get on in the same way. The medical profession thrives on two incurable diseases - a He-disease and a She-disease. She-disease - nervous depression; He-disease - suppressed gout." [1].

The New Magdalen is essentially a purpose novel, but its main failing is that it has not courageously enough faced up to the realities of the chosen theme: the rehabilitation of fallen women. The social criticism is, however, not superimposed upon the story; it is essentially part of it. The New Magdalen fails also in respect of characterization and artificial manipulation of what is really a very simple little plot, much more suited to a short story. Juian Grey's views on political economy are well controlled and are in keeping with the portrayal of his character. Collins may, however, be criticised for allowing this side of Gray's character to be forgotten once it is established.

## iii : American Readings

In response to repeated invitations, mainly by Harpers, to undertake a reading tour of America where Collins had a great following, he set out in September, 1873 for America and Canada, returning in March, 1874. The tour seems to have been a great success, though he earned only about two thousand five hundred pounds compared with Dickens's twenty thousand pounds for a similar tour.[2].

His readings consisted of an adapted version of his play, The Frozen Deep, an adapted and improved

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1. The Second Scene, Chap. 13.
2. vide Robinson, op. cit., p. 273.

version of The Dream Woman, and John Jago's Ghost, a story which he wrote while in New York.

John Jago's Ghost was first published in The Home Journal (London), beginning on the 27th December, 1873. It also appeared in The New York Fireside Companion under the title of The Dead Hand, beginning on the 29th December, 1873. It also appeared in August, 1886 in The Leisure Hour Library (New York) as The Morwick Farm Mystery.

Collins had, while in America, had access to an account of a murder trial which had taken place in Vermont in the Nineteenth Century. He used this material for writing this novelette, which constitutes his best story on the dead-alive theme. This story quashes any theories about Collins's waning powers; it is rapid-moving, tautly-knit, and devoid of any rambling digression or unnecessary elaboration. The characterization is excellent: there is about Morwick farm an air of brooding fatality which prepares us for the disappearance of John Jago and the discovery of clues in the lime-kiln. There are strong elemental passions at work which give the story a meaning and power quite out of proportion to the ninety-one pages which it occupies in the volume The Frozen Deep ans Other Tales first published in 1874.

The story takes a freshness from being told by Philip Lefrank, a barrister-at-law from London, who visits his relations at Morwick farm. There is an interesting, but not overdone, contrast between English and American customs, and a refreshing, controlled use of American idiom in some of the dialogue.

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The family at Morwick farm consists of the father, an old-maid daughter and two brothers. One, Ambrose, is in love with his pretty little American cousin, Naomi, who lives with them. Neither brother can abide John Jago, the American overseer, who is continually being held up to them as an example of efficiency by both the father and the daughter. She is in love with Jago. There is mounting tension as quarrels between the brothers and Jago break out. Jago is also in love with Naomi, but she has refused to have anything to do with him.

Then Jago is nowhere to be found. The brothers are suspected of murder, clues are found which point to their guilt, and a public outcry results in their being committed for trial. In spite of all his efforts, Lefrank, who is assisting the American barrister, cannot prevent a verdict of murder.

Jago appears privately to Naomi and offers to save the brothers' lives provided she will marry him. She refuses, and Lefrank, who has overheard the conversation, has Jago arrested. The father dies of shock and the sister, who has inherited the farm, offers herself in marriage to Jago. He refuses and the sister lives the life of a recluse on her farm. The brothers are set free and emigrate to New Zealand. Lefrank marries Naomi.

John Jago's Ghost does nothing to enhance Collins's reputation, but he is still managing to maintain his standard.

There is no record of the reception accorded to Collins by Caroline on his return; but Martha Rudd must have welcomed him with open arms for, ten months

(later

later, his third and last child, a son, was born. This period marks a change in his life. Ill-health and his reliance on laudanum had made him an old man at fifty. With his mother dying in 1868, Dickens in 1870 and Collins's brother Charles in 1873, Collins seems to have felt the hand of time resting heavily upon him. His habits changed. He went out seldom, saw fewer and fewer people and, towards the end of his days, lived almost the life of a recluse.

The pattern of his work changed after his return from America. After The Woman in White Collins had devoted himself almost exclusively to novels and plays. In 1871 he departed from this practice to write the novelette, Miss or Mrs?. After his return from America a number of his stories must be classed as novelettes and short stories. He was still to write a number of novels, but not to the exclusion of other forms.

