

## FOREWORD

THE charge of using friends and enemies as models is one that is levelled at almost every novelist who writes of life as he finds it ; and though " life as he finds it " is the novelist's rightful asset, and the only one of which a hard world cannot rob him, every true lover of his art writhes under the accusation and finds it unbearable. He will give you his own heart to lay careless hands upon, and let you pry into the secret places of his soul ; you may even accredit him with every dark and despicable deed of the villain of the book and he will forgive you. But accuse him of laying bare the failings of his friends and mocking the griefs of his enemies and you outrage him indeed, not only by implying baseness, but by denying him the possession of imagination and skill in his trade. You wound him in his tenderest part : pride of craft—the pride of one who of flotsam and jetsam and bits of broken boats cast up by the sea has built a little ship that can ride the waves ; or, who seeking and sorting in Life's rag-bag has found such scraps of silk and tinsel, tarnished brocade and torn cloth-of-gold as will serve, when dyed and blended and bordered, to weave at last into a little tapestry that someone may perhaps think good enough to hang upon the wall.

I have myself, to a certain degree, suffered craftsman's mortification. After the publication of two novels which I fondly believed to be full of original characters, composed—if I may be allowed to mix my metaphors—of shreds and patches and bits of broken boats, I received a perfect storm of letters from people who had " recognized " themselves between the covers of *Virginia of the Rhodesians* and *Poppy*. The writers were not very indignant : they merely wished me to know they were aware that I had been taking photographs. I felt uncomfortable but innocent. In the case of the present book I am still innocent, but I have taken precautions against discomfort.