

The Sydney Smith Association Newsletter

Issue 10 April 2005

Our AGM weekend will take place in London from 23 to 25 September 2005

On 21 February 1832 under a rule enabling the Club committee to select as members persons of distinguished eminence in Science, Literature, or the Arts or for Public Services, Sydney Smith was elected a member of the Athenaeum.

On **Friday 23 September 2005** we shall foregather and eventually dine in the Garden Room of this prestigious Club in Pall Mall. We have the opportunity of enjoying the erudite and comfortable ambience which meant so much to Sydney.

On **Saturday 24 September** we shall visit Kensal Green Cemetery, one of Britain's oldest and most beautiful burial grounds. It was originally designed by a landscape gardener as a gentleman's country park, has aristocratic connections and enjoys a wealth of mature trees and specimen plantings. In these charming and elegant surrounds Sydney rests in peace. Henry Vivian-Neal, Chief Guide for the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery, has tailor-made an interesting programme for us which includes a welcoming cup of coffee, a venue for our AGM, a talk by him about the cemetery, lunch, and a tour of the area to include the catacomb (if wished for), and the grave of Sydney Smith with the laying of a modest wreath. Kensal Green has seen over 700,000 interments: notables (other than Sydney) include Isambard Kingdom Brunel, Wilkie Collins, Anthony Trollope and W.M. Thackeray. The cemetery is also the resting place of Lord Byron's wife, Oscar Wilde's mother, Charles Dickens's sister-in-law, and Winston Churchill's daughter; the first man to cross Australia from south to north, and the last man to fight a duel in England. Henry Vivian-Neal would welcome hearing about any personalities linked with Sydney Smith. Would any member in possession of such information please contact the Membership Secretary who will pass it on.

In the evening from 7 o'clock onwards members may like to meet up for a drink in the Jacobite Room (a private room used for our regular London lunches) in the Boisdale Restaurant, 15 Eccleston Street, very near Victoria station; and if they so wish stay on for dinner.

Sunday 25 September

The Dean of St Paul's has kindly offered to reserve seats for our members at the 11.30 Sung Eucharist. After the service a table has been reserved for members at the Refectory Restaurant in the Crypt.

N.B. Jo Wisdom, Librarian of St Paul's, offers a brief tour at 12.30 to those members who have not previously visited the library. Building work demands that access will be by 90 or so steps and the climb is unsuitable for those with vertigo. If you have heeded this warning and wish to visit the library, please say so on the booking form.

Subscriptions

Annual subscriptions are due on 1 March. For those who do not pay by Banker's Order and have not yet paid, would they please do so now. Cheques should be made out to The Sydney Smith Association and sent to The Hon. Treasurer, Sydney Smith Association, Belgrave House, 46 Acomb Road, York YO24 4EW.

The Baroness Brigstocke

Heather Brigstocke, who so recently agreed to become a patron of the Sydney Smith Association, was killed, together with a colleague, in a road accident in Greece last May.

We were friends for more than forty years and first met when she taught at the Francis Holland School in London, as well as bringing up three, later four young children together with Geoffrey, her first husband, a brilliant civil servant who also died tragically, in the terrible 1974 Paris air crash, while the children were still young. With typical courage, Heather worked hard and brilliantly, both as a teacher and bringing up her children, eventually becoming the memorable High Mistress of St Paul's Girls' School, the most famous educator of her day, and certainly the most glamorous. On retirement Heather was created Baroness Brigstocke and spoke on education for the Conservative Party in the House of Lords. Heather brought her sound common sense, good taste and charm to many charitable organisations, most recently as Chairman of the English-Speaking Union. She is sadly missed by her friends and family and her distinguished second husband, Lord Griffiths, a famous law lord, High Court Judge and sportsman.

Mary Beaumont

York Lunches

We have had to change our venue and new arrangements have been made for members to enjoy the delightful atmosphere and excellent cuisine of the Grange Hotel, Clifton. Members living in and around Yorkshire will be notified about these lunches; they will take place on Wednesdays 18 May, 10 August and 9 November. Those living further afield who would like to attend will be most welcome and should contact Mary Rose Blacker, Huttons Ambo Hall, York YO60 7HW. 01653

696056. Mary Rose has nobly volunteered to organise and run these lunches. Two topics at recent lunches were 'Food for Thought' by Ifan Williams and 'Winners or Losers?' by John Roe. Both were thought-provoking and amusing, and were admirable in stimulating conversation and setting the right tone for the occasion. The talks are reported elsewhere in this issue.

London Lunches

There were three Sydney Smith lunches at the Boisdale Restaurant in 2004, enjoyable occasions enlivened by good food and conversation. As usual, a member was asked to introduce a discussion topic and on 3 March, Deirdre Bryan-Brown's subject was 'Sydney in Print and on the Small Screen', accompanied by a well-researched list of websites. On 2 June our Chairman Randolph Vigne talked on 'How Sydney Would Have Regarded Today's Politicians' which attracted a lively discussion, the word 'spin' featuring with some frequency. On 1 December Peter Payan was the star with a well-deserved tribute to Mrs Sydney who was, it seems, a suitably witty and wise spouse for the great man. Both talks are recorded in this number. This year we have already planned two more lunches, on Wednesdays 6 July and 5 October. If you would like to join us, please ring Mary Beaumont on 020 8318 3388 or via email to mary@maryb.demon.co.uk

Sydney's saws at the Sawmill...

The second lunch of the Association's south-western members was held on 23 April 2004 in the Sawmill Café of Mapperton House, Dorset, the home of the Earl and Countess of Sandwich. Lady Sandwich, an enthusiastic admirer of Sydney and his writings, had decorated the tables with lemons and adorned the blackboard with 'NOT Twelve Miles from a Lemon'. After her welcome, Norman Taylor gave a short reading of Sydney's reactions to Dr Langford's Anniversary Sermon to the Royal Humane Society. Having fallen asleep in the middle, he referred to the need for the services of the illustrious Society, owing to the difficulty of rousing himself. A subsequent footnote in the *Edinburgh Review* of 1802 declared Dr Langford to be an exceedingly foolish man to be entrusted with the first years of Etonian education: 'How is it possible to inflict a greater misfortune on a country than to fill up such an office with such an officer?'

