# THE SYDNEY SMITH ASSOCIATION

# NEWSLETTER

Issue 8

May 2003

# The Sydney Smith Association

Aims

To perpetuate the memory and achievements of Sydney Smith
To cultivate appreciation of the principles for which he stood
To support the churches connected with his career
To help in the preservation of manuscripts and memorabilia relating to him and his family
To arrange periodic events, receptions and services in keeping with his inclinations

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| Editor | Frank Collieson, Esq.<br>23 Neville Road<br>Cambridge CB1 3SW<br>Telephone 01223 246552 |

Committee
Mrs Mary Beaumont, Alan Bell, Esq., Professor Graham Parry
Dr Peter Payan, The Revd Norman Taylor

# The Sydney Smith Association Newsletter

**Issue 8 May 2003**

**Weekend in Winchester**

Thanks to Alan Bell and James Milligan, arrangements have been made for our AGM to take place in Winchester College on **Saturday 27 September 2003**. This date coincides with the annual Cathedral Flower Show - well worth visiting.

Our programme is as follows:

**Saturday 27 September 2003**

1.00pm Lunch at the Winchester Royal Hotel, St Peter's Street, where James Milligan has made appropriate bookings.

3 to 4pm Conducted tour of Winchester College. Geoff Day will meet members at the Porters' Lodge at 3pm, show them round, ending up in the Library.

4.15 pm Meet in the Library for AGM after which Geoff Day will give a talk at 4.30 about the state of education in England during Sydney's time at Winchester, and digressing from there.

7pm Meet at the Winchester Royal Hotel for dinner at 7.30.

**Sunday 28 September 2003**

11.00 am. Visit to Jane Austen's House, Chawton

As the rooms in the house are too small for a fully guided tour we will be given an introductory talk and then can wander round at our leisure. Meet at The Granary (next to the house). If we number more than 15 the cost will be £3 per head, otherwise £4 each. Lunch has been provisionally arranged in Cassandra's Cup Restaurant (immediately opposite the house).

**Parking** in Winchester is not easy. However those staying or having lunch or dinner at the Winchester Royal Hotel can leave their cars there.

**Accommodation** 10 rooms have been reserved at the Winchester Royal Hotel (Tel: 01962 840840) which is half a mile from the College and has parking space for 50 cars. The reservations are at a discounted rate of £89.10 for a single and £99 for double inclusive of full English breakfast and VAT at 17.5%. These rooms will be held until one month prior to 27 September 2003.

The Tourist Information Centre produces an excellent booklet in which can be found details of interesting places to visit, forthcoming events, and a diverse list of



places where to stay. (Tel: 01962 840500). email tourism@winchester.gov.uk or website: www.visitwinchester.com.

**Subscriptions** were due for payment on 1 March. For those who do not pay by standing order and have not yet paid, please send the Hon. Treasurer the appropriate amount (£5 single or £8 joint). If you enjoy your membership please tell others about the Association and if you have an email address please let the Hon. Treasurer (ama5@york.ac.uk} or Membership Secretary (pjdiggle@aol.com) have yours. This will help reduce postage costs.

**London Lunches**

London lunches to celebrate Sydney Smith are held in the delightful and quirky Boisdale Restaurant, where the only problem is the size of its private dining room, which restricts our numbers to fifteen. However, the assembled company is almost Pickwickian in its jollity. Discussion themes for recent lunches have included a profile of Sydney by a descendant, Philip Trower (see below), a Christmas treat presented by Deirdre Bryan-Brown, 'Sydney on Food', including his recipe in rhyme for a salad, taken from Alan Bell's book and, most recently, Tyrrell Burgess on Sydney's 'Modern Remedies for Low Spirits'. Any member who is in London or near by on Wednesdays 4 June, 3 September or 3 December is welcome to contact Mary Beaumont on 0208 318 3388 or email mary@maryb.demon.co.uk. Our lunches are addictive, in the nicest possible way.

**Sydney as Sage**

Philip Trower, in his excellent London lunch talk on his forebear, attempted to compress Sydney's wisdom into the smallest possible compass: '"Life", to use his own words, "is a sorry business at best." But there is no need to be uncomfortable or miserable if, with a bit of effort, you can be happy. Therefore make the best of what you've got and help others to do the same. This, it seems to me (expressed at great length in his famous letter to Lady Morpeth), is the essence of his message to us as individuals.

'His "social doctrine", if one can call it that, I would say is almost as simple: There will always be rich and poor, good men and bad, rulers and ruled. But within that framework men should have as much freedom to do and say what they think true or right in so far as this is compatible with the common good. Ridicule folly when it harms others, and speak up loudly and manfully against people in authority or with social influence when they abuse their privileges or neglect their responsibilities.'

**Wissett, was it?**
Yes, it was. And what was it? Another Sydney Smith/Holy Mackerel lunch in East Anglia (convenor: Michael Belfrage: 01728 748 087). Wissett, west of Halesworth , is where Duncan Grant and David Garnett were perhaps unlikely fruit farmers 'during summer of Somme', notes Norman Scarfe in *The Suffolk Guide* (1988). 'What *did* Wissett make of their visitors?' he asks. 'Lytton Strachey was one.' *Our* fruitful lunch, on a lovely day last July, was for eight, two of whom being our generous hosts at Peartree Farm: members Gale and Ann Sieveking. Mackerel neither sacred nor secular was among the delicious dishes offered, and somehow Sydney was scarcely mentioned. He would not have complained: 'Serenely full, the epicure would say, "Fate cannot harm me, I have dined today."'

**Rus in Urbe: our London Weekend, 21/22 September 2002**

'Our friend makes all the country smell like Piccadilly', said Sydney of 'Poodle' Byng. And, he might have observed, much of London smelled like Foston or Combe Florey during the gloriously sunny weekend of our annual meeting – owing not to the presence in town of the Sydney Smith Association, but because coincidentally the rustic troops of the Countryside Alliance were assembling in force for their 'freedom march' on the Sunday. Sydney animadverted on the country: no charms for him, who looked forward anxiously 'to the return of bad weather, coal fires, and good society in a crowded city'; but marchers and our members co-existed happily, and some of us kept bucolic step with them.

The weekend, recollected in outline, began with Saturday lunch at the warmly welcoming Polish Club in Prince's Gate, followed by a choice of dessert: a trip on the Thames, or a visit to Sydney's first London home at 14 Doughty Street; thanks to our hosts, members Michael Horowitz and Gillian Darley, we were allowed the run of the house and garden in their absence, for they had been called to France as members of a wedding. For tea, we broached the extra-security of the Army & Navy Club in Pall Mall; then Chairman Randolph Vigne conducted an admirably brief AGM, after which Canon Eric James entertained us with a discursive and autobiographical talk which he concluded by saying: 'I fear I have not been able to do more this evening than scratch the surface of the important question I set myself: "Should Sydney Smith ever have been ordained?"' Dinner was served at eight in the Marlborough Room.

