

CHAPTER SEVEN

“ Household Words ”

DURING THE MONTHS following the performance of *The Frozen Deep*, while Wilkie was at work on *The Dead Secret*, Dickens was straining to finish *Little Dorrit* on schedule. Restless and dispirited he sought Wilkie's company more and more. The letters of this period make frequent reference to dinners together at the *Household Words* office, jaunts into the country and, later, visits to Dickens' new home near Rochester, Gad's Hill Place, of which he took possession in May. He writes to Wilkie in March, 1857 :

I cannot tell you what pleasure I had in the receipt of your letter yesterday evening, or how much good it did me in the depression consequent upon an exciting and exhausting day's work. I immediately arose (like the desponding Princes in the *Arabian Nights*, when the old woman—Procuress evidently, and probably of French extraction—comes to whisper about the Princesses they love) and washed my face and went out; and my face has been shining ever since.

Ellis [proprietor of a Brighton hotel] responds to my letter that rooms shall be ready! There is a train at 12 which appears to me to be the train for the distinguished visitors. If you will call for me in a cab at about 20 minutes past 11, my hand will be on the latch of the door.

I have got a book to take with me of which I have not read a line, but which I have been saving up to get a pull at it in the nature of a draught—*The Dead Secret*—by a Fellow Student.

In May *Little Dorrit* is finished and Wilkie is informed that 'any mad proposal you please will find a wil'dly insane response in Yours ever, C.D.' And a week or so later Dickens writes :

Tomorrow I am bound to Forster; on Sunday to solemn Chief Justice's in remote fastnesses beyond Norwood; on Monday to Geographical Societies dining to cheer on Lady Franklin's Expedition; on Tuesday to Proctor's; on Wednesday, sir—on Wednesday—if the mind can devise anything sufficiently in the style of sybarite Rome in the days of its culminating voluptuousness, I am your man . . . If you can think of any tremendous way of passing the night, in the meantime, do. I don't care what it is. I give (for that night only) restraint to the Winds! Wilkie Collins was no longer, if indeed he had ever been, merely the companion of Dickens' 'Inimitable' moods.

In *The Dead Secret*, published in two volumes in June, 1857, by Bradbury & Evans, part-owners of *Household Words*, Wilkie Collins is still feeling his way. Although it did much at the time to enhance his reputation, it can hardly be said to mark any great advance on *Hide and Seek*. For a Collins novel it is strangely deficient in plot; the 'secret' does not remain for long a secret from the reader, and there is scarcely enough intrinsic interest in the rest of the story to carry it through. In his portrait of the lady's maid, Sarah Leeson, the principal character of the book, he tells us that he wished to trace 'the influence of a heavy responsibility on a naturally timid woman whose mind was neither strong enough to bear it, nor bold enough to drop it altogether.' Unfortunately Sarah never quite comes to life and her dilemma seems altogether too contrived. Leonard Frankland, the hero, is blind—one of the long succession of Collins' characters suffering from some major disability. Uncle Joseph, with his musical-box and his passion for Mozart, is an entertaining figure, and we see all too little of the Reverend Dr. Chennery, one of Wilkie's most delightful clerics. The misanthropic Andrew Treverton and his attendant, Shrowl, are drawn several sizes larger than life in the early Dickens' manner. Competent, if unoriginal, *The Dead Secret* can best be described as a tentative move in the direction of the sensation novel, that department of fiction of which Wilkie Collins was soon to become the best known

exponent. Dickens found the book of absorbing interest. It is doubtful if even he could have been prepared for the astonishing work which was to follow it.

The same month there appeared an article on Wilkie Collins in *The Train*, a short-lived periodical founded by that enthusiastic young journalist Edmund Yates. The magazine featured a series of articles on literary figures of the day, written by Yates himself and entitled 'Men of Mark.' Number Two, which appeared in June 1857, was devoted to Wilkie Collins; on the strength of half-a-dozen books, all more or less immature, he is startlingly accounted 'fourth among his contemporaries, after Dickens, Thackeray and Charlotte Brontë.' That such an estimate, extravagant as it was, could have been seriously advanced is at least an indication of Wilkie Collins' growing popularity with the novel-reading public. Yates adds that he considers him the most conscientious novelist of the day and a story-teller without equal. Alluding to *The Lighthouse* and *The Frozen Deep*, he says that they were performed with great success 'before the most refined and critical audiences in the land.'

