

AN INTRIGUING FRIENDSHIP REVISITED:

George Smith (1824-1901): Victorian publisher and Charlotte Brontë (1816-1855),

novelist By Robin Agnew.

Introduction

Many aspects of George Smith's life have already been addressed in Jenifer Glynn's excellent biography first published in 1986.¹ In particular, the correspondence between Charlotte Brontë, George Smith, Ellen Nussey and William Smith Williams is well documented.² In her scholarly approach, Glynn quotes the letter, in which Smith emphatically denies that he was ever in love with Charlotte.³

Evidently this question was put by Mrs Humphry Ward as late as 1898, when she was writing the foreword to *Villette* for the Haworth collected edition to be published then by Smith and Elder. This statement enticed me, and I wanted to know more about the man whom Charlotte Brontë is said to have characterized as 'Dr John' in that same novel. This article, therefore, concentrates primarily on the special relationship shared by two individuals of major literary stature and importance: Charlotte Brontë, author, and George Smith, her efficient, honest and kindly publisher.

It should be remembered that in 1898, George was in his mid-seventies which may account for its rather dismissive and sour tones. In addition the letter reflects the strong influence of Mrs Smith senior on her son's matrimonial prospects in the past. Glynn also quotes a letter to Ellen Nussey dated 20 January 1851, in which Charlotte makes it clear that she is happy to have her publisher "as a friend" and no more than that.⁴ Anything more than friendship was improbable given 'the vast barrier of age, fortune, etc'; she credits their friendship with 'a kind of natural liking and sense of something congenial.'

Nevertheless courtesy, mutual respect and grateful appreciation was always maintained between the two. The publisher, without any doubt, had engaged himself in the personal concerns of one of his first prized authors in an unusually generous way; this was more than just a commercial relationship to both, and both would benefit greatly from the association.

The opportunity for me to bring the subject up to date – at least for my own mind - arose recently when I acquired a copy of *George Smith - A Memoir* by Sidney Lee, George Smith and Leslie Stephen, from which this essay is drawn.⁵ My own interest had been aroused in learning of the historic friendship between the Scottish parents of Smith and of Dr John

¹Glynn, J (1986) *Prince of Publishers: A Biography of the Great Victorian Publisher George Smith*, London: Allison & Busby Ltd.

²*Ibid.* Notes to Chapter VI, pp 210-212.

³*Ibid.* VI, p 61.

⁴*Ibid.* VI, p 64.

Forbes, the latter about whom I have researched and published in the past.⁶ These familial connections or knowledge of each other, though perhaps not the first chronologically for the Brontës and Dr Forbes themselves, as we find in this current study, enabled young Smith to introduce Dr Sir John Forbes, the Royal Physician, to Charlotte Brontë in person, after her arrival in London.⁷

Referring to Smith's previous brief autobiography included in the *Memoir* (p 91, reprinted from the *Cornhill Magazine*), he had described his first impression of Charlotte as 'interesting rather than attractive'. Was this the author of *Jane Eyre*? (In July 1848, Charlotte and her younger sister, Anne, had visited the premises of Smith, Elder & Co, at 65 Cornhill, in order to establish their separate Bell identities.) He continued: 'There was but little feminine charm about her...she was *not* pretty'. Assuredly it was not love at first sight for either, nor set to attract ideas of a future romance.

Surprisingly, Smith took great pains to introduce her to other famous novelists - and especially to 'her hero' William Thackeray - as well as to such worthies as Sir John Forbes (1787-1861) mentioned above, who sought to assist her and her family with medical advice, Smith also entertained her as his guest at the Opera. These incidents were brought to my attention first when reading the outstanding biography of the Brontës by Juliet Barker.⁸ Clearly, through George Smith's good offices, Charlotte Brontë – after previous rejections and disappointments – had fortunately joined a group of authors who were becoming amongst Britain's finest and most admired. This proved most fortunate whereas her sisters did not benefit similarly with Thomas Cautley Newby over time.

Fig. 1: 65 Cornhill: Charlotte and Anne Brontë arrived here one morning to explain who they were (other than Currer and Acton Bell). Copyright ©2000-2020 Andy Donaldson, with thanks!



