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Paper

Thomas Southwood Smith – the Man (1788 – 1861)

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A friend of Southwood Smith's, John Stuart Mill, said in his famous 'Essay on Liberty' 'that the initiative of all wise and noble things comes and must come, from individuals, and generally at first from some one individual'. In the history of public health Edwin Chadwick is usually credited with this initiative, especially among medical men, and it was left to Graham Wallas, a historian who made a special study of the political economists of the early nineteenth century, to describe Southwood Smith as 'the intellectual father of our modern public health system' [1]. Another social historian, Professor Asa Briggs, in his 1946 Chadwick Lecture, consistently coupled the name of Southwood Smith with Chadwick in discussing the early history of the public health movement. Sir Arthur MacNalty, in his Fitzpatrick Lectures of 1946–7, was the first medical writer to hint at the true character of Smith's contribution, which was certainly not appreciated by Sir John Simon [2], Sir Benjamin Ward Richardson [3;**1**, xv–lxxiv], or Sir Malcolm Morris [4].

The overpowering Chadwick was still alive when Simon was writing, and documents, both printed and manuscript, have survived to remind us how quick Chadwick was to rebuke those who seemed to question the primary nature of his own role in any aspect of public health reform. Richardson was Chadwick's disciple and was unlikely to query his master's claims. Sir Malcolm Morris based his own accounts almost entirely on Simon, and all three have been the constant source for later historians of the movement.

A commemoration is not an occasion for controversy, even a historical one. Chadwick's great and lasting contributions to the making of modern England are self-evident and are unassailable, but they should not be allowed to obscure the equally great – if insufficiently recognized – contributions of Southwood Smith. Since

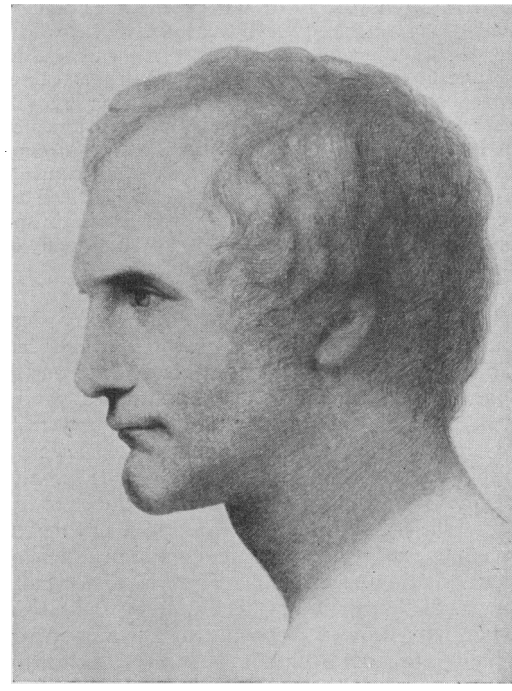

Fig 1 *Thomas Southwood Smith. A portrait drawn in 1842 by Margaret Gillies*

I first became interested in Southwood Smith about fifteen years ago I have been surprised that none of the many writers on the public health movement – and the medical writers above all – has seemed to ask himself how it was that Chadwick, this young and briefless barrister, suddenly emerged as some kind of 'medical genius'. Yet so accustomed are we to regard him in this light that a serious and learned historian could write, in the definitive biography of Chadwick published in 1952 [5, p 36], of Chadwick attending Jeremy Bentham during his last illness in 1832 and of how well he discharged the 'care and responsibility *for his patient*'.[1] Southwood Smith, who was Bentham's close

[1]My italics

friend and personal physician during the last twelve years of his life, is not even mentioned in this connexion. Is this not very strange?

There are a multitude of intriguing points like this which should have aroused the curiosity of any historian, medical or general, but the questions have never been asked and so the correct answers have never been found. There is, however, one fundamental question which has been asked, if only rhetorically, in an authoritative publication from which I should like to quote before closing this preamble. It is this:

> 'What, it may be asked, was Chadwick's "sanitary idea", the root-principle which inspired his life-work? It was, according to Richardson, "that man could by getting at first principles, and by aiming at causes which affect health, mould life altogether into its natural cast, and beat what had hitherto been accepted as fate by getting behind fate itself, and suppressing the forces which led up to it at their prime source". To this end, direct investigation on the spot into the removal of the preventable antecedents of disease and crime claimed his attention. . . . He dwelt on unity of purpose in the prevention of evil' [6].

This was indeed the origin of the 'sanitary idea' but this root-principle which inspired all Chadwick's life-work was not his own. It was in fact embodied in lectures by Southwood Smith delivered in Edinburgh between 1813 and 1815 (when Chadwick was a boy) and published in a popular and widely praised book in 1816. The beginning of the sanitary idea can be traced to the fact that Southwood Smith, after a change of religious belief, became a Unitarian minister before taking up medicine. There is no adequate record of that period of his life, and if I give to it what may seem a disproportionate amount of time it is because I think it essential to the history of 'the sanitary idea'. The only published biography, a personal memoir written by his granddaughter in 1898 [7], does not even name his parents and avoids mention of many things which are important to our understanding of the life and work of this very remarkable man and of his no less remarkable family.

Early Life and Training

Thomas Southwood Smith was born at Martock, near Yeovil, in Somerset on December 21, 1788. He was the son of William Smith, of Kingsbury, and Catherine Southwood, who were married at Martock on September 21, 1785 [8]. His parents were members of a strict sect of Calvinist dissenters and in 1798 they became very friendly with the Reverend William Blake, who in that year came to minister to the Presbyterian congregation in the neighbouring town of Crewkerne. He was to become a powerful influence in the life of the growing boy, directing his education, moulding his opinions and character, and, at a later stage, making a decisive intervention in a spiritual crisis which was to influence the whole of his life work [9, 10].