In June, Douglas Jerrold, friend of both Dickens and Collins, died suddenly and Dickens decided on an impulse that they must do something to assist Jerrold's widow. He had been longing for an excuse to revive *The Frozen Deep*, ever since the last performance, and here it was. There had been hints of Royal interest in the play and at one time Dickens had passed on to Wilkie a rumour that the Queen intended to command a performance at Windsor Castle. Nothing had come of it, but, having decided on a further series of performances in aid of Jerrold's family, Dickens made discreet soundings at Court. The result was favourable and he was able to announce a short season, with the same cast as before, at the Gallery of Illustration, Regent Street, of which the first night would be a Command Performance.

The Queen, the Prince Consort, the King of the Belgians and their party numbering about fifty formed, on July 7th, 'a most excellent audience,' and at the public performances

which followed the earlier success was repeated. Among the handful of ' outsiders ' invited by Dickens to the first night was Hans Andersen, who was wonderfully impressed with the whole affair.

Andersen had been a great admirer of Dickens since meeting him years before on a previous visit to England, and he had been angling for some time for an invitation to stay with his ' dear Boz.' Having recently taken possession of Gad's Hill Place, Dickens had little choice but to issue the invitation so clearly expected of him. Hans Andersen accepted with alacrity and stayed for five weeks during most of which time Wilkie was also a guest at Gad's Hill. Sir Henry Dickens, K.C., in his recollections of his father, tells a story which illustrates Andersen's childlike humour. Wilkie appeared one day in an enormous wide-awake hat, which Andersen proceeded to adorn with a garland of daisies, quite unsuspected by the wearer. The Dickens boys then persuaded Wilkie to accompany them on a walk through the village and were delighted by the laughter of the passers-by, the reason for which remained a mystery to Wilkie until he got home and removed his hat. Andersen enjoyed his visit to Gad's Hill enormously; for his host, however, the naïve charm of the author of the fairy-tales had begun to wear thin. On his departure a card was placed on the dressing table of his bedroom which read ' Hans Andersen slept in this room for 5 weeks which seemed to the family ages.'

Reports of the undoubted success of *The Frozen Deep* at the Gallery of Illustration had spread to the provinces, and by the end of July, Manchester was clamouring to see it. The sum which Dickens had in mind to hand over to Mrs. Jerrold had not yet been reached, and he willingly concurred. The Free Trade Hall was booked and two performances arranged for Friday and Saturday, August 21st and 22nd. Dickens did not wish the female parts to be played on this occasion by the members of his family, for the

ostensible reason that their voices and gestures would be lost in so large a hall, but perhaps also on grounds of propriety. He sought the advice of Alfred Wigan, manager of the Olympic Theatre, in the matter of engaging professional actresses and Wigan proposed a Mrs. Ternan and her daughters Ellen and Maria, who were playing at the Royal Princess's Theatre, Oxford Street. Dickens accepted the suggestion and, with no time to lose, the three actresses began to rehearse at Tavistock House.

At the very first rehearsal Dickens fell violently in love with the eighteen-year-old Ellen Ternan. He had met her some months earlier in her dressing-room at the Haymarket, where he had found her in tears because she was forced 'to show too much leg.' Although rehearsing in his own house, Dickens was unable, or made no attempt, to conceal his infatuation and his wife quite naturally felt affronted. Relations were already strained when the company left for Manchester on August 20th, 1857.

Besides Dickens and the author, the cast for the Manchester performance included Mark Lemon, Shirley Brooks, Lemon's successor as editor of *Punch*, Augustus Egg and Wilkie's brother Charles. Stimulated to the highest pitch by the emotional excitement, Dickens gave the performance of his life at the Free Trade Hall, and inspired the whole cast to surpass itself. In a foreword to the MS. copy of *The Frozen Deep*, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, Wilkie Collins wrote: 'At Manchester this play was twice performed; on the second evening before three thousand people. This was, I think, the finest of all its representations. The extraordinary intelligence and enthusiasm of the great audience stimulated us all to do our best. Dickens surpassed himself. He literally electrified the audience.' A few days later Dickens was able to hand over more than £2,000 to Jerrold's widow.

