

THE RHETORIC OF SYDNEY SMITH

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Sydney Smith (1771-1845) was the best-loved wit of his lifetime, the principal founder of the Edinburgh Review, an essayist, and a promoter of liberal causes, yet his work is unacknowledged and unanthologized in nineteenth-century rhetorical studies. A study of Smith's essays in the Edinburgh Review shows him to be a rhetorician with an acute sense of audience, who employed distinctive, comic techniques of argument to promote the ideals of democracy. Smith's lively, persuasive essays merit inclusion in the curriculum alongside the manuals of rhetoric that are usually studied.

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Introduction

Lincoln admired him (Epstein 18). Dickens named his seventh child after him (Virgin 248). Trollope quotes him in Barchester Towers (9). Byron satirizes him in Don Juan (967). He is the Rev. Sydney Smith (1771-1845), best-loved wit of his lifetime, principal founder of the Edinburgh Review, essayist, and promoter of liberal causes.

Norman Taylor and Alan Hankinson write at the beginning of the most recently published collection of Sydney Smith's works, Twelve Miles from a Lemon (1996), that they hope their anthology "will reveal a great and good Englishman . . . one who deserves to be known, and to have a place in our history books" (8).¹ Although Smith's collected works went through four editions from 1839-1848 (Cavanaugh 275), by 1891, George Saintsbury was predicting that biographies of Smith rather than Smith's works would keep his name alive: "I more than suspect," Saintsbury wrote, "that his actual works are less and less read as time goes on . . ." (67). Saintsbury was right. Smith's delightful, persuasive writing attracts notice every generation or so (Cavanaugh 275), but the result is usually a biography. Saba Holland published a memoir of her father in 1855; Stuart Reid produced a biography in 1885; Hesketh Pearson, in 1934 (four reprints between 1934 and 1945); Sheldon Halpern, in 1966; Howard Mackey, in 1979; Alan Bell, in 1980; and Peter Virgin, in 1994. Nowell Smith intended to write a biography of Smith, but in the process found that Smith's letters badly needed editing (Letters 1: v). He published two volumes of Smith's correspondence in 1953. Bell is working on a complete edition of Smith's letters, which will include many not found by Nowell Smith. Between 1858 and 1957, seven different editions of selected writings were published in England and America (Halpern 144). After W.H. Auden edited a collection published in 1957, nothing of

Sydney Smith's appeared until Bell published a book of quips in 1993 and Taylor and Hankinson published Twelve Miles from a Lemon in 1996.

Smith's works do not fit naturally into either period or genre courses in the English literature curriculum. Smith wrote prose, but not Romantic prose, in the era of Wordsworth and Coleridge. He took little notice of the Romantic poets, unlike his more famous (or infamous) editor, Francis Jeffrey. Although Sydney Smith wrote reviews for the Edinburgh Review, he was no critic of literature. Whether writing pamphlets such as the Letters of Peter Plymley (on Catholic emancipation), or preaching sermons, or publishing essays in the Edinburgh Review, Sydney Smith wrote to change behavior, beliefs, and laws.

Editors of Smith's writing and his biographers agree that Smith was what Auden calls a "writer of polemics" (xii). Joseph Epstein writes, "Sydney Smith was mainly a polemical essayist . . ." (21). Taylor and Hankinson conclude that Smith's " . . . sphere of writing was the polemical His foremost aim was to persuade . . ." (124). Sheldon Halpern writes that Smith's work "involves issues, not themes . . ." (preface). Late Victorian Leslie Stephen, in an otherwise negative essay, concedes that Smith "knows a good cause when he sees it" (265). Reid (xi) and Ernest Newman (112) acknowledge Smith's value as a persuasive writer.

Polemics, issues, and persuasion seem to add up to rhetoric, but Smith is unanthologized and unacknowledged in nineteenth-century rhetorical studies. The emphasis in such studies is on theorists and synthesizers, so students must labor, unmoved, over Richard Whately's ponderous Elements of Rhetoric (1828). It is a pity that there seems to be no room in the curriculum for brilliant practitioners of rhetoric such as Sydney Smith. Smith's works deserve inclusion in the curriculum for nineteenth-century rhetoric

because Smith was an accomplished and effective rhetorician who left a body of work (albeit small) about rhetoric; and because his comic technique, as delightful today as it was in pre-Victorian England, merits study.

Above all, Smith knew which audience he wanted to reach, and he wrote to attract and keep them. He could excite their emotions when necessary but usually chose to stimulate their intellect. His wit was a devastatingly effective rhetorical weapon, but was by no means his only weapon. Living in a world of rigid class divisions, under a heavy-handed and repressive government, Smith believed in equality, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness, and these ideals permeate every line of his persuasive essays. In Smith's best essays for the Edinburgh Review, there is a powerful demonstration of his mastery of the rhetorician's art.

Chapter 1 Smith and His Audience

The Edinburgh Review itself served the rhetorical purpose of advancing the interests of the underclass in a manner palatable to the growing middle classes.

"A thousand evils were in existence" when the Edinburgh Review began (Smith qtd. in Holland 32). Britain battled the French revolutionary armies, then Napoleon. Her citizens suffered inflation rates of 30% in 1790 (Virgin 57) and throughout the period were taxed at confiscatory rates² to keep their own and the continental armies on the move. Fear that the excesses of the French Revolution would spread to Britain led to repressive measures such as the suspension of Habeus Corpus and vigorous prosecution of opposition journalists (Taylor and Hankinson 9-10). Taxes on newspapers kept them out of the hands of most readers (Dudek 42). When the upper classes failed to keep the peasantry utterly ignorant, they attempted to use the press to keep the lower classes in their place (Altick 31, 85).

"[I]t was safer almost to be a felon than a reformer . . . " (Bell, Sayings 52), Smith wrote years later. The upper classes fought to preserve the old structure; the lower classes, who accounted for three-fourths of the population, wanted democracy (Altick 82, 85). Paine's The Rights of Man was enormously popular (69). The Wesleyan movement, whose members were the most literate of the poor people (35), grew rapidly at the expense of a staid, corrupt Anglican Church. In this context, the Edinburgh Review served as a forum for the educated classes to advocate the reforms necessary to keep the uneducated classes from absolute revolt.

Politics was always a focus of the Edinburgh Review, and it was the catalyst that led to its founding. Sydney Smith might never have traveled to Scotland if not for

Napoleon. After enduring an education amongst the Tories at Oxford, Smith began a career in the Anglican church in 1794 as a curate at Nether Avon, a few miles from Stonehenge (Reid 22). The local squire liked Smith and hired him to accompany his son, Michael Hicks-Beach, to a German university (36). Smith told his daughter years later that their plan had been to go to the University of Weimar, but " . . . before reaching our destination, Germany was disturbed by war and, in stress of politics, we put into Edinburgh The principles of the French Revolution were then fully afloat, and it is impossible to conceive a more violent and agitated state of society" (Holland 22).

When Smith and his pupil arrived in June 1798, Edinburgh was in full intellectual flower. Dugald Stewart, professor of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, carried forward to a new generation the ideas of Thomas Reid and Adam Smith (Halpern 72). By the time Smith arrived in Edinburgh, Stewart was disillusioned by the turn the French Revolution had taken, but he was still a Whig (Clive, Scotch Reviewers 24). Smith attended Stewart's lectures and joined the Academy of Physics (Spurgeon 139), where members' original papers were read each week (Virgin 53). Here he associated with other up-and-coming young men, among them Francis Jeffrey, Henry Brougham, and Francis Horner. In his later years, Smith told his daughter about meeting Horner: " . . . my desire to know him proceeded first of all from being cautioned against him by some excellent and feeble people to whom I brought letters of introduction, and who represented him as a person of violent political opinions" (Holland 27). Since Horner, Jeffrey, and Brougham, all young attorneys with Whig leanings, were making little headway at Edinburgh's Tory bar (Spurgeon 139), they had ample time for a new venture.

Smith, Jeffrey, and Brougham each left an account of the founding of the Edinburgh Review. All agree that there was a meeting at Jeffrey's house, that other

people were there, and that the initial plan was Smith's (Reid 57). Saba Holland gives her father's version:

Toward the end of my residence in Edinburgh, Brougham, Jeffrey, and myself [sic] happened to meet in the eighth or ninth story or flat in Buccleugh Place, the then elevated residence of 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 Review. The motto I proposed for the Review was, "Tenui Musam meditamur avena"--"We cultivate literature on a little oat-meal;" but this was too near the truth to be admitted, so we took our present grave motto from Publius Syrus, of whom none of us had, I am sure, read a single line; and so began what has since turned out to be a very important and able journal. (31)

According to Brougham, this meeting took place in March of 1802 (Reid 57). Plans must have been made earlier, perhaps without Brougham's knowledge, for in January of 1802, Smith wrote to his friend James Mackintosh that he and a number of other gentlemen planned to start a review. He wrote,

The rocks and shoals to be avoided are religion, politics, excessive severity, and irritable Scotchmen. If any of the members of the King of Clubs have a mind to barbeque a poet or two, or strangle a metaphysician, or do any other act of cruelty to the dull men of the earth, we are in hopes they will make our journal the receptacle of their exploits. (Bell, Sydney Smith 35)

Nine months later, the first issue of the Edinburgh Review burst onto the political and literary scene in Great Britain with an abundance of religion, lots of politics, no mercy, and plenty to irritate Scotchmen, Englishmen, all other Europeans, and Americans, too. Smith, aided by Horner, supervised the publication of the first issue (Graham 234). Their publisher, Constable, got the first three issues for free (Pearson 56). Within a year, more than 2,000 copies of the first number were sold in Edinburgh alone (Clive Essays 115). The success of the Review surprised all of its original contributors (Gross 2), but no one more than Francis Jeffrey, who had fully expected irritable Scotchmen to put a speedy end to the project, as they had Hugh Blair's Edinburgh Review, killed after only two issues some fifty years earlier (Reid 61). The avowed purpose of Blair's Edinburgh Review had been to review Scottish letters (Schmitz 27); Smith, Jeffrey, Horner, and Brougham instead took aim at literary and political Englishmen. Before he left Edinburgh to pursue a career in London, Smith wrote to Archibald Constable:

Sir, You ask me for my opinion about the continuation of the E. Review. I have the greatest confidence in giving it you, as I find every body here (who is capable of forming an opinion upon the subject) unanimous in the idea of its success, and in the hope of its continuation. It is notorious that all the reviews are the organs either of party or of booksellers. I have no manner of doubt that an able, intrepid, and independent review would be as useful to the public as it would be profitable to those who are engaged in it. If you will give £200 per annum to your editor, and ten guineas a sheet, you will soon have the best review in Europe. This town, I am convinced, is preferable to all others for such an undertaking, from the abundance of literary men it contains, and from the freedom which at this distance they

can exercise towards the wits of the south. . . . [In the postscript] I do not, by the expressions I have used above, mean to throw any censure on the trade for undertaking reviews It is fair enough that a bookseller should guide the public to his own shop. And fair enough that a critic should tell the public they are going astray. (Letters 1: 79-80)

The old reviews, such as the Monthly Review and the Critical Review, had their start in the eighteenth century, when few works were published each year. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, reviewers continued to try to be encyclopedic (Graham 236), but too much was published, and too much of poor quality was published, for reviewers to do their work well (Roper 37-38). The first issue of the Edinburgh Review had 29 articles. By contrast, the October 1802 Monthly Review had 44; the Critical Review, 60; and the British Critic, 77 (Roper 40). The Edinburgh reviewers " . . . decline[d] any attempt at exhibiting a complete view of modern literature . . ." (forward Edinburgh Review 1). The audacious young men who founded the Edinburgh Review liked to pick a subject first, then find a publication to use as a vehicle for the essay. Smith wrote to his friend John Allen in 1818, "It is ten years since there has been any account in the Edinburgh Review of Botany Bay; I have a fancy to give an account of the progress of the colony since that time; do you know any books to have recourse to?" (Letters 1: 299). A year later, he again asks Allen (who must have been an avid reader) for help: "I am going to write in the E.R. an article upon the commutation for Tithes. Will you tell me upon what book I can hang my dissertation and what works I can read upon the subject?" (Letters 1: 324).

