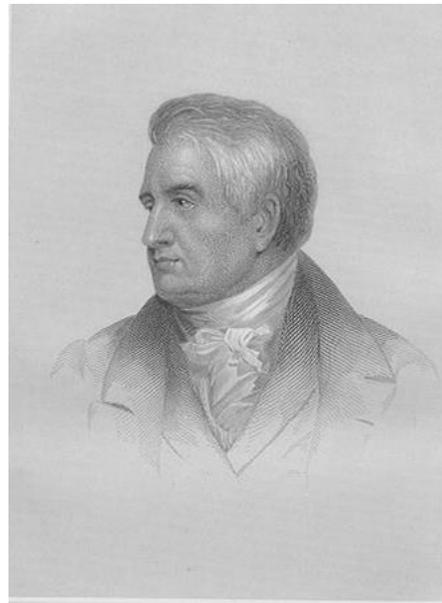


‘AN OPEN ROAD TO HEAVEN’, JOHN LINGARD & SYDNEY SMITH ON CATHOLIC EMANCIPATION

Dr Leo Gooch



John Lingard



Sydney Smith

The campaign leading to Catholic Emancipation in 1829 was both protracted and hard fought. The two principal clerical protagonists in the cause were John Lingard, its main Catholic proponent, and Sydney Smith its chief Anglican supporter. Their biographies have several similarities. They were born within a few months of each other: Lingard in February and Smith in June 1771. Both spent most of their lives in northern England and both became prominent and admired members of their respective Communion. They intervened in the debate independently of each other in 1807-8 when the Catholic Question became a major political issue and it is of some interest to explore their writings on the matter, particularly those of Smith since his contribution has not been given its due in Catholic historical studies.¹

It might have been expected that as clergymen Lingard and Smith would have both addressed the theological and ecclesiastical arguments about emancipation but, whereas for the most part Lingard did confine himself to those matters because he wrote primarily for a clerical audience, Smith courted an educated secular readership and focussed on the political question of religious liberty and justice. Both, however, deliberately adopted a bantering and ironic style, intended, at first, to be gently persuasive. A clerical reader of one of Lingard's

pamphlets feared 'from its lively and entertaining stile, [it was] likely to become popular'.² Although their approach could be seen as complementary, Smith as an Anglican was bound to have a wider readership than the Catholic Lingard and therefore a greater influence nationally; his opinions are, in any case, well worth quoting extensively for their literary merit and humour let alone their polemics. (By the way, although they were certainly aware of each other, it seems that they never met or corresponded.³)

John Lingard's parents came from Lincolnshire. They moved to Winchester, presumably where there were better employment prospects. John entered the English College, Douai, at the age of eleven and was said to have passed through the schools with distinction. Following the outbreak of the French Revolution the students returned home and a large number of French priests became émigrés in England. Lingard became tutor to a young Catholic gentleman. In October 1794 a new seminary was opened in Crook Hall in County Durham and Lingard was ordained priest at the Bar Convent in York in 1795 aged twenty-four. He remained at the college as a professor and he became Vice President. His interventions in the debate over the Catholic Question came in 1807, firstly with a short correspondence in the *Newcastle Courant* and then in a longer pamphlet exchange with Shute Barrington, Bishop of Durham, and various Anglican clergymen.

Sydney Smith's father, Robert, was a fast-talking businessman who spent much of his life in unsuccessful financial speculations. Sydney described him as 'a good kind of man, who disappeared about the time of the assizes & we asked no questions'.⁴ In 1768 Robert married Maria Olier, an émigré French Huguenot. Sydney was born in Woodford, Essex; he went to a grammar school in Southampton and, aged eleven, he won a scholarship to Winchester College. After leaving school, his father sent him for six months to Normandy to improve his French. Revolution was in the air and it was thought a salutary precaution that he should join a local Jacobin club and he was duly entered as 'Le Citoyen Smit, Membre Affilié au Club des Jacobins de Mont Villiers.' In 1789 he went up to New College, Winchester's sister foundation at Oxford but he gained little from his time there.⁵ In 1794 he took up a curacy at Netheravon as a deacon and two years later, aged twenty-five, he was ordained. He moved to Edinburgh and took on the tutorship of a young gentleman. In 1800 he married Catherine Pybus of a well-to-do Tory family.

It is generally held that in the eighteenth-century an Anglican clergyman could not be said to be exclusively devoted to his calling – he was a country gentleman, a naturalist, a magistrate, a sportsman and occasionally, as in Smith's case, an essayist and polemicist.⁶ Smith became an enthusiastic member of various liberal social circles in Edinburgh and in 1802, with a group of Whig friends, he launched the *Edinburgh Review* to challenge the prevailing Tory orthodoxy which ran through public affairs. The journal was an instant success

and Smith was propelled into a twenty-five-year long career in journalism, contributing to 'the *Edinburgh*' on a wide range of subjects. He moved to London in 1803⁷; three years later he was appointed to the living of Foston in Yorkshire, worth £500 a year. He soon became popular as a caring pastor (and unconventional JP), though he was not best pleased with his rural situation: he considered the countryside 'a healthy grave', he feared that 'creation would expire before tea-time', and he complained that Foston was twelve miles from a lemon.⁸ He would, however, serve there for twenty years (obliged by the Clergy Residence Act of 1808) and it was at Foston that he wrote, anonymously, *Letters on the Subject of the Catholics to my Brother Abraham, who lives in the country*. By Peter Plymley.