Reaction set in immediately. Troubled by his passion for Ellen Ternan and aware that soon he must face a crisis in his domestic life, Dickens fell headlong into gloomy intro-

spection. A week after their return from Manchester he wrote to Wilkie :

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

Wilkie obediently rattled his head, and produced the idea of a walking-tour in Cumberland. This would remove Dickens from his own surroundings, in which he was feeling so restless; and if they were to collaborate in an account of their experiences, the writing of it might to some extent take his mind off the impending domestic crisis. The proposal was eagerly accepted and they left London in early September.

Their initial excursion ended in misfortune. Dickens was determined to climb Carrick Fell, and with the local inn-keeper—who later confessed he had not set foot on the mountain for twenty years—as guide, they set off in pouring rain. The summit was reached, but on the way down the visibility worsened, the pocket compass broke, and the party lost its way. The final disaster occurred when Wilkie slipped on a stone while crossing a brook, fell down and sprained his ankle. He had to be carried down the rest of the way by Dickens, 'exactly like Richard Wardour in private life,' and it was only after many difficulties that they arrived back at the inn after nightfall.

As the unlucky Wilkie lay immobilised with 'his foot wrapped up in a flannel waistcoat, and a horrible dabbling of lotion incessantly in progress,' they seized the opportunity to start on their narrative, *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*. Within a few days, Wilkie was able to hobble

about with the aid of two sticks, but further walking was out of the question for the remainder of the holiday. On the look-out for good 'copy,' they decided to visit Doncaster during St. Leger week. They found rooms at the Angel Hotel, where Wilkie, for whom putting things away in cupboards was no part of a Lazy Tour, provoked his immaculate friend to write, 'I am perpetually tidying the rooms after him, and carrying all sorts of untidy things which belong to him into his bedroom, which is a picture of disorder.' Wilkie was still unable to walk out of doors, but was taken for a couple of carriage rides about the town; he was promised a third upon completion of his part of the current instalment, which was sticking a little. Towards the end of September the two friends parted company, Dickens returning to Gad's Hill and Wilkie going on to Scarborough for a short stay. He returned to 2, Harley Place, which was now the Collins family's *pied-à-terre* in London since Mrs. Collins was living mainly in the country.

The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices which appeared in *Household Words* in five parts during October, 1857, is the record of a fairly uneventful trip, and its general effect is somewhat fragmentary. Each writer pads out his contribution with an essay in the macabre, Wilkie's story of 'The Dead Hand' being later included in *The Queen of Hearts*.

In the reflections of Mr. Idle, which occur in Part III of the *Lazy Tour*, we can detect a substratum of autobiographical truth. Thomas Idle, *alias* Wilkie Collins, is musing upon disasters which befell him in his youth through engaging in unnecessary activity instead of following his proper instinct towards indolence. He recalls that, as a lazy and popular schoolboy, he was suddenly constrained to try for a prize, and actually won it. From that moment life at school became unbearable; the idle boys shunned him as a deserter, the industrious ones as a new and possibly dangerous competitor, while the masters began to punish him for offences which they would previously have overlooked as inevitable. A further misfortune arose, shortly after he had left school,

from his ill-advisedly playing in a cricket match he had intended merely to watch. The strenuous exertions involved in getting out of the way of the ball, he claims, produced a perspiration which in turn brought on a chill which kept him in bed for many weeks. He had been a healthy child since birth and this was his first serious illness. Finally, Mr. Idle reflects upon his brief flirtation with the Law. 'Young men who aspired to the honourable title of barrister, were, very properly, not asked to learn anything of the law, but were merely required to eat a certain number of dinners at the table of their Hall, and to pay a certain sum of money; and were called to the Bar as soon as they could prove that they had sufficiently complied with these extremely sensible regulations.' We are told that, having thus painlessly acquired the status of barrister, he was persuaded to enter a conveyancer's chambers with a view to learning something of his profession. This resolution was short-lived, however, and a fortnight later he bade a permanent farewell to the Law. He had in the meantime made the acquaintance of a very adhesive bore, who took a liking to him and pursued him for a long time. Mr. Idle draws the moral which seems to him incontrovertible, that where the choice lies between inertia and action, the one spells bliss and the other catastrophe.

