

THE MOONSTONE

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Wilkie Collins

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Introduction by Carolyn G. Heilbrun

Notes by Chris Willis



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WILKIE COLLINS

Wilkie Collins, the prolific Victorian novelist, playwright, and short story writer who is generally regarded as the father of the English detective novel, was born in London on January 8, 1824. He was the elder son of William Collins, a respected landscape painter, and Harriet Geddes Collins, a spirited woman of Scottish descent. Collins was sent to expensive private schools in the hope that he would make useful connections and spent part of his adolescence touring the Continent with his parents. In 1846, having worked for five years as a clerk in the tea business, Collins began reading for the bar at Lincoln's Inn. Though he never practiced law, the legal training afforded him invaluable material for his novels. He made a respectable debut as a writer in 1848 with *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.*, a biography of his late father. His other early works include *Antonina; or, The Fall of Rome* (1850), a historical romance, and *Rambles Beyond Railways* (1851), an anecdotal travelogue inspired by a walking tour of Cornwall.

A chance encounter with Charles Dickens in 1851 marked a turning point in Collins's career. The two shared a passion for amateur theatricals and became lifelong friends and collaborators. Collins frequently contributed stories to Dickens's journal *Household Words*, and Dickens produced and acted in two of Collins's melodramas, *The Lighthouse* (1855) and *The Frozen Deep* (1857). During the 1850s Collins completed *Basil* (1852), a lurid novel that offended most critics, and began experimenting with detective fiction in the mysteries *Hide and Seek* (1854) and *The Dead Secret* (1857). He also issued *After Dark* (1856) and *The Queen of Hearts* (1859), two volumes of short stories that display his growing preoccupation with suspense as well as his increasing skills as a mystery writer.

The publication of *The Woman in White* in 1860 brought Collins his first great commercial success. Originally serialized in Dickens's new weekly *All the Year Round*, the classic mystery thriller features two of the most memorable creations in Victorian fiction: Count Fosco, the mesmerizing, corpulent Napoleonic villain, and Marian Halcombe, the resourceful heroine who is his rival for power and knowledge. William Thackeray reportedly sat up all night to finish the book, and the future Prime Minister William Gladstone canceled a theater engagement in order to continue reading it. "To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors," observed Henry James. "*The Woman in White* is the novel in which Collins most closely approaches Dickens," reflected T. S. Eliot. "Every one knows Count Fosco and Marian Halcombe intimately... If *The Woman in White* is the greatest of Collins's novels, it is so because of these two characters." Though Collins went on to create other memorable heroines and villains in both *No Name* (1862) and *Armada* (1866), neither of these "sensation novels" matched the runaway success of *The Woman in White*.

In 1868 Collins serialized *The Moonstone*, his second great mystery, in *All the Year Round*. A pioneering work in the genre of detective fiction, it tells of the theft of a sacred Hindu diamond and the efforts of Sergeant Cuff, the policeman investigating the crime, to solve the case. "*The Moonstone* is the first and greatest of English detective novels," judged T. S. Eliot. "Sergeant Cuff is the perfect detective... Far more than [Sherlock] Holmes, [he] is the ancestor of the healthy generation of amiable, efficient, professional but fallible inspectors of fiction among whom we live today." Dorothy L. Sayers agreed: "*The Moonstone* is probably the very finest detective story ever written. By comparison with its wide scope, its dovetailed completeness, and the marvellous variety and soundness of its

characterisation, modern mystery fiction looks thin and mechanical. Nothing human is perfect, but *The Moonstone* comes about as near perfection as anything of its kind can be.” And P. D. James remarked: “*The Moonstone* [is] one of the most perfectly plotted and technically brilliant novels in the English language. More than one hundred and thirty years after its first appearance, *The Moonstone* still continues to delight and enthral us.”

In later years, Collins attempted to meld suspense with social criticism in novels such as *Man and Wife* (1870), *The New Magdalen* (1873), *The Fallen Leaves* (1879), *The Black Robe* (1881), *Heart and Science* (1883), *The Evil Genius* (1886), and *The Legacy of Cain* (1889). His didacticism prompted the poet Algernon Swinburne to quip: “What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition? / Some demon whispered—Wilkie! have a mission.” Yet Collins continued to write detective fiction in *The Law and the Lady* (1875) and *My Lady’s Money* (1878), and reconfirmed his reputation as “the master of sensation” with *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), *Miss or Mrs?* (1873), *The Haunted Hotel* (1879), and *The Guilty River* (1886). In addition he adapted several of his most popular novels, notably *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, for the London stage.