*

Anti-Catholicism in Britain comprised two main elements. Firstly, to a greater or lesser extent, Protestants held that Catholics were insincere and that their beliefs and practices were blasphemous, idolatrous, impious and sacrilegious. Secondly, religious conformity was required by law and since the crown claimed spiritual as well as temporal authority, it was treasonable to adhere to a religion which owed obedience to another jurisdiction. Hence, the Pope, as a religious leader and temporal ruler, was held to represent an alternative focus of Catholic civil allegiance and it would be a constitutional outrage to admit Catholics to places of trust and authority under the crown. John Wesley held that 'No government not Roman Catholic ought to tolerate men of the Roman Catholic persuasion'. The topic became something of a fixed idea with Shute Barrington, Bishop of Durham. He spoke in the House of Lords on only ten occasions in an episcopate of fifty-seven years but all those utterances were in fervent support of the Tory doctrine of the indivisibility of Church and State. He also advanced the policy in *A Charge Delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Durham* at each of his diocesan visitations in 1797, 1801 and 1806.⁹

The international and national political background to the controversy can be briefly summarised. The Napoleonic Wars, 1803-1815, (a continuation of the French Revolutionary Wars) were fought to contest Bonaparte's domination of Europe and to curb his strategic ambitions in the eastern Mediterranean which threatened India. Moreover, he entertained hopes of fomenting rebellion in Ireland and of invading England. A successful invasion depended on a defeat of the Royal Navy, of course, but Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in 1805 put paid to Bonaparte's maritime strategy and he would never regain effective sea-power although he continued to have continental Europe at his feet until his defeat by Wellington at Waterloo in 1815. William Pitt the Younger, the Prime Minister, who had resigned in February 1801 when George III refused to let him to bring in a measure of Catholic Relief, returned to office in 1804 but he died in January 1806 and, in the absence of a coherent single political grouping, a 'Ministry of the All the Talents' (or the 'Broad-bottomed Ministry') was formed

under Lord Grenville. But a little over a year later this government too was dismissed by the king because of its desire to respond to pressure by extending the provisions of the Irish Catholic Relief Act of 1793 to England as well as its refusal to pledge never again to propose further concessions. A general election ensued. The Whigs put Catholic Emancipation at the top of their agenda and the Tories went to the country on the single issue, 'Support the King and the British Constitution.' The Tories were returned in May 1807.

*

Catholic political loyalty was a subject of fierce controversy before and during the election campaign of 1807. The Revd Thomas Gillow at Callaly Castle wrote a substantial pamphlet of one hundred and four pages entitled *Catholic Principles of Allegiance Asserted* (Keating 1807, 2/6d). Although sympathetic to his purpose, the *Edinburgh Review* thought Gillow had falsified some of his historical claims and that he was 'too zealous a Romanist' to be persuasive. At the time of the election, however, Gillow had one hundred and seventy copies reprinted in Newcastle for sale at the reduced price of one shilling each so as to reach the widest audience. At the same time, Henry Cotes, Vicar of Bedlington, published a 'Letter to the Electors' in the *Newcastle Courant* using the pseudonym of 'A Liege Subject'. He rejected Catholic claims to emancipation on the grounds that they owed ultimate fidelity not to the king and British constitution but to the pope who, he reminded everyone, was then under the sway of Bonaparte, Britain's mortal enemy. But Edward Walker, the editor (and Lingard's publisher as it happened), even-handedly reprinted the Irish *Declaration of Loyalty* of March 1792 refuting Cotes's position. The discomfited Cotes wrote again, but Walker now reprinted the recent *Address* of Bishop Douglass and over fifty leading lay Catholics, including the Northumbrians George Silvertop, John Charlton and Ralph Riddell, clearly stating that the Church had no authority whatever over the civil affairs of any country and further that the pope could not dispense Catholics from their secular oaths of allegiance or sanction them to deal insincerely with heretics. George Gibson of Stonecroft (as 'A Friend to Peace and Union') and Thomas Selby of Biddlestone ('A Loyal Freeholder') wrote in deploring Cotes's intolerance and falsehoods. Lingard ('J.L.') also wrote pointing out that papal authority was confined to spiritual matters. Cotes now cited a catechism of 1685 to prove his point; fatally, however, he did not know that Lingard knew it was spurious and had been written to misrepresent Catholic beliefs by John Williams, a Protestant clergyman and controversialist. Lingard delightedly exposed the fraud in the *Courant*. After a blustering response nothing else was heard from 'A Liege Subject' until he appeared as 'Elijah Index' in the more extensive debate which followed. (Lingard spotted the new guise immediately.)¹⁰

During the parliamentary election campaign following the fall of the 'Talents', Barrington published his *Charge* of 1806 for a general readership.

