

CHAPTER XV

LITERARY MEMORIES

AND now I have come to the last chapter. Not that I have no more to say, for I have much, only too much ; but it cannot be said. The story of my full, busy, happy married life is too near and dear to my heart—too many of those who have taken part in it are still doing so, too much that has happened is still in a sense happening.

Into it, therefore; with all its joys and sorrows, its extended sphere, its accumulated experiences, I will not enter, but confine myself to what may just possibly interest a few of my readers, or fellow-writers—namely, such features of my literary career as can be supplied by memory, supplemented by a box of old letters.

Perhaps the only person who ever asked me for a copy of one of my books was Queen Victoria. This very great compliment was paid *Pauline* at the close of its career in *Blackwood's Magazine*, when I received the following notes (the first being from the Duchess of Roxburghe, already referred to in these pages ; and the other, enclosed by her from Miss Drummond, one of the Queen's Maids of Honour). That from the duchess, who was then in the Riviera, was as follows :—

“MY DEAR MRS WALFORD,—This moment have I received the enclosed from Miss Drummond, forwarded from Floors. Pray sent *Pauline directly* to Osborne. I am sure you will,—and will also kindly

at once relieve *my* anxiety as to this note's reaching you, as I have been so stupid as to have mislaid your last letter, and am therefore not *certain* of your address. — Believe me (catching the post), very sincerely yours.
S. ROXBURGHE."

N.B.—She was always "catching the post," this dear, kind, energetic lady—but she never failed to catch it; and the better I got to know her the more I appreciated that warmth of heart and fervour of sympathy which made her so truly beloved as well as admired by all who knew her.

The letter which had been received only "a moment" before being despatched to me, was worth the haste bestowed on it—at least in my eyes. It was dated from Osborne, where the Court was then assembled, and ran thus :—

"MY DEAR DUCHESS,—I have just had a message from the Queen to say that the authoress of *Mr Smith* who was to have sent the Queen her last book called *Pauline*, has not done so yet, and I was to let you know this, as H.M. wishes to have the book. . . ."

The rest of the sheet had reference to private affairs.

And what was *Pauline* about that she had not already flown to the feet of her royal mistress? *Pauline* was putting on her Court dress, *i.e.* the book was at the binders'; and, never imagining that there was any hurry, since my special Lady-in-Waiting was not at hand to present it, I had not set them a time-limit.

Here was a dilemma. Should I send the book in its ordinary attire of neat, plain, dark-green cloth, or wire the binders to "rush" the Queen's copy in its navy-blue calf? "You *can't* send it in its common binding," pronounced my father, who was staying with my husband and me at the time. "Certainly not. I had *The Moor and the Loch* beautifully bound. It's only proper respect."

But was it not more respectful to be obedient? We really were perplexed—we two, my husband and I, who were always one in everything—and what would have happened I know not, if by a stroke of luck the glorified *Pauline* had not arrived by parcel-post the same day, when it was sped forth on its southern way then and there.

Forthwith I received a letter in the fine, delicate writing of the then Lady-in-Waiting, the Marchioness of Ely, to the effect that the Queen was much pleased, “and desires me to say that she likes *Mr Smith* so much that she is most anxious to read *Pauline*, as H.M. hears it is so highly spoken of.”

After this I never again failed to have the Queen’s copy of every new novel bound in time, and up to the date of her death Her Majesty always had them read aloud to her, and took care that her appreciation reached me through one or other of her ladies.

The Queen, however, could criticise on occasion: I am not sure that she ever greatly cared for *The Baby’s Grandmother*. “Lady Matilda” was, I take it, a little too sprightly for Queen Victoria’s very Victorian ideas; though she pronounced the story “absorbingly interesting,” and could never make up her mind whether Challoner ought to have married the girl he was engaged to or not.

