

**A MEMOIR OF THE REVEREND
SYDNEY SMITH. BY HIS
DAUGHTER LADY HOLLAND, WITH
A SELECTION FROM HIS LETTERS;
IN TWO VOLUMES, VOL. I. [1855]**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649747634

A Memoir of the Reverend Sydney Smith. By His Daughter Lady Holland, with a Selection from His Letters; In Two Volumes, Vol. I. [1855] by Sydney Smith & Saba Holland & Mrs. Sarah Austin

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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SYDNEY SMITH & SABA HOLLAND & MRS. SARAH AUSTIN

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OF THE

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BY HIS DAUGHTER,

LADY HOLLAND.

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A SELECTION FROM HIS LETTERS,

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VOL. I.

NEW YORK:
HARPER & BROTHERS, PUBLISHERS,
FRANKLIN SQUARE

1855.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

SYDNEY SMITH'S Life: he who opens this book under the expectation of reading in it curious adventures, important transactions, or public events, had better close the volume, for none of these things will he find therein.

Nothing can be more thoroughly private and eventless than the narrative I am about to give; yet I feel myself, and I have reason to believe there are many who will feel with me, that this Life is not therefore uninteresting or unimportant: for, though circumstances over which my father had no control forbade his taking that active share in the affairs of his country, for which his talents and his character so eminently fitted him, yet neither circumstances nor power could suppress these talents, or subdue and enfeeble that character; and I believe I may assert, without danger of contradiction, that by them, and the use he has made of them, he has earned for himself a place among the great men of his time and country.

Such being the case, however, his talents, and the employment of them, are alone before the world. This is but half the picture, and I believe few who have known so much do not wish to know more.

The mode of life, the heart, the habits, the thoughts and feelings, the conversation, the home, the occupations of such a man—all, in short, which can give life and reality to the picture—are as yet wanting; and it is to endeavor to supply this want that I have ventured to undertake this task.

It is always more difficult to write the life of a pri-

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vate than of a public man. There are many things likewise which make that of my father a peculiarly difficult one to delineate; and I should shrink from the task I have undertaken, from the fear of not doing it justice, had not death made such fearful havoc among his early contemporaries, and those best fitted to do justice to his memory; and age, business, or health, placed insuperable obstacles in the way of all those abler pens which both my mother and I had once hoped might undertake it.

I therefore, from these causes, and in accordance with my mother's most earnest desire, repeated in her will, that some record of his virtues should be written, venture to give to the public these recollections of my father, which I had previously been collecting for some years solely for myself and my children, together with numerous contributions from various friends.

With these materials, illustrating the selection of his letters, which my friend Mrs. Austin has kindly undertaken to edit, I trust to lay before the public such a record of my father's character, as a son, a clergyman, a father, a husband, and a friend, as may be deemed by them not unworthy of the reputation he has already acquired for talent and honesty by his writings.

If I succeed, I shall have accomplished the object I have most at heart. If I fail, I trust that with many my motive will be some excuse; and that they will attribute it to the inability and inexperience of his advocate, and not to the weakness of the cause.

In giving these annals of my father's life, the object has been, as much as possible, to make him speak for himself, even where (as in some few instances) a portion of them have already appeared before the public; as these extracts serve to weave together the rest of the narrative, and are of course far better than any thing I could put in their place.

The points which can alone justify the publication of these recollections and letters are, that they shall neither hurt the living, injure the dead, or impair the reputation of their author. These objects we have endeavored most strenuously to keep in view. There is little in the whole work that could give pain, even if every particular were understood. Most of the persons alluded to have been long since dead, and the allusions forgotten. Yet, should there be, in either the letters or the narrative, any anecdote accidentally preserved which may meet the eye of those who, from intimacy with him, or from having been present at the scene described, could lift the veil that has been purposely thrown over it, let me here entreat them, if they loved my father in life, and honor his memory in death, never, by their explanations, to make the pen of Sydney Smith do in death what it never did in life—inflict undeserved pain on any human being.

I must add, with respect to the letters collected from various sources, that it is a remarkable fact, as testifying the estimation in which my father was held by his contemporaries, that there are among them many small notes merely containing some trifling message or an invitation to dinner; things without the slightest merit or value in themselves, yet carefully folded up, dated, and preserved with the greatest care for years by those who had received them from him. This little trait speaks, I think, volumes. From these letters Mrs. Austin has selected those most calculated to interest the reader, or in any way to illustrate my father's feelings and character, without special reference to their talent only.

It will be seen in the narrative, and, in justice to my father, it ought not to be forgotten, that he entered the Church out of consideration for, and in obedience to, the wishes of his father; and like his friend, Dr. Stan-

ley, Bishop of Norwich, with a strong natural bias toward another profession; so that, in his passage through life, he had often to exercise control over himself, and to make a struggle to do that which is comparatively easy to those who have embraced their profession from taste and inclination alone.

But having entered the Church from a sense of duty, I think the narrative will show that he made duty his guide through life; that he honored his profession, and was honored in it by those who had the best opportunities of observing him; that, ever ready to perform its humblest duties, he gathered (as he says) from the study of the Bible, that the highest duty of a clergyman was to calm religious hatreds, and spread religious peace and toleration; that in this labor of love he exerted himself from the time of his entering the Church to the hour of his death; and that he dreaded, as the greatest of all evils, that the "golden chain," which he describes as "reaching from earth to heaven," should be injured either by fanaticism or skepticism. Thus, lending himself to no extremes and no party in the Church, he endeavored through life to guard religion simple and pure, as we received it from the hand of God, and as it is taught in that Church to which he belonged.

It now only remains for me to express my thanks to those who have aided my task by their contributions, which I should gladly have done by name, had they not been too numerous. But it has been deeply gratifying to my feelings, and has given me courage to proceed, to find that all my father's oldest friends have been eager to assist me in my task, and have all, with very few exceptions, contributed something toward it. I trust they may not think I have misused their gifts, and, for the sake of the father, will receive with indulgence the efforts of his daughter to do fresh honor to his memory by chronicling his virtues.

This slight sketch of my father's life has passed through the ordeal of his private friends, and has been pronounced by them to present a faithful picture of his habits and character. The subject of it is of course so deeply interesting to me, that I can form no estimate of what it may be to others; but I am encouraged by these friends to believe that the life of an honest man honestly told, can never be without some value and interest to every one. In deference therefore to their opinions I now offer this Memoir to the public, with some additions and such corrections as I have been able to make; though I fear there may still remain many errors as to time, inevitable in a narrative written (as this is chiefly) from memory, and with but few data to guide me.

I do not however, I confess, offer this Memoir to the public without some anxiety; not from the fear of any honest opposition to my father's opinions, or censure of the imperfect manner in which I may have performed my task: these are of course open to criticism, and are fair and honorable objects of attack. But I am aware how easily the frank and fearless, because innocent, expressions of my father's conversation may be misunderstood and misrepresented, or the private feelings of my friends wounded, should there be any one ungenerous enough to do so. I will however trust that, as this Memoir has been written with the most earnest desire to tell the truth, but in doing so to avoid giving just cause of pain to any one, I shall meet with equal delicacy from the public; and shall find that any angry feelings which the bold, undisguised expression of my father's opinions during life may have formerly excited in the world, have been long since forgotten, or are buried in the grave of him whose loss I (may I not rather say, we all?) lament.

S. H.

London, May, 1855.

