

## THE LATE RIGHT HON. W. H. SMITH, M.P.



WITH the death of Mr W. H. Smith, the greatest of English booksellers, the present Conservative Government of England loses one of its most solid and consistent pillars of support. It was curious that a man sprung from the trading class should have become an exponent of the policy of the privileged stratum of society, but this fact represents the change which has come over the face of English Conservatism in the last generation and the wholesome tendency of English politics. Instead of sending itself rudely away from all sympathy with the people, it prefers to bridge over the chasm by the importation to its ranks of brilliant *litterateurs* such as Disraeli, or substantial shopkeepers such as the deceased statesman here noticed.

Mr Smith's great position in public life was due to the fact not that he was a man of vast wealth combined with commanding ability, but that he represented 'the Man in the Street' as that man has never been represented before. France worshipped Voltaire and Victor Hugo, because they typified the two highest French ideals of human genius and character. Mr Smith typified all the ideals of 'the Man in the Street.' Wealth, respectability, propriety in thought, word, and deed, sobriety, of expression, correctness of bearing, smooth, conciliatory civility, attentive business habits, and an entire absence of any outward sign of genius, intellectual brilliancy, literary and scientific culture; these are some of the qualities that made Mr Smith what he was. Mr Spenslow it will be remembered, argued that as the price of wheat had never been higher than when Doctors Commons was in the plenitude of its power, so if you touched 'the Commons' you would ruin the country. England has, as a nation of shopkeepers, grown rich and powerful under the guidance of the type of mind which has reached its apogee in Mr W. H. Smith; to challenge his right to lead the House of Commons was to ruin the Empire. Walt Whitman now-a-days admits that Democracy is eliminating 'something that gives the last majesty to man.' In giving Mr Smith as the leader of the House of Commons, Democracy invested the Representative Chamber with a halo of bourgeois domestic virtue. But it must be allowed that it has also eliminated from it the last element of Imperial dignity, by the assumption of which leaders of the classical school created the illusion that the House of Commons was a modern reproduction of the Roman Senate. Nobody could possibly mistake Mr Smith for what Montague Tigg termed a 'toga-like Roman.'

Sainte Beuve said of Louis XIV. that he had good sense, and that in having it he had a good deal that went to make success in life. Perhaps this is the only respect in which the Leader of the House of Commons and newly-appointed Warden of the Cinque Ports resembled the kingliest of kings. His career, indeed, was the triumph of common sense and of the patient industry so often associated with that admirable quality.

To begin with, Mr Smith had never been above his business. The son of a rich man who made a fortune as a newspaper-vendor, he enjoyed all the educational advantages that money could bestow; yet he did not despise the sources of his fortune—on the contrary, he set himself to develop them. At an age when the heirs of opulent tradesmen leave school or college to waste their lives on sport or playing at soldiers, varied by baccarat, Mr Smith set himself to 'stick to the shop,' on Richardson's principle that if one does so, the chances are that the shop will stick to him. And it did. Mr Smith, by hard and unattractive work, acquired a very competent knowledge of every branch of the great business of which he was for so many years the presiding genius—a business which gave him in the end the same sort of influence, direct and indirect, over the electors of Westminster, which a feudal baron wielded over his vassals. When he contested Westminster against the late Mr John Stuart Mill, he was supported on the broad ground that he was a safe man without much brain, opposing a man with too much brain who was by no means safe. His victory surprised the country. In the House of Commons this enlightened view of the Westminster election prevailed. Mr Smith, at all events, would not lecture it with an air of aggravating superiority, and the man who had delivered it from Mr Mill was sure of a warm welcome. From the outset Mr Smith's success was assured. He entered Parliament at a time which was most favourable for those who were party men without partisanship—politicians without politics. No other man could have been got with Mr Smith's local influence and bottomless purse to rock in the cradle of Registration such a constituency as Westminster was till it was broken up by the last Reform Act, and few men ever entered Parliament with feebler political prepossessions.

Mr Smith had the art of conciliating opponents, and he practised it without ceasing. He expressed a general antipathy to reforms, but in a manner which left even Radicals sorrowful because they had not succeeded in converting such a good and worthy soul, so obviously reasonable that very little was needed to convert him. He was soon discovered to be of an obliging disposition. He was always ready to do anybody little friendly services. Whenever duty that involved drudgery fell to eminent politicians of his own side,

Mr Smith was ever willing to take much of it on himself. Very soon he came to be looked on as the general utility man of the Conservative party, and his service on Committees and in facilitating the transaction of non-contentious business gradually made him a *persona grata* to men on both sides of the House, who believe, with Macaulay, that compromise is the essence of politics. He developed, moreover, a very pretty talent for negotiation, and in time when intrigues had to be carried on with sickly Liberals, it was found that nobody could approach them with a manner that was more caressing and less alarming than the member for Westminster. For a long time he seemed to live by gnawing Blue-books, and he 'got up' the details of financial administration pretty thoroughly. About this period it became clear to his leaders that they would find life much pleasanter if they had such a useful and amiable person for a colleague rather than a critic, and so Mr Smith went into office as Financial Secretary to the Treasury, where again his complaisant manners and imperturbable temper strengthened his hold on official life.