The audience for the Edinburgh Review had been building since Addison and Steele helped turn the middle class into readers (Altick 46). "[C]ountry squires, rusticated

peers, and provincial doctors" (Horner qtd. in Roper 24) subscribed to the old reviews. By 1791, the four main ones, the Monthly Review, the British Critic, the Critical Review, and the Analytical Review, all supported government reform (Roper 180). The Edinburgh Review was designed to attract these educated middle class readers (Roper 173; Clive, Scotch Reviewers 179). "The squire never reads," wrote Smith in 1809 (Letters 1: 161), and the lower classes, for the most part, could neither read (Dudek 35) nor afford to pay five shillings for a magazine when a day's pay might be only two (Clive 135).³ Jeffrey, who took over as editor of the Edinburgh after the third issue (Reid 56) and remained as editor for 27 years, described the review's middle class audience as " . . . almost all those who are below the sphere of what is called fashionable or public life, and who do not aim at distinctions or notoriety beyond the circle of their equals in fortune and situation" (qtd. in Clive 143-44).

In Edinburgh, Smith had begun to preach to the kind of audience the Edinburgh Review attracted. He was a popular preacher (Virgin 53, Taylor and Hankinson 117), and in a preface to his first publication, a collection of sermons that appeared in 1801, he shared what he had learned about his audience. Abstruse subjects, he wrote, are "ungenial to the habits and taste of a general audience" who should get "the result only of erudition" (Holland 49). That was the formula for the Edinburgh Review, and it was successful. In an 1825 Edinburgh Review article about Bentham's Book of Fallacies, after noting that Mr. Bentham tended to be long, involved, and obscure, Smith writes, "The great mass of readers will . . . choose rather to become acquainted with Mr. Bentham through the medium of Reviews--after that eminent philosopher has been washed, trimmed, shaved, and forced into clean linen. One great use of a Review, indeed, is to make men wise in ten pages who have no appetite for an hundred pages . . ." (368).

From time to time in later years, Smith would chastise Jeffrey for letting Review articles get too esoteric and too long.⁴ In 1812, Smith wrote, ". . . it is the great fault of our Review that our wisdom is too long; it did well at first, because it was new to find so much understanding in a journal. But every man takes up a Review with a lazy spirit, and wishes to get wise at a cheap rate, and to cross the country by a shorter path" (Letters 1: 220). In 1819 he wrote to Jeffrey:

You must consider that Edinburgh is a very grave place, and that you live with Philosophers--who are very intolerant of nonsense. I write for the London, not for the Scotch market, and perhaps more people read my nonsense than your sense. The complaint was loud and universal of the extreme dulness and lengthiness of the Edinburgh Review. Too much I admit would not do of my style; but the proportion in which it exists enlivens the Review if you appeal to the whole public, and not to the 8 or 10 grave Scotchmen with whom you live. (1: 331)

Smith always wrote with his audience in mind, and he advised others to do the same:

"Every thing which is written is meant either to please or to instruct. The second object it is difficult to effect, without attending to the first . . . " (Edinburgh Review 15: 44).

More so than the other Edinburgh reviewers, Smith could change his style to appeal directly to the audience he wanted to reach (Reid 80). An example of Smith's great skill at tailoring his arguments to his audience is his essay on the education of women in the January 1810 issue of the Edinburgh Review. Smith writes directly to fathers of daughters, for it is only they who have the motive and the power to make the changes Smith envisions.

The essay begins as a review of Thomas Broadhurst's Advice to Young Ladies on the Improvement of the Mind. Smith devotes the first paragraph to positive comments on Broadhurst's effort and then never mentions the book again. Instead he makes a (for Smith) passionate appeal to fathers to educate their daughters. He refuses to engage in any debate about whether men and women have an "original difference of capacity . . . " (299). Instead, he takes it "for granted, that nature has been as bountiful of understanding to one sex as the other . . . " (299). He depends on the fathers who read his words to agree, because, like Smith, they have observed their own boys and girls as young children, before they were segregated, the boys to receive an education, the girls not.

Smith encourages the fathers of young girls to think of the future their daughters face without an education. Distilling his argument into one powerful, pathetic example, Smith writes, "It is not easy to imagine that there can be any just cause why a woman of forty should be more ignorant than a boy of twelve years of age" (299-300). When the daughters of Smith's readers are women of forty, their beauty will be faded and their energy will be diminished, but it is quite likely they will be in charge of one of nature's insufferable know-it-alls, a twelve-year-old boy. What is already an unequal contest is made hopeless when the woman has no education.

Smith continues, ". . . as the matter now stands, the time of women is considered as worth nothing at all. . . . They are kept with nimble fingers and vacant understandings, till the season for improvement is utterly passed away, and all chance of forming more important habits completely lost" (300). To the argument that educating women is useless or dangerous because it has never been done before, Smith slyly writes,

. . . in the progress from absolute ignorance, there is a period when cultivation of mind is new to every rank and description of persons. A

century ago, who would have believed that country gentlemen could be brought to read and spell with the ease and accuracy, which we now so frequently remark,--or supposed that they could be carried up even to the elements of antient [sic] and modern history? (301)

In other words, if the incompetent gentlemen who have control of the government, the Tory squirearchy, are educable, the daughters of Edinburgh Review readers certainly are, too. Here Smith permits his readers to feel intellectually superior to their social superiors.

Smith indirectly addresses the unspoken fears of fathers that their educated daughters will not be able to attract or keep a husband. He attacks the idea that educated women will neglect their families:

[T]here is a very general notion, that the moment you put the education of women upon a better footing than it is at present, at that moment there will be an end of all domestic economy; and that if you once suffer women to eat of the tree of knowledge, the rest of the family will very soon be reduced to the same kind of aerial and unsatisfactory diet. These, and all such opinions, are referable to one great and common cause of error;--that man does every thing, and that nature does nothing; and that every thing we see, is referable to positive institution, rather than to original feeling. Can any thing, for example, be more perfectly absurd than to suppose, that the care and perpetual solicitude which a mother feels for her children, depends upon her ignorance of Greek and Mathematics; and that she would desert an infant for a quadratic equation? We seem to imagine, that we can break in pieces the solemn institution of nature, by the little laws of a boarding school . . . (302)

He also dismisses the idea that girls who are educated will necessarily be so arrogant that they will not attract a man, addressing fathers' fears that they will never find homes for their daughters:

When foolish women think they have any distinction, they are apt to be proud of it; so are foolish men. But we appeal to any one who has lived with cultivated persons of either sex, whether he has not witnessed as much pedantry, as much wrongheadedness, as much arrogance, and certainly a great deal more rudeness, produced by learning in men, than in women: therefore, we should make the accusation general--or dismiss it altogether.

(303)

Then Smith brings the reader back to the present, and reminds him that his intelligent little girl wants to do more than is asked of her now:

. . . why are we necessarily to doom a girl, whatever be her taste or her capacity, to one unvaried line of petty and frivolous occupation? . . . why [are] books of history and reasoning . . . to be torn out of her hand, and why is she to be sent, like a butterfly, to hover over the idle flower of the field? . . . If by a simple pleasure is meant an innocent pleasure, the observation is best answered by showing, that the pleasure which results from the acquisition of important knowledge is quite as innocent as any pleasure whatever. (303)

Smith directs his arguments only to educated and cultivated men who care about their wives and daughters. When he must address the subject of ignorant men, it is clear that he is writing about them, not to them:

. . . it is natural that men who are ignorant themselves, should view, with some degree of jealousy and alarm, any proposal for improving the education of women. But such men may depend upon it, however the system of female education may be exalted, that there will never be wanting a due proportion of failures; and that after parents, guardians and preceptors have done all in their power to make every body wise, there will still be a plentiful supply of women who have taken special care to remain otherwise; and they may rest assured, if the utter extinction of ignorance and folly is the evil they dread, that their interests will always be effectually protected, in spite of every exertion to the contrary. (304)

The conclusion to be drawn here is, of course, that only ignorant men want women to be ignorant. The Edinburgh Review reader is no such fellow.

Smith next urges his readers to consider what their daughters will face as adult women, married or not:

Let any man reflect, too, upon the solitary situation in which women are placed,--the ill treatment to which they are sometimes exposed, and which they must endure in silence, and without the power of complaining--and he must feel convinced that the happiness of a woman will be materially increased, in proportion as education has given to her the habit and the means of drawing her resources from herself. (305)

He notes that the only role society will permit middle or upper class women to fulfill is that of noble caretaker, but no woman "can fill up the twenty-four hours by acts of virtue"

(306). "We know women are to be compassionate," he argues, "but they cannot be compassionate from eight o'clock in the morning till twelve at night;--and what are they to do in the interval?" (306).

Smith does not frighten the men to whom he addresses his arguments by suggesting that a woman's education is to be used in the workplace. "The great use of her knowledge will be, that it contributes to her private happiness" (306). Smith suggests that a woman's separation from the business world is just one more reason for her to acquire an education. Men learn about the world in the world, Smith argues. Women need to know about the world for their own safety and happiness, yet they cannot learn about the world directly: " . . . if you neglect to educate the mind of a woman, by the speculative difficulties which occur in literature, it can never be educated at all . . ." (307).

Smith urges his readers to think beyond the few years a daughter lives with her parents. The usual middle class occupations for girls, the "accomplishments . . . drawing, music, painting and dancing," do not last:

These are merely means for displaying the grace and vivacity of youth, which every woman gives up, as she gives up the dress and the manners of eighteen: she has no wish to retain them; or, if she has, she is driven out of them by diameter and derision. The system of female education, as it now stands, aims only at embellishing a few years of life, which are in themselves so full of grace and happiness, that they hardly want it

(308)

Education for boys and girls, writes Smith, should give them resources to "endure as long as life endures . . . occupations that will render sickness tolerable, solitude pleasant, age

venerable, life more dignified and useful . . ." (308). The accomplishments girls are taught, he argues, are nothing to the lifelong benefits of a cultivated mind (309)

Smith concludes by asking those who resist improvements in women's education to explain why "half the talent in the universe [should] run to waste" (311). The powers of women are gifts of nature: "Nature makes to us rich and magnificent presents; and we say to her--You are too luxuriant and munificent--we must keep you under, and prune you . . ." (311). He returns to the picture of old age:

One of the most agreeable consequences of knowledge, is the respect and importance which it communicates to old age. Men rise in character often as they increase in years;--they are venerable from what they have acquired, and pleasing from what they can impart. If they outlive their faculties, the mere frame itself is respected for what it once contained; but women (such is their unfortunate style of education) hazard every thing upon one cast of the die;--when youth is gone, all is gone. (313)

Smith ends the essay with a positive portrait of the educated woman:

The education of women favours public morals; it provides for every season of life, as well as for the brightest and the best; and leaves a woman when she is stricken by the hand of time, not as she now is, destitute of every thing, and neglected by all; but with the full power and the splendid attractions of knowledge,--diffusing the elegant pleasures of polite literature, and receiving the just homage of learned and accomplished men. (315)

Unlike Smith's other essays in the Edinburgh Review, this one depends almost entirely upon emotional appeals for advancement of the argument. Smith occasionally

wrote about the importance of such appeals: "It is only by the fresh feelings of the heart, that mankind can be very powerfully affected," he wrote in "Rennels Sermons," an essay from the first issue of the Edinburgh Review (85). A year earlier, in the preface to his collection of sermons, he wrote, ". . . we are strange, very strange creatures, and it is better perhaps not to place too much confidence in our reason alone" (Holland 53).

Typically, Smith uses pathos sparingly. In an essay on the poor laws in the January 1820 issue of the Edinburgh Review, he begins with an apology for even bothering his readers about the poor laws, noting that pamphlets on the poor laws "generally contain[] some little piece of favourite nonsense" (91). Then he lists the pieces of nonsense, including, "It is proposed also that alehouses should be diminished" Smith continues,

We have every wish that the poor should accustom themselves to habits of sobriety; but we cannot help reflecting sometimes, that an alehouse is the only place where a poor tired creature, haunted with every species of wretchedness, can purchase three or four times a year, three pennyworth of ale, a liquour upon which winedrinking moralists are always extremely severe. (92)

The balance of the essay is a reasoned discussion of the unintended consequences of the poor laws and suggestions for their alteration, which the reader does not approach as coolly as he or she otherwise might, because the image of the poor tired creature having three pennyworth of ale lingers. Smith uses an emotional appeal to enable the comfortable, middle class reader to identify with the poor (Burke 146).

Smith appeals most effectively to his readers' emotions when, as above, he substitutes a concrete example ("tired creature" in an alehouse) for an abstraction ("the

poor") (Stephen 263-64, Newman 116). In one of his many essays about Ireland and the Catholics, Smith writes:

. . . the potatoe [sic] farm is all that shelters them from absolute famine. If the Pope were to come in person, and seize upon every tenth potatoe, the poor peasant would scarcely endure it. With what patience, then, can he see it tossed into the cart of the heretic Rector, who has a church without a congregation, and a revenue without duties. (Edinburgh Review 34: 324)

A reader who might read complacently about the importance of tithes to support the established church is less comfortable visualizing a poor farmer with a hungry family surrendering a tenth of his crop to support a church he never attends.