Sunday morning. Bright day. While battalions gathered to promote country matters, a scholarly troop of SS members divided into six-packs in the blessed lift to the antiquarian heights and delights of St Paul's Library. Sydney's portrait there seemed to approve of our coming. Then to the body of the Cathedral, to our



reserved places for the Sung Eucharist -- during which Canon Philip Buckler preached an excellent sermon (reproduced below) recognizing Sydney's contribution to the life of St Paul's. After a good lunch in the Refectory Restaurant it was time to break up, some to march a little, others to take trains unusually fully furnished with waxed and waterproofed clothing. Town and Country had met in the City and had a thoroughly enjoyable time. Our best thanks to our organizers, hosts, speakers, and guides.

**Sermon preached at St Paul's Cathedral by Canon Philip Buckler at the Sung Eucharist on the Seventeenth Sunday after Trinity, 22 September 2002**

*Are you envious because I am generous?* asks the owner of the vineyard in that parable we have just heard read. Having hired workers throughout the day, he chose to pay the last to be hired (who had only worked an hour or two) the same rate as the first. There was grumbling and discontent — but his only crime was generosity. *Are you envious,* he asks, *because I am generous?* Now the difficulty here is that another saying of Jesus has been attached to this story and hijacked its meaning. For the last words we heard — the ones ringing in our ears as the story ends — are the words *For the first shall be last, and the last first.* Perhaps related to the story, but not the point of the parable. For Jesus is asking a question of sheer common sense: Can God not do what he wants with his own creation? Can he not be generous if he wishes?

Common sense is often most uncommon, indeed rare in our complex world. I want to speak this morning of one person of eminent common sense to whom this Cathedral and indeed this country owes a great debt. I speak of Sydney Smith — a welcome name upon a card in the society salons of early nineteenth-century London. To some it is a name that conjures up a great store of witty sayings, to others a name completely unknown.

Sydney Smith was a clergyman, born in 1771 at the time of the great evangelical revival (for which he had little time) and who died in 1845 at one of the defining moments of the catholic revival, the Oxford Movement, when Newman left the Church of England for the Church of Rome. Living between these two great movements which shaped the future Church, Smith was impervious to both influences. He remained his own person, with a deal of common sense and a horror of humbug.

He was well known in society as a humorous and witty guest at the best dinner tables of London - indeed his portly frame bore ample witness to such indulgences. *What a hideous, odd-looking man!* wrote Mrs Brookfield. *With a mouth like an*

*oyster, and three double chins.* His portrait in the Cathedral library is a little more flattering, but one can see what was meant by the remark. Despite his influential connections, it was many years before he found preferment in the Church. His political views, strongly expressed and liberal yet not belonging to any one party, meant that none dared risk making him a bishop. He was perhaps (to use an expression he himself gave to the English language) *a square peg in a round hole.* Yet his influence had been considerable through his writings in the *Edinburgh Review*, a magazine he helped to found. He wrote articles exposing the shallowness of much popular political thinking. His writing was skilful and humorous — often in parable-like stories. He used his humour to ridicule the nonsense that had so easily become accepted wisdom in society.

He wrote a series of witty letters under the pseudonym of Peter Plymley arguing persuasively for toleration to be extended to Roman Catholics. He pointed out the absurdity of claiming their loyalty could not be trusted, when it was their very regard for oaths which prevented them enjoying full citizenship. He was no lover of the Roman Church, but detested discrimination even more. He also fought hard for Parliamentary Reform and was one of those who created the atmosphere which resulted in the Reform Bill of 1832. All the time his shrewd common sense was turned against the temptations of self-interest that led to injustices. As he said, *The only true way to make the most of mankind see the beauty of justice, is by showing them in pretty plain terms the consequences of injustice.*

He was a clergyman, not out of the sort of vocation we might expect today, but because his father would not support him in any other work. Yet he dutifully served as a parish priest, though initially hating the countryside to which he was exiled. *I have no relish for the country; it is a kind of healthy grave,* he said. Would he have been marching today, I wonder? Certainly he would have supported the aspirations for freedom, but he might have had quizzical observations on humans and foxes. He built vicarages and learned about medicine to help the poor in his parishes. *I dine with the rich in London, and physic the poor in the country; passing from the sauces of Dives to the sores of Lazarus.* As well as ministering to the sick in body, he had advice to offer those who were depressed. It was interesting to read recently in *Iris* how John Bayley suggested his wife Iris Murdoch, when A1zheimer's began to alarm her, should follow Sydney Smith's advice to take *Short views of human life not farther than dinner or tea.*

At last he was rewarded with a Canonry here at St Paul's in 1831, and was installed 171 years ago this week on September 27th. Immediately he set about bringing that same common sense — along with a shrewd business brain — into the life of the Cathedral. He took control of the finances and sorted them out, he oversaw the work on the building — at first clashing with the Surveyor to the



Fabric and then earning his respect for his willingness to explore every pinnacle and passage despite his large frame. He set about reforming some of the practices of the choirmen and other departments. Indeed a later Dean, Milman, said that wherever he looked he saw evidence of Sydney's presence. The Cathedral in his day was very different from today — no mosaics decorated the Quire, services were held beyond a screen, and this would be a public thoroughfare. The place was cold and neglected when he arrived: *To go to St Paul's is certain death. The thermometer is several degrees below zero. My sentences are frozen as they come out of my mouth.* And the coldness was not just in temperature. For, as he wrote to one person, *I am just going to pray for you at St Paul's, but with no very lively hope of success.* (But although much has changed, there are, I believe, things he would recognize — not least our ambition to clean and restore this building to God's glory.

He would be an implacable opponent of nonsense today — having no time for discrimination on the one hand, but being scornful of the excesses of political correctness on the other. His struggle for toleration should warn us against any racial or religious intolerance today. His fight for justice and truth continues in every age — but his belief in the vindication of reform and common sense is something we need to hold on to. Prison reform and matters of justice were issues then as now. The slave trade might not exist today, the laws which allowed death or disablement of poachers might not be on the statute book, but there is still much exploitation and nonsense we take for granted.

Sydney Smith was not a saint as such, but he was one who in a flamboyant way spoke of God's concerns. Perhaps he was a prophet — not a wild figure in a loin-cloth in the desert, but a portly figure sitting over claret in Holland House with the political leaders of his time. Yet the voice of God's common sense needs to be heard everywhere — and the gift of wit enables it to pierce our self-satisfied blindness. He is worth remembering for his wit and wisdom, for the common sense he brought to the understanding of faith, and for the humility that went with it — the humility to recognize and not be envious of God's generosity.

*Are you envious because I am generous?* asks God. Good common sense shows us how ridiculous it is to make God into our own mean image, to drag him down to our level. Rather, we must allow his grace to draw us up to live according to the full stature of Jesus Christ, his Son, our Lord.

