



Portraits of Elizabeth and William, parents of **Ida Smedley**, from Constance Smedley's *Crusaders* (1929).

'Our Home became a miniature salon'

Ida Smedley's parents William and Elizabeth, as depicted by her brother-in-law, the artist Maxwell Armfield. These portraits appeared in *Crusaders* (1929), the memoirs of Ida's sister, Constance Smedley, who achieved fame in her own right as an author and playwright.

Ida and Constance benefited from having parents who placed a premium upon education and learning.¹ In *Crusaders*, Constance recalled the soirées that her mother held for Birmingham's literati, which she suggested had transformed their family home into a 'miniature salon'.² Both parents encouraged their daughters to read and debate: skills that perhaps encouraged the independence of mind evident in the later careers of both daughters.

Both sisters undoubtedly benefited from their privileged and prosperous middle-class background. Wealth provided access to private education, whilst Constance's account suggests the family home further exposed the girls to music, languages and scientific enquiry. It was from such professional and managerial middle-class households that the first women science students emerged in the 1870s.³ More than most, Ida would capitalise upon the advantages that her affluent and open-minded parents had given her.

¹ Mary R.S. Creese, 'Ida Smedley MacLean', *Dictionary of National Biography* at <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/37720>.

² Constance Smedley, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), p. 4.

³ Roy MacLeod and Russell Moseley, 'Fathers and Daughters: Reflections on Women, Science and Victorian Cambridge', *History of Education* **8** (1979), p. 322.