CHARLES READE

A STUDY OF A LITERARY REPUTATION

by

JOHN McGEOCHAEN

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TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Introduction

Part One Charles Reade's method of writing fiction.

Part Two The popularity of Reade's fiction in his own day.

Part Three Contemporary critical opinion of Charles Reade's fiction.

Part Four Later critical opinion of Charles Reade's fiction.

Part Five The reasons for the eclipse of Charles Reade's "purpose" fiction.
This essay seeks to explain why Charles Reade's fiction, which was once so popular, is no longer of interest to modern readers. By referring to the available material on the sale of his books, and by considering what reviewers in his own day said about them, an attempt is made to estimate his popularity with contemporary readers. His novels were melodramatic in style and sensational in content, for he exploited the social abuses common in England during the second half of the nineteenth century.

Modern critics of the novel believe that Reade failed to turn his material into sound and probable fiction. His plots are weak and his characters poorly drawn. For this reason his books ceased to interest readers as soon as the abuses with which he dealt were corrected. A certain amount of agreement is shown to exist between the opinions of modern students of the novel and those of Reade's more discerning contemporary critics who, throughout his career, urged him to change his method of writing fiction.

The shortcomings of his fictive theory are discussed and the inevitability of the eclipse of his fame is set forth in conclusion.
From the year 1856, when *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* was published, until his death in 1884 Charles Reade enjoyed great popularity as a writer of fiction. Dickens alone outstripped him in the race for public approval, but it is doubtful indeed if any of Dickens's novels created more comment and discussion than *It Is Never Too Late to Mend, Put Yourself In His Place*, or *Hard Cash*. The demand for his fiction made Reade rich as well as famous and, quite understandably, led him to believe that he was a person of some importance in English letters. On this point he was never backward about expressing his firm convictions, for Reade was not a self-effacing man, and he was convinced, not only that his work was justifiably popular in his own time, but that it would continue to be popular after his death.

Although it is not possible to deny the popularity of Reade's fiction during his lifetime it is equally impossible to claim that it has any value or importance today. The public for which he wrote has turned its back completely upon his work with the result that it is difficult to find many people who have heard of him and almost impossible to find anyone who reads his fiction. With the single excep-
II.

tion of The Cloister And The Hearth his works have been forgotten.

In this study I shall try to explain why Reade's fiction was so popular in his lifetime and why it is so completely disregarded today. I have divided my essay into five parts. In Part One I attempt to show by analysis of some of Reade's novels the method which he used to capture the interest of his readers, and I hope to prove that it is not the method by which sound and enduring fiction is written. In Part Two, by referring to what data I have been able to gather regarding the sale of his novels, I endeavour to gauge with some degree of accuracy the extent of his success with the reading public of his time. In Part Three I have tried to set forth the opinions that contemporary critics held of his novels, and I endeavour to show in Part Four that modern critical opinion agrees in the main with the conclusions concerning his work that his contemporary critics reached. My purpose in the fifth and final section is to prove that there is nothing remarkable in the fact that Reade's fiction is now disregarded but that this disregard is an inevitable result of the method he used in writing his novels.
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PART I

CHARLES READE'S METHOD OF WRITING FICTION.

In a letter to The Times dated August 26, 1871, Charles Reade named *It Is Never Too Late To Mend*, *Hard Cash*, *Put Yourself In His Place*, and *A Terrible Temptation* as the novels which he thought were his best. They illustrate his "general method" of writing fiction and for this reason have been selected as the basis of this study which seeks to explain why his fiction, once so popular and important, is of little or no consequence today. Two other works, written after 1871, share the characteristics of the above novels and have been included in the study; for though they do not compare in every respect with his first four "purpose" novels they are constructed upon the same plan, and both *A Woman-Hater* and *A Simpleton* illustrate very clearly the faults into which Reade's method led him.

Reviewers and critics have called these works novels with a social purpose because in them Reade criticised  


2. Some reviewers and literary historians have suggested that Reade wrote the above novels with the purpose in mind of attacking certain social evils. I cite three by way of illustration. The first is a reviewer, contemporary with Reade, who wrote in *Blackwood's Magazine* (March, 1879) vol. 125, p.332. The second is Prof. W. Minto in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Ninth Edition, vol.20, p.303, col.1, 1.11. The third is Emile Legouix in *A Short History of English Literature*, Oxford, 1935, p.351, 1.17.
2.
certain social evils. It is doubtful indeed whether the
term "purpose" novels may be correctly applied to Reade's
fiction for it implies that Reade took up his pen in order
to attack these evils and that this was his chief end in
writing. Only in the case of *Put Yourself In His Place* is
this so, and Reade's reasons for discussing the social ills
of nineteenth century England in some of his other novels
are worth investigating.

It may be seen from Reade's novels that he placed great
trust in factual truth; and he missed no opportunity to point
out that, in his opinion, the more factual truth a novel con-
tained the better it was. His initial bent towards "truth"
revealed itself when he wrote *Christie Johnstone* for he took
pains to check and verify the facts which he used, and he
visited the district and talked with the people in order to
"get up" his background on the scene.

To be fair to Reade it must be admitted that he captur-
ed the spirit of the simple fishing folk and his treatment
of the difficult dialect does him credit. If he had taken as
much care with plot development or character portrayal,
*Christie Johnstone* would have been a much better novel; but
it is typical of all Reade's work that truth to fact came
first and was, indeed, the pivot around which his fictive
theory turned.

He outlined his plan for fiction early in his career.
In 1853, for example, he wrote in his diary: "The plan I
propose to myself in writing stories will, I see, cost me
undeniable labour. I propose never to guess where I can know.”¹ For this reason, and with *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* in mind, he commissioned his brother who was a sailor "to describe as he would to an intelligent child, a ship sailing...";² and because he wanted to make his Jew, Levi, "a Truth...instead of a lie"³ he read eight considerable volumes on the subject. In describing his proposed treatment of the Australian scenes he revealed the importance which he attached to his method by saying:

"My story must cross the water to Australia, and plunge after that into a gold mine. To be consistent with myself, I ought to cross-examine at the very least a dozen men that have farmed, dug, or robbed in that land. If I can get hold of two or three that have really been in it, I think I could win the public ear by these means. Failing these I must read books and letters, and do the best I can. Such is the mechanism of a novel by Charles Reade. If I can work the above great system, there is enough of me to make one of the writers of the day; without it, No, No."⁴

Reade succeeded in winning the "public ear" to an extent far beyond even his expectations but his success was not due to his laboriously gathered data on gold mining. It was due to the fact that he discovered in *The Times of*

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2. Ibid., p. 86, ll. 30-31.
3. Ibid., p. 87, ll. 14-16
4. Ibid., p. 87, ll. 17-26.
September 7 and 8, 1853 the account of a boy driven to suicide because of ill-treatment at the hands of his jailors in Birmingham Jail. Although Reade claimed some years later that this "noble passage" in the Times was the "germ" of his work since it "touched" his heart and "inflamed" his imagination there is good reason to believe that this was not the case. He had started his novel some time before reading the Times story for Elwin points out that Reade had so far advanced his story by July, 1853, that he had changed the title from Gold, the name of the play from which the novel was adapted, to It Is Never Too Late To Mend; and Reade's diary indicates that until that time he had come upon nothing startling in the way of prison conditions in spite of the fact that he had visited the prisons at Durham, Oxford, and Reading in search of "warm facts for the Robinson business." It is not difficult to explain these visits; for Robinson, one of his characters, was a jail-bird and Reade sought authentic background for his story. No doubt he obtained many "warm facts" from these visits but his warmest facts came from The Times and his discovery of this new information was a fortunate addition to the material he had already gathered.

3. Ibid., p.91, ll. 1-3.
Setting aside for the moment any discussion regarding the excellence of Reade's handling of the prison scenes, let us examine briefly the position they hold in the story and their effect upon the general structure of the work. The story begins with the departure of the hero, Fielding, for Australia where he is forced to go in search of fortune to enable him to marry Susan Merton. The young lady's hand is also sought by the villain Meadows who hopes, in the absence of Fielding, to lead her to the altar by fair means or foul. Meadows incurs the hate of the Jew, Levi, early in the story and the Jew, as well as helping the hero at critical times throughout the story, manages also to contribute to the thwarting of the evil squire's schemes. Robinson, after his release from jail, travels to Australia where his path crosses that of Fielding and in this way the threads of interest are drawn into a reasonably well-formed plot. If, as Reade said, the "germ" of his novel was the story of Josephs it is difficult to understand why he introduced it so late in his work and why it was so poorly connected to the rest of his plot. In the eighteen chapters of uninterrupted narrative which Reade devoted to the prison scenes, Robinson, his original jail-bird, has only a small part to play while the story of Josephs, Mr. Eden, and Hawes and his minions is treated at great length and in minute detail. Reade, of course, simply halted his own story to deal with the one which he found in The Times. There is no doubt that he treated the subject in a masterful fashion,
and there can be no doubt, either, that his emotions were deeply touched and his just and righteous wrath honourably and effectively aroused; for the entire story of Josephs is told with feeling and with such dramatic effect as to make the rest of the book seem poor by comparison. The fact remains, however, that Reade must be criticised for allowing a section even as excellent as this to disfigure the form and plot of his novel. He was aware of its in-artistic effect for he said himself that "a story within a story is a frightful flaw in art." ¹ When we consider that he made this statement regarding the story of Robinson's life which he said was intended as "the central gem of my little coronet" ² but which was omitted from the novel and published separately under the title of The Autobiography Of A Thief we are forced to the conclusion that Reade was concerned about artistic form only when it proved to his advantage to be so. His real reason for omitting Robinson's story was, as he himself said, that "the novel without the autobiography, was five ordinary volumes by printer's calculation" ³ and something had to be left out. He retained the story of Josephs because he felt that the abuse which prompted it ought to be exposed and probably, too, because he was aware that it would create interest in his novel.


². Ibid., p. 3, l. 11.

³. Ibid., p. 3, ll. 11-13.
One of Reade's chief difficulties in writing was with pure invention. On one occasion, after his adaptation of a play from the French, he said "I want to show people that, though I adapt French pieces, I can invent too, if I choose to take the trouble. And it is a trouble to me I confess." When we consider that when Reade was writing, the three-volume novel, which might run to three hundred thousand words or better, was in vogue, it becomes clear that Reade's problem was grave enough to concern him greatly. It is also clear why he so eagerly embraced the plan which his success in It Is Never Too Late To Mend suggested to him. He saw that such subjects as prison conditions, abuses in private asylums, and so forth had a double value for him since they provided sensational interest in his novels and stretched them out at the same time to fill three volumes or even more. Here, then, was the answer to his problem and in his subsequent works he never lacked something to say, for his system of research provided him with an abundance of material. As a result, all his "purpose" novels were based upon the plan which had proved so successful in It Is Never Too Late To Mend and which consisted of a simple love story of the type common in his day, and indeed common enough in ours, interrupted from time to time to include some topic or topics of contemporary interest. Although

1. Elwin, op. cit., p. 84, ll. 6-9.
Reade was really making a virtue of necessity, he argued that his kind of fiction was the only true one and he was satisfied in the preface to *A Simpleton*, written toward the end of his career to remark: "I can only say that I rarely write a novel without milking about two hundred heterogeneous cows into my pail, and that *A Simpleton* is no exception to my general method; that method is the true method, and the best, and if on that method I do not write prime novels, it is the fault of the man, and not of the method." ¹

In order to see the results of Reade's method let us examine two novels, *Put Yourself In His Place* and *A Simpleton*. The former illustrates Reade's method at its best whereas the latter, written when Reade had long passed the peak of his popularity and power as a writer, reveals what he was content to publish at the end of a successful career as a writer of fiction.

Some who read this essay may not have read these novels, and others who have read them may have forgotten much of what they contain; for Reade's fiction tends to slip easily from the memory. It may be useful, therefore, at this point to set down an outline of them to make clearer the quality of Reade's fiction to which I am seeking to draw attention.

*Put Yourself In His Place* was conceived by Reade as a novel with a purpose. Elwin says that "the idea of writing

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a story on the subject of Trades Unions with a growing industrial town for its background had been in Reade's mind since 1859." 1 In keeping with his custom of never guessing where he could know, Reade began, as early as 1862, to collect news cuttings on the subject. He also visited Manchester and Sheffield, and not only inspected the factories and mills, but interviewed many mill-girls and tradesmen, both union and non-union. The importance to him of this procedure is revealed in a letter to Mrs. Seymour. He wrote:

"Yesterday I received several men who had been beaten, injured, shot, by the Unions; and in the evening a detective, the richest fellow in the world. Oh for a shorthand writer to record the things I heard! Seriously, were I Dickens, it would pay me well to take a shorthand writer everywhere. I am getting anecdotes and racy dicta."

Having gathered his facts he set to work on his novel, choosing Hillsborough as its setting, which, as Elwin points out was merely a thin disguise for Sheffield.

The story opens with the account of the quarrel between Mrs. Little and her aristocratic brother Squire Raby, whose contempt for trade and disapproval of his sister's marriage led indirectly to the suicide of her husband, Mr. Little. The son, Henry Little, was brought up in London by his uncle on his father's side, who trained him in the craft of tool-making with such success that he became a skilled craftsman.

2. Ibid., p. 203, ll. 13-18.
early in life. Realizing that Hillsborough offered him opportunities for advancement for which he could not hope in London, Henry persuaded his mother to re-visit the countryside of her youth and the scenes of her former unhappiness.

They had not been long in Hillsborough before Henry fell in love with Grace Carden, whose birth and position in society made her inaccessible to a common workman; and this provided an added stimulus to the young man's ambition to rise in his trade and become a master. He would have succeeded well enough, no doubt, had it not been that the Unions opposed him, chiefly on the grounds that he was not a local man and that the work in which he was engaged was so specialized as to exclude him automatically from any of the unions existing there at the time. His struggle with the trades, though short, was extremely bitter and the injustice and injuries that he suffered are recorded by Reade in minute and accurate detail.

Defeated and discouraged, Little decided to give up the hopeless struggle and return to London but was dissuaded by Dr. Amboyne whose interest in Little was sincere and arose not only from his admiration of the lad's ability and pluck, but also from the fact that the Doctor had once loved Mrs. Little and, indeed, still cherished the hope of making her his wife. Amboyne encouraged Henry to set up his forge in a deserted church belonging to Squire Raby, his uncle. In this isolated place Henry worked at nights, but during the
day divided his time between two jobs calculated to justify his continued presence in Hillsborough without arousing the suspicions of his enemies. One of these jobs was woodcarving; but the other was that of examining the factories of the city and it was undertaken at the doctor's suggestion in an effort to find out and correct the causes of so many occupational illnesses among workers. Reade used this section of the story to display his findings on factory conditions and Little's report is nothing more than an itemized account of the prevailing bad conditions together with suggestions for their improvement which the author felt inspired to lay before his readers in the form of an appendix to his novel.