Lingard was annoyed not only by the offensive tone and inaccuracy of the *Charge*, but also because the bishop had intervened during ‘the ferment of a general election’ with a pamphlet which ‘seemed designed to prepare the way for the warwhoop of no popery’. He therefore responded, anonymously, with *Remarks on A Charge...*¹¹ Predictably, Barrington had rehearsed all the traditional anti-Catholic bugbears, which would be rebutted effortlessly (and need not detain us), but Lingard specifically emphasised their irrelevance to the political question and objected to the conclusions the bishop drew from them to deny Catholics their civil rights. It was sufficient, Barrington had written, to show charity and kindness to people holding a different faith, but that did not mean they should be given political power. He would treat the Irish with kindness, and improve their social and economic condition, but without granting them political power: ‘Let us keep inviolate the barriers of our religious and political constitution’. Lingard demurred:

what can religious doctrines have to do with petitions for political privileges, or, what is there in my belief that should incapacitate me, or in yours that should qualify you for civil employment?

Smith entirely agreed:

It is ridiculous to tell men who use a different hassock from me, that till they change their hassock they shall never be Colonels, Aldermen or Parliament-men.

At the same time, however, Smith was an uncompromising upholder of the established church (‘The purest religion in the world, in my humble opinion, is the religion of the Church of England’) and was ‘disgusted with the nonsense of the Roman Catholic religion’. Catholics were, of course, dismayed by his antipathy to their beliefs and practices (which he scorned as intellectually in error and superstitious) and accepted his support warily and only for its political utility. Smith was not devout, and he played down doctrine in favour of simple Christian ethics; he hated Evangelicals and Methodists and he would later ridicule the Oxford Movement. W.H. Auden described him as the perfect expression of the Whig mentality – a moderate royalist, liberal in politics, and enlightened in religious belief.¹² Just as he detested Methodism because it offended his liberal convictions, for him the Catholic Question was one of religious freedom. His ‘passionate love for common justice and for common sense’ explains why this Low Churchman adopted the Catholic cause in the first place and why he hardly touched on theological issues. He hated religious persecution and was impelled to confront it whenever he came across it. The state had nothing whatever to do with theological ‘errors’ which did ‘not violate the common rules of morality and militate against the fair power of the ruler.’ Catholics obey the Pope as the spiritual head of their Church just as Dissenters obey theirs. ‘What have I to do with the speculative nonsense of his theology

when the object is to elect the mayor of a country town, or to appoint a colonel of a marching regiment?’

Lingard noted that Barrington had ‘imputed the overthrow of the ancient government of France and all its tremendous consequences, ultimately, to the corruptions of the Church of Rome and its wide departure from the simplicity of the Gospel’. In fact, the revolutionaries treated all religion ‘as their natural and most formidable enemy.’ He later reflected that if the revolution had taken place in England and the Anglican clergy had displayed the same determined opposition as was shown by the French clergy, the established church would certainly have fallen. In any case, Lingard wondered, why did ‘members of the government and the higher classes of people’ of nations in communion with Rome, having discovered the errors of popery, not accept ‘the pure, rational, unadulterated system of Protestantism’ but chose ‘the absurdities of infidelity’ instead.

Barrington also observed that England had received and protected French exiled priests with all the warm charity of Christians and the liberality of Englishmen, undeterred by the lack of ‘security against the introduction of spies and enemies’. But Lingard hoped that Barrington would applaud the return of the expatriate Catholic schools from France whence ‘as aliens in our own country, we were compelled to seek an education’:

The country will not lose by it. A domestic education will strengthen our attachment to our native land, and will retain at home the sums which formerly were of necessity expended abroad.

No sooner had Lingard’s response appeared than the bishop reissued his pamphlet but under a new title: *The Grounds on which the Church of England Separated from the Church of Rome*. Lingard immediately reissued his *Remarks* but with a new and provocative preface. He was incensed both at its anti-Catholic contents and its deliberately wide dissemination:

From one extremity of his diocese to the other he preached a crusade against the opinions, I had almost said the persons, of Catholics ... The limits of his diocese were too narrow to confine his benevolence: he resolved to extend the benefit of his *Charge* to the whole nation. He presented it to his majesty at a very critical period; published it and re-published it; he gave it first one title and then another; he printed it in quarto for the rich and in duodecimo for the poor; he made himself all to all that he might communicate to all his enmity to the opinions of Catholics. After so much provocation we certainly may be allowed to speak in our own defence.

Over and above that, however, Lingard was irritated that the beliefs ascribed to Catholics so as to justify their oppression were false: ‘They take from us our

civil rights and in return give us erroneous articles of faith' so that we are excluded

from the privileges of our birthright here, and the same will exclude us from the joys of heaven hereafter. All the good things both of this world and of the next appear to be reserved for the professors of the established creed.