The Frozen Deep had been written as a drama in 1856, and we know the result of Dickens's acting opposite Ellen Ternan. In what measure The Frozen Deep influenced A Tale of Two Cities will appear from a digest of the story.

Collins had adapted the play for his readings in America and re-adapted it for publication as a novelette upon his return from America. It appeared in Temple Bar in August, 1874 and ran until October. Collins tells us in his introductory note that the story is "considerably longer" than the version prepared for reading. His narrative departs widely from Act I of the play, with the exception of Scene 3. It "follows the play as closely as possible in the succeeding Acts".

(Clara

Clara Burnham believes in second sight and is convinced that Richard Wardour, whose love she has spurned, will kill her betrothed. Chance makes these men members of the same expedition, and chance makes them members of the same party in the Arctic which sets out to seek relief when all is thought to be lost.

Collins goes out of his way to multiply unnecessarily a chain of coincidences, seemingly under the impression that we will see in this the workings of fate, and that the story will gain in dramatic suspense. It is, however, not chance which makes Wardour remain behind to help Clara's fiancé; nor is it chance which makes him resist the temptation to desert him and thus win Clara!s He risks death and faces hardship and privation so that Frank may return "to the arms of the woman they both love". Clara's second sight is proved to be wrong.

The characters are colourless, with the possible exception of John Want, a disgruntled sailor who cheers everyone by means of his constant grumbling at the North Pole; but once he has returned to England, he longs to be back in the "frozen north":

> "It was very dry and snowy at the North Pole - and its very damp and sandy here. Do you ever miss your bone soup, sir? I do. It mightn't have been strong; but it was very hot; and the cold seemed to give it a kind of meaty flavour as it went down. Was it you that was a-coughing so long, last night, sir? I don't presume to say anything against the air of these latitudes - but I should be glad to know it wasn't you that was a-coughing so hollow. Would you be so obliging, as just to feel the state of these ropes with the ends of your fingers, sir? You can dry them afterwards on the back of my jacket." [1]

The Frozen Deep should properly be considered along with the work of the '50's because it keeps closely to the play. Chapter III in the Firts Scene is written in the present tense and has all the flavour of a play.

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1. The Fifth Scene.

The tone of the conversation in the conservatory scene, quoted below, suggests that Alfred Sutro's one-act play, A Marriage Has Been Arranged, might owe something to The Frozen Deep.

Barrie and Shaw have been credited with creating a taste for reading plays, but Collins deserves some credit for paving the way. Here is part of the conservatory scene:

"The burden on Clara's mind weighs on it more heavily than ever after what Mrs Crayford has said to her. She is too unhappy to feel the inspiriting influence of the dance. After a turn round the room, she complains of fatigue. Mr Francis Aldersley looks at the conservatory (still as invitingly cool and empty as ever), leads her back to it, and places her on a seat among the shrubs. She tries, very feebly, to dismiss him.

'Don't let me keep you from dancing, Mr Aldersley.'

He seats himself by her side, and feasts his eyes on the lovely downcast face that dares not turn towards him. He whispers to her:

'Call me Frank.'

She longs to call him Frank - she loves him with all her heart. But Mrs Crayford's warning words are still in her mind. She never opens her lips. Her lover moves a little closer, and asks another favour. Men are all alike on these occasions. Silence invariably encourages them to try again. ....."

If we accept the melodrama and the string of coincidences, The Frozen Deep makes most exciting reading of the sort which demands of us that we cast to the winds any demands of credibility.

A Fatal Fortune appeared in two parts of All the Year Round in October, 1874. It is a short story written in the epistolary form and reverts to a favourite theme: wrongful detention in an asylum. This strangely powerful story is told with a simple directness which seems to indicate close adherence to some trial which served as source material. In 1889 it appeared in Miss or Mrs? and Other Stories in Outline as A Mad Marriage and was published in America as A Sane Madman.

(Roland

Roland Cameron had always been ruled by a hard father. He meets a French governess and asks her to be his wife. His father comes to hear of this and insists that Roland take a trip abroad until he has overcome his infatuation for the governess. When Roland says that he will marry as soon as he comes of age, his father counters this first sign of rebellion by having him certified insane and committed to an asylum. After five years his father dies and he eventually gains his freedom. He inherits a fortune from an uncle, but interested parties have him certified insane once again.