George Smith Junior and his family business

⁶ Agnew, RAL & Lerner, AJ, (2017) 'Dr John Forbes and the Brontës', *Medical Historian*, 27, p 38. ⁷ Dr Forbes, in his early medical career, had practised as head of the Penzance Public Dispensary in Cornwall, a few doors away from the Branwell family home of Maria and Elizabeth Branwell, mother and aunt of the Brontë children, with whom they were also personally familiar. Charlotte may or may not have known of

George Smith (1824-1901), publisher, journalist and proprietor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, (DNB) was of Scottish descent. His paternal grandfather farmed land in Morayshire but was impecunious and died leaving a young family. His son, George Smith (1789-1846), gained an apprenticeship to a bookseller in Elgin but quickly decided that his future lay in London rather than in Scotland. He was first employed at the publishing house of Rivington in the City near St. Paul's Cathedral. Later he found work at the well-known publishing house of John Murray in Albemarle Street. Having excelled in his trade, he formed a partnership with Alexander Elder, also a Scot from Banff, and set up a small business at 158 Fenchurch St. as booksellers and stationers.

This new business was Smith & Elder, which added publishing to their ventures so that by 1819 they were admitted to membership of the Stationers' Company. Their first publication was a little-known collection of sermons by a Congregational minister but it was described as being 'well-printed' and set the standard for subsequent works.

On 12 October 1820 George Smith married Elizabeth Murray, aged 23, eight years his junior, who was the daughter of Alexander Murray (unrelated to the London publishers, John Murray); like her husband she was of Scottish descent, having a native shrewdness and judgement which later proved of invaluable help to her husband. They lived over the shop in Fenchurch Street, where young George Smith was born on 19 March 1824. Shortly afterwards the family moved to 65 Cornhill, which was to become famous in literary and commercial circles as a publishing house.

At the age of six young George suffered an attack of 'brain fever' or encephalitis which left him hyperactive in childhood and difficult to control at home and at his school in the City of London. His father decided to take him in to his office, where he was noted to excel in Latin, maths. and chemistry. Later he acquired a good knowledge of French as well as a business instinct. Additionally, he showed an appreciation of good literature, which increased in his father's firm“. But it was the stir of the mercantile world that first gave useful direction to his abundant mental energy” (p 5 of *Memoir*). This was the young man whom Charlotte Brontë had described at their first meeting in 1848 as enterprising and practical rather than handsome.

Fig.2: George Smith (1824-1901) as a young man.



The job of publishing: discovery, negotiation, andfriendship

Meanwhile, in 1824 Smith & Elder were joined by a third partner and became Smith, Elder & Co.⁹ The business had connections with a firm of merchants in Calcutta, which enhanced the export of books and stationery to officers of the East India Company. At that time the only land route to India was via Suez and through the Red Sea and young Smith entered the import/export business to India with enthusiasm. His work started at 7.30 am and ended at 8pm, with only short breaks for food and rest; it was a hard life but gave him much satisfaction. He was trained in all aspects of the stationery and bookselling business, including bookbinding and type composition. For relaxation he attended a riding school and became an expert horseman, a recreation which became life long.

In 1841 the Smith family moved to a new residence at Denmark Hill, London. In the 1830s and 1840s the firm's business steadily increased, especially in the publishing department for which Elder was responsible; it included a Greek and English dictionary, which became a standard work. In addition, a new annual magazine called *Friendship's Offering*, whose writers numbered oldies like Southey and Coleridge and newcomers like Tennyson and Ruskin, was introduced. Thomas Macauley contributed his *Ballad of the Armada* to the 1833 volume. At the apex of its popularity eight to ten thousand copies were sold at Christmas.

A female literary connection was Miss Louisa Sheridan of whom young George entertained admiring boyhood memories. Between 1831 and 1835 she produced five annual illustrated volumes of comic writings. In 1838 Smith, Elder & Co. brought out a further illustrated book with contributions from various well-known authors.

In the following year the great collected edition of the works of Sir Humphry Davy (1778-1829) edited by his brother, Dr John Davy (1790-1868) began to appear, with the completed collection of nine volumes available from 1840. Both of these scientific men, Fellows of the Royal Society of which Sir Humphry was also President for some years, had been young pupils of the Brontë children's Uncle John Fennell in their youth, Both of these brothers and their cousin, Edward Davy, had been members of the Royal Geological Society in Penzance, and were known to the Carne-Branwell families as kin. Humphry Davy had proposed Maria's cousin, mineralogist Joseph Carne, in 1818 to the Fellowship of the Royal Society. 'Cousin Jo' was born the year before Maria Brontë in West Cornwall within the same kinship circle.