Besides, the bishop's choice of a new title for his pamphlet led Lingard to warn that 'to discuss the reasons which induced the English Protestants to separate from the Catholic communion [was] a subject of dangerous investigation':

[The] Protestant is the established church. This should satisfy her ambition. In the present temper of mankind, while she remains in possession of wealth and honour, she may deem herself secure. Let her be content with her present glories and cast a decent veil over the infirmity of her birth

which had only come about because of

the impetuous passion of Henry the Eighth, who renounced the authority of the Pontiff, that he might give to his mistress a seat on his throne; the rapacity of the courtiers of Edward the Sixth, who to fill their own coffers, promoted with all their influence the godly work of the reformation; and the policy of Elizabeth, who rejected an authority which she could not acknowledge without confessing her mother's shame and her own illegitimacy.¹³

Smith thought historical arguments were pointless: 'There were as many persons put to death under the mild Elizabeth as under the bloody Mary'; it was better 'to forget times past and to judge and be judged by present opinions and present practice'.

Although the Tory election victory effectively consigned the Catholic Question to the political wasteland Smith maintained the offensive with a scathing sermon on religious intolerance, delivered in the Temple church (and published) in July 1807. But that was merely an overture to the *Peter Plymley Letters* which dealt at length with religious freedom for Catholics (but always subject to the preservation of the Anglican establishment) and the security of the country. The first letter became an immediate best seller; four more appeared before the end of 1807 and another five came out early the next year. They were gathered into a pamphlet which ran into sixteen editions by the end of 1808. It appears that the government tried without success to confirm the authorship and he always disclaimed it. With tongue in cheek, however, he wrote in the preface to his *Works* (1840) that

finding that I deny it in vain, I have thought it might be as well to include the Letters in this Collection: they had an immense circulation at the time, and I think above 20,000 copies were sold.

The great danger to England was the threat of a French invasion assisted by the Irish. There was in any case a real possibility of an autonomous Irish insurrection if emancipation and the admission of Catholics to parliament were not granted. But the required legislation could not be enacted unless the king's scruples over his coronation oath were overcome. George III (and his successor George IV agreed) held that in principle he could not consent to any relaxation of the penal laws. Both Lingard and Smith pointed out the inconsistency of the king's position. In fact, he had done more for the Catholics of both kingdoms than had been done for them since the Reformation. Nothing was said about the royal conscience when the Catholic Relief Acts were enacted late in the previous century. Nor was any conscientious objection raised against the act of 1804 enabling the king to grant military commissions to foreign Catholics even if they did not disclaim the tenets of their faith deemed prejudicial to the safety of throne and established church. In 1807, however, a similar proposal in favour of English Catholics was refused. Smith scoffed: 'it is contended that this is now perjury which we had hitherto called policy and benevolence'. The king had repealed the Corporation and Test Act in Ireland and relaxed the laws against Protestant Dissenters so why not relax them for the Catholics. 'If one is contrary to his oath, the other must be so too'. Surely, Lingard said,

as well as Jews, deists and atheists, we might aspire to places of trust, emolument and rank, and obtain the privileges for which our fathers fought, and which are the birth-right of every Englishman.'

Smith did not believe that the establishment of church and state was in any danger, but if it was it was from Dissenters not Catholics:

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.

The Dissenters were 'infinitely more distant from the Church of England than the Catholics' yet they had never been excluded from parliament (there were forty-five of them in one house and sixteen in the other).

A Catholic Chancellor of the Exchequer would not do a ten thousandth part of the mischief to the English Church that might be done by a Methodistical Chancellor of the true Clapham breed.

For a century Britain had been exposed to the enmity of France, and the royal succession was disputed in the two Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745 but even the Pope was unable to induce the Irish to rise.

Let me hear no more of the danger to be apprehended from the general diffusion of Popery. It is too absurd to be reasoned upon ...

He had had enough of 'Arabian-night stories about the Catholics'.

Further, 'the Catholic asks you to abolish some oaths which oppress him; your answer is that he does not respect oaths. Then why subject him to the test of oaths?' In 1774 the oath of supremacy was dispensed with for the Catholics of Canada and they were then only required to take a simple oath of allegiance. In any event, 'Suppose Bonaparte were to threaten Ireland, do you think we should hear anything of the impediment of a coronation oath' to recruiting Catholics for the army and navy. It was ridiculous 'to tell Catholics that they cannot be honourable in war because they are conscientious in religion'. Even Louis XIV was perfectly willing to have Protestants in his army. Smith could not conceive of a greater disgust for an English monarch

than to see such a question as that of Catholic Emancipation argued, not with a reference to its justice or importance, but universally considered to be of no further consequence than as it affects his own private feelings.

In fact,

the king would comply more strictly with his oath if he is guided by the advice of his parliament, and parliament was unanimous about the necessity of Lord Howick's bill'

which he had refused to entertain.

As to the admission of Catholics to parliament, Smith noted that they were not excluded from the Irish House of Commons or military commands before the revolution of 1688. At present the Catholics could not bring in half the number of Scottish members:

The most ample allowance does not calculate that there would be more than twenty members who were Roman Catholics in one house and ten in the other if Catholic emancipation were carried into effect ... Nothing would give me such an idea of security as to see twenty or thirty Catholic gentlemen in Parliament looked upon by all the Catholics as the fair and proper organ of their party.