Wilkie had just completed a year on the staff of *Household Words*, the occasion being marked by a rise of £50 per annum. Dickens wrote to Wills: 'I don't remember whether I have told you that I have made the arrangement with Collins—that he is extremely sensible of the extra Fifty, and was rather unwilling to take it—and that I have no doubt of his being devoted to *H. W.*, and doing great service.'

The Christmas Number was the occasion of a rather more successful attempt at collaboration than the *Lazy Tour*. The original idea of *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, was Wilkie's, which may account for its marking an abrupt departure from the type of fireside story which Dickens'

readers had come to expect at the Christmas season. There are three chapters of which Dickens wrote the first and last, Wilkie the second and longest. Each revised the work of the other.

The Perils of Certain English Prisoners, which Dickens read for the first time to a gathering of friends on December 1st, 1857, is a tale of pirates and adventure in Central America, of marches through jungle and escape by rafts, and bears little resemblance to anything else written by either author. It has been said that, in their joint productions, it is often impossible to distinguish Dickens' work from Collins'; in this story, however, there is an unmistakable shift of emphasis at the end of each chapter from character to incident and setting and back again. Wilkie's scene, in 'The Prison in the Woods,' is carefully set—with generous splashes of local colour—and his action moves forward with deliberate tread, while Dickens is content to breathe life into a handful of memorable characters, with no more than a passing glance at the melodramatic situation into which he flings them.

Dickens had the manuscript of the *Perils* bound, and presented it to Wilkie with a covering note dated February 6th, 1858. 'Thinking it may one day be interesting to you—say, when you are weak in both feet, and when I and Doncaster are quiet and the great race is over—to possess this little Memorial of our joint Christmas work, I have had it put together for you, and now send it on its coming home from the Binder.' At the sale of Wilkie's effects after his death, the manuscript realised the sum of £200.

Wilkie Collins had become a regular contributor to *Household Words*, not only of short stories, but of articles dealing with a wide variety of subjects. Some of these he collected a few years later and published as *My Miscellanies*. The topics range from a biography of Balzac to concise accounts of French crimes of the Eighteenth Century (no doubt distilled from his copy of Méjan's *Causes Célèbres*), from 'A Petition to the Novel-Writers' to an amusing dis-

cussion of one of the earlier 'Answers to Correspondents' columns of popular journalism.

Now and again he would launch a protest against some injustice or other which had come to his notice. In one such article entitled, 'Highly Proper,' he attacked a schoolmaster who, in refusing to keep Alfred Wigan's son at his school on the ground that Wigan was an actor, had displayed the sort of snobbery which always roused him to anger. The attack was on too wide a front, however, for Dickens who wrote to Wills: 'I particularly wish you to look well to Wilkie's article, and not to leave anything in it that may be sweeping, and unnecessarily offensive to the middle class. He has always a tendency to overdo that—and such a subject gives him a fresh temptation.'

Wilkie was devoting a good deal of his time to the affairs of *Household Words*, for, apart from his contributions, he was acting as Wills' assistant and in this capacity frequently attended editorial conferences. These would sometimes take the form of dinners at the office when the discussion would be accompanied by the ritual of brewing Gin Punch, an elaborate manœuvre executed with all the showmanship of which Dickens was capable. Of the relative merits of his two closest associates Dickens later wrote to Bulwer-Lytton, 'Wills has no genius, and is, in literary matters, sufficiently commonplace to represent a very large proportion of our readers . . . Wilkie Collins is a partner here for three years, and I can trust him implicitly.' Dickens must have been out of humour with Wills when he wrote this, since it is hardly likely that he would have retained as his sub-editor for twenty years one who was merely commonplace in literary matters, but it was upon Wilkie's judgment that Dickens came more and more to rely.

Three years of journalism did not harm, if they did little to develop Wilkie Collins' talents as a writer. He was versatile and soon learned to strike the particular note that his editor required, but he lacked the flair of a George Augustus Sala and was never quite happy in the journalistic field. His

best work resulted from such opportunities as he had to exercise his narrative skill, for instance in the series dealing with French crimes. The humorous articles, in which he was trying to copy Dickens' journalistic style, are for the most part ponderous and exhibit a tendency which he was never able to keep completely under control, perhaps best described as literary archness.