> "A Commission in Lunacy was issued against me. It was held by one Commissioner without a jury, and without the presence of a lawyer to assert my interests. By one man's decision I was declared to be of unsound mind."

His estates are left in the care of the very persons who were responsible for having him committed to the asylum.

Roland meets and falls in love with Mary Brading (he is allowed out of the asylum during the hours of daylight), and her father assists him in drawing up a petition to the Lord Chancellor. On the most flimsy evidence the decision goes against him, and he and Mary flee to America, abandoning the fortune.

After his return from America, Collins took the reading version of The Dream Woman and expanded it into a novelette which was included in The Frozen Deep and Other Tales (1874). This version is of especial interest as it shows clearly Collins's improved skills compared with The Dream Woman as he wrote it in 1855.

(The

The names are changed and new opening and closing chapters are written. The story is cast in the multiple-narrative form, an improvement on the first-person technique used for The Ostler's Story. The Dream Woman reads much more naturally than does the original version and several weaknesses have been eliminated. Though the 'dream woman's' past is still left obscure, it is made more acceptable. We are now told that the ostler has his recurrent dream only on the eve of his birthday and that he is retained only because the inn has been ruined by the approach of the railways and there is hardly any work to do.

The new version gains in variety and careful building up of suspense. The atmosphere of horror is much more convincing and chance plays a relatively subordinate part, especially in the ostler's meeting the dream woman, and his courtship of her. In this version he does not leave her to her own devices, but secretly offers her shelter in his mother's home. Alicia's taking up with drunkards is made feasible by the explanation of how the ostler came by an annuity as reward for saving his mistress's life. He opens a lodging house, and it is there that his wife takes up with her rough companions and turns against him.

Some improvement in characterisation, the introduction of humour, more natural dialogue and an improvement in pace, makes this story much more readable. Yet the prophetic dream, the appearance of a clasp-knife identical with that in the dream, and a quality of 'much-ado' still prevent this story from being among his best.

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It seems to have been popular in America and one of the pirated editions bore the title of Alicia Warlock.

## iv : Successor to The Moonstone

The Law and the Lady began to appear in The London Graphic Illustrated Newspaper on the 13th March, 1875. This novel is an immediate successor in type to The Moonstone; and, while The Moonstone must be credited with being the first English detective novel, The Law and the Lady is Collins's best. This novel has been dismissed as a thesis novel, "an unpleasant study of human deformity", [1.] "deficient in those qualities of inventiveness and ingenuity which distinguished his novels of the sixties" [2.] and, "just Wilkie Collins" [3.].

I have come across only one critic who does justice to The Law and the Lady. Robert Ashley writes:

> "Almost as strikingly as The Moonstone, The Law and the Lady employs themes and motifs which are now stock devices of the detective story. Prominent among these are the court room scenes, the attempt of the amateur (Valeria) to succeed where the professionals (Eustace's lawyers) had failed, the endeavour to clear the name of a wrongly suspected person, and the piecing together of the fragments of a torn letter. In two respects The Law and the Lady comes much closer than The Moonstone to the Twentieth-Century detective story: the crime is murder, not theft, and the detective (Valeria) is the protagonist, not merely an important minor character. As in The Moonstone suspicion is cleverly shifted from character to character; the eventual fastening of guilt upon a person previously stricken from the list of suspects provides an ingenious twist to the plot and represents another skilful employment by Collins of the least-likely-person motif. For all these reasons, the neglect of The Law and the Lady by historians is difficult to understand." [4.]

I find myself in agreement with Ashley, except that the novel contains excellences not mentioned by him.

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1. Quilter: op.cit., p. 272.
2. Robinson: op.cit. p. 276.
3. The Scotsman, 5th March, 1875.
4. Ashley: op. cit., 122.

There is an absence of melodrama, except in the scene in which Dexter becomes insane, which makes it superior to The Moonstone; and the construction is superior in that the fair-play rule is more carefully observed. In The Law and the Lady there is no shifting to another narrator as soon as too much is about to be revealed. Valeria Macallan tells her story candidly and honestly; we share her discoveries in full and have only ourselves to blame if we are nonplussed when she is not. Valeria proceeds with her investigation with an admirable singleness of purpose and refuses to be diverted from it in spite of seemingly insuperable obstacles. Though characterisation is subordinate to plot, Valeria emerges as a person who can love deeply, and who can overcome fear of personal danger and who can pursue a determined course with pertinacious obstinacy. Miserrimus Dexter and Ariel are penetrating studies in abnormal psychology: Dexter a sadistic psychopath and Ariel a masochistic moron. In his "Note addressed to the Reader", Collins says that "Characters which may not have appeared, and Events which may not have taken place, within the limits of our own individual experience, may nevertheless be perfectly natural Characters and perfectly probable Events, for all that."

