

CHAPTER XIII

PUBLICATION OF "MR SMITH"

Mr Smith was published on the 10th October 1874, and I question whether any youthful author ever experienced such a "mingled scene of joy and woe" as I did over it.

One day I would be exalted to the heights, the next plunged in the depths; the warmest epistolary encomiums would arrive cheek-by-jowl with the most contemptuous disparagements. By turns I was joyful and downcast, elated and mortified. I never knew what to expect, nor how the wind would blow from any quarter.

Roughly speaking, however, on the one hand were Mr Blackwood, the critics, and the general public; on the other, the bulk of my relations, and a considerable number of new friends who fancied themselves or their belongings shown up in print. *Mr Smith* seemed, really seemed, to draw out all that was at once kindest and cruellest in human nature.

Let me begin with the critics. They were almost unanimous in his favour—so much so that I felt genuinely surprised and quite a little hurt when a provincial paper of acknowledged high status observed that the new novel might be all very well if compressed into a one-part magazine story, but that it was "made to meander with sickening prolixity through two mortal volumes."

This made me feel very flat—*how* flat only a palpitating young beginner, moved by every breath of praise or blame,

can realise ; and perhaps I could not recount it so gaily even now, if twenty years later the same high-class weekly, when doling out laudation of a new novel with no niggardly pen, averred that “with it all, nothing by Mrs Walford will ever come up in our estimation to our first friend, the incomparable *Mr Smith*.”

Little does the lordly reviewer think how a careless phrase, thrown off in a moment of peevishness or boredom, burns itself into the brain of the sensitive young author,—or, contrariwise, with what ecstasy he or she repeats to him or herself, the choice, discerning, altogether excellent paragraph, (no matter how long it be,) which is to guide the intelligence of their readers.

It was owing to the vast importance my husband and I attached to our reviews that we were enabled to “tick off” the little slip narrated above ; for was not every one of them carefully cut out and pasted into a book, to be read—I am not ashamed to say—over and over again ? That early enthusiasm is not a thing to be sneered at. In the nature of things it does not last ; review-albums ceased with us after my fourth book ; but I fearlessly aver that any affectation of indifference to newspaper criticism has never been and never will be mine, and that it has often proved a source of instruction by which I have gladly profited.

As, however, “Press Cutting Associations” either did not exist in the days of *Mr Smith* or did not come my way, it may be supposed that only a very small amount of the above reached me in my quiet country home—in fact, that I should only see as much of it in proportion to the whole as one sees of the iceberg whose true bulk is concealed beneath the water.

This was not so. Owing to the kindness of the Blackwoods, and the not invariable *kindness* of others, I really do not think any press notice of the slightest consequence was

suffered to escape us ; but, multifarious as they were, of one thing I am sure, we never knew who wrote them, and I mention this because the fact seemed very much to surprise a well-known man of letters to whom I told it some dozen years later.

It chanced that at one of Miss Jean Ingelow's literary dinner-parties I was sitting by Sir Frederick Locker, and the same day there had appeared in the *St James's Gazette* (of which Mr Greenwood was then editor) an article on novels signed by Coventry Patmore. It began thus :—

“The wealth of this country in prose fiction is scarcely yet appreciated. The number of novels produced from the time of Walter Scott to the present day which are really works of art, and which deserve, and will probably obtain, a classical position, in literature, is surprisingly great ; and the fact is curiously little recognised. . . . To call a book a ‘novel’ is to stamp it at once with an ephemeral character in the minds of most readers ; but it will probably be found that while by far the larger portion of the poetical and historical writing of the present century which is looked upon as ‘classical’ will prove to be ephemeral, a large mass of that writing which is regarded as almost by nature transitory, will take its place in the rank of abiding fame with the fiction of Fielding and Goldsmith. No generation has known so well how to paint itself as our own. . . . Among living writers are two—one well, and one at present comparatively little known—whose work of this kind can scarcely be surpassed : namely, Thomas Hardy and L. B. Walford. . . .”

