

a servant is a feature often copied, and some traces of Dickensian influence make this story worth notice. Charlotte's father is a delightful eccentric portrayed with some of Collins's old skill.

In September, 1877 The Moonstone was produced at the Olympic Theatre. By all reports, Collins had found his novel a difficult one to adapt as a play, and it ran to half-filled houses.

The Duel in Herne Wood appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 22nd December, 1877, and was included in Little Novels as Miss Bertha and the Yankee. This is one of Collins's best short stories. Though there is no new technique, there is originality in the composition, some good characterisation, a deft application of the multiple-narrative technique, and a clever description of a fencing trick by means of which an inferior swordsman gains the advantage over his opponent.

Collins shows that he has lost none of his skill in manipulation and presentation of evidence. The story opens strongly and so as to awaken immediate interest in the reader. The effect of the appearance of a man believed dead is made all the more powerful because of the rational resolution.

The method of revealing the story in the form of testimonies made by Bertha, the Captain's servant, the fencing master, a parson, the surgeon and Varleigh, lends an authenticity to the story which places it among Collins's best.

My Lady's Money is a failure. As a short story it might have interested the reader, but it is padded out into a novelette and loses much by this. It was first published as a Christmas story in The London Illustrated News in December, 1877 and was published in two volumes along with The Haunted Hotel in November, 1878 with the title The Haunted Hotel, A Mystery of Modern Venice to which is added My Lady's Money.

Considered as a detective story it is also a failure. It concerns a missing bank note for five hundred pounds. The shifting of suspicion from one person to another is clumsy; the detective, promising to begin with, fails to satisfy; there is not a single character that comes to life and the construction is faulty in several respects. There is no successful detection and the recovery of the note depends on chance.

The unity and pace of the story are destroyed by the introduction of the prince and the beggar-maid theme. The guilty person is revealed in the early pages of the story, but the search for him goes on relentlessly. The characters make their exits and their entrances with the split-second timing of a play, and page after page is devoted to Tommie, an over-fed Scots terrier, who is responsible for the only scrap of successful detection: he finds the wallet which contains evidence as to who had taken the note.

At times the story is ridiculous. Collins strains a dramatic convention to breaking point when he permits a letter to be written to a person living at some distance, and has this person turning up in response to the letter within a matter of minutes.

Old Sharon writes in a sealed letter the name of the guilty person and obtains a promise that the letter will not be opened until a week has elapsed. When opened, the name of the guilty person is given as: "Mr -----(Blank)." ¹. We cannot accept that Hardiman knows that Isabel is suspected of theft, knows that Felix is faced with financial ruin and cannot pay his debts one day, pays with a five hundred pound note the next: and still sees no connection at all.

Nevertheless, this story presents one or two interesting features. We encounter for the first time openly derogatory remarks about police detectives who are shown to be incompetent and hide-bound in their methods. Old Sharon, the dirty and eccentric private detective, puts into words the least-likely-person motif:

"Suspect, in this case, the very ²last person on whom suspicion could possibly fall."

Unfortunately he proves to be wrong then, and again later. Suspicion, as far as the reader is concerned, has fallen on the right person from the very moment that the bank-note is reported missing.

The trick by means of which Sharon convinces himself that Isabel is innocent is worth quoting:

"'Did you hear me ask her how she came to seal the letter - just when her mind was running on something else?'

'I heard you,' said Moody.

'Did you see how she started and stared at me?'

'I did.'

'Well, I can tell you this - if she had stolen the money she would neither have started nor stared. She would have had her answer ready beforehand in her own mind, in case of accidents. There's only one thing in my experience that you can never do with a thief, when a thief happens ³to be a woman - you can never take her by surprise.'

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1. Chap. 17.
2. Chap. 9.
3. Chap. 14.

We remember that Pedgift, in Armadale, had held the same opinion.

Lady Lydiard is the character who comes nearest to success. She believes in people marrying within their station, she loves her dog more than any human, she can be generous, she can think for herself, and she is a connoisseur of beer:

"'Small!' said Lady Lydiard, setting down the empty tumbler, and referring to the quality of the beer. 'But very pleasant and refreshing. What's the servant's name? Susan? Well, Susan, I was dying of thirst and you have saved my life. You can leave the jug - I dare say I shall empty it before I go!'"^{1.}

My Lady's Money seems to have been written when Collins's inventive powers were at a low ebb. It is likely that he had contracted to write for the Christmas Number of The Illustrated London News, and had had to produce something, whether his muse co-operated or not. My Lady's Money is a piece of hack-work which did not come off.

The Haunted Hotel, which ran in The Belgravia Magazine from June to November, 1878, means different things to different people. Davis says it is "one of the best ghost stories of the century."^{2.} Ellis says "It is a macabre story of the supernatural, and in its own genre, it is very well done."^{3.} Eliot holds that "as the chief character is internally melodramatic, the story itself ceases to be merely melodramatic, and partakes of true drama."^{4.} Robinson is more cautious and criticises The Haunted Hotel on the score of poor construction and Collins's failure to create his effects

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1. My Lady's Money, Chap. 11.
2. Davis N.P.: op. cit., p. 288.
3. Ellis S.M.: op. cit., p. 49.
4. Eliot T.S.: op. cit., p. 467.

by rational means, a skill which had previously been his strength. ^{1.} Swinburne says The Haunted Hotel is "hideous fiction". ^{2.}

Inconceivable as it may seem, all these verdicts may be reconciled. Davis's opinion may be accepted if it rests upon the last two pages of Chapter 22. We may accept Ellis's opinion if we ignore the serious deficiencies in the construction. When Eliot says that the Countess is internally melodramatic, this is true, but as a femme fatale she is not convincing and cannot compare with Miss Gwilt. Robinson puts his finger on the essential weakness of The Haunted Hotel. This is not a story of the supernatural, pure and simple. Collins has made an unhappy attempt to combine an essay in the macabre with a story that relies in part upon a rational explanation. He has fallen between two stools and Swinburne is, for once, correct in his estimate of The Haunted Hotel.

The Countess Narona marries Lord Mountbarry and persuades him to insure his life in her favour for ten thousand pounds. Rumour has it that she has had a most unsavoury past and that the inveterate gambler, her brother, is no brother at all, but her lover. Lord Mountbarry dies under suspicious circumstances, but so nothing wrong can be found. The countess believes that fate is using Agnes Lockwood as the instrument for her destruction and because of this conviction, becomes the instrument of her own destruction. Before she dies of a "rupture of a blood-vessel on the brain", she writes a confession in the form of a script for a
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1. Robinson K.: op.cit., p. 289.

2. Swinburne A.C.: op. cit., p. 127.

play. Lord Montbarry had discovered the truth about his wife and intended taking steps towards a separation. The Countess and her "brother" plan his death. A courier in their service is dying of bronchitis and they offer to give him a thousand pounds for his wife if he will personate Lord Montbarry who is not known in Venice. A doctor will then certify that Montbarry's death was due to natural causes. Montbarry is poisoned, his body destroyed by means of a strong acid, anticipating Haigh of acid-bath notoriety; and the head, not destroyed because the "brother" has burned his hands with the acid, is hidden in a secret compartment.

This head descends through the floor, and through the ceiling of the room beneath, and appears to Agnes Lockwood:

"The flesh of the face was gone. The shrivelled skin was darkened in hue, like the skin of an Egyptian mummy - except at the neck. There it was of a lighter colour; elsewhere it showed spots and splashes of the hue of that brown spot on the ceiling, which the child's fanciful terror had distorted into the likeness of a spot of blood. Thin remains of a discoloured moustache and whiskers, hanging over the upper lip, and over the hollows where the cheeks had once been, made the head just recognisable as the head of a man. Over all the features death and time had done their obliterating work. The eyelids were closed. The hair on the skull, discoloured like the hair on the face, had been burnt away in places. The bluish lips, parted in a fixed grin, showed the double row of teeth. By slow degrees, that strange doubly-blended odour, which the Commissioners had discovered in the vaults of the old palace - which had sickened Francis Westwick in the bed-chamber of the new hotel - spread its fetid exhalations over the room. Downward and downward the hideous apparition made its slow progress, until it stopped close over Agnes - stopped, and turned slowly, so that the face of it confronted the upturned face of the woman in the chair.

There was a pause. Then, a supernatural movement disturbed the rigid repose of the dead face.

The closed eyelids opened slowly. The eyes revealed themselves, bright with the glassy film of death - and fixed their dreadful look on the woman in the chair.

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Agnes saw that look; saw the eyelids of the living woman open slowly like the eyelids of the dead; saw her rise, as if in obedience to some silent command - and saw no more."

