CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Turning Point

WHATEVER RUPTURE MAY have taken place between Dickens and Wilkie, friendly relations seem to have been re-established by the time the latter's next play was produced. *Black and White,* a melodrama concerned with slavery and the colour question in Trinidad, was written in collaboration with Fechter during the latter part of 1868. The plot was suggested by Fechter, who was to play the lead, and Wilkie made himself responsible for the conception and development of the characters, and for the dialogue. It is a curious fact that Wilkie, with his far greater experience of writing for the stage, invariably submitted his plays to Dickens for his advice and practical help, whereas, after *No Name,* he apparently ceased to consult him over his novels. Accordingly, the script of *Black and White* was sent to Dickens who replied on February 25th, 1869: 'I have read the play with great attention, and with a stage eye: and I think it will be *a great success.* It is highly interesting, admirably constructed and carried through, and very picturesque.' He added some suggestions concerning stage 'business,' and at Wilkie's invitation spent several hours at the dress rehearsal. And so the hatchet, if there was a hatchet, was buried.

Black and White was first produced at the Adelphi Theatre on March 29th, with Carlotta Leclercq, the Marguerite of *No Thoroughfare,* in the leading woman's role opposite Fechter. The entire Dickens family attended the first night in the lower omnibus-box by the stage, 'full of

affectionate partisanship—trying to believe it was a success,' to quote Percy Fitzgerald. Writing to Wills the next day Dickens said: 'You will be glad to hear that Wilkie's play went brilliantly last night. It was extremely well played throughout, and I have rarely seen Fechter to greater advantage. It was more like a fiftieth night than a first . . . There is no doubt that it ought to run, for it has real merit.' The play did not however fulfil the promise of a six-months' run, which the tumultuous applause of the first night had seemed to indicate. Wilkie thought Fechter's playing of Maurice de Layrac even finer than his Obenreizer, and many critics shared his view. Dutton Cook praised faintly: 'It is not a work of high order, but it is certainly a commendable specimen of its class.' It ran for about six weeks at the Adelphi, and a short provincial tour followed. Fechter left for America the following year and in January, 1871, he and Carlotta Leclercq appeared in their original roles in a production of *Black and White* at Boston. Wilkie attributed its comparative failure in England to the fact that the public was tired of slavery as a theme after the spate of dramatic *Uncle Tom's Cabins*. It was said in France at the time that the English had developed a mania of 'Oncle Tommerie.'

This was the beginning of a particularly unsettling period of his life. The year 1868 had been a difficult one in many ways. First there had been his mother's death, then the strain of a long and painful illness. Even the great success of *The Moonstone* must have been offset to some extent by the wrangle with Tinsley, perhaps also by a break in his friendship with Dickens. Finally there was the serious upheaval in his domestic life which resulted in Caroline Graves leaving him to marry another man. It is unlikely that we shall ever know the circumstances which led up to Caroline's marriage to Joseph Clow in October, 1868, whether it was a straightforward case of Wilkie's losing her to a rival, or the outcome of some tacit understanding between them. All we do know, on the evidence of his sister-in-law, is that he was

present at the wedding ceremony. We may however assume that his liaison with Martha Rudd was in some way associated with Caroline's departure, but whether as cause or effect can only be conjecture. Caroline's daughter, then about sixteen years old, remained with Wilkie at Gloucester Place.

On April 24th, 1869, he wrote a strange letter to Frederick Lehmann:

Thank you, from the bottom of my heart, for your kind letter. No man—whatever his disappointments may be—can consider himself other than a fortunate man, when he has got such a friend as you are.

But, for the present, my head is 'well above water.' I have few debts unpaid—I have three hundred pounds or so at my bankers— and a thousand pounds in Indian and Russian railways, which I can sell out (if the worst comes to the worst) at a gain instead of a loss. I may also, in a few months, sell another edition of *The Moonstone* (cheap edition) and get two or three hundred pounds in that way. So, thus far, the money anxieties are not added to the other anxieties which are attacking me. If my health gives way and my prospects darken as this year goes on—you shall be the first man who knows it. Till then, thank you, most sincerely, once more.

I am coming to take pot-luck on Monday next at seven—if you and the Padrona have still arranged to dine alone on that day. Don't trouble to write—unless there is an alteration. I am refusing all invitations on the plea of being 'out of town.' It is necessary to 'lay the keel' of something new—after this disaster—and I am trying to keep myself as quiet as I can.

Yours ever,

W.C.

I shall pay the Arts. Damn the Arts!

There is no means of identifying the 'disaster' mentioned at the end of the letter. It could hardly refer to Caroline's departure which had occurred six months before. It seems too strong a word to describe the comparative failure of *Black and White,* then approaching the close of its brief run. The letter suggests that it is unconnected with money— which Lehmann had clearly offered, or with a breakdown in

health. Something else had happened to him that seriously disturbed his peace of mind.

The keel of his next book, *Man and Wife,* was duly laid, but not even hard work could allay his restlessness. It was not easy to adjust himself to the profound change which, after ten years, had come over his private life, and he found it impossible to remain at 90, Gloucester Place, for more than short periods. The Lehmanns came to his rescue in offering him the hospitality of 'Woodlands,' their house in Southwood Lane, Highgate, for as long as he liked. It was here that he spent many months of 1869 and 1870 and wrote much of *Man and Wife.* He was allotted his own study and the household received the strictest injunctions against disturbing him.

