CHAPTER THREE

Literary Beginnings

WILKIE COLLINS LAID aside the manuscript of the historical novel upon which he had been working for some time, in order to carry out his father's wish that he should write his biography. He set to work collecting letters and reminiscences of friends to supplement the Journal, even going so far as to trace almost every picture his father had painted, a task which involved visits to Public Galleries and private collections all over Britain.

Towards the end of July 1847 he interrupted his labours to take a short holiday in Normandy with Charles Ward. Normandy proved somewhat disappointing and after about ten days they found themselves, despite Mrs. Collins' warnings, once more in Paris. Reassuring his mother, Wilkie wrote: 'We find provincial cities insupportably oppressive to our mercurial characters.' Paris, as always landed him in financial straits. At first it was merely a matter of whether his mother had a spare five-pound note which she could send him, even though he had money enough for a short stay. No cash arrived, and Charles Ward left for home a day or two later. Ever optimistic, Wilkie remained, expecting a cheque from one post to the next, until after a week he was compelled to write in desperation to Charles Ward at Coutts' Bank:

> Up to this moment I have received no communication—monetary or epistolary—from England, and I now write to you, with eight francs in my pocket, and in debt for two pair of boots, to ascertain whether I am to expect any remittances at

all before I become bankrupt—an event which I have my suspicions will take place tomorrow.

On the day you left me I made a calculation of my resources—including the five pounds I expected from England—and found to my horror and astonishment that if I paid for my boots, my bill here and my journey back, like an honest man I could not stay more than two days longer at Paris, at the furthest. I made up my mind therefore to start for London today rather than spend a single farthing more money, but on Saturday no money arrived—on Sunday no money arrived—on Monday no money arrived—and today—this present Tuesday—par le sang bleu! I have changed my last ‘Nap’ and have not a banker at Paris to go to for any more!

I suppose Mrs. Collins is determined to punish me for going to Paris at all, by keeping me there as long as she pleases in a state of *pauperism*. This may seem at the first glance a monstrous good joke, but it will be found on closer inspection to be rather an expensive one. Every day I stay here enlarges my bill in the Hotel and increases my current expenses, which, carefully as I watch them, grow upon me as fast as moss on an old house or pimples on a drunkard's face.

I breakfast for a franc and a half, I dine for three francs and a half. I have never entered a hackney coach since I have been at Paris, I have missed the Theatre *one whole* night, I occupy myself all day in painting and taking salubrious walks, I have had three glorious bowel complaints since I saw you which have done my stomach a world of good and made my complexion as pure as milk of roses. Can anything be more economical, more salubrious, more virtuous than such a mode of life as this?

Have the goodness to show (or send) this letter to Mrs. Collins, directing her attention particularly to the above paragraph and also to the statement of my assets and liabilities exposed beneath.

LIABILITIES (supposing that W.W.C. departs from Paris in a solvent state on Saturday next. N.B. This is only allowing proper time for securing my place in the *Diligence* and getting the money from London)		ASSETS
		Frs. 8
Probable amount of Lodging, Washing, Candles, Servants, or in two words: ‘Hotel Bill.’	Frs. 40	
Journey back (cheapest way)	Frs. 65	
Bill for boots	Frs. 68	

(This bill for boots includes two new pair at 50frs. (charged £3 in London) and new fronting an old pair the leathers and soles of which have burst, at 18 frs—charged £1 in London.)

Board and pocket money for five days at 10 frs. a day (i.e. 15 frs. *less* than I spent at Paris per diem on my last visit) Frs. 50

TOTAL 223

8

Liabilities 215 Frs.

or £8-12-6

This will doubtless appear very horrifying to Mrs. Collins, but it is not entirely my fault . . . If you have already forwarded five pounds to Lafitte's, forward another five *immediately* on the receipt of this, without waiting to get it from Mrs. Collins. I will settle with you on my return. If you have not remitted me a rap (Mrs. Collins being unpropitious) ask her boldly for £10 at one fell swoop and send the money with all possible despatch to Lafitte's. If Mrs. Collins refuses to touch the estimate let me know by return of post. It will then be time to pawn my watch and coat at the Mont de Piété and try my fortune with the proceeds at a table of Rouge et Noir (Horror! Horror!!) . . . I have been very ill-used by the Devonport Street Dynasty, to which however in a fine spirit of Christian piety I extend my forgiveness and desire my love.

