

# MARY RUSSELL MITFORD : THE INAUGURATION OF A LITERARY CAREER

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MARY RUSSELL MITFORD'S reputation, seemingly secure, if modest, rests primarily upon her prose sketches of country life, particularly the five series collected under the title, *Our Village*, and upon the several volumes of her published correspondence.<sup>1</sup> Yet she herself at first placed no great weight upon her efforts at prose, and, in point of fact, came almost unawares upon her *métier*. It is now possible to follow and to reconstruct in some detail the beginnings of her career as a writer principally through the medium of her laconic, if informative, diary,<sup>2</sup> and her as yet unpublished correspondence with Thomas Noon Talfourd, who was for about twenty years her literary adviser, friend, helper, and confidant.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The three chief collections are : *The Life of Mary Russell Mitford, Related in a Selection from Her Letters to Her Friends*, ed. Rev. Arthur Guy L'Estrange, 3 vols. (London, 1870); *Letters of Mary Russell Mitford, Second Series*, ed. Henry Chorley, 2 vols. (London, 1872); and *The Friendships of Mary Russell Mitford as Recorded in Letters from Her Literary Correspondents*, ed. Rev. Arthur Guy L'Estrange, 2 vols. (London, 1882).

<sup>2</sup> Miss Mitford used as a diary the 1819 edition of the *Literary Pocket-Book*, edited by Leigh Hunt and printed by C. and J. Ollier. She crammed her entries onto pages allotted for notes, and then onto blank pages and printed pages, so that her writing is at times very difficult to decipher. The volume is now in the British Museum. The diary runs from 1 January 1819 to 11 March 1823.

<sup>3</sup> The correspondence exists primarily in three large batches. The largest, about 275 letters and fragments, almost entirely from Miss Mitford to Talfourd, is contained in two quarto volumes owned by the Harvard University Library. The John Rylands Library has three quarto volumes which contain about 180 letters and fragments. One third of these are from Talfourd to Miss Mitford, and the rest from her to him. There are also in the Bodleian Library about eighty-three letters and fragments from Miss Mitford to Talfourd. To these may be added a few other scattered letters. The letters in all of the collections are closely related, and often a fragment in one library is continued in a fragment in another. Almost none of them has ever been reproduced in print, and, as far as I know, only the letters in the John Rylands Library have ever been used before by students (Miss Vera Watson drew on them for her biography, *Mary Russell Mitford*

By 1820 the Mitford family fortunes must have been at, or very close to, ebb tide. Her father, Dr. George Mitford had by then successively consumed whatever money he himself had inherited, his wife's considerable fortune of £28,000 in addition to houses and landed property (with the exception of about £3,000 which was in trust, but mortgaged for income), and the £20,000 in prize money which he had won from a sweepstakes ticket chosen by his daughter, Mary. In April of that year the family finally moved from their country estate, Bertram House, to a small rented cottage at Three Mile Cross, a mile away and three miles from Reading. Miss Mitford already must have been considering the prospect (which she voiced despairingly to Talfourd the following year)<sup>1</sup> of leaving her family and becoming a schoolteacher or a governess. Her only other alternative was to achieve success in, or what was more to the point, to make money at, writing. For this work she was not wholly unprepared, for as a young woman, ten years earlier, she had published several volumes of verse,<sup>2</sup> and she was always a voracious and cultivated reader. Whatever thought she may have given to this plan was certainly spurred at the end of 1820. For on 6 December she saw Macready perform in C. E. Walker's play, *Wallace*, at Covent Garden, and learned that the play, which was by no means first-class, had earned its young and unknown author several hundred pounds. Miss Mitford decided to see what a similar attempt might yield her, and in this resolve she was probably encouraged by her young friend Thomas Talfourd, whom she saw in London on the following day.

(London, 1949), but she quotes only a few sentences in all). The dimensions and value of the correspondence, therefore, have not yet been recognized. I have edited the letters of the first five years in an unpublished Harvard University thesis "The Correspondence of Mary Russell Mitford and Thomas Noon Talfourd (1821-1825)" (1956), and I am now editing the rest. I give the location of each letter quoted in the text of this article in a parenthesis following the passage. *H* designates the Harvard University Library and *R* the John Rylands Library.