The Lehmanns' wide circle of friends, to entertain whom was one of their chief delights, included Reade, George Eliot and G. H. Lewes, Forster, Browning and Millais. Another frequent guest was H. F. Chorley, the critic who had attacked *Armadale* so vehemently in the pages of *The Athenaeum.* Always a trifle eccentric, he was now getting old and his mind was beginning to wander. He still enjoyed dining out, but was apt to suffer from the embarrassing delusion that he was dining in his own home, and used to address the servants of the house by his own servants' names. R. C. Lehmann describes a dinner-party at Woodlands where Chorley rose from the table, asked his hostess to look after his guests for him and in particular to see that Mr. Collins got the wine he liked, and tottered off to bed on the arm of what he imagined to be his own valet. On another occasion when Wilkie lighted his cigar after dinner, Chorley immediately upbraided him saying that he never allowed smoking in his dining-room. During a lucid interval he apologised profusely to Wilkie, and for a moment all was well; a few minutes later, however, he was off again ringing the bell and giving instructions to the Lehmanns' servants as if they were his own. He died a year or so later, in February, 1872.

In his reminiscences R. C. Lehmann describes Wilkie as he remembers him during these months at Woodlands:

A neat figure of a cheerful plumpness, very small feet and hands, a full brown beard, a high and rounded forehead, a small nose not naturally intended to support a pair of large spectacles behind which his eyes shone with humour and friendship.

We are told that his conversation was easy and delightful in both English and French. 'I don't care a fig for the accent,' he used to say. 'The French are a polite people, and they don't trouble to think about the accent if they understand you. They understand me.' He had one or two peculiarities of English speech, such as pronouncing 'real' as 'rail,' and 'obliged' as 'obleeged.' If one would hesitate to describe Wilkie as fond of children, in the general sense, there is no doubt that he had a great affection for certain children, among whom were the young Lehmanns. They, in their turn, adored him and never called him by any more formal name than Wilkie. He seems to have possessed to a high degree the knack of making children feel at ease, and of treating them as equals instead of patronising them. They used to listen breathless to his tales of Tom Sayers, the prizefighter, whom he had often met. 'He hadn't any muscle to speak of in his forearm,' he told them, 'and there wasn't any show of biceps; but when I remarked on that, he asked me to observe his triceps and the muscle under his shoulder, and then I understood how he did it.' No doubt his popularity with the Lehmann boys lost nothing by the help he used to give them with their homework. One evening Rudy was struggling with a Horace Ode which he had to translate into English verse. Wilkie, picking up the Bohn 'crib,' said, 'I'm no good at the Latin, I'm afraid; but I'll see what I can do with the English.' He thereupon started to dictate, as fast as Rudy could write down, a set of couplets beginning:

What man or hero, Clio, dost thou name,
On harp or lute, to swell the role of fame?

What God whose name doth sportive Echo sound
On Haemus cold or lofty Pindus' mound?
Or Helicon whence followed Orpheus' strain
The winds and rivers, flowing to the main?

And so forth for fifty-six lines.

There is a story from another source† which confirms his instinctive understanding of children. Frank Beard's son, Nathaniel, was often entrusted with messages from his father to Wilkie, who lived close by. On one occasion he was told to bring back an answer, and on reaching Wilkie's study, discovered that he had left the note at home. Without thinking, the boy said: 'Never mind, you write the answer while I go back and fetch the letter.' Instead of roaring with laughter, Wilkie replied gently: 'Very well, but it will be rather difficult; perhaps you had better bring the note round first.' A trivial incident, but also one that the boy remembered with gratitude years after Wilkie's death.

In October, 1869, he wrote from Gloucester Place a long account of his doings to Frederick Lehmann, who was then in the United States on his way round the world:

The Stoughton bitters arrived this morning from Liverpool. At the same time appeared a parcel of country sausages from Beard. I sent him back a bottle of the bitters with instructions to drink your health in brandy and bitters, and to meditate on the innumerable virtues of intoxicating liquors for the rest of the day. On my part I suspended an immortal work of fiction, by going downstairs and tasting a second bottle properly combined with gin. Result delicious! Thank you a thousand times! The first thing you must do on your return to England is to come here and taste gin and bitters. May it be soon!

Have I any news? Very little. I sit here all day attacking English institutions—battering down the marriage laws of Scotland and Ireland and reviling athletic sports—in short, writing an *un*-popular book which may possibly make a hit, from the mere oddity of a modern writer running full tilt against the popular sentiment instead of cringing to it. The publishers are delighted with what I have done,—especially my American publishers, who sent me an instalment of £500 the

† 'Some Recollections of Yesterday.' Nathaniel Beard (*Temple Bar Magazine, Vol. cii*).

other day, on receipt of only the first weekly part. I call *that* something like enthusiasm. Produce me the English publisher who treats his author in this way . . .

Reade has been here, and has carried off my book about the French police ('mémoires tirées des archives'). He begged me to go and see him at Oxford. I said, 'Very well! write and say when.' Need I add that he has *not* written?

