Sydney Smith eBook

Sydney Smith by George William Erskine Russell

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CHAPTER I

EDUCATION—SALISBURY PLAIN—EDINBURGH

A worthy tradesman, who had accumulated a large fortune, married a lady of gentle birth and manners. In later years one of his daughters said to a friend of the family, “I dare say you notice a great difference between papa’s behaviour and mamma’s. It is easily accounted for. Papa, immensely to his credit, raised himself to his present position from the shop; but mamma was extremely well born. She was a Miss Smith—-one of *the old Smiths, of Essex*.”

It might appear that Sydney Smith was a growth of the same majestic but mysterious tree, for he was born at Woodford; but further research traces his ancestry to Devonshire. “We are all one family,” he used to say, “all the Smiths who dwell on the face of the earth. You may try to disguise it in any way you like—Smyth, or Smythe, or Smijth[1]—but you always get back to Smith after all—the most numerous and most respectable family in England.” When a compiler of pedigrees asked permission to insert Sydney’s arms in a County History, he replied, “I regret, sir, not to be able to contribute to so valuable a work; but the Smiths never had any arms. They invariably sealed their letters with their thumbs.” In later life he adopted the excellent and characteristic motto—*Faber meae fortunae*; and, to some impertinent questions about his grandfather, he replied with becoming gravity—“He disappeared about the time of the assizes, and we asked no questions.”

As a matter of fact, this maligned progenitor came to London from Devonshire, established a business in Eastcheap, and left it to his two sons, Robert and James. Robert Smith[2] made over his share to his brother and went forth to see the world. This object he pursued, amid great vicissitudes of fortune and environment, till in old age he settled down at Bishop’s Lydeard, in Somerset. He married Maria Olier, a pretty girl of French descent, and by her had five children: Robert Percy—better known as “Bobus”—born in 1770; Sydney in 1771; Cecil in 1772; Courtenay in 1773; and Maria in 1774.

Sydney Smith was born on the 3rd of June; and was baptized on the 1st of July in the parish church of Woodford. His infancy was passed at South Stoneham, near Southampton. At the age of six he was sent to a private school at Southampton, and on the 19th of July 1782 was elected a Scholar of Winchester College. He stayed at Winchester for six years, and worked his way to the top place in the school, being “Prefect of Hall” when he left in 1788. Beyond these facts, Winchester seems to retain no impressions of her brilliant son, in this respect contrasting strangely with other Public Schools. Westminster knows all about Cowper—and a sorry tale it is. Canning left an ineffaceable mark on Eton. Harrow abounds in traditions, oral and written, of Sheridan and Byron, Peel and Palmerston. But Winchester is silent about Sydney Smith.

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Sydney, however, was not silent about Winchester. In one of the liveliest passages of his controversial writings, he said:—

“I was at school and college with the Archbishop of Canterbury:[3] fifty-three years ago he knocked me down with the chess-board for checkmating him—and now he is attempting to take away my patronage. I believe these are the only two acts of violence he ever committed in his life.”

Now Howley was a prefect when Sydney was a junior, and this game of chess must have been (as a living Wykehamist has pointed out to me) “a command performance.” The big boy liked chess, so the little boy had to play it: the big boy disliked being checkmated, so the little boy was knocked down. This and similar experiences probably coloured Sydney’s mind when he wrote in 1810:—

“At a Public School (for such is the system established by immemorial custom) every boy is alternately tyrant and slave. The power which the elder part of these communities exercises over the younger is exceedingly great; very difficult to be controlled; and accompanied, not unfrequently, with cruelty and caprice. It is the common law of these places, that the younger should be implicitly obedient to the elder boys; and this obedience resembles more the submission of a slave to his master, or of a sailor to his captain, than the common and natural deference which would always be shown by one boy to another a few years older than himself. Now, this system we cannot help considering as an evil, because it inflicts upon boys, for two or three years of their lives, many painful hardships, and much unpleasant servitude. These sufferings might perhaps be of some use in military schools; but to give to a boy the habit of enduring privations to which he will never again be called upon to submit—to inure him to pains which he will never again feel—and to subject him to the privation of comforts, with which he will always in future abound—is surely not a very useful and valuable severity in education. It is not the life in miniature which he is to lead hereafter, nor does it bear any relation to it; he will never again be subjected to so much insolence and caprice; nor ever, in all human probability, called upon to make so many sacrifices. The servile obedience which it teaches might be useful to a menial domestic; or the habit of enterprise which it encourages prove of importance to a military partisan; but we cannot see what bearing it has upon the calm, regular, civil life, which the sons of gentlemen, destined to opulent idleness, or to any of the more learned professions, are destined to lead. Such a system makes many boys very miserable; and produces those bad effects upon the temper and disposition which boyish suffering always does produce. But what good it does, we are much at a loss to conceive. Reasonable obedience is extremely useful in forming the disposition. Submission to tyranny lays the

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foundation of hatred, suspicion, cunning, and a variety of odious passions....“The wretchedness of school tyranny is trifling enough to a man who only contemplates it, in ease of body and tranquillity of mind, through the medium of twenty intervening years; but it is quite as real, and quite as acute, while it lasts, as any of the sufferings of mature life: and the utility of these sufferings, or the price paid in compensation for them, should be clearly made out to a conscientious parent before he consents to expose his children to them.”

Lady Holland tells us that in old age her father “used to shudder at the recollections of Winchester,” and represented the system prevailing there in his youth as composed of “abuse, neglect, and vice.” And, speaking of the experience of lower boys at Public Schools in general, he described it as “an intense system of tyranny, of which the English are very fond, and think it fits a boy for the world; but the world, bad as it is, has nothing half so bad.”

“A man gets well pummelled at a Public School; is subject to every misery and every indignity which seventeen years of age can inflict upon nine and ten; has his eye nearly knocked out, and his clothes stolen and cut to pieces; and twenty years afterwards, when he is a chrysalis, and has forgotten the miseries of his grub state, is determined to act a manly part in life, and says, ’I passed through all that myself, and I am determined my son shall pass through it as I have done’; and away goes his bleating progeny to the tyranny and servitude of the Long Chamber or the Large Dormitory. It would surely be much more rational to say, ’Because I have passed through it, I am determined my son shall not pass through it. Because I was kicked for nothing, and cuffed for nothing, and fagged for everything, I will spare all these miseries to my child.’”

And, while he thus condemned the discipline under which he had been reared, he had no better opinion of the instruction. Not that he was an opponent of classical education: on the contrary, he had a genuine and reasoned admiration for “the two ancient languages.” He held that, compared to them, “merely as vehicles of thought and passion, all modern languages are dull, ill-contrived, and barbarous.” He thought that even the most accomplished of modern writers might still be glad to “borrow descriptive power from Tacitus; dignified perspicuity from Livy; simplicity from Caesar; and from Homer some portion of that light and heat which, dispersed into ten thousand channels, has filled the world with bright images and illustrious thoughts. Let the cultivator of modern literature addict himself to the purest models of taste which France, Italy, and England could supply—he might still learn from Virgil to be majestic, and from Tibullus to be tender; he might not yet look upon the face of nature as Theocritus saw it; nor might he reach those springs of pathos with which Euripides softened the hearts of his audience.”

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This sound appreciation of what was best in classical literature was accompanied in Sydney Smith by the most outspoken contempt for the way in which Greek and Latin are taught in Public Schools. He thought that schoolmasters encouraged their pupils to "love the instrument better than the end—not the luxury which the difficulty encloses, but the difficulty—not the filbert, but the shell—not what may be read in Greek, but Greek itself?"

"We think that, in order to secure an attention to Homer and Virgil, we must catch up every man, whether he is to be a clergyman or a duke, begin with him at six years of age, and never quit him till he is twenty; making him conjugate and decline for life and death; and so teaching him to estimate his progress in real wisdom as he can scan the verses of the Greek Tragedians."

He desired that boys should obtain a quick and easy mastery over the authors whom they had to read, and on this account he urged that they should be taught by the use of literal and interlinear translations; but "a literal translation, or any translation, of a school-book is a contraband article in English schools, which a schoolmaster would instantly seize, as a custom-house officer would seize a barrel of gin."

Grammar, gerund-grinding, the tyranny of the Lexicon and the Dictionary, had got the schoolboys of England in their grasp, and the boy "was suffocated with the nonsense of grammarians, overwhelmed with every species of difficulty disproportionate to his age, and driven by despair to pegtop or marbles"; while the British Parent stood and spoke thus with himself:—

"Have I read through Lilly? Have I learnt by heart that most atrocious monument of absurdity, the Westminster Grammar? Have I been whipt for the substantives? whipt for the verbs? and whipt for and with the interjections? Have I picked the sense slowly, and word by word, out of Hederich? and shall my son be exempt from all this misery?... Ay, ay, it's all mighty well; but I went through this myself, and I am determined my children shall do the same."

Another grotesque abuse with regard to which Sydney Smith was a reformer fifty years before his time was compulsory versification.—

"There are few boys who remain to the age of eighteen or nineteen at a Public School without making above ten thousand Latin verses—a greater number than is contained in the *Aeneid*; and, after he has made this quantity of verses in a dead language, unless the poet should happen to be a very weak man indeed, he never makes another as long as he lives."[4]"The English clergy, in whose hands education entirely rests, bring up the first young men of the country as if they were all to keep grammar-schools in little country-towns; and a nobleman, upon whose knowledge and liberality the honour and welfare of his country may depend, is diligently worried, for half his life, with the

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small pedantry of longs and shorts."

The same process is applied at the other end of the social scale. The baker's son, young Crumpet, is sent to a grammar-school, "takes to his books, spends the best years of his life, as all eminent Englishmen do, in making Latin verses, learns that the *Crum* in Crumpet is long and the *pet* short, goes to the University, gets a prize for an essay on the Dispersion of the Jews, takes Orders, becomes a Bishop's chaplain, has a young nobleman for his pupil, publishes a useless classic and a Serious Call to the Unconverted, and then goes through the Elysian transitions of Prebendary, Dean, Prelate, and the long train of purple, profit, and power."

In this vivacious passage, Sydney Smith caricatures his own career; which, though it neither began in a baker's shop nor ended in an episcopal palace, followed pretty closely the line of development here indicated. At Winchester he "took to his books" with such goodwill that, in spite of all hindrances, he became an excellent scholar, and laid the strong foundations for a wide and generous culture. His family indeed propagated some pleasing traditions about his schooldays—one of a benevolent stranger who found him reading Virgil when other boys were playing cricket, patted his head, and foretold his future greatness; another of a round-robin from his schoolfellows, declining to compete against him for prizes, "because he always gained them." But this is not history.

From Winchester Sydney Smith passed in natural course to the other of "the two colleges of St. Mary Winton"; and, in the interval between Winchester and Oxford, his father sent him for six months to Normandy, with a view to improving his French. Revolution was in the air, and it was thought a salutary precaution that he should join one of the Jacobin clubs in the town where he boarded, and he was duly entered as "Le Citoyen Smit, Membre Affilie au Club des Jacobins de Mont Villiers."

But he was soon recalled to more tranquil scenes. He was elected Scholar of New College, Oxford, on the 5th of January 1789, and at the end of his second year he exchanged his Scholarship for a Fellowship. From that time on he never cost his father a farthing, and he paid a considerable debt for his younger brother Courtenay, though, as he justly remarks, "a hundred pounds a year was very difficult to spread over the wants of a College life." Ten years later he wrote—"I got in debt by buying books. I never borrowed a farthing of anybody, and never received much; and have lived in poverty and economy all my life."

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His career at Oxford is buried in even deeper obscurity than his schooltime at Winchester. This is no doubt to be explained, on the intellectual side, by the fact that members of New College were at that time exempt from public examination; and, on the social side, by the straitened circumstances which prevented him from showing hospitality, and the pride which made him unwilling to accept what he could not return. We are left to gather his feelings about Oxford and the system pursued there, from casual references in his critical writings; and these are uncomplimentary enough. When he wishes to stigmatize a proposition as enormously and preposterously absurd, he says that there is “no authority on earth (always excepting the Dean of Christ Church), which could make it credible to me.” When stirred to the liveliest indignation by the iniquities which a Tory Government is practising in Ireland, he exclaims—“A Senior Proctor of the University of Oxford, the Head of a House, or the examining chaplain to a Bishop, may believe these things can last; but every man of the world, whose understanding has been exercised in the business of life, must see (and see with a breaking heart) that they will soon come to a fearful termination.” He praised a comparison of the Universities to “enormous hulks confined with mooring-chains, everything flowing and progressing around them,” while they themselves stood still.

When pleading for a wider and more reasonable course of studies at Oxford, he says:—

“A genuine Oxford tutor would shudder to hear his young men disputing upon moral and political truth, forming and putting down theories, and indulging in all the boldness of youthful discussion. He would augur nothing from it but impiety to God and treason to Kings.”

Protesting against the undue predominance of classical studies in the Universities, as at the Public Schools, he says:—

“Classical literature is the great object at Oxford. Many minds so employed have produced many works, and much fame in that department: but if all liberal arts and sciences useful to human life had been taught there; if some had dedicated themselves to chemistry, some to mathematics, some to experimental philosophy; and if every attainment had been honoured in the mixt ratio of its difficulty and utility; the system of such an University would have been much more valuable, but the splendour of its name something less.”

The hopelessness of any attempt to reform the curriculum of Oxford by opening the door to Political Economy is stated with characteristic vigour.—

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“When an University has been doing useless things for a long time, it appears at first degrading to them to be useful A set of lectures upon Political Economy would be discouraged in Oxford, possibly despised, probably not permitted. To discuss the Enclosure of Commons, and to dwell upon imports and exports—to come so near to common life, would seem to be undignified and contemptible. In the same manner, the Parr or the Bentley of his day would be scandalised to be put on a level with the discoverer of a neutral salt; and yet what other measure is there of dignity in intellectual labour, but usefulness and difficulty? And what ought the term *University* to mean, but a place where every science is taught which is liberal, and at the same time useful to mankind? Nothing would so much tend to bring classical literature within proper bounds as a steady and invariable appeal to these tests in our appreciation of all human knowledge. The puffed-up pedant would collapse into his proper size, and the maker of verses and the rememberer of words would soon assume that station which is the lot of those who go up unbidden to the upper places of the feast.”

In 1810 he wrote, with reference to the newly-invented Examination for Honours at Oxford:—

“If Oxford is become at last sensible of the miserable state to which it was reduced, as everybody else was out of Oxford, and if it is making serious efforts to recover from the degradation into which it was plunged a few years past, the good wishes of every respectable man must go with it.”

And again:—

“On the new plan of Oxford education we shall offer no remarks. It has many defects; but it is very honourable to the University to have made such an experiment. The improvement upon the old plan is certainly very great; and we most sincerely and honestly wish to it every species of success.”

His opinions on the subject of the Universities did not mellow with age. As late as 1831 he wrote of a friend who had just sent his son to Cambridge:—

“He has put him there to spend his money, to lose what good qualities he has, and to gain nothing useful in return. If men had made no more progress in the common arts of life than they have in education, we should at this moment be dividing our food with our fingers, and drinking out of the palms of our hands.”

It was just as bad when a lady sent her son to his own University.—

> “I feel for her about her son at Oxford, knowing, as I do, that the only consequences of a University education are the growth of vice and the waste of money.”

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In 1792 Sydney Smith took his degree,[5] and now the question of a profession had to be faced and decided. It was necessary that he should begin to make money at once, for the pecuniary resources of the family, narrow at the beat, were now severely taxed by his mother's failing health and by the cost of starting his brothers in the world. At Oxford, he had dabbled in medicine and anatomy, and had attended the lectures of Dr., afterwards Sir Christopher, Pegge,[6] who recommended him to become a doctor. His father wished to send him as a super-cargo to China! His own strong preference was for the Bar, but his father, who had already brought up one son to that profession and found it more expensive than profitable, looked very unfavourably on the design; and under paternal pressure the wittiest Englishman of his generation determined to seek Holy Orders, or, to use his own old-fashioned phrase, to "enter the Church." He assumed the sacred character without enthusiasm, and looked back on its adoption with regret. "The law," he said in after life, "is decidedly the best profession for a young man if he has anything in him. In the Church a man is thrown into life with his hands tied, and bid to swim; he does well if he keeps his head above water."

Under these rather dismal auspices, Sydney Smith was ordained Deacon in 1794. He might, one would suppose, have been ordained on his Fellowship, and have continued to reside in College with a view to obtaining a Lectureship or some other office of profit. Perhaps he found the mental atmosphere of Oxford insalubrious. Perhaps he was unpopular in College. Perhaps his political opinions were already too liberal for the place. Certain it is that his visit to France, in the earlier stages of the Revolution, had led him to extol the French for teaching mankind "the use of their power, their reason, and their rights." Whatever was the cause, he turned his back on Oxford, and, as soon as he was ordained, became Curate of Netheravon, a village near Amesbury.[7] As he himself said, "the name of Curate had lost its legal meaning, and, instead of denoting the incumbent of a living, came to signify the deputy of an absentee." He had sole charge of the parish of Netheravon, and was also expected to perform one service every Sunday at the adjoining village of Fittleton. "Nothing," wrote the new-fledged Curate, "can equal the profound, the immeasurable, the awful dulness of this place, in the which I lie, dead and buried, in hope of a joyful resurrection in 1796." Indeed, it is not easy to conceive a more dismal situation for a young, ardent, and active man, fresh from Oxford, full of intellectual ambition, and not very keenly alive to the spiritual opportunities of his calling. The village, a kind of oasis in the desert of Salisbury Plain, was not touched by any of the coaching-roads. The only method of communication with the outside world was by the market-cart which brought the necessaries

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of life from Salisbury once a week. The vicar was non-resident; and the squire, Mr. Hicks-Beach, was only an occasional visitor, for his principal residence was fifty miles off, at Williamstrip, near Fairford. (He had acquired Netheravon by his marriage with Miss Beach.) The church was empty, and the curate in charge likened his preaching to the voice of one crying in the wilderness. The condition of the village may best be judged from a report made to Mr. Hicks-Beach by his steward in 1793. Nearly every one was dependent on parochial relief. Not a man earned ten shillings a week. A man with a wife and four children worked for six shillings a week. A girl earned, by spinning, four shillings a month. Idleness, disease, and immorality were rife; and, as an incentive to profitable industry, a young farmer beat a sickly labourer within an inch of his life.

Mrs. Hicks-Beach referred this uncomfortable report on the condition of her property to the newly-installed curate, requesting his opinion on the cases specified. The curate replied with characteristic vigour. One family owed its wretched condition to mismanagement and extravagance; another to “ignorance bordering on brutality”; another to “Irish extraction, numbers, disease, and habits of idleness.” One family was composed of “weak, witless people, totally wretched, without sense to extricate them from their wretchedness”; a second was “perfectly wretched and helpless”; and a third was “aliment for Newgate, food for the halter—a ragged, wretched, savage, stubborn race."[8]

The squire and Mrs. Hicks-Beach, who seem to have been thoroughly high-principled and intelligent people, were much concerned to find the curate corroborating and even expanding the evil reports of the steward. They immediately began considering remedies, and decided that their first reform should be to establish a Sunday-school. The institution so named bore little resemblance to the Sunday-schools of the present day, but followed a plan which Robert Raikes[9] and Mrs. Hannah More[10] had originated, and which Bishop Shute Barrington[11] (who was translated to Durham in 1791) had strongly urged on the Diocese of Sarum.[12] Boys and girls were taught together. The master and mistress were paid the modest salary of two shillings a Sunday. The children were taught spelling and reading, and, as soon as they had mastered those arts, were made to read the Bible, the Prayer Book, and Mrs. More’s tracts. The children attended church, sitting together in a big pew, and, in hot weather, had their lessons in the church, before and after the service. As soon as the Sunday-school had proved itself popular and successful, an Industrial School was arranged for three nights in the week, so that the girls of the village might be taught domestic arts. Both institutions prospered, and ninety years later Mr. Stuart Reid, visiting the cottages of Netheravon in order to collect material for his book, caught the lingering tradition that Sydney Smith “was fond of children and young people, and took pains to teach them.”

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This tradition bears out what Sydney Smith said in his Farewell Sermon to the people of Netheravon. Preaching from Proverbs iv. 13, “Take fast hold of instruction,” he said:—

“The Sunday-school which, with some trouble and expense, has been brought to the state in which you see it, will afford to the poorest people an opportunity of giving to their children some share of education, and I will not suppose that anybody can be so indolent, and so unprincipled, as not to exact from their children a regular attendance upon it. I sincerely exhort you, and beg of you now, for the last time, that after this institution has been got into some kind of order, you will not suffer it to fall to ruin by your own negligence. I have lived among your children, and have taught them myself, and have seen them improve, and I know it will make them better and happier men.”

And now a change was at hand. The curate of Netheravon had never intended to stay there longer than he was obliged, and the “happy resurrection” for which he had hoped came in an unexpected fashion. Here is his own account of his translation, written in 1839:—

“The squire of the parish took a fancy to me, and requested me to go with his son to reside at the University of Weimar; before we could get there, Germany became the seat of war, and in stress of politics we put into Edinburgh, where I remained five years. The principles of the French Revolution were then fully afloat, and it is impossible to conceive a more violent and agitated state of society.”

Sydney Smith and his pupil, Michael Beach,[13] arrived at Edinburgh in June 1798. They lodged successively at 38 South Hanover Street, 19 Ann Street, and 46 George Street. The University of Edinburgh was then in its days of glory. Dugald Stewart was Professor of Moral Philosophy; John Playfair, of Mathematics; John Hill, of Humanity. The teaching was at once interesting and systematic, the intellectual atmosphere liberal and enterprising. English parents who cared seriously for mental and moral freedom, such as the Duke of Somerset, the Duke of Bedford, and Lord Lansdowne, sent their sons to Edinburgh instead of Oxford or Cambridge. The University was in close relations with the Bar, then adorned by the great names of Francis Jeffrey, Francis Homer, Henry Brougham, and Walter Scott. While Michael Beach was duly attending the professorial lectures, his tutor was not idle. From Dugald Stewart, and Thomas Brown, he acquired the elements of Moral Philosophy. He gratified a lifelong fancy by attending the Clinical Lectures given by Dr. Gregory[14] in the hospitals of Edinburgh, and studied Chemistry under Dr. Black.[15] He amused himself with chemical experiments.—

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“I mix’d 4 of Holland gin with 8 of olive oil, and stirr’d them well together. I then added 4 of nitric acid. A violent ebullition ensued. Nitrous oether, as I suppos’d, was generated, and in about four hours the oil became perfectly concrete, white and hard as tallow.”

To these scientific pastimes were soon added some more professional activities. The Episcopalians of Edinburgh at this time worshipped in Charlotte Chapel, Rose Street, which was sold in 1818 to the Baptists. The incumbent was the Rev. Archibald Alison, [16] who wrote a treatise on “Taste” and ministered in one of the ugliest buildings in the world. The arrival in Edinburgh of a clever young man in English Orders was an opportunity not to be neglected, and Sydney Smith was often invited to preach in Charlotte Chapel. Writing to Mr. Hicks-Beach, he says:—

> “I have the pleasure of seeing my audience nod approbation while they sleep.”

And again:—

> “The people of Edinburgh gape at my sermons. In the middle of an exquisite address to Virtue, beginning ‘O Virtue!’ I saw a rascal gaping as if his jaws were torn asunder.”

But this, though perhaps it may have perplexed the worthy squire to whom it was addressed, is mere self-banter. Sydney’s preaching attracted some of the keenest minds in Edinburgh. It was fresh, practical, pungent; and, though rich in a vigorous and resounding eloquence, was poles asunder from the rhetoric of which “O Virtue!” is a typical instance.

So popular were these sermons at Charlotte Chapel that in 1800 the preacher ventured to publish a small volume of them, which was soon followed by a second and enlarged edition. This book of sermons is dedicated to Lord Webb Seymour[17]—“because I know no man who, in spite of the disadvantages of high birth, lives to more honourable and commendable purposes than yourself.”

The preface to the book is a vigorous plea for greater animation in preaching, a wider variety of topics, and a more direct bearing on practical life, than were then usual in the pulpits of the Church of England.

“Is it wonder,” he asks, “that every semi-delirious sectary, who pours forth his animated nonsense with the genuine look and voice of passion, should gesticulate away the congregation of the most profound and learned divine of the Established Church, and in two Sundays preach him bare to the very sexton? Why are we natural everywhere but in the pulpit? No man expresses warm and animated feelings anywhere else, with his mouth alone, but with his whole body; he articulates with every limb, and talks from head to foot with a thousand voices. Why this holoplexia on sacred occasions alone?

Why call in the aid of paralysis to piety? Is it a rule of oratory to balance the style against the subject, and to handle the most sublime truths in the dullest language and the driest manner? Is sin to be taken from men, as Eve was from Adam,

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by casting them into a deep slumber? Or from what possible perversion of common sense are we to look like field-preachers in Zembla, holy lumps of ice, numbed into quiescence and stagnation and mumbling?"

The subjects with which these sermons deal are practical in the highest degree, such as "The Love of Country," "The Poor Magdalen," "The Causes of Republican Opinions," "The Effect of Christianity on Manners," and "The Treatment of Servants." One or two short samples of his thought and style will not be out of place.

This is from his sermon on the Magdalen:—

> "The best mediation with God Almighty the Father, and His Son of Mercy and Love, is the prayer of a human being whom you have saved from perdition."

This is from the sermon on "Christianity and Manners":—

"If ye would that men should love you, love ye also them, not with gentleness of face alone, or the shallow mockery of smiles, but in singleness of heart, in forbearance, judging mercifully, entering into the mind of thy brother, to spare him pain, to prevent his wrath, to be unto him an eternal fountain of peace. These are the fruits of the Spirit, and this the soul that emanates from our sacred religion. If ye bear these fruits now in the time of this life, if ye write these laws on the tablets of your hearts so as ye not only say but do them, then indeed are ye the true servants of Jesus and the children of His redemption. For you He came down from Heaven; for you He was scorned and hated upon earth; for you mangled on the Cross; and at the last day, when the trumpet shall sound, and the earth melt, and the heavens groan and die, ye shall spring up from the dust of the grave, the ever-living spirits of God."

All the sermons breathe the same fiery indignation against cruelty and tyranny, the same quick sympathy with poverty, suffering, and debasement; and, here and there, especially in the occasional references to France and Switzerland, they show pretty clearly the preacher's political bias. In his own phrase, he "loved truth better than he loved Dundas,[18] at that time the tyrant of Scotland"; and it would have been a miracle if his outspokenness had passed without remonstrance from the authoritative and privileged classes. But the spirited preface to the second edition shows that he had already learned to hold his own, unshaken and unterrified, in what he believed to be a righteous cause:—

"As long as God gives me life and strength I will never cease to attack, in the way of my profession and to the best of my abilities, any system of principles injurious to the public happiness, whether they be sanctioned by the voice of the many, or whether they be

not; and may the same God take that unworthy life away, whenever I shrink from the contempt and misrepresentation to which my duty shall call me to submit."

The year 1800 was marked, for Sydney Smith, by an

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event even more momentous than the publication of his first book. It was the year of his marriage. His sister Maria had a friend and schoolfellow called Catharine Amelia Pybus. He had known her as a child; and while still quite young had become engaged to marry her, whenever circumstances should make it possible. The young lady's father was John Pybus, who had gone to India in the service of the Company, attained official distinction and made money. Returning to England, he settled at Cheam in Surrey, where he died in 1789. In 1800 his daughter Catharine was twenty-two years old. Her brother, a Tory Member of Parliament and a placeman under Pitt, strongly objected to an alliance with a penniless and unknown clergyman of Liberal principles; but Miss Pybus happily knew her own mind, and she was married to Sydney Smith in the parish church of Cheam on the 2nd of July 1800. The bride had a small fortune of her own, and this was just as well, for her husband's total wealth consisted of "six small silver teaspoons," which he flung into her lap, saying, "There, Kate, you lucky girl, I give you all my fortune!"

In the autumn of 1800, Mr. and Mrs. Sydney Smith established themselves at No. 46 George Street, Edinburgh. Mrs. Smith sold her pearl necklace for L500, and bought plate and linen with the proceeds. Michael Beach had now quitted Edinburgh for Oxford, but his younger brother William took his place in the Smiths' house, and was joined by the eldest son of Mr. Gordon of Ellon. Lady Holland states that with each of these young gentlemen her father received L400 a year; and Mr. Hicks-Beach, grateful for his good influence on Michael, made a considerable addition to the covenanted payment.

In 1802 the Smiths' eldest child was born and was christened Saba. The name was taken out of the Psalms for the Fourteenth Day of the Month, and was bestowed on her in obedience to her father's conviction that, where parents were constrained to give their child so indistinctive a surname as Smith, they ought to counterbalance it with a Christian name more original and vivacious. Saba Smith became the wife of the eminent physician, Sir Henry Holland, and died in 1866. The other children were—a boy, who was born and died in 1803; Douglas, born in 1805, died in 1829; Emily, wife of Nathaniel Hibbert, born in 1807, died in 1874; Wyndham, born in 1813, died in 1871.

[1] For this remarkable variant, *see* Burke's Peerage, *Bowyer-Smijth*, *Bart.*

[2] (1739-1827.)

[3] William Howley (1766-1848).

[4] In 1819 Sydney Smith violated his own canon, thus: "But, after all, I believe we shall all go—

"*ad veteris Nicolai tristia regna,*
Pitt ubi combustum Dundasque videbimus omnes."

[5] He became M.A. in 1796.

[6] (1765-1822.) Lees' Reader in Anatomy 1790, Regius Professor of Medicine 1801.

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[7] It is curious that the date and place of Sydney Smith's ordination as Deacon cannot be traced. He would naturally have been ordained at Salisbury by John Douglas, Bishop of Sarum; but there is a gap in that prelate's Register of Ordinations between 1791 and 1796. He may have been ordained on Letters Dimissory in some other diocese. He was raised to the Priesthood in Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, on the 22nd of May 1796 by Edward Smallwell, Bishop of Oxford; being described as Fellow of New College, and B.A.

For the foregoing facts I am indebted to the courtesy of Mr. A.R. Malden, Registrar of the Diocese of Salisbury, and Mr. J.A. Davenport, Registrar of the Diocese of Oxford.

[8] Quoted by Mr. Stuart Reid.

[9] (1735-1811).

[10] (1745-1833.)

[11] (1734-1826.)

[12] "At the commencement of the nineteenth century, the Sunday-school had become a part of the regular organization of almost every well-worked parish. It was then a far more serious affair than it is now, for, where there was no week-day school, it supplied secular as well as religious instruction to the children. In fact, the Sunday-school took up a considerable part of the day,"—J.H. OVERTON, *The English Church in the Nineteenth Century*.

[13] Grandfather of Sir Michael Hicks-Beach, M.P.

[14] James Gregory (1753-1821), Professor of Medicine.

[15] Joseph Black (1728-1799), Professor of Chemistry.

[16] (1757-1839.)

[17] (1777-1819). Son of the 10th Duke of Somerset.

[18] Henry Dundas (1742-1811), Lord Advocate, created Viscount Melville in 1802.

CHAPTER II

THE EDINBURGH REVIEW—LONDON—“MORAL PHILOSOPHY”—PREFERMENT

We now approach what was perhaps the most important event in Sydney Smith’s life, and this was the foundation of the *Edinburgh Review*. Writing in 1839, and looking back upon the struggles of his early manhood, he thus described the circumstances in which the Review originated:—

“Among the first persons with whom I became acquainted [in Edinburgh] were Lord Jeffrey, Lord Murray (late Lord Advocate for Scotland), and Lord Brougham; all of them maintaining opinions upon political subjects a little too liberal for the dynasty of Dundas, then exercising supreme power over the northern division of the Island.“One day we happened to meet in the eighth or ninth story or flat in Buccleugh Place, the elevated residence of the then Mr. Jeffrey. I proposed that we should set up a Review; this was acceded to with acclamation. I was appointed Editor, and remained long enough in Edinburgh to edit the first number of the *Edinburgh Review*. The motto I proposed for the Review was—

“‘*Tenui musam, meditamur avena.*’

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"'We cultivate literature on a little oatmeal.'

"But this was too near the truth to be admitted, and so we took our present grave motto from Publius Syrus, of whom none of us had, I am sure, ever read a single line; and so began what has since turned out to be a very important and able journal. When I left Edinburgh, it fell into the stronger hands of Lord Jeffrey and Lord Brougham, and reached the highest point of popularity and success."To appreciate the value of the *Edinburgh Review*, the state of England at the period when that journal began should be had in remembrance. The Catholics were not emancipated. The Corporation and Test Acts were unrepealed. The Game-Laws were horribly oppressive; steel-traps and spring-guns were set all over the country; prisoners tried for their lives could have no counsel. Lord Eldon and the Court of Chancery pressed heavily on mankind. Libel was punished by the most cruel and vindictive imprisonments. The principles of Political Economy were little understood. The laws of debt and conspiracy were upon the worst footing. The enormous wickedness of the slave-trade was tolerated. A thousand evils were in existence, which the talents of good and able men have since lessened or removed; and these efforts have been not a little assisted by the honest boldness of the *Edinburgh Review*."

Lord Brougham has left on record a similar account.

"I at once entered warmly into Smith's scheme. Jeffrey, by nature always rather timid, was full of doubts and fears. It required all Smith's overpowering vivacity to argue and laugh Jeffrey out of his difficulties. There would, he said, be no lack of contributors. There was himself, ready to write any number of articles, or to edit the whole; there was Jeffrey, *facile princeps* in all kinds of literature; there was myself, full of mathematics and everything relating to the Colonies; there was Horner for Political Economy, and Murray for General Subjects. Besides, might we not, from our great and never-to-be-doubted success, fairly hope to receive help from such leviathans as Playfair, Dugald Stewart, Thomas Brown, Thomson, and others?"

These bright forecasts put heart of grace into the timid Jeffrey. Sydney Smith's jovial optimism prevailed. The financial part of the business was arranged with Constable in Edinburgh, and Longman in London: and the first number (clad in that famous livery of Blue and Buff[19] which the Whigs had copied from Charles Fox's coat and waistcoat) appeared in the autumn of 1802. The cover was thus inscribed—

THE EDINBURGH REVIEW

OR

CRITICAL JOURNAL

FOR

Oct. 1802—Jan. 1803

To be continued quarterly

* * * * *

Judex damnatur cum nocens absolvitur

PUBLIUS SYRUS.

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To this first number Sydney Smith contributed five articles. Four of these are reviews of sermons, and the fifth is a slashing attack on John Bowles,[20] who had published an alarmist pamphlet on the designs of France. Jeffrey thought this attack too severe, but the author could not agree. He thought Bowles “a very stupid and a very contemptible fellow.”

“He has been hangman for these ten years to all the poor authors in England, is generally considered to be hired by government, and has talked about social order till be has talked himself into L600 or L700 per annum. That there can be a fairer object for critical severity I cannot conceive.”

To the first four numbers Sydney Smith contributed in all eighteen articles; and he continued to contribute, at irregular intervals, till 1827. The substance and style of his articles will be considered later on. As to his motives in writing, he stated them to Jeffrey as being, “First, the love of you; second, the habit of reviewing; third, the love of money; to which I may add a fourth, the love of punishing fraud and folly.”

Ticknor[21] has put it on record that, late in life, Sydney Smith thus described his pecuniary relations with the *Review*:—“When I wrote an article, I used to send it to Jeffrey, and waited till it came out; immediately after which I enclosed to him a bill in these words, or words like them: ’Francis Jeffrey, Esq., to Rev. Sydney Smith: To a very wise and witty article on such a subject, so many sheets, at forty-five guineas a sheet’; and the money always came.”

Sydney Smith “remained long enough in Edinburgh to edit the first number” of the new review, but he now determined to leave Edinburgh and settle in London, and Jeffrey became editor. Regarding Holy Orders frankly as a profession, Sydney naturally desired professional advancement, and this of course could not be attained in presbyterian Scotland. “I could not hold myself justified to my wife and family if I were to sacrifice any longer to the love of present ease, those exertions which every man is bound to make for the improvement of his situation.”

He left Edinburgh with very mixed feelings, for he hated the place and loved its inhabitants. He called it “that energetic and unfragrant city.” He dwelt in memory on its “odious smells, barbarous sounds, bad suppers, excellent hearts, and most enlightened and cultivated understandings.”

“No nation,” he said, “has so large a stock of benevolence of heart, as the Scotch. Their temper stands anything but an attack on their climate. They would have you even believe they can ripen fruit; and, to be candid, I must own in remarkably warm summers I have tasted peaches that made most excellent pickles; and it is upon record that at the Siege of Perth, on one occasion the ammunition failing, their nectarines made admirable cannon-balls. Even the enlightened mind of Jeffrey cannot shake off the illusion

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that myrtles flourish at Craig Crook.[22] In vain I have represented to him that they are of the genus *Carduus*, and pointed out their prickly peculiarities.... Jeffrey sticks to his myrtle illusions, and treats my attacks with as much contempt as if I had been a wild visionary, who had never breathed his caller air, nor lived and suffered under the rigour of his climate, nor spent five years in discussing metaphysics and medicine in that garret of the earth—that knuckle-end of England—that land of Calvin, oatcakes, and sulphur."

As soon as he reached England, he wrote to his friend Jeffrey:—

"I left Edinburgh with great heaviness of heart; I knew what I was leaving, and was ignorant to what I was going. My good fortune will be very great, if I should ever again fall into the society of so many liberal, correct, and instructed men, and live with them on such terms of friendship as I have done with you, and you know whom, at Edinburgh."

On arriving in London, in the autumn of 1803, the Sydney Smiths lodged for a while at 77 Upper Guilford Street, and soon afterwards established themselves at 8 Doughty Street. Sydney's dearest friend, Francis Horner,[23] had preceded him to London, and was already beginning to make his mark at the Bar, without, apparently, abandoning his philosophical pursuits. "He lives very high up in Garden Court, and thinks a good deal about Mankind." But he could spare a thought for individuals as well as for the race, and did a great deal towards securing his friend an introduction into congenial society. Doughty Street was a legal quarter, and among those with whom the Smiths soon made friends were Sir Samuel Romilly, James Scarlett (afterwards Lord Abinger), and Sir James Mackintosh. To these were added as time went on, Henry Grattan, Alexander Marcet, John William Ward (afterwards Lord Dudley), Samuel Rogers, Henry Luttrell, "Conversation" Sharp, and Lord Holland.

Sydney Smith's eldest brother Robert ("Bobus"[24]) had married Caroline Vernon, Lord Holland's aunt. Sydney's politics were the politics of Holland House. Lord Holland was always recruiting for the Liberal army, and an Edinburgh Reviewer was a recruit worth capturing. So the hospitable doors were soon thrown open to the young clergyman from Doughty Street, who suddenly found himself a member of the most brilliant circle ever gathered under an English roof. In old age he used to declare, to the amusement of his friends, that as a young man he had been shy, but had wrestled with the temptation and overcome it. As regards the master[25] of Holland House, it was not easy to be shy in the presence of "that frank politeness which at once relieved all the embarrassment of the youngest and most timid writer or artist, who found himself for the first time among Ambassadors and Earls."[26] And even the imperious mistress[27] of the house found her match in Sydney Smith, who only made fun of her foibles, and repaid her insolence with raillery. Referring to this period, when he had long outlived it, he said:—

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“I well remember, when Mrs. Sydney and I were young, in London, with no other equipage than my umbrella, when we went out to dinner in a hackney coach (a vehicle, by the bye, now become almost matter of history), when the rattling step was let down, and the proud, powdered red-plushes grinned, and her gown was fringed with straw, how the iron entered into my soul.”

One of the most useful friends whom the Smiths discovered in London was Mr. Thomas Bernard,[28] afterwards a baronet of good estate in Buckinghamshire, and a zealous worker in all kinds of social and educational reform. Mr. Bernard was Treasurer of the Royal Institution in Albemarle Street, which had been founded in 1799; and, with the laudable desire of putting a few pounds into a friend’s pocket, he suggested that Sydney Smith should be invited to lecture before the Institution. The invitation was cordially given and gratefully accepted. The lecturer chose “Moral Philosophy” for his subject, and the Introductory Lecture, in which he defined his terms, was delivered on the 10th of November 1804. The second and third lectures dealt with the History of Moral Philosophy; the fourth, with the Powers of External Perception; the fifth, with Conception; the sixth, with Memory; the seventh, with Imagination; the eighth, with Reason and Judgment; and the ninth, with the Conduct of the Understanding.

These lectures were treated by the author as forming one course, their general subject being “The Understanding.” In February 1805 he wrote to his friend Jeffrey:—“I got through my first course I think creditably; whether any better than creditably others know better than myself. I have still ten to read.” This second course followed immediately on the first, and, under the general head of “Taste,” discussed topics so various as “Wit and Humour,” “The Beautiful,” “The Sublime,” “The Faculties of Animals as compared with those of Man,” and “The Faculties of Beasts.” By this time the lectures had become fashionable. One eye-witness writes:—

“All Albemarle Street, and a part of Grafton Street, was rendered impassable by the concourse of carriages assembled there during the time of their delivery. There was not sufficient room for the persons assembling; the lobbies were filled, and the doors into them from the lecture-room were left open.”

Horner reckoned “from six to eight hundred hearers and not a seat to be procured, even if you go there an hour before the time.” Sir Robert Peel, who had just left Harrow, was one of the audience, and remembered the lectures forty years after their delivery. As late as 1843, Dr. Whewell[29] inquired if they were still accessible. Sydney Smith, according to Lord Houghton, described his performances as “the most successful swindle of the season”; and, writing to Jeffrey in April 1805, he says:—

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“My lectures are just now at such an absurd pitch of celebrity, that I must lose a good deal of reputation before the public settles into a just equilibrium respecting them. I am most heartily ashamed of my own fame, because I am conscious I do not deserve it, and that the moment men of sense are provoked by the clamour to look into my claims, it will be at an end.”

Notwithstanding this premonition, the lecturer adventured on a third course, which was delivered at the same place in the spring of 1806. “Galleries were erected, which had never before been required, and the success was complete.” The general subject of this third course was “The Active Powers of the Mind,” and it dealt with “The Evil Affections,” “The Benevolent Affections,” “The Passions,” “The Desires,” “Surprise, Novelty, and Variety,” and “Habit.”