<sup>1</sup> In a letter of 16 December 1821, in the Harvard University Library.

<sup>2</sup> *Miscellaneous Poems* (1810), and a second edition the following year with twenty-three additional poems; *Christina, the Maid of the South Seas* (1811); *Watlington Hill* (1812), and *Narrative Poems on the Female Character* (1813). At that time she was also publishing verse in R. H. Davenport's *Poetical Register* (vols. vii and viii (1812 and 1814)).

Miss Mitford had met Talfourd, who was then almost twenty-six, and about seven years her junior, several years earlier in Reading, where he was born, and where he had been a prize pupil of Dr. Richard Valpy, the headmaster of Reading School. After leaving school Talfourd had gone to London to study for the bar, and on a side had begun his own active literary career. By 1820 he had published a large variety of verse, reviews, and articles, ranging from Greek to contemporary literature, politics, and law, and had become an active champion of the Romantic writers. His early friendship with Charles Lamb led him on to intimacy with Wordsworth, and his circle of friends soon included Coleridge, Hazlitt, and other leading figures of the literary and theatrical worlds. In 1820 Talfourd was particularly well situated to help Miss Mitford in her career since in that year he began his long association with the *New Monthly Magazine*, for which he wrote the regular dramatic reviews and occasional essays. Also in the same year he was introduced by Lamb to John Scott, the editor of the *London Magazine*, and he began to contribute articles there. After the death of Scott he was even offered the editorship of the magazine, but he had to refuse it because he felt the duties would not be compatible with his profession.<sup>1</sup> In spite of his youth, therefore, he had wide connections in periodical circles, and through his reviewing he became familiar with the playwrights, actors, and managers of the London theatres.

Miss Mitford's early literary hopes were concentrated entirely upon the drama, for success there could have meant financial ease. The prayer that she records in her diary on 20 December, the day she began her first play, *Fiesco*, echoes throughout her career: "God grant I may make money of it." She apparently began her correspondence with Talfourd in January of 1821, while she was working on the play. From him she received suggestions for alterations, and she benefited from his knowledgeable advice on stage effect, dramatic construction, and, most important of all,

<sup>1</sup> Miss Mitford alludes to Talfourd's refusal in a letter of 25, 26 May 1821, in the Harvard University Library. Miss Vera Watson confirmed my earlier conjecture of the fact in her article, "Thomas Noon Talfourd and His Friends—I", *TLS* (20 April 1956), p. 244.

the requirements of individual actors in a star-crossed theatre. She was writing at first wholly for the actor William Macready, to whom Talfourd sent her plays for presentation to the managers of Covent Garden, and though she was acutely conscious of her defects and inadequacies as a dramatist, her mood at first was enthusiastic and optimistic. On 24 March she writes to Talfourd: "I am quite prepared for rejection—which Mr. Macready, though he has caught some of your infectious good will, seems himself to anticipate. Nevertheless I shall go on. You have inspired me with the hope that I may sometime or other produce something worthy even of his powers & I have set before my eyes the example of Mr. Tobin who after eleven rejected Dramas wrote the *Honeymoon*.<sup>1</sup> I will write a good Tragedy, even if I first write eleven bad ones. On this I am determined" (*H*).

It did not take eleven separate rejections to sour Miss Mitford's mood: four acceptances accomplished that. By the end of 1825 she had written *Foscari*, *Julian*, *Rienzi*, and *Charles the First*, and had seen all accepted at the two major theatres. But during that period only one, *Julian*, was brought to the stage,<sup>2</sup> and for this she received only £200, since its run was cut off just short of the ninth night so as to avoid payment of a third £100. The rest were written and revised, and revised again, laboured upon and fretted over, urged on by the theatres, and then stalled and put aside, because of the bickerings, rivalries, jealousies, and debts of the actors and managers, or, in the case of *Charles*, the ban of the licenser. Letter after letter tells the story in frequently deadening detail, and recurring passages of pathos and anguish alone redeem and dignify what might otherwise be read as burlesque or Grub Street farce. From the letters emerges an unsurpassed picture of the theatrical conditions under which the old drama finally toppled, and they also remind us that the dark night of the soul is not restricted to the major writer alone.