Little was discovered at his forge one winter's night by Grace Carden and Frederick Coventry who, having lost their way in a snow storm, sought refuge in the church. Coventry, who was also a suitor for Grace's hand, became jealous when he learned of the girl's attachment to Little and in a moment of anger revealed Little's whereabouts to the astonished trades, who soon attacked Little and injured him. As a result of this outrage Raby became aware of the desecration of his church and of the fact that Little was his nephew. Raby and his sister were reconciled and Henry set up in a safe place to continue his work unmolested. Within a short time he became master in a model factory where he put into practice the improvements suggested in his report and, after a few technical adjustments were made, found
himaelf, at last, right with the trades.

His troubles were far from over, however, for Mr. Garden told him that in order to win Grace's hand he would have to make a fortune within two years. Henry turned his attention to inventing, and, after devising a more economical method of grinding saws, succeeded in patenting it and set up in business with Ben Bolt whom he met on his way home from London after an unsuccessful attempt to raise the necessary capital to set himself up in business. Once again, however, he found himself wrong with the trades for his invention threatened to deprive most of the Hillsborough saw-grinders of their means of livelihood. Coventry connived with certain low characters in the employ of the Unions to kill Little and blow up his plant at the same time; and though they succeeded in the latter scheme, they were thwarted in the former; for Little, at the time of the explosion, was on his way to America to patent his invention and attend to its exploitation there. This section of the plot is particularly weak for Little who, throughout the book, was more than a devoted son and a thoughtful friend, left his mother, his sweetheart, and his business associates in complete ignorance of his departure. As a result, a human arm which was found in the river after the explosion was taken for his and he was presumed dead by everyone except his mother who was kept in ignorance of the supposed tragedy.

Henry, of course, wrote letters from America but only to Grace; who never got them for the very good reason that
Coventry managed to intercept and destroy them all. This villain pressed his suit with such persistence that Grace capitulated, more to please her father than herself, and married Coventry the day before Henry arrived home from America, rich and eager to claim his bride. Grace, who heard of Henry's impending return some ten minutes or so after her marriage, attacked her wicked deceiver with a stiletto, denounced him, and refused to remain for one minute beneath the same roof and no one can deny that Reade succeeded in wringing out the last drop of melodrama from this extremely melodramatic situation. Henry returned, therefore, to find his sweetheart married to another man, and the fact that she was his wife in name only did little more than soften the blow. Following another stormy and melodramatic scene, Henry finally suggested that Grace go to America with him where they might be able to start life afresh. Grace refused his offer, of course, and instead herself left Hillsborough at the same time decoying the persistent Coventry away in a fruitless chase in order to prevent Henry from wreaking vengeance upon the villain who had wrecked his life. In due course Grace returned to Hillsborough and, dressed as a Protestant nun, every night stole to Henry's window to view and love him from afar. Henry learned of her presence in Hillsborough and moved to a room near her place of residence where he watched her from time to time as she walked in the seclusion of her garden. Coventry, too, learned of her whereabouts and was on the point of carrying her away by
force when the valley was inundated by a great flood caused by the breaking of a dam. Although Reade's description of the flood is good, the scene itself is by no means necessary to the advancement of the plot in spite of the fact that we learn that Henry and Grace are restored to each other and Coventry is crippled for life. Shortly after their experiences in the flood the lovers learned that Grace was not really married to Coventry at all for the curate who officiated at the wedding was none other than Shifty Dick, a notorious criminal, who had used the disguise of a clergyman to hide his identity and further his evil schemes.

Shifty Dick was not a new character in the story. Some of his exploits are recorded in Chapter Thirty where Reade displayed his findings on a gang of unscrupulous rascals who succeeded in defrauding insurance companies by producing a dead body and claiming it to be that of a policy holder. This incident has no relation to the rest of the story and was included presumably because it was "based upon some information which Reade had been at pains to secure and was reluctant to omit." ¹ His use of Shifty Dick in solving Henry's problem is clever enough, but no more convincing than his marrying Jael Dence, the simple and unlettered country girl, to the proud and snobbish Raby. Reade was pleased enough with the dénouement of his story and it was

¹ Elwin, op. cit., p. 205, l. 9.
characteristic of his melodramatic style in fiction that all should end happily with wedding bells drowning out the cries of injured workers and bereaved widows. It is true that Reade concluded his book with two or three pages devoted to an account of further outrages by the Unions, but it is also true that his novel cannot claim to reveal a just and fair picture of the situation although most of his material is based on fact. In the closing lines of the novel Reade says:

"Seeing these things, I have drawn my pen against cowardly assassination and sordid tyranny: I have taken a few undeniable truths out of many, and have laboured to make my readers realize those appalling facts of the day, which most men know, but not one in a thousand realizes, until fiction which, whatever you may have been told to the contrary, is the highest, widest, noblest, and greatest of all the arts—comes to his aid, studies, penetrates, digests the hard facts of chronicles and blue books, and makes their dry bones live."

Actually Reade did not make the dry bones live for the simple reason that his novel is not good fiction. One sees too clearly the chronicles and blue books behind everything Reade says and in this respect Put Yourself In His Place is very little different from any other "purpose" novel of Reade's. The commonplace love story is there; the melodramatic tricks are there; the plot, though intricately enough contrived, is improbable; and the characters

are marionettes that move about at the whim of their creator. Reade gathered material on many subjects and he used it all. Consequently his novel deals with outrages by Trades Unions, poor working conditions in factories, the duping of insurance companies by unscrupulous swindlers, the "red tape" connected with the office of Letters Patent, and, for good measure, an account of the bursting of a dam which has really no place in the story but which had been suggested to him by his Boston friend Fields, who sent him pictures of the American floods of 1869. Although, with the help of Wilkie Collins, Reade made an effort to work all these materials into a satisfactory plot it was not very successful. According to Elwin, Collins was aware of Reade's besetting sins in fiction for he warned him against repetition and the inclination to dwell too much upon the polemical part of the story. Collins said:

"...the interest in the characters is so strong, the collision of human passions is so admirably and so subtly struck out, that the public will have no more of new trade unions and their outrages.""}

Commenting upon this Elwin says:

"Shrewdly he knew how Reade, in his habit of thorough research and consequent accumulation of serried masses of facts, was inclined to impede the movement of his story by the introduction of irrelevancies, based upon some information which

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1. Elwin, op. cit., p. 204, l. 33, p. 205, l. 3.
he had been at pains to procure and was reluctant to omit."

The fact of the matter is that Reade considered such bits of information more important than the movement of his story, or his characters, or anything else; for in no other way can we explain his willingness to present these "purpose" novels as the basis of his claim to fame as a novelist.

If *Put Yourself In His Place* is Reade's best attempt at a novel with a purpose, *A Simpleton* is certainly his worst. It is true, as I have already said, that it was written at the close of his career and after he had passed the peak of his power as a writer, yet Reade himself once said that a novelist should be able to write better fiction at forty than he could at twenty because he had accumulated more facts, and facts to Reade were the things which made fiction good. Surely, then, at sixty, when he had gathered the amazing mass of stuff that filled his filing cabinets to overflowing, Reade should have produced his best, rather than one of his worst novels. Reade's argument, of course, was quite wrong and *A Simpleton* is sure proof of this. It is a trivial work compared to *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* or *Put Yourself In His Place* and it is only with difficulty that we realize that it came from the same pen as *The Cloister And The Hearth*. In it we find again the simple

love story and the interesting tid-bits of contemporary interest that we have grown to expect in all Reade's fiction, and we miss the sound and valuable comment upon life that a man of Reade's ability and learning might have made had his fictive theory not been what it was.

A Simpleton is the story of Christopher Staines, a young doctor, and his bride, Rosa Lusignan. Their experiences with unscrupulous house agents, vendors of adulterated buns and cosmetics, and dishonest auctioneers during the time that the doctor tried unsuccessfully to establish a practice in London make up the first thirteen chapters of the book. Staines, however, was forced to hire himself out first as a cab driver and later as the guardian of a wealthy boy who was embarking on an ocean voyage. During the voyage Staines fell overboard. He was rescued and taken to South Africa but because he was suffering from amnesia he was unable to notify his wife that he was safe. Phoebe Falcon recognized him as a man to whom she sold buns in London and she and her husband Falcon, who, incidentally, was a former suitor of Rosa's, took charge of Staines until his memory returned.

When he recovered he was shocked to realize that his wife no doubt considered him dead and must have spent the money from the insurance policy which her father had made Staines procure before he married Rosa. To get the money with which to repay this debt Staines accompanied Falcon
to the diamond fields and was fortunate enough to gather a few stones in a short time. He sent Falcon back to Cape Town with them, redoubled his efforts, and soon met with even greater success. Falcon, however, deserted his wife, went to London, and, instead of assuring Rosa of her husband's safety, tried to marry her himself. So eagerly did he press his suit and so ably did Mr. Lusignan help him that Rosa, torn between loyalty to the memory of her husband and duty to her father, became desperate and decided to poison herself.

Staines in the meantime had followed his false friend to London and melodramatically stepped out from behind a shrub in his father-in-law's garden just in time to snatch the lethal bottle from his wife's hand. Although he was disguised by a beard Rosa recognized him and fled screaming into the house convinced that she had seen a ghost. Falcon, who knew that Staines was not a ghost, tried to shoot him, then jumped from the window only to be impaled upon the fence below where he was discovered by Phoebe who drove up in a cab just at that time. She took her erring and now crippled spouse back to South Africa and Staines and Rosa, re-united at last, lived out their days in peace and prosperity. This was, of course, the usual ending of Reade's "stories of the day."

That Reade was willing, even anxious, to rest his claim to fame upon such "meager humanity" 1 indicates the

faith which he had in factual truth as the proper basis for fiction. He was content to build his novels around the hackneyed plot of lovers separated and brought together again. He was content, too, to portray people as types and to make no effort to probe the hidden springs of human action or to discover why people react as they do to the impact of life. He saw nothing wrong with giving his readers a hodge-podge of melodramatic nonsense, brilliant narrative, and startling facts because he felt that his facts justified themselves and his fiction, and by adhering closely to his facts he was giving his readers a true picture of life.

Readers overlooked the point that factual truth is not the same thing as fictional truth and, indeed, has nothing to do with it. Most people are willing to accept or deny the truth of a fact, but they demand the right to accept the truth of a fiction. Readers of fiction do not expect an author to deal with attested fact but demand instead that the situations and people he invents for his story seem lifelike, consistent, and probable. It is enough for the reader to know that the things that happen to characters in fiction are those that might well happen to such people in the situations in which the author has placed them. For example, it makes no difference whether or not Becky Sharp ever really lived for she is so well and consistently drawn that we admit that such a person as she might have lived and we are convinced that a real person would have reacted to the circumstances of her life exactly as Becky did.
Whenever a writer includes in his fiction actual experiences of living people and labels them as such he complicates his task considerably. The reader is forced to believe first that such experiences are possible in real life and second that these experiences were likely to have been encountered by the characters in the novel. The conflict thus set up in the reader's mind is serious, and if he feels that the author, in order to use or exploit his factual material, has had to force his characters to do or say things that such people normally would not do or say the result is fatal, for the illusion of reality in his novel is destroyed.

It is important that a novel should appear to be a true picture of life but it is not important that the incidents in the lives of the characters be based on facts.

The willingness on the part of readers of fiction to regard as true things that have no actual basis in fact has been termed that "willing suspension of disbelief for a moment" which is the only basis upon which fiction can be accepted. I should like to discuss briefly what I think good fiction ought to be and to compare with its standards those that satisfied Reade.

Good fiction embodies and reveals certain truths of human nature and life. Although its primary purpose may be to interest or entertain, its enduring value depends upon what it tells us about ourselves. The serious novelist, therefore, must pass on to his readers in an interesting and acceptable manner what he has found to be true of life. An
understanding exists between author and reader which, though seldom actually expressed, is nevertheless very real and important. The reader understands that the author has discovered something from his observations of life that he proposes to reveal through the artificial medium of fiction. The author is allowed to set his stage as he wishes and to make use of incidents which are not true to fact and characters that have no exact counterparts in real life, provided his novel seems real and probable. In this way he is able to direct the interest of his readers to the specific comment which he wishes to make and to stimulate effectively their emotions and imaginations.

In his effort to make his story seem true to life, the novelist must first construct a plot as the framework for it. Although some writers are better than others in this department of fiction, and can devise very intricate and well-balanced plots, the ultimate test of a good plot is not its complexity, but its probability. The incidents and happenings in any story must be those which seem likely to happen to people in life and the writer who forces unusual situations into his plot in order to produce interesting or startling effects, runs the risk of destroying the appearance of reality that his novel ought to have. A good plot restricts the attention of the reader to the particular aspect of life which the author is considering, and leads, step by step, to an inevitable and satisfying conclusion.
Character portrayal is important in a novel. If an author is to succeed in setting forth a true picture of life the people about whom he writes must seem to be living people. Becky Sharp, for instance, seems more like a living person about whom Thackeray wrote than someone who was created in his imagination and this is due to the fact that she has a personality of her own. Thackeray does not try to force Becky to do anything that would be foreign to anyone of her temperament, nor does he force her into improbable situations merely to advance his story. So it is with Squire Western and Emma Woodhouse, for so convincingly are they drawn that it is with difficulty that one realizes they are not actually flesh and blood people.

Some novelists are better able than others to make the people in their fiction real due to the fact that they are primarily interested in the study of character, and the reactions of people to the circumstances of life, rather than in the circumstances themselves. Other writers, of course, are justified in neglecting the finer points of character delineation if their fiction is intended to deal with some other aspect of life. They must take care, however, to see that the people who appear in their novels are consistent, for unnatural conduct upon the part of any character tends to destroy the illusion of reality and, consequently, the effectiveness of the novel.

A good setting is important to a novel and contributes much to the illusion of reality. When setting is artis-
tically used it forms a perfect background for both plot development and character study. The works of Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy, for example, owe much of their success to the fact that they are written against effective backgrounds easily accepted by readers with little or no effort of imagination. When Jane Austen leads us from the drawing-room to the country we make no objection, for nothing is strained or forced about the transition. We feel, if we think about it at all, that it is quite fitting to accompany Emma on her picnic, for we know that such events, though rare, are natural in her life. The harmonious blending of plot and setting in Jane Austen's novels illustrates how setting may properly be used, but it also shows that such harmony is not always, indeed, not often found in fiction. Setting is too often exploited for its own sake and Charles Reade frequently offended in this regard, for he often sacrificed not only his plots but the entire illusion of reality of his novels, simply because he wanted to use settings which he thought were startling and sensational.