As soon as the lectures were delivered, the lecturer threw the manuscripts into the fire; and it is satisfactory to find that he did not take his performance very seriously, or set a very high value on his philosophical attainments. In 1843 he wrote, in reply to Dr. Whewell’s inquiry:—

“My lectures are gone to the dogs, and are utterly forgotten. I knew nothing of Moral Philosophy, but I was thoroughly aware that I wanted L200 to furnish my house. The success, however, was prodigious; all Albemarle Street blocked up with carriages, and such an uproar as I never remember to have seen excited by any other literary imposture. Every week I had a new theory about Conception and Perception, and supported it by a natural manner, a torrent of words, and an impudence scarcely credible in this prudent age. Still, in justice to myself, I must say there were some good things in them. But good and bad are all gone.”

As a matter of fact, however, they were not “all gone.” Mrs. Smith had rescued the manuscripts, a good deal damaged, from the flames, and after her husband’s death she published the three courses in one volume under the title, *Elementary Sketches of Moral Philosophy*.

Was it worth while to publish them? The answer must depend on the object of publication. If the book was meant to be considered as a serious contribution to mental science, the manuscripts might as well have remained where their author threw them. If, on the other hand, it was intended only to show the versatility, adroitness, and plausibility of a young man in need of money, nothing could have better illustrated those aspects of Sydney Smith’s character and career. He is thirty-three years old, married, with an increasing family, and no means of subsistence beyond periodical journalism and odd jobs of clerical duty. “Two or three random sermons,” he says, “I have discharged, and thought I perceived that the greater part of the congregation thought me mad. The clerk was as pale as death in helping me off with my gown, for fear I should bite him.” He wants money to furnish his house. A benevolent

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friend obtains him the opportunity of lecturing. It is not uncharitable to suppose that he chooses a subject in which accurate knowledge and close argument will be less requisite than fluency, fancy, bold statement, and extraordinarily felicitous illustration. The five years spent in Edinburgh can now be turned to profitable account. Dugald Stewards lectures can be exhumed, decorated, and reproduced. The whole book reeks of Scotland. The lecturer sets out by declaring that Moral Philosophy is taught in the Scotch Universities alone. England knows nothing about it. At Edinburgh Moral Philosophy means Mental Philosophy, and is concerned with "the faculties of the mind and the effects which our reasoning powers and our passions produce upon the actions of our lives." It has nothing to do with ethics or duty. And the definition used in Edinburgh is also used in Albemarle Street. Dugald Stewart and Thomas Brown[30] and Adam Smith, Hume and Reid and Oswald and Beattie and Ferguson, are names which meet us on every page. The lecturer has learnt from Scotsmen, and reproduces what the Scotsmen taught him. Mind and Matter are two great realities. When people are informed that all thought is explained by vibrations and "vibratiuncles" of the brain, and that what they consider their arms and legs are not arms and legs but ideas, then, says the lecturer, they will pardonably identify Philosophy with Lunacy. "Bishop Berkeley destroyed this world in one octavo volume; and nothing remained after his time but Mind; which experienced a similar fate at the hand of Mr. Hume in 1737.... But is there any one out of Bedlam who *doubts* of the existence of matter? who doubts of his own personal identity? or of his consciousness? or of the general credibility of memory?"

From this rough-and-ready delimitation of the area within which Moral Philosophy must work, if it is to escape the reproach of insanity, the lecturer goes on, as becomes a divine, to champion his study against the reproach of tending to Atheism. He groups all our senses, faculties, and impulses together, and says: "All these things Moral Philosophy observes, and, observing, adores the Being from whence they proceed."

Having thus defined his subject, the lecturer goes on, in his second and third lectures, to trace the history of Moral Philosophy, from Pythagoras to Mrs. Trimmer. Plato is praised for beauty of style, and blamed for mistiness of doctrine. Aristotle is contrasted, greatly to his disadvantage, with Bacon. "Volumes of Aristotelian philosophy have been written which, if piled one upon another, would have equalled the Tower of Babel in Height, and far exceeded it in Confusion." But to Bacon "we are indebted for an almost daily extension of our knowledge of the laws of nature in the outward world; and the same modest and cautious spirit of enquiry, extended to Moral Philosophy, will probably give us clear, intelligible ideas of our spiritual nature."

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The remaining lectures of this course are those which suffered most severely from the flames, and are indeed in so fragmentary a condition as to render any close criticism of them impossible. But enough has been quoted to show that Sydney Smith, so far as he was in any sense concerned with philosophy, was a sworn foe to mysticism and ideality, and a worshipper of Baconian common-sense even in the sphere of mind and soul.

He was never tired of poking fun at his philosophical friends in Edinburgh. When sending some Scotch grouse to Lady Holland, he said—"I take the liberty to send you two brace of grouse—curious, because killed by a Scotch metaphysician: in other and better language, they are mere ideas, shot by other ideas, out of a pure intellectual notion called a gun." In another letter to the same correspondent he says—"I hope you are reading Mr. Stewart's book, and are far gone in the Philosophy of Mind—a science, as he repeatedly tells us, still in its infancy. I propose, myself, to wait till it comes to years of discretion."

To his friend Jeffrey he wrote in 1804:—

"I exhort you to restrain the violent tendency of your nature for analysis, and to cultivate synthetical propensities. What is virtue? What's the use of truth? What's the use of honour? What's a guinea but a d——d yellow circle? The whole effort of your mind is to destroy. Because others build slightly and eagerly, you employ yourself in kicking down their houses, and contract a sort of aversion for the more honourable, useful, and difficult task of building well yourself."

He reports a saying of his little boy's, "which in Scotland would be heard as of high metaphysical promise. Emily was asking why one flower was blue, and another pink, and another yellow. 'Why, in short,' said Douglas, 'it is their *nature*; and, when we say that, what do we mean? It is only another word for *mystery*; it only means that we know nothing at all about the matter.' This observation from a child eight years old is not common."

The second and third courses of lectures would force us (even if we had not the lecturer's confession to guide us) irresistibly to the conclusion that he had said all he knew about Moral Philosophy, and rather more, in the first course. It is only by the exercise of a genial violence that his dissertations on Wit and Humour, Irish Bulls, Taste, Animals, and Habit, can be forced to take shelter under the dignified title of Moral Philosophy. But, philosophical defects apart, they are excellent lectures. They abound in miscellaneous knowledge and out-of-the-way reading, and they bristle with illustrations which have passed into the common anecdotage of mankind.

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“In the late rebellion in Ireland, the rebels, who had conceived a high degree of indignation against some great banker, passed a resolution that they would burn his notes, which accordingly they did, with great assiduity; forgetting that, in burning his notes, they were destroying his debts, and that for every note which went into the flames, a correspondent value went into the banker’s pocket.”

In every war of the last century this story has been revived. It would be curious to see if it can be traced back further than Sydney Smith.

From the lecture on Habit, I cull this pleasing anecdote:—

“The famous Isaac Barrow, the mathematician and divine, had an habitual dislike of dogs, and it proceeded from the following cause:—He was a very early riser; and one morning, as he was walking in the garden of a friend’s house, with whom he was staying, a fierce mastiff, that used to be chained all day, and let loose all night, for the security of the house, set upon him with the greatest fury. The doctor caught him by the throat, threw him, and lay upon him; and, whilst he kept him down, considered what he should do in that exigence. The account the doctor gave of it to his friends was, that he had once a mind to have killed the dog; but he altered his resolution upon recollecting that it would be unjust, since the dog only did his duty, and he himself was to blame for rambling out so early. At length he called out so loud, that he was heard by some in the house, who came out, and speedily separated the mastiff and the mathematician. However, it is added, that the adventure gave the doctor a strong habitual aversion for dogs; and I dare say, if the truth were known, fixed in the dog’s mind a still stronger aversion to doctors.”

This last sentence is in exactly the same vein of humour as the comment, in the review of Waterton’s Travels,[31] on the snake that bit itself. “Mr. Waterton, though much given to sentiment, made a Labairi snake bite itself, but no bad consequences ensued—nor would any bad consequences ensue, if a court-martial was to order a sinful soldier to give himself a thousand lashes. It is barely possible that the snake had some faint idea whom and what he was biting.”

The house which was furnished with the products of this Moral Philosophy was No. 18 Orchard Street, Portman Square, and here the Smiths lived till they left London for a rural parish. Meanwhile, the excellent Bernard had secured some clerical employment for his friend. Through his influence the Rev. Sydney Smith was elected “alternate Evening Preacher at the Foundling Hospital,” on the 27th of March 1805. He tried to open a Proprietary Chapel on his own account, but was foiled by the obstinacy of the Rector in whose parish it was situate.[32] He was appointed Morning Preacher at Berkeley Chapel, Mayfair, and combined his duties there with similar duties at Fitzroy Chapel, now St. Saviour’s Church, Fitzroy Square.[33]

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These various appointments, coupled with his lectures at the Royal Institution, brought him increasingly into public notice. His preaching was admired by some important people. His contributions to the *Edinburgh*, so entirely unlike anything else in periodical literature, were eagerly anticipated and keenly canvassed. It was reported that King George III. had read them, and had said, “He is a very clever fellow, but he will never be a bishop.” His social gifts won him friends wherever he went; and Lord and Lady Holland, though themselves not addicted to the public observances of religion, were anxious to promote his professional advancement; but this was not easy. “From the beginning of the century,” he wrote, “to the death of Lord Liverpool, was an awful period for those who had the misfortune to entertain Liberal opinions, and were too honest to sell them for the ermine of the judge or the lawn of the prelate—a long and hopeless career in your profession, the chuckling grin of noodles, the sarcastic leer of the genuine political rogue—prebendaries, deans, and bishops made over your head—reverend renegadoes advanced to the highest dignities of the Church, for helping to rivet the fetters of Catholic and Protestant dissenters, and no more chance of a Whig administration than of a thaw in Zembla.”

But this gloomy period of oppression and exclusion was broken by a transient gleam. Pitt died on the 23rd of January 1806, and Lord Grenville[34] succeeded him, at the head of the ministry of “All the Talents.” In this place, perhaps, may be not unsuitably inserted the epitaph which Sydney Smith suggested for Pitt’s statue in Hanover Square.

To the Right Honourable William Pitt
Whose errors in foreign policy
And lavish expenditure of our Resources at home
Have laid the foundation of National Bankruptcy
And scattered the seeds of Revolution,
This Monument was erected
By many weak men, who mistook his eloquence for wisdom
And his insolence for magnanimity,
By many unworthy men whom he had ennobled,
And by many base men, whom he had enriched at the Public
Expense.
But for Englishmen
This Statue raised from such motives
Has not been erected in vain.
They learn from it those dreadful abuses
Which exist under the mockery
Of a free Representation,
And feel the deep necessity
Of a great and efficient Reform.

In Lord Grenville's ministry Lord Erskine became Lord Chancellor, and Lord Holland Lord Privy Seal. In the autumn of 1806 the living of Foston-le-Clay, eight miles from York, fell vacant. It was in the Chancellor's gift; the Lord Privy Seal said a word to his colleague; the Chancellor cordially accepted "the nominee of Lord and Lady Holland"; and that nominee was Sydney Smith. Foston was worth L500 a year, and Dr. Markham, Archbishop of York, allowed the new Rector to be non-resident, accepting his duties at the Foundling Hospital as a sufficient justification for absence from his parish. Early in 1807 he preached at the Temple Church, and published by request, a sermon on Toleration, which drew this testimony from a scandalized peer:[35]—

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> “Sydney Smith preached yesterday a sermon on the Catholic question.... It would have made an admirable party speech in Parliament, but as a sermon, the author deserved the Star Chamber, if it still existed.”

During the summer of 1807, the Smiths lived in a hired house at Sonning on the Thames; and one of their neighbours was the great civilian Sir William Scott,[36] afterwards Lord Stowell (who deserves to be honoured for having coined the phrase—-“The elegant simplicity of the Three per cents"). The old judge took a fancy to the young clergyman, and pointed out, in a friendly spirit, how much he had lost by his devotion to Whiggism. In later life, Sydney Smith wrote to Lord John Russell[37]—“I remember with pleasure, thirty years ago, old Lord Stowell saying to me, ’Mr. Smith, you would have been a much richer man if you had joined us.’”

But the Tory table-talk of Earley[38] was powerless to seduce this staunch partisan from his political allegiance; and, just at this period, he was meditating the most skilful and the most resounding blow which he ever struck for freedom and justice.

It was a critical time. The besotted resistance of the King to the slightest concession in favour of his Roman Catholic subjects had driven the ministry of “All the Talents” out of office in the spring. The High Tories succeeded them, and the General Election which ensued on the change of government gave a strong majority for “No Popery” and reaction. Meanwhile the greatest genius that the world has ever seen was wading through slaughter to a universal throne, and no effective resistance had as yet been offered to a progress which menaced the freedom of Europe and the existence of its states. At such a juncture it seemed to Sydney Smith that England could not spare a single soldier or sailor, nor afford to alienate the loyalty of a single citizen. “Buonaparte,” he wrote, “is as rapid and as terrible as the lightning of God; would he were as transient.” It was nothing short of national suicide to reject men desirous of serving in the army and navy on account of their beliefs, to madden English Romanists by defrauding them of their civil rights, and to outrage the whole people of Ireland by affixing a legal stigma to their religion.

His musings on this pregnant theme took shape in—

A LETTER
ON
THE SUBJECT
OF
THE CATHOLICS
TO
MY BROTHER ABRAHAM
WHO
LIVES IN THE COUNTRY
BY PETER PLYMLEY.

This Letter was published in the summer of 1807, and “its effect was like a spark on a heap of gunpowder,” It was followed by nine more, bearing the same title, four of which appeared in the same year and five in the next. A little later Sydney Smith wrote to Lord Grey—“I wish I could write as well as Plymley: but, if I could, where is such a case to be found? When had any lawyer such a brief?”

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In 1808 *Peter Plymley's Letters* were collected and published in a pamphlet, and the pamphlet ran through sixteen editions. "The government of that day," wrote Sydney Smith in 1839, "took great pains to find out the author; all that they *could* find out was that they were brought to Mr. Budd, the publisher, by the Earl of Lauderdale.[39] Somehow or another it came to be conjectured that I was the author.[40]... They had an immense circulation at the time, and I think above twenty thousand copies were sold." Some little space must be bestowed upon these masterpieces of humour and wisdom.

[19] "Yet mark one caution, ere thy next Review
Spread its light wings of Saffron and of Blue,
Beware lest blundering Brougham spoil the sale,
Turn Beef to Bannocks, Cauliflowers to Kail."

BYRON, *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.

[20] Barrister, and writer of political pamphlets between 1791 and 1807.

[21] George Ticknor (1791-1871), American traveller and man of letters.

[22] Jeffrey's house near Edinburgh.

[23] (1778-1817.) Barrister and M.P. On his death, Sydney Smith wrote——"I say nothing of the great and miserable loss we have all sustained. He will always live in our recollection; and it will be useful to us all, in the great occasions of life, to reflect how Horner would act and think in them, if God had prolonged his life."

[24] Sydney Smith used to say, "Bobus and I have inverted the laws of nature. He rose by his gravity; I sank by my levity."

[25] Henry Richard (1773-1840), 3rd Lord Holland.

[26] Macaulay, "Lord Holland."

[27] The Lady Holland who figures so frequently in Sydney Smith's correspondence was Elizabeth Vassall (1770-1845), wife of the 3rd Lord Holland. Sydney Smith's daughter, Saba, did not become Lady Holland till 1853, when her husband, Dr. Holland, was made a baronet.

[28] (1750-1818).

[29] William Whewell (1794-1866), Master of Trinity College, Cambridge, author of *Elements of Morality*, 1845.

[30] Sydney Smith wrote his friend Sir George Philips in 1836—“Thomas Brown was an intimate friend of mine, and used to dine with me regularly every Sunday in Edinburgh. He was a Lake poet, a profound metaphysician, and one of the most virtuous men that ever lived. As a metaphysician, Dugald Stewart was a humbug to him. Brown had real talents for the thing. You must recognize, in reading Brown, many of those arguments with which I have so often reduced you to silence in metaphysical discussions. Your discovery of Brown is amusing. Go on! You will detect Dryden if you persevere; bring to light John Milton, and drag William Shakspeare from his ill-deserved obscurity!”

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[31] See p. 185.

[32] See his Essay on “Toleration":—“A chapel belonging to the Swedenborgians, or Methodists of the New Jerusalem, was offered, two or three years since, in London, to a clergyman of the Establishment. The proprietor was tired of his irrational tenants, and wished for better doctrine. The rector, with every possible compliment to the fitness of the person in question, positively refused the application; and the church remains in the hands of Methodists.”

[33] Sir David Wilkie (1785-1841) wrote in 1808:—“To church, where I heard Sydney Smith preach a sermon, which, for its eloquence and power of reasoning, exceeded anything I had ever heard. The subject was the Conversion of St. Paul, of which he proved the authenticity, in opposition to all the objections and doubts of infidelity.”

[34] William Wyndham Grenville (1759-1834), created Lord Grenville in 1790.

[35] Morton Eden (1751-1830), created Lord Henley in 1799.

[36] (1745-1836), created Lord Stowell in 1821.

[37] (1792-1878).

[38] A house which Lord Stowell acquired by his marriage with an heiress, Anna Maria Bagnall.

[39] James, 8th Earl of Lauderdale (1759-1839).

[40] Byron, in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, attributes the authorship of Peter Plymley to “Smug Sydney.” See also his allusion to “Peter Pith” in *Don Juan*, canto xvi.

CHAPTER III

PETER PLYMLEY

Peter Plymley’s Letters are supposed to be written by a Londoner, who is in favour of removing the secular disabilities of Roman Catholics, to his brother Abraham, the parson of a rural parish. They proceed throughout on the assumption that the parson is a kind-hearted, honest, and conscientious man; but rather stupid, grossly ignorant of public affairs, and frightened to death by a bogy of his own imagining. That bogy is the idea of a Popish conspiracy against the crown, church, and commonwealth. Abraham

communicates his alarms to his brother Peter in London, and Peter's *Letters* are replies to these outpourings.

Letter I. begins by assuring Abraham that there is no truth in the rumour that the Pope has landed on English soil, and has been housed by the Spencers or the Hollands or the Grenvilles. "The best-informed clergy in the neighbourhood of the metropolis are convinced that the rumour is without foundation." Having set this fear at rest, Peter deals with Abraham's argument.—

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“You say that the Roman Catholics interpret the Scriptures in an unorthodox manner, Very likely.... But I want soldiers and sailors for the state; I want to make a greater use than I now can do of a poor country full of men; I want to render the military service popular among the Irish; to check the power of France; to make every possible exertion for the safety of Europe, which in twenty years’ time will be nothing but a mass of French slaves: and then you, and ten thousand other such boobies as you, call out—-’For God’s sake, do not think of raising cavalry and infantry in Ireland! They interpret the Epistle to Timothy in a different manner from what we do.... ’What! when Turk, Jew, Heretic, Infidel, Catholic, Protestant, are all combined against this country; when men of every religious persuasion, and no religious persuasion, when the population of half the globe, is up in arms against us; are we to stand examining our generals and armies as a bishop examines candidates for holy orders? and to suffer no one to bleed for England who does not agree with you about the Second of Timothy!”

And then Peter disclaims the reproach of unfriendliness to the Established Church.—

“I love the Church as well as you do; but you totally mistake the nature of an Establishment, when you contend that it ought to be connected with the military and civil careers of every individual in the state. It is quite right that there should be one clergyman in every parish interpreting the Scriptures after a particular manner, ruled by a regular hierarchy, and paid with a rich proportion of haycocks and wheat sheaves. When I have laid this foundation for a national religion in the state—when I have placed ten thousand well-educated men in different parts of the kingdom to preach it up, and compelled every one to pay them, whether they hear them or not—I have taken such measures as I know must always procure an immense majority in favour of the Established Church; but I can go no farther. I cannot set up a civil inquisition, and say to one—’You shall not be a butcher, because you are not orthodox’; and prohibit another from brewing, and a third from administering the law, and a fourth from defending the country. If common justice did not prohibit me from such a conduct, common sense would.”

Persecution, Peter goes on to say, makes martyrs. Fanatics delight in the feeling that they are persecuted for righteousness’ sake; and, the more they are harried, the more tenaciously they cling to their misbeliefs.—

“This is just the effect your disqualifying laws have produced. They have fed Dr. Rees and Dr. Kippis;[41] crowded the congregation of the Old Jewry[42] to suffocation; and enabled every sublapsarian, and supralapsarian, and semipelagian, clergyman to build himself a neat brick chapel, and live with some distant resemblance to the state of a gentleman.”

But, says Abraham, the King is bound by his Coronation Oath to resist the emancipation of the Roman Catholics. Peter replies—

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“Suppose Bonaparte were to retrieve the only very great blunder he has made, and were to succeed, after repeated trials, in making an impression upon Ireland, do you think we should bear anything of the impediment of a Coronation Oath? or would the spirit of this country tolerate for an hour such ministers and such unheard-of nonsense, if the most distant prospect existed of conciliating the Catholics by every species even of the most abject concession? And yet, if your argument is good for anything, the Coronation Oath ought to reject, at such a moment, every tendency to conciliation, and to bind Ireland for ever to the Crown of France.”

After a cursory reference to Abraham’s fears about Popish fires and faggots, and a reminder that “there were as many persons put to death for religious opinions under the mild Elizabeth as under the bloody Mary,” Peter concludes with these vigorous sentences—

“You tell me I am a party man. I hope I shall always be so, when I see my country in the hands of a pert London joker[43] and a second-rate lawyer.[44] Of the first, no other good is known than that he makes pretty Latin verses; the second seems to me to have the head of a country parson and the tongue of an Old Bailey barrister. If I could see good measures pursued, I care not who is in power; but I have a passionate love for common justice and for common sense, and I abhor and despise every man who builds up his political fortune upon their ruin.”

Abraham’s next objection to emancipation appears to have been that a Roman Catholic will not respect an oath. “Why not?” asks Peter in Letter II. “What upon earth has kept him out of Parliament, or excluded him from all the offices whence he is excluded, but his respect for oaths? There is no law which prohibits a Catholic to sit in Parliament. There could be no such law; because it is impossible to find out what passes in the interior of any man’s mind.... The Catholic is excluded from Parliament because he will not swear that he disbelieves the leading doctrines of his religion. The Catholic asks you to abolish some oaths which oppress him; your answer is, that he does not respect oaths. Then why subject him to the test of oaths? The oaths keep him out of Parliament; why, then he respects them. Turn which way you will, either your laws are nugatory, or the Catholic is bound by religious obligations as you are.”

From Roman Catholics in general, Peter now turns to the Roman Catholics of Ireland. —

“The moment the very name of Ireland is mentioned, the English seem to bid adieu to common feeling, common prudence, and common sense, and to act with the barbarity of tyrants and the fatuity of idiots. Whatever your opinion may be of the follies of the Roman Catholic religion, remember they are the follies of four millions of human beings, increasing rapidly in numbers, wealth and intelligence, who, if firmly united

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with this country, would set at defiance the power of France, and, if once wrested from their alliance with England, would in three years render its existence as an independent nation absolutely impossible. You speak of danger to the Establishment; I request to know when the Establishment was ever so much in danger as when Hoche was in Bantry Bay, and whether all the books of Bossuet, or the arts of the Jesuits, were half so terrible?... Whatever you think of the Catholics, there they are—you cannot get rid of them. Your alternative is to give them a lawful place for stating their grievances, or an unlawful one. If you do not admit them to the House of Commons, they will hold their Parliament in Potatoe Place, Dublin, and be ten times as violent and inflammatory as they would be in Westminster. Nothing would give me such an idea of security as to see twenty or thirty Catholic gentlemen in Parliament, looked upon by all the Catholics as the fair and proper organ of their party. I should have thought it the height of good fortune that such a wish existed on their part, and the very essence of madness and ignorance to reject it."

A noble lord—his name unluckily has perished—had attempted to salve his own conscience and that of his colleagues in hostility to the Roman claims, by affirming that exclusion from civil office was not persecution; and Peter handles him with delighted vigour, in a passage which, more than eighty years later, was quoted with enthusiasm by Mr. Gladstone.[45]—

"A distinction, I perceive, is taken by one of the most feeble noblemen in Great Britain, between persecution and the deprivation of political power; whereas there is no more distinction between these two things than there is between him who makes the distinction and a booby. If I strip off the relic-covered jacket of a Catholic and give him twenty stripes, I persecute. If I say, 'Everybody in the town where you live shall be a candidate for lucrative and honourable offices but you, who are a Catholic,' I do not persecute! What barbarous nonsense is this! As if degradation was not as great an evil as bodily pain, or as severe poverty; as if I could not be as great a tyrant by saying, 'You shall not enjoy,' as by saying, 'You shall suffer.'... You may not be aware of it, most reverend Abraham, but you deny their freedom to the Catholics upon the same principle that Sarah your wife refuses to give the receipt for a ham or a gooseberry dumpling. She values her receipts, not because they secure to her a certain flavour, but because they remind her that her neighbours want it—a feeling laughable in a priestess, shameful in a priest; venial when it withholds the blessings of a ham, tyrannical and execrable when it narrows the boon of religious freedom."

Letter III. gives utterance to a genuine alarm inspired by Bonaparte's uninterrupted progress. England is confronted by the most formidable adversary whom she has ever known, and her defence is entrusted to Canning and Perceval. Canning's armoury contains nothing more serviceable than "schoolboy jokes and doggerel rhymes, an affronting petulance, and the tones and gesticulations of Mr. Pitt." Perceval, instead of looking after the national defences,

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“will bestow the strictest attention on the smaller parts of ecclesiastical government. In the last agonies of England he will bring in a bill to regulate Easter offerings; and he will adjust the stipends of curates, when the flag of France is unfurled on the hills of Kent. [46]... Whatever can be done by very mistaken notions of the piety of a Christian, and by very wretched imitations of the eloquence of Mr. Pitt, will be done by these two gentlemen”;

but these are no adequate defences against the genius and ambition of Bonaparte. “There is nothing to oppose to the conqueror of the world but a small table-wit, and the sallow Surveyor of the Meltings."[47]

Abraham, terrified by those prognostics, asks Peter if he thinks it possible for England to survive the recent misfortunes of Europe. Peter replies that if Bonaparte lives, and a great deal is not immediately conceded to the Roman Catholics, England must perish, and perish in disgrace.—

“It is doubly miserable to become slaves abroad, because we would be tyrants at home; and to perish because we have raised up worse enemies within, from our own bigotry, than we are exposed to without from the unprincipled ambition of France.”

Then he goes on to a famous apologue. England is a frigate, attacked by a corsair of immense strength and size. The rigging is cut, there is water in the hold, men are dropping off very fast, the peril is extreme. How do you think the captain (whom we will call Perceval) acts? Does he call all hands on deck and talk to them of king, country, glory, sweethearts, gin, French prisons, wooden shoes, old England, and hearts of oak —till they give three cheers, rush to their guns, and, after a tremendous conflict, succeed in beating off the enemy?—

“Not a syllable of all this: this is not the manner in which the honourable commander goes to work. The first thing he does is to secure twenty or thirty of his prime sailors who happen to be Catholics, to clap them in irons, and set over them a guard of as many Protestants. Having taken this admirable method of defending himself against his infidel opponents, he goes upon deck, reminds the sailors, in a very bitter harangue, that they are of different religions; exhorts the Episcopal gunner not to trust to the Presbyterian quartermaster, issues positive orders that the Catholics should be fired at upon the first appearance of discontent; rushes through blood and brains, examining his men in the Catechism and xxxix. articles, and positively forbids every one to sponge or ram who has not taken the Sacrament according to the Church of England.... Built as she is of heart of oak, and admirably manned, is it possible with such a captain to save this ship from going to the bottom?”

Abraham’s next argument against a policy of concession is that it would only lead to further demands in the future. In reply to this Peter makes vigorous use of Spencer Perceval’s official career. Perceval had held a sinecure for several years; at the time of

writing he was Chancellor of the Exchequer; and he had just attempted, and been defeated in attempting, a most nefarious job, by which the revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster were to have been secured to him for life.

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“Suppose the person to whom he applied for the Meltings had withstood every plea of wife and fourteen children, no business, and good character, and had refused him this paltry little office, because he might hereafter attempt to get hold of the revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster for life; would not Mr. Perceval have contended eagerly against the injustice of refusing moderate requests, because immoderate ones may hereafter be made? Would he not have said (and said truly), ’Leave such exorbitant attempts as these to the general indignation of the Commons, who will take care to defeat them when they do occur; but do not refuse me the Irons and the Meltings now, because I may totally lose sight of all moderation hereafter’?”

Letter IV. begins with a reply to those who contended that England ought not to pay for the education of the Roman Catholic clergy in Ireland.

“The whole sum now appropriated by Government to the religious education of four millions of Christians is L13,000—a sum about one hundred times as large being appropriated in the same country to about one-eighth part of this number of Protestants. When it was proposed to raise this grant from L8000 to L13,000, its present amount, this sum was objected to by that most indulgent of Christians, Mr. Spencer Perceval, as enormous; he himself having secured for his own eating and drinking, and the eating and drinking of the Master and Miss Percevals, the reversionary sum of L21,000 a year of the public money,[48] and having just failed in a desperate and rapacious attempt to secure to himself for life the revenues of the Duchy of Lancaster; and the best of it is, that this Minister, after abusing his predecessors for their impious bounty to the Catholics, has found himself compelled, from the apprehension of immediate danger, to grant the sum in question.”

Abraham now goes on to plead that our present relations with the Roman Catholics date from the Revolution of 1688, and that laws passed at that period are unalterable. To this Peter replies:—

“When I hear any man talk of an unalterable law, the only effect it produces upon me is to convince me that he is an unalterable fool.... Besides, it happens that, to the principal incapacities under which the Irish suffer, they were subjected *after* that great and glorious Revolution, to which we are indebted for so many blessings.... The Catholics were not excluded from the Irish House of Commons, or military commands, before the 3rd and 4th of William and Mary, and the 1st and 2nd of Queen Anne.”

Then he goes on to cite the example of Scotland. There the English government had, in times past, tried to force the national conscience in matters of faith and worship. The government had failed, as it deserved to fail, for Scotland was resolute and rebellious. Then “the true and only remedy was applied. The Scotch were suffered to worship God after their own tiresome manner, without pain, penalty, and privation.” And Scotland had become a contented, loyal, and profitable part of the United Kingdom. Exactly the

reverse was happening in Ireland. A vehement hostility to the Union was spreading through all parts of the country and all classes of the people.

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“The Irish see that their national independence is gone, without having recovered any single one of those advantages which they were taught to expect from the sacrifice. All good things were to flow from the Union; they have none of them gained anything. Every man’s pride is wounded by it; no man’s interest is promoted. In the seventh year of that Union, four million Catholics, lured by all kinds of promises to yield up the separate dignity and sovereignty of their country, are forced to squabble with such a man as Mr. Spencer Perceval for five thousand pounds with which to educate their children in their own mode of worship; he, the same Mr. Spencer, having secured to his own Protestant self a reversionary portion of the public money amounting to four times that sum.... Our conduct to Ireland, during the whole of this war, has been that of a man who subscribes to hospitals, weeps at charity-sermons, carries out broth and blankets to beggars, and then comes home and beats his wife and children. We have compassion for the victims of all other oppression and injustice, except our own.”

It is of no use for statesmen to ignore the Irish question. It is much too urgent and too dangerous a topic to be long suppressed.—

“A man may command his family to say nothing more about the stone, and surgical operations; but the ponderous malice still lies upon the nerve, and gets so big that the patient breaks his own law of silence, clamours for the knife, and expires under its late operation. Believe me, you talk folly when you speak of suppressing the Irish question. I wish to God that the case admitted of such a remedy ... but, if the wants of the Catholics are not heard in the manly tones of Lord Grenville, or the servile drawl of Lord Castlereagh, they will be heard ere long in the madness of mobs, and the conflicts of armed men.”

In Letter V. Peter turns upon Abraham, who cannot believe that England will ever be ruined and conquered, and says:—

“Alas! so reasoned, in their time, the Austrian, Russian, and Prussian Plymleys. But the English are brave? So were all these nations. You might get together an hundred thousand men individually brave; but, without generals capable of commanding such a machine, it would be as useless as a first-rate man-of-war manned by Oxford clergymen or Parisian shopkeepers. I do not say this to the disparagement of English officers: they have had no means of acquiring experience. But I do say it to create alarm. We do not appear to me to be half alarmed enough, or to entertain that sense of our danger which leads to the most obvious means of self-defence. As for the spirit of the peasantry, in making a gallant defence behind hedgerows and through plate-racks and hencoops, highly as I think of their bravery, I do not know any nation in Europe so likely to be struck with panic as the English; and this from their total unacquaintance with the science of

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war. Old wheat and beans blazing for twenty miles round—cart-mares shot—sows of Lord Somerville's[49] breed running wild over the country—the minister of the parish wounded sorely in his hinder parts—Mrs. Plymley in fits—all these scenes of war an Austrian or a Russian has seen three or four times over. But it is now three centuries since an English pig has fallen in fair battle upon English ground, or a farm-house been rifled.... But whatever was our
conduct—if every ploughman was as great a hero as he who was called from his oxen to save Rome from her enemies—I should still say that, at such a crisis, you want the affections of all your subjects in both islands. There is no spirit which you must alienate, no heart you must avert. Every man must feel he has a country, and that there is an urgent and pressing cause why he should expose himself to death."

Although Peter is so seriously concerned about the military disasters which will fall on England unless she behaves more wisely to her Roman Catholic population, he is not the least afraid of any dangers arising from the Roman Catholic religion. England has done with it, once for all—

"Tell me that the world will return again under the influence of the smallpox; that Lord Castlereagh will hereafter oppose the power of the court; that Lord Howick and Mr. Grattan will each of them do a mean and dishonourable action; that anybody who has heard Lord Redesdale speak will knowingly and willingly hear him again; that Lord Eldon has assented to the fact of two and two making four, without shedding tears, or expressing the smallest doubt or scruple; tell me any other thing absurd or incredible, but, for the love of common sense, let me hear no more of the danger to be apprehended from the general diffusion of Popery. It is too absurd to be reasoned upon; every man feels it is nonsense when he hears it stated, and so does every man while he is stating it."

No, the only real danger which Peter sees—and this he sees with startling clearness—is that Ireland will be absorbed by France, and will welcome her deliverance from England; that the civil existence of England will be most seriously imperilled; and that the Irish themselves will, in the long-run, suffer grievously by the change,—

"Who can doubt but that Ireland will experience ultimately from France a treatment to which the conduct they have experienced from England is the love of a parent or a brother? Who can doubt that, five years after he has got hold of the country, Ireland will be tossed by Bonaparte as a present to some one of his ruffian generals, who will knock the head of Mr. Keogh against the head of Cardinal Troy, shoot twenty of the most noisy blockheads of the Roman persuasion, wash his pug-dogs in holy water, and confiscate the salt butter of the Milesian Republic to the last tub? But what matters this? or who is wise enough in Ireland

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to heed it? or when had common sense much influence with my poor dear Irish? Mr. Perceval does not know the Irish; but I know them, and I know that, at every rash and mad hazard, they will break the Union, revenge their wounded pride and their insulted religion, and fling themselves into the open arms of France, sure of dying in the embrace.... In the six hundredth year of our Empire over Ireland, have we any memorial of ancient kindness to refer to? any people, any zeal, any country, on which we can depend? Have we any hope, but in the winds of heaven and the tides of the sea? any prayer to prefer to the Irish, but that they should forget and forgive their oppressors, who, in the very moment that they are calling upon them for their exertions, solemnly assure them that the oppression shall still remain?"

Letter VI. begins with one of those vivacious apologues in which Sydney Smith excelled. Abraham Plymley has been talking of the concessions which Roman Catholics hare already received, and their shameless ingratitude in asking for more. To the cry of ingratitude Peter thus replies.—There is a village, he says, in which, once a year, the inhabitants sit down to a dinner provided at the common expense. A hundred years ago the inhabitants of three of the streets seized the inhabitants of the fourth street, bound them hand and foot, laid them on their backs, and compelled them to look on while the majority were stuffing themselves with beef and beer—and this, although they had contributed an equal quota to the expense. Next year the same assault was perpetrated. It soon grew into a custom; and, as years went on, the village came to look on the annual act of tyranny as the most sacred of its institutions. Unfortunately, however, for the tyrannical majority, the inhabitants of the persecuted street increased in numbers, determination, and public spirit. They murmured, protested, and resisted, till the oppressors, "more afraid of injustice, were now disposed to be just." On the next occasion of the annual dinner, the victims were unbound. The year after, they were allowed to sit upright. Then they got a bit of bread and a glass of water. Finally, after a long series of small concessions, they grew so bold as to ask that they might sit down at the bottom of the table, and feast with their grander neighbours. Forthwith, a general cry of shame and scandal.—

"Ten years ago, were you not laid upon your backs? Don't you remember what a great thing you thought it to get a piece of bread? How thankful you were for cheese-parings? Have you forgotten that memorable aera, when the lord of the manor interfered to obtain for you a slice of the public pudding? And now, with an audacity only equalled by your ingratitude, you have the impudence to ask for knives and forks, and to request, in terms too plain to be mistaken, that you may sit down to table with the rest, and be indulged even with beef and beer.

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There are not more than half a dozen dishes which we have reserved for ourselves; the rest has been thrown open to you in the utmost profusion; you have potatoes, and carrots, suet dumplings, sops in the pan, and delicious toast-and-water, in incredible quantities. Beef, mutton, lamb, pork, and veal are ours; and, if you were not the most restless and dissatisfied of human beings, you would never think of aspiring to enjoy them."

Is not this, says Peter, the very nonsense and the very insult which you daily practise on the Roman Catholics? I, though I am an inhabitant of the village and live in one of the three favoured streets, have retained some sense of justice, and I most earnestly counsel these half-fed claimants to persevere in their just demands, till they are admitted to their just share of a dinner for which they pay as much as the others.

"And, if they see a little attenuated lawyer[50] squabbling at the head of their opponents, let them desire him to empty his pockets, and to pull out all the pieces of duck, fowl, and pudding which he has filched from the public feasts, to carry home to his wife and children."

Before ending his letter, Peter has a fling at the Home Secretary, Lord Hawkesbury, "the lesser of the two Jenkinsons."[51] Lord Hawkesbury has said that "nothing is to be granted to the Catholics from fear." Why not, asks Peter, if the thing demanded is just?

"The only true way to make the mass of mankind see the beauty of justice is by showing them in pretty plain terms the consequences of injustice. If any body of French troops land in Ireland, the whole population of that country will rise against you to a man, and you could not possibly survive such an event three years. Such, from the bottom of my heart, do I believe to be the present state of that country; and so little does it appear to me to be impolitic and unstatesmanlike to concede anything to such a danger, that if the Catholics, in addition to their present just demands, were to petition for the perpetual removal of the said Lord Hawkesbury from his Majesty's councils, I think the prayer of the petition should be instantly complied with. Canning's crocodile tears should not move me; the hoops of the Maids of Honour should not hide him. I would tear him from the banisters of the Back Stairs, and plunge him in the fishy fumes of the dirtiest of all his Cinque Ports."[52]

Letter VII. begins with a rebuke to brother Abraham for placing all his hopes for the salvation of England in the "discretion" and "sound sense" of Mr. Secretary Canning.—

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“To call him a legislator, a reasoner, and the conductor of the affairs of a great nation, seems to me as absurd as if a butterfly were to teach bees to make honey. That he is an extraordinary writer of small poetry, and a diner-out of the highest lustre, I do most readily admit.... The Foreign Secretary is a gentleman—a respectable as well as a highly agreeable man in private life; but you may as well feed me with decayed potatoes as console me for the miseries of Ireland by the resources of his ‘sense’ and his ‘discretion.’ It is only the public situation which this gentleman holds that entitles me or induces me to say so much about him. He is a fly in amber: nobody cares about the fly; the only question is, How the devil did it get there? Nor do I attack him from the love of glory, but from the love of utility, as a burgomaster hunts a rat in a Dutch dyke, for fear it should flood a province.”

Under the rule of Canning and his colleagues, Ireland has become utterly disloyal.—

“The great mass of the Catholic population, upon the slightest appearance of a French force in that country, would rise upon you to a man. There is no loyalty among the Catholics: they detest you as their worst oppressors, and they will continue to detest you till you remove the cause of their hatred. It is in your power in six months’ time to produce a total revolution of opinions among these people.... At present see what a dreadful state Ireland is in! The common toast among the low Irish is, ‘The Feast of the *Pass-over*.’ Some allusion to Bonaparte, in a play lately acted at Dublin, produced thunders of applause from the pit and the galleries; and *a politician should not be inattentive to the public feelings expressed in theatres*. Mr. Perceval thinks he has disarmed the Irish. He has no more disarmed the Irish than he has resigned a shilling of his own public emoluments. An Irish peasant fills the barrel of his gun full of tow dipped in oil, butters the lock, buries it in a bog, and allows the Orange bloodhound to ransack his cottage at pleasure. Be just and kind to the Irish, and you will indeed disarm them; rescue them from the degraded servitude in which they are held by an handful of their own countrymen; and you will add four millions of brave and affectionate men to your strength.”

But instead of these wise remedies, Mr. Secretary Canning only offers the Irish people his incessant, unseasonable, and sometimes indecent jokes.—

“He jokes upon neutral flags and frauds, jokes upon Irish rebels, jokes upon northern and western and southern foes, and gives himself no trouble upon any subject.... And this is the Secretary whose genius, in the estimation of brother Abraham, is to extinguish the genius of Bonaparte. Pompey was killed by a slave, Goliath smitten by a stripling; Pyrrhus died by the hand of a woman. Tremble, thou great Gaul, from whose head an armed

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Minerva leaps forth in the hour of danger; tremble, thou scourge of God, for a pleasant man is come out against thee, and thou shalt be laid low by a joker of jokes."

