



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

‘The New Dragon of Wantley: A Social Revelation’, A Lost Tale by Wilkie Collins, With further discussion of his contributions to *The Leader*

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A quarter of a century has now passed since Kirk H. Beetz drew attention to the importance of Wilkie Collins’s involvement with *The Leader*, the radical journal committed to socialism, secularism, and rationalism which was founded by Thornton Hunt and G.H. Lewes in March 1850.¹ *The Leader* was not a monthly literary magazine like *Bentley’s Miscellany*, to which Collins also contributed a number of articles in the early 1850s, but a stamped weekly newspaper selling at sixpence. It gave over half of its space to socio-political reporting, commentary, and debate in the ‘News of the Week’, ‘Public Affairs’, ‘Organizations of the People’, and ‘Open Council’ departments. The remaining columns were devoted to reviewing in sections headed ‘Literature’ and ‘The Arts’, and to the ‘Portfolio’, which typically carried cultural essays but occasionally featured short poems or works of fiction. To begin with, Hunt acted as both general and political editor, while literature and the arts were overseen by Lewes, who often wrote under the pseudonym ‘Vivian’. During 1851, however, the paper ran into financial difficulties, and was bought up by Edward Pigott, the third son of wealthy landowners from North Somerset, who was in a position to subsidize the enterprise to the tune of over £2,000 a year. By the beginning of 1852, Pigott had also taken over the general editorship of the paper. Having graduated from Cambridge in 1845, Pigott was of an age with Wilkie Collins and the two must have met up as fellow students at Lincoln’s Inn, for they were called to the bar together in November 1851.² Based on detailed study of both the manuscript letters from Collins to Pigott held at the Huntington Library, California, and the files of *The Leader* itself, Beetz demonstrated that Collins had been far more than ‘an occasional contributor’ (Robinson, 86). Drawing a parallel with the author’s role after he joined the staff of *Household Words* in October 1856, Beetz argued that Collins concerned himself with

¹ The most reliable brief account of the foundation and development of the *Leader* can be found in Christopher Kent’s entry in Sullivan, ed., 3:185-9.

² There is no evidence to support the statement that ‘Pigott and Collins had been boyhood friends, perhaps meeting at the public school of John Bullar, a close friend of Collins’ father’ (Beetz, 22).

both the paper's departmental organization and its political policy, and may even have taken on editorial responsibilities for a limited period.

Moreover, Beetz listed 29 articles dating between 27 September 1851 and 25 August 1855, positively identified as contributions by the author through documentary evidence – common signatures and cross-references, as well as explicit mentions in the letters. In addition, he assigned another 50 to the category 'Other Works Possibly by Wilkie Collins' on rather more speculative grounds, within an extended date range from 9 August 1851 to 15 November 1856. At the same time, from the frequency of references in Collins's letters to Pigott, he concluded that 'although the lists are extensive, they are not inclusive', suggesting that 'many more articles' appearing in the paper during that period were likely to be by Collins (27). Though it is not a point which Beetz emphasizes, a major difficulty in identifying specific articles from references in Collins's correspondence with Pigott is that few of the relevant letters are dated precisely. Out of forty-three letters to Pigott belonging to the period from summer 1851 to autumn 1856, when Collins was resident with his mother at 17 Hanover Terrace, only seven are dated in the form 'January 12th 1852' or its equivalent, while the rest are headed at best by the address and something like 'Thursday evening'. Perhaps that is why Beetz's article does not seem to have provoked other scholars to take up this bibliographical challenge, so that Andrew Gasson's entry for Wilkie Collins in the *Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* (3rd edition, vol. 4, 1999) had to remain content with a summary of the data Beetz put forward in 1982.

However, the completion of major research projects on the author's correspondence, represented by the publication of *The Letters of Wilkie Collins* (1999) and *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters* (2005), does now allow us to take a few steps forward. In the *Public Face*, in particular, where close to three thousand letters are placed in a single chronological sequence, the dating of the early letters to Pigott is much more firmly secured in relation both to external evidence and to other items in the run. Reading through the letters from summer 1851 to autumn 1856, it becomes clear that the many explicit references to journalistic work for *The Leader* are by no means distributed evenly over that span of time. Of the forty-three letters to Pigott already mentioned, fourteen are concentrated in the period from November 1851 to March 1852, and twenty-four in that between May 1854 and September 1855, with only five dating from the period in between. While these forty-three extant letters cannot be the only ones actually sent to Pigott during the period in question,³ there are stretches when there seems to have been relatively little communication between the two. On 25 June 1853, for example, the day before Pigott's father died, Collins wrote:

³ The first and last extant letters in this series (11 November 1851 and 4 September 1855) certainly commence and leave affairs *in medias res*, while there are a number of pointers to missing correspondence in between. For example, the letter of Thursday, 14 June 1855 refers to 'my letter of Monday last' (BGLL I, 126), of which there is no sign.

It seems months since I have heard anything *from* you or *of* you – Do you still go to Weston every week? Are you quite recovered? In what state is your father's health? – Do let me have a line to answer these questions – or drop in here any evening you like to dinner (if you are not still passing your leisure time at home) and answer in your own proper person.

(BGGL I, 84)

Indeed, clearly dated letters like this one tend to be found during the fallow periods, while the undated missives tend to belong to more intensive flurries of communication. This pattern lends support to the following narrative: that Collins began to contribute literary material to the 'Portfolio' soon after Pigott invested in *The Leader* and before the two friends left Lincoln's Inn; that ideological disagreements in the spring of 1852 with both Pigott in private correspondence, and with Lewes in the columns of the paper itself, led Collins to distance himself from the publication for some time, though he remained in social contact with Pigott, occasionally attending the theatre in his company; that, while remaining in financial control, Pigott himself relinquished the editorship to E.M. Whitty from mid-1853 to the spring of 1854, at which point Collins again began to contribute to the paper, initially in the form of tit-bits of news; that, the same summer, when Lewes left the country after the scandal broke concerning his relations with George Eliot, and his wife's relations with Thornton Hunt, Collins had already begun to take over his role as a regular reviewer of plays, books, and exhibitions in the 'Literature' and 'Arts' sections; and that Collins's contributions tailed off from the summer of 1855, when Lewes returned and resumed his position as chief reviewer. This scenario must obviously remain tentative in many of its details, but it seems much closer to reality than the story of a Collins steadfastly committed to *The Leader* for a period of five years and more, his flow of contributions interrupted only by illness or trips abroad, which Beetz fosters in both his article and in his list of speculative attributions.

If we turn again to the files of *The Leader* with this perspective in mind, and the author's collected letters to hand, many of Beetz's speculative attributions begin to look extremely unlikely to have been written by Collins. Scanning through the 'Literature' department, it becomes clear that the heading 'A Batch of Books' cannot be associated personally with Collins, but merely indicates that there is a backlog of books on the editor's table that can only be cleared by reviewing a number of books more cursorily in a single article.⁴ Moreover, several of the 'Batch' reviews in question appeared when Collins was seriously ill or resident overseas.⁵ Beetz is quite right to pick up the following interesting remark to Pigott and hunt for a corresponding article in *The Leader*: 'I think I shall be able to do something amusing for you, about the Pre-Raphael painting School in the country. John Millais (entre

⁴ Collins refers to such an article (by 'Reviewer No 2') in the letter to Pigott of 3 February 1855 (BGGL I, 113-4).

⁵ For example, in early June 1853, when Collins was confined to bed, or at the end of August the same year, when he was staying with Dickens in Boulogne.

nous) is going to lend me his diary'. But the case collapses when the letter in question is explicitly dated 'January 12th 1852' but the article located appears the previous summer.⁶ There seems no justification external or internal for linking to Collins articles under the signature θ (*theta*) that review plays and exhibitions in Paris in June 1855 – especially when we know that he was not in France at that time. The suggestion that the signature 'W.-P.' might indicate a joint contribution by Collins and Pigott, looks considerably less convincing when we note that 'Plague Spots' (2 September 1854, 836-7) is not a theatre review in 'The Arts' but a heavy-handed allegory on the cholera epidemic for the literary 'Portfolio'.⁷

On the other hand, this new perspective casts no doubt on Beetz's twenty-nine firm attributions, which are divided below into two groups according to both period and department. All these identifications are supported directly in the letters, or indirectly through consistent patterns of signature ('W.W.C' in late 1851/early 1852, and 'W.' in June-July 1854), which are elsewhere directly attested.

