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The Romance of the Dead Letter Office.

For over half a century Mr. G. R. Smith has laboured in the Dead Letter Office of the British Post Office Department, and he has recently written a book on his experiences, for private circulation; a book so fascinating, so informative, and so full of good humour, that it certainly deserves to be widely known. In the pages of this volume we realise, perhaps for the first time, the gigantic work of the Post Office, its untiring care, its ingenuity, and its splendid system of organization. The Postman becomes a romantic figure, and that little penny stamp the means of giving us the greatest value for our money in the world.

Mr. F. Hadland Davis writing in the British *Civilian* re-tells some of Mr. Smith's stories as follows:

An amusing story is told of the days when letters were franked. A Duke kindly consented to frank a letter for a lady friend of his. However, nothing could be made of the Duke's writing, and it was returned, marked "illegible." The lady told the Duke about it, and that amiable man, though at first a little annoyed, again franked the letter for her, setting about it with all the care of a schoolboy trying very hard for a writing prize. This time the letter was returned, marked "forgery." The Duke had written too well!

In 1847, the year of the Chartist Rising, the Bank of England was covered with sand-bags, and Government men, including those of the Post Office, were called out to defend public buildings from an attack by Fergus O'Connor and his followers. Mr. Smith remarks that though he still treasures his staff as a trophy of his duty as special con-

stable, many of his fellow-men have converted their staves "into kitchen rolling-pins"! I suspect that the wives of these brave men had much to do with this domestic transformation, and now realize that, in addition to the old adage, it is possible to spare the rod and spoil the pastry! Long after the inaugurated forces were withdrawn the Chartists still caused considerable alarm in the Dead Letter Office. On one occasion a curious cylinder arrived in the office. For days no one would open what was generally considered to be an infernal machine. At length, however, with much fear and trembling, Mr. Smith opened the cylinder with a file, and discovered samples of Indian tea in little tin boxes!

It was one of Mr. Smith's duties to supervise the management of certain provincial Post Offices, and to coach a suitable man for the position of Postmaster. While at Scarborough, in this capacity, he narrates the following story:—"One day, a plump little woman, with a shawl on her head and a fish-basket (in which was a letter) on one of her naked arms, came in and asked for 'One o' them stickers,' putting down a wet, scaly penny. On receiving the stamp she popped it into her mouth, and sucked it furiously; then, taking it out, she tried to squeeze it into place on her letter with her fat thumb; but it slipped away all over its surface. 'Drat the thing, he wont stick,' she exclaimed. 'Let's try again,' and popped it once more into her mouth. Of course that did not improve matters. The 'sticker' slipped about more than before. The poor woman looked appealingly at me, and said, as she raised the