Collins led an unorthodox private life that remained largely hidden from the public. He lived for some thirty years with a widow, Caroline Graves, who was said to be the model for his “woman in white,” while in a separate household he enjoyed a liaison with Martha Rudd, a young working-class woman who bore him three illegitimate children. Collins suffered from agonizing attacks of rheumatic gout and eventually became addicted to the laudanum that was prescribed as treatment. Wilkie Collins died in London on September 23, 1889, three months after being partially paralyzed by a stroke. He chose to summarize his career by inscribing on his tombstone this epitaph: “Author of *The Woman in White* and other works of fiction.”

“Wilkie Collins is the first properly uniformed and impressive detective novelist in English literature,” stated V. S. Pritchett. “Never was there such a specialist. *The Moonstone* is the first and the last of the detective novels, and I would like to ask the addicts what more has really been added to the genre since his time.” Dorothy L. Sayers concurred: “Collins was a master craftsman, whom many modern mystery-mongers might imitate to their profit. He never wastes an incident; he never leaves a loose end.” And T. S. Eliot concluded: “There is no contemporary novelist who could not learn something from Collins in the art of interesting and exciting the reader.... The resources of Wilkie Collins are inexhaustible.”

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INTRODUCTION *by* CAROLYN G. HEILBRUN

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PREFACE TO THE PRESENT EDITION

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Extracted from a Family Paper

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INTRODUCTION

Carolyn G. Heilbrun

What most people will tell you about *The Moonstone* is that in this novel Wilkie Collins created the first fictional detective. T. S. Eliot famously pronounced *The Moonstone* to be “the first and greatest of English detective novels,” which may be overstating the case, but not by much. Certain it is that Sergeant Cuff, on his appearance almost a century and a half ago, established the qualifications and quirky habits to be followed by fictional detectives to this very day. It is no doubt for this reason that famous writers of detective fiction—such as Dorothy Sayers, the creator of amateur sleuth Lord Peter Wimsey and P. D. James, the creator of Commander Adam Dalgleish of Scotland Yard—have been asked to write earlier introductions to this astonishing novel. Wilkie Collins, their predecessor, had ordained that a detective must be highly intelligent and perceptive, eccentric, honorable, solitary by nature, and indifferent to criticism from the ignorant or guilty. Here is Sergeant Cuff when we first meet him:

He was dressed all in decent black, with a white cravat around his neck... His eyes, of a steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more of you than you were aware of yourself. His walk was soft; his voice was melancholy; his long lanky fingers were hooked like claws. He might have been a parson or an undertaker—or anything else you like, except what he really was.

Scotland Yard was new when Wilkie Collins introduced his detective, and Cuff had his models in real life, as did some of the events occurring in this novel. Yet Collins and Cuff are no less extraordinary for that. While it is true that Edgar Allan Poe’s sleuth Dupin preceded Cuff in the world of detective fiction, he appeared only in short stories, and more as a thinking machine than as a breathing human being who might, for example, have a passion for roses. Poe is rightly honored for his legacy to the future world of detective fiction, but it is Wilkie Collins who goaded so many thousands to imitation, including Charles Dickens. Dickens’s last novel, *Edwin Drood*, left unfinished at his death, was begun in imitation of and competition with Wilkie Collins. They had long been friends and coworkers, they had recently fallen out, and Dickens wanted to show that he could do what Collins could do. His was an endeavor that has, under other hands, continued to this day.

Nor is the intriguing originality of Sergeant Cuff the only innovative aspect of Collins’s novel. Many of the plot arrangements in *The Moonstone* set the standards for detective fiction: honesty with the reader; the solution involving the least likely suspect; the use of narrations from various points of view. Collins is, however, most notable as a markedly unusual Victorian, even if we admit that most of what we have heard about the Victorians has been exaggerated or misunderstood. For starters, Collins was unique among popular male novelists of his day in his respect for women and his ability to draw them as purposeful characters, strong, knowing their own minds, and respected for their competence. *The Woman in White* introduced the most significant of these women in Marion Halcomb, a person of high intelligence and ingenuity, acting with a sense of resolve and what was then thought to be the mind and fortitude of a man.