Often, Smith's examples are meant to amuse as well as to persuade. In an article promoting the Hamiltonian system of interlinear translation (Edinburgh Review 44), Smith uses a concrete example to help his audience identify with a member of society somewhat less downtrodden than an Irish Catholic, but one who is pitiable nevertheless:

Nor is there a greater object of compassion than a boy, full of animal spirits, set down in a bright sunny day, with an heap of unknown words before him, to be turned into English, before supper, by the help of a ponderous dictionary alone. . . . It must be remembered, we say an average boy,--not what Master Evans, the show-boy, can do, nor what Master Macarthy, the boy who is whipt every day, can do, but some boy between Macarthy and Evans; and not what this medium boy can do, while his mastigophorous superior is frowning over him; but what he actually does, when left in the midst of noisy boys, and with a recollection, that, by

sending to the neighbouring shops, he can obtain any quantity of ripe gooseberries upon credit. (50-51)

The reader smiles, but empathizes, too. Here Smith induces his readers, both schoolmasters and parents, to consider educational practices from the point of view of the recipient. The medium boy, the peasant unable to part with his crop, the poor man enjoying a drink, and the ignorant woman past the age of dancing are successful pathetic images. Smith uses them to move his reader to identify with individuals who are part of a group that is not the reader's own. As a clergyman and later as a magistrate, Smith ministered to the lowest classes. As a writer and wit, he socialized with the highest (Halpern 103). He was able to use his knowledge of both groups, and of the middle class to which he belonged, to select and shape arguments according to the audience he wished to reach. Of all the early Edinburgh reviewers, Smith had the greatest sense of audience and the best ability to change his tone to suit them (Auden xii).

Chapter 2

Smith's Techniques of Argument

When the Edinburgh Review was still in the mind of its creator, Smith wrote to James Mackintosh that he would welcome any contributor who wanted to, among other things, "strangle a metaphysician" (Bell 35). As a rhetorician, Smith always assumes that the metaphysician is already dead. He never raises what Auden calls "ultimate questions" (xvii). Instead, Smith simply states his position on the ultimate questions before he launches his argument, which nearly always concerns, as Halpern writes, the "immediate and practical" (52).

Smith's essay on the poor laws (Edinburgh Review 33) is typical of his treatment of social problems. Smith captures the reader's sympathy with a single pathetic example (in this case, the "poor tired creature" in an alehouse), states his premise, then argues from the facts as he views them. At the start of the essay he writes, "There are two points which we consider as now admitted by all men of sense. First, That the Poor-Laws must be abolished; 2dly, That they must be very gradually abolished. We hardly think it worth while to throw away pen and ink upon any one who is still inclined to dispute either of these propositions" (95). Smith's main argument is that the poor laws increase, rather than relieve, the misery of the poor. He writes, ". . . the present redundant population of the country has been entirely produced by the Poor-Laws; and nothing could be so grossly unjust, as to encourage people to such a vitious [sic] multiplication, and then, when you happen to discover your folly, immediately to starve them into annihilation" (95). Smith includes a little comprobatio (compliments to his hearer), noting that the chairman of the committee in the House of Commons that is studying the issue is a capable fellow.

To illustrate the complexity of the existing poor laws, Smith provides a series of examples:

Upon the simple fact, for example, of a farmer hiring a ploughman for a year, arise the following afflicting questions. Was it an expressed contract? Was it an implied contract? Was it an implied hiring of the ploughman, rebutted by circumstances? Was the ploughman's contract for a year's prospective service? Was it a customary hiring of the ploughman? Was it a retrospective hiring of the ploughman? Was it a conditional hiring? Was it a general hiring? Was it a special, or a special yearly hiring, or a special yearly hiring with wages reserved weekly? Did the farmer make it a special conditional hiring with warning, or an exceptive hiring? Was the service of the ploughman actual or constructive? Was there any dispensation expressed or implied?--or was there a dissolution implied?--by new agreement?--or mutual consent? or by Justices?--or by any other of the ten thousand means which the ingenuity of lawyers has created? (100)

Here Smith shows that laws meant to provide for the unemployed have had the unintended consequence of increasing unemployment, because no one will dare to attract a man to a county to take a job for fear the county will have to support him when the job is complete.

Next Smith offers a number of suggestions for legislation. The structure of the existing laws rewards those who can move their poor people to another jurisdiction.

Smith writes that the poor laws encourage abuse by individual Justices:

Every body is full of humanity and good-nature when he can relieve misfortune by putting his hand--in his neighbour's pocket. Who can bear to see a fellow-creature suffering pain and poverty, when he can order other fellow-creatures to relieve them? Is it in human nature, that A should see B in tears and misery, and not order C to assist him? (102)

Smith writes that one pamphlet author, Davison, argues that the plea of the aged "stands on a different footing . . . from all other pleas." Smith responds unemotionally by asking,

. . . why should this plea be more favoured than that of sickness? why more than losses in trade, incurred by no imprudence? In reality, this plea is less entitled to indulgence. Every man knows he is exposed to the helplessness of age; but sickness and sudden ruin are very often escaped--comparatively seldom happen. Why is a man exclusively to be protected against that evil which he must have foreseen longer than any other, and has had the longest time to guard against? (103)

Davison also errs, according to Smith, by idealizing the poor. Smith responds,

This is viewing human life through a Claude Lorraine glass, and decorating it with colours which do not belong to it. A ploughman marries a ploughwoman because she is plump; generally uses her ill; thinks his children an incumbrance; very often flogs them; and, for sentiment, has nothing more nearly approaching to it, than the ideas of broiled bacon and mashed potatoes. This is the state of the lower orders of mankind--deplorable, but true--and yet rendered much worse by the Poor-Laws. (106)

At the end of the essay, Smith suggests specific steps to end the poor laws, and reiterates that the process must be gradual. He concludes by writing, "And the true reason for abolishing these laws is, not that they make the rich poor, but that they make the poor poorer" (108). "Poor Laws" is typical of Smith's clear-eyed, un-idealistic, yet humane approach to social ills. He is unconcerned with the philosophical underpinnings or intentions of social policy, concentrating instead on its actual effects on individuals.

Smith's usual rhetorical technique is a comic dissection of his opponent's arguments. When an adversary's ill-considered words are all that are required to hang him, Smith is happy to assist. To the French writer of a travel book about England who is brash enough to suggest that his unfavorable remarks might start a war, Smith writes, ". . . we have no scruple to say, that to sacrifice 20,000 lives, and a hundred millions of money, to resent Mr. Fievue's book, would be an unjustifiable waste of blood and treasure; and that to take him off privately by assassination, would be an undertaking hardly compatible with the dignity of a great empire" (2: 88). In "Methodists and Indian Missions," an essay from the April 1809 issue of the Edinburgh Review, Smith mercilessly uses the text he is reviewing to turn his adversary's errors into a series of jokes. Smith's hapless target, John Styles, published a pamphlet in response to Smith's 1808 essay on Methodist missionaries (Edinburgh Review 12). One line of Smith's 1808 essay read as follows: "Some [Hindus] swim on hooks, some run kimes through their hands, and widows burn themselves to death . . ." (179).

Smith begins the 1809 essay with a direct assault on the Dissenters: "In rooting 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" (40). He states one of his chief objections to the Methodists, which is that,

These very impudent people have one ruling canon, which pervades every thing they say and do. Whoever is unfriendly to Methodism, is an infidel and an atheist. This reasonable and amiable maxim, repeated in every form of dulness, and varied in every attitude of malignity, is the sum and substance of Mr. Style's pamphlet. (40)

Then Smith refers to the 1808 essay by writing,

. . . Mr. Styles is peculiarly severe upon us for not being more shocked at their piercing their limbs with kimes. 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. . . . it is for us to explain the plan and nature of this terrible and unknown piece of mechanism. A kime, then, is neither more nor less than a false print in the Edinburgh Review for a knife; 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 arguments against kimes; we grew frightened;--we stated to ourselves the horror of not sending missionaries to a nation which used kimes

(45)

Smith refutes Styles's other arguments point by point. Smith notes that the behavior of the British in India has been so criminal that it is "matchless impudence to follow up such practice with such precepts" (48). Smith repeats an argument that he made in the 1808 essay, which is that conversion to Christianity turns Hindus into pariahs in their own community. He closes with the following:

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. (50)

With "Methodists and Indian Missions," Smith offended critics a hundred years apart. Stephen (266) and other Victorians (Bell 198), as well as Smith's most recent biographer, Peter Virgin, disapprove of Smith's attacks on the Methodists. Stephen writes that such attacks are "inexcusable" (266). Virgin writes that, ". . . Sydney set out to wound and he succeeded. He was not scrupulous and he was not fair" (144). However, George Saintsbury, writing during the same period as Stephen, admires the way Smith constructs his argument in "Methodists and Indian Missions." Saintsbury writes, ". . . the way in which so apparently light and careless a writer has laboriously supported every one of his charges, and almost every one of his flings, with chapter and verse from the writings of the incriminated societies, is very remarkable" (88).

Smith wrote once that "[t]he best way of answering a bad argument is not to stop it, but to let it go on in its course till it leaps over the boundaries of common sense" (Edinburgh Review 35: 133). Reductio ad absurdum is a rhetorical technique Smith uses frequently and to good effect. In a review of Coelebs in Search of a Wife (Edinburgh Review 14), a book "supposed to be written" (145) by Mrs. Hannah More (who was never popular with the Edinburgh reviewers⁵), Smith quotes a passage and then arrives at his own absurd conclusion:

"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 coquet

would adopt it as an allurements; the pure as her appropriate attraction; and the voluptuous as the most infallible art of seduction." (150)

To this, Smith dryly notes, "If there is any truth in this passage, nudity becomes a virtue; and no decent woman, for the future, can be seen in garments" (14: 150).

Often Smith takes an argument to its logical extreme simply by substituting a concrete example for an opponent's general statement. Responding to John Bowles's assertion in a pamphlet that "those rights of government, which because they are ancient, are recognised by the moral sense as lawful, are the only ones which are compatible with civil liberty," Smith writes,

So that all questions of right and wrong, between the governors and the governed, are determinable by chronology alone. Every political institution is favourable to liberty, not according to its spirit, but in proportion to the antiquity of its date; and the slaves of Great Britain are groaning under the trial by jury, while the free men of Asia exult in the bold privilege transmitted to them by their fathers, of being trampled to death by elephants. (Edinburgh Review 1: 96)

Smith's series of essays on Britain's oppressive game laws have many good examples of his use of reductio ad absurdum. In 1814, Smith joined the bench and became a magistrate. There he gained the experience he needed to write knowledgeably about social and political issues, including the game laws. In 1818, when Smith's first essay about the game laws appeared in the Edinburgh Review, only those landowners whose property was worth more than £100 per year could "carry guns and keep dogs and employ game keepers" (Taylor and Hankinson 100). Convicted poachers could be sent to

Australia for seven years. The sale of game was illegal, but there was an enormous black market.

Smith opens his first essay on the subject, a review of "Three Letters on the Game Laws" (Edinburgh Review 31), with a flat assertion that the game laws ought to be changed. He grants his opponents their weakest point, by agreeing at the outset that gentlemen ought to be encouraged to visit the country. He declines to join the most radical of those who resist the game laws and who take the position that game ought to belong to everyone. If that were the case, Smith notes, soon there would be no game at all.

Smith bases the main part of his argument on the effects of enforcement of the existing game laws. He observes that the law prohibits gentlemen with land producing income of less than £100 per year from hunting on their own property. The absurd conclusion Smith draws from that rule is that small landowners should be prohibited from races or "bowls and skittles," too (298). Upholding the game laws, he writes, has undermined justice. People scoff at laws prohibiting the sale of game. "Do the country gentlemen imagine, that it is in the power of human laws to deprive the three per cents of pheasants?" (301). To no avail, "Squires may fret, and Justices commit, and gamekeepers and poachers continue their nocturnal wars" (302). The result of the laws has been "[n]ot a cessation of poaching, but a succession of village guerrillas;--an internecine war between the gamekeepers and marauders of game . . ." (304). As a solution, Smith suggests an open market for game: "If game can be lawfully sold, the quantity market will be increased, the price lowered, and with that, the profits and temptations of the poacher" (304). He writes that customers would gladly buy game legally. Under the existing law,

" . . . no one has the slightest shame at violating a law which every body feels to be absurd and unjust" (305).