I had a friend to dinner at the Junior Athenaeum the other day. Our remonstrance has produced its effect. I declined to order *any*thing after our experience. 'A dinner at so much a head. If it isn't good I shall personally submit myself for examination before the committee, and shall produce specimens of the dishes received by myself.' The result was a very good dinner. When you come back let us try the same plan. Nothing like throwing the whole responsibility on the cook.

I had a day at Gad's Hill a little while since. Only the family. Very harmonious and pleasant—except Dickens's bath, which dripped behind the head of my bed all night . . . Fechter has refused what appears to everybody but himself to be an excellent offer from America. He seems determined to go 'on his own hook' in December next, and will find the managers whom he has refused his enemies when he gets there. I am afraid he has made a mistake.

Mrs. John Wood has made the St. James' Theatre a perfect fairy palace, and is playing old English comedy with American actors. Scenery and dresses marvellously good. A great success. The other great success I am going to see on Wednesday—monkeys who are real circus riders, jump through hoops, dance on the horse's back, *and* bow to the audience when they are applauded. We shall see them in Shakespeare next—and why not? They can't be worse than the human actors, and they *might* be better.

Where will you be when this reaches you? I am told you have got to San Francisco. That will do. Come back. Leave well alone, and come back. I will describe Japan to you, and take you to see the manufactures afterwards at the Baker Street Bazaar.

Man and Wife had been accepted for serial publication by *Cassell's Magazine* and *Harper's Weekly,* and instalments began in January, 1870 and November, 1869 respectively. Harpers, who were clearly doing very well out of him despite the multiplication of their rivals, offered him £750—the

same sum that they had paid for his last two or three books —but added that if he received a better offer 'from any *responsible* house, from whom you are sure of getting your money' they would match it. Several letters concerning *Man and Wife* written to Cassell, Petter & Galpin, proprietors of *Cassell's Magazine*, have been preserved. The first refers to expletives in literature, a subject about which he felt strongly:

The expletive is not essentially necessary at the place which you point out to me—and I am very ready to make what concessions I can to your ideas of what is due to your constituency, at the outset of our literary connection. The objectionable 'Damn it' shall therefore disappear. But I must at the same time beg that this concession may not be construed into a precedent. Readers who object to expletives in books, are—as to my experience—readers who object to a great many other things in books, which they are too stupid to understand. It is quite possible that your peculiar constituency may take exception to things to come in my story which are essential to the development of character, or which are connected with a much higher and larger moral point of view than they are capable of taking themselves. In these cases, I am afraid you will find me deaf to all remonstrances—in those best interests of the independence of literature which are *your* interests (properly understood) as well as mine.

It is to be hoped that Messrs. Cassell appreciated the concession. At a later date, another publisher found him less accommodating on a similar point:

The other alteration I cannot consent to make. The 'damns' (two 'damns' only, observe, in the whole story) mark the characters at very important places in the narrative. The 'compromise' which you suggest is simply what they would *not* say . . . My story is *not* addressed to young people exclusively —it is addressed to readers in general. I do not accept young people as the ultimate court of appeal in English literature. Mr. Turlington must talk like Mr. Turlington—even though the terrible consequence may be that a boy or two may cry 'Damn' in imitation of him. I refer your friends to Scott and Dickens—writers considered immaculate in the matter of propriety. They will find damn where damn ought to be in

the pages of both those masters. In short, I am damned if I take out damn!

The remainder of the Cassell correspendence refers to the thorny question of international copyright, a subject in which Wilkie, as one of the most popular English writers beyond the shores of his own country, was especially interested. His work was now regularly translated into French and German, and often into Dutch, Polish, Italian and Russian. Publication for European circulation in English by his friend Baron Tauchnitz of Leipzig had become more or less simultaneous with London publication. By 1870 reciprocal copyright was the rule in most European countries, but Holland and Switzerland refused to conform. It was not to be expected that a profitable author like Wilkie Collins would escape the attentions of publishers in Holland, nor that a man of his temperament and business acumen would quietly acquiesce in what he considered to be plain theft. In November, 1869, a Dutch firm, Belinfaute Brothers of The Hague, approached Cassells with an offer, as between publishers, for the electrotypes of *Man and Wife*. Although Wilkie's consent was unnecessary, Cassells considerately informed him of the approach. Here, he thought, was the chance for which he had been waiting, the opportunity 'of taking some public notice of the dishonesty of the publishers in Holland—and of contrasting it with the honourable conduct of Tauchnitz, who is also not bound by any treaties to pay English authors, but who does pay them nevertheless.' In a letter to Cassell's announcing his intention of joining battle, he complained, with some justification: 'In this matter everybody in Holland gains something—the printer, the papermaker, the translator, the publisher. I, who set the whole thing going, get nothing.'

He tried writing to the Hague, 'good-humouredly and strongly,' but got nowhere. His blood was now up. Having sent copies of the correspondence to the editor of the *Echo*, he discharged, on November 18th, a broadside which reveals him as a useful hand at the more vigorous type of invective.