This is a most interesting statement. Collins, as we have learned to know him, drew from personal experience and from the experience of those closely associated with him for his characters and the events which impinged upon their lives (even 'the moonstone', a genuine one, was in the possession of Reade). If Collins had no knowledge of persons in real life like Dexter and Ariel, then he has drawn on his imagination for the first time; or he has delved rather more

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deeply than usual into his "French Newgate Calendar".

The Law and the Lady, with its plot turning upon the Scottish verdict, is not a thesis novel. At no time does Collins express an opinion on Scottish law. The story is concerned with the consequences of a verdict of "not proven", but could just as well have been based on a verdict of guilty, provided a sentence had been served. If The Law and the Lady is to be accepted as a thesis novel, then The Woman in White with its implicit condemnation of asylums, and Basil with its outspoken comment on conditions in hospitals and on jerry-building should also be considered as theses novels.

The Law and the Lady was written as a work of fiction first and foremost, and Collins did not at any time re-cast it as a drama. The pace is good and there is not a single digression. Once again Collins proves himself a past-master in the technique of creating suspense. This is particularly clear in the chapter endings which are calculated to awaken the interest of the reader to the point of purchasing the next number:

> "'What!' I exclaimed, catching the infection of his excitement. 'Are your ideas, my ideas? Is it possible that you suspect Mrs Beauly too?'
> He made this remarkable reply:
> 'Suspect?' he repeated contemptuously. 'There isn't the shadow of a doubt about it. Mrs Beauly poisoned her.'" [1]

Collins once again makes use of scenic description to arouse in us a quickening expectancy, but his references to the environment and the weather are kept short, as in The Moonstone, and so do not interfere with the pace:

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1. Chap.29.

"As I opened the second cupboard, it struck me that the light was beginning to fail.

I looked at the window. It was hardly evening yet. The darkening of the light was produced by gathering clouds. Rain-drops pattered against the glass; the autumn wind whistled mournfully in the corners of the courtyard. I mended the fire before I resumed my search. My nerves were in fault again, I suppose. I shivered when I went back to the book-case. My hands trembled: I wondered what was the matter with me." [1]

Collins makes most effective use of the short presentative sentence to create mounting suspense.

In a longer passage he gives us one of his best descriptions of a sinister house. Valeria is on her way to meet Miserrimus Dexter for the first time:

"The sun was setting in heavy clouds when we got into the carriage, and the dreary twilight began to fall round us while we were still on the road .....

For more than an hour the carriage threaded its way through a dingy brick labyrinth of streets, growing smaller and smaller, and dirtier and dirtier, the further we went. Emerging from the labyrinth, I noticed in the gathering darkness dismal patches of waste ground which seemed to be neither town nor country. Crossing these we passed some forlorn outlying groups of houses with dim little scattered shops anong them, looking like lost country villages wandering on the way to London; disfigured and smoke-dried already by their journey! Darker and darker, drearier and drearier the prospect grew - until the carriage stopped at last ..... Right and left of me, in the dim light, I saw the half-completed foundations of new houses in their first stage of existence. Boards and bricks were scattered about us. At places, gaunt scaffolding-poles rose like the branchless trees of the brick-desert. Behind us, on the other side of the high road, stretched another plot of waste ground, as yet not built on. Over the surface of this second desert, the ghastly white figures of vagrant ducks gleamed at intervals in the mystic light. In front of us, at a distance of two hundred yards or so, as well as I could calculate, rose a black mass which gradually resolved itself, as my eyes became accustomed to the twilight, into a long, low and ancient house with a hedge of evergreens and a pitch-black paling in front of it. The footman led the way towards the paling, through the boards and the bricks, the oyster-shells and the broken crockery that strewed the ground .....
There was a gate in the pitch-black paling, and a bell-handle - discovered with great difficulty. Pulling at the handle, the footman set in motion, to judge by the sound produced, a bell of prodigious size, fitter for a church than a house." [2]

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1. Chap.10.
2. Chap. 24.