Rachel Verinder, the woman protagonist of *The Moonstone*, is a female of strong character as well as beauty, as is

her mother, Lady Verinder. Gabriel Betteredge, the first narrator, House-Steward to Lady Verinder, who has known Rachel Verinder all her life, says of her:

She judged for herself, as few women of twice her age judge in general; never asked your advice; never told you beforehand what she was going to do; never came with secrets and confidences to anybody, from her mother downwards. In little things and great, with people she loved, and people she hated (and she did both with equal heartiness), Miss Rachel always went on a way of her own, sufficient for herself in the joys and sorrows of her life.

Rachel's personal maid and close friend, Betteredge's daughter Penelope testifies to Collins's ability to create more than one independent woman in this novel: Penelope is permitted to be sensible, staunchly loyal, and in no way feeling herself subordinate.

Although, as Dorothy Sayers pointed out, Collins "never, in the vulgar and cruel Victorian manner, made fun of barrenness, or age, or ugliness in women," he nevertheless had a sharp distaste for what one of his biographers called "ostentatious piety" and "evangelistic females." Miss Clack, Lady Verinder's niece and a most intrusive and imperceptive person, is Collins's revenge on such infinitely proselytizing creatures. But he knows also that there are men behind religious movements, like Godfrey Ablewhite in *The Moonstone*, whose dishonesty gives hypocrisy new meaning. Unlike their female colleagues, such bounders, despised by Collins, seek to profit financially from the rich women they cultivate through charitable works, pretending to attend upon the spiritual needs of those they counsel.

Similarly, with every opportunity to present the then acceptable racist attitude toward Indians—India was then part of the British Empire—Collins, atypically for his time, treats his Indian characters with respect and admiration. Their determination to recover the diamond known as the moonstone, stolen from the most sacred of their religious statues, is honorable and never violent, something that cannot be said of all the English characters in the novel.

Finally, in this as in so many of Collins's novels, he is engrossed by the unprivileged, those, in his own words, "who have drawn blanks in the lottery of life—the people who have toiled hard after happiness, and have gathered nothing but disappointment and sorrow; the friendless and the lonely, the wounded and the lost." Collins uses Rosanna Spearman's story to exemplify this theme. Rosanna, he tells us, "had been a thief, and not being of the sort that get up Companies in the City and rob from thousands, instead of only robbing from one, the law laid hold of her and the prison and the reformatory followed the lead of the law." Lady Verinder rescues Rosanna from the reformatory and employs her as a servant in her household. Here Rosanna falls desperately and inappropriately in love. Collins's lack of sentimentality in this portrayal is as remarkable as his depiction of life's most cruel social afflictions and of hopeless, obsessive love.

Of greatest importance for readers, of course, is the fact that *The Moonstone* is a page-turner—true, the pace is a bit slower than the works of John Grisham or Robert Parker, but it catches one up and unfolds its amazing story through the recountings of its several narrators, all of them enticing and singular. Collins was called "The King of Inventors" by a critic of his day—the phrase provides the title of a recent excellent biography of him—and he was the king of inventors in more than plot and characterization. His treatment of both Rosanna and the Indians who seek the return of their diamond demonstrates that he was even more notable as an "inventor" in the realm of social action and in his attempts to remedy the inequities and deceptions of his time.

The plot of *The Moonstone* includes, among much else, the use of opium as a painkiller; opium in Victorian times was readily available and widely used for many maladies. Collins himself became dependent on it and each day downed astonishing amounts of the drug. In his second preface to *The Moonstone* Collins describes how, while he was writing the book to appear in weekly installments, he was enduring the "severest illness from which I have ever suffered." He goes on to say that it was his unwillingness to disappoint his readers that forced him to continue writing the novel despite his bitter affliction. He speaks of the "physical sacrifice this effort cost me" but does not

mention that he was relieved from pain by huge doses of opium. On this subject, as in much else, Collins knew whereof he spoke. He did not, like so many other nineteenth-century writers of thrillers, depict opium use as confined to so-called opium dens.