Even if every one of the hundred Irish constituencies returned a Catholic they would have to out-vote 588 Protestants in the House of Commons. 'You keep out twenty or thirty Catholics and you lose the affections of four millions.'

In the name of Heaven, what are we to gain by suffering Ireland to be rode by that faction which now predominates over it? Ten or twelve great Orange families have been sucking the blood of that country for these hundred years past ... To a short period of disaffection among

the Orangemen I confess I should not much object ... and the more violent the hatred of the Orangemen, the more certain the reconciliation of the Catholics.

‘Abhorred by the English, who have witnessed their oppression, and by the Catholic Irish who have smarted under them’, the Orangemen would be well-advised to keep quiet or leave for foreign parts.

The Relief Acts had allowed the Irish to prosper and since then the commerce of Ireland had doubled, but every law which irritated them remained:

if you were determined to insult the Catholics, you should have kept them weak; if you resolved to give them strength, you should have ceased to insult them – at present your conduct is pure unadulterated folly ... If you had intended to refuse the Catholics political power, you should have refused them civil rights.

It was absurd to trust the lowest Catholics with the offices corresponding to their situation in life and deny such privileges to the higher. ‘Such an idea is nauseous, antiperistaltic and emetical’. If you wanted to engage the vigour of the common people you must not disgrace their nobility and insult their priesthood.

Smith was opposed to Catholics having to pay their tithes to the Church of Ireland:

I admit that nothing can be more reasonable than to expect that a Catholic priest should starve to death genteelly and pleasantly for the good of the Protestant religion but not for the fabric of the Protestant churches of Ireland. Upon what principle of justice or common sense is he to pay every tenth potato in his little garden to a clergyman in whose religion nobody believes for twenty miles around him and who has nothing to preach to but bare walls while two hundred yards off, a thousand Catholics are huddled together in a miserable hovel and pelted by all the storms of heaven. Can anything be more distressing than to see a venerable man pouring forth sublime truths in tattered breeches and depending for his food upon the little offal he gets from his parishioners?

Smith held that all the trouble in Ireland would cease if the Catholic clergy were paid and the appointment of bishops by the pope could be facilitated with a modest expenditure. There were twenty-six Irish bishops who got at most £400, and more than a thousand priests who received from £30 to £90 a year. Smith would allocate £250,000 to the Irish Catholic Church to cover salaries, church upkeep and schools. The clergy would all receive their salaries at the Bank of Ireland. ‘Even St Ignatius would not withstand the temptation.’ Bishop James Doyle of Kildare scorned the idea that they would ever take money from

an English government. 'Do you mean to say', demanded Smith, 'that if every priest in Ireland received tomorrow morning a government letter with one hundred pounds, first quarter of their year's income, they would refuse it?' 'Ah! Mr Smith', the bishop replied, 'you've such a way of putting things.'

Smith was certain that

All other dangers taken together are not equal to the danger of losing Ireland from disaffection and invasion' but the 'moment the very name of Ireland is mentioned, the English seem to bid adieu to common feeling, common prudence and common sense and to act with the barbarity of tyrants and the fatuity of idiots.

What can you say to a Prime Minister who really believes it feasible to convert four million Catholic Irish and considers it the best remedy for the disturbed state of Ireland? It is really such trash that it is an abuse of the privilege of reasoning to reply to it.

Catholics were here to stay: they could not be ignored, converted or eliminated, they must be accepted. Smith took the example of Scotland which had been as much a part of the weakness of England in the past as Ireland was at present:

For years it was attempted to compel the Scotch to change their religion but when the Book of Common Prayer could not be introduced they were suffered to worship God in their own way. No lightning descended from heaven; the country was not ruined; the world is not yet come to an end and Scotland has ever since been an increasing source of strength to Great Britain.

Whatever your opinion may be of the follies of the Roman Catholic religion, remember they are the follies of four millions of [Irish] human beings, increasing rapidly in numbers, wealth and intelligence who, if firmly united with this country, would set at defiance the power of France.

Smith dismissed the idea of a papal invasion in the first letter: 'the Pope is not yet landed' although he 'is probably hovering about our coast in a fishing smack'. The danger of a French invasion was an entirely different matter, of course, and so the defence of the realm, and indeed of Europe, was of the greatest and most immediate necessity.

I want soldiers and sailors for the state; I want to make greater use than I now can do of a poor country full of men; I want to render the military service popular among the Irish; to check the power of France; to make every possible exertion for the safety of Europe which in twenty years time will be nothing but a mass of French slaves ... yet people say 'do not think of raising cavalry and infantry in Ireland! They interpret the Epistle to Timothy in a different manner

from what we do!’ ... When Turk, Jew, Heretic, Infidel, Catholic, Protestant, are all combined against this country; when men of every religious persuasion and no religious persuasion, when the population of half the globe is up in arms against us; are we to stand examining our generals and armies as a bishop examines a candidate for holy orders and to suffer no one to bleed for England who does not agree with you about the second of Timothy...