Had Collins asked of us that we accept the supernatural appearance as such, the apparition would have been legitimate. But the head is unearthed and is so decayed that it is unrecognisable. This is the head which we have been told possessed eyelids which could move, and eyes "bright with the glassy film of death." It is a figment of the imagination which takes actual shape as a head which descends through the ceiling, turns - and even drops its dentures.

This dental plate seems to have caused Collins some difficulty. Usually he ties up every little incident so that it has a meaning in the plot, but with these dentures he has to resort to a postscript to identify them as Lord Montbarry's. This is done after the Countess's confession has made the information redundant. We should not, however, overlook the importance of Collins's idea of a dental plate as a means of identification. This means of identification of otherwise unrecognisable corpses had been used to good effect by the police and is a method still employed today.

The Haunted Hotel is padded out with irrelevancies to make of it a novelette. The characterisation is poor. The plot is a feeble imitation of A Terribly Strange Bed, which is a far better story. The story opens well, but there is a sad falling-off, and Collins does not succeed in creating that atmosphere which makes for ready acceptance of supernatural occurrences. Had he used the first person or the multiple-narrative

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technique, this story might have carried more conviction.

A Shocking Story is a short story which first appeared in Barnes' International Review on the 2nd November, 1878. In December, 1878 it found a place in The Belgravia Annual and appeared in Little Novels (1887) as Miss Mina and the Groom. In this story Collins recovers his old form. It is a first-person narrative with a taut construction, in which mystery and suspense are well sustained. Miss Mina is no mean detective and unravels the clues steadily and progressively until the mystery is solved and she attains her ends.

Miss Mina falls in love with her groom who was, as a child, a foundling with something mysterious about his origins. Her mother by adoption is so antipathetic towards the groom that Mina becomes suspicious, and discovers that her mother had been engaged to a Frenchman of noble birth, who had died suddenly on the eve of the wedding. She was with child, had a nervous breakdown and disappeared from the scene. Upon her recovery she married and lived securely until she recognised in the groom her abandoned son. Miss Mina marries the groom, who does well for himself.

The Mystery of Marmaduke, which appeared in Little Novels as Mr Marmaduke and the Minister, is a well-written light short story with some skilful humorous touches. It first appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 28th December, 1878. The Scottish minister records in his diary how an English gentleman, lost in the Highlands, sought shelter at the manse. He was ill and was nursed to health by the minister's

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daughter. They fall in love and marry, but the minister receives reports from his daughter in London, that the husband is behaving in a most suspicious manner. The minister goes to London to investigate, and discovers that Marmaduke is a famous actor who has neglected to mention this in deference to the minister's religious principles.

Collins skilfully makes the naïve but lovable character of the minister emerge from the pages of a diary. We also obtain, by means of clever innuendo, a clear picture of the minister's sister:

"Neither let me forget my elder sister, Judith; a friendless single person, sheltered under my roof, whose temperament I could wish somewhat less prone to look at persons and things on the gloomy side, but whose compensating virtues Heaven forbid I should deny."

The minister is a loyal Scotsman. He is shocked at Marmaduke's extravagance:

"He drank wine too - and, good heavens, champagne wine! - a needless waste of money surely, when there was whiskey on the table."

The Fallen Leaves is a complete and utter failure; it is the poorest of all Collins's novels. It was first published in The World (1878-1879), and appeared in The Canadian Monthly from February, 1879 to March, 1880. When first published it was entitled The Fallen Leaves - First Series. In the preface to Jezebel's Daughter, Collins explained that the Second Series would appear at a more opportune time; but, fortunately for us, the Second Series remains another of his "lost opportunities".

Sadleir said of The Fallen Leaves that it provided "tragic proof that high motive and technical efficiency may yet come together and produce only imbecile hysteria."¹

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Collins's high motives are not suspect, but he shows a lamentable lack of technical skill in this story. Not a single character is well portrayed. Simple Sally comes nearest to satisfying, but lapses every now and then into sentimentality quite out of character with the rest of her portrayal. In any event, at no time does she really emerge as a person. She is more convincing than Mercy in The New Magdalen because we believe in her having been a street-walker, and she remains in character in her humble devotion to Amelius Greatheart, the saccharine hero who is given to making long speeches on the principles of social economy, as understood by the Primitive Christian Socialists, of Tadmore, Illinois.

Mrs Sowley (who has received her name according to a system which makes Collins name his hero Greatheart, and two young ladies, Mellicent and Regina) also rings true on occasion. But Farnaby, the villain of the piece, is a stock character. His innocent little wife, easily duped, who turns into a cigar-smoking, web-footed classical scholar with a leaning to dumb-bells and Indian clubs, is quite incredible; and Mellicent and Regina are ridiculous in concept and foolish in behaviour.

Rufus, Greathead's loyal friend, shows his friendship in the strangest way and takes liberties with Greathead's shaving cream:

"'It smells lovely' he said, assuming it to be some rare pomatum. 'Just what I want, it seems, for my head.' He rubbed the shaving-cream into his bristly iron-grey hair until his arms ached."

The rest of the story is nearly as silly as this. We are given graphic pictures of life in a London slum and of the life led by the street-walkers, but Collins

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is not convincing when he comes to the means for improving their lot. The sections on socialism are superimposed on the story most awkwardly, and present no clear picture of the tenets of the group. The selection and presentation of this material is poor.

To add to the poor qualities of this book, Collins obviously changed his plan half-way through and left Mellicent high and dry with no part to play. At the end of his story he tries lamely to tie up this loose thread. In a similar manner, much time was devoted to Regina, and all to little purpose.

The suicide of Mrs Farnaby is well done, but is spoilt by the melodramatic touch at the end:

"The fell action of the strychnine wrung every muscle in her with the torture of convulsion. Her hands were fast clenched; her head was bent back; her body, rigid as a bar of iron, was arched upwards from the bed, resting on the two extremities of the head and the heels: the staring eyes, the dusky face, the twisted lips, the clenched teeth, were frightful to see For one awful moment, the shrinking vital forces rallied, and hurled back the hold of death. Her eyes shone radiant with the divine light of maternal love; an exulting cry of rapture burst from her. Slowly, very slowly, she bent forward, until her face rested on her daughter's foot. With a faint cry of ecstasy she kissed it. The moments passed - and the bent head was raised no more. The last beat of the heart was a beat of joy."

The influence of Collins's American tour is evident. While it is possible that he might have visited the settlement of the Brotherhood of the New Life at Brocton in America, Robinson points out that Collins had in his possession The Communistic Societies of the United States by Charles Nordhoff, which would have supplied him with all the information he required.

The critics reviewed the book with disfavour and it did not sell.

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The Ghost's Touch was first published in 1879 along with My Lady's Money by Tauchnitz of Leipzig. It also appeared in Harper's Weekly on the 23rd October, 1885. It was included in Little Novels (1887) as Mrs Zant and the Ghost. This rather unsatisfactory short story is another experiment with an occult theme. Mrs Zant, widowed after a few weeks of marriage, feels that she is protected by her husband's presence. Her brother-in-law tries to seduce her; but is prevented by the sudden onslaught of a paralytic stroke which, Mrs Zant believes, is brought about through the agency of her deceased husband. The story is not convincing and the construction is poor. Mr Rayburn's motives for permitting himself to become involved are altogether too contrived.

The portrait of the little girl, outspoken and embarrassingly truthful, is well done.

The Devil's Spectacles is a short story which appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 20th December, 1879. It appeared in The Seaside Library as The Magic Spectacles on the 25th June, 1880. This is the best story by Collins for several years. Once again the supernatural plays a part, but we are not asked to take it at its face value, and it is merely the vehicle for a fascinating story.

A sailor, on his deathbed, sends for Alfred and tells him the story, reminiscent of The Frozen Deep, of a dash for the North Pole in which he is sole survivor. In the sailor's delirium the Devil, rather charmingly offers him a pair of spectacles:

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"Take my spectacles," says the Devil, "they'll help you to see more than you bargain for. Look through them at your fellow-mortals and you'll see the inmost thought of their heads as plain as I do, and, considering your nature, Septimus, it will drop you even below the level of a wolf."

The spectacles cannot be thrown away, cannot be broken, but can only be given to another man. Septimus passes the spectacles on to Alfred.

Alfred loves Cecilia, his mother's companion, but his mother wishes him to marry his cousin, Zilla, an heiress. When Alfred tries out his spectacles he finds that the trusted butler has been robbing him systematically. He sees his friends in a new light, especially those who flatter him with a view to borrowing money. Alfred discovers that Zilla has disguised herself as a needle-woman and has come to size him up. His spectacles show him that she is a mercenary schemer. Because of the knowledge provided by the spectacles, Alfred is able to prove to his mother that Cecilia is truly in love with him and that Zilla is hard and false.

The story ends on a refreshing note:

"Are we to have no satisfactory explanation of the supernatural element in the story? How did it come into the Editor's hands? Was there neither name nor address on the manuscript?