<sup>1</sup> John Tobin (1770-1804), dramatist. All his works were posthumously produced. *The Honey Moon* was accepted at Drury Lane before his death and performed on 31 January 1805. It was very successful and remained a favourite for twenty years.

<sup>2</sup> It was first performed at Covent Garden on 15 March 1823.

*Foscari*, *Charles the First*, and *Rienzi* were eventually performed,<sup>1</sup> and the latter play was even a very considerable success, but they never really repaid Miss Mitford for the time and emotional energy that she lavished upon them. Furthermore three later plays, *Gaston de Blondville*, *Otto of Wittlesbach*, and *Inez de Castro* never even reached the stage. The descrescendo of Miss Mitford's hopes for financial security from the drama is apparent in a letter that she writes to Talfourd on 4 December 1825: "I am really so worn down by fruitless exertion, so heartsick with perpetual anxiety & constant disappointment that it would be a relief & a comfort to me to escape from these hopeless efforts into some straight forward path however rugged. Gladly & joyfully should I see all that remains gathered together & sunk in an annuity on their<sup>2</sup> joint lives, whilst I went out to take my chance in the world—and this is no romantic expression—but the real & simple language of my feelings—Of this however neither will hear—But it will & must be the end" (R).

It probably would have been the end, were not a counter-strain of possibilities steadily, if at times uncertainly, rising. In a letter earlier in the year, on 7 October, Miss Mitford voices the same despair, but suggests an alternative course: "I . . . can only lament the trouble & pain which these theatrical affairs give *you*—I deserve disappointment for having against all warning clung to the Drama instead of trying the more laborious but more certain path of the Novelwriter" (R). She goes on, however, to explain why she feared fiction, even though such friends as the poet Henry Hart Milman and the publishers, Longman's, had strongly urged her to attempt it: "The excuse which I have always made to myself has been a persuasion that my talent, such as it is, . . . is essentially dramatic & that I am not likely to succeed in narrative." Also in an earlier letter she had told Talfourd that her "talent poor as it is" seemed to her "very mannered & limited".<sup>3</sup> What she seemed to fear most was her ability to construct a plot, invent situation, and carry forward

<sup>1</sup> In 1826, 1834, and 1828, respectively.

<sup>2</sup> Her parents'.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter of 11 (?) July 1824, in the Harvard University Library.

continued action. This was her problem in dramatic composition too, for she always relied on friends to construct her plots, or took them from history, biography, and the like. Moreover, she had a very high opinion of the novel, and measured worth by the loftiest standards. On 13 (?) April 1823, she asked Talfourd if she should try a novel, and then gave her own negative answer: "But then a good Novel is so very great a thing—a Novel like Miss Austen's—a tragedy is nothing to it<sup>1</sup>—I never should be able" (*H*). And again on 23 September 1824, she writes, "After all, unless I could write a really good & *characteristic* novel (that to me is the charm of Miss Austen—) unless I could produce some thing above the common run in that department (of which I have great doubts) I had better stick to the Drama, where there are fewer competitors, & those few not extremely alarming" (*H*). What she thought of the "common run" of fiction is apparent in a letter of 29 July 1825: "I shall be driven to spinning out wretched trash of novels—I know it—& I know how utterly contemptible they will be—& how completely I shall sink to the level of the Minerva Press" (*R*).

Miss Mitford's reservations about her abilities as a novelist were apparently sound; she was spared the fiction mills. The one novel that she wrote, *Atherton*, was conceived in 1825, contracted for in 1836, and finally published in 1854, the year before her death. That was not a profitable pace for craftsmanship. But prose was nevertheless her real province of work. Miss Mitford saw Talfourd in Reading and at Three Mile Cross at the beginning of March 1821, soon after she had finished *Fiesco*. He probably then suggested to her that she begin writing poems and prose pieces for periodicals, and he offered to transmit them for her to the editors of the *New Monthly* and the *London* magazines. She quickly sent off some sonnets and a poem, and even suggested that she begin some dramatic scenes, but she was fearful about her prose. On 16 March she writes: "Ah, my dear Mr. Talfourd, I shall never make any thing of prose! Do you think I shall? I know as much about it as poor Mr. Jourdain who was so astonished to find he had been talking prose all his