Of *Leddy Marget: A Girl of Eighty*—the last book of mine to be sent Her Majesty—she was also at first a little shy. Probably in the last years of her life the aged Queen did not feel sufficiently in sympathy with the gay-spirited old heroine, who played pranks whenever she was out of sight of her faithful dragon, Gibbie,—and it is only human nature not to care for others to do what we cannot do ourselves as the years pass. Be that as it may, I gathered from those then about Her Majesty that she listened coldly to *Leddy*

Marget, which, to confess the truth, I had rather expected would be a favourite with my Royal reader.

Then came a second letter. Quite unexpectedly, Lady Erroll had been asked to read the book aloud a second time, and had looked up to behold the tears running down the face of her Royal Mistress! "Afterwards I saw Her Majesty re-reading it quietly to herself," subjoined my kind correspondent; "and as for *my* opinion, if it is worth having, I do think I never read a more beautiful book—the last chapters are quite perfect."

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At the time of the death of the Duke of Clarence, I had a short but interesting correspondence with the Queen (through those about her) on the subject of Her Majesty's letter to the nation.

This most touching and admirably expressed letter was permitted to be published by Raphael Tuck, and was of course widely bought by such loyal subjects as could afford a shilling for the purchase.

But it seemed to me that there were many thousands of very loyal subjects who would willingly have adorned their cottage walls with this memento of their Sovereign, but to whom a shilling was a shilling, and not to be parted with unnecessarily.

I therefore made bold to propound to the Duchess of Roxburghe the suggestion that a copy of the letter should be sold for a penny, and the idea caught her fancy at once.

"I enter into all you say *most* warmly," wrote she, replying, as usual, on the instant, "and have sent on your letter of this morning by this post to Sir Henry Ponsonby, begging his advice, and if favourable to your suggestion, asking him to take the Queen's pleasure on it."

Sir Henry's reply, however, was not favourable. "This

is a difficult question to answer, my dear duchess," wrote he. "If Raphael Tuck had given a facsimile of the letter at once, for a penny, he would have made a fortune. But he waited for the expensive surroundings which no one cared for, and so made but little. Still, the Queen promised to stand by him, and she cannot now give leave for any other reproduction."

To the latter statement, however, the duchess demurred. "It seems to me that, once published and sold, *anybody* can copy *anything*," cried she. "I enclose Sir Henry's letter, and you will see what I mean. I do not understand the subject, *do you?* But at any rate, cannot the same publisher now issue a cheaper edition? Shall I ask Sir Henry if this idea could be proposed to the Queen?"

As, however, I find no further mention of the subject among my letters, many of which have got lost, I must conclude that the one finally dismissing it is among these, and that the project fell to the ground—a pity, for nothing so good of its kind had ever before been given by Queen Victoria to her people, and now it has probably sunk into oblivion, to be heard of no more.

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Pauline had not reached its last instalment in *Blackwood* ere I was at work upon *Cousins*, which was published the following year.

This novel I wrote with greater ease and pleasure than anything I had ever written before, for the following reason. It depicted the kind of life to which I was born. *Mr Smith* was the work of an alien; I did not look at my characters ill-naturedly—indeed, I regarded them with the liveliest sympathetic interest; but I had often to stop and think what they would say and do under certain circumstances: whereas my "cousins" Simon and Hetty, likewise Jem, Bertie,

Agatha—all of these talked, and acted, of themselves. I knew just how angry Agatha would be when Simon put his arm round Hetty in the boat, and felt every wince of the poor little crushed Hetty when “all the starch was taken out of her” thereafter.

The fateful blunder of Simon’s proposal to the wrong sister has been criticised as improbable—nay, as impossible; but two cases of the kind in real life were communicated to me, not indeed by their actual perpetrators, which was perhaps hardly to be expected, but by men who knew the facts and vouched for their truth. This was not, however, till after the book was published; so all that can be said is that if the case were an abnormal one, I did not give it proper attention, being only bent on finding some peg, however slight, on which to hang the thread of the tale. Simon had got to be parted from his true love, and the parting had got to be of a painful and, as I thought, probable character.

Mr Blackwood’s first opinion of the new novel was a shock to me. I had grown accustomed to his favourable verdicts and to depending upon them.