There was an address, if you must know, but I decline to mention it.

Suppose I guess that the address was at a lunatic asylum? What would you say to that?

I should say I suspected you of being a critic and I should have the honour of wishing you good morning."

The Devil's restrictions upon what might be done with the spectacles recalls similar restrictions placed upon the Devil's bottle in R.L. Stevenson's Bottle Imp. Possession of the spectacles does not, however, carry with it a selling of the soul. The device of contrasting a character's words with his thoughts is made use of in Saki's Tobermory and in a large number of modern plays,

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Jezebel's Daughter, adapted from the play, The Red Vial, which had had such a poor reception twenty-one years before, appeared in The Bolton Weekly Journal and syndicated papers in 1879. In his preface Collins states that Jack Straw is "used as a means of relief in some of the darkest scenes of terror and suspense occurring in this story." Collins succeeds neither in awakening in us any interest in Jack Straw or in creating "the darkest scenes of terror and suspense."

Jezebel's Daughter is without a single convincing character. Mrs Fontaine is cold, cruel and callous to all except her daughter, but she remains remote and at no time can she really compare with Gwilt or Lecount. Her actions and her words may indicate her love for her daughter but there is no human touch to lend conviction to this aspect of her nature. The rest of the characters are drawn from stock and are colourless.

The novel, if it is one, works up to a climax in the dead-house. There is hardly any plot. Mrs Fontaine's daughter, Minna, is in love with Fritz Keller, whose father will not permit a marriage. Mrs Fontaine wins her way into Mr Keller's favour by poisoning him and then, after the doctors have given him up, saving his life by means of a secret antidote. She poisons Mr Engelman rather than marry him. She poisons Mrs Wagner who is able to expose her as a thief. She herself is poisoned by the mentally deranged Jack Straw with her own poison.

The climax of the story comes after Mrs Wagner's body has been placed in the deadhouse. Many years before, Collins had been impressed by the custom

prevalent in the Frankfurt mortuary, where strings were attached to the fingers of the corpses so that, if they moved, a warning bell would be rung. Unwittingly, Jack Straw has administered an antidote to the secret Borgia poison which Mrs Fontaine has given to Mrs Wagner. In the dead of the night Mrs Wagner recovers, stirs - and rings the warning bell.

Unfortunately Collins's effects are strained, and he is hampered by poor characters, so that the whole story becomes preposterous. There is no suspense as the reader can anticipate each event, and the final evidence found in Mrs Fontaine's diary comes as a complete anti-climax to an unsuccessful melodrama.

The story has pace, is reasonably free of sentimentality and, had the theme of secret poisons been more adroitly handled, it could have been most successful. There is some fumbling with the clue as to the writer of the anonymous letter, and the newspaper report is preposterous. For such a persistent poisoner, Mrs Fontaine is appallingly clumsy and most careless in permitting Jack Straw to run around with a little bottle of poison, in the hope that he will himself take it. To do her justice, she is not given an opportunity of showing her mettle, as she has no real opponent. Jezebel's Daughter has the merit of not being burdened with any purpose other than that of entertainment; but it fails even in this. Davis tells us that it sold well.

It would seem that ill-health had made it impossible for Collins to make the concerted effort required for a major novel. We should not forget, however, that

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in this period he wrote Percy and the Prophet, The Duel in Herne Wood, A Shocking Story and The Devil's Spectacles all short stories of some merit.

vi : The Black Robe

The Black Robe was first published in The Canadian Monthly (November, 1880 to June, 1881). The theme was an attack on the Jesuits, and it is likely that Collins thought that the Anglo-French situation in Canada would make for a reading public interested in such a theme. As far as England was concerned, it might have come better had it been written thirty years earlier when the Manning and Pusey agitations had created a demand for this sort of novel.

The Black Robe falls back on a theme which Collins had already employed in The Yellow Mask (1855): a Catholic priest is determined to recover for the Church property which had been taken from it in earlier days. In The Black Robe, Father Benwell obtains the ancient title deeds to Vange Abbey and determines that the Abbey shall be returned to the Church. His aim is to persuade Lewis Romaine to adopt Catholicism and then persuade him to make over to the Church that to which it has a moral right. He does not give up when Romaine marries; but ferrets out the information that Stella, Romaine's wife, had unwittingly contracted a bigamous marriage and had left the bridegroom at the church door. Father Benwell persuades Romaine that this was a true marriage as it was a church marriage. The first marriage by Winterfield had been no marriage at all in the eyes of the Church as it had been contracted in a registry

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office. Therefore Stella was still married to the husband she had deserted at the church door and was not Romaine's wife. Accepting this reasoning, Romaine becomes a Catholic priest. He learns later that a son has been born to him. When his health fails, he sends for his wife and son and, before he dies, destroys the will which has made provision for Vange Abbey to go to the Roman Catholic Church. Stella re-marries Winterfield, whose first wife has died.

The Black Robe is not the utter failure of its immediate predecessors. While it is a thesis novel, the propaganda material is kept in check (except where Collins paints a most unconvincing picture of Father Benwell's chagrin when Vange Abbey is lost to the Church once more). The young priest, Father Penrose, does not at all like the role he has to play; and eventually, from love of Romaine, refuses to go any further with it. Father Benwell is convincingly portrayed as a suave and formidable man who relentlessly overcomes obstacles to his appointed goal. Only in the last scene does he lose his composure. On occasion he may be compared with Fosco.

The early chapters of The Black Robe are well written and the story progresses well. For the most part, however, it drags on without any action. This story is really rather thin, and Collins is niggardly in doling out small doses of story with large doses of irrelevance. This novel does not suffer from many real digressions; but the story of the duel, Romaine's subsequent persecution complex, and the part played by the son of the General, who had witnessed the duel, could easily have been dispensed with.

No character comes to life. Father Benwell is human at times only; Mrs Eyrecourt is well drawn as a type but falls short of success. Stella remains passive, though we would expect more of a woman in her late twenties: she fails to live up to the promise of the early chapters.

With the exception of the gambling scene and the duelling scene, both in the prologue, the book is without atmosphere. In the earlier chapters Collins successfully creates some suspense, but after this the story drags on interminably following a course foreseen by the reader.

Had the characterisation been clear-cut, the story speeded up and the dialogue kept more pertinent, Collins could have made of this an absorbing thriller - but it would still not have achieved anything like the status of The Moonstone.

vii : Two Good Short Stories and a Poor One

"Yes, sir, I am to caution the persons that whatever they may say will be taken down, and may be used in evidence against them."

"I removed the key from the street door after locking it; and I said to the landlady: 'Nobody must leave the house, or enter the house, till the Inspector comes!'"

Who Killed Zebedee? is an exciting short story of detection. Collins includes features which have, once again, provided with subsequent writers with techniques without which they seem ill-equipped to write a detective story. We are introduced to regular routine police procedure: The doors are locked, windows checked for security, enquiries are made about visitors and the times of their arrival and departure, and the histories

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of the residents are checked. These residents all have characteristics which make them possible candidates for the role of murderer, and the person who admits to being guilty is obviously innocent. The murder weapon is photographed and advertised widely in every police station in the country. Several most satisfactory red herrings are included.

Who Killed Zebedee? was first published in The Seaside Library on the 26th January, 1881 and was included in the Little Novels collection as Mr Policeman and the Cook.

Mr Zebedee, who is on his way with his wife to Australia, is found murdered in a lodging-house in London. Mrs Zebedee believes that she has murdered her husband in his sleep. The murder weapon is a knife bearing the inscription "To Zebedee from". One of the residents, Mr Deluc, a Creole from Martinique, is suspect. He had made advances to Mrs Zebedee and, upon being repulsed, had said "Madam, you may live to regret this." He is watched, but nothing suspicious is discovered. A description of the knife is circulated, but to no purpose. The case is filed, but the young policeman cannot take his mind off the problem. In the course of his investigations he has fallen in love with the cook at the lodging-house, and arranges a visit to her parents. She has preceded him and he misses the train when seeking refreshment at the station previous to his destination. Whiling away the time until he can catch the next train, he wanders about the town. On the off-chance, he makes enquiries about the knife at a cutler's shop. The unfinished engraving on the knife is explained: it should have read "To Zebedee. From Priscilla Thirby" - that is the cook's name. Once

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he has completed his journey, he makes enquiries of the local parson and learns that Zebedee had worked in that area, had been engaged to the cook, but had left after the banns had been called and after attempting unsuccessfully to seduce her. The cook had reclaimed the knife from the engraver before the inscription had been completed and had gone to London to seek a position. When Zebedee had turned up at the lodging-house bound for Australia with another wife, the cook had seized her opportunity and had plunged the knife into him.