The Blakes were a well-known Somerset family. The minister's brother, Dr Malachai Blake, was one of the founders of the Somerset Hospital at Taunton, where his portrait still hangs in memory of his services to the sick in the town. Among their ancestors was the famous Admiral Blake who, before achieving his high place in Cromwell's navy, had taken part in the defence of Bristol against the Royalists and taken Taunton from the King's forces. It was a family with a long tradition of dissent and independent thought as well as public service and it was in this tradition that the young Southwood Smith was now instructed. His parents had always thought him destined for the ministry and their intention was reinforced by Blake's approval and warm encouragement. He wrote about the boy in such glowing terms to Dr John Ryland, the Principal of the Baptist Academy, Bristol, that Smith was called to an interview late in 1802, before his fourteenth birthday, although the average age of the students at entry was 17 or 18. The Academy was an old foundation, dating from 1679, being an offshoot of the Baptist Chapel established in Broadmead, Bristol, in 1643, and supported by prosperous merchants and city officials. To enable young men of marked ability but limited means to study for their ministry they had established scholarships known as Broadmead benefactions, one or two of which were awarded each year. In spite of his extreme youth, Smith was unanimously awarded this scholarship, and because of it the grant was awarded for more than double the usual term [11].

To-day the Academy, now the Bristol Baptist College, occupies a handsome new building, but its large library, which has many old and rare books, still consists largely of the eighteenth century works and editions which it contained when Smith took up his residence there in 1803. As a Broadmead scholar, great things were expected of him and he read long and assiduously, not only in theology, but also in history, the classics and philosophy. The Academy also prided itself upon the possession of a most unusual department – a museum of antiquities, natural history and natural philosophy. This was considerably more than a 'cabinet of curiosities' and filled a large room, having been set up by one of the tutors who had formerly been on the staff of the British Museum, and enriched by the bequest of the collections of Dr Gifford and Dr Llewellin. There one can find to-day scientific apparatus dating from that time,

including one of the enormous glass spheres such as Thomas Beddoes employed in his experiments on gases in his Pneumatic Institution at Bristol.

If the graduates of the Baptist Academy went out into the world ignorant of all but Calvinist theology it would be entirely their own fault, for even the older universities at that time could not have offered greater incentives to learning. But, with all the history and poetry and natural philosophy, Calvinist theology was their chief study and since it must have coloured their whole view of man and the universe, as well as leaving an ineradicable mark on their character, it would be as well to glance at the creed in which Southwood Smith was being so competently instructed and which he was preparing himself to preach to his fellows. In its origins it goes far beyond Calvin, as far as St Paul indeed, or rather to St Augustine's interpretation of St Paul. That great father of the early Church taught that man, ever since the Fall, is born in sin and deserves eternal damnation. Only by the operation of the Divine grace can he ever abstain from sin. God's grace can operate only among the baptized; all others, even infants, will go to hell and suffer eternal torments. By God's will, certain of the baptized are destined for heaven. These are the Elect, living witnesses of God's mercy, just as the hosts of the damned are witnesses of His justice. This was the belief which Calvin revived and which was taken over by the Reformed churches. While such a creed could give great confidence to the elect and endow them with uncommon energy and purpose, it needs little imagination to understand what a burden it must have been on the mind of a sensitive, idealistic, and intelligent youth such as Southwood Smith. Brought up in the conviction of sin, his adolescence must have been tormented by that sense of guilt which weighed so heavily upon the poet Byron, who was also nursed in Calvinist theology, that his whole life was haunted by the certainty of damnation. It is strange to reflect that Byron was to find comfort and reassurance in a book written only a few years later by the boy who was now caught up in the same spiritual struggle which the poet was never to resolve. This was the great decade of the Romantic poets, and Wordsworth (who also praised Smith's first book) and Coleridge were powerful influences on the young student.

Coleridge believed that it was God's love, and not His justice, which was the support and hope of man, and nothing was beyond the reach of His love. Was not Coleridge himself a Unitarian preacher? And in the Unitarian chapel in Lewin's Mead, only a stone's throw from the Baptist chapel in Broadmead, was to be found Coleridge's friend and benefactor, the minister John Prior Estlin [12, p 218 (note)]. On Blake's advice, Smith discussed his problems with this good and wise man. It was indeed a step into the opposing camp, for the Unitarians held to that Arian heresy which denied the Trinity and saw in Jesus not the Son of God but the best and greatest of men. For this reason they were called 'humanitarians', a word which, from its association with their benevolent social causes, only later acquired its modern connotation. It was the belief for which Servetus had been burned at the stake by Calvin and was the antithesis of all that Smith had been trained to believe, for it denied salvation to none, whether he be Christian, Jew, Mohammedan or Buddhist. The connexion between social progress and an apparently remote theological belief was clearly understood by men like Estlin. Discussing the idea of eternal damnation, a creed accepted almost universally in his day, when it was even the official doctrine of the Church of England, he reminds us that the vast majority of all who have ever lived are so predestined. 'I know', he wrote, 'that we are apt to *overlook* the fate of this *immense multitude;* and a most baneful effect upon the human mind, upon all the institutions of society, and particularly upon penal jurisprudence, has this overlooking of what *others*, even the majority, suffer' [12, p 218 (note)].

Smith's own compassionate nature responded immediately to these new ideas of the possible 'restoration' or reformation of the wicked and a vast new field of work opened up before him. He tells us that much of the interest and zeal with which he carried out his later work sprang from this episode in his life. Abandoning what he later came to call 'that terrible doctrine', which had become 'horrible and repugnant' to him, he informed Dr Ryland of his changed views and left the Academy [11]. During his five years' residence there he had been accustomed to visit the house of a certain Mr Read, a large manufacturer in Bristol and one of the supporters of the College. There he had come to know, and eventually to love, Read's daughter Anne. Both were strict Calvinists and it says much for Smith's character – and for their understanding and appreciation of it – that they supported him throughout what must have been an ordeal for a young man of 19. On May 25, 1808, he and Anne Read were married at Clifton [13]. His own parents were less tolerant. Deeply shocked at what they considered as the betrayal of all their hopes and beliefs, they disowned him utterly and forbade him to return to his home. They were never to see each other again [7, p 8].