When therefore he wrote, though kindly and courteously as ever, that he was not quite sure that *Cousins* was “equal to its predecessors” and “would like to see me about it,” I could hardly believe my eyes. Honestly, I thought the book as good as *Mr Smith*, and better than *Pauline*. But as I never showed a manuscript to anybody before submitting it to the arbiter of fate himself, I could only take it for granted that my opinion was wrong, and with a sinking heart present myself at the old house in George Street.

Ah! that old house! It seemed to wear a forbidding aspect now, and I had grown to love it so!

It was not quite the time for which my interview was appointed when I reached the outer steps, and down and

down went my courage till it was clean out of sight before the chime of St Andrew's clock rang out the dreaded hour.

However, the thing had to be done, and a brother who accompanied me, having no idea of anything amiss, had the cruelty to open the door and beckon me to lead the way, on the instant. We went into the historic Blackwood room where the portraits of Scott, Hogg, Christopher North, George Eliot, and others known to fame adorn the walls,—and there we waited, while fancy conjured up a frowning publisher and a rejected MS. Of course, he would do it nicely—of course, he would do his best to soften my disappointment; but I must be prepared, and would be prepared, to take with a good grace whatever was in store.

John Blackwood came forward to receive us. He certainly was not frowning; his face wore its most genial expression, and he did not delay a moment in putting me out of my misery.

“Now I have got good news for you”; (perhaps he saw how little the “good news” was expected, for he took me again by the hand and shook it heartily),—“I am going to climb down about your book. It's a capital book; I have read it all through again; I sat up till the small hours over it last night, and cannot imagine what I was about to take such a grumpy view of it the other day. The only thing I can think of”—and he laughed slyly—“is that I had had a fearful drubbing at golf on St Andrews Links that afternoon; and when I got back to Strathtyrum, (where I was stopping for a match, and had taken *Cousins* with me to read), I was feeling not fit to live! My dear young lady, you can have no idea of what we golfers suffer when we have had a real bad day—when luck's been against us, and we have played abominably into the bargain. We——”; but here he pulled himself up with a laugh. “It's not *that* you want to hear about, and I am just like all other golf men, start me on the

one great subject, and it's all up with any other. However, *Cousins* is all right, and we shall have the greatest pleasure in publishing it."

With my head swimming and ears ringing, I feebly stammered out my willingness to make any alterations, to—to—add anything, or—or omit anything.

"You will not need to alter a syllable," said Mr Blackwood emphatically. He then proceeded, "Well now, Mrs Walford, here we have a full-length portrait of the author of *The Moor and the Loch* at last. We have had several snapshots; we catch a glimpse of him here and there; but 'Sir John Manners' is my old friend John Colquhoun to the life."

It was then arranged that *Cousins* should be brought out the following October, and my brother and I flew home on wings.

I think it was on this visit to Edinburgh that I dined with the Blackwoods to meet George Eliot.

To meet George Eliot? That was my one thought. Colonel Chesney (afterwards Sir George Chesney, author of *The Battle of Dorking*) was also present, and there was a large dinner-party, of whom nearly all were interesting and notable people, but George Eliot alone engrossed my attention. She was at the height of her fame, having just produced *Middlemarch*. But she did not shine in society—at least, she certainly did not shine that evening; and I am inclined to think that those who met her only in public found her as destitute of personal charm as I did. Here I recall the tale of an undergraduate.