Smith argues more passionately in his next essay on the game laws, "Spring Guns and Man Traps," which appeared in the March 1821 issue of the Edinburgh Review. He meets the outrageous behavior of landowners with outrage of his own, writing at the beginning of this essay that it is only after " . . . long experience, that mankind ever think of recurring to humane expedients for effecting their objects. The rulers who ride the people never think of coaxing and patting till they have worn out the lashes of their whips, and broken the rowels of their spurs" (124). He cites the calendars of the Assizes and Sessions to show that "[t]here is hardly now a Jail-delivery in which some gamekeeper has not murdered a poacher--or some poacher a gamekeeper" (124). He attributes the murder and mayhem to the severity of the game laws: "If the question concerned the payment of five pounds, a poacher would hardly risk his life rather than be taken; but when he is to go to Botany Bay for seven years, he summons together his brother poachers--they get brave from rum, numbers, and despair--and a bloody battle ensues" (124).

Smith acknowledges that "[g]ame ought to belong to those who feed it" (124), but he strenuously objects to some of the measures taken to protect game. His main target is the practice of setting up spring guns to prevent poachers from trespassing. He argues the parallel case:

Suppose any gentleman were to give notice that all other persons must abstain from his manors; that he himself and his servants paraded the woods and fields with loaded pistols and blunderbusses, and would shoot any body who fired at a partridge; and suppose he were to keep his word, and shoot through the head some rash trespasser who defied this bravado

and was determined to have his sport:--Is there any doubt that he would be guilty of murder? (125)

The answer is unarguably "yes," writes Smith: "We think this so clear, that it would be a waste of time to argue it. There is no kind of resistance on the part of the deceased; no attempt to run away; he is not even challenged: but instantly shot dead by the proprietor of the wood, for no other crime than the intention of killing game unlawfully" (125).

Because the human being shooting a poacher is a murderer, Smith argues, then so is the human being setting a trap with a gun that will shoot whoever stumbles upon it. He cites another parallel case, writing that, "It has long been decided, that it is unlawful to kill a dog who is pursuing game in a manor. . . . Pointers have always been treated by the Legislature with great delicacy and consideration" (126).

Quoting a judge who rules that increased defence of game is lawful, Smith points out that the generalization of increased defense actually means an increase from a five pound fine to instant death. About the Lord Chief Justice of the King's Bench, Mr. Justice Best, Smith writes,

Is he so ignorant of the philosophy of punishing, as to imagine he has nothing to do but to give ten stripes instead of two, an hundred instead of ten, and a thousand, if an hundred will not do? to substitute the prison for pecuniary fines, and the gallows instead of the jail? Is it impossible so enlightened a Judge can forget, that the sympathies of mankind must be consulted; that it would be wrong to break a person upon the wheel for stealing a penny loaf, and that gradations in punishment must be carefully accommodated to gradations in crime; that if poaching is punished more than mankind in general think it ought to be punished, the fault will either

escape with impunity, or the delinquent be driven to desperation; that if poaching and murder are punished equally, every poacher will be an assassin. (127)

This is an effective mixture of ethos, logos, and pathos. Stating that the "sympathies of mankind must be consulted," Smith appears to assume that the principles of democracy may be taken for granted, when, in fact, in early nineteenth-century England, they cannot be. Smith writes from his experience as a magistrate when he forecasts the results of unduly harsh laws. When he asserts that the opinions of "mankind in general" cannot be ignored without consequences, he subtly prompts fear of the kind of revolutionary action that all Englishmen viewed with alarm.

Smith points out that at the heart of the game laws supporters' argument is a discounting of the value of human life:

We do not suppose all preservers of game to be so bloodily inclined that they would prefer the death of a poacher to his staying away. Their object is to preserve game; they have no objection to preserve the lives of their fellow-creatures also, if both can exist at the same time; if not, the least worthy of God's creatures must fall--the rustic without a soul--not the Christian partridge--not the immortal pheasant--not the rational woodcock, or the accountable hare. (128)

He continues his attack as he writes,

If this speech of Mr. Justice Best is correctly reported, it follows, that a man may put his fellow-creatures to death for any infringement of his property--for picking the sloes and blackberries off his hedge--for breaking a few dead sticks out of them by night or by day--with resistance or

without resistance--with warning or without warning;--a strange method this of keeping up the links of society, and maintaining the dependence of the lower upon the higher classes. (130)

Here Smith combines pathos and expediency. The trespasser to be shot is not a mere abstraction but a poor human being looking for food and fuel. Smith's mention of the fragile bonds of society is another allusion to the possibility of violent revolution.

Returning to the spring gun, Smith writes,

This instrument, so highly approved of by Mr. Justice Best--this knitter together of the different orders of society--is levelled promiscuously against the guilty or the innocent, the ignorant and the informed. . . . But the very amusements of the rich are, in the estimation of Mr. Justice Best, of so great importance, that the poor are to be exposed to sudden death who interfere with them. (131-32)

Smith contrasts the employment of the spring gun by the upper classes with legislation the same gentlemen passed to exempt themselves from responsibility for damage done by hunting:

Says the higher link to the lower, "If you meddle with my game, I will immediately murder you I am in Parliament, and you are not . . . we claim the right . . . of riding over your fences, hedges, gates, stiles, guideposts, milestones, woods, underwoods, orchards, gardens, nursery-grounds, crops, vegetables, plants, lands, or other matters or things growing or being thereupon--including your children and your selves, if you do not get out of the way." (132)

This stream of concrete examples is far more effective rhetorically than a generalization such as property would be.

Smith replies to those who insist that severe punishments will deter poaching by imaginatively applying Draconian solutions to other petty crimes:

Let the first pickpocket who is taken be hung alive by the ribs, and let him be a fortnight in wasting to death. Let us seize a little grammar boy, who is robbing orchards, tie his arms and legs, throw over him a delicate puff-paste, and bake him in a bunn-pan in an oven. If poaching can be extirpated by intensity of punishment, why not all other crimes? If racks and gibbets and tenter-hooks are the best method of bringing back the golden age, why do we refrain from so easy a receipt for abolishing every species of wickedness? (133)

The problem, Smith writes, is not the poor man poaching game, but the rich one who is willing to buy it on the black market. "You may . . . render the common people savage, ferocious, and vindictive; you may disgrace your laws by enormous punishments, and the national character by these new secret assassinations, but you will never separate the wealthy glutton from his pheasant" (134). Again Smith suggests establishment of a free market to end the unlawful, deadly trade in game.

In 1823, when the game laws were investigated by a committee of Parliament (Halpern 106), Smith took the opportunity to write yet another essay on the subject (Edinburgh Review 39). He begins the essay where he left off in the previous one, by urging the establishment of a free market in game. Proponents of the status quo continue to argue weakly that altering the game laws would "drive gentlemen out of the country" (49). Smith changes his tactic from the first essay and suggests that the gentlemen would

not be missed: "A colonel of the Guards, the second son just entered at Oxford, three Diners out from Piccadilly--Major Rock, Lord John, Lord Charles, the Colonel of the regiment quartered at the neighboring town, two Irish Peers, and a German Baron . . . how is the country benefited by their presence?" (49). Then Smith burlesques the squirearchy's irrational attachment to game by making the absurd parallel case that another category of nature's bounty ought to be reserved for the upper classes, too. He suggests fruit laws " . . . to put vast quantities of men into prison as apricot-eaters, apricot-buyers, and apricot-sellers--to appoint a regular day for beginning to eat, and another for leaving off--to have a lord of the manor for greengages--and to rage with a penalty of five pounds against the unqualified eater of the gage!" (49).

Smith points out that one fourth of the commitments in Great Britain are for offences against the game laws. "The game laws have been carried to a pitch of oppression which is a disgrace to the country. The prisons are half filled with peasants, shut up for the irregular slaughter of rabbits and birds,--a sufficient reason for killing a weazle, but not for imprisoning a man" (54). Smith ends by subtly endorsing the principles of democracy: " . . . the happiness of the common people, whatever gentlemen may say, ought every now and then to be considered" (54).

In these essays on the game laws, Smith makes his case by exploiting the weaknesses in his opponent's arguments, and by exposing the baseness of their motive, which is to preserve their privileges at any cost. Revision of the game laws was a reform that Smith experienced in his lifetime. In 1827, spring guns were made illegal. In 1831, the game laws were liberalized (Cavanaugh 273).

Francis Jeffrey once told Walter Scott that the Edinburgh Review had "'but two legs to stand on, literature being one, but its right leg politics'" (qtd. in Clive Essays 119).

Fortunately, Smith usually concentrated his efforts on the right leg. Bell writes tactfully that Smith left purely literary matters to Jeffrey and others (38). Saintsbury remarks, ". . . I cannot say that [Smith] had very good taste" (85). Smith had a tin ear ("Never hear Mendelshome or Troublesome or whatever may be his name play on the pianoforte; it is intolerable nonsense" [qtd. in Bell 189]; "Nothing can be more disgusting than an oratorio" [qtd. in Taylor and Hankinson 119]) with taste in literature to match. The too-long passages he quotes admiringly in his review of Anastasius (Edinburgh Review 35), for example, do not resonate--they clang. Smith reviews the novel Granby (Edinburgh Review 43), praising it for its picture of upper class manners, but ignores Emma or any other work by Jane Austen. In the Granby review, Smith explains how he judges a novel. Apparently he requires only that it be a page-turner. Smith writes:

The main question as to a novel is--did it amuse? were you surprised at dinner coming so soon? did you mistake eleven for ten, and twelve for eleven? were you too late to dress? and did you sit up beyond the usual hour? If a novel produces these effects, it is good; if it does not--story, language, love, scandal itself, cannot save it. It is only meant to please; and it must do that, or it does nothing. (43: 395)

At least once, Smith's motive for reviewing a book kindly was charitable. He wrote to Jeffrey in 1824:

My dear Jeffrey, I have received a remittance from you £82 which leaves a balance of one pound in my favor--my work measuring £83: let this stand till next settlement. I will revise my article. If you mean that my article itself is light and scanty I agree to that, reminding you that lightness and flimsiness are my line of reviewing. If you mean that my notice of Moore's

book [Memoirs of Captain Rock] is scanty, that also is true, for I think the book very ill done: still, it is done by an honest worthy man who has neither bread nor butter. How can I be true under such circumstances? (Letters 1: 408)

Smith was a better judge of persuasive writing, which he called eloquence. In "Characters of the late Charles James Fox," a collection of panegyrics Smith reviewed in the July 1809 issue of the Edinburgh Review, Smith evaluates his favorite essay according to standards that Locke would approve. Smith writes that the essay is

. . . remarkable for good sense, acting upon a perfect knowledge of his subject, for simplicity, and for feeling. Amid the languid or turgid efforts of mediocrity, it is delightful to notice the skill, attention and resources, of a superior man,--of a man, too, who seems to feel what he writes,--who does not aim at conveying his meaning in rhetorical and ornamented phrases, but who uses plain words to express strong sensations. (14: 353)

To Smith, rhetoric is a pejorative term that signifies circumlocution, obscurity, excessive ornamentation, and bombast. Smith prefers "rough and ungrammatical truth" to "mendacious finery" (2:42). In "Dr. Parr's Spital Sermon," an essay from the first issue of the Edinburgh Review, Smith writes:

The Doctor is never simple and natural for a single instant. Every thing smells of the rhetorician. He never appears to forget himself, or to be hurried by his subject into obvious language. Every expression seems to be the result of artifice and intention Dr. Parr seems to think, that eloquence consists not in an exuberance of beautiful images--not in simple and sublime conceptions--not in the feelings of the passions; but in a

studious arrangement of sonorous, exotic, and sesquipedal words: a very ancient error, which corrupts the style of young, and wearies the patience of sensible men. (1: 22)

Similarly, Smith chastises another churchman, a pamphleteer named Davison, for self-conscious composition. Smith writes, "If he would think less about it, [Davison] would write much better. . . . He is sometimes obscure; and is occasionally apt to dress up common-sized thoughts in big clothes, and to dwell a little too long in proving what every man of sense knows and admits (33: 105).