“You have seen Coventry Patmore's article in this evening's *St James's* ?” inquired Sir Frederick Locker ; and, after a little more, added, “I suppose even if he had not signed it you would have known—or would soon have known who wrote it ? Oh, really ?”—as I disclaimed any

such knowledge. "But I thought—is it impertinent of me to say so?—but I certainly thought—I am sure Miss Ingelow has told me she generally knows something of her reviewers—reviewers of note, I mean."

To this I had but one answer. Miss Ingelow lived in the literary world. Despite her modest, retiring nature, it sought her out and buzzed around her; I was different; I scarcely knew a writer, certainly not a reviewer. We discussed the subject in all its bearings, but I fear that even to the last he regarded me as a solitary exception to the rule.

Mr John Blackwood did not confine himself to sending me press notices of *Mr Smith*, however numerous these might be. Like a truly busy man, he had time for everything: he wrote often, and seldom without enclosing other letters—letters from friends whose opinions were worth having; while there was a warmth and generosity of feeling in his own tributes which touched me to the heart. I cannot write, I cannot think, of that kindest of men and wisest of counsellors without a glow of pride in the reflection that he thought me worthy the time and trouble thus bestowed.

And how gently, how delicately, did he hint at an amendment, with what diffidence suggest an alteration in the page! It would be—"I am not altogether sure if your meaning is sufficiently intelligible here. Very likely it is my stupidity, but perhaps you would read it over and see what you think? If you decide to let it stand, please just do so." Or, again—"If it is not presumption in me to say so, the scene between the lovers might, I think, be amplified with advantage. It is so good that readers would like a little more of it." Or, on the other hand—"I have been thinking over your last chapter, and it occurs to me that

though it seems a pity to cut it down, the interest at the point is so great that your excellent description of nature would probably be skipped by readers eager to know the *dénouement*." Such gentle, deferential handling would have suggested rather the timid novice and the veteran *littérateur* than the old, experienced publisher and the raw recruit.

Some years after I had obtained a foothold in the writing world, it happened to me to receive back from a very well-known society, (too well known to be named here,) a manuscript, slashed on every page with a roystering blue pencil, which had obviously never hesitated for a moment on its murderous track. Alongside came a few bald lines, in which I was desired to send the story back when "revised"—which, being interpreted, meant with all the spirit, all the "vim" taken out of it—while even the very spelling and punctuation were not immune from free and fearless correction. John Blackwood would have died sooner than have sent the like.

I told him of it, and can see now his disgusted face. "Impertinent fools! Never permit anyone to take such liberties with you, my dear young lady. And I do hope," he added earnestly, "you did not let them have the story? I *do hope* you didn't?"

I had not.

Let me tell, however, the experience of a fellow-sufferer who did. This was the Rev. P. B. Power, that most amusing and original of writers in his own line. Mr Power was an Irishman, and to his Irish wit was doubtless due the amazing popularity of his religious booklets, *The Oiled Feather*, etc. *N.B.*—My mother would order these by a hundred at a time, and scarce an evangelical family but read and distributed them.

Knowing, then, that he had his own particular world at

his feet, it was delightfully interesting and entertaining to me to hear on one occasion of a "rankle" against that very blue pencil which had raised the blue devil in me.

It appeared that my interlocutor had recently written a tale—and one could guess a racy tale—founded on a visit of a certain ultra-refined and courteous dignitary of the Church to a rough mining district where he had *un succès fou*. The miners were greatly struck by their fine friend, finally succumbed altogether to his gentle, persuasive demeanour, and thus summed up the situation :

"Us can stand up agin most things, that us can ; but that bloke and his manners, he were too much for the likes o' we !"