(A) Articles in 'Portfolio'

- 'A Plea for Sunday Reform', 27 September 1851, 925-6.
- 'Magnetic Evenings at Home: Letter I. To G. H. Lewes', 17 January 1852, 63-64.
- 'Magnetic Evenings at Home: Letter II. To G. H. Lewes', 14 February 1852, 160-1.
- 'Magnetic Evenings at Home: Letter III. To G. H. Lewes', 21 February 1852, 183-4.
- 'Magnetic Evenings at Home: Letter IV. To G. H. Lewes', 28 February 1852, 207-8.
- 'Magnetic Evenings at Home: Letter V. To G. H. Lewes', 6 March 1852, 231-3.
- 'Magnetic Evenings at Home: Letter VI. To G. H. Lewes', 13 March 1852, 256-7.
- 'The Incredible Not Always Impossible: To G. H. Lewes', 3 April 1852, 328-9.⁸

(B) Reviews and News items in 'Literature' and 'The Arts'

- 'A Word about a Painted Window' ('The Arts'), 11 March 1854, 236.⁹
- 'La Promise' ('The Arts'), 17 June 1854, 572.¹⁰
- 'The Courier of Lyons', with an untitled paragraph on 'operatic matters' ('The Arts'), 1 July 1854, 619.¹¹

⁶ The article 'The Issue Out of Pre-Raphaelitism' (9 August 1851) seems rather more likely to be by Thornton Hunt; Collins's own article on the Royal Academy Exhibition in *Bentley's Miscellany* (June 1851), takes a much more positive line on the Pre-Raphaelites.

⁷ In a style entirely uncharacteristic of Collins, the article opens: 'The foe is leagues from our homes – who's afraid? and Procrastination – who takes off his cares with his clothes – pulls his night-cap over his ears ad falls into a sleep as dull and heavy as that of the dead'.

⁸ All seven articles share the signature 'W.W.C.', and, although no mention of 'A Plea for Sunday Reform' is found in the extant correspondence, there are numerous references to the 'Magnetic Letters' series, beginning in the letter to Pigott of 10 February 1852 (BGLL I, 59).

⁹ Referred to thus: 'I wish you would let me know, when you have room in the "Leader" for a couple of paragraphs which I have written about some painted glass at Marlborough House.' (2 March 1854, BGLL I, 96).

¹⁰ Signed 'W.' and referred to in a letter – see note 33. Not 'La Promise' as in Beetz.

¹¹ Signed 'W.' and referred to thus: 'Kean, Cabel, and the Opera, I have duly reported on.' (30 June 54, BGLL I, 103). Beetz overlooks the additional paragraph which touches on 'Cabel, and the Opera'.

- ‘A Second Batch of New Books’ (‘Literature’), 8 July 1854, 642-3.¹²
- ‘La Sirène’, with two untitled paragraphs on opera and foreign adaptations (‘The Arts’), 8 July 1854, 644-5.¹³
- ‘Les Diamans de la Couronne’ (‘The Arts’), 15 July 1854, 668.¹⁴
- ‘Theatres’ (‘The Arts’), 29 July 1854, 717.¹⁵
- ‘Chaucer’ (‘Literature’), 23 December 1854, 1215-6.¹⁶
- ‘A Batch of Fictions’ (‘Literature’), 6 January 1855, 19-20.¹⁷
- ‘William Etty, R.A.’ (‘Literature’), 27 January 1855, 90-91.¹⁸
- Untitled paragraph on publishing venture by Richard Bentley (‘Literature’), 10 February 1855, 136.
- ‘A New Bookselling Dodge’ (‘Literature’), 10 February 1855, 139-40.
- ‘The British Institution’ (‘The Arts’), 10 February 1855, 140-1.¹⁹
- ‘The Warden’ (‘Literature’), 17 February 1855, 164-5.
- ‘Geoffrey Crayon’s New Sketch-Book’ (‘Literature’), 24 February 1855, 187-8.²⁰
- ‘Four Novels’ (‘Literature’), 24 March 1855, 282-3.²¹
- ‘Mr Silk Buckingham’ (‘Literature’), 31 March 1855, 306.²²
- ‘The British Artists’ (‘The Arts’), 21 April 1855, 380.²³
- ‘A Queer Story’ (‘Literature’), 16 June 1855, Supplement, 584-5.²⁴
- ‘The Novels of M. Hendrick Conscience’ (‘Literature’), 18 August 18, 1855, 795-6.²⁵
- ‘M. Forgues on the Caricaturists of England’ (‘Literature’), 25 August 1855, 823-4.²⁶

¹² See note 29

¹³ Signed ‘W.’ and referred to thus: ‘Shall I do the Sirène, and the Italian Opera next week? Write me a line – Yes or No. I only ask because I have missed Lewes and don’t know what his plans may be.’ (30 June 1854, BGLL I, 103). Beetz refers to this material only under the generic heading ‘The Arts’, giving the page reference as 644 only.

¹⁴ Signed ‘W.’ and cross-referenced to ‘La Sirène’.

¹⁵ Signed ‘W.’ and referred to thus: ‘*Two* new Plays for Theatres next week.’ (18 July 1854, BGLL I, 106).

¹⁶ Referred to thus: ‘I have done an article for this week on *Chaucer*, apropos of Bell’s admirable edition.’ (18 December 1854, B&C I, 129).

¹⁷ Referred to thus: ‘a book called “The Old Chelsea Bun House”, which *I* reviewed in a Batch a few weeks since.’ (3 February 1855, BGLL I, 113-4).

¹⁸ Referred to thus: ‘I intend to do you the very best review I can of *Etty*, for the next number.’ (21 January 1855, BGLL I, 111-12).

¹⁹ The three articles appearing in the issue of 10 February 1855 are all mentioned in the letter of 6 February 1855 (BGLL I, 115).

²⁰ Both articles referred to thus: ‘Is anybody at work on “Wolfert’s Roost”? or “The Warden”? – both of which I think of tackling this week.’ (3 February 55, BGLL I, 113-4).

²¹ Referred to in the letter of 14 March 1855 (BGLL I, 117-8).

²² Referred to thus: ‘see that I have not gone too far in making fun of Silk Buckingham’s vanity and twaddling.’ (29 March 1855, BGLL I, 121).

²³ Referred to thus: ‘I will also do the article on the Suffolk street Exhibition.’ (9 April 1855, BGLL I, 122).

²⁴ Referred to thus: ‘I enclosed the corrected proof of *Moredun* in my letter of Monday last.’ (14 June 1855, BGLL I, 126).

²⁵ Referred to thus: ‘a proper appreciation of *Conscience* the Flemish novelist’ (14 August 1855, BGLL I, 128-9). Beetz erroneously cites the pages numbers as 794-5.

²⁶ Referred to thus: ‘Forgues’ pamphlet has not arrived yet. Of course I will undertake it.’ (2 May 1855, B&C I, 146 [misdated]).

In addition, it seems safe to transfer the following three items from among Beetz's speculations to the confirmed list, all falling into group (B):

- 'A Batch of New Books' ('Literature'), 24 June 1854, 593-4.²⁷
- 'Miscellenea' ('Literature'), 20 January 1855, 65-7.²⁸
- 'A Batch of Books' ('Literature'), 28 April 1855, 403.²⁹

Moreover, we can also add to group (B) the following thirteen items not noted by Beetz which are as firmly secured through references in the letters or by the signature:

- 'Le Prophète' ('The Arts'), 10 June 1854, 547.
- 'Le Bijou Perdou' ('The Arts'), 10 June 1854, 547-8.³⁰
- 'Grisi in Lucrezia Borgia' ('The Arts'), 17 June 1854, 572.
- 'Sunshine through the Clouds' ('The Arts'), 17 June 1854, 572-3.³¹
- 'The German Exhibition' ('The Arts'), 24 June 1854, 596.³²
- Untitled paragraph on 'dearth of literary enterprise' abroad ('Literature' Summary), 15 July 1854, 665.
- Untitled paragraphs on the drama in Paris and Munich ('Literature' Summary), 22 July 1854, 687-8.³³
- 'The Easter Pieces' ('The Arts'), 14 April 1855, 357.³⁴
- 'Haymarket Theatre' ('The Arts'), 12 May 1855, 453.³⁵
- 'The Royal Academy Exhibition' ('The Arts'), 5 May 1855, 428-9.
- 'The Royal Academy Exhibition' ('The Arts'), 12 May 1855, 452.
- 'The Royal Academy Exhibition' ('The Arts'), 19 May 1855, 475-6.
- 'The Royal Academy Exhibition' ('The Arts'), 26 May 1855, 500.³⁶

²⁷ This article is clearly cross-referenced to 'A Second Batch of New Books' (8 July 1854), which itself is mentioned in the letters thus: 'But next week the second Batch of New Books (which was not wanted this week) shall be done.' (30 June 1854, BGLL, 103).