To his unpersuasive, tongue-tied brethren in the Church, Smith gives absolutely no quarter.⁶ (Smith's review of Langford's Anniversary Sermon of the Royal Humane Society, from the first issue of the Edinburgh Review, speaks for itself. It is reproduced in its entirety in the appendix.) In a review of Rennel's Discourses on Various Subjects from the first issue of the Edinburgh Review, Smith discusses the state of pulpit eloquence in early nineteenth-century England. He begins with praise for a practitioner from the previous century, Hugh Blair. Smith admires Blair's sermons, but he laments their lack of passion:

We have no modern sermons in the English language, that can be considered as very eloquent. The merits of Blair (by far the most popular writer of sermons within the last century) are plain good sense, a happy application of scriptural quotation, and a clear harmonious style, richly tinged with scriptural language. He generally leaves his readers pleased with his judgment, and has just observations on human conduct, without ever rising so high as to touch the great passions, or kindle any enthusiasm in favour of virtue. (1: 83-84)

Smith writes that the sermons of his own contemporaries are hopelessly dull. "The great object of modern sermons," he writes, "is to hazard nothing. Their characteristic, is decent debility; which alike guards their authors from ludicrous error, and precludes them from striking beauties.⁷ Every man of sense, in taking up an English sermon, expects to find it a tedious essay" (84). Smith struggles to explain why well-educated men, whose job it is to move their listeners, so often bore them instead. He offers as a possible reason the fact that the best practitioners of eloquence go to the bar and to Parliament where the costs of failure are greater than in the church. At the bar, " . . . the penalty which an individual client pays for choosing a bad advocate, is the loss of his cause"; in Parliament, "a prime minister must . . . suffer in the estimation of the public, who neglects to conciliate eloquent men, and trusts the defence of his measures to those who have not adequate talents for that purpose . . . " (84). Smith suggests also that eloquence has come somehow to be associated with the French, so "patriotic solidity, and loyal awkwardness" prevent English preachers from making moving appeals (85).

Delivery is part of the problem. Smith writes:

Pulpit discourses have insensibly dwindled from speaking to reading; a practice, of itself sufficient to stifle every germ of eloquence. It is only by the fresh feelings of the heart, that mankind can be very powerfully affected. What can be more ludicrous, than an orator delivering stale indignation, and fervour of a week old; turning over whole pages of violent passions, written out in German text; reading the tropes and apostrophes into which he is hurried by the ardour of his mind; and so affected at a preconceived line, and page, that he is unable to proceed any farther! (85)

Students cannot practice their delivery, Smith writes, because in school, "the study of eloquence makes little or no part. The exterior graces of a speaker are despised; and debating societies . . . would hardly be tolerated, either at Oxford or Cambridge" (85).

Invention is neglected, too, Smith complains. His brother clergymen, he writes, claim that their subjects are exhausted. Smith concedes that their subjects may be old, but that "the modes of expanding, illustrating and enforcing a particular theme, are capable of infinite variety; and, if they were not, this might be a very good reason for preaching commonplace sermons, but it is a very bad one for publishing them" (85). Smith quotes approvingly from Rennel's first sermon, but disparages the second. He chastises Rennel for publishing a harangue about the excesses of the French Revolution. Smith signals the approach the Edinburgh Review will take to the war with the French ("bored exasperation" is what Clive calls it [Scotch Reviewers 96]) when he writes,

We confess ourselves long since wearied with this kind of discourse, bespattered with blood and brains, and ringing eternal changes upon atheism, cannibalism, and apostasy . . . the subject is not fit for the pulpit . . . the mind, on such occasions, so easily outruns ordinary description, that we are apt to feel more, before a mediocre oration begins, than it ever aims at inspiring. (87-88)

Still on the subject of invention, Smith writes that Rennel is a "holy bully," who rails at the " . . . silly ignorant sophisms of Voltaire, Rousseau, Condorcet, D'Alembert, and Volney" (88), but does not bother to answer their arguments. Smith writes,

While these pernicious writers have power to allure from the Church great numbers of proselytes, it is better to study them diligently, and to reply to

them satisfactorily, than to veil insolence, want of power, or want of industry, by a pretended contempt; which may leave infidels and wavering Christians to suppose that such writers are abused, because they are feared; and not answered, because they are unanswerable. (88)

Smith values style suited to the subject and informed argument, but most important to him is the good man speaking. A letter Smith wrote to Jeffrey about Pitt summarizes Smith's simultaneous attraction to, and suspicion of, rhetoric. Pitt, writes Smith, is

. . . one of the most luminous eloquent blunderers with which any people was ever afflicted. For 15 years I have found my income dwindling away under his eloquence, and regularly in every Session of Parliament he has charmed every classical feeling and stript me of every guinea I possest. At the close of every brilliant display an expedition failed or a Kingdom fell, and by the time that his Style had gained the summit of perfection Europe was degraded to the lowest abyss of Misery. God send us a stammerer, a tongueless man (Letters 1: 112)

Joseph Epstein writes of Smith's work, "Throughout everything he wrote one finds delicious passages, touches, turns, ornamentation in sufficient quantity to decorate the Christmas tree at Rockefeller Center, but now hung in his three volumes of collected writings, for the most part on quite bare boughs" (35). Leslie Stephen, writing in 1894, expresses a similar view. Smith's Edinburgh Review essays, he writes, ". . . are of a very slight texture, though the reader is rewarded by an occasional turn of characteristic quaintness. The criticism is of the most simple-minded kind, but here and there crops up a comment which is irresistibly comic" (263). Stephen uses for an example Smith's review

of Waterton's Wanderings in South America (Edinburgh Review 43). Smith biographer Hesketh Pearson (1934) calls "Waterton's Wanderings" "[t]he most amusing essay Sydney ever wrote" (87). Taylor and Hankinson include it in their 1996 anthology with the remark that it is the "best known, the most entertaining and exhaustive of all Sydney's travel book reviews . . ." (29).⁸

No doubt "Waterton's Wanderings" was delightful to its contemporary audience, who must have enjoyed Smith's many barbs aimed at the squirearchy, Parliament, the upper reaches of the Anglican Church, and the royal family. Smith opens the essay by writing that the explorer Waterton " . . . appears in early life to have been seized with an unconquerable aversion to Piccadilly, and to that train of meteorological questions and answers, which forms the great staple of polite English conversation" (299). Because there are "many more [country gentlemen] than are wanted," Smith is happy to note that Waterton, "instead of exhausting life in the chase," has instead dedicated himself to the pursuit of knowledge (299). In a summary of the flora and fauna described by Waterton, Smith writes, "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 appointed on account of shabby politics, small understanding, and good family!" (304). Smith mentions the toucan:

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. (305)

On crocodiles, Smith writes, "Their boldness is such, that a cayman has sometimes come out of the Oroonoke at Angustura near the public walks where the people were assembled, seized a full grown man, as big as Sir William Curtis after dinner, and hurried him into the bed of the river for his food" (313). In "Waterton's Wanderings" and other essays like it ("Botany Bay" [Edinburgh Review 32] for instance, and "Statistical Annals of the United States" [Edinburgh Review 33]), Smith's style fits Epstein's description of ornaments on bare boughs. These essays are amusing, but dated. All are delightfully quotable, yet the whole of each is somehow less than the sum of its parts.

Smith's most effective writing is his political and social commentary. In essays such as the "Poor Laws" and the series on the game laws, Smith uses humor not as ornament, as Epstein describes, but as an integral part of the development of his arguments. The charm of Smith's technique is that he spins humor "like a golden thread" (Reid 79) from logical argument.

Chapter 3 Smith's Politics and World View

In 1803, Smith wrote to Constable that Edinburgh was a good place from which to exercise freedom toward the wits of the south (Letters 1:79).⁹ Edinburgh was also a good place from which to promote freedom to the wits of the south. From the very first issue of the Edinburgh Review, Smith and his fellow reviewers used the platform of the Review to discuss and to promote liberal causes (Clive, Scotch Reviewers 65). Critics disagree about the extent to which the Edinburgh Review was a Whig party mouthpiece. Graham (English 233), Haydon (xxi), Gross (7), and Roper (36) contend that politics was less important to the Edinburgh Review than has been generally assumed. Clive charts the incidence of the appearance of politics in the Review from 1802 to 1815 and reports that the curve rises and falls with Whig political crises (66). Nevertheless, he concludes that " . . . it would be a mistake to think of the Edinburgh Review during the nineteenth century as wholly, or even primarily, a political journal. The great majority of the articles it published dealt with other subjects--religion, education, science, and, of course, literature" (Essays 131). On the other hand, Gross characterizes the quarterlies, including the Edinburgh, as "unashamed vehicles for party propaganda" (7). Dickie Spurgeon notes that the Edinburgh took positions on every important political issue and that even its colors were the Whig "buff and blue" (140).

Smith himself was not rich enough to be a Whig, according to G. K. Chesterton, who writes that Smith was "truly and exactly a Liberal; with all the truths and all the difficulties involved in the genuine love of Liberty" (13). Saintsbury writes that Smith "would always and naturally have been on the side opposite to that on which most of the fools were" (95). Epstein agrees with Saintsbury, characterizing Smith as "of that

permanent minority, the party perpetually out of power, the Party of Common Sense" (29). The world view that Smith displays in his Edinburgh Review essays is clear-eyed acceptance of human nature ("I paint mankind as I find them, and am not answerable for their defects" [Smith qtd. in Pearson 286]) within a framework of uncompromising fidelity to the highest ideals. The beliefs that underlie Smith's essays in the Edinburgh Review are the same set and in the same spirit as those embodied in the second paragraph of America's Declaration of Independence. Self-evident truths for Smith are equality before the law; rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; and governments deriving power from the consent of the governed.

Smith openly admired the American approach to government¹⁰ and in his essays often contrasts American freedom with British repression. In an essay in the July 1824 Edinburgh Review, Smith uses a review of three books on travel in North America to promote democratic ideals. He states his purpose at the start of the essay when he writes, ". . . we think the example of America will in many instances tend to open the eyes of Englishmen to their true interests" (437). He notes that the English assume superiority over the Americans for the wrong reasons: ". . . we think ourselves entitled to indulge in impertinent sneers at America,--as if civilization did not depend more upon making wise laws for the promotion of human happiness, than in having good inns, and post-horses, and civil waiters" (428). Smith admires Americans for having "fairly and completely, and probably for ever, extinguished that spirit of religious persecution which has been the employment and the curse of mankind for four or five centuries . . ." (429). Delightfully juxtaposing high ideals with low human nature, he continues, ". . . the wisdom of America keeps . . . all [religious groups] down--secures to them all their just rights--gives to each of them their separate pews and bells and steeples--makes them all alderman in their turns

--and quietly extinguishes the faggots which each is preparing for the combustion of the other" (429). He continues, "[Americans] are devout without being unjust (the great problem in religion) an higher proof of civilization than painted tea-cups, water-proof leather, or broad cloth at two guineas a yard" (430).

Smith indirectly attacks Britain's monarchy when he writes that America has no "mischievous remains of feudal institutions" (430). He praises America's freedom of commerce and admires a system that attempts education for all classes. Then he compensates his British audience for enduring praise of their old enemy by writing:

It is rather surprising that such a people . . . should be so extremely sensitive and touchy as the Americans are said to be. We really thought at one time they would have fitted out an armament against the Edinburgh and Quarterly Reviews, and burnt down Mr. Murray's and Mr. Constable's shops, as we did the American Capitol. (432-33)¹¹

He also notes that Americans spit on carpets: "Now all claims to civilization are suspended till this secretion is otherwise disposed of. No English gentleman has spit upon the floor since the Heptarchy" (435).

Obliquely promoting democracy as a cure for the civil unrest in Britain, Smith writes, "Mobs are created by opposition to the wishes of the people;--but when the wishes of the people are consulted so completely as they are consulted in America--all motives for the agency of mobs are done away" (438). He ends the essay as he always does when his subject is America, with praise for the country and condemnation of slavery:

America seems, on the whole, to be a country possessing vast advantages, and little inconveniences; they have a cheap government, and bad roads; they pay no tithes, and have stage coaches without springs. They have no

poor laws and no monopolies--but their inns are inconvenient, and travellers are teased with questions. They have no collections in the fine arts; but they have no Lord Chancellor, and they can go to law without absolute ruin. They cannot make Latin verses, but they expend immense sums in the education of the poor. . . . But then comes the great disgrace and danger of America--the existence of slavery, which if not . . . corrected, will one day entail (and ought to entail) a bloody servile war . . . which will separate America into slave states and states disclaiming slavery" (442)

Smith sounds a similar note at the end of "Waterton's Wanderings," an essay he wrote a few years later (Edinburgh Review 43). He again uses the example of America to remark on Britain's shortcomings:

We are always glad to see America praised, (slavery excepted). And yet there is still, we fear, a party in this country, who are glad to pay their court to the timid and the feeble, by sneering at this great spectacle of human happiness. We never think of it without considering it as a great lesson to the people of England, to look into their own affairs, to watch and suspect their rulers, and not to be defrauded of happiness and money by pompous names, and false pretences. (314)

Smith addresses the same issue in his review, the "Statistical Annals of America." He appears to warn Americans, but is actually warning Britons, that " . . . it is the constant tendency of those entrusted with power, to conceive that they enjoy it by their own merits, and for their own use, and not by delegation, and for the benefit of others" (33: 78).