Within a year of his return home the biography was finished and arrangements were made for publication. In November, 1848, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins R.A.* was published in two volumes by Longmans, Brown, Green and Longmans. One of the first subscribers was Charles Dickens.

A few days before publication Wilkie wrote to R. H. Dana, the American author, to thank him for information about Washington Allston, who had been the friend of both Dana and William Collins. The letter continues:

Many causes connected with delay in engraving the illustrations to the book and with changing the arrangement of parts of the MSS., have contributed to put off the publication of my work—it will, however, be 'out' at last in about a week or ten days hence. It occupies two volumes, is dedicated by permission to Sir Robert Peel, and will be published by Messrs. Longmans.

> What chances of success can be predicted for a book devoted to so peaceful a subject as the Art, amid the vital and varied interests of home politics and foreign revolutions now attracting everybody's attention in England, it is impossible to say. I resign myself philosophically to await the event of my experiment—hoping little and foreboding less.

It is not surprising that the *Memoirs* show signs of immaturity: the writing is careful but the style too often ponderous. Page after page is devoted to painstaking descriptions of Collins' paintings down to the smallest detail. If these remind one sometimes of an art-dealer's catalogue, they were also a form of apprenticeship and developed in Wilkie Collins a sense of landscape which enabled him, in later books, to set his scene with marked effect.

> The sky is tinged by a mild, dawning light, which arises over a bank of misty vapour, and touches the wild, sharp edges of a large cloud, stretching across the heavens towards the light. Above this, still lingers the deep, purple, transparent atmosphere of the departing light, studded in one or two places with the glimmer of a fading star. Beneath, the fresh, buoyant sea dances onward to the foreground, garnished here and there fantastically with the rising light. In front, a single fishing-boat—whose large sail, flapping lazily against the mast, rises grandly against the lighter part of the sky—is stranded in shallow water. Around, and on it, stand the burly fishermen, hauling in their nets over the wet sand. In the distance is seen a town, faintly discernible on the cliffs that rise on the right hand of the picture; while, on the horizon, appears the sail of another boat approaching the beach. The tone of colour in this elaborate work is dark, yet transparent—representing a sort of brightening obscurity, and suggests at every point the mysterious morning stillness which reigns over the scene.

A living portrait of William Collins emerges from this biography. If a blemish is concealed here and there, this was only to be expected. On its first page the author admits that he is 'perplexed at being called upon to delineate a character which it has hitherto been his only ambition to respect' but he sets about his task modestly and with complete sincerity and achieves no small success.

To the biographer of Wilkie Collins the *Memoirs* hold a special disappointment in the deliberate self-effacement of their author, who so seldom intrudes upon his father's story. His own opinions are but rarely expressed. When we do come across them they reveal a shrewd and alert mind, as for example in his judgment upon the uninformed art-critic, hardly less apposite today than when it was written.

> There is probably no department of intellectual Art which is so incautiously approached by those who have never studied it, as painting. . . . People who, in music, will silently submit to the infliction of a modern symphony, because they suppose that their professional friends, who assure them that it is 'full of tune,' must know better than they do; or, who toil boldly through a volume of metaphysical poetry because a learned acquaintance has described it as 'earnest' or 'hopeful' or 'subjective' or 'æsthetic,' are in many cases, the very people who in matters of Art, scorn all guidance and decide, *ex cathedra* upon everything pictorial over the last sip of a cup of coffee, or during a passing salutation in the crowd of an Exhibition-Room.

Nor is the book entirely lacking in wit: 'He scouts logic and probabilities with all the serenity of a juryman waiting for his dinner, or a politician with a reputation for consistency.'

On the whole the *Memoirs* are a remarkable achievement for the first book of a young man of twenty-four. Mr. Walter de la Mare, in his interesting essay, *The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins,* sums up the biography as 'the quiet and veracious record of the life of a man who manifestly deserved every ounce of loving admiration his son accorded him—of a father whose companionship must have been a priceless blessing to such a son.'

Some six weeks after publication Wilkie wrote again to Dana, this time at some length:

38 Blandford Square,
London.
January 12th, 1849.

My dear Sir,—On Saturday the 30th December last, I gave Messrs. Longmans directions to send a copy of my *Memoirs* of my late father's life to their Boston Correspondents—Little and Brown, addressed to you. They assured me that the parcel should be despatched at the first opportunity—I hope you will receive it with as little delay as possible.