Lingard too wanted to know why British Catholics were not permitted to gain preferment in the armed services of the country:

At the present day, Englishmen are, I trust, too wise to fight with each other for modes of faith. They would rather unite men of every religious persuasion to oppose the designs of a bold, powerful and fortunate enemy who, with all Europe at his beck, threatens our very existence as an independent nation.

Smith pointed out that from Brest to Cape St Vincent there were a dozen harbours capable of containing a sufficiently large invasion force. The nearest was not two days sail and the furthest not ten from the southern coast of Ireland with a fair wind, and that coastline of more than five hundred miles abounded in deep bays, admirable harbours and disaffected inhabitants. There was at that moment ‘a universal clamour throughout the whole of Ireland against the Union’ and although two fifths of those serving in the army and navy were Irishmen, the priests were preventing further recruitment. If French troops landed, the whole population ‘would rise against you and you could not possibly survive such an event three years.’ To deny the Irish justice now,

in the present state of Europe, and in the summer months, just as the season for destroying kingdoms is coming on, is whatever you may think if it, little short of positive insanity.

You may ask if it is possible for this country to survive the recent misfortunes of Europe under Bonaparte. I answer without the slightest degree of hesitation that if Bonaparte lives and a great deal is not immediately done for the conciliation of the Catholics, it does seem to me absolutely impossible but that we must perish.

If you do not relieve these people from the civil incapacities to which they are exposed, you will lose them or you must employ great strength and much treasure in watching over them.

If we conciliate Ireland, we can do nothing amiss; if we do not, we can do nothing well. In the sixth *Letter* Smith recalled that Lord Auckland, (a Durham peer) Secretary to the Lord Lieutenant (Duke of Northumberland) had declared to parliament that if he ‘did not carry with him a compliance with all their demands, Ireland was for ever lost to this country’.

Smith noted that an unfortunate consequence of the penal laws was that the persons of Catholics were routinely insulted:

The Irish country gentleman would bear his legal disabilities with greater temper if these were all he had to bear, if they did not enable every Protestant cheesemonger and tidewaiter to treat him with contempt.¹⁴

He was astonished that so many clergymen painted Catholics in detestable colours: 'I solemnly believe blue and red baboons to be more popular here than Catholics', echoing Lingard's remark that he had 'known many an orthodox churchman stare at a Catholic clergyman as if he were an ourang outang or an infernal being in a human shape'. Actually, Smith suggested,

after a Catholic justice had once been seen on the bench, and it had been clearly ascertained that he spoke English, had no tail, only a single row of teeth and that he loved port wine ... he would be reckoned a jolly fellow and very superior in flavour to a sly Presbyterian. After dissection Catholics will be found to be really human creatures.

Smith would have agreed with Earl Grey, with whom he struck up a friendship, who had told the House of Lords that he enjoyed the acquaintance of many Northumbrian Catholics and in the

discharge of the duties of life they could not be excelled and if religion was to be appreciated by the conduct of those who professed it, he must at least say that the religion which produced such fruits could not be a bad one.¹⁵

Smith reasoned that since at least two thirds of Europeans belonged to the oldest and most numerous sect of Christians (though 'mistaken') one could hardly suggest that they were incapable of fulfilling the offices of common and civil life:

It is supposed that Huskisson and Sir Harry Englefield would squabble behind the Speaker's chair about the Council of Lateran and many a turnpike bill miscarry by the sarcastical controversies of Mr Hawkins Brown and Sir John Throckmorton upon the Real Presence.

Smith enjoyed cordial relationships with the local Yorkshire Catholic gentry. He was delighted to find that Henry Howard of Corby Castle, 'an excellent man', was to be his neighbour; the Fairfaxes of Gilling stayed at Foston; and the Cholmeleys became particular friends. Francis Cholmeley was a liberal Catholic squire who lived at Brandsby some eight miles from Smith at Foston and the two families regularly exchanged letters on recipes and agricultural matters as well as making visits bearing fruit, seeds, cake and other presents. Smith respected Cholmeley's moderate religious opinions: 'I wish you would inspire

those Irish Catholic Bishops with a little of your understanding – they have marred their own cause most miserably.’ Cholmeley’s help was solicited to place Signor Denarchi, an Italian refugee, in a teaching post at the Bar Convent or Ampleforth College.¹⁶

For all that Smith was strongly in favour of emancipation, however, he teased its champions about its likely consequences:

If you free the Catholics to gain high positions, they would come over to the established Church; there are very few old and rich families among Dissenters. A rich young Catholic in parliament would belong to White’s and to Brookes’s, would keep race-horses would walk up and down Pall Mall, be exonerated of his ready money and constitution, become as devoid of morality, honesty, knowledge and civility as Protestant loungers in Pall Mall and return home with a supreme contempt for Father O’Leary and Father O’Callaghan. I am astonished at the madness of the Catholic clergy in not perceiving that Catholic emancipation is Catholic infidelity ... and will ensure the loss of every man of fashion and consequence.