<sup>1</sup> She is clearly thinking only of the sort of tragedy she and her contemporaries wrote.

life.<sup>1</sup> And I am equally provoked & ashamed to feel myself so incapable of expressing my own notions. The real truth is I believe that I have been for many years a most egregious letter-writer, & have accustomed myself to an incorrect & gossiping rapidity which does very well in writing to indulgent friends but will by no means suit that tremendous Correspondent the Public—so that in addressing that high personage I am frightened out of my wits—ponder over every phrase, disjoint every sentence, & finish by producing such marvellous lumps of awkwardness as those which I have the honour to send you. Will they be accepted do you think? I promise to improve, for on that I am resolved, cost what it may” (H).

The “marvellous lumps of awkwardness” that she enclosed were her first prose sketch, “Field Flowers”, and an article “On the Comedies of Thomas May”. Both were printed in the *New Monthly Magazine*<sup>2</sup> and are here for the first time identified as hers. Soon afterwards she sent Talfourd two other sketches, “Richmond” and “On Letters and Letter-Writers”, both of which were also published in the *New Monthly*.<sup>3</sup> But she had not yet arrived at the idea of a sketch of village life, and when she did, she was characteristically uncertain of her accomplishment and afraid of the subject matter. On 8 June she sent Talfourd the sketch entitled “Our Village”, which she had written between 27 May and 5 June, and she writes in the letter which accompanied the packet: “The enclosure of this (p)acket<sup>4</sup> is more bad prose—I have great qualms of conscience about that too—because it is true almost to the letter—only as I have posted it in Yorkshire & I don’t think there is a soul in Three Mile Cross who knows what a magazine looks like I should hope it might pass unsuspected. But if you think it at all improper, or liable even by possibility to hurt any one’s feelings pray send it back to me” (H). Talfourd, however, was quick to recognize the value of the piece and must have written back enthusiastically, for on 21 June, Miss Mitford

<sup>1</sup> The title character of Molière’s *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*; see Act II, scene iv.

<sup>2</sup> In i (1821), 648-50, and ii (1821), 70-5, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> In ii (1821), 56-9, and ii (1821), 142-6, respectively.

<sup>4</sup> Parentheses enclose letters added by the editor to fill in tears in the manuscript.

writes : “ What you say of ‘ Our Village ’ is exceedingly encouraging & comfortable—I had looked on prose composition as a thing not difficult merely, but impossible—I shall now take heart ” (R).

But Talfourd was a keener judge than Thomas Campbell, the editor of the *New Monthly*, for the latter certainly must have seen this sketch and two others, “ Boarding School Recollections. No. 1. The French Teacher ”,<sup>1</sup> and, “ Lucy ”, on the basis of which Talfourd was trying unsuccessfully until at least late July 1822, to negotiate for a series of prose sketches. It has been maintained incorrectly that Campbell saw *all* of the first series of *Our Village* sketches and refused them.<sup>2</sup> It is, of course, unlikely that Miss Mitford would have written *all* without hope of publication. But it is quite true that he saw the first few and rejected the idea of a series. Furthermore Campbell persisted in his obtuseness ; for in 1824,<sup>3</sup> after the first volume of *Our Village* was published, Miss Mitford sent him, through her friend, William Harness,<sup>4</sup> two other sketches “ The Touchy Lady ”, and “ Rosedale and Its Tenants ”,<sup>5</sup> and again tried, and again without success, to negotiate for a series of “ country Articles ”, “ letter fashion or journal wise with new scenery & new people ”. But Campbell’s was not to be the final word. On 8 January 1823, after he had arranged for the publication of the series in the *Lady’s Magazine*, and the sketch “ Our Village ” had appeared in the 31 December 1822, issue,<sup>6</sup> Talfourd wrote gloatingly to Miss Mitford : “ Charles Lamb is quite enchanted with ‘ Our

<sup>1</sup> Later published in the second series of *Our Village* (1826) as “ Early Recollections : The French Teacher ”.