The book has hitherto succeeded very satisfactorily. It has been received with much greater indulgence, and reviewed at much greater length, by the Press, here, than I had ventured to anticipate. More than half the edition of 750 copies is already sold; and this success thus far, trifling as is its importance in itself, is a matter of some gratification to me—not merely as showing that I have not entirely failed in my undertaking—but also as relieving me from some pecuniary responsibility; for the *Memoirs* are my own speculation, and by the sale of the larger half of the edition, the somewhat heavy expenses connected with their publication are already more than paid.† I sincerely hope that you may be led to form a favourable opinion of the work, on perusal.

You ask what is the opinion among artists here of Ruskin's *Modern Painters*. Although I do not follow my father's profession (being a student of Lincoln's Inn; and only painting at leisure moments, in humble *amateur-fashion*, for my own amusement) I live very much in the society of artists, and can therefore tell you something of the impression made by Ruskin's work. The violent paradoxes in the first volume had the effect which violent paradoxes, when cleverly argued, usually produce; they amused some, displeased others, and startled everybody. It was pretty generally admitted that the Author was a vigorous and dashing writer, who had studied Art with genuine enthusiasm, but with doubtful judgment. On the other hand, however, the greater part of his readers (with whom I came in contact) while doing justice to his capacities, thought them woefully misdirected; and considered him as a man, who having determined to say something new on every subject that he touched, resolutely overlooked or dogmatically contradicted any received and tested principle of intellectual or critical truth that came in his way; and fancied that he had achieved originality when in many cases he merely succeeded in producing

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†Messrs. Longmans' records indicate that Collins arranged for the printing and binding, and that they distributed the book for him on commission terms, retaining 10% on bookshop sales. The published price was 21/-. The author himself disposed of 200 copies, the publishers some 300 at the trade price of 15/-, and the rest of the edition was remaindered in 1852 at 2/6. The author's final profit on the transaction may have been about £100. The book has never been reprinted.

what was eccentric or absurd. His book had its small circle of resolute admirers—but it made a sensation, and only a sensation, among the larger class of readers—artists and amateurs. His *second Volume,* published some time after his first, and containing an expression of regret for the arrogance of manner in his preceding publication, has, however, raised him immensely in the estimation of cultivated and thinking readers. I have merely looked into it myself, but I have heard it spoken of by artists who have read it carefully as a work of very unusual power, exhibiting a deep sympathy with the highest purpose of Art—poetical observation of Nature—and profound critical appreciation of many of the works of the 'Old Masters.' Some paradoxical opinions it might contain, in common with the preceding volume; but they were urged in a different spirit, and were amply compensated by the general intention of the book, and the real good to be gained from it—philosophically as well as pictorially—by attentive readers. Such is the general opinion of this second Volume, so far as it has reached me.
All *literary* London is now astir, however, about a work of a very different order—Macaulay's *History of England.* It is regarded everywhere, as a really great achievement, and as tending to found a new school of Historical writing. The first edition of three thousand copies was out of print in a fortnight. This is indeed a great age for great authors. Dickens told a friend of mine, that he had made *four thousand guineas* by his last year's Christmas book—(*The Battle of Life*)—a five shilling publication (!) which everybody abused, and which, nevertheless, everybody read. Eighteen thousand copies of his present Christmas book (*The Haunted Man*) were 'subscribed for' by the booksellers, before publication . . .
It has been one of the greatest sources of gratification to me, since the publication of my work, that the *Memoirs* have gained the favourable opinion of Sir Robert Peel; whose long and kind friendship for my father, and whose well-known judgment in matters of Literature and Art, concurred to give the highest importance to any criticism of his on my undertaking. I had the pleasure of visiting him, by invitation, at his country seat, to receive his personal congratulations . . .

Mrs. Collins had moved with her two sons to 38, Blandford Square, a rather smaller house than the one in Devonport Street, some six months after her husband's death. William Collins had learned to be prudent in matters of money, though he seems not to have been parsimonious; he had received considerable sums by the sale of his pictures and his mode of living had never been luxurious. It is not surprising, therefore, that he left to his widow an income which enabled the family to live in some degree of comfort.