Although plot development, character portrayal, and setting are indispensable in creating an illusion of reality it must not be imagined that this in itself is the true end and purpose of fiction. A novel is great when it can stand as an enduring and valuable human document; but when it is anything less than that its interest and importance must, of necessity, be transitory. Looking back upon the great
works in our own and other literatures, we cannot fail to realize that those that have outlived their creators contain messages which are as valuable to us today as to the people for whom they were first intended. Tom Jones, for example, appeals to modern readers not only because the plot is clever and the character's life-like, but also because Fielding, from his vast knowledge of human nature, succeeded in making observations about life which we can still understand and which succeeding generations will continue to understand as long as human nature remains what it is. Similarly, Scott's novels hold our interest not only because of his narrative powers or his great knowledge of history, but also because there shines through all his work a great love for humanity; and his comments upon human virtues and frailties help us to see ourselves as others see us.

Good fiction, then, concerns itself with the general laws which underlie human action and in this way it may be said to deal with truth. The writer of good fiction must observe carefully the conduct of his fellow men and their reactions to the situations of life. On the basis of what he sees he must formulate a philosophy of life which seeks to explain why people act and react as they do. Having done this to his own satisfaction, he must present his findings in his novel, asking his readers to accept the fact that although the people and happenings of his story are fictitious his novel is worth the reader's consideration,
for it gives a fairly true picture of what takes place in life. If, by artistic use of plot, character, and setting he presents a story which gives a true picture of life, his novel has accomplished its purpose; but no amount of factual truth will avail if the story does not itself seem true or probable.

I have already suggested that Reade, in spite of his passionate and painstaking search for truth, failed to realize the distinction between factual and fictional truth. The extent of his failure may be seen in a remark in his introduction to *An Autobiography Of A Thief* where he said:

"I feign probabilities; I record improbabilities: the former are conjectures, the latter truths: mixed, they make a thing not so true as gospel nor so false as history; viz., fiction. When I startle you most, think twice before you disbelieve me. What able deceiver aims at shocking credulity? Distrust rather my oily probabilities. They should be true if I could make them; but I can't: they are guesses."

It seems almost incredible that a writer of Reade's ability, the author of *The Cloister And The Hearth*, the man who transformed the story of Josephs from an obscure newspaper item into a moving and powerful human story should fail to

see that facts, no matter how true or sensational, have no value in fiction unless they seem probable; yet such is the case. Time and again in his novels Reade asks his readers to believe something which he assures us is true but which has no appearance of truth because it is out of keeping with the nature of a character or is unrelated to the rest of the incidents in the story. An example of this is the story of Rhoda Gale in *A Woman-Hater* with which I shall deal later. Another is found in *Hard Cash* where Hardy's father committed his son to an institution for the insane although up to this time he had not been portrayed as the kind of callous and inconsiderate parent likely to do this sort of thing. Obviously he did it merely to enable Reade to exploit his findings on asylums and the effect on the probability of the story may easily be imagined. In *A Terrible Temptation* Reade changes Rhoda Somerset from a kept mistress of rather low moral character into something resembling a combination of Florence Nightingale and a Salvation Army lass. Though such a transformation is not impossible Reade's motives must be questioned for it is apparent early in the story that Reade had exhausted his material on the subject of kept mistresses, and in order to clear the way for new subject matter he disposed of Rhoda in this unconvincing manner.

Reade's contempt for what he called "the oily probabilities" of fiction led him far astray for nowhere else,
in his "purpose" novels at least, did Reade achieve that measure of fictional truth which raised the story of Josephs above sensationalism into the field of good, sound fiction. In this case Reade succeeded because he altered his facts to suit his purpose. Hawes, Josephs, and even Mr. Eden remain in character and do only the things that people of their sort might be expected to do. The events of the story, though sensational and even shocking, seem at the same time natural and the whole story proceeds in a plausible manner to an inexorable conclusion. As a result the reader is profoundly affected and is thereby able to accept the story for what it is: a damning indictment of a wicked and vicious system. Fitzjames Stephen, a lawyer, challenged Reade's facts and refused to admit Reade's right to tamper with them even though by so doing Reade made his story more vital and threw into sharper focus the evils which he sought to denounce. Stephen did not appear to realize that he and Reade were not only interested in different kinds of truth but were actually talking about different people. He was entitled to accept or deny the truth of the facts regarding the boy in jail but he was forced to accept Reade's statements regarding Josephs in the novel just as it is necessary to accept as true what Fielding said of Tom Jones or Dickens said of David Copperfield. The fact that Josephs was patterned after a real boy was only of secondary importance; the important thing was that Josephs, and, of course, the other characters as well, should seem real and
that the experiences which affected their lives should be those that people such as they would encounter. Reade was careful to make his story give an illusion of reality and he did it by altering facts to make probable fiction. He was quite right in refusing to set down slavishly the bare facts as they appeared in the reports from which his inspiration came.

It is quite surprising, however, to discover that from this point in his career until its end Reade, with very few exceptions, made use of Fitzjames Stephen's type of facts. One can infer only that Reade's emotions were carried away by the story of Josephs and this inspired his treatment of it, or that he was shrewd enough to see that sensational facts themselves were enough to catch the public ear and make his novels saleable though not sound fiction. Whatever the reason, factual truth became the corner-stone upon which he raised the structure of his fiction and he defended his use of factual truth to the end of his career.

"Ask your common sense" he said in the preface to *A Simpleton* "why a man writes better fiction at forty than he can at twenty. It is simply because he has gathered more facts from each of these three sources, - experience, hearsay, print." ¹ So firmly did he believe that "all fiction worth a button is founded on fact" ² that he went to unlimited

trouble to gather facts from blue books, newspapers, and
reports until, at the end of his life he had amassed an
amazing collection of carefully indexed clippings. This
was his Bible and he referred to it often, for he was
often challenged as to the authenticity of the facts he
used. This is hardly to be wondered at for he used the
most outrageous factual truths at times and, indeed, sought
out the raw facts that were stranger than fiction and that
challenged belief. He did not, however, make much attempt
to make his facts seem probable within the limits of his
story but insisted instead that they be accepted upon the
plane of fiction although often they retarded the movement
of his story and destroyed its illusion of reality.

The reader, unable to accept Reade's fiction as true,
finds it difficult even to accept his facts, for their
appearance in an improbable story tends to destroy what­
ever inherent value they possess. The asylum scenes in
Hard Cash, though doubtless true to fact, lose their
effectiveness because the reader is unable to understand
why Hardy is exposed to them at all. We are asked to be­
lieve that Hardy's father was justified in placing Hardy
in such a place but this is difficult, if not impossible
to do, for there is nothing in the nature of the older man
to suggest that he would be capable of such an unnatural
act. It becomes obvious, then, that Reade simply wished
to get the young man into his chamber of horrors in order
to describe conditions in such places and the reader is
justified in being skeptical of the absolute accuracy of his description. At any rate, Hardy's experiences do not impress the reader and arouse his sympathy as they might have done had they seemed an inevitable consequence of something that had gone before. In the case of Josephs the reader is able not only to admit that Reade's facts about prisons are true, but also that the incidents he relates might easily have happened to the boy. The value of Reade's material in this case lies, not in its sensational nature alone, but in its effect upon a character that seems real and life-like and because the situations seem probable within the limits of the story. In the case of Hardy, however, there is a conflict between two kinds of reader's belief. The reader readily admits that conditions such as Reade described might well prevail in institutions of the sort in which Hardy found himself. The reader cannot understand why Hardy was placed in the asylum to begin with nor can he see what bearing his experiences have upon the plot of the main story. The illusion of reality is sacrificed and the story suffers as a result so that the entire asylum section is revealed for what it is; an interpolated sensationalism quite unnecessary to the novel and quite out of place in it. The reader feels that he is being asked to consider a contrived, rather than an inevitable situation and he is not moved much by Hardy's tribulation for he feels that somehow or other Hardy will emerge unscathed from his ordeal. This, too, is in contrast to the story of Josephs for there the
reader sees the effect of cruel hardship upon a sensitive and timid lad and his suicide at the end of the story is the natural and inevitable result.

As I have suggested earlier in this study, Reade never again achieved that harmonious blending of factual with fictional truth which alone might have made the "dry bones live." Sir Charles Bassett, in A Terrible Temptation, is literally dragged into a madhouse to keep Reade's plot of fiction boiling and the incidents which make up the last half of Put Yourself In His Place seem forced and trivial to the reader who realizes that they would never have happened if Little had not gone to America without first notifying his family of his departure. A Woman-Hater is perhaps the best example of Reade's contempt for what he called the "oily probabilities" of fiction for he frankly abandoned any attempt to blend his own story and his sensational material into probable fiction.

The original plot of this novel of manners was well conceived and nicely balanced. The primary interest centred around six characters: Harrington Vizard and his sister Zoe, Ina Klosking and her husband Ned Severne, Lord Uxmoor and Fanny Dover. These characters were linked in the following manner: Harrington Vizard, the misogynist, though pursued by Fanny Dover, was captured by the charms of Ina Klosking. She, however, was the wife of Severne whose interest in Zoe made him try to trick her into what would have been a disastrous and illegal marriage. Lord Uxmoor, who was also in-
interested in Zoe, rounded out the cast of the story which Reade thought would reveal life among the upper classes of his day. This plot ought to have satisfied Reade because it was not only complete and balanced, but broad enough to supply him with material for a good novel. It is a matter of record, however, that once again he found difficulty with pure invention and in order to bolster up interest in his story he made use of a report which came into his hands of the injustice suffered by women medical students at the hands of the medical profession. Although his reason for using this material may be excused, his method must be condemned; for he arrested his original story and turned to that of Rhoda Gale. He made no effort whatever to integrate her story with his own and excused himself by saying that her story was "a true story the simplicity of which I shall not try to spoil with any vulgar arts of fiction." 1 He expected his readers, however, to accept the facts about women doctors on the level of fiction but although he argues that the story of Rhoda was "not a mere excrescence of my story but she was rooted to it even before the first scene of it" 2 that fact is by no means apparent to the reader nor is it borne out by reality, for as I shall show later his

correspondence with Blackwood reveals that Reade's decision to use the material was made after the novel had been partly written.

Although Reade was not always as artless in his use of sensational padding as he was in *A Woman-Hater* it was, nevertheless, an integral part of his fictive creed to combine proved fact with fiction. I have tried to show that good fiction should be a sound study of life embodied in a probable story which deals with characters that seem real and lifelike. The account of Josephs was such a story and it gains in power, not from the facts about prisons which it reveals, but from the fact that Josephs was a real and lifelike character whose trials and persecutions arouse in the reader feelings of anger and shame. In presenting the story of what happened to the boy, Reade, for a time, set fact to one side and instead of making an appeal to our reason chose instead to appeal to our imagination and emotions. He re-arranged, altered, and modified details in the story in order to give it dramatic effect, and in so doing exercised his privilege as a novelist to do anything he liked with his material provided he succeeded in turning it into a probable story. Unfortunately Reade does not seem to have thoroughly understood the reasons for the popularity of his novel for, though he was at once aware that the timeliness of his topic accounted in some measure for the novel's success, he did not realize that this success was based even more upon his method of telling his story than upon the sub-
ject matter itself. As a result he turned his attention to searching out and using the raw facts which he gleaned from the press of his day, but never again in any of his "purpose" novels did he attempt to integrate these startling incidents with his own created material in such a way as to produce a probable story or sound fiction. On the contrary, he spent the rest of his life sneering at the "oily probabilities of fiction" and those who employed them, steadfastly maintaining that "fertile situations are the true cream of fiction," and fertile situations as Reade understood them meant melodramatic incidents and sensational facts and very little else.

By turning his back on character development and on a study of the impact of circumstances upon lifelike people Reade was forced to provide a great deal of sensational incident in order to fill his novels. At first, in *Hard Cash* as well as in *It Is Never Too Late To Mend*, he was able to deal with one major social abuse in each work. In *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* it was prison conditions; in *Hard Cash*, insane asylums. The effect of disjointedness, therefore, is less apparent in these novels than it is in later works. In *A Terrible Temptation*, however, his original theme of kept mistresses did not sustain his work so he returned to the theme of private lunatic asylums. In *Put Yourself In His*

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Place, which is the one novel in which he deliberately set out to attack a social abuse, the story of Little's struggle with the trades is not enough and a number of other topics are introduced some of which have no bearing whatever on the struggle with the trades. Reade was forced to start more hares than ever in A Simpleton and the result is that it is more disjointed than any work that came from his pen. Perhaps he was sincere in arguing that "fertile situations are the true cream of fiction" but analysis shows that in reality he came suspiciously close to making a virtue of a necessity and I am convinced that he did no more than this. The proof lies, I think, in A Woman-Hater where he frankly abandoned any attempt to work over his material in order to make something of his own out of it, but bluntly told Blackwood, his publisher, of his motives in using the material on women doctors, and rather irritably anticipated any questions that might arise in the minds of his readers regarding this section by telling them that Rhoda was "not a mere excrescence" of his story but that "she was rooted to it even before the first scene of it," though no evidence whatever can be found to support the statement.

It is, of course, not enough to say that the use of sensational facts alone accounted for the popularity of his fiction though it was in large measure responsible for it. Reade was a good raconteur and in his hands a story lost nothing in the telling. He was well-grounded in the melodramatic technique of the theatre of his time and he carried
his skill over into his fiction. He uses dialogue in his novels as a dramatist does in his plays to advance his story and sustain interest. His stories seldom drag and at times they race on almost at breakneck speed, a quality which was in pleasant contrast to much of the fiction of the time. Sometimes his prose is sustained and powerful, compelling interest, and certainly he was gifted in using the correct expression or illustration to make plain his meaning.

The reasons then, for his popularity were not incon siderable. He chose topics which interested his contemporaries and he presented them in an interesting, if melodramatic, way. He set out to catch the public ear and he succeeded. Had his only aim been that of becoming popular he undoubtedly would have achieved unqualified success, but, as we saw at the beginning of this essay, he felt that not only passing popularity but lasting fame was due him. He was quite wrong in this assumption and if he had heeded the warnings of contemporary critics he would have discovered why; for their criticisms of his fiction parallel those of modern judges and both agree that when Reade deliberately sought popularity by writing melodrama he sacrificed his chance for lasting fame as a novelist, a chance which anyone who has read The Cloister And The Hearth will agree was excellent.
PART II

THE POPULARITY OF READE'S FICTION IN HIS OWN DAY.