Interestingly enough to be mentioned here is that Davy's final monograph, *Consolation in Travel or Last Days of a Philosopher*, was first published by John Murray in 1830 as a single volume. Fictionally, the book is mentioned as found on Helen Graham's sitting room desk where Gilbert Markham idly picks it up to hold it in his hand. Anne Brontë's novel, *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*¹⁰, was first published by T C Newby in 1848, and not re-published until 1850 by Smith & Elder, It is clear that the single volume edition existed within Brontë reading matter prior to the publishing project of Smith & Elder's Collected

⁹ Patrick Stewart, was also from Scotland, and the son of an Edinburgh clergyman. ¹⁰ Hill, K (1994) *The Brontë Sisters and Sir Humphry Davy, A sharing of visions*, Penzance: Jamieson Library (imprint of Hypatia Publications). Volume IX of this set (*The Collected Works of Sir Humphry Davy*) published in 1840.

Edition, and therefore was not a gift or loan made to the Brontës by George Smith (i.e. Smith did not know Acton Bell's manuscript content at that stage, nor who she was). This anecdotal finding strengthens the theme that Kerrow Hill highlights in her monograph of 1994 (Footnote 10) wherein she explores the visionary qualities of Davy and the Brontës as found in their shared Cornish back stories.

Meanwhile Smith & Elder also produced travel books with handsome drawings of great beauty. Perhaps the most famous was *The Zoological Report of the Expedition of HMS Beagle* by Charles Darwin in 1840, which was subsidised by the government to the tune of £1,000 (£88,000 today). This production preceded the definitive *The Origin of Species by means of Natural Selection...* published by Smith's rivals John Murray in 1859. This was to achieve worldwide fame for the author but before that Smith became involved with the great art-critic John Ruskin.

Ruskin had written the first volume of *Modern Painters, by a Graduate of Oxford* in 1843 which, on its rejection by John Murray, was at once accepted by Smith & Elder, more especially by George Smith the younger, who was just about to take full responsibility for the firm. At the end of 1844 Smith's father developed dementia and in 1846, he died, leaving his son in charge of providing for his mother, younger brothers and sisters.

The family crisis was accentuated by the discovery that the third partner was misusing the firm's finances.¹¹ Simultaneously Elder decided to retire and live in Sussex, leaving young Smith alone to run the business at the tender age of 22. He rose to the occasion by hard work in expanding the agency and banking business. Long hours at work were rewarded by increased profits both at home and overseas where branches were opened in Bombay, Java and West Africa. All sorts of objects were exported to the Indian government, the most remarkable being a human skeleton!

Fig. 3: William Smith Williams: The reader who first brought Charlotte's talents to George Smith, and encouraged her to continue writing.



¹¹ Though almost ruined by this fraud, Smith did not prosecute; he simply removed Stewart from fiscal responsibilities and reassigned him to work in East India, where he subsequently died.

These activities came at the expense of neglecting the publishing side of the business but by good luck George met William Smith Williams (1800-1875) and offered him the job of 'reader' and 'literary' adviser to the Cornhill business. A biographical note about Williams appears on pp 16-17 of the *Memoir*. In 2019, Philip H Williams, a great, great nephew of Williams published an excellent biography of his forebear, which makes clear the important role which the 'reader' was to play in Brontë publishing history in addition to the great friendship which blossomed and continued between Charlotte and William.¹²

In July 1847 Williams called Smith's attention to a manuscript entitled *The Professor*, a novel submitted by an unknown author *Currer Bell*. This was, of course, Charlotte Brontë. Smith and Williams while recognizing its worth, rejected it as a commercial proposition; in doing so in a kindly manner, they suggested that the author should submit another work. The result was the prompt arrival of the manuscript of *Jane Eyre*. Williams read it and passed it on to Smith who, at once, realized its value, accepted it for publication and wrote back to the author as *Currer Bell, Esq* with the good news. Both Smith and Williams suspected that the author was of female gender but respected her anonymity.

Charlotte Brontë described Williams as a pale middle-aged gentleman who had encouraged her to persevere in her writing. Interestingly, it was to Williams that in August 1849 Charlotte wrote a disconsolate letter (Glynn, p 210) following the tragic death of Anne in May; their shared bond being not only Smith, Elder & Co. but also a warm personal friendship. He retired from the business in February 1875 and died six months later, aged 75, at Twickenham.