Though he was a staunch advocate of religious liberty, Smith was not a supporter of every religion. Leaving to his colleague Jeffrey the task of attacking the Romantic poets,¹² Smith aimed his fire at the religious Romantics. As has been seen in the discussion of "Methodists and Indian Missions," Smith mocked Dissenters at every opportunity. He refers to all of them as Methodists: "We shall use the general term of Methodism . . . not troubling ourselves to point out the finer shades, and nicer discriminations of lunacy, but treating them all as if one general conspiracy against common sense, and rational orthodox [C]hristianity" (Edinburgh Review 11: 341-2). Smith does not subscribe to Romantic notions about the nature of man. "Nature impels us both to good and bad actions," he writes in the first Edinburgh Review (20). He scorns the Methodist "doctrine of inward impulse and emotions, which, it is quite plain, must lead, if universally insisted upon, and preached among the common people, to every species of folly and enormity" (11: 356). A year later, he writes, "If the preacher sees visions, and has visitations, the clerk will come next, and then the congregation: every man will be his own prophet, and dream dreams for himself: the competition in extravagance will be hot and lively, and the whole island a receptacle for incurables" (14: 43).

Smith had a sunny nature, and he recoiled from the gloom of the Dissenters.¹³ Smith wrote to Horner in 1816 about some Methodists of his acquaintance: "I endeavor 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!" (Letters 1: 269). Smith writes in the Edinburgh Review that the Dissenters always try to make man more religious than nature intended him to be, and that "[e]nnui, wretchedness, melancholy, groans and sighs are the offerings

which these unhappy men make to a Deity, who has covered the earth with gay colours, and scented it with rich perfumes . . . " (11: 357).

To the end of his life, Smith ridiculed Dissenters but, unlike the squire he describes in the Peter Plymley Letters ("When a country squire hears of an ape, his first feeling is to give it nuts and apples; when he hears of a Dissenter, his immediate response is to commit it to the county jail, to shave its head, to alter its customary food, and to have it privately whipped" [qtd. in Bell, Sayings 53]), Smith never suggests that Dissenters deserve anything other than equal treatment under the law.¹⁴ Smith's review of Causes of the Increase of Methodism and Dissension (Edinburgh Review 11) is a merciless attack on Methodists, but at the close of the essay, Smith writes,

We most sincerely hope that the Government of this country will never be guilty of such indiscretion as to tamper with the Toleration Act, or to attempt to put down these follies by the intervention of the law. If experience has taught us any thing, it is the absurdity of controlling men's notions of eternity by acts of Parliament. Something may perhaps be done, in the way of ridicule, towards turning the popular opinion. (361)

When Parliament was so foolish as to consider revising the Toleration Act, Smith responded with his review of Hints on Toleration (Edinburgh Review 17). Smith opens the essay by writing, "If a prudent man sees a child playing with a porcelain cup of great value, he takes the vessel out of his hand, pats him on the head, tells him his mamma will be sorry if it is broken, and gently cheats him into the use of some less precious substitute. Why will Lord Sidmouth meddle with the Toleration act . . ." (393). Then Smith defines religious toleration:

What is the meaning of religious toleration? That a man should hold, without pain or penalty, any religious opinions,--and choose for his instruction, in the business of salvation, any guide whom he pleases;--care being taken, that the teacher, and the doctrine, injure neither the policy nor the morals of the country. . . . What right has any government to dictate to any man, who shall guide him to heaven, any more than it has to persecute the religious tenets by which he hopes to arrive there? (394)

Sidmouth was considering a measure to inhibit the preaching of Dissenting ministers. Using expediency to defend principle, Smith writes that any plan to keep Dissenting preachers from preaching is destined to fail:

This is a receipt for making a stupid preacher popular, and a popular preacher more popular; but can have no possible tendency to prevent the mischief against which it is levelled. It is precisely the old history of persecution against opinions, turned into a persecution against persons. The prisons will be filled,--the enemies of the Church made enemies of the State also,--and the Methodists rendered ten times more actively mad than they are at present. (396)

He continues by examining the motives of those who wish to curtail the activities of the Dissenters. When Smith is finished, their motives appear very base, even sadistic. He writes:

Nothing dies so hard, and rallies so often, as Intolerance. The fires are put out, and no living nostril has scented the nidor of a human creature roasted for faith;--then after this, the prison doors were got open, and the chains knocked off:--And, now, Lord Sidmouth only begs that men, who disagree

with him in religious opinions, may be deprived of all civil offices, and not be allowed to hear the preachers they like best. Chains and whips he would not hear of; but these mild gratifications every orthodox mind is surely entitled to. The hardship would indeed be great, if a churchman were deprived of the amusement of putting a dissenting parson in prison. . . . It is the error of some four or five hundred thousand English gentlemen, of decent education and worthy characters, who conscientiously believe, that they are punishing, and continuing incapacities, for the good of the State; while they are, in fact, (though without knowing it), only gratifying that insolence, hatred and revenge, which all human beings are unfortunately so ready to feel against those who will not conform to their own sentiments.

(396)

Smith ends the essay by writing, "We apologize to men of sense for sentiments so trite; and patiently endure the anger which they will excite among those with whom they will pass for original" (402). Smith flatters his audience by assuming that they agree with him that religious liberty is such a fundamental right that defense of it must necessarily consist only of trite sentiments. No one reading the essay would want to be counted among the naifs encountering for the first time the concept of a right to religious freedom.

Smith fought for religious freedom throughout his career as a writer and clergyman. Doing so, he managed to offend everybody: the "low-Church Anglicans," with his attacks on the Dissenters; and the "high-Church Anglicans," with his defense of Catholics (Halpern 45). In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Catholics could not, among other things, vote for candidates for public office, sit in Parliament, or be commissioned in the military (Epstein 25-26). The short-lived Whig government of 1806-

07 was turned out by Tories who ran on a platform of "no-Popery" (Halpern 58).

Catholic emancipation was a unifying issue for the Whigs, but the rest of society, including the established church, was uninterested or opposed. Directly in violation of the policy of his superiors in the Anglican Church, Smith fought tirelessly for Catholic emancipation, not only in print with the Peter Plymley Letters and his essays in the Edinburgh Review, but also personally in speeches and petitions (often bearing his signature only) at meetings of the clergy (Bell, Sydney Smith 154).

Smith signals the position the Edinburgh will take on the Catholic question in the very first number. In his review of Rennel's Discourses, Smith writes, "Upon the danger to be apprehended from Roman Catholics in this country, Dr. Rennel is laughable. We should as soon dream that the wars of York and Lancaster would break out afresh, as that the protestant religion in England has any thing to apprehend from the machinations of Catholics" (1: 90). Inextricably bound to the issue of Catholic emancipation were the problems of Ireland and the Irish Catholics. Smith reviewed Parnell's History of the Penal Laws against the Irish Catholics for the October 1808 issue of the Review. Fresh from the Whig defeat over the issue of Catholic emancipation, Smith chastises those who are willing to give up the struggle. He writes that the only opponents of religious liberty left are those "who can neither learn nor blush" (77). Silently waiting for change is not an option, Smith writes: "We have a strange incredulity where persecution is to be abolished, and any class of men restored to their indisputable rights. When we see it done, we will believe it. . . . Toleration never had a present tense, nor taxation a future one" (78). Smith lightens the mood by introducing sections of summary of Parnell's book as follows: ". . . we shall present a very short, and we hope, even to loungers, a readable abstract" (79). Smith concludes with a passage that is typical of his treatment of the Irish Catholic

question, a combination of ethos and expediency. He writes that it is both wrong and foolish to abuse the Irish Catholics at a time when the "united efforts of the whole of Europe" are against England (82).

In Smith's last essay for the Edinburgh Review, he revisits the Irish Catholic issue, admitting that "there is little new to be said" (424). However, he writes, "we must not be silent, or, in these days of baseness and tergiversation, we shall be supposed to have deserted our friend the Pope . . ." (424). Although the threat of invasion from France is past, Smith maintains that the Irish are needed as allies. The motive of the Tories who resist emancipation is base, Smith writes. They are afraid of losing their place. Smith then paints an amusing picture of the future of no-Popery:

That this childish nonsense will have got out of the drawing room, there can be no doubt. It will most probably have past through the steward's room--and butler's pantry into the kitchen. This is the case with ghosts. They no longer loll on couches and sip tea; but are down on their knees scrubbing with the scullion--or stand sweating, and basting with the cook. (429)

He notes that Dissenters are tolerated, though Dissenters themselves are not very tolerant:

In the country, three or four thousand Ranters are sometimes encamped, supplicating in religious platoons, or roaring psalms out of waggons [sic]. Now, all this freedom is very proper; because, though it is abused, yet in truth there is no other principle in religious matters, than to let men alone as long as they keep the peace. Yet we should imagine this unbounded license of Dissenters should teach them a little charity towards the

Catholics, and a little respect for their religious freedom. But the picture of sects is this--there are twenty fettered men in a jail, and every one is employed in loosening his own fetters with one hand, and rivetting those of his neighbour with the other. (429-30)

Dissenters are not the only hypocrites, Smith observes: "Wherever three or four negotiators are gathered together, a British diplomat appears among them, with some article of kindness and pity for the poor negro. All is mercy and compassion, except where wretched Ireland is concerned" (432-33).

Smith writes prophetically that the price of emancipation rises by delay. He speculates that the cost of subduing Ireland will be too high: "Is the best blood of the land to be flung away in a war of hassocks and surplices? . . . and men to be led on to the charge by professors of divinity?" (434). One of his best arguments is expediency:

Persecuting gentlemen forget the expense of persecution; whereas, of all luxuries, it is the most expensive. The Ranters do not cost us a farthing, because they are not disqualified by ranting. The Methodists and Unitarians are gratis. The Irish Catholics, supposing every alternate year to be war, as it has been for the last century, will cost us, within these next twenty years, forty millions of money. (437)

Then Smith reminds his audience that the Catholics' cause is just: "The Catholics do not ask for political power, but for eligibility to political power . . . Eligibility to political power is a civil privilege, of which we have no more right to deprive any man than any other civil privilege" (438). He urges those in power to concede early, when the concession will be "received as a favour" (442).

Smith closes the essay "with a few words of advice to the different opponents of the Catholic question." He writes,

To the No-Popery Fool. You are made use of by men who laugh at you, and despise you for your folly and ignorance

To the No-Popery Rogue. A shameful and scandalous game, to sport with the serious interest of the country in order to gain some increase of public power!

To the Honest No-Popery People. We respect you very sincerely--but are astonished at your existence.

To the Base. Sweet children of turpitude, beware! the old anti-popery people are fast perishing away. . . . 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. (445)

He addresses the Catholics themselves last, implicitly expressing confidence in the power of rhetoric. Smith writes, "To the Catholics. Wait. Do not add to your miseries by a mad and desperate rebellion. Persevere in civil exertions, and concede all you can concede. All great alterations in human affairs are produced by compromise" (445).¹⁵

Abuse of power at all levels of government was especially common during and after the French Revolution (Clive 180). Smith frequently used the forum of the Edinburgh Review to defend the defenseless. When a few magistrates, led by a Mr. John Headlam, admitted forcing untried prisoners to work on a treadmill while being held for trial, then dared to suggest that magistrates in other jurisdictions adopt the same program, Smith responded with a blistering rebuke in the January 1824 issue of the Review. Smith undermines Headlam's authority in his opening statements. Smith writes that he will not

waste print disputing Headlam on the law, because " . . . time cannot be more unprofitably employed than in hearing gentlemen, who are not lawyers, discuss points of law" (303). Smith continues, " . . . he will pardon us for believing, that for the moderate sum of three guineas, a much better opinion of what the law is now, or was then, can be purchased, than it is in the power of Mr. Headlam, or of any county magistrate, to give for nothing . . ." (303).