Gentlemen,—The grave error that I have committed is the

error of assuming you to be more just and more enlightened men than you are. Your answer to my letter tells me what I was previously unwilling to believe—that you have persisted so long in publishing books by authors of all nations, without paying for them, that any protest against that proceeding on my part, which appeals to your sense of a moral distinction between right and wrong, appeals to something that no longer exists.

What am I to say to men who acknowledge that they, and the people whom they employ, all derive profit from publishing my book; and who, owning this, not only repudiate the bare idea of being under any pecuniary obligation towards me as the writer of the book, but shamelessly assert their own act of spoliation as a right—because no law happens to exist which prohibits that act as wrong? There is nothing to be said to persons who are willing to occupy such a position as this. What is to prevent men who trade on such principles as these from picking my pocket, if they see their way to making a profit out of my handkerchief? There is absolutely nothing to prevent their picking my pocket; and, what is more, indignantly informing me that it is their right—unless by some lucky chance, English handkerchiefs are better cared for than English literature, and are protected in Holland by law.

Suppose international copyright to be, one of these days, established between England and Holland. What would become of you and your right then? You would have no alternative left but to curse the cruel fate that made you Dutchmen, and retire from business.

Returning, before I close these lines, to your answer to my letter, I have to add that I have not in the least mistaken the nature of your application to me on the subject of the illustrations. It is the most indecent application I ever heard of in my life. You ask me to help you to pay honestly for obtaining the illustrations to my story—telling me, in the same breath, that you claim a right to take the story itself without paying for it. Do you expect me to notice such an application as that? It would be accepting an insult to notice it.

For the rest—whether you do, or do not, take my book from me—I persist, in the interests of public morality, in asserting my right to regard as my own property the produce of my own brains and my own labour—any accidental neglect in formally protecting the same, in any country, notwithstanding. I declare any publisher who takes my book from me, with a view to selling it in any form for his own benefit—without my

permission and without giving me a share in his profits—to be guilty of theft, and to be morally, if not legally, an outlaw and a pest among honest men. And I send the correspondence between us to an English newspaper of wide circulation, by way of openly recording this protest, and openly exposing the principles on which Dutch publishers trade. In this way, my views on the subject of fair-dealing with foreign authors may possibly reach the ears of those other persons of larcenous literary habits, who are ready—as you kindly inform me—to steal my story, without that preliminary notice of their intention, which you yourselves were personally compelled to give me by the honourable conduct, in this affair, of my English publishers.

It was hardly to be expected that such a letter would have any effect beyond inducing a momentary malaise in the piratical conscience. To Wilkie's astonishment, however, it succeeded in penetrating their defences, as his next letter to the *Echo*, which had given editorial support to his campaign, shows :

. . . . I have now to announce a conclusion to this matter which was not anticipated either by you, or by me. My English publishers received a letter yesterday from the Hague, in which Messrs. Belinfaute Bros. concede the point which I endeavoured (good-humouredly) to press upon them in my first letter. Of their own free will (bound by no law whatever) they consent to recognise my moral claim on them, as the author, by giving me a share in the profits produced by my book—if profit is realised by the Dutch translation of *Man and Wife*. Let us never despair of our dear Dutchmen, sir, in any future human emergency; and let us take Belinfaute Brothers to our hearts as brothers in international copyright with ourselves! While I maintain every word I have written as to all publishers who take books from authors without paying for them, I am glad publickly to declare that what I wrote no longer applies to Belinfaute Bros. They publish *Man and Wife* in Holland with my full consent, and with my best wishes for the success of the speculation.

The financial outcome of this concession was hardly spectacular. ' Belinfaute Bros. have made a noble effort,' he wrote some twelve months after publication; ' they have sent me as purchase-money for *Man and Wife* the sum of one hundred guilders—amounting in English money to between £8 and

£9! As they have never hitherto paid sixpence to any author (but a Dutchman) in this civilised universe, I feel bound to consider myself as the object of an act of extraordinary munificence.' Sending the draft to Charles Ward at Coutt's Bank he wrote, 'Acknowledge receipt for God's sake—I am afraid of something happening to this precious enclosure. Pay it in to my account—in *red* ink if possible. I never was so excited in my life.' Nevertheless it was a moral victory of some importance. The custom of paying token royalties to foreign authors was adopted by other Dutch publishing firms and continued until full inter-European copyright was secured by the Berne Convention in 1886.

There was trouble across the Atlantic as well. 'I find there is a piracy of *Man and Wife* in Canada, which I can only stop by authorising a publication of the story there, and sending sheets in advance, as I do in America.' Even in those countries which respected the rights of foreign authors, things were often made as complicated as possible. For Germany, he mentions, four copies of each monthly part must be deposited, with the words 'The right of translation is reserved' appearing at the top of each instead of in their usual place at the end. In fact he begins to wonder whether the game is worth the candle. 'For my own part, I am getting so weary of the vexatious and absurd regulations which these foreign laws impose on English literature that I am strongly disposed to let myself be robbed, as the preferable alternative to letting myself be worried . . .' Thus he wrote in 1871. All in all the campaign had been worth waging; and his small triumph marked a stage at least on the road to international copyright.

