



A LITTLE FABLE

BY

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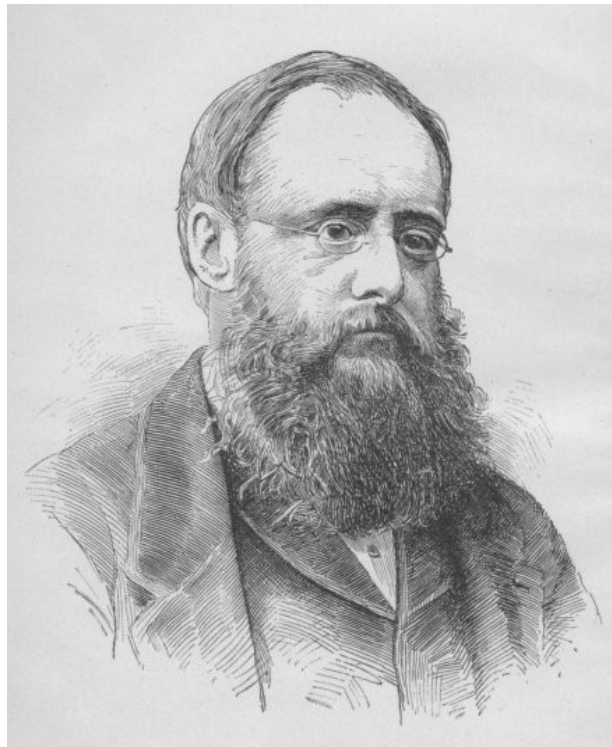
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‘A Little Fable’ is one of Collins’s unpublished fragments, here reproduced in its brief entirety for the first time. It is undated but probably written in the early 1880’s. Parts of it are very similar to the opening lines of Chapter II of *Heart and Science* (1883) where Ovid Vere sets out for Lincoln’s Inn Fields.

"When two friends happen to meet in the street, do they ever look back along the procession of small circumstances which has led them both, from the same starting point of their own houses, to the same spot, at the same time"! Not one man in ten thousand has probably thought of making such a fantastic inquiry as this. And consequently not one man in ten thousand, living in the midst of reality, has discovered that he is also living in the midst of romance."

The text of the Fable covers one sheet of large quarto and is signed ‘Wilkie Collins’. It was sold by Christie’s as lot 134 of the Arthur A. Houghton, Jr. sale, Part I, 13 June 1979. There is no information as to why or for whom it was written and its history remains as enigmatic as the text.

Andrew Gasson 1996



Wilkie Collins in the early 1880s

A Little Fable.

The other day, two good friends — a lawyer and a mathematician — happened to meet in a remote part of London, in front of a cheap book-shop. The stall ~~outside~~ the shop presented a row of novels, offered at half price.

Having exchanged the customary expressions of pleasure and surprise, and having made the necessary inquiries on the subject of wives and children, the two gentlemen relapsed into a momentary silence. Perceiving in ~~his friend~~ ^{his friend} signs of mental pre-occupation, the lawyer asked what he

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Having exchanged the customary expressions of pleasure and surprise, and having made the necessary enquiries on the subject of wives and children, the two gentleman relapsed into a momentary silence. Perceiving in his friend signs of mental pre-occupation, the lawyer asked what he was thinking of. The mathematician answered, "I was looking hack along the procession of small circumstances, which has led me from the starting-point of my own door to this unexpected meeting in the street."

Hearing this, it occurred to the lawyer to look back, on his side. He also discovered that a procession of small circumstances had carried him, by devious ways, to the morsel of pavement on which he then stood. "Well," he said, "and what do you make of it?"

"I have led a serious life," the mathematician announced, "for forty years."
"So have I," the lawyer said.
"And I have just discovered," the other continued, "that a man in the midst of reality is also, in this strange life of ours, a man in the midst of romance."

"I have led a serious life," the mathematician announced, "for forty years."

"So have I," the lawyer said.

"And I have just discovered/ the other continued, "that a man in the midst of reality is also, in this strange life of ours, a man in the midst of romance."

The lawyer pondered a little on that reply. "And what does your discovery amount to?" he asked.

"Only to this. I have been to school; I have been to college; I am sixty years old - and my education is not complete. Good morning. "

They parted. As soon as the lawyer's back was turned, the mathematician retraced his steps to the book-shop - and bought a novel.

The lawyer looked round at that moment. A strong impression was produced on him. He walked back to his friend. "When you have done with that book," he said, "lend it to me."