It may be well at this point in our study of Reade to set down in some detail the facts which prove the popularity of his writings in his own day. It is, I think, quite true to say that no writer except Dickens was more popular than Reade. From 1856 until his death in 1884 his name was well known and his works were widely read, so much so in fact that he died convinced that he would be long remembered in English letters. The records of his dealings with his various publishers are useful in forming some estimate of his popularity and they reveal some very interesting facts, not only about his work but about the man himself.

His first novel, Peg Woffington, was published on the 17th of December, 1852. Both this novel and Christie Johnstone, which followed it in June of the next year, were fairly well received by critics and the general public but neither was an outstanding success, and it is safe to say that had Reade written nothing else he would soon have been forgotten. It Is Never Too Late To Mend, however, published in 1856, raised him at once from obscurity to fame.

Within two months of its appearance it became evident that It Is Never Too Late To Mend was a success. In a letter to his Boston publisher, Fields, Reade stated that a cut had been made into a second edition as early as
October 4th, or two months after its publication, and there is reason to believe that its popularity in America was greater than in England. The story of Reade's dealings with Bentley, his English publisher, is worth noting for it helps us to estimate the extent of Reade's new-found popularity. Bentley, who had published Peg Woffington and Christie Johnstone, had done so on the basis of what Reade called "the half-profit swindle" which may best be explained by reference to the actual terms of their agreement. These were the terms:

"It is agreed that the said Richard Bentley shall publish at his own expense and risk a work at present entitled Peg Woffington, and after deducting from the produce of the sales thereof the charges of printing, paper, advertisements, embellishments if any, and other incidental expenses, including the allowance of 10 per cent on the gross amount of the sale for commission and risk of bad debts, the profits remaining of every edition that shall be printed of the work are to be divided into two equal parts, one moiety to be paid to the said Charles Reade and the other moiety to be paid to the said Richard Bentley ..."

Bentley did not purchase the copyright of either Peg Woffington or Christie Johnstone, which reverted to Reade as soon as the sales of the novels repaid the publisher's outlay. By 1856 three editions of Christie Johnstone had

1. Elwin, op. cit., p. 84, ll. 30-37, p. 85, ll. 1-10.
been sold and there was no doubt that Reade was the rightful owner of the copyright. Bentley, a shrewd man of business, was impressed by the increasing sales of *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* and saw in Reade "an author more productive of profit than any since he had lost Dickens and Harrison Ainsworth, and he was eager to issue any book with Reade's name on the title page." ¹ He approached Reade for permission to issue a cheap edition of *Christie Johnstone* but Reade refused for he preferred "a smaller public at half-a-guinea" to "a wider circle of readers at three-and-six-pence." ² In spite of this refusal Bentley issued the cheap edition on February 17th, 1857 and his estimate of Reade's popularity was vindicated for the edition sold out within a month. Reade, however, was extremely indignant at Bentley's high-handed conduct and took legal action against him. Reade lost his case and although he said in a letter to Ticknor and Fields, "were he (Bentley) the only publisher in the British Isles, he should never publish another work for me, except by fraud or violence" ³ it appears that Reade was forced to allow him to publish his next work, entitled *The Course Of True Love Never Did Run Smooth* for Reade points out in the Eighth Commandment that Bentley had pur-

2. Ibid., 11. 27-28.
chased the copyright of two of the three stories that made up this work and "by the light of It Is Never Too Late To Mend ... sold twenty-five thousand copies in a few months." 1

Reade spurned Bentley's offer of £700 for his next novel, White Lies and, indeed, obtained a judgment at law which forbade the publisher to issue any edition of Reg Woffington or Christie Johnstone after October 5th, 1857. The effect of this was detrimental to both parties for not only was Bentley kept from sharing Reade's later successes, but Reade discovered that other publishers were unwilling to deal with an author so independent and unmanageable; and he was forced to publish his next five novels, including The Cloister And The Hearth, on a commission basis. White Lies was published in 1857 by Trubner after it had run as a serial in the flourishing London Journal. This work was admittedly a "pot-boiler" for Reade said of it:

"I sat down to write a pack of fibs... One or two honest fellows came about me, animated with a friendly warmth, to bid for the coming fibs. I bled them." 2

It is little wonder, therefore, that as a serial it was not a success and in the opinion of R. L. Stevenson "nearly wrecked that valuable property, the London Journal," 3 but it is proof of the popularity of his name that, in spite of this, Bradbury and Evans who had set up their magazine

2. Ibid., p. 130, ll. 17-20.
Once A Week in opposition to Dickens's All The Year Round chose Reade as the "next most celebrated 'sensation novelist'"\(^1\) to supply a story which would be the main feature of the new venture. This work, entitled A Good Fight, appeared not only in Once A Week in England but in Harper's Weekly in America but there is no evidence to suggest that there was anything extraordinary about its reception. In fact Reade was a little dissatisfied with Harper's treatment of him for he complained:

"I don't feel quite satisfied. A Good Fight is a masterpiece. A Tale of Two Cities is not a masterpiece. Yet Messrs. Harper gave Five Thousand Dollars (£1000) for it, and to me one-twentieth of that sum. Now this might be just in England; but hardly just in America, where you know very well, I rank at least three times higher than I do in this country."

He was dissatisfied, too, with his English publisher but for a different reason. It appears that Lucas, the editor of Once A Week insisted upon the right of editing Reade's story and this created such bad feeling that Reade brought the story to a summary conclusion. Although Reade said that the story "had done great things for them"\(^3\) he admitted that the publishers did not think so and blamed the fact that

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2. Ibid., p. 147, ll. 17-23.
3. Ibid., p. 148, l. 23.
the story "suffered in serial form" 1 upon "the marvelous incapacity" 2 with which the numbers had been concluded.

A Good Fight was the nucleus of The Cloister And The Hearth and this work, which was, of course, his masterpiece, appeared two years later in October 1861 and was favourably received by critics and public alike. It was not as well received, however, as It Is Never Too Late To Mend had been and in view of the labour and time which he had expended upon it Reade was disappointed. He resolved never again to go out of his century for subject matter and The Cloister And The Hearth marks a turning point in Reade's career for from then on, with the single exception of Griffith Gaunt, he devoted his energies to writing on contemporary themes and his next novel, Hard Cash, though inferior in every way to his masterpiece, made a smashing hit with the public.

Hard Cash appeared as a serial in All The Year Round, the magazine of which Dickens was the editor. Dickens went to considerable trouble to engage Reade as a contributor for he considered him "the best man to be got." 3 Moreover he allowed Reade to name his own price and paid £800 for the story. Unfortunately for Dickens the story was a disappointment as a serial for, as Reade himself reveals,

2. Ibid., p. 148, ll. 31-32.
3. Ibid., p. 162, l. 31.
the circulation of the magazine dropped some 3000 copies. The story was a success when published in book form and Reade did not regret having turned down an offer from another publisher, Smith, of £2000 for the copyright plus an additional £1000 if the story were published in the Cornhill Magazine. It is interesting to note that Reade considered the £800 that he got from Dickens, plus the £300 from Harper's Weekly a better offer than Smith's, for it means that he was sure that his book sales would exceed the difference of £900 between Smith's offer of £2000 and the £1100 which he was guaranteed by Dickens and Harpers. Actually he was offered £2250 for the work by Sampson Low and the fact that he did not avail himself of this but, instead, allowed Low to publish the book on commission indicates that he was more sure in this way of realizing the £5000 which he thought Hard Cash ought to bring. In his letter to Low on settling terms he expressed not only his confidence in the success of his work but also the reasons for this confidence. He said:

"I trust, my dear sir, you will allow that I have now made an effort to meet you. I will only add that the ordinary novel, which deals, however ably, with shadows only, is one kind of property, a story that cuts deep into the realities of the day, and has already set hundreds discussing it as history and law, is a different thing; it finds buyers as well as readers, and that amongst a class that does not buy novels as a rule."

Reade's faith in his work was fully justified for Elwin points out that "the publications of The Cloister And The Hearth and Hard Cash assured their author not only of a place among living authors second only to Dickens, but also of an appreciable income. Both books were substantial successes..." 1

The publication of Griffith Gaunt brought Reade to the peak of his popularity. This work appeared first as a serial in The Argosy in England and The Atlantic Monthly in America. Reade later claimed that the story "floated" 2 the former magazine and was "eagerly read" 3 in the latter and there is every reason to believe him. It was published in book form in England by Chapman and Hall and in America by Ticknor and Fields and its appearance aroused a storm of debate. Reade was accused of immorality by critics in England, America, and Canada and both the accusations and Reade's spirited defense of his work received wide publicity. Indeed, Reade sued the London Journal, threatened to sue The Globe and replied to the charges made by The Round Table in an article entitled The Prurient Prude which may be found in Readiana. He was supported by Edwin Arnold and Wilkie Collins, and although Dickens refused to appear before the court in Reade's defense because he did not wish to be implicated in the case, he praised the work with the

1. Elwin, op. cit., p. 178, 11. 5-10.
2. Ibid., p. 190, 1. 16.
3. Ibid., p. 190, 1. 16.
exception of certain situations which he considered "coarse and disagreeable." Reade won his case and received damages of six cents. His critics had done him a great service, of course, for "notoriety inspired galloping sales" both in England and America and it is likely that The Memoir was not far off the mark in saying that Griffith Gaunt was "the culminating point of Charles Reade's literary career."  

Foul Play. Reade's next novel appeared in serial form in Once A Week on January 4th, 1868 and was published in book form at the end of May by Bradbury and Evans who paid £2000 for the limited copyright of the work. This novel was no sooner written than Reade signed a contract with George Smith on very favourable terms indeed. Reade agreed:

"to furnish a novel the size of Foul Play to appear in 13 numbers Cornhill beginning January 1, 1869. Smith to pay for this bare right £2000 with a right of purchasing the copyright for £2000 more four months before completion. Failing such purchase copyright is mine and I can publish in 3 vols, 28 days before completion in Cornhill. I have the exclusive right of sending early sheets to America and then publish after serial."

Actually the novel did not appear in serial form until

1. Elwin, op. cit., p. 189, l. 27.
2. Ibid., p. 190, l. 17.
3. Ibid., p. 190, l. 23.
March and it ran to seventeen instead of thirteen installments. Its success was "unqualified", Smith exercised his option of purchasing the copyright and issued the novel, *Put Yourself In His Place*, in three volumes in June, 1870.

It must have been gratifying to Reade, after his earlier difficulties with publishers, to find himself eagerly sought after by no less than five reputable concerns. He was approached by the Rev. T. Teignmouth-Shore, editor of *The Quiver* and *Cassell's Family Magazine*, who wanted Reade to write a serial story. G. P. Putnam, an American, also approached him in the hope of weaning him away from Harper Brothers who were just as anxious to retain his services as Putnam was to secure them. Frederick Chapman, who had issued *Griffith Gaunt*, was eager to win him back from George Smith who maintained a close connection with Reade in the hope of holding him to terms for his next book. This was *A Terrible Temptation* which appeared first in serial form in *Cassell's Family Magazine* in England and *Harper's Monthly* in America and aroused such a storm of comment and criticism that the publishers who had been so eager to secure the rights for the book became equally determined to have nothing to do with it. Smith, indeed, said he was "afraid

to publish it" ¹ and Chapman's lack of enthusiasm provoked
the following comment by Reade:

"Yesterday I treated with Mr. Frederick Chapman for A Terrible Temptation. He gives me £600 for a 3 vol. edition of 1500 copies. Should this be exhausted, fresh arrangements to be made. This is a pitiable decline on former sales. He gave me £1500 for limited copyright of Griffith Gaunt. Bradbury and Evans gave me £2000 for ditto of Foul Play. The serial in its first form will soon be the only considerable market open to me." ²

Reade's discouragement was premature, for the book enjoyed an amazing success, particularly in America. In a letter to The Times entitled Facts must be Faced, Reade revealed some figures regarding the book's sale. He said:

"...my English circulation is larger than that of The Times; and in the United States three publishers have already sold three hundred and seventy thousand copies of this novel—which, I take it, is about thirty times the circulation of The Times in the United States, and nearly six times its English circulation." ³

It will be seen from these figures that the circulation of A Terrible Temptation closely approached, if it did not

2. Ibid., p. 220, ll. 10-17.
exceed, half a million copies which proves that Reade enjoyed a popularity which might well be the envy of modern writers. Such was the magic of his name that even less pretentious works than A Terrible Temptation were eagerly bought and read. We have Reade's own figures on the sale of The Wandering Heir in proof of this. In an Appendix to this novel Reade tells us:

"The Wandering Heir was first published and registered as a drama 18th December, 1872, to hinder dramatic pirates from stealing the subject in the theatres. A few days later it appeared, as a story, occupying the whole Christmas number of the Graphic.

The sale in Europe was two hundred thousand copies, - the price one shilling.

In the United States Messrs. Harper & Co. sold a hundred and fifty thousand copies in their weekly, and eighty thousand in book form.

Messrs. Rose and Hunter (Toronto), ten thousand in journal, and five thousand in book.

The pirates in America and the Colonies sold about ninety thousand more, as I am informed."

Although Reade's popularity diminished noticeably towards the end of his career, it did not entirely desert him. It is interesting to note, for example, that A Woman-Hater, published anonymously in England and America, was quickly recognized as having come from his pen. The cautious Blackwood, for whom Reade was very eager to write, had insisted upon publishing A Woman-Hater anonymously be-

cause he did not want the "odour" of Reade's name to "offend
the sensitive nostrils of the readers of the Magazine," and Harper's in America agreed to co-operate, although
much against their will. Within a week Reade's identity
was discovered, for Mrs. Oliphant wrote to Blackwood congratu-}

ating him upon his new author, and S. S. Conant, editor
of Harper's Weekly wrote to Reade:

"I enclose a notice of A Woman-Hater, which shows that you have
already been discovered, although your publishers and editors have
scrupulously maintained your secret.
Your most intelligent readers
here are women; if I may judge from
the ignominious defeat suffered by
one of the Messrs. Harper and my-
self in attempting to delude the
ladies of our respective families
on the subject."

The notice to which Conant referred was probably taken from
The Boston Daily Globe of the 20th June, which, reviewing
the July number of Harper's Magazine said:

"Garth, Julian Hawthorne's story,
is curtailed, apparently to make
room for a new story entitled A
Woman-Hater; this is announced as
"published anonymously", but if it
be not the work of Mr. Charles Reade,
it is written by somebody who has
studied him closely."

Not only professional reviewers detected Reade's hand in

1. Elwin, op. cit., p. 295, ll. 5-6.
2. Ibid., p. 304, ll. 27-31.
3. Ibid., p. 305, ll. 7-11.
A Woman-Hater but many of his readers did too. Two Wash-
ington ladies wrote to Harper's monthly and said:

"To attempt to bury the author-

ship of such a novel as A Woman-

Hater under such an incognito

as that of perfect silence! Ah,

the dear little sentences, all full

of feeling! The heart that beats

all through the works! A Woman-

Hater, by Charles Reade! A dia-

mond among glass; a star behind

a cloud; think you they cannot be
discerned?"