Meanwhile Smith, Elder & Co. pursued a cautious policy in publishing. They had the good fortune in completing the *magnus opus* of the Astronomer Royal Sir John Herschel entitled *Astronomical Observations made at the Cape of Good Hope* in 1846. In 1849 Smith brought out the second of Ruskin's great works *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, which was well received.

Smith maintained a link with William Thackeray and, following a failed bid to publish the former's *Vanity Fair* in 1848, Smith used his personal powers of persuasion to get him to agree to the issue of such volumes as *Lectures on the English Humourists*. In December 1854 Smith published *The Rose and the Ring* one of the best known of Thackeray's Christmas books.

¹² Williams, PH (2019) *Charlotte Brontë's Devotee: William Smith Williams: Friend and Mentor* UK: Independently published.

Fig.4. William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863).
By kind permission of Boston Public Library, Massachusetts, USA.



The Virginians was published by Bradbury & Evans in 1857-59 but Thackeray's important novel *Henry Esmond* had been produced by Smith & Elder in a 'trio of half-a guinea volumes' in 1852, just before its author left for a lecturing tour in America. This work was secured on very favourable terms by Smith, with whom Thackeray remained in close friendship, frequently visiting his house and being especially enchanted by the author's young daughters. Smith commissioned the artist Samuel Laurence (1812-1884) to draw a portrait of Thackeray as a reminder for them during his trip to America which, no doubt, they much appreciated. For Charlotte Brontë, the fact of her presence amongst the set of authors published by Smith was the opportunity of meeting Thackeray, for so long a distinguished personage in her pantheon.

Fig. 5: Portrait of Sir John Forbes by John Partridge.
Now in the Royal College of Physicians, London. By kind permission of the College.



Another aforementioned friend of George Smith that Charlotte met personally in London was Sir John Forbes, knighted in 1853. The career of this Victorian polymath, a Royal Physician, medical journalist and translator, has been fully recorded.¹³ Further aspects of Forbes' scientific interests and former medical practice in Cornwall are mentioned in Melissa Hardie's recent book, *Brontë Territories, Cornwall and the Unexplored Maternal Legacy*¹⁴, wherein she credits him as one of the more modern 'creators of Penzance.

An expert on diseases of the chest and particularly on the use of the stethoscope, he was invited to Penzance, Cornwall to fully establish the infirmary which treated the surrounding mining community. While in Cornwall, and living a few doors away from the Branwell and Carne family homes (of the mother and aunt of the Brontë children) he was also to help create the library, during Aunt Branwell's residence there, that became today's Morrab Library, with its Napoleonic and Brontë special collections. He also served as first secretary and contributed several papers to the newly formed (1814) Royal Geological Society of Cornwall, of which Benjamin Carne Branwell, Maria and Elizabeth's sibling was a member¹⁵

In that same year Charlotte Brontë acknowledged receipt of a box of books from George Smith, which included Forbes' *Memorandums made in Ireland in the autumn of 1852*, which had been published in two volumes by Smith, Elder & Co. This was an unbiased account of conditions in Ireland after the famine years of the 1840s.

A polemical article by John Forbes, allegedly said by *The Lancet* to support homeopathy, had cost him the editorship of the renowned *British & Foreign Medical Review* in 1848. In her fatal illness of the same year, Emily Brontë (1818-1848) had been sent a book on homeopathy in a despairing attempt to persuade her to accept any form of treatment for her consumption from which she died on 19 December. (She shared Forbes' scepticism of the benefits of homeopathy, describing it as 'only another form of Quackery').

Possibly at the suggestion of George Smith, Charlotte Brontë had consulted Forbes about Anne Brontë's (1820 -1849) fatal pulmonary tuberculosis that followed Emily's. The Scottish physician did not make the long journey from London to Haworth as he agreed with the prescriptions of the local doctor; Charlotte was so impressed by his generous offer of advice that in 1853 she gave him a copy of her novel *Villette* inscribed with the words 'in acknowledgement of Kindness'. There is no record of their conversations but it is tempting to speculate that they may have discussed their shared connection with Penzance in Cornwall.