²⁸ This batch review is clearly cross-referenced to Collins's notice of 'Chaucer' – see note 18.

²⁹ This batch review leads off with a translation of the *Exemplary Novels of Cervantes* from the house of Bohn, and includes the comment: 'We prefer ... the charming story of *The Little Gipsy Girl* ... to all that Boccaccio has ever written.' This is referred to in the letter to Pigott of 2 May 1855: 'I am glad the notice of Bohn is thought likely to benefit the publisher. I have nothing to say in defence of my low opinion of Boccaccio – except that I always was a heretic about him and always shall be.' (B&C I, 146).

³⁰ Both articles appearing on 10 June 1854 are signed 'W.', and 'Le Bijou Perdou' is clearly cross-referenced to later notices of the French soprano Marie Cabel's performances at the St James's Theatre, including 'La Sirène' – see note 15.

³¹ Collins's three reviews in the issue of 17 June 1854 (including that on the French opera 'La Promise', listed above) are signed 'W.' and referred to in a letter to Harriet Collins: 'Opera the other night. Grisi wonderful. . . . French Opera to do tomorrow night and new Play at Lyceum the night after.' (13-14 June 1854, BGGL I, 100-1).

³² Secured by the signature 'W.' only, though perhaps supported by the prominent reference to Collins's father's friend and patron William Danby.

³³ The two successive items of foreign literary news are cross-referenced and referred to thus: 'Plenty of news for the Literary Summary this week, from abroad' (18 July 1854, BGGL I, 106).

³⁴ Referred to thus: 'I can make up an article with the Times information about Easter pieces I do not see.' (9 April 1855, BGGL I, 122).

³⁵ Referred to thus: 'We will go next week, and suffer under Cushman' (B&C I, 146). The review itself states rather sourly that 'the American *tragédienne* makes up for fascination by force, and for coquetry and passion by tragic purpose and intensity.'

And, as I will try to demonstrate, there should be a further and most interesting addition to group (A):

- ‘The New Dragon of Wantley: A Social Revelation’ (‘Portfolio’), 20 December 1851, 1213-4.

Before moving on to the text and context of that story, though, we should repeat Beetz’s caveat that even this expanded list of forty-six confirmed contributions is highly unlikely to be comprehensive. There remain many references to work for *The Leader* in the extant letters that it has not proved possible to identify with any certainty. These include both non-specific comments like ‘Any books for *The Leader* I shall be delighted to do, as well’ (4 September 1855, B&C I, 145), as well as more tantalizing evidence of a specific contribution (e.g. ‘I return the proof corrected’ (9 August 1855, B&C I, 140-1), which presumably points to an unidentified article in the issue for Saturday, 11 August 1855.³⁷ At the same time, there are doubtless many more unmentioned contributions that might be pinned down through internal cross-references and stylistic analysis. In particular, there remains an important gap in the record in late 1854, when Pigott was staying in Paris and Collins seems to have taken on some sort of editorial responsibility, reporting a week before Christmas that ‘[t]he paper goes on famously’ (B&C I, 129). This type of work should soon be possible without the necessity of expensive trips to specialist libraries like the British Library Newspaper Library in Colindale. The complete *Leader* files are scheduled in 2008 to become freely available on the World Wide Web in searchable digital format as part of the Nineteenth-Century Serials Edition project.³⁸

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The ‘Call Party’ at Lincoln’s Inn to celebrate the qualification as barristers of Pigott, Collins, and their peers, took place on the evening of Thursday, 21 November. The evening before, Collins wrote to Pigott to make arrangements to meet up, squeezing the following postscript into his left-hand margin: ‘I have just received and

³⁶ These four cross-referenced articles on the Royal Academy exhibition are referred to thus: ‘I will be at the office on Friday afternoon, and will do a *paragraph* about the R. A. . . . I think a paragraph by way of preliminary will be quite enough, considering that we are going to treat the subject at full length this year – I have got the ticket.’ (B&C I, 146).

³⁷ Since Collins seems to have been in Folkestone with Dickens from 31 July, this is unlikely to be a theatre or opera notice. The most likely candidate might then be the review of ‘Four Novels’ (‘Literature’), 772-3, which includes the following interesting observation: ‘We had not gone farther than the first twenty or thirty pages of *A Lost Love* before we began to have our suspicions that “Owen Ashford” must be a lady. The book exhibits the harmless sexual feeling, the observations of minute things, the intense appreciation of the pleasure of talking, the feeble dramatic power, and the delicate glibness of style, which – among other characteristics – generally distinguish fiction written by women.’

³⁸ Led by Laurel Brake, and hosted by the Humanities Computing Centre at King’s College, London.

read the proof of my article. It strikes me that where the writing flags is *near the end* – I’ll put “*spunk*” into it there; and we’ll test the quality of it together, *before going to Press*’ (20 November 1851, BGLL I, 51-2). Despite the frivolities – ‘What a night! what speeches! what songs! I carried away much clarets and am rather a seedy barrister this morning. I think it must have been the *oaths* that disagreed with me!’ – he wrote again the morning after the Call, enclosing the corrected proof: ‘Look over the proof and see whether it will do for Press now. . . . We’ll talk it over next week.’ (22 November 1851, B&C I, 76). The article in questions could not have been either ‘A Plea for Sunday Reform’, which had appeared nearly two months earlier, or the first of the ‘Magnetic Evenings at Home’ series, which records events that took place in Somerset on 1 January 1852. So the proof must have been that of a hitherto unidentified article, probably published in the ‘Portfolio’ section of *The Leader* from Saturday, 29 November onwards. It also seems likely that the article appeared before 22 December, because on that day Collins wrote to Pigott declining what was clearly an invitation to write a further article for the paper: ‘I would do the article for the Leader with pleasure – but the doctor forbids me to *use my brains* just yet; and I feel that the doctor is right.’ (BGLL I, 55).

In the four issues between 29 November and 20 December, there appeared only two prose contributions to the ‘Portfolio’. The first, on 6 December, 1166-7, was the third of a series of aesthetic essays on ‘The Useful and the Beautiful’ signed by ‘Hephaistos’, the earlier two having appeared on 25 October and 8 November respectively. The other article was a first-person comic narrative, entitled ‘The New Dragon of Wantley’, which appeared in the Christmas issue of the paper on 20 December, alongside poems by George Meredith and ‘Marie’ of Chorley. The tale appeared not under the initials ‘W.W.C.’ but the pseudonym ‘Philo-Serpens’, a humorous classical allusion to the narrator, an eccentric amateur naturalist with a passion for reptiles. The story is in the Dickensian vein that Collins adopted in his 1851 Christmas Book, ‘Mr Wray’s Cash-Box’, that was written hastily between the end of November and the middle of December and left him exhausted. ‘The New Dragon’ unfolds in Stoke Muddleton, a ‘pastoral village . . . within easy omnibus distance of London’, where the locals bear outlandish names like Dabbs and Clutton (working-men), Frostick and Yaxley (merchants), and the Reverend Morbus Lipsacus Stretch (vicar of the parish). All the inhabitants are terrorized by a ‘common, harmless, English snake, between two and three feet long’, which escapes from the narrator’s clutches. The original ‘Dragon of Wantley’ was celebrated in a seventeenth-century verse satire, where, in parody of a mediaeval romance, an avaricious local clergyman is figured as the dragon and the lawyer who brings him to book is the dragon-slaying knight.³⁹ In *The Leader* version, the narrator sees himself as the representative of modernity, and the villagers as relics of ancient ignorance, and thus concludes by ‘crying aloud for social reform’ in the shape of ‘an immediate supply of Missionaries of the Brotherhood of Common Sense to convert Stoke Muddleton’. After this call,

³⁹ The work was included in Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1767).

there are a couple of paragraphs by way of postscript, which might be seen as evidence of ‘spunk’ being added to the ending. These additions serve to confirm that the butt of the humour is the obsessive rationalism of the narrator himself, so that the story comes close to parodying *The Leader*’s radically earnest editorial line.