The famous authoress was being fêted at Cambridge, and a few enthusiastic and very youthful admirers were permitted to join a luncheon-party given in her honour, though accommodation could only be found for them at a side-table. They could, however, look and listen—and as there was not

much to look at, they listened the more. The large, full lips seemed to be emitting words of wisdom ; they craned their necks, they stretched their ears—suddenly the tension was relieved, they leaned back in their chairs, and laughed as only boys ever laugh. What had they heard ? The deep voice that should have pronounced judgment on a Cicero or a Sophocles, had exclaimed with fervid protest : “ But, surely, Mr So-and-so, you do not mean to say you *really* like that bitter Bairisch beer ? ”

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Cousins was followed a year later by *Troublesome Daughters*, which was written from start to finish in three months. As this comprised the writing out for the press, it will surprise no one to learn that, in the teeth of all protest, I was at work from eight to ten hours every day ; and as I was suffering a good deal from asthma at the time, and had to change my attitude every short while—from sitting to standing, from standing to kneeling, from kneeling to lying flat on my face on the floor (while the pencil still steadily pursued its way),—it will surprise no one either to hear that something like a collapse ensued directly the strain was over, or that I never again defied health and authority in like manner.

The book was “ on time,” however, for the next opening in *Maga*, and then—then came a heavy loss and bitter disappointment.

Of the loss first. My kindest of friends and most invaluable of supporters, Mr John Blackwood, died rather suddenly, and as no formal arrangement had been made for *Troublesome Daughters* running serially in the magazine, and as the new head of the firm preferred a tale called *The Private Secretary* (which was believed to be by Sir George Chesney, but to which his name was never attached), my three months

of vehement overwork was in a sense thrown away. The new novel was indeed published by the old firm, but it did not run in *Maga*.

It was much liked, but I have already been too frank over the kind receptions accorded my work and shall say no more on this head. One little reminiscence, however, may perhaps be pardoned. I was standing with a party of my own people in Chester Station when Mr Gladstone, who was travelling south from Hawarden, and naturally the centre of a good deal of attention, popped his head out of a carriage window, and called something after a retreating figure. "Did you hear what he said?" demanded those about me, laughing.

I had not ; my attention had been momentarily diverted.

"Oh, you ought," rejoined they ; "it was, 'If you want the third volume of *Troublesome Daughters*, you will find it on the little table beside my bed.'" And then I felt rather sorry not to have heard for myself the great statesman say it.

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Troublesome Daughters elicited a letter from a daughter of Robert Chambers (and sister of Lady Priestley, in whose reminiscences she figures as "Annie") which is so brimful of sprightly charm—rare in a middle-aged woman—that for its own sake I append a portion of it.

"My husband happened to be kept at home yesterday—*no vera weel*—(awful business a man in the house, and not ill enough to be in bed—only able and willing, alas ! to go poking and prying about, discovering mares'-nests in every sort of unexpected and unthought-of quarter)—when I set him down to *Troublesome Daughters* and peace ensued. I had no further trouble, except to get him to put out the *candle*, which one night in the middle of the second volume he would *not* do. We fought and struggled, till he

jumped out of bed, flung on his dressing-gown, and bounded and banged into the spare room. No sheets there, of course,—but that was a trifle—he had *your book*, and peace to devour it. Where do you get all your wonderful knowledge of life from? You are as much at home in the whirl of London society as in the lonely castle or farmhouse. As for your handling of *Scotch*, you beat William Black hollow.”

Now I must own I am a little proud of my Scotch, so this from such a thorough Scot was delightful. On the same subject wrote Dr Donald Macleod, editor of *Good Words*. “Your Scotch sometimes beats me, and I flatter myself I am not easily beat. What is ‘a drink of the Dodgill Reepan?’ I repeat, it marvels me where you have picked up such idiomatic and vigorous Scotch.”

For the benefit of those equally ignorant of the “Dodgill Reepan” and its qualities, I may explain that it is a herb which grows among the red mosses of Galloway, and if brewed by a despairing lover, and presented by him to the lady of his affections, is supposed to be all-potent in causing them to turn in his favour.

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Throughout my writing career, now extending over thirty-seven years, I have had the full share of reprobation, animadversion, and instruction which inevitably falls to the lot of a novelist endeavouring to depict the manners and customs of her day. I was told by one indignant correspondent, among other items, that I must be completely ignorant of how men really talk when I could make them use such an expression as “By Jove!” He railed through three sheets at this unfortunate expletive, assuring me it never had been and never would be in use “among gentlemen,” and wound up by the complacent announcement that

he might be supposed to know, as he had been among boys all his life, and was now in a responsible position attached to the Y.M.C.A. !