The next few years of his life are not well documented. He was an eloquent and thoughtful preacher and his sermons were so popular that many of them were published. From them we know that he was for a short time minister of the

Unitarian chapel at Taunton, where he preached a farewell sermon on October 18, 1808. In the following year his first child, Caroline, was born, and in 1810 a second daughter, Emily. The death of his father-in-law at this time probably removed financial support from the young family, and it had scarcely recovered from this blow when, in 1812, his wife died of fever, leaving him, at the age of 24, a widower with two small children to care for. Casting about for a suitable profession, he probably discussed his problems again with his friends Blake and Estlin. Estlin's own son, John Bishop Estlin, a former student of Guy's and a friend of Beddoes, had in that very year founded in Bristol the ophthalmic dispensary which is now the Bristol Eye Hospital. Blake's brother was a prominent doctor in Taunton. There was already in Edinburgh a very small congregation of Unitarians and arrangements were made for Smith, with financial support from the Unitarian Fund, to go to Edinburgh to minister to this congregation and simultaneously to take the course in medicine at the university [14].

Edinburgh and the Origins of 'The Sanitary Idea'

He set out for Scotland in the autumn of 1812, leaving the two children in the care of their mother's relations, and founded the Scottish Unitarian Association, of which he became first secretary, and minister to the congregation which met in Skinner's Hall, Edinburgh. At first it was uphill work against strong opposition and after a lonely winter he returned to Bristol to take Caroline, the elder of his daughters, then aged 4, back with him to Edinburgh, a journey which took many days in a sailing vessel and on which they met with a terrible storm. He must have been an unusual figure among the medical students of his day, who included among their number Richard Bright, Thomas Addison, and Robert Knox. In 1813 he began to give fortnightly evening lectures as well as his usual sermons in Skinner's Hall, and these attracted so much notice that the numbers who attended increased rapidly from 20 or 30 to 200, and on special occasions 500. His preaching, and the subjects which he discussed, began to be noticed in the newspapers. In the summer of the same year he made a long and exhausting missionary journey through the Highlands and in the following year his regular congregation had grown so much that it moved to a larger hall in Carruber's Close [15]. There were many demands that his evening lectures on 'divine restitution' should be published and in 1816 they appeared in a volume entitled 'Illustrations of the Divine Government' [9]. It at once established his reputation as an original and eloquent writer. The eloquence being that of the trained pulpit speaker is not perhaps to the modern taste, but the clear exposition of a difficult theme, the discussion, often for the first time, of ideas which were later to become of the greatest importance, and the writer's own appreciation of the implications of his arguments make it a remarkable performance. It was widely read and commented upon and several editions were called for. In the preface to the third edition, published in 1822, he wrote, 'I have considered, separately and in detail, the several classes of evil, namely, natural and moral evil, and the evils which have hitherto been found inseparable from the social state, namely poverty, dependence and servitude. . . . There is a closer connection than there might at first sight seem between these subjects and those [that is, medicine and sanitary reform] which now much more exclusively occupy my attention: the real end of both is the same; for the object of each alike is to extend the knowledge, to mitigate the suffering and to increase the happiness of mankind; and without doubt that is the great business of life.'

The influences in his book are obvious, for although Smith was in advance of his time his ideas sprang from his own response to the great intellectual ferment of which the establishment of the United States and the French Revolution were but the outward expression, and are imbued with that 'Nonconformist conscience' which was to provide the driving power of nineteenth century liberalism. Arnold Toynbee claims that 'the historical link between sixteenth century Calvinism and twentieth century Communism is nineteenth century Liberalism', and it is perhaps not so paradoxical as it seems at first sight that a man who had rejected Calvinism should, in a book which denounces that creed, claim divine authority for a deterministic 'Law of Progress – that kind of improvement which can be measured by statistics'. Fifty years later – and even up to the outbreak of the First World War – the natural inevitability of progress was almost universally accepted, but at the time when Smith was writing, in the year of Waterloo, it was the existing social order which was regarded as predestined and immutable. The poor and the wretched, sinners and criminals, were not only debarred from all the amenities of life on earth but were condemned to eternal punishment hereafter. Revolting with all his being against the second of these 'judgments', Smith argued that if this cannot be true then there was no moral sanction for maintaining a social system which reflects it. In his own words, 'What *can* be improved *must* be improved and *will* be improved until man in society reflects the benevolent purpose of the Almighty' [9, p 95]. Here, and not in Chadwick's paraphrase about 'getting behind

fate' is the origin of what has been called 'Chadwick's sanitary idea and the root-principle of his life work'. Smith discusses the disease and misery attendant upon poverty which is *preventable* and should therefore be prevented. He acclaims John Howard as one of his earliest heroes and pays particular attention to the treatment of criminals, pointing out the religious basis for much vindictive cruelty in the law. It is impossible to discuss this book at length here, but to give some idea of its character I will quote a striking passage where he declares that the doctrine of 'universal restitution' which he is trying to establish

'discloses a principle which, were it properly felt and invariably regarded in the affairs of life, would have a happier effect on society than any other opinion which has ever engaged the attention of man. It leads to a distinction, which is but beginning to be observed, even by the intelligent and enlightened which . . . will alter astonishingly the moral condition of the world. It leads to an exact distinction between the criminal and the crime. While it inspires us with abhorrence of the offence, it softens the heart with compassion for the unhappy condition of the offender, induces us to do everything in our power to change it, to give him better views and better feelings. . . . Could it but enter the heart of every legislator . . . prisons would not be hotbeds of vice, in which the youthful offender grows into the hardened criminal and the want of shame succeeds the abolition of principle, but *hospitals of the mind*, in which its moral disorder is removed by the application of effectual remedies' [9, pp 231–2].