"I named the story *That Bloke and his Manners*," recounted Mr Power, "and would you believe it"—here his eyes danced with mirth,—“would you *iver* believe it,” (the Irish accent flew out), “I got it back with a savage dash of that brute of a pencil through the words, and this on the margin—‘We draw the line at “Bloke”’ !”

Not long after we had laughed together over this, I came on *The Man and his Manners* at a religious bookseller's ; and while I thought of poor Mr Power with sympathy, I could not resist a certain self-gratulation in that I had not yielded as he had done, but taken my wares to another market, with orders to pay no heed to anything in blue !

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While every post was bringing me in adulatory epistles, often from unknown or anonymous correspondents ; while I grew almost sick of the very sight of a “simple, noble Christian gentleman,” and was grateful if it were omitted, I was on the other hand suffering in no small degree from the attitude generally adopted by my mother's family towards *Mr Smith*.

The Colquhouns might take kindly to it: the Fuller-Maitlands did not. A few words first about the Colquhouns. My great-aunt Helen (one of those who danced a reel by moonlight on the top of Ben Lomond) being now, despite her age, above all things a woman of the world who swam with the tide, wrote, "I hear you called a new Jane Austen on every side, and am congratulated every day on being the aunt of such a *genius*"; while my father's younger brother William, a man of leisure with clannish instincts, made it his business to hunt out press notices and collect opinions, which he freely passed on when they were laudatory—and probably they mostly were laudatory when said to his face. I had thus two adherents on that side of the house; but, alas! I must own I did not greatly value the support of either. They would have supported anything done or written by one of the clan.

And the Colquhouns were few, and the Fuller-Maitlands many; and with all respect to my father's people, "the English relations," as we called them, were more intellectual than the hardy Highlanders. I looked forward to their verdict confidently. I sent copies to the heads of various houses. I pictured *Mr Smith* being read—read aloud perhaps—by uncles, aunts, and cousins; and as there were nearly forty of the latter on the other side of the Border, they formed an imposing phalanx.

Well! What the cousins said is of small consequence, since so thoroughly were we of that generation subservient to our elders, that a genuine opinion was hardly to be extracted from any of them—but the fathers and mothers were simply horrified.

They talked to each other; they wrote to each other; they shook their heads; they threw up their hands. That one of themselves should have written a novel at all was bad enough, but that it should have had for its *dramatis*

personæ such people as the Tolletons and the Hunts was inexplicable.

I have still a letter from one aunt to another wondering how "the dear child"—we were always children to those relatives—"could ever have known anything about such inferior society?"—and another deploring that she should have "taken any notice whatever of such vulgar people,"—while a third took pen in hand to address myself on the subject. "Your book appears to be full of nothing but silly, useless chatter, most unworthy of being recorded. I daresay *the T.'s* did say it, but that is no reason why I should have to read it. You might have given us *one* good woman with a heart and a character. *That* would have refreshed us and done us good; but your cold, worldly-wise, manœuvring doll, Helen Tolleton, does no one good, and her only attraction is of the shallowest kind, in her pretty face. If I had readers—which I never shall have—I would teach them to reverence womankind, and not imagine that all girls are laying horrible little traps for rich old men. . . . I miss in the book the warmth and colour of a wholesome, honest, noble love story, such as is lovely and of good report—I do *not* want to be reminded of ignoble flirtations."

This was giving it me pretty "straight"; but I had it straighter still from another quarter, and more condensed. "I have heard it said that there may be something to be learnt even from novels. I do not know if this be true—but at any rate there is nothing whatever to be learnt from *yours*."

The pain inflicted by this severity—for though I can smile now, I did not smile then—was increased by my electing to keep such missives to myself. I could not bear that my husband, who would have been stung to the core by them, should share my bitterness of spirit—indeed, he

would have done more than share it, for he ever felt more for me than I did for myself. Accordingly I hid the mortifying budget, and of course knew by heart what it contained.

Obviously my relations had missed the whole point of *Mr Smith* : scarce a comment was passed on the man himself ; no one seemed to deem him worth even a passing observation, while one and all fell tooth and nail on his surroundings.

