in The Yellow Mask. He is no stock villain, but is beloved by the poor for his good works and is led from one wrong to another by his obsession. When Nanina discovers his complicity, Rocco accepts it as God's will that he "is rejected as the instrument of securing a righteous restitution to the Church", and encourages Nanina to report everything she had learned.

Brigida is, thus far, Collins's best Jezebel, but she is too consistently scheming and insensitive and callous to be altogether credible. Nanina is portrayed with great sympathy, and both she and her sister live. In one respect, however, she does not ring true. When she accepts voluntary banishment for love of Fabio, she learns to write, and within a few months pens an epistle which might well be the envy of many a graduate.

Collins has learned the economy of words. Brigida is described as "a tall woman, with bold black eyes, a reckless manner, and a step as firm as a man's". He is, however, taken up with Brigida to the point where the novelette is robbed of its unity. In consideration of the small part she has to play, far too much space is devoted to her.

The Yellow Mask was later to serve as the source for The Black Robe (1880), one of Collins's most unfortunate novels.

After visiting Dickens at Folkestone, Collins joined a friend, Pigott, on a sailing trip to the Scilly Isles. This experience he immediately seized upon in The Cruise of the Tomtit, the first piece of

non-fiction by Collins to appear in Household Words (22nd Dec.,1855), is written with the exuberance of a young man relating his adventures. It reads well and embodies a charming description of Clovelly.

For the Extra Christmas Number of Household Words, The Holly Tree Inn (Dec., 1855), Collins contributed The Ostler's Story. This story was to have a rather chequered career. In 1859 it was re-published without change in The Queen of Hearts as The Dream Woman; in 1867 Collins expanded and adapted this story for public readings while on his American tour; in the same year it was adapted once more for inclusion in The Frozen Deep and other tales as The Dream Woman; a Mystery in Four Narratives. Furthermore, a pirated edition appeared in America with the title of Alicia Warlock (1875).

The Ostler, which occupies only twenty-two pages as reprinted in The Queen of Hearts, as compared with eighty-nine pages in the expanded version, is of especial interest because it presents an excellent opportunity of assessing Collins's improved skill after a period of twelve years. When I deal later with the expanded version of The Dream Woman it will be seen that many of the weaknesses of The Ostler have been eliminated.

The ostler, while spending a night at an inn, awakes to find a woman with a bright new clasp-knife standing beside his bed. He rolls out of the way just in tim time to escape the knife which she repeatedly plunges into the mattress. The light flickers, and when he is able to see again, there is no sign of the woman. He

(leaves

leaves the inn immediately and, on his return home, describes his adventure to his mother. She writes down the details of the time and place and a description of the woman.

Many years later the ostler encounters a woman pleading with an apothecary for a supply of laudanum. He befriends this woman, who still shows some signs of early refinement, falls in love with her and marries her in spite of his mother's convincing him that his wife is the woman of his dream. His wife soon changes towards him, takes to drink and keeps undesirable company. One day he finds her cutting bread with a new clasp-knife identical with that he had seen at the inn. She refuses to give it up and in the ensuing quarrel he strikes her. She leaves the house, but returns to re-enact the scene at the inn. The ostler leaves for ever and, as he does so, realises that the day and the time are identical with those in the dream at the inn. From that time on his sleep is troubled with evil dreams.

This story is most unsatisfactory in many ways. There is no rational explanation of the original dream and we are required to accept implicitly as an accurate augury the ostler's dream. The woman's early history, the reasons for her downfall, and the reasons for her turning against him, are all left unexplained. The motives given to explain the ostler's not marrying earlier, are not convincing; nor can we understand how the ostler keeps his place when he sleeps all day. His mother's initial suspicions seem to be groundless and her writing down of the details of his dream in expectation of

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needing them again seems to be far-fetched. The chance meeting of the woman of his dream in the apothecary's shop, her purchase of a clasp-knife identical with that the ostler had seen in his dream and her attack on him at the very hour presaged make great demand on any reader's credulity. The Ostler is not to be compared with the best of Collins's work written previously, and he must have been dissatisfied with its defects because the revised version (1874) eliminates most of these defects.

After Dark, a collection of stories already published (with the exception of The Lady of Glenwith Grange, which appeared for the first time) was brought out in February, 1856. The work is provided with a connecting narrative which, though unnecessary, is ingenious. Here Collins draws a convincing picture of an itinerant portrait painter who relates the stories told him by his clients during sittings.

The Lady of Glenwith Grange is a poor story. Rosamond marries an imposter. The law catches up with him and he is killed while trying to escape. Rosamond dies in childbirth. Yet the story has pace, and once again we have a house which reminds us of Satis House in Great Expectations (1860). The double identity motif which was lacking in Sister Rose to make a comparison with A Tale of Two Cities even closer, is found in this story which antedates Dickens's story by three years. There is an abnormal child, some good building up of atmosphere, some excellent word painting, and a detective: but the humour is clumsy and forced.

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In February, 1856, Collins went to visit Dickens in Paris, but ill-health struck once again (it has been suggested that he caught a chill on one of his nocturnal expeditions)[1]. After being bed-ridden in Paris for a while, he returned to London where, as his mother and brother were staying in the country, he was confined to his bed in lodgings. It was typical of Collins that he should turn even his misfortunes into capital; and Laid up in Lodgings[2] provides an interesting contrast in the attitudes of a landlady in Paris and a landlady in London. Collins's observations on the treatment of domestic servants show that he had acquired an understanding of them such as other novelists might have envied. In later novels his servants are portrayed with conviction.

A Rogue's Life (March, 1856) is different from anything which Collins had written hitherto and he was to write nothing quite like it subsequently. In character and flavour it harks back to Richardson and Fielding. It was published in Household Words in five parts, and Collins later stated that he had intended to expand it into a full length novel - but he never did so.

Though this novelette reads fast and has good pace, it cannot be compared with either Basil or Hide and Seek. These are studies of wayward young men, but they are certainly not rogues; they are guilty of peccadilloes to be expected of spirited young Victorians. We learn

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1. Robinson: op.cit.: p.95.
2. Household Words, June, 1856.

to know them in the round, while Frank Softly never comes altogether to life. However, we enjoy following his adventures and grudgingly admire the insouciance with which he extricates himself from one predicament, only to fall into a worse one. This rogue's attitude to responsibily, financial and otherwise, is not unlike that of Mr Micawber. Collins excuses the "tone of almost boisterous gaiety in certain parts of these imaginary confessions" [1] by pleading that they were written at a very happy time in his life. He states, quite correctly of his rogue, that "he is never serious for two moments together and he 'doesn't take long to read.'"

The rogue's story is episodic in type and carries us along with it - the autobiography of a high-spirited, irresponsible young man of good family, telling of his procession from one mad adventure to another. He is by turns a medical student, a caricaturist, a convicted criminal, an artist of sorts, a librarian, accessory to a forger, and a convict who is transported to Australia, where he eventually becomes a successful merchant.

The story contains ingredients which we recognise as being typical of Collins: the forger, the well-laid plans for an elopement, the highly melodramatic machinery created by Collins's first arch-criminal, Dr Dulcifer. A Rogue's Life possesses unity within its diversity and reads much better than does The Yellow Mask; but it is without much significance as a pointer to future excellences. It may be that Collins was correct in saying

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1. Preface.

that not re-writing this story and expanding it was "one of the lost opportunities of my life."

The pre-eminent excellence of The Diary of Anne Rodway, which appeared in three issues of Household Words in July, 1856, is the tautness of the plot, the economy in the telling and the use of character portrayal as an integral part of the unfolding of the plot. This is a mystery story in which a woman is the detective. It is true that chance provides the first clue, but the successive steps in the detection, leading to the running down of the criminal, are dealt with rationally and in a manner to arouse the greatest interest in the reader.

This is Collins's first real detective story, and the first story in which the detective is a woman. There is nothing false or forced in the story of a poor needle-woman who, for love of a friend, cannot rest until she has set right the wrong done to her friend.

As indicated by the title, the story is in diary form throughout, a form which Collins handles with great skill and which he is to employ to good effect in his best work. What he learned of housemaids while in lodgings (and doubtless on other occasions) is put to good use in this story. His picture of the way of life and thought of the mid-Victorian lower classes is most convincing and, in its way, better than anything similar done by Dickens.

Anne Rodway does not believe that Mary Mallinson's death is accidental, and because of her belief and perseverance, she succeeds in tracking down the murderer and establishing his guilt.

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In October, 1856 Collins was invited by Dickens to join the staff of *Household Words*, and this he did after some hesitation. The advantages were obvious: a regular income and close association with Dickens, whom he admired greatly and from whom he could learn a great deal. But these advantages were counterbalanced by serious disadvantages: Collins was not attracted by regular hours; the salary did not offer any real incentive; and he would be constrained to write according to the requirements of the periodical and not according to his inspiration. His output of fiction while he was associated with *Household Words* and, subsequently, *All the Year Round*, was relatively low; though he did produce *The Woman in White* during this period.

The best that can be said of his association with *Household Words* is that it does not seem to have done him much harm. On the other hand, had he continued to develop his skill as a story-teller after the pattern we have already seen, and had he devoted his energies to this aspect of his art while his powers were still developing and before ill-health claimed him, he might well have written more novels of the quality of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*.

V : Working for Dickens

Few of the articles which Collins wrote for *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* possess much appeal for us today. Most deal with matters of purely topical interest. *Laid up in Lodgings* is strongly

(autobiographical

autobiographical and also shows that he has been learning something of the way of life of servants; Mrs Badgery and Mrs Bullwinkle provide him with the knowledge he requires for the true portrayal of landladies and women occupying a similar position in life. There are a few articles which are near-fiction: A Queen's Revenge is an historical piece, but is written with a touch which is typically Collins; The Little Huguenot is, we are told, a true story of the escape from death of a young French boy; The Poisoned Meal, Memoirs of an Adopted Son and The Cauldron of Oil read well, but are still too close to the court records from which they were taken to be accepted as fiction. [1]

Here and there we find a scrap of self-revelation and indirect evidence on Collins's attitudes.