Norman ended by offering as topics for conversation Sydney's views on education, sermons and 'If the worst comes to the worst - life-saving!'. With our coffee we were delighted to listen to a personal account by one of our patrons, Lord Knutsford, of Sydney and his family, to whom he is related by descent through both daughters. A walk round Mapperton's lovely gardens rounded off an occasion of which Sydney would surely have approved, affording as it did the opportunity for exuberant conversation to the seventeen happy people - members and friends - who were present.

Date for the Diary: Wednesday 19 October 2005

The Foston Church Sydney Smith Trust have arranged an evening at the New Borthwick Library at York University where there will be a short discourse about All Saints Church, Foston, followed by a tour of the new library and a special viewing of documents about Sydney Smith, his milieu and his Foston connection. Numbers are limited. For bookings and further information please contact Peter Diggle, The Old Brewery, Thornton le Clay, York YO60 7TE, email:pjdiggle@aol.com

At Castle Howard...

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Sydney Smith Association held on 2 October 2004 at Castle Howard following a tour of the house and a talk, both kindly given by our patron, the Hon. Simon Howard.

Chairman: Randolph Vigne. Seventy members attended.

1. The Minutes of the 2003 AGM were taken as read.
2. *Treasurer's Report:* The Society's finances remain similar to last year. Revenues consist of members' subscriptions. The expenses are for the *Newsletter*. Donations were made last year to both Foston and Combe Florey churches. Some expenses are envisaged for the Society's new website (see below).
3. *Membership:* Peter Diggle reported that in July there were 270 paid-up members, about 70 of whom are seen as 'sporadic' and 190 of whom pay by banker's order, for which we are most grateful.
4. *Website:* Graham Frater had given a presentation to the committee of a plan to make Sydney Smith's works available to the general public online. This would be done a little at a time, using volunteers to keep expenses down. Any members owning works by Sydney Smith who also possess scanners and can assist in this work are invited to make themselves known as soon as convenient.
5. *2005:* It is hoped to plan an event in London probably on a Friday evening. At the close of the meeting, Robin Price proposed a motion that the membership present approve the committee's proposal to establish a website to include the works of Sydney Smith. The meeting approved the motion by a show of hands, *nem con*.

Notes taken by Deirdre Bryan-Brown.

....and later that evening

After an excellent afternoon at Castle Howard we returned to York for dinner in the King's Manor, during which Colonel Eddy York, whose forebears were close lifelong friends of Sydney Smith, reminisced most agreeably.

Website: sydney-smith.org.uk

Following on the decision at the 2004 AGM to proceed with the setting up of a Sydney Smith website we are pleased to confirm that this has happened and was facilitated by the generosity of The Gemini Foundation and the perseverance of Dr Graham Frater, who writes :

With warmest thanks to members who have proof-read Sydney's texts: you may expect to find the Association's growing website at this address towards the end of the first week of May. I expect this to be a 'work in progress' for the foreseeable future. Thanks too to David Chamberlain for starting us off with thoughts about a design. In the event, we have employed a professional design firm to launch the work that colleagues have helped with so generously.

For the moment, the texts you will find have been drawn from Sydney's collected *Works* of 1849. In due course, I hope to add selections from his sermons, the lectures on moral philosophy, his treasured sayings, and pictures of places associated with Sydney. Since we have been scanning from early copyright-free texts, you will not yet find any of Sydney's letters: the most reliable texts are still covered by copyright, and we shall need advice on how we may obtain copies for web publication. Volunteers willing to help with scanning and proof-reading will be most welcome.

If you have a favourite saying of Sydney's, the project will be glad to receive it. If you can provide its source too, my cup will run over.

I can be contacted via the website, or through Peter Diggle.

THE PITHY PIONEER by Graham Frater (article re-printed from the summer 2004 issue of *Basic Skills*)

More than 'bon mots'

'There is no protestant country in the world where the education of the poor has been so grossly and infamously neglected as in England.'

I want to go back before compulsory schooling to celebrate one of education's most articulate advocates: the Rev. Sydney Smith (1771-1845); he was born before railways, before electric light, even before waterproof raincoats. If the general public knows anything of Sydney nowadays, it is probably his playful *bon mots*: his idea of heaven ('eating *foie gras* to the sound of trumpets'), his description of someone in an unsuitable position ('a square peg in a round hole'), or his mischievous comment on book reviewing: 'I never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so.'

Pioneer

But Sydney was no mere wit: as a young curate, in a desperately poor parish on Salisbury Plain, he took action. He reported shocking deprivations to the absentee squire: 'On Sunday last, there were 3 or 4 children with their feet on cold stones without any shoes, and one came a perfect *sans culottes* - or at least with only the grinning remnants of that useful garment.' Such vivid accounts led to the funding of the Sunday school that Sydney had in mind – *for instruction in basic skills*.

Having obtained the squire's support, he appointed a teacher: the local tailor, 'in my opinion is the most sensible man ... His wife reads, his brother reads and his apprentice reads. He has a good kitchen, some room in his shop, and his mother next door has a good kitchen which may be filled with the overflowings of the school, if it ever should overflow.' And he arranged such practical matters as the teacher's payment (2 shillings per Sunday and 2 score of faggots), the resources (spelling books, benches, reading materials), and breeches for the trouserless boy. It was not long before the squire's wife took an interest, and asked Sydney to add sewing for the girls of the poorest families.

Campaigning commentator

Sydney had good luck: the squire, Hicks Beach, soon employed him as tutor to his elder son. A grand tour was planned, but war in Europe led tutor and pupil to Edinburgh instead. The timing was fortunate too: while Oxford and Cambridge slept on unreformed, Edinburgh was alive with intellectual activity. Sydney attended lectures in the medical faculty - they helped him treat his parishioners in later years - he heard cutting-edge lectures on philosophy and economics, and he began to make a name for himself as a preacher.

Luckiest of all, he fell in with the liveliest company, a group of young lawyers who were all to go far. At Sydney's suggestion, they founded the *Edinburgh Review*, a reforming periodical that contained lengthy, probing essays on current affairs, and book reviews - they were very rough with Wordsworth. The *Review* was a great success, and soon gained a nationwide circulation. Sydney edited the first issue, and continued to contribute reviews and essays, especially on abuses that seem unbelievable to us now: laws that allowed capital punishment or transportation for poaching: the use of man traps and spring guns (to deter trespassers); the denial of a defence lawyer in trials for murder; cruel inequalities for Catholics; England's mishandling of Ireland; the grimmest prison conditions; the ill-treatment of child chimney sweeps; and education.

Bricks in the wall

'The instruction of women improves the stock of the national talents.'