And it was not till one very dear simple-minded creature, whom I had been trained to regard as an authority on conventions, propounded the following theory, that I drew a breath to wonder, Could she really be as ignorant of life as it evinced, and had I and all the other nephews and nieces been under a hallucination regarding her all along ?

This was what raised the question. In a letter to my mother, she wrote, "What is the poor dear child thinking of to *dream* of making her Lord Sauffrenden 'hanker after the Tolletons' ? The idea is perfectly *preposterous*. A man like Lord Sauffrenden would never have known that such girls as the Tolletons *existed*." Another epistle of a like nature followed, but the kind heart of the writer sought to modify her strictures in it : "Farrer defends the book, and says it is immensely clever—though he does agree with me that it is an extraordinary one for *your* child to have written."

Instructed by her menfolk, my mother was able not only to receive this with equanimity, but even to appreciate the surpassing adroitness of the reply—that wonderful adroitness which, united to his great ability, eventually landed the said "Farrer" on the Woolsack. Lord Herschell, while eminently sincere and truthful, contrived never to make an enemy. He had a marvellous way of getting round a difficulty without giving offence. And, moreover, he would disarm an opponent—and once told me that in

the whole course of his life only two men had ever been personally rude to him. He gave the names of the two ; but my readers must be left to conjecture what these were, for of course I keep them to myself.

And while I am writing of this dear and lifelong friend in connection with my first novel, can there be any harm in admitting that he was a sworn admirer of its heroine ? Years and years afterwards when some beauties of the day were being vaunted, he turned to me with his own quiet smile, saying, "But you know, I never think I see any girls now as perfectly lovely as were your 'Tolletons.'"

Naturally he kept this sentiment to himself, when to have avowed it would have done me no good, and only have vexed an excellent and devoted stepmother ; but when we met—and he often spent week-ends, (the thing, though not the name, was invented then,) with my husband and me when on the Northern Circuit, we had great talks over every book I wrote.

On one occasion he arrived to stay with us in Scotland—at the time of the Great Seal incident—and, drawing *Lourdes* out of one pocket and *The Matchmaker* out of the other, observed tranquilly : "You and Zola might have got on together very well, I daresay ; but I thought it safest to put you in different pockets. However, between you I have had a delightful journey."

While detailing family disparagement, however, I love to recall that this disparagement was not shared by my new family. The Walfords were, in the best sense of the word, people of the world. They took wider views of life than we did, were infinitely more tolerant, and, I must add, infinitely more humble-minded. It did us all imaginable good to consort with them ; and for myself I can only add that no young bride was ever introduced into a family of more delightful "In-laws."



MY GREAT GRANDMOTHER WHEN NEARLY NINETY YEARS OF AGE



Having no daughters of their own, the two dear parents took every son's wife to their hearts, and their proximity to our own first wedded home was one of my chief sources of happiness.

Both of them were renowned for beauty of person, my father-in-law being a perfect model of the "fine old English gentleman," while she was a dainty creature of whom everyone said on the instant, "What a little Dresden Shepherdess!"

In connection with them, and because I know not where else to insert it, I must insert here a very slight incident which amused us at the time. Many years later my husband and I were making a call on an aged lady, Mrs Whitaker Maitland, of Loughton Hall, Essex, and she thus addressed us: "It is so strangely interesting to me, your coming to reside in this neighbourhood, for I knew long ago *all four of your grandmothers.*" Then to me, "I knew Lady Colquhoun and Mrs Fuller-Maitland," and to him, "I knew Mrs Walford and Mrs Hanson"—Mrs Hanson was only a great-aunt, but we let that pass.