The documentary evidence for the attribution of ‘The New Dragon of Wantley’ to Collins is thus strong but not conclusive. It then seems appropriate to put the text to the test of a simple comparative analysis. The method adopted was to select a series of word clusters occurring in the text and to compare their frequency of occurrence in three corpora, one consisting of known works by Wilkie Collins, and two controls consisting of works by literary authors of a similar period. This was done using the concordance and text-analysis software ‘AntConc’ developed by Laurence Anthony of the School of Science and Engineering, Waseda University, Japan.

The text of ‘The New Dragon of Wantley’ was generated by OCR from scanned pages of *The Leader*, with the resulting digital file checked carefully against the original. The authors selected as controls were Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, on the basis of the comparability of both their literary outputs and the print contexts in which they worked (see Law), plus the ready availability of virtually all of their published work in the form of digital text files of proven reliability. In each of the three cases, the corpus created consisted of all available works published during the author’s lifetime, whether short or long, literary or journalistic, fiction or non-fiction, with the exception of texts containing a high percentage of quoted material, such as Collins’s *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins* (1848), which features ‘Selections from his Journals and Correspondence’. (Personal letters and diaries not intended for publication are excluded by the stipulation of contemporary issue.) The relative size of the resulting corpora is reflected in the quantity of digital data: Wilkie Collins (WC), 25.00MB; Charles Dickens (CD), 29.40MB; Elizabeth Gaskell (EG), 9.95MB. Assigning a value of 1 in the case of Collins, in order to attain parity the unweighted occurrence frequency data needs to be multiplied by factors of 0.85 and 2.51 in the cases of Dickens and Gaskell respectively.

As listed in the table, fifty word strings were selected, all consisting of coherent grammatical formations of varying type, stretching from two to seven words in length, and representing a total of 153 words or 5.84% of the text (2,621 words in all). Explicitly excluded were strings featuring keywords, that is, words found with markedly higher frequency in ‘The New Dragon of Wantley’ than in the three corpora combined. Such items obviously include proper nouns like ‘Stoke Muddleton’ or ‘Frostic’, ‘snake’ and its equivalents (serpent, reptile, dragon, eft, boa constrictor), and other plot-driven items of vocabulary (baby, hatbox, parapet, roof, cage, etc.). As permitted by the software employed, wildcards (asterisks) were employed on several occasions – to exclude a proper noun from a noun phrase, to allow pronoun variation, or to permit tense changes in verb phrases. Three of the selected strings (15, 17, 22) occur more than once in the target text. One of these, (22) ‘up stairs’ (two words), is found three times in that marked form and once as the more familiar ‘upstairs’ (one

word). On the other hand, (31) ‘in the mean time’ (four words) occurs in the source text once only, in that marked form rather than in the unmarked form ‘in the meantime’ (three words). Since such variations can reflect authorial preference but are often subject to intervention by the compositor or editor, both forms were searched for in the corpora, with the results for the unfavoured/marked form shown in parentheses. The results, both unweighted and weighted, are shown in the table.

Word Clusters from ‘The New Dragon of Wantley’	Frequency of Occurrence in Corpus				
	WC	Unweighted		Weighted	
		CD	EG	CD	EG
(1) or, in other words	33	14	2	11.9	5.02
(2) the innocent cause of	8	8	0	6.8	0
(3) at a moment’s notice	47	8	2	6.8	5.02
(4) without further preface	7	5	0	4.25	0
(5) a quarter’s salary	1	0	0	0	0
(6) if I may use such an expression	5	7	0	5.95	0
(7) when I state that	3	0	0	0	0
(8) the next instant	47	2	2	1.7	5.02
(9) dangerously ill	16	4	2	3.4	5.02
(10) out of *her wits	20	13	5	11.05	12.55
(11) not worth mentioning	4	3	0	2.55	0
(12) fondly imagine*	1	0	1	0	2.51
(13) that done	28	48	1	40.8	2.51
(14) fatal security	1	0	0	0	0
(15) shift* the scene [x2]	2	0	0	0	0
(16) at business	4	1	0	0.85	0
(17) fond of [x3]	351	323	137	274.55	342.87
(18) is it necessary to . . . ?	13	0	0	0	0
(19) under the circumstances	81	49	7	41.65	17.57
(20) garden of Eden	8	2	0	1.7	0
(21) in answer to	52	39	29	33.14	72.79
(22) up stairs [x3 (x1)]	84 (464)	75 (368)	8 (226)	63.75 (312.8)	20.08 (567.26)
(23) laugh* contemptuously	2	2	0	1.7	0
(24) serious consideration	8	7	0	5.95	0
(25) momentous question	1	1	0	0.85	0
(26) frighten* into	6	4	0	3.4	0
(27) the lot of *them	3	0	0	0	0
(28) the smallest conception	0	0	0	0	0
(29) brand new	0	0	0	0	0
(30) firmly believe*	68	12	2	10.2	5.02
(31) in the mean time	41 (155)	15 (109)	0 (12)	12.75 (92.65)	0 (30.12)
(32) in some quarters	5	2	0	1.7	0
(33) foreign parts	36	12	5	10.2	12.55
(34) in the shape of	123	23	22	19.55	55.22

(35) still further	13	21	5	17.85	12.55
(36) gains* ground	6	0	3	0	7.53
(37) *'s abode	7	2	1	1.7	2.51
(38) the bare truth	1	1	0	0.85	0
(39) one atom of	4	3	0	2.55	0
(40) nineteenth century	24	2	3	1.7	7.53
(41) laid* bare	4	16	7	13.6	17.57
(42) the bare idea	54	6	3	5.1	7.53
(43) in common regard	1	0	0	0	0
(44) public or private	1	3	0	2.55	0
(45) all the better for it	4	7	2	5.95	5.02
(46) boldly claim*	0	1	0	0.85	0
(47) best of all	21	22	4	18.7	10.04
(48) sign* *myself	7	4	0	3.4	0
(49) write* word	5	0	4	0	10.04
(50) need I say	16	7	0	5.95	0
TOTALS	1275	774	257	657.9	645.07

Perhaps unsurprisingly given that first-person comic narrative is a genre found much more commonly in Dickens's work than Gaskell's, a far higher number of the selected phrases do not appear at all in the Gaskell canon (54% as against 26% with Dickens). Only 6% of the phrases are not found in the Collins corpus. On the other hand there is little to choose between the two control corpora in terms of total weighted frequency of occurrence of the selected clusters, both registering around half that found in the Collins corpus. This pattern is of course not reflected uniformly across the fifty strings. There are a couple of clusters in the source text that feature in none of the corpora (28, 29). There are two clusters that occur rather more frequently in both controls (41, 45), and a number of others that stand out slightly in one or other (6, 12, 13, 21, 35, 36, 44, 46, 49). In several other cases (2, 4, 11, 17, 22, 23, 24, 25, 38, 39, 47, 48), the balance in favour of the Collins corpus is small and/or only apparent after weighting. In all other cases, the weighted frequency is highest in the Collins corpus by a significant margin. In some of these (5, 7, 14, 15, 16, 27, 37, 43), though there are no more than a handful of occurrences in the Collins corpus, the phrase itself is sufficiently distinctive to make the disparity telling. In the remainder (1, 3, 8, 9, 10, 18, 19, 20, 24, 30, 31, 32, 33, 34, 40, 42, 50), the phrase itself seems commonplace enough but the frequency of occurrence in the Collins corpus, both comparative and absolute, is often so high as to suggest that clusters such as 'the next instant', 'at a moment's notice', and 'in the shape of' may represent key idiosyncratic signatures of his narrative style. The phrase 'in the mean time' deserves special mention. Whether written as three words or four, the cluster again seems to occur with unusual frequency in the Collins canon. Moreover, the appearance of the phrase in its marked form in 'The New Dragon of Wantley' does correspond to a distinct authorial preference. This is supported not only by the corpora data, though there it is

difficult to compute the degree of external intervention, but also in the transcripts from manuscript of the author's collected personal letters. These reveal over 150 occurrences of the phrase in all, with an overwhelming preponderance of the four-word form in the correspondence of the 1840s and 1850s.⁴⁰

If there were no documentary support for the attribution of 'The New Dragon of Wantley' to Wilkie Collins, doubtless a much broader battery of statistical tests would be needed to clinch the case (Sinclair, Coulthard). In the present circumstances, no other conclusion seems possible. All that remains is to offer the story itself to the judgement of others.