Abraham comforts himself with his reflection that Bonaparte has no ships or sailors. But, says Peter, there are quite enough remains of the navies of France, Spain, Holland, and Denmark, for such a short excursion as would be needed for the capture of Ireland. And Bonaparte can increase his forces every day. With all Europe at his feet, he can get timber and stores and men to any conceivable amount. "He is at present the despotic monarch of above twenty thousand miles of sea-coast, and yet you suppose he cannot procure sailors for the invasion of Ireland." Ireland is still the burden of the song. Conciliate Ireland and all will be well. Tyrannize over her and we are undone.

"If Ireland was friendly, we might equally set at defiance the talents of Bonaparte and the blunders of his rival Mr. Canning: we could then support the ruinous and silly bustle of our useless expeditions, and the almost incredible ignorance of our commercial Orders in Council.[53] Let the present administration give up but this one point, and there is nothing which I would not consent to grant them. Perceval should have full liberty to insult the tomb of Mr. Fox, and to torment every eminent Dissenter in Great Britain. Lord Camden should have large boxes of plums; Mr. Rose receive permission to prefix to his name the appellation of Virtuous; and to the Viscount Castlereagh a round sum of ready money shall be well and truly paid into his hand.[54] Lastly, what remains to Mr. George Canning, but that he ride up and down Pall Mall glorious upon a white horse, and that they cry out before him, 'Thus shall it be done to the statesman who hath written *The Needy Knife-Grinder*'?"

Letter VIII. begins with the statistics of Ireland, its area, population, trade, manufactures, exports and imports. "Ireland has the greatest possible facilities for carrying on commerce with the whole of Europe. It contains, within a circuit of 750 miles, 66 secure harbours, and presents a western frontier against Great Britain, reaching from the Firth of Clyde north to the Bristol Channel south, and varying in distance from 20 to 100 miles; so that the subjugation of Ireland would compel us to guard with ships and soldiers a new line of coast, certainly amounting, with all its sinuosities, to more than 700 miles—an addition of polemics, in our present state of hostility with all the world, which must highly gratify the vigorists and give them an ample opportunity of displaying that foolish energy upon which their claims to distinction are founded. Such is the country which the Chancellor of the Exchequer would drive into the arms of France."

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Religious freedom, continues Peter, is the strongest safeguard of states. France has it, and is victorious over Europe; England lacks it, and is in imminent peril. "How sincerely and fervently have I often wished that the Emperor of the French had thought as Mr. Spencer Perceval does upon the subject of government; that he had entertained doubts and scruples upon the propriety of admitting the Protestants to an equality of rights with the Catholics, and that he had left in the middle of his empire these vigorous seeds of hatred and disaffection. But the world was never yet conquered by a blockhead. One of the very first measures we saw him recurring to was the complete establishment of religious liberty. If his subjects fought and paid as he pleased, he allowed them to believe as they pleased. The moment I saw this, my best hopes were lost. I perceived in a moment the kind of man we had to do with. I was well aware of the miserable ignorance and folly of the country upon the subject of Toleration; and every year has been adding to the success of that game which it was clear he had the will and the ability to play against us."

Abraham has suggested that the Emperor is not a religious man, and that his tolerance is the fruit of indifference. But, says Peter, "if Bonaparte is liberal in subjects of religion because he has no religion, is this a reason why we should be illiberal because we are Christians? If he owes this excellent quality to a vice, is that any reason why we may not owe it to a virtue? Toleration is a great good, and a good to be imitated, let it come from whom it will."

And now Peter turns upon Lord Sidmouth,[55] who has been prophesying woe and destruction from the emancipation of the Roman Catholics. Such prophecies, he says, will, in the process of time, become matter of pleasantry even to "the sedulous housewife and the Rural Dean." There is always a copious supply of Lord Sidmouths in the world, and they have always uttered the most dismal predictions about every improvement in the lot of mankind.—

"Turnpike roads, navigable canals, inoculation, hops, tobacco, the Reformation, the Revolution—there are always a set of worthy and moderately-gifted men who bawl out death and ruin upon every valuable change which the varying aspect of human affairs absolutely and imperiously requires."

The only contention of poor Abraham which Peter will in the slightest degree accept, is that the emancipation of the Roman Catholics will alienate the Orangemen. But, even if this be the result of a just act, it is far less formidable than the result of continued injustice. Brother Abraham, "skilled in the arithmetic of Tithe," must perceive that it is better to have four friends and one enemy, than four enemies and one friend; and, the more violent the hatred of the Orangemen, the more certain the reconciliation of the Catholics. Even supposing, for the sake of argument, that the Orangemen carry their disaffection to the point of resistance, and brave the discipline of the law, the prospect has no terrors for Peter Plymley.—

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“My love of poetical justice does carry me as far as that—one summer’s whipping, only one; the thumb-screw for a short season; a little light, easy torturing between Lady Day and Michaelmas; a short specimen of Mr. Perceval’s rigour. I have malice enough to ask this slight atonement for the groans and shrieks of the poor Catholics, unheard by any human tribunal, but registered by the Angel of God against their Protestant and enlightened oppressors.”

Letter IX. opens with an enumeration of offices not tenable by adherents of the Roman faith.

“No Catholic can be chief Governor or Governor of this Kingdom, Chancellor or Keeper of the Great Seal, Lord High Treasurer, Chief of any of the Courts of Justice, Chancellor of the Exchequer, Puisne Judge, Judge in the Admiralty, Master of the Rolls, Secretary of State, Keeper of the Privy Seal, Vice-Treasurer or his Deputy, Teller or Cashier of Exchequer, Auditor or General, Governor or Custos Rotulorum of Counties, Chief Governor’s Secretary, Privy Councillor, King’s Counsel, Serjeant, Attorney, Solicitor-General, Master in Chancery, Provost or Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, Postmaster-General, Master and Lieutenant-General of Ordnance, Commander-in-Chief, General on the Staff, Sheriff, Sub-Sheriff, Mayor, Bailiff, Recorder, Burgess, or any other officer in a City, or a Corporation. No Catholic can be guardian to a Protestant, and no priest guardian at all: no Catholic can be a gamekeeper, or have for sale, or otherwise, any arms or warlike stores; no Catholic can present to a living, unless he choose to turn Jew in order to obtain that privilege; and the pecuniary qualification of Catholic jurors is made higher than that of Protestants.”

Out of that splendid list of unattainable posts, Peter Plymley chooses, to illustrate his theme, the offices of Sheriff and Deputy-Sheriff in Ireland. No one he says, who is unacquainted with that country, can conceive the obstacles to justice which exclusion from these offices entails. The lives, liberties, and properties of the Roman Catholic population are at the mercy of the Juries, and the Juries are nominated exclusively by Protestants—and this in a country where religious animosities are peculiarly inflamed. —

“A poor Catholic in Ireland may be tried by twelve Percevals, and destroyed, according to the manner of that gentleman, in the name of the law, and with all the insulting forms of justice. I will not go the length of saying that deliberate and wilful injustice is done. I have no doubt that the Orange Deputy-Sheriff thinks it would be a most unpardonable breach of his duty if he did not summon a Protestant panel. I can easily believe that the Protestant panel may conduct themselves very conscientiously in hanging the gentlemen of the Crucifix; but I blame the law which does not guard the Catholic against the probable tenour of those feelings which must unconsciously influence the

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judgments of mankind. I detest that state of society which extends unequal degrees of protection to different creeds and persuasions; and I cannot describe to you the contempt I feel for a man who, calling himself a statesman, defends a system which fills the heart of every Irishman with treason."

If then the Courts of Assize are, by the very nature of the case, instruments of injustice, it is the Grand Juries which are the great scene of Jobbery. They have the power of levying a county rate for roads, bridges, and other public accommodations. Milesian gentlemen, attendant on the Grand Inquest of Justice, arrange these little matters for their mutual convenience.—

> "You suffer the road to be brought through my park, and I will have the bridge constructed in a situation where it will make a beautiful object to your house. You do my job, and I will do yours."

And so, as far as the Protestant gentry are concerned, all is well. But there is a religion even in jobs; "and it will be highly gratifying to Mr. Perceval to learn that no man in Ireland who believes in Seven Sacraments can carry a public road, or bridge, one yard out of its way, and that nobody can cheat the public who does not expound the Scriptures in the purest and most orthodox manner.... I ask if the human mind can experience a more dreadful sensation than to see its own jobs refused, and the jobs of another religion perpetually succeeding?"

And then again there is the grievance which consists in exclusion from the higher posts of the Professions.—

"Look at human nature. Your boy Joel is to be brought up to the Bar: has Mrs. Plymley the slightest doubt of his being Chancellor? Do not his two shrivelled aunts live in the certainty of seeing him in that situation, and of cutting-out with their own hands his equity habiliments? And I could name a certain Minister of the Gospel who does not, in the bottom of his heart, much differ from these opinions. Do you think that the fathers and mothers of the holy Catholic church are not as absurd as Protestant papas and mammas? The probability I admit to be, in each case, that the sweet little blockhead will in fact never get a brief. But I venture to say that there is not a parent from the Giant's Causeway to Bantry Bay, who does not conceive that his child is the unfortunate victim of the exclusion, and that nothing short of positive law could prevent his own dear, pre-eminent Paddy from rising to the highest honours of the State. So with the army, and Parliament. In fact, few are excluded; but, in imagination, all. You keep twenty or thirty Catholics out, and lose the affections of four millions."

And then Peter turns to the war-cry of No Popery, which had been so vigorously and successfully raised at the General Election of 1807, and derides the loyal indignation

then directed against the Ministers who had the heart to worry George III. with plans of redress for Roman Catholics.—

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“The general cry in the country was, that they would not see their beloved monarch used ill in his old age, and that they would stand by him to the last drop of their blood.” This ebullition of ill-judging loyalty reminds Peter of an accident which once befell the Russian Ambassador in London. His Excellency fell down in a fit when paying a morning call. A doctor was summoned, who declared that the patient must be instantly bled; and he prepared to perform the operation. “But the barbarous servants of the Embassy, when they saw the gleaming lancet, drew their swords, threw themselves into an attitude of defiance, and swore they would kill the man who dared to hurt their beloved master.”

Peter’s own remedy for Irish disaffection was, first, to remove all civil penalties for religious faith, and then to subsidize the Roman Catholic bishops and clergy in Ireland, and pay for the maintenance of their schools and churches. He calculated that this would cost L250,000 a year. The clergy should all receive their salaries through the Bank of Ireland; the salaries were to be proportioned to the size of the congregations; and all patronage should be lodged in the hands of the Crown.—

“Now I appeal to any human being, what the disaffection of a clergy would amount to, gaping after this graduated bounty of the Crown; and whether Ignatius Loyola himself, if he were a living blockhead instead of a dead saint, could withstand the temptation of bouncing from L100 a year in Sligo, to L300 in Tipperary. This is the miserable sum of money for which the merchants, and landowners, and nobility of England, are exposing themselves to the tremendous peril of losing Ireland.”

If all these schemes of conciliation were rejected as dangerous and impracticable, there remained of course the time-honoured remedy of Coercion. This had been demanded by Spencer Perceval, when attacking the conciliatory administration of “All the Talents,” and it provoked Peter Plymley to a characteristic outburst:—

“I cannot describe the horror and disgust which I felt at hearing Mr. Perceval call for measures of vigour in Ireland. If I lived at Hampstead[56] upon stewed meats and claret; if I walked to church every Sunday morning before eleven young gentlemen of my own begetting, with their faces washed, and their hair pleasingly combed; if the Almighty had blessed me with every earthly comfort—how awfully would I pause before I sent forth the flame and the sword over the cabins of the poor, brave, generous, open-hearted peasants of Ireland! How easy it is to shed human blood! How easy it is to persuade ourselves that it is our duty to do so, and that the decision has cost us a severe struggle! How much in all ages have wounds and shrieks and tears been the cheap and vulgar resources of the rulers of mankind! How difficult it is to govern in kindness, and to found an empire upon the everlasting basis of justice and affection!”

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Letter X. begins with some observations on the Law of Tithe in Ireland. "I submit to your common sense, if it is possible to explain to an Irish peasant upon what principle of justice he is to pay every tenth potato in his little garden to a clergyman in whose religion nobody believes for twenty miles round him, and who has nothing to preach to but bare walls." Let the landowner pay the tithe, and charge the labourer a higher rent. This, Peter seems to think, will meet all the difficulties of the case, and yet not impoverish the Established clergy. And he is more than ever persuaded that the best way to check the predominance of the Roman Church in Ireland is to deliver the Romanists from every species of religious disability. On this theme Peter harps in a vein which, if he were a clergyman writing over his own name, would be justly described as cynical.—

"If a rich young Catholic were in Parliament, he would belong to White's and to Brookes's; would keep race-horses; would walk up and down Pall Mall; be exonerated of his ready money and his constitution; become as totally devoid of morality, honesty, knowledge, and civility, as Protestant loungers in Pall Mall; and return home with a supreme contempt for Father O'Leary and Father O'Callaghan.... The true receipt for preserving the Roman Catholic religion is Mr. Perceval's receipt for destroying it: it is to deprive every rich Catholic of all the objects of secular ambition, to separate him from the Protestants, and to shut him up in his castle with priests and relics."

However sound this estimate of theological results may be, Abraham thinks that a period of universal war is not the proper time for innovations in the Constitution. This, replies Peter, "is as much as to say that the worst time for making friends is the period when you have made many enemies; that it is the greatest of all errors to stop when you are breathless, and to lie down when you are fatigued."

Abraham, and those who think with him, hold that concession to Roman Catholics ought to be refused, if for no other reason, because King George III. dislikes it. This is an argument which Peter cannot away with. He respects the King as a good man, and holds that loyalty is one of the great instruments of English happiness.—

"But the love of the King may easily become more strong than the love of the Kingdom, and we may lose sight of the public welfare in our exaggerated admiration of him who is appointed to reign only for its promotion and support.... *God save the King*, you say, warms your heart like the sound of a trumpet. I cannot make use of so violent a metaphor; but I am delighted to hear it, when it is a cry of genuine affection: I am delighted to hear it when they hail not only the individual man, but the outward and living sign of all English blessings. These are noble feelings, and the heart of every good man must go with them; but *God save the King*, in these

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times, too often means—God save my pension and my place, God give my sisters an allowance out of the Privy Purse—make me Clerk of the Irons, let me survey the Meltings, let me live upon the fruits of other men's industry, and fatten upon the plunder of the public."

This brings us again to the "sepulchral Spencer Perceval," as he is called in another place, with his enormous emoluments from the public purse, his dream of pacifying Ireland by converting its inhabitants to Protestantism, and his fantastic policy of the Orders in Council.—

"He would bring the French to reason by keeping them without rhubarb, and exhibit to mankind the awful spectacle of a nation deprived of neutral salts. This is not the dream of a wild apothecary indulging in his own opium; this is not the distempered fancy of a pounder of drugs, delirious from smallness of profits—but it is the sober, deliberate, and systematic scheme of a man to whom the public safety is entrusted, and whose appointment is considered by many as a masterpiece of political sagacity."

And now, having exhausted the "Catholic Question" as it presents itself in England and Ireland, Peter Plymley (who has already called attention to the religious liberty established in France) cites the cases of Switzerland and Hungary as illustrating the civil strength of nations free from the legalized animosities of religion. Did Frederick the Great ever refuse the services of a Catholic soldier? There is a Catholic Secretary of State at St. Petersburgh. There was a Greek Patriarch associated with a Vicar-Apostolic in the government of Venice. A Catholic Emperor has entrusted the command of his guard to a Protestant Prince. But what signifies all this to Spencer Perceval? He looks at human nature from the top of Hampstead Hill, and has not a thought beyond the sphere of his own vision. And so we reach the conclusion of the whole matter.—

"I now take a final leave of this subject of Ireland. The only difficulty in discussing it is a want of resistance—a want of something difficult to unravel and something dark to illumine. To agitate such a question is to beat the air with a club, and cut down gnats with a scimitar: it is a prostitution of industry, and a waste of strength. If a man says, 'I have a good place, and I do not choose to lose it,' this mode of arguing upon the Catholic Question I can well understand. But that any human being with an understanding two degrees elevated above that of an Anabaptist preacher should conscientiously contend for the expediency and propriety of leaving the Irish Catholics in their present state, and of subjecting us to such tremendous peril in the present condition of the world, it is utterly out of my power to conceive. Such a measure as the Catholic Question is entirely beyond the common game of politics. It is a measure in which all parties ought to acquiesce, in order to preserve the place where and the stake for which they play.

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If Ireland is gone, where are jobs? where are reversions? where is my brother, Lord Arden?[57] where are ‘my dear and near relations’? The game is up, and the Speaker of the House of Commons will be sent as a present to the menagerie at Paris. We talk of waiting, as if centuries of joy and prosperity were before us. In the next ten years our fate must be decided; we shall know, long before that period, whether we can bear up against the miseries by which we are threatened, or not: and yet, in the very midst of our crisis, we are enjoined to abstain from the most certain means of increasing our strength, and advised to wait for the remedy till the disease is removed by death or health. And now, instead of the plain and manly policy of increasing unanimity at home, by equalizing rights and privileges, what is the ignorant, arrogant, and wicked system which has been pursued? Such a career of madness and of folly was, I believe, never run in so short a period. The vigour of the ministry is like the vigour of a grave-digger—-the tomb becomes more ready and more wide for every effort which they make.... Every Englishman felt proud of the integrity of his country; the character of the country is lost for ever. It is of the utmost consequence to a commercial people at war with the greatest part of Europe, that there should be a free entry of neutrals into the enemy’s ports; the neutrals who carried our manufactures we have not only excluded, but we have compelled them to declare war against us. It was our interest to make a good peace, or convince our own people that it could not be obtained; we have not made a peace, and we have convinced the people of nothing but of the arrogance of the Foreign Secretary: and all this has taken place in the short space of a year, because a King’s Bench barrister and a writer of epigrams, turned into Ministers of State, were determined to show country gentlemen that the late administration had no vigour. In the mean time commerce stands still, manufactures perish, Ireland is more and more irritated, India is threatened, fresh taxes are accumulated upon the wretched people, the war is carried on without it being possible to conceive any one single object which a rational being can propose to himself by its continuation; and in the midst of this unparalleled insanity we are told that the Continent is to be reconquered by the want of rhubarb and plums. A better spirit than exists in the English people never existed in any people in the world; it has been misdirected, and squandered upon party purposes in the most degrading and scandalous manner; they have been led to believe that they were benefiting the commerce of England by destroying the commerce of America, that they were defending their Sovereign by perpetuating the bigoted oppression of their fellow-subjects; their rulers and their guides have told them that they would equal the vigour of France by equalling her atrocity; and they have gone on wasting that opulence, patience,

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and courage, which, if husbanded by prudent and moderate counsels, might have proved the salvation of mankind. The same policy of turning the good qualities of Englishmen to their own destruction, which made Mr. Pitt omnipotent, continues his power to those who resemble him only in his vices; advantage is taken of the loyalty of Englishmen to make them meanly submissive; their piety is turned into persecution, their courage into useless and obstinate contention; they are plundered because they are ready to pay, and soothed into asinine stupidity because they are full of virtuous patience. If England must perish at last, so let it be; that event is in the hands of God; we must dry up our tears and submit. But, that England should perish swindling and stealing; that it should perish waging war against lazar-houses and hospitals; that it should perish persecuting with monastic bigotry; that it should calmly give itself up to be ruined by the flashy arrogance of one man, and the narrow fanaticism of another; these events are within the power of human beings, and I did not think that the magnanimity of Englishmen would ever stoop to such degradations."

So ends this vivid argument on behalf of political justice and social equality. Lord Grenville saw the resemblance to Swift, and Lord Holland kindly reminded the anonymous satirist that "the only author to whom he could be compared in English, lost a bishopric for his wittiest performance." In later years Lord Murray[58] said, "After Pascal's *Letters*, it is the most instructive piece of wisdom in the form of Irony ever written." Macaulay declared that Sydney Smith was "universally admitted to have been a great reasoner, and the greatest master of ridicule that has appeared among us since Swift." Even now, after a century of publishing, *Peter Plymley's Letters* retain their preeminence. The unexpurgated edition of the *Apologia* may rank with the *Provincial Letters*;[59] but the creator of Peter and Abraham Plymley stands alone.

[41] Abraham Rees, D.D. (1743-1825), and Andrew Kippis, D.D. (1723-1795), were Presbyterian ministers of great repute.

[42] The meeting-house in Old Jewry was built in 1701 and destroyed in 1808. It "covered 2600 square feet, and was lit with six bow windows." Dr. Rees was its last minister.

[43] George Canning (1770-1827).

[44] Spencer Perceval (1762-1812).

[45] When it was proposed to exclude King's College from the re-constituted University of London.

[46] Spencer Perceval brought in several bills to compel non-resident incumbents to pay their curates a living wage.

[47] Spencer Perceval obtained the sinecure office of Surveyor of the Meltings and Clerk of the Irons in 1791.

[48] Spencer Perceval procured the reversion of his brother’s office of Registrar to the Court of Admiralty, and burked a parliamentary inquiry into reversions generally.

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[49] John Southey, 15th Lord Somerville, President of the Board of Agriculture.

[50] Spencer Perceval.

[51] Robert Bankes Jenkinson (1770-1820), 2nd Earl of Liverpool, was Lord Hawkesbury from 1796 to 1808.

[52] Lord Hawkesbury was appointed Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports at a salary of L3000 a year.

[53] “The allusion is to the Orders in Council under which Mr. Perceval endeavoured to retaliate on Napoleon’s Baltic decree by regulating British trade with the Continent. Under these orders the exportation of all goods to France was prohibited which were not carried from this country and had not paid an export-duty here. But there were certain articles which the Minister decided that the Continent should have on no terms, and amongst others quinine, or Jesuit’s Bark, as it was called. Sydney Smith, writing as Peter Plymley, said, ’You cannot seriously suppose the people to be so degraded as to look for their safety from a man who proposes to subdue Europe by keeping it without Jesuit’s Bark.’”—SIR SPENCER WALPOLE, *Life of Lord John Russell*.

[54] In 1839 Sydney Smith pronounced this “a very unjust imputation on Lord Castlereagh.” Robert Stewart (1769-1823), Viscount Castlereagh, became Marquis of Londonderry in 1821.

[55] Henry Addington (1757-1844), created Viscount Sidmouth in 1805.

[56] Spencer Perceval had recently taken a villa on Hampstead Heath, for the benefit of his wife’s health.

[57] Spencer Perceval’s elder brother, Charles George Perceval (1756-1840), was created Lord Arden in 1802.

[58] John Archibald Murray (1779-1859), a Judge of the Court of Session.

[59] In October 1844 Eugene Robin, reviewing Sydney Smith in the *Revue des Deux Mondes*, wrote as follows:—“Cache sous le pseudonyme de Peter Plymley il adresse ces nouvelles *provinciales* a un reverend pasteur, qui est bien le parfait modele de la sottise protestante, la quintessence des docteurs Bowles et des archidiacres Nares.”

CHAPTER IV

FOSTON—"PERSECUTING BISHOPS"—BENCH AND BAR

At the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth, the most serious evil which beset the Church of England was the system of Pluralities and Non-Residence. A prosperous clergyman might hold half-a-dozen separate preferments, and, as long as he paid curates to perform the irreducible minimum of public duty, he need never show his face inside his deserted parishes. The ecclesiastical literature of the time abounds in quaint illustrations of the equanimity with which this system, and all its attendant evils, was regarded even by respectable and conscientious men. Thomas Newton, the commentator on Prophecy,

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was Dean of St. Paul's as well as Bishop of Bristol, and, before he became a bishop, held a living in the City, a Prebend of Westminster, the Precentorship of York, the Lectureship of St. George's, Hanover Square, and "the genteel office of Sub-Almoner." Richard Watson (who is believed never to have set foot in his diocese) was Bishop of Llandaff and Archdeacon of Ely, and drew the tithes of sixteen parishes. William Van Mildert, afterwards Bishop of Durham, was Rector of St. Mary-le-Bow, Cheapside, and also held the living of Farningmam, near Sevenoaks, "as an agreeable retreat within a convenient distance from town." Richard Valpy was Head Master of Reading School, and Rector of Stradishall in Suffolk. George Butler, afterwards Dean of Peterborough, was Head Master of Harrow and Rector of Gayton in Northamptonshire. Nearly every bishop had a living together with his see. The valuable Rectory of Stanhope in Durham was held by four successive bishops. Henry Courtenay, Bishop of Exeter, was Rector of St. George's, Hanover Square. George Pelham, Bishop of Exeter, had a living in Sussex, and Christopher Bethell, Bishop of Exeter, had a living in Yorkshire.

When Sydney Smith was appointed to the rectory of Foston, there had been no resident Rector since the reign of Charles II. The churches of non-resident Rectors were commonly served by what were called "galloping parsons," who rattled through the services required by law, riding at full speed from parish to parish, so as to serve perhaps three churches on one Sunday. In many places the Holy Communion was celebrated only three times a year. At Alderley, before Edward Stanley, afterwards Bishop of Norwich, became Rector there, "the clerk used to go to the churchyard stile to see whether there were any more coming to church, for there were seldom enough to make a congregation. The former Rector used to boast that he had never set foot in a sick person's cottage." When the shepherds thus deserted and starved their flocks, it was only natural that the sheep betook themselves to every form of schism, irreligion, and immorality. To remedy these evils, Spencer Perceval, whose keen interest in the affairs of the Church had a curiously irritating effect on Sydney Smith, took in hand to pass the Clergy Residence Bill, and the Bill became an Act in 1803. In 1808 a new Archbishop[60] was enthroned at York. He immediately began to put the Act in force, and summoned Sydney Smith from the joys of London to the austerities of Foston-le-Clay. The choice lay between complying and resigning, for no exchange of livings seemed practicable. On the 8th of October 1808, Sydney wrote to Lady Holland—"My lot is now cast, and my heritage fixed—most probably. But you may choose to make me a bishop, and, if you do, I think I shall never do you discredit; for I believe it is out of the power of lawn and velvet, and the crisp hair of dead men fashioned into a wig,[61] to make me a dishonest man."

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Two months later he wrote—“I have bought a book about drilling beans, and a greyhound puppy for the Malton Meeting. It is thought I shall be an eminent rural character.” The expense of removing his family and furniture from London to Yorkshire was considerable, so he published two volumes of sermons and paid for the journey with the L200 which he received for them. The rectory-house at Foston was ruinous and uninhabitable, and it was necessary to rebuild it. Meanwhile, the Rector hired a house some way off, in the village of Heslington, and there he established himself on the 21st of June 1809, “two hundred miles,” as he ruefully remarked, “from London.” Three days later he wrote to Lady Holland that he had laid down two rules for his own guidance in the country:—

“1. Not to smite the partridge; for, if I fed the poor, and comforted the sick, and instructed the ignorant, yet I should be nothing worth, if I smote the partridge. If anything ever endangers the Church, it will be the strong propensity to shooting for which the clergy are remarkable. Ten thousand good shots dispersed over the country do more harm to the cause of religion than the arguments of Voltaire and Rousseau. [62]“2. I mean to come to town once a year, though of that, I suppose, I shall soon be weary, finding my mind growing weaker and weaker, and my acquaintances gradually falling off. I shall by this time have taken myself again to shy tricks, pull about my watch-chain, and become (as I was before) your abomination.... Mrs. Sydney is all rural bustle, impatient for the parturition of hens and pigs; I wait patiently, knowing all will come in due season.”

To Jeffrey he wrote on the 3rd of September:—

“Instead of being unamused by trifles, I am, as I well knew I should be, amused by them a great deal too much. I feel an ungovernable interest about my horses, my pigs, and my plants. I am forced, and always was forced, to task myself up into an interest for any higher objects.”

Six days later he wrote to Lady Holland:—

“I hear you laugh at me for being happy in the country, and upon this I have a few words to say. In the first place, whether one lives or dies I hold, and have always held, to be of infinitely less moment than is generally supposed. But, if life is to be, then it is common sense to amuse yourself with the best you can find where you happen to be placed. I am not leading precisely the life I should choose, but that which (all things considered, as well as I could consider them) appeared to me to be the most eligible. I am resolved, therefore, to like it, and to reconcile myself to it; which is more manly than to feign myself above it, and to send up complaints by the post, of being thrown away, and being desolate, and such-like trash. I am prepared, therefore, either way. If the chances of life ever enable me to emerge, I will show you that I have not

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been wholly occupied by small and sordid pursuits. If (as the greater probability) I am come to the end of my career, I give myself quietly up to horticulture, *etc*. In short, if it be my lot to crawl, I will crawl contentedly; if to fly, I will fly with alacrity; but, as long as I can possibly avoid it, I will never be unhappy. If, with a pleasant wife, three children, and many friends who wish me well, I cannot be happy, I am a very silly, foolish fellow, and what becomes of me is of very little consequence."

If ample occupation be, as some strenuous moralists assert, the true secret of happiness, Sydney Smith had plenty to make him happy during the early years of his life in Yorkshire. Here is his own account of his translation:—

"A diner-out, a wit, and a popular preacher, I was suddenly caught up by the Archbishop of York, and transported to my living in Yorkshire, where there had not been a resident clergyman for a hundred and fifty years. Fresh from London, and not knowing a turnip from a carrot, I was compelled to farm three hundred acres, and without capital to build a Parsonage House."

He was his own architect, his own builder, and his own clerk of the works. The cost of building a house, with borrowed money, made him a very poor man for several years.

"I turned schoolmaster, to educate my son, as I could not afford to send him to school. Mrs. Sydney turned schoolmistress, to educate my girls, as I could not afford a governess. I turned farmer, as I could not let my land.... Added to all these domestic cares, I was village parson, village doctor, village comforter, village magistrate, and Edinburgh Reviewer; so you see I had not much time on my hands to regret London."

Every one has heard of "Bunch," the "little garden-girl, shaped like a milestone," who "became the best butler in the county"; of the gaunt riding-horse "Calamity," which "flung me over his head into a neighbouring parish, as if I had been a shuttlecock, and I felt grateful that it was not into a neighbouring planet"; and of the ancient carriage called "the Immortal," which was so well known on the road that "the village-boys cheered it and the village-dogs barked at it"—and surely remembrance should be made, amid this goodly caravan, of the four draught-oxen, Tug and Lug, Haul and Crawl, even though "Tug and Lug took to fainting, and required buckets of salvolatile, and Haul and Crawl to lie down in the mud."

When Sydney Smith says that he was "village doctor," he reminds us of his lifelong fancy for dabbling in medicine. When his daughter, not six months old, was attacked by croup, he gave her in twenty-four hours "32 grains of calomel, besides bleeding, blistering, and emetics." When he was called to baptize a sick baby, he seized the opportunity of giving it a dose of castor oil. One day he writes—

“I am performing miracles in my parish with garlic for whooping-cough.”

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Another:—

“We conquered the whooping-cough here with a pennyworth of salt of tartar, after having filled them with the expensive poisons of Halford.[63] What an odd thing that such a specific should not be more known!”“I attended two of my children through a good stout fever of the typhus kind without ever calling in an apothecary, but for one day. I depended upon blessed antimony, and watched anxiously for the time of giving bark.”“Douglas[64] alarmed us the other night with the Croup. I darted into him all the mineral and vegetable resources of my shop, cravatted his throat with blisters and fringed it with leeches, and set him in five or six hours to playing marbles, breathing gently and inaudibly.”

After an unhealthy winter he writes:—

“Our evils have been want of water, and scarlet-fever in our village; where, in three quarters of a year, we have buried fifteen, instead of one per annum. You will naturally suppose I have killed all these people by doctoring them; but scarlet-fever awes me, and is above my aim. I leave it to the professional and graduated homicides."[65]

In this connexion it is natural to cite the lines on “The Poetical Medicine Chest,"[66] which Mr. Stuart Reid has printed. They contain some excellent advice about the drugs which a mother should provide for the use of a young family, and end, majestically, thus:—

> “Spare not in Eastern blasts, when babies die,
> The wholesome rigour of the Spanish Fly.
> From timely torture seek thy infant’s rest,
> And spread the poison on his labouring breast.
> And so, fair lady, when in evil hour
> Less prudent mothers mourn some faded flower,
> Six Howards valiant, and six Howards fair
> Shall live, and love thee, and reward thy care.”

But parochial and domestic concerns could not altogether divert Sydney Smith’s mind from the strife of politics. He watched the turmoil from afar. On the 1st of January 1813, he wrote to his friend John Allen, who was more sanguine than himself about the prospects of the Whigs:—

“Everything is fast setting in for arbitrary power. The Court will grow bolder and bolder, a struggle will commence, and, if it ends as I wish, there will be Whigs again.... But when these things come to pass, you will no longer be a Warden,[67] but a brown and impalpable powder in the tombs of Dulwich. In the meantime, enough of liberty will remain to make our old-age tolerably comfortable; and to your last gasp you will remain

in the perennial and pleasing delusion that the Whigs are coming in, and will expire mistaking the officiating clergyman for a King's Messenger."

While the new Rectory House at Foston was building, the Rector was wholly engrossed in the work. "I live," he wrote, "trowel in hand. My whole soul is filled up by lath and plaster."

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He laid the foundation-stone in June 1813, and took possession of the completed edifice in March 1814. “My house was considered the ugliest in the county, but all admitted that it was one of the most comfortable."[68] It remains to the present day pretty much as Sydney Smith left it. A room on the ground-floor, next to the drawing-room, served the threefold purposes of study, dispensary, and justice-room. As a rule, he wrote his sermons and his articles for the *Edinburgh* in the drawing-room, not heeding the conversation of family and visitors; but in the “study” he dosed his parishioners; and here, having been made a Justice of the Peace, he administered mercy to poachers. He hated the Game-Laws as they stood, and it stirred his honest wrath to reflect that “for every ten pheasants which fluttered in the wood, one English peasant was rotting in gaol.” So strong was his belief in the contaminating effects of a prisoner’s life that he never, if he could help it, would commit a boy or girl to gaol. He sought permission to accompany Mrs. Fry on one of her visits to Newgate, and spoke of her ministry there as “the most solemn, the most Christian, the most affecting, which any human eye ever witnessed."[69] A pleasing trait of his incumbency at Foston was the creation of allotment-gardens for the poor. He divided several acres of the glebe into sixteenths, and let them, at a low rent, to the villagers. Each allotment was just big enough to supply a cottage with potatoes, and to support a pig. Cheap food for the poor was another of his excellent hobbies. His Common-Place Book contains receipts for nourishing soups made of rice and peas and flavoured with ox-cheek. He notes that more than thirty people were comfortably fed with these concoctions at a penny a head. After a bad harvest he and his family lived, like the labourers round them, on unleavened cakes made from the damaged flour of the sprouted wheat. His daughter writes—“The luxury of returning to bread again can hardly be imagined by those who have never been deprived of it.”

But, in spite of occasional difficulties of this description, which were always faced and overcome with invincible good-humour, Sydney Smith’s fifteen years at Foston were happily and profitably spent. He was in the fulness of his physical and intellectual vigour. He said of himself, “I am a rough writer of Sermons,” but his energy in delivering them awoke the admiration of his sturdy flock.—

“When I began to thump the cushion of my pulpit, on first coming to Foston, as is my wont when I preach, the accumulated dust of a hundred and fifty years made such a cloud, that for some minutes I lost sight of my congregation."[70]

His Bible-class for boys was affectionately remembered sixty years afterwards.[71] By his constant contributions to the *Edinburgh*, he was both helping forward the great causes in which he most earnestly believed, and establishing his own fame. Good health, cheerfulness, and contentment reigned in the Rectory, which might well have been called “A Temple of Industrious Peace."[72]

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In spite of some small irregularities and oddities in the furniture of the house and the arrangements of the establishment—all of which the Rector habitually and humorously exaggerated—the Rectory was an extremely comfortable home. It was so constructed as to be full of air, light, and warmth. The Rector said of it:—

> "We are about equal to a second-rate inn, as Mrs. Sydney says; but I think myself we are equal to any inn on the North Road, except Ferrybridge."

The larder of this "second-rate inn" was pleasantly supplied by the kindness of faithful friends.

"I am very much obliged to you for sending me the pheasants. One of my numerous infirmities is a love of eating pheasants."—"Many thanks for two fine Gallicia hams; but, as for boiling them in *wine*, I am not as yet high enough in the Church for that; so they must do the best they can in water."—"Lord Tankerville has sent me a whole buck; this necessarily takes up a good deal of my time. Venison is an interesting subject, which is deemed among the clergy a professional one."—"Your grouse are not come by this day's mail, but I suppose they will come to-morrow. Even the rumour of grouse is agreeable."—"Lord Lauderdale has sent me two hundred and thirty pounds of salt fish."—"You have no idea what a number of handsome things were said of you when your six partridges were consumed to-day. Wit, literature, and polished manners were ascribed to you—some good quality for each bird."—"What is real piety? What is true attachment to the Church? How are these fine feelings best evinced? The answer is plain—by sending strawberries to a clergyman. Many thanks."

To the hostelry, thus well victualled, and called by its owner "The Rector's Head," many interesting visitors found their way. Lord and Lady Holland, Miss Fox, Miss Vernon, Sir James Mackintosh, Sir Humphry Davy, Samuel Rogers, Dr. and Mrs. Marcet, and Francis Jeffrey were among the earliest guests. "Mrs. Sydney was dreadfully alarmed about her side-dishes the first time Luttrell[73] paid us a visit, and grew pale as the covers were lifted; but they stood the test. Luttrell tasted and praised."

The neighbours of whom the Smiths saw most were Lord and Lady Carlisle,[74] who drove over from Castle Howard[75] in a coach-and-four with outriders, and were upset in a ploughed field; their son and daughter-in-law, Lord and Lady Georgiana Morpeth, who with their children made "no mean part of the population of Yorkshire"; and the Archbishop of York, who became one of the Smiths' kindest and most faithful friends. Every year Sydney paid a visit to London, receiving the warmest of welcomes from all his old associates. In 1821 he revisited his friends at Edinburgh, and going or coming he visited Lord Grey at Howick, Lord Tankerville at Chillingham, Lord Lauderdale at Dunbar, and Mr. Lambton, afterwards Lord Durham, at Lambton. At Chillingham he duly admired the beef supplied by the famous herd of wild cattle, but he admired still more the magnificent novelty of gas at Lambton.—

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“What use of wealth so luxurious and delightful as to light your house with gas? What folly to have a diamond necklace or a Correggio, and not to light your house with gas! The splendour and glory of Lambton Hall make all other houses mean. How pitiful to submit to a farthing-candle existence, when science puts such intense gratification within your reach! Dear lady, spend all your fortune in a gas-apparatus. Better to eat dry bread by the splendour of gas, than to dine on wild beef with wax candles!”

Another friend whom the Smiths visited regularly was Mr., afterwards Sir George, Philips, an opulent cotton-spinner of Manchester. Once, when staying with Philips, Sydney undertook to preach a Charity Sermon in Prestwich Church, and with reference to this he wrote in the previous week; “I desire to make three or four hundred weavers cry, which it is impossible to do since the late rise in cottons.”

Writing from Philips’s house in 1820 he says:—

“Philips doubles his capital twice a week. We talk much of cotton, more of the fine arts, as he has lately returned from Italy, and purchased some pictures which were sent out from Piccadilly on purpose to intercept him.”

His daughter tells us that, during these years of small income and large expenses, her father never bought any books. He had brought a small but serviceable library with him from London, and his friends made additions to it from time to time. He wrote to a friend in 1810:—

“I have read, since I saw you, Burke’s works, some books of Homer, Suetonius, a great deal of agricultural reading, Godwin’s *Enquirer*, and a great deal of Adam Smith. As I have scarcely looked at a book for five years, I am rather hungry.”

Here are some of the plans which, year by year, he laid down for the regulation of his studies:—

“Translate every day ten lines of the *De Officiis*, and re-translate into Latin. Five chapters of Greek Testament. Theological studies. Plato’s *Apology for Socrates*; Horace’s *Epodes, Epistles, Satires*, and *Ars Poetica*.”“Write sermons and reviews, Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. Read, Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday. Write ten lines of Latin on writing days. Read five chapters of Greek Testament on reading days. For morning reading, either Polybius, or Diodorus Siculus, or some tracts of Xenophon or Plato; and for Latin, Catullus, Tibullus, and Propertius.“Monday: write, morning; read Tasso, evening. Tuesday: Latin or Greek, morning; evening, theology. Wednesday, same as Monday. Friday, ditto. Thursday and Saturday, same as Tuesday. Read every day a chapter in Greek Testament, and translate ten lines of Latin. Good books to read: —Terrasson’s *History of Roman Jurisprudence*; Bishop of Chester’s *Records of the Creation*.”

His daughter says that he read with great rapidity. "He galloped through the pages so rapidly that we often laughed at him when he shut up a thick quarto as his morning's work. 'Cross-examine me, then,' he said; and we generally found that he knew all that was worth knowing in it." Here, obviously, is the stuff out of which reviewers are made, and this was the very zenith of Sydney Smith's power and usefulness in the *Edinburgh Review*.

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He wrote as quickly as he read. When once he had amassed the necessary facts, he sate down amid all the distracting sights and sounds of a drawing-room crowded with femininity, and wrote at full speed, without deliberations, embellishments, or erasures; only betraying by the movements of his expressive face his amusement and interest "as fresh images came clustering round his pen." As soon as the essay was finished, he would throw it on the table, saying to his wife, "There, Kate, just look it over—dot the *i*'s and cross the *t*'s;" and went out for his walk. It should be added that his writing was singularly difficult to read, that he was very infirm about spelling proper names, and that he was exceptionally careless in correcting his proofs.

Of those essays which he subsequently reprinted, as judging them most worthy of preservation, I see that by 1821 he had written fifty. Among these were such masterpieces of humour and argument as "Edgeworth on Bulls," "Methodism," "Indian Missions," "Hannah More," "Public Schools," "America," "Game-Laws" and "Botany Bay." On the 19th of May 1820, he wrote, "I found in London both my articles very popular—upon the Poor-Laws and America. The passage on Taxation had great success."[76] Some of these papers will be considered separately, when we come to discuss his style and his opinions; but space must here be found for an unrivalled specimen of his controversial method, which belongs to the year 1822. It is called "Persecuting Bishops." "Is *Bishops* in that title a nominative or an accusative?" grimly inquired a living prelate, when the present writer was extolling the essay so named. It is a nominative; and perhaps the exacter title would have been "A Persecuting Bishop."