Collins is not as famous today as his contemporaries Dickens and Thackeray. Not as famous or as honored as they but perhaps more often read for pleasure rather than for academic scrutiny. He wrote what we call “mysteries,” and the writers of these are not accorded the same stature as are “real” novelists. His contemporaries, for their part, placed him lower in the literary hierarchy because of his morals. Certainly he bothered the Victorians with his odd views on women and even on that most sacred of institutions: marriage. Collins had few illusions about marriage and the romantic views it has inspired; indeed, in *The Moonstone* he notes that “you hear more than enough of married people living together miserably.” The only happy marriage in the novel is between Lady Verinder and her dead husband. The House-Steward Gabriel Betteredge’s own unsatisfactory marriage, and his dead wife, are recalled by Betteredge with outspoken cynicism and mockery.

Collins himself refused ever to marry. Eschewing legal marriage, he maintained separate households with two women, both of them highly intelligent; they knew of each other’s association with Collins, who treated them both honorably and respectfully. He supported their children and provided for both women in his will. He did not cause them as much unhappiness or leave them in as much misery as did Dickens and other men of the time more publicly steadfast in their defense of the married state.

Collins lived with Caroline Graves, with one intermission, from 1858 to the end of his life in 1889; this was a marriage in all but name. The other woman in Collins’s life, Martha Rudd, became his secretary and, after they became lovers, remained to help him in his work; like Caroline Graves, she had children with Collins. Unlike Caroline Graves, however, Martha Rudd was not much known to Collins’s circle of friends. Collins’s dislike of legal marriage is partly explained by his detestation of the law and moral hypocrisy. Dickens, we might note, even while deserting his own wife for a much younger woman, never condescended to meet Caroline Graves because she was not Collins’s legal wife.

In Collins’s novels he crusaded particularly on behalf of orphaned illegitimate children unfairly disinherited by law, and on the justice of allowing married women control of their own money: Lady Verinder, for example, is endowed with complete control over her own finances, which she handles with great skill and discretion. The titles of some of Collins’s other novels, *The Lady and the Law* and *No Name*, indicate his devotion to these themes. Collins in this as in so many matters was strikingly modern. His novels are, for this reason, less “dated” than the works of many of his contemporaries despite the fact that *The Moonstone* never questions the English class system. Indeed, Gabriel Betteredge is a pleasing comic portrait of a xenophobic, sexist, and mildly racist but good-natured person beyond whose eyes Collins allows us to glimpse a less bigoted and quite different version of the events Betteredge so complacently describes.

As he disdained marriage in his life, so did Collins look with a lackluster eye upon religion as it was practiced in his day, and as it is not altogether unknown in ours. Collins never denied the power of unpretentious religious belief, lived out quietly and evidenced by actions of what he and the Bible call true charity. But he felt there was much cant and falsehood abroad in the name of religion, and much self-serving. Nor did the constant reference to the Bible as the source of all wisdom appeal to him. Gabriel Betteredge exalts the novel *Robinson Crusoe* to the position of holy text, and thus Collins parodies those who live by the Bible as if it were the clue to all earthly action.

And then there is the diamond, the moonstone itself, almost a living thing. Collins had seen diamonds the size of plovers’ eggs; he recalled them when he came to describe the moonstone: “This jewel, that you could hold between your finger and thumb, seemed as unfathomable as the heavens themselves. We set it in the sun, and then shut the light out of the room, and it shone awfully out of the depths of its own brightness, with a moony gleam, in the dark.” Large diamonds inspire such flights; in our own day, we have heard tales about the Hope diamond (now on

view at the Smithsonian Institution), which is believed (inaccurately) to have brought ill fortune to all who have owned it. Collins's moonstone is, however, readily distinguished from such actual gems by being returned to the religious idol from which it had been imperially plundered by Western villains.

Collins, having made the “physical sacrifice” that the effort of writing *The Moonstone* while suffering from “rheumatic gout” had cost him, hoped to be rewarded for his heroic efforts by his novel's success; he “awaited its reception by the public with an eagerness of anxiety” he had never felt before and would never feel again. Fortunately as he tells us, the novel was instantly and universally welcomed; it has never since been out of print and continues to this day to be read, widely and with astonished pleasure.