From among a host of other humorous epistles I select one which pleased us much. It also adopted an aggrieved and contemptuous tone. Did I suppose that the aristocracy (*sic*) ever had dessert on the table for luncheon? I ought not to have made a mistake like that. Biscuits and cake—*never* fruit—were alone “served” in the middle of the day. Again, I offended against the susceptibility of one whom I judged to hold a position in a great household similar to that obviously held by the above writer. “You seem to know a good deal,” she was good enough to allow, “but permit me to set you right on one point. The aristocracy, (again the aristocracy), *do not use davenports*. Davenports are never to be seen in their houses.” And, to enhance the value of this instruction, this writer, like the other, added for my information a synopsis of her own status: “You may believe me, *as I am writing in the room with a Countess.*”

On the other hand, a heated pen accused me roundly of prejudice and ignorance in depicting the family of Tufnells in *The Baby's Grandmother*, and I was told that I knew nothing whatever about such people; that they might not have handles to their names, and might only live in a simple, provincial town, but they could be every whit “as refined and cultivated and well-bred,” as my Lady Matilda and her brothers for all that. To poke fun at them was “not like a lady,” whatever I might think. Here again was a letter a yard long.

But the climax of these was perhaps reached in one before me now, though not written directly to myself.

Perhaps it would be best to suppress the name of the editress to whom it was addressed, and who, with a fine sense of humour, passed it on.

“MADAM,—Allow me as an old subscriber to your magazine, to say that if you admit many more such stories as *A Carrier of Parcels*, by L. B. Walford, you will lower the tone of it by many degrees. The vulgar slang which runs through the whole of it would do no discredit to the *Referee*, or the *Pink 'Un*,—papers which I hope you have never seen.—Yours faithfully,

“A SADDENED READER.”

I was also frequently proffered advice. One writer could not any longer endure to find me year after year deliberately choosing for my novels such heroines as Kate Newbattle, Lady Matilda Wilmot, and Rosamund Liscard. Was it possible that I did not know any other kind of girls? They abounded in my native land. In the writer's own neighbourhood she (I felt sure it was a “she,” though only initials were appended in this instance) could enter at least half-a-dozen houses, where were to be found dear, sweet, *good* girls, living useful and beautiful lives, devoted to their home duties, to the poor, to books, music, and pleasant, wholesome recreations, etc., etc.

Obviously it never dawned upon the mind of this other “saddened reader” that the lives of such “dear, sweet, *good* girls” were not laid absolutely bare before her approving eye, and that if they did not, as she proceeded to allege, “give men a thought,” there would hardly have been in them material for a novelist.

Another well-wisher began by being complimentary. So far she liked my books, but thought I had now exhausted the subjects of country-house life, and ought to turn to something new—something altogether different. “Why not try our hop-pickers, for instance?” continued she. “They come down every year from the East End, when the hops are ready, and are really a most interesting set of people,” etc.

Hop-pickers and me! To compare a small thing to a great, I could not but think of the suggestion made to Miss Austen, by the Librarian to King George IV., that she should "delineate in some future work the habits of life, character, and enthusiasm of a clergyman who should pass his time between the metropolis and the country, who should be something like Beattie's Minstrel, fond of and entirely engaged in literature."

Nor was this attempt to turn the current of my thoughts into another channel by any means a solitary one, and I will only add that if I ever did try to conform to some well-meant counsels, the result never justified them.

How to introduce a comical little piece of miss-fire which happened on one occasion, I do not know. It connects with nothing, and yet we have laughed so often over it that I must risk dragging it in by the heels.

A novelette of mine, yclept *The Havoc of a Smile*, had for its hero a figure in my own eyes lovable and pathetic. Young Gregory Pomfret is nobody in his father's pompous mansion, and leads a lonely, neglected life there, because, owing to the circumstances of his lot, he is unable to keep the hours and enter into the amusements and occupations of the rest. The story has eventually a happy ending for Gregory, which makes ample amends to him for all he has had to go through beforehand.