Herbert Marsh[77] was Second Wrangler in 1779, Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, Margaret Professor of Divinity, Bishop of Llandaff from 1816 to 1819, and of Peterborough from 1819 till his death. He was a "High Churchman of the old school"—-perhaps the most unpleasant type of theologian in Christendom. We know, from the Life of Father "Ignatius" Spencer,[78] that Bishop Marsh played whist with his candidates for Orders on the eve of the ordination, and all that we read about him beautifully illustrates that tone of "quiet worldliness" which Dean Church described as the characteristic of the English clergy in the earlier part of the nineteenth century. But what he lacked in personal devotion he made up (as some have done since his day) by furious hostility to spiritual and religious enthusiasm in others. He opposed the civil claims alike of Roman Catholics and of Dissenters. He attacked the Bible Society. He denounced Charles Simeon. He insulted Isaac Milner; and he determined to purge his diocese of Evangelicalism (which, oddly enough, he seems to have identified with Calvinism). His manly resolve to stifle religious earnestness culminated in the year 1820, when he drew up a set of eighty-seven

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questions, which he proposed to every candidate for Orders, and to every clergyman who sought his license to officiate. Failure to answer these questions to the Bishop's satisfaction was to be punished by exclusion from the diocese of Peterborough. Happily, the Evangelical clergy of that period was very little disposed to sit down under Episcopal tyranny. The Bishop's set of questions was met by a hailstorm of pamphlets. Petitions for redress were poured into the House of Lords. The Bishop was forced into the open, and constrained to make the best defence he could in a published speech. In November 1822, Sydney Smith, in the *Edinburgh Review*, came to the assistance of his brother-clergy against the high-handed tyranny of the Persecuting Bishop.

The reviewer begins by giving the Bishop credit for good intentions; but maintains that his conduct has been—

"singularly injudicious, extremely harsh, and in its effects (though not in its intentions) very oppressive and vexatious to the clergy.... We cannot believe that we are doing wrong in ranging ourselves on the weaker side, in the cause of propriety and justice. The Mitre protects its wearer from indignity; but it does not secure impunity."

After this preface Sydney Smith goes on to develop his argument against the Bishop, and he starts with the highly reasonable proposition that a man is presumably wrong when all his friends, whose habits and interests would naturally lead them to side with him, think him wrong.—

"If a man were to indulge in taking medicine till the apothecary, the druggist, and the physician all called upon him to abandon his philocathartic propensities—if he were to gratify his convivial habits till the landlord demurred and the waiter shook his head—we should naturally imagine that advice so disinterested was not given before it was wanted."

The Bishop of Peterborough has all his brother-bishops against him, though they certainly love power as well as he. Not one will defend him in debate; not one will allege that he has acted or would act as Peterborough has acted.

Then, again, the bishop who refuses to license a curate unless he satisfactorily answers Eighty-Seven Questions, thereby puts himself in opposition to the bishop who ordained the curate. One standard of orthodoxy is established in one diocese; another in another. The theological system of the Church becomes local and arbitrary instead of national and fixed.—

"If a man is a captain in the army in one part of England, he is a captain in all. The general who commands north of the Tweed does not say, 'You shall never appear in my district, or exercise the functions of an officer, if you do not answer eighty-seven

questions on the art of war, according to my notions.’ The same officer who commands a ship of the line in the Mediterranean is considered as equal to the same office in the North Seas. *The Sixth Commandment*

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is suspended by one medical diploma from the North of England to the South.[79] But, by the new system of interrogation, a man may be admitted into Orders at Barnet, rejected at Stevenage, readmitted at Buckden, kicked out as a Calvinist at Witham Common, and hailed as an ardent Arminian on his arrival at York."

The Bishop's reply to the charges brought against him evinces surprise that any one should have the hardihood to criticize or to resist him; and yet, the reviewer asks, to what purpose has he read his ecclesiastical history, if he expects anything except the most strenuous opposition to his tyranny?—

"Does he think that every sturdy Supralapsarian bullock whom he tries to sacrifice to the Genius of Orthodoxy will not kick, and push, and toss; that he will not, if he can, shake the axe from his neck, and hurl his mitred butcher into the air? We know these men fully as well as the Bishop; he has not a chance of success against them. They will ravage, roar, and rush till the very chaplains, and the Masters and Misses Peterborough, request his lordship to desist. He is raising a storm in the English Church of which he has not the slightest conception, and which will end, as it ought to end, in his lordship's disgrace and defeat."

Then the reviewer goes on to urge that discretion and common sense, good nature and good manners, are qualities far more valuable in bishops than any "vigilance of inquisition." Prelates of the type of Bishop Marsh are the most dangerous enemies of the Establishment which they profess to serve.—

"Six such Bishops, multiplied by eighty-seven, and working with five hundred and twenty-two questions, would fetch everything to the ground in six months. But what if it pleased Divine Providence to afflict every prelate with the spirit of putting eighty-seven questions, and the two Archbishops with the spirit of putting twice as many, and the Bishop of Sodor and Man with the spirit of putting forty-three questions? There would then be a grand total of two thousand three hundred and thirty-five interrogations flying about the English Church, and sorely vexed would be the land with Question and Answer.... If eighty-seven questions are assumed to be necessary by one bishop, eight hundred may be considered as the minimum of interrogation by another. When once the ancient faith-marks of the Church are lost sight of and despised, any misled theologian may launch out on the boundless sea of polemical vexation."

The Bishop's main line of defence, when challenged in the House of Lords, was that he had a legal right to do what he had done. This was not disputed. "A man may persevere in doing what he has a right to do till the Chancellor shuts him up in Bedlam, or till the mob pelts him as he passes." But the reviewer reminds him that he has no similar right as against clergymen presented to benefices in his diocese. They are protected by the patron's action of *Quare Impedit*; and all considerations of honour, decency, and common sense should restrain the Bishop from "letting himself loose

against the working man of God," and enforcing against the curate a system of inquisition which he dare not apply to the incumbent.—

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“Prelates are fond of talking about *my* see, *my* clergy, *my* diocese, as if these things belonged to them as their pigs and dogs belonged to them. They forget that the clergy, the diocese, and the bishops themselves, all exist only for the public good; that the public are a third and principal party in the whole concern. It is not simply the tormenting bishop against the tormented curate; but the public against the system of tormenting, as tending to bring scandal upon religion and religious men. By the late alteration in the laws,[80] the Labourers in the vineyard are given up to the power of the Inspector of the vineyard. If he has the meanness and malice to do so, an Inspector may worry and plague to death any Labourer against whom he may have conceived an antipathy.... Men of very small incomes have often very acute feelings, and a curate trod on feels a pang as great as a bishop refuted.”

Another of the Bishop’s ways of defending himself was to boast that, in spite of all his interrogations, he has actually excluded only two curates from his diocese: and this boast supplies the reviewer with one of his best apologues. “So the Emperor of Hayti boasted that he had only cut off two persons’ heads for disagreeable behaviour at his table. In spite of the paucity of the visitors executed, the example operated as a considerable impediment to conversation; and the intensity of the punishment was found to be a full compensation for its rarity.”

In conclusion, the reviewer says:—“Now we have done with the Bishop.... Our only object in meddling with the question is to restrain the arm of Power within the limits of moderation and justice—one of the great objects which first led to the establishment of this journal, and which, we hope, will always continue to characterize its efforts.”

To this period also belong two splendid discourses on the principles of Christian Justice, which Sydney Smith, as Chaplain to the High Sheriff, preached in York Minster at the Spring and Summer Assizes of 1824. The first is styled “The Judge that smites contrary to the Law."[81]

At the outset, the preacher thus defines his ground:—

“I take these words of St. Paul as a condemnation of that man who smites contrary to the law; as a praise of that man who judges according to the law; as a religious theme upon the importance of human Justice to the happiness of mankind: and, if it be that theme, it is appropriate to this place, and to the solemn public duties of the past and the ensuing week, over which some here present will preside, at which many here present will assist, and which almost all here present will witness.”

A Christian Judge in a free land must sedulously guard himself against the entanglements of Party. He must be careful to maintain his independence by seeking no promotion and asking no favours from those who govern. It may often be his duty to stand between the governors

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and the governed, and in that case his hopes of advantage may be found on one side, and his sense of duty on another. At such a crisis he is trebly armed, if he is able from his heart to say—“I have vowed a vow before God. I have put on the robe of justice. Farewell avarice, farewell ambition. Pass me who will, slight me who will, I will live henceforward only for the great duties of life. My business is on earth. My hope and my reward are with God.”

“He who takes the office of a Judge as it now exists in this country, takes in his hands a splendid gem, good and glorious, perfect and pure. Shall he give it up mutilated, shall he mar it, shall he darken it, shall it emit no light, shall it be valued at no price, shall it excite no wonder? Shall he find it a diamond, shall he leave it a stone? What shall we say to the man who would wilfully destroy with fire the magnificent temple of God, in which I am now preaching? Far worse is he who ruins the moral edifices of the world, which time and toil, and many prayers to God, and many sufferings of men, have reared; who puts out the light of the times in which he lives, and leaves us to wander amid the darkness of corruption and the desolation of sin. There may be, there probably is, in this church, some young man who may hereafter fill the office of an English Judge, when the greater part of those who hear me are dead, and mingled with the dust of the grave. Let him remember my words, and let them form and fashion his spirit: he cannot tell in what dangerous and awful times he may be placed; but as a mariner looks to his compass in the calm, and looks to his compass in the storm, and never keeps his eyes off his compass, so in every vicissitude of a judicial life, deciding for the people, deciding against the people, protecting the just rights of kings, or restraining their unlawful ambition, let him ever cling to that pure, exalted, and Christian independence, which towers over the little motives of life; which no hope of favour can influence, which no effort of power can control.“A Christian Judge in a free country should respect, on every occasion, those popular institutions of Justice, which were intended for his control, and for our security. To see humble men collected accidentally from the neighbourhood, treated with tenderness and courtesy by supreme magistrates of deep learning and practised understanding, from whose views they are perhaps at that moment differing, and whose directions they do not choose to follow; to see at such times every disposition to warmth restrained, and every tendency to contemptuous feeling kept back; to witness the submission of the great and wise, not when it is extorted by necessity, but when it is practised with willingness and grace, is a spectacle which is very grateful to Englishmen, which no other country sees, which, above all things, shows that a Judge has a pure, gentle, and Christian heart, and that he never wishes

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to smite contrary to the law.“A Christian Judge who means to be just must not fear to smite according to the law; he must remember that he beareth not the sword in vain. Under his protection we live, under his protection we acquire, under his protection we enjoy. Without him, no man would defend his character, no man would preserve his substance. Proper pride, just gains, valuable exertions, all depend upon his firm wisdom. If he shrink from the severe duties of his office, he saps the foundation of social life, betrays the highest interests of the world, and sits not to judge according to the law.”

But Justice, if it is to be truly just, must be tempered by mercy, and must have a scrupulous regard to the strength of temptation, the moral weakness of the subject, the degrading power of ignorance and poverty.—

“All magistrates feel these things in the early exercise of their judicial power; but the Christian Judge always feels them, is always youthful, always tender, when he is going to shed human blood; retires from the business of men, communes with his own heart, ponders on the work of death, and prays to that Saviour who redeemed him that he may not shed the blood of man in vain.”

A pure, secure, and even-handed administration of Justice is the strongest safeguard of national stability and happiness.—

“The whole tone and tenor of public morals is affected by the state of supreme Justice; it extinguishes revenge, it communicates a spirit of purity and uprightness to inferior magistrates; it makes the great good, by taking away impunity; it banishes fraud, obliquity, and solicitation, and teaches men that the law is their right. Truth is its handmaid, freedom is its child, peace is its companion; safety walks in its steps, victory follows in its train; it is the brightest emanation of the Gospel, it is the greatest attribute of God: it is that centre round which human motives and passions turn: and Justice, sitting on high, sees Genius and Power, and Wealth and Birth, revolving round her throne; and teaches their paths and marks out their orbits, and warns with a loud voice, and rules with a strong arm, and carries order and discipline into a world, which but for her would only be a wild waste of passions. Look what we are, and what just laws have done for us:—a land of piety and charity;—a land of churches, and hospitals, and altars;—a nation of good Samaritans;—a people of universal compassion. All lands, all seas, have heard we are brave. We have just sheathed that sword which defended the world; we have just laid down that buckler which covered the nations of the earth. God blesses the soil with fertility; English looms labour for every climate. All the waters of the globe are covered with English ships. We are softened by fine arts, civilized by humane literature, instructed by deep science; and every people, as they break their

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feudal chains, look to the founders and fathers of freedom for examples which may animate, and rules which may guide. If ever a nation was happy, if ever a nation was visibly blessed by God—if ever a nation was honoured abroad, and left at home under a government (which we can now conscientiously call a liberal government) to the full career of talent, industry, and vigour, we are at this moment that people—and this is our happy lot.—First the Gospel has done it, and then Justice has done it; and he who thinks it his duty to labour that this happy condition of existence may remain, must guard the piety of these times, and he must watch over the spirit of Justice which exists in these times. First, he must take care that the altars of God are not polluted, that the Christian faith is retained in purity and in perfection: and then turning to human affairs, let him strive for spotless, incorruptible Justice;—praising, honouring, and loving the just Judge, and abhorring, as the worst enemy of mankind, him who is placed there to 'judge after the law, and who smites contrary to the law.'"

The second of these sermons is called "The Lawyer that tempted Christ."[82] The preacher begins by pointing out that the Lawyer who, in the hope of entangling the new Teacher, asked what he should do to inherit eternal life, received a very plain answer—-"not flowery, not metaphysical, not doctrinal." The answer was, in effect, thus: "If you wish to live eternally, do your duty to God and man." Whereas the earlier sermon was addressed to the Bench, this is addressed, very directly indeed, to the Bar.

"There are probably in this church many persons of the profession of the law, who have often asked before, with better faith than their brother, and who do now ask this great question, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?' I shall, therefore, direct to them some observations on the particular duties they owe to society, because I think it suitable to this particular season, because it is of much more importance to tell men how they are to be Christians in detail, than to exhort them to be Christians generally; because it is of the highest utility to avail ourselves of these occasions, to show to classes of mankind what those virtues are, which they have more frequent and valuable opportunities of practising, and what those faults and vices are, to which they are more particularly exposed."It falls to the lot of those who are engaged in the active and arduous profession of the law to pass their lives in great cities, amidst severe and incessant occupation, requiring all the faculties, and calling forth, from time to time, many of the strongest passions of our nature. In the midst of all this, rivals are to be watched, superiors are to be cultivated, connections cherished; some portion of life must be given to society, and some little to relaxation and amusement. When, then, is the question to be asked, 'What

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shall I do to inherit eternal life?' what leisure for the altar, what time for God? I appeal to the experience of men engaged in this profession, whether religious feelings and religious practices are not, without any speculative disbelief, perpetually sacrificed to the business of the world? Are not the habits of devotion gradually displaced by other habits of solicitude, hurry, and care? Is not the taste for devotion lessened? Is not the time for devotion abridged? Are you not more and more conquered against your warnings and against your will; not, perhaps, without pain and compunction, by the Mammon of life? And what is the cure for this great evil to which your profession exposes you? The cure is, to keep a sacred place in your heart, where Almighty God is enshrined, and where nothing human can enter; to say to the world, 'Thus far shalt thou go, and no further'; to remember you are a lawyer, without forgetting you are a Christian; to wish for no more wealth than ought to be possessed by an inheritor of the Kingdom of Heaven; to covet no more honour than is suitable to a child of God; boldly and bravely to set yourself limits, and to show to others you have limits, and that no professional eagerness, and no professional activity, shall ever induce you to infringe upon the rules and practices of religion: remember the text; put the great question really, which the tempter of Christ only pretended to put. In the midst of your highest success, in the most perfect gratification of your vanity, in the most ample increase of your wealth, fall down at the feet of Jesus, and say, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"

The advocate's duty to his client, with its resulting risk to the advocate's own conscience, is thus set forth:—

"Justice is found, experimentally, to be most effectually promoted by the opposite efforts of practised and ingenious men presenting to the selection of an impartial judge the best arguments for the establishment and explanation of truth. It becomes, then, under such an arrangement, the decided duty of an advocate to use all the arguments in his power to defend the cause he has adopted, and to leave the effects of those arguments to the judgment of others. However useful this practice may be for the promotion of public justice, it is not without danger to the individual whose practice it becomes. It is apt to produce a profligate indifference to truth in higher occasions of life, where truth cannot for a moment be trifled with, much less callously trampled on, much less suddenly and totally yielded up to the basest of human motives. It is astonishing what unworthy and inadequate notions men are apt to form of the Christian faith. Christianity does not insist upon duties to an individual, and forget the duties which are owing to the great mass of individuals, which we call our country; it does not teach you how to benefit your neighbour, and leave you to inflict the most

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serious injuries upon all whose interest is bound up with you in the same land. I need not say to this congregation that there is a wrong and a right in public affairs, as there is a wrong and a right in private affairs. I need not prove that in any vote, in any line of conduct which affects the public interest, every Christian is bound, most solemnly and most religiously, to follow the dictates of his conscience. Let it be for, let it be against, let it please, let it displease, no matter with whom it sides, or what it thwarts, it is a solemn duty, on such occasions, to act from the pure dictates of conscience, and to be as faithful to the interests of the great mass of your fellow-creatures, as you would be to the interests of any individual of that mass. Why, then, if there be any truth in these observations, can that man be pure and innocent before God, can he be quite harmless and respectable before men, who in mature age, at a moment's notice, sacrifices to wealth and power all the fixed and firm opinions of his life; who puts his moral principles to sale, and barters his dignity and his soul for the baubles of the world? If these temptations come across you, then remember the memorable words of the text, 'What shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"

After warning the younger barristers against their characteristic faults of self-sufficiency and affected pessimism, the preacher turns to another aspect of the advocate's duty towards his client.—

"Upon those who are engaged in studying the laws of their country devolves the honourable and Christian task of defending the accused: a sacred duty never to be yielded up, never to be influenced by any vehemence, nor intensity of public opinion. In these times of profound peace and unexampled prosperity, there is little danger in executing this duty, and little temptation to violate it; but human affairs change like the clouds of heaven; another year may find us, or may leave us, in all the perils and bitterness of internal dissension; and upon one of you may devolve the defence of some accused person, the object of men's hopes and fears, the single point on which the eyes of a whole people are bent. These are the occasions which try a man's inward heart, and separate the dross of human nature from the gold of human nature. On these occasions, never mind being mixed up for a moment with the criminal, and the crime; fling yourself back upon great principles, fling yourself back upon God; yield not one atom to violence; suffer not the slightest encroachments of injustice; retire not one step before the frowns of power; tremble not, for a single instant, at the dread of misrepresentation. The great interests of mankind are placed in your hands; it is not so much the individual you are defending; it is not so much a matter of consequence whether this, or that, is proved to be a crime; but on such occasions, you are often called upon to defend the occupation of a defender, to take care

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that the sacred rights belonging to that character are not destroyed; that that best privilege of your profession, which so much secures our regard, and so much redounds to your credit, is never soothed by flattery, never corrupted by favour, never chilled by fear. You may practise this wickedness secretly, as you may any other wickedness; you may suppress a topic of defence, or soften an attack upon opponents, or weaken your own argument and sacrifice the man who has put his trust in you, rather than provoke the powerful by the triumphant establishment of unwelcome innocence: but if you do this, you are a guilty man before God. It is better to keep within the pale of honour, it is better to be pure in Christ, and to feel that you are pure in Christ: and if ever the praises of mankind are sweet, if it be ever allowable to a Christian to breathe the incense of popular favour, and to say it is grateful and good, it is when the honest, temperate, unyielding advocate, who has protected innocence from the grasp of power, is followed from the hall of judgment by the prayers and blessings of a grateful people."

And then comes an admonition about private duty.—

"Do not lose God in the fervour and business of the world; remember that the churches of Christ are more solemn, and more sacred, than your tribunals: bend not before the judges of the king, and forget the Judge of Judges; search not other men's hearts without heeding that your own hearts will be searched; be innocent in the midst of subtility; do not carry the lawful arts of your profession beyond your profession; but when the robe of the advocate is laid aside, so live that no man shall dare to suppose your opinions venal, or that your talents and energy may be bought for a price: do not heap scorn and contempt upon your declining years by precipitate ardour for success in your profession; but set out with a firm determination to be unknown, rather than ill-known; and to rise honestly, if you rise at all. Let the world see that you have risen, because the natural probity of your heart leads you to truth; because the precision and extent of your legal knowledge enables you to find the right way of doing the right thing; because a thorough knowledge of legal art and legal form is, in your hands, not an instrument of chicanery, but the plainest, easiest and shortest way to the end of strife.... I hope you will weigh these observations, and apply them to the business of the ensuing week, and beyond that, in the common occupations of your profession: always bearing in your minds the emphatic words of the text, and often in the hurry of your busy, active lives, honestly, humbly, heartily exclaiming to the Son of God, 'Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'"

[60] Edward Vernon, afterwards Harcourt (1757-1847).

[61] Charles James Blomfield (1786-1857), Bishop of London, was the first bishop to discard the episcopal wig; and John Bird Sumner (1780-1862), Archbishop of Canterbury, the last to wear it.

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[62] In later life he said:—“If you shoot, the squire and the poacher both consider you as their natural enemies, and I thought it more clerical to be at peace with both.”

[63] Sir Henry Halford, Bart., M.D. (1766-1844).

[64] His eldest son.

[65] Compare—“The Sixth Commandment in suspended, by one medical diploma, from the North of England to the South.”—Essay on “Persecuting Bishops.”

[66] Addressed to Mrs. Henry Howard.

[67] John Allen (1771-1843) was Warden of Dulwich College.

[68] Macaulay called it “the very neatest, most commodious, and most appropriate rectory that I ever saw.”

[69] In 1818 he writes to Lady Mary Bennet:—“I am glad you liked what I said of Mrs. Fry. She is very unpopular with the clergy: examples of living, active virtue disturb our repose, and give birth to distressing comparisons; we long to burn her alive.”

[70] Macaulay describes Foston Church as “a miserable little hovel with a wooden belfry.”

[71] As testified by Mr. Stuart Reid.

[72] Carlyle’s description of Dr. Arnold’s house at Rugby.

[73] Henry Luttrell (1765-1835), wit and epicure.

[74] Frederick, 5th Earl of Carlisle (1748-1825) married Lady Margaret Caroline Leveson-Gower.

[75] In old age Sydney Smith wrote—“Castle Howard befriended me when I wanted friends: I shall never forget it till I forget all.”

[76] *See* Appendix B.

[77] (1757-1839).

[78] The Hon. and Rev. George Spencer (1799-1864).

[79] *See* p. 83.

[80] The Residence Act, 1817.

[81] Acts xxiii. 3.

[82] St. Luke x. 25.

CHAPTER V

“CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION”—BRISTOL—COMBE FLOREY—REFORM—-PROMOTION

The first quarter of the nineteenth century was now nearing its close, and the most exciting topic in domestic politics was the emancipation of the Roman Catholics. The movement in favour of emancipation, though checked by the death of Pitt, had never completely collapsed, and now it was quickened by the exertions of the “Catholic Association” in Ireland, and stimulated by the eloquence of O’Connell and Sheil. Session after Session, emancipating Bills were brought into Parliament, and were supported by Castlereagh and Canning in opposition to their colleagues. The clergy of the Church of England—fashioned, almost to a man, on the model of Abraham Plymley—were dreadfully alarmed. Bishops charged against the proposed concession. Clerical meetings all over the country petitioned Parliament to defend them against insidious attacks on our national Protestantism. Before long, the storm rolled up to Yorkshire, and a meeting of the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of Cleveland was assembled at Thirsk on the 24th of March 1823.

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To this meeting a Resolution was submitted, protesting against the emancipation of the Roman Catholics. A counter-petition was submitted by Sydney Smith, begging for an inquiry into all laws affecting the Roman Catholics of Great Britain and Ireland, and "expressing a hope" that only those which were absolutely necessary to the safety of Church and State might be suffered to remain. It is difficult to conceive a milder proposition, but it was defeated by twenty-two votes to ten—Archdeacon Wrangham[83] and the Rev. William Vernon,[84] son of the Archbishop of York, voting in the minority. Sydney Smith's speech in support of his motion recapitulated the main arguments which, as Peter Plymley, he had adduced at an earlier stage of the same controversy. He urged that a Roman Catholic's oath was as sacred and as binding as a Protestant's; that the English Constitution, with great advantage to its subjects, tolerated, and behaved generously to, all forms of religion (except Romanism); and that all possible danger to civil order in Ireland was averted by the stringency of the restrictions with which it was proposed to safeguard the gift of Emancipation.—

"I defy Dr. Duigenan,[85] in the full vigour of his incapacity, in the strongest access of that Protestant epilepsy with which he was so often convulsed, to have added a single security to the security of that oath. If Catholics are formidable, are not Protestant members elected *by* Catholics formidable? But what will the numbers of the Catholics be? Five or six in one house, and ten or twelve in the other; and this I state upon the printed authority of Lord Harrowby, the tried and acknowledged friend of our Church, the amiable and revered patron of its poorest members. The Catholics did not rebel during the war carried on for a Catholic king, in the year 1715, nor in 1745. The government armed the Catholics in the American war. The last rebellion no one pretends to have been a Catholic rebellion; the leaders were, with one exception, all Protestants. The king of Prussia, the emperor of Russia, do not complain of their Catholic subjects. The Swiss cantons, Catholic and Protestant, live together in harmony and peace. Childish prophecies of danger are always made, and always falsified. The Church of England (if you will believe some of its members) is the most fainting, sickly, hysterical institution that ever existed in the world. Every thing is to destroy it, every thing to work its dissolution and decay. If money is taken for tithes, the Church of England is to perish. If six old Catholic peers, and twelve commoners, come into Parliament, these holy hypochondriacs tear their hair, and beat their breast, and mourn over the ruin of their Established Church! The Ranter is cheerful and confident. The Presbyterian stands upon his principles. The Quaker is calm and contented. The strongest, and wisest, and best establishment in the world, suffers in the full vigour of manhood, all the fears and the tremblings of extreme old age.

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“I conclude, Sir, remarks which, upon such a subject, might be carried to almost any extent, with presenting to you a petition to Parliament, and recommending it for the adoption of this meeting. And upon this petition, I beg leave to say a few words:—I am the writer of the petition I lay before you; and I have endeavoured to make it as mild and moderate as I possibly could. If I had consulted my own opinions *alone*, I should have said, that the disabling laws against the Catholics were a disgrace to the statute-book, and that every principle of justice, prudence, and humanity, called for their immediate repeal; but he who wishes to do any thing useful in this world, must consult the opinions of others as well as his own. I knew very well if I had proposed such a petition to my excellent friend, the Archdeacon and Mr. William Vernon, it would not have suited the mildness and moderation of their character, that they should accede to it; and I knew very well, that without the authority of their names, I could have done nothing. The present petition, when proposed to them by me, met, as I expected, with their ready and cheerful compliance. But though I propose this petition as preferable to the other, I should infinitely prefer that we do nothing, and disperse without coming to any resolution.“I am sick of these little clerico-political meetings. They bring a disgrace upon us and upon our profession, and make us hateful in the eyes of the laity. The best thing we could have done, would have been never to have met at all. The next best thing we can do (now we are met), is to do nothing. The third choice is to take my petition. The fourth, last, and worst, to adopt your own. The wisest thing I have heard here to-day, is the proposition of Mr. Chaloner, that we should burn both petitions, and ride home. Here we are, a set of obscure country clergymen, at the ‘Three Tuns,’ at Thirsk, like flies on the chariot-wheel; perched upon a question of which we can neither see the diameter, nor control the motion, nor influence the moving force. What good can such meetings do? They emanate from local conceit, advertize local ignorance; make men, who are venerable by their profession, ridiculous by their pretensions, and swell that mass of paper-lumber, which, got up with infinite rural bustle, and read without being heard in Parliament, is speedily consigned to merited contempt."[86]

So ended Sydney Smith’s first political speech; and he took two years’ holiday from the labours of the platform. On the 11th of April 1825, he returned to the charge. He had now acquired, in addition to Foston, the Rectory of Londesborough, which he held from 1823 to 1829, as “warming-pan” for his young friend and neighbour, William Howard. [87] As Rector of Londesborough, he attended a meeting of the Clergy of the Archdeaconry of the East Riding, held at Beverley to protest against the Roman Catholic claims.

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The *Yorkshire Gazette* reported the proceedings, and commented as follows:—

“The meeting was unanimous in its determination to petition Parliament against the claims of the Roman Catholics—one individual only excepted, the Rector of Londesborough. This gentleman made his speech on the occasion, enlarging on the inexpediency of refusing the Roman Catholics their claims.... The meeting, though by no means unprepared to hear extraordinary things from the Rector of Londesborough, as they had reason to anticipate from the proceedings of a meeting in another Archdeaconry about two years ago, were yet perfectly astonished to hear him assert that the Roman Catholic religion is now changed from what it was formerly, and that the oath of a Papist may, in all cases, be relied upon with the same confidence as that of a Protestant.... It is certainly due to the Rector of Londesborough to state in conclusion that he bore his defeat with his usual good humour, and further that, having learned previous to the meeting the intention of his curate to attend, but that he was hesitating out of delicacy to the declared opinions of his rector, the latter gentleman made it a particular request to his curate that he would persevere in his original intention.”

Sydney Smith’s peroration, though it failed to persuade his brother-clergy, is so good that it deserves to be reproduced.—

“When this bill passes, it will be a signal to all the religious sects of that unhappy country to lay aside their mutual hatred, and to live in peace, as equal men should live under equal law—when this bill passes, the Orange flag will fall—when this bill passes, the Green flag of the rebel will fall—when this bill passes, no other flag will fly in the land of Erin than that which blends the Lion with the Harp—that flag which, wherever it does fly, is the sign of freedom and of joy—the only banner in Europe which floats over a limited King and a free people.”

On this occasion the orator fared even less well than before in the matter of votes. His “excellent and respectable curate, Mr. Milestone,"[88] voted against him; and he was left in a minority of one. But he had the satisfaction of being able to write to a friend—“A poor clergyman whispered to me that he was quite of my way of thinking, but had nine children. *I begged he would remain a Protestant.*”

By this time the life of the Parliament, which had been elected on the demise of the Crown in 1820, was running out, and both parties were making vigorous preparations for the General Election. On the 29th January 1826, Sydney Smith wrote to Lady Grey:—

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“Terrible work in Yorkshire with the Pope! I fight with the beasts at Ephesus every day.... This week I publish a pamphlet on the Catholic question, with my name to it. There is such an uproar here that I think it is gallant, and becoming a friend of Lord Grey’s, to turn out and take a part in the affray.... What a detestable subject!—stale, threadbare, and exhausted; but ancient errors cannot be met with fresh refutations.”

Not with fresh refutations, perhaps, but with a wonderful prodigality of fresh illustrations and conceits. *A Letter to the Electors upon the Catholic Question* begins with the thrice-repeated question, “Why is not a Catholic to be believed on his oath?”

“What says the law of the land to this extravagant piece of injustice? It is no challenge against a juryman to say he is a Catholic, he sits in judgment upon your life and your property. Did any man ever hear it said that such or such a person was put to death, or that he lost his property, because a Catholic was among the jurymen? Is the question ever put? Does it ever enter into the mind of the attorney or the counsellor to enquire of the faith of the jury? If a man sell a horse, or a house, or a field, does he ask if the purchaser be a Catholic? Appeal to your own experience, and try, by that fairest of all tests, the justice of this enormous charge.“We are in treaty with many of the powers of Europe, because we believe in the good faith of Catholics. Two-thirds of Europe are, in fact, Catholics; are they all perjured? For the first fourteen centuries all the Christian world were Catholics; did they live in a constant state of perjury? I am sure these objections against the Catholics are often made by very serious and honest men, but I much doubt if Voltaire has advanced any thing against the Christian religion so horrible as to say that two-thirds of those who profess it are unfit for all the purposes of civil life; for who is fit to live in society who does not respect oaths?

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“I have lived a little in the world, but I never happened to hear a single Catholic even suspected of getting into office by violating his oath; the oath which they are accused of violating is an insuperable barrier to them all. Is there a more disgraceful spectacle in the world than that of the Duke of Norfolk hovering round the House of Lords in the execution of his office,[89] which he cannot enter as a peer of the realm? disgraceful to the bigotry and injustice of his country—to his own sense of duty, honourable in the extreme: he is the leader of a band of ancient and high-principled gentlemen, who submit patiently to obscurity and privation rather than do violence to their conscience. In all the fury of party, I never heard the name of a single Catholic mentioned, who was suspected of having gained, or aimed at, any political advantage,

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by violating his oath. I have never heard so bitter a slander supported by the slightest proof. Every man in the circle of his acquaintance has met with Catholics, and lived with them probably as companions. If this immoral lubricity were their characteristic, it would surely be perceived in common life. Every man's experience would corroborate the imputation; but I can honestly say that some of the best and most excellent men I have ever met with have been Catholics; perfectly alive to the evil and inconvenience of their situation, but thinking themselves bound by the law of God and the law of honour, not to avoid persecution by falsehood and apostasy. I remember hearing the Catholics accused from the Hustings of disregarding oaths, and within an hour of that time I saw five Catholic voters rejected, because they would not take the oath of Supremacy; and these were not men of rank who tendered themselves, but ordinary tradesmen. The accusation was received with loud huzzas, the poor Catholics retired unobserved and in silence. No one praised the conscientious feeling of the constituents; no one rebuked the calumny of the candidate.

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"I beg to remind you, that in talking of the Catholic religion, you must talk of the Catholic religion as it is carried on in Ireland; you have nothing to do with Spain, or France, or Italy: the religion you are to examine is the Irish Catholic religion. You are not to consider what it was, but what it is; not what individuals profess, but what is generally professed; not what individuals do, but what is generally practised. I constantly see, in advertisements from county meetings, all these species of monstrous injustice played off against the Catholics. The Inquisition exists in Spain and Portugal, therefore I confound place, and vote against the Catholics of Ireland, where it never did exist, nor was purposed to be instituted. There have been many cruel persecutions of Protestants by Catholic governments; and, therefore, I will confound time and place, and vote against the Irish, who live centuries after these persecutions, and in a totally different country. Doctor this, or Doctor that, of the Catholic Church has written a very violent and absurd pamphlet; therefore I will confound persons, and vote against the whole Irish Catholic Church, which has neither sanctioned nor expressed any such opinions. I will continue the incapacities of men of this age, because some men, in distant ages, deserved ill of other men in distant ages. They shall expiate the crimes committed, before they were born, in a land they never saw; by individuals they never heard of. I will charge them with every act of folly which they have never sanctioned and cannot control. I will sacrifice space, time, and identity, to my zeal for the Protestant Church. Now, in the midst of all this violence, consider, for a moment, how you are imposed on by words, and what a serious

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violation of the rights of your fellow-creatures you are committing. Mr. Murphy lives in Limerick, and Mr. Murphy and his son are subjected to a thousand inconveniences and disadvantages because they are Catholics. Murphy is a wealthy, honourable, excellent man; he ought to be in the corporation; he cannot get in because he is a Catholic. His son ought to be King's Counsel for his talents, and his standing at the Bar; he is prevented from reaching this dignity, because he is a Catholic. Why, what reasons do you hear for all this? Because Queen Mary, three hundred years before the natal day of Mr. Murphy, murdered Protestants in Smithfield; because Louis XIV. dragooned his Protestant subjects, when the predecessor of Murphy's predecessor was not in being; because men are confined in prison, in Madrid, twelve degrees more south than Murphy has ever been in his life; all ages, all climates, are ransacked to perpetuate the slavery of Murphy, the ill-fated victim of political anachronisms.

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"When are mercy and justice, in fact, ever to return upon the earth, if the sins of the elders are to be for ever visited on those who are not even their children! Should the first act of liberated Greece be to recommence the Trojan war? Are the French never to forget the Sicilian Vespers; or the Americans the long war waged against their liberties? Is any rule wise, which may set the Irish to recollect what they have suffered?

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"It is no part of my province to defend every error of the Catholic Church; I believe it has many errors, though I am sure these errors are grievously exaggerated and misrepresented.... But, if you will take a long view instead of a confined view, and look generally to the increase of human happiness, *the best check upon the increase of Popery, the best security for the establishment of the Protestant Church is, that the British empire shall be preserved in a state of the greatest strength, union, and opulence*. My cry then is, *No Popery*; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may not join with foreign Papists in time of war. *Church, for ever*; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may not help to pull it down. *King for ever*; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may become his loyal subjects. *Great Britain for ever*; therefore emancipate the Catholics, that they may not put an end to its perpetuity. *Our Government is essentially Protestant*; therefore, by emancipating the Catholics, give up a few circumstances which have nothing to do with the essence. *The Catholics are disguised enemies*; therefore, by emancipation, turn them into open friends. *They have a double allegiance*; therefore, by emancipation, make their allegiance to their King so grateful, that they will never confound it with the spiritual allegiance to their Pope. It is very difficult for electors,

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who are much occupied by other matters, to choose the right path amid the rage and fury of faction: but I give you one mark, *vote for a free altar*; give what the law compels you to give to the Establishment; (that done,) no chains, no prisons, no bonfires for a man's faith; and, above all, no modern chains and prisons under the names of disqualifications and incapacities, which *are only the cruelty and tyranny of a more civilized age*; civil offices open to all, a Catholic or a Protestant alderman, a Moravian or a Church of England or a Wesleyan justice, *no oppression, no tyranny in belief: a free altar, an open road to heaven; no human insolence, no human narrowness, hallowed by the name of God*.

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"Our Government is called essentially Protestant; but, if it be essentially Protestant in the distribution of office, it should be essentially Protestant in the imposition of taxes. The Treasury is open to all religions, Parliament only to one. The tax-gatherer is the most indulgent and liberal of human beings; he excludes no creed, imposes no articles; but counts Catholic cash, pockets Protestant paper, and is candidly and impartially oppressive to every description of the Christian world. Can anything be more base than when you want the blood or the money of Catholics, to forget that they are Catholics, and to remember only that they are British subjects; and, when they ask for the benefits of the British Constitution, to remember only that they are Catholics, and to forget that they are British subjects?"*No Popery* was the cry of the great English Revolution, because the increase and prevalence of Popery in England would, at that period, have rendered this island tributary to France. The Irish Catholics were, at that period, broken to pieces by the severity and military execution of Cromwell, and by the Penal Laws. They are since become a great and formidable people. The same dread of foreign influence makes it now necessary that they should be restored to political rights. Must the friends of rational liberty join in a clamour against the Catholics now, because, in a very different state of the world, they excited that clamour a hundred years ago? I remember a house near Battersea Bridge which caught fire, and there was a great cry of 'Water, water!' Ten years after, the Thames rose, and the people of the house were nearly drowned. Would it not have been rather singular to have said to the inhabitants —'I heard you calling for water ten years ago; why don't you call for it now?'"

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“Mild and genteel people do not like the idea of persecution, and are advocates for toleration; but then they think it no act of intolerance to deprive Catholics of political power. The history of all this is, that all men scarcely like to punish others for not being of the same opinion with themselves, and that this sort of privation is the only species of persecution, of which the improved feeling and advanced cultivation of the age will admit. Fire and faggot, chains and stone walls, have been clamoured away; nothing remains but to mortify a man’s pride, and to limit his resources, and to set a mark upon him, by cutting him off from his fair share of political power. By this receipt insolence is gratified, and humanity is not shocked. The gentlest Protestant can see, with dry eyes, Lord Stourton excluded from parliament, though he would abominate the most distant idea of personal cruelty to Mr. Petre. This is only to say that he lives in the nineteenth, instead of the sixteenth century, and that he is as intolerant in religious matters as the state of manners existing in his age will permit. Is it not the same spirit which wounds the pride of a fellow-creature on account of his faith, or which casts his body into the flames? Are they any thing else but degrees and modifications of the same principle? The minds of these two men no more differ because they differ in their degrees of punishment, than their bodies differ because one wore a doublet in the time of Mary, and the other wears a coat in the reign of George. I do not accuse them of intentional cruelty and injustice: I am sure there are very many excellent men who would be shocked if they could conceive themselves to be guilty of any thing like cruelty; but they innocently give a wrong name to the bad spirit which is within them, and think they are tolerant because they are not as intolerant as they could have been in other times, but cannot be now. *The true spirit is to search after God and for another life with lowliness of heart; to fling down no man’s altar, to punish no man’s prayer; to heap no penalties and no pains on those solemn supplications which, in divers tongues, and in varied forms, and in temples of a thousand shapes, but with one deep sense of human dependence, men pour forth to God.*”

At this point of his Letter, the writer turns aside to combat the contention that, because Roman Catholics have in times past persecuted Protestants, therefore they must now be deprived of their civil rights. If this contention be sound, the Protestant must, by parity of reasoning, be disfranchised.

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“The first object of men who love party better than truth, is to have it believed that the Catholics alone have been persecutors. But what can be more flagrantly unjust than to take over notions of history only from the conquering and triumphant party? If you think the Catholics have not their Book of Martyrs as well as the Protestants, take the following enumeration of some of their most learned and careful writers. The whole number of Catholics who suffered death in England for the exercise of the Catholic religion since the Reformation stands thus:—

“Henry VIII., 59
Elizabeth, 204
James I., 25
Charles I., and Commonwealth, 23
Charles II., 8

Total, 319

“Henry VIII., with consummate impartiality, burnt three Protestants and hanged four Catholics for different errors in religion on the same day, and at the same place. Elizabeth burnt two Dutch Anabaptists for some theological tenets, July 22, 1575, Fox the martyrologist vainly pleading with the queen in their favour. In 1579, the same Protestant queen cut off the hand of Stubbs, the author of a tract against popish connection, of Singleton, the printer, and Page, the disperser of the book. Camden saw it done. Warburton properly says it exceeds in cruelty any thing done by Charles I. On the 4th of June, Mr. Elias Thacker and Mr. John Capper, two ministers of the Brownist persuasion, were hanged at St. Edmund’s-bury, for dispersing books against the Common Prayer. With respect to the great part of the Catholic victims, the law was fully and literally executed: after being hanged up, they were cut down alive, dismembered, ripped up, and their bowels burnt before their faces; after which they were beheaded and quartered. The time employed in this butchery was very considerable, and, in one instance, lasted more than half an hour.“The uncandid excuse for all this is, that the greater part of these men were put to death for political, not for religious, crimes. That is, a law is first passed, making it high treason for a priest to exercise his function in England, and so, when he is caught and burnt, this is not religious persecution, but an offence against the State. We are, I hope, all too busy to need any answer to such childish, uncandid reasoning as this.”