He argues against views and theories which 'tend to degrade man in the estimation of man and represent him as too cheap. This low estimation of the value of a human being', he writes, 'this contempt of human nature, is fatal to human improvement and is at the foundation of the enormous errors of statesmen and the gigantic crimes of warriors; they could not squander life and violate happiness as they do, did they judge of man as he is' [12, pp 171–2].

Forty years later, when he was approaching the end of a struggle which had taken him into scenes of such abject wretchedness that even a saint might have despaired, Smith looked back on this book and 'thought that he had passed too lightly over the sea of misery and crime that there is in the world; he thought there was too much of the bright hopefulness of youth about it'. Bright hopefulness there may be, but it is not the crass optimism of a youth ignorant and ill informed. The brightness is a reflection of his own spirit; there is a serenity, a warm humanity and a calm wisdom which one would not expect in so young a man.

It was doubtless his insight into human nature which attracted him towards the study of mental illness during his medical studies and on August 1, 1816, he graduated MD with a thesis on the injurious effects of diseases on the mind. He was apparently still deeply interested in this subject nine years later, when he wrote a long review article dealing with the physical causes of mental illness for the *Westminster Review* [16]. His views seem to be well in advance of his time and are worthy of attention in the study of British psychiatry. On August 5, 1816, he wrote to a friend, the Hon D G Halliburton:

'I leave Edinburgh this week . . . with much regret, for I have found friends here whom I shall ever remember with respect, affection, and gratitude. I go to Yeovil, a little town in the west of England, where it is my intention to take charge of a congregation and at the same time to practise medicine. This double capacity of physician to body and soul does not appear to me to be incompatible, but how the plan will succeed can be determined only by the test of experience. My expectations are not very sanguine, but neither are my desires ambitious' [*see* 7, p 15].

He rapidly assumed a leading role among his co-religionists in his native county and his services as a preacher were much in demand. Several of his sermons were published, the most notable of them being his funeral sermon on the tragic death in 1818 of the penal reformer Sir Samuel Romilly, who had committed suicide following the death of his wife, an event which clearly affected Smith deeply. Yet another, more personal, event was to make this year a memorable one for him. A young widowed minister with two children was a fair target for all the match-makers in the countryside and all his friends persuaded him that a second marriage was advisable. The senior officers of the Unitarian Society also agreed that marriage would extend the usefulness of a man who had already shown himself worthy of admission to their councils, and it was Mary, the daughter of their Treasurer, John Christie of Hackney, who became his second wife and bore him a son, Herman, in 1819. Accustomed to life in the capital and ambitious for the advancement of her husband, Mrs Southwood Smith urged him to leave Yeovil and settle in London, where all kinds of opportunities both as minister and physician awaited him. Early in 1820 they left the west country for ever and settled at Trinity Square near the Tower and near the central office of the Unitarian Fund in Mark Lane.

The Bentham Circle

It was doubtless among his fellow Unitarians that he first began to establish his practice in London. He walked the wards of one of the London hospitals – probably Guy's or St Thomas's – for a year, and on June 25, 1821, he was admitted a Licentiate of the Royal College of Physicians, the equivalent of the modern Membership [17]. At

the same time he quickly took his place among the group of social reformers and political economists who had gathered around the ageing Jeremy Bentham. Among these were the two Mills, father and son, Grote, Wakefield, Francis Place, Parkes, John Bowring, and others. Smith's work – if only for its discussion of the penal laws – would certainly have been known to them all, and there may already have existed a personal link between Smith and Bentham through Romilly.

They were a formidable group and Bentham drew on the varied talents and experience of all of them to carry on his work of political innovation with results which were only to become apparent after his death. The great task of his last years was the framing of a vast 'constitutional code' covering every aspect of central and local government. When he came to consider that branch of administration concerning public health and the prevention of disease there can be no doubt to whom he turned for expert advice. Smith was the only medical man in the group at that time. He had published his preliminary views on the subject ten years earlier and was now acquiring much practical experience and first-hand information as physician to the London Fever Hospital, and to the Eastern Dispensary and the Jews' Hospital in Whitechapel, where his duties often took him into some of the worst slums in the civilized world. He spent much time at Bentham's home in Westminster (which backed on the very house where John Milton had lived) helping Bentham with his new constitution, so that the sections dealing with the functions and duties of the proposed national Minister of Health and the Preventive Service Minister may fairly be taken to represent Smith's contribution.

These sections are too long to analyse here, but their main provisions bring under the direction of the Minister all that concerns public health, hospitals, lazarettos (or isolation hospitals), quarantine, laboratories, lunatic asylums, workhouses, prisons, schools and other public buildings, water supply, sewers and drains, burial places, mines, factories, the medical services of the Army and Navy, the manufacture and storage of drugs, and even medical museums and libraries. The methods to be employed included inspection and collection of statistics and other information and their publication, a complete system of registration not only of births, marriages and deaths, but also of mortality and morbidity, and full powers were given for acting on all this information by measures to promote improvement. It is interesting to see that the adequate examination and registration of medical practitioners was not overlooked and there are even clauses designed to prevent what is called 'professional confederacy' against the public interest [18; 9, 439–45].

What practical effect did all this have at the time? It is generally acknowledged that this 'amazing *Constitutional Code* was the mine from which a new relation between English central and local government was extracted in the years that followed the Reform Bill of 1832. From the incompletely printed manuscript Chadwick took the details of the new Poor Law of 1834, Parkes and Place the details of the Municipal Reform Act of 1835, Chadwick the details and even the phrasing of the Act establishing a scientific system of vital statistics in 1836...' [19]. It may be added that all the Public Health Acts, up to the establishment of the Ministry of Health in 1919, were also indebted to it.