Smith warns his readers that he will be obliged to state the obvious: "If, in this discussion, we are forced to insist upon the plainest and most elementary truths, the fault is not with us, but with those who forget them; and who refuse to be any longer restrained by those principles which have hitherto been held to be as clear as they are important to human happiness" (303). He continues:

To begin, then, with the nominative case and the verb,--we must remind those advocates for the tread-mill . . . that it is one of the oldest maxims of common sense, common humanity, and common law, to consider every man as innocent till he is proved to be guilty; and not only to consider him to be innocent, but to treat him as if he was so . . . (303)

Here Smith's tone is patronizing because Smith pretends merely to remind his nominal audience, Headlam and his fellows, of values that the larger community holds. Smith's actual audience is the community whose values he seems simply to reinforce, but really wishes to elevate. He censures and ridicules the truly base behavior of a small part of the community to motivate the larger community to examine its own values.

Underlying the scheme of forcing untried prisoners to work for their keep is the magistrates' acceptance of unequal treatment before the law of the rich and the poor. Smith writes, "Gentlemen punishers are sometimes apt to forget that the common people

have any mental feelings at all, and think, if body and belly are attended to, that persons under a certain income have no right to likes and dislikes" (304). "For the question between us is not," he writes a few pages further on, "how suspected persons are to be treated, and whether or not they are to be punished; but how suspected poor persons are to be treated . . . " (307).

Smith observes that treadmill work is particularly odious. On the treadmill, Smith writes, a man is " . . . put upon a level with a rush of water or a puff of steam" (305). He calls the magistrates "millers" and takes their argument to absurd lengths:

If there are, according to the doctrines of the millers, to be two punishments, the first for being suspected of committing the offence, and the second for committing it, there should be two trials as well as two punishments. Is the man really suspected, or do his accusers only pretend to suspect him? Are the suspecting of better character than the suspected? Is it a light suspicion which may be atoned for by grinding a peck a day? Is it a bushel case? or is it one deeply criminal, which requires the flour to be ground fine enough for French rolls? (307-08)

Returning to a discussion of the community's values, Smith writes,

Mr. Headlam forgets that general rules are not beneficial in each individual instance, but beneficial upon the whole; that they are preserved because they do much more good than harm, though in some particular instances they do more harm than good; yet no respectable man violates them on that account, but holds them sacred for the great balance of advantage they confer upon mankind. (309)

Here Smith is reminding his readers of the essence of the rule of law. He writes that, "Sensible men are never staggered when they see the exception" (309). Readers may conclude for themselves that Headlam is neither respectable nor sensible.

Headlam's mistake, writes Smith, is that he has "a perpetual tendency to confound the convicted and the accused" (305). Smith continues, "The simple rule is, whatever felons do, men not yet proved to be felons should not be compelled to do" (306).

Headlam " . . . applauds and advocates a system of prison-discipline which renders injustice certain, in order to prevent it from being occasional" (309). "Prison discipline is an object of considerable importance," Smith continues, "but the common rights of mankind, and the common principles of justice, and humanity, and liberty, are of greater consequence even than prison discipline" (311). Smith ends the essay expressing confidence that Parliament will overturn the plan, which they did (Edinburgh Review 40: 431).

The next year, in the review of three travel books about North America, Smith aims a final volley at Headlam. In this essay, Smith interjects a note on the treadmill issue, remarking that Headlam responded to the Edinburgh Review article with a pamphlet. Smith writes:

It would have been a very easy thing for us to have hung Mr. Headlam up as a spectacle to the United Kingdoms of England, Scotland and Ireland, the principality of Wales, and the town of Berwick-on-Tweed; but we have no wish to make a worthy and respectable man ridiculous. For these reasons we have not even looked at his pamphlet, and we decline entering into a controversy upon a point, where, among men of sense and humanity . . . there cannot possibly be any difference of opinion. (40: 431)

Smith attacks society's disparate treatment of the rich and the poor in a review of the "Statement of the Proceedings of the Society for the Suppression of Vice," in the January 1809 issue of the Edinburgh Review. Societies for the suppression of vice were groups of self-appointed guardians of public virtue that sprang up in the early nineteenth century, perhaps to counter the perceived spread of the ideals of the French Revolution (Pearson 62). Smith expresses revulsion at the very concept of such an organization: "An informer, whether he is paid by the week, like the agents of this Society--or by the crime, as in common cases--is, in general, a man of a very indifferent character" (333-34). The real mischief is that it is only the vices of the poor that such societies seek to suppress. Smith writes, "A man of ten thousand a year may worry a fox as much as he pleases . . . and a poor labourer is carried before a magistrate for paying sixpence to see an exhibition of courage between a dog and a bear!" (340). He continues:

The trespass, however, which calls forth all the energies of a suppresser, is the sound of a fiddle. That the common people are really enjoying themselves, is now beyond all doubt: and away rush Secretary, President, and Committee, to clap the cotillion into the Compter, and bring back the life of the poor to its regular standard of decorous gloom. The gambling houses of St. James's remain untouched. The peer ruins himself and his family with impunity; while the Irish labourer is privately whipped for not making a better use of the excellent moral and religious education which he has received in the days of his youth! (341)

Smith castigates those in society who wrap themselves in the cloak of morality as an excuse to persecute: "Upon religion and morals depends the happiness of mankind;--but the fortune of knaves and the power of fools is sometimes made to rest on the same

apparent basis . . ." (343). He ends the essay by writing that " . . . true zeal for virtue knows no distinction between the rich and the poor" (343).

Smith argues for government by the consent of the governed as well as for equal treatment under the law for rich and poor in "Counsel for Prisoners" (Edinburgh Review 45). He begins the essay by noting that jurymen are petitioning for a change in the Criminal Code. Smith agrees with their argument, writing, "The proper execution of laws must always depend, in great measure, upon public opinion; and it is undoubtedly most discreditable to any men intrusted with power, when the governed turn round upon their governors, and say, 'Your laws are so cruel, or so foolish, we cannot, and will not act upon them'" (75-76). Smith effectively employs the pathetic appeal first: "It is not that a great proportion of those accused are not guilty--but that some are not--and are utterly without means of establishing their innocence" (76). "But by what possible means is the destitute ignorant wretch himself to find or to produce . . . witnesses?" (77). The prisoner, writes Smith, "comes into Court, squalid and depressed from long confinement--utterly unable to tell his own story from want of words and want of confidence, and is unable to produce evidence from want of money" (77).

Smith reviews the history of English law on counsel for the defense, noting that it took seven sessions of the legislature to get counsel for the defense in cases of treason. He refutes the absurd argument that a counselor would be expensive for the prisoner, "just as if anything was so expensive as being hanged!" (80-81). Smith dismisses as ludicrous the notion that the judge is the prisoner's counsel. He asks, "Is there any one gentleman in the House of Commons, who, in yielding his vote to this paltry and perilous fallacy of the Judge being counsel for the prisoner, does not feel, that, were he himself a

criminal, he would prefer almost any counsel at the bar, to the tender mercies of the Judge?" (83).

The reason the laws are written as they are, Smith writes, is that "Gentlemen are rarely hung. If they were so, there would be petitions without end for counsel. The creatures exposed to the cruelties and injustice of the law are dumb creatures, who feel the evil without being able to express their feeling" (92). Then he calls for volunteers:

Let two gentlemen on the Ministerial side of the House (we only ask for two) commit some crimes, which will render their execution a matter of painful necessity. Let them feel, and report to the House, all the injustice and inconvenience of having neither a copy of the indictment, nor a list of witnesses, nor counsel to defend them. . . . Such evidence would save time and bring the question to an issue. It is a great duty, and ought to be fulfilled,--and, in ancient Rome, would have been fulfilled. (92)

Smith ends the essay by observing that the system of English justice will never be just until the "last and lowest of mankind" has "means of compelling the attendance of his witnesses; when his written accusation is put into his hand, and he has time to study it--when he knows in what manner his guilt is to be proved, and when he has a man of practised understanding to state his facts, and prefer his arguments" (95).

In this essay, as in all of Smith's essays that address social issues, Smith's standard for action or decision-making is the welfare of the individual. Biographer Peter Virgin's assessment of Smith's social thought is that "the final impression is one of incoherence, of sadness at the contrast between what was and what might have been. Sydney was a man of enormous sensitivity, of flashing intuitive insight, and of the broadest human sympathies; but he never managed to meld thought and feeling in order to fashion a unified

response to the world" (210). But Smith does have a unified response to the world. His support for democratic ideals is unwavering. He always puts the freedom, happiness, and well-being of individuals in front of every other concern. Although he entertains no illusions about human nature, he insists that principles serve people, not the reverse. He is a refreshingly sane humanist.

Chapter 4

Conclusion and Suggested Reading

In 1831, Smith was appointed Canon of St. Paul's Cathedral. Having at last become a dignitary in the Anglican Church, he chose to end his career as an Edinburgh Reviewer because, his daughter reports, he thought it unseemly to continue to write anonymously (Holland 205). In the same year, on October 11, Smith made the most important, and last, political speech of his life. On October 8th, the House of Lords rejected a bill for electoral reform that the House of Commons had passed. The Duke of Wellington came out against reform. The atmosphere in England was tense. There had been riots in Bristol. Parliament was dissolved. Smith addressed a large, unruly crowd at Taunton (Holland 206). He began his speech with characteristic charm:

Mr. Bailiff, I have spoken so often on this subject, that I am sure both you and the gentlemen here present will be obliged to me for saying but little, and that favour I am as willing to confer, as you can be to receive it.

He continued:

The loss of the bill I do not feel . . . [because] before the expiration of the winter . . . this bill will pass As for the possibility of the House of Lords preventing ere long a reform of Parliament, I hold it to be the most absurd notion that ever entered into 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 of 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 vigourously 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. (Taylor and Hankinson 129)

Smith mimed the actions of Mrs. Partington with her mop as he spoke. His audience, who had been tense and angry when he began his speech, laughed when he ended it. Within days, pictures of "Dame Partington and the Ocean" appeared in The Times and then in the London print shops. Mop-wielding Mrs. Partington bore a strong resemblance to the Duke of Wellington (Bell 159). With a few swipes of Smith's mop, an angry, suspicious crowd was moved to laughter and confidence. Their laughter proved to be at least as effective against the anti-reform Tories as riots had been. Eight months later, the Whigs won passage of the Reform Bill.

Smith's creation of the simple, homely image of Mrs. Partington capped his career as a rhetorician. The speech is a model of Smith's rhetorical technique. As he does in his Edinburgh Review essays, Smith subtly flatters his audience. He advocates peaceful, incremental change, not radical revolution. He disavows disrespect, yet his weapon is ridicule. He assures his audience that their wish for change is as inevitable and right as the forces of nature.

Great strides toward democracy were made in British society during the period between the French Revolution and the reign of Queen Victoria. When Smith launched the Edinburgh Review and his own career as an Edinburgh reviewer, it was "considered a piece of impertinence in England if a man of less than two or three thousand a year ha[d] any opinions at all on important subjects . . ." (qtd. in Holland 36). The lid was clamped down hard on civil liberties in British society. Taxes and inflation were high. The lower classes were at the point of rebellion. The upper classes were unwilling to give any quarter out of fear. The Edinburgh Review served as a forum for a growing, newly-empowered, literate middle class to articulate ideas that led to peaceful democratic reform in Britain.¹⁶ As founder of the Review and long-time contributor to it, Sydney Smith deserves at least a mention in the curriculum for nineteenth-century rhetoric.

Late in his life, Smith wrote in a letter to Bishop Bloomfield: "You call me in [your] speech your facetious friend, and I hasten with gratitude in this letter to denominate you my solemn friend; but you and I must not run into commonplace errors; you must not think me necessarily foolish because I am facetious, nor will I consider you necessarily wise because you are grave" (Letters 2: 707). Whately's grave Elements of Rhetoric is about rhetoric; Smith's lively essays in the Edinburgh Review are rhetoric. Smith's distinctive, persuasive essays merit inclusion in anthologies of rhetoric, nineteenth-century or otherwise. Smith's subjects are not, as Epstein alleges, "of antique interest" (34). Game laws are not at the top of any legislature's agenda, but drug laws are; equal treatment under the law for rich and poor is still an issue; and Smith might have written his essays on Ireland yesterday. Smith was a master of all the elements of rhetoric: he could capture and hold an audience; his essays delight as well as instruct; he was a good man speaking. Students ought to know him.

Suggested Reading:

The best introduction to Sydney Smith's delightful writing is what Epstein calls "one of the great collections of nineteenth century letters" (21), Nowell Smith's two-volume, 1953 edition of Smith's letters. Alan Bell has been at work for nearly twenty years on what will be the definitive edition of Smith's letters. His task is made difficult by Smith's illegible handwriting and apparently random punctuation.