Man and Wife had pushed up the sales of *Cassell's Magazine* to well over 70,000 by the time it appeared in book-form towards the end of June, 1870. It has the odd distinction of being, so far as one can discover, the only novel issued by F. S. Ellis, the Rossettis' publisher. Towards the end Wilkie had written himself to exhaustion, with Beard in frequent attendance. Both were 'utterly worn out' and took

a week-end trip to Antwerp in order to recuperate at sea. Writing to tell the Lehmanns that he has dedicated the novel to them, he adds: 'I am so weak, I can hardly write a note.'

Man and Wife is his first thoroughgoing propaganda novel. The Preface opens with these words: 'The Story here offered to the reader differs in one respect from the stories which have preceded it from the same hand. This time the fiction is founded on facts, and aspires to afford what help it may towards hastening the reform of certain abuses which have been too long suffered to exist among us unchecked.' In March, 1865, the Queen had appointed a Royal Commission to enquire into the Marriage Laws of the United Kingdom. The Commission's Report,† published three years later, expressed strong criticism of certain aspects of the Scottish and Irish laws relating to marriage, and recommended early reform. In Ireland, for instance, the existing law declared null and void a marriage between two Catholics if one of them had been received into the Catholic Church less than twelve months before; any priest celebrating such a marriage was guilty of a felony. More serious in its social consequences was the survival in Scotland of the curious form of matrimony known as the Irregular Marriage, or Marriage by Consent. A contemporary judgment, quoted in *Man and Wife,* underlines the extraordinary state of the law: 'Consent makes marriage. No form or ceremony, civil or religious; no notice before, or publication after; no cohabitation, no writing, no witnesses even, are essential to the constitution of this, the most important contract which two persons can enter into.' Even the exchange of consent could be proved by inference, with the result that persons who did not consider themselves married could be held to be married in law. It it not surprising that a law so unpredictable in its incidence provided a harvest for lawyers, nor that the Royal Commis-

†Report of the Royal Commissioners on the Laws of Marriage. (*H.M.S.O.,* 1868).

sion should have demanded its abolition.† These were the very real abuses which Wilkie pledged himself to bring before the notice of his extensive public, most of whom would probably be unaware of the existence of the Commission's Report. If the spark which kindled his imagination, in writing *The Moonstone*, was the contemplation of a jewel, here inspiration sprang directly from a Government Blue Book.

So far as we know, Wilkie was not an habitual reader of official publications and it may well have been Reade who drew his attention to this particular Report in the first instance. Certainly Reade's influence is unmistakably evident in *Man and Wife.* Such was Wilkie's indignation at the state of affairs disclosed by the Royal Commission that he did not pause to consider whether his technical equipment was equal to the task of hewing this refractory material into the shape of a novel. In fact the skill with which he constructed his story around the anomalies of the marriage law cannot be denied. It is on other counts that the book falls short of his best work.

For some time there had been growing up among the younger generation of the upper and middle classes a cult of athleticism, particularly at the universities where it was partly responsible for increasing displays of hooliganism. In many quarters, even among older people, this glorification of muscular prowess and excessive devotion to sport was regarded with tolerant approval, and had found expression in several novels of Charles Kingsley. To Wilkie Collins, who saw in it a denial of the intellectual and cultural aspects

† An actual case, upon which the novel was partly founded, had been in the courts some ten years earlier. A Scottish marriage contracted by a Mr. Yelverton was pronounced valid in a Scottish court. By a majority decision the Court of Appeal pronounced it null and void. The House of Lords was equally divided with two Law Lords for, and two against the Appeal; the fifth, Lord Brougham, was unable to come to the House to record his judgment which was said to be in favour of the first decision in the Scottish Court. The Court of Appeal decision therefore stood, by the narrowest of margins.

of education, the idea could only be repellent. Not content with illustrating the case for marriage-law reform, he assumed the further duty of refuting the doctrines of Kingsley and his flock. The acrobatic feat of riding two such horses at once demanded an agility which he did not possess. His attempt was ambitious but unwise, even allowing for his brave determination to write 'an unpopular novel.' The instrument of his attack on athleticism—and on the manners of the younger generation—is the character of the seducer Geoffrey Delamayn. A long-distance runner of superb physique, Geoffrey is both brutish and brainless. The author might have held up such a figure to constant ridicule, impaled him with satire; instead, allowing his spleen full play, Wilkie represents him as something of a monster. So obvious a blackguard would not have deceived the most guileless of heroines.

The other main weakness of *Man and Wife* springs from a different source. It was first conceived not as a novel but as a play; in fact we have the evidence of Bancroft, who later produced the drama, that the first act was completed before a line of the novel was on paper. At first glance it seems improbable that this vast novel—the longest of all his books save *Armadale*—packed with incident, complicated in construction, could have grown out of a stage-play, yet that is undoubtedly what happened. Had he recast the story more thoroughly in expanding it into a three-volume novel the result might have been more successful; as it is, too many vestiges of its dramatic origin remain. He failed to appreciate, in retaining the countless exits and entrances, overheard conversations and coincidences of the play, that devices which are legitimate and often necessary in overcoming the limitations of space and time in the theatre, may be unacceptable in a novel.

Man and Wife is a bitter, angry book. It is one of the least typical of all Wilkie Collins' novels; its deeply-felt sincerity recalls the early *Basil*. Despite a certain theatricality, and a tendency towards strident overstatement, *Man and*

Wife remains a powerful story which seldom relaxes its grip.