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1. In a footnote to the first page of Memoirs of an Adopted Son, as it appears in My Miscellanies, Collins writes: "The curious legend connected with the birth of this 'Adopted Son', and the facts relating to his extraordinary career in after life, are derived from the 'Records' of the French police of the period. In this instance, and in the instances of those other papers in the present collection which deal with foreign incidents and characters, while the facts of each narrative exist in print, the form in which the narrative is cast is of my own devising. If these facts had been readily accessible to readers on general, the papers in question would not have been reprinted. But the scarce and curious books from which my materials are derived, have been long since out of print, and are, in all human probability, never likely to be published again."

An immediate result of Collins's joining the staff of Household Words was his collaboration with Dickens in The Wreck of the Golden Mary for the Christmas Number, though there must have been some previous planning of the piece. This is the third Christmas story on which Collins collaborated with Dickens, and he was to hold the distinction of being the only writer with whom Dickens worked on one story. From 1854 until Household Words came to an end in 1859, Collins worked with Dickens on each Christmas Number.

Any assessment of the degree of collaboration is beset with pitfalls. For instance, van Thal [1] holds that Dickens wrote "The Wreck" and Collins the remainder. Robinson [2] believes that Collins contributed only two chapters: "John Steadiman's Account" and "The Deliverance". Davis [3] writes: "Wilkie wrote all the number except the description of the shipwreck and a section in the middle called 'The Beguilement of the Boats'. To make up this part Dickens canvassed lesser members of his clique for contributions." Ashley [4] says that Collins helped Dickens, planned the story and joined with him in composing the frame narrative. Parrish [5] gives "The Beguilement in the Boats", "The Deliverance" and part of "The Wreck" as being by Collins. To confound confusion, The Wreck of the Golden Mary was published in one volume in 1898 as being "by Charles Dickens and Others". No evidence is adduced by any of the writers above as grounds for their opinions.

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1. Introduction to The Wreck of the Golden Mary (Arthur Barker, London, 1955), p. 14.
2. Robinson: op.cit. p. 106.
3. Davis: op. cit. p. 92.
4. Ashley: op. cit. p. 46.
5. Parrish: op. cit., p. 30.

The Wreck of the Golden Mary consists of three parts, "The Wreck", "The Beguilement in the Boats" and "The Deliverance". Chapter IV of part One consists of John Steadiman's Account. There can be no doubt that the first three chapters were written by Dickens. The richness of figures, the romantic sentiment, the approach to women characters, the idealised picture of the child and the exuberance of style, label this section as being altogether characteristic of Dickens.

In Chapter IV, the style changes abruptly, becomes methodical and the threads are picked up in a rather pedestrian fashion, where Dickens left off. There is internal evidence which makes me inclined to label this as Collins's work: He writes "When the ship struck the iceberg, he had to run on deck, leaving his shoes in his cabin." This preference of the past tense above the pluperfect is typical of Collins. Further on he writes: "Before I go on to relate what happened after the two boats were under my command, I will stop a little here, ..." This use of 'will' is also characteristic of Collins.

Part II, "The Beguilement of the Boats", consists of five chapters, each containing a complete story with some connecting narrative. Chapter I contains the armourer's story of Will Whichelo who killed Mary Arthur's lover, a rich young philanderer from London, after she had trifled with Whichelo's affections. This was in all probability written by Collins. There is a Jezebel of sorts, the setting is a quaint village in Cornwall, there are references to painters, the descriptions have a typically graphic Collins quality about them, and

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there is a consciousness of colour which we have found before in Collins:

"For that matter, I am looking at it this moment, standing, as it might be, at the corner of the road, looking down the slope. There was the old church, just here on the right, with a slanting roof running to the ground, almost ..... Then, going down the hill, a little further on, you met queer, old-fashioned houses, with great shingle roofs. Beyond that again, was a puzzling bit of building, like the half of a church window, standing up quite stiff by itself."

And further on:

"There was a sort of open place in front of the Joyful Heart, with a market-cross in the middle, and a spring where the young women used to come for water and stand talking there, telling each other the news. The painters used to put them down, too - spring and all; and I don't wonder their fancying them. For, when I was sitting that way in the porch, looking out at them, the red petticoats and the queer jars, and the old cross, and the sun going down behind made a kind of picture, very pretty to look at."

This could well be the work of one who had had a picture hung in the Royal Academy and who had been rambling in Cornwall.

Chapter II contains the story of Dick, a young wastrel who is being sent to California on remittance. He had loved Amy, three years older than he, and when she married he took to a life of drink and gambling, running through a fortune in the process. This is a slight story which could have been written by anyone. There is nothing in it which is strikingly reminiscent of Collins. Amy might be said to be as saccharine as some of the women in his poorer short stories, but the absence of any plot, any suspense and any descriptive passages, and the nature of the dialogue, point to the work of another hand. The last two pages, including the child's hymn, remind us of Dickens, and bring us back to the boats.

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The third story in this section is derivative, and contains references to paintings; mentions the "dull, indigo tint" of the waves; possesses atmosphere, suspense, a workmanlike exposition, a dream-fantasy and descriptions typical of Collins.

Jan Fagel one Christmas kidnapped the wife and child of a man who had crossed him. When pursued by a British frigate in a wild and stormy sea, he throws the woman and child overboard. A wild frenzy seizes him and, in his crazy caperings, he trips, falls overboard and is drowned. Every Christmas since then, if the sea is stormy, his brig haunts the bay, preventing ships from leaving harbour.

Here is a description of a cabin on a ship:

"By the light of a dull oil-lamp overhead, that never for a moment ceased swinging, I tried to make out what my new abode was like. It was of an ancient massive fashion, with a dark oak panelling all round, rubbed smooth in many places by wear of time and friction. All round were queer little nobs and projections, mounted in brass and silver, just like the butt-ends of pistols; while here and there were snug recesses that reminded me of canon's stalls in a cathedral. The swinging lamp gave but a faint yellow light, that scarcely reached beyond the centre of the room, so that the oak-work all round cast little grotesque shadows, which had a very gloomy and depressing effect."

This is seen with the eyes of a painter. The method is typical of Collins.

In Chapter IV, the old seaman sings a ballad about a shipwrecked sailor who returns after many years in foreign lands only to find that his wife has re-married. Henceforth he is doomed to wander in strange lands.[1] The poor quality of the verse and the trick of throwing two quatrains of ballad metre together into one stanza, indicate that this ballad is probably by the same writer responsible for the ballads in The seven Poor Travellers.

(It

1. This ballad was possibly Tennyson's source of inspiration for <u>Enoch Arden</u> (1861).

It is in all probability by Collins, but contributes nothing to our study.

The last story is written in Scottish dialect, a form of which Collins was chary, even in stories such as Mr Marmaduke and the Minister, with a Scottish setting and characters.[1] As it evinces no other evidence of being the work of Collins, we may ascribe it to some anonymous writer.

Part III, "The Deliverance", is certainly not the work of Dickens. The pattern for the Christmas Numbers has already emerged: Dickens, sometimes with Collins as collaborator, conceived a frame-work which would bring diverse characters together, each telling a tale after the pattern originally set by Chaucer. Once the stories were to hand, the nature of the characters would be moulded so as to make the stories come naturally from them. In The Wreck of the Golden Mary this same pattern seems to have been followed, but Collins was given more to write than any other contributor to any of Dickens's Christmas Numbers. In "The Deliverance" the methodical approach, the rational quality, the neat tying up of loose threads, the recurrence of the phrase "a lurid bluish-white light", the rather prosy style typical of Collins when he was not inspired, all indicate that Collins was solely responsible for this last part.

All in all, Collins's share in this Christmas Number shows little advance in technique: to him it seems to have been nothing more than a piece of hack-work.

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1. An exception is Man and Wife.

HALF-PAGE FROM DRAFT MS. OF 'BASIL'

Approximate size of original

vi : The Making of a Craftsman

When Collins had been approached on the question of joining the staff of Household Words, he was not unaware of the possible advantages; but he was only too aware of the disadvantages. The time he would have to devote to the writing of articles for the periodical would leave just so much less time for the writing of fiction and plays; the regular hours, the discipline and the salary of five guineas a week: these considerations made him hesitate. Dickens, through his manager, Wills, put the case well:

> "Of course he should have permission to collect his writings, and would be handsomely and generously considered in all respects. I think it would do him, in the long run, a world of good; and I am certain that by meeting together - dining three instead of two - and sometimes calling in Morley to boot - we should knock out much new fire.
>
> What it is desirable to put before him, is the regular association with the work, and the means he already has of considering whether it would be pleasant and useful to him to work with me, and whether any mere trading engagement would be likely to render him as good service.[1]

Collins had, however, the temerity to suggest that he would suffer, as his contributions might be ascribed to Dickens. He suggested that his articles appear under his own name and that he be permitted to publish a full-length novel serially in Household Words.

While Dickens would not capitulate on the question of signed articles, he agreed to accept a serialised novel, provided it did not run for more than six months, and he agreed to advertising the forthcoming novel under Collins's name. Collins then suggested that publication of the serial might begin when he had written one half or a third, but Dickens generously expressed

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1. Dexter W.: op. cit., Vol. II, p. 801.

his confidence in Collins and suggested that the parts be published as they were written. Dickens must, however, have been more interested in Collins's periodical contributions, because he wrote to Wills to the effect that he doubted the value of the novel to Household Words.[1]

So The Dead Secret ran in Household Words from January to June, 1857. It represents something of a milestone in Collins's career. It was the first novel which he wrote specifically for periodical publication, and the first which began to appear in parts before it was completely written. He found this rather a strain. He was learning new skills in the way of turning out regular articles for Household Words, he was collaborating with Dickens on the Christmas Numbers, he was working on the play, The Frozen Deep, and he was, at the best of times, a tortuous writer - an examination of his MSS will reveal. Indeed, he failed to produce one instalment on time.