But I was not prepared for the feelings the book aroused in a country squire who overtook me one day when out walking, and holloed from horseback his heartiest applause, waxing more and more eloquent, till, with fiery red face and blazing eyes, he finally burst forth, "I feel I could *just kick that Gregory!*" What was in his mind to bring about such a state of savagery, we were never destined to know, then or thereafter.

In 1889 I had a difference of opinion with Messrs Blackwood as to issuing cheap editions of my novels; my husband's view of the case—and he had an excellent insight into such matters—being that these were bound to come sooner or later (which prediction has been amply fulfilled, we all know), while the fine old conservative firm held out stoutly against the idea of any such innovation.

We parted company, with the greatest reluctance on my part,—though I have had no reason to regret my course of action from any other point of view than that of friendship and gratitude.

In Messrs Longman, to whom after a short time my novels and books of all sorts were ultimately transferred, I found all the steady, sound, reliable support and generous treatment which had so smoothed my literary path in its early stages, and which is still so invaluable to me as a veteran.

After ceasing to write serials for *Maga* (the last of them being *A Stiffnecked Generation*, in 1888) I started with *The Mischief of Monica* in *Longman's Magazine* in 1890.

I was then at my busiest. I was pouring out at one and the same time novels, magazine stories, essays, poems, anything and everything. Referring to my literary record, which has been faithfully kept ever since the first faded entry of *Mr Smith* in 1874, I find that I have produced forty-five full-sized books, and may add that there are two smaller ones in the press at the present moment.

This number does not, it is true, rival that of my friend Mrs Maxwell (Miss Braddon), but who could rival that fertile and wonderful pen? Moreover, *Lady Audley's Secret* came out when I was in my teens,—and though there are, no doubt, many writers of to-day who can claim to have been, and to be, as industrious as I during any given time, there are few, alas! for whom the writing-time has been so prolonged.

In addition to other work, I was for four years, namely from 1889 to 1893, London Correspondent of the *New York Critic*, for which I wrote a fortnightly budget of literary news; and when it is added that my predecessor was Mr W. E. Henley, it will be seen that I had to put my best foot forward.

Moreover, the articles had to be sent in punctually, and it will always be a source of triumph to me that such a born free-lance as myself should have faithfully fulfilled this binding engagement, and only once, and that on an almost excusable occasion, forgotten the day. Had I said beforehand I should do this, no one would have believed me. But I did it, and had pleasure in doing it; it was, I repeat, a triumph, and, to confess the truth, a triumph little likely to be ever wiped out by repetition. To do anything *regularly* is, and always has been, foreign to my inclinations.

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I also wrote fugitive pieces for the *World*, then edited by Edmund Yates, and one of these was composed under rather unusual circumstances.

It was a perfect summer day, and Henley Regatta was in full swing, when, under cover of my parasol, indeed using it as a species of desk, I added line upon line, and verse upon verse, to a poem a column long entitled *A Henley Ghost*.

The whole was written from first to last in the midst of the Regatta—now in a boat, now in a tent, now on the seething brink of the river.

As the evening shadows fell, my husband, who had to go back to town, carried off the pencilled scrawl in his pocket, handed it in at the *World* offices, and next day it appeared!

Mr Yates's brief notes in the tiniest of handwritings—such a contrast to his big, burly self—were curiosities. One ran: "Dear Mrs Walford, Do go on. Yours, E. Yates."

Another, still more brief and equally to the point, was: "Dear Mrs Walford,—Hooray!—Yrs., E. Yates." With Mr Yates's death, however, my connection with the *World* ceased.

Some who read these pages may remember, and will never forget the advent of a singularly endearing young American amongst us, about eighteen years ago. Wolcott Balestier came over to this country with a few introductions, and in an incredibly short space of time he had turned the subjects of these introductions into friends—some of them close and intimate friends. There was scarcely a literary man or woman in England whom he had not approached on behalf of the large publishing firm in New York which he had been sent hither to represent, and very, very few whom he had not drawn into his net.