In the person of Sir Patrick Lundie, Wilkie gives us not only one of his most engaging characters but also an ideal portrait of himself. Sir Patrick's urbanity, his dry humour, his broadminded wisdom and hatred of cruelty are all characteristics with which the author himself was in some degree endowed; even his club-foot may have represented Wilkie's increasing lameness. It is Sir Patrick Lundie who expresses the author's views on the new athleticism and on the tragic farce of Irregular Marriages.

In his Essay on Wilkie Collins, Swinburne adapted a well-known couplet:

What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?
Some demon whispered—'Wilkie! have a mission.'

Whilst one can agree that his missionary zeal did considerable harm to his natural gifts, it is misleading to advance this, as many besides Swinburne have done, as the sole explanation of the steady decline in Collins' work which began with *Man and Wife.* Of his total output not more than half a dozen books can properly be classified as 'purpose-novels.' In a sense *No Name* is a purpose-novel no less than *Man and Wife*, but one in which the story comes first and the problem is more implied than sated. With *Man and Wife* comes a shift of emphasis. Not only is the purpose clearly stated, but reiterated on every other page. The reformer has here won the upper hand over the novelist. Nevertheless, if there is in *Man and Wife* a foreshadowing of the inferior work that was to come, equally there are echoes of the best that had gone before.

In several respects the year 1870 marked a turning-point in Wilkie Collins' life. Although he was to live for another twenty years, all his work of significance was already behind him. He had made his contribution to the fiction of his time; none of the dozen or so novels still to come would earn for him more than the passing attention of a devoted public. At the age of 46 he was already in appearance and outlook an old man, largely as a result of ill-health. The intervals

during which he could enjoy even reasonably good health were becoming briefer and less frequent; he must have known that all hope of eradicating his rheumatic trouble had gone; that sooner or later he would become, at best, a semi-invalid. His dependence upon opium, hitherto intermittent, was now virtually complete. He had come to need the drug not only to alleviate pain, but often to induce sleep. Similarly, in his private life, one phase had ended with Caroline's marriage, another was beginning. His liaison with Martha Rudd, despite the fact that she had borne him one daughter and was soon to bear another, can hardly have provided a substitute for his comparatively settled domestic life with Caroline. Nor is it certain, in the circumstances, that Caroline's return a year or so later fully re-established their earlier relationship.

This was about the time when Julian Hawthorne, son of the author of *The Scarlet Letter*, first met Wilkie during a visit to England. Writing more than fifty years after the event†—a fact which inclines one to make certain reservations—he describes Wilkie, whom he found in 'his plethoric, disordered writing-room,' in terms which almost suggest a man in his dotage.

> He was soft, plump, and pale, suffered from various ailments, his liver was wrong, his heart weak, his lungs faint, his stomach incompetent, he ate too much and the wrong things. He had a big head, a dingy complexion, was somewhat bald, and his full beard was of a light brown colour. His air was of mild discomfort and fractiousness; he had a queer way of holding his hand, which was small, plump, and unclean, hanging up by the wrist, like a rabbit on its hind legs. He had strong opinions and prejudices, but his nature was obviously kind and lovable, and a humorous vein would occasionally be manifest. One felt he was unfortunate and needed succour.

Poor Wilkie ventured to express his admiration of *The Scarlet Letter,* which he described as 'one of the great novels.' 'Even the second volume, where most novelists weaken, is fine,' he continued graciously, 'and the third ful-

†*Shapes that Pass.* Julian Hawthorne (*Murray,* 1928).

fils the splendid promise of the first.' Julian Hawthorne protested, not very tactfully, that *The Scarlet Letter* was in one volume. 'Pardon me! Three volumes, and large ones!' replied his host and went to the bookshelf to prove his point. Taking down the single volume he looked perplexed. 'You are right. One volume and not over seventy thousand words in all! It is incomprehensible! Such a powerful impression in so small a space!'

Though it is largely in restrospect that the year 1870 stands out in Wilkie's life as one of transition, it contained one event which marked, not only for him but for the people of England, the end of an age. On June 9th Dickens died. It is probably true to say that they had met less often during the last five years of Dickens' life than during the previous fifteen years. Only a single letter written by Dickens to Wilkie in the last year of his life has survived. It is dated January 27th, 1870, and enclosed a formal letter giving Wilkie the right of disposing of material which had originally appeared in Dickens' periodicals. There is a melancholy note about the last few sentences he wrote to his old friend: 'I have been truly concerned to hear of your bad attack. Well, I have two hopes of it—first, that it will not last long; second, that it will leave you in a really recovered state of good health. I don't come to see you because I don't want to bother you. Perhaps you may be glad to see me by-and-by. Who knows?' If these words suggest that they had to some extent drifted apart, it would be wrong to assume that they had ceased altogether to see each other. We know that Wilkie had been staying at Gad's Hill some three months before the date of the letter, and he told a friend that he was engaged to go down there on the very day of Dickens' death.