And then the Letter goes on to give, with the fullest apparatus of details, dates, and authorities, the miserable tale of religious persecution practised, during three centuries, at home and abroad, by Anglicans on Puritans, by Protestants on Romanists, by orthodox Protestants on heterodox Protestants; and then, to clinch his argument and drive it home, he gives the substance of the Penal Code under which Irish Catholics suffered so cruelly and so long.

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“With such facts as these, the cry of persecution will not do; it is unwise to make it, because it can be so very easily, and so very justly retorted. The business is to forget and forgive, to kiss and be friends, and to say nothing of what has passed; which is to the credit of neither party. There have been atrocious cruelties, and abominable acts of injustice, on both sides. It is not worth while to contend who shed the most blood, or whether death by fire is worse than hanging or starving in prison. As far as England itself is concerned, the balance may be better preserved. Cruelties exercised upon the Irish go for nothing in English reasoning; but if it were not uncandid and vexatious to consider Irish persecutions[90] as part of the case, I firmly believe there have been two Catholics put to death for religious causes in Great Britain for one Protestant who has suffered: not that this proves much, because the Catholics have enjoyed the sovereign power for so few years between this period and the Reformation; and certainly it must be allowed that they were not inactive, during that period, in the great work of pious combustion.“It is however some extenuation of the Catholic excesses, that their religion was the religion of the whole of Europe when the innovation began. They were the ancient lords and masters of faith, before men introduced the practice of thinking for themselves in these matters. The Protestants have less excuse, who claimed the right of innovation, and then turned round upon other Protestants who acted upon the same principle, or upon Catholics who remained as they were, and visited them with all the cruelties from which they had themselves so recently escaped.“Both sides, as they acquired power, abused it; and both learnt, from their sufferings, the great secret of toleration and forbearance. If you wish to do good in the times in which you live, contribute your efforts to perfect this grand work. I have not the most distant intention to interfere in local politics; but I advise you never to give a vote to any man whose only title for asking it is that he means to continue the punishments, privations, and incapacities of any human beings, merely because they worship God in the way they think best: the man who asks for your vote upon such a plea, is, *probably*, a very weak man, who believes in his own bad reasoning, or a very artful man, who is laughing at you for your credulity: at all events, he is a man who knowingly or unknowingly exposes his country to the greatest dangers, and hands down to posterity all the foolish opinions and all the bad passions which prevail in those times in which he happens to live. Such a man is so far from being that friend to the Church, which he pretends to be, that he declares its safety cannot be reconciled with the franchises of the people; for what worse can be said of the Church of England than this, that wherever it is judged necessary to give it a legal establishment, it becomes necessary to deprive the body of the people, if they adhere to their old opinions, of their liberties, and of all their free customs, and to reduce them to a state of civil servitude?

“SYDNEY SMITH.”

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After the discharge of this tremendous missile against the tottering fortress of bigotry, the energetic engineer sought a brief interlude of rest and recreation. His money-matters had of late years improved. An aunt had died and left him a legacy, and the Rectory of Londesborough was a profitable preferment. The income thus augmented enabled him to realize a long-cherished dream and pay his first visit to Paris, in the spring of 1826. There he met some old friends, made several new acquaintances, ate some excellent but expensive dinners, mastered the Louvre in a quarter of an hour, and saw Talma in tragedy and Mademoiselle Mars in "genteel comedy." At the Opera he noticed that "the house was full of English, who talk loud, and seem to care little for other people. This is their characteristic, and a very brutal and barbarous distinction it is." He keenly admired the luxury and beauty and prettiness of Paris, and especially the profusion of glass in French drawing-rooms. "I remember entering a room with glass all round it, and saw myself reflected on every side. I took it for a meeting of the clergy, and was delighted of course." He returned to England in May; on the 2nd of June Parliament was dissolved. "We have been," he wrote, "in the horror of Elections—each party acting and thinking as if the salvation of several planets depended upon the adoption of Mr. Johnson and the rejection of Mr. Jackson." In July, Thomas Babington Macaulay, a young and unsuccessful barrister, found himself on circuit at York. He was told that Mr. Smith had come to see him, and, when the visitor was admitted, he recognized—

"the Smith of Smiths, Sydney Smith, *alias* Peter Plymley. I had forgotten his very existence till I discerned the queer contrast between his black coat and his snow-white head, and the equally curious contrast between the clerical amplitude of his person, and the most unclerical wit, whim, and petulance of his eye."

Macaulay spent the following Sunday at Foston Rectory, and thus records his impressions:—

"I understand that S.S. is a very respectable apothecary, and most liberal of his skill, his medicine, his soup, and his wine, among the sick. He preached a very queer sermon —the former half too familiar, and the latter half too florid, but not without some ingenuity of thought and expression...."His misfortune is to have chosen a profession at once above him and below him. Zeal would have made him a prodigy; formality and bigotry would have made him a bishop; but he could neither rise to the duties of his order, nor stoop to its degradation."

In December Sydney wrote to a newly-elected Member of Parliament:—

"I see you have broken ice in the House of Commons. I shall be curious to hear your account of your feelings, of what colour the human creatures looked who surrounded you, and how the candles and Speaker appeared.... For God's sake, open upon the Chancery. On this subject there can be no excess of vituperation and severity.

Advocate also free trade in ale and ale-houses. Respect the Church, and believe that the insignificant member of it who now addresses you is most truly yours,

"SYDNEY SMITH."

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At the same time he wrote as follows to a young friend—Lord John Russell—who had lost his seat and published a book:—

"DEAR JOHN,—I have read your book on the *State of Europe since the Peace of Utrecht* with much pleasure—sensible, liberal, spirited, philosophical, well-written. Go on writing History. Write a History of Louis XIV., and put the world right about that old Beast.

"I am sorry you are not in parliament. You ought to be everywhere where honest and bold men can do good. Health and respect. Ever yours,

"SYDNEY SMITH."

The year 1827 opened dramatically. On the 18th February Lord Liverpool, who had been Prime Minister since the assassination of Spencer Perceval in 1812, was suddenly stricken by fatal illness. On the 10th of April King George IV. found himself, much against his will, constrained to entrust the formation of a Government to George Canning. Canning was avowedly favourable to the Roman Catholic claims, and on that account some of the most important of his former colleagues declined to serve under him. The Ministry was reconstructed with an infusion of Whigs; and the brilliant but unscrupulous Copley became Chancellor with the title of Lord Lyndhurst.[91]

A Ministry, containing Whigs as well as Tories and committed to the cause of Roman Catholic emancipation, seemed likely to open the way of preferment to Sydney Smith. Knowing that his income would soon be materially reduced by the cessation of his tenure of Londesborough, he wrote to some of his friends among the new Ministers and boldly stated his claims. One of these Ministers seems to have made a rather chilly response; and the applicant did not spare him.—

"I am much obliged by your polite letter. You appeal to my good-nature to prevent me from considering your letter as a decent method of putting me off. Your appeal, I assure you, is not made in vain. I do not think you mean to put me off; because I am the most prominent, and was for a long time the only, clerical advocate of that question, by the proper arrangement of which you believe the happiness and safety of the country would be materially improved. I do not believe you mean to put me off; because, in giving me some promotion, you will teach the clergy, from whose timidity you have everything to apprehend, and whose influence upon the people you cannot doubt, that they may, under your Government, obey the dictates of their consciences without sacrificing the emoluments of their profession. I do not think you mean to put me off; because, in the conscientious administration of that patronage with which you are entrusted, I think it will occur to you that something is due to a person who, instead of basely chiming in with the bad passions of the multitude, has dedicated some talent and some activity to soften religious hatreds, and to make men less violent and less foolish than he found them."

In July he wrote to a friend:—

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“The worst political news is that Canning is not well, and that the Duke of Wellington has dined with the King. Canning dead, Peel is the only man remaining alive in the House of Commons, I mean, the only man in his senses.”

On the 8th of August Canning died, and was succeeded by Lord Goderich, who in turn made way for the Duke of Wellington in January 1828, Lord Lyndhurst again becoming Chancellor.

On the 1st of January 1828, Sydney Smith’s Second daughter, Emily, was married to Nathaniel Hibbert, afterwards of Munden House, near Watford, Her father wrote:—

> “We were married on New Year’s Day, and are *gone*! I feel as if I had lost a limb, and were walking about with one leg—and nobody pities this description of invalids.”

Three weeks later, Lord Chancellor Lyndhurst, yielding to private friendship what the Whigs had refused to political loyalty, appointed the Rector of Foston to a Prebendal Stall in Bristol Cathedral. This brought him at length official station in the Church, and a permanent instead of a terminable income. He wrote from Bristol on the 17th of February:—

“An extremely comfortable Prebendal house; seven-stall stables and room for four carriages, so that I can hold all your *cortege* when you come; looks to the south, and is perfectly snug and parsonic; masts of West-Indiamen seen from the windows... I have lived in perfect solitude ever since I have been here, but am perfectly happy. The novelty of this place amuses me.”

From the time of his appointment to Bristol, Sydney Smith severed his connexion with the *Edinburgh Review*, holding that anonymous journalism was inconsistent with the position of an ecclesiastical dignitary. He had contributed to the *Review* for a quarter of a century; and, by a happy accident, his last utterance, in the organ through which he had so long and so strenuously fought for freedom, was yet one more plea for Roman Catholic emancipation. Yet once again he urged, with all his force, the baseness of deserting the good cause, and the danger and cruelty of delaying justice.—

“There is little new to be said; but we must not be silent, or, in these days of baseness and tergiversation, we shall be supposed to have deserted our friend the Pope, and they will say of us, *Prostant venales apud Lambeth et Whitehall*. God forbid it should ever be said of us with justice. It is pleasant to loll and roll and to accumulate—to be a purple-and-fine-linen man, and to be called by some of those nicknames which frail and ephemeral beings are so fond of accumulating upon each other;—but the best thing of all is to live like honest men, and to add something to the cause of liberality, justice, and truth.

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“We should like to argue this matter with a regular Tory Lord, whose members vote steadily against the Catholic question. ’I wonder that mere fear does not make you give up the Catholic question! Do you mean to put this fine place in danger—the venison—-the pictures—the pheasants—the cellars—the hot-house and the grapery? Should you like to see six or seven thousand French or Americans landed in Ireland, and aided by a universal insurrection of the Catholics? Is it worth your while to run the risk of their success? What evil from the possible encroachment of Catholics, by civil exertions, can equal the danger of such a position as this? How can a man of your carriages, and horses, and hounds, think of putting your high fortune in such a predicament, and crying out, like a schoolboy or a chaplain, ’Oh, we shall beat them! we shall put the rascals down!’ No Popery, I admit to your Lordship, is a very convenient cry at an election, and has answered your end; but do not push the matter too far. To bring on a civil war for No Popery, is a very foolish proceeding in a man who has two courses and a remove! As you value your side-board of plate, your broad riband, your pier-glasses—if obsequious domestics and large rooms are dear to you—if you love ease and flattery, titles and coats of arms—if the labour of the French cook, the dedication of the expecting poet, can move you—if you hope for a long life of side-dishes—if you are not insensible to the periodical arrival of the turtle-fleets—emancipate the Catholics! Do it for your ease, do it for your indolence, do it for your safety—emancipate and eat, emancipate and drink—emancipate, and preserve the rent-roll and the family estate!”

In conclusion he gives a word of warning first to his Roman Catholic clients, imploring them to be patient as well as firm; and then to the various sections of the “No Popery” party in England—

“*To the Base*.—Sweet children of turpitude, beware! the old antipopery people are fast perishing away. Take heed that you are not surprised by an emancipating king, or an emancipating administration. Leave a *locus poenitentiae!*—prepare a place for retreat—get ready your equivocations and denials. The dreadful day may yet come, when liberality may lead to place and power. We understand these matters here. It is safest to be moderately base—to be flexible in shame, and to be always ready for what is generous, good, and just, when any thing is to be gained by virtue,”

The suggested prophecy had not long to wait for its fulfilment. In the summer of 1828, William Vesey Fitzgerald, a great landowner in County Clare, and one of the Members for that county, accepted office in the Government as President of the Board of Trade, thereby vacating his seat. Lord Beaconsfield shall tell the remainder of the story. “An Irish lawyer, a professional agitator, himself a Roman Catholic and therefore ineligible, announced himself as a candidate in opposition to the new minister, and on the day of election thirty thousand peasants, setting at defiance all the landowners of the county, returned O’Connell at the head of the poll, and placed among not the least memorable of historical events—the Clare Election."[92]

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This election decided the emancipation of the Roman Catholics, and the cause, for which Sydney Smith had striven so heroically, was won at last. On the 28th of August 1828 he wrote to a Roman Catholic friend:—

“Brougham thinks the Catholic question as good as carried; but I never think myself as good as carried, till my horse brings me to my stable-door.... What am I to do with my time, or you with yours, after the Catholic question is carried?”

To the same friend he wrote:—

“You will be amused by hearing that I am to preach the 5th of November[93] sermon at Bristol, and to dine at the 5th of November dinner with the Mayor and Corporation of Bristol. All sorts of bad theology are preached at the Cathedral on that day, and all sorts of bad toasts drunk at the Mansion House. I will do neither the one nor the other, nor bow the knee in the house of Rimmon.”

On the 5th of November 1828, he wrote to Lord Holland:—

“To-day I have preached an honest sermon before the Mayor and Corporation in the Cathedral—the most Protestant Corporation in England! They stared at me with all their eyes. Several of them could not keep the turtle on their stomachs.”

The sermon[94] well deserved the epithet. It glanced, as the occasion demanded, at the civil grievances of the Roman Catholics, and then it went on to lay down some simple but sufficient rules by which men should regulate their judgment on religious forms and bodies with which they do not sympathize.—

“Our holy religion consists of some doctrines which influence practice, and of others which are purely speculative. If religious errors be of the former description, they may, perhaps, be fair objects of human interference; but, if the opinion be merely theological and speculative, there the right of human interference seems to end, because the necessity for such interference does not exist. Any error of this nature is between the Creator and the creature,—between the Redeemer and the redeemed. If such opinions are not the best opinions which can be found, God Almighty will punish the error, if mere error seemeth to the Almighty a fit object of punishment. Why may not a man wait if God waits? Where are we called upon in Scripture to pursue men for errors purely speculative?—to assist Heaven in punishing those offences which belong only to Heaven?—in fighting unasked for what we deem to be the battles of God,—of that patient and merciful God, who pities the frailties we do not pity—who forgives the errors we do not forgive,—who sends rain upon the just and the unjust, and maketh His sun to shine upon the evil and the good.

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“I shall conclude my sermon (extended, I am afraid, already to an unreasonable length), by reciting to you a very short and beautiful apologue, taken from the Rabbinical writers. It is, I believe, quoted by Bishop Taylor in his *Holy Living and Dying*. I have not now access to that book, but I quote it to you from memory, and should be made truly happy if you would quote it to others from memory also.“’As Abraham was sitting in the door of his tent, there came unto him a wayfaring man; and Abraham gave him water for his feet, and set bread before him. And Abraham said unto him, Let us now worship the Lord our God before we eat of this bread. And the wayfaring man said unto Abraham, I will not worship the Lord thy God, for thy God is not my God; but I will worship my God, even the God of my fathers. But Abraham was exceeding wroth; and he rose up to put the wayfaring man forth from the door of his tent. And the voice of the Lord was heard in the tent—Abraham, Abraham! have I borne with this man for three score and ten years, and can’st thou not bear with him for one hour?’"[95]

This sermon was published by request, and the preacher apologized in the preface for “sending to the press such plain rudiments of common charity and common sense.”

The beginning of 1829 was darkened by what Sydney Smith called “the first great misfortune of his life.” On the 14th of April, his eldest son Douglas died, after a long illness, in his twenty-fifth year. His health had always been delicate, but, in spite of repeated illnesses, he had become Captain of the King’s Scholars at Westminster,[96] and a Student of Christ Church. His epitaph says—“His life was blameless. His death was the first sorrow he ever occasioned his parents, but it was deep and lasting.” On the 29th of April his father wrote—“Time and the necessary exertions of life will restore me;” but four months later the note is changed.—

“I never suspected how children weave themselves about the heart. My son had that quality which is longest remembered by those who remain behind—a deep and earnest affection and respect for his parents. God save you from similar distress!”

And again:—

“I did not know I had cared so much for anybody; but the habit of providing for human beings, and watching over them for so many years, generates a fund of affection, of the magnitude of which I was not aware”

Sixteen years later, when he lay dying and half-conscious, the cry “Douglas, Douglas!” was constantly on his lips.

The prebendal stall at Bristol carried with it the incumbency of Halberton, near Tiverton; and Sydney Smith exchanged the living of Foston for that of Combe Florey in Somerset, which could be held conjointly with Halberton. On the 14th of July 1829 he wrote from the “Sacred Valley of Flowers,” as he loved to call it:—

“I am extremely pleased with Combe Florey, and pronounce it to be a very pretty place in a very beautiful country. The house I shall make decently convenient.”

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“I need not say how my climate is improved. The neighbourhood much the same as all other neighbourhoods. Red wine and white, soup and fish, commonplace dulness and prejudice, bad wit and good-nature. I am, after my manner, making my place perfect, and have twenty-eight people constantly at work.”“I am going on fighting with bricklayers and carpenters, and shall ultimately make a very pretty place and a very good house.” “I continue to be delighted with the country. My parsonage will be perfection. The harvest is got in without any rain. The Cider is such an enormous crop, that it is sold at ten shillings a hogshead; so that a human creature may lose his reason for a penny.”“Luttrell came over for a day, from whence I know not, but I thought not from good pastures; at least, he had not his usual soup-and-pattie look. There was a forced smile upon his countenance, which seemed to indicate plain roast and boiled; and a sort of apple-pudding depression, as if he had been staying with a clergyman.... He was very agreeable, but spoke too lightly, I thought, of veal soup, I took him aside, and reasoned the matter with him, but in vain; to speak the truth, Luttrell is not steady in his judgments on dishes. Individual failures with him soon degenerate into generic objections, till, by some fortunate accident, he eats himself into better opinions. A person of more calm reflection thinks not only of what he is consuming at that moment, but of the soups of the same kind he has met with in a long course of dining, and which have gradually and justly elevated the species. I am perhaps making too much of this; but the failures of a man of sense are always painful”

One of the chief features in the restored Rectory of Combe Florey was a library, twenty-eight feet long and eight high, ending in a bay-window supported by pillars, and looking into a brilliant garden. This room had been made by “throwing a pantry, a passage, and a shoe-hole together.” Three sides of it were covered with books. “No furniture so charming as books,” said Sydney, “even if you never open them, or read a single word.” He passionately loved light and colour, sunshine and flowers; and all his books were bound in the most vivid blues and reds. “What makes a fire so pleasant is that it is a live thing in a dead room,” A visitor thus describes him at his literary work:—

“At a large table in the bay-window, with his desk before him—on one end of this table a case, something like a small deal music-stand, filled with manuscript books—on the other a large deal tray, filled with a leaden ink-stand, containing ink enough for a county; a magnifying glass; a carpenter’s rule; several large steel pens, which it was high treason to touch; a glass bowl full of shot and water, to clean these precious pens; and some red tape, which he called ’one of the grammars of life’; a measuring line,

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and various other articles, more useful than ornamental. At this writing establishment, unique of its kind, he could turn his mind with equal facility, in company or alone, to any subject, whether of business, study, politics, instruction, or amusement, and move the minds of his hearers to laughter or tears at his pleasure."

The daily life at Combe Florey was eminently patriarchal. He lived surrounded by children, grandchildren, and friends; chatting with the poor, comforting the sick, and petting the babies of the village. Old and young alike he doctored with extraordinary vehemence and persistency, "As I don't shoot or hunt, it is my only rural amusement." He wrote to a friend—"The influenza to my great joy has appeared here, and I am in high medical practice." "This is the house to be ill in," he used to say, "I take it as a delicate compliment when my guests have a slight illness here. Come and see my apothecary's shop." The "shop" was a room filled on one side with drugs and on the other with groceries. "Life is a difficult thing in the country, I assure you, and it requires a good deal of forethought to steer the ship, when you live twelve miles from a lemon."

The church of Combe Florey was described by Francis Jeffrey as "a horrid old barn." There the Rector performed two services a Sunday, celebrated the Holy Communion once a month, and preached his practical sermons, transcribed from his own execrable manuscript by a sedulous clerk. "I like," he said, "to look down upon my congregation —to fire into them. The common people say I am a *bould preacher*, for I like to have my arms free, and to thump the pulpit." A lady dressed in crimson velvet he welcomed with the words, "Exactly the colour of my preaching cushion! I really can hardly keep my hands off you."

An anonymous correspondent kindly furnishes me with this description of the Valley of Flowers as it was in more recent years:—

"I visited Combe Florey, with camera and vasculum, in 1893. It is one of the loveliest spots in that district of lovely villages, lying in the Vale of Taunton on the southern slope of the Quantocks. The parsonage is entirely unchanged: there is Sydney's study, a low-ceilinged room supported partly by pillars, level with the garden and opening into it. There is the old-fashioned fireplace by which he and his wife sate opposite each other in his last illness. 'Mrs. Sydney has eight distinct illnesses, and I have nine. We take something every hour, and pass the mixture from one to the other.' Outside still grow his Conifers, a large Atlantic Cedar and a Deodara; unchanged too are the palings over which Jack and Jill[97] peered with antlered heads. Old villagers still talk of his medical dispensary, and of the care with which he drove round to collect and carry into Taunton their monthly deposits for the Savings Bank."

Meanwhile, great events were transacting themselves in the political world, and they had an important bearing on the tranquil life of Combe Florey. On the 4th of May 1830, Sydney Smith wrote from London to his wife in the country:—

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“The King is going downhill as before, but seems to be a long time in the descent. All kinds of intrigues are going on about change of Ministry, and all kinds of hopes and fears afloat. Nothing is more improbable than that I should be made a Bishop, and, if I ever had the opportunity, I am now, when far removed from it, decidedly of opinion that it would be the greatest act of folly and absurdity to accept it—to live with foolish people, to do foolish and formal things all day, to hold my tongue, or to twist it into conversation unnatural to me.”

King George IV. died on the 26th of June. The accession of William IV., who was supposed to have some tendencies towards Whiggism, greatly stimulated the demand for Parliamentary Reform; and the revolution in France, which dethroned Charles X., gave a strong impetus to the democratic forces in England. Parliament was dissolved on the 24th of July. On the 14th of August Charles Greville wrote, “The elections are still going against the Government, and the signs of the times are all for reform and retrenchment, and against slavery.” In writing to congratulate a young Roman Catholic who had been elected for Carlisle, Sydney Smith said—

“I rejoice in the temple which has been reared to Toleration; and I am proud that I worked as a bricklayer’s labourer at it—without pay, and with the enmity and abuse of those who were unfavourable to its construction."[98]

The new Parliament met on the 26th of October. On the 2nd of November, in the debate on the Address, the Duke of Wellington made a vehement declaration against Reform. This was the signal for an immense outcry. There were mobs and riots everywhere. The King’s projected visit to the City on Lord Mayor’s Day was abandoned. The Tory Government were beaten on a motion relating to the new Civil List. “Never was any Administration so completely and so suddenly destroyed; and, I believe, entirely by the Duke’s declaration.” Lord Grey[99] became Prime Minister, as the head of a Whig administration pledged to Reform. Soon afterwards Sydney Smith wrote to a friend—

> “I think Lord Grey will give me some preferment if he stays in long enough; but the upper parsons live vindictively, and evince their aversion to a Whig Ministry by an improved health.”

The Reform Bill was brought in on the 1st of March 1831. Sydney thought it “a magnificent measure, as wise as it is bold.” Meetings of Reformers were held all over the country to support it. Such a meeting was held at Taunton on the 9th of March, and the Rector of Combe Florey attended and spoke.

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“This,” he said, “is the greatest measure which has ever been before Parliament in my time, and the most pregnant with good or evil to the country; and, though I seldom meddle with political meetings, I could not reconcile it to my conscience to be absent from this. Every year for this half century the question of Reform has been pressing upon us, till it has swelled up at last into this great and awful combination; so that almost every City and every Borough in England are at this moment assembled for the same purpose and are doing the same thing we are doing.”

A great part of the controversy turned on the disfranchisement of the “Pocket Boroughs,” and this was a subject which immediately suggested a happy apologue—

“These very same politicians are now looking in an agony of terror at the disfranchisement of Corporations containing twenty or thirty persons, sold to their representatives, who are themselves perhaps sold to the Government: and to put an end to these enormous abuses is called *Corporation robbery*, and there are some persons wild enough to talk of compensation. This principle of compensation you will consider perhaps, in the following instance, to have been carried as far as sound discretion permits. When I was a young man, the place in England I remember as most notorious for highwaymen and their exploits was Finchley Common, near the metropolis; but Finchley Common, in the progress of improvement, came to be enclosed, and the highwaymen lost by these means the opportunity of exercising their gallant vocation. I remember a friend of mine proposed to draw up for them a petition to the House of Commons for compensation, which ran in this manner—’We, your loyal highwaymen of Finchley Common and its neighbourhood having, at great expense, laid in a stock of blunderbusses, pistols, and other instruments for plundering the public, and finding ourselves impeded in the exercise of our calling by the said enclosure of the said Common of Finchley, humbly petition your Honourable House will be pleased to assign to us such compensation as your Honourable House in its wisdom and justice may think fit.’—Gentlemen, I must leave the application to you....“The greater part of human improvements, I am sorry to say, are made after war, tumult, bloodshed, and civil commotion: mankind seem to object to every species of gratuitous happiness, and to consider every advantage as too cheap, which is not purchased by some calamity. I shall esteem it as a singular act of God’s providence, if this great nation, guided by these warnings of history, not waiting till tumult for Reform, nor trusting Reform to the rude hands of the lowest of the people, shall amend their decayed institutions at a period when they are ruled by a popular monarch, guided by an upright minister, and blessed with profound peace.”

On the 22nd of March the Second Reading was carried

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by a majority of one. But directly afterwards the Government was defeated on an amendment in Committee, and promptly appealed to the country. Parliament was dissolved on the 23rd of April. “Bold King! bold Ministers!” wrote Sydney on the 25th. Popular feeling was now really roused. “The Bill, the whole Bill, and nothing but the Bill” was the war-cry from Caithness to Cornwall. Lord John Russell, who had brought the Bill into Parliament, was the hero of the hour. He contested Devonshire at the General Election, and Sydney, who had a vote for the county, met him at Exeter.—
“The people along the road were very much disappointed by his smallness. I told them he was much larger before the Bill was thrown out, but was reduced by excessive anxiety about the people. This brought tears into their eyes!”

At this juncture Sydney composed (and published in the name of an imaginary Mr. Dyson), a “Speech to the Freeholders on Reform”—

“Stick to the Bill—it is your Magna Charta, and your Runnymede. King John made a present to the Barons. King William has made a similar present to you. Never mind common qualities, good in common times. If a man does not vote for the Bill, he is unclean—the plague-spot is upon him—push him into the lazaretto of the last century, with Wetherell[100] and Sadler[101]—purify the air before you approach him—bathe your hands in Chloride of Lime, if you have been contaminated by his touch....“The thing I cannot, and will not bear, is this;—what right has *this* Lord, or *that* Marquis, to buy ten seats in Parliament, in the shape of Boroughs, and then to make laws to govern me? And how are these masses of power re-distributed? The eldest son of my Lord is just come from Eton—he knows a good deal about AEneas and Dido, Apollo and Daphne—-and that is all; and to this boy his father gives a six-hundredth part of the power of making laws, as he would give him a horse or a double-barrelled gun. Then Vellum, the steward, is put in—an admirable man;—he has raised the estates—watched the progress of the family Road-and-Canal Bills—and Vellum shall help to rule over the people of England. A neighbouring country gentleman, Mr. Plumpkin, hunts with my Lord—opens him a gate or two, while the hounds are running—dines with my Lord—-agrees with my Lord—wishes he could rival the South-Down sheep of my Lord—and upon Plumpkin is conferred a portion of the government. Then there is a distant relation of the same name, in the County Militia, with white teeth, who calls up the carriage at the Opera, and is always wishing O’Connell was hanged, drawn, and quartered—then a barrister, who has written an article in the *Quarterly*, and is very likely to speak, and refute M’Culloch; and these five people, in whose nomination I have no more agency than I have in the nomination of the toll-keepers of the Bosphorus, are to make laws for me and my family—to

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put their hands in my purse, and to sway the future destinies of this country; and when the neighbours step in, and beg permission to say a few words before these persons are chosen, there is an universal cry of rain, confusion, and destruction—'We have become a great people under Vellum and Plumpkin—under Vellum and Plumpkin our ships have covered the ocean—under Vellum and Plumpkin our armies have secured the strength of the Hills—to turn out Vellum and Plumpkin is not Reform, but Revolution.'"

It was said by the opponents of the Bill that the existing system worked well.—

"Work well! How does it work well, when every human being in-doors and out (with the exception of the Duke of Wellington) says it must be made to work better, or it will soon cease to work at all? It is little short of absolute nonsense to call a government good, which the great mass of Englishmen would, before twenty years were elapsed, if Reform were denied, rise up and destroy. Of what use have all the cruel laws been of Perceval, Eldon, and Castlereagh, to extinguish Reform? Lord John Russell, and his abettors, would have been committed to gaol twenty years ago for half only of his present Reform; and now relays of the people would drag them from London to Edinburgh; at which latter city we are told, by Mr. Dundas, that there is no eagerness for Reform. Five minutes before Moses struck the rock, this gentleman would have said that there was no eagerness for water."There are two methods of making alterations: the one is to despise the applicants, to begin with refusing every concession, then to relax by making concessions which are always too late; by offering in 1831 what is then too late, but would have been cheerfully accepted in 1830—gradually to O'Connellize the country, till at last, after this process has gone on for some time, the alarm becomes too great, and every thing is conceded in hurry and confusion. In the mean time fresh conspiracies have been hatched by the long delay, and no gratitude is expressed for what has been extorted by fear. In this way peace was concluded with America, and Emancipation granted to the Catholics; and in this way the War of Complexions will be finished in the West Indies. The other method us, to see at a distance that the thing must be done, and to do it effectually, *and at once*; to take it out of the hands of the common people, and to carry the measure in a manly liberal manner, so as to satisfy the great majority. The merit of this belongs to the administration of Lord Grey. He is the only Minister I know of, who has begun a great measure in good time, conceded at the beginning of twenty years what would have been extorted at the end of it, and prevented that folly, violence, and ignorance, which emanate from a long denial and extorted concession of justice to great masses of human beings. I believe the question of Reform, or any dangerous agitation of it, is set at rest for thirty or forty years; and this is an eternity in politics.

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“I am old and tired,—thank me for ending; but one word more before I sit down. I am old, but I thank God I have lived to see more than my observations on human nature taught me I had any right to expect. I have lived to see an honest King, in whose word his ministers could trust, I have lived to see a King with a good heart, who, surrounded by nobles, thinks of common men; who loves the great mass of English people, and wishes to be loved by them; and who, in spite of clamour, interest, prejudice, and fear, has the manliness to carry these wise changes into immediate execution. Gentlemen, farewell! Shout for the King!"[102]

Having done his best for the good cause in the country, Sydney Smith returned to London to watch the results. On the 6th of June Macaulay met him at dinner, and writes thus next day:—

> “Sydney Smith leaves London on the 20th—the day before Parliament meets for business, I advised him to stay and see something of his friends, who would be coming up to London. ‘My flock!’ said this good shepherd, ’my dear sir, remember my flock!
>
> “The hungry sheep look up and are not fed,"’
>
> “...He begged me to come and see him at Combe Florey. ’There I am, sir, in a delightful parsonage, about which I care a great deal, and a delightful country, about which I do not care a straw.’”

When the new House of Commons assembled, it was found to contain a great majority of Reformers. A fresh Bill was introduced, and passed the Second Reading, by a majority of 136, on the 8th of July. While it was ploughing its way through Committee, the Coronation of William IV. took place on the 8th of September. The solemnity was made an occasion for public rejoicings in the country, and loyalty was judiciously reinforced by the suggestion that the King was, in this great controversy, on the same side as his people. At a meeting at Taunton, Sydney Smith spoke as follows:—

“I am particularly happy to assist on this occasion, because I think that the accession of the present King is a marked and important era in English history. Another coronation has taken place since I have been in the world, but I never assisted at its celebration. I saw in it a change of masters, not a change of system. I did not understand the joy which it occasioned. I did not feel it, and I did not counterfeit what I did not feel.“I think very differently of the accession of his present Majesty. I believe I see in that accession a great probability of serious improvement, and a great increase of public happiness. The evils which have been long complained of by bold and intelligent men are now universally admitted. The public feeling, which has been so often appealed to, is now intensely excited. The remedies which have so often been called for are now, at last, vigorously, wisely, and faithfully applied, I

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admire, gentlemen, in the present King, his love of peace—I admire in him his disposition to economy, and I admire in him, above all, his faithful and honourable conduct to those who happen to be his ministers. He was, I believe, quite as faithful to the Duke of Wellington as to Lord Grey, and would, I have no doubt, be quite as faithful to the political enemies of Lord Grey (if he thought fit to employ them) as he is to Lord Grey himself. There is in this reign no secret influence, no double ministry—on whomsoever he confers the office, to him he gives that confidence without which the office cannot be holden with honour, nor executed with effect. He is not only a peaceful King, and an economical King, but he is an honest King. So far, I believe, every individual of this company will go with me.

* * * * *

“There is an argument I have often heard, and that is this—Are we to be afraid?—is this measure to be carried by intimidation?—is the House of Lords to be overawed? But this style of argument proceeds from confounding together two sets of feelings which are entirely distinct—personal fear and political fear. If I am afraid of voting against this bill, because a mob may gather about the House of Lords—because stones may be flung at my head—because my house may be attacked by a mob, I am a poltroon, and unfit to meddle with public affairs. But I may rationally be afraid of producing great public agitation; I may be honourably afraid of flinging people into secret clubs and conspiracies—I may be wisely afraid of making the aristocracy hateful to the great body of the people. This surely has no more to do with fear than a loose identity of name; it is in fact prudence of the highest order; the deliberate reflection of a wise man, who does not like what he is going to do, but likes still less the consequences of not doing it, and who of two evils chooses the least.“There are some men much afraid of what is to happen; my lively hope of good is, I confess, mingled with very little apprehension; but of one thing I must be candid enough to say that I am much afraid, and that is of the opinion now increasing, that the people are become indifferent to reform; and of that opinion I am afraid, because I believe in an evil hour it may lead some misguided members of the Upper House of Parliament to vote against the bill. As for the opinion itself, I hold it in the utmost contempt. The people are waiting in virtuous patience for the completion of the bill, because they know it is in the hands of men who do not mean to deceive them. I do not believe they have given up one atom of reform—I do not believe that a great people were ever before so firmly bent upon any one measure. I put it to any man of common sense, whether he believes it possible, after the King and Parliament have acted as they have done, that the people will ever be content with much less than the present bill

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contains. If a contrary principle be acted upon, and the bill attempted to be got rid of altogether, I confess I tremble for the consequences, which I believe will be of the worst and most painful description; and this I say deliberately, after the most diligent and extensive enquiry. Upon that diligent enquiry I repeat again my firm conviction, that the desire of reform has increased, not diminished; that the present repose is not indifference, but the calmness of victory, and the tranquillity of success. When I see all the wishes and appetites of created beings changed,—when I see an eagle, that, after long confinement, has escaped into the air, come back to his cage and his chain,—-when I see the emancipated negro asking again for the hoe which has broken down his strength, and the lash which has tortured his body—I will then, and not till then, believe that the English people will return to their ancient degradation—that they will hold out their repentant hands for those manacles which at this moment lie broken into links at their feet."

This fine speech was delivered at a crucial moment of the speaker's personal fortunes. Whether he would or would not have made a good bishop, and whether the Whigs were or wore not justly chargeable with cowardice[103] in not having raised him to the Episcopal Bench, are disputable points. It seems certain, from his own declarations, that in later life he would have declined the honour; but there was a time when it might have been offered, and would probably have been accepted. When he feared that England might be dragged into war with France on behalf of Spain, he composed a skit purporting to be a Protest entered on the Journals of the Lords by the Bishop of Worcester, and signed it "Sydney Vigorn."[104] The Bishop of Worcester[105] died on the 5th of September 1831, and Lord Grey gave the vacant mitre to a Tory.[106] Sydney's emotions are not recorded; but on the 10th of September Lord Grey offered him a Residentiary Canonry of St. Paul's—"a snug thing, let me tell you, being worth full L2000 a year." It was not an overwhelming reward for such long and such brilliant service to the causes which Lord Grey represented, but it was a recognition—and it was enough. He was installed on the 27th of September, and on the day of his installation he wrote to a friend—"It puts me at my ease for life. I asked for nothing—never did anything shabby to procure preferment. These are pleasing recollections."

Soon afterwards, he was presented on his appointment, and met with a misadventure at the Palace.—

"I went to Court, and, horrible to relate, with strings to my shoes instead of buckles—not from Jacobinism, but ignorance. I saw two or three Tory lords looking at me with dismay, was informed by the Clerk of the Closet of my sin, and, gathering my sacerdotal petticoats about me (like a lady conscious of thick ankles) I escaped further observation."

[83] Francis Wrangham (1769-1842), Archdeacon of Cleveland.

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[84] William Vernon-Harcourt {1789-1871}, father of Sir William Vernon-Harcourt, M.P.

[85] Patrick Duigenan (1735-1816), LL.D., M.P. for the City of Armagh, and Protestant agitator.

[86] The *Yorkshire Gazette* for April 12, 1823, contains a long letter from “A North Riding Clergyman,” protesting against the language used by Sydney Smith. This clergyman states that the report of the meeting at Thirsk, given by the *York Herald* of March 29, was “unquestionably by the Minority themselves.” It “professes to be a sketch of what was said and done at the meeting of the North Riding Clergy. Then the public is favoured with three considerable speeches, filling three close columns of a newspaper, on the one side; and not with three lines, nay, not with one, of anything said on the other side.... Surely the whole of the twenty-two clergyman who differed from the ten were not so astounded by the eloquence and display of their opponents as to remain absolutely speechless.” It is further said that “on the present occasion, and after assuring his learned brethren that he was not going to inflict upon them a speech, and some other remarks of similar accuracy, Mr. Smith immediately harangues them in a vehement and long speech; during which, with firm resolve, it may seem, not to possess either ‘overheated mind’ or body, he nearly exhausted the ‘Three Tuns’ of water,” For this quotation, and for the date of the meeting, which had been erroneously stated by previous writers, I am indebted to the courtesy of Mr. J.S.R. Phillips, editor of the *Yorkshire Post*.

[87] (1808-1889): became 8th Earl of Carlisle in 1864 The Rev. Richard Wilton, Canon of York and Rector of Londesborough, wrote in 1895:—“My former venerable friend, the oldest inhabitant, gave me some graphic descriptions of Sydney Smith’s visit to the parish once or twice a year, and the interest which was felt in the village when he drove over from Foston, his other living, to preach an occasional sermon at Londesborough. His reading, and manner in the pulpit, were described to me as having been ‘bold and impressive.’ As soon as the sermon was over, he would hasten out of the church along with his hearers, and chat with the farmers about their turnips, or cattle, or corn-crops, being anxious to utilize his scant opportunities of conversing with his parishioners.... There was until lately living in this parish an old man aged eighty, who was proud of telling how he was invited over to Foston to ‘brew for Sydney,’ as he affectionately called him.”

[88] Mr. Stuart Reid gives to this curious name the more impressive form of Mayelstone.

[89] As Earl Marshal.

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[90] “Thurloe writes to Henry Cromwell to *catch* up some thousand Irish boys, to send to the colonies. Henry writes back he has done so; and desires to know whether his Highness would choose as many girls to be caught up: and he add, ’doubtless it is a business in which God will appear.’ Suppose *bloody Queen Mary* had caught up and transported three or four thousand Protestant boys and girls from the three Ridings of Yorkshire!!!!!! S.S.”

[91] John Singleton Copley (1772-1863).

[92] *Endymion*, vol. I. chapter vi.

[93] The special services for “Gunpowder Treason” and other State Holy Days were discontinued by Royal Warrant in 1859.

[94] From Col. iii. 12, 13—“Put on, as the elect of God, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another.”

[95] This apologue (which, the preacher thought, “would make a charming and useful placard against the bigoted”) occurs in the *Liberty of Prophesying*, and has been traced to Gentius, the Latin translator of Saadi.

[96] “Having become a King’s Scholar, the hardships and cruelties he suffered, as a junior boy, from his fag-master, were such as at one time very nearly forced us to remove him from the school. He was taken home for a short period, to recover from his bruises, and restore his eye. His first act, on becoming Captain himself, was to endeavour to ameliorate the condition of the juniors, and to obtain additional comforts for them from the Head Master.”—*From Mrs, Sydney Smith’s Journal*.

[97] Two donkeys, which were disguised as deer for the astonishment of visitors.

[98] The Roman Catholic Emancipation Bill had become law on the 13th of April 1829.

[99] Charles, 2nd Earl Grey (1764-1846).

[100] Sir Charles Wetherell (1770-1846), Attorney-General, and Recorder of Bristol.

[101] Michael Thomas Sadler (1780-1835), M.P. for Newark.

[102] This is the “Speech respecting the Reform Bill” in Sydney Smith’s Collected Works.