The Dead Secret was important to Collins in that it brought him a host of new readers who liked it as a serial. When it was published in two volumes in June, 1857, Bradbury and Evans so underestimated the demand that it was soon completely sold out - and today this first edition remains one of the rarer items for collectors. Though it represents no great advance on either Basil or Hide and Seek, it does present certain features which constitute an improvement in technique. There is an improved balance between character, humour

and

1. Dexter W.: op.cit., Vol. II, p. 801.

and plot; though it must be admitted that the plot is not yet complex enough for a full-length novel of sensation.

Collins was never one to be reticent about his aims. In his preface he tells us that he intended with Sarah Leeson to trace

"the influence of a heavy responsibility on a naturally timid woman, whose mind was neither strong enough to bear it, nor bold enough to drop it altogether."

In a preface to a later edition he writes:

"After careful consideration, and after trying the experiment both ways, I thought it most desirable to let the effect of the story depend on expectation rather than surprise." [1]

In the first of these aims he did not altogether succeed. Sarah Leeson does not capture our interest; indeed we find that we are impatient with this woman who has sworn to her mistress that she will reveal the secret, who flees in terror from the responsibility of such a revelation, and yet acts with the greatest determination in doing everything possible to prevent her daughter from discovering the very secret she has sworn to reveal. This in spite of her being in abject terror of being haunted by her mistress if she does not carry out the terms of her oath.

The secret is soon told: Rosamond Treverton is Sarah Leeson's child and is thus not entitled to the fortune which she has inherited. Though this theme of illegitimacy was a favourite with Victorians, in this novel there does seem to be much ado about nothing. Collins did not commit a similar error in <u>The Woman in White</u>, his next novel: the weak-minded Anne Catherick

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1. This is a method he was to use to good effect later in <u>No Name</u> and <u>Armadale</u>.

is given a subordinate part to play, and the plot is much more complex. Only in the closing chapters is all revealed.

The Dead Secret, though there is an advamce in technical skill, is not written with the conviction of Basil or Hide and Seek. It has been said that every man has at least one novel in him : At this stage Collins seems to have written himself out of everything of an autobiographical nature. Great changes were to come about in his life before he was ready to write The Woman in White. The Dead Secret is more concentrated than his previous novels and is better balanced, but he is not yet quite at home with his humour; his eccentric characters and the occasional passages embodying some sort of social protest do not come from the heart as they did in his previous novels: it would seem that he is writing to conform to the editorial policy of Household Words, i.e. to please Dickens.[1] Andrew Treverton, Rosamond's uncle, and his servant, Shrowl, are eccentric characters after the manner of Dickens's earlier works. In spite of this imitation, the scenes in which they appear are eminently readable. Uncle Joseph, while he compares well with Pesca in The Woman in White, is tiresome in his constantly recurring love for his music box which, it seems, can play only one tune from Mozart; in other respects he is a most sympathetically pertrayed character.

Considered as a tentative move in the direction

(of

1. Book II, Chap. 3: Rosamond disagrees with her husband when he maintains that the well-being of society depends on distinctions in rank. Though Collins from time to time hit out against the unjust use of power by the rich, and, though he was sympathetic to the serving class, he upheld consistently the privileges of the class to which he belonged.

of a sensation novel, The Dead Secret brings Collins nearer his aim, but has not yet achieved full success. Once the secret is revealed, there is scarcely enough intrinsic interest to carry the story through to the end. The discovery of the secret has little effect on the fortunes of those involved, and is not sufficiently important to string together satisfactorily the episodes in the instalments. Furthermore, though Collins has paid attention to other aspects of his craft, everything is too much subordinated to his main aim: the creation of mystery and suspense.

"Make 'em wait" said Collins, and he was certainly a past-master in this art; but his effects are sometimes altogether too contrived. After the convergence of the rivals upon the secret, and a most exciting chase this is, we may in all fairness expect to have the secret revealed to us at last. But Collins manages to spin out his narrative for another fifty pages before the contents of the secret document, which contains nothing new for the reader, are revealed. Every possible obstruction has been put in the way: Rosamond first assesses the possibilities of the drawing-room as a living-room; next she chooses the bedroom which they are to use; they have tea and then their evening meal. At this stage Rosamond regrets that it is too late to begin exploring. Morning arrives six pages later, but we have to read on for another twenty-five pages and wait impatiently for the plan of the ruined north wing to arrive, for Rosamond to summon up her courage to enter the room; for her to describe in the

(greatest

greatest detail the room to her blind husband; and for the following of many false trails. At last the letter is in her hand:

"'I will read it to you directly, Lenny,' she said, dropping into the nearest seat, and languidly pushing her hair back from her temples. 'But put it away for a few minutes now, and let us talk of anything else you like that does not remind us of the Myrtle Room. I am very capricious, am I not, to be so suddenly weary of the very subject that I have been fondest of talking about for so many weeks past?'"

And so they talk small-talk for another five pages. At last the letter is read. In bald terms it informs them of what they had already expected.

We now know the story in its entirety: Sarah Leeson had had an illegitimate child which Mrs Treverton, her mistress, had imposed upon her husband as his. This child is Rosamond and, when she learns the truth, she renounces the fortune to her uncle, the rightful heir. In a manner which is most uncharacteristic of him, the uncle returns the money to them. The Dead Secret was well named, for any life in the story comes from the characterisation and the atmosphere created, rather than the strained efforts to breathe life into the revelation of what Sarah Leeson was at pains to hide when she had every reason in the world to make all known.

I cannot find myself at all in agreement with the eulogistic terms which Swinburne employs to describe The Dead Secret:

"But in The Dead Secret Wilkie Collins made his mark for the first time as a writer who could do something well worth doing. The skill of the plot, the construction, and the narrative, whatever such skill may be worth, was far beyond the reach of any contemporary, however far above him in the loftier and clearer qualities of genius. Dickens never wrote and Thackeray never tried to write a story so excellent in construction and so persistent in its hold on the reader's curiosity ..)[1]

(In

1. Swinburne A.C.: Studies in Prose and Poetry, p. 112.

In a novel which sets out to be sensational, Collins was remarkably successful in breathing life into many characters. It is true that some remain little more than dummies, however. Leonard Frankland, Rosamond's blind husband, is insipid, stuffy and colourless. Collins makes use of his blindness only to afford Rosamond sufficient opportunity to inform the reader, through Frankland, of the nature of their surroundings. Here is no study of a physical disability comparable to that of Madonna in Hide and Seek.

Sarah Leeson, because her mind is "not strong enough", acts so as to alienate our sympathies.

Rosamond, impulsive, warm-hearted, good-tempered, strong-minded, attractive and capricious, is the best of Collins's heroines to date. She is intelligent and capable, a worthy forerunner to Marion Halcombe.

Except for his rather tiresome eccentricity, Uncle Joseph is a most likeable character. He shows at his best when called upon to assist Sarah in her distress:

> "'On my way back to my own home at Truro, I am frightened for Sarah, because of the faint she fell into on your stairs here, and because of the look on her face that it makes me heavy at my heart to see. Also, I am sorry for her sake, because she has not done that one curious little thing which she came into the house to do. I fret about these same matters, but I console myself too; and my comfort is that Sarah will stop with me in my house at Truro, and that I shall make her happy and well again, as soon as we are settled in our life together.'"[1]

With his simple affection, delicacy of feeling and readiness to sacrifice his interests for those of Sarah, who really had very little claim upon him, he is an early sketch for Pesca in The Woman in White.

(Andrew

1. Book I, Chap. 1.

Andrew Treverton [1], a misanthropic recluse, is drawn larger than life, but brings some interest to a sagging story. Though his change of heart, after he has become convinced of the genuineness of Rosamond's honesty and unselfishness, does not ring true, there remain shreds of his former caustic and cynical attitude:

"''I rather wish I had brought Shrowl here with me,' he said to himself, I should like him to have seen this. It staggers me, and I rather think it would have staggered him. Both these people,' continued Mr Treverton, looking perplexedly from Rosamond to Leonard and from Leonard back again to Rosamond, 'are, to all outward appearance, human beings. They walk on their hind legs, they express ideas readily by uttering articulate sounds, they have the usual allowance of features, and in respect of weight, height, and size, they appear to me to be mere average human creatures of the regular civilised sort. And yet, there they sit, taking the loss of a fortune of forty thousand pounds as easily as Croesus, King of Lydia, might have taken the loss of a halfpenny!'" [2]

Some of the most delightful characters in The Dead Secret have no right in a novel of this type. We are fascinated by them - and then they are dropped before they have served any function. Foremost of these is Mr Phippen, a dyspeptic philosopher who weighs out his bread and measures his tea. In his pre-occupation with his visceral sensations, he provides us with the best humorous passages in this novel:

"'Digestively considered, Miss Sturch, even the fairest and youngest of us is an Apparatus. Oil our wheels, if you like; but clog them at your peril. Farinaceous puddings and mutton-chops: mutton-chops and farinaceous puddings - those should be the parents' watch-words, if I had my way, from one end of England to the other. Look here, my sweet child, look at me. There is no fun, dear, about these little scales, but dreadful earnest. See! I put in the balance on one side, dry bread (stale, dry bread, Amelia!), and on the other some ounce weights. 'Mr Phippen, eat by weight; Mr Phippen, eat the same quantity, day by day, to a

(hair's-breadth.

1. Baker in his History of the English Novel (Vol. VIII, p. 195) refers to Treverton and his servant, Shrowl, as "Trevanion and Squelch".

hair's-breadth. Mr Phippen, exceed your allowance (though it is only stale dry bread) if you dare!' Amelia, love, this is not fun - this is what the doctors tell me - the doctors, my child, who have been searching my Apparatus through and through for thirty years past, with little pills, and have not found out where my wheels are clogged yet.'"[1]

The original from which Mr Phippen was drawn must have made a deep impression upon Collins, because we find in Mr Fairlie of The Woman in White a hypochondriac who has much in common with Phippen.