The appearance of Rhoda vale in the story convinced many
more readers that Reade was the author and some even went
so far as to write him congratulating him upon the stand
which he had taken. Indeed, in the face of the obvious
fact that Reade's anonymity was no disguise at all Harp-
er's wrote enclosing a letter from the Woman's College
of the New York Infirmary:

"Don't you think it about time,
in view of the enclosed letter and
paragraphs, and of a good many
similar paragraphs, that you re-
lieve us of your injunction not
to betray the authorship of A
Woman-Hater?"

Blackwood stubbornly refused to release Reade from his
obligation and maintained the anonymous until the story
finished its serial run, but when he published it in book
form in June, 1877 Reade's name appeared on the title page
as it did on that of the American edition published by

2. Ibid., p. 312, 11. 25-29.
Harper's.

In April of the following year Harper's assured Reade that "there can be no doubt whatever as to the success of the story in this country" but it is apparent that Reade's popularity had declined. It was in this year that Tillotson approached him with an offer of £640 for a novel to be syndicated under the system in which Tillotson was the pioneer. Elwin states that Reade was discouraged by the "depressing figures of the book-sales on his last three novels," and for this and reasons of ill-health, did not produce A Perilous Secret until 1883.

Although by this time the sands of Reade's popularity were fast running out it cannot be denied that at the height of his success his reputation was great. He made a fortune with his pen and what he wrote was eagerly read and much discussed by critics and the reading public alike. Even his sharpest critics admitted that in popularity he stood in the front rank of the novelists of his generation and the writer who said "there is not a circulating library in any town which would venture to omit Charles Reade's last novel" was merely stating a fact.

2. Ibid., p. 333, l. 33.
Throughout Reade's literary career reputable critics and reviewers were uneasy about his works. None denies his popularity, of course, for that would have been flying in the face of fact, yet many consistently sought to show Reade that he was following the wrong course in his fiction. Naturally different critics expressed different views. Some attacked him savagely while others praised him inordinately and Reade perhaps despaired of finding much instruction from critics who contradicted one another. He suggested this himself once in a letter to Mrs. Seymour for he said: "...if I listened to my critics, there is nothing somebody or other would not cut out, and if I listened again, there is nothing I should not restore." 1 Perhaps it was his own conceit that led him to disregard the opinions of others but whatever the reason we know for a fact that he followed the plan which he set down for himself throughout his entire career and that he seldom departed from it despite the warnings and advice of his contemporaries.

The first critic to raise his voice against Reade was a writer in Blackwood's Magazine. This reviewer admitted

1. Elwin, op. cit., p. 114, ll. 31-34.
the popular success of *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* but he considered it a "vulgar" success and felt, too, that Mr. Reade's partisans would "be willing so far as his true fame is concerned to let this popular work slip out of being." He felt that the book was full of Reade's "characteristic faults and few of his excellences." He gave as an example of the latter the struggle in jail which was, in his opinion, "full of dramatic power and wonderful interest," but he regarded as examples of Reade's characteristic faults the improbability of plot and incident of the story. He also criticised the theatrical ending of the book and it is clear that he did not consider *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* good fiction, asserting that it owed its success to its sensational and melodramatic nature and not to its value as a sound study of life.

It is interesting to note that Reade's next important novel, *The Cloister And The Hearth*, contained fewer of his characteristic faults than any other of his works. This novel has unity and coherence to a degree not often found in his fiction and his treatment of character shows what he could do in this field when it suited his purpose to try.

2. Loc. cit.
3. Loc. cit.
4. Loc. cit.
It is true, of course, that there is considerable melodrama in the story and that Reade was unable to resist the temptation, from time to time, to put in sensational and artificial effects. But these faults pale into insignificance in the face of the moving story of Margaret and Gerard and it is the insight into life and the knowledge of human nature that Reade reveals which make his novel great. This fact was recognized at once by his contemporaries, and their opinions may well be summed up in those of a reviewer who wrote in the Atlantic monthly in February 1862:

"The Cloister And The Hearth, in spite of its faults, is a really great book. It is a contribution to history as well as romance. No other volume could so well describe European life in the fifteenth century. The author has studied the annals etc. of that period and has coupled it with his knowledge of powers and passions of all ages. The result is a romance of history containing much essential truth, for Reade had the heart to feel and the imagination to conceive the realities of the time. Characterization is original, various, powerful. Scenes of passion show hold upon emotional elements of character and the use of language keeps pace. In vigour and vividness of description and narration this novel excels any of his others... This novel is classed among the best of the last twenty years."

It is very doubtful whether Reade's technique in The Cloister And The Hearth was the result of any wish on his part to

please his discerning critics. On the basis of the evidence at our disposal we are more justified in assuming that he was bogged down in his subject; and his lack of opportunity for exploiting any subject of contemporary interest left him free to develop his novel as he did. It is certain, however, that he was disappointed with the book's reception by the general public which, to use his own expression, preferred "a live ass to a dead lion" and he made up his mind to devote his energies in the future to topics of his own day. Clearly, then, he valued public approval above critical approval and it is no wonder that in gaining the former he lost the latter.

In spite of the fact that Dickens professed to like *Hard Cash* which was Reade's next novel it appears that he considered Reade's attack upon private lunatic asylums bitter and uncalled for. He knew that the facts Reade used would provoke controversy and in order to disassociate himself and his magazine from it he appended the following note to the last installment of the story:

"The statements and opinions of this journal generally are, of course, to be received as the statements and opinions of its conductor. But this is not so in the case of a work of fiction first published in these pages as a serial story, with the name of an eminent writer attached to it. When one of my literary brothers

does me the honour to undertake such a task, I hold that he executes it on his own personal responsibility, and for the sustainment of his own reputation; and I do not consider myself at liberty to exercise that control over his text which I claim as to other contributors."

Other critics objected to Reade's use of facts and felt that their effect upon his novel was bad. The Athenaeum said of the novel:

"Hard Cash contains gold that rings out clear music as it falls on the table, silver of impure coinage, and dirty copper. It is a love story, an attack upon private mad-houses, and a satire on the medical profession. The love story is pure gold; the base silver must be looked for in the chapters on asylums; the satire on the medical faculty is copper."

This criticism, together with that of Dickens, indicates that some of Reade's contemporaries at any rate, felt that Hard Cash lacked the uniform excellence of good fiction. In their opinion Reade did not succeed in moulding his subject matter into a creditable story, which, as an example of fictional truth was above criticism; but instead so combined factual with fictional truth that controversy about the former was inevitable.

Reade's treatment of Griffith Gaunt was severely criticised too, although this time it was not his use of facts that was called in question but his melodramatic technique. A writer in the Atlantic Monthly objected to

the artificiality of the denouement and gave as his opinion that the story to the point of Catherine's trial was of "high quality" but "from there to the end it is courageous but not art." To defend his criticism he said:

"Is it just in a novelist to raise to the heights and then descend to the level of comic opera? Griffith Gaunt presents jealousy, anger, lies and their effects but the denouement of the story is a let down. Contrasted with Tito Melemac in Romola it is an artificial rather than an artistic solution of a moral problem."

The significance of this criticism lies, not so much in the fact that it was true of Griffith Gaunt, but that the technique here criticized was that which Reade used in all his fiction. Griffith Gaunt was a failure because Reade preferred to depart from fictional truth in order to exploit the sensational possibilities of the story. Reade was unwilling to allow his story to progress to its inevitable and tragic end but preferred instead to affront the intelligence of his more discerning readers by forcing them to accept the artificial and even ridiculous solution to Griffith's problem. A brief glance at the story I think will illustrate this point.

2. Loc. cit.
3. Loc. cit.
Griffith Gaunt was a Protestant squire and the husband of a devout, high-principled Catholic lady. He was a man of strong passions and an inordinately jealous disposition. He suspected his wife of infidelity because of her interest in a young Catholic priest. In a fit of passion Gaunt deserted her and, under an assumed name, took up residence at an inn miles away from his home. There, in the course of time, he married a young girl of good character but of lower birth than himself. About a year later he returned to his former home for money and discovered that his suspicions concerning his first wife were unfounded and that she really loved him deeply. Reconciled with her he returned to his second wife intending to declare his deception and make what amends he could. During his absence, however, the girl had given birth to a son and because of this Gaunt felt unable to destroy her happiness. He allowed the deception to continue until he was finally unmasked by accident, and he returned to his former home. It was not long before his first wife learned of his second marriage. After a bitter quarrel Gaunt disappeared, a pistol shot was heard in the night, and his wife was accused of his murder because a body resembling his was found in the river near his home.

Up to this point Reade wrote well. His story is interesting and his portrayal of character is convincing and good. What follows however, destroys much of what was good in his work, for, as the aforementioned critic suggests,
he descends to the level not only of melodrama but of comic opera.

During his first wife's trial Gaunt, who was not dead, did not appear, and had Mercy Vint, his second wife, not come to the aid of her rival the latter would have been convicted. A firm friendship grew up between Gaunt's two wives. Gaunt who all through the trial had been in a drunken stupor returned later, and his first wife and he were soon reunited. Mercy Vint married a titled friend of Mrs. Gaunt and the child she bore Gaunt died. The story ends happily but not very convincingly for in order to bring about the happy ending Reade made Gaunt renounce his nature and behave like a knave and a weakling. Therefore, what might have been a valuable study of human nature and emotions became simply an interesting story which was robbed of meaning and significance by reason of the improbability of its denouement. There was enough in it to appeal to the mass of his readers, but sounder literary critics deprecated the fact that in the book Reade had turned his back upon his method in The Cloister And The Hearth and had given his time to writing melodrama.

With the publication of Put Yourself In His Place critics grew louder in their condemnation of Reade's system than ever before. As I sought to show in the foregoing outline of this story Reade did not make it seem probable but relied upon melodrama and factual truth to sustain interest. This
fact was noted by a writer in *Blackwood's Magazine*, who, in the following statement, sets forth very clearly the basic weakness of Reade's technique:

"Mr. Reade is one of the most experienced and accomplished of playwrights, but he presumes sadly upon our ignorance and unbelief. Success has made him over daring. We can swallow a great deal when it is provided for us by his bold and skilful hand, but there are limits even to our faith in him. *Put Yourself In His Place* is about the wildest of all. In arguing that Truth is stranger than fiction Reade goes wrong and makes the highest blunder - one unworthy of him, and of his unmistakable powers. Fact is no guide to art...Mr. Reade is not guilty of the mistake of copying where he should reproduce, for even in his impetuosity his hand cannot forget its cunning nor his mind those instincts of the maker which turn the wildest realities into something like natural truth. Yet he is running a very perilous course. No man needs crudities of fact less yet no man uses them more. He could not be dull if he were to try yet we wish he would give us something of his own, something which might happen by divine right of truth and genius not something which has happened by vulgar tyranny of fact."

This criticism, of course, challenged Reade's entire fictive theory. The critic pointed out that the duty of the novelist is to present a picture of life complete in itself and not to set forth a recapitulation of facts-held

together by flimsy "oily probabilities." He pointed out, too, that Reade's facts did not justify his fiction but instead robbed it of its illusion of reality, and that the product of his labours was not a probable study of human nature but was instead an improbable and unconvincing story. He was seconded in this opinion by a writer in The Nation who had this to say of Put Yourself In His Place:

"..."And Fiction" says Reade as if he thought something of the kind ought to be said "whatever you may have been told to the contrary, is the highest, widest, noblest and greatest of all the arts" which may be true, though honestly things in this book have made us doubt it. At the same time we are bound to believe, from thorough conviction by Reade's former books, that, when he ceases to be an artist, it is of his own motion. We only wonder that he cares so little for the public that honours him so much, for it seems to us that he finally sacrifices to theatrical effects what was first and best in the conception of his story. The book is interesting and then let us say that it is a pity that it is not less interesting and better."

As readers became more familiar with Reade's method, interest in his subjects waned and, as a result, the deficiencies, or at least the shortcomings, of his technique stood out more clearly. A Terrible Temptation, which was written on the same plan as his earlier "purpose" novels,

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illustrates this point. Although the Atlantic Monthly said that it had "no misgivings concerning the literary character" of this work it made the following comment, and if they are not discussing "literary character" it is difficult to decide just what they are discussing:

"We are, of course, tired of insane hospitals, and of the universal knowledge of the author — Mr. Rolfe is to be suffered rather than enjoyed — the author's apparatus and manoeuvres are in droll disproportion to the effect he produces and his habit of indexing his many notebooks is of no interest to the story and it is all injurious to the artistic conceptions."

The Nation, too, objected to Reade's use of extraneous matter and felt that the novel was "in the worst of Reade's two manners." The reviewer contrasted A Terrible Temptation with Reade's earlier novels and said:

"Such perfect gems of art as Peg Woffington and others in which everything is beautifully evolved from a central motive which governs all the parts he no longer cares to produce and in their place we are yearly more likely to get from him some astonishing farrago of improbabilities in which there is little of his characteristic excellences except his wit, which is brilliant, and occasional flashes of light on human nature. Unity and natural coherence of plot, as in the early stories, which are of poetic and beautiful simplicity, we no longer expect; nor well-drawn

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2. Loc. cit.
characters nor a probable story; and in this *Terrible Temptation* we get none of them any more than in *Put Yourself In His Place* and *Griffith Gaunt*."

This is severe criticism indeed and the fact that such strong disapproval of his work should come from many sources indicates that his more discerning critics were becoming increasingly impatient with him. As we have seen earlier, however, the popular appeal of *A Terrible Temptation* was considerable for it contained its full share of melodrama and sensationalism. In one point only did it differ from his earlier successes and it is worthy of mention. In *A Terrible Temptation* Reade was not fortunate enough to hit upon a new and interesting topic to bolster up his story, with the result that it drags from time to time; and the account of Rolfe, as well as the scenes in the mad-house, are seen for what they are - rather clumsy attempts to keep his story going. Although *A Terrible Temptation* lacked unity and coherence it should be noted that the same criticism must be made of *It Is Never Too Late To Mend*. The difference lies in the fact that in the latter he had been unable to use one subject in order to carry his work, whereas in the former he was forced to use three or four.

Naturally the appearance of disunity is greater in *A Terrible Temptation* than in any of his purpose novels so far but the

criticisms of A Terrible Temptation must, of necessity, be applied to all his popular works since his method for all was the same.