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PREFACE

In some of my former novels, the object proposed has been to trace the influence of circumstances upon character. In the present story I have reversed the process. The attempt made, here, is to trace the influence of character on circumstances. The conduct pursued, under a sudden emergency, by a young girl, supplies the foundation on which I have built this book.

The same object has been kept in view, in the handling of the other characters which appear in these pages. Their course of thought and action under the circumstances which surround them, is shown to be (what it would most probably have been in real life) sometimes right, and sometimes wrong. Right, or wrong, their conduct, in either event, equally directs the course of those portions of the story in which they are concerned.

In the case of the physiological experiment which occupies a prominent place in the closing scenes of *The Moonstone*, the same principle has guided me once more. Having first ascertained, not only from books, but from living authorities as well, what the result of that experiment would really have been, I have declined to avail myself of the novelist's privilege of supposing something which might have happened, and have so shaped the story as to make it grow out of what actually would have happened—which, I beg to inform my readers, is also what actually does happen, in these pages.

With reference to the story of the Diamond, as here set forth, I have to acknowledge that it is founded, in some important particulars, on the stories of two of the royal diamonds of Europe. The magnificent stone which adorns the top of the Russian Imperial Sceptre,¹ was once the eye of an Indian idol. The famous Koh-i-Noor² is also supposed to have been one of the sacred gems of India; and, more than this, to have been the subject of a prediction, which prophesied certain misfortune³ to the persons who should divert it from its ancient uses.

GLOUCESTER PLACE, PORTMAN SQUARE, *June 30th, 1868*

PREFACE TO THE PRESENT EDITION

The circumstances under which *The Moonstone* was originally written, have invested the book—in the author's mind—with an interest peculiarly its own.

While this work was still in course of periodical publication¹ in England, and in the United States, and when not more than one third of it was completed, the bitterest affliction of my life and the severest illness from which I have ever suffered, fell on me together. At the time when my mother lay dying in her little cottage in the country, I was struck prostrate, in London; crippled in every limb by the torture of rheumatic gout. Under the weight of this double calamity, I had my duty to the public still to bear in mind. My good readers in England and in America, whom I had never yet disappointed, were expecting their regular weekly instalments of the new story. I held to the story—for my own sake, as well as for theirs. In the intervals of grief, in the occasional remissions of pain, I dictated from my bed that portion of *The Moonstone* which has since proved most successful in amusing the public—the “Narrative of Miss Clack.” Of the physical sacrifice which the effort cost me I shall say nothing. I only look back now at the blessed relief which my occupation (forced as it was) brought to my mind. The Art which had been always the pride and the pleasure of my life, became now more than ever “its own exceeding great reward.”² I doubt if I should have lived to write another book, if the responsibility of the weekly publication of this story had not forced me to rally my sinking energies of body and mind—to dry my useless tears, and to conquer my merciless pains.

The novel completed, I awaited its reception by the public with an eagerness of anxiety, which I have never felt before or since for the fate of any other writings of mine. If *The Moonstone* had failed, my mortification would have been bitter indeed. As it was, the welcome accorded to the story in England, in America, and on the Continent of Europe was instantly and universally favourable.³ Never have I had better reason than this work has given me to feel gratefully to novel-readers of all nations. Everywhere my characters made friends, and my story roused interest. Everywhere the public favour looked over my faults—and repaid me a hundredfold for the hard toil which these pages cost me in the dark time of sickness and grief.

I have only to add that the present edition has had the benefit of my careful revision. All that I can do towards making the book worthy of the readers' continued approval has now been done.

May, 1871 W. C.

PROLOGUE

THE STORMING OF SERINGAPATAM (1799)

Extracted from a Family Paper

I

I address these lines—written in India—to my relatives in England.

My object is to explain the motive which has induced me to refuse the right hand of friendship to my cousin, John Herculastle. The reserve which I have hitherto maintained in this matter has been misinterpreted by members of my family whose good opinion I cannot consent to forfeit. I request them to suspend their decision until they have read my narrative. And I declare, on my word of honour, that what I am now about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth.

The private difference between my cousin and me took its rise in a great public event in which we were both concerned—the storming of Seringapatam,¹ under General Baird,² on the 4th of May, 1799.