Sydney was a contemporary of Jane Austen. They might easily have met in Bath.* Her world - the girls undereducated at home, the boys sent away to school - embraced one of the accepted inequities that, well ahead of his time, Sydney contested:

‘Can anything ... be more perfectly absurd than to suppose that the care and perpetual solicitude which a mother feels for her children, depends on her ignorance of Greek and mathematics ... that she would desert her infant for a quadratic equation?’

Equally open to attack was the waste of talent: the scandal that, in his lifetime, ‘the disproportion in knowledge [between boys and girls] should be so great’. Today, with less excuse, it is boys who underachieve. But he never forgot the desperation and ignorance of his first parish, nor that they were linked. When he had risen in the church, he preached an accession sermon at St Paul’s, and returned to the same theme:

‘First and foremost, I think the new Queen should bend her mind to the very serious consideration of educating the people... [Universal education] presents the best chance of national improvement.’

And, later in the same sermon: ‘There are, I am sorry to say, many countries in Europe which have taken the lead of England in the great business of education.’ Compulsory education did not come for another 33 years, but Sydney’s were early bricks in the wall.

Continuing relevance

That last quotation makes me uncomfortable, because it is still true: too many competitors remain ahead of us; in particular, by contrast with many other

* Professor Lord David Cecil used to hope that the character of Henry Tilney, the witty young parson in *Northanger Abbey*, was the result of just such an encounter. All the quotations in this article are from the *Works or Letters* of Sydney Smith; all the emphases are mine.

developed nations, we have much further to go with the groups that so concerned Sydney 190 years back - the least privileged.

Curriculum reform

Sydney was vigorous too on the need for curricular reform. He asked why pupils, ‘who often make a considerable figure at school, so very often make no figure in the world’, and he answered his own question: ‘*The test established in the world is widely different from that established in a place which is presumed to be a preparation for the world.*’

Much the same applies to some of our exams and national tests today, though Sydney was writing about the Classics-only curriculum of the English public schools of his own era. It was a curriculum that had grown so dominant, narrow, and curiously inverted, that its teachers had come: ‘to love the instrument better than the end; not the luxury which the difficulty encloses, but the difficulty; not the filbert, but the shell; *not what maybe read in Greek, but Greek itself*’

The National Literacy Strategy, where word level and sentence study are *listed before the text level* - the parts before the meaning or the point - repeats the same error today. By exposing the *because/despite* confusion, which still runs as an unbroken thread through education’s debates, Sydney answered the old canard about existing systems producing great men and women. ‘*It is scarcely possible to prevent* great men from rising under any system of education, however bad. Teach men demonology, or astrology, and you will still have a certain portion of original genius in spite of these or any other branch of folly or ignorance.’ Thus too, he exploded the worn-out don’t-fix-it argument.

Language teaching

Though successful in Classics under the old system himself - Sydney won a scholarship and a fellowship - he was keen to support new approaches to language teaching. He found the Hamilton system, which emerged in 1826, immensely attractive. On the principle that ‘an Englishman who means to say *I will go to London*, does not say, *I could go to London*. He never read a word of grammar in his life ... he has learnt by habit,’ the Hamilton method sought to establish fluency *before* teaching syntax explicitly. Hamilton’s students could go on as far as they liked with the study of rules; what was innovative was that they began on ‘grammar as a study’ *only after* making ‘considerable progress in the language’. Sydney saw this as ‘a very important feature in the Hamiltonian system, and a very great improvement in the education of children’. I only wish that my own French and Latin teachers had applied the same principles when I was at school.

A reforming common sense

‘When an university has been doing useless things for a long time, it appears at first degrading to them to be useful The causes of national wealth; the relations of foreign trade; the encouragement of manufactures and agriculture; the laws of population; ... the use and abuse of monopoly; the theory of taxation, the consequences of public debt. These are ... some of the branches of civil education to which we would turn the minds of future university students.’

‘*Looking always to real utility*’, Sydney was passionate in the cause of reform, in schools and universities alike. It was a criterion that led him to propose universal schooling, to see education as a vital ladder for the poor, and to urge equal opportunities in education for girls. Inevitably too, it led him to argue for curricular reform. Plainly, Sydney’s reforming interests were also wider than education. He was not alone. Early in his own writing career Dickens met Sydney, near the close of his. They took warmly to each other; and in a sense, Dickens carried the older man’s reforming zeal forward, to add

cruel Yorkshire schools (*Nicholas Nickleby*), the Poor Law (*Oliver Twist*), the workhouse (*Bleak House*), army flogging, and public hanging, among many others.

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Hesketh thinks it over...

James Thirsk of Kent was good enough to write about our bibliographical query in *Newsletter 9* concerning Sydney's birthplace as shown in the 1984 reprint of *The Smith of Smiths*. We have now discovered a correction issued by Hesketh Pearson in his *Thinking It Over* (1938): 'Although I am usually accurate over dates and places and such-like details, I made two slips in my Life of Sydney Smith. The first was simply unaccountable. I gave his birthplace as Woodbridge, Suffolk, instead of Woodford, Essex, and can only guess that I had been reading the letters of FitzGerald, who had lived at the former.' Fair enough. His 'second error... excusable and due to ignorance' need not concern us here: it referred to the difference, if any, between the 'Immaculate Conception' and the 'Virgin Birth'.

And Mr Thirsk, clearly a man after our own book-hunting heart, adds a mouth-watering postscript: 'I was interested in the piece about S.S. letters. I have recently bought the 2 vol OUP edn from a bookseller in Iowa for the very reasonable price of \$24. An ex-library copy but in excellent condition.' This must be the 21st century's book bargain so far. Congratulations, James! Impossible to cap this?

High Spirits in Coxwold

'Some houses are built like fictions, and are even built of fictions. Shandy Hall is just such a house, and that is why there is no better way to come to know the spirit of Sterne than by visiting it' (Malcolm Bradbury in *Writers and Their Houses*, 1993). And visit it we did, very happily but all too briefly, at the start of our spirited Sunday morning in Coxwold on 3 October. Patrick Wildgust, genial and enthusiastic Curator of Shandy Hall, made sure we got to the church on time to enjoy Lord Habgood's splendid address published in this issue; but Patrick noted the reluctance of some members to leave Shandy and generously offered second helpings to those able to walk back there after the jolly sustenance of Sabbath roast at the Fauconberg Arms. As many of our members live in Yorkshire but may be unaware of the delights of Shandy Hall, we asked Patrick to write a piece to tempt them. Here it is:

Malcolm Bradbury made an astute observation when he made that comment, for Shandy Hall is neither the place of Laurence Sterne's birth or his death - these can be merely accidents of circumstance - but it is where he wrote. And he wrote one of the oddest, eccentric and innovatory novels of English literature: *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman*.