This is one of Collins's best short stories and certainly his best short detective story. The construction is excellent, the least-likely-person motif is cleverly exploited and the red herrings are most satisfactory. There are two small points of adverse criticism: Collins departs from the fair-play rule when he withholds from us information obtained from the cook as regards Deluc; and chance plays rather too large a part in bringing the constable to the cutler's shop.

Your Money or Your Life , published in The People's Library on the 17th December, 1881, and in Little Novels as Mr Cosway and the Landlady, is a flimsy story of two naval officers who run into debt at an inn while waiting for their ship to sail. The landlady suggests that she will take no steps against them in one of them will marry her. Though the marriage is not to be consummated, it will give her status and protection in her position as landlady. Mr Cosway marries her, spends four years at sea, leaves the navy, inherits a fortune and learns

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that his wife is dead. He falls in love with a young lady far above him in station, but the course of true love does not run at all smoothly. A senior share-holder in his prospective father-in-law's business, a Miss Benshaw, turns out to be his wife. Reports of her death had been false. Upon inheriting her father's estate she had given up the inn and had resumed her maiden name.

Two years later Cosway learns that his wife has been drowned in a boating accident and that her fortune has been bequeathed to the girl he loves, provided she does not marry Cosway. She does, nevertheless.

Collins informs us that the strange marriage is based on fact and is taken from an anecdote in Lockhart's Life of Scott which concerns one of Scott's cousins who married the proprietress of an inn under similar circumstances.

Collins writes with skill and fluency, but there is in this story a triteness which is to become increasingly evident in later stories.

How I Married Him, published in The Spirit of the Times on the 24th December, 1881 and included in Little Novels as Miss Morris and the Stranger, is written with lightness and charm and a fine understanding of a young woman's mind. We find in this short story an excellent example of that strange secret language which only women understand, a language which seems perfectly innocuous to men, but with which women can wound each other deeply. There is a touch of malice in Miss Morris. When a gentleman says that her rival sings so well that she should be on the stage, she places on record:

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"I thought so too. Big as it was, our drawing room was not large enough for her."

Nancy Morris, a friendless, poor orphan, is provided with an education by Sir Gervase. She shows her gratitude in such a becoming manner that he becomes truly fond of her. Upon taking up a position as governess, she meets Mr Sax. They love each other, but Sax is so shy that he is easily rebuffed. Upon Sir Gervase's death Nancy inherits seventy thousand pounds, but the executor suggests that Sir Gervase's nephew has more right to the money. Nancy refuses the bequest and then learns that the nephew is Mr Sax. When he refuses to accept the money, she drops her maidenly **reserve** and suggests that they solve the difficulty by marrying.

Collins has obviously written this story for a special market: the light magazine. Yet there are some delightful touches of character: Mrs Fosdyke has an easy competent way with children, Mr Sax's shyness leads him deeper into the mire whenever he tries to extricate himself from a predicament. The story flows smoothly, the difficulties are created and resolved with aplomb, and a delicate vein of humour flows through all. This is a first-person narrative in which Nancy Morris emerges as a natural and sweet young woman with a well-developed sense of humour - provided she is not in the presence of a rival.

(viii.)

viii : Heart and Science

By 1880 Collins was a semi-invalid put on a simple diet to which he did not always adhere. He was too weak to do much walking and hardly ever went out. Nor did he entertain. In 1881 he wrote to a friend "For three months the gout has again tortured my eyes."¹ Then in 1882 he started on Heart and Science, and wrote to Mrs Lehmann: "For six months while I was writing furiously - without exception, one part sane and three parts mad - I had no gout."²

This improved state of health is reflected in Heart and Science, which made its appearance in The Belgravia Magazine, commencing in August, 1882. Though Collins was fifty-eight there are no signs yet of diminishing powers. The inclusion of anti-vivisection propaganda is unfortunate, but is only incidental to the plot and occupies relatively little space.

Robinson says that "the plain narrative is handled clumsily and fails to grip".³ I cannot find myself in agreement with this opinion. There is little that is new in the construction of Heart and Science.

It is compounded of tried and tested ingredients: thwarted lovers, a strange will, a Jezebel, a sinister house, poison, touches of humour, suspense, atmosphere, scenic description and unsuspected twists in the tale. In two ways, however, this story comes near to the greatness of The Woman in White, No Name and Armadale: the materials of his craft are handled with much of

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1. Robinson K.: op. cit., p. 295.

2. Davis N.P.: op. cit., p. 296, quoting from the Lehmann Collection, London.

3. Robinson K.: op. cit., p. 302.

his old skill, and the characters are not only new and refreshing, but are changed by their impact upon one another in a way which materially affects the course of the story. This is something new in Collins. Previously there had been hints in Hartright in The Woman in White and in Captain Wragge in No Name, but this quality has not previously become an integral part of a novel.

While Collins's motives are praiseworthy, he would have done well to avoid the topic of vivisection. Heart and Science reveals that he was ill-equipped for dealing with the question, both on the score of knowledge and of temperament. It is true that he tries to present a fair case, but he fails to show that Dr Benjulia was callous because of his practices, and he fails to prove that vivisection is not necessary. His preoccupation with this theme betrays him into writing several foolish scenes, e.g. that of Carmina's refusing to enter a cab lest it run over a dog or a child, and Ovid Vere's horror when Benjulia steps unwittingly upon a beetle.

In his preface, Collins mentions the Ferrier Case in which Professor Ferrier had been charged under the Vivisection Act with causing unnecessary suffering to two monkeys, and this is obviously the source of his protest.

Though there is some truth in Swinburne's parody:

"What brought Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?
Some demon whispered - 'Wilkie! have a mission!'"¹.

this does not justify a complete condemnation of Heart and Science.

No summary can do justice to this novel because the interest arises from the changing loyalties brought about in the characters, and the changes are the result

(of

1. Swinburne A.C.: op. cit., p. 127.

of the power of good over evil, though this is not at any time openly stated as a theme. The action arises out of the terms of the will left by Carmina's father.

Carmina's aunt is made her guardian, and Carmina may not marry without her aunt's consent before she comes of age. If she dies unmarried or without issue, her fortune goes to the aunt and her daughters. The aunt, Mrs Gallilee, is deeply in debt and does all in her power to prevent Carmina's marriage to her son. She fails in the end.

In spite of their strange names, the characters are new and convincing. Carmina is simple and good, but she shows that she has the courage to rebel against injustice. There is something about her sweet innocence and her influence over others that brings to mind the strange unwitting power of Browning's Pippa.

Mrs Gallilee, a ~~mabbish~~ bully, weak enough to be in debt because of a desire to emulate her rich sister, is unscrupulous, hard and cruel - but she cannot really compare with Gwilt or Lecount. We see her on her mettle only in the subtle exchanges with Frances Minerva, the governess, who is more than a match for her:

"There was an interval of silence between the two ladies.

Mrs Gallilee waited for Miss Minerva to speak next. Miss Minerva waited to be taken into Mrs Gallilee's confidence. The sparrows twittered in the garden; and, far away in the schoolroom, the notes of the piano announced that the music lesson had begun.

'The birds are noisy,' said Mrs Gallilee.

'And the piano sounds out of tune,' Miss Minerva remarked.

There was no help for it. Either Mrs Gallilee must return to the matter in hand - or the matter in hand must drop.

'I am afraid I have not made myself understood,' she resumed.

'I am afraid I have been very stupid,' Miss Minerva confessed.

Resigning herself to circumstances, Mrs Gallilee put the question in a new form."

(Mrs

Mrs Gallilee's character emerges from her deeds and her opinions:

"Coprolites are the fossilised indigestions of extinct reptiles. The great philosopher who has written that book has discovered scales, bones, teeth and shells - the undigested food of those interesting Saurians. What a man! Poetry? Oh, good heavens! Everybody has flowers in their drawing rooms - they are part of the furniture I sometimes dissect flowers, but I never trouble myself to arrange them When you see a little more of society, my child, you will know that one must like music. So again with pictures - one must go to the Royal Academy Exhibition." 1

In spite of himself, Collins has painted a convincing portrait of Dr Benjulia. This "living skeleton" over six feet six inches in height, with his "massive forehead, his great gloomy eyes, his protuberant cheek-bones" and "gipsy-brown" complexion, is portrayed as a man who lives for his research, who has no love for anyone - but cannot resist the open honesty and exuberance of the ten-year-old Zo. He sneers when Carmina speaks of love and challenges her to define it - but is thoughtful when she replies that "Love is - God".

We witness Minerva struggling with her jealousy of Carmina and her response to the young girl's trust in her:

"I felt attracted toward you, when we first met. You didn't return the feeling - you (very naturally) disliked me. I am ugly and ill-tempered; and, if there is any good₂ in me, it doesn't show itself on the surface."