Although, as he takes care to mention to Dana, Wilkie remained a student of Lincoln's Inn, his exertions seem to have been mainly directed towards eating the requisite number of dinners; he later admitted to having read seriously for the Bar for perhaps six weeks. The study of law he found as irksome as the importing of tea; its pursuit would have interfered with his writing and writing had already become a ruling passion. Even as late as August 1850, he had some idea of eventually practising at the Bar (' I resign myself to the Queen's Bench,' he wrote in a letter to his mother) but discovering that he could earn a living in more pleasant ways he seems to have changed his mind soon afterwards. It was not difficult, however, for a gentleman in the mid-nineteenth century to become a barrister and, in November 1851, Wilkie was duly called. It is probable that he did not entirely abandon his legal associates, since no characters are more closely observed or sharply delineated than the lawyers who figure in his novels. They are certainly drawn, not without a wry affection, from the life. He once described himself as ' a barrister of some fifteen years' standing, without even having had a brief, or ever having even so much as donned a wig and gown.'

It was, however, from the painting fraternity that most of Wilkie's friends were drawn at this time and indeed he was able to enjoy the friendship of artists all his life. First among them was E. M. Ward, the painter and brother of Charles Ward, who became, like his brother, Wilkie's life long friend. Nine years older than Wilkie, Ward was originally his father's friend, having first met William Collins in Rome. Some years before his death Collins had written : ' Yesterday, Jones offered to take my evening duty at the Library, so I came home to Willie, who would have been dull enough by himself—as it was he was amused; for I had asked Mr. Ward to spend the evening with us.' Among E. M. Ward's friends, who became Wilkie's too, were John Leech, Maclise, painter of several portraits of Dickens, and Augustus Egg, R.A. Then there were the friends and fellow-students of Wilkie's younger brother Charles, who included Millais, Frith, Holman Hunt and the Rossettis. Wilkie Collins was well qualified to express, as in his letter to Dana, what artistic London was thinking.

E. M. Ward was deeply in love with a sixteen-year-old girl, daughter of a painter also named Ward, although no relation. They were determined to get married and, aware of both parents' disapproval on account of Henrietta's extreme youth, they decided upon a secret wedding. The plan was confided to Wilkie, to whose sense of adventure it made an immediate, if vicarious, appeal. He became a fellow-conspirator and willingly undertook all arrangements. The wedding took place at All Souls, Langham Place, on May 4th, 1848, with Wilkie as best man, and was followed by a dinner in celebration. The dinner over, husband and wife departed to their respective homes. The final step was not taken until three months later, when they ran away to spend a delayed honymoon in a country cottage found for them by Wilkie.

For his share in organising the runaway marriage, Wilkie Collins was invited to be godfather to the Wards' first child, Alice, who was born the following year and christened at St. Pancras Church. Mrs. Ward relates that, after the ceremony, he joined in the celebrations to such effect that he was observed to gaze at the sleeping infant and say 'The baby sheems to be moving in a very odd way and is making funny faces. Why! 'Pon my soul, the baby's drunk! The baby's drunk!'

The Wards, who lived in Harewood Square, Marylebone, were close neighbours of the Collins family. Wilkie and E. M. Ward shared a love of amateur theatricals, and used to stage ambitious productions in what Wilkie called the

'Theatre Royal Back Drawing Room' at Blandford Square. Among the performances given were Sheridan's *The Rivals* and Goldsmith's *The Good-Natured Man.* These shows remained among Wilkie's most affectionate memories; writing to Ward in 1862 he said: 'I thought certain old memories of ours would be roused by that Chapter [in *No Name*] about the private theatricals. I read *The Good-Natured Man* and *The Rivals* again while I was writing it, and saw you once more in 'Croaker' as plainly as I see this paper. I have been engaged in far more elaborate private theatrical work since that time—but the real enjoyment was at the Theatre Royal, Blandford Square.'

The first recorded instance of Wilkie's appearance on a public stage is on February 26th, 1850 when he played the part of Soubise in *A Court Duel* adapted from the French by himself. The performance took place at the Soho Theatre (late Miss Kelly's), 73, Dean Street, Soho and was in aid of The Female Emigration Fund. It was followed by a short play by an anonymous author called *Raising the Wind!!*; from the two exclamation marks and the fact that Wilkie played a character named Jeremy Diddler one may make a reasonable guess of the nature of its plot.