In 1823 the 'Bentham group' decided to found their own journal and in 1824 the famous *Westminster Review* was launched. The early numbers contained no less than three long articles by Southwood Smith. All were important and one is of special interest. Entitled 'The Use of the Dead to the Living', [20], it was a reasoned appeal for legislation to permit the bodies of unclaimed paupers who died in hospitals and workhouse infirmaries to be used for the teaching and study of anatomy. It contained a brief history of medicine, demonstrating that good medical practice has always depended on a sound knowledge of anatomy and physiology and that where this is deficient practice must be bad. If surgeons cannot learn from the bodies of the dead, he said, then they will be forced to learn from the living bodies of the poor. He also pointed out the damage to medical education and the medical schools in England caused by the existing laws which were driving English and Scottish students to Paris for anatomical instruction. This article made such an impression that it was immediately reprinted as a pamphlet, was republished in America three years later and in 1832, when Parliament was being asked to consider the Anatomy Act, a third edition was printed and a copy given to every Member of Parliament. *The Times* stated that the Act was a direct result of Smith's article, which had led to a Parliamentary inquiry. 'The Administration was impressed' it says, 'the public was excited, something was promised, a little was attempted, but nothing was done. Then came on the Edinburgh horrors, and now we are thrown into a state of intense alarm lest the same horrors should be perpetrated at our own doors' [21].

Other articles which Smith wrote in 1824 dealt with 'Contagion and Sanitary Laws' [22]. They discuss at considerable length epidemiological theories which are now outdated but they do embody the basic principle of the 'sanitary idea', that epidemic diseases are associated with particular places (a Hippocratic idea), but – and this

was the novelty – this association could be traced to particular sanitary defects in those places which could be remedied and so the disease be prevented.

Just at this time, Edwin Chadwick, a young man of 24 who, after working for five years as a solicitor's clerk, was starting to read for the Bar, took rooms in Lyon's Inn (which stood on the site of the present Bush House). He was introduced to Smith, who took him, as he did several of his friends, to some of the 'fever-nests' he had already come to know so well. Chadwick caught fever and nearly died [5, p 10]. It was a lesson he was never to forget, but neither was he to forget the facts and figures which accompanied Smith's demonstration. Three years later, in his first article for the *Westminster Review* [23], he used them in a discussion of life-insurance and life-tables, arguing as authoritatively about the expectation of life in Shoreditch and Bethnal Green and the average mortality in the London hospitals as if he had investigated these matters for himself. It is this article, by the way, which is always cited as the 'birth of Chadwick's sanitary idea'. Chadwick was not introduced to Bentham until late in 1829, and in 1830, when he had been admitted to the Bar but had thrown up his first and only case in disgust, Bentham (then 82) and his friends were looking round for something for him to do and he was engaged as Bentham's secretary. It is therefore interesting – to say the least – that when Bentham wanted a good article written on a new penal code it was not to the young lawyer that he turned but to Southwood Smith. Edward Livingston, penal reformer and American senator, had written to Bentham asking him to give publicity in England to the new penal code which Livingston had devised for the state of Louisiana. Bentham's reply is illuminating:

'An article on it will appear', he told Livingston, 'in *The Jurist* . . . written by Dr Southwood Smith, by profession a physician; but a man of genius, philanthropical affections and eminently extensive knowledge. . . . Why and whence this physician? You know, or do not know, that your code, in its first state has been republished here in London; the act of publication was a spontaneous act of philanthropy on the part of this physician. He was, and is, far from rich; he has no patrimony, no source of subsistence but his professional practice, which is not by any means adequate to his merits. . . . On the present occasion I wrote to Southwood Smith, and he has consented to write: I made application to the editors of *The Jurist*, and they have consented to publish: the *Jurist*, I am told, pays no fees. . .' [18; 9, 35].[1]

The amount of time which Smith spent on unpaid work of this kind must have been considerable. In April 1825 he had been one of the founders of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge and for its publications he wrote a 'Treatise on Animal Physiology' (1829), all the main articles on anatomy, physiology, and medicine for its *Penny Cyclopædia* (1832–45), and 'The Philosophy of Health' (2 vols, 1836–7). All these works show that, despite his many preoccupations, he kept up to date with his reading, and the last named was in fact the first work published in England to give an account of William Beaumont's studies on the physiology of digestion [*see* 24]. They are all extremely well written and are the first examples of adequate medical and scientific books designed for popular instruction. Smith, who was a pioneer in popular education as well as other matters, believed in education as an important means of progress, leading people to demand reforms which could not be effected merely by government decree.

In 1830 he published a long monograph entitled 'A Treatise on Fever' which was a detailed elaboration of his review articles of 1825. It was hailed enthusiastically by the medical journals, the *Medico-Chirurgical Review* praising it as 'the best work on fever that ever flowed from the pen of physician in any age or country.' The term 'fever' then covered all the diseases which were by 1900 classified as distinct infectious and epidemic diseases. Smith's study was a survey of the literature of these diseases, from plague and yellow fever to smallpox and typhus (then still undifferentiated from typhoid) and from this survey, made in the light of his own experience, he drew general principles. Major Greenwood [25] pointed out that Smith and Sutherland were two of our greatest practical epidemiologists, although they were Galenists and believed in the 'miasmatic' transmission of disease. The history of scientific ideas is one of progression through a series of useful hypotheses which were later abandoned, and what is important is that Smith's principles led to the right action. He realized that individual observations were not enough.

'Further inquiries are necessary', he wrote, 'such as whether the vegetable and animal poisons we have been considering be the *only* true, exciting cause of fever; by what means its general diffusion is effected; on what conditions its propagation depends; by what measures its extension may be checked and its power diminished or destroyed; what circumstances in the modes of life, in the habits of society, in the structure of houses, in the condition of the public streets and common sewers, in the state of the soil . . . drainage, and so on, favour or check the origin and propagation of this great curse of civilized, no less than uncivilized, man' [26].