This is a fitting setting for the strange scenes which are to be enacted here. The passage quoted above also indicates that Collins has not forgotten what he had learned from Dickens.

Collins seems to have had a gift for seizing upon techniques which subsequent writers find indispensable for the writing of detective stories. In Chapter 9 Collins introduces us to a form of detective game, a development of the nursery game of "Animal, vegetable, or mineral?", into something similar to the "Twenty Questions Quiz", so popular nawadays in wireless programmes. Valeria has been told that Fitz-David cannot tell her about the mystery because he has sworn not to do so, but he will do nothing to prevent her from discovering it for herself. She asks if there is any clue to the mystery in his house and he says that there is. Upon further questioning, she establishes that the clue may be seen, and touched, and that it is to be found in that very room.

Valeria commences a systematic search, but she is working in the dark. She runs into one difficulty after another. A promising clue is found to lead nowhere. And the she finds the report on the trial of her husband for murder - and Collins cleverly makes the other seemingly loose threads fall deftly into place. The pattern set here is a pattern followed religiously by many Twentieth Century writers of stories of detection.

The Law and the Lady might seem to embody no pitting of strengths between the amateur detective and established authority, an ingredient common to most detective stories; but it is there. Valeria undertakes the task of reversing the verdict at the murder

(trial

trial, a verdict arrived at after Eustace's lawyers have done everything in their power to bring about an acquittal and her task is made all the more difficult because of the lapse of three years since the trial. Valeria's powers of sleuthing and detection make of this book a great success. The slightest hint, whether it be tone of voice, a strange set of initials, a little unexpected gesture, or an oblique reference to some person, is ruthlessly followed until she has found something which leads her a little nearer her goal.

The trial scene, in which all the drama of court procedure is cleverly exploited, also sets a pattern for subsequent writers to copy. Valeria's quality as a detective is especially evident here. In spite of the clever balance of evidence and counter-evidence, she sees immediately that it is all circumstantial; and that if her husband is not guilty, then suspicion must be shifted to one of the other persons involved. Valeria's analysis of the possibilities is masterly and prepares the way for Collins to lay his red herrings to practical purpose.

Once Mrs Beauly's guilt is firmly established, Collins deftly provides her with an excellent alibi and the hunt is on again. Collins finds it necessary to explain the meaning of the word 'alibi'; and we remind ourselves with a shock that The Law and the Lady was written sixteen years before the appearance of the first Sherlock Holmes story:

> "'The story permits of two interpretations. One on the surface, and another under the surface. I look under the surface, in your interests; and I say, it is just possible that Mrs Beauly may have been cunning enough to forestall suspicion, and to set up an alibi.'

('I

'I am ashamed to own that I did not understand what he meant by the last word - alibi. He saw that I was not following him, and he spoke out more plainly.

'Was the maid something more than her mistress's passive accomplice?' he said. 'Was she the Hand that her mistress used? Was she on her way to give the first dose of poison, when she passed me in the corridor, did Mrs Beauly spend the night in Edinburgh - so as to have her defence ready, if suspicion fell upon her?'" [1].

It may seem strange to persons who have become steeped in the ways of writers of detective fiction that Collins, who has already brought to our notice the dustheap at Gleninch, undisturbed after three years, finds it necessary, when the scraps of the torn letter are sought, to send a messenger to America to interrogate the maid responsible for cleaning up for the last time - but Collins was writing for the uninitiated.

Perhaps the most remarkable advance in Collins's technique as a writer is to be found in the first Mrs Macallan's letter. Though it is a moving, pathetic document revealing the woman's misery at the discovery that her husband loves another woman, there is not a vestige of melodrama. Her purpose is plain: she no longer wishes to live, but she wishes to warn her husband against his friend, and wishes to provide him with protection against suspicion.

Another feature common to modern detective novels, which we encounter for the first time in The Law and the Lady is the post mortem. Collins is the first to use this device to tie up all the loose threads.

And that is the final impression of The Law and the Lady: A story of detection, sensational but not melodramatic, a story possessing unity, excellent pace, clever sleuthing, and subtle deduction, and embodying the techniques of the fair-play rule, the least-likely-

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1. Chap. 35.

person motif, the red herring, the careful shifting of suspicion from one character to another, the drama of a court scene, the excitement of "Twenty Questions", a post mortem and Collins's first completely successful woman detective.