This fact seems to be suggested by a critic in The Century Magazine who, in looking for some work of Reade's to praise before condemning A Terrible Temptation, ignored any of Reade's former "purpose" novels but chose Peg Woffington and Christie Johnstone instead. He said:

"We remember the sparkle and flow and vividness of Peg Woffington; the genuine strength and sweetness of Christie Johnstone. How glad we were that Reade wrote! How have we learned to shudder at an announcement of a fresh story bearing his name. Instead of sparkle we have flippancy; instead of flow; spasms; instead of true vividness we have cheap melodramatic shams; and overlying and underlying everything an air, - nay, more, a positive odour of coarse vulgarity which is disgusting."

Although this critic wished that there were some "means of rousing in the reading public a liking for pure English and an aversion to indecency of plot to force writers away from police court records as source material" he admitted the popularity of Reade's melodrama for he said "there is not a circulating library in any town which would venture to omit 'Charles Reade's last novel'. In common with

2. Loc. cit.
3. Loc. cit.
all Reade's critics he regretted that Reade had chosen to neglect the powers which he had revealed in his early works and had chosen, instead, to produce superficial, melodramatic thrillers based upon current happenings.

It is perhaps only to be expected that Reade's last two novels were more severely criticised than any of his others for they are poor stuff indeed. There is apparent, too, in certain quarters an apathy toward Reade that indicates that some critics at least had long since lost patience with him and no longer hoped for anything good from his pen. A Simpleton did not arouse much interest, and critical opinion of it may safely be summed up in the remarks of a writer in Harper's New Monthly Magazine, a publication, it should be noted, with which Reade had had considerable dealings and which had at no time in his career been severe in its judgment of him. These are the comments upon A Simpleton:

"...A Simpleton hardly ranks among his best stories yet so long as he resists his fatal temptation to run to impossible romance it is good...We commend the first half of the story to those who want a sensible novel of real life and the last half to those who want an impossible melodrama, sensational but in-

nocent."

A Woman-Hater, however, received much rougher handling. The Atlantic Monthly felt that the book lacked any "intel-

ligible aim." It felt, too, that, not only were the characters poorly portrayed, but the entire story was poorly presented. The writer said:

"Kloshing is not made enough of. Severne is in for no purpose. Gale is not well done. Miss Gale and her troubles are clumsily grafted on to the story. Mr. Vizard is only a woman hater in courtesy to Mr. Reade. He merely increases the general effect of disjointedness. This division and distraction of interests together with the poverty of the style and a tawdriness in the atmosphere of the whole story recalling the aspect of theatres behind the scenes, deprive A Woman-Hater of what we have learned to think Mr. Reade's characteristic charm - that of clear purpose, vivid picturing, absorbing plot, and the introduction of people who for the time being engage our sympathies."

The Century Magazine felt that A Woman-Hater was "wholly of Reade" and contained "his worst faults and his brightest charms." What the latter were it did not say but claimed only that the story was "destitute of heart, feeling, humanity and atmosphere." More severe criticism could hardly be made of any work and the reviewer left no doubt as to his opinion of the worth of the book when he said

2. Loc. cit.
4. Loc. cit.
5. Loc. cit.
that it was "agreeable reading but the reader might wonder if both reader and author might not have been in a better business."  

The first direct mention of Reade's declining popularity with the reading public as a whole was made by a reviewer writing in *The Nation* on July 19th, 1877. He wrote:

"If a new novel by Mr. Reade is not so important an event as it was say twenty years ago, the difference is not due merely to the fact that he writes less well, but also to the greater familiarity of the public with his manner of work. Since Reade began, many novelists have gone more deeply into drawings of women's characters while he is left behind to expound to an indifferent audience the transparent craftiness of his combination of the snake and the cat."

Clearly, then, Reade's fault of exploiting incident at the expense of character development was beginning to bear its inevitable fruit and not only critics, but his public, too, wearied of his method. Actually professional critics in their objections to *A Woman-Hater* merely reiterated their criticisms of most of his other works, but the dissatisfaction of his less critical following arose from the fact that they enjoyed variety and were finding in the works of other authors interests with which

1. *The Century Magazine*, op. cit., p. 720,
Reade did not supply them. His method in writing fiction lost its power to capture their interest and to entertain them and, although the writer who said that "the adult reader will derive about as much pleasure from reading Reade's crude caricatures of a couple of vulgar girls as he would from playing with two china dolls" was perhaps a little unkind to Reade it is true to say that many of his readers had outgrown their liking for his fiction. I hasten to add, however, that their liking for sensationalism and melodrama had not changed; they merely sought it in different and newer forms.

1. The Nation, op.cit., p. 44.
LATER CRITICAL OPINION OF CHARLES READE'S FICTION.

After Reade's death in 1884 the debate regarding his "proper station and definition" as a writer "became at once, for the moment, a matter in some quarters of something like personal controversy." ¹ Many critics did not agree with Sir Walter Besant that Reade "stands in the front rank and he stands alone" ² and Swinburne felt that the disagreement concerning Reade's genius was only natural, for his works were not uniformly good. He said:

"If he had often written as well as he could sometimes write - or, again, if he had often written as ill as he could sometimes write - there would be no possibility of dispute on the subject." ³

Although Swinburne felt that Reade had written "not a few pages which if they do not live as long as the English language will fail to do so through no fault of their own" ⁴ he felt, on the other hand, that Reade had "taken good care that few of his larger and more laboured works shall have so much as a fair chance for their lives" ⁵ for "no man was

5. Ibid., p. 272, 11. 4-6.
ever at more pains to impair his own prospects of literary survival than Reade.

Swinburne criticised Reade for many of the faults to which Reade's contemporaries objected, and it is of interest to note, he mentioned first of all that "not a few of his more glaring faults as a novelist" are traceable to his experience as "a dramatic aspirant." Reade's experience with the stage led him to strive in his fiction for theatrical effects rather than a careful study of character. These effects often created in his stories serious blemishes that are not "effaced" or "redeemed" by the "charming scenes which precede or follow them"; and they often made his people unconvincing. Levi, the Jew in It Is Never Too Late To Mend is an example of a character that "might have done well enough on the boards of a theatre, but does very much less than well between the boards of a novel;" and Mr. Eden is a "far more absolute failure" than Levi. Reade's fault, according to Swinburne, was not only due to a "theatrical style of writing but also to a theatrical habit of mind." He could not resist the opportunity to use "stage effects of sur-

2. Ibid., p. 272, 11. 11-12.
3. Ibid., p. 272, 1. 11.
4. Ibid., p. 272, 1. 18.
5. Ibid., p. 272, 11. 27-29.
6. Ibid., p. 273, 1. 12.
prise, anxiety, and terror" ¹ even when to do so meant the "destruction in the mind of every reader worth having, of all sympathetic or serious interest" ² in his characters. Reade was no worse offender than any other melodramatist whose aim is "to provoke and relieve anxieties on behalf of poetic justice" ³ but he was no better; and it is not surprising that his theatrical tricks and melodramatic effects too often

"cut away the very root of interest from the very centre of his dramatic scheme or ethical design and took from the creation of his fancy the essential property of imaginative life; that quality of moral truth, that condition of credible reality, the want of which deprives fiction of all right to exist and all reason for existing."

In the opinion of Swinburne Reade's treatment of character damaged the appearance of reality of his novels, for Reade was seen too clearly behind his people. He argued that

"Hawes, and even Grotait - a much more lifelike and interesting person than Hawes, are not the creations of a dramatist; they are the creatures of a mechanist; you see the action of the wirepuller behind at every movement they make;..."

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1. Swinburne, op. cit., p. 272, ll. 6-8.
2. Ibid., p. 289, ll. 3-4.
5. Ibid., P. 281, ll. 13-16.
and what is true of these characters is even more true of many others. Reade not only controlled the movements of all his characters but explained and interpreted their actions in a most obtrusive way. He seemed to consider the average reader's intelligence

"incompetent or slow to appre­ciate, with quiet recognition and peaceable approval, the charm or the force of character, the strength or the subtlety of motive displayed in the conduct of action or dialogue, without some vigorous note of more or less direct and personal appeal to the attention and admiration required by the writer as his due."

Swinburne did not question the sincerity of Reade's attacks upon injustice but he did question the artistic success of his efforts. He felt that the prison scenes in *It Is Never Too Late To Mend* are a "flagrant instance of passionate philanthropy riding roughshod over the ruins of artistic propriety" because, in his opinion, the characters were not lifelike and the story was not probable. It is possible, if not imperative, to agree with his general estimate of Reade and yet take exception to the example which he used in proof of it for the judgment of time upon this particular episode seems to indicate that it more closely approximates what good fiction ought to be than any other part of his "purpose" fiction.

1. Swinburne, op. cit., p. 300, ll. 2-5.
2. Ibid., p. 274, ll. 26-27.
There can be, of course, no question of the fact that Reade's "passionate philanthropy" often rode "roughshod over the ruins of artistic propriety" for, as we know, his facts came before his fiction most of the time. Swinburne comments upon Reade's adherence to the principle "that a study from life should be founded on what he calls 'documents' — nay, that it should be made up of these, were they never so noisome or so wearisome" and he gave this as the reason for "the passages of almost superfluous dullness as the dull-est superfluities of ...M. Zola" which disfigure Reade's "purpose" fiction. Reade's unwillingness to suppress and select his facts; his preference for them instead of probable stories, lifelike characters, and a thoughtful comment upon life are responsible in great measure for the inartistic qualities of his novels just as they are proof of his "apparent unconsciousness that fact done into fiction may easily or may ever become disgusting and insufferable" unless it pass through the creative imagination of the author and emerge as something having an appearance of truth and making a sound comment upon life.

Swinburne thought that Reade's strength as a novelist lay in his narrative powers for he said that "there is a vivid force in his best and highest examples of narrative

2. Ibid., p. 275, ll. 9-11.
3. Ibid., p. 295, ll. 6-8.
which informs even prose with something of the effect of epic rather than dramatic poetry, 1 and he felt that this power lifted parts of Reade's works to heights "far beyond the reach of the finest painter of social manners, the most faithful and trustworthy spokesman or showman of commonplace event and character." 2 Such writing is to be found in the account of the homeward voyage of the Agra in Hard Cash; the narrative of Gerard's adventures in the company of Denys of Burgundy in The Cloister And The Hearth; and in the description of the flood in Put Yourself In His Place. Unfortunately these heights, when reached, were not easily maintained and the works in which they appear were too frequently marred by characteristic and serious faults such as those found in the last mentioned work where the "silly old squire" 3 is nothing more than a "venerable stage property not worth the author's care in refurbishing" 4 and where the story was "a little overcharged with details of documentary evidence." 5

Although Swinburne did not agree with Trollope that Reade left "not'a character that will remain!" 6 and as a result faced "oblivion or neglect" 7 he felt that Reade's

2. Ibid., p. 300, ll. 11-14.
3. Ibid., p. 301, l. 3.
4. Ibid., p. 301, ll. 3-4.
5. Ibid., p. 301, ll. 5-6.
6. Ibid., p. 296, l. 16.
hope of fame rested, not upon the sum of his writing, but upon the "excellence of episodes, on the charm of a single character or the effect of a particular scene." He pointed out that time alone would determine Reade's true position as a novelist and in spite of the fact that he personally felt that Reade at his best "was a truly great writer of a truly noble genius" it is plain to be seen that he considered the obstacles which Reade had placed in his own way quite serious enough to accomplish his undoing.

Later critics whose opinions on Reade we must consider fall into two classes. The first is that group of writers who are concerned with a broad study or history of the novel in general and who treat Reade merely as one writer among many. The second, and less numerous group, is that which is interested in Reade's particular contribution to fiction and which discusses at some length his technique, his fictive theory, and the quality of his product. In practically every case modern critics seem anxious to be as lenient as possible with Reade but in spite of this fact it is quite apparent that none feels that Reade's novels entitle him to a place with the masters of his day and there are those who think that there is little to be wondered at in the decline of his popularity.

2. Ibid., p. 302, 11. 22-23.
The Encyclopaedia Britannica makes no critical comment upon Reade but merely mentions his skill in "weaving a complicated plot and devising thrilling situations." It stresses his habit of gathering material from every available source; and considers that "this vast documentation, and Reade's use of it, shows him as a precursor of the school of Zola." The Cambridge History of English Literature also mentions the "immense accumulations of reports of actual events by which he supported his boast, that, when he spoke of fact he was 'upon oath'," and suggests that Reade's use of fact illustrates his "sympathy with the impulse towards realism which was at work in fiction in the middle of the century." His outstanding gift, however, is his ability to produce "sustained and absorbing narrative" such as the homeward voyage of the Agra in Hard Cash and the bursting of the reservoir in Put Yourself In His Place, where his prose is "masterful, concentrated, deliberate and at the highest pitch of excitement, can bear the closest scrutiny of detail." In spite of this power, however,
none of his "purpose" novels compares with The Cloister And
The Hearth in "spaciousness of design, and many-sidedness
of interest, in range of knowledge, in fertility of creation,
in narrative art and in emotional power," because in the
opinion of the critic this work is unique. It is this work
alone that places Reade near the level of his greater con­
temporaries for on the basis of his other novels he must be
judged a "minor novelist."  

Chambers Cyclopaedia of English Literature agrees that
"Charles Reade has not been usually accounted one of the
greatest novelists of the nineteenth century" although
the writer in this case feels that "few would hesitate to
place him foremost or among the very foremost, of the second
order." His work was marred by coarseness and by the
fact that he was "theatrical sometimes rather than dramatic,
and sometimes even dull, weighed down with his authorities -
the blue books, the books of travel, the all too copious
scrapbooks and notebooks with which he fettered his ima­
gination." "With the greatest novelists," he goes on to say
"the reader is conscious only of the story, with him one
is always conscious of the story-teller," for, though he
considered Reade an excellent story-teller he pointed out

1. Cambridge History Of English Literature, op.cit., p.477,  
11. 23-26.
2. Ibid., p. 477, l. 28.
3. Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature,1903,vol. 3,  
4. Ibid., p. 30-32.
5. Ibid., p. 33-38.
that there was some tone or mannerism that from time to
time "jars upon us." 1

Among literary historians who are chiefly concerned
with a study of the novel there is some difference of opinion
regarding Reade's particular gifts as a novelist but very
little regarding the value of his fiction in general. He
is not considered a great novelist by any. In A Study Of
Prose Fiction, Bliss Perry makes no mention of Reade or of
his work; and David Cecil in his book Early Victorian
Novelists makes only an oblique reference to Reade when he
says of Charlotte Bronte:

"But equally she cannot be dis­
missed to a minor rank, to the
Fanny Burneys, the Charles Reades:
for unlike them she rises at times
to greatest heights." 2

Although such treatment as this may easily be considered
severe, one is tempted to point out that Cecil has said in
two lines what many other critics have taken pages to set
down, for no critic calls Reade great and all feel that the
faults that marred his fiction were too serious and too
numerous to allow him a place with the masters of his age.