At this time Smith held the post of lecturer in forensic medicine in the Webb Street School, but

[1]The work which Smith republished in London was Livingston's 'Introductory Report to the Code of Prison Discipline, being part of the System of Penal Law prepared for the State of Louisiana'

medical practice, medical writing and medical teaching, together with his work for penal reform, were not the limit of his activities. With Chadwick and other Benthamites he had helped to found an institute for adult education called the London Literary and Scientific Institution and was giving there a course of lectures on physiology to which ladies were invited – a most unusual concession. There, in April 1830, he took the chair at a large and successful meeting held to protest at what were called the 'taxes on knowledge', the newspaper tax. Smith made the most convincing and persuasive speech of the evening [3; **1**, 83]. A year later, we find Chadwick writing an article on the same subject in the *Westminster Review* (July 1831) and thereafter making the subject peculiarly his own. As we have seen, Smith had strong and advanced views on the role of education in reform. His very first article in the *Westminster Review* was on the subject of education [27] and he had himself educated his two daughters to such good purpose that they both left home in their 'teens' to earn their living as teachers. They were both to become women of great intellectual and moral power and their early training and their father's influence were to have results affecting his own family life, and eventually, some aspects of life in England to-day.

A life of useful service was Smith's ideal, but the amount of work, mostly unpaid, which he did for all his good causes must have laid a strain on his personal relations. Writing in 1898 his granddaughter stated that financial stringency at this time caused Mrs Southwood Smith to go to live on the Continent with the boy [7, p 35). A less guarded account was published in New York by a friend in 1849. This tells us that his second marriage 'was not fortunate; the dissentients had however the good taste to separate amicably, and preserve for each other a mutual respect, although the incompatibility of their tempers prevented them living together in a state of domestic happiness' [28]. This reasonable approach to marriage problems was by no means unique in Smith's circle and I mention it merely because of the effects it was to have on his subsequent career and influence.

A much less private event at this time was one which followed the death of Jeremy Bentham in 1832. By his will he left his body for the purposes of anatomical study and Smith was directed to carry this out. The skeleton and embalmed head was afterwards to be clothed in his customary dress and to be brought out at meetings of a kind of Bentham society to be founded by his followers. No society was founded and the effigy reposed in a glass case in Smith's consulting-rooms until 1850, when he presented it to University College [29]. The dissection was begun in the Webb Street School while the Anatomy Bill was going through Parliament and was attended not only by medical students but by many of the leading professors and a distinguished gathering of Bentham's friends and associates. Pale, but undeterred by a heavy thunderstorm which accompanied the proceedings, Smith spoke with moving eloquence of Bentham's services to humanity. A contemporary report says that 'None who were present can ever forget that impressive scene. . . . In the features was an expression of placid dignity and benevolence . . . at time rendered almost vital by the lightning playing over them. . . . With the feelings which touch the heart in the contemplation of departed greatness . . . there mingled a sense of the power which that lifeless body seemed to be exercising in the conquest of prejudice for the public good, thus co-operating with the triumphs of the spirit by which it had been animated. It was a worthy close of the personal career of the great philosopher and philanthropist' [30].

Reforms in Factories and Mines

It was in this very year that the Reform Bill was passed. Industrial unrest was reaching a climax and in February 1833 Lord Ashley (later the Earl of Shaftesbury) reintroduced Sadler's famous Ten-Hours Bill in the House of Commons. This Bill would forbid the employment in factories of children under 9 and restrict the hours of those under 18 to ten hours a day and eight on Saturdays. Despite the opposition of the factory-owners, who saw it as a disguised attempt to regulate the hours of adult workers (who could not carry on without the children), the Bill was defeated by only one vote. Realizing that something must be done, Melbourne, then Home Secretary, appointed a Royal Commission and ordered it to report within six weeks. Together with Chadwick and Thomas Tooke, Southwood Smith was made a Commissioner, unpaid, of course. On August 29 a Bill was passed which departed in several important respects from the recommendations of the Commission, but did ban employment of children under 9 and reduce to eight hours the working day of those under 14 and to twelve hours those under 18. It also made provision for two hours' daily schooling for child workers and for the appointment of government inspectors to see that the regulations were enforced [5, p 65]. This was a most important innovation and was to prove most effective. Nevertheless, the Commissioners and the Bill were bitterly attacked by the reform parties. Even the Hammonds, writing nearly a century later, said that Smith 'was better employed in dissecting the body of Bentham than in legislating for the bodies of the workers' children', although, inconsistently, they went on to say that after a few

years of the Act its fiercest critics realized its merits and workers were urged 'to hold first, as for life itself, to the eight hour clause, the education clause, and the inspection clause of the present' [cited in 31]. Smith took a great interest in the working of the Act and for several years he used to travel to make a personal inspection of the factories and their attached schools.

Meantime, the famous, or – as some think – infamous, Poor Law Amendment Act was passed in 1834, Chadwick being the full-time paid secretary in its implementation. When, in 1837, there was an unusually severe epidemic of fever in east London, placing a heavy burden on the rates, Smith was asked by Chadwick to investigate and report on the situation to the Poor Law Commissioners. After a personal investigation of every fact included he presented his 'Report on the Physical Causes of Sickness and Mortality to which the Poor are particularly exposed, and which are capable of Prevention by Sanitary Measures'. It was of such a nature that it could not be ignored. When published as an appendix to the Poor Law Reports [32] it created a sensation. Even sympathizers, reading of conditions which would have disgraced a savage tribe, thought it must be exaggerated. Lord Normanby, who was to be one of the most active Members of the Government in the sanitary cause, was taken by Smith to see things for himself and confessed that, far from being exaggerated, Smith's account could hardly do justice to the facts. Ashley went twice with Smith to Shoreditch and Bethnal Green, having to break off the first visit as he could stomach no more. Charles Dickens asked to go and then wrote of what Smith had showed him in 'Oliver Twist' and 'Bleak House' [33]. In 1839 the Bishop of London, in the House of Lords, used Smith's report as the occasion for proposing a sanitary inquiry amongst the labouring class in other parts of England and Wales and two days later the Poor Law Commissioners were ordered by Lord John Russell to start the investigation. Three years later the report appeared, not as an official publication, for its contents were considered to be too controversial, but as Edwin Chadwick's celebrated 'Report on the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population' (1842).