She proves worthy of Carmina's trust in her, but her love for Ovid Vere is as strong as ever. Jealousy overpowers her:

"She started to her feet, roused to a frenzy by her own recollections. Standing at the window, she looked down at the pavement of the courtyard - it was far enough below to kill her instantly if she fell on it. Through the heat of her anger there crept the chill and stealthy prompting of despair. She leaned over the window-sill - she was not afraid - she might have done it, but for₃ a trifling interruption. Somebody spoke outside."

(Minerva

1. Chap. 15.
2. Chap. 16.
3. Chap. 21.

Minerva decides in a weak moment that she will use Mrs Gallilee to break the love between Ovid and Carmina, but she cannot bring herself to go through with it, and she warns Carmina that she, Minerva, is not to be trusted:

"You are little better than a child. I have ten times your strength of will - what is there in you that I can't resist? Go away from me! - Be on your guard against me! I am false; I am suspicious; I am cruel. You simpleton, have you no instincts to protect you? Is there nothing in you that shrinks from me?"¹

Before she has done, she resigns her post rather than have anything to do with Carmina's enemy, Mrs Gallilee and she relinquishes another post to be at Carmina's bedside when she is ill.

Teresa's consistent devotion to Carmina, her elemental reaction to any threat to her protegee's safety, her superstitious beliefs, and her simplicity make of her a most convincing minor character. Mr Gallilee, bullied and browbeaten, with a good solid meal as his cure for all ills, comes to Carmina's aid when Mrs Gallilee calls her an 'impudent bastard'. He enjoys his new-found power and the unaccustomed respect shown by the servants, but his heart fails him once his exhilaration has worn off - and he shelters behind the law and friendship of Mr Mool, the shy lawyer who is one of Collins's most convincing legal men. Zo is ten years of age - and Collins's daughter was ten at the time of writing this novel. She flits through the pages with a refreshing candour, absorbing knowledge with reluctance and comestibles with alacrity; she thinks breakfast is "jolly", and whispers "Give us a holiday" at the mention of lessons; "Look sharp" she cries to the celebrated Dr Benjulia, and says he is a "miserable chap" when he tells her that he has no children, no wife and no friend. She loses no time in hiding when

(her

her mother returns:

"'She said I wasn't to come to you. She's a quick one on her legs - she might catch me on the stairs.'" ¹

She returns from Scotland with a poor opinion of haggis and the highest opinion of pipers and Scottish drinking songs.

Ovid Vere is as good as most of Collins's young men and better than some. The weakness, meanness and spitefulness of the music master, Le Frank, is well brought out. There is a touch of poetic justice in Teresa's damaging his hands by closing the door to the cupboard into which he had no right to be prying: his career as a music master is over.

Benjulia's house is situated at the end of a lonely lane:

" a hideous square building of yellow brick with a slate roof. A low wall surrounded the place, having another iron gate at the entrance. The enclosure within was as barren as the field without: not even an attempt at flower-garden or kitchen-garden was visible." ²

Benjulia suffers from gout:

"'Ten thousand red-hot devils are boring through my foot. If you touch the pillow on my stool, I shall fly at your throat.' He poured some cooling lotion from a bottle into a small watering-pot, and irrigated his foot as if it had been a bed of flowers." ³

Heart and Science is compounded of character, plot and humour; and humour plays a much greater part than in any previous novel. For the time in which he wrote, Collins was sometimes rather daring; for instance he makes a man-servant say:

"Most cooks are excitable. They say it's the kitchen fire." ⁴

(Heart)

1. Chap. 45.
2. Chap. 19.
3. Chap. 19.
4. Chap. 37.

Heart and Science gives us a greater number of worthwhile characters than any other Collins novel; its plot is subtly unfolded and its course cannot be anticipated, because it depends on the influence of one character upon another rather than upon incident. If we exclude the unfortunate pages devoted to anti-vivisection propaganda, Heart and Science must rank very near Collins' best.

ix : Three Frivolous Tales

Fie! Fie! or the Fair Physician appeared in a special supplement to The Pictorial World on the 23rd December, 1882.

Miss Sophia Pillico, M.D., is loved by the men and hated by the women. She is attracted to Mr Fitzmark, and consequently decides to break his engagement to Salome whom he loves dearly. Pretending to be concerned about the state of his heart, she advises against his marrying or moving in society. Salome is desolated, but her sister takes charge and proves a match for Miss Pillico. She rouses Fitzmark by making him believe that Salome is attracted to another man, frightens off Miss Pillico - and all ends happily.

Collins manages his effects with skill, but the story remains frothy.

She Loves and Lies appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 23rd December, 1883. In Little Novels (1887) it bore the title of Mr Lismore and the Widow. This is a somewhat ridiculous story of how Mr Lismore, when in financial difficulties, is approached by a

(wealthy

wealthy old widow and told that he had once saved her from a burning building. Her husband, who had not recovered from the burns sustained, had left the usufruct of his estate to her. If, however, she married the man who had rescued her, she would inherit the whole estate in her own right.

She offers herself to Lismore in marriage, saying that they will live as mother and son. Lismore agrees and, after a quiet wedding, they travel on the Continent. Lismore, who has a taste for painting, falls in love with a young girl who he meets in an art gallery. Lismore remains true to his wife and suggests that they depart for another town. Upon further acquaintance with the young woman, he finds that her coarseness repels him.

The young woman then declares herself as his wife, explains that she had been a young character actress married to an old man, and that she had never really loved until Lismore had rescued her from the fire.

Collins fails to explain why the wife should have adopted the character of an old woman and why Lismore had not remembered that the woman he had rescued from the fire was young. It is likely that this story was rushed through to be ready for the Christmas Supplement.

Love's Random Shot is something of a mystery. It was never published in Britain. Parrish gives it as appearing in Love's Random Shot and other stories by Wilkie Collins (George Munro's Sons, N.Y., 1894) and my copy is from The Seaside Library, Vol. LXXXVII, No. 1770, which bears no printed date. The date, 1884, is added

(in

in ink, and the first page bears the Library of Congress stamp, dated February 12, 1884. There is some reason to believe that this story constitutes piracy in a new form: piracy of Collins's name rather than his work. This story bears no resemblance at all to anything else written by Collins.

Written in the first person, the narrator is sheriff of an unspecified Scottish town. A priceless painting has been stolen, and Lord Dalton offers to treble the income of Benjamin Parsley, a retired detective, reputed to be the best in all Scotland. Within three weeks Parsley restores the painting but refuses to say how he recovered it. He says that his prisoner escaped on the journey from Brussels. Gossip has it that a member of the lord's family was responsible for the theft.

Mrs Parsley tells the sheriff that Parsley has lost all interest in her and their daughters, and has taken to dressing in the latest fashion. He has been mumbling in his sleep, and, upon her complaining, has insisted upon sleeping in a separate bedroom. When the sheriff questions Parsley, Parsley refuses to tell him anything, but leaves with tears in his eyes. The sheriff feels sure that Parsley is being unfaithful to his wife and has fallen into the hands of some scheming woman.

Parsley insists that a governess for his daughters be appointed. Miss Beaumont is a shameless wretch with whom Parsley is suspected of being in love. When Miss Beaumont is reported to have been seen throwing coloured water out of her window, a detective drugs her and finds that she has assumed a disguise. She wears a wig to cover her short pretty hair. When he espies a scar

(near

near her right breast and a false eye-tooth, he identifies her as a woman suspected of a terrible crime.

A warrant is issued for her arrest and Parsley is accused of being an accomplice after the fact. Parsley is acquitted but the woman is found guilty and sentenced to death. Parsley does everything in his power to obtain a reprieve and, when he fails, suffers a breakdown, and becomes more and more listless until death ends his sufferings.

"'Don't mention it among my colleagues' says the doctor. 'If there really is such a thing - Benjamin Parsley died of a broken heart.'"

If this is not a piracy of Collins's name by someone who has clumsily tried to use a record of a criminal court case as the basis for a short story, then it may be adduced as proof of the allegation, current in Collins's later years, that he employed a 'ghost-writer'. Arthur Waugh had written in The Academy Magazine (5th April, 1902) in an article entitled Wilkie Collins: and his Mantle, of "that period in which, so I have been told, the pens of kindly companions helped his failing vigour to keep pace with the demands of the market."¹ Collins's work evinces characteristics which label it as unmistakably his and any suggestion that he employed 'ghost writers' to any extent must be discounted. If Love's Random Shot was written with his cognisance, then it is an isolated example.

There is a racy terseness to the style, a lack of description, personal or scenic, a lack of unity, a lack of true detection, and no suspense or atmosphere. Collins wrote nothing like this either before or after 1884.