I hope that those members of the Sydney Smith Association who wound and set their alarm clocks diligently, said their prayers, slept the sleep of the just and managed to arrive at Shandy Hall on time the next morning, enjoyed their encounter with Sterne's spirit. For those who didn't, perhaps the drama adaptation on 'Woman's Hour' in February might have captured a little of Sterne's genius, for as Boswell recorded in the spring of 1760 in his 'Poetical Epistle':

Each Waiter with an eager eye
Observes him as he passes by
'That there is he, - do, Thomas! look
Who's wrote such a damn'd clever Book.'

It is a clever book. It is also a very funny book, so it is appropriate that comedians Steve Coogan, Rob Brydon, Dylan Moran and Stephen Fry have been cast in Michael Winterbottom's soon-to-be-released film version of this Cock and Bull story. And if that were not sufficient, Lord Bragg of the 'South Bank Show' will be introducing a special programme on Sterne and the making of the film. 'I assure you...Tristram is the Fashion' wrote Sterne in a letter soon after the publication of the first two volumes. Now Tristram is the fashion once more...

It was a pleasure to show the Association's members through the house and I hope that others may find time to visit in the future. Shandy Hall is open to the public on Wednesday (2-4.30) and Sunday (2.30-4.30) from May to September. Groups (and SSA members) very welcome at other times by appointment. Telephone 01347 868465. Website - www.asterisk.org.uk

An address by The Rt Revd Lord Habgood, previously Archbishop of York, given during mattins at St Michael's Church, Coxwold, on Sunday 3 October 2004

It says something about the quality of the clergy in this part of Yorkshire that, by coming to Coxwold, you have effectively chosen to celebrate two of them on the same day. Both were sharp critics of their times; both were major figures in English literature; both were much loved, not least because they make us laugh. We love Sydney Smith for his insight into the

foibles and hypocrisies of his day, for his honesty with himself, for his urbanity and, above all, for his wit. We love Laurence Sterne for the shambolic confusion of his greatest work, for his earthiness and, above all, for his humour.

Before asking why it is appropriate to celebrate them in an act of worship, it is worth dwelling a little on the relationship between wit and humour. St Paul clearly did not approve of either. We were admonished in our lesson from the Epistle to the Ephesians: 'No coarse, stupid or flippant talk; these things are not in place; you should rather be thanking God.' Paul was obviously not a humorist, but fortunately this part of his teaching was soon forgotten by most Christians, though not, I suspect, by the disciples of Calvin. Against Paul's judgement we need to set the fact that large parts of the Bible are full of wit and humour, including the book from which our first lesson (Ecclesiasticus 31) was read - a marvellous example of down-to-earth, no-nonsense humanity. Unfortunately much of the humour in the Bible - mostly in the prophets - depends on puns, which are lost in translation.

Both wit and humour have to do with incongruity - everything from a red nose to a cock and bull story. Both can be essentially kindly, though wit has the sharper edge. Humour strikes us at the emotional level, as the origin of the word suggests. I used to think it came from 'humus', meaning earth. In fact it comes from the Latin for fluid - hence 'humid' - and gained its emotional connotations via the ancient medical theory of 'humours'. According to this the various bodily fluids (blood, yellow bile or 'choler', black bile and phlegm) were supposed to control our characters and moods - hence sanguine, choleric, melancholic and phlegmatic. It is thus no coincidence that we talk about a belly laugh. Humour wells up like a spring from below. Wit, on the other hand, is intellectual. It is a quality of mind - our wits in fact - a facility for using striking words and images which surprise and delight us by their unexpectedness.

Wit has its superficial forms of which, I suppose, the making of puns is the worst - though some strike home. I have always enjoyed the notice said to have been seen in a chemist's shop: 'We dispense with accuracy'. Wit at its best, and in Sydney Smith we see it at its best, can jolt the reader or listener into new insights. Take his famous remark about Brighton Pavilion. 'When I first saw it I thought St Paul's had come down and pupped.' Those who heard it must for ever after have looked at the Pavilion with new eyes.

Both wit and humour can have more important consequences than that. Both of them have the power to undermine pretentiousness. That is why they are so essential to religion. If hypocrisy is the main vice of religion, then it may well be that wit and humour are among the main remedies. This was not only a necessity in the 18th century. In fact there is an interesting parallel to Sydney Smith and Laurence Sterne, in the late 15th and early 16th centuries, the Reformation era, when there was plenty of pretentiousness and hypocrisy needing to be undermined. For those with their wits about them, the corruptions and contradictions of the late mediaeval Church were as irresistible a target, as were the complacency and venality of the late 18th century Church of England. So for Smith substitute Erasmus, and for Sterne substitute Rabelais.

It was said of the role played by Erasmus in the Reformation that he laid the egg and Luther hatched it. He was a scholar, the outstanding Biblical scholar of his day, and it was his intellectual contribution that effectively undermined much current theological teaching. But his most potent weapon was wit, and it was his wit that made people take note of what his scholarship was revealing. His work on the Bible paved the way for new interpretations. He also wrote satires about pedantic theologians and worldly clergy, and made the educated classes of Europe laugh at them. And they deserved it. As the Reformation progressed a man as loyal and orthodox as Sir Thomas More could say of these same theologians that 'he might as soon obtain bodily nourishment by milking a he-goat into a sieve as obtain spiritual nourishment by reading them'.

Erasmus's wit is not much remembered nowadays because the occasion for that kind of scholarly sharpness has passed. Or has it? He gives us a wonderful letter, for instance, supposedly written by the Virgin Mary in heaven, complaining about all the things she is asked for: 'Everything was asked of me, as if my Son - because he is painted so - was still a child at my breast; they therefore take it for granted that I have him still at my beck and call, and that he dares not deny me anything for fear that I should deny him the bubby when he is thirsty. Nay, and they ask such things from me, a Virgin, that a modest young woman would scarce dare ask of a bawd, and which I am ashamed to commit to writing ...; and so on.