During the evening of June 8th Dickens had a seizure after which he never recovered consciousness. The last provincial Reading Tour had been prematurely concluded some weeks earlier. Against his friends' advice he had persisted with the readings through various stages of exhaustion, as

if some obscure force were driving him to his death. Wilkie had consistently encouraged Dickens to undertake these Reading Tours, which most of his friends condemned as undignified. He knew that the excitement, the histrionics and the applause had become essential as a drug to Dickens. At the same time he realised how much the performance cost him in mental and physical strain, and once told Wybert Reeve that the Reading of the scene between Bill Sykes and Nancy 'did more to kill Dickens than all his other work put together.'

In accordance with the dead man's wishes, no public announcement of the funeral was made, and only three mourning-coaches followed the hearse along Whitehall to Westminster Abbey. In the third coach, with his brother Charles and Frank Beard, rode the man who for most of twenty years had been Dickens' closest friend.

This intimate friendship, thus broken after twenty years, had been a thing of value to both writers. The benefits that Wilkie gained are all too obvious, but the contribution he was able to make in his turn is usually overlooked by Dickens' biographers. From the beginning of their acquaintance he had been a congenial companion, able to adapt himself to Dickens' somewhat mercurial temperament and frequent changes of mood. Unlike Forster he made few demands. He was neither priggish, nor bad-tempered, nor possessive, nor pompous. He was in fact the antithesis of Forster in character and temper, and thereby succeeded, quite unintentionally, in supplanting Forster in Dickens' regard. Uninhibited, scornful of convention, epicurean, Wilkie had, until ill-health overtook him, a remarkable capacity for enjoying the very stuff of life. These were the qualities which at first appealed to Dickens, whose febrile determination to extract the last ounce from life contrasted sharply with Wilkie's easy acceptance of its pleasures. He seemed to find in Wilkie's company both a stimulant and a sedative. It was in part due to the intense seriousness with which they both regarded the writer's craft, and to their com-

mon devotion to their calling, that an association so begun grew into one of the more enduring literary friendships.

It has been hinted that one of the chief bonds between Collins and Dickens was that they shared a taste for licentious orgies and loose women. Apparently this view is based upon a literal interpretation of certain passages in their letters to each other. Such an interpretation ignores the hyperbole that they were accustomed to employ in their correspondence, and at the same time measures respectability by the standards of the society of their own day. It is probably safe to assume that their experience of women was more extensive than that society would have countenanced, but it is going far beyond the available evidence to deduce that sexual promiscuity was their habit. Certainly, references to ' sybarite Rome in the days of its culminating voluptuousness ' and ' furtive and Don Giovanni purposes ' are not of themselves evidence of gross immorality. Furthermore, there is no indication that such adventures as they may have shared in the company of women were more than a casual aspect of their relationship, which was based upon far more solid foundations.

For Wilkie the advantages of constant association, during his formative years as a novelist, with so prolific a genius as Dickens were immeasurable. His talents, though of a very different order from those of his friend, developed all the sooner and shone the more brightly for the careful nursing they received at Dickens' hands. By his thoughtful and constructive criticism, offered only when it was invited, and by his generous encouragement he helped the less experiencd novelist to find himself within a very few years. As not only ' one of Mr. Dickens' young men,' but as the chosen one of that select band, Wilkie quickly made his mark in the world of letters. The close association between them developed Wilkie's eye for character and his sense of the dramatic just as surely as it belatedly awakened Dickens to the advantages of a well-constructed plot. Each benefited in his own way and no harm came to either. It seems appro-

priate to quote here the view of G. K. Chesterton, who wrote, in a typical passage:

> In his capacity as editor [Dickens] made one valuable discovery. He discovered Wilkie Collins. Wilkie Collins is the one man of unmistakable genius who has a certain affinity with Dickens; an affinity in this respect, that they both combine a modern and Cockney and even commonplace opinion about things with a huge elemental sympathy with strange oracles and spirits and old night. There were no two men in mid-Victorian England, with their top-hats and umbrellas, more typical of its rationality and dull reform; and there were no two men who could touch them at a ghost-story. No two men would have more contempt for superstitions; and no two men could so create the superstitious thrill.

It is strangely appropriate that, during the last year of his life, Dickens had been at work on a novel of the kind that had made Wilkie Collins' reputation, while at the same time Wilkie himself was turning his back upon pure sensationalism in favour of the propaganda-novel. *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* appears to be a deliberate challenge to Wilkie on his own territory, an attempt to eclipse the acknowledged 'master of sensation.' At the same time it provides the clearest example of Wilkie's influence upon his friend's work. It is therefore small wonder that, when Dickens died with *Edwin Drood* unfinished, many people believed that Wilkie would know all the details of the plot and would complete the story. The rumours that he was about to do so became so prevalent that both he and Chapman and Hall had to issue public statements denying any such intention. These disclaimers did not however deter a New York journalist named Henry Morford from writing 'a sequel to *The Mystery of Edwin Drood,*' entitled *John Jasper's Secret* and attributing the authorship to Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens Jnr. In a letter dated 1878 Wilkie wrote: 'I was asked to finish the story and positively refused.'