As it was, the old lady's acquaintance with our forebears was surprising enough, as she continued: "What a horse-woman *old Mrs Maitland* was—Ebenezer's mother, I mean! She rode to the day of her death, and she died at ninety. They tried to stop her, and she did stop for a little; but one day she saw a butcher's pony at her door, and took a fancy to have her saddle put on it, and her habit put on her, and away she went round the paddock. She bought that pony; and there is a picture of her somewhere, on its back, and her big, stolid coachman, on a big horse close behind!"

This picture I insert, having obtained a copy of it for reproduction in these pages.

"Yes, I knew your grandmothers too," continued our aged friend, scanning my husband with the musing eyes

of old age, then suddenly rousing up: "The Walfords were a handsome race!"

We went away laughing; my people were out of it on that occasion.

A Walford, my husband's grandfather, was High Sheriff of Essex in 1815, the "Waterloo year"; and we now possess the dining-table of dark mahogany at which this High Sheriff entertained the Waterloo heroes on their return to their native land. I must be forgiven for this digression.

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One letter much prized by me anent *Mr Smith* came in a roundabout way which doubled its value. "It is the book of the year," wrote Mr Mudie, the then head of the well-known firm; "none other can touch it at present for popularity. As to whether it is by a man or a woman is much discussed, but general opinion is in favour of the former."

This was also attested by others, and some went so far as to affirm in the most positive manner that not only was "L. B. Walford" a pseudonym, but that they "knew the fellow who took it"—that he was, in fact, a brother-officer.

"They are saying in your eldest brother's regiment that he is the author of *Mr Smith*," wrote Mr Blackwood. "There is no harm in its being supposed to be so, provided you and he don't mind. People don't think a woman can know as much as you do about sport."

Of course we did not "mind"—in fact we both enjoyed the joke; but when it came to one newspaper critic alleging that the young author "knew more of woodcock-shooting than of religion" my mother looked grave. She who had instructed us all so carefully, so anxiously, on this highest of all subjects, to have it, as it were, "cast up" at her that she had brought me up in ignorance! It was not till I had

explained that the jeer simply referred to a Biblical passage which I had failed to verify before quoting, that she recovered her equanimity, while I took the hint to heart and never after fancied I knew a text, or texts, of Scripture too well to need looking them up before writing them afresh.

From across the Atlantic there soon sounded a welcome note. I had heard of piracies and infringements of copyrights, but these terms conveyed nothing to my ignorant mind ; indeed, I should willingly have made a present of *Mr Smith* to the whole American continent if he would have been accepted as a colonist, so that a letter from one of the leading New York publishers astonished as much as it pleased me.

It ran thus :—

“DEAR MADAM,—I hope that you will not be unpleasantly surprised at receiving by mail an American edition of *Mr Smith* and the enclosed draft for £20— which the profits of the book enable my house to forward with compliments. Although it is made payable to the order of ‘L. B. Walford’—a name that we take for granted to be fictitious—you are justified in signing it for the purpose of collecting the draft. Your book has done exceptionally well here for one by a new author, and should you enable us to publish as good ones in future, we can show our practical appreciation more liberally. Personally, I beg leave to express more admiration for your work than it is often my pleasure to experience, and I beg to remain,—Respectfully yours, etc.”

This was the beginning of a long and lucrative business connection with one of the most charming Americans I have ever met.

It was not till twenty years later that we did meet, and during that period he had not only published American editions of nearly everything I wrote, but introduced me to

other useful fellow-countrymen who ran my serial novels contemporaneously with their appearance in this country.

I was also indebted to him for making known to me many agreeable acquaintances, who first sought me out in my English home, armed with letters of introduction, and subsequently entertained me with their well-known royal hospitality on the other side of the Atlantic.

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Let me now ascend to an exalted sphere. *Mr Smith* had been out about six months, and though the post still continued to bring me many exciting epistles of one sort or another on the all-important subject, the first flood had abated when I received one whose envelope bore the stamp of "Windsor Castle."