¹³ Agnew, RAL (2018) *The Life of Sir John Forbes (1787-1861)* Shoreham by Sea: Bernard Durnford Publishing. Website: <http://sirjohnforbesbooks.webeden.co.uk>

¹⁴ Hardie, M (2019) *Brontë Territories: Cornwall and the Unexplored Maternal Legacy 1760-1860*, Brighton: Edward Everett Root Publishers. www.eerpublishing.com

¹⁵ J C Elliott, D Freeman, M Hardie-Budden (2016) *Bibliography of Transactions of the Royal Geological Society of Cornwall 1814-2014*, Bi-centennial Vol XXIII, Part 2 ISSN: 0372-1108. Dr John 1787-1861, later Sir John Forbes, FRS; On the Temperature of Mines, **II**: 159-217, 1822; On the Geology of the Land's-End District, **II**: 242-280, 1822; On the Geology of St Michael's Mount, **II**: 366-375, 1822.

Fig. 6: Chalk portrait of Charlotte by George Richmond, June 1850, for whom she was persuaded to sit by George Smith. On seeing it for the first time Charlotte is said to have shed tears as it reminded her of her late sister Anne.



“She was diminutive in height, and extremely fragile in figure. Her hand was one of the smallest I have ever grasped. She had no pretensions to being considered beautiful, and was far removed from being plain. She had rather light brown hair, somewhat thin, and drawn plainly over her brow. Her complexion had no trace of colour in it, her lips were pallid also; but she had a sweet smile, with a touch of tender melancholy in it. Altogether she was unpretending, undemonstrative, quiet a little lady as you could well meet.” (Barker p 779, a description of her by a budding young Halifax writer in 1850):

A visit to the phrenologist

There is an amusing account of George Smith's and Charlotte's visit to a phrenologist in London in June 1851, at that time a fashionable occupation. Phrenology provided a lucrative income to sundry medical practitioners of the day, together with homeopathy, but were not recognized by the London College of Physicians as they were considered to be part of *fringe medicine*.

In a rather prolix analysis of the lady's head bumps, TP Browne, MD concluded: “In its intellectual development this head is very remarkable. The forehead is at once very large and well formed. It bears the stamp of deep thoughtfulness and comprehensive understanding”.¹⁶ No mention is made of the fee paid to Dr Browne for this estimate of Miss Brontë's talents, probably paid for by Smith, but goes to show that the doctor's ability to please his clients may have matched his clinical acumen.

The visit to “Dr Brown” [sic] is documented in a long letter quoted in full on pp 61-63 of Jenifer Glynn's book: their visit to his premises on the Strand was incognito as “Mr and

¹⁶George Smith *Memoir*, p 94..

Miss Fraser”, posing, perhaps, as brother and sister. Her letter ends, however, by expressing concerns about George’s business affairs rather than in terms of affection. The correspondence continued throughout 1851 and 1852, mainly about the publication of her books. In January 1853 she visited London for the last time coinciding with the appearance of her novel *Villette*.

Charlotte Brontë faced down Smith’s objections to the book’s ending; George atoned for his criticism by sending her an engraving of Thackeray’s portrait. Thereafter the letters and gifts of books from Cornhill seem to have petered out; they finally concluded with a letter from Charlotte congratulating George on his engagement.

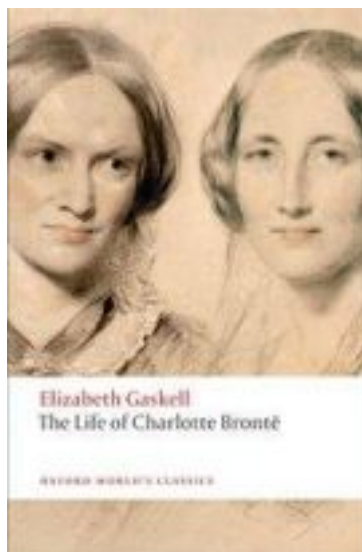
In *George Smith - A Memoir* (p 104) we are informed: ‘Towards the end of 1853 I was engaged to be married, and wrote to inform Miss Brontë of the fact. Her reply was brief, but she afterwards wrote more at length on the subject, when informing me of her engagement to Mr Nicholls. She ended her letter: “I hardly know in what form of greeting to include your wife's name, as I have never seen her. Say to her whatever may seem to you most appropriate and most expressive of goodwill” (p 105).’ In her biography of George Smith, Glynn records that George Smith and his bride, Mrs Smith senior and her daughters were all invited to Charlotte’s wedding in June 1854, but sadly, none attended. From the evidence in the literature, the relationship between author and publisher would seem to have been wholly platonic with no regrets expressed on either’s part.