Partly because he knew that the obstinacy of the king was not likely to be overcome, and that his likely successor the Prince Regent had said he would not accept emancipation either, Smith realized that the Catholic claims would not be achieved for some time to come. Reluctantly, but pragmatically, then, he moderated his demands: If Bonaparte were to ‘put off his intrigues and his invasion of Ireland’ he would ‘overlook the question of justice and, finding the danger suspended, agree to the delay’ of legislation. Therefore, he suggested, the best solution might be

to keep the penal law in effect but to suspend it every year as had been done for fifty years ... This effectually removes persecution but lets Protestants have the exquisite satisfaction of enjoying some advantage over the Catholics.

And that is what happened.

In any case, Smith, ever the realist, predicted in the last *Letter* that if the safety of Europe was restored ‘Catholics may for ever bid adieu to the slightest probability of effecting their object.’ He was certainly right that when the threat of invasion receded and with the peace following Wellington’s victory at Waterloo in 1815, Catholic emancipation was no longer seen in London as an immediate political necessity. Nonetheless, Smith continued to argue the case, saying that ‘the Protestants must not have it all their own way’. In March 1823 he spoke to a meeting of the Anglican clergy of the North Riding at the Three Tuns in Thirsk, called to petition parliament against making any concessions to the Catholics; his counter-petition gained only two supporters. At a similar meeting in April 1825 he addressed the East Riding clergy at the Tiger Inn,

Beverley, and found himself in a minority of one (even his own curate Mr Milestones opposed him). Further articles appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* and in February 1826 he published *A Letter to the Electors on the Catholic Question* (which sold two thousand copies within a month) containing some memorable images of religious liberty: ‘No chains, no prisons, no bonfires for a man’s faith ... *an open road to heaven* ...’ His last intervention on the subject came in 1828 when, as a prebendary of Bristol, he gave the Gunpowder Plot Anniversary Sermon before the Mayor and Corporation, allegedly the most anti-Catholic civic body in England; He gleefully reported that he had ‘let off in the Minster no ordinary collection of Squibs, Crackers and *Roman Candles*’ giving them ‘such a dose of toleration as will last them for many a year’.¹⁷

Lingard dealt with several Anglican opponents during the debate but after he left Ushaw College in 1811 to become missionary at Hornby in Lancashire he concentrated on the historical work which he preferred but which had been interrupted by the controversy. Smith had devoted more time and energy to the Catholic Question than any other cause but he wearied of it saying it had become ‘stale, threadbare and exhausted’ and that men were ‘tired to death of it’. That was certainly not the case in Ireland where the matter was far from played out; discontent had never wholly subsided and agitation, both religious and nationalist, rose to alarming levels in the mid-1820s. Though at heart deeply anti Catholic, Wellington, now Tory Prime Minister, and Robert (‘Orange’) Peel, Home Secretary, conceded that emancipation was essential if Ireland was to be kept at peace and, to the despair of the king, decided to legislate for it. (Peel’s nickname was amended to ‘Turncoat’ Peel.) In April 1829 following the bill’s successful passage through parliament, George IV was obliged to give his assent though he only did so with pain and regret.¹⁸ Smith wrote: ‘Thank God there is an end to it’.¹⁹

In his *Charge* of 1831, Bishop van Mildert, Barrington’s successor as Bishop of Durham, lamented the passage of Catholic Emancipation and encouraged his clergy to put it out of their minds:

Far better is it, for the peace of the community, and for its future welfare, that such things should be left to the historian hereafter to dilate upon, with a cooler judgement and a more impartial spirit than can be expected from contemporary observers.

Peter Plymley had concluded long before that

the anti-Catholic people little foresee that they will hereafter be the sport of the antiquary; that their prophecies of ruin and destruction from Catholic Emancipation will be clapped into the notes of some quaint history and be matter of pleasantry even to the sedulous housewife and the rural dean.

NOTES & REFERENCES

¹ Their most recent biographies are Peter Phillips, *John Lingard, Priest and Historian*, 2008; Peter Virgin, *Sydney Smith*, 1994.

² *Reply to the Revd Mesurier*.

³ I have not found a personal reference of Lingard to Smith. On two occasions in his pamphlets, without naming anyone, Lingard refers to 'Edinburgh and Monthly reviewers' in general and said of them that he did not 'know much more than that they have often taught him to laugh at the Rector of Newnton Longville', see *Reply to the Revd Mesurier*. Smith's only reference to Lingard was in a letter to John Allen, a friend and contributor to the *Edinburgh Review*, who had severely criticized Lingard's account of the Anglo-Saxon period and the Massacre of St Bartholomew in his *History of England*: 'Have you finished your squabbles with Lingard? The Catholics are outrageous with you, and I have heard some of the most violent express a doubt whether you are quite an orthodox member of the Church of England'. N.C. Smith, *The Letters of Sydney Smith*, 1953, No. 487, 9 Nov 1826; Allen in *Edinburgh Review* 83, art. I, Apr 1825; art. IV, Jun 1826; see also Phillips, 70 ff.

