

other questionable points are these: facts are omitted if they do not support the thesis (e.g., Pope's obscene version of the First Psalm, Cibber's pamphlet on his immorality); in quoted letters some sections are italicized as his proof, where other sections of the same letters would lead to opposite conclusions; and support is claimed from insubstantial sources (e.g., evidence of Pope's pietism lies in, we are told, "the golden march of his verse").

But, we may still wonder, what was Pope's actual religious position? Hoxie Fairchild, who deals with the problem in "Religious Trends in English Poetry," concludes that Pope, so eager to be all things to all men,

and led to Pope's low esteem in the next century. To read all the relevant materials demands persistence, ingenuity, and a strong stomach—all of which Mr. MacDonald has. He has wisely gone to first-hand sources, and arrived at independent conclusions. Thus instead of accepting the traditional opinion that Pope's pastorals are superior to "Namby-Pamby" Phillips's he compares them anew. In general his objectivity proves that one may be both impartial and sympathetic to Pope.

In the final book here, Mr. Knight examines Pope's translation of the "Iliad," showing that it is not a "pretty poem" (as a contemporary classical scholar called it) but the

Dickens's Confrere

WILKIE COLLINS. By Kenneth Robinson. New York: The Macmillan Co. 348 pp. \$4.50.

By JOHN T. WINTERICH

NEXT time you buy a toothbrush at your neighborhood druggist's, make a mild obeisance to the metal rack of paperbacks just inside the door. It is a memorial to Wilkie Collins. For while Edgar Allan Poe invented the detective story (and tried, unsuccessfully, to float it as a paperback), it was Wilkie Collins who invented the detective novel.

He did more than that (or is that enough, or too much?). He flourished (and he *did* flourish) in the great era of the English novel. Scott was in active production when Collins was born, Hardy when he died. He grew up in the shadow of Dickens, and played Pythias to Dickens's Damon. You didn't have to hear Collins in the days of Victoria—you didn't even have to read Dickens. There were the Brontës, Thackeray, George Eliot. The competition was too stiff for Collins to have any hopes of making the first team. But he was a worthy captain of the second.

Yet his own story has always been something of a mystery—a mystery which Kenneth Robinson has done his best (and a competent best it is) to penetrate. But at the end, writes Mr. Robinson, "there remains a sense of incompleteness. . . . From all but his closest friends he seems to have kept something in reserve." Even his closest friends were not voluble; Dickens had much to say about him, but it was hardly revelatory. John Forster was voluble, but he was so obviously jealous of Collins's close friendship with Dickens that he makes a poor witness. Collins kept no journal. His surviving letters, "like his books, are for the most part narrative." He is known to have destroyed many letters. Of his correspondence with Caroline Elizabeth Graves, with whom he contracted a nine-year liaison, not a line appears to have been preserved.

The way of the biographer, in such a situation, is hard. Too often he yields to conjecture or surmise—there are biographers who prefer that treatment. Not Mr. Robinson. He sticks to such data as he has been able to accumulate, which turns out to be quite a lot. He has foregone the temptation (if he had one) to psychoanalyze his subject. He adheres to the born-lived-died formula with fluent straightforwardness, and the result should be eminently satisfactory alike to the



—By William Hogarth, from The Bettmann Archive.

Doctor James Garth and Alexander Pope in a coffee house.

lacked a firm spiritual center. The main expression of Pope's doctrine lies in his "Essay on Man," where, as Maynard Mack has recently shown in his Twickenham edition of the poem, it is a combination of deism, eighteenth-century sociality, and Roman Catholicism.

Almost every element of Pope's career is so obscurely hidden beneath an underbrush of controversy that Mr. MacDonald's is a very useful task in beating a path through the tangled commentary of eighteenth-century critics. Much of it before Pope's death (in 1744) and the collected edition of his works (in 1751), is valueless, for it was generated more by personal than by literary motives. Still, the analysis here is fresh, and suggestive in showing how critical judgment of the poetry followed the crumbling of neo-classic standards,

embodiment of a deep tradition of epic poetry, one which sustains a whole world-view. His reasoning is so close-packed and allusive that the book makes difficult, though rewarding, reading. Like Mr. MacDonald's book, its value comes from its fresh examination of a vital phase in Pope's career.

The ups and downs of Pope's reputation would lend support to a cyclical theory of literary history. Today we are on the upswing of taste for his poetry. Perhaps after the current evaluation he will achieve the standard reputation of a classic unaffected by literary fashions. An earlier generation of critics damned the poet along with his poetry; we must beware of making the obverse mistake, that of canonizing the poet because we are dazzled by the luminous excellences of his works.