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- B&C = *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, ed. William Baker and William M. Clarke. 2 vols. London: Macmillan, 1999.
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⁴⁰ The case is less clear-cut with the phrase 'up stairs'. Here, the manuscripts of the author's collected personal letters suggest that Collins's shifts unpredictably between the two forms throughout his career.

probable; it might have been made profoundly affecting, had the author, on the occasion of painting woman's love overriding moral judgment. It is impossible that Clara should have for a moment been blind to the moral obliquity of her husband, the more so as his crime had its impulse in a motive she could never sympathize with. He must have stood gully before her eyes. But it is quite possible that she should love him nevertheless; love him in the face of all that he had done to destroy her affection. Loving him she might perform these sacrifices. But the art of the novelist would have been to paint these two conflicting impulses—the moral impulse and the affectionate impulse—and to make us feel the nature of the struggle and understand the victory. The picture so painted would have had reality. As it is, every one must feel that it is a mere fiction.

In the treatment of the characters there is little individuality. Dr. Weston and Leonora are the merest lay figures. Sir Frederick Buckton is outrageously unlike life, and his visit to Clara is the sort of thing we expect to find in a very bad farce; every accent is false. Lady Ashford is the best-drawn character in the book, and she reveals something like genuine dramatic power. But we end as we began in the book has its charm, let criticism say what it will.

BOOKS ON OUR TABLE.

The Cabinet of Reason: a Library of Freethought, Politics, and Culture. Vol. I. *The Task of To-day*. By Evans Bell.

Waiting the time when we can notice at length this bold expression of opinion, we may announce the existence of a new shining library, which every effort to complete the system of opinion should warmly support, without inquiring too narrowly into the particular views any one work in the series may advocate. It is desirable that all sincere convictions should gain utterance and attention. Nothing but evil and bitterness can ever come from the opponents of freethought and democracy persisting in misrepresentation, or in that unworthy strategy which lays hold of a nameless and unrecognized advocate, and proceeds to his opinions as to the opinions of a fly. The object of the *Cabinet of Reason*, which Mr. Holyoake edits, is to bring together in a portable form such works as may take the place of scolded expressions of the "extreme left" of politics and religion.

The Museum of Classical Antiquities. A Quarterly Journal of Architecture and the Sister Branches of Classic Art. Vol. I. Edited by W. Parker and Son.

It is little creditable to our lettered and artistic circles that Periodicals like the present are so few and so ill-supported. In Germany, in France, even in Italy where books are so few; there can always be found a sufficient public for works of this grave kind.—There are assuredly as many persons in England, who interest themselves in these studies; but somehow they never managed to keep a good periodical in existence. *The Museum of Classical Antiquities* is the latest attempt. It is a handsome work, with valuable illustrations, and some good, though unequal, contributions. A press of matters more cogent, and of more passing interest, has prevented our reading all these contributions; and we must defer till a more leisure period anything like an estimate of their contents, for the present restricting ourselves to an announcement of its existence as a quarterly journal.

A SAUNTERER.—The words "saunter" and "saunterer" are singular records of mediæval practices and feelings. "Saunterer," derived from "la sainte terre," is one who visits the Holy Land. At first a deep and earnest conviction drew men thither, drew them to visit,—in the beautiful words which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of Henry IV., and which explain so well the ardour that at one time made it the magnet of all Christendom.—to visit, I say,

"those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed,
For our advantage on the bitter cross."

By degrees, however, the making of this pilgrimage degenerated into a mere worldly fashion, and every idle person that liked strolling about better than performing the duties of his calling, assumed the pilgrim's staff, and proclaimed himself bound for the Holy Land; and thus very often he never in earnest set out. And thus this world forfeited the more honourable meaning that at one time made it the magnet of all Christendom.—to visit, I say,

"those holy fields,
Over whose acres walked those blessed feet,
Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed,
For our advantage on the bitter cross."

HOARSE PLAG.—A horse belonging to one of the large brewing establishments in London, at which a great number of pigs were kept, used frequently to scatter the grains on the ground with his mouth, and as soon as a pig came within his reach, he would seize it without injury and plunge it into the water,—*Thompson's Fæstons of Animals.*

Portfolia.

We should do our utmost to encourage the Beautiful, for the Useful encourages itself.—GOSWELL.

TO ALEX. SMITH, "THE GLASGOW POET."

ON HIS SONNET TO "YAMA."
Not vainly doth the earnest voice of man
Call for the thing that is his pure desire!
Fame is the birthright of the living lyte!
To noble impulse Nature puts no ban.
Nor vainly to the Sphynx thy voice was raised!
Thou' art thy great emotions like a sea,
Against her stony immortality,
Shatter themselves unheeded and amazed.
Time moves behind her in a blind eclipse:
Yet if in her cold eyes the end of man
Be visible, as on her large closed lips
Hangs dumb the awful riddle of the earth—
She sees, and she might speak, since that wild call,
The mighty warning of a Poet's birth,
GEO. MARSHALL.

PATIENT LOVE.

My weary heart is sorely tried—
I long, I long for rest!
The sweetest way to glide,
For eyes and lips do frown and chide,
I'll my poor soul, like timid Bride,
Steals softly to my dear Lord's side,
And weeps upon his breast!
Our household deities retire,
And strife and discord rage;
My words add fuel to the fire—
My gentlest ways are spurn'd in ire,
Till hope and love almost expire,
And I broken faith do halt and tire,
As if oppress'd with age!
I gaze out on the evening skies,
So calm—so grand—so fair—
A subtle influence through me flies,
And I shiver in mine eyes;
And to my soul's half-utter'd cries
Pure spirit-echo quick replies,
And undulates the air.
In sacred words it seems to say,
"While breathing on my brow),
"With Patient Love pursue thy way,
The hearts that now are led astray,
Instinctive feel thy gentle aid;
Ere a while—another day—
"Is dawning, ay, e'en now!"
Glad words of hope; with soul subdued,
I bend me to thy will;
Impatient thoughts no more intrude,
Upon thy sweet dilating mood,
But olden memories, gentle, good,
Around my central life are strew'd,
And joys my being fill!

I think me of the ancient time,
When one brought me reproof—
Then wildest passions were in prime,
And blinded pride would madly climb;
When to each soft and pleading chime,
I answer'd with a frosty rhyme,
"And keep my heart aloof!"
Yet, patiently, the loving look
Bent o'er me where I stood;
It would not let me be forsook,
But read my soul as 'twere a book:
Beneath its shade my life it took
And in that bless'd, secluded nook
Have grown all things of good!
Turn back, strong heart, turn back again,
And I will not be absent from thee;
Thy words of peace are not in vain,
The pent up god, that long hath lain,
Will one day burst, like summer rain,
And answer thy life's broad plain,
"Till 'harrest home' betide!"
Turn back, brave heart, turn back again,
In patient love abide!
Chorley. MARSH.

THE NEW DRAGON OF WANTLEY.

A SOCIAL REVELATION.

I am a young man of domestic habits, studious tendencies, and commercial occupations; or, in other words, I live with my mother, doze on natural history, and get my bread in an office. My scientific researches (the innocent cause of all I have now to relate) are exclusively directed to the subject of reptiles. I have studied alike the anatomy of the Asiatic box constrictor and the British eel; and am ready at a moment's notice to calculate the exact poison-power of any serpent in any part of the world you choose to mention. My taste may seem an odd one; but I can't help it, and can't account for it. All I know is, that I am passionately attached to reptiles, and that I have a tremendous social grievance in connection with

them to make public. Without further preface, here it is:

I live in the pastoral village of Stoke Muttonton, which, as everybody knows, is within easy omnibus distance of London. The other evening, while I was taking a walk, a labouring man accosted me, and asked if I would like to buy a live snake. Of course I would—if he had offered a live box constrictor for sale I would have mortgaged a quarter's salary to get it. The reptile in this case was only a common, harmless, English snake, between two and three feet long—one of a large family, residing, if I may use such an expression, in a wood near our neighbourhood. The man asked four shillings for it: gave him the money. He recommended me to carry it home wrapped up in my pocket-handkerchief: I took his advice. I felt a calm sense of triumph as I walked back to the house with the first live specimen I had ever possessed—with the nucleus of the great reptile menagerie I was now determined to form, coiled snug in my own *bandana*, and lightly panned from my own finger and thumb. Little did I then think that I had tied up in that one small bundle the requisite materials for producing the public misery of all Stoke Muttonton.

That night I said nothing to my mother about the snake. I stole away to my bedroom, and put him into an empty hatbox, hitherto cutting an air-hole in the lid before I shut it down. Then I went to sleep, full of trust and tranquillity. In the middle of the night I awoke; and, experiencing a strong, but unaccountable desire to have a look at my snake, got up and struck a light. When I state that my mother's bedroom is under mine, that she is a light sleeper, and that I took particular pains not to wake her, it is, perhaps, unnecessary to say that I knocked down everything within my reach in searching for the match-box. However, I lit the candle at last eagerly opened my temporary snake-cage, and the next instant found myself sitting on my bed, covered with a cold perspiration of horror—the reptile was gone!