While Chadwick was busy writing up the reports of all his inspectors, Southwood Smith was involved in another Royal Commission, this time to investigate the employment of women and children in mines. The Factory Act had passed them by, and children, boys and girls, from 4 and 5 upwards, spent from twelve to sixteen hours a day underground; women of all ages, even when pregnant, were harnessed like animals to haul coal trucks through the shafts on all fours; women worked at the coal-face with men, often in two- or three-foot seams, and all stripped naked. Smith, recalling the horror and disbelief with which his earlier report had been received, wondered how he could bring these facts home to the public. It was no accident that he hit upon the idea of illustrating the scenes he had witnessed, for he had for some years been sharing the home of two remarkable women, the painter Margaret Gillies and her sister Mary, a writer, the daughters of a Scottish judge who was living in Kentish Town. It was Margaret Gillies who went to draw some of the scenes which were reproduced in the report, the first blue-book, I think, to contain illustrations. If the country had been shocked by his sanitary report, now it was stunned. Dickens confessed that he broke down and sobbed when he read it. Lord Londonderry, who was opening up new collieries and building a harbour at Seaham, fiercely resented it and was indignant that 'the disgusting pictorial woodcuts accompanying the Report of the Commissioners should have found their way into the boudoirs of refined and delicate ladies who were weak-minded enough to sympathize with the victims of industry' [34]. Disgusting or not, they had more effect than all the pages of text and in 1844 Ashley's Bill succeeded in banning all female labour in mines as well as the employment of boys under 10. Probably the only people who resented the Bill, other than Lord Londonderry and his fellow mine-owners, were the miners themselves, who had grown to expect the wages of their wives and children as a supplement to their own.

Just as he had embarked on this report Smith had been going through something of a crisis in his family. In 1832 his daughter Caroline had been engaged to educate the six children of a young widower named James Hill, a business man with wide liberal interests, who had been attracted by Caroline's articles on education. In 1835 they had married and by 1840 she had borne him three daughters, Miranda, Gertrude, and Octavia. In that year, Hill went bankrupt. The children of his first marriage were taken by their maternal grandparents. Southwood Smith, who was always passionately fond of children, adopted Gertrude and settled the rest of the family in a cottage at Loughton, in Epping Forest, where a fourth daughter, Emily, was born. After several unsuccessful attempts to re-establish himself – the last at Leeds, where a fifth child, Florence, was born in 1843 – Hill had a complete breakdown from which he never recovered, and Southwood Smith undertook responsibility for the whole family. In 1844 he and Margaret Gillies set up their home in a house which they called 'Hillside' at Highgate, overlooking Lord Mansfield's estate and Ken Wood. All the grandchildren have spoken with more than filial devotion of 'the daily beauty

of his life, the serenity and sweetness of his disposition'. Gertrude tells us of his daily routine, getting up at 4 o'clock in the morning to work on his official reports, going to hospital at 10, and making the rounds of his patients, often on horseback, in the afternoons, addressing meetings or attending committees in the evenings. He took a great interest in Margaret Gillies's work, and was never too busy to obtain commissions for her, making arrangements for her to paint a portrait of Dickens and another of Wordsworth, which took her for a short stay with the Wordsworths at Rydal Mount. Smith was also a close friend of Leigh Hunt and Macready, the actor, and 'Hillside' was never without its interesting guests, Browning, William and Mary Howitt, and Hans Andersen among them. His own favourite poets in later life were Milton and Dante, and he greatly admired Sir Thomas Browne. Dickens was a personal friend, and among Smith's surviving letters is an account of 'The Christmas Carol', which he read in proof.

Dickens was connected with another pioneer venture of Smith's, a private hospital designed to provide medical care for members of the middle classes who were living alone in rooms in London. They paid a small annual subscription and, when admitted for treatment, a modest weekly sum. This was called 'The Sanatorium', and was opened in May 1842 in Devonshire Place House, York Gate, Regent's Park, immediately opposite the house where Dickens lived. Although it achieved its purpose admirably and secured Prince Albert as its Patron, it was not a financial success and in 1845 Dickens and his friends played in a charity performance of Ben Jonson's 'Every Man in his Humour' in an attempt to keep it going [35]. Unfortunately, it had to close, but it was the forerunner of the modern nursing home and private patients' wing. Smith was never interested in money and this episode provoked a sneer from Chadwick that he 'was a man of benevolence merely who had mismanaged the Sanatorium' [36]. Another contemporary, who has left the best personal description of Smith, thought differently. For him Smith was 'a man to be respected and loved. . . . Eminently practical in his views, he is not content with pointing out the way, he helps the traveller on his errand; he is large-handed as well as large hearted, and the perusal of his writings brings us to the conclusion that he is large headed too'. This writer attributes the failure of The Sanatorium to 'that apathy with which the middle classes always regard the efforts made for their good by others'. He goes on to tell us that

'Dr Smith . . . deliberately sacrificed a large private practice that he may work for the million instead of the few. In social life he is benevolent, gentle and consistent. Beloved by his friends, he enjoys, with peculiar relish, the quiet of rural delights; the most pleasant and intellectual delights we have enjoyed have been with him, wandering after the labours of the day in the fields and woods about Highgate. His conversation is singularly clear, and although slow and somewhat hesitating in his speech, the words might be taken down as uttered and sent to the printers without a correction. He reads with peculiar force and discrimination. One of his efforts we particularly remember; it was the greater part of "Comus", one fine May day, in the woods near Loughton – the only accompaniment to the poetry of Milton being the singing of birds and the rustling of trees.