We find, too, deadly accurate mockery of ridiculous interpretations of Scripture - of which, alas, there is still no shortage today. What have we come to, I wonder, when Creationism, for example, is taken seriously and even deemed worthy of a correspondence in *The Times*? Less admirably, Erasmus mocked the ignorance of those who lacked his knowledge and sophistication. There is plenty of justified mockery of bishops who are described by him as having had so little to do that they spent all their time writing commendations of holy relics. Some of what he wrote is cruel - but then wit can be cruel when it assumes a kind of superiority. It must regretfully be admitted that Erasmus was a bit of an intellectual snob.

I don't think Sydney Smith fell into this trap. Though he was not a scholar of the calibre of Erasmus, we know that he was no mean intellectual. The *Edinburgh Review*, which was so much part of his early life, represented the intellectual avant-garde of his day. But it is not this we remember him for. We celebrate his life because he saw through many of the pretensions of the society of which he was an honoured member. We honour him because, despite its dangers, there is always a religious role for wit, and for those who can use it effectively. The religious frame of mind offers constant temptations to be complacent, to profess to know more than we actually do as we pontificate on life, the world, and everything else. It is easy, also, to lose sight of the heart of faith in the trappings which surround it. No doubt this was particularly true of the Church of England at the time when Sydney Smith was so critical of it. But his wit, though sharp, did

not have the contemptuous edge of the superior scholar which we find in Erasmus. Erasmus never hesitated, for instance, to laugh at those whose knowledge of Greek was inadequate. Sydney's wit was reserved for those who could stand up to it.

What about humour? The most famous humorist in pre-Reformation Europe was a Frenchman - Rabelais. His great, and only, book was a vast shambolic tale about Gargantua and Pantagruel, and bears comparison with *Tristram Shandy*. It is packed with fantastic characters and bawdy humour, and was intended as a comprehensive indictment of a gullible and corrupt society. Rabelais was a priest and Franciscan friar, as well as being a doctor, but he was essentially a man of the world who understood human vanity, and mercilessly exposed it. There is a preface to my edition of his book which lists a huge number of people said to have been satirised in it. These include the Pope, the French and Spanish monarchies, bishops, preachers, Lutherans, and many many others whose names now mean nothing to us. It is not clear whether this is more than a Victorian editor's guesswork, but it seems likely that contemporaries would have known who was being lampooned. Even Scripture is not spared. In fact the whole book is very loosely modelled on the Old Testament, and where the Bible is obscure Rabelais provides an explanation. There is the pressing question, for instance, of how one of Pantagruel's ancestors, who was a giant, managed to survive the Flood. He sat astride the Ark, says Rabelais, and paddled with his feet to steer it, while Noah fed him through the chimney. Much of this was just good fun, and could be justified by some of the ridiculous interpretations of the Bible then current. But like all successful satire it predisposed people to laugh at established authorities, and thus helped to propel the changes which Erasmus and Luther had started. So what has this highly extravagant kind of humour to tell us about the Christian faith? Rabelais reminds us, whoever we are, not to take ourselves too seriously. The Bible is widely regarded as a very solemn book, and Christianity has at times seemed more concerned with sin than with joy. What these two authors did was to help break the spell.

I have spent time on them because it seems to me that in a period no less in need of reform, our two Yorkshire clergymen did something of the same. In a much more mannerly and civilised style what they did then, and can still do for us, is to show us our limitations and help us to laugh at them.

Sydney Smith moved in a glittering and rather brittle society. Holland House was an enviable place to visit. I have an engraving of it on my study wall, from which it is clear what an amazing place it must have been. The picture is not there because I have any aspirations after that kind of house - my wife and I have had enough of them. My reason for having it is that as a newly fledged curate I used to preach to children in Holland Park, and faint glow from the great house which once stood there still lingers in the atmosphere. It is in a very grand part of London. There is a sense, of course, in which dear Sydney, in his frequent visits to the house, was seduced by the assumptions of the society in which he was lionised. Perhaps this is why he went on so much about money and preferment. But he had no illusions about bishops - even though he would like to have been one. It was his wit, I suspect, which not only made him so popular, but also saved him from corruption.

Laughter is a much more effective weapon than anger - especially if we can laugh at ourselves, as Sydney undoubtedly could. This is not the same as the frivolity which St Paul condemned. If you take nothing seriously, you are left with nothing worth caring about. But if you take everything seriously, it is hard to come to terms with the absurdities of life, and not least with the fact that in some things you may be wrong. Our Church today, alas, seems to contain rather too many infallible Christians who know exactly what God is thinking, and are determined that everyone else shall know it too. They would be much improved by a few Sydney Smiths.

And this is where Laurence Sterne too can help us. I have compared him with Rabelais, and they have much in common, except for the bawdiness. The point of Sterne's great book, which seems to have no beginning and no end, which has one story constantly interrupting another, and which invites us to laugh at the sheer oddity of being human, is surely to show its readers how impossible it is to capture in words the full reality of an individual life. As has frequently been pointed out, Sterne was deliberately mocking what was then a new form of literature, the novel, which claimed to be able to do precisely that - to capture a life in all its fullness. But reality is beyond us, not to be captured in words, or in anything else. Sterne's inconsequential rambling humour, like Smith's rapier shafts of wit, expresses a deep religious truth. It is not just the limitations of bishops (though they are many), nor the limitations of other clergy (though they are many too), but the limitations of all humanity, which need gentle mockery - humour in fact - to expose our vain assumptions that we know more than we do, or ever could, know. This is even more important today, surrounded as we are with professors and pundits and politicians who presume to know all about us, and do not hesitate to tell us what we are and what is best for us.

Those of us who are Anglicans see a church which is tying itself in knots over matters in which no final answer is possible. Christians in almost all churches like to lay down laws which they believe come straight from the mind of God. Religious believers in most faiths only feel secure if they can assert absolute confidence in their superiority. I like to think that God laughs gently at us, and hopes not to have to cut us down to size. The key word is 'gently', for he too has been mocked. We hear the mocking voices of the crowd at the foot of the cross. 'He saved others; himself he cannot save.' They wanted to cut him down to size. And he let them. For this is the way to rise again to new life. A final word, and a final author. I have concentrated mostly on the negative, destructive role of wit and humour - a highly necessary one because there can be no new life without death, and without the deflation of human pride and pretension. But there is also a positive side to laughter, indeed the most important function of it, which opens us to even deeper truths about what life, the universe and everything else are for. G. K. Chesterton knew this. As an author he is now out of fashion, and much of his work is too firmly set in a vanished age to be of immediate relevance to us. But the essential heart of it remains. The one great truth he knew, and proclaimed by every possible means, is that the secret of creation is joy. In the end, we laugh, not primarily to mock, nor to

deflate, nor to cover our tears. We can laugh freely because God is good. 'Pessimism', he wrote at the end of his great book on *Orthodoxy*, 'is at best an emotional half-holiday: joy is the uproarious labour by which all things live.'