I believe I was frantically rolling about in the flu under my bed, feeling for the runaway snake, when I heard my mother's voice, hysterically desiring to know whether I was not taken dangerously ill, and casually adding that she was frightened out of her wits at the noise I was making. I calmed the maternal anxiety, bounced into bed again in despair, drooped asleep, and had frightful dreams, which, however, fell so far short of the reality that was soon to follow them as to be not worth mentioning. Let me pass on to the next morning.

Shortly after sunrise I began to search the house—no snake. Then I went into the garden, and there I found him, apparently breakfasting on snails. How he had got out of the room I had not the slightest idea; but now he was in the garden, the next thing to do was to fix him there. This I fondly imagined I could effect by turning over him an old cage that had been used to keep bantams in, and covering the cage with a cloth. That done, I went in to breakfast, told my mother all about it, and set off to business, feeling pretty sure of the snake till I got back again. Fatal security!

And now let us shift the scene to next door, the house of Mr. Frostick, of the well-known firm of Frostick, Yaxley, and Frostick. Mr. Frostick is at business: Mrs. Frostick, a most charming person, is upstairs in the nursery, fondling her first child. She has been amusing herself with that kind of thing for the last three hours, and is not tired yet. She is so fond of her baby, she hardly knows what to do with it next. Something of this sort is passing through her mind in reference to the infant at the present moment. "What shall I do with my baby now? I have washed my baby, kissed my baby, suckled my baby, dressed my baby, dandled my baby, stuck a pin by accident into my baby, laid my baby on the floor, the bed, the rug, the chair, and my own knees; made my baby laugh, and cry, and go to sleep, and wake up again. Nothing, I imagine, is now left for me to do but to air my baby." Acting on this sweet and sanitary impulse, Mrs. Frostick advances with the infant to the window, and, buoyant with maternal bliss, smartly throws it open. What starts up on the parapet before her? What erect and hissing shape of terror flies out like a jack-in-the-box before her eyes! Horror! unpeepable horror! It is my snake! my infernal, gadabout snake, that no crafty imprisonment whatever can confine to his proper premises!

Is it necessary to say that Mrs. Frostick uttered a piercing scream, and, clasping the baby to her

bosom, fell back fainting on the floor? Of course she did this, and I respect her for it. It was a natural and dignified and femininely proper mode of proceeding. Could she know that the snake was harmless, was asleep on her parapet in the sun, and had only started up and hissed in fear at the sudden noise—the opening of the curtains? Certainly not. It was her business, under the circumstances, to scream and faint; and she did her business.

Now let us shift the scene again. Mr. Frostick is returning in the evening from his office—returning eager for domestic enjoyment, impatient to fondle his wife and child. The servant opens the door to him, pale as if all blood had been turned to whiteash; and muttering fearfully about "Missus" and a serpent. He rushes into the parlour—there is his beloved partner, as nearly as possible raving mad, pressing the baby convulsively to her bosom. She has been attacked by a boa constrictor, twenty feet long, who lives in the roof of the house—nothing shall induce her to sleep up stairs again, or to let the baby sleep up stairs—no! no! it is of no earthly use for Mr. Frostick to tarry, and taunt her about dreaming in broad daylight, her mind being naturally so soundly and prefering to go to the workhouse, or to roam the streets all night, to setting foot on the bedroom floor again. It is in vain for her husband to soothe, and promise, and expostulate—she is determined to pass the night on a chair in the back parlour; and she sticks to her determination.

I am soon made aware that I have unconsciously introduced a serpent into a domestic garden of Eden. I have already told my mother that I have a snake; my mother tells our servant; our servant tells Mr. Frostick's servant; and I get a message, requesting to know what I mean by ruining forever the tranquillity of a whole household. I apologise, explain, and prove from natural history that the snake is perfectly harmless. In answer to this I get another message. Mrs. Frostick has consented to sleep up stairs again, provided the whole roof of the house is taken off, to assure her that there is no snake in it: Mr. Frostick, as in connubial duty bound, has consented to this tremendous course of proceeding, concerning at the same time the diabolically revengeful design of bringing an action against me to pay expenses. I laugh contemptuously at this, and dare him to meet me before our country's tribunals; but serious considerations soon overcome me—again, when I hear that the house roof has really been taken off, and no reptile found in any part of it.

Where is the snake? is the momentous question I now ask myself. What scrap will he get me into next? Whose house will he visit, now he has done with Mr. Frostick's house? What babies will be frightened into fits, what mothers into swoons, what old gentlemen into apoplexies? From the Church pulpit to the workhouse dusthole, there is no place in Stoke Muddleton into which he may not at this moment be introducing himself; and there is no individual in Stoke Muddleton who will not know him, by this time, to be my property whenever he appears. Talk about Frankenstein and the Monster, that's all stuff and fiction—here's an appalling reality for you that no novelist of the lot of them can have the smallest conception of! here I am, expecting every minute to be told that I have innocently frightened to death some fellow parishioner; and all because I have bought a snake, price four shillings, and failed to persuade the ungrateful reptile that my best hat-box was a comfortable lodging for him!

I have not omitted making some attempt at putting an end to this frightful state of suspense. The other day I paid two labouring men to become provisionally snake-busters, and to search all Stoke Muddleton for the missing reptile. This proceeding mollified even the furious Frostick (who is putting on a bran-new slate roof to his house); but it produced no other effect. Once, indeed, my two labouring men—Dabbs and Clutton—saw the snake crossing the road; changing his quarters, perhaps, from a baby's cradle to an old woman's nightcap.

Dabbs gave chase, while Clutton stood still and called for extra help. The snake got away, and has not been seen since. Dabbs felt certain that he was on his way home to his native wood—Clutton firmly believed that he was directing his course straight to the house of the Reverend Morbus Lipscomb Stretch, our respected minister, who has twelve children to be frightened out of their wits, and one more soon expected, for the snake to begin upon again when he has done with the first dozen.

In the mean time, public opinion assumes, day by day, a more threatening aspect towards me. I am already, socially speaking, the Pariah of Stoke Muddleton. The reports circulated—especially among my poorer neighbours—about my snake, are worthy of the Dark Ages, of our Canimulee. In some quarters it is believed, that I have let loose a boa constrictor, whose breath can poison people, yards and yards off. In others, it is averred that my so-called snake was in reality an alligator from "foreign parts," accustomed in his native country to feed exclusively on human flesh. One tierce party, beset with the Reverend Mr. Stretch's overgrown errand-boy, stoutly assert that my vga-bond reptile has been seen crossing the high road, in the shape of a winged serpent. This last superstition gains ground immensely among all who remember that the snake not only escaped, nobody knew how, from a hatbox into a garden, but extended his wanderings still further, from a garden to the top of a house. In spite of the trellis-work that runs up the back of Mr. Frostick's abode, many people are still determined to believe that my snake could only have got to the parapet outside the nursery window by being there by magic. As if I fact—I am exposing the bare truth, without adding one atom of embroidery. I am not writing for effect; and, being no author, I could not do so if I would. The present is a serious statement, seriously intended—if I thought anybody would laugh at it, I should be utterly disgusted and disappointed. When a man has become, as I have, an accredited perpetrator of a perfectly original species of public nuisance, his position is far too solemn to be joked about either by himself or by others.

Not persecuted and proscribed by a whole parish, publicly charged with predilections for lying, robbing, and letting them loose in society, ribald feelings are not the feelings which accompany such a revelation as mine. When I remember that the outrageous reports which I have described are spread abroad and firmly believed in this nineteenth century of education and cheap literature, by people who live within sixteen miles of the great metropolis, I really cannot accuse myself of revolutionary tendencies in crying aloud for social reform, in calling lamentably and imperatively for an immediate supply of Missionaries of the Brotherhood of Common Sense to convert Stoke Muddleton. The social disease is spreading, and the most surprising part of that disease will be forthwith applied, and I shall not have been ignorantly "sent to Coventry" by all my neighbours without some good coming from it, after all.