<sup>2</sup> See Vera Watson, *Mary Russell Mitford* (London, 1949), pp. 141-3, for a discussion and rejection of such contentions. However, as Miss Watson had not seen the Harvard letters she was unable to give full and precise information about the early history of the sketches.

<sup>3</sup> She mentions sending a sketch to Campbell in a letter of 4 September, in the Harvard University Library.

<sup>4</sup> (1790-1869), divine and author, later her literary executor. He edited the *Life of Mary Russell Mitford* (see p. 33, n. 1), which was completed and published after his death by his curate, the Rev. Arthur Guy L’Estrange.

<sup>5</sup> They were printed in the *New Monthly Magazine*, xi (1824), 348-51, and xi (1824), 521-8, respectively. The former was later reprinted in *Our Village*, 2nd ser. (1826), and the latter was revised and reprinted as “ Rosedale ” in *Our Village*, 4th ser. (1830).

<sup>6</sup> iii. 645-50.



Village'—nothing so fresh and characteristic has, he says, appeared for a long time. Everyone who has read it thinks with him, & I enjoy telling everybody that Campbell declined it."<sup>1</sup>

Talfourd tried unsuccessfully to sell the sketches during the rest of 1821, while Miss Mitford attended solely to the drama. Near the end of the year, on 27 December, he wrote: "I still hope something may be done by way of moving the Editors to attention; but I would not have you write any more fugitive pieces till these are disposed of" (R). By the middle of 1822 Talfourd had definitely given up hope of publication in the *New Monthly*, and, indeed, was having troubles in that quarter himself. He writes to Miss Mitford<sup>2</sup> that Campbell had "almost shut the door . . . against merely critical articles", and for a time at least seemed to be considering doing without his services entirely. Yet his own difficulties indirectly benefited Miss Mitford, for Talfourd had married on 31 August and needed steady literary employment to eke out his as yet modest income from the law. Therefore quite surreptitiously, for fear of the ignominy of publishing in so insignificant a periodical, he engaged to write articles and reviews in the *Lady's Magazine*, and he also arranged for Miss Mitford to do a series of sketches there, beginning in the 30 September issue of the magazine.

Miss Mitford at first had no thought of collecting her sketches. She first voices the idea in a letter of 13 (?) April 1823, when, after the production of *Julian*, she was afraid to begin another play and was momentarily looking around for something else to do: "Would a Volume of Dramatic Scenes and sonnets . . . answer do you think? Or a Vol. of prose—some of the best things in Mr. Hamilton's<sup>3</sup>—I mean of my best—& others of the same sort with as much Dutch picture finishing as possible? I think that would—but then Mr. Hamilton having bought the Articles I suppose the right to them is in him now" (H). On

<sup>1</sup> The passage, from a letter of 8 January 1823, in a recently discovered collection of Talfourd material which I have not yet seen, is quoted by Vera Watson in "Thomas Noon Talfourd and His Friends—II", *TLS*, 27 April 1956, p. 260.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter dated 16 July 1822, which I have not yet seen. The passage is quoted by Vera Watson in the article cited in the preceding note.

<sup>3</sup> The *Lady's Magazine*, edited by S. Hamilton. His career is quite obscure. Miss Mitford's diary gives his address as 30 Judd Street, Brunswick Square.

the matter of copyright, however, Miss Mitford's misfortunes eventually worked to her gain. During the same month Hamilton, the editor of the magazine, absconded, owing her between thirty and forty guineas, and for the moment the periodical seemed likely to halt. The threat that her regular if quite modest income from this source might stop was for Miss Mitford more serious than the loss of money. She tells Talfourd on 24 April: "I should like to get as much as I could of course,<sup>1</sup> but my prime wish is that the thing might go on—I should like constant employment there or else where—for I begin not to dislike that sort of writing, & as to the stage I am heartsick at the very thought. . . . That Magazine did seem something certain—but there is nothing sure in this world but disappointment" (H).