In order that the circumstances may be clearly understood, I must revert for a moment to the period before the assault, and to the stories current in our camp of the treasure in jewels and gold stored up in the Palace of Seringapatam.

II

One of the wildest of these stories related to a Yellow Diamond—a famous gem in the native annals of India.

The earliest known traditions describe the stone as having been set in the forehead of the four-handed Indian god who typifies the Moon.³ Partly from its peculiar colour, partly from a superstition which represented it as feeling the influence of the deity whom it adorned, and growing and lessening in lustre with the waxing and waning of the moon, it first gained the name by which it continues to be known in India to this day—the name of THE MOONSTONE. A similar superstition was once prevalent, as I have heard, in ancient Greece and Rome; not applying, however (as in India), to a diamond devoted to the service of a god, but to a semi-transparent stone of the inferior order of gems, supposed to be affected by the lunar influences—the moon, in this latter case also, giving the name by which the stone is still known to collectors in our own time.

The adventures of the Yellow Diamond begin with the eleventh century of the Christian era.

At that date, the Mohammedan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni, crossed India; seized on the holy city of Somnauth⁴; and stripped of its treasures the famous temple, which had stood for centuries—the shrine of Hindoo pilgrimage, and the wonder of the eastern world.

Of all the deities worshipped in the temple, the moon-god alone escaped the rapacity of the conquering Mohammedans. Preserved by three Brahmins,⁵ the inviolate deity, bearing the Yellow Diamond in its forehead, was removed by night, and was transported to the second of the sacred cities of India—the city of Benares.⁶

Here, in a new shrine—in a hall inlaid with precious stones, under a roof supported by pillars of gold—the moon-god was set up and worshipped. Here, on the night when the shrine⁷ was completed, Vishnu the Preserver⁷ appeared to the three Brahmins in a dream.

The deity breathed the breath of his divinity on the Diamond in the forehead of the god. And the Brahmins knelt and hid their faces in their robes. The deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched, from that time

forth, by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of the generations of men. And the Brahmins heard, and bowed before his will. ~~The deity predicted certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem, and to all of his house and name who received it after him.~~ And the Brahmins caused the prophecy to be written over the gates of the shrine in letters of gold.

One age followed another—and still, generation after generation, the successors of the three Brahmins watched their priceless Moonstone, night and day. One age followed another, until the first years of the eighteenth Christian century saw the reign of Aurungzebe,⁸ Emperor of the Moguls. At his command, havoc and rapine were let loose once more among the temples of the worship of Brahmah. The shrine of the four-handed god was polluted by the slaughter of sacred animals; the images of the deities were broken in pieces; and the Moonstone was seized by an officer of rank in the army of Aurungzebe.

Powerless to recover their lost treasure by open force, the three guardian priests followed and watched it in disguise. The generations succeeded each other; the warrior who had committed the sacrilege perished miserably; the Moonstone passed (carrying its curse with it) from one lawless Mohammedan hand to another; and still, through all chances and changes, the successors of the three guardian priests kept their watch, waiting the day when the will of Vishnu the Preserver should restore to them their sacred gem. Time rolled on from the first to the last years of the eighteenth Christian century. The Diamond fell into the possession of Tippoo,⁹ Sultan of Seringapatam, who caused it to be placed as an ornament in the handle of a dagger, and who commanded it to be kept among the choicest treasures of his armoury. Even then—in the palace of the Sultan himself—the three guardian priests still kept their watch in secret. There were three officers of Tippoo's household, strangers to the rest, who had won their master's confidence by conforming, or appearing to conform, to the Mussulman faith; and to those three men report pointed as the three priests in disguise.

III

So, as told in our camp, ran the fanciful story of the Moonstone. It made no serious impression on any of us except my cousin—whose love of the marvellous induced him to believe it. On the night before the assault on Seringapatam, he was absurdly angry with me, and with others, for treating the whole thing as a fable. A foolish wrangle followed; and Herncastle's unlucky temper got the better of him. He declared, in his boastful way, that we should see the Diamond on his finger, if the English army took Seringapatam. The sally was saluted by a roar of laughter, and there, as we all thought that night, the thing ended.

Let me now take you on to the day of the assault.