Encouraged by the favourable reception of the *Memoirs* Wilkie Collins took up again the manuscript of his historical novel. Much of the earlier draft was revised and re-written and, about the middle of 1848, the work was finished. It was offered without success to Henry Colburn and to George Smith, of Smith, Elder. It was Ruskin who brought the manuscript to Smith but the latter did not consider a first novel with a classical subject a tempting proposition. On 8th September Wilkie wrote to his mother: 'Two volumes of my book are in Bentley's hands. I wrote a civil letter offering them on trial, received a civil answer accepting them on trial; and expect, in process of time, a second civil answer refusing them on trial.' His fears were unfounded, for Richard Bentley accepted the book and it was published in

February, 1850 under the title of *Antonina, or the Fall of Rome.*

In this novel Wilkie had taken Bulwer Lytton, for whom he shared at that time the public's extravagant admiration, as his model, and *Antonina* is to a large extent imitative. Abounding in scenes of violence, it describes the sacking of Rome early in the Fifth Century by the Visigoths. The subject was an ambitious one for a writer of his inexperience to tackle, and his courage at least can be commended. The book is, unfortunately, long and dull, the style flamboyant and the dialogue mainly declamatory. *Antonina* bears little resemblance to anything else he wrote and is today almost unreadable.

The work nevertheless gained for its author a certain reputation. Some ten years later, Wilkie wrote that the reviewers acclaimed it 'with such a chorus of praise as has never been sung over me since.' There were dissentient voices, however, and, discussing *Antonina* with his friend Frank Archer towards the end of his life, Wilkie said, 'There was a man who came down on me heavily, and prophesied that I should never make a novelist. Many years afterwards I met him and we had a hearty laugh over his prediction. Though I must honestly say that the story was anything but a good one.' He must have appreciated that the historical novel was not to be his medium, for he made no effort to repeat the experiment.

He was amused to find himself a minor celebrity following the success of *Antonina.* In a letter to E. M. Ward he wrote:

> An awful crowd at the Mayor's last Thursday, stewards with names of distinguished individuals on private printed lists—charged to make civil speeches to all authors and artists, made hideous mistakes instead: Cardwell taken for Bulwer, your humble servant taken for a P-R.B., and asked whether the author of *Antonina* was there that night. Gallons of cider-cup in a vessel like a gold slop-pail, out of which the company drank like horses out of a trough. Seedy next morning and miserably unfit to be in the house of a virtuous man whose

servant had never heard of Brandy and Soda-water in the whole course of his life. I met Bulwer at a party on Monday night. He is looking bright and plump. Now is the time to take his portrait.

During the summer months following the publication of *Antonina* Wilkie determined to take a holiday—but it must be one that he could turn to literary account. The year 1850 roughly marks the end of the first frenzied period of railway-construction in England; by then the net had spread over most of the country despite every protest from the partisans of the stage-coach. One of the few counties still to escape the penetration of the locomotive was Cornwall: on the maps of 1850 the thin black line stops short at Plymouth. To the average Londoner, Cornwall, with its remote fishing-villages and its superb coastline was an unknown land. According to Wilkie Collins, books of travel crowded the shelves of the circulating libraries relating to every country of the Globe ' except perhaps Cornwall and Kamchatka.' Of the two he thought he preferred Cornwall, and, accompanied by a young artist friend, H. C. Brandling, he set out in July for Plymouth and the end of the railway.

The tour lasted several weeks during which they visited many places that have since become well-known to Cornish holiday-makers, among them Looe, Kynance Cove, St. Michael's Mount, Land's End and Tintagel. It was a happy tour and Wilkie and Brandling got along excellently together. They found the Cornish hospitable and courteous, although then as now, anyone coming from east of the Tamar was regarded as a foreigner. They were mistaken for travelling pedlars and for ' Mappers,' come to survey the land in preparation for the railroad. Everywhere their misfortune in having to carry their baggage on their back elicited sympathy. At Fowey ' the mere sight of two strangers walking along with such appendages as knapsacks strapped on their shoulders, seemed of itself to provoke the most unbounded wonder. We were stared at with almost incredible pertinacity and good humour. People hard at work left off to look at us; whole groups congregated at cottage-doors, walked into the middle of the road when they saw us approach. Little children ran indoors to bring out large children.' At Liskeard, on the other hand, their landlady liked them for being 'nice strong young Englishmen who walked about independently and didn't mind the weight of their knapsacks,' and because they were not 'effeminate dandies. So much Wilkie proudly records in a letter to his mother.