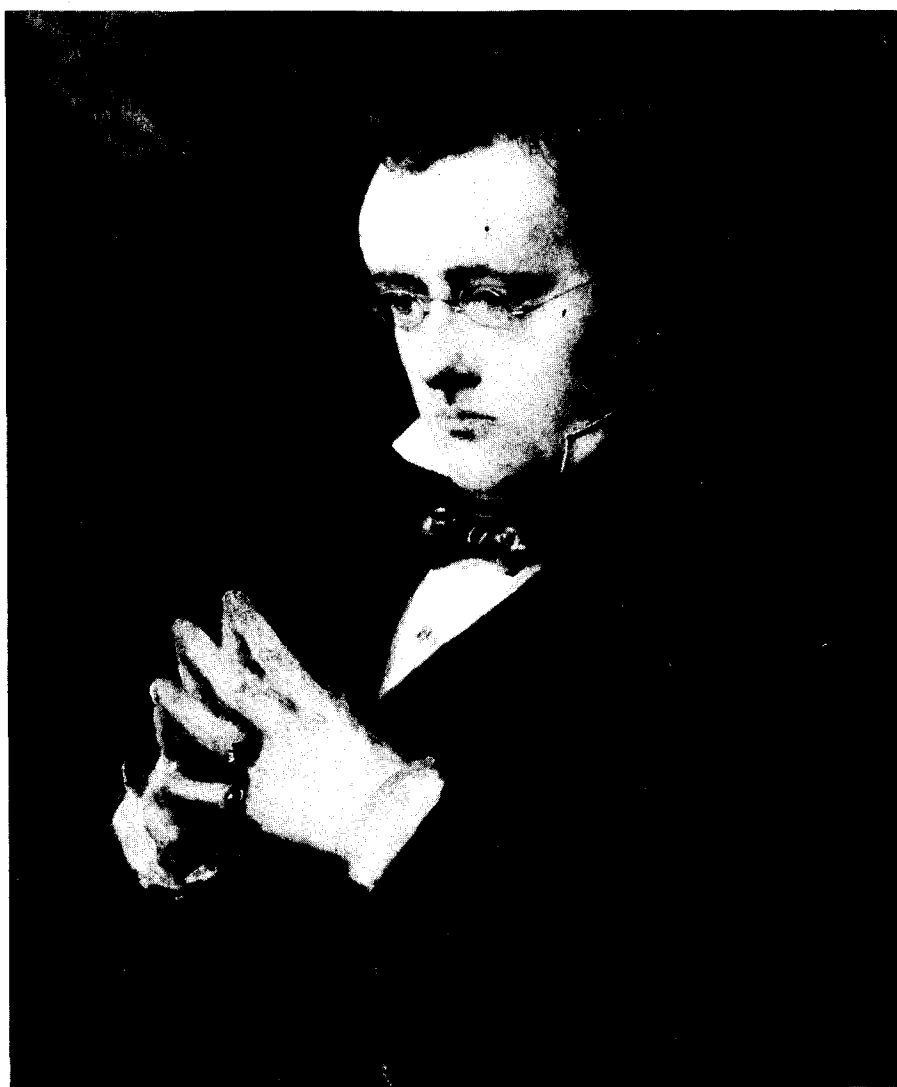
curious reader, the student of Victorian fiction, the social historian, and the professional writer eager to learn how an able, gifted, businesslike fore-runner managed his own affairs.

Collins was a conscientious workman. Facts had to be facts. He besought his friend Charles Ward of Coutt's Bank to tell him how long it would have taken a letter to reach Zurich from London in 1847. William Henry Wills, who had spent three years in Edinburgh, was asked to supply data about Dumfries—what did they make there, what was the local topography, and what identifiable village on the banks of the Nith would be a suitable site for a fictional honeymoon? Collins saw no reason why the truth should be a stranger to fiction.

Collins carried this passion for actuality to the extent of using real cases, or real persons, in the two novels which are likely to keep him permanently in print. "The Woman in White" was almost certainly suggested by a dramatic sequence of events in France toward the end of the eighteenth century. The preface to "The Moonstone" acknowledges the author's gratitude to two famous diamonds, and Sergeant Cuff, the Adam of fictional detectives (book-length division), clearly derived from Inspector Jonathan Whicher of good old Scotland Yard.

Five years after "The Moonstone," Collins visited America. He was welcomed by the Harpers, with whom his relations were of almost lyrical cordiality. "There is no author," the firm had written him the previous year, "more prompt and thoughtful of the interest and convenience of publishers than you. Your careful and regular transmission of copy . . . has frequently elicited the grateful admiration which is naturally felt by us as practical printers for authors who are never behindhand." Those were the days!

Collins's American visit lasted nearly six months—until March 1874. He got as far as Chicago, but had to forego his intention to journey "as far as the Mormons." He enjoyed his stay and his hosts. "I should be the most ungrateful man living if I had any other than the highest opinion of the American people. I find them to be the most enthusiastic, the most cordial, and the most sincere people I have ever met with in my life. When an American says, 'Come and see me,' he *means* it. This is wonderful to an Englishman." The nice thing about this pronouncement is that it was not delivered at dockside to a contemporary Grover Whalen, but set down in a private letter to an English friend.



—The Bettmann Archive.

William Wilkie Collins, by Sir John E. Millais (1850)—"passion for actuality."

Strength through Strength

LESLIE STEPHEN. By Noel Gilroy Annan. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press. 327 pp. \$5.

By R. ELLIS ROBERTS

THE peculiar quality of Victorian agnosticism was at its best in Leslie Stephen. When T. H. Huxley, after attending a meeting of the Metaphysical Society, invented the word, all he claimed for himself and his followers or colleagues was that they were not certain about the universe of the mind and spirit, as, for instance, Newman, for all his natural skepticism, was certain, or as even Tennyson was certain. But the peculiar quality that distinguished most of the group that rejected Christianity and theism was not that they were uncertain, but that they were proud of their uncertainty. They claimed as a virtue what was at best a failure, at

worst a self-indulgent complacency.

How did they acquire that complacency? In this brilliant monograph Mr. Annan, a fellow of King's College, Cambridge, endeavors to answer the question, although he never poses it as brutally as I have. This book is not a biography of Leslie Stephen, though there is sufficient biographical narrative to enable the reader—even if he knows nothing of Stephen except that he was Virginia Woolf's father—to have a good picture of this Cambridge don who was born in 1832 and died in 1904. During his life he did a prodigious amount of work, journalism, biography, editing, philosophical history, literary criticism. He was ordained priest in the Church of

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