Windsor Castle? I started, as well I might. For though we had relations holding offices about the Court, my parents seldom went there, and were absolutely indifferent to any advantages that might have been obtained by cultivating their goodwill. As for seeking them out?—however, here was somebody apparently seeking me out, which was quite another thing.

And I am not ashamed to own that I did feel proud and pleased as I read the letter, which was from the then Duchess of Roxburghe, who was First Lady-in-Waiting to the Queen at the time.

The Duke of Roxburghe and my father were third cousins—not a near relationship certainly, but it still counts for something north of the Tweed, especially when friendship is added to it. His wife now wrote to me; and little did I think how many, many more letters I was to receive from her, bearing on the same subject with variations; but as this was the first, I may be forgiven for transcribing it verbatim.

“MY DEAR MRS WALFORD,—I have just come in from driving with the Queen, who said she wanted to read *Mr Smith*, and I undertook to say you would be proud to send it. Will you do so *directly*—(not waiting for binding)—addressed to the Countess of Erroll, as I leave early to-morrow? I am sure you will like what I have promised in your name? Lady Erroll is to read it aloud to Her Majesty.—Catching the post, yours most truly,
S. ROXBURGHE.”

Here indeed was a pleasant note for a young author to receive.

And scarcely had *Mr Smith* been despatched, and the Queen’s gracious message of thanks received *via* Lady Erroll, (which to me and mine meant the close of the affair), when there came another letter from this new friend.

I need not quote it : its *raison d’être* was one from Lady Erroll to herself, which her kind heart impelled her to forward on the instant. The latter ran as follows :—

“MY DEAR DUCHESS,—. . . I have been reading *Mr Smith* to the Queen ever since it arrived, and I *can* say with what interest the Queen listens to the readings. How interesting it is, and how delightfully it is written ! I wish we had more literature of this kind. Novels written with so good and righteous an end in view. I have written to thank Mrs Walford from the Queen.—Believe me, my dear Duchess, ever yours sincerely,
E. A. ERROLL.”

I have not quite done with this subject, which indeed wove a thread into all my future literary career ; but as this chapter deals only with my first novel, I will just mention a trivial incident which took place in connection with it at my presentation at Court a year or two later.

At that precise moment the Duchess of Roxburghe, who was to present me, was taking the place of the then Mistress

of the Robes, absent from indisposition, and, sending for me beforehand to see her privately at Buckingham Palace, she told me that she would in consequence be close to the Queen's ear on the occasion, and had been desired to whisper "Mr Smith" on my approach. "I believe Her Majesty intends to speak to you," added she.

"If so, what am I to say?" inquired I, somewhat fluttered.

"Nothing. Only bow, unless you are asked a question. *Then* you will know better than I what reply to make. And do be early," continued my kind sponsor, who forgot nothing, "for the Queen will not stay till the end of the Drawing-Room, and may retire very soon."

Acting on this hint, our small party, consisting of my eldest brother, (lately married), his bride, and myself, secured seats in the front row of the front room, and I was the eighth lady to pass into the Royal Presence.

But nothing happened! The Queen afterwards scolded the duchess, who, she averred, had omitted to do as she was bid; the duchess could not reply to her august mistress, but assured me that she had whispered so loudly that she thought I must myself have heard; be it as it may, "Mr Smith" passed on with the rest; and whether I were glad or sorry, I declare I don't know.

The Queen might, of course, have sent for me afterwards; but she did not—I believe she was not well at the time,—and as I lived far from London, and was fast tied and bound in my own home, I was well pleased that future intercourse with the Court should be epistolatory.

Now comes a curious touch of human nature.

My good uncles and aunts in the south, who had been so *down* on my first essay into the realms of literature, were quite unmoved by popular feeling striking a different note—indeed, this only served to exasperate them. They were

overhead saying to each other, "The worst of it is *she'll go on aoining it!*"—and groaning.