But the virtues of The Law and the Lady are not limited to those already mentioned. Woven onto the story and sharing in the unfolding of the plot are the two strange creatures, Miserrimus Dexter and Ariel. These are unusual people who are not easily portrayed with conviction, and Collins scores a remarkable triumph with his analysis and his inclusion of these two people in such a way that the unfolding of the plot depends upon them.

Collins's inspiration for Ariel was obviously Caliban; but his portrayal is not of a brute, but of a dim-witted creature pathetically loyal and devoted to Dexter, jealous of him, dominated by him, and proud of the little chores of which she is capable. Her distorted mind can conceive only of her submitting to physical pain as a means of atoning for Dexter's misery:

> "'Take this stick' - were the first words she said to me.
> 'Why am I to take it,' I asked.
> She struggled a little with her sluggishly-working mind, and slowly put her thoughts into words.
> 'You're angry with the master,' she said. 'Take it out on Me. Here's the stick. Beat me.'
> 'Beat you!' I exclaimed.
> 'My back's broad' said the poor creature. 'I won't make a row. I'll bear it. Drat you, take the stick! Don't vex him. Whack it out on my back. Beat me.'
> She roughly forced the stick into my hand; she turned her poor shapeless shoulders to me, waiting for the blow. It was at once dreadful and touching to see her. The tears rose in my eyes. I tried gently and patiently, to reason with her. Quite useless! The idea of taking the Master's punishment on herself was the one idea in her mind. 'Don't vex him', she repeated. 'Beat me.' .....

('Don't

'Don't do that!' I cried. She was still rocking herself in imitation of the "Master", and still staring into the fire with her hands to her head. 'Get up, pray! I am not angry with him now. I forgive him.'

She rose on her hands and knees, and waited, looking up intently into my face. In that attitude - more like a dog than a human being - she repeated her customary petition, when she wanted to fix words that interested her in her mind.

'Say it again!'

I did as she bade me. She was not satisfied.

'Say it as it is in the letter,' she went on. 'Say it as the Master said it to Me.' .....

'I forgive him; and one day I will let him see me again.'

She sprang to her feet at a bound. For the first time since she had entered the room, her dull face began to break slowly into light and life.

'That's it' she cried. 'Hear if I can say it too! Hear if I've got it by heart.'

Teaching her, exactly as I should have taught a child, I slowly fastened the message, word by word, on her mind."[1]

So convincingly has Collins portrayed Ariel, that her unwillingness to accept Dexter's death, her escape from the asylum and her death from exposure at Dexter's grave has the ring of truth.

Miserrimus Dexter is Collins's most acute study of character. He was born without legs and hops about on his hands, but this does not turn him merely into another Collins eccentricity with a deformity. His disfigurement has warped his mind. Chapter 24 gives a powerful picture of Miserrimus Dexter suffering from delusions of grandeur; and then we learn of the tortures suffered by this man who had fallen in love with the first Mrs Macallan, had worshipped her beautiful figure, and had seen himself spurned for Macallan who had married her to save her name, and not for love.

There is a strange appropriateness about his improvised song:

("Why

1. Chap. 36.

"Why does she come?
She reminds me of the lost;
She reminds me of the dead;
In her form like the other,
In her walk like the other?
Why does she come? .....

The Future will show.
Let the night pass;
Let the day come.
I shall see into her mind:
She will look into Mine.
The Future will show." [1.]

In Chapter 27 we are introduced to Dexter as an artist. Collins here foreshadows modern psychological practice in reading the workings of a man's mind by analysing his paintings. Later we see Dexter in the role of epicure and curator of a little private "chamber of horrors" [2.] and as a sadist. His streak of cruelty fits in with Ariel's desire for punishment and her pride in being able to bear pain:

"'Come in! Come in! I am in one of my malicious humours this morning, caused entirely Mrs Valeria, by my anxiety to see you. When I am in my malicious humours, I must tease something. I am teasing Ariel. Look at her! She has had nothing to eat all day, and she hasn't been quick enough to snatch a morsel of cake yet. You needn't pity her. Ariel has no nerves - I don't hurt her.'

'Ariel has no nerves,' echoed the poor creature, frowning at me for interfering between her master and herself. 'He doesn't hurt me.' .....

She passed me with the strings hanging from her swollen wrists, and the dish of cakes in her hand. She nodded at me defiantly.