Beyond this, I don't think I have much more to say. Up to the present time I have not heard of my snake again; he has either wriggled himself back to his native wood, or is lurking in impervious concealment in somebody else's house. Mr. and Mrs. Frostick have toned down, under their new roof, into a state of dignified sullenness. Among the Muddleton mob opinion is still violently exasperated against me. The last night that was given of the estimation in which I am held by the populace generally, came from our own maid servant, who gave us warning yesterday, assigning as the reason that the bare idea of her living in the same house with a gent who was fond of serpents made the affectionate young lead-smelter's journeyman with whom she "kep company" so nervous about her that she was compelled to leave her place, in common regard for her lover's peace of mind. Insults such as these have long ceased to move me; persecutions, public or private, strike vainly at my tranquillity. I may have lost my snake and lost my character; but I have not lost my ardent interest in reptile creation. While this survives, I can calmly expose my sufferings from the ignorance and malevolence of a large parochial neighbourhood, and feel all the better for it—I can boldly claim the sympathies of my naturalist brethren throughout the world—and, best of all, I can still conscientiously sign myself (certain that I am as good as my name),

PHILO-SERPENS.

I open my paper again to say that I have just received a letter from my brother Tom, who is in the navy, and now with his ship at Borneo. Tom (bless him!) writes word that, knowing my peculiar tastes, and anxious to gratify them, he has secured a fine sea porpoise for me (!) and has sent it off to my address here by a household ship (!!) Need I say that I shall receive it joyfully—receive it as a rod of chastisement opportunely arriving to scourge a calumnious neighbourhood? Welcome, avenging reptile! Welcome, thrice welcome, to the village of Stoke Muddleton!

The Arts.

THE LYCEUM REOPENED.

On Monday evening last, I found myself in what the American language designates by an "almighty fit"; and as many of my fellow-bachelors will probably understand the blissful tumult of my thoughts, I shall not hesitate to take them into confidence. The case is this. I had passed Sunday with the stately Harriet, and never before had I been so near making a fool of myself by offering my hand and copyrights where I had already given my heart. Justly alarmed and duly grateful for the escape, I resolved to fortify myself against a relapse by a severe perusal of *TERULLIANUS Ad Uxorem*; the remarks of the Christian Father upon marriage were to be the antidote to Harriet's eyes. I had a dim remembrance of his argument that St. Paul's counsel was far from intimating marriage to be a good thing in itself, but only good comparison with something worse. I remembered also the splendid phrase of savage discernment in which he characterizes "that very bitter pleasure of children—*liberum amarissimâ voluptate*," not to mention "weekly bills!" With *TERULLIANUS* I felt there was safety.

But as the chair was wheeled to the fire, who should present himself but that mysterious and dirty entity the Devil (the printer's!), with an intimation that my presence was needed at the Lyceum Theatre, which was to reopen that night. Tertullian—the Lyceum—which was I to choose? In the pages of the one lay perhaps the destiny of my future life—in the boxes of the other lay my duty (and engagement on the *Leader*). Intellect was on the side of the quarto—the affections on the side of the theatre. Buridan's Ass, the schoolmen say, when placed between the two equally attractive temptations of water and hay, perished because the attractions were so equalized that he could not decide. But he was an ass. Vivian, being a philosopher, decided, and decided to let his affections gain the victory over his interest—he went to the Lyceum.

Gay and brilliant was the house in its new decorations, happy the smiling faces of the audience pleased to be once more comfortably within its elegant walls. The comedy of my lucky, but over-estimated friend, Slingsby Lawrence was played with great ease and finish; and Charles Mathews, when he first presented himself as Affable Hawk, received the hearty *friendly* salute of a publicist who has no such accomplished actor among his favourites. Frank Mathews was as *modest* and effective as ever in the begging creditor; and Roxby, in spite of nervousness (they were all nervous!), greatly improved in Sir Harry Lester. Every body had a "reception"; every body was made to feel at home by an audience that felt pleased to see its friends. After the comedy "God save the Queen" was sung by the company, which brought more old friends upon the stage, among them MADAME, who sang her verse with immense effect; Julia St. George, who improves daily; Mrs. Frank Mathews, a deserved favourite; and, beside the old familiar faces, there were new faces—Mrs. Chatterley, who returns to the stage after many years absence, to fill a place long vacant; Laura Keene from the Olymp; and Miss Lanza, whose singing will be an acquisition. VIVIAN.

HINDOSTAN.

The Asiatic Gallery, a new and capacious room adjoining the waxwork show in Baker-street, contains the last new colossus picture on rollers; and thither we went last week to assist at the gathering of notables, private acquaintances, and literary men with which these things are usually inaugurated. The ramparts of Fort William, the citadel of Calcutta, formed the starting point, whence we ascended the Ganges to its source among the snowy ranges of the Himalaya. The first transition from the flat, even range of Doric respectability, Town-hall, Government-house, and Mint, to some real Bengali cottage scenery on the opposite or right bank of the river, was exceedingly agreeable. Without doubt, thought Louis Haghe, the figure painter; his clever group of officers and cadets in the first scene is completely eclipsed by the portrayal of unconstrained native life which follows. Another artistic bit of painting, creditable alike to the landscape painter, Mr. Phillips, and to the great artist who have named, is a sunset, and would have been quite perfect, even as a *dioramic effect*, but for the work of the machinist, who has contrived to ruin the light and atmosphere by the veriest s. of a

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THE NEW DRAGON  
OF WANTLEY.

A SOCIAL REVELATION

*The Leader*

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I am a young man of domestic habits, studious tendencies, and commercial occupations; or, in other words, I live with my mother, dote on natural history, and get my bread in an office. My scientific researches (the innocent cause of all I have now to relate) are exclusively directed to the subject of reptiles. I have studied alike the anatomy of the Asiatic boa constrictor and the British eft; and am ready at a moment's notice to calculate the exact poison-power of any serpent in any part of the world you choose to mention. My taste may seem an odd one; but I can't help it, and can't account for it. All I know is, that I am passionately attached to reptiles, and that I have a tremendous social grievance in connection with them to make public. Without further preface, here it is: –

I live in the pastoral village of Stoke Muddleton, which, as everybody knows, is within easy omnibus distance of London. The other evening, while I was taking a walk,

a labouring man accosted me, and asked if I would like to buy a live snake. Of course I would! – if he had offered a live boa constrictor for sale I would have mortgaged a quarter's salary to get it. The reptile in this case was only a common, harmless, English snake, between two and three feet long – one of a large family, residing, if I may use such an expression, in a wood near our neighbourhood. The man asked four shillings for it: I gave him the money. He recommended me to carry it home wrapped up in my pocket-handkerchief: I took his advice. I felt a calm sense of triumph as I walked back to the house with the first *live specimen* I had ever possessed – with the nucleus of the great reptile menagerie I was now determined to form, coiled snug in my own *bandana*, and lightly pendant from my own finger and thumb. Little did I then think that I had tied up in that one small bundle the requisite materials for producing the public misery of all Stoke Muddleton.

That night I said nothing to my mother about the snake. I stealthily took him up to my bed-room, and put him into an empty hatbox, humanely cutting an air-hole in the lid before I shut it down. Then I went to sleep, full of trust and tranquillity. In the middle of the night I awoke; and, experiencing a strong, but unaccountable desire to have a look at my snake, got up

and struck a light. When I state that my mother's bedroom is under mine, that she is a light sleeper, and that I took particular pains not to wake her, it is, perhaps, unnecessary to say that I knocked down everything within my reach in searching for the match-box. However, I lit the candle at last, eagerly opened my temporary snake cage, and the next instant found myself sitting on my bed, covered with a cold perspiration of horror – the reptile was gone!

I believe I was frantically rolling about in the flue under my bed feeling for the runaway snake, when I heard my mother's voice, hysterically desiring to know whether I was not taken dangerously ill, and casually adding that she was frightened out of her wits at the noise I was making. I calmed the maternal anxiety, bounced into bed again in despair, dropped asleep, and had frightful dreams, which, however, fell so far short of the reality that was soon to follow them as to be not worth mentioning. Let me pass on to the next morning.

Shortly after sunrise I began to search the house – no snake. Then I went into the garden, and there I found him, apparently breakfasting on snails. How he had got out of the room I had not the slightest idea; but now he was in the garden, the next thing to do was to fix him there. This I fondly imagined I could effect by turning over him

an old cage that had been used to keep bantams in, and covering the cage with a cloth. That done, I went in to breakfast, told my mother all about it, and set off to business, feeling pretty sure of the snake till I got back again. Fatal security!