The Rev. Dr Channery may be ill-equipped as regards his knowledge of divinity, but he is Collins's most refreshing cleric.

Collins had a flair for capturing in a sympathetic way, the eccentricities of servants. Mr Munder, the verbose and circumlocutory steward of Porthgenna Tower, is especially well done:

"'Up to the present moment,' said Mr Munder, 'I have refrained from expressing an opinion. The time has now come, when, holding a position of trust as I do, in this establishment, and being accountable, and indeed responsible , as I am, for what takes place in it, and feeling, as I must, that things cannot be allowed, or even permitted, to rest as they are - it is my duty to say that I think your conduct is very extraordinary .... My only desire is to act fairly by all parties. I don't wish to frighten anybody, or to startle anybody, or even to terrify anybody. I wish to unravel, or, if you please, to make out, what I may term, with perfect propriety - events. And when I have done that, I should wish to put it to you, ma'am, and to you, sir, whether - I say, I should wish to put it to you both, calmly and impartially, and politely, and plainly, and smoothly - and when I say smoothly, I mean quietly - whether you are not both of you bound to explain yourselves.'"[2]

In many Collins may be considered to have followed the lead of the Gothic novel and transmuted the form into the type of sensation novel from which evolved the present-day thriller. The Dead Secret has its Gothic elements: Porthgenna Tower is said to be haunted,

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1. Book II, Chap. 1.
2. Book IV, Chap. 4.

Sarah Leeson lives in terror of a visitation by the spirit of her deceased mistress, the deserted North wing is infested with "creepy-crawlies", and Rosamond experiences a vague sense of oppression on the night before the secret is discovered.

Part of Collins's recipe for a novel was "Make 'em cry," and he sets out to do this in The Dead Secret in no small measure, particularly in the death-bed scene when Rosamond takes her last leave of her mother. Collins was not one to bilk at melodrama or overdone pathos, and this scene recalls echoes of a dying grandfather in Gabriel's Marriage.

Collins seems to be developing an increasing fondness for the legal trick of the hypothetical case. It may be that he acquired this by way of Mr Micawber; but, whatever the source, we know that he used this method to effect in A Stolen Letter, and now he uses it twice in The Dead Secret. Rosamond, after having read the secret letter, addresses her husband:

"'I remember I used to offend you,' she continued quickly and confusedly. 'No, no, not to offend - only to vex you a little - by talking too familiarly to the servants. You might almost have fancied, at first, if you had not known me so well, that it was a habit with me because I had once been a servant myself......'" [1]

Uncle Joseph takes refuge in a similar device:

"'You will suppose that!' exclaimed Uncle Joseph, looking greatly relieved. 'Ah! I thank you, sir, and you, good madam, a thousand times for helping me out of my own muddlement with a "Suppose"'". [2]

We have already noticed that Collins does not describe a scene merely to fill up space or to set the stage. For him, description of a scene is intimately

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1. Book V, Chap. 6.
2. Book VI, Chap. 1.

bound up with the portrayal of character and the unfolding of the plot. Professor R.E. Davies, in an unpublished paper on The Dead Secret, has the following to say:

"Collins's descriptions of nature are never done for themselves alone, and particularly in this novel the close relationship between incident and natural phenomena is clearly seen. Thus the Franklands arrive at last at Porthgenna Tower on an evening of dreary, dense white fog and steady, sullen rain, after a morning storm has proved fatal to three local fishermen. Here nature seems to be conspiring to shroud the Secret hidden in the old house (Bk. V, Ch. 3).

Then again, the oppressiveness of the heat and the breathless stillness of everything are stressed throughout the day that the Myrtle Room at last gives up its secret. (Bk. V, Chs. 5 & 6). Here nature appears to be waiting in breathless silence for the inevitable finding of the Secret. As Rosamond says: 'There is something threatening in the sky, and the earth seems to know it!'. (Bk. V, Ch. 5.) It is surprising that Collins could not synchronise the discovery with a frightful storm as a suitable climax.

Then, too, Sarah dies in the long chapter fittingly entitled The Close of Day (Bk. VI, Ch. 4). One feels throughout that her life and that of the day are slowly fading away together.

And lastly, it is on the calmest and loveliest day of the year that the story concludes, after the weary pilgrimage of Sarah Leeson has come to its quiet end at last. This is a fitting setting for the new life beginning for the Franklands and Uncle Joseph.

Sometimes, however, but less frequently, Collins contrasts the doings of nature and man. For instance, at the beginning of the novel, the strengthening breeze wafts a breath of its fragrance into the room of death, and the unresting music of the everlasting sea is heard more clearly at the first hour of the new day. Again, much later in the book, the eternal changelessness of Porthgenna is contrasted with the changes which sixteen years have made in Sarah. (Bk IV, Ch. 2)."

This approach to scenic description is to become of great importance in The Woman in White and subsequent novels. Many of Collins's best effects derive from a sense of fatality; we feel that the mills of God grinding inexorably to a fore-ordained end. One example from The Dead Secret will suffice. Rosamond watches her husband as he fingers the unopened letter:

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"The heat-mist still hid the horizon. Nearer, the oily, colourless surface of the water was just visible, heaving slowly from time to time in one vast monotonous wave that rolled itself out smoothly and endlessly till it was lost in the white obscurity of the mist. Close on the shore, the noisy surf was hushed. No sound came from the beach except at long, wearliy long intervals, when a quick thump, and a still splash, just audible and no more, announced the fall of one tiny, mimic wave upon the parching sand. On the terrace on front of the house, the changeless hum of summer insects was all that told of life and movement. Not a human figure was to be seen anywhere on the shore; no sign of a sail loomed shadowy through the heat at sea; no breath of air waved the light tendrils of the creepers that twined up the house-wall, or refreshed the drooping flowers ranged in the windows." [1]

The Dead Secret is written in the third person. There are a few letters, but Collins does not employ the epistolary style to any extent; nor does he employ the device of a diary, a form to which he was addicted. His interest in the theatre is reflected in the melodramatic scenes, especially the overdone melodrama of Sarah's farewell at the grave of her lover [2] and the instances of dramatic irony such as when Rosamond asks Mrs Japheth, her real mother, if she has ever had a child of her own [3].

Finally, once again we are introduced to rooms which present "a dreary spectacle of dust, dirt, dimness and desolation" [4].

The early part of 1857 was a busy period for Collins. His play, The Frozen Deep, was produced in January at Tavistock House, with Dickens playing a leading rôle with great gusto. In February The Siege of the Black Cottage appeared in Harper's Monthly Magazine.

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1. Book V, Chap. 6.
2. Book IV, Chap. 5.
3. Book III, Chap. 4.
4. Unpublished paper on The Dead Secret by Prof. R.E.Davies.

It is not clear whether this had been offered to Harper's before Collins joined the staff of Household Words, or whether Dickens felt that enough space had already been given to Collins. It is not improbable that Dickens would not publish the story because of its unsuitability; it is an insignificant story. If it has any interest for us, it is because of the attention to detail, and because it is written entirely in the first person, a technique which Collins was to use with great success, and never better than in Blow up with the Brig! Strangely enough, though the scene is set in an isolated cottage on a lonely moor in the West of England, scenic description plays no part in this short story which was later included in The Queen of Hearts (1859)

Mr Knifton, of Holme Manor, passes the time of day with Bessie, a stone-cutter's daughter, and leaves his wallet in her care while he and his wife go on to the nearest town. Shifty Dick and a companion of the same seedy type ask to see Bessie's father. She tells them that he will not be home till the next day, but after they have left, she suspects that their eyes might have fallen on the wallet which had been lying in full view. She locks, bars and bolts the house only just in time. Shifty Dick and Jerry bang at the front door and demand not only the wallet but her mother's silver teaspoons. Upon her refusing, they attempt to batter open the door, using large rocks for the purpose; but by this time Bessie has barricaded the door. Any resemblance this story might bear to the story of The Three Little Pigs is strengthened as Dick and Jerry attack by way of the chimney: a stone is thrown down, scattering embers all

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over and setting fire to many "knickknacks". While Bessie is busy extinguishing the fire, her assailants have recourse to a battering ram in the form of a heavy beam which they have found lying outside. The disadvantage of this method of attack is that it keeps both assailants fully occupied. Bessie is a strategist and immediately sees the weakness in the plan of assault: she opens the back door and flees with the wallet, the teaspoons, her cat - and her virtue.

The story has a happy ending: Mr Knifton so admires the way in which she protected his wallet that he provides a cottage on his land rent-free, and the son of the farmer from whom she had sought shelter after her race across the dark and wet moors, takes her to wife in spite of the opposition of his family, who think that the son of a well-to-do farmer can make a better match than a stone-cutter's daughter.

Uncle George or the Family Mystery, which was first published in The National Magazine in May, 1857 and which formed part of The Queen of Hearts (1858) as Brother Morgan's Story of the Family Secret, is another attempt at a short story written in the first person. The writer, while away from home, learns that his sister has died. While walking out in the dusk, a man whom he cannot recognise rushes up to him, embraces him and covers him with kisses. Upon his return home, he finds that his beloved Uncle George, who is a doctor, is no longer living with the family. Upon his making enquiries, he is told that he is never again to mention Uncle George's name.. Many years later, while travelling in the south

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of France, by chance he comes across Uncle George's grave. A priest whom he encounters in the churchyard, upon establishing that he is nephew to Uncle George, informs him that it was his uncle's dying wish that his story should never be told unless Fate should bring his nephew to that very spot. The secret, which has for many pages been a "secret" to Collins but not to the reader, amounts to this: The writer's sister had developed a tumour which marred her beauty. Medical opinion was against an operation, but Uncle George had been convinced that it could be successfully performed. In her husband's absence, the mother falsely told Uncle George that he had the father's permission to operate. Feeling the weight of the responsibility he carried, Uncle George's hand trembled and the sister died. The mother allowed the full blame to fall on Uncle George who, in his distress undertook to leave England never to return.