During the winter of 1857-8, he had been working on a new play, this time with an eye on the commercial theatre. In March, Dickens wrote to Miss Coutts, 'I am engaged to dinner today, to hear Wilkie Collins read a new play (in the construction of which I have held no end of councils with him) which he designs for Mr. Robson.' Wilkie greatly admired Robson's acting and was anxious to provide him with a part at least as good as that of Aaron Gurnock, which he had played in the Olympic production of *The Lighthouse*. The Olympic Theatre, in Wych Street, near the Strand, (one of the streets which disappeared to make way for the Aldwych) was steadily acquiring a tradition as the home of well-acted melodrama. It became the fashion to distinguish between 'Olympic drama' and 'Adelphi drama,' the latter being regarded as altogether cruder and more old-fashioned. The Olympic was to be the scene of many a Wilkie Collins first night, and it was here that the new melodrama *The Red Vial*, was presented in October, 1858. Besides Robson who played Hans Grimm, a half-wit, the cast included Mrs. Stirling, an actress of considerable reputation.

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

Henry Morley considered the characters 'mere puppets, uttering commonplace sentiments tediously expressed.' Mrs. Stirling's performance was favourably noticed, but about Robson opinion was sharply divided. It was generally agreed that nothing could have saved the play. After a few nights it was withdrawn to be forgotten by all except its author who, twenty years later, refurbished the plot and turned it into a novel. The manuscript of the play bears a note in Wilkie's handwriting: 'On its first night it was damned. Mrs. Stirling and Addison both admirable. Poor little Robson did his best. The rest is silence.'

This was the first time that Wilkie Collins had tasted the bitterness of failure. One effect was to turn his attention once more towards the novel and away from a medium which never lost its fascination for him, but for which he was curiously unsuited. No one who reflects upon Wilkie's contribution to English fiction during the next ten years, can wholly regret the fiasco of *The Red Vial*.

In the spring of 1858 the inevitable separation of Dickens and his wife had taken place; the details are too well-known to need repetition here. One aspect of the matter is, however, relevant. It had been suggested more than once, on the slenderest evidence, that Wilkie Collins' influence played a large part in precipitating the final break. He probably did not, as Forster did, actively dissuade Dickens from taking a step which was the logical outcome of the estrangement between him and his wife. To assume more than that must be mere conjecture, since we know that he remained Mrs. Dickens' friend until her death twenty years later. It is the same with the affair of Dickens' 'Personal Statement,' which appeared in most of the periodicals. Forster again tried to discourage him and Mark Lemon went to the length of refusing to publish the statement in *Punch*—an act which lost him Dickens' friendship. Forster states that Dickens was guided by the advice of 'a certain distinguished man (still living)' but there is little ground for suggesting, as has been suggested, that he was referring to Wilkie Collins. A more

likely explanation may be found in Percy Fitzgerald's *Memories of Charles Dickens*: 'Forster suggested that the matter should be submitted to Mr. Delane, and this gentleman unfortunately gave his voice for publication.'

Wilkie Collins' role throughout this domestic crisis and the reaction that followed was rather that of a sympathetic listener. The letters become more intimate in tone. Henceforth it is, 'My dear Wilkie,' instead of 'Dear Collins'; Dickens is no longer 'ever faithfully,' but 'ever affectionately.' On March 21st, he writes :

The domestic unhappiness remains so strong upon me that I can't write, and (waking) can't rest one minute. I have never known a moment's peace or content since the last night of *The Frozen Deep*.

Two months later, just after the separation, Dickens writes again.

A thousand thanks for your kind letter. I always feel your friendship very much, and prize it in proportion to the true affection I have for you.

Your letter comes to me only tonight. Can you come round in the morning (Wednesday) before 12? I can then tell you all in lieu of writing. It is rather a long story—over, I hope now.

In August, 1858, Wilkie, who had been unwell, was recuperating at Broadstairs while Dickens was engaged on a Reading Tour designed, as he wrote to Wilkie, 'to wear and toss my storm away—or as much of it as will ever calm down while the water rolls.' Their correspondence was quite uninhibited, as is shown by Dickens' reply to a letter in which Wilkie had apparently made a jocular allusion to Dickens' frequent changes of address: 'As to that furtive and Don Giovanni purpose at which you hint, that may be all very well for *your* violent vigour, or that of the companions with whom you may have travelled continentally, or the Caliphs Haroun Alraschid with whom you have unbent metropolitanly; but anchorites who read themselves red hot every night are as chaste as Diana . . .' November found them both at Gad's Hill working on the Christmas

Number, 'A House to Let,' which was to be the last of the *Household Words* series.