Philippians 1.21-end
Matthew 20. 1-16

**From a talk given by Canon Eric James in The Army & Navy Club, Pall Mall on Saturday 21 September 2002**

I have deliberately avoided talking of Sydney this evening as though he was primarily a wit, though it might have been more entertaining for you had I done so. But it has occurred to me, as erstwhile Director of the charity Christian Action for over seventeen years - a charity which amongst other things strongly supported the successful campaign for the abolition of capital punishment - it would be appropriate for me to end what I have to say by quoting a passage from a sermon of Sydney which reveals a somewhat unusual but important aspect of him. It's a passage from a sermon he preached on behalf of the 'Society for the Diffusion of Knowledge upon the Punishment of Death and the Improvement of Prison Discipline'- a society founded in 1808. Sydney preached the sermon towards the end of his life, when he was a Canon of St Paul's. He took as his text Psalm 102, 19 & 20 in the Authorized Version: 'For he hath looked down from the height of his sanctuary; from heaven did the Lord behold the earth. To hear the groaning of the prisoner; to loose those that are appointed to death.'

I shall quote only a single paragraph from the sermon - though it's not a short one! And I think as one hears it, it's important to see Sydney preaching under the great dome of St Paul's, with, of course, none of the benefits of a modern public address system. After announcing his text, he begins his sermon:

'A question has been raised by some humane men, whether or not it is lawful to take away life as a punishment for crime. The argument has been carried on with great force and great ingenuity: the humane reasoner almost wishes that the objection to capital punishment could be made good, and that reason and reflection could be led to disapprove a practice at which every feeling of humanity trembles; but whatever be the difference of opinion among thoughtful men upon this important topic, there is one observation to which all men have agreed and must agree; and that is, that you yourself must not have taught the man you put to death the very crime for which he dies; that the executioner ought not to be the master; that the pupil ought not to be the victim; that the corruption worthy of death should not have been instilled by him in whose hands the instrument of death is placed.

'If there be cruelty upon earth - this it is! If there is a mockery of justice - that is it! What has been the state of our prisons before the late exertions of this valuable society, and what blood guiltiness laid upon us? A young man led out to execution in the flower of his youth, and sent before his God and his Redeemer, with all the solemn and appalling forms of justice! But what cruelty, you will ask, is there in all this? Was he not fairly tried? Yes. Was he not fairly heard? Certainly he was. Is there any doubt of his having committed the offence? None! But where did he



learn to commit the offence? What blackened his soul? Where did he acquire that portion of hell which drove him to murder and to rob? You found him when a boy in the commission of some trifling offence, and you placed him in prison, among grown-up thieves and murderers; and no one came to see the poor wretch; and no one warned him. Howard (John Howard) was gone - and that blessed woman (Elizabeth Fry) who visits dungeons had not begun her labours of the Gospel; and day after day the poor youth was encouraged to murder and to steal - and the law smote him - and his soul is in the torments of hell!

'This is the foundation of our Society! Upon this plea we ask for your association and your assistance, that we may prevent crime, may prevent prisons from becoming the school of crime; that we may classify, assort, and separate in prisons; that we may avoid that awful responsibility and un-Christian feeling, that the victim of the law has become a victim of the law through our negligence, callousness, and coldness of heart; that we have grudged the expense of preparing proper receptacles; that we have grudged the time for inspection, and parental care; that the only activity and alacrity we have shown is in the infliction of those condign punishments which are never just but when everything has been done to render them infrequent and improbable?'

What eloquence! What humanity! What courage!

I am not, of course, pretending that that single paragraph adequately represents all that needs to be said on Sydney and Social Justice. There is another talk - indeed, another lecture - there. I fear I have not been able to do more this evening than scratch the surface of the important question I set myself: 'Should Sydney Smith ever have been ordained?'

But I am myself glad there was such an one as Sydney in the ordained ministry of the Church of England - in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century – if only to preach such a sermon - in such a place as St Paul's - as that from which I have quoted. I am no less glad that our Association exists to commemorate and celebrate him.

**Without Prejudice: two book reviews**

*I never read a book before reviewing it; it prejudices a man so.*

Malcolm Johnson: *'Bustling Intermeddler'? The Life and Work of Charles James Blomfield.* Leominster: Gracewing, 2001, £14.99. 0 85244 546 6

It was as a curate that Malcolm Johnson first became interested in Bishop Blomfield (1786-1857), and in retirement from work as Area Dean of the City of London he has returned to a subject that has been of special interest throughout his career. He takes on the most active, but also the most high-handed and unpopular, prelate of the day, and shows the extent of Blomfield's achievement not only in the London diocese but also on behalf of the Anglican communion abroad, which was then part of the Bishop of London's responsibility. The title of this short biography comes not from Sydney Smith, who would surely have agreed with the sentiment, but from Disraeli's *Tancred*, and the Bishop himself might have seen it as a compliment.

Charles James Blomfield will be known to members of our Association as the object of some pretty rough handling from Sydney Smith's pen. Sydney described this personification of 'the Church of England here upon earth' as being 'passionately fond of labour, (with) no aversion to power, of quick temper, great ability, thoroughly versant in ecclesiastical law', and so on. The threat that such a vigorous chairman of the Ecclesiastical Commission posed to the endowments and privileges of the dean and chapter of St Paul's was a strong one.

Sydney's three *Letters to Archdeacon Singleton*, published from 1837 onwards, are pungently argued, verging on impertinence towards Blomfield as his diocesan. They certainly showed the limits of Sydney's sympathies as a reformer. Some of his senior Whig contemporaries regretted their tone, but Sydney himself had no regrets and the episcopal hide was of rare thickness and well able to withstand this well-aimed, impudent banter. It was to Blomfield that Sydney, having been called by him 'my facetious friend', wrote in a letter to *The Times*: 'you must not think me necessarily foolish because I am facetious, nor will I consider you necessarily wise because you are grave'.

The vast and heavily populated metropolitan diocese is seen here, however, not in the context of a prosperous canon's stall in its cathedral but from the urgent pastoral needs of an area that had long since outgrown its original ecclesiastical organization. What Blomfield achieved, by unremitting industry during his twenty-eight years at Fulham Palace from 1828, is truly amazing.



Blomfield, this 'holy innovator', is a big subject. His full achievement can scarcely be accommodated in a short monograph like this. He was too busy to have left much personal documentation and thus remains rather elusive as a personality, but the sources for the administrative history of the diocese are correspondingly large and deserve much further study. Meanwhile Mr Johnson's book provides a good introduction.

Alan Bell

Alan Webster: *Reaching for Reality. Sketches from the Life of the Church.* London: SPCK, 2002, £10.99. 0 281 05438 X

Alan Webster's ministry in the Church of England has been long and distinguished, and his book is very much a personal record of that ministry with reflections upon it. In his Introduction he gives a clue to the book's title: 'These pages describe occasions when religious life has been realigned after it had drifted away from reality.' Beginning with the parish of Barnard Castle in Teesdale, to which he was instituted in 1953, and where the Harvest Festival became a real representation of the work of the town, he goes on to describe the work of other parish priests, including his father and grandfather, who brought new life to parishes, 'for religious truth has always been most clearly communicated through personalities'.