My mother, who had become converted to another view of the case after a second perusal of "the horrid book"—(for I am bound to own she too had at first mourned in secret over what was to her a bitter disappointment)—in vain strove to induce her people to follow her example. No, they would not; among themselves they agreed that it was perhaps natural, and certainly it was "Fanny all over" to stand up for her own children, but that if *Mr Smith* had not been written by one of them, she would have been more severe upon it than anyone.

Well, as luck would have it, this disarmed critic was staying with me in my own new home when there arrived the letters from Windsor Castle already quoted—and she soon had them all round the family.

What a sensation they made! To be able to appreciate it, one must have lived from start to finish, if the expression may be used, in the Victorian era. My mother's people were no *snobs*; the sudden revulsion which took place in my favour was not due to snobbery; it had its origin in the profound and ingrained reverence for Queen Victoria which was with them and others of their kind a species of religion.

Had she not seen with her own eyes that the dreadful book of which they were all so ashamed was being read aloud to her adored Sovereign, my aunt, Mrs Herschell, who affirmed that the very existence of such girls as the Tolletons would be unknown to Lord Sauffrenden, would have pronounced as unhesitatingly that the very existence of such a book as *Mr Smith* would be unknown to the Queen. And that the three select ladies who were Her Majesty's chosen friends and companions, and who were equally as herself above reproach, should be vying with

each other in their encomiums, and writing them moreover to the poor, misguided child? It was incredible—impossible.

The shock must have been terrific; for it was followed by a silence which told its own tale. And though it was not till after this new experience was as old as the hills, and *Pauline*, *Cousins*, *Troublesome Daughters*, and *The Baby's Grandmother* were affording opportunities for a change of front, it certainly did in some instances come about with singular rapidity upon the heels of royal favour.

Queen Victoria may or may not have been a good judge of a book; but the verdict of the finest critic in the world would not have carried the same weight as did that of Her Majesty with those nineteenth-century relations of mine.

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But I must now speak of some other antagonists of *Mr Smith*, not so soon nor so surely silenced.

It was alleged in my own neighbourhood—the neighbourhood in which the book was written—that every single character in it was drawn from life. This common accusation against character-novelists derived intensity from the fact that there was unfortunately an admixture of truth in it,—yet the strange thing was that those persons who really did serve as prototypes, who heard it so said on every side, and would doubtless have found it out for themselves if it had not been said at all, were not by any means the ones to feel resentment.

That was reserved for insignificant, obscure individuals, some of whom I had never even heard of, but who chose to imagine themselves and their belongings held up to ridicule. Thus one poor man could not hear me spoken of without anger, and would not permit himself to be introduced to my acquaintance for years and years,

because of a casual remark in which his name had been introduced. In vain he was assured by those who knew me best—and by myself through them—that I had merely heard by chance a name which suited me, and had no knowledge that a person bearing it lived in our locality, to be wounded by its being coupled with the epithet “Fool.” He stoutly held to his own opinion ; and when at last, quite a dozen years afterwards, he consented to relinquish it, his doing so was a fresh instance of human inconsistency. He and I met by accident at a country house, and, horror of horrors ! he was told to take me in to dinner. Naturally, *Mr Smith* was never mentioned ; but, as often happens, my neighbour, out of sheer nervousness, introduced the very topic he may be credited with wishing to avoid—he spoke of my other novels. How it then came about I do not remember ; but in the short space of time at command I contrived to effect what years and the stoutest asseverations on the part of others had failed to do. Probably he was tired of his grievance, and glad to give in. He went about telling everybody that he was convinced of my innocence at last.

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The mistake I made, and it was a very serious one, was in using too many characters from one neighbourhood for the same book. It is true that many more were assigned to me than I did use ; but I confess to some—and also to having drawn them more closely from life than occasion warranted.

But I was very young, and like a lion or bear-cub, unaware of my power. I never supposed—*never*—that caps would be fitted as they were.

Moreover, I did not feel ill-natured, and it did not occur to me that I was doing an ill-natured thing. The uproar that was created petrified me.