Wilkie's next task was the collection of a number of his short stories for publication in book form, which necessitated the contriving of a chain of narrative upon which to hang them, after the fashion of Dickens' Christmas Stories. When *The Queen of Hearts*, which contains some of his best short tales, was published in the following year by Hurst & Blackett, it received only a brief notice in *The Athenaeum* which described the book as 'a reprint of the author's contributions to *Household Words*.' This called forth an indignant, if slightly disingenuous, reply from the author. He explained in a letter to the editor that 'rather less than one-fourth' of the book was a reprint from *Household Words*, but omitted to state that this fourth represented half the number of stories in the book, or that the remainder were reprinted from other periodicals. The editor, while accepting the rebuke, thought that these explanations might have been given in a preface, but added: 'We make room for them however with hearty goodwill; for we have the highest respect for Mr. Collins as a conscientious cultivator of the art of story-telling.'

Wilkie's brother Charles was also beginning to drift into journalism and had already published several articles in *Household Words*. As a painter, Charles Allston Collins was a most exacting critic of his own work, and an inordinately slow worker. The inevitable result was that picture after picture was left unfinished, and he began to find the pen a readier means of expression than the brush. Encouraged to write by both Dickens and Wilkie, a year or two later Charles abandoned painting altogether.

Neither his brother's defection nor his own close association with Dickens, a strong opponent of Pre-Raphaelitism, prevented Wilkie from maintaining his old friendship with the founders of the Brotherhood, and Holman Hunt in particular. Writing some 45 years later, Hunt gives an

interesting picture of Wilkie Collins about this time.† One was sure, he wrote, of a warm welcome at whatsoever time of day one dropped in upon him. He would rock himself to and fro in his rocking chair, his hands clasping his knees, and 'ask with deep concern where you came from last.' His room was decorated with his father's paintings, including one or two beautiful pictures of the Bay of Naples.

Finding Hunt's gaze wandering, on one occasion, to a painting by another hand, Wilkie exclaimed :

Ah! you might well admire that masterpiece; it was done by that great painter Wilkie Collins, and it put him so completely at the head of landscape painters that he determined to retire from the profession in compassion for the rest. The Royal Academy were so affected by its supreme excellence and its capacity to teach, that they carefully avoided putting it where taller people in front might obscure the view, but instead placed it high up, that all the world could without difficulty survey it. Admire, I beg you, sir, the way in which those colours stand; no cracking in that *chef d'oeuvre*, and no tones ever fail. Admire the brilliancy of that lake reflecting the azure sky; well, sir, the painter of that picture has no petty jealousies, that unrivalled tone was compounded simply with Prussian blue and flake white. It was put on, you say, by a master hand; yes, but it will show what simple materials in such a hand will achieve. I wish all masterpieces had defied time so triumphantly.

We can easily identify the subject of this panegyric as 'The Smugglers' Refuge,' which graced the walls of the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1849.

The object of Holman Hunt's visit on the particular occasion he describes, was to seek Wilkie's advice. Having just completed his enormous canvas 'The Finding of Christ in the Temple,' after six years of intermittent work, Hunt was exercised to know how much he should ask for it. 'You must take care and get a thundering big price for it or you will be left a beggar,' advised Wilkie, and asked Hunt if he had any figure in mind. Hunt replied that 5,500 guineas, 'far

† *Pre-Raphaelitism and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood*. W. Holman Hunt. (Macmillan, 1905).

more than has ever been given in England for a modern picture,' would be no more than a fair reward for the work he had put into it. 'Then,' said Wilkie, 'that is the figure you must ask, and you should be able to get it,' adding that if Hunt felt diffident about it, he should consult Dickens' opinion. 'Dickens is not only a man of genius, he is a good business man. Go to him and ask him.' The story has a happy ending. Wilkie arranged the meeting; Dickens despite his prejudice against the Pre-Raphaelite School, agreed with Wilkie's view, and the picture was ultimately sold to a dealer for £5,500.

Wilkie Collins was, according to Hunt, a generous spender at all times, although prudent in money matters. As a host, 'no one could be more jolly than he as the lord of the feast in his own house, where the dinner was prepared by a chef, the wines plentiful and the cigars of choicest brand. The talk became rollicking and the most sedate joined in the hilarity; laughter long and loud crossed from opposite ends of the room and all went home brimful of good stories.'