The magazine did continue. It was taken over by Charles Heath,<sup>2</sup> Hamilton's brother-in-law, who refused to make up the contributors' losses, but promised to pay for all future articles, and, by way of compensation, to give permission to print articles published in the magazine. To Miss Mitford the arrangement seemed like a swindle contrived by the family, and at first she paid little attention to the concession. On 16 May she related the news to Talfourd and asked for his opinion: "Do you think the permission to print the papers worth any thing? Certainly Lucy, Hannah, *Our Village* & one or two more would with some new Articles make a pretty Volume<sup>3</sup>—& if that could be done I might go on quietly under the new arrangement—perhaps George Whittaker<sup>4</sup> would give me the price of my debt<sup>5</sup> for the Volume—But Mrs. Hofland<sup>6</sup> put that in for a pacifier, conscious poor dear woman that she had gone far beyond her powers in the treaty with Mr. Heath" (H).

Miss Mitford bowed to the new terms and later even accepted a reduction in her rate of payment. She could not afford to cut

<sup>1</sup> Of the money owed her.

<sup>2</sup> (1785-1848), engraver.

<sup>3</sup> Actually the first series of *Our Village* contained twenty-four sketches.

<sup>4</sup> (1793-1847), bookseller and publisher.

<sup>5</sup> The allusion is either to a specific debt to Whittaker, or to her general indebtedness, which she had hoped in vain that the profits from *Julian* would cover.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara Hofland (1770-1844), novelist, Miss Mitford's friend and fellow-contributor to the magazine.

herself off from what was then her sole source of income. But she began to arrange definitely for the publication of a prose volume. Once again bad luck came to her assistance. On 3 July she writes to Talfourd that George Whittaker will print the volume, but only on terms of a division of profit.<sup>1</sup> Fearing that sales would be slight, and anxious for any assured money, she wanted an outright sale, however small the price. But in a letter of 18 (?) January 1824, she tells Talfourd that she will accept Whittaker's terms "rather than not get out the Volume, in the hope that if it took at all it might be the means of procuring for me some employment in that line" (*R*). Though Miss Mitford's royalties on the first edition of the volume were lamentably small, a mere £20,<sup>2</sup> she profited eventually, for within four months of publication the first edition of 750 copies was sold out, and a new edition was printing; and by April of 1825, the book was in its third edition.

Miss Mitford first thought of calling her volume "Walks in the Country & sketches of rural character".<sup>3</sup> However, in a letter of 9 April 1824, she tells Talfourd that "'Our Village' is printing". "It will be a pretty little book", she says, "about the size & type of a Vol of the Scotch novels. I wonder whether it will gain me employment—which has been my object in the bringing it out—Really I see worse writing in the great Magazines—Many articles much better of course—but still some that are worse" (*H*). The precise date of the publication of *Our Village* has been the subject of imprecise speculation, which Miss Mitford's correspondence with Talfourd now clarifies. On Thursday, 6 May, she writes Talfourd that although the volume was "announced for last Saturday", she has heard nothing of it. On 12 May she writes again that she supposes the book is not yet published, but on 5 June she says that she has heard a fortnight ago that it was selling well.<sup>4</sup> This would suggest that the volume appeared during the third week of May. It is advertised in the

<sup>1</sup> The letter is in the Harvard University Library.

<sup>2</sup> She tells this to Talfourd in a letter of 23-26 September 1824, in the Harvard University Library.

<sup>3</sup> She mentions the title in a letter of 29 October 1823, in the Harvard University Library.

<sup>4</sup> The three letters are in the Harvard University Library.

*Morning Chronicle*, as "Published This Day", on 17 May, which was probably the actual day of publication.