In turn the author became Dean of Norwich Cathedral and Dean of St Paul's and he relates vividly the work of past members of the Cathedral close who contributed in their day to 'reaching for reality'. One, of course, was our Sydney Smith, who 'believed that wit could move mountains'-- examples of which cover several pages of the chapter, 'People at St Paul's'. Continuing with the purpose of St Paul's in our own day he gives a moving account both of day-by-day pastoral care of an immense number of visitors and of the important great occasions. 'Today people will find more services at St Paul's than at any time since its foundation in the seventh century. The backbone is the Eucharist, Mattins and Evensong. In addition there are thousands of specially arranged services.' Last year we were fortunate enough to be granted a share in the Sunday Eucharist to commemorate Sydney. There are two fascinating chapters written as the result of Alan Webster's involvement there: 'Faith in the City' and 'The Falklands Service'.

When we come to the chapter 'New Liturgies' — a baptism and a wedding service for members of his family — I confess to being uneasy. Having attended a High Mass at St Magnus Martyr which bore no relation to the Book of Common Prayer, Geoffrey Fisher, when Bishop of London, was asked what he thought of the service. He replied: 'I cannot say that I am in favour of presbyterian congregationalism', and I rather feel the same. Nor can I pray to God as Mother,

for the guidance we have from Jesus is that we address God as Father. However, each reader must make up his or her own mind about this.

Having attended a service at Westminster Abbey to commemorate martyrs of the twentieth century, Alan Webster devotes a chapter to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, than whom 'none has more to teach the churches today . . . He insisted that believers should not fear secularization, because prayer, the communion of saints and courageous faith would be as valid as ever. . . He was reaching for reality in religion, and for this he gave his life.'

The final personality takes us back to Norwich to a 1973 celebration of Mother Julian, whose *Revelations of Divine Love* (1373) was the first book written by a woman in English and the first work of theology in English. This is a fine essay on Julian - her life, her beliefs and the influence she continues to have today. The author ends with a message of hope for the new millennium. The whole book is extremely readable and interesting, sometimes inspiring, and altogether well worth reflecting on.

Norman Taylor

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**'Some men have only one book in them; others, a library...'**

The two books reviewed here are both by members of the Association. The Editor hopes to hear of more: single volumes or complete libraries will be reviewed or noticed—without prejudice.

**N.B.**
**'As a general rule, run your pen through every other word you have written: you have no idea what vigour it will give your style.'**



**Big Issue! Big Issue!**
The unusual bulk of this number of the *Newsletter* should arouse no great expectations among readers: for big issues are not to be the norm; but the opportunity to share 'Sydney's Nightmare' with our whole membership was too good to miss. It was so enjoyed by those who heard it delivered in the village hall at Combe Florey in September 2001 that we asked the speaker, William Thomas, Student of Christ Church, Oxford, if he would prepare a version for publication in our *Newsletter*. Mr Thomas readily agreed, and here it is:

## SYDNEY'S NIGHTMARE: MACAULAY AND SYDNEY SMITH

### I

It was at Norman Taylor's suggestion that I called this talk 'Sydney's Nightmare'. You will all know the story told by Monckton Milnes of his visit to Sydney in his last illness. When Milnes hoped that he had had a good night, Sydney replied, 'Oh horrid, horrid my dear fellow. I dreamt I was chained to a rock and being talked to death by Harriet Martineau and Macaulay.' As imagined tormentors they seem an ill-matched pair. Harriet Martineau was a radical blue-stocking of the type Macaulay abhorred. She was a crank, and a notorious bore. But Macaulay was surely in a different class. He was a man of copious learning, a poet, an orator, a politician and man of the world; above all a Whig and a writer in the *Edinburgh Review,* the great quarterly that Sydney had helped found. He ought to have been an ally, not a threat. Yet the two most critical comments on Macaulay which everyone quotes, that he was 'a book in breeches' and that his later conversation had become more agreeable for its 'flashes of silence', are Sydney's.

Both were published in his daughter's *A Memoir of The Reverend Sydney Smith* (1855), while Macaulay was alive. Criticism of this sort is rather unusual in Victorian memoirs. Biographers usually took some care that nothing their subject said should be published which might give offence to any acquaintances still living, and no one, I think, observed this discretion more thoroughly than Macaulay's nephew, George Otto Trevelyan, when he came to write his uncle's life. Defiance of the rule could bring ostracism, even litigation. That may account for the long delay in the publication of the *Memoir.* Many of Sydney's friends were reluctant to record in print the jokes and gossip they had so enjoyed in talk. Macaulay was one. When Saba asked him for his recollections of her father, he replied, rather implausibly, that he felt it unbecoming to sit in judgement on an older man. Later when she asked him to write a sketch of the state of the Church of England at the time when Sydney was ordained, he refused. His comment in his journal is rather harsh. 'Sydney had many excellent qualities', he wrote, 'but it was

not as a priest that he shone, and I will not prostitute my pen.' So those two critical phrases of Sydney's might well have been inserted in the *Memoir* deliberately, in reprisal.

There is not much doubt that each man resented the other's success, in doing what he himself could not do. But nothing is harder to recapture than witty talk. It is not easy to record a conversation, still less to capture the peculiarities of speech, timing and choice of subject which make good talk memorable. When one tries to convey the anecdotes and witticisms one has heard to a third party, it is hard to avoid making them sound banal and one's own delight at them seem rather silly. But for Victorian society we are not quite in the dark. We need to remember that Victorian families generated their own entertainment, and famous hostesses diversified their dinners and 'routs' by inviting as guests people who were famous performers. Tom Moore was in demand for his songs, Sydney Smith and Macaulay for their talk; and as the fame of each spread, so they found themselves under a heavier burden of expectation, from a growing number of people who were there on purpose to hear them perform. Fortunately many witnesses had the impulse to record what they had heard. Sydney and Macaulay had contrasting styles. Sydney's wit was more spontaneous, he needed company to provide the stimulus to repartee, and once primed, he found his material in the common experience of those around him and could reduce any gathering to helpless laughter. He had a sharp eye for human oddity and a parodist's ear for catch-phrases, which could be ridiculed if they were set in an inappropriate context; as when he said of Brougham, when the Whig lawyer arrived late for a performance of the *Messiah* in York Minster, that he had appeared as 'counsel for the other side'. But he could also hold attention by flights of elaborate fantasy in which a string of hypothetical events is just rescued from absurdity by vivid, everyday phrases: for instance, the Scot who was going to marry a fat woman twice his size, which you will find quoted in full in *Twelve Miles from a Lemon.*

This burlesque style starts out, I imagine, from a sense of the artificiality of human conventions, and the absurdity of the action burlesqued is heightened by the fact that the mocker affects to invoke the authority of tradition and convention. It did actually strike the prim as vulgar and unclerical. But it was not all uproarious slapstick. Sydney could vary the tone from the hilarious to the solemn, just as he could move from rehearsed anecdote to spontaneous repartee. And after all, four volumes of his works, still highly readable, attest that he was not a mere talker.