In the opinion of Cornelius Weygandt Reade's greatest
gift is that of "epical narrative," 3 and Louis Cazamian

1. Chambers's Cyclopaedia of English Literature, 1903, vol. 3,
p. 41.
2. Cecil, David, Early Victorian Novelists, London, Con­
3. Weygandt, Cornelius, op. cit., p. 159, 1. 5.
agrees that his chief merit lies in the fact that he "knows how to tell a story." They feel at the same time that this power in narrative does not compensate for his faults and that it is not indicative of the general level of his work. J.B. Priestley points out this unevenness in the following statement:

"He had certainly one gift ... a superb gift of narration. When his imagination has really caught fire and a great scene is to hand, he is as compelling as a cavalry charge, and if novelists were to be judged by a few extracts, he would seem one of the greatest geniuses of the century."

In the opinion of modern critics one of the reasons for the unevenness in Reade's work was his preoccupation with attested fact. Priestley, for example, calls him the "most thorough-going of all the mid-Victorian novelists who wrote stories around various social abuses" and says "he was the first - and in England certainly the most laborious - of the "document" novelists, who do not begin their stories until they are surrounded by notebooks and newspaper cuttings full of facts bearing on the kind of life they are about to describe." In spite of this care, however, Reade was, in this reviewer's opinion "perhaps the most unequal storyteller of his time."

3. Ibid., p. 47, ll. 35-37.
4. Ibid., p. 48, ll. 2-7.
5. Ibid., p. 48, l. 19.
the fact that Reade's zeal in search of material stamps him as "a realist by temperament, and also by method, to a degree of conscientiousness and system that had as yet been unequalled in England." ¹ Reade did not succeed in transforming his subject matter into warm and living novels for he considers Reade's works "too documentary and loaded with circumstantial detail to rouse emotion." ² He relied too much upon "philanthropic arguments" ³ based on fact, consequently, though his arguments convince his readers, his stories lack "the warmth and feeling" ⁴ of Dickens' which owe their strength to their suggestive force and their appeal to the emotions and imaginations of their readers.

Saintsbury draws attention to the fact that Reade failed to digest "these 'marine stores' of detail and document" ⁵ and claims that Reade "remains with Zola, the chief example of the danger of working at your subject too much as if you were getting up a brief, or preparing an article for an encyclopaedia." ⁶ Obviously good fiction must be something at least other than a collection of accurate data, regardless of how interesting such facts are in themselves, but must be a criticism of human life and action; and Reade's

¹ Legouis and Cazamian, op. cit., p. 1210, ll. 18-21.
³ Ibid., p. 1211, l. 12.
⁴ Ibid., p. 1211, l. 16.
⁶ Ibid., p. 249, ll.1-4.
failure to write good fiction must be traced, as his critics suggest, partly at least to his unwillingness to subordinate documentary evidence to the more valuable illusion of reality which characterizes fiction of the first class; and also to his unwillingness to let the reader draw his own conclusions about what he has to say. Wilbur L. Gross feels that Reade's refusal to concern himself with probable stories was due to his belief that "fiction should not be written simply to please, but that it should contain matter for instruction and edification."¹ No doubt this belief inspired every novelist of note who ever put pen to paper because their obvious task is to show something of interest about human nature and human action. Reade considered the social abuses of his day most worthy of his attention but he dealt with them in "the controversial manner"² and it has already been pointed out that in the opinion of some critics his arguments were convincing enough but his stories were not real and his characters were not lifelike and as a result his novels more closely resemble a series of facts and documents than sound and probable fiction.

Not only do modern critics feel that Reade stayed too close to his material in writing his fiction they also feel that he made too much use of theatrical tricks and sensational effects in presenting it. Cazamian speaks of the "sensational

2. Ibid., p. 213, l. 27.
3. intensity" of Reade's novels and another writer says that "Put Yourself In His Place affords many examples of the sensational scenes which Reade expanded from newspaper stories, giving to his narrative a journalistic quality similar to that of Dickens." This writer draws attention to the fact that "in Reade's novels, however, the working up of the sources is more laboured and the sensationalism of presentation is more violent than his master's." Richard Burton feels that the purpose novels which give Reade a place "in the movement for recognition of the socially unfit and those unfairly treated" were "frankly melodramatic." He criticises Reade's method in them by pointing out that in spite of the fact that he was a "superb partisan" Reade would have "secured a safer position in the annals of fiction" if he had cared "less for polemics and more for his art." Weygandt agrees with this opinion and argues that "what were once regarded as his great 'show' passages are

1. Legouais and Cazamian, op. cit., p. 1209, l. 12.
3. Ibid., p. 247, 11. 34-36.
5. Ibid., p. 251, 1. 6.
6. Ibid., p. 251, 1. 22.
7. Ibid., p. 251, 11. 24-25.
fallen to poor things enough now; what were once regarded as moments of high tragedy now disclose themselves as no more than melodrama." ¹ He feels that Reade's writing lacks "the power of the highest order" ² which produces "the great situations that are inevitable, and nobly felt, and grandly fashioned; the readings of life that show insight and vision; the store of wisdom that is come of years of rich experience and deep sympathy with men; the characters that are vital, that are no mere compounds of manners and eccentricities." ³ and he claims that Reade's best "was clearly short of the best of the great novelists." ⁴ It is Weygandt who puts into words what must be recognized about much of Reade's fiction for he says that in spite of "all the incident he manufactured for his tales and long novels, they are meager humanity. The characters are apt to be types, the situations stock, the writing careless, the comment of the writer on the actions of his puppets conventional or platitudinous." ⁵

In the opinion of Sir Hugh Walpole, Reade's faults were due to his training in the theatre of his day. He says that Reade "was a melodramatist of the theatre" and it was un-

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¹ Weygandt, op. cit., p. 159, ll. 11-14.
² Ibid., p. 159, l. 26.
³ Ibid., p. 159, ll. 16-21.
⁴ Ibid., p. 160, ll. 3-4.
⁵ Ibid., p. 160, ll. 5-9.
questionably this real theatre-felt at a time when the
English drama was at its lowest ebb—that was responsible
for the gravest faults in his tempestuous novels." 1 Walter
C. Phillips agrees with this theory when he points out that
with Reade "the drama is always the primary consideration" 2
and though it is responsible for the excellence of his
narrative it is also responsible for the general superficial­
ity of his work. His narrative gains much of its effective­ness
from the direct, natural, and forceful use of dialogue
by which Reade eliminated much of the wordiness that usually
characterizes the works of story tellers. This style suited
Reade's method of throwing "the dramatic into high relief" 3
thereby enabling him to make the most of the sensational
incident in which his novels abound. Unfortunately his zeal
for action caused him to "reject psychological analysis and
exposition almost entirely" 4 because he believed, in the
opinion of Phillips at any rate, that "commentary upon the
persons, like decorative description, was merely a profane
interruption of the sacred narrative." 5 He rejected the
method of Trollope, Eliot, and other realists whose works
he considered "the chronicle of small beer" 6 and imposed

1. Walpole, Sir Hugh, "Novelists of the 'Seventies," in
Granville-Barker, Harley, The Eighteen-Seventies, Cambridge
University Press, 1929, p. 34, ll. 15 and 11. 23-26.
3. Ibid., p. 207, 11. 5-6.
4. Ibid., p. 207, 11. 6-7.
upon himself limitations as rigorous as those which are forced upon the dramatist in writing for the stage. As a result his novels reveal a masculine force; a strength and vividness of presentation that make them unique among the works of his day; but unfortunately their brilliance was "mostly at the surface." Because he minimized character interest "most Readean folk, like Collins', slip quickly out of mind," and Phillips feels that there are only two men in his "purpose" novels who are "something more than stalking horses for exciting melodrama." These men, David Dodd and Dr. Sampson, both characters from Hard Cash, together with Lucy Fountain, Julia Dodd and Kate Peyton are the only characters in his works who are more than conventional types, for he says of the rest

"About them personally we have small concern; where they will "come out" we feel tolerably sure. They play their assigned part in the melodrama acceptably, but we leave them little the wiser ourselves, without having made new friends of them. "Fertile situations" as Reade understood and applied the term, practically precluded that."

Phillips continues his criticism of Reade by saying that not only did Reade disregard character analysis because

2. Ibid., p. 214, 1.32.
3. Ibid., p. 215, 1.2-3.
he considered it "small beer," he also subordinated what character interest he did allow himself to the "exigencies of his drama." ¹ He believed "that fertile situations are the true cream of fiction" ² and they received first consideration. He did not hesitate to create a sensational or theatrical effect at the expense of his characters with the result that, on the one hand "situation and climax crash down upon his readers like well-aimed blows of a single-stick player, until they are battered into a kind of emotional insensibility that nothing but floods or earthquakes can touch," ³ and on the other the real drama which is found in conflict of character is vulgarized and seriously damaged, so that his fiction cannot be called a sound study of life so much as a series of thrilling incidents and situations. His narrative skill; his ability to give vigour and force to his stories stamp him as a "doctrinaire virtuoso in narrative art" ⁴ rather than a "student of life," ⁵ and it is because he held fast to "a wrong-headed faith in his creed" ⁶ that"the pit has --- decided against him." ⁷

². Ibid., p. 136, ll. 21-22.
³. Ibid., p. 216, ll. 22-26.
⁴. Ibid., p. 218, l. 7.
⁵. Ibid., p. 218, l. 7.
⁶. Ibid., p. 218, ll. 18-19.
⁷. Ibid., p. 218, ll. 4-6.
PART V.

THE REASONS FOR THE ECLIPSE OF CHARLES READE'S "PURPOSE" FICTION.

It will be seen from the foregoing opinions of Reade's fiction that the defects which contemporary critics saw in it are those which modern critics give as the reasons for its failure to endure. Both agree that it fell far short of what good fiction ought to be, for Reade sacrificed character portrayal and probability to sensationalism, factual truth, and melodrama. The critic who said that Reade's faults were the faults of the melodramatic theatre of his day gives us the clue, not only to his failure to write sound fiction, but to the popularity which the fiction he did write enjoyed during his lifetime. Undoubtedly Reade was a melodramatist, and to understand what I mean by "melodrama" let us consider Fowler's definition of it and set it beside what we know of the works of Reade which we are discussing:

"Melodrama is a term generally used with some contempt, because the appeal of such plays as are acknowledged to deserve the title is especially to the unsophisticated and illiterate whose acquaintance with human nature is superficial, but whose admiration for goodness and detestation of wickedness, is ready and powerful. The melodramatist's task is to get his characters labelled good and wicked in his audience's minds, and to provoke striking situations that shall provoke and relieve anxieties..."
on behalf of poetic justice...
(melodrama) depends upon sensa-
tional incident with exaggerated
appeals to conventional sentiment
rather than on play of character,
the dramatis personae follow con-
ventional types - the villain, the
hero wrongfully charged with crime,
the persecuted heroine, the adven-
ture etc... ."

Even the best of Reade's "purpose" novels, *It Is Never
Too Late To Mend* and *Put Yourself In His Place* fit very well
the description given above. Both George Fielding and Henry
Little, though not wrongfully accused of crime, were un-
doubtedly the stock type of melodramatic heroes, poor but
honest, facing and overcoming almost insuperable obstacles.
They are presented as flat characters who do not change,
except, of course, to become rich. Not only are Susan Merton
and Grace Garden persecuted heroines, they are persecuted
by black and transparent villains whose lack of redeeming
qualities stamp them as little less than monsters. There is
never any doubt in the reader's mind as to who are Reade's
good and who are his bad people, for early in both stories
he sets his puppets up and prepares to move them about accord-
ing to convention. No one who studies Reade's fiction would
care to refute the many critics who argued that his works
abound in sensational incidents and striking situations. For
example, Little's return from America to discover that his
sweetheart had been tricked into marrying a cad like Coventry

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1. Fowler, op. cit., p. 347, col. 1, ll. 18-32 and ll. 46-54.
is a situation pregnant with interest for those who like that sort of thing, and the fact that Reade managed to outdo most melodramatists who usually save their heroines at the church door, or at least at the altar, is simply a tribute to his skill in melodrama, a skill, incidentally, which paid him well. Fielding's narrow escapes in Australia and Little's frequent brushes with the trades are handled by Reade in such a way as to wring from them the last drop of suspense with which they are filled, so that all combine to produce thrilling, if not very probable stories which, apparently, suited many thousands of his readers if we are to judge from the money he made from them.

Many incidents can be found in his work to prove its sensational nature. Staines in A Simpleton stepping from behind the shrub to snatch the poison from the hands of his distracted wife; the unmasking of Severne as he was leading Zoe away to shame and disgrace; the whisking away of Sir Charles Bassett to the asylum in A Terrible Temptation; and the complete destruction that fell suddenly upon Meadows in It Is Never Too Late To Mend are but four out of dozens of sensational situations that illustrate very clearly what Reade had in mind when he said that "fertile situations are the true cream of fiction."

Naturally, too, Reade's novels of the day all end happily. This is a definite requirement of melodrama and Reade was not one to disappoint his readers in this regard. It is interesting to note in passing the lengths to which he
was willing to go to please his public in the matter. One of Reade's most important motives for concerning himself with the question of the trades in *Put Yourself In His Place* was to illustrate how impossible it was for a man of special talents to profit by his ability because of the restrictive effect of unions. Whether or not this was true is not a matter under discussion here, the main thing is that Reade said it was true and claimed to have taken up his pen in order to attack the evil. Strangely enough, however, his hero manages to rise to a position of security and wealth, thereby, it seems to me, refuting Reade's argument. He did not seem to see that in order to use the melodramatic "happy ending" he had to sacrifice his entire thesis or if he did grasp this point apparently he was quite willing to pay this price. He knew, of course, that had he killed Little, as some workmen had been killed; or had he left him thwarted and beaten to live his life on the fringe of starvation, his book would have lost some of its appeal, so he allowed "right" to triumph, satisfied his public, and sold thousands of copies of his book.

The sensational incidents which abound in Reade's fiction were the product of systematic and thorough search, for he combed blue books, reports, and newspapers for subject matter which he thought he could use. He was shrewd in doing this, of course, for the newspapers of his day were just as quick as our own at ferreting out the type of news which the public wants to read. In using this sort of material Reade
was fairly safe for its news value was proved and he was sure of its appeal to and effect upon readers. Although critics reproached him for adhering too closely to his facts and not turning them into "something like natural truth" in the form of probable fiction it is doubtful if for any length of time Reade entertained the thought of doing this for it seems he was satisfied with the facts themselves and it is certain that he knew their value. For proof of this point we need only refer to one or two remarks of his own in his correspondence with publishers. When he was writing to his publisher Low concerning the novel Hard Cash he drew attention to the fact that it was not an "ordinary novel" which dealt with "shadows only" but that it "cut deep into the realities of the day" and "set hundreds discussing it as history and law." The "realities of the day" of which he spoke were, of course, the sensational facts pertaining to insane asylums which he had gleaned from the sources mentioned above, and which he honestly thought gave his book a degree of importance that no mere fiction could equal. In a letter to Blackwood regarding A Woman-Hater he made what, to say the least, must be called a very blunt statement on the subject.