In the year following Dickens' death, Wilkie was involved

in a trivial but illuminating episode with Forster. George Bentley, son of Richard Bentley, perhaps the most famous of Victorian publishers, was anxious to collect for biographical purposes as many of his father's letters as possible. He probably thought that it would be tactful to use Wilkie as a channel of approach to Forster, who was Dickens' literary executor, in applying for the return of Richard Bentley's letters to Dickens. Wilkie, never quite appreciating the intensity of Forster's dislike, or perhaps hoping that he might respond to new overtures now that the cause of jealousy was removed, accepted without hesitation. But the Bear, as he was called by many of his acquaintances, was not disposed to co-operate. Announcing his failure to George Bentley, Wilkie wrote: 'Mr. Forster's answer to my letter makes it, I am sorry to say, impossible for me to represent your views any further. There is some soreness in his mind on the subject, which I do not in the least understand. He has not answered my second letter.' Even this rebuff did not prevent Wilkie from warmly congratulating Forster upon the first volume of his *Life of Dickens* when it appeared a year or so later.

It was the firm of Bentley which published Wilkie's next novel, *Poor Miss Finch,* then being serialised, like its immediate predecessor, in *Cassell's Magazine.* Michael Sadleir tells an interesting story† relating to its publication in the usual three volumes at half-a-guinea per volume. When Bentley's travellers offered the book to the larger libraries, Mudie's and W. H. Smith's, upon whose purchases depended to some extent the success or failure of a three-decker, they received a negligible order. The libraries had learned by their experience of *Man and Wife* that a bound volue of *Cassell's Magazine* containing the whole of *Poor Miss Finch* would shortly be available at a much lower price. Since there was collusion between the two biggest libraries, it mattered little that their subscribers were forced to wait a few weeks or

† 'The Camel's Back' from *Nineteenth Century Essays.* (*Oxford University Press,* 1948).

months. Bentley was faced with a considerable loss on the book,— of which he had printed 2,000 copies. Wilkie, whose hard bargaining with publishers did not mean that he was incapable of generosity in special circumstances, immediately offered to return half the sum he had already been paid, and launched a fierce campaign against the 'Library Despots.'

Poor Miss Finch was summed up by the *Athenæum,* a little unkindly, as a 'sensation-novel for Sunday reading.' The plot, in which crime plays a negligible part, is an ingenious piece of carpentry for all its fantastic material. A bald account of the main situation will be sufficient to convey some idea of the extraordinary nature of the story. Lucilla, an attractive girl who has been blind from childhood, falls in love with a young man, one of twins, who becomes subject to epilepsy. In his desperate search for a cure he has recourse to silver nitrate treatment, an incidental effect of which is to turn the patient's skin blue in colour. It is only when the other twin brother has secretly fallen in love with her that Lucilla regains her sight after a brilliant operation. Although Wilkie executes some intricate variations on the old theme of mistaken identity he cannot disguise the fact that the whole situation is somewhat preposterous. All ends more or less happily with Lucilla going blind again.

The book's virtues lie primarily in the characters of Lucilla and Madame Pratolungo, the narrator of the story and Lucilla's companion. Cheerful, sensible—'I am not rich enough to care about money'—as garrulous as her name suggests, she is the French-born widow of a South American patriot, and a staunch believer in her late husband's Socialist theories and prophecies of revolution. Her exotic presence in the midst of the Sussex Downs somehow gives an air of reality to the improbable happenings she has to relate. Lucilla herself is a thoroughly charming person, slightly reminiscent of Madonna in *Hide and Seek,* living a happy and useful life despite her blindness. She illustrates once more Wilkie's belief that, in the words of his Preface, 'the conditions of human happiness are independent of bodily

affliction, and that it is even possible for bodily affliction itself to take its place among the ingredients of happiness.' Herr Grosse, the eminent German specialist who restores Lucilla's sight, is no more than a caricature of a type of German once popular on the stage. He was however a great favourite with readers of Wilkie's day, many of whom, assuming him to be drawn from life, wrote to the author begging him to disclose Herr Grosse's real name and address in order that their blind friends or relatives might consult him. After replying to many such letters, Wilkie had to insert a note in the second edition assuring his readers that 'Herr Grosse has no (individual) living prototype.' He bore in fact a close resemblance to Wilkie's doctor at Aix-la-Chapelle, who was not however an oculist. The other remarkable character is the little girl, Jicks. It is interesting to note that what is in effect Wilkie's first portrait of a small child should appear at a time when his own first-born, Marian, was in her third year. Jicks is natural and delightful; she behaves like a real child, in contrast to the sentimentalised children so dear to the Victorian novelist.

With all its faults, *Poor Miss Finch* is a story told, if not in his most beguiling manner, at least skilfully enough to capture and hold the reader's attention. Whilst admiring the assurance with which the author tackles his self-imposed obstacles, one cannot wholly disagree with *The Spectator's* description of *Poor Miss Finch* as 'that repertory of wasted cleverness.' On the other hand it is difficult to see why this innocuous work should have been specifically included by Ruskin in what he called 'the loathsome mass of modern fiction.' At least it is unencumbered with any mission and has the advantage over both its forerunner and its successor in having been conceived as a novel, without even half an eye upon the stage. In fact Wilkie wrote to a friend: 'My *Poor Miss Finch* has been dramatised (without asking my permission) by some obscure idiot in the country. I have been asked to dramatise it but have refused because my experience tells me that the book is eminently *unfit* for stage purposes.'