Among their adventures was the descent of a copper mine at Botallack, for which Wilkie was provided with a miner's suit several sizes too large—he was only five feet six inches in height. After a climb down many hundreds of feet of vertical ladders, complicated for Wilkie by his voluminous garb, they are conducted along a gallery leading out under the sea. They stop and listen:

> A distant, unearthly noise becomes faintly audible—a long, low, mysterious moaning, that never changes, that is *felt* on the ear as well as *heard* by it—a sound that might proceed from some incalculable distance—from some far invisible height—a sound unlike anything that is heard on the upper ground, in the free air of heaven—a sound so sublimely mournful and still, so ghostly and impressive when listened to in the subterranean recesses of the Earth, that we continue instinctively to hold our peace, as if enchanted by it, and think not of communicating to each other the strange awe and astonishment which it has inspired in us both from the very first.
>
> At last, the Miner speaks again, and tells us that what we hear is the sound of the surf lashing the rocks a hundred and twenty feet above us, and of the waves that are breaking on the beach beyond. The tide is now at the flow, and the sea is in no extraordinary state of agitation: so the sound is low and distant . . . But, when storms are at their height, when the ocean hurls mountain after mountain of water on the cliffs, then the noise is terrific; the roaring heard down here in the mine is so inexpressibly fierce and awful, that the boldest men at work are afraid to continue their labour.

Wilkie collects facts as a squirrel gathers nuts. He tells us that the miner's normal wage is between forty and fifty shillings a month; that five per cent of the population of the Penzance area emigrated to Australia and New Zealand in 1849, chiefly as a result of the potato-blight; that a dozen pilchards sell for a penny; that good cottages are to be had in Cornwall for between fifty shillings and four pounds a year; that no one dies of starvation in Cornwall—a fact apparently worthy of remark.

He is interested too in folklore and superstition, relating with gusto the story of how the people of Looe once rid themselves of a plague of rats by cooking and eating them, liberally flavoured with onion; and of Old Daniel Gumb whose addiction to mathematics led him ultimately to seek solace in a hermit's life, his dwelling a small cave on the walls of which he scratched out his Euclidean problems. He retails the local superstition that no wound will fester as long as the instrument which had caused it is kept bright and clean. In one village they visited the inhabitants took comfort from the belief that no one baptised with water from a certain well would be hanged—surely a classic example of the anti-social superstition.

The wind-swept cliffs and desolate heaths of Cornwall stirred his imagination; the sea, which he loved, was never far away:

> Far out on the ocean the waters flash into a streak of fire; the sails of ships passing there, glitter bright; yet a moment more, and the sunlight in triumphant brilliancy bursts out over the whole view. The sea changes soon from dull grey to bright blue, embroidered thickly with golden specks, as it rolls and rushes and dances in the wind.

Cornwall was to furnish the setting for many a chapter to come.

Wilkie's account of the holiday is as unpretentious as its title, *Rambles Beyond Railways; or Notes in Cornwall taken A-foot*. It appeared early in 1851 with Brandling's illustrations, Bentley again being the publisher. In its small way the *Rambles* proved most successful, and ran into several editions. Shortly after publication, Wilkie wrote to George Bentley, with whom he was on cordial terms, seeking advice as to how best to deal with a certain menace named Britton:

This is the third occasion on which the Venerable B. has lain in ambush for my books and bounced out upon me with a letter of broad hints. On the first occasion, I gave him a copy of the *Life of Collins* and received in return a treatise on *Junius.* I couldn't read it, but suppose I ought to consider myself a gainer by my swop . . . On the second occasion I determined to protect *your* rights of property and evade paying tribute with *Antonina* by writing a polite, grateful and complimentary letter. This answered my purpose for *Antonina,* but, as you will see by the enclosed letter, has not protected *Rambles Beyond Railways.* What am I to do? Am I to return a *gift* of illustration by a *loan* of *Rambles*? Or am I, now and henceforth, to consider the Venerable B. as a sort of second British Museum, reguarly entitled to a copy of every book I write? If you decide to send the book, I will toss up with you for the proprietorship of the promised illustrations.†

Soon after his return from Cornwall, Wilkie Collins sat to Millais, then about 21 years of age, for the attractive little portrait which hangs in the National Portrait Gallery. It is one of the very few likenesses which show him as clean-shaven, exhibiting features which, a few years later, were to be swallowed up for ever in a jungle of beard. The eyes peer through gold-rimmed spectacles—he was so near-sighted that he could hardly see without them; the bulbous forehead adds a hint of intellectuality to a face which is pale and sensitive. The sitter's elbows rest on the arms of his chair; his small hands touch only at the tips of heavily-ringed fingers. It is a characteristically precise pose suggesting a mood of studious reflection.

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†Quoted in 'The Camel's Back,' Michael Sadleir. *Nineteenth Century Essays.* (*Oxford University Press,* 1948.)