⁴ H. Pearson, *The Smith of Smiths*, 1934, 43, but see Virgin, 7.

⁵ His experience of the teaching profession made him a zealous supporter of educational reform. Lingard would remind his readers of Gibbon's remark that a single Benedictine monastery had produced more valuable works than both English universities, citing Aikin's *Annual Review* 1802, vol. 1, p. 579.

⁶ J. Althoz, *The Mind and Art of Victorian England*, 1976, p. 60.

⁷ Thomas Creevey thought Smith 'too much of a buffoon ...' H. Maxwell (ed.) *The Creevey Papers* II 1903, p. 79. Charles Greville would later hear Smith preach in St Paul's saying he was 'very good; manner impressive, voice sonorous and agreeable, rather familiar but not offensively so, language simple and unadorned, sermon clever and illustrative'. The cathedral service was 'simple, intelligible and grand, appealing at the same time to reason and the imagination. I prefer it infinitely to the Catholic service, for though I am fond of the bursts of music and clouds of incense, I can't endure the undistinguishable sounds with which the priest mumbles over the prayers'. C. Greville & P. Wilson, (eds), *The Greville Diary*, 1927, I, p.151, 1 Dec 1834.

⁸ There was no rectory at Foston so he spent the first two years living at Heslington in a house that would become the Catholic chaplaincy of York University, renamed More House. His bedroom was turned into a confessional.

⁹ Barrington became Chaplain in Ordinary to kings George II and III. He was firstly Bishop of Llandaff (1769), then of Salisbury (1782) and was translated to Durham in 1791.

¹⁰ Walker would publish the whole correspondence in a pamphlet later in the year. For this and the following episode see Phillips, 75 ff and L. Gooch, 'Lingard v. Barrington, et al: Ecclesiastical Politics in Durham 1805-29' in P. Phillips (ed.) *Lingard Remembered* (CRS 2004). Walker also published *A Review of the Question of Catholic Emancipation* (1808) by Charles Stanley Constable, (nee Haggerston) which went into two editions and was sold in Newcastle, Durham, London, and York. J. Gillow, *Bibliographical Dictionary of the English Catholics* (5 vols. 1885-1902) I, p. 548.

¹¹ I have used: J. Lingard, *Tracts occasioned by the publication of a Charge delivered to the Clergy of the Diocese of Durham by Shute, Bishop of Durham, 1806* (Classic Reprint, 2015) which unfortunately prints the tracts with a continuous pagination. A general discussion is at

Gooch, *Lingard Remembered*, art. cit. See Phillips pp. 77 ff. for a treatment of the theological issues. In the rest of this paper I freely quote the *Plymley Letters* without references.

¹² W.H. Auden, *Selected Writings of Sydney Smith*, 1957, vii.

¹³ Preface to *Remarks*, 3rd ed. He would reiterate these observations in later pamphlets.

¹⁴ William Cobbett's pro-Catholic *History of the Protestant 'Reformation' in England and Ireland*, 1824-5, sold 60,000 copies in its first year. Cobbett always put reformation in quotation marks. He drew attention to the abusive language often applied to Catholics (letter I, para 10), and he saluted Lingard's 'usual fairness' (letter X, para 293).

¹⁵ *Parliamentary Debates* (1) 17, 430. Smith made annual visits to Grey's home, Howick Hall in Northumberland, and he dined at Lambton Castle with Lord Lambton ('Radical Jack'), Grey's son in law.

¹⁶ *Letters* No. 452 to Lady Grey, 14 Oct 1825. A collection of eighteen letters dating 1808-22 between the Cholmeleys and Smiths is in the NYRO. Smith also took satisfaction that Philip Howard of Corby Castle was elected as MP for Carlisle after emancipation. Smith was particularly taken with the best-selling book *Wanderings in South America*, 1825, by the eccentric Yorkshire Catholic Charles Waterton which he reviewed for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1826 in one of the funniest pieces Smith ever wrote.

¹⁷ *Virgin*, 231. See also *Letters* No. 521, Smith to Lady Holland 5 Nov 1828 and No. 522 to E. Littleton 7 Nov. Smith's connection with the west country was cemented with his appointment as Rector of Combe Florey in Somerset in 1829.

¹⁸ In December 1785, when he was Prince Regent, George married (validly but illegally) the twice-widowed Catholic Maria Fitzherbert; her brother John Smythe and uncle Henry Errington signed the marriage certificate. As a result George became acquainted with many of her Catholic relations and connections: the Smythes, Welds, Fitzherberts, Haggerstons and others, perhaps giving rise to his observation that Roman Catholicism was the only religion fit for a gentleman (not that he would grant religious freedom or extend the franchise to one). J. Munson, *Maria Fitzherbert*, 2001, pp. 147, 238.

¹⁹ *Letters*, No. 455 to Lady Grey 29 Jan 1826; A. Bell, *Sydney Smith*, 1980, 154.