Two characters come to life in some measure: Uncle George is portrayed with conviction, especially in his relationship with the two children; and the Jezebel of a mother, a woman who has married above her station and brings to this new way of life the standards of feminine behaviour of her early environment.

The story lacks unity, the attempts to build up an atmosphere of suspense are crude, and the melodrama could please only a Victorian palate:

> "'What he had suffered during his long exile, no man can presume to say. I, who saw more of him than anyone, never heard a word of complaint fall from his lips. He had the courage of the martyrs while he lived, and the resignation of the saints when he died. Just at the last his mind wandered. He said he saw his little darling waiting by the bedside to lead him away; and he died with a smile on his face - the first I had ever seen there.'"

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This story provides no evidence of development in Collins's art.

M.L. Parrish [1] maintains that A Fair Penitent, which appeared in Household Words on 18th July, 1857 was the work of Collins. This piece, which occupies just over four pages in Household Words, is not acknowledged as fiction, but claims to be based upon two manuscripts "of some literary pretensions" found among the papers of Charles Pineau Duclos, a French writer of biographies and novels. Both manuscripts deal with the life of Mme Gautier, who began life as an actress and ended it as a Carmelite nun. The second paper is written in the first person and tells the lady's own story of the changes in her life which led to her conversion. Collins was sympathetic towards France and the French people, but he was not a supporter of Catholicism: this is brought out clearly in pieces such as A Passage in the Life of Perugino Potts, The Yellow Mask, Rambles among Railways and The Black Robe. A Fair Penitent is written with an acceptance of the tenets of Catholicism and a sympathy for the taking of the veil on the part of Mme Gautier, which would be quite unlike Collins. Furthermore, careful attention is paid to minute and purposeless detail : this is not typical of Collins. This is probably not pure fiction though the treatment is vastly different from that of such pieces as The Memoirs of an Adopted Son, The Poisoned Meal and The Cauldron of Oil.

I very much doubt whether Collins should be credited with this piece. Apart from the above objections, there

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1. op. cit., p. 323.

is nothing in A Fair Penitent which is positively characteristic of his work.

The Yellow Tiger, which occupies nine-an-a-half pages of the issue of Household Words for the 8th August, 1857, also has a French setting; but it is quite different in character. There are several reasons why Collins is indicated as the author. We know that he was attracted by the French scene - and this is a detective story of sorts played out against the background of rural France. The writer is obviously acquainted with French religious ceremony and with the workings of French law. Add to this a descriptive technique indicating the training of a painter, and it seems reasonable to attribute The Yellow Tiger to Collins. The method of dealing with the dénouement is one to which Collins was partial.

The maid, Fanchonette, arouses in the traveller "suddenly a reminiscence as of Lancry and of a juicy brush and clear limpid colouring." A vignette of a young child is done in the Collins style:

> "Here a glass door just opposite opened softly, and a little figure in boddice and petticoat of bright colours, with a small lace cap and ribbons on the back of her head, stepped upon the gallery, as it were, straight from one of Lancry's pictures."

During the night spent at a small country inn, "Le Tigre Jaune", near Troyes in the south of France, the traveller becomes aware of creaking footsteps on the gallery overlooking the innyard and the shadow of a tall man cast on the glass door of his room. As he is boarding the diligence in the morning he learns that a M. Lemoine has been murdered in the inn during the

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night, and that the murdered man's half-brother, whom the traveller had found to be a suspicious character, has vanished. The diligence cannot wait, and it is over four years before the traveller finds himself in that part of the country again. He encounters Fanchonette, the maid, who begs him to visit her mistress. There it is explained to him that the maid and her mistress, who is the mother of the man who was murdered that night at "Le Tigre Jaune", had searched for the half-brother whom they were sure was guilty. Eventually they had tracked him down in a lonely German town and had waited patiently for ten months until he returned to France and justice. This he had now done. The maid was sure that he was the man, but the mistress, whose eye-sight was failing, could not be sure enough to justify drastic action. Would the traveller assist by identifying the man? He agrees and goes to the inn in the small town a few miles away where this man is staying under the name of M. Rabbe. The traveller then tells his tale to the Chief of Police, who agrees to be pre sent at dinner that night when the traveller will carry out a littke experiment. During the meal the traveller says that the best wines in that area are to be found near Troyes at a little cabaret known as "Le Tigre Jaune". M. Rahbe splutters, drinks his wine at a gulp. A cowering look flits across his face, but he soon recovers. The traveller continues to say that he cannot ever forget "The Yellow Tiger" as a foul murder was committed there. Upon this M. Rabbe spills his wine and looks at the traveller "with a painful, devouring look". He rises and says that he is not feeling well. M. le Chef

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says that fresh air is good and so the half-brother is led outside and taken into custody.

This short story is remarkable for a bitter and biassed picture of a Catholic festival. The occasion is a grand mass in honour of the patroness of the town:

"Alack, for the music, though chaunted indeed, with a will, but dissonant and of the nose nasal. Nor can I restrain a gentle remonstrance against the leathern spiral instrument - that cruel disenchanter - worked with remorseless vigour by the Tubal Cain of the place!"

In June, 1857, The Frozen Deep was revived with such great success that Dickens arranged for two performances in Manchester. Members of his family had taken the female parts at Tavistock House, but Dickens arranged for professional actresses to take the parts. At the first rehearsal in Manchester Dickens fell violently in love with the eighteen-year-old Ellen Ternan. In this way a chain of events was set in motion which was to change the whole of Dickens's life. Interesting as this story is, it has no place in these pages. Dickens at the age of forty-five was faced with strained relations in the home, the problems concomitant with a passion of this sort (Ellen Ternan was possessed of a temperamental mother, also an actress), and John Foster, for many years his closest associate, who gave him good advice which he was most loth to follow. It is not surprising that he looked to Collins to provide distraction. This time he would not seek the sort of diversion which Collins had previously supplied, but he bethought himself of Rambles beyond Railways, A Pictorial Tour to St George Bosherville

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and A Journey in Search of Nothing. This last piece had only just appeared in Household Words (September 5th). Within a week of their return from Manchester we find Dickens writing to Collins:

> "Partly in the grim despair and restlessness of this subsidence from excitement, and partly for the sake of Household Words, I want to cast about whether you and I can go anywhere - take any tour - see anything - whereon we could write something together. Have you any idea tending to any place in the world? Will you rattle your head and see if there is any pebble in it which we could wander away and play at marbles with? We want something for Household Words, and I want to escape from myself. For when I do start up and stare myself seedily in the face, as happens to be my case at present, my blankness is inconceivable - indescribable - my misery amazing."[1]

The record of their walking tour of Cumberland, Lancashire and Yorkshire, was embodied in The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices which appeared in five parts in Household Words (3rd to 31st October, 1857).[2] For our present purpose, two sections are of interest. The first appears in Part Three, where Collins indulges in some autobiography, telling of how he had lost all his friends at school, the idle boys considering him to be a traitor to their cause, and the industrious boys avoiding him "as a dangerous interloper"; and all because he had been untrue to himself and had tried for and won, a prize in the half-yearly examination.

Collins has seldom done anything better in humorous vein, than his description of his first cricket match. This is all the more refreshing as no hint of this or any similar experience is to be found elsewhere.

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1. Robinson K.: op.cit., p. 115.
2. Collins was responsible for the following: (Page references according to the first (1890) edition in book form): pp. 11-19; 28-49; 55-65; 97-103. The points at which each took over are quite clear.

There is no other record of his indulging in any exercise other than walking tours - his inclinations ran rather in the direction of travel, exotic meals, theatre and amorous adventure.

He records that, shortly after leaving school, he had accompanied some friends to a cricket field in the capacity of spectator:

On the ground it was discovered that the players fell short of the required number, and facile Thomas was persuaded to assist in making up the complement. At a certain appointed time, he was roused from peaceful slumber in a dry ditch, and placed before three wickets with a bat in his hand. Opposite to him, behind three more wickets, stood one of his bosom friends, filling the situation (as he was informed) of bowler. No words can describe Mr Idle's horror and amazement, when he saw this young man - on ordinary occasions, the meekest and mildest of human beings - suddenly contract his eyebrows, assume the aspect of an infuriated savage, run back a few steps, then run forward, and, without the slightest provocation, hurl a detestably hard ball with all his might straight at Thomas's legs. Stimulated to preternatural activity of body and sharpness of eye by the instinct of self-preservation, Mr Idle contrived, by jumping deftly aside at the right moment, and by using his bat (ridiculously narrow as it was for the purpose) as a shield, to preserve his life and limbs from the dastardly attack that had been made on them both, to leave the full force of the deadly missile to strike his wicket instead of his leg; and to end the innings, as far as his side was concerned, by being immediately bowled out."

To his dismay, he is sent out to field:

"Whenever the ball came near him, he thought of his shins, and got out of the way immediately. 'Catch it!' 'Stop it!' Pitch it up!' were cries that passed by him like the idle wind that he heeded not."

Collins records that the unwonted activity brought on a perspiration which, leading to a chill, culminated in a fever.

Collins proceeds to give some account of his experiences while he was reading Law. Part V contains three pages devoted to Collins's experiences of horse-riding; part of this harks back to the trip he had undertaken with his father to the Shetlands when he was seventeen.

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The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices is of especial interest because Part II contains one of Collins's best short stories: The Double-Bedded Room. [1] This story was included in The Queen of Hearts (1859) as Brother Morgan's Story of the Dead Hand.

Ever since Collins had visited the morgue in Paris with Ward in 1844, he had been deeply impressed by the bodies "laid out naked at the Morgue, like unsaleable codfish." He is to use this motif again and again. [2] In The Double-Bedded Room he uses it to good effect to create a story in which the grim and gruesome is relieved by the innuendo and the ironical humour of the landlord. The result is a short story in which the main character is well portrayed, the innkeeper depicted with conviction and the atmosphere built up rapidly and in a manner vastly superior to anything which Collins had hitherto accomplished.