As we know, Charlotte married her father's curate, Arthur Nicholls in June 1854 at Haworth and had a blissful honeymoon in North Wales and Southern Ireland. Whilst there in July 1854, Charlotte suffered a fall from her horse when negotiating a dangerous path near Killarney. She was shocked but otherwise unhurt. There is no suggestion of a miscarriage with loss of an unborn child, which she and her husband may have conceived. If that mishap had taken place, she would have been spared from the persistent morning sickness which she did endure with its tragic consequences.

As it was, she suffered progressive wasting from mid January 1855, probably as the result of *hyperemesis gravidarum*, which proved fatal on the 31st March.¹⁷ Charlotte’s doctor, Mr Ingham of Haworth, perhaps bearing in mind the family history, had certified the cause of death as *phthisis* (pulmonary tuberculosis or like wasting disease). She died just three weeks before her thirty-ninth birthday and was buried in the family vault at Haworth old church, thus adding to the *genius loci* of the Yorkshire moors.

¹⁷ Philip Rhodes (1972) ‘A Medical Appraisal of the Brontës’, *Bronte Society Transactions* 16, No 2, pp 101-09.

Fig.7. Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë.
By kind permission of the Oxford University Press.



In 1857 Mrs Gaskell completed, at the request of the Rev. Patrick Brontë, her now classic *Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Published by Smith & Elder it contained some controversial allegations that the descent of his son Branwell into terminal alcoholism was linked with his rejection by a Mrs Robinson, to whose children Branwell had been tutor. George Smith had warned Mrs Gaskell of the probability that these assertions were libellous and this proved to be the case.

However, due to the intervention of Sir James Stephen, a negotiated settlement was amicably reached. Smith, who had acquired the copyright of the younger Brontës' books in the summer of 1850, reissued copies of *Wuthering Heights* (Ellis Bell) and *Agnes Grey* (Acton Bell) in a combined edition with a preface by Charlotte Brontë. Strangely, the older sister had expressly forbidden the simultaneous publication of Acton's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* for reasons best known to herself – probably to do with the degradations in brother Branwell's tortured life and ruin which Anne had observed closely and fictionally revealed.

The Cornhill – a serial publishing project

In 1859 Smith started a new venture based on his connection with Thackeray; this was based on offering the public a novel by him in serial instalments. Thackeray agreed to become its first editor on favourable financial terms and suggested the title of *The Cornhill* after its publishing house. Though Thackeray was the major contributor, its business success was due to Smith. Amongst others participating was Matthew Arnold, who remarked that his Oxford lecture on Heine was to be printed in *Cornhill* “because it both pays best and has much the largest circle of readers”. George Smith offered Arnold the hospitality of his home in South Kensington whenever he visited London and in 1874 played billiards with him at Smith's excellent table. The novelist Anthony Trollope of *The Chronicles of Barsetshire* fame was also accustomed to sending his works to the

Cornhill for publication and enjoyed a warm friendship with its owner. Smith also published *Brother Jacob* by George Eliot although they disagreed on financial terms!

Thackeray resigned his editorship in March of 1862, for personal reasons but continued contributions up until his unexpected death in December 1863. Smith did all he could to support his daughters and eventually acquired all his literary property. That he was utterly altruistic in his motivation is evidenced by his posthumous offer of hospitality to the family, which they much appreciated. In fact, he acted as godfather to Thackeray's granddaughter and enjoyed the full confidence of the family including Thackeray's mother.

In 1867 the finances of the business suffered permanent setback from the Indian mutiny. The governance of the subcontinent reverted to the Crown without the use of Smith, Elder & Co's agents. This crisis was somewhat compensated for by the continuing sale of John Ruskin's works. His popular works, including *Lectures on Architecture and Painting* in 1854 and the fifth and final volume of *Modern Painters* in 1860, had kept Smith in business. He also cultivated a personal friendship at Ruskin's house at Denmark Hill, proposing his health in a glass of "Nelson" sherry (Glynn, p103). Through knowing Ruskin, Smith enlarged his social circles with such artists as the Pre-Raphaelite John (later Sir John) Millais, who later married Ruskin's annulled wife.