'In person he is short, and somewhat thickly made; but his head is very fine, and has a striking resemblance to Napoleon's. His eyes are grey and deeply-set, his brow massive and lofty. He is passionately fond of music and poetry. He occasionally preaches in Finsbury Chapel. He is approaching his sixtieth year and from his temperate habits and strong constitution seems likely to have a long life to benefit mankind by his labours' [28].

Sanitary Reform

We are now approaching the climax of those labours. Like the Medical Reform Bills, the Sanitary Bills were only with difficulty fitted into the jig-saw of contemporary politics. One of the greatest difficulties was that Chadwick's name on the 1842 report had identified him prominently with sanitary reform and Chadwick was, as *The Times* said, 'the best-hated man in England', while Disraeli called him 'a monster in human shape'. Politicians were reluctant to act unless public opinion could be changed and Normanby suggested to Smith that he might organize what we should call now 'a propaganda campaign'. The result was The Health of Towns Association, which lasted from 1844 until 1849. It was, as an American historian of public health has pointed out [37], the first voluntary agency for health education on a national scale. Branches were set up all over the country, many of them by Unitarian ministers who were friends of Smith's. By public meetings, by the distribution of nearly 100,000 pamphlets, and at Liverpool by a special journal called *The Health of Towns Advocate*, edited by Sutherland, the whole atmosphere was rapidly changed. Chadwick had tried to appeal to the self-interest of the men in power. Smith realized that no satisfactory legislation could ever be passed or generally accepted unless the mass of the people could be aroused either to demand or accept it. In this cause he was the golden-tongued evangelist and on January 1, 1847, there was published for one penny his burning 'Address to the Working Classes' which matches Marx's, more celebrated, Manifesto published later in the same year. In that year too, Smith was elected a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians.

I do not propose to go into the history of the first Public Health Act of 1848 and the first General Board of Health for this has been well written by others. Three Commissioners were originally appointed, none of them a medical man, and only one of them, Chadwick, was to receive a salary. Chadwick's low estimation of medical men and his contempt for many of the qualities embodied in Southwood Smith have been indicted as the probable cause, but I suspect that if we accepted this view we should be doing Chadwick an injustice. The abortive Bill of 1847 had also allowed for only one paid Commissioner on the Central Board and on that occasion Chadwick had written to Joseph Hume that 'It would have been worth several salaries to have secured the services of Southwood Smith, with his literary skill, his special knowledge of the medical aspects of the subject, and his popularity with the Press and the medical profession' [38].

The deliberate passing over of Smith in appointing the Commissioners under the 1848 Act was regarded as scandalous. The *Lancet* had a series of indignant editorials about the Government's attitude towards medical men in a matter which affected them so closely. Smith was invited to a meeting of the Board in late August, and a few days later Lord Morpeth wrote to Smith inviting him to join the Board as an unpaid Commissioner. Smith's letter of acceptance, dated September 12, 1848, in which he described what he had already done to prepare for the threatened cholera epidemic, concluded: 'My intimate relation with the origin and progress of this work, and my deep conviction that it is one of the most useful to which experience and science can be applied, would render it a satisfaction to me to spend the remainder of my life in assisting to complete it' [7, p 130]. The notice of his appointment appeared in *The London Gazette* on October 5, 1848, and he was immediately plunged into the task of implementing the Act and at the same time fighting against a serious epidemic of cholera. Two years later he was made a salaried Commissioner and he abandoned the remains of his practice.

The brief but stormy history of the Board has been told many times. The fury aroused by many of Chadwick's proposals gave added strength to the opposition and, in 1854, it became clear that he would have to go. There were many, even among the opposition, who would have liked to retain the services of Southwood Smith, especially as another outbreak of cholera was threatening, but it was decided that, politically, the only thing to do was to make a clean sweep, and Ashley and Smith were sacrificed. Chadwick was to receive a pension of £1,000 a year, which he was to enjoy until his death in 1890. Smith, now 66, got nothing, the official explanation being that 'as so much of his service had been unpaid he was not eligible for a pension'. This was a type of injustice which affected Chadwick keenly and he wrote to a friend that the blow had fallen heaviest on the unoffending and uncomplaining Southwood Smith, who 'without fault proved and indeed after extraordinary and successful labour is dismissed a ruined man without any compensation whatever' [39].

When the new President of the Board took over he was astonished to find how much there was to be done, and how much his derided predecessors had done; no three men, he observed, could possibly have worked harder. Smith's health was affected by his labours and he looked older than his years. He had just published a pamphlet, entitled 'The Results of Sanitary Improvement', which described the progress of another of his pioneer schemes, The Metropolitan Society for Improving the Dwellings of the Industrious Poor, which he founded in 1842. This product of Smith's benevolence was also distrusted by Chadwick who declared that a housing scheme which brought in its promoters less than 7% could not possibly succeed. Chartered as a public charity by Sir Robert Peel, this had in fact succeeded, not only in providing some of the worst districts of London with decent housing at modest rents, but in cutting the death rate in the new dwellings to less than a quarter of the figure for London as a whole, and not a single case of cholera had been reported there.

In the summer of 1854 Smith was having a new house built for himself and his family at Weybridge which, when they moved into it in September, they called 'The Pines'. He delighted in the view, in the woods and the countryside, and in his companions, and he wrote:

> 'This made me feel how little is what I have lost in comparison with what I retain and what the external world cannot take from me. I require a full sense of this to sustain me now that the reality is come that everything else is taken from me; for I never did or could believe that no compensation whatever would be given me for all I have done. So