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1. vide Robinson K.: op. cit., p. 303.

x : I Say No

I Say No (1884) was Collins's last detective story and its interest for us ends with this. It was his least successful novel and for several reasons. It is a poor imitation of The Law and the Lady; Emily Brown only turns detective half-way through the novel when she essays to solve the mysterious death of her father. Suspicion shifts from one character to another according to a familiar pattern and there is an unexpected ending similar to that of The Law and the Lady. The secret is easily guessed at by the reader, and chance plays an unduly preponderant part in the unfolding of the story. The characterisation is poor and there is no sign of any of the technical excellences which we have come to know as typical of Collins's work. Swinburne liked this novel and called it an "example of his conscientious and ingenious workmanship."

The Girl at the Gate appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 6th December, 1884 and was included in Little Novels as Mr Lepel and the Housekeeper. There is a freshness to this story and a complexity of plot and a skilful exposition of Lepel's character which makes this short story important. Here is evidence that Collins had not yet lost his touch, though he was sixty years of age and a sick man.

Lepel, a wealthy bachelor of forty years, is in Italy with his friend Rothsay. They see a play in which a wealthy young nobleman who has been condemned to death, marries a girl of common birth so that upon his

(death,

death, she will be a wealthy countess and thus a fit wife for his friend who is in love with her.

Immediately after his marriage the nobleman is pardoned - but Lepel is called away at this point and does not see how the play ends.

Lepel goes to stay at his uncle's country mansion and falls into the habit of helping Susan with her French lessons. Susan is the daughter of Mrs Rymer, keeper of the lodge gates. Rothsay, who is not rich, will not allow himself to be mentioned in Lepel's will, and says that Lepel has made a mistake in letting his housekeeper know that she is to benefit. Lepel learns that Rothsay has fallen in love with Susan.

Lepel falls victim to some strange sickness and moves from London to his uncle's residence to see if the country air will benefit him. Susan attends him, but his condition deteriorates until he is near death. He learns that Susan loves him and marries her so that when he is dead, she may be won, with a fortune, by Rothsay.

Susan, while nursing him, drops his medicine on the floor and his recovery is almost immediate. Upon enquiry Lepel discovers that his medicine had been tampered with by his housekeeper's brother who worked for the firm of chemists who supplied the medicine. Lepel now also learns that Susan's mother had intercepted the letter stating the terms upon which he would marry her, so that Susan knew nothing about his intentions. He now loves her so dearly that he offers his friend, first an explanation, and then the satisfaction of a duel. Susan intervenes, demands to see Rothsay alone and then refuses to impart any information as to what had transpired

(between

between them. All she will say is that Rothsay has left asking Lepel to forgive and forget.

The skilful manipulation of two plots in such a short story is no mean achievement. The story is given added meaning as it moves parallel to the theme of the play. Depth and vividness is lent to the characterisation of Lepel by the device of letting us see him through the eyes of his servant.

Royal Love is a readable short story first published in the Christmas Number of Longman's Magazine, December, 1884. In Little Novels it appeared as Mr Medhurst and the Princess.

Medhurst, a young man of good family, is a junior diplomat in a German principality. He learns that the princess is in love with him and he is captivated by her beauty. He sees in her all the virtues, and refuses to believe his friend when he says that she is shallow and frivolous.

It is suggested to Medhurst that he would be wise to have an affair with some woman of low degree to quash the rumour that the princess has been interested in him. While Medhurst is wondering what he will do, he meets Jeanne, the daughter of his old singing-master. She has become a great opera-singer. He visits her backstage, and this is taken as compliance with the official request.

He meets the princess and she suggests an elopement or a suicide pact. She says she cannot be made jealous by "a person in that rank of life." Medhurst spends a sleepless night, but the next day he learns

(that

that the princess has engaged herself to be married to the ruler of a neighbouring duchy; and that the opera-singer has been banished.

Medhurst escorts the opera-singer to London, cares for her and marries her.

This story flows smoothly and is given several neat twists. Collins shows once again his gift for capturing character in a few words. A diplomat is described as "an empty man carefully trained to look full on public occasions."

xi : The Evil Genius

The Evil Genius was produced in 1885 for one performance only, with the purpose of securing copyright. It would seem that Collins, after the relative failure of The Moonstone as a drama in 1877 and the complete failure of Rank and Riches in 1883, could not find anyone to back it. The novel appeared in The Leigh Journal Times from December, 1885 to May, 1886.

The Evil Genius is something quite different from anything Collins had written previously. It hardly deserves to be called a domestic novel and is, perhaps, better considered as a love story. Very little happens that has to do with the story: the master runs off with the governess and fails to marry her after his wife has divorced him. He goes back to his wife mainly because he has been missing his child; his wife takes him back because she has found the life of a divorcee¹⁶ most ungenial, and especially because a suitor has refused to marry her after discovering that she is a divorced woman.

(There

There are interesting sections, but they are by way of being digressions. Collins opens this story strongly with a study of a jury considering their verdict. He continues well with a story of a cryptogram and the hunt for a parcel of diamonds which is filched by a most promising cracker of cyphers so that he can return it to its rightful owners. Then we are given a picture of a private school in which Sydney Westerfield re-enacts, to some extent, Becky Sharp's departure from Miss Pinkerton's Academy. There is a convincing little scene in which Sydney's mother, formerly a barmaid, and a barman arrange the terms on which they will consider marriage. All this is contained in the first forty pages.

The rest of the novel holds little interest for us apart from one or two autobiographical touches. Chance plays far too important a rôle, not a single character in the main part of the story comes to life, there is no plot worth mentioning, no suspense, no atmosphere and a series of ridiculous scenes. Even Sarrazin, the lawyer, is mediocre.

It may seem surprising that the critics took Collins to task for allowing the divorced couple to re-marry, but quite apart from the Victorian attitude to divorce, I feel that they were right in criticising Collins as far as The Evil Genius is concerned. Mr and Mrs Linley re-marry for the poorest of reasons - convenience.

It is likely that Collins drew from his own experience when he wrote of the difficulties encountered in hotels by Linley and his mistress, Sydney Westerfield.

(Davis

Davis tells us that the scene in Chapter XXXIV where no children come to Kitty Linley's tea party and where she wants to know why people call her a 'hussy', actually happened to Collins's Caroline and Harriet. He gives what he calls a verbatim reconstruction, but there are important divergences - and we must conclude that, though it is likely that something similar did occur to Collins and his family, we shall never know just what happened. It is just as likely that some such incident had come Collins's way while he was at Broadstairs with Martha Rudd and her children, as "Mr and Mrs Dawson". Collins goes out of his way to drag the question of international copyright into Chapter XXVIII:

"What made you go to America? You haven't been delivering lectures, have you?"

"I have been enjoying myself among the most hospitable people in the world."

"A people to be pitied."

"Why?"

"Because their government forgets what is due to the honour of the nation."

"How?"

"In this way: The honour of a nation which confers right of property in works of art, produced by its own citizens, is surely concerned in protecting from theft works of art produced by other citizens."

Perhaps Collins derived some comfort from a mental picture of an American publisher, bent on literary piracy, feeling a twinge of conscience as he reads these words.

The description of the jury is the best passage in The Evil Genius:

"It was the foreman's duty, under these circumstances to treat his deliberative brethren as we treat our watches when they stop: He wound up the jury and set them going."

"Gentlemen", he began, "Have you formed any decided opinion on the case thus far?"

Some of them said 'Yes', and some of them said 'No.' The little drowsy man said nothing. The fretful invalid cried, 'Go on!' The nervous jurymen suddenly rose. His brethren all looked at him, inspired by the same fear of having got an orator among them. He was an essentially polite man; and he hastened to relieve

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 their minds. 'Pray don't be alarmed gentlemen; I am not going to make a speech. I suffer from fidgets. Excuse me if I occasionally change my position.' The hungry juryman (who dined early) looked at his watch. 'Half-past four,' he said. 'For heaven's sake cut it short.' He was the fattest person present; and he suggested a subject to the inattentive juryman who drew pictures on his blotting-paper. Deeply interested in the progress of the likeness, his neighbours on either side looked over his shoulders. The little drowsy man woke with a start, and begged pardon of everybody. The fretful invalid said to himself, 'Damned fools all of them!' The patient foreman, biding his time, stated his case." 1.

The Poetry Did It : An Event in the Life of Major Evergreen, appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 26th December, 1885.

This is a somewhat ridiculous story written in lighter vein. Major Evergreen cannot abide Sir John because one of Sir John's papers had printed an article accusing Major Evergreen's poetry of being imitations of Byron, Scott and Wordsworth.