My cousin and I were separated at the outset. I never saw him when we forded the river; when we planted the English flag in the first breach; when we crossed the ditch beyond; and, fighting every inch of our way entered the town. It was only at dusk, when the place was ours, and after General Baird himself had found the dead body of Tippoo under a heap of the slain, that Herncastle and I met.

We were each attached to a party sent out by the general's orders to prevent the plunder and confusion which followed our conquest. The camp-followers committed deplorable excesses; and, worse still, the soldiers found their way, by an unguarded door, into the treasury of the Palace, and loaded themselves with gold and jewels.¹⁰ It was in the court outside the treasury that my cousin and I met, to enforce the laws of discipline on our own soldiers. Herncastle's fiery temper had been, as I could plainly see, exasperated to a kind of frenzy by the terrible slaughter through which we had passed. He was very unfit, in my opinion, to perform the duty that had been entrusted to him.

There was riot and confusion enough in the treasury, but no violence that I saw. The men (if I may use such an

expression) disgraced themselves good-humouredly All sorts of rough jests and catchwords were bandied about among them; and the story of the Diamond turned up again unexpectedly, in the form of a mischievous joke. "Who's got the Moonstone?" was the rallying cry which perpetually caused the plundering, as soon as it was stopped in one place, to break out in another. While I was still vainly trying to establish order, I heard a frightful yelling on the other side of the court-yard, and at once ran towards the cries, in dread of finding some new outbreak of the pillage in that direction.

I got to an open door, and saw the bodies of two Indians (by their dress, as I guessed, officers of the palace) lying across the entrance, dead.

A cry inside hurried me into a room, which appeared to serve as an armoury. A third Indian, mortally wounded, was sinking at the feet of a man whose back was towards me. The man turned at the instant when I came in, and I saw John Herncastle, with a torch in one hand, and a dagger dripping with blood in the other. A stone, set like a pommel, in the end of the dagger's handle, flashed in the torchlight, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. The dying Indian¹¹ sank to his knees, pointed to the dagger in Herncastle's hand, and said, in his native language:—"The Moonstone will have its vengeance yet on you and yours!" He spoke those words, and fell dead on the floor.

Before I could stir in the matter, the men who had followed me across the courtyard crowded in. My cousin rushed to meet them, like a madman. "Clear the room!" he shouted to me, "and set a guard on the door!" The men fell back as he threw himself on them with his torch and his dagger. I put two sentinels of my own company, on whom I could rely, to keep the door. Through the remainder of the night, I saw no more of my cousin.

Early in the morning, the plunder still going on, General Baird announced publicly by beat of drum, that any thief detected in the fact, be he whom he might, should be hung. The provost-marshal¹² was in attendance, to prove that the General was in earnest; and in the throng that followed the proclamation, Herncastle and I met again.

He held out his hand, as usual, and said, "Good morning."

I waited before I gave him my hand in return.

"Tell me first," I said, "how the Indian in the armoury met his death, and what those last words meant, when he pointed to the dagger in your hand."

"The Indian met his death, as I suppose, by a mortal wound," said Herncastle. "What his last words meant I know no more than you do."

I looked at him narrowly. His frenzy of the previous day had all calmed down. I determined to give him another chance.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" I asked.

He answered, "That is all."

I turned my back on him; and we have not spoken since.

IV

I beg it to be understood that what I write here about my cousin (unless some necessity should arise for making it public) is for the information of the family only. Herncastle has said nothing that can justify me in speaking to our commanding officer. He has been taunted more than once about the Diamond, by those who recollect his angry outbreak before the assault; but, as may easily be imagined, his own remembrance of the circumstances under which I surprised him in the armoury has been enough to keep him silent. It is reported that he means to exchange into another regiment, avowedly for the purpose of separating himself from *me*.

Whether this be true or not, I cannot prevail upon myself to become his accuser—and I think with good reason. If

I made the matter public, I have no evidence but moral evidence to bring forward. I have not only no proof that he killed the two men at the door; I cannot even declare that he killed the third man inside—for I cannot say that my own eyes saw the deed committed. It is true that I heard the dying Indian's words; but if those words were pronounced to be the ravings of delirium, how could I contradict the assertion from my own knowledge? Let our relatives, on either side, form their own opinion on what I have written, and decide for themselves whether the aversion I now feel towards this man is well or ill founded.