Young Arthur Holliday, pandering to a last-minute whim to attend the Doncaster races, seeks in vain for accommodation. At last, on the very outskirts of the town he espies "the dull gleam of an oil lamp, the one faint, lonely light that struggled ineffectually with the foggy darkness all round him." At last he has found an inn of sorts: "The Two Robins". As he enters he finds a traveller leaving with the words: "No, Mr Landlord, I'm not easily scared by trifles; but, I don't mind confessing that I can't quite stand that." Thinking

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1. Incidentally, Dickens's ghost story which appears in Part Four, is one of his best, and his description of the journey in the express train in Part One is delightfully graphic. Of the country stations past which they raced; Dickens writes: "Here, again, were stations with nothing going but a bell, and wonderful wooden razors set aloft on great posts, shaving the air."
2. cf. The Red Vial.

that the traveller had been asked too much for the room, Holliday offers to pay whatever is asked. The inn-keeper "in a meditative, doubtful way" asks for five shillings, but informs Holliday that, though he can have a bed all to himself, he will have to share a room. Holliday hesitates:

"'What sort of man is it who has got the other bed?' he inquired (sic). 'Is he a gentleman? I mean, is he a quiet, well-behaved person?'
'The quietest man I ever came across,' said the landlord."

They repair to the room:

"'He's a very quiet sleeper,' said Arthur.
'Yes,' said the landlord, 'very quiet.' ....
'How pale he is!' said Arthur.
'Yes,' returned the landlord, 'pale enough, isn't he?'"

Holliday now discovers that the man is dead, but the innkeeper holds him to his bargain, saying that he has kept to his side of it by providing a bed and a room-mate who will certainly not disturb him. On a question of pride Holliday decides to take the room, but sleep is out of the question. He consoles himself with the thought that it is already late, so morning must come all the sooner; at least he has a roof over his head. The hours drag on and Holliday finds the corpse an irresistible attraction. Time and again he looks at it. He snuffs the candle while trying to pinch the wick. When he manages to light it again, he looks at the corpse and finds that it has moved. The alarm is raised and the doctor sent for.

Upon the recovery of 'the corpse', he learns that Holliday is the son of the man to whom the 'corpse' was born out of wedlock; he learns too, that Holliday loves the very young woman whom he has returned to woo.

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He takes his leave and is not heard of again. [1]

Collins has shown that he can build up suspense and create an eerie atmosphere; he can suggest character in a few words - something new for one who has so far relied on word-painting - and he has mastered the art of dialogue. The opening is most effective, in an almost racy style; it is unfortunate that the ending comes to so little. Nevertheless, The Double-Bedded Room is a first-rate terror story.

The 1857 Christmas Number of Household Words comprised The Perils of Certain English Prisoners. Once again Dickens chose Collins as his collaborator. This number consists of three chapters, of which it is clear that Collins was responsible for the second. It is likely that Dickens provided the original idea and the general frame-work. The stress upon character and the exuberance of the style make it clear that the first and third chapters are by Dickens. Chapter Two, "The Prison in the Woods", the longest, is concerned with the march, the prison, and the planning and execution of the escape, and is clearly in Collins's vein.

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners is a story of high adventure in the New World. It is written with Gill Davis, a private in the Royal Marines, as the mouthpiece. The year is 1744 and the place the Nicaraguan Mosquito coast. Chapter One tells of the attack by the pirates and the capture of the small English colony known as Silver-Store. The character

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1. In Ambrose Bierce's A Watcher by the Dead we find a fascinating variation of this dead-alive motif. (Ambrose Bierce: In the Midst of Life - 1892)

of Gill Davis is cleverly brought out; we have the pompous Mr Pordage, the heroine, Marion Maryon, and the villain of the piece, drawn in colours of the deepest Victorian dye.

At this point Collins takes over. There is a description of the Commander ofl the "Buccaniers":

"He was a little, active, active, weazen, monkey-faced man, dressed in the brightest colours .... Over his shoulders, and falling down in front to below his waist he wore a sort of sling of broad scarlet cloth, embroidered with beads and little feathers, and holding at the lower part, four loaded pistols, two on a side, ready to either hand. His face was mere skin and bone, and one of his wrinkled cheeks had a blue scar running all across it, which drew up that part of his face, and showed his white shining teeth on that side of his mouth."

Delineation with these neat, painstaking strokes is the work of Collins.

Systematically, with all due attention to detail, but without inspiration, Collins then proceeds to tell of the hardships of the march through the jungle for six days. We find what we might expect: hardship and hunger; women faint and children crying; cowardice and courage. Eventually they arrive at the ruins of an Aztec city where they are imprisoned in 'The Palace'. The prisoners are ordered to chop down trees to provide a roof for 'The Palace'. The logs are lashed into rafts, the guards are drugged and the escape is effected.

Chapter Three is painted in broader strokes and tells of the difficult passage down the river to safety: Dickens has taken over.

<u>A Marriage Tragedy</u>, which appeared in <u>Harper's Monthly Magazine</u> in February, 1858 and was included in <u>The Queen of Hearts</u> (1859) inder the title of <u>Brother Griffith's Story of a Plot on Private Life</u>, is a

(detective

detective story, better than anything Collins has yet done. In The Queen of Hearts it occupies fifty-one pages. It is a first-person narrative, with the narrator in character throughout; fast-moving, with some excellent deduction and sleuthing; a fresh and breezy, but remarkably acute detective graphically portrayed; a quadroon who is another Jezebel: here we have a story which reads with a freshness and pace to compare with any modern short story of detection.

At this stage the question arises: How was it possible for Collins, who could write so well in A Marriage Tragedy, to publish so many trashy short stories throughout the years to come? Did he consider them to be mere pot-boilers, or was he unable to adopt a critical position towards his own work? We know that he drove a hard bargain and that he delighted to boast of his not inconsiderable earnings from "tale-spinning". It seems likely that he was incapable of throwing a story into the waste-paper basket if it did not work out satisfactorily. We know that he often intended to re-write some of his work, and indeed did re-write much of it, but it would seem that much that should have been scrapped or re-written was published. There is reason to believe that whenever he could not manage to have a story accepted by a periodical of some standing, he would palm it off on The Seaside Library or other publications of the same type. Love's Random Shot and The Captain's Last Love are, perhaps, the most glaring examples.

However that may be, A Marriage Tragedy is an example of what Collins was capable in 1858, at the age of thirty-four, and a pointer to his special gifts

(which

which were to lead to the writing of The Moonstone.[1]

The narrator is manservant to a rich young widow who marries a Mr James Smith.

> "He was a tall, fine young man enough, with black hair, which grew very long, and the bushiest pair of black whiskers which I ever saw. Altogether he had a rakish, unsettled look, and a bounceable way of talking ....."

This husband soon wheedles a "fine schooner yacht" out of her, and after that she sees little enough of him. In her loneliness she takes up with the local parson. They have many interests in common, especially music. Mr Meeke, the parson, is

> "a single man, very young, and very lonely in his position ... He had a mild, melancholy, pasty-looking face, and was as shy and soft-spoken as a little girl - altogether - what one may call, without being unjust or severe, a poor weak creature and, out of all sight, the very worst creature I sat under in my life."

Smith demands from his wife that she refrain from seeing the parson again. When she refuses to undertake anything of the sort, he leaves the house in a rage, takes to his yacht and three-and-a-half months later the mistress receives an anonymous letter informing her that her husband has contracted a bigamous marriage. William, the servant, is sent to post a letter to summon Mrs Smith's lawyer from London. The lawyer doubts the truth of the anonymous letter, but William is assigned the task of accompanying, for purposes of identification, the hard-drinking Mr Dark, lawyer's clerk, who sets out to find the truth. Mr Dark is sent for:

> "I had expected from his master's description, to see a serious, sedate man, rather sly in his looks, and rather reserved in his manner. To my amazement, this practised hand at delicate investigations was a

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1. According to Davis, op. cit., p. 327, the germ of this story was taken from Richer, op. cit., Vol. IV, pp. 43 ff.

brisk, plump, jolly little man, with a comfortable double chin, a pair of very bright black eyes, and a big bottle-nose of the true groggy red colour. He wore a suit of black, and a limp, dingy white cravat; took snuff perpetually out of a very large box; walked with his hands crossed behind his back; and looked, upon the whole, much more like a parson of free and easy habits than a lawyer's clerk."

Here follows the sort of deduction at which Collins was to become so adept. Dark ascertains that the yacht turned north after leaving the harbour: so it would seem that Smith had intended to carry out his announced intention of making for Sweden. Dark consults a map, sends for a conveyance and, in true Dupin fashion, without moving from his seat, without further evidence, relying on deductive reason only, plans his campaign. William is ordered to acquire fishing tackle.

"Money, luggage, fishing-rods, papers of directions, copy of anonymous letter, guide-book, map, ... All right so far. Drive off."

Disguises are assumed and on the way Dark explains his actions to William:

"Now you listen to reason, William, and profit by it as much as you can. Mr James Smith says he is going on a cruise to Sweden, and makes his word good, at the beginning, by starting northward toward the coast of Scotland. What does he go in? A yacht. Do yachts carry live beasts and a butcher on board? No. Will joints of meat keep fresh all the way from Cumberland to Sweden? No. Do gentlemen like living on salt provisions? No. What follows from these three Noes? That Mr James Smith must have stopped somewhere, on the way to Sweden, to supply his sea-larder with fresh provisions. Where in that case, must he stop? Somewhere in Scotland, supposing he didn't alter his course when he was out of sight of your sea-port. Where in Scotland? Northward on the mainland, or westward at one of the islands? Most likely on the mainland, where the seaside places are largest, and where he is sure of getting all the stores he wants. Next, what is our business? Not to risk losing a link in the chain of evidence by missing any place where he has put his foot on shore. Not to over-shoot the mark when we want to hit it in the bull's-eye. Not to waste time and money by taking a long trip to Sweden, till we know that we must absolutely go there."