Macaulay's colloquial style was heavier, more bookish and academic, drawing less on contemporary events and topical language than on a lifetime of reading stored in the famous memory. It was that memory which provided him with what one observer called 'a weapon more than anyone else in the world's tournament'.



There is no question that he prepared his displays of learning well in advance in order to keep up his reputation for it. It enabled him to pulverize a rash assertion with a dozen contrary examples; to humiliate anyone who had quoted a line of poetry inaccurately, or used a wrong quantity in Latin or Greek; to torment them with quizzes about the dates of Popes and kings and archbishops of Canterbury; and generally to bear them down with a volume of information that reduced a whole company to silence. There are many examples, but one of the best is recorded by Mrs Brookfield, Thackeray's friend: 'I remember sitting next him at dinner, at one period of which I asked him if he admired Jane Austen's works. He made no reply till a lull occurred in the general conversation, when he announced, "Mrs. Brookfield has asked me if I admire Jane Austen, to which I reply" --- And then he entered into a lengthy dissertation to which all listened but into which no one else dared intrude, finally describing how some time ago he had found himself by the plain marble slab which covered the remains of J.A., when he said to himself, "Here's a woman who ought to have had a National monument."'

This is what Sydney meant by 'confounding soliloquy and colloquy'. An even more forthright judge was the diarist Charles Greville, who said that Macaulay's was 'a roaring torrent, and not a meandering stream of talk'. And he added, 'I believe we would all of us have been glad to exchange some of his sense for more of Sydney's nonsense.'

## II

But of course there was more to the relationship than the drawing-room rivalry of two great talkers. Underneath the social decorum, there were different assumptions which obtruded themselves even in their agreements and their common membership of the Whig party. Smith was born in1771; so he was a year younger than the poet Wordsworth and unlike the poet, he watched, from the relative security of a fellowship of New College, the French Revolution swing into anarchy. He was ordained deacon in the year of the Terror. He gave up his living when offered a private tutorship, and as continental travel was impractical, he took his pupil to Edinburgh, where the famous *Review* was conceived in the short period of peace, I801-3, before Bonaparte resumed his career of conquest. Sydney was thirty-eight before the *Edinburgh* became associated with the Whig opposition, but for him that meant a period of rustication, stuck in a country rectory 'twelve miles from a lemon'. He was fifty-six when Canning's premiership and death split the Tory party and led to the revival of the Whigs as a political force. By then he had passed too long a period as a Whig reviewer and jester to be an appropriate addition to the bench of bishops.

Macaulay's dates are easy to remember. He was born in 1800 and he died in 1859, the year of Mill's *On Liberty* and Darwin's *Origin of Species.* He passed his childhood in the atmosphere of ardent patriotism which swept England between Trafalgar and Waterloo. He came to legal maturity after the crises of 'Peterloo' and the Six Acts, as the threat of revolution receded and England stood out as the banker and to some degree the arbiter of European politics. Macaulay's undergraduate allegiance was to Canning. He had at twenty-eight his first political preferment from Lyndhurst, Wellington's Lord Chancellor. He was elected to parliament for Calne when Wellington was still Prime Minister. What made him a Whig was his association with the *Edinburgh Review* and the patronage of the owner of Calne, Lord Lansdowne. At thirty, he already had a formidable reputation as a reviewer. He first entered Holland House in 1831. So Sydney's fame came gradually and late; Macaulay's was acquired much earlier in his life, and it coincided with a political crisis. It is worth mentioning that, as he died in 1845, Sydney knew Macaulay's gifts only from his reviews, collected in three volumes in1843, and from the *Lays of Ancient Rome* published in 1842. As writers and in Sydney's lifetime they were on a par. It was only with the publication of the first two volumes of the *History of England* in 1848, three years after the older man's death, that Macaulay's reputation as it were broke out of the circle of London political life, and became a truly national and popular one, comparable with that of Scott, Dickens or Thackeray.

## III

The most obvious source of divergence between the two men is the fact that they were a generation apart. But this involved crucial differences in social and political experience. Sydney's upbringing was under the Old Regime, and his duties in a series of rural parishes accentuated this, and gave him a view of English life as dominated by a resident gentry and a prosperous clergy. It was a life far from the industrialism that was transforming the North, and though places like Manchester or New Lanark were there to be studied as portents of the new order, they were more often visited by Sydney and his class as curiosities, like medieval castles or cathedrals. For all Sydney's quick perception of the distinctive idiom and outlook of the Edinburgh *literati* whom he met from 1798 onwards, there is little sign that he absorbed the philosophy which underlay what academics now call the Scottish enlightenment, that is, the articulation of a commercial view of the origin of wealth, and the consequent revolution in ethics and social relations which we now acknowledge stemmed from the work of Adam Smith and his pupils. I don't mean that he had no eye for social conflicts and injustice, but he noticed them, it seems to me, individually and on a small scale: the Game Laws and man-traps rather than the larger conflict of agriculture and commerce; the misery of child chimney-sweeps rather than the wider misery of the urban poor; the privations of underpaid



curates rather than the larger scandal of a clerical monopoly of higher education. There is little sense of the forces which moved the great social machine. Turn to Macaulay's essays on Southey and Sadler and you see at once how Adam Smith's economic theory has transformed the outlook of the next generation. We have moved from piecemeal criticism of abuses as they arise to a thoroughgoing critique of Tory paternalism and its implication for government policy. For Sydney, political conflict is a question of the fortunes of the Ins and Outs; for Macaulay it is a conflict between two rival philosophies. Even in his more narrowly political actions, Sydney was rather naïve; as for example in his surprise that writing in a Whig review in a period of Tory governments actually threatened his preferment in the Church. Later as a canon, he seems to have thought that simple gratitude should have led the Whigs to make him a bishop; and when they set up a Church Commission to redress inequalities of clerical income, he argued that the model should be the Bar, with bishoprics awarded to the most enterprising and able like silk gowns to the sharpest counsel. Of course, it is the small coin of argument, the homely examples like the clerical career of 'young Crumpet' the baker's son, that give his pamphlets their charm. We read them for their characteristic energy and wit. My point is that nobody would now go to them for a deeper understanding of the society which produced them. They have a bucolic innocence like *The Deserted Village* or Cobbett's *Rural Rides.*

A profounder difference derived from religion. Sydney was, as we know, obliged by his father to go into the Church. He made the best of his situation by conscientious study; he experienced no conversion, and other men's conversions always struck him as suspect and theatrical. He seems to have adopted a creed akin to the broad churchmen like Thomas Arnold but without the zeal; indeed he notoriously ridiculed zeal, especially among Methodists and evangelicals. Macaulay on the contrary was, as he once admitted, 'bred a Pharisee', in the heart of the evangelical movement, and it affected him profoundly, throughout his Cambridge years and beyond. He later said that as a child he was 'imbued with the technical vocabulary of the evangelical theology'. At seven, when he found that a maid had removed the oyster shells with which he had marked out a little garden plot, he exclaimed, 'Cursed be Sally, for it is written "Cursed be he that removeth his neighbour's landmark."' In manhood he continued to look on the Authorized Version as the foundation of good English prose, and when Lady Holland once declared her dislike of the vogue for new words like 'talent' he was shocked to find her ignorant of the parable of the talents. 'I did not tell her, though I might have done so, that a person who professed to be a critic of the English language ought to have the Bible at his fingers' ends.'