[103] Lord Houghton wrote in 1873—“I heard Lord Melbourne say, ’Sydney Smith has done more for the Whigs than all the clergy put together, and our not making him a bishop was mere cowardice.”

[104] The archaic signature of the Bishops of Worcester. Mrs. Austin transcribes it “Vigour,” and puts the Protest among the letters of 1831. Sir Spencer Walpole points out that it probably belongs to the year 1823, when Lord Ellenborough moved an Address to the Crown in favour of intervention in Spain.

[105] Ffolliot H.-W. Cornewall (1754-1831).

[106] Robert James Carr (1774-1841). It was said that this appointment was due to a promise made by George IV., whom Dr. Carr, formerly Vicar of Brighton, had attended in his last illness.

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CHAPTER VI

ST. PAUL'S—THE PARALLELOGRAM—ARCHDEACON SINGLETON—-COLLECTED WORKS

Meanwhile the Reform Bill had passed the House of Commons and was sent up to the House of Lords. In the summer, Sydney Smith had written to Lord Grey—"You may be sure that any attempt of the Lords to throw out the Bill will be the signal for the most energetic resistance from one end of the kingdom to another." The Lords faced the risk, and threw out the Bill on the 8th of October 1831.

Sydney's prophecy was promptly justified, and the most threatening violence and disorder broke out in the great centres of industrial population. Whigs and Radicals alike rallied, as one man, to the cause of Reform. On the 11th of October a public meeting was held at Taunton to protest against the action of the Lords and express unabated confidence in the Government. It was on this occasion that Sydney Smith made the most famous of his political speeches. He deplored the collision between the two Houses of Parliament, but he was not the least alarmed about the fate of the Bill. The Lords were no match for the forces arrayed against them.—

"As for the possibility of the House of Lords preventing for long a reform of Parliament, I hold it to be the most absurd notion that ever entered into the human imagination. I do not mean to be disrespectful, but the attempt of the Lords to stop the progress of Reform reminds me very forcibly of the great storm at Sidmouth, and of the conduct of the excellent Mrs. Partington on that occasion. In the winter of 1824, there set in a great flood upon that town—the tide rose to an incredible height—the waves rushed in upon the houses, and everything was threatened with destruction. In the midst of this sublime and terrible storm, Dame Partington, who lived upon the beach, was seen at the door of her house with mop and pattens, trundling her mop, squeezing out the sea-water, and vigorously pushing away the Atlantic Ocean. The Atlantic was roused. Mrs. Partington's spirit was up; but I need not tell you that the contest was unequal. The Atlantic Ocean beat Mrs. Partington. She was excellent at a slop, or a puddle, but she should not have meddled with a tempest. Gentlemen, be at your ease—be quiet and steady. You will beat Mrs. Partington."

Fifty years later, an eye-witness thus described the scene:—"The introduction of the Partington storm was startling and unexpected. As he recounted in felicitous terms the adventures of the excellent dame, suiting the action to the word with great dramatic skill, he commenced trundling his imaginary mop and sweeping back the intrusive waves of the Atlantic with an air of resolute determination and an appearance of increasing temper. The scene was realistic in the extreme, and was too much for the gravity of the most serious. The house rose, the people cheered, and tears of superabundant laughter trickled down the cheeks of fair women and veteran reformers."[107]

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This was his last public act in connexion with Parliamentary Reform; but the keenness of his interest remained unabated till the day was won. On the 12th of December 1831, the Reform Bill was brought in a third time. It again passed the House of Commons, and was again threatened with destruction in the Lords. Sydney Smith wrote thus to Lord Grey:—

"I take it for granted you are prepared to make Peers, to force the measure if it fail again, and I would have this intention half-officially communicated in all the great towns before the Bill was brought in. If this is not done—I mean, if Peers are not made—there will be a general convulsion, ending in a complete revolution.... If you wish to be happy three months hence, create Peers. If you wish to avoid an old age of sorrow and reproach, create Peers."

Acting on this counsel, Lord Grey obtained the King's written consent to the creation of as many peers as were required to carry the Bill. "I am for forty," wrote Sydney, "to make things safe in Committee." But this extreme remedy was not required. When it became known that the King had given his consent, the opposition collapsed, and the Bill received the Royal Assent on the 7th of June 1832. It was, as the Duke of Wellington said, a revolution by due course of law.

Henceforward Sydney Smith appears rather as a supporter of things as they are, than as a promoter of political or ecclesiastical change. Indeed there are signs which seem to show that his stock of reforming zeal had already run low. "The New Beer Bill[108] has begun its operations. Everybody is drunk. Those who are not singing are sprawling. The Sovereign People are in a beastly state." He was now past sixty, and a spirit of amiable self-indulgence was creeping over him.—

"I love liberty, but hope it can be so managed that I shall have soft beds, good dinners, fine linen, *etc*., for the rest of my life. I am too old to fight or to suffer." "I am tired of liberty and revolution! Where is it to end? Are all political agglutinations to be unglued? Are we prepared for a second Heptarchy, and to see the King of Sussex fighting with the Emperor of Essex, or marrying the Dowager Queen of Hampshire?"

Just before the first elections under the Reform Act, he wrote to a Scotch friend:—

> "What oceans of absurdity and nonsense will the new liberties of Scotland disclose! Yet this is better than the old infamous jobbing, and the foolocracy under which you have so long laboured."

Sydney Smith's first term of official duty at St. Paul's began on the 1st of February 1832. On the eve of the new year he wrote to his married daughter:—

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“We are debating how to come up to town, and how to make a Stage Coach compatible with Saba’s aristocracy and dignity. The Coach sets off from Taunton at four o’clock. It is then dark. I recommend her hurrying in three minutes before the Coach departs with her face covered up. But there is a maiden lady who knows us and who lives opposite the Coach. I have promised to keep her in conversation whilst Saba steps in. Once in, all chance of detection is over.

> “*PS.*—We think Miss Y—— has discovered us, for, upon meeting her in Taunton, she spoke of the *Excellence of Public Conveyances*. I said it was a fine day, and, conscious of guilt, retired.”

The removal to London was safely accomplished, and on the 29th of January he wrote:—

“I drove all this morning with Lady Holland. I had refused two or three times last week, but, as a good deal is due to old friendship, I wrote word that, if she would accept the company of a handsome young clergyman, I knew of one who was much at her service. She was very ill. I preached to her, not ’of Temperance and Righteousness and Judgement to come,’ but said nothing of the two last and confined myself to the first topic. ’Lay aside pepper, and brandy and water, and *baume de vie*. Prevent the evil instead of curing it. A single mutton chop, a glass of toast and water’—here she cried and I stopped; but she began sobbing, and I was weak enough to allow two glasses of sherry—on which she recovered.”

A few days later he wrote to his old friend Lady Morley[109]:—

“I have taken possession of my preferment. The house is in Amen Corner,—an awkward name on a card, and an awkward annunciation to the coachman on leaving any fashionable mansion.[110] I find too (sweet discovery!) that I give a dinner every Sunday, for three months in the year, to six clergymen and six singing-men, at one o’clock. Do me the favour to drop in as *Mrs.* Morley.”

It soon became evident that the Whig Government, flushed with its triumph over Toryism, intended to lay reforming hands upon the Church,[111] and the newly-fledged dignitary was alarmed. On the 22nd of December 1832 he wrote—

“I see Lord Grey, the Chancellor, and the Archbishop of Canterbury have had a meeting, which I suppose has decided the fate of the Church.” “Do you want a butler or respectable-looking groom of the chambers? I shall be happy to serve you in either capacity; it is time for the clergy to look out. I have also a cassock and stock of sermons to dispose of, dry and fit for use.” “I am for no more movements: they are not relished by Canons of St. Paul’s. When I say, ’no more movements,’ however, I except the case of the Universities; which, I think, ought to be immediately invaded with Enquirers and Commissioners. They are a crying evil.” “Do not imagine I am going to

rat. I am a thoroughly honest, and, I will say, liberal person, but have never given way to that puritanical feeling of the Whigs against dining with Tories.

> "'Tory and Whig in turns shall be my host,
> I taste no politics in boil'd and roast.'"

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In declining an invitation to dinner he wrote:—

“On one day of the year, the Canons of St. Paul’s divide a little money—an inadequate recompense for all the troubles and anxieties they undergo. This day is, unfortunately for me, that on which you have asked me (the 25th of March), when we all dine together, endeavouring to forget for a few moments, by the aid of meat and wine, the sorrows and persecutions of the Church.”

Of Sydney Smith’s official relations with St. Paul’s abundant traces are still to be found. He took a leading part in the business of the Chapter. Dean Milman[112] wrote:—“I find traces of him in every particular of Chapter affairs: and, on every occasion where his hand appears, I find stronger reasons for respecting his sound judgment, knowledge of business, and activity of mind; above all the perfect fidelity of his stewardship.... His management of the affairs of St. Paul’s (for at one time he seems to have been *the* manager) only commenced too late and terminated too soon.”

A Select Committee of the House of Commons was appointed in 1841 to inquire into the condition of National Monuments. One fragment of Sydney Smith’s evidence is quaint enough to be recalled.—

“I hope I leave the Committee with this very decided impression, that, in such an immense town as this, free admission into the Cathedral would very soon inflict upon that Cathedral the infamy of being a notorious resort for all bad characters; it would cease to be frequented as a place of worship, and the whole purpose for which it exists destroyed; and that to this the payment operates as a decided check.”

When examined before the same Committee, the Surveyor to the Cathedral testified that there “had been no superintendence at all comparable to that of Mr. Sydney Smith”; that he had warmed the Library and rebound the books; that he had insured the fabric against fire; and had “brought the New River into the Cathedral by mains.” The Verger testified that the monuments had fallen into a dreadful state of decay and disfigurement, and that there were “twenty thousand names scratched on the font”; but that now by Mr. Smith’s orders everything had been repaired, cleaned, and set in order.

As regards Sydney Smith’s preaching, testimony is equally explicit. He said of himself, in a letter stating his claims to ecclesiastical preferment, “I am distinguished as a preacher,” and this seems to have been no more than the truth. George Ticknor, writing in 1835, said that he had heard from Sydney “by far the best sermon that I have heard in England.” Charles Greville wrote;—“He is very good; manner impressive, voice sonorous and agreeable: rather familiar, but not offensively so.” Mrs, Austin,[113] who afterwards edited his Letters, writes:—“The choir[114] was densely filled.... The moment he appeared in the pulpit, all the weight of his duty, all the authority of his office, were written on his countenance; and, without a particle of affectation, his whole demeanour bespoke the gravity of his purpose.”

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This exactly corresponds with the impression of a listener to his famous sermon on Toleration, in Bristol Cathedral. “Never did anybody to my mind look more like a High Churchman, as he walked up the aisle to the altar—there was an air of so much proud dignity in his appearance.”

Perhaps this account of Sydney Smith’s relations with St. Paul’s Cathedral cannot be better concluded than with some extracts from the noble sermon which he preached there on the occasion of Queen Victoria’s accession. It is a remarkably fine instance of his rhetorical manner. It reveals an ardent and sagacious patriotism. It breathes a spirit of fatherly interest which excellently becomes a minister of religion, glancing, from the close of a long life spent in public affairs, at the possibilities, at once awful and splendid, which lay before the Girl-Queen.

The preacher, in his opening paragraphs, briefly announces his theme. His starting-point is the death of the King.—

“From the throne to the tomb—wealth, splendour, flattery, all gone! The look of favour—the voice of power, no more;—the deserted palace—the wretched monarch on his funeral bier—the mourners ready—the dismal march of death prepared. Who are we, and what are we? and for what has God made us? and why are we doomed to thus frail and unquiet existence? Who does not feel all this? in whose heart does it not provoke appeal to, and dependence on, God? before whose eyes does it not bring the folly and the nothingness of all things human?”

He pauses to pay a tribute to the honesty and patriotism of William IV., and then proceeds:—

“But the world passes on, and a new order of things arises. Let us take a short view of those duties which devolve upon the young Queen, whom Providence has placed over us: what ideas she ought to form of her duties; and on what points she should endeavour to place the glories of her reign.“First and foremost, I think the new Queen should bend her mind to the very serious consideration of educating her people. Of the importance of this I think no reasonable doubt can exist; it does not in its effects keep pace with the exaggerated expectations of its injudicious advocates; but it presents the best chance of national improvement.“Reading and writing are mere increase of power. They may be turned, I admit, to a good or a bad purpose; but for several years of his life the child is in your hands, and you may give to that power what bias you please. Thou shalt not kill—Thou shalt not steal—Thou shalt not bear false witness:—by how many fables, by how much poetry, by how many beautiful aids of imagination, may not the fine morality of the Sacred Scriptures be engraven on the minds of the young? I believe the arm of the assassin may be often stayed by the lessons of his early life. When I see the village school, and the tattered scholars,

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and the aged master or mistress teaching the mechanical art of reading or writing, and thinking that they are teaching that alone, I feel that the aged instructor is protecting life, insuring property, fencing the altar, guarding the throne, giving space and liberty to all the fine powers of man, and lifting him up to his own place in the order of Creation.“There are, I am sorry to say, many countries in Europe which have taken the lead of England in the great business of education, and it is a thoroughly commendable and legitimate object of ambition in a Sovereign to overtake them. The names, too, of malefactors, and the nature of their crimes, are subjected to the Sovereign;—how is it possible that a Sovereign, with the fine feelings of youth, and with all the gentleness of her sex, should not ask herself, whether the human being whom she dooms to death, or at least does not rescue from death, has been properly warned in early youth of the horrors of that crime, for which his life is forfeited—’Did he ever receive any education at all?—did a father and a mother watch over him?—was he brought to places of worship?—was the Word of God explained to him?—was the Book of Knowledge opened to him?—Or am I, the fountain of mercy, the nursing-mother of my people, to send a forsaken wretch from the streets to the scaffold, and to punish by unprincipled cruelty the evils of unprincipled neglect?’”

From zeal for education, we go on to love of Peace.—

“A second great object, which I hope will be impressed upon the mind of this Royal Lady, is a rooted horror of war—an earnest and passionate desire to keep her people in a state of profound peace. The greatest curse which can be entailed upon mankind is a state of war. All the atrocious crimes committed in years of peace—all that is spent in peace by the secret corruptions, or by the thoughtless extravagance, of nations—are mere trifles compared with the gigantic evils which stalk over the world in a state of war. God is forgotten in war—every principle of Christian charity trampled upon—human labour destroyed—human industry extinguished—you see the son, and the husband, and the brother, dying miserably in distant lands—you see the waste of human affections—you see the breaking of human hearts—you hear the shrieks of widows and children after the battle—and you walk over the mangled bodies of the wounded calling for death. I would say to that Royal child, Worship God by loving peace—it is not *your* humanity to pity a beggar by giving him food or raiment—*I* can do that; that is the charity of the humble and the unknown—widen you your heart for the more expanded miseries of mankind—pity the mothers of the peasantry who see their sons torn away from their families—pity your poor subjects crowded into hospitals, and calling in their last breath upon their distant country and their young Queen—pity the stupid, frantic

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folly of human beings who are always ready to tear each other to pieces, and to deluge the earth with each other's blood; this is your extended humanity—and this the great field of your compassion. Extinguish in your heart the fiendish love of military glory, from which your sex does not necessarily exempt you, and to which the wickedness of flatterers may urge you. Say upon your death-bed, 'I have made few orphans in my reign—I have made few widows—my object has been peace. I have used all the weight of my character, and all the power of my situation, to check the irascible passions of mankind, and to turn them to the arts of honest industry. This has been the Christianity of my throne, and this the Gospel of my sceptre. In this way I have strove to worship my Redeemer and my Judge.'"

True to his lifelong conviction, the preacher urges the sacredness of religious freedom.—

"I hope the Queen will love the National Church, and protect it; but it must be impressed upon her mind that every sect of Christians have as perfect a right to the free exercise of their worship as the Church itself—that there must be no invasion of the privileges of the other sects, and no contemptuous disrespect of their feelings—that the Altar is the very ark and citadel of Freedom.

* * * * *

"Though I deprecate the bad effects of fanaticism, I earnestly pray that our young Sovereign may evince herself to be a person of deep religious feeling: what other cure has she for all the arrogance and vanity which her exalted position must engender? for all the flattery and falsehood with which she must be surrounded? for all the soul-corrupting homage with which she is met at every moment of her existence? what other cure than to cast herself down in darkness and solitude before God—to say that she is dust and ashes—and to call down the pity of the Almighty upon her difficult and dangerous life. This is the antidote of kings against the slavery and the baseness which surround them; they should think often of death—and the folly and nothingness of the world, and they should humble their souls before the Master of masters, and the King of kings; praying to Heaven for wisdom and calm reflection, and for that spirit of Christian gentleness which exalts command into an empire of justice, and turns obedience into a service of love."

Thus he recapitulates and concludes:—

"A young Queen, at that period of life which is commonly given up to frivolous amusement, sees at once the great principles by which she should be guided, and steps at once into the great duties of her station. The importance of educating the lower orders of the people is never absent from her mind; she takes up this principle at the

beginning of her life, and in all the change of servants, and in all the struggle of parties, looks to it as a source of permanent improvement.

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A great object of her affections, is the preservation of peace; she regards a state of war as the greatest of all human evils; thinks that the lust of conquest is not a glory, but a bad crime; despises the folly and miscalculations of war, and is willing to sacrifice every thing to peace but the clear honour of her land.“The patriot Queen, whom I am painting, reverences the National Church—frequents its worship, and regulates her faith by its precepts; but she withstands the encroachments, and keeps down the ambition natural to establishments, and, by rendering the privileges of the Church compatible with the civil freedom of all sects, confers strength upon, and adds duration to, that wise and magnificent institution. And then this youthful Monarch, profoundly but wisely religious, disdaining hypocrisy, and far above the childish follies of false piety, casts herself upon God, and seeks from the Gospel of His blessed Son a path for her steps, and a comfort for her soul. Here is a picture which warms every English heart, and would bring all this congregation upon their bended knees before Almighty God to pray it may be realized. What limits to the glory and happiness of our native land, if the Creator should in His mercy have placed in the heart of this Royal Woman the rudiments of wisdom and mercy; and if, giving them time to expand, and to bless our children’s children with her goodness, He should grant to her a long sojourning upon earth, and leave her to reign over us till she is well stricken in years? What glory! what happiness! what joy! what bounty of God! I of course can only expect to see the beginning of such a splendid period: but, when I do see it, I shall exclaim with the pious Simeon, ’Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.’”

We turn now from ecclesiastical to social life. Though Sydney Smith still retained his beautiful Rectory of Combe Florey, and lived there a good deal in the summer, he spent more and more of his year in London, He held that the parallelogram between Oxford Street, Piccadilly, Regent Street, and Hyde Park, “enclosed more intelligence and ability, to say nothing of wealth and beauty, than the world had ever collected in such a space before.” He frankly admitted that the summer and the country had no charms for him. His sentiments on this head found poetical expression in a parody of *Paradise Lost*. He felt

> “As one who, long in rural hamlets pent,
> (Where squires and parsons deep potations make,
> With lengthen’d tale of fox, or timid hare,
> Or antler’d stag, sore vext by hound and horn),
> Forth issuing on a winter’s morn, to reach
> In chaise or coach the London Babylon
> Remote, from each thing met conceives delight;—
> Or cab, or car, or evening muffin-bell,
> Or lamps—each city-sight, each city-sound”

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“I do all I can to love the country, and endeavour to believe those poetical lies which I read in Rogers and others, on the subject; which said deviations from truth were, by Rogers, all written in St. James’s Place.” “I look forward anxiously to the return of the bad weather, coal fires, and good society in a crowded city.” “The country is bad enough in summer, but in winter it is a fit residence only for beings doomed to such misery for misdeeds in another state of existence.” “You may depend upon it, all lives lived out of London are mistakes, more or less grievous—but mistakes.” “I shall not be sorry to be in town. I am rather tired of simple pleasures, bad reasoning, and worse cookery.”

His life in London, free from these kindred evils, was full of enjoyment. He dined out as often as he liked, and entertained his friends at breakfast, luncheon, and dinner. He admits that he “sometimes talked a little,” and “liked a hearty laugher,”

> “I talk only the nonsense of the moment from the good humour of the moment, and nothing remains behind.”
>
> “I like a little noise and nature, and a large party, very merry and happy.”

Here are some of his invitations:—

> “Will you come to a philosophical breakfast on Saturday?—ten o’clock precisely? Nothing taken for granted! Everything (except the Thirty-Nine Articles) called in question.”
>
> “I have a breakfast of philosophers to-morrow at ten punctually; muffins and metaphysics, crumpets and contradiction. Will you come?”
>
> “Pray come and see me. I will give you very good mutton chops for luncheon,[115] seasoned with affectionate regard and respect.”

“I give two dinners next week to the following persons, whom I enumerate, as I know Lady Georgiana loves a little gossip. First dinner—Lady Holland, Eastlake, Lord and Lady Monteagle, Luttrell, Lord Auckland, Lord Campbell, Lady Stratheden, Lady Dunstanville, Baring Wall, and Mr. Hope. Second dinner—Lady Charlemont, Lord Glenelg, Lord and Lady Denman, Lord and Lady Cottenham, Lord and Lady Langdale, Sir Charles Lemon, Mr. Hibbert, Landseer, and Lord Clarendon.”

This period is marked by one domestic incident which caused the Smiths lasting happiness. In the spring of 1834 their elder daughter, Saba, was married to Dr., afterwards Sir Henry, Holland. Sydney thus expressed his joy:—

> “The blessing of God be upon you both, dear children; and be assured that it makes my old age much happier to have placed my daughter in the hands of so honourable and amiable a son.”

A few years later he wrote from Combe Florey:—

> “We expect Saba and Dr. Holland the end of this month. I am in great hopes we shall have some ‘cases’: I am keeping three or four simmering for him. It is enough to break one’s heart to see him in the country.”

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In November 1834, the King dismissed the Whig Government, and sent for Sir Robert Peel. A General Election took place at Christmas. In the spring of 1835 Peel's Government was displaced by a vote of the House of Commons, and a Whig Government was formed again under Lord Melbourne. Henry Labouchere,[116] M.P. for Taunton, accepted office, and thereby vacated his seat. On seeking re-election, he was opposed, unsuccessfully, by Benjamin Disraeli. "The Jew spoke for an hour The boys called out 'Old Clothes' as he came into the town, and offered to sell him sealing-wax and slippers."[117]

As soon as the Election was over, the country relapsed into its normal calm. On the 3rd of June Sydney wrote:—

"We are going through our usual course of jokes and dinners. One advantage of the country is that a joke once established is good for ever; it is like the stuff which is denominated *everlasting*, and used as pantaloons by careful parents for their children."

In the following autumn the Smiths paid a flying visit to France, The crossing from Dover was terrific; but Sydney comforted himself with the reflection that, "as I had so little life to lose, it was of little consequence whether I was drowned, or died, like a resident clergyman, from indigestion."

France gave him the same pleasure as it had always given him.—

"Paris is very full. I look at it with some attention, as I am not sure I may not end my days in it. I suspect the fifth act of life should be in great cities: it is there, in the long death of old age, that a man most forgets himself and his infirmities.""I care very little about dinners, but I shall not easily forget a *matelote* at the Rochers de Cancale, an almond tart at Montreuil, or a *poulet a la Tartare* at Grignon's, These are impressions which no changes in future life can obliterate."

Before the year ended, he was established in London. The remaining ten years of his life saw him, in spite of some bodily infirmities, at the summit of his social fame. An immense proportion of the anecdotes relating to his conversation belong to this period. "It was," wrote Mr. Gladstone in 1879, "in the year 1835 that I met Mr. Sydney Smith for the first time at the table of Mr. Hallam. After dinner Mr. Smith was good enough to converse with me, and he spoke, not of any general changes in the prevailing tone of doctrine, but of the improvement which had then begun to be remarkable in the conduct and character of the clergy. He went back upon what they had been, and said, in his vivid and pointed way of illustration, 'Whenever you meet a clergyman of my age, you may be quite sure he is a bad clergyman.'"[118]

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In 1836 the Ecclesiastical Commission was established by Act of Parliament as a permanent institution for the management of business relating to the Church. Its constitution and recommendations were very distasteful to Sydney Smith; and, as time went on, he found it impossible to restrain himself from public criticism. At the beginning of the Session of 1837, he published his “First Letter to Archdeacon Singleton."[119] The Letter begins with an attack on the constitution of the Commission. It was stuffed with Bishops. Deans and Canons and Rectors and Vicars and Curates had no place upon it. The result was that all interests, not episcopal, had been completely overlooked, and that the reforms, though perhaps theoretically sound, were practically unworkable. Further, the reforms had been far too extensive. The plan of making a Central Fund from the proceeds of confiscated Prebends,[120] and enriching the smaller livings with it, was chimerical. The whole income of the Church, equally divided among all its clergy, would only give each man the wages of a nobleman’s butler. The true method in all professions was the method of Blanks and Prizes. But for the chance of those Prizes, men of good birth and education would not “go into the Church”; and an uneducated clergy would inevitably become fanatical.—

“You will have a set of ranting, raving Pastors, who will wage-war against all the innocent pleasures of life; vie with each other in extravagance of zeal; and plague your heart out with their nonsense and absurdity. Cribbage must be played in caverns, and sixpenny whist take refuge in the howling wilderness. In this way low men, doomed to hopeless poverty and galled by contempt, will endeavour to force themselves into station and significance.”

Then again there was the difficulty of oaths. The property of Cathedrals could only be confiscated at the expense of violated vows.—

“The Archbishop of Canterbury, at his enthronement, takes a solemn oath that he will maintain the rights and liberties of the Church of Canterbury; as Chairman, however, of the New Commission, he seizes the patronage of that Church, takes two thirds of its Revenues, and abolishes two thirds of its Members. That there is an answer to this I am very willing to believe, but I cannot at present find out what it is; and this attack upon the Revenues and Members of Canterbury is not obedience to an Act of Parliament, but the very Act of Parliament, which takes away, is recommended, drawn up, and signed by the person who has sworn he will never take away; and this little apparent inconsistency is not confined to the Archbishop of Canterbury, but is shared equally by all the Bishop-Commissioners, who have all (unless I am grievously mistaken) taken similar oaths for the preservation of their respective Chapters. It would be more easy to see our way out of this little embarrassment, if some of the embarrassed had not unfortunately,

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in the parliamentary debates on the Catholic Question, laid the greatest stress upon the King's oath, applauded the sanctity of the monarch to the skies, rejected all comments, called for the oath in its plain meaning, and attributed the safety of the English Church to the solemn vow made by the King at the altar to the Archbishops of Canterbury and York.

* * * * *

"Nothing can be more ill-natured among politicians, than to look back into Hansard's Debates, to see what has been said by particular men upon particular occasions, and to contrast such speeches with present opinions—and therefore I forbear to introduce some inviting passages upon taking oaths in their plain and obvious sense, both in debates on the Catholic Question and upon that fatal and Mezentian oath which binds the Irish to the English Church."

The gist of all these reforms, actual and projected, was that the Bishops were enormously increasing their own power and patronage at the expense of the Deans and Chapters. Sydney Smith, as a member of a Chapter, protested, and then the friends of the Bishops cried out that all such protests were indecent, and even perilous.—

"We are told that if we agitate these questions among ourselves, we shall have the democratic Philistines come down upon us, and sweep us all away together. Be it so; I am quite ready to be swept away when the time comes. Everybody has his favourite death: some delight in apoplexy, and others prefer marasmus. ... I would infinitely rather be crushed by democrats than, under the plea of the public good, be mildly and blandly absorbed by Bishops."

With Bishops as a body, and allowing for some notable exceptions, Sydney Smith seems to have had only an imperfect sympathy. He held that they could not be trusted to deal fairly and reasonably with men, subject to their jurisdiction, who dared to maintain independence in thought and action.—

"A good and honest Bishop (I thank God there are many who deserve that character!) ought to suspect himself, and carefully to watch his own heart. He is all of a sudden elevated from being a tutor, dining at an early hour with his pupil (and occasionally, it is believed, on cold meat), to be a spiritual Lord; he is dressed in a magnificent dress, decorated with a title, flattered by Chaplains, and surrounded by little people looking up for the things which he has to give away; and this often happens to a man who has had no opportunities of seeing the world, whose parents were in very humble life, and who has given up all his thoughts to the Frogs of Aristophanes and the Targum of Onkelos. How is it possible that such a man should not lose his head? that he should not swell? that lie should not be guilty of a thousand follies, and worry and tease to death (before

he recovers his common sense) a hundred men as good, and as wise, and as able as himself?”

On all accounts, therefore, both public and private, it was very good for Bishops to hear the voice of candid criticism, and their opportunities of enjoying that advantage were all too rare.—

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“Bishops live in high places with high people, or with little people who depend upon them. They walk delicately, like Agag. They hear only one sort of conversation, and avoid bold reckless men, as a lady veils herself from rough breezes.”

And for the Whig Government, which was consenting to all these attacks on the Church and the Chapters, Sydney had his parting word of reminiscent rebuke.—

“I neither wish to offend them nor any body else. I consider myself to be as good a Whig as any amongst them. I was a Whig before many of them were born—and while some of them were Tories and Waverers.[121] I have always turned out to fight their battles, and when I saw no other Clergyman turn out but myself—and this in times before liberality was well recompensed, and therefore in fashion, and when the smallest appearance of it seemed to condemn a Churchman to the grossest obloquy, and the most hopeless poverty. It may suit the purpose of the Ministers to flatter the Bench; it does not suit mine. I do not choose in my old age to be tossed as a prey to the Bishops; I have not deserved this of my Whig friends.”

It is perhaps not surprising that the Whig Ministers should have remained impervious to arguments thus enforced. On the 10th of February, Sydney Smith wrote to Lord John Russell (whom he addressed as “My dear John"):—

“You say you are not convinced by my pamphlet I am afraid that I am a very arrogant person; but I do assure you that, in the fondest moments of self-conceit, the idea of convincing a Russell that he was wrong never came across my mind. Euclid would have had a bad chance with you if you had happened to have formed an opinion that the interior angles of a triangle were not equal to two right angles. The more poor Euclid demonstrated, the more you would not have been convinced.”

In 1838 Sydney Smith published a second Letter to the same Archdeacon:—

“It is a long time since you heard from me, and in the mean time the poor Church of England has been trembling from the Bishop who sitteth upon the throne, to the Curate who rideth upon the hackney horse. I began writing on the subject in order to avoid bursting from indignation; and, as it is not my habit to recede, I will go on till the Church of England is either up or down—semianimous on its back or vigorous on its legs.... If what I write is liked, so much the better; but, liked or not liked, sold or not sold, Wilson Crokered or not Wilson Crokered, I will write."[122]

He now returns to the “Prebends” which the Commissioners propose to confiscate. Some of these, he says, are properties of great value. He instances one which will soon be worth between L40,000 and L60,000 a year. Some of them are held by non-residentiary Prebendaries, who never come near the Cathedral, and who have no duty except to enjoy their incomes. Those prebends Sydney Smith,

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as a real though temperate reformer, would now surrender, and make from them a fund to enrich poor livings. But for the prebends of the Residentiaries, who perform the daily duties of the Cathedral, he will fight to the death. With splendid courage he asserts that these great estates, held for life by ecclesiastical officers, are as well managed, and as profitably employed, with a view to the general interests of the community, as the lands of any peer or squire.—

“Take, for instance, the Cathedral of Bristol, the whole estates of which are about equal to keeping a pack of foxhounds. If this had been in the hands of a country gentleman; instead of Precentor, Succentor, Bean, and Canons, and Sexton, you would have had huntsman, whippers-in, dog-feeders, and stoppers of earths; the old squire, full of foolish opinions and fermented liquids, and a young gentleman, of gloves, waistcoats, and pantaloons: and how many generations might it be before the fortuitous concourse of noodles would produce such a man as Professor Lee,[123] one of the Prebendaries of Bristol, and by far the most eminent Oriental scholar in Europe.”

Then he reverts to his familiar argument that the abolition of these ecclesiastical prizes would lower the social character of the clergy as a body.—

“To get a stall, and to be preceded by men with silver rods, is the bait which the ambitious squire is perpetually holding out to his second son.... If such sort of preferments are extinguished, a very serious evil (as I have often said before) is done to the Church—the service becomes unpopular, further spoliation is dreaded, the whole system is considered to be altered and degraded, capital is withdrawn from the Church, and no one enters into the profession but the sons of farmers and little tradesmen, who would be footmen if they were not vicars—or figure on the coach-box if they were not lecturing from the pulpit.

* * * * *

“If you were to gather a Parliament of Curates on the hottest Sunday in the year, after all the services, sermons, burials, and baptisms of the day, were over, and to offer them such increase of salary as would be produced by the confiscation of the Cathedral property, I am convinced they would reject the measure, and prefer splendid hope, and the expectation of good fortune in advanced life, to the trifling improvement of poverty which such a fund, could afford. Charles James, of London, was a Curate; the Bishop of Winchester[124] was a Curate; almost every rose-and-shovel man has been a Curate in his time. All Curates hope to draw great prizes.

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“One of the most foolish circumstances attending this destruction of Cathedral property is the great sacrifice of the patronage of the Crown: the Crown gives up eight Prebends of Westminster, two at Worcester, L1500 per annum at St. Paul’s, two Prebends at Bristol, and a great deal of other preferment all over the kingdom: and this at a moment when such extraordinary power has been suddenly conferred upon the people, and when every atom of power and patronage ought to be husbanded for the Crown. A Prebend of Westminster for my second son would soften the Catos of Cornhill, and lull the Gracchi of the Metropolitan Boroughs. Lives there a man so absurd, as to suppose that Government can be carried on without those gentle allurements? You may as well attempt to poultice off the humps of a camel’s back as to cure mankind of these little corruptions.“I am terribly alarmed by a committee of Cathedrals now sitting in London, and planning a petition to the Legislature to be heard by counsel. They will take such high ground, and talk a language so utterly at variance with the feelings of the age about Church Property, that I am much afraid they will do more harm than good. In the time of Lord George Gordon’s riots, the Guards said they did not care for the mob, if the Gentlemen Volunteers behind would be so good as not to hold their muskets in such a dangerous manner. I don’t care for popular clamour, and think it might now be defied; but I confess the Gentleman Volunteers alarm me. They have unfortunately, too, collected their addresses, and published them in a single volume!!!"[125]

And now he returns to one of the prominent topics of his first Letter, and reminds the Archbishop of Canterbury that he has sworn to protect the rights and possessions of the Metropolitical Church of Canterbury.—

“A friend of mine has suggested to me that his Grace has perhaps forgotten the oath; but this cannot be, for the first Protestant in Europe of course makes a memorandum in his pocket-book of all the oaths he takes to do, or to abstain. The oath, however, may be less present to the Archbishop’s memory, from the fact of his not having taken the oath in person, but by the medium of a gentleman sent down by the coach to take it for him—a practice which, though I believe it to have been long established in the Church, surprised me, I confess, not a little. A proxy to vote, if you please—a proxy to consent to arrangements of estates if wanted; but a proxy sent down in the Canterbury Ply, to take the Creator to witness that the Archbishop, detained in town by business or pleasure, will never violate that foundation of piety over which he presides—all this seems to me an act of the most extraordinary indolence ever recorded in history. If an Ecclesiastic, not a Bishop, may express any opinion on the reforms of the Church, I recommend that Archbishops and Bishops should take no more oaths

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by proxy; but, as they do not wait upon the Sovereign or the Prime Minister, or even any of the Cabinet, by proxy, that they should also perform all religious acts in their own person ... I have been informed, though I will not answer for the accuracy of the information, that this vicarious oath is likely to produce, a scene which would have puzzled the *Dudor Dubitantiim.* The attorney who took the oath for the Archbishop is, they say, seized with religious horrors at the approaching confiscation of Canterbury property, and has in vain tendered back his 6s. 8d. for taking the oath. The Archbishop refuses to accept it; and feeling himself light and disencumbered, wisely keeps the saddle upon the back of the writhing and agonized scrivener. I have talked it over with several Clergymen, and the general opinion is, that the scrivener will suffer."

And next lie turns his attention to a foolish Bishop who has argued in a pamphlet that, if a fund for the improvement of poor benefices was to be created, it must be drawn from the property of the Cathedrals, because the Bishops' incomes had already been pruned.

"This is very good Episcopal reasoning; but is it true? The Bishops and Commissioners wanted a fund to endow small Livings; they did not touch a farthing of their own incomes, only distributed them a little more equally; and proceeded lustily at once to confiscate Cathedral Property. But why was it necessary, if the fund for small Livings was such a paramount consideration, that the future Archbishops of Canterbury should be left with two palaces, and L15,000 per annum? Why is every future Bishop of London to have a palace in Fulham, a house in St. James's Square, and L10,000 a year? Could not all the Episcopal functions be carried on well and effectually with the half of these incomes? Is it necessary that the Archbishop of Canterbury should give feasts to Aristocratic London; and that the domestics of the Prelacy should stand with swords and bag-wigs round pig, and turkey, and venison, to defend, as it were, the Orthodox gastronome from the fierce Unitarian, the fell Baptist, and all the famished children of Dissent? I don't object to all this; because I am sure that the method of prizes and blanks is the best method of supporting a Church which must be considered as very slenderly endowed, if the whole were equally divided among the parishes; but if my opinion were different—if I thought the important improvement was to equalize preferment in the English Church—that such a measure was not the one thing foolish, but the one thing needful—I should take care, as a mitred Commissioner, to reduce my own species of preferment to the narrowest limits, before I proceeded to confiscate the property of any other grade of the Church.... Frequently did Lord John meet the destroying Bishops; much did he commend their daily heap of ruins; sweetly did they smile on each other, and much charming talk was there of meteorology and catarrh, and the

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particular Cathedral they were pulling down at each period; till one fine day the Home Secretary,[126] with a voice more bland, and a look more ardently affectionate, than that which the masculine mouse bestows on his nibbling female, informed them that the Government meant to take all the Church property into their own hands, to pay the rates out of it and deliver the residue to the rightful possessors. Such an effect, they say, was never before produced by a *coup de theatre*. The Commission was separated in an instant, London clenched his fist. Canterbury was hurried out by his chaplains, and put into a warm bed. A solemn vacancy spread itself over the face of Gloucester. Lincoln was taken out in strong hysterics. What a noble scene Serjeant Talfourd[127] would have made of all this? Why are such talents wasted on *Ion* and *The Athenian Captive*?"

And then Sydney Smith went on to a stricture on his friend Lord John Russell, which has been quoted in a thousand forms from that day to this. It is only fair both to the critic and to the criticized that this stricture should be read in connexion with its history.

When, in November 1834, Lord Althorp's removal to the House of Lords vacated the Leadership of the House of Commons, Lord Melbourne and the rest of the Cabinet decided that Lord John must take it. He doubted his fitness for the post, but said that even if he were called to take command of the Channel Fleet, he supposed he must obey the call and do his best, Sydney Smith heard of this modest and patriotic saying, and wove it into his most celebrated passage,—

"There is not a better man in England than Lord John Russell; but his worst failure is that he is utterly ignorant of all moral fear; there is nothing he would not undertake, I believe he would perform the operation for the stone—build St. Peter's—or assume (with or without ten minutes' notice) the command of the Channel Fleet; and no one would discover by his manner that the patient had died—the Church tumbled down—-and the Channel Fleet been knocked to atoms. I believe his motives are always pure, and his measures often able; but they are endless, and never done with that pedetentous pace and pedetentous mind in which it behoves the wise and virtuous improver to walk. He alarms the wise Liberals; and it is impossible to sleep soundly while he has the command of the watch."

Once again, in 1839, Sydney Smith returned to the same subject through the same medium. He rejoiced in great improvements which had been introduced into the measures of the Commissioners, claimed some credit for these improvements, and pointed out that they materially affected the well-being of the parochial clergy. But, as regards the dealings of the Commission with Chapters and Cathedrals, he remains convinced that they were rash, foolish, and dangerous to the Church, "Milton asked where the nymphs were when Lycidas perished? I ask where the Bishops are when the remorseless deep is closing over the head of their beloved Establishment."

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One of the Bishops had emerged from silence and security to rebuke the correspondent of Archdeacon Singleton, and now he had his reward.—

“You must have read an attack upon me by the Bishop of Gloucester,[128] in the course of which he says that I have not been appointed to my situation as Canon of St. Paul’s for my piety and learning but because I am a scoffer and a jester. Is not this rather strong for a Bishop, and does it not appear to you, Mr. Archdeacon, as rather too close an imitation of that language which is used in the apostolic occupation of trafficking in fish? Whether I have been appointed for my piety or not, must depend upon what this poor man means by piety. He means by that word, of course, a defence of all the tyrannical and oppressive abuses of the Church which have been swept away within the last fifteen or twenty years of my life; the Corporation and Test Acts; the Penal Laws against the Catholics; the Compulsory Marriages of Dissenters, and all those disabling and disqualifying laws which were the disgrace of our Church, and which he has always looked up to as the consummation of human wisdom. If piety consisted in the defence of these—if it was impious to struggle for their abrogation, I have indeed led an ungodly life.... To read, however, his Lordship a lesson of good manners, I had prepared for him a chastisement which would have been echoed from the *Segrave* who banqueteth in the castle,[129] to the idiot who spitteth over the bridge at Gloucester.”