Upon their arrival in Scotland they follow several false trails before they arrive at a seaside town of

(considerable

considerable size which has a harbour attached to it. By this time, William has had time to observe with amazement how Mr Dark can worm information out of the most canny and cautious Scotsman. Believing that "High company in a coffee-room won't be familiar with us. Low company in a tap-room will", Mr Dark finds that his work fits in well for his propensity for absorbing large and regular quantities of liquor.

"He varied his way artfully with different men; but there were three standing opinions of his, which he made a point of expressing in all varieties of company while we were in Scotland. In the first place, he thought the view of Edinburgh from Arthur's Seat the finest in the world. In the second place, he considered whisky to be the most wholesome spirit in the world. In the third place, he believed his late beloved mother to have been the best woman in the world. It may be worthy of note that whenever he expressed this last opinion in Scotland, he invariably added that her maiden name was Macleod."

Within hours of their arrival at the sea-side town, Dark has established the truth of the contents of the anonymous letter, and by midnight he has the whole case cleared up. Smith, attracted by a pretty face, had decided that he was violently in love with the girl. He took lodgings in the house, tried unsuccessfully to seduce the girl, and then covered his tracks by dismissing the crew of his yacht, saying that he had abandoned his plans for a trip to Sweden. A fortnight later he had married the girl and, with a fresh crew, set sail for the Mediterranean. The anonymous letter had been written by the steward of the original crew who, unknown to his master, had stayed on in the sea-side town.

William's mistress wants the whole thing hushed up, but Mr Dark says: "Mark my words, William. Mr James Smith will come back."

This would be the end of the story for most writers, but Collins's peculiar genius now comes into

(play.

play. The amazing way in which his tale is given a new twist which leads it along unsuspected paths is done with a skill which we encounter for the first time in A Marriage Tragedy, but which we are to see at its best in The Moonstone. There is no prolonging of the agony such as we found in The Dead Secret; this is the development of a special technique which has not been successfully emulated by later writers.

Six months later Smith does indeed return. He is taken aback to learn that his wife knows of his bigamous marriage. In the morning there is no trace of him other than a blood-stained night-gown. Upon a deposition by Josephine, the maid, the mistress and William are held on a warrant for the murder of Smith. Josephine has supplied the information that the mistress had entered Smith's bedroom during the night with a dagger in her hand. Upon leaving the room Mrs Smith had gone to William's room; thereafter both had gone back to the master's room. Josephine also avers that the parson is her mistress's lover.

The lawyer is summoned - and his opinion is that Mrs Smith and William will have to face trial unless further evidence is forthcoming. The only way is to find Smith and persuade him to declare himself by offering to come to a compromise on the question of the second marriage. The greatest danger lies in Josephine's probable knowledge of this second marriage. Upon enquiry, the lawyer establishes that she bears an animus against her mistress because she had been accused of stealing some trinkets.

"The lawyer's face turned as red as scarlet. He jumped out of his chair, and hit me such a smack on the shoulder, that I thought he had gone mad.

('By

'By Jupiter!' he cried out, 'we have got the whip-hand of the she-devil at last.'
I looked at him in astonishment.
'Why, man alive,' he said, 'don't you see how it is? Josephine's a thief!'"

Mr Dark is set to find Smith.

When the preliminary examination is resumed, Dark produces Smith - sans beard. Josephine denies that it is he, but the servamts identify him. She is charged with the theft of the trinkets which have been found hidden in her mattress. and taken away before she can blurt out anything about the second marriage.

Mr Dark explains to William how he traced Smith through his reputed wife, satisfied him with the promise of a properly drawn up document indemnifying him - "(mere waste paper, of no earthly use, except to pacify him)" - and ascertained that the blood spots on the night-gown had resulted from a cut sustained by Smith when he was removing his beard as part of his disguise.

This story represents an important milestone in Collins's career. In it we not only find the ability which made possible his best work, but the story presents many features which have become the stock-in-trade of Twentieth Century writers of detective and mystery stories. In this novelette we have the qualities which justify a claim for Collins to be considered as successor to Poe and no mean innovator on his own account. Mr Dark's deductive powers compare well with Dupin's; he is Collins's first charmingly eccentric detective:

"In a quarter of an hour's time Mr Dark joined me, and drank to my health, happiness and prosperity, in three separate tumblers. After performing this ceremony, he wagged his head and chuckled with an appearance of such excessive enjoyment, that I could not avoid remarking on his high spirits.
'It's the Case, William; it's the beautiful neatness of the Case that quite intoxicates me!' cries Mr Dark, slapping his stumpy hands on his fat knees in a sort of ecstasy."

(William

William remains in character throughout and is a most convincing trusted servant. Collins avails himself of all the advantages of using William as Mr Dark's Dr Watson. In Josephine we have Collins's best Jezebel to date:

"The first sight of her face - with its wicked self-possession, with its smooth, leering triumph - so sickened me that I turned my head away, and never looked at her a second time throughout the proceedings."

When she realises that events have turned against her:

"Even Josephine's extraordinary powers of self-control now gave way at last. At the first words of the unexpected charge against her, she struck her hands together violently, gnashed her sharp white teeth, and burst out with a torrent of fierce sounding words in some foreign language, the meaning of which I did not understand then, and cannot explain now.
'I think that's check-mate for Marmzelle,' whispered Mr Dark, with his invariable wink.'"

There are no loose threads: the blood spots are explained, the shaven beard is produced, Smith's lack of money is found to be the reason for his return.

Collins handles very well indeed the murder trial in which no corpse can be produced. We have read many variations on this theme, but Collins is the first to introduce it into a trial which has several other interesting twists.

A Marriage Tragedy is a fascinating story of detection which can hold its own with most detective stories written since; and it is Collins's best to date, not only because of its many virtues, but because he has so rigorously eliminated the weaknesses which appeared in earlier work. Mr Dark especially, is a delight.

Who is the Thief? was first published in The Atlantic Monthly in April, 1858. The following year it was included in The Queen of Hearts as Brother Griffith's Story of The Biter Bit. It occupies only twenty-six

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pages in The Queen of Hearts but it is of especial significance in that it is the first humorous detective story, the first detective story in which antagonism between the police force and an interloper is introduced and the first detective story written entirely in the form of notes and reports. This story is an excellent example of the fair-play method and there are interesting points of similarity between it and Conan Doyle's Silver Blaze. [1.]

Once again Collins shows how he can create character by means of a few economic strokes, and especially, by means of making it emerge in the process of unfolding his tale: his heroes and villains act in character. The story has good pace, the plot is a taut one, the reader is taken into full confidence, with the delightfully exasperating result that we have no one to blame but ourselves that we have overlooked the glaring clue which the Inspector of Police immediately seizes upon. It is with the greatest skill that Collins makes us unsympathetic towards the over-confident, smug and ebullient Matthew Sharpin. The desire is aroused in us that he should ride for a fall, but there is suspense too: we wish it, but are not sure as to whether the muddling of the Force - that is there too - or the aplomb of Sharpin is to win the day. There is an elopement, some tilting at newspaper offices, a skit on routine police methods, an elimination of suspects done in the best tradition of later days, some good sleuthing and several red herrings. This is certainly one of Collins's best pieces. He was not to write a better short detective story.

(Mr

1. In Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes story, Silver Blaze (1892), a horse-trainer, Straker, is found guilty of rigging a race, and Holmes discovers the reason: Straker's mistress had run into debt because of her expensive tastes in millinery.

Mr Yatman, a stationer, on the recommendation of Mr Jay, keeps two hundred pounds in cash in his house. The shopman, the servant and his wife are all aware of this. In the morning the money is gone. Because of Matthew Sharpin's interest in high quarters, Sergeant Bulmer is withdrawn from the case and Sharpin takes over. He has been a lawyer's clerk, and it is suspected that the lawyer was interested in finding other employment for him. To date, Bulmer had eliminated the shopman and servant as suspects. Sharpin proceeds with the greatest confidence and a great display of competence, makes much of the times at which various events occurred, but which are not at all relevant, and with all the insouciance in the world, by means of a series of examples of false logic, comes to the conclusion that Mr Jay is the guilty person. Inspector Theakstone receives Sharpin's report, sees that Sharpin has been unable to spot the thief with the evidence staring him in the face, and sends on the report to Sergeant Bulmer without even troubling himself to point out who the guilty person must be. It is immediately clear to Bulmer that Mrs Yatman has stolen the money. He establishes that she was deeply in debt to her dressmaker and had taken the money as her husband had been unaware of her extravagance in the matter of clothing. Sharpin is unrepentant, and the last we hear of him is that he has been assaulted for interfering in an elopement in which he had no interest, and has left to offer his services to the provincial police.

One false trail which Sharpin follows is really well done: the preliminary arrangements for the elopement in which Mr Jay assisted. It is likely that

(Collins

Collins still had lively memories of the part he had played in the elopement of his friend, E.M. Ward, with the sixteen-year-old Henrietta Ward.

Collins was now in his third year on the staff of Household Words. His association with Dickens had grown ever closer and he frequently attended editorial conferences. Dickens separated from his wife in 1858, and his troubled infatuation with Ellen Ternan made him seek solace in plenty of work. It was at this point that Collins's play, The Red Vial, turned out to be a complete fiasco.

> "The audience first tittered and then roared with laughter at the most serious moments of the play which was described by one critic as 'two hours of unbroken seriousness'. The loudest outburst came at the climax of the play, the awakening of the supposed corpse in the Frankfurt dead-house. The sight of a naked arm thrust from the door of the mortuary-cell and clutching at the handle of an alarm-bell was more than even an Olympic audience could swallow."[1]

This disappointment, together with enough ill-health to discourage wild adventures, Dickens otherwise occupied, two the confidence that came with the success of A Marriage Tragedy and Who is the Thief?, and the knowledge that he was thirty-four and that, if he did not soon make his mark he never would, made Collins turn away from the theatre which had now treated him so scurvily. He decided to show the world the sort of novel he could write. But before The Woman in White was published he wrote two more short stories and collaborated with Dickens on A House to Let.