When Cyril Corydon, a young graduate, falls in love with Mabel, the major's niece, she pretends to be displeased and Cyril goes in despair to Sir John to consult him. Sir John realises that they both love the same woman, and gains the advantage by keeping this information to himself, and advising Cyril accordingly. In a spirit of mischief Mabel says she will marry the one who writes the best poem. Cyril gives up in despair after many attempts, but Sir John steals one of the major's poems:

"They say she's dark; yes like the night
 Whose beauty shines from starry skies;
 Oh, my sweet saint, how darkly bright
 The mellow radiance of thine eyes!
 I love you in the tender light -
 The light that gaudy day denies."

"Very pretty" says Mabel " - and reminds me of Byron."

(The

1. Before the Story.

The major enters and accuses Sir John of having "been among my manuscripts." Sir John makes an undignified exit, Mabel marries Cyril and, whenever she is asked why, replies: "The poetry did it."

An Old Maid's Husband appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 25th December, 1886 and was included in Little Novels as Miss Dulane and My Lord.

Lord Beaucourt contracts a marriage of convenience with Miss Dulane: she is rich, and he can make her Lady Beaucourt. He was in love with a young widow, but she would not marry him because her marriage with her previous husband had been a bigamous one. This widow accepts a post as companion, not knowing that she will be entering Beaucourt's home. Lady Beaucourt learns of their love and the widow is assisted to emigrate to New Zealand where she will live with rich relatives.

Lady Beaucourt causes enquiries to be made about the first marriage and her lawyer's clerk establishes that the husband's first wife was already married when she went through the second form of marriage. So it is the first marriage which is bigamous and invalid. Lady Beaucourt takes a chill and dies. Beaucourt learns from New Zealand that there has been a volcanic eruption and that, as a result, the whole household where the widow had been staying, had been killed.

Beaucourt withdraws himself from society and, when his health declines, is taken to hospital. In his poor state of health he imagines that he sees the apparition of the young widow - but it turns out that her life had been saved and she has returned to Beaucourt. They marry.

(This

This story shows that Collins can still, at sixty-two, create interesting characters and find his way through an intricate plot. Though the plot is a combination of part of The Black Robe and part of The Story of the First Poor Traveller, Collins still writes with skill. Chance plays an inordinate part in this story, but Moses Jackling makes up for this by taking us on a fascinating hunt for information regarding the widow's husband. Jackling is Collins's last detective and he employs methods with which later writers have made us familiar. He bribes servants, he confronts a woman with irrefutable evidence and obtains further information after brow-beating her. He is a real ferret for information and laudably sparing of words.

The Guilty River is, according to Quilter, "a shilling dreadful."¹ Arrowsmith later published it in soft covers for sixpence, but it was hardly worth the money. The first edition was published in December, 1886, as Arrowsmith's Christmas Annual. This last Christmas Number by Collins was written in two months and is compounded of ideas taken from earlier work, thrown together with little regard for unity or credibility. There is hardly a device for creating sensation not to be found in the pages of The Guilty River; but there is no plot worth mentioning, no characters that live and the construction is careless in the extreme. Collins has let his imagination run riot with poisons and antidotes, a sinister house, a rich young man in love with a miller's daughter, a cruel father and a deaf man who is mentally unbalanced. This deaf man is possessed of a grandfather who ended on the gallows,

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1. Quilter H.: op.cit., p. 276.

an uncle guilty of gambling with loaded dice and a father who had seduced and deserted an innocent girl. The deaf man's favourite reading consists of volumes of French and English trials.

There is a boat adrift on the ocean - and the miller's daughter is missing. A rocket is fired at sea - but still the miller's daughter cannot be found. The deaf man has left too. A year later information arrives to the effect that the miller's daughter has been cruising in the Mediterranean with her wealthy uncle in his yacht; and that the deaf man has recovered his hearing and his sanity - but he has only three weeks to live. The young man finds the miller's daughter and they marry.

Twenty thousand copies of The Guilty River were sold in the first week.

The rushing of this novelette took its toll of Collins. After he had completed it in November he wrote:

"I am like the old posting horse in the old posting days. While I was whipped my pace was wonderful. Now we have got to our destination my head hangs down and my forelegs tremble. But considering that I was twelve hours a day at work for the last week of my labours, I have no reason to complain of my constitution."

In April, 1887 Collins published Little Novels in three volumes. Though it contains no little novels, nor any novelettes, several of the fourteen stories, all reprinted from various periodicals, are among his best.

The First Officer's Confession is Collins's last short story. It appeared in The Spirit of the Times on the 24th December, 1887.

Miss Mira Ringmore is horrified when the captain of the ship bound for England from America tells her that
 (she is ...)
 l. vide Robinson K.: op. cit. p. 311.

she cannot keep her dog and must send it to the ship's butcher. The first officer explains that the butcher will care for the dog until they reach England. They fall in love with each other and the first officer visits Mira at the Ladies' school of which her aunt is the headmistress. He learns that Mira is married and has a son. As he is leaving, the gate-keeper tells him the truth: The aunt had married a rogue who had deserted her after she had discovered that the marriage was bigamous. When a son is born the aunt, to preserve appearances, lets it be known that it is Mira's son who has been sent to her from America to care for. When Mira comes to visit the aunt, she is asked to keep up the deception. The first officer marries Mira and the headmistress keeps her 'adopted' son.

This story is readable, and much more successful than The Guilty River. It is written with a light, sure touch and the construction is taut.

xii : The Legacy of Cain

The Legacy of Cain was published in July, 1888 and is the first Collins novel for many years not published in a periodical before appearing in book form. This was Collins's last complete novel, and it is fitting that he dedicated it to Mrs Henry Powell Bartley (Harriet Graves) who had for many years acted as his secretary.

There is something sad about The Legacy of Cain. No one will ever know the sufferings of "the old postang horse" who struggled against ill-health and waning

powers as he fought to compose from his notes a novel worthy of its predecessors. The materials for a good novel are all there; but the clarity of mind and the old ingenuity are missing. Here and there he writes magnificently, but the novel is a failure.

Could Collins have succeeded in making a case for the power of inherited traits over environment, or could he have shown that a good environment can overcome a poor heredity, this novel could have been a great success. Unfortunately Collins fumbles and his aims are not at all clear. His presentation is needlessly muddled and so he fails; first in stating his aim clearly, and second in showing anything in particular.

Eunice is adopted by a Congregational minister. Her mother has been condemned to death for the brutal murder of her husband. The minister's wife is hard, mean and cruel. A year after the adoption, a daughter, Helena, is born to them - the minister's wife dies soon after. The minister keeps the adoption secret.

When the girls grow up, Eunice falls in love with Philip Dunboyne. Helena manages to attract him and he tries to break off his engagement with Eunice. Eunice is strongly tempted to kill him, but she resists and gains a victory over her elemental passions. Philip tires of Helena, and she tries to kill him by poisoning. She is prevented, serves a sentence and goes to America where she becomes a famous preacher. Eunice and Philip marry and remain happy, though both have been told of Eunice's background.

Collins uses the multiple-narrative technique, but his old skill has deserted him. There is much ado about which daughter is the elder (and therefore adopted)

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n/ and about a Mrs Tenbrugge[↑] who knows part of the secret of the adoption and the fact that the daughter was born in the absence of the minister: but these are all loose threads which come to nothing. This is quite unlike the Collins who did not let a door-handle turn without its fulfilling an important function.

Collins keeps his purpose well within limits, and the story would have gained had Collins been able to show how events supported or refuted the strong opinions on heredity held by the prison doctor: but he fails in this.

The Congregational minister has a failing mind which will not see clearly or pertinently, and which keeps wandering. It is perhaps significant that this is a type of character who appears in a Collins novel for the first time. He serves little purpose other than to slow down the pace and spin out the novel into three volumes.

Collins shows some of his old skill in not letting us know which girl is the adopted one until half-way through the novel, but fails to maintain interest after this. He is no longer capable of giving his story the ingenious and unexpected twists which made his best novels so fascinating.

n/ Miss Chance (later Mrs Tenbrugge[↑]) is a complete failure as a sly schemer. Her purpose is never clear, not even to herself; and her efforts come to nothing in the end, not because of successful opposition on the part of anyone, but because she had no motive other than a vague spitefulness.

Helena is rather better, but her villainy lacks finesse. Philip is colourless; no character comes to

(life,

life, unless it is Eunice. Many pages are devoted to Miss Jillgall, but she does not at any time ring true.

There is a refreshing honesty and naïveté about Eunice, and she appears in that moving and powerful scene depicting a person acting under the hallucinations induced by a drug, which could only have sprung from Collins's personal experience:

"The light grew fainter and fainter; the objects in the room faded slowly away. Darkness came.

It may be a saying hard to believe - but, when I declare that I was not frightened, I am telling the truth. Whether the room was lit by an awful light, or sunk in awful dark, I was equally interested in the expectation of what might happen next. I listened calmly for what I might hear: I waited calmly for what I might feel.