3. Ibid., p. 176, l. 15.
4. Ibid., p. 176, l. 16.
5. Ibid., p. 176, l. 17.
He wrote:

"I send you herewith the installment of new story, which lands the party in England and introduces Aesculapia, or the Doctress and her struggles; which are a great chapter of human nature and of unjust civilization.

This character is so important that I must beg you to receive it in strict confidence and sepulchral silence.

New ideas of any magnitude are now very rare in fiction. The very whisper of such a thing seems to be echoed, and it would be a calamity if any one of my contemporaries were to get wind of Aesculapia. He would bungle her and do no good with her, but thoroughly spoil her for us.

On this account I am desirous to start this story not later than 1st June.

For, if we strike while the iron is hot, that is to say, while the ladies are still struggling, we shall serve a good cause and perhaps make a big hit; but we shall fall comparatively flat, if we hang fire till Cowper Temple and others have righted the wrong without our aid."

It is superfluous to comment upon his remarks above for it is perfectly obvious what he was doing. He had done no less many times before and critical opinion does no more than emphasize what is already evident in the text of his works that both in his choice of material and in his treatment of it Reade clearly set the sails of his fiction to catch the wind of public approval — approval, that is, of the broad mass of uncritical readers who sought in fiction

vicarious thrills and an escape for a time from the dull realities of their own more or less humdrum lives. This class of reader always has been and always will be drawn to melodrama for the reasons that Fowler makes clear. In Reade's works they found the melodrama they sought. They saw goodness triumph; they saw wrong punished; they met no characters and little philosophy difficult to understand; they were thrilled and startled at times and, above all else, they were thoroughly entertained.

They found something else, however, which raised Reade's work above the level of much of the melodrama of its time and it would be most unjust to Reade if this were overlooked. He had a few undeniable gifts as a writer one of which was his skill in narrative. The story of Joseph's, the voyage of the Agra, and the story of the bursting of Ousley dam are three examples of Reade at his best and they illustrate the powerful and telling prose which he succeeded at times in writing. He had a good feeling for words and his prose often is strong and moving, a fact which even his sharpest critics readily admit. He made effective use of dialogue, too, and, in consequence, his stories move forward rapidly. His experience with the theatre undoubtedly affected the development of this faculty for his novels read at times as though they were, as one commentator remarked, dramatizations for the stage. Reade consciously strove, not only to make his dialogue effective as such, but to make use of it in advancing his story. "When in a novel" he said upon one
occasion "you find yourself about to say something, pull up and ask - can't I make one of my dramatic personae say it? If you can, always do." ¹ Reade managed to do this successfully enough, for one cannot read much of his fiction without being impressed by the manner in which his stories are carried along because of it. His painstaking care in not guessing where he could know paid him rich dividends in his dialogue for, by and large, it is very true to life and at times it is excellent, as in the case of The Merchant of Venice scenes in Christie Johnstone.

Reade certainly knew that dialogue well used was an effective means not only of capturing the interest of his readers but of holding it and, undoubtedly, he had this in mind when he wrote. Similarly he knew that detailed description tends at times to weary the casual reader so he steadfastly avoided it. With characteristic frankness he makes it quite clear that he considered it unnecessary for he referred to such works as made use of it, notably those of Trollope and George Eliot, as "the chronicle of small beer." ² Sometimes his remarks in passing were quite amusing. Phillips refers to the incident in Hard Cash where Peterson, an Oxonian who has just seen Julia Dodd, "launches" as Reade says "into a rapturous description of the lady's person well worth leaving out." ³ Even his descriptions of people are

¹ Phillips, op. cit., p. 203, 11. 8-10.
² Ibid., p. 207, 11. 10-11.
stripped of all superfluity though none quite so much as that of Jacky, the native in It Is Never Too Late to Mend. "It is usual," says Reade of him, "in works of this kind to give minute descriptions of people's dress. I fear I have often violated this rule. However, I will not in this case. Jacky's dress consisted of, in front, a short purse made of ratskin; behind, a brand new tomahawk and two spears." 1

Though Reade curtailed physical description in his novels and kept it to the very minimum he disregarded psychological analysis and description almost entirely. On this point he was most at variance with Trollope, Eliot, and the other realists, so called at any rate, who sought to show in their fiction some effect of the impact of circumstances upon the natures and characters of the people in their fiction. Reade had no time for this, nor did he feel that time should be spent in character analysis for in casting this method aside he said, "In life, people don't come to you labeled, explanation in hand." 2 He was quite correct in his statement, of course, but he did not realize, apparently, that his people did that very thing. They were labeled and definitely cast for the roles they were to play, and if they did not come "explanation in hand" it was only because they were so transparent that they needed no supporting comment from Reade. What Reade really had in mind was that the time spent in dis-

2. Ibid., p. 207, 11. 7-8.
cussing the effect of incident upon the people in his fiction, was, in a sense, time wasted, for the public preferred action to analysis, therefore his efforts were directed towards making his fiction thrilling, sensational, and dramatic at the expense of both physical and psychological description.

When we consider that Reade aimed his fiction squarely at the uncritical mass of his readers and when we consider, too, that he carried to the task certain definite and considerable gifts as a writer, it is little wonder that the reading public responded to his efforts as they did. His works, as we have seen, were eagerly read; he made a fortune with his pen; and he held a place second only to Dickens in the affections of the public of his time. It is true that the many controversies in which he engaged throughout his career brought his name much before the public and the value of this circumstance as advertising cannot be overlooked. Advertising, however, goes only so far and unless supported by a worthy product soon loses its effectiveness. There is no doubt that his contemporaries considered his product worthy of their patronage and their support led him to believe, not only that he was a novelist of great importance to his time, but that his fiction was destined to live on after him.

To say that Reade is not popular with the general reading public of today is to understate the case a great deal. He is unknown and quite forgotten. It is doubtful indeed if one person in fifty knows who he was and even fewer know any
of his works except *The Cloister And The Hearth*. Even this work is by no means popular for it is read today by the same class of reader that enjoyed it at the time of its publication, namely those who seek in fiction some comment upon life and something more than sensationalism. This class is in the minority and for every reader who asks that the fiction he reads be probable and sound, there are hundreds who ask only that it be interesting and melodramatic. The latter group has forsaken Reade's fiction and the ironic fact remains that those who read him today belong to the group which in his lifetime he made no effort to please.

Although just a few years ago Sir Hugh Walpole felt that much of what Reade wrote was good and some of it ought to be revived, there is no evidence, as yet, that modern readers are likely to accept his suggestion. Not even the cinema, that magic medium which has brought about a re-birth of interest in works much less worthy of attention than many of Reade's, has taken upon itself the task of presenting Reade to this generation. This is rather significant I think, for there is much in Reade that should do well in the cinema.

What Hollywood could do with the prison story in *It Is Never Too Late To Mend*, or the asylum scenes in *Hard Cash*, or the struggles with the trades in *Put Yourself In His Place* is a matter for interesting speculation and it is my opinion that they could produce something quite spectacular if they wished. Probably, however, there are many other sources of melodrama for them to tap without risking anything on the works of a
writer who is now unknown.

This brings us now to the real reasons for Reade's eclipse. We know that he wrote a superior sort of melodrama and we know, too, that melodrama is as popular today as it was in Reade's era. One of the reasons, then, that Reade's melodrama is no longer popular must be that it is out-dated. The inhuman asylum keeper has been supplanted by the cattle rustler, the claim-jumper, and the real estate swindler of Western fiction. During the years of the last war the Prussian officer came into his own and it was through playing such parts in the moving pictures of the time that Erich Von Stroheim won for himself the title of "the man you love to hate." The next stage saw the bootlegger and gangster used as villains, and of late the swaggering, sadistic Nazi has almost exclusively played the part of the bad man. Who the villain will be tomorrow no one knows but, of course, he will be there, though he may resemble Coventry, Meadows, Falcon and the rest of Reade's bad men in deeds alone. Each generation makes its own demands on the melodramatist and it demands constantly that he keep his settings up to date. If he fails to do so his works soon are cast aside.

Reade, apparently, was well aware that the interest of the public is a capricious and volatile thing. For this reason his ear was always close to the ground to catch each hint of change as it appeared during his lifetime. Unfortunately for his popularity he could not foresee the many changes that were to take place after his death and it goes
without saying that he was quite unable to make his fiction suit those changes. A great deal has happened since Reade wrote and the evils which shocked his followers a generation or so ago have long since ceased to exist. Others have taken their place, of course, and they are the subject matter of the modern melodramatist. To the modern reader of sensational literature the evils of prison life in England seventy-five years ago pale into insignificance beside the stories of Sing Sing, and Dillinger and Al Capone make Hawes and Grotait seem saints by comparison.

The writers of dime novels and pulp magazine "thrillers" have usurped Reade's place not only because they are writing about topics that are more "timely" than Reade's but because, too, they are able to write in a manner that Reade could not attempt in his day. When we consider the storm of abuse that fell upon his head over the stories of Griffith Gaunt and A Terrible Temptation where "sex reared its ugly head" such a short distance, and when we consider the freedom both to read and write about the subject today, we can but marvel that such a vast change could be possible in less than a hundred years. Had Reade tried to write a fraction of what is written today it is doubtful, indeed, if anyone would have published his works though it is quite certain many would have been willing to read them had they been published. The mere fact, then, that this subject was, in large measure, forbidden to Reade and that it scarcely appears at all in his fiction is a point held against him by modern devotees of sensationalism and when there
is so much that is "spicy" to be had nowadays, it is no
wonder that Reade's daring, but limited attempts at such sub-
jects should be forgotten.

Reade's popularity was not based entirely upon his
appeal to lovers of raw, stark sensationalism. Many others
read his works because they told them of strange lands and
peoples with which they had no acquaintance. Here, again,
what Reade had to tell has been lost in the deluge of what
has been said since. To begin with, many places have been
discovered which Reade did not even know about, but, more
important than this a class of literature has been developed
since his time which takes the reader everywhere under the
sun. These books are not works of fiction at all but are
factual accounts of journeys by travellers and explorers.
They are interesting and informative, and their popularity
with the reading public proves beyond doubt that they fill
a deeply-felt want. Such writings as those of Richard
Haliburton and Martin and Osa Johnson enjoy a great vogue;
and those of John Gunther, Leland Stowe, Edgar Snow and other
writers and commentators of the same sort bear testimony to
a broadening interest and, I think, a sincere desire on the
part of many to understand better the world in which they
live.

It is perhaps naive to say that a great many good books
have been written since Reade died; yet it must be said, for
it has contributed to the decline of his popularity. The
modern reader who wishes to read about social evils, for
example, enjoys *The Grapes Of Wrath* better than *Put Yourself In His Place*, not only because the social ills with which the former deals are peculiar to our own era but also because *The Grapes Of Wrath* is a much better book than *Put Yourself In His Place*. Steinbeck, Hemingway, D.H. Lawrence and a great many other novelists not only have the advantage over Reade in being able to write with greater freedom about topics more suited to the modern taste, but they are unquestionably better novelists than Reade was. It would be incorrect to call Hemingway a melodramatist, or D.H. Lawrence a sensationalist, or Steinbeck a mere commentator upon social ills, for they are something more than these things. Each seeks to give a true picture of his time as he saw it and each seeks to present his picture through the medium of acceptable fiction. This, as we have seen, was what Reade was not willing to do for we cannot feel that his novels give a true picture of society in his time, and it is certain that they are not good fiction.

The fact that so much good fiction is available today merely robs Reade of part of the small following of discerning readers who might have been interested in his better works. So far as the great mass of readers is concerned — the lovers of the sensational and melodramatic that he despised yet pandered to so much — their interest in what he had to offer diminished greatly towards the end of his career and disappeared very shortly after his death for the simple reason that nothing in literature becomes so completely un-
interesting, or interesting only as a curiosity, as the melodrama of yesterday. Each age produces its own melodrama, and more has been produced so far in the twentieth century than was ever produced before. Detective fiction, some of it well written and most of it interesting in its way, was practically unknown in Reade's time yet it would be quite impossible to gauge the extent of its popularity today. The development of cheaper printing has flooded the markets of the world with True Love Stories, Western Stories, Ghost Stories, Horror Stories and matter of that sort so that anyone with ten cents in his pocket at any corner shop or newsstand may satisfy his craving for whatever thrill he fancies.

Reade, of course, is not the only author whose works have suffered whole or partial neglect because of an altered taste in literature on the part of the reading public in general. Even the great writers of the past, Fielding, Jane Austen, Thackeray and Dickens, do not enjoy today a fraction of the popularity that was theirs when they were alive. It is indeed a tribute to their greatness as novelists that in the face of such competition as modern literature affords them they hold their place in the interest of the reading public as they do. Reade's complete eclipse merely proves what many of his discerning contemporaries feared, that he was not a great novelist but a melodramatist; a teller of tales rather than a student of life.

Reade set the seal upon his own failure when he chose to subordinate character interest to sensationism, for as a
result of this choice he left no characters that are remembered today, and, as we have seen, the fertile situations of which he was so proud no longer bear the fruit of public approval. Apart from *The Cloister And The Hearth* there is little or nothing that might reasonably be expected to please the modern reader who seeks in fiction some broad study of life or some insight into human action. The purple passages of Reade's narrative remain, but they are not enough to sustain his reputation and much of what he wrote reads like something from yesterday's newspaper and is about as interesting.

His "purpose" novels are little more than commentaries by Reade upon certain abuses common to English society during the last half of the nineteenth century. What he said about them, and the method by which he attacked them proved interesting to his own generation. But that interest died with the century, and because his works lack the qualities that good fiction must have, they have lost their appeal for us. It is curious, in fact, that Reade even advanced them as his claim to fame for he must have been aware of the criticism that his discerning contemporaries made of them and, more important than this, he indicated on at least one occasion that he considered the type of fiction which they represented inferior to that which is represented by *The Cloister And The Hearth*. We are forced to the conclusion, therefore, that Reade deliberately wrote sensationalism because it paid well and his claims for his purpose novels
seem little more than rationalization. It is quite probable, of course, that he considered the labour of a lifetime of some value and the interest which his sensationalism roused among his contemporaries might easily have led him to attach more importance to it than was warranted. As it turned out the interest in his sensational material was short lived for it did not long survive him.
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