He had a unique personality. He took the most cold and cautious hearts by storm. His wit, his enthusiasm, his absolute and unqualified self-reliance, untinged as it was by any personal vanity or egotism, inspired us with the same faith.

On the one hand lay old associations, reluctance to trust a stranger, (and that stranger a "smart" Transatlantic cousin), together with the lurking inbred conservatism which makes change of any sort detestable in the eyes of a true-born Briton; on the other was a slight, fragile form whose persuasive tongue neither man nor woman could resist.

Our first meeting took place at Cranbrooke Hall, in Essex, which my husband and I had taken for a term of years. Mr Balestier asked leave to run down shortly after his arrival in England, and only the day before he did so, we heard of him simultaneously from one or two quarters. From such celerity and vivacity what was to be expected but a forward, irrepressible, impossible young man?

Never were prognostications more agreeably disappointed. When he had opened his mission and found me disinclined to negotiate, the subject was quietly dropped. By-and-by, however, and that in the most natural manner possible, it was again on the *tapis*. I began to listen, to hesitate, to deliberate.

“We are prepared,” said the young American, “to be reasonably reckless.” It was an odd phrase—one of Wolcott Balestier’s many odd phrases; but it forcibly conveyed his meaning, as I subsequently found—for though the matter stood over for a time, it ended as anyone can guess.

But there came a sad day all too soon, when a little band of mourners, with more than ordinary grief in their hearts, stood on a platform of Liverpool Street Station to see a train go out, bearing some of their number to a foreign land where, after a few days’ illness, death had cut short that bright young life, so full of promise—and I know that none of those who stood there will ever forget Wolcott Balestier. Shortly afterwards his sweet young sister married Mr Rudyard Kipling, and the same little circle reassembled; but influenza, which was raging at the time, struck me down upon the wedding-day, and I lost the pleasure of being ‘the bride’s only feminine friend present. Readers of a stirring tale, *The Naulaka*, may recall that it was written conjointly by Rudyard Kipling and Wolcott Balestier.

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Although I have never written stories for children, I have written about them, and a small book (not worthy of being included in the forty-five referred to above) contains four, which appeared first in *Atalanta*, to which magazine at one time I was a regular contributor. The most popular of these little tales is *Such a Little Thing*, and though it was not founded on fact, it was founded on what might have been

fact. A child's disappointment, a child's suffering under a sense of its offerings being slighted, and the great things of its life shown to be of small account in the eyes of others—this is what I never can bear to see, and on one occasion, unwittingly, I and others all but inflicted it.

We were skating on the pond at Cranbrooke, and it was a glorious winter afternoon, and the fun was at its height. Two little faces watched us from the nursery window, and on a sudden we remembered—just in time.

They, the little ones, had prepared for us—for *us*, not we for *them*—a Christmas tree. It had cost them weeks of preparation beneath the care of an affectionate and intelligent nurse, and we were within an ace of forgetting it!

But all went well; at the cost of no little self-sacrifice, sisters and brother cheerfully tramped across the snowy gardens up to the house, leaving behind the merry scene, the frosty air, the rising moon, to take part in a poor little, loving festivity; and as I, the mother, looked round the tables which told so much, I thought of all that might have been, had the bidden guests refused to come. Thereupon I wrote *Such a Little Thing*.

The small, square volume, named *For Grown-up Children*, is now issued by Messrs Ward, Lock & Co.

It may interest some readers—or, at any rate, some writers—to know that *The Matchmaker* was the last three-volume novel accepted by Mudie's Library. Perhaps I was one of the writers of fiction hit hardest by the sweeping away of that ancient landmark.

Still, I have had my day; I have never until within a year or two ago had a single unpublished MS. in my possession; and what I have now are—shall I confess it?—the abortive efforts of a novelist who would fain be a playwright!

Nature has denied me this gift, and so I must e'en do without it.