It was not in the political activity of the English abolitionists that the test of orthodoxy lay, for the movement comprised many shades of religious belief and

sought to appeal to men who belonged to a variety of churches in several countries. It was rather in the domestic life of the Clapham families that religious belief was actively inculcated, in church attendance, family prayers, Bible reading and regular acts of philanthropy. As he grew older, it is plain that Macaulay found this routine irksome and his rebellion expressed itself in sly satire and parody. But he could not escape it. It was an element in his life, through childhood and beyond. His siblings, particularly Selina his eldest sister and Frances (Fanny) who was eight years his junior, were both ardent evangelicals. Of his two favourite younger sisters, Hannah married another evangelical, Charles Trevelyan, who was as earnest as Zachary and just as pious. What marks Macaulay's divergence from the family's religious practice was not outward action but private reading. He began in his teens to acquire that astonishing acquaintance with English and continental fiction and drama, which appears in the essays. Of this Zachary knew only the fiction. Macaulay did not tell him he went to the theatre; indeed his intimate knowledge of plays from Sophocles to Sheridan may have been got largely from reading; but in his journal he mentions many actors' lives in a way which suggests that he was also a regular theatregoer. The letters only record one serious tiff between father and son, over a report from a fellow-undergraduate which reached Zachary, that Tom was a 'novel reader', and this the latter denied. In fact Zachary's main fault in his son's eyes was not interference but being sparing of praise. He never exercised the tyranny which Robert Smith exercised over his sons, partly because his wife Selina always shielded her children from their father's wrath, and partly because in 1826 Zachary's business failed, and Thomas in a few years found himself the only breadwinner.

Because they were so gentle and insinuating, so inseparable from domestic affection, I think the religious influences on Macaulay's outlook were profound. He never openly criticized the Christian faith, so it is not easy to know what exactly he believed. I doubt if he believed in the afterlife or the divinity of Christ. He went along with Hume and Gibbon on the miracles of the early Church and like Gibbon wrote of the Middle Ages as a time of superstition and intellectual stagnation, but he was far from being a rationalist or a Voltairean. In fact in his attitude to the French *philosophes* he followed Burke, whom he once called 'the greatest man since Milton'. Quite early in his reviewing for the *Edinburgh* we find him transferring Burke's charges against the French *philosophes* to his own contemporaries in England, the followers of Bentham and James Mill. It was Burke's interpretation of the English Revolution of 1688 which provided the framework of the political argument of the *History of England.* And as Burke taught a whole generation of English writers to revere the past and distrust radical plans for the regeneration of society, so it is not surprising to find in Macaulay's articles and speeches a deep distrust of radical agitators and writers from Tom Paine to the Chartists. On the Church of England he was a moderate. Doctrinally



he was closer to Dissent; but he disliked Biblical fundamentalism in all forms. He also disliked the Romish leanings of the Tractarians and he called Newman's Tract XC 'the quintessence of Jesuitism'. To call him a Broad Churchman would be broadly true, but it would not catch the quality of his interest in religion. His Christianity was not muscular or earnest, but intellectual and aloof. He was a keen reader of theology and a sharp connoisseur of sermons. Above all, he liked his clergy to be serious, intellectual and high-minded like Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, or H.H. Milman, the Dean of St Paul's. He never said so, but we may reasonably infer that he found Sydney Smith too high-spirited, too Falstaffian and too irreverent. That is what he meant when he said, 'it was not as a priest that he shone'.

But it is in their differences on education that one sees the differences between the two men widen to a gulf. It is well known that Sydney suffered Winchester in one of its bleakest periods. Some of his most passionate writing is against the public schools, their miserable living conditions, their bullying, their absurd preoccupation with physical prowess, their unimaginative concentration on Latin and Greek. Plainly there was no refuge for him from the austerities of school in a kind and understanding family. New College was not much better. There the austerity was made worse by intellectual torpor and abundant drink. Sydney had escaped to Edinburgh before Oxford had reformed its curriculum, and he looked on his time both at Winchester and New College as a period of misery and bondage. But at least it was a misery that threw him on his own resources, and one could say that those resources remained fresh, unpedantic and untrammelled by any academic preconceptions. He had had an education in two demanding languages, which if they do nothing else, teach verbal fluency and a wide vocabulary, demand considerable capacity for systematic thought, and leave a confidence that even the most forbidding subjects can be mastered. He was not, as some specialists are, ill-fitted to attempt anything else. He was certainly not burdened, as we shall see Macaulay was, by the weight of other people's expectations, by a reputation which he had to enhance if he was not to be thought a failure, or by a conceit at successes won in a restricted circle, which the outside world could not appreciate. His descriptions of his work as a country clergyman at Foston show that he could turn his hand to anything -- except perhaps music.

By contrast Macaulay's education is a measure of the influence for good of the evangelical revival. His mother was an experienced teacher before her marriage, and Zachary seems to have had the Scottish view that the heir should get the education and his siblings be taught at home. Actually the boys all had formal schooling, while the girls were all taught by their mother. But of the boys only Tom and John went to university. Tom was prepared by a Mr Preston, whose school at Little Shelford was a small establishment concentrating on godliness and

good learning. When he went up to Trinity he was already well grounded in Latin and Greek, and unlike Sydney's contemporaries, he loved both classical languages. Greek in fact, and Greek literature (which remained his ideal, against which he always judged the literary efforts of writers in other languages) became for him the counterpoise to his father's ambitions for him. Zachary hoped his eldest son would succeed Wilberforce and lead the abolitionist movement and he watched with apprehension Tom's immersion in the pagan classics, not merely because they turned him away from Scripture, but because his devotion to them implied a preference for literature over active life. On one occasion the boy compared Napoleon and Homer. Napoleon, he said, did no more 'than force the often reluctant service of a few thousand hands for ten or twelve years'; but Homer was 'the man who through six and twenty centuries has influenced the feelings, interested the sympathies, governed and fixed the standard of taste of vast and enlightened empires'. This divided allegiance between politics and literature and particularly between the modern world and the classical, runs through Macaulay's life. And on the whole literature wins. This is where the 'book in breeches' tag is, I'm afraid, lamentably uninformative.