A touch came first. I felt it creeping on my face - like a little fluttering breeze. The sensation pleased me for a while. Soon it grew colder, and colder, and colder, till it froze me.

'Oh, no more!' I cried out. 'You are killing me with an icy death!'

The dead-cold touch lingered a moment longer - and left me.

The first sound came.

It was the sound of a whisper on my pillow, close to my ear. My strange insensibility to fear remained undisturbed. The whisper was welcome, it kept me company in the dark room."¹

Eunice took the drug only to make her sleep, and the passage quoted serves no particular function in the story: we must conclude that Collins is writing of himself.

The passage immediately succeeding the one quoted above is Collins's most successful venture in capturing the atmosphere of the supernatural:

"It said to me: 'Do you know who I am?'

I answered: 'No.'

It said: 'Who have you been thinking of this evening?'

I answered: 'My mother.'

The whisper said: 'I am your mother.'

'Oh, mother, command the light to come back! Show yourself to me!'

'No.'

'Why not!'

'My face was hidden when I passed from life to death. My face no mortal creature may see.'

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'Oh, mother, touch me! Kiss me!'

'No.'

'Why not?'

'My touch is poison. My kiss is death.'

The sense of fear began to come to me now. I moved my head away on the pillow. The whisper followed my movement.

'Leave me,' I said. You are an Evil Spirit.'

The whisper answered: 'I am your mother.'

'You come to tempt me.'

'I come to harden your heart. Daughter of mine, whose blood is cool; daughter of mine, who tamely submits you have loved. Is it true?'

'It is true.'

'The man who loved you has deserted you. Is it true?'

'It is true.'

'A woman has lured him away to herself. A woman who has had no mercy on you, or on him. Is it true?'

'It is true.'

'If she lives, what crime towards you will she commit next?'

'If she lives, she will marry him.'

'Will you let her live?'

'Never.'

'Have I hardened your heart against her?'

'Yes.'

'Will you kill her?'

'Show me how.'

There was a sudden silence. I was still left in the darkness; feeling nothing, hearing nothing. Even the consciousness that I was lying on my bed deserted me. I had no idea that I was in the bedroom; I had no knowledge of where I was."

She is led by the voice which suggests killing by means of a knife, by means of poison, by means of smothering. As she is about to kill her sister, she calls on Philip to save her - and wakes beside her sister's bed.

There is a convincing inevitability about this passage which makes us feel that Eunice's mother is near and is indeed exerting her influence over her daughter.

Collins writes about death as he has never done before. Previously his characters have died in great numbers, but always at the most convenient time, and usually leaving the most inconvenient wills. But there

m/ is a grim realism to the description of Eunice's mother as she faces the gallows:

"In the autumn of last year I was taken to see some waxworks. Portraits of criminals were among them. There was one portrait --' She hesitated; her infernal self-possession had failed her at last. The colour left her face; she was no longer able to look at me firmly. 'There was one portrait,' she resumed, 'that had been taken after the execution. The face was so hideous; it was swollen to such a size in its frightful deformity -- oh, sir, don't let me be seen in that state, even by the strangers who bury me! Use your influence - forbid them to take the cap off my face when I am dead 1.

There is one scene which is melodramatic in the extreme. The minister has learned that the governor of the prison has let Miss Chance know which daughter is the elder. In his rage, the minister locks the door, throws the key out of the window and approaches the governor with an open razor in his hand. The doctor outside finds the door is locked and quickly writes a note: "How can I help you?" Without being seen or suspected the governor pens a reply: "He has thrown the key into the garden: look for it under the window." There is a struggle while the doctor fetches the key and dashes back to the rescue. One view only emerges from this novel: in spite of the influence of heredity or environment, the will still plays a part.

xiii : Blind Love

Collins was now breaking up. In 1837 he had been obliged to give up the house in Gloucester Place where he had lived for more than twenty years, and move to 82 Wimpole Street. In his state of health, this move upset him badly. We are told that his heart began troubling him at this time, and that the laudanum which he

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was still taking regularly to numb the pain of his gout, so stimulated his mind that he imagined every night as he went to bed, that the staircase was crowded with ghosts trying to push him down. He walked bent almost double leaning heavily on his stick, looking more like a man of eighty than sixty-five.

In January, 1889, he was involved in a collision while travelling in a cab and was thrown out on to the pavement. Though he suffered little more than shock, within a few weeks he had bronchitis. In June, 1889, a few days before the first instalment of Blind Love appeared in The Illustrated London News he suffered from a paralytic stroke. He recovered sufficiently to have visitors, but knew that he could never write again. He had written out the "scenario" of Blind Love in detail and had completed about two-thirds of the novel - sufficient to cover eighteen weekly instalments - and in August he asked Walter Besant if he would finish Blind Love for him.

Besant readily agreed to do this and wrote in the preface that the "scenario" had been worked out in such detail that "the plot of the novel, every scene, every situation, from beginning to end, is the work of Wilkie Collins."

In the middle of September Collins had another attack of bronchitis, and on September 23rd he feebly penned a note to Frank Beard, his doctor and friend of many years standing:

"I am dying - come if you can."

Blind Love is based on the von Scheurer insurance fraud which had been perpetrated in 1883. The Baron von Scheurer had insured his life for fifteen thousand

(pounds

pounds and had left London to live with his mistress in an isolated French village. With a Doctor Castelnau as their accomplice, they searched the pauper wards of the Paris hospitals until they found a man who was dying of consumption and who resembled the Baron. They took him to the isolated village, ostensibly to nurse him back to health. Unfortunately for them, his health did improve, and so Doctor Castelnau hastened matters by administering a dose of poison.

The plan for collecting the insurance money bears a strong resemblance to the plan executed by the Countess in The Haunted Hotel, written five years earlier than the perpetration of this fraud.

The corpse was photographed, but the Baron was not satisfied with the likeness and himself posed as the corpse. The corpse was buried with much pomp and ceremony and a monument erected - then the mistress sent in her claims to the London insurance offices. It seemed strange that the Baron, in perfect health a few months before, should so quickly succumb to consumption, and the insurance companies ordered an investigation similar to that we read of in The Haunted Hotel. They could however discover nothing to justify a refusal to pay out the fifteen thousand pounds.

It is said that truth is stranger than fiction. The German maid at the little cottage had understood French much better than was suspected. Doctor Castelnau ran into her in Paris and forced his attentions upon her. She reported this to her fiancé and also the story of the fraud, and the fiancé reported the matter to the police. The doctor and mistress served prison sentences.

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The Baron committed suicide and the insurance offices recovered eleven thousand pounds.

Volume One of Blind Love is slow-moving. The scene is Ireland and the atmosphere one of intrigue, secret messages and secret meetings. We are introduced to the main characters but very little happens. There is one passage of interest: Collins's mind takes him back to the introduction of A Paradoxical Experience (1858), and he elaborates on the story of the man who picked up some priceless French wine for a song:

'Did the gentleman complain of the French wine?'

'He wants to see you about it ma'am.'

The lady turned pale. The expression of Mr Mountjoy's indignation was evidently reserved for the mistress of the house. 'Did he swear,' she asked, 'when he tasted it?'

'Lord bless you, ma'am, no! Drank it out of a tumbler, and - actually seemed to like it.'

'I'm sorry to trouble you, ma'am. May I ask where you got this wine?'

'The wine, sir, was one of my late husband's bad debts. It was all he could get from a Frenchman who owed him money.'

'It's worth money, ma'am.'

'Indeed, sir?'

'Yes, indeed. This is some of the finest and purest claret that I have tasted for many a long day.'

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'You are the first gentleman, sir, who has not found fault with it.'

'In that case, ma'am, perhaps you would like to get rid of the wine?' Mr Mountjoy suggested.

The landlady was still cautious. 'Who will buy it of me, sir?'

'I will. How much do you charge for it by the bottle?'

It was by this time clear that he was not mischievous - only a little crazy. The worldly-wise hostess took advantage of that circumstance to double the price. Without hesitation she said: 'Five shillings a bottle, sir.'¹

For the rest Blind Love follows the story of the insurance fraud closely. The scene is shifted to Ireland, the mistress becomes Iris Henley, who allows herself to become an accomplice out of "blind love" for the rascally and dissolute Lord Harry.

(Collins

Collins thought that Blind Love would be "a second Moonstone", but there is no mystery, no detection and no pace. His story wearily unfolds itself and, though the plot lends itself to a treatment similar to that of The Woman in White, Collins had lost the inventive genius which had enabled him to take the reader along the strange paths leading to an end appointed by and known only to Collins.

Doctor Vimpany makes a satisfactory villain, but he is not to be compared with Fosco. The other characters fail to make a lasting impression. In spite of this, Blind Love is the best of the novels since Heart and Science (1882).