But the Bishop had made a rather misplaced appeal for compassion, on account of his failing eyesight; and Sydney, flinging him contemptuously on one side, passed on to the more formidable Bishop of London.—

“I was much amused with what old Hermann says of the Bishop of London’s *AEschylus*. ‘We find,’ he says, ’*a great arbitrariness of proceeding, and much boldness of innovation, guided by no sure principle*’; here it is: *qualis ab incepto*. He begins with AEschylus, and ends with the Church of England; begins with profane, and ends with holy innovations—scratching out old readings which every commentator had sanctioned; abolishing ecclesiastical dignities which every reformer had spared; thrusting an anapaeest into a verse, which will not bear it; and intruding a Canon into a Cathedral, which does not want it; and this is the Prelate by whom the proposed reform of the Church has been principally planned, and to whose practical wisdom the Legislature is called upon to defer. The Bishop of London is a man of very great ability, humane, placable, generous, munificent; very agreeable, but not to be trusted with great interests where calmness and judgment are required: unfortunately, my old and amiable school-fellow, the Archbishop of Canterbury, has melted away before him, and sacrificed that wisdom on which we all founded our security.... Whatever happens, I am not to blame. I have fought my fight. Farewell”

A little later he wrote to an old friend:—

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“I don’t like writing to the Bishop of London: it is making a fuss, and looks as if I regretted the part I had taken on Church Reform, which I certainly do not—but I should be much annoyed if the Bishop were to consider me as a perpetual grumbler against him and his measures—I really am not: I like the Bishop and like his conversation—the battle is ended, and I have no other quarrel with him and the Archbishop but that they neither of them ever ask me to dinner. You see a good deal of the Bishop, and as you have always exhorted me to be a good boy, take an opportunity to set him right as to my real dispositions towards him, and exhort him, as he has gained the victory, to forgive a few hard knocks.”

In the summer of 1839 Courtenay Smith died suddenly, and left no will.[130] He had accumulated wealth in India, and a third part of it now passed to his brother Sydney. Referring to these circumstances four years later, Sydney wrote:—

> “This put me at my ease for my few remaining years. After buying into the Consols and the Reduced, I read Seneca *On the Contempt of Wealth*. What intolerable nonsense!
>
> “I have been very poor the greatest part of my life, and have borne it as well, I believe, as most people, but I can safely say that I have been happier every guinea I have gained.”

His novel opulence did not paralyse his pen. In 1839 he published a vehement attack upon the Ballot, from which he foresaw no better results than the enfranchisement of every one, including women, universal corruption, systematic lying, and a victory for the “lower order of voters” over their “betters.” Of the great advocate of the Ballot, George Grote,[131] he says—“Mr. Grote knows the relative values of gold and silver; but by what moral rate of exchange is he able to tell us the relative values of Liberty and Truth?”

The paper on the Ballot was included in a collection of reprints, mainly from the *Edinburgh Review*, which he published in 1839. The book sold so well that in 1840 he published an enlarged edition. The articles reprinted from the *Edinburgh* amount to sixty-five, and a memorandum by his daughter shows that twelve more were omitted from the reproduction, “probably because their subjects are already treated of in the extracted articles, or because they applied only to the period in which they were written,” The complete list will be found in Appendix A.

In the preface to these collected pieces, which are styled *The Works of the Rev. Sydney Smith*, the author said, after recounting the circumstances under which the *Edinburgh Review* was founded:—

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“To set on foot such a Journal in such times, to contribute towards it for many years, to bear patiently the reproach and poverty which it caused, and to look back and see that I have nothing to retract, and no intemperance and violence to reproach myself with, is a career of life which I must think to be extremely fortunate. Strange and ludicrous are the changes in human affairs. The Tories are now on the treadmill, and the well-paid Whigs are riding in chariots: with many faces, however, looking out of the windows (including that of our Prime Minister[132]), which I never remember to have seen in the days of the poverty and depression of Whiggism. Liberality is now a lucrative business. Whoever has any institution to destroy, may consider himself as a Commissioner, and his fortune as made; and, to my utter and never-ending astonishment, I, an old Edinburgh Reviewer, find myself fighting, in the year 1839, against the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of London, for the existence of the National Church.”

Some of the reprinted articles would be fairly ranked in the present day under the derogatory title of “Pot-boilers”; but others are among the most effective and entertaining pieces which the author ever penned. Some of these must be specified. There is the extraordinarily amusing, but quite unjust, attack on Methodism, under which convenient heading are grouped “the sentiments of Arminian and Calvinistic Methodists, and of the Evangelical clergymen of the Church of England.” The fun in this article is chiefly gleaned from the pages of the *Evangelical Magazine* and the *Methodist Magazine*. Here we have the affecting story of the young man who swore, and was stung by a bee “on the tip of the unruly member,” “one of the meanest of creatures” being thus employed “to reprove the bold transgressor.” Not less moving are the reflections of the religious observer who saw a man driving clumsily in a gig.—“‘What (I said to myself) if a single untoward circumstance should happen! Should the horse take fright, or the wheel on either side get entangled, or the gig upset,—in either case what can preserve them? And should a morning so fair and promising bring on evil before night,—should *death on his pale horse* appear,—what follows?’ My mind shuddered at the images I had raised.”

Very curious too is the case of the people who, desiring to go by sea to Margate, found the cabin occupied by a “mixed multitude who spoke almost all languages but that of Canaan”; and started a weekly hoy on which “no profane conversation was allowed.” The advertisements are as quaint as the correspondence.—

> “‘Wanted, a man of serious character, who can shave.’
> ‘Wanted, a serious young woman, as servant of all work.’
> ‘Wants a place, a young man who has brewed in a serious family.’”

On these eccentricities of mistaken devotion, Sydney pounces with delighted malice; and his jokes, acrid as they are, seem to be the vehicles of a real conviction. He honestly believed that “enthusiasm” in religion tended to hysteria and insanity; that it sapped plain morality; and turned the simple poor into “active and mysterious fools.”

Something, he thought, “in the way of ridicule,” might be done towards checking Methodism, and to that task he addressed himself with hearty goodwill.

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Equally unfair, and equally insensible to all the appeals of religious fervour, is the article on Indian Missions, for which, fifty years after, Archbishop Tait found it hard to forgive him.[133] Here again the artificial quaintness of religious phrase and thought gave him the necessary material for his fun. As he had found delight in the proper names of Methodist ministers—Shufflebottom and Ringletub[134]—so he delighted in lampooning "Ram Boshoo," and "Buxoo a brother," and "the Catechist of Collesigrapatuam." The saintly and scholarly Carey[135] ought to have been safe from his attacks, but the Baptist Missionary Society rather invited ridicule.—

"Brother Carey, while very sea-sick, and leaning over the ship to relieve his stomach from that very oppressive complaint, said his mind was even then filled with consolation in contemplating the wonderful goodness of God."

And Brother Carey's own journal was calculated to raise a smile.—

> "*1793. June 30. Lord's-day*. A pleasant and profitable day: our congregation composed of ten persons."
>
> "*July 7*. Another pleasant and profitable Lord's-day: our congregation increased with one. Had much sweet enjoyment with God."
>
> "*1794. Jan, 26. Lord's-day*. Found much pleasure in reading Edwards's *Sermon on the Justice of God in the Damnation of Sinners*."
>
> "*April 6*. Had some sweetness to-day, especially in reading Edwards's Sermon."
>
> "_.1796. Feb. 6_. I am now in my study; and oh, it is a sweet place, because of the presence of God with the vilest of men. It is at the top of the house; I have but one window in it."

In reply to Jeffrey, who as Editor of the *Edinburgh Review* rebuked his contributor for "levity of quotations," Sydney Smith wrote in 1808:—

"I do not understand what you mean. I attack these men because they have foolish notions of religion. The more absurd the passage, the more necessary it should be displayed—the more urgent the reason for making the attack at all."

This is at any rate an explanation, even if it does not amount to a justification; but what is lamentable is that, as in the case of the Methodists at home, he seems frankly unable to conceive of the passion for spreading the Gospel which drove men from all that is enjoyable in life to slave and die under Indian suns. He seems genuinely to believe that the spread of the Christian religion in India will produce a revolution, and he turns the ludicrous blunders of religious men into arguments for slothfulness in evangelization.—

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“If there were a fair prospect of carrying the Gospel into regions where it was before unknown,—if such a project did not expose the best possessions of the country to extreme danger, and if it was in the hands of men who were discreet as well as devout, we should consider it to be a scheme of true piety, benevolence, and wisdom: but the baseness and malignity of fanaticism shall never prevent us from attacking its arrogance, its ignorance, and its activity. For what vice can be more tremendous than that which, while it wears the outward appearance of religion, destroys the happiness of man, and dishonours the name of God?”

In the second article on Methodism, he returns, as his manner was, to the ground formerly traversed, and claims the praise of all reasonable men for his previous strictures.—

“In routing out a nest of consecrated cobblers, and in bringing to light such a perilous heap of trash as we were obliged to work through, in our articles upon the Methodists and Missionaries, we are generally conceived to have rendered an useful service to the cause of rational religion.”

But he had been rebuked by the admirers of the Cobblers, and now he turns upon his rebukers with characteristic vigour. Prominent among these was the Rev. John Styles, and Mr. Styles, unhappily for his cause and happily for his opponent, made a grotesque slip which Sydney turned to the best advantage.—

“In speaking of the cruelties which their religion entails upon the Hindoos, Mr. Styles is peculiarly severe upon us for not being more shocked at their piercing their limbs with *kimes*. This is rather an unfair mode of alarming his readers with the idea of some unknown instrument. He represents himself as having paid considerable attention to the manners and customs of the Hindoos; and, therefore, the peculiar stress he lays upon this instrument is naturally calculated to produce, in the minds of the humane, a great degree of mysterious terror. A drawing of the *kime* was imperiously called for; and the want of it is a subtle evasion, for which Mr. Styles is fairly accountable. As he has been silent on this subject, it is for us to explain the plan and nature of this terrible and unknown piece of mechanism. *Kimes*, then, are neither more nor less than a false print in the *Edinburgh Review* for *knives*; and from this blunder of the printer has Mr. Styles manufactured this Daedalean instrument of torture, called a *kime*! We were at first nearly persuaded by his argument against *kimes*; we grew frightened;—we stated to ourselves the horror of not sending missionaries to a nation which used *kimes*;—we were struck with the nice and accurate information of the Tabernacle upon this important subject:—but we looked in the errata, and found Mr. Styles to be always Mr. Styles—-always cut off from every hope of mercy, and remaining for ever himself.”

At the end of the article, the writer glories in the fact that the Government of India is beginning to harry the missionaries.—

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“The Board of Control (all Atheists, and disciples of Voltaire, of course) are so entirely of our way of thinking, that the most peremptory orders have been issued to send all the missionaries home upon the slightest appearance of disturbance. Those who have sons and brothers in India may now sleep in peace. Upon the transmission of this order, Mr. Styles is said to have destroyed himself with a *kime*.”

The same vigorous dislike to the Evangelical way of religion animates the article on Hannah More; and here again the criticized writer gave the critic just the handle which he required.

“We observe that Mrs. More, in one part of her work, falls into the common error about dress. She first blames ladies for exposing their persons in the present style of dress, and then says, if they knew their own interest—if they were aware how much more alluring they were to men when their charms are less displayed, they would make the desired alteration from motives merely selfish.“’Oh! if women in general knew what was their real interest, if they could guess with what a charm even the *appearance* of modesty invests its possessor, they would dress decorously from mere self-love, if not from principle. The designing would assume modesty as an artifice; the coquette would adopt it as an allurement; the pure as her appropriate attraction; and the voluptuous as the most infallible art of seduction.’

> “If there is any truth in this passage, nudity becomes a virtue; and no decent woman, for the future, can be seen in garments.”

That is aptly said; but it is a relief to turn from Sydney Smith the Philistine—the bigoted and rather brutal opponent of enthusiastic religion, to Sydney Smith the Philanthropist—the passionate advocate of humanitarian reform born at least fifty years before his time. Excellent illustrations of this aspect of his character are to be found in “Mad Quakers,” with its study of the improved methods of treating lunacy; “Chimney-Sweepers,” “Game-Laws,” “Spring-Guns,” “Prisons,” and “Counsel for Prisoners.” Each of these essays shows a deliriously warm sympathy with the sufferings of the downtrodden and the friendless; and a curiously intimate knowledge of matters which lie quite outside the scope of a clergyman’s ordinary duties. As an appreciation of character, friendly but not servile, nothing can be better than his paper on Sir James Mackintosh,[136] with the illustration from Curran, and the noble image (which the writer himself admired) of the man-of-war. Writing to Sir James’s son, Sydney Smith says:—

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“Curran, the Master of the Rolls, said to Mr. Grattan, ’You would be the greatest man of your age, Grattan, if you would buy a few yards of red tape, and tie up your bills and papers.’ This was the fault or the misfortune of your excellent father; he never knew the use of red tape, and was utterly unfit for the common business of life. That a guinea represented a quantity of shillings, and that it would barter for a quantity of cloth, he was well aware; but the accurate number of the baser coin, or the just measurement of the manufactured article, to which he was entitled for his gold, he could never learn, and it was impossible to teach him. Hence his life was often an example of the ancient and melancholy struggle of genius with the difficulties of existence.

* * * * *

“A high merit in Sir James Mackintosh was his real and unaffected philanthropy. He did not make the improvement of the great mass of mankind an engine of popularity, and a stepping-stone to power, but he had a genuine love of human happiness. Whatever might assuage the angry passions, and arrange the conflicting interests of nations; whatever could promote peace, increase knowledge, extend commerce, diminish crime, and encourage industry; whatever could exalt human character, and could enlarge human understanding, struck at once at the heart of your father, and roused all his faculties. I have seen him in a moment when this spirit came upon him—like a great ship of war—cut his cable, and spread his enormous canvass, and launch into a wide sea of reasoning eloquence.”

For pure fun, one could not quote a better sample than the review of Waterton’s[137] *Travels in South America*.—

“Snakes are certainly an annoyance; but the snake, though high-spirited, is not quarrelsome; he considers his fangs to be given for defence, and not for annoyance, and never inflicts a wound but to defend existence. If you tread upon him, he puts you to death for your clumsiness, merely because he does not understand what your clumsiness means; and certainly a snake, who feels fourteen or fifteen stone stamping upon his tail, has little time for reflection, and may be allowed to be poisonous and peevish. American tigers generally run away—from which several respectable gentlemen in Parliament inferred, in the American war, that American soldiers would run away also!“The description of the birds is very animated and interesting; but how far does the gentle reader imagine the Campanero may be heard, whose size is that of a jay? Perhaps 300 yards. Poor innocent, ignorant reader! unconscious of what Nature has done in the forests of Cayenne, and measuring the force of tropical intonation by the sounds of a Scotch duck! The Campanero may be heard three miles!—this single little bird being more powerful than the belfry of a cathedral, ringing for a new dean—-just

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appointed on account of shabby politics, small understanding, and good family!... It is impossible to contradict a gentleman who has been in the forests of Cayenne; but we are determined, as soon as a Campanero is brought to England, to make him toll in a public place, and have the distance measured.“The Toucan has an enormous bill, makes a noise like a puppy dog, and lays his eggs in hollow trees. How astonishing are the freaks and fancies of nature! To what purpose, we say, is a bird placed in the woods of Cayenne with a bill a yard long, making a noise like a puppy dog, and laying eggs in hollow trees? The Toucans, to be sure, might retort, to what purpose were gentlemen in Bond Street created? To what purpose were certain foolish prating Members of Parliament created?—pestering the House of Commons with their ignorance and folly, and impeding the business of the country? There is no end of such questions. So we will not enter into the metaphysics of the Toucan.“The Sloth, in its wild state, spends its life in trees, and never leaves them but from force or accident. The eagle to the sky, the mole to the ground, the sloth to the tree; but what is most extraordinary, he lives not *upon* the branches, but *under* them. He moves suspended, rests suspended, sleeps suspended, and passes his life in suspense—like a young clergyman distantly related to a bishop.

* * * * *

“Just before his third journey, Mr. Waterton takes leave of Sir Joseph Banks,[138] and speaks of him with affectionate regret. ‘I saw’ (says Mr. W.) ’with sorrow, that death was going to rob us of him. We talked of stuffing quadrupeds; I agreed that the lips and nose ought to be cut off, and stuffed with wax.’ This is the way great naturalists take an eternal farewell of each other!

* * * * *

“Insects are the curse of tropical climates. The bete rouge lays the foundation of a tremendous ulcer. In a moment you are covered with ticks. Chigoes bury themselves in your flesh, and hatch a large colony of young chigoes in a few hours. They will not live together, but every chigoe sets up a separate ulcer, and has his own private portion of pus. Flies get entry into your mouth, into your eyes, into your nose; you eat flies, drink flies, and breathe flies. Lizards, cockroaches, and snakes, got into the bed; ants eat up the books; scorpions sting you on the foot. Every thing bites, stings, or bruises; every second of your existence you are wounded by some piece of animal life that nobody has over seen before, except Swammerdam and Meriam. An insect with eleven legs is swimming in your teacup, a nondescript with nine wings is struggling in the small beer, or a caterpillar with several dozen eyes in his belly is hastening over the bread and butter! All nature is alive, and seems to be gathering all her entomological hosts to eat

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you up, as you are standing, out of your coat, waistcoat, and breeches. Such are the tropics. All this reconciles us to our dews, fogs, vapours, and drizzle—to our apothecaries rushing about with gargles and tinctures—to our old, British, constitutional coughs, sore throats, and swelled faces."

Space should be found, in even the shortest book on Sydney Smith, for two passages in which, perhaps more effectively than anywhere else, he clinched an argument with a masterpiece of fun. The first is the warning to the United States against the love of military glory. The second is the wonderful concatenation of fallacies in "Noodle's Oration."[139] Both these pieces will he found in Appendix B.

In 1840 he wrote to a friend:—

"I printed my reviews to show, if I could, that I had not passed my life merely in making jokes; but that I had made use of what little powers of pleasantry I might be endowed with, to discountenance bad, and to encourage liberal and wise principles."

The natural and becoming indolence of age was now beginning to show itself in Sydney Smith. He had worked harder than most men in his day, and now he wisely cultivated ease. In his comfortable house in Green Street, he received his friends with what he himself so excellently called "that honest joy which warms more than dinner or wine"; but he went less than of old into general society. Least of all was he inclined to that most melancholy of all exertions which consists in rushing about to entertainments which do not amuse. In 1840 he wrote, in answering an invitation to the Opera:—

> "Thy servant is threescore-and-ten years old; can he hear the sound of singing men and singing women? A Canon at the Opera! Where have you lived? In what habitations of the heathen? I thank you, shuddering."

Although the Canon would not go to the Opera, his general faculty of enjoyment was unimpaired, and, as always, he loved a gibe at the clergy. On the 30th of November 1841, Samuel Wilberforce wrote to a friend about George Augustus Selwyn,[140] Missionary Bishop of New Zealand:—

"Selwyn is just setting out. Sydney Smith says it will make quite a revolution in the dinners of New Zealand. *Tete d'Eveque* will be the most *recherche* dish, and the servant will add, 'And there is *cold clergyman* on the side-table.'"

But this is Sydney's own version of the joke:—

"The advice I sent to the Bishop of New Zealand, when he had to receive the cannibal chiefs there, was to say to them, 'I deeply regret, sirs, to have nothing on my own table suited to your tastes, but you will find plenty of cold curate and roasted clergyman on

the sideboard’; and if, in spite of this prudent provision, his visitors should end their repast by eating him likewise, why, I could only add, ‘I sincerely hoped he would disagree with them.’”

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In spite of increasing years and decreasing health—“I have,” he said, “seven distinct diseases, but am otherwise pretty well”—the indefatigable pamphleteer had not yet done with controversy. In 1842 he published three Letters on the Mismanagement of Railways,[141] and in 1843 two on a tendency displayed by the “drab-coloured men of Pennsylvania” to repudiate the interest on their State’s bonds. On the 18th of December 1843 he wrote:—

> “My bomb has fallen very successfully in America, and the list of killed and wounded is extensive. I have several quires of paper sent me every day, calling me monster, thief, atheist, deist, *etc*.”
>
> “I receive presents of cheese and apples from Americans who are advocates for paying debts, and very abusive letters in print and in manuscript from those who are not.”

All this time, in spite of continual discomfort from gout and asthma, he kept up his merry interest in his friends’ concerns, his enjoyment of good company, and his kindness to young people. Here is a charming letter, written in September 1843 to his special favourite, Miss Georgiana Harcourt,[142] daughter of the Archbishop of York:—

“I suppose you will soon be at Bishopthorpe, surrounded by the Sons of the Prophets. What a charming existence, to live in the midst of holy people; to know that nothing profane can approach you; to be certain that a Dissenter can no more be found in the Palace than a snake in Ireland, or ripe fruit in Scotland; to have your society strong, and undiluted by the laity; to bid adieu to human learning, to feast on the Canons, and revel in the XXXIX. Articles. Happy Georgiana!”

At the beginning of 1844 he wrote, “I am tolerably well, but intolerably old.” He complained of “nothing but weakness, and loss of nervous energy.” “I look as strong as a cart-horse, but cannot get round the garden without resting once or twice,” Soon he was back again at St. Paul’s, preaching a sermon on Peace, and rebuking the “excessive proneness to War.” “I shall try the same subject again—a subject utterly untouched by the clergy."[143] The summer passed in its usual occupations, and on the 28th of July he preached for the last time in the pulpit of the Cathedral. His subject was the right use of Sunday; and the sermon was a strong protest against the increasing secularization of the holy day. The best ways of employing Sunday, he said, were Worship, Self-Examination, and Preparation for Death. The sermon ended with some words which indicate the sense of impending change:—

> “I never take leave of any one, for any length of time, without a deep impression upon my mind of the uncertainty of human life, and the probability that we may meet no more in this world."[144]

He now left London for Combe Florey. “I dine with the rich in London, and physic the poor in the country; passing from the sauces of Dives to the sores of Lazarus.” His bodily discomforts increased, but his love of fun never diminished. He wrote as merrily as ever to Miss Harcourt:—

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> “Neither of us, dear Georgiana, would consent to survive the ruin of the Church. You would plunge a poisoned pin into your heart, and I should swallow the leaf of a sermon dipped in hydro-cyanic acid.”

In October, after an alarming attack of breathlessness and giddiness, he returned to London. In Green Street he was happy in the proximity and skill of his son-in-law, Dr. Holland, and “a suite of rooms perfectly fitted up for illness and death.” This phrase occurs in the last of his published letters, dated the 7th of November 1844. It was now pronounced that his disease was water on the chest, caused by an unsuspected affection of the heart. He was entirely confined to his bed, perfectly aware of his condition, and keenly grateful for the kindness and sympathy of friends. His daughter writes:—

“My father died at peace with himself and with all the world; anxious, to the last, to promote the comfort and happiness of others. He sent messages of kindness and forgiveness to the few he thought had injured him. Almost his last act was, bestowing a small living of L120 per annum on a poor, worthy, and friendless clergyman, who had lived a long life of struggle with poverty on L40 per annum. Full of happiness and gratitude, the clergyman entreated he might be allowed to see my father; but the latter so dreaded any agitation that he most unwillingly consented, saying, ’Then he must not thank me; I am too weak to bear it.’ He entered,—my father gave him a few words of advice,—the clergyman silently pressed his hand, and blessed his death-bed. Surely such blessings are not given in vain!”

Sydney Smith died on the 22nd of February 1845, and was buried by the side of his son Douglas in the Cemetery at Kensal Green.

[107] R.A. Kinglake, quoted by Mr. Stuart Reid.

[108] The Beer-house Act, 1830, allowed any one to retail beer, on merely taking out an excise-licence.

[109] Frances Talbot, wife of John, 1st Earl of Morley.

[110] As a matter of fact he lived at 33 Charles Street, and subsequently at 56 Green Street.

[111] This intention gave rise to the “Oxford Movement.” Keble thought that the time had come when “scoundrels must be called scoundrels.” His Sermon on “National Apostasy” was preached on the 14th of July 1833.

[112] Henry Hart Milman (1791-1868).

[113] Born Sarah Taylor (1793-1867).

[114] At that period there were no sermons under the Dome

[115] In 1825, after a visit to Lord Essex at Cassiobury, he noted with disapproval—“No hot luncheons.”

[116] (1798-1869), created Lord Taunton in 1859.

[117] This is interesting as being, so far as I know, Sydney Smith’s only reference to Lord Beaconsfield.

[118] Gladstone’s *Gleanings*, vol. vii. p. 220.

[119] Thomas Singleton (1783-1842), Canon of Worcester and Archdeacon of Northumberland.

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[120] It is sometimes forgotten that a Prebend is a thing; a Prebendary a person.

[121] Compare his letter to Lady Holland, May 14, 1835;—“Liberals of the eleventh hour abound! and there are some of the first hour, of whose work in the toil and heat of the day I have no recollection!”

[122] John Wilson Croker (1780-1857), M.P. and Tory pamphleteer.

[123] Samuel Lee (1783-1852).

[124] Charles Richard Sumner (1790-1874).

[125] On the 13th of January 1838, he wrote to the Bishop of London—“I think the best reason for destroying the Cathedrals is the abominable trash and nonsense they have all published since the beginning of this dispute.”

[126] Lord John Russell.

[127] Thomas Noon Talfourd (1795-1854), Judge and Dramatist.

[128] James Henry Monk (1784-1856).

[129] William FitzHardinge Berkeley (1786-1857) was created Lord Segrave of Berkeley Castle in 1831, and Earl FitzHardinge in 1841.

[130] “You see my younger brother, Courtenay, is turned out of office in India, for refusing the surety of the East India Company! Truly the Smiths are a stiff-necked generation, and yet they have all got rich but I. Courtenay, they say, has L150,000, and he keeps only a cat! In the last letter I had from him, which was in 1802, he confessed that his money was gathering very fast.” (S.S. 1827).

[131] (1794-1871), Banker, Historian, and Politician.

[132] William, Viscount Melbourne (1779-1848).

[133] “Have you read Sydney Smith’s Life? There is a strange mixture in his character of earnest common-sense and fun. On the whole, I think he will be thought more highly of in consequence of the publication of the Life, though it may be doubted whether his religion was not injured by his strong sense of the ludicrous. I cannot forgive him for his anti-missionary articles in the *Edinburgh Review*.”—*Life of Archbishop Tait*, vol. I. chapter xiii.

What seems to be his later and juster judgment on missionary work is given, without date, by Lady Holland. “Some one, speaking of Missions, ridiculed them as inefficient. He dissented, saying, that though all was not done that was projected, or even boasted of, yet that much good resulted; and that wherever Christianity was taught, it brought with it the additional good of civilization in its train, and men became better carpenters, better cultivators, better everything.”

[134] “It is immaterial whether Mr. Shufflebottom preaches at Bungay, and Mr. Ringletub at Ipswich; or whether an artful vicissitude is adopted, and the order of insane predication reversed.”

[135] William Carey (1761-1834), Shoemaker, Orientalist, and Missionary.

[136] (1765-1832), Historian and Philosopher.

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[137] Charles Waterton (1782-1865), Naturalist.

[138] (1748-1820.)

[139] It is possible that the argument about the Wisdom of our Ancestors in "Noodle's Oration" may have been suggested by the following extract from the Parliamentary Debates for May 26, 1797. On Mr. Grey's Motion for a Reform of Parliament, Sir Gregory Page-Turner, M.P., spoke as follows—"He craved the indulgence of the House for a few observations which he had to make. When he got up in the morning and when he lay down at night, he always felt for the Constitution. On this question he had never had but one opinion. When he came first into Parliament, he remembered that the Chancellor of the Exchequer proposed a Reform, but he saw it was wrong, and he opposed it. Would it not be madness to change what had been handed, sound and entire, down from the days of their fathers?"

[140] (1809-1878.)

[141] In these a special appeal is made to "our youthful Gladstone," then recently appointed Vice-President of the Board of Trade.

[142] Afterwards Mrs. Malcolm: died in 1886.

[143] He said afterwards that this Sermon on Peace was really Channing's.

[144] Compare his letter on parting from his friends at Edinburgh, quoted by Lady Holland:—"All adieus are melancholy; and principally, I believe, because they put us in mind of the last of all adieus, when the apothecary, and the heir-apparent, and the nurse who weeps for pay, surround the bed; when the curate, engaged to dine three miles off, mumbles hasty prayers; when the dim eye closes for ever in the midst of empty pillboxes, gallipots, phials, and jugs of barley-water."

CHAPTER VII

CHARACTERISTICS—HUMOUR—POLITICS—CULTURE—THEORIES OF LIFE—-RELIGION

What Sydney Smith was to the outward eye we know from an admirable portrait by Eddis[145] belonging to his grand-daughter, Miss Caroline Holland. He had a long and slightly aquiline nose, of the type which gives a peculiar trenchancy to the countenance; a strongly developed chin, thick white hair,[146] and black eyebrows. His complexion

was fresh, inclining to be florid. In figure he was, to use his own phrase, “of the family of Falstaff.” Ticknor described him as “corpulent but not gross.” Macaulay spoke of his “rector-like amplitude and rubicundity.” He was of middle height, rather above it than below, and sturdily built. He used to quote a saying from one of his contemporaries at Oxford—“Sydney, your sense, wit, and clumsiness, always give me the idea of an *Athenian carter*.” Except on ceremonious occasions, he was careless about his dress. His daughter says:—“His neckcloth always looked like a pudding tied round his throat, and the arrangement of his garments seemed more the result of accident than design.”

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His manner in society was cordial, unrestrained, and even boisterous. "I live," he said in an admirable figure, "with open doors and windows." His poor parishioners regarded him with "a curious mixture of reverence and grin."[147] His daughter says that, "on entering the pulpit, the calm dignity of his eye, mien, and voice, made one feel that he was indeed, and felt himself to be, 'the pastor standing between our God and His people,' to teach His laws, to declare His judgments, and proclaim His mercies."

Enough has been quoted from his writings to give the reader a clear notion of his style. In early life it was not scrupulously correct,[148] and to the end it was marked here and there by an archaism such as "I have strove," and "they are rode over." It was singularly uninvolved and uncomplicated, and was animated, natural, and vigorous in the highest degree. As years went on, it gained both in ease and in accuracy, but never lost either its force or its resonance. It ran up and down the whole gamut of the English tongue, from sesquipedalian classicisms (which he generally used to heighten a comic effect) to one-syllabled words of the homeliest Anglo-Saxon. His punctuation was careless, and the impression produced by his written composition is that of a man who wrote exactly as he spoke, without pause, premeditation, or amendment; who was possessed by the subject on which he was writing, and never laid down the pen till that subject lived and breathed in the written page.[149] Here and there, indeed, it is easy to note an unusual care and elaboration in the structure of the sentences and the cadence of the sound, and then the style rises to a very high level of rhetorical dignity.

Enough too has been quoted, both from his writings and from his conversation, to illustrate the quality and quantity of his humour. It bubbled up in him by a spontaneous process, and flowed over into whatever he wrote or said. Macaulay described his "rapid, loud, laughing utterance," and adds—"Sydney talks from the impulse of the moment, and his fun is quite inexhaustible." He was, I think, the greatest humourist whose jokes have come down to us in an authentic and unmutilated form. Almost alone among professional jokers, he made his merriment—rich, natural, fantastic, unbridled as it was—subserve the serious purposes of his life and writing. Each joke was a link in an argument; each sarcasm was a moral lesson. *Peter Plymley*, and the *Letters to Archdeacon Singleton*, the essays on America and on Persecuting Bishops, will probably be read as long as the *Tale of a Tub* or Macaulay's review of "Satan" Montgomery; while of detached and isolated jokes—pure freaks of fun clad in literary garb—an incredible number, current in daily converse, deduce their birth from this incomparable clergyman.[150] "In ability," wrote Macaulay in 1850, "I should say that Jeffrey was higher, but Sydney rarer. I would rather have been Jeffrey; but there will be several Jeffreys before there is a Sydney."

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It would of course be absurd to pretend that all his jokes were of an equally high order. In his essays and public letters he is always and supremely good; in his private letters and traditional table-talk he descends to the level of his correspondent or his company. Thus, in spite of his own protests against playing on words, he found his clerk “a man of great amen-ity of disposition.” He complimented his friends Mrs. Tighe and Mrs. Cuffe as “the cuff that every one would wear, the tie that no one would loose.” His fondness for Lord Grey’s family led him to call himself “Grey-men-ivorous.” When the Hollands were staying with him, “his house was as full of hollands as a gin-shop.” He nicknamed Sir George Philips’s home near Manchester Philippi. He ascribed his brother’s ugly mansion at Cheam to “Chemosh, the abomination of Moab.” In 1831 he wrote to his friend Mrs. Meynell that “the French Government was far from stable—like Meynell’s[151] horses at the end of a long day’s chase.” When a lady asked him for an epitaph on her pet dog Spot, he proposed “Out, damned Spot!” but, “strange to say, she did not think it sentimental enough.” When William Cavendish,[152] who had been Second Wrangler, married Lady Blanche Howard, Sydney wrote—“Euclid leads Blanche to the altar—a strange choice for him, as she has not an angle about her.” It was with reference to this kind of pleasantry that he said:—

“A joke goes a great way in the country. I have known one last pretty well for seven years. I remember making a joke after a meeting of the clergy, in Yorkshire, where there was a Rev. Mr. Buckle, who never spoke when I gave his health. I said that he was a buckle without a tongue. Most persons within hearing laughed, but my next neighbour sat unmoved and sunk in thought. At last, a quarter of an hour after we had all done, he suddenly nudged me, exclaiming, ’I see *now* what you meant, Mr. Smith; you meant a joke.’ ‘Yes,’ I said, ’sir; I believe I did.’ Upon which he began laughing so heartily, that I thought he would choke, and was obliged to pat him on the back.”

A graver fault than this boyish love of punning is the undeniable vein of coarseness which here and there disfigures Sydney Smith’s controversial method. In 1810 he wrote, very characteristically, about his friend Lord Grey—“His deficiency is a want of executive coarseness.” This is a fault with which he could never have charged himself. His own “executive coarseness” is referable in part to the social standard of the day, when ladies as refined as the Miss Berrys “d——d” the too-hot tea-kettle, and Canning referred to a political opponent as “the revered and ruptured Member.” In a similar vein Sydney jokes incessantly about skin-disease in Scotland; writes of a neighbour whose manners he disliked that “she was as cold as if she were in the last stage of blue cholera”; and, after his farmers had been dining with him, says that “they were just as tipsy as farmers ought to be when dining with the parson.”

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When he came to dealing publicly with a political opponent, he seems to have thought that, the coarser were his illustrations, the more domestic and personal his allusions, the better for the cause which he served. The *Letters of Peter Plymley* abound in medical and obstetrical imagery. The effect of the Orders in Council on the health of Europe supplies endless jokes. Peter roars with laughter at the thought of his sister-in-law, Mrs. Abraham Plymley, "led away captive by an amorous Gaul." Nothing can be nastier (or more apt) than his comparison between the use of humour in controversy and that of the small-tooth comb in domestic life; nothing less delicate than the imaginary "Suckling Act" in which he burlesques Lord Shaftesbury's Ten Hours Bill. He barbs his attacks on an oppressive Government by jokes about the ugliness of Perceval's face and the poverty of Canning's relations—the pensions conferred on "Sophia" and "Caroline," their "national veal" and "public tea"; and the "clouds of cousins arriving by the waggon." When a bishop has insulted him, he replies with an insinuation that the bishop obtained his preferment by fraud and misrepresentation,[153] and jeers at him for having begun life as a nobleman's Private Tutor, called by the "endearing but unmajestic name of Dick." It is only fair to say that these aberrations from good taste and good feeling became less and less frequent as years went on. That they ever were permitted to deform the splendid advocacy of great causes is due to the fact that, when Sydney Smith began to write, the influence of Smollett and his imitators was still powerful. Burke's obscene diatribes against the French Revolution were still quoted and admired. Nobody had yet made any emphatic protest against the beastliness of Swift or the brutalities of Junius.[154]

When these necessary deductions have been made, we can return to the most admiring eulogy. In 1835 Sydney wrote:—

> "Catch me, if you can, in any one illiberal sentiment, or in any opinion which I have need to recant; and that, after twenty years' scribbling upon all subjects."

It was no mean boast, and it was absolutely justified by the record. From first to last he was the convinced, eager, and devoted friend of Freedom, and that without distinction of place or race or colour. He would make no terms with a man who temporized about the Slave-Trade.—

> "No man should ever hold parley with it, but speak of it with abhorrence, as the greatest of all human abominations."

The toleration of Slavery was the one and grave exception to his unstinted admiration of the United States, which afforded, in his opinion, "the most magnificent picture of human happiness" which the world had ever seen. And this because in America, more than in any other country, each citizen was free to live his own life, manage his own affairs, and work out his own destiny, under the protection of just and equal laws. As regards

political institutions in England, he seems to have been converted rather gradually to the belief that Reform was necessary. In 1819 he wrote to his friend Jeffrey:—

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“The case that the people have is too strong to be resisted; an answer may be made to it, which will satisfy enlightened people perhaps, but none that the mass will be satisfied with. I am doubtful whether it is not your duty and my duty to become moderate Reformers, to keep off worse.”

In 1820 he wrote:—“I think all wise men should begin to turn their faces Reform-wards.” In 1821 he writes about the state of parties in the House of Commons:—

“Of all ingenious instruments of despotism, I most commend a popular assembly where the majority are paid and hired, and a few bold and able men, by their brave speeches, make the people believe they are free.”

And then again, with regard to religious liberty, what can be finer than his protest against the spirit of persecution?—

“I admit there is a vast luxury in selecting a particular set of Christians and in worrying them as a boy worries a puppy dog; it is an amusement in which all the young English are brought up from their earliest days. I like the idea of saying to men who use a different hassock from me, that till they change their hassock, they shall never be Colonels, Aldermen, or Parliament-men. While I am gratifying my personal insolence respecting religious forms, I fondle myself into an idea that I am religious, and that I am doing my duty in the most exemplary (as I certainly am in the most easy) way.”

It may perhaps be dangerous to persecute the Roman Catholics of Ireland. They are many, they are spirited—they may turn round and hurt us. It might be wiser to try our hands on some small body like the Evangelicals of Clapham or the followers of William Wilberforce (at whom in passing he aims a Shandeau sneer).—

“We will gratify the love of insolence and power; we will enjoy the old orthodox sport of witnessing the impotent anger of men compelled to submit to civil degradation, or to sacrifice their notions of truth to ours. And all this we may do without the slightest risk, because their numbers are (as yet) not very considerable. Cruelty and injustice must, of course, exist: but why connect them with danger? Why torture a bull-dog, when you can get a frog or a rabbit? I am sure my proposal will meet with the most universal approbation. Do not be apprehensive of any opposition from Ministers. If it is a case of hatred, we are sure that one man[155] will defend it by the Gospel: if it abridges human freedom, we know that another[156] will find precedents for it in the Revolution.”

As years went on, he was sometimes displeased by the doings of his Liberal friends, but he was never “stricken by the palsy of candour”; he never forsook the good cause for which he had fought so steadily, never made terms with political deserters. After the Conservative triumph of 1841 he wrote:—“The country is in a state of political transition, and the shabby are preparing their consciences and opinions for a tack.”

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But, though he was so keen and so consistent a champion of civil and religious freedom, he was a sworn foe to anarchy and licence. Like most people who had seen the later stages of the French Revolution, he had a holy horror of mob-law and mob-justice. "If I am to be a slave," he said, "I would rather be the slave of a king than of a rabble"; but he vehemently objected to being the slave of either. He likened Democracy and Despotism to the "two tubes of a double-barrelled pistol," which menaced the life of the State. "The democrats are as much to be kept at bay with the left hand as the Tories are with the right." "A thousand years," he wrote in 1838, "have scarce sufficed to make our blessed England what it is: an hour may lay it in the dust."

After the riots at Bristol in 1831, consequent on the rejection of the Reform Bill, he strenuously demanded stern punishment for the rioters. He wrote to the Prime Minister:—

"Pray do not be good-natured about Bristol. I must have ten people hanged, and twenty transported, and thirty imprisoned; it is absolutely necessary to give the multitude a severe blow, for their conduct at Bristol has been most atrocious. You will save lives by it in the end. There is no plea of want, as there was in the agricultural riots."

You will save lives by it in the end. There spoke the truly humanitarian spirit which does not shrink from drawing the sword at the bidding of real necessity, but asks itself once and again whether any proposed effusion of blood is really demanded by the exigencies of the moral law.

On questions of peace and war, Sydney Smith was always on the right side.[157] He saw as clearly as the most clamorous patriot that England was morally bound to defend her existence and her freedom. He exhorted her to rally all her forces and strive with agonies and energies against the anti-human ambition of Napoleon. And, when once the great deliverance was achieved, he turned again to the enjoyment and the glorification of Peace.—

"Let fools praise conquerors, and say the great Napoleon pulled down this kingdom and destroyed that army: we will thank God for a King[158] who has derived his quiet glory from the peace of his realm.""The atrocities, and horrors, and disgusts of war have never been half enough insisted upon by the teachers of the people; but the worst of evils and the greatest of follies have been varnished over with specious names, and the gigantic robbers and murderers of the world have been holden up for imitation to the weak eyes of youth."

No wars, except the very few which we really required for national self-defence, could attract his sympathy. Wars of intervention in the affairs of other nations, even when undertaken for excellent objects, he regarded with profound mistrust.

When in 1823, the nascent liberties of Spain were threatened, he wrote:—

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“I am afraid we shall go to war; I am sorry for it. I see every day in the world a thousand acts of oppression which I should like to resent, but I cannot afford to play the Quixote. Why are the English to be the sole vindicators of the human race?”

And again:—

“For God’s sake, do not drag me into another war! I am worn down, and worn out, with crusading and defending Europe, and protecting mankind; I *must* think a little of myself. I am sorry for the Spaniards—I am sorry for the Greeks—I deplore the fate of the Jews; the people of the Sandwich Islands are groaning under the most detestable tyranny; Bagdad is oppressed—I do not like the present state of the Delta—Thibet is not comfortable. Am I to fight for all these people? The world is bursting with sin and sorrow. Am I to be champion of the Decalogue, and to be eternally raising fleets and armies to make all men good and happy? We have just done saving Europe, and I am afraid the consequence will be, that we shall cut each other’s throats.”

In 1830 he wrote to his friend Lady Holland about her son,[159] afterwards General Fox:—

“I am very glad to see Charles in the Guards. He will now remain at home; for I trust that there will be no more embarkation of the Guards while I live, and that a captain of the Guards will be as ignorant of the colour of blood as the rector of a parish. We have had important events enough within the last twenty years. May all remaining events be culinary, amorous, literary, or any thing but political!”

And so again, according to Lord Houghton, he said in later life:—

> “I have spent enough and fought enough for other nations. I must think a little of myself. I want to sit under my own bramble and sloe-tree with my own great-coat and umbrella.”