## IV

Macaulay's precocity meant that from an early age he was on display, pointed at and talked about for his wonderful literary composition, his erudition and his memory. But what his parents fostered and made allowances for caused him great difficulties in school and college. Like John Stuart Mill, he was exempted from the exercises and field sports, which other rich men's sons took for granted. There is no record that he ever played a team game. Unlike Mill, he never regretted it. He only rode a horse twice in his life, once in North Wales and once in Kerry. When, as a minister, he was asked by Queen Victoria to join her in a ride, he replied, 'If your Majesty wishes me to ride, you must order an elephant.' He was, it is true, a prodigious walker, but this did not arrest his coronary problems: he was a prodigious eater as well. But exercise for its own sake did not appeal to him. Education was for him cerebral, not a physical process. He looked on an undergraduate friend of his nephew's who was about to climb Mont Blanc as completely stupid. He was expected to compete with his contemporaries and win prizes for feats of classical composition and debating. But this seems only to have increased his isolation. He had been accustomed (again unlike Mill) to mix with other children from an early age and to exercise his dominance with his superior knowledge and sharp tongue. He made them play at Homer but, it was noticed, kept the role of Achilles to himself. He could always command attention. What he found hard was to make friends. In college he was always on the stretch, living up to his reputation for recondite learning and sardonic humour. But he could not be himself. For that, he had to turn back to his family, who were the only people who



appreciated him for his own sake. As this family diminished, it was not replaced by friends from outside. He also relied on his family, not just for love and praise but also for providing the comforts of home.

To this domestic dependency was added an emotional complication. As his Cambridge career developed and with it an estrangement from his father, he found allies in his mother and more importantly in his two youngest sisters. Hannah was ten years his junior, Margaret two years younger still. What began as playful instruction of an elder brother developed into the most important emotional relationships of his life. He literally could not do without them. He had no such feeling for Selina (b.1802) or Jean (b. 1804) or Frances (b.1808). Selina became a martyr to migraine. Frances was entirely loyal to her father's beliefs and she became the maid of all work after her mother's death in 1831. She looked after Zachary in his last illness. After 1831 Hannah and Margaret became the focus of Tom's emotional life. Margaret's marriage in 1832 caused him great grief. But he took Hannah to India with him to run his household. There he suffered the double shock of her marriage to Trevelyan, and then the news of Margaret's death in childbirth. He was so distraught that Hannah and Trevelyan shortened their honeymoon to be with him. For the rest of his stay in India they lived in the same house. After his return to England he managed to live close enough to the Trevelyans to see them every day. He spoke of their children as his children, showering them with gifts and sharing their lessons. When Trevelyan accepted the Governorship of Madras in 1858 the prospect of losing Hannah certainly shortened his life. He actually died late in December 1859 soon after Hannah had told him, by letter, that she would be joining Trevelyan in India in February the following year.

This strangely stunted private life is the hidden underside of the brilliant man of letters who was 'lionized' in the salons and the clubs. The man who poured out his knowledge with such force and clarity and who seemed to know every author and every historic period, remained emotionally a schoolboy. He had had a short political career and in an era of aristocratic amateurism in politics he had acquitted himself well. But he had hankered after a life of writing and in 1848 he returned to it for good. For the last decade of his life he lived in London, making short excursions to the country and abroad when the city air threatened his health. Wherever he went he took a box of books. At home he read a book while dressing, at meals and on his walks. Abroad, or on his holiday in Britain, he did the same. He particularly loved re-reading the books of his youth: the Latin and Greek authors he loved; the dramatists many of whom he knew by heart; and quantities of fiction. On the whole the reading of them took more time than his reading for the *History* of which he once said that he wrote it only when in the mood. On the Isle of Wight for example, in September 1850, he read on his walks the plays of

Plautus, the lives of Plutarch and (for evening meals) Paolo Sarpi's *History of the Council of Trent.* The journal he kept in his last decade is most meticulous in recording his reading. It is less full on the people he meets, although it makes it clear that he was a frequent guest at the best houses in London. He is less and less interested in political gossip. He records few discussions and when he does, it is with some such phrase as 'I fancied I had the upper hand.' He sees close friends and former political colleagues at breakfast parties. They do not include many men of letters though Thackeray features quite often. Macaulay preferred his novels to the novels of Dickens because Thackeray was a gentleman and Dickens was not. Most of his visitors were aristocratic or politically influential people. At one breakfast where the guests included Lord Lansdowne, the Earl of Carlisle, Viscount Mahon and Lord Glenelg, Macaulay noted complacently that the only grade of nobility not represented was that of a Duke. One is reminded of Hannah More's comment when she watched him fifty years earlier, 'He is like a prince who refused to play with anyone but kings.'

This inner man was hidden from most of his acquaintances by a forceful vocabulary and a dismissive dogmatism, distressing to friends and terrifying to strangers. Few people guessed at the sensibility which the manner protected. One who did guess was Walter Bagehot in an essay written in 1856. Bagehot did not know Macaulay personally, but he sniffed a weakness in the historian's confession of his love of books. In his essay on Bacon, written during his Indian exile, Macaulay had said that books were more reliable friends than people: 'These are the old friends who are never seen with new faces, who are the same in wealth and in poverty, in glory and in obscurity. With the dead there is no rivalry. In the dead there is no change. Plato is never sullen. Cervantes is never petulant. Demosthenes never comes unseasonably. Dante never stays too long. No difference of political opinion can alienate Cicero. No heresy can excite the horror of Bossuet.' Bagehot's comment is that most people have to associate with their fellow-men and cannot afford the luxury of living in books: 'Only a mind impassive to our daily life, unalive to bores and evils, to joys and sorrows, incapable of the deepest sympathies, a prey to print, could imagine it. The mass of men have stronger ties and warmer hopes. The exclusive devotion to books tires. We are required to love and hate, to act and live.' He goes on to say that Macaulay in his *History* thinks too little about how men actually behave, and too much about how they would be looked on by posterity. 'He regards existing men as painful prerequisites of great grandchildren.' It's a striking phrase but not quite fair. It is true that in the *History* Macaulay is more inclined to notice someone if he has written a poem or a play or a book, and also that the vivacity of his characters, whether types such as the country clergy or the gentry in the famous third chapter, or famous individuals like Shaftesbury or Marlborough, is drawn from other men's creations, from the work of Restoration dramatists, from the *Spectator*, Fielding and Smollett, or the satires



of Dryden and Pope. But the fact remains that in his inner life he was a man of tender susceptibility. One has only to read his anguished letters on the loss of Margaret, or the record of lesser crises such as the time when his niece was expecting her first child and Macaulay could neither read nor sleep for worry, to realize that he could sympathize with others. What Bagehot noticed was the hard arrogance of the essays, which are written with the same overbearing fluency that had struck Greville and Mrs Brookfield. He did not notice, because he could not know what we know, that Macaulay was essentially a lonely man, whose reliance on books was a reflection and extension of his social unease. With the dead there might be no rivalry, with the living, for him, there always was. Only within his family could he be himself, give and receive affection unselfconsciously, accept advice, unbend, play, and be a boy again. It was because this soft inner sensibility was so at odds with the late-Victorian ideal of manliness that George Otto Trevelyan, when he came to write his uncle's life, decided to play it down. His Macaulay is a vigorous, manly extrovert, whose reading and scholarship were not pursued from nostalgia but developed for practical use — for polemical journalism and parliamentary debate. It was Trevelyan who unwittingly gave support to Matthew Arnold's charge that Macaulay was the 'apostle of the Philistines', a man of cocksure habit, his prose a strident counterpart to the clangorous progress of the first railway age. Undoubtedly Macaulay was in part a materialist and a utilitarian. But this is not the whole man, and certainly not the most endearing aspect of him. As a matter of record, even those 'flashes of silence' became in his last decade more frequent than the overbearing monologues, as the historian increasingly avoided society and tried, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to finish his life-work, the *History of England.*