Thackeray's death left a big gap at the *Cornhill Magazine*, which was filled in 1871 by the appointment of Leslie Stephen as editor, but in the 1860s the editorial duties abruptly upon the shoulders of Smith himself. He invited Charles Dickens to write an article entitled *In Memoriam* for Thackeray (1864), for which the author waived payment.

Mrs Gaskell died the following year (1865) and Smith bought the copyrights for all her books and published some handsome editions of them. He was a personal friend of Wilkie Collins, Charles Lever and George Meredith, to each of whom he acted as publisher. He never neglected the social side of his duties by having monthly dinner parties at his house in Gloucester Square and later at his new house in Hampstead. Few of the famous *literati* of the 1870s failed to be present at these convivial occasions. In 1861 he had joined the Reform Club on the proposition of Sir Arthur Buller, seconded by William Thackeray. Four years later he was elected to the Garrick Club on the nomination of Anthony Trollope and Wilkie Collins. He also became a member of the Cosmopolitan Club.

The Pall Mall Gazette and other publishing projects

The general business of Smith, Elder & Co. prospered during the 1860s so that additional premises were acquired at 45 Pall Mall. It was decided to publish a daily newspaper entitled *The Pall Mall Gazette*, which appeared in February 1865 for the sum of 2d. as an evening edition distinct from the morning *Times* at 3d. At first it sold badly but with the introduction of Leslie Stephen and Anthony Trollope to the paper things slowly improved. A notable absentee from the paper was Charles Dickens by then engaged on his public reading tours.

In 1867 it received a boost to its circulation by the publication of a public edition of Queen Victoria's *Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands, 1848-1861*. In 1884

Smith brought out a second edition of the Queen's journal, *More Leaves from the Journal of a Life in the Highlands, 1862-1882*, which proved very popular.

The following year Smith decided to abandon the overseas agency and banking activities to concentrate on publishing. His partner and brother-in-law, Henry Samuel King, took over this business working from Cornhill and Pall Mall in January 1869, Smith, Elder & Co then worked from Smith's new home at 15 Waterloo Place. In spite of increased seeming leisure time, the effect of his workload on his health was dire. He spent long spells of leave in Scotland to restore his former health. By the following year with health recovered he was able to concentrate on editing the *Pall Mall Gazette*. He also decided on further capital investment by diverging into shipbuilding, entering into a new partnership with Arthur Bilbrough, a ship owner, and underwriter at 36 Fenchurch Street. Smith, Bilbrough, & Co joined Lloyd's in 1871. At first his role as a shipowner pleased him and the firm acquired a number of sailing vessels, but in 1879 he resigned his partnership.

Fig 8. Portrait of George Smith by G F Watts RA, 1876.
By kind permission of Cambridge University Press



His portrait was painted at a time when the relationship between Smith and John Ruskin was becoming strained. Not only were the plates of his earlier masterpieces becoming worn out but, more importantly the new prices charged by his booksellers were in dispute. In 1878 Ruskin cut all connections with Smith by removing his books from the business.

In the late 1860s, Smith had become friends with Robert Browning and also became his sole publisher; simultaneously he took over the works of Elizabeth Browning from Chapman & Hall. Robert Browning continued to use Smith, Elder & Co. to publish all his poems until his death in late 1889 and amongst the pallbearers at Browning's funeral at Westminster Abbey was George Smith.

Meanwhile Leslie Stephen was adding the names of famous writers: *Hours in a Library* and *History of Thought in the Eighteenth Century* were his own essays and Robert Louis Stevenson also contributed. Henry James's *Washington Square* and Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* were among serials published in the *Cornhill Magazine*, later published by Smith, Elder, & Co. in book form.

In 1872 Smith had entered on a new departure by starting a department of medical literature to which Ernest Hart, editor of the *British Medical Journal*, acted as medical adviser. Hart suggested two weekly periodicals the earlier of which was the *London Medical Record* (January 1873) and followed by the *Sanitary Record* (July 1874). These later became monthly issues. The former proved popular with the medical profession both at home and abroad encouraging Smith to publish Ellis's *Demonstrations of Anatomy* and Quain and Wilson's *Anatomical Plates*. These formed the core of medical publications published by Smith, Elder & Co. between 1873 and 1887. Other notable medical topics were Holmes's *Surgery*, Bristowe's *Medicine* and Playfair's *Midwifery*. Smith liked the company of medical authors so much that he invited them to whist parties on Saturday nights at his rooms in Waterloo Place.