A Paradoxical Experience appeared in Household Words on the 13th November, 1858. It was later

(published

1. Robinson K.: op.cit. p. 120.

published in The Queen of Hearts as Brother Morgan's Story of Fauntleroy and achieved print several times in America as Fauntleroy the Forger.

This story is of importance to us in that Fauntleroy is a forger who has redeeming features . When justice catches up with him, his last thought and act is a selfless one. In this respect he contributes his mite to Fosco and Father Rocco, both of whom were rascals not without charm.

For the rest, the story is soon told: Fauntleroy stands security for the narrator when the latter is starting out in business and later warns him in time to draw out his money before the bank fails. The paradox, of course, lies in the strange machinations of a man's mind which makes him befriend a young man to whom he owes nothing, makes him, when he is almost at the foot of the gallows, remember this young man; and yet he has not quibbled at betraying the trust of those who left their money in his care.

This story has a striking passage on wine-bibbers:

"Every man in this country who is rich enough to pay income-tax, has, at one time or another in his life, effected a remarkable transaction in wine. Sometime he has made such a bargain as he never expects to make again. Sometimes he is the only man in England, not a peer of the realm, who has got a single drop of a certain famous vintage which has perished from the face of the earth. Sometimes he has purchaesd, with a friend, at an exorbitant price, a few last left dozens from the cellar of a deceased potentate. Sometimes he has been at an out-of-the-way country inn; has found the sherry not drinkable; has asked if there is no other wine in the house; has been informed that there is some 'sourish foreign stuff that nobody ever drinks'; has called for a bottle of it; has found it Burgundy, such as all France cannot now produce; has cunningly kept his own counsel with the widowed landlady, and has bought the whole stock for 'an old song'."

A House to Let, which appeared as the Christmas Number of Household Words in 1858, is of interest for

several

several reasons. It was the last Christmas Number to appear in Household Words because shortly after this Dickens quarrelled with the publishers and the periodical came to an end. Dickens immediately set about founding All the Year Round, and Collins moved over with him.

It had been a turbulent year for Dickens. He had published no novel and he had a minor share only in A House to Let. Parrish ascribes only twelve of the thirty-six pages to him, with collaboration on some six pages. This seems to me to be an over-simplification of the position. While the story Going into Society is clearly by Dickens and The Manchester Marriage clearly by Collins, and while it seems that Collins was responsible for the general framework into which the stories were fitted after the familiar pattern, Dickens's touch is recognisable throughout. The introductory portion, Over the Way, is by Collins, with an odd paragraph here and there by Dickens. Three Evenings in the House is a ballad of the type which we have come to recognise as Collins's. The plot of Trottle's Report is characteristic of Collins, and he probably wrote most of this; but there are many touches which bear the mark of Dickens.

A House to Let is fitted into this framework: An unmarried gentlewoman of over seventy is intrigued by the house over the street which is to let but which attracts no tenants. There seems to be something mysterious about it, and Jarber, her suitor for many long years, offers to solve the mystery. Trottle, the trusted servant, is jealous of the place Jarber holds in his mistress's affections, and thinks little will come of Jarber's investigations. The stories which

(follow

follow have been cast into a certain mould: they are stories of the misfortunes which have befallen any who have been rash enough to rent the house. This introduction is covered by Over the Way. Here and there we find a Dickensian touch:

"Jarber rose and put on his little cloak. A couple of fierce brass lions held it tight around his little throat, but a couple of the mildest Hares might have done that, I am sure.
'Sarah,' he said, 'I go. Expect me on Monday evening, the Sixth, when perhaps you will give me a cup of tea; - may I ask for no Green? Adieu!'"

Jarber is a Dickensian eccentric:

"He had always little legs, a little smile, and a little voice and little roundabout ways. As long as I can remember him he was always going little errands for people, and carrying a little gamp."

The Manchester Marriage is the work of Collins alone. There is no sign of collaboration with Dickens; the planning, the careful, sometimes plodding progression and the theme are recognisable as the work of Collins. Jarber reports on the story of the Openshaws. Mrs Openshaw's first husband, a sea-captain from Liverpool, is reported as having died at sea; and Mrs Wilson, as she then was, moves to Manchester where she and her mother-in-law take in lodgers. With her go Norah, her faithful maid, and her crippled daughter, Ailsie. Their lodger, Mr Openshaw, a hard young man with a future, proposes marriage and is accepted. Openshaw is offered a responsible position in London, and the family moves into 'the house to let'. Frank Wilson now turns up (he has been held prisoner by savages!) and sees the servant, Norah. She will not let him see his wife, but lets him see his sleeping child. She also informs him that his wife has re-married and has a son. Wilson leaves and commits suicide: a new turn to a well-worn theme.

(This

This story is not one of Collins's best. There are several loose threads, and it lacks unity. The mother-in-law is painted as being unnecessarily hard and cruel both to Mrs Wilson and the maid. A great deal of time is devoted to Mr Openshaw, showing him to be a materialist determined to succeed at all costs; and then he learns to love the crippled girl and wins the mother through her. Finally, all the pother about the lost brooch and Norah's flight is quite unnecessary. It is possible that Dickens had suggested the portrayal of a hard character who underwent a change of heart - which Dickens would have done well - and that Collins made the best of something which he himself could not feel.

Going into Society is by Dickens. Magsman, a showman, takes the house for his shows, but when his dwarf wins a fortune in a lottery, goes into society, is robbed by his friends and his servants, and returns to the show to die, Magsman finds the house too dismal and gives it up.

In Three Evenings in the House we have a ballad: Bertha's brother is dying, so she sends away her lover. She believes that she can care for her brother better than can his wife, Dora. Instead, the brother demands that his last words be heard by his "bride of one short year". When Bertha's lover returns from America she is ready to accept him, but he finds the young widow more attractive - so the house is to let once more.

Written in stanzas of eight iambic trimeters, with some variation of rhyme, these verses are typical of Collins's previous contribution to Christmas Numbers:

("Watching

"Watching the sullen fire,
Hearing the dreary rain,
Drop after drop, run down
On the darkening window-pane:
Chill was the heart of Bertha,
Chill as that winter day
For the star of her life had risen
Only to fade away."

Trottle's Report is rather better than the preceding stories. Trottle is sure that Jarber has not really found out the secret of the house and pursues investigations on his own account. The woman who lets him into the house is surely a creation of Dickens:

"An offensively-cheerful old woman, awfully lean and wiry, and sharp all over, at eyes, nose, and chin - devilishly brisk, smiling, and restless, with a dirty false front and a dirty black cap, and short fidgetty arms, and long, hooked fingernails - an unnaturally lusty old woman, who walked with a spring in her wicked old feet and spoke with a smirk on her wicked old face."

From her, Trottle learns that the house is always to let as the owner has intentionally kept the rent impossibly high so that no one will take it. He finds that a little boy is kept prisoner upstairs in an almost bare room. The caretaker's son awakes old memories in Trottle's mind, and he follows up the clue until he unearths the whole story: Forley, the owner of the house, hated his younger daughter and was determined that her son should not inherit the fortune, which was entailed. To this end, Forley had the death of mother and child recorded, and the child was removed to 'the house to let' so that the fortune might be inherited by the other daughter. Forley conveniently dies at this juncture.

Let at Last provides the conclusion to the previous section. The caretaker confesses all she knows, the elder sister relinquishes the fortune, Trottle's mistress adopts the boy, buys the house and turns it into a children's hospital: the house is let at last.

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In 1858 Dickens had sought distraction from his personal problems by undertaking the first of his public readings. This, his infatuation for Ellen Ternan, and his pre-occupation with A Tale of Two Cities (1859) [1] explains the small part he played in producing this Christmas Number. Previously these Christmas Stories had always been a first consideration with Dickens.

A New Mind (January 1st, 1859) was the last Collins story to appear in Household Words before its demise. In The Queen of Hearts it appeared as Brother Owen's Story of the Parson's Scruple. It is a trite story of a parson who finds that he has unwittingly married a divorced woman. Obeying the Gospel according to St Luke, "Whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, committeth adultery", the parson leaves her for the mission field.

This story is of interest on two scores only. The unfolding of the steps that lead to the parson's discovery is done with typical Collins punctiliousness, and this is the first story which embodies a thesis to the point where all else is subordinated. In taking up a lance against the divorce laws in force at the time, by which the husband was protected but the wife was not, in which a woman, blameless in her first marriage, and blameless in her second, is made to

(suffer

1. Dickens later claimed that the idea of A Tale of Two Cities came to him while he was acting in Collins's Frozen Deep. We know that he interpreted the rôle of Richard Wardour, who sacrifices his life that his rival may marry the woman both love, with the greatest gusto. His debt to Sister Rose is also clear. Charles Darnay, who has Dickens's initials and Lucy Manette are not far to seek.

suffer under a cruel law, Collins fills in a gap in his preparation for the writing of The Woman in White, and anticipates to some extent his theme in The Law and the Lady. The bitterness of A New Mind leads to speculation as to whether the answer to the riddle of his not marrying Caroline Graves is to be found in a similar situation. Any consideration of his relationship with Caroline is so bound up with the writing of The Woman in White, that this question must perforce be left over until Part Three.

A New Mind was the last new piece of fiction Collins published before the appearance of The Woman in White. In October, 1859 there appeared The Queen of Hearts, which contained ten stories previously published, some of them among his best. The volumes are given some semblance of unity after the manner of the Christmas Numbers. Collins took some trouble with the characterisation of the Welsh brothers, but Jessie, the Queen of Hearts, is not a success - she is silly and frivolous. The scheme by which these brothers, who live the lives of hermits, plan to keep Jessie entertained, is as new as The Canterbury Tales, or perhaps even The Thousand and One Nights.

PART III

THE MAIN WITNESSES

FOR THE

DEFENCE

1 : The Woman in White

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

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

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

(Wilkie