

## AN APOLOGY IN CONFIDENCE 337

Shepherd's Bush, and Wimbledon; and I now perceive that my reader was entitled to expect Clapham Junction or Peckham Rye, at least. Nothing would have pleased me better, when writing my last book, than to supply the nearest practicable Carolean equivalent, had I seen more clearly how the land lay. However, it's done now and can't be helped.

Broadly speaking, then, non-Victorianity and defective Suburbanity seem to be responsible for my slump in conformity. And, though I have to go to America for distinct proofs of it, I am obliged to recognise suggestions of the same critical decision nearer home. The first three of the following American reviews appeared at intervals in the same journal, showing how deeply the writer had taken my delinquency to heart:

"Probably written years ago, and found in an old desk."

"A totally uncharacteristic and thoroughly disappointing 'historical romance.'"

"A perfectly good cat, that I have found in the literary ash-pan . . . differs from everything that has come to us previously from the author's pen, as lifeless clay differs from living spirit."

"Wherein lies the superiority of fiction that can give us nothing better than this?"

"It is not, in itself, worth reading . . . being an unpleasant, unexciting, and unoriginal experiment in historical romance . . . leaving us disappointed of what we hoped for, and unedified by what we get."

"The ghosts of 'David Copperfield' and 'Joseph Vance,' 'Alice-for-Short,' and the 'Little Marchioness,' may together weep pale spirit tears, or nobly repress them, in the hope that 'It Never can Happen Again.'"

"We can but hope for a return from this invented matter and artificial style to an unabashed Victorianism, from which it should appear the author is trying to escape."

There is something spirited in a selection of quotations which begins and ends with such different conjectures as to the genesis of their subject. There can be no doubt about the earnestness of the hope expressed in the last one, for it is confirmed in the same words by more than one American journal.\*

\* The force of the unanimity of two or three American papers grows less when their reader perceives the verbal identity of the article throughout—and that their writers are not only unanimous, but unincorporeal. Numbers are impressive, but when they play fast and loose with plurality in this way, all their edge is taken off.