This is no fatty degeneration of the chivalrous spirit. It is merely the old doctrine of Non-intervention speaking in a lighter tone.

An account of a man’s personal characteristics must contain some estimate of his aesthetic sense. This was not very strongly developed in Sydney Smith. He admired the beauties of a smiling landscape, such as he saw in the Vale of Taunton, and hated grimness and barrenness such as he remembered at Harrogate. “I thought it the most heaven-forgotten country under the sun when I saw it; there were only nine mangy fir-trees there, and even they all leaned away from it.” He enjoyed bright colours and sweet scents, and had a passion for light. His views of Art were primitive. We have seen that he preferred gas to Correggio. He admired West,[160] and did not admire Haydon.[161] He bought pictures for the better decoration of his drawing-room, and, when they did not please him, had them altered to suit his taste,—

“Look at that sea-piece, now; what would you desire more? It is true, the moon in the corner was rather dingy when I first bought it; so I had a new moon put in for half-a-crown, and now I consider it perfect.”

This perhaps may be regarded as burlesque, and so may his sympathetic remark to the gushing connoisseur—

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“I got into dreadful disgrace with him once, when, standing before a picture at Bowood, he exclaimed, turning to me, ’Immense breadth of light and shade!’ I innocently said, ‘Yes;—about an inch and a half.’ He gave me a look that ought to have killed me.”

But his gratitude to his young friend Lady Mary Bennet, who covered the walls of his Rectory with the sweet products of her pencil, is only too palpably sincere. It may perhaps be imputed to him for aesthetic virtue that he considered the national monuments in St. Paul’s, with the sole exception of Dr. Johnson’s, “a disgusting heap of trash.” It is less satisfactory that he found the Prince Regent’s “suite of golden rooms” at Carlton House “extremely magnificent.”

To music he was more sympathetic, but even here his sympathies had their limitations. Music in the minor key made him melancholy, and had to be discontinued when he was in residence at St. Paul’s;[162] and this was not his only musical prejudice.—

> “Nothing can be more disgusting than an oratorio. How absurd to see five hundred people fiddling like madmen about the Israelites in the Red Sea!”

“Yesterday I heard Rubini and Grisi, Lablache and Tamburini. The opera, by Bellini, *I Puritani*, was dreadfully tiresome, and unintelligible in its plan. I hope it is the last opera I shall ever go to.”“*Semiramis* would be to me pure misery. I love music very little. I hate acting. I have the worst opinion of Semiramis herself, and the whole thing seems to me so childish and so foolish that I cannot abide it. Moreover, it would be rather out of etiquette for a Canon of St. Paul’s to go to the opera; and, where etiquette prevents me from doing things disagreeable to myself, I am a perfect martinet.”

After a Musical Festival at York he writes to Lady Holland:—

“I did not go once. Music for such a length of time (unless under sentence of a jury) I will not submit to. What pleasure is there in pleasure, if quantity is not attended to, as well as quality? I know nothing more agreeable than a dinner at Holland House; but it must not begin at ten in the morning, and last till six. I should be incapable for the last four hours of laughing at Lord Holland’s jokes, eating Raffaelle’s cakes, or repelling Mr. Allen’s[163] attack upon the Church.”

Yet, in spite of these limitations, he took lessons on the piano, and often warbled in the domestic circle. In 1843 he writes—“I am learning to sing some of Moore’s songs, which I think I shall do to great perfection,” His daughter says, with filial piety, that, when he had once learnt a song, he sang it very correctly, and, “having a really fine voice, often *encored himself*.” A lady who visited him at Combe Florey corroborates this account, saying that after dinner he said to his wife, “I crave for Music, Mrs. Smith. Music! Music!” and sang, “with his rich sweet voice, *A Few Gay Soarings Yet*.” In old age he said;—

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> "If I were to begin life again, I would devote much time to music. All musical people seem to me happy; it is the most engrossing pursuit; almost the only innocent and unpunished passion."

When we turn from the aesthetic to the literary faculty, we find it a good deal better developed. That he was a sound scholar in the sense of being able to read the standard classics with facility and enjoyment we know from his own statements. In the early days of the *Edinburgh Review* he perceived and extolled the fine scholarship of Monk[164] and Blomfield[165] and Maltby.[166] The fact that Marsh[167] was a man of learning mitigated the severity of the attack on "Persecuting Bishops." His glowing tribute to the accomplishments of Sir James Mackintosh is qualified by the remark that "the Greek language has never crossed the Tweed in any great force." In brief, be understood and respected classical scholarship. He was keenly interested in English literature, and kept abreast of what was produced in France; but German he seems to have regarded as a kind of joke, and Italian he only mentions as part of a young lady's education.

In 1819 he wrote to his son at Westminster:—

"For the English poets, I will let you off at present with Milton, Dryden, Pope, and Shakespeare; and remember, always in books, keep the best company. Don't read a line of Ovid till you have mastered Virgil; nor a line of Thomson till you have exhausted Pope; nor of Massinger, till you are familiar with Shakespeare."

He thought Locke "a fine, satisfactory sort of a fellow, but very long-winded"; considered Horace Walpole's "the best wit ever published in the shape of letters"; and dismissed Madame de Sevigne as "very much over-praised." Of Montaigne he says—"He thinks aloud, that is his great merit, but does not think remarkably well. Mankind has improved in thinking and writing since that period."

It was, of course, part of his regular occupation to deal with new books in the *Edinburgh*; and, apart from these formal reviews, his letters are full of curious comments. In 1814 he declines to read the *Edinburgh's* criticism of Wordsworth, because "the subject is to me so very uninteresting." In the same year he writes:—

> "I think very highly of *Waverley*, and was inclined to suspect, in reading it, that it was written by Miss Scott of Ancrum."

In 1818 he wrote about *The Heart of Midlothian*:—

"I think it excellent—quite as good as any of his novels, excepting that in which Claverhouse is introduced, and of which I forget the name.... He repeats his characters, but it seems they will bear repetition. Who can read the novel without laughing and crying twenty times?"

In 1820:—

> “Have you read *Ivanhoe*? It is the least dull, and the most easily read through, of all Scott’s novels; but there are many more powerful.”

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Later in the same year:—

“I have just read *The Abbot*; it is far above common novels, but of very inferior execution to his others, and hardly worth reading. He has exhausted the subject of Scotland, and worn out the few characters that the early periods of Scotch history could supply him with. Meg Merrilies appears afresh in every novel.”

In 1821:—

“*The Pirate* is certainly one of the least fortunate of Sir Walter’s productions. It seems now that he cannot write without Meg Merrilies and Dominie Sampson. One other such novel, and there’s an end; but who can last for ever? who ever lasted so long?”

In 1823:—

> “*Peveril* is a moderate production, between his best and his worst; rather agreeable than not.”

His judgment on *The Bride of Lammermoor* is indeed deplorable. He thought it like Scott’s previous work, but “laboured in an inferior way, and more careless, with many repetitions of himself. Caleb is overdone.... The catastrophe is shocking and disgusting."[168]

Incidentally we find him praising Lister’s *Granby*, and Hope’s *Anastasius*. He early discovered and consistently admired Macaulay, though he drew the line at the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, on the ground that he “abhorred all Grecian and Roman subjects.” It is curious to note the number and variety of new books which he more or less commends, and which are now equally and completely forgotten. As we come nearer our own times, however, we find an important conversion. In 1838 he writes:—

> “*Nickleby* is very good. I stood out against Mr. Dickens as long as I could, but he has conquered me.”

In 1843 he writes to Dickens:—

> “Pecksniff and his daughters, and Pinch, are admirable—quite first-rate painting, such as no one but yourself can execute. Chuffey is admirable. I never read a finer piece of writing.”

And, when Dickens asks him to dinner, he replies:—

“I accept your obliging invitation conditionally. If I am invited by any man of greater genius than yourself, or one by whose works I have been more completely interested, I will repudiate you, and dine with the more splendid phenomenon of the two.”

His crowning glory in the matter of literary criticism is that, as Ruskin told us, he was the first man in the literary circles of London to assert the value of *Modern Painters*. “He said it was a work of transcendent talent, presented the most original views in the most elegant and powerful language, and would work a complete revolution in the world of taste."[169]

With the physical sciences Sydney Smith seems to have had no real acquaintance, unless we include among them the art of the apothecary, which all through life he studied diligently and practised courageously. But he recommended Botany, with some confidence, as “certain to delight little girls”; and his friendship with the amiable and instructive Mrs. Marcet[170] gave him a smattering of scientific terms. In a discussion on the *Inferno* he invented a new torment especially for that excellent lady’s benefit.—

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“You should be doomed to listen, for a thousand years, to conversations between Caroline and Emily, where Caroline should always give wrong explanations in chemistry, and Emily in the end be unable to distinguish an acid from an alkali.”

When we turn, from these smaller matters of taste and accomplishment, to the general view of life, Sydney Smith would seem, at first sight, to have been a Utilitarian: and yet he declared himself in vigorous terms an opponent of the Utilitarian School.—

“That school treat mankind as if they were mere machines; the feelings or affections never enter into their calculations. If everything is to be sacrificed to utility, why do you bury your grandmother? why don’t you cut her into small pieces at once, and make portable soup of her?”

In a similar vein, he said of his friend George Grote that he would have been an important politician if the world had been a chess-board. Any system, social, political, or philosophical, which did not directly concern itself with the wants and feelings and impulses of human flesh and blood, appealed to him in vain.

“How foolish,” he wrote, “and how profligate, to show that the principle of general utility has no foundation; that it is often opposed to the interests of the individual! If this be true, there is an end of all reasoning and all morals: and if any man asks, Why am I to do what is generally useful? he should not be reasoned with, but called rogue, rascal, *etc*., and the mob should be excited to break his windows.”

He liked what he called “useful truth.” He could make no terms with thinkers who were “more fond of disputing on mind and matter than on anything which can have a reference to the real world, inhabited by real men, women, and children.” Indeed, all his thinking was governed by his eager and generous humanitarianism. He thought all speculation, which did not bear directly on the welfare and happiness of human beings, a waste of ingenuity; and yet, at the same time, he taught that all practical systems, which left out of account the emotional and sentimental side of man, were incomplete and ineffectual. This higher side of his nature showed itself in his lively affections, his intense love of home and wife and children, his lifelong tenacity of friendship, and his overflowing sympathy for the poor, the abject, and the suffering.

“The haunts of Happiness,” he wrote, “are varied, and rather unaccountable; but I have more often seen her among little children, and by home firesides, and in country houses, than anywhere else,—at least, I think so.”

When his mother died, he wrote—“Everyone must go to his grave with his heart scarred like a soldier’s body,” and, when he lost his infant boy, he said—“Children are horribly insecure; the life of a parent is the life of a gambler.”

His more material side was well exhibited by the catalogue of “Modern Changes” which he compiled in old age, heading it with the characteristic couplet:—

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"The good of ancient times let others state,
I think it lucky I was born so late."[171]

It concludes with the words, "Even in the best society one third of the gentlemen at least were always drunk."

This reminds us that, in the matter of temperance, Sydney Smith was far in advance of his time. That he was no

"budge doctor of the Stoic fur,
Praising the lean and sallow Abstinence,"

is plain enough from his correspondence. "The wretchedness of human life," he wrote in 1817, "is only to be encountered upon the basis of meat and wine"; but he had a curiously keen sense of the evils induced by "the sweet poyson."[172] As early as 1814 he urged Lord Holland to "leave off wine entirely," for, though never guilty of excess, Holland showed a "respectable and dangerous plenitude." After a visit to London in the same year, Sydney wrote:—

"I liked London better than ever I liked it before, and simply, I believe, from water-drinking. Without this, London is stupefaction and inflammation. It is not the love of wine, but thoughtlessness and unconscious imitation: other men poke out their hands for the revolving wine, and one does the same, without thinking of it. All people above the condition of labourers are ruined by excess of stimulus and nourishment, clergy included. I never yet saw any gentleman who ate and drank as little as was reasonable."

In 1828 he wrote to Lady Holland (of Holland House):—

"I not only was never better, but never half so well: indeed I find I have been very ill all my life, without knowing it. Let me state some of the goods arising from abstaining from all fermented liquors. First, sweet sleep; having never known what sweet sleep was, I sleep like a baby or a plough-boy. If I wake, no needless terrors, no black visions of life, but pleasing hopes and pleasing recollections: Holland House, past and to come! If I dream, it is not of lions and tigers, but of Easter dues and tithes. Secondly, I can take longer walks, and make greater exertions, without fatigue. My understanding is improved, and I comprehend Political Economy. Only one evil ensues from it: I am in such extravagant spirits that I must look out for some one who will bore and depress me."

In 1834 he wrote:—

"I am better in health, avoiding all fermented liquors, and drinking nothing but London water, with a million insects in every drop. He who drinks a tumbler of London water

has literally in his stomach more animated beings than there are men, women, and children on the face of the globe."

In spite of this disquieting analysis he persevered, and wrote two years later:—

"I have had no gout, nor any symptom of it: by eating little, and drinking only water, I keep body and mind in a serene state, and spare the great toe. Looking back at my past life, I find that all my miseries of body and mind have proceeded from indigestion. Young people in early life should be thoroughly taught the moral, intellectual, and physical evils of indigestion."

Saba, Lady Holland, who had a discreet but provoking trick of omitting the proper name wherever we specially thirst to know it, thus reports her father's conversation:—

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“Now, I mean not to drink one drop of wine to-day, and I shall be mad with spirits. I always am when I drink no wine. It is curious the effect a thimbleful of wine has upon me; I feel as flat as——’s jokes; it destroys my understanding: I forget the number of the Muses, and think them xxxix, of course; and only get myself right again by repeating the lines, and finding ‘Descend, ye Thirty-Nine!’ two feet too long.”

All this profound interest in the matter of food and drink was closely connected in Sydney Smith with a clear sense of the influence exercised by the body over the soul.—

“I am convinced digestion is the great secret of life; and that character, talents, virtues, and qualities are powerfully affected by beef, mutton, pie-crust, and rich soups. I have often thought I could feed or starve men into many virtues and vices, and affect them more powerfully with my instruments of cookery than Timotheus could do formerly with his lyre."[173]

According to his own accounts of himself he seems, like most people who are boisterously cheerful, to have had occasional tendencies to melancholy. “An extreme depression of spirits,” he writes in 1826, “is an evil of which I have a full comprehension.” But, on the other hand, he writes:—

> “I thank God, who has made me poor, that He has made me merry. I think it a better gift than much wheat and bean-land, with a doleful heart.”

“My constitutional gaiety comes to my aid in all the difficulties of life; and the recollection that, having embraced the character of an honest man and a friend to rational liberty, I have no business to repine at that mediocrity of fortune which I *knew* to be its consequence.”

The truth would seem to be that, finding, in his temperament and circumstances, some predisposing causes of melancholy, he refused to sit down under the curse and let it poison his life, but took vigorous measures with himself and his surroundings; cultivated cheerfulness as a duty, and repelled gloom as a disease. He “tried always to live in the Present and the Future, and to look upon the Past as so much dirty linen.” After reading Burke, and praising his “beautiful and fruitful imagination,” he says—“With the politics of so remote a period I do not concern myself.” He had a robust confidence in the cheering virtues of air and exercise, early hours and cold water, light and warmth, temperance in tea and coffee as well as wine—“Apothegms of old women,” as he truly said, but tested by universal experience and found efficacious. He recommended constant occupation, combined with variety of interests, and taught that nothing made one feel so happy as the act of doing good. He thus describes his own experience, when, as Canon of St. Paul’s, he had presented a valuable living to the friendless son of the deceased incumbent. He announced the presentation to the stricken family.—

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“They all burst into tears. It flung me also into a great agitation, and I wept and groaned for a long time. Then I rose, and said I thought it was very likely to end in their keeping a buggy, at which we all laughed as violently. The poor old lady, who was sleeping in a garret because she could not bear to enter into the room lately inhabited by her husband, sent for me and kissed me, sobbing with a thousand emotions. The charitable physician wept too.... I never passed so remarkable a morning, nor was more deeply impressed with the sufferings of human life, and never felt more thoroughly the happiness of doing good.”

Of all his various remedies against melancholy, the one on which he most constantly and most earnestly insisted, was the wisdom of “taking short views,”—

“Dispel,” he said, “that prophetic gloom which dives into futurity, to extract sorrow from days and years to come, and which considers its own unhappy visions as the decrees of Providence. We know nothing of to-morrow: our business is to be good and happy to-day.”

Our business is to be good and happy. This dogma inevitably suggests the question—-What was Sydney Smith’s religion? First and foremost, he was a staunch and consistent Theist.—

“I hate the insolence, persecution, and intolerance, which so often pass under the name of religion, and have fought against them; but I have an unaffected horror of irreligion and impiety, and every principle of suspicion and fear would be excited in me by a man who professed himself an infidel."[174]

In a lighter vein, he talked with dread of travelling in a stage-coach with “an Atheist who told me what he had said in his heart."[175] And in 1808 he wrote to his friend Jeffrey with reference to the tone of the *Edinburgh Review*:—

“I must beg the favour of you to be explicit on one point. Do you mean to take care that the *Review* shall not profess or encourage infidel principles? Unless this is the case, I must absolutely give up all thoughts of connecting myself with it.”

The grounds on which his theism rested seem, as Sir Leslie Stephen points out, to have been exactly those which satisfied Paley. Lord Murray, who, though he was a judge, does not seem to have been exacting about the quality of argument, admiringly relates this anecdote of his friend:—

“A foreigner, on one occasion, indulging in sceptical doubts of the existence of an overruling Providence in his presence, Sydney, who had observed him evidently well satisfied with his repast, said, ’You must admit there is great genius and thought in that dish.’ ‘Admirable!’ he replied; ‘nothing can be better,’ ’May I then ask, are you prepared to deny the existence of the cook?”

Of course this is nothing but Paley's illustration of the Watch, reproduced in a less impressive form.

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But Sydney Smith was not content with a system of thought which provided him with a working hypothesis for the construction of the physical universe and the conduct of this present life. He looked above and beyond; and reinforced his own faith in immortality by an appeal to the general sense of mankind.—

"Who ever thinks of turning into ridicule our great and ardent hope of a world to come? Whenever the man of humour meddles with these things, he is astonished to find that in all the great feelings of their nature the mass of mankind always think and act aright; that they are ready enough to laugh, but that they are quite as ready to drive away, with indignation and contempt, the light fool who comes with the feather of wit to crumble the bulwarks of truth, and to beat down the Temples of God. We count over the pious spirits of the world, the beautiful writers, the great statesmen, all who have invented subtlely, who have thought deeply, who have executed wisely:—all these are proofs that we are destined for a second life; and it is not possible to believe that this redundant vigour, this lavish and excessive power, was given for the mere gathering of meat and drink. If the only object is present existence, such faculties are cruel, are misplaced, are useless. They all show us that there is something great awaiting us,—that the soul is now young and infantine, springing up into a more perfect life when the body falls into dust.""Man is imprisoned here only for a season, to take a better or a worse hereafter, as he deserves it. This old truth is the fountain of all goodness, and justice, and kindness among men: may we all feel it intimately, obey it perpetually, and profit by it eternally!"

He was not a theist only, but a Christian. Here again, as in the argument from Design, he followed Paley, laid great stress on Evidences, and "selected his train of reasoning with some care from the best writers." He said;—"The truth of Christianity depends upon its leading facts, and of these we have such evidence as ought to satisfy us, till it appears that mankind have ever been deceived by proofs as numerous and as strong." Having convinced himself that the Christian religion was true, he was loyal in word and act to what he had accepted. He remonstrated vigorously against an "anti-Christian article" which crept into the *Edinburgh Review*; and felt, as keenly as the strongest sacerdotalist or the most fervent Evangelical, the bounden duty of defending the body of truth to which his Ordination had pledged him.

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It can scarcely be contested that his conceptions of that truth were, in some grave respects, defective. The absolute dominion and overruling providence of God are always present to his mind, and he urges as the ground of all virtuous effort the Character and Example of Christ. But the notion of Atonement finds no place in his thought. The virtuous will attain to eternal blessedness, and the vicious will perish in their vices. The free pardon of confessed sin—access to happiness through a Divine Mediation—in a word, the Doctrine of the Cross—seems, as far as his recorded utterances go, to have been quite alien from his system of religion. The appeal to personal experience of sinfulness, forgiveness, and acceptance, he would have dismissed as mere enthusiasm—and he declared in his sermon on the Character and Genius of the Christian Religion, that "*the Gospel has no enthusiasm*." That it once was possible for a clergyman to utter these five words as containing an axiomatic truth, marks, perhaps as plainly as it is possible for language to mark it, the change effected in the religion of the Church of England by the successive action of the Evangelical Revival and of the Oxford Movement.

Sydney Smith's firm belief, from first to last, was that Religion was intended to make men good and happy in daily life. This was "the calm tenor of its language," and the "practical view" of its rule. And, as far as it goes, no one can quarrel with the doctrine so laid down. After staying with some Puritanical friends, he wrote:—

"I endeavour in vain to give them more cheerful ideas of religion: to teach them that God is not a jealous, childish, merciless tyrant; that He is best served by a regular tenour of good actions,—not by bad singing, ill-composed prayers, and eternal apprehensions. But the luxury of false religion is, to be unhappy!"

It was probably this strong conviction that everything pertaining to religion ought to be bright and cheerful, that led him, as far back as the days when he was preaching in Edinburgh, to urge the need for more material beauty in public worship.—

"No reflecting man can ever wish to adulterate manly piety (the parent of all that is good in the world) with mummery and parade. But we are strange, very strange creatures, and it is better perhaps not to place too much confidence in our reason alone. If anything, there is, perhaps, too little pomp and ceremony in our worship, instead of too much. We quarrelled with the Roman Catholic Church, in a great hurry and a great passion; and, furious with spleen, clothed ourselves with sackcloth, because she was habited in brocade; rushing, like children, from one extreme to another, and blind to all medium between complication and barrenness, formality and neglect. I am very glad to find we are calling in, more and more, the aid of music to our services. In London, where it can be commanded, good music has a prodigious

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effect in filling a church; organs have been put up in various churches in the country, and, as I have been informed, with the best possible effect. Of what value, it may be asked, are auditors who come there from such motives? But our first business seems to be, to bring them there from any motive which is not undignified and ridiculous, and then to keep them there from a good one: those who come for pleasure may remain for prayer."

When Sydney speaks of our "quarrel with the Roman Catholic Church," he speaks of a quarrel in which, at least as far as doctrine is concerned, he had his full share. Never was a stouter Protestant. Even in the passages in which he makes his strongest appeals for the civil rights of Romanists, he goes out of the way to pour scorn on their religion. Some of his language is unquotable: here are some milder specimens:—

> "As for the enormous wax candles, and superstitious mummeries, and painted jackets of the Catholic priests, I fear them not."
>
> "Spencer Perceval is in horror lest twelve or fourteen old women may be converted to holy water and Catholic nonsense."
>
> "I am as disgusted with the nonsense of the Roman Catholic religion as you can be; and no man who talks such nonsense shall ever tithe the products of the earth."

"Catholic nonsense" is not a happy phrase on the lips of a man who was officially bound to recite his belief in the Catholic Faith and to pray for the good estate of the Catholic Church. A priest who administers Baptism according to the use of the Church of England should not talk about "the sanctified contents of a pump," or describe people who cross themselves as "making right angles upon the breast and forehead." But time brings changes in religious, as well as in social, manners, and Peter Plymley prophesied nearly thirty years before Keble's sermon on "National Apostasy" had started the second revival of the English Church.[176]

No one who has studied the character and career of Sydney Smith would expect him to be very sympathetic with the work which bore the name of Pusey. In 1841 he preached against it at St. Paul's.

"I wish you had witnessed, the other day, my incredible boldness in attacking the Puseyites. I told them that they made the Christian religion a religion of postures and ceremonies, of circumflexions and genuflexions, of garments and vestures, of ostentation and parade; that they took tithe of mint and cummin, and neglected the weightier matters of the law,—justice, mercy, and the duties of life: and so forth."

From Combe Florey he wrote:—

> “Everybody here is turning Puseyite. Having worn out my black gown, I preach in my surplice; this is all the change I have made, or mean to make.”

In 1842 he wrote to a friend abroad:—

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“I have not yet discovered of what I am to die, but I rather believe I shall be burnt alive by the Puseyites. Nothing so remarkable in England as the progress of these foolish people.[177] I have no conception what they mean, if it be not to revive every absurd ceremony, and every antiquated folly, which the common sense of mankind has set to sleep. You will find at your return a fanatical Church of England, but pray do not let it prevent your return. We can always gather together, in Green Street, a chosen few who have never bowed the knee to Rimmon.”

It may be questioned whether the Hermit of Green Street was very well qualified to settle the points at issue between the “Puseyites” and himself, or had bestowed very close attention on what is, after all, mainly a question of Documents. In earlier days, when it suited his purpose to argue for greater liberality towards Roman Catholics, he had said:—

> “In their tenets, in their church-government, in the nature of their endowments, the Dissenters are infinitely more distant from the Church of England than the Catholics are.”

In 1813 he had intervened in the controversy which raged round the cradle of that most pacific institution, the British and Foreign Bible Society, and had taken the unexpectedly clerical view that Churchmen were bound to “circulate the Scriptures with the Prayer Book, in preference to any other method.” But he grounded a claim to promotion on the fact that he had “always avoided speculative, and preached practical, religion.” He spoke of a “theological” bishop in the sense of dispraise, and linked the epithet with “bitter” and “bustling.” Beyond question he had read the Bible, but he was not alarmingly familiar with the sacred text. It is reported[178] that he once referred to the case of the man who puts his hand to the plough and looks back[179] as being “somewhere in the Epistles.” He forgot the names of Job’s daughters, until reminded by a neighbouring Squire who had called his greyhounds Jemima, Kezia, and Keren-Happuch. He attributed the *Nunc Dimittis* to an author vaguely but conveniently known as “The Psalmist,” and by so doing drew down on himself the ridicule of Wilson Croker.[180] It may be questioned whether he ever read the Prayer Book except in Church. With the literature of Christian antiquity he had not, so far as his writings show, the slightest acquaintance; and his knowledge of Anglican divines—Wake, and Cleaver, and Sherlock, and Horsley—has a suspicious air of having been hastily acquired for the express purpose of confuting Bishop Marsh. So we will not cite him as a witness in a case where the highest and deepest mysteries of Revelation are involved, and where a minute acquaintance with documents is an indispensable equipment. We prefer to take leave of him as a Christian preacher, seeking only the edification of his hearers. In a sermon on the Holy Communion, preached from the pulpit of St. Paul’s, he delivers this striking testimony to a religious truth, which, if stated in a formal proposition, he would probably have disavowed:—

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“If you, who only *partake* of this Sacrament, cannot fail to be struck with its solemnity, we who not only receive it, but minister it to every description of human beings, in every season of peril and distress, must be intimately and deeply pervaded by that feeling.... To know the power of this Sacrament, give it to him whose doom is sealed, who in a few hours will be no more. The Bread and the Wine are his immense hope! they seem to stand between him and infinite danger, to soothe pain, to calm perturbation, and to inspire immortal courage.”

What is the conclusion of the whole matter? It is, in my judgment, that Sydney Smith was a patriot of the noblest and purest type; a genuinely religious man according to his light and opportunity; and the happy possessor of a rich and singular talent which he employed through a long life in the willing service of the helpless, the persecuted, and the poor. To use his own fine phrase, the interests of humanity “got into his heart and circulated with his blood."[181] He wrote and spoke and acted in prompt and uncalculating obedience to an imperious conviction.—

> “If,” he said, “you ask me who excites me, I answer you, it is that Judge Who stirs good thoughts in honest hearts—under Whose warrant I impeach the wrong, and by Whose help I hope to chastise it.”

Here was both the source and the consecration of that glorious mirth by which he still holds his place in the hearts and on the lips of men. His playful speech was the vehicle of a passionate purpose. From his earliest manhood, he was ready to sacrifice all that the sordid world thinks precious for Religious Equality and Rational Freedom.

[145] Eden Upton Eddis (1812-1901).

[146] Miss Holland writes—“His hair, when I know him, was beautifully fine, silvery, and abundant; rather *taille en brosse*, like a Frenchman’s.”

[147] Lord Houghton.

[148] A hostile reviewer of his Sermons quotes from them such phrases as—“Lays hid,” “Has sprang,” “Has drank,” “Rarely or ever.”

[149] See p. 90.

[150] I have not attempted to make a catalogue of these jokes. Such catalogues will be found in the previous Memoirs of Sydney Smith, and in Sir Wemyss Reid’s Life of Lord Houghton.

[151] Hugo Charles Meynell-Ingram (1784-1869), of Hoar Cross and Temple Newsam.

[152] (1808-1891), became 7th Duke of Devonshire in 1858.

[153] This insinuation was quite unfounded.

[154] It is pleasant to cite the testimony of Lord Houghton, who assured Mr. Stuart Reid that he “never knew, except once, Sydney Smith to make a jest on any *religious* subject; and then he immediately withdrew his words and seemed ashamed that he had uttered them.”

[155] Spencer Perceval.

[156] Lord Hawkesbury.

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[157] See Appendix E.

[158] William IV.

[159] Charles Richard Fox (1796-1873).

[160] Benjamin West (1738-1820).

[161] Benjamin Robert Haydon (1786-1846).

[162] I am indebted for this tradition to the Rev. H.S. Holland, D.D., Canon of St. Paul's.

[163] John Allen was nicknamed "Lady Holland's Atheist."

[164] Bishop of Gloucester.

[165] Bishop of London.

[166] Bishop of Durham.

[167] Bishop of Peterborough.

[168] Quoted by Mr. Stuart Reid.

[169] *Praeterita*, vol. II. chap. ix.

[170] Jane Marcet (1769-1858), authoress of *Conversations on Chemistry*.

[171] *See* Appendix C.

[172] *Comus*.

[173] See Appendix D.

[174] Compare his attack on Hobbes, of whom he says that his "dirty recreation" of smoking did not interrupt any "immoral, irreligious, or unmathematical track of thought in which he happened to be engaged."—*Lectures on Moral Philosophy*, xxvi.

[175] Dixit insipiens in corde suo; Non est Deus.—*Psalm* xiv.

[176] July 14, 1833. "I have ever considered and kept the day as the start of the religious movement of 1833."—CARDINAL NEWMAN, *Apologia*.

[177] In early life he wrote from Edinburgh;—"In England, I maintain, (except among ladies in the middle rank of life) there is no religion at all. The Clergy of England have no more influence over the people at large than the Cheesemongers of England."

[178] By Mr. Stuart Reid.

[179] St. Luke ix. 62.

[180] "What can we think of the fitness of a man to address his Queen and his country in the *dogmatical* strain of this pamphlet, who does not know the New Testament from the Old; the Psalms from the Gospel, David from Simeon; who expatiates so pompously on the duty and benefit of *prayer*, yet mistakes and miscalls a portion of the *Common Prayer*, which he is bound in law and in conscience to repeat every evening of his life."—*Quarterly Review*, July 1837.

The reference is to the Sermon on the Queen's Accession. The blunder was rectified in a later edition.

[181] He said this of Lord Grey.

APPENDIX A

LIST OF SYDNEY SMITH'S ARTICLES IN THE *EDINBURGH REVIEW*

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1	3	24
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35	5	92
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41	7	143
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Of these articles, sixty-five were reprinted by the author and are to be found in his *Works*. Those which he did not reprint are the following:—

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APPENDIX B

“We can inform Jonathan what are the inevitable consequences of being too fond of glory; TAXES upon every article which enters into the mouth, or covers the back, or is placed under the foot—taxes upon every thing which it is pleasant to see, hear, feel, smell, or taste—taxes upon warmth, light, and locomotion—taxes on every thing on

earth and the waters under the earth, on everything that comes from abroad, or is grown at home—taxes on the raw material—taxes on every fresh value that is added to it by the industry of man—taxes on the sauce which pampers man's appetite, and the drug that restores him to health—on the ermine which decorates the judge, and the rope which hangs the criminal—on the poor man's salt, and the rich man's spice—on the brass nails of the coffin, and the ribands of the bride. At bed or board, couchant or levant, we must pay—the schoolboy whips his taxed top—the beardless youth manages his taxed horse, with a taxed bridle, on a taxed road;—and the dying Englishman, pouring his medicine, which has paid 7 per cent., into a spoon that has paid 15 per cent. —flings himself back upon his chintz bed, which has paid 22 per cent—and expires in the arms of an apothecary who has paid a licence of a hundred pounds for the privilege of putting him to death. His whole property is then immediately taxed front 2 to 10 per cent. Besides the probate, large fees are demanded for burying him in the chancel; his virtues are handed down to posterity on taxed marble; and he is then gathered to his fathers—to be taxed no more."—*Review of Seybert's "America" in the Collected Works*.

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“What would our ancestors say to this, Sir? How does this measure tally with their institutions? How does it agree with their experience? Are we to put the wisdom of yesterday in competition with the wisdom of centuries? (*Hear! hear!*) Is beardless youth to show no respect for the decisions of mature age? (*Loud cries of hear! hear!*) If this measure be right, would it have escaped the wisdom of those Saxon progenitors to whom we are indebted for so many of our best political institutions? Would the Dane have passed it over? Would the Norman have rejected it? Would such a notable discovery have been reserved for these modern and degenerate times? Besides, Sir, if the measure itself is good, I ask the Honourable Gentleman if this is the time for carrying it into execution—whether, in fact, a more unfortunate period could have been selected than that which he has chosen? If this were an ordinary measure, I should not oppose it with so much vehemence; but, Sir, it calls in question the wisdom of an irrevocable law—of a law passed at the memorable period of the Revolution. What right have we, Sir, to break down this firm column on which the great men of that age stamped a character of eternity? Are not all authorities against this measure—Pitt, Fox, Cicero, and the Attorney and Solicitor-General? The proposition is new, Sir; it is the first time it was ever heard in this House. I am not prepared, Sir—this House is not prepared, to receive it. The measure implies a distrust of his Majesty’s Government; their disapproval is sufficient to warrant opposition. Precaution only is requisite where danger is apprehended. Here the high character of the individuals in question is a sufficient guarantee against any ground of alarm. Give not, then, your sanction to this measure; for, whatever be its character, if you do give your sanction to it, the same man by whom this is proposed, will propose to you others to which it will be impossible to give your consent. I care very little, Sir, for the ostensible measure; but what is there behind? What are the Honourable Gentleman’s future schemes? If we pass this bill, what fresh concessions may he not require? What further degradation is he planning for his country? Talk of evil and inconvenience, Sir! look to other countries—study other aggregations and societies of men, and then see whether the laws of this country demand a remedy or deserve a panegyric. Was the Honourable Gentleman (let me ask him) always of this way of thinking? Do I not remember when he was the advocate in this House of very opposite opinions? I not only quarrel with his present sentiments, Sir, but I declare very frankly I do not like the party with which he acts. If his own motives were as pure as possible, they cannot but suffer contamination from those with whom he is politically associated. This measure may be a boon to the constitution, but I will accept no favour to the constitution from such hands. (*Loud*

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cries of hear! hear!) I profess myself, Sir, an honest and upright member of the British Parliament, and I am not afraid to profess myself an enemy to all change, and all innovation. I am satisfied with things as they are; and it will be my pride and pleasure to hand down this country to my children as I received it from those who preceded me. The Honourable Gentleman pretends to justify the severity with which he has attacked the Noble Lord who presides in the Court of Chancery, But I say such attacks are pregnant with mischief to Government itself. Oppose Ministers, you oppose Government; disgrace Ministers, you disgrace Government; bring Ministers into contempt, you bring Government into contempt; and anarchy and civil war are the consequences. Besides, Sir, the measure is unnecessary. Nobody complains of disorder in that shape in which it is the aim of your measure to propose a remedy to it. The business is one of the greatest importance; there is need of the greatest caution and circumspection. Do not let us be precipitate, Sir; it is impossible to foresee all consequences. Every thing should be gradual; the example of a neighbouring nation should fill us with alarm! The honourable gentleman has taxed me with illiberality. Sir, I deny the charge. I hate innovation, but I love improvement. I am an enemy to the corruption of Government, but I defend its influence. I dread reform, but I dread it only when it is intemperate. I consider the liberty of the press as the great Palladium of the Constitution; but, at the same time, I hold the licentiousness of the press in the greatest abhorrence. Nobody is more conscious than I am of the splendid abilities of the Honourable Mover, but I tell him at once, his scheme is too good to be practicable. It savours of Utopia. It looks well in theory, but it won't do in practice. It will not do, I repeat, Sir, in practice; and so the advocates of the measure will find, if, unfortunately, it should find its way through Parliament. (*Cheers*.) The source of that corruption to which the Honourable Member alludes, is in the minds of the people; so rank and extensive is that corruption, that no political reform can have any effect in removing it. Instead of reforming others—instead of reforming the State, the Constitution, and every thing that is most excellent, let each man reform himself! let him look at home, he will find there enough to do, without looking abroad, and aiming at what is out of his power. (*Loud Cheers*). And now, Sir, as it is frequently the custom in this House to end with a quotation, and as the gentleman who preceded me in the debate has anticipated me in my favourite quotation of the 'Strong pull and long pull,' I shall end with the memorable words of the assembled barons—*Nolumus leges Angliae mutari*'"—*Review of Bentham's "Book of Fallacies" in the Collected Works*.

APPENDIX C

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“It is of some importance at what period a man is born. A young man, alive at this period, hardly knows to what improvements of human life he has been introduced; and I would bring before his notice the following eighteen changes which have taken place in England since I first began to breathe in it the breath of life—a period amounting now to nearly seventy-three years.

“Gas was unknown: I groped about the streets of London in all but the utter darkness of a twinkling oil lamp, under the protection of watchmen in their grand climacteric, and exposed to every species of depredation and insult.

“I have been nine hours in sailing from Dover to Calais before the invention of steam. It took me nine hours to go from Taunton to Bath, before the invention of railroads, and I now go in six hours from Taunton to London! In going from Taunton to Bath, I suffered between 10,000 and 12,000 severe contusions, before stone-breaking Macadam was born.

“I paid L15 in a single year for repairs of carriage-springs on the pavement of London; and I now glide without noise or fracture, on wooden pavements.

“I can walk, by the assistance of the police, from one end of London to the other, without molestation; or, if tired, get into a cheap and active cab, instead of those cottages on wheels, which the hackney coaches were at the beginning of my life.

“I had no umbrella! They were little used, and very dear. There were no waterproof hats, and *my* hat has often been reduced by rains into its primitive pulp.

“I could not keep my smallclothes in their proper place, for braces were unknown. If I had the gout, there was no colchicum. If I was bilious, there was no calomel. If I was attacked by ague, there was no quinine. There were filthy coffee-houses instead of elegant clubs. Game could not be bought. Quarrels about Uncommuted Tithes were endless. The corruptions of Parliament, before Reform, infamous. There were no banks to receive the savings of the poor. The Poor Laws were gradually sapping the vitals of the country; and, whatever miseries I suffered, I had no post to whisk my complaints for a single penny to the remotest corners of the empire; and yet, in spite of all these privations, I lived on quietly, and am now ashamed that I was not more discontented, and utterly surprised that all these changes and inventions did not occur two centuries ago.

“I forgot to add that, as the basket of stage-coaches, in which luggage was then carried, had no springs, your clothes were rubbed all to pieces; and that even in the best society one third of the gentlemen at least were always drunk.”—“*Modern Changes” in the Collected Works*.

APPENDIX D

“The longer I live, the more I am convinced that the apothecary is of more importance than Seneca; and that half the unhappiness in the world proceeds from little stoppages, from a duct choked up, from food pressing in the wrong place, from a vext duodenum, or an agitated pylorus.

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“The deception, as practised upon human creatures, is curious and entertaining. My friend sups late; he eats some strong soup, then a lobster, then some tart, and he dilutes these esculent varieties with wine. The next day I call upon him. He is going to sell his house in London, and to retire into the country. He is alarmed for his eldest daughter’s health. His expenses are hourly increasing, and nothing but a timely retreat can save him from ruin. All this is the lobster; and, when over-excited nature has had time to manage this testaceous encumbrance, the daughter recovers, the finances are in good order, and every rural idea effectually excluded from the mind.

“In the same manner old friendships are destroyed by toasted cheese, and hard salted meat has led to suicide. Unpleasant feelings of the body produce correspondent sensations in the mind, and a great scene of wretchedness is sketched out by a morsel of indigestible and misguided food. Of such infinite consequence to happiness is it to study the body.”—*Quoted by Lady Holland in her “Memoir of Sydney Smith*.”

APPENDIX E

“I am sorry that I did not, in the execution of my self-created office as a reviewer, take an opportunity in this, or some other military work, to descant a little upon the miseries of war; and I think this has been unaccountably neglected in a work abounding in useful essays, and ever on the watch to propagate good and wise principles. It is not that human beings can live without occasional wars, but they may live with fewer wars, and take more just views of the evils which war inflicts upon mankind. If three men were to have their legs and arms broken, and were to remain all night exposed to the inclemency of weather, the whole country would be in a state of the most dreadful agitation. Look at the wholesale death of a field of battle, ten acres covered with dead, and half dead, and dying; and the shrieks and agonies of many thousand human beings. There is more of misery inflicted upon mankind by one year of war, than by all the civil peculations and oppressions of a century. Yet it is a state into which the mass of mankind rush with the greatest avidity, hailing official murderers, in scarlet, gold, and cocks’ feathers, as the greatest and most glorious of human creatures. It is the business of every wise and good man to set himself against this passion for military glory, which really seems to be the most fruitful source of human misery.

“What would be said of a party of gentlemen who were to sit very peaceably conversing for half an hour, and then were to fight for another half hour, then shake hands, and at the expiration of thirty minutes fight again? Yet such has been the state of the world between 1714 and 1815, a period in which there was in England as many years of war as peace. Societies have been instituted for the preservation of peace, and for lessening the popular love of war. They deserve every encouragement. The highest praise is due to Louis Philippe for his efforts to keep Europe in peace,”—*Footnote to Review of “Letters from a Mahratta Camp” in the Collected Works*.

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