By a streak of good fortune, when dining with Ernest Hart in early 1872, his attention was drawn to an exceptional aerated water which came from the Apollinaris spring in the valley of the Ahr to the east of the river Rhine in Germany. After the successful conclusion of negotiations in the City of London a private company was formed in 1873 for the importation of Apollinaris water to England. As a shareholder in this business, which distributed the water not only in England but also in America, Europe and the British Empire, Smith was able to secure a steady income during the last twenty years of his life.

In 1878, following his mother's death at the age of eighty-one, he started a charitable venture by buying a block of houses in Whitechapel to accommodate forty families. The Smith family took a close interest in this philanthropic project which was associated with Toynbee Hall. [A Victorian social scheme to get the rich and poor to live more closely together]; it was named after the Oxford historian Arnold Toynbee (1852-1883)]. It should perhaps be pointed out that Smith's motives in carrying out this scheme, were not entirely benevolent and were more influenced by his obtaining a good return on his investment!

James Payn, the novelist, replaced William Smith Williams (Figure 3) on his retirement in 1875, as literary adviser. In 1882 Payn, who had succeeded Stephen as editor of the *Cornhill*, introduced new monthly issues of the magazine at the reduced price of sixpence. He managed the business well, publishing *The White Company* by Conan Doyle in 1891 as serial stories and introducing to the firm a string of popular writers. Payn died in March 1898.

In 1880 Smith had handed over the *Pall Mall Gazette* to his son-in-law Henry Yates Thompson. Initially Smith had settled in South Kensington in rented properties, finally buying the Duke of Lancaster's mansion in Park Lane, where he entertained his old friends. He also had a house near Weybridge, Surrey. Holidays were spent on the French Riviera or at German spas.

The Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)

In 1882 Smith embarked on a new venture, which was to prove the crowning achievement of his career in journalism and commanded the last nineteen years of his life. The first volume of the massive dictionary appeared in January of 1885 and the final one in 1900.

As founder and main financial contributor to the DNB Smith was ably assisted by his friend Leslie Stephen (later Sir), its first editor, and after Stephen's retirement, by Sidney Lee.

No effort was spared in obtaining the best contributors, whom Smith entertained at his home in Park Lane; in 1895 the University of Oxford conferred the degree of MA *honoris causa*. Two years later Smith hosted a group of famous writers at the Hôtel Métropole and in July that year, at a meeting of the International Library Conference in London, a Harvard librarian congratulated him 'for carrying forward so stupendous a work'. On completion of the *Dictionary* in May 1900, the Prince of Wales (soon to be King Edward VII) honoured him by giving a small dinner party; finally, the Lord Mayor of London invited him and all the editors to a banquet at the Mansion House to mark the occasion.

In the 1890s Smith gradually relinquished his business interests to devote himself entirely to the *DNB* but he continued his advisory role to the editor of the *Cornhill Magazine*. Four articles appeared in it in 1900-01: one of which was that of December 1900 on Charlotte Brontë. Other articles were contemplated but he did not live to write them.

Following a surgical operation at his home in Park Lane on 11 January, he failed to regain his usual vigour and retired to convalesce in the country. He died on the 6 April 1901 at home in Byfleet near Weybridge in Surrey and is buried in the churchyard there. He bequeathed the *Dictionary of National Biography* to his wife, who commissioned his posthumous portrait by the Hon. John Collier in 1901.

Leslie Stephen in summing up his achievements in more than sixty years of adulthood mentioned the many ambitions and abilities that characterised his career: he was able to blend the success of a literary life with liberality and kindness of heart. The *Dictionary of National Biography* was a tribute to both his native shrewdness and to his genuine generosity of spirit.

A memorial tablet was placed in St. Paul's Cathedral by his friends as a token of their esteem. It is perhaps fitting that the final tribute to his memory should be in the words of the first editor of the *DNB*, Leslie Stephen: "He was a friend to be relied upon in any trouble; but, trouble or none, his sympathy was one of the permanent elements that spoke good cheer and courage in the dark moments of life." (*George Smith – A Memoir*, p 151)



Fig.9:

Memorial tablet in St Paul's Cathedral. By kind permission of the Cambridge University Press.

Love is like the wild rose-briar;
Friendship like the holly-tree.
The holly is dark when the rose-briar blooms.
But which will bloom most constantly?
Emily Brontë (1818-1848)

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