In his first great office, that of First Lord of the Admiralty, he was, however, less successful, and there was a time when it seemed as if Mr Smith's career had ended with the fall of that famous Beaconsfield Administration, which con-



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trived, like the Yankee editor, to make so many big men out of small material. The spirit of the Fourth Party was abroad, and it was in conflict with those forces of order and decorum of which Mr Smith was the most oppressive representative. But again Mr Smith was 'in luck's way.' When that spirit triumphed, and all the virtues of the Tory Party went down before all the talents, an unexpected accident happened. The vanity and caprice which caused the collapse of Lord Randolph Churchill's leadership, together with the clattering of the Opposition, and the strong rivalry among Conservative politicians, each eager to wrest the leadership of the Commons from his neighbour, told in favour of Mr Smith. Nor was Mr Smith unworthy of support. He worked hard. He smoothed down everybody who got ruffled in controversy. In time he amused the House by the air of complete earnestness with which he entered the most respectable commonplaces on the most solemn and critical occasions; and if a man has not genius, there is no better way of gaining the favour of the House of Commons than by affording it a little innocent amusement at one's own expense.

The following are the salient features in the political career of the deceased statesman. He was the son of Mr William Henry Smith, of the Strand, London, and Bourne-mouth, Hampshire, bookseller, publisher, and news-agent, was born in Duke-street, Grosvenor Square, London, June 24th, 1825. He was educated at the Grammar School, Tavistock, and became in due course, a partner in the well-known firm in the Strand. In July, 1865, he unsuccessfully contested Westminster in the Conservative interest, but his candidature was renewed

with success in November, 1859, when he defeated Mr John Stuart Mill. He continued to sit for Westminster down to 1885, when, after the Redistribution Act, he was returned for the Strand, being again elected in 1886. He was Financial Secretary of the Treasury from February, 1874, till August 8, 1877, when he was appointed First Lord of the Admiralty, in succession to the late Mr Ward Hunt. He went out of office on the retirement of the Conservatives in April, 1880, and was appointed Secretary of State for War in 1885 on the formation of the Salisbury Conservative Government in June of that year. On the resignation of Sir William Hart Dyke in January, 1886, Mr W. H. Smith was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland, but the Salisbury Government fell immediately afterwards, and he held the appointment for only six days. In Lord Salisbury's second administration he was appointed Secretary of State for War. When the Ministry was reconstructed on the resignation of Lord R. Churchill, Mr Smith became First Lord of the Treasury and Leader of the House of Commons.

## JENNY LIND.

THE Rev. H. R. Haweis, writing of Jenny Lind, says that a life of more ideal completeness than that of hers it is hardly possible to imagine. All its aims were worthy; all were achieved; rise, development, progress, culmination, immense gifts, numerous opportunities, a great example of honest work and spotless integrity, and a splendid legacy of benefactions innumerable, in the shape of hospitals, schools, and institutes founded by her own unaided efforts, in addition to unknown and unnumbered private bounties. Such is the record of Jenny Lind's life, and it has assuredly not been written in vain.

The phases of this unique career seem to follow each other with an almost dramatic propriety and scenic completeness. She appears to us on her way attended by the clamour, and heat, and vociferous applause of the surging multitude. But she moves like one all robed in white—a saintly presence, inspired, somnambulant, and unconscious of the lower world—with eyes raised heavenwards, absorbed only in her most perfect and all purifying work; passing through a troubled and polluted world of chicanery and lust—as a beam of sunlight passes into the depths of a foul and noisome cavern, yet without contracting any stain. She seems to us at once the most real and the most ideal creature ever born.

I can see the little plain girl of nine years old, with her sensitive face and spare figure—shrinking, suspicious, not kindly treated at home, but ever singing to herself and her cat 'with the blue ribbon,' both seated in the deep window niche. The passers-by stop to listen: the good Herr Crolius, Court singing-master is attracted, will have her officially trained. Behold, the incredulous and severe Herr Puke, who will hardly consent to listen to the little girl, and then bursts out crying at the exquisite pathos of the child's voice. What a gift of tears, what *larmes dans le gosier* she had! How many more were to cry at that voice in the coming years!

Little Jenny is at last installed as pupil, under official auspices, to be taught 'piano, religion, French, history, geography, writing, arithmetic, and drawing,' and so trained for the stage. She meets with kind people—especially her maternal grandmother, who impresses her sensitive, eager heart with that steady moral principle and those deep religious feelings which, as the years lengthened, became her most striking characteristics. At first Jenny seemed destined for the spoken drama; she was by nature a consummate actress—such abandon and spontaneity. But her extraordinary voice asserted itself irresistibly. It was said by a great critic, 'If she had not been the greatest singer, she would still have been the greatest actress of the age. She was destined to be both. At eighteen, her singing-mistress listened to her in silence one day; Jenny had been doing her very best to please her, and felt disappointed at no least word of approval.

'Am I then so stupid?' she said, with a little pout. 'My child,' said her mistress, while the tears coursed down her own cheeks, 'I have nothing to teach you; do as Nature tells you.'

## SIX HUNDRED FEET OF FROZEN GROUND.

SCIENTIFIC men have been perplexed for many years over the phenomenon of a certain well at Yakutsk, Siberia. A Russian merchant in 1823 began to dig the well, but he gave up the task three years later, when he had dug down thirty feet, and was still in solidly frozen soil. Then the Russian Academy of Sciences dug away at the well for months, but ceased when it had reached a depth of 382 feet, and the ground was still frozen as hard as a rock. In 1894 the Academy had the temperature of the excavation carefully taken at various depths, and from these data it was estimated that the ground was frozen to a depth of 612 feet. Although the pole of the greatest cold is in this province of Yakutsk, not even the terrible severity of the Siberian winters could freeze the ground to a depth of over 600 feet. Geologists have decided that the frozen valley of the lower Lena is a formation of the glacial period. They believe, in short, that it froze solidly then, and has never since had a chance to thaw out.

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