And now let us shift the scene to next door, the house of Mr. Frostick, of the well-known firm of Frostick, Yaxley, and Frostick. Mr. Frostick is at business: Mrs. Frostick, a most charming person, is upstairs in the nursery, fondling her first child. She has been amusing herself with that kind of thing for the last three hours, and is not tired yet. She is so fond of her baby, she hardly knows what to do with it next. Something of this sort is passing through her mind in reference to the infant at the present moment. "What shall I do with my baby now? I have washed my baby, kissed my baby, suckled my baby, dressed my baby, dandled my baby, stuck a pin by accident into my baby, laid my baby on the floor, the bed, the ruff, the chair, and my own knees; made my baby laugh, and cry, and go to sleep, and wake up again. Nothing, I imagine, is now left for me to do but to air my baby." Acting on this sweet and sanitary impulse, Mrs. Frostick advances with the infant to the window, and, buoyant with maternal bliss smartly throws it open. What starts up on the parapet before her? What erect and hissing shape of

terror flies out like a jack-in-the-box before her eyes! Horror! unspeakable horror! It is my snake, my infernal, gadabout snake, that no crafty imprisonment whatever can confine to his proper premises!

Is it necessary to say that Mrs. Frostick uttered a piercing scream, and, clasping the baby to her bosom, fell back fainting on the floor. Of course she did this, and I respect her for it. It was a natural and dignified and femininely proper mode of proceeding. Could she know that the snake was harmless, was asleep on her parapet in the sun, and had only started up and hissed in fear at the sudden noise of the opening window? Certainly not. It was her business, under the circumstances, to scream and faint: and she did her business.

Now let us shift the scene again. Mr. Frostick is returning in the evening from his office – returning eager for domestic enjoyment, impatient to fondle his wife and child. The servant opens the door to him, pale as if all her blood had been turned to whitewash; and muttering fearfully about “Missus” and a serpent. He rushes into the parlour – there is his beloved partner, as nearly as possible raving mad, pressing the baby convulsively to her bosom. She has been attacked by a boa constrictor, twenty feet long, who lives in the roof of the house – nothing shall induce her to sleep

up stairs again, or to let the baby sleep up stairs – no! no! it is of no earthly use for Mr. Frostick to stare, and taunt her about dreaming in broad daylight, her mind is made up: she would infinitely prefer going to the workhouse, or roaming the streets all night, to setting foot on the bedroom floor again. It is in vain for her husband to soothe, and promise, and expostulate – she is determined to pass the night on a chair in the back parlour; and she sticks to her determination.

I am soon made aware that I have unconsciously introduced a serpent into a domestic garden of Eden. I have already told my mother that I have a snake; my mother tells our servant; our servant tells Mr. Frostick’s servant; and I get a message, requesting to know what I mean by ruining for ever the tranquillity of a whole household. I apologise, explain, and prove from natural history that the snake is perfectly harmless. In answer to this I get another message. Mrs. Frostick has consented to sleep up stairs again, provided the whole roof of the house is taken off, to assure her that there is no snake in it: Mr. Frostick, as in connubial duty bound, has consented to this tremendous course of proceeding, conceiving at the same time the diabolically revengeful design of bringing an action against me to pay expenses. I laugh contemptuously at this, and dare him

to meet me before our country tribunals; but serious considerations soon overcome me again, when I hear that the house roof has really been taken off, and no reptile found in any part of it.

Where is the snake? is the momentous question I now ask myself. What scrape will he get me into next? Whose house will he visit, now he has done with Mr. Frostick's house? What babies will he frighten into fits, what mothers into swoons, what old gentlemen into apoplexies? From the Church pulpit to the workhouse dusthole, there is no place in Stoke Muddleton into which he may not at this moment be introducing himself; and there is no individual in Stoke Muddleton who will not know him, by this time, to be my property whenever he appears. Talk about Frankenstein and the Monster, that's all stuff and fiction! here's an appalling reality for you that no novelist of the lot of them can have the smallest conception of! here I am, expecting every minute to be told that I have innocently frightened to death some fellow parishioner; and all because I have bought a snake, price four shillings, and failed to persuade the ungrateful reptile that my best hat-box was a comfortable lodging for him!

I have not omitted making some attempt at putting an end to this frightful state of suspense. The other day I paid two labouring

men to become provisionally snake-hunters, and to search all Stoke Muddleton for the missing reptile. This proceeding mollified even the furious Frostick (who is putting on a brand new slate roof to his house); but it produced no other effect. Once, indeed, my two labouring men – Dabbs and Clutton – saw the snake crossing the road; changing his quarters, perhaps, from a baby's cradle to an old woman's nightcap.

Dabbs gave chase, while Clutton stood still and called for extra help. The snake got away, and has not been seen since. Dabbs felt certain that he was on his way home to his native wood – Clutton firmly believed that he was directing his course straight to the house of the Reverend Morbus Lipskus Stretch, our respected minister, who has twelve children to be frightened out of their wits, and one more soon expected, for the snake to begin upon again when he has done with the first dozen.

In the mean time, public opinion assumes, day by day, a more threatening aspect towards me. I am already, socially speaking, the Pariah of Stoke Muddleton. The reports circulated – especially among my poorer neighbours – about my snake, are worthy of the Dark Ages, or the Cannibal Islands. In some quarters it is believed, that I have let loose a boa constrictor, whose breath can poison people,

yards and yards off. In others, it is averred that my so called snake was in reality an alligator from "foreign parts," accustomed in his native country to feed exclusively on human flesh. One select party, headed by the cheesemonger's overgrown errand-boy, stoutly assert that my vagabond reptile has been seen crossing the high road, in the shape of a winged serpent. This last superstition gains ground immensely among all who remember that the snake not only escaped, nobody knew how, from a hatbox into a garden, but extended his wanderings still further, from a garden to the top of a house. In spite of the trellis-work that runs up the back of Mr. Frostick's abode, many people are still determined to believe that my snake could only have got to the parapet outside the nursery window by flying there. This is a fact – I am exposing the bare truth, without adding one atom of embroidery. I am not writing for effect; and, being no author, I could not do so if I would. The present is a serious statement, seriously intended – if I thought anybody would laugh at it, I should be utterly disgusted and disappointed. When a man has become, as I have, the accredited perpetrator of a perfectly original species of public nuisance, his position is far too solemn to be joked about either by himself or by others.

No! persecuted and proscribed by a whole parish, publicly charged with predilections for keeping monsters, and letting them loose on society, ribald feelings are not the feelings which accompany such a revelation as mine. When I remember that the outrageous reports which I have described are spread abroad and firmly believed in this nineteenth century of education and cheap literature, by people who live within a sixpenny ride of the great metropolis, I really cannot accuse myself of revolutionary tendencies in crying aloud for social reform, in calling lamentably and imperatively for an immediate supply of Missionaries of the Brotherhood of Common Sense to convert Stoke Muddleton. The social disease is laid bare in these unpretending pages; let the remedy be forthwith applied, and I shall not have been ignorantly "sent to Coventry" by all my neighbours without some good coming from it, after all.

Beyond this, I don't think I have much more to say. Up to the present time I have not heard of my snake again; he has either wriggled himself back to his native wood, or is lurking in impervious concealment in somebody else's house. Mr. and Mrs. Frostick have toned down, under their new roof, into a state of dignified sullenness. Among the Stoke Muddleton mob opinion is still violently exasperated against me. The last proof that was given

of the estimation in which I am held by the populace generally, came from our own maidservant, who gave us warning yesterday, assigning as the reason that the bare idea of her living in the same house with a gent who was fond of serpents made the affectionate young lead-smelter's journey-man with whom she "kep' company" so nervous about her that she was compelled to leave her place, in common regard for her lover's peace of mind. Insults such as these have long ceased to move me; persecutions, public or private, strike vainly at my tranquillity. I may have lost my snake and lost my character; but I have not lost my ardent interest in reptile creation. While this survives, I can calmly expose my sufferings from the ignorance and malevolence of a large parochial neighbourhood, and feel all the better for it – I can boldly claim the sympathies of my naturalist brethren throughout the world – and, best of all, I can still conscientiously sign myself (certain that I am as good as my name),

PHILO-SERPENS.

I open my paper again to say that I have just received a letter from my brother Tom, who is in the navy, and now with his ship at Borneo. Tom (bless him!) writes word that, knowing my peculiar tastes, and anxious to gratify them,

he has secured a *live boa constrictor* for me (!) and has sent it off to my address here by a homeward-bound ship (!!)

Need I say that I shall receive it joyfully – receive it as a rod of chastisement opportunely arriving to scourge a calumnious neighbourhood? Welcome, avenging reptile! Welcome, thrice welcome, to the village of Stoke Muddleton!