Holman Hunt's final observation is, whether intentionally or not, something of an enigma. 'Personally, he was without ambition to take a place in the competition of society, and avoided plans of life which necessitated the making up of his mind enough to forecast the future.'

In July, 1860, Holman Hunt acted as best man at the wedding of Charles Collins to Dickens' younger daughter Kate. Since adopting the profession of literature, Charles had been gathered more closely into the Dickens circle and had seen a good deal of Kate during his visits to Gad's Hill. He was attracted to her from the first and, for her part she found this strange young man interesting and sympathetic. The announcement of their engagement in the spring of this year occasioned no little surprise among their friends, although Wilkie had written to Ward some months before, 'Charley continues to spin madly in the social vortex, and

is still trying hard to talk himself into believing that he ought to be married.' That Kate accepted his offer may be partly attributed to the changed atmosphere in the Dickens household since her mother's departure. She never accepted, as did her sister Mamie, the substitution of Aunt Georgina as mistress of the house and looked on her coming marriage as a means of escape.

Dickens must have viewed this link between the Collins family and his own with pleasure but also with some misgivings. Charlie's temperament was too nervous and highly-strung and his health too delicate for him to be an ideal husband. He possessed, however, great charm and sincerity and was well liked by those who knew him best. Forster wrote of Charles Collins that 'no man disappointed so many reasonable hopes with so little fault or failure of his own, that his difficulty always was to please himself, and that an inferior mind would have been more successful in both the arts he followed.' His personal appearance was striking. Hunt described him as 'slight, with slender limbs, but erect in the head and neck, square in the shoulders, beautifully cut features, large chin, a crop of orange-coloured hair (latterly a beard), blue eyes.' On the whole Kate might have done a good deal worse, and so far as is known, Dickens made no attempt to place any obstacles in the way of the marriage.

The wedding, which took place at Gad's Hill, was a great event for the villagers who, turning out in force, formed triumphal arches all the way to the church. A special train from London Bridge was organised for the guests who included Mr. and Mrs. Wills, the Forsters, Frederick Lehmann, Charles Fechter, Edmund Yates, H. F. Chorley, Thomas Beard and, of course, Wilkie. After the ceremony the party played games on the lawn and was then taken to Rochester to inspect the castle and to Chatham to hear a band concert. The programme, being signed 'W. Collins, Bandmaster,' gave rise to a number of bad jokes at Wilkie's expense. The departure of the bride and bridegroom was a

tearful moment, 'Katey crying bitterly on her father's breast, Mamie dissolved in tears, and Charlie as white as snow.'

After the guests had returned to London at eleven o'clock at night, Dickens was discovered by his elder daughter in Kate's room with his face buried in her wedding-gown, murmuring in a broken voice, 'But for me Kate would never have left home.'

Early in 1859, as the result of a quarrel on mainly personal issues, Dickens dissolved partnership with Bradbury and Evans. Such a step entailed, as he fully intended it should, the end of *Household Words*. Taking with him Wills, Wilkie and most of his other 'young men,' he founded a new weekly, *All The Year Round*, similar in appearance and content to its predecessor. He even contrived to have the first number on sale several weeks before the final issue of *Household Words*. Bradbury and Evans, naturally incensed at Dickens' somewhat high-handed behaviour, decided to retaliate. They declared war by launching yet another periodical, *Once a Week*, with which they hoped to entice back into their fold at least some of the readers who had transferred their allegiance to Dickens' new paper.

It was therefore essential, with a subscription war brewing between the two periodicals, for Dickens to get *All the Year Round* off to a good start. His own new novel was sufficiently advanced to begin serial publication with the first issue, a fact which may have influenced his timing in bringing *Household Words* to an end. *A Tale of Two Cities* was a strong enough attraction to ensure the initial success of the magazine, but being considerably shorter than his average would only stretch to six months in serial form. Some worthy successor had to be found without delay. It is characteristic of Dickens that at this crucial point he should turn for his next serial, not to a safe name like Bulwer-Lytton, but to Wilkie Collins, in whose future as a novelist he had an unshakable faith. It was a gamble which succeeded far beyond even Dickens' expectations.