Despite the griefs and pains, despite the mistakes and stupidities, despite all that might quite reasonably make us anxious and miserable, there is a joyful laughter at the heart of things, as God rejoices over what he has made. And the Christians we all like best are those who hear it, and laugh with him. Michael Ramsey once ended a sermon about Bishop Frank Weston of Zanzibar with these words: 'It would displease him if we tried to be solemn about him. So let the last word be that of the little African boy who said, "You know he is a loving man, for his mouth is opened ready for laughter, for he is still laughing and will laugh for ever."' It might have been said of Michael Ramsey himself. And how wonderful if it could also be said of us.

York Lunch, August 2004: **Food for Thought** by Ifan Williams

Some weeks ago I heard about a debate on Radio 4 on the proposition that obesity should be controlled by legislation. Though I have no idea of the outcome of the debate, I do wonder what Sydney Smith would have made of it. He was not above making fun of fat. Hesketh Pearson records that when told that a young Scot of his acquaintance was about to marry an Irish widow, twice his age and more than twice his size: 'Going to marry her!' cried Sydney, 'going to marry her! Impossible! You mean a part of her; he could not marry her all himself. It would be a case, not of bigamy, but trigamy; the neighbourhood or the magistrates should interfere. There is enough of her to furnish wives for a whole parish....' You can just see Sydney warming to his work, rising to his feet to describe how he once tried to walk round her before breakfast but only got half-way and gave it up exhausted. In this passage it seems that Sydney is indeed advocating that the courts should be involved - that the magistrates should interfere - but of course he intends the suggestion to be so outlandish that it only adds to the humour of his explosion.

On the question of food Sydney says 'I am convinced digestion is the great secret of life; and that character, talents, virtues, and qualities are powerfully affected by beef, mutton, pie-crust, and rich soups. I have often thought that I could feed or starve men into many virtues and vices, and affect them more powerfully with my instruments of cookery than Timotheus could do formerly with his lyre.' In another letter three years later he wrote 'One of the greatest evils of old age is the advance of the stomach over the rest of the body. It looks like the accumulation of thousands of dinners and luncheons. It looks like a pregnant woman in a cloth waistcoat, and as if I were near my time and might reasonably look for twins.'

In a review of the proceedings of the Society for the Suppression of Vice, from the *Edinburgh Review* of 1809, Sydney takes up the question of fashion and the foibles of the gentry. 'To suppose that any society will ever attack the vices of people of fashion is wholly out of the question.... Nothing therefore remains but to rage against the Sunday dinners of the poor.' Concluding his review, he sums up his purpose as being 'To suppress the arrogance of suppressers - to keep them within due bounds - to show them that to do good requires a little more talent and reflection than they are aware of.' A message for our own time, and food for thought!

London Lunch, June 2004: **Sydney and Politics** by Randolph Vigne

What were Sydney's politics? In his self-deprecating way, he called himself, at the end of his life '*a mild Whig, a tolerating churchman and much given to talking, laughing and noise*'. He would have found a place in any of today's three major parties, always on the liberal wing. His adversary was the big battalions - in his day the great landowners who controlled so many pocket boroughs in the pre-Reform House of Commons, but also lesser forces, the defenders of slavery, too powerful country magistrates, the upholders of anti-Catholic discrimination and those who perpetuated Britain's exploitation of the native Irish. He believed in holding back the powers of government, especially its imposition of taxes, but above all in its taking the country to war. What would he have thought of the government of today being asked to spend millions trying to persuade people not to get fat, or, on another level, of our involvement in Iraq?

In his childhood we were at war with America and its allies for seven years and by the time he was 44 we had fought Napoleon for half of Sydney's lifetime. After Waterloo there was peace and he argued constantly for its preservation, at the cost of keeping out of other countries' affairs. '*There is more of misery inflicted upon mankind*' said Sydney, '*by one year of war, than by all the civil peculations and oppressions of a century.*' As a non-interventionist, he differed from most of his kind today. He opposed the growth of empire, largely on grounds of the cost to the people of Britain, expostulating, only half in jest, that '*Every rock in the ocean where a cormorant can perch is occupied by our troops, has a governor and deputy-governor, storekeeper and deputy-storekeeper - and will soon have an archdeacon and a bishop.*' He called it '*an extravagance that must mar our fortunes*'. War was a far greater wastage yet.

Where would he stand today? He would strongly oppose our following the lead of the United States, which he would see as today's 'big battalions'. He would vilify our closer integration into Europe. He would deride the anti-immigration lobby and support the welcoming of asylum seekers, as his mother's Huguenot family had been welcomed, but would probably reject 'economic migrants', except where they brought us real benefit. He would laugh out of court our world of too many 'regulators', the Nanny state, 'focus groups' and Quangos.

What about politicians themselves? There was not, in his time, a breed of men called ‘politicians’, perhaps because, in his time, politics was not, in Parliament anyway, a paid occupation. Even those in public life with whom he disagreed he kept as his friends. He told Lord John Russell, when they fell out over Church of England reform, ‘*I will fight you to the last drop of my ink and dine with you to the last drop of your claret.*’ Leaders, like Lord Grey and Lord John Russell, he admired or, like Spencer Perceval, Castlereagh or Eldon, the Lord Chancellor, he loathed. He called Eldon, with a fine tirade: ‘*a cunning, canting old rogue whose object was to make all the money he could by office at any expense to the public happiness. In addition he was the bigoted enemy of every sort of improvement and retarded by his influence for more than 25 years those changes which the state of the country absolutely required.*’

His attitude to the small fry is probably best expressed in the response to the proposal that his MP in Somerset, retiring after 17 years in the House of Commons, be presented with a piece of plate ‘*for his eminent services to Parliament*’; Sydney pretended to believe it was to be a silver toothpick. ‘*The inscription*’, he said in his best mock-pompous style, ‘*is to be omitted for want of latitude and longitude, in the metallic memorial*’. How he would have judged the reign of *demos*, achieved by the Reform Bill he championed so vigorously, is for us to debate. My own view is that he would have been gladdened by the reduction of human wretchedness that has been achieved in this country, however many ills still remain, which would surely not have happened without the Reform he fought for.