And it is no exaggeration to use the word "uproar." Even a respectable Liverpool paper allowed itself to print a column of abuse, under the heading of a "Second Notice," since *Mr Smith* had already been reviewed in its pages; and our country doctor—a fine specimen of the old Scotch doctor, who was always my fast friend and staunch ally—reported to me one day that he had found an elderly patient one day too much engrossed by the new novel to think of his ailments. "For," quoth he, "I'm told that I shall find everyone I know in it, and I have already found a lot."

"Said I, 'Bless me, sir, am I the doctor?'" chuckled my good friend, Doctor Main, very happily aware that he was not—and I may add that no one was. The "Dr Hunt" of *Mr Smith* evolved himself out of no real person.

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I have written too much on this theme—naturally more interesting to myself than to others; but when one begins to think over old days, how vividly one thing after another rises to view!—and I cannot resist adding two curious little incidents connected with my first novel which may at least entertain my fellow-writers.

The first of these was the discovery in a Highland parish that it possessed in its midst an authoress hitherto content to be anonymous, but resolved to be so no longer.

She was a servant girl at the Free Church manse; and she proclaimed *Mr Smith* to be the child of her brain, winning credence for the assertion at the hands of all her associates. Her master alone was sceptical.

Maggie, or Jenny, or whatever her name was, nevertheless persisted; she had thoroughly mastered her part, and "got up" the book—which probably the worthy minister had not,—and all he had to go upon was his conviction

that one so illiterate could not possibly have written *any* book, *Mr Smith* or not ; and as things became increasingly disagreeable, (strangers coming to the manse, and demanding to see "the inspired lassie"), he took what no doubt was to him a strong measure—he wrote a statement of the case to the Blackwoods.

From them I heard of it—for the letter was sent on to me,—and of course we both laughed together over the imposture ; but will it be believed that our emphatic denials were met in a manner so ingenious that they failed of their end ?

"Ah," said the girl, "that's what they say, is it ? Shame upon them ! The writin' itsel' is no mine, that's true ; but I find a' the rest. I mak up the tale, tho' a' the money and the credit gaes to anither." (*Sic vos non vobis*, she might have added, but that would have been beyond her.)

Nevertheless, so stoutly did she hold to this amended assertion, and so satisfactory was it considered by her followers, that shortly afterwards she made a marriage far above her station on the faith of it—though whether the deluded husband finally learned the truth or not, history does not say.

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The second nefarious proceeding to which my first novel gave rise emanated from the other side of the Atlantic.

This time *Mr Smith* had not merely a new author, but a new name. A story entitled *A Sudden Change* appeared in an American journal, described as "A magazine of pure literature," which caught the eye of a Scotch editor, who, thinking it would suit his readers, made arrangements to reproduce it for their benefit.

This he did in all innocence ; but, unluckily for him, the new tale caught the eye of one to whom its outlines seemed

strangely familiar. This gentleman showed it round in his circle, where his opinion was not only confirmed, but a voice was raised unhesitatingly to proclaim, "Why, this is *Mr Smith!*"

The Blackwoods were again applied to, and an amusing correspondence ensued.

Naturally, the American fought every inch of the ground. The MS. had been sent him as authentic; he had no reason for supposing it was not so, with more of the kind, (all of which I have before me as I write); but eventually, being compelled by threats of exposure to give up the alleged "authentic MS.," it proved to be simply *Mr Smith in print*—with the names altered, and paragraphs here and there struck out.

The whole was considerably abridged; every page was mutilated; "Mr Smith" himself was "Mr Adams," "Miss Tolleton" was "Miss Podmore," and other names throughout were likewise changed—well, indeed, might the whole be called *A Sudden Change!*—but no further concealment of the fraud was possible.

We inflicted a fine of ten pounds—the man was down upon his knees, so we had to let him off cheap—and I handed the cheque over to the Royal Literary Fund.