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**Keeping Up with the Hollands**

Claire Tomalin's *Samuel Pepys: The Unequalled Self* (2002), brilliant winner of this year's Whitbread Prize, recalls that the great Diary (as first published in 1825) did not win favour with Sydney Smith who 'told Lady Holland it was nonsense'. Writing to her on 20 June 1826 he confesses: 'I have been reading Pepys not without some indignation at being obliged to read such nonsense merely because yourself and Allen and other persons have read it, and I must not fall behind.' 'More significantly,' writes Tomalin, 'Macaulay enthused, saying he felt he knew every inch of Whitehall from the diaries - "I go in at Hans Holbein's gate and come out through the matted gallery" - and he used Pepys as a source for his *History of England.*'

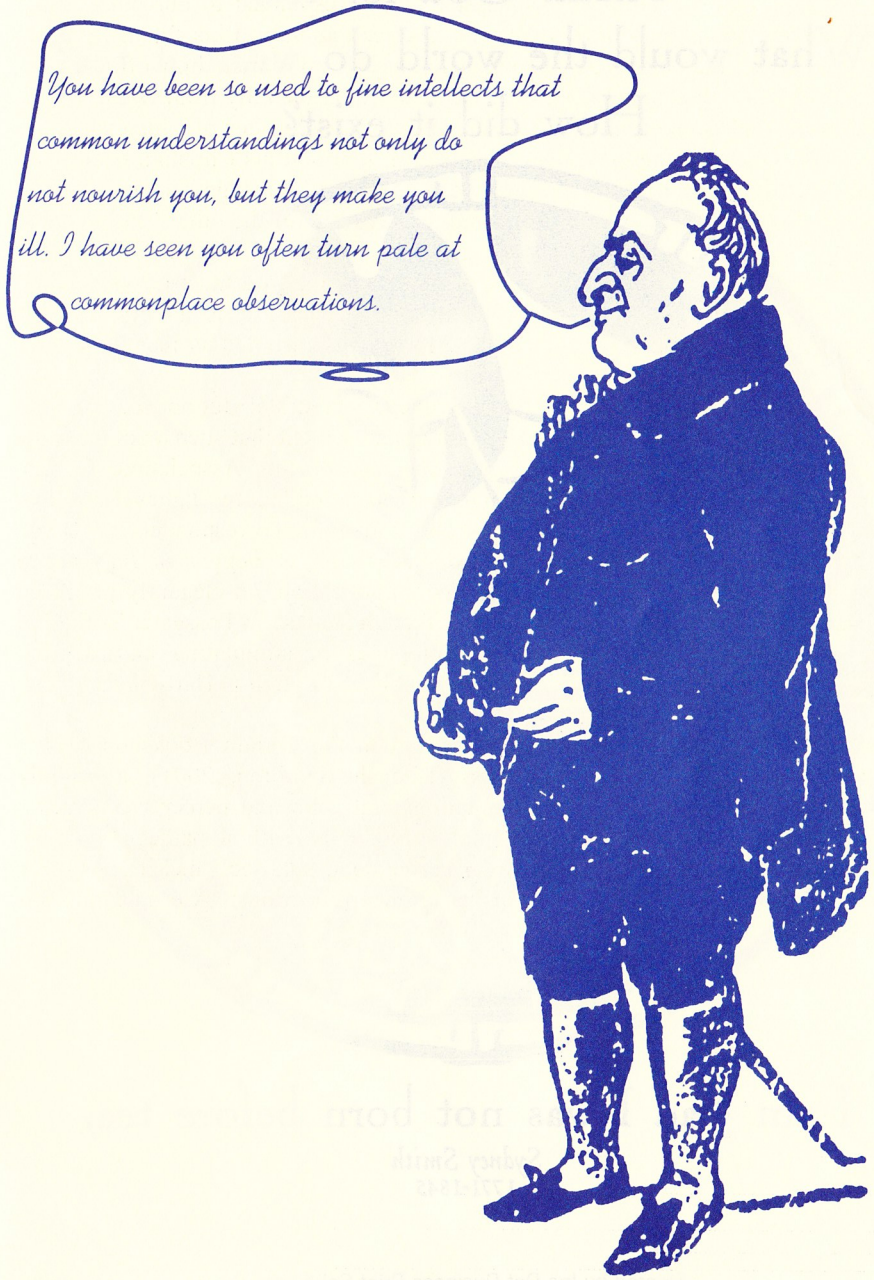
**Continued from our last....**
Our member Philip Mottram of Doncaster kindly responded to our piece about commonplace books by telling us that he has been adding to his for many years and that it was the 'eminently quotable Sydney' who started him off. 'It now contains some 48 quotations from him, well exceeding the tally from Oscar Wilde, Mark Twain and Samuel Johnson.' Philip offered six favourites of which we quote two: 'Pray remember me to Samuel Rogers. Tell him that his Christian name only is a substantive, that his surname is a verb, and that both together assert a fact which makes him the envy of one sex and the favourite of the other.' Philip adds: 'Perhaps it was prudent to get someone else to deliver the message!...But the quote I warm to is: '...to enjoy the pleasures of doing nothing you must do something. Idle people know nothing of the pleasures of idleness; it is a very difficult accomplishment to acquire in perfection.' More, please, from other members.

A commonplace book that doesn't quote Sydney? Incredible! But not so. Our Man in Combe Florey would, we feel, derive quirky amusement that such a volume now exists — published, what's more, by a member of this Association, George Ramsden: *George Lyttelton's Commonplace Book,* edited by James Ramsden. George Lyttelton, of course, was mentor and unflagging correspondent of ('I say Rupert!') Hart-Davis whose own commonplace book, *A Beggar in Purple*, we drew upon last time. George Ramsden's new publication, an elegantly produced hardback bargain at £15 (get it from Stone Trough Books, 38 Fossgate, York YO1 9TF - £1.50 more if posted), offers 160 pages of stimulating entries from Lyttelton's collection, together with some unpublished Lyttelton Hart-Davis letters.

And still they come. A recent and jolly find in the Oxfam Bookshop was *A Commonplace Book* by Alec Guinness (Hamish Hamilton, 2001), a brightly jacketed and designed selection of quotations and calm and perceptive personal observations. (Sydney gets in once, not surprisingly with a passage from an *Edinburgh Review* article on 'Catholics'.) Throughout, Sir Alec's mellifluous voice echoes from the pages. Here's one of his briefest reflections: 'Are halcyon days only in winter? I think so.' Can't you hear him saying it?



To Lady Holland, 26 August 1844, from Combe Florey - 'so dull a place':



Thank God for tea!
What would the world do without tea?
How did it exist?

I am glad I was not born before tea.

*Sydney Smith*
*1771-1845*

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