Although I attach no sort of credit to the fantastic Indian legend of the gem, I must acknowledge, before I conclude, that I am influenced by a certain superstition of my own in this matter. It is my conviction, or my delusion, no matter which, that crime brings its own fatality with it. I am not only persuaded of Herncastle's guilt; I am even fanciful enough to believe that he will live to regret it, if he keeps the Diamond; and that others will live to regret taking it from him, if he gives the Diamond away.

The Story

THE LOSS OF THE DIAMOND (1848)

*The Events related by GABRIEL BETTEREDGE, House-Steward¹
in the service of JULIA, LADY VERINDER*

CHAPTER I

In the first part of *Robinson Crusoe*, at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find thus written:

“Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it.”

Only yesterday, I opened my *Robinson Crusoe* at that place. Only this morning (Monday, twenty-first, Eighteen hundred and fifty), came my lady’s nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, and held a short conversation with me, as follows:—

“Betteredge,” says Mr. Franklin, “I have been to the lawyer’s about some family matters, and, among other things, we have been talking of the loss of the Indian Diamond, in my aunt’s house in Yorkshire, two years since. Mr. Bruff thinks, as I think, that the whole story ought, in the interests of truth, to be placed on record in writing—and the sooner the better.”

Not perceiving his drift yet, and thinking it always desirable for the sake of peace and quietness to be on the lawyer’s side, I said I thought so too. Mr. Franklin went on.

“In this matter of the Diamond,” he said, “the characters of innocent people have suffered under suspicion already—as you know. The memories of innocent people may suffer hereafter, for want of a record of the facts to which those who come after us can appeal. There can be no doubt that this strange family story of ours ought to be told. And I think Betteredge, Mr. Bruff and I together have hit on the right way of telling it.”

Very satisfactory to both of them, no doubt. But I failed to see what I myself had to do with it, so far.

“We have certain events to relate,” Mr. Franklin proceeded; “and we have certain persons concerned in those events who are capable of relating them. Starting from these plain facts, the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn²—as far as our own personal experience extends, and no farther. We must begin by showing how the Diamond first fell into the hands of my uncle Herncastle, when he was serving in India fifty years since. This prefatory narrative I have already got by me in the form of an old family paper which relates the necessary particulars on the authority of an eye-witness. The next thing to do is to tell how the Diamond found its way into my aunt’s house in Yorkshire, two years ago, and how it came to be lost in little more than twelve hours afterwards. Nobody knows as much as you do, Betteredge, about what went on in the house at that time. So you must take the pen in hand, and start the story.”

In those terms I was informed of what my personal concern was with the matter of the Diamond. If you are curious to know what course I took under the circumstances, I beg to inform you that I did what you would probably have done in my place. I modestly declared myself to be quite unequal to the task imposed upon me—and I privately felt, all the time

that I was quite clever enough to perform it, if I only gave my own abilities a fair chance. Mr. Franklin, I imagine, must have seen my private sentiments in my face. He declined to believe in my modesty; and he insisted on giving my abilities a fair chance.

Two hours have passed since Mr. Franklin left me. As soon as his back was turned, I went to my writing-desk to start the story. There I have sat helpless (in spite of my abilities) ever since; seeing what Robinson Crusoe saw, as quoted above—namely, the folly of beginning work before we count the cost, and before we judge rightly of our own strength to go through with it. Please to remember, I opened the book by accident, at that bit, only the day before I rashly undertook the business now in hand; and, allow me to ask—if *that* isn't prophecy, what is?

I am not superstitious; I have read a heap of books in my time; I am a scholar in my own way. Though turned seventy, I possess an active memory, and legs to correspond. You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years—generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco—and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad—*Robinson Crusoe*. When I want advice—*Robinson Crusoe*. In past times, when my wife plagued me; in present times, when I have had a drop too much—*Robinson Crusoe*. I have worn out six stout *Robinson Crusoes* with hard work in my service. On my lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and *Robinson Crusoe* put me right again. Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.

Still, this don't look much like starting the story of the Diamond—does it? I seem to be wandering off in search of Lord knows what, Lord knows where. We will take a new sheet of paper, if you please, and begin over again, with my best respects to you.

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