The Question of ID Cards

A few years ago Adam Fergusson spoke to a London lunch of the Association about the desirability of ID cards for Britain, as a means of controlling immigration, curbing illegitimate demands on social welfare and, perhaps, preventing crime and terrorism. Since then, the figures for illegal immigration and crime have risen, the pressure on our social services has increased, and with a Government Bill introduced the prospect of ID cards for British citizens has become real. There follow some of the points Fergusson raised.

The arguments in favour of ID cards using the latest technologies are broadly these. They could reduce welfare fraud by our own nationals, and prevent illegal immigrants or asylum refuseniks who stay on from living off the public purse - thereby reducing communal ill-feeling. They could make it easier and cheaper for the police to combat crime, from petty offences through football hooliganism to terrorism, for example by reducing the need to arrest or detain and question. They could be used by OAPs and minors for a number of worthy purposes connected with age (sales of tobacco and alcohol, licensed premises and cinemas, admission to galleries and so on).

Against these is first the civil liberty argument, tending to the emotional – ID cards are all very well in war, but we don’t want to start again now especially because they have them on the Continent. Like the European passport and driving licence, they could quickly be presented as a Brussels plot, notwithstanding that one immediate advantage would be passportless travel within Europe. But the question is a fair one: why should anyone be compelled to identify himself going about his legitimate business in his own country? It is undeniable that ID cards are among the repressive weapons of a police state. The particular fear that the police, or anyone else, might have instant access to personal data from a criminal record to a credit rating is understandable - even if instant information about your blood-group could save your life.

However, could not the arguments for and against - the practical advantages against the private intrusion - be neatly reconciled, first, by making the possession of ID cards voluntary; and, second, by enacting that without an ID no social benefits subject to fraud would be available - housing help, health care, pensions, dole? The choice, not the compulsion, would be there. This is what operates for all the other identification we progressively have to carry in our activities if we want something free or at all: driving licence, credit card, bus pass, Homebase card, National Trust membership, all of which encroach on our right to anonymity. Time was when we needed neither driving licence nor driving test. Shotgun licences are quite recent. As for the fear of constitutional creep: Article 19 of the often contentious Charter of Human Rights enshrines the right to determine oneself whether personal data may be disclosed or used. This seems to be critical in the matter of ID cards. It remains so that, for most of us, not to be able to identify oneself is likely to be far more inconvenient than being made to. The right to an identity recognised by the State seems pretty important too.

And what would Sydney Smith have thought? He could not have envisaged immigration or public hand-outs on today’s scale, so that the problems they bring would be outside his ken. However, in the days when charity took care of welfare, he might have argued that the innocent had nothing to fear for their identity being known. Or again, he might not.

From Randolph Vigne: Sydney - the unquenchable firework

Sir Francis Hastings Charles Doyle (1810-88) was a notable, if not eminent, Victorian, being both Commissioner of Customs and Professor of Poetry at Oxford, though his own poems, like ‘The Private of the Buffs’ and ‘Loss of the Birkenhead’ (‘When, like a wild shriek from some captured town,/ The cry of women rose’) are well out of favour today. He knew Sydney and wrote of him in his *Reminiscences and Opinions* (1886). The following extract from Doyle’s autobiography was inscribed in her copy of the 1886 edition of *The Wit and Wisdom of Sydney Smith* by a collateral forebear of our founder member Anthony Trower, who is the great-great-great grandson of Elizabeth Smith, the sister of Sydney’s father, Robert Smith, and her husband Thomas Trower. My thanks to the Trowers for allowing me to borrow the book and quote the inscription:

'The Rev Sydney Smith was a very striking looking man with a countenance indicating great intellectual power, a countenance which indeed might have been said to wear a thoughtful, if not rather a stern expression in repose - only that it never was in repose. His strength of mind, firmness of purpose and great general ability might, no doubt, have earned for him a Bishopric from the Archbishop but unluckily his wit lost it him. The chiefs of his party had not courage enough (more shame to them) to place so unquenchable a firework upon the episcopal bench - though nobody who knew him doubted that he would make an excellent bishop. For he was thoroughly conscientious, knew men and understood life in all its forms and varieties and was rendered indulgent both to high and low by the softening influence of humour as well as by the breadth and vigour of his mind. He also distinguished himself as a preacher, for all that. His inevitable and irresistible flood of fun rolled over one like a cataract, never ceasing, never slackening, never varying its pace for an instant. He rarely condescended to that inferior form of jocoseness - a pun. Sydney Smith was great in repartee, in quotation, in easy banter, but his typical form of wit was a fanciful form. He fixed before you a scene or situation in some picturesque or original grotesqueness and then took your breath away by his ludicrous exaggerations.'

The Wit and Wisdom of Sydney Smith is a marvellous collection of snippets from the *Edinburgh Review*, from pamphlets, sermons and lectures, and from the *Memoir* and correspondence. The unnamed editor compares his work with the identically titled book by 'Mr Duyckink', published in the United States in 1856, which 'has had, as might be anticipated, a wide circulation in America'. He glorifies Sydney with words that would have pleased but amazed, and probably amused, the always self-deprecating subject: 'In this form it is believed that the fragments of Sydney Smith may rank beside the thoughts of Pascal without his mysticism, and eclipse the wit of La Rochefoucauld without his misanthropy.'

Editor's PS: Doyle was awarded half a column in the first edition (1941) of *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*: five stanzas were quoted from his poem 'The Unobtrusive Christian', and we feel Sydney would have felt particular relish (and admiration) for this one:

His creed no parson ever knew,
'For this was still his simpler plan,'
To have with clergymen to do
As little as a Christian can.

York Lunch, February 2005: **Winners or Losers?** by John Roe

John Roe's considered talk inevitably suffers in summary.

Most of us, he began, got to know Sydney Smith because somebody else quoted him: in his case, the American comic writer Peter de Vries who used as an epigraph to a novel these words from Sydney's long letter to Bishop Blomfield, Bishop of London, sent to *The Times* in September 1840: '...you must not think me necessarily foolish because I am facetious, nor will I consider you necessarily wise because you are grave'. John Roe continued: '... what has caused the altercation between Sydney and the bishop is money, as it so often is. The Bishop of London was anxious to show himself a Reforming bishop ...by reducing the income of those holding minor offices in the cathedrals, prebendaries and the like while the man at the top, i.e. himself, saw no decrease in his revenue.'