There are a number of biographies from which to choose. Smith's daughter Saba Holland's A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith (1855) is old-fashioned, but charming. Holland includes a list (which Smith prepared himself and distributed to friends) of her father's Edinburgh Review essays with volume and page numbers. Subsequent biographers rely heavily on Holland's book. Two of the older biographies, Hesketh Pearson's The Smith of Smiths and Stuart Reid's A Sketch of the Life and Times of the Rev. Sydney Smith are especially entertaining and informative. Pearson offers more criticism of Smith's writing. Sheldon Halpern (Sydney Smith) helpfully provides the social and political background to many of the Edinburgh Review essays. The most recent biography of Smith is Peter Virgin's Sydney Smith (1994). Virgin, Howard Mackey (Wit and Whiggery: The Rev. Sydney Smith [1771-1845]), and Alan Bell (Sydney Smith) all enjoyed access to still-unpublished letters of Smith. Of these three biographies, Virgin's is the least sympathetic; Mackey's has the most detail; and Bell's is closest to the subject and most readable.

In England, there appears to be a quiet revival of interest in Smith's writing. Taylor and Hankinson published Twelve Miles from a Lemon: Selected Writings of Sydney Smith in 1996. It is a delightful collection of Smith's letters, pamphlets, lectures, sermons, and Edinburgh Review essays, which the authors enhance with their

commentary. It is the first anthology of Smith's work published since Auden's 1957 anthology. Taylor and Hankinson report that there is now a Sydney Smith Association, which may be contacted at the English Department, University of York, Heslington, YORK, YO1 5DD.

Endnotes

¹Smith does appear in at least one recent history book, The Birth of the Modern, Paul Johnson's study of world events from 1815 to 1830. Johnson credits Smith with having the idea to start the Edinburgh Review and quotes Smith's Edinburgh Review articles on America (51, 57), on taxes in England (207-8), and on the Anglican church (378-80).

²Here is Smith on taxes in the January 1820 Edinburgh Review:

We can inform Jonathan [Americans] 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 everything 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 every thing 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.--makes his will on an eight pound stamp, and expires in the arms of an apothecary who has paid a license of an hundred pounds for the privilege of putting him to death. His whole property is then immediately taxed from 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. (Edinburgh Review 33: 77-78)

Nothing escaped the taxmen. In "Wanderings in South America," Edinburgh Review November 1825, Sydney writes:

This is really perfectly absurd; that a man of science cannot bring a pickled armadilla, for a collection of natural history, without paying a tax for it. . . . That a great people should compel an individual to make them a payment before he can be permitted to land a stuffed snake upon their shores, is, of all the paltry customhouse robberies we ever heard of, the most mean and contemptible . . . (314)

³Readers of evangelical magazines were mostly members of the lower classes, and according to Richard Altick, evangelical magazines had circulations as high as 18,000 in 1807 (318).

⁴Here is Smith on excessive length in writing, from "Characters of Mr. Fox," in Edinburgh Review 14 (1809):

There is an event recorded in the Bible, which men who write books should keep constantly in their remembrance. It is there set forth, that many centuries ago, the earth was covered with a great flood, by which the whole of the human race, with the exception of one family, were destroyed. It appears also, that, from thence, a great alteration was made in the longevity of mankind, who, from a range of seven or eight hundred years, which they enjoyed before the flood, were confined to their present period of seventy or eighty years. . . . Now, to forget this event,--to write without the fear of the deluge before his eyes, and to handle a subject as if mankind could lounge over a pamphlet for ten years, as before their submersion, is to be guilty of the most grievous error into which a writer can possibly fall. The author of this book should call in the aid of some brilliant pencil, and cause the distressing scenes of the deluge to be pourtrayed in the most lively colours for his use. He should gaze at Noah, and be brief. (357)

⁵Jeffrey thought the works of Mrs. More encouraged servility (Clive, Scotch Reviewers 138).

⁶Richard Whately, sixteen years Smith's junior and also an Anglican minister, was one of the dull brethren. James Golden and Edward Corbett report that there was no market for the publication of Whately's "dry, systematic, unimpassioned" sermons (274). Smith, on the other hand, was by all accounts an "accomplished and histrionic performer, from the pulpit or in the lecture hall" (Taylor and Hankinson 117). A contemporary of both Smith and Whately writes that Smith was always sensitive to audience, but Whately was not, "a defect which no brilliancy of speech or power of argument can remedy, and which rendered all the acuteness and fluency of Archbishop Whately comparatively unattractive" (Milnes 257).

Part of the appeal of the Dissenters, Smith wrote, was the passion in their sermons. As for his fellow Anglicans,

A clergyman clings to his velvet cushion with either hand, keeps his eye riveted upon his book, speaks of the ecstasies of joy and fear with a voice and a face which indicate neither, and pinions his body and soul into the same attitude of limb and thought, for fear of being called theatrical and affected. . . . Is it a wonder, then, 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 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, by casting them into a deep slumber? (1801 Sermons qtd. in Holland 50-1)

⁷Smith sprinkles commas everywhere. He describes his own handwriting " . . . as if a swarm of ants, escaping from an ink-bottle, had walked over a sheet of paper without wiping their legs" (qtd. in Pearson 142). Commas must have fallen on the page every time an ant shook a leg.

⁸On the other hand, W. H. Auden, whose prefatory remarks to his anthology of Smith's work indicate that he values Smith most as a polemicist, does not include "Waterton's Wanderings" in his 1957 collection. The essay is delightful to read, but its pleasures unquestionably fit Epstein's description of ornaments on bare branches.

⁹Having Edinburgh in the title and address of the Review lent a cachet of rebellion to the new venture, accustomed as English readers were to defiance from the north. Smith left Edinburgh in August of 1803 and never lived there again, but he often assumed a Scottish persona in his Edinburgh Review essays. For example, in a review of Madame de Staël's Delphine, Smith writes, "The bookseller has employed one of our countrymen for that purpose, who appears to have been very lately caught" (Edinburgh Review 2: 174). He continues, "We doubt if Grub-Street ever imported from Caledonia a more abominable translator" (175). In a review of three travel books about North America, Smith writes, "It is very natural that we Scotch, who live in a little shabby scraggy corner of a remote island, with a climate which cannot ripen an apple, should be jealous of . . . more favoured people . . ." (Edinburgh Review 40: 433). A year later, he wrote in "Wanderings by Waterton," another review of a travel book, about trees of a girth "not easy for a Scotch imagination to reach" (Edinburgh Review 43: 300). These little jokes served the purpose of indulging the London audience's feelings of superiority over the savage Scots, while preserving the pretense that the reviewers made their pronouncements from Edinburgh, when very often only Jeffrey was there, pleading with his authors to send him their work (Clive 56).

¹⁰In 1818, in a letter to Lord Grey, Smith wrote, "How can anyone in this Country be dead to the [American] Experiment in which so many millions of English are making of living without Church, King or Noble--three institutions of Society which are kind enough to eat up for us the fruits, the power, and the distinction of the Land in which we live . . ." (Letters 1: 307).

¹¹Unlike their rivals at other periodicals, the Edinburgh reviewers did not automatically disparage American subjects and American books (Halpern 117). In this instance, Smith is probably referring to the American reaction to his essay in the January 1820 issue of the Edinburgh Review, in which he praised America mightily, but also wrote:

In the four quarters of the globe, who reads an American book? or goes to an American play? or looks at an American picture or statue? What does the world yet owe to American physicians or surgeons? What new substances have their chemists discovered? or what old ones have they analyzed? What new constellations have been discovered by the telescopes of Americans?--What have they done in the mathematics? Who drinks out of American glasses? or eats from American plates? or wears American coats or gowns? or sleeps in American blankets?--Finally, under which of the old tyrannical governments of Europe is every sixth man a Slave, whom his fellow-creatures may buy and sell and torture? (79-80)

¹²Smith did not indulge in attacks on the Romantics. He admired Byron:

To publish verses is become a sort of evidence that a man wants sense; which is repelled not by writing good verses, but by writing excellent verses;--by doing what Lord Byron has done;--by displaying talents great enough to overcome the disgust which proceeds from satiety, and showing that all things may become new under the reviving touch of genius. (Edinburgh Review 22: 68).

The January 1815 Edinburgh Review ("out early--a rare event") carried Jeffrey's scathing "This will never do" review of Wordsworth. Smith wrote to Jeffrey:

I have not read the review of Wordsworth, because the subject is to me so very uninteresting; but may I ask was it worth while to take any more notice of a man respecting whom the public opinion is completely made up? and do not such repeated attacks upon the man wear in some little degree the shape of persecution? (Letters 1: 250)

Two years later Smith wrote to a friend, "Jeffrey has thrashed Coleridge happily and deservedly;--but is it not time now to lay up his cudgel? Heads that are plastered and trepanned all over are no longer fit for breaking" (Letters 1: 281). For once, Smith misjudged his audience. Circulation numbers were never higher than when Jeffrey assaulted the Romantics (Sullivan, Romantic Age viii).

¹³In 1809, after being effectively banished to the country by his superiors in the Anglican church, Smith wrote to Lady Holland that he would not be complaining about his fate: "In short, if my lot be 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" (Letters 1: 166).

¹⁴Smith's daughter writes that, in the last months of his life, "My father went, for a short time, in the autumn, to the sea-side, complaining much of languor. He said, 'I feel so weak, both in body and mind, that I verily believe, if the knife were put into my hand, I should not have strength or energy enough to stick it into a Dissenter'" (358).

Using a pseudonym, Smith published ten short pamphlets between 1807 and 1808 on the subject of Protestant intolerance of Catholics. A collection of the Letters of Peter Plymley was published in 1808 and quickly went through sixteen editions (Virgin 3). Reportedly, the effect in London " . . . was like a spark on a heap of gunpowder" (Taylor and Hankinson 177). Richard Sheridan described the Letters as "the most argumentative, logical, ingenious, and by far the wittiest performance I ever met with" (qtd. in Virgin 3). Bibliographer Cavanaugh writes that the Peter Plymley Letters are "the essays for which [Smith] is, perhaps, best remembered" (272).

¹⁵In March of 1829, two days before Smith's son Douglas died, the Catholic Emancipation Bill passed (Pearson 195).

¹⁶Of the Edinburgh Review, Epstein writes:

In ways that cannot be precisely calculated but that are nonetheless generally acknowledged, the journal, through arguments conducted in its pages, contributed importantly to the emancipation of Catholics, the representation by counsel for anyone accused of a capital crime, the abolition of the death penalty for stealing, the establishment of parliamentary representation in Scotland, the closing off of the slave trade, and much more. (23-24)

Smith's contemporaries acknowledged their debt to Smith for his reform efforts. Taylor and Hankinson quote the obituary in the Annual Register for 1845:

"When his 'quips and cranks' are lost and forgotten, it will be remembered that he supported the Roman Catholic claims and than they were conceded; that he compelled a large portion of the public to acknowledge the mischief of our penal settlements; that he became the advocate of the wretched chimney sweepers, and their miseries were alleviated; that he contended against many of the unjust measures of the Church Reform Bill, and they were amended; that, whereas before his time, a man accused at the bar of a criminal court might be hanged before he had been half heard, now every prisoner has the benefit of a defence by counsel. It will further be freely acknowledged that no public writer was more successful than he in denouncing a political humbug, or demolishing a literary pretender" (219)

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Appendix

ART. XVI. Anniversary Sermon of the Royal Humane Society. By. W. Langford, D.D.
Printed for F. and C. Rivington. 1801. 8vo. 40 pages.

An accident, which happened to the gentleman engaged in reviewing this Sermon, proves, in the most striking manner, the importance of this charity for restoring to life persons in whom the vital power is suspended. He was discovered, with Dr. Langford's discourse lying open before him, in a state of the most profound sleep; from which he could not, by any means, be awakened for a great length of time: By attending, however, to the rules prescribed by the Humane Society, flinging in the smoke of tobacco, applying hot flannels, and carefully removing the discourse itself to a great distance, the critic was restored to his disconsolate brothers.

The only account he could give of himself was, that he remembers reading on, regularly, till he came to the following pathetic description of a drowned tradesman; beyond which, he recollects nothing.

But to the individual himself, as a man, let us add the interruption to all the temporal business in which his interest was engaged. To him indeed, now apparently lost, the world is as nothing: But it seldom happens, that man can live for himself alone: Society parcels out its concerns in various connexions; and from one head issue waters, which run down in many channels.--The spring being suddenly cut off, what confusion must follow in the streams which have flowed from its source? It may be, that all the expectations reasonably raised of approaching prosperity, to those who have embarked in the same occupation, may at once disappear; and the important interchange of commercial faith be broken off, before it could be brought to any advantageous conclusion.

This extract will suffice for the style of the sermon. The charity itself is above all praise. (1: 113)