The publication of *Our Village* brought Miss Mitford's connection with the *Lady's Magazine* to a conclusion. Jealous of the success of the volume, Heath and the publishers wanted to print on their own sketches in the magazine which Miss Mitford had not reprinted, and they also wanted to retain copyright on all future pieces. On 5 June 1824, she complains to Talfourd: "I have now to ask your advice what I should do with regard to writing for them in future—Their terms are six guineas a sheet, of very small print in double columns—little enough God knows—yet if I might reserve the right of copy for this I should not so much care—but it is clear that whilst offending & neglecting & beating me down they yet think well enough of the articles to desire to publish them in a Volume on their own account—Now this I should particularly dislike—I have selected the best for my own Volume—& of those that remain there are several that I should dislike exceedingly to be printed with my name—because there is a mixture of pungency, which in an obscure magazine where the author is unknown can hurt no one, but which when the writer is avowed would assume quite a different character, & probably be assigned to people whom I never dreamt of—Nevertheless it is throwing myself out of all employment to give them up—& that I hardly dare do. What would you advise?" (H). Talfourd told her to refuse to go on without copyright,<sup>1</sup> and on 4 September she writes again: "Mr. Heath will not hear of any future publication of articles written for him—an offer which I had made some months back—& so unless nobody will have me, & George Whittaker refuses the Second Vol<sup>2</sup>—why I have done with Mr. Heath. By the way Robinson<sup>3</sup>, who is very desirous to retain me, begs me to send them what I do not mean to publish myself—but your opinion of the discredit attached to writing for that trumpery work is decisive. I have entered a strong protest against their reprinting any of my articles on their

<sup>1</sup> She mentions this in a letter of 11 (?) July 1824, in the Harvard University Library.

<sup>2</sup> Of *Our Village* sketches.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel Robinson of Chapter House Court, St. Paul's Churchyard, publisher of the magazine.

own account—a thing I could by no means endure ” (*H*). So the matter ended ; however, in after years Miss Mitford lost her fears about the nature of her subject matter, for all the *Lady's Magazine* sketches were eventually reprinted in the *Our Village* series.

The reviews of *Our Village* were invariably kind. In her letter of 5 June Miss Mitford describes the reaction of the literary press and of her friends : “ the Literary Newspapers (a thousand thanks for the Examiner by the bye—I recognized your kind hand without & within) <sup>1</sup>—the Literary papers speak favourably of it—especially the Somerset House Gazette <sup>2</sup> which is as kind as if you had written it—— . . . Mr. Macready condescends to be pleased —& Mr. Haydon causes the book to be read to his sitters to keep them in a good expression—Is not that a compliment ? ” (*H*). And though at first she complained that the book was not noticed by the great reviews, she could take comfort by the end of the year from a long and favourable review in the *Quarterly*. Even her own opinion of the volume increased as its reception continued favourable, for on 22 June she writes : “ really I do think of that Volume (& I never thought so of Julian, or of any thing else of mine) that there are parts of it, which are good, & if known would prosper ” (*R*).

Furthermore her intentions in publishing the book were adequately realized. As early as September 1824, George Whittaker had asked her for a second series of *Our Village* sketches,<sup>3</sup> though this was not to appear until 1826. But by the end of 1825 Miss Mitford was assured of regular employment as a prose writer. On 15 December she tells Talfourd that she has been solicited for articles by the various annual publications,<sup>4</sup> and that she has sent them off. And on 21 December she writes :

<sup>1</sup> *Our Village* was reviewed in the *Examiner* on 23 May 1824 (p. 332). The reviewer was apparently not Talfourd, for in a letter of 22 June, in the John Rylands Library, Miss Mitford writes, “ Who could write that kind notice in the Examiner ? It seemed an unusual thing—& you know any thing kinder than ordinary is laid at your door of course ”.

<sup>2</sup> See the *Somerset House Gazette, and Literary Museum : or, Weekly Miscellany of Fine Arts, Antiquities, and Literary Chit Chat*, ii (22 May 1824), 104-5.

<sup>3</sup> She mentions this in a letter of 23-26 September, in the Harvard University Library.

<sup>4</sup> The letter is in the Harvard University Library.

“ Mr. Thelwall is setting up a new periodical<sup>1</sup> in opposition to Mr. Baylis<sup>2</sup> & has sent me an offer of 10 guineas a sheet—I have sent articles to both ” (*R*). Her work had happily prospered and she could now keep house on *both* sides of the street.

<sup>1</sup> John Thelwall (1764-1834), reformer and lecturer on elecution. The first issue of his new magazine, the *Panoramic Miscellany*, came out on 31 January 1826.

<sup>2</sup> Of Cox and Baylis, the printers of the *Monthly Magazine ; or, British Register of Literature, Sciences, and the Belles-Lettres*, New Series (London, 1826-39).