In the de Vries novel the boss dresses up as Santa Claus and from his sack throws out bonuses to his employees: some scramble on hands and knees to catch them. 'Our hero catches his bonus but throws it back, hitting the boss squarely on his forehead. A desperate, and even foolhardy gesture, as it is bound to cost him his job, it can also be seen as a courageous one, and Sydney, we may be sure, would have approved of it. We admire the gesture because like his, it insists on a little bit of human dignity.... Sydney adopted a similar position when he represented the lesser clergy against the great.

Bishop Blomfield pushed on with his reforms, sweeping poor Sydney to one side. But who, in these two illustrations, is the winner and who the loser? Well, we all know the answer, because it turns on the age-old difference between the moral and the material. But what it brings out, and this is demonstrated so often in Sydney Smith, is that humour is at its most compelling, and most admirable, when it is allied to courage.... It takes courage to fly in the face of authority, especially when there is nothing to be gained apart from a feeling of doing the right thing.

'No mere appendage'

Peter Payan writes: Finding to my embarrassment that I knew next to nothing about Mrs Sydney Smith - and that I was not entirely alone - I broached the subject at one of last year's London lunches. The following brief contribution resulted, and I am grateful for Alan Bell's permission to quote from his biography:

In June 1798, aged twenty-seven and eighteen respectively, Sydney and his young pupil Michael Hicks Beach went to live in Edinburgh. Before the end of the year (surely the proverbial effect of absence) Sydney had privately engaged himself to Miss Catharine Amelia Pybus, a close childhood friend of his sister Maria living with her mother in Cheam. Sydney then wrote to his father: 'I have long wished to marry and think that state of life to be almost the only happiness that is worth looking forward to. I know but one woman who unites fortune, understanding and good disposition in a degree that makes an alliance desirable with her, and who at the same time is not in a situation of life that puts her out of my reach.'

To his friend Clarke he wrote rather less formally: 'As for the lady, she is three years younger than me, a very old friend of mine - a good figure, and *to me* an interesting countenance, of excellent disposition, extremely good sense, very fond of music, and me - a wise, amiable woman such as...will quietly for years and years make the happiness of her husband's life'. So it turned out.

Catharine provided Sydney with the happiest possible domestic background and in due course became a devoted mother to their children. No mere appendage to his brilliant presence, she was valued by Sydney's friends for her own sake and was fully capable, socially and intellectually, of accompanying him as he rose in life. An American friend was in 1844 to refer to Catharine as 'a most amiable and intelligent lady, highly cultivated by reading, and a long life spent in the society of the most distinguished persons of both sexes in Great Britain and of the foreigners who throng London'.

Peter Payan tells us he will have more to offer on Mrs Sydney in next year's 'Newsletter'. Good. Contributions always welcome!

'My reverend and facetious visitor'

A book-find we treasure is an elegantly slim blue volume published in Edinburgh in 1882: *Story of a Long and Busy Life* by W. Chambers, LL.D. The previous owner's bookplate - a sepia photograph - reveals a figure in knee-breeches intent upon reading in his library, his hair and ample beard outdone only by the author's in the printed engraving which follows. William Chambers (1800-83) was a publisher who with his brother Robert founded *Chambers's Edinburgh Journal* in 1832; William was its first editor. *Chambers's Journal*, as it became known, survived as a monthly until it ceased publication in 1956.

William's long and busy life was enriched in 1844 by a meeting with Sydney Smith whom William amused by recalling one of Sydney's doubtless several 'jocularities' about oatmeal ('We cultivate literature on a little oatmeal' was the motto he proposed for the *Edinburgh Review*). This charming memoir of Sydney at the close of his own long and busy life makes the perfect end to this tenth issue of our *Newsletter*:

The manner in which I became acquainted with Sydney Smith is too remarkable to be omitted. In 1844, when residing in Greek Street, Soho, one day about noon a carriage drives up to the door; not a vehicle of the light modern sort, but an old family coach, drawn by a pair of sleek horses. From it descends an aged gentleman, who, from his shovel hat and black gaiters, is seen to be an ecclesiastical dignitary. I overhear, by the voices at the door, that I am asked for. 'Who in all the world can this be?' A few minutes solve the question. Heavy footsteps are heard deliberately ascending the antique balustraded stair. My unknown visitor is ushered in, his name announced: 'The Rev. Sydney Smith.' I hasten to receive so celebrated a personage as is befitting, and express the pleasure I have in the unexpected visit - wondering how he had discovered me.

'I heard at Rogers's, you were in town,' said he, 'and was resolved to call. Let us sit down and have a talk.' We drew towards the fire, for the day was cold, and he continued: 'You are surprised possibly at my visit. There is nothing at all strange about it. The originator of the *Edinburgh Review* has come to see the originator of the *Edinburgh Journal*.'

I felt honoured by the remark, and delighted beyond measure with the good-natured and unceremonious observations which my visitor made on a variety of subjects. We talked of Edinburgh, and I asked him where he had lived. He said it was in Buccleuch Place, not far from Jeffrey, with an outlook behind to the Meadows. 'Ah!' he remarked, 'what charming walks I had about Arthur's Seat, with the clear mountain air blowing in one's face. I often think of that glorious scene.' I alluded to the cluster of young men - Jeffrey, Horner, Brougham, himself, and one or two others, who had been concerned in commencing the *Review* in 1802. Of these he spoke with most affection of Horner; and specified one who, from his vanity and eccentricities, could not be trusted. Great secrecy, he said, had to be employed in conducting the undertaking; and this agrees with what Lord Jeffrey told my brother. My reverend and facetious visitor made some little inquiry about my own early efforts; and he laughed when I reminded him of a jocularities of his own about studying on a little oatmeal - for that would have applied literally to my brother and to myself.

There was some more chat of this kind, and we parted. This interview led to a few days of agreeable intercourse with Sydney Smith. By invitation, I went next morning to his house in Green Street, Grosvenor Square, to breakfast; and the day following, went with him to breakfast with a select party, which included my old and valued friend, Mr Robert Carruthers of Inverness, now deceased, at the mansion of Samuel Rogers, St James's, when there ensued a stream of witticisms and repartees for pretty nearly a couple of hours. This was assuredly the most pleasant conversational treat I ever experienced.

On quitting London, I bade goodbye to Sydney Smith with extreme regret. We never met again. He died in February the following year.