'Ariel has got no nerves,' she repeated, proudly. 'He doesn't hurt me.'" [3.]

Finally comes the scene, reminiscent to some extent of the play-scene in Hamlet. Dexter tell his queer story of 'The Mistress and the Maid'. The scene is a "dark vaulted chamber in a castle. Time, evening. The owls are hooting in the wood; the frogs are croaking in the marsh." [4.] The diabolic tale unfolds: The mistress

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1. Chap. 25.
2. Chap. 29.
3. Chap. 40.
4. ibid.

has keys to the room in which the woman is to be poisoned; the maid is to provide the alibi; and is to show the letter. The story becomes incoherent, but there is the reference to the Diary and "Number Nine, Caldershaws. Ask for Dandie", which is to provide the vital clue to the murderer of Mrs Macallan.

The strain has been too much for Dexter. He forgets his story and refers to people living at Glen-inch.

" ..... he threw up both his hands above his head and burst into a frightful screaming laugh .. .....

He fell back in the chair. The shrill and dreadful laugh died away into a low sob. Then there was one long, deep, wearily-drawn breath. Then, nothing but a mute vacant face turning up to the ceiling, with eyes that looked blindly, with lips parted in a senseless, changeless grin."[1]

In The Law and the Lady Collins manages to give us characters portrayed better than we have come to expect in a novel of action. Valeria's husband does n not really come to life, but his mother rings true, and the lawyer, Mr Playmore, is as good as most of Collins's long list of lawyers - yet he is more than merely a repetition. In Major Fitz-David we see something of Collins in his younger days. He is jolly, and is interested in making of Miss Hoighty, whom he has rescued from washing dishes in a refreshment-room at a railway station, a prima donna who is to startle the world with the beauty of her voice. He is desolate when he marries her and robs the world of a great singer. He shows Valeria a bullet wound:

"'Not received in the service of my country - oh, dear no! Received in the service of a much-injured lady, at the hands of her scoundrel of a husband, in a duel abroad. Well, she was worth it! ..... That fine estate once belonged to me. It was sold years and years

(since.

1. Chap. 40.


Wilkie Collins
To Harry Quilter
1887

since. And who had the money? The women - God bless them all! - the women. I don't regret it. If I had another estate, I have no doubt it would go the same way.'" [1]

The Law and the Lady is pre-eminent in the creation of suspense; in the way in which each piece fits finally into the puzzle, quite justifiably; and in the way in which the secret is kept till the closing pages. Collins has lost none of his inventiveness and writes with greater technical skill than ever. To those who believe that at this time Collins was past his best and that he was the wreck of a man as a result of ill-health and drugs, I would like to recommend a second glance at a photograph taken in 1874. It shows an alert face, lively eyes and nothing that we might expect to see in the face of a drug-addict. Collins was then fifty years of age.

According to Davis, "it sold very well and was immediately translated into French, German, Italian, Russian and Dutch." [2]

The Clergyman's Confession appeared in The Canadian Monthly from August to September, 1875. In Little Novels (1887) its title was Miss Jéromette and the Clergyman. This short story is an unhappy venture into the realm of the occult. The man who tells the story reads for the law "to enjoy the pleasures of London life". He has an affair with Jéromette who tells him of another man in her past. She believes that the day "of his return will bring with it the darkest days of my life", and she says "I shall die young, and die miserably".

(In

1. Chap. 9.
2. Davis N.P.: op. cit., p. 282.

In deference to his mother's dying wish the narrator takes Orders, obtains a living, and takes in pupils to help him eke out an existence. Among these is a gentleman of about his own age who is something of a mystery. When this man leaves hurriedly for London after receiving a letter, the clergyman finds a photograph of Jéromette left behind. An apparition in the form of a mist, changes into the shape of Jéromette and kisses him. The next day the newspapers carry the news of the murder of Jéromette and the arrest of a young man who is later set free. The clergyman is convinced of the young man's guilt but holds his peace.

Collins fails in his attempt to create an atmosphere of the uncanny; the story is thin; and the characterisation negligible. It is likely that Collins dashed this off in preparation for The Two Destinies.

Miss Gwilt, the dramatic version of Armadale, was printed in 1875 and produced at the Globe Theatre in 1876. It would seem that Collins's thoughts were once again turning to destiny and the occult. The Two Destinies ran in Temple Bar from January to August, 1876 and was published in two volumes in the same year. It is rather shorter than the novels immediately preceding it.

## v : A Series of Failures

The Two Destinies, which Collins dedicated to Charles Reade, is quite unlike anything he had written before. Robinson tells us that at this time Collins was much occupied with stage rehearsals and casting his novels into dramatic form. This might explain The

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Two Destinies. It is disappointingly devoid of almost everything which we have come to associate with Collins. It is a flat, uninspired tale, rather thin, incredible and even ridiculous, and spun out clumsily with a succession of digressions. The references to telepathy and fate are lacking in atmosphere, there is practically no plot and not a character worth mentioning. Davis suggests that ill-health was the cause; and we know that in the following year Collins went on a trip to the Continent and had great trouble in keeping himself supplied with a sufficient quantity of laudanum. He returned, according to his friends, looking twenty years younger.

George and Mary form a childhood attachment for each other, but they are parted at the age of thirteen. Mary speaks to George in his dreams and, at the age of twenty-three he returns to seek her, but without success. Chance takes him to a bridge from which Mary jumps into the river. He saves her life, but does not recognise in her his childhood companion as she has married and he learns only her married name. Likewise, she fails to identify him because he has taken his step-father's name. Years pass, and chance or fate brings them together again. They discuss their telepathic communication, and Mary tells him of her bigamous marriage to a Hollander. Still they do not see in each other the companions of their childhood. After a passage of time they meet on the Continent; then again in London; and this sets the pattern for the rest of the story. They marry at last but are not accepted by George's friends because of Mary's unfortunate association with the Dutchman.

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In The Two Destinies we find no complicated plot, no theme other than that destiny exercises some obscure and ill-defined purpose in the lives of the main characters. There is no mystery, no suspense, nothing surprising - only the incredible.

One scene comes to life; but it serves no legitimate purpose in the story. This is the description of George, lost on the moors of Shetland. This takes us all the way back to The Memoirs of the Life of William Collins (1848), in which Collins described how he and his father had been lost under similar circimstances.

The Two Destinies is Collins's first complete failure.

The Captain's Last Love appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 23rd December, 1876. There is no record of periodical publication in England, but it was included in Little Novels (1887) as Mr Captain and the Nymph. This is a ridiculously far-fetched story about the captain of a ship which is driven off course and arrives at an uncharted island. The crew is made welcome but warned to keep away, upon pain of death, from a neighbouring island which is inhabited only by their priest and his beautiful daughter. Needless to say, the captain visits this island and plays Ferdinand to his Miranda. There is a volcanic eruption, and the island sinks into the sea taking with it his beloved and her father. The captain is rescued by his crew but deserts the sea and will not consider marriage.

Collins's description of the first meeting of the lovers is daring for his own time:

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"She admired the beautiful stranger as she might have admired a new bird that had flown to her to be fondled with the rest. She patted his fair white skin, and wished she had a skin like it. She lifted the great glossy folds of her long black hair and compared it with the Captain's bright curly locks, and longed to change colours with him from the bottom of her heart. His dress was a wonder to her; his watch was a new revelation. She rested her head on his shoulder to listen delightedly to the ticking, as he held the watch to her ear. Her fragrant breath played on his face, her warm supple figure rested against him softly. The Captain's arm stole round her waist, and the Captain's lips gently touched her cheek. She lifted her head with a look of pleased surprise. 'Thank you' said the child of nature simply. 'Kiss me again; I like it. May I kiss you?'"

Percy and the Prophet appeared in All the Year Round on the 2nd July, 1877 and was included in Little Novels as Mr Percy and the Prophet. In this story, rather longer than most of his short stories, Collins shows something of his old self. But it cannot be compared with his best short stories.

In an atmosphere redolent of the supernatural, Dr Legarde, a fortune-teller, warns Mr Percy and Captain Bervie that he sees them fighting a duel for the love of a lady. Percy is sceptical, as Bervie is a stranger to him and he cannot place the woman described. Bervie, however, seems strangely moved and departs. The visionary sees in his trance the captain persuading the lady to fly with him. Dr Legarde ends the seance and will tell Percy no more. This story now follows, in miniature, the pattern of Armadale: the events in the vision all come true.

The elopement theme is a favourite of Collins's, but his adoption of fortune-telling as the basis for a story is something new. The atmosphere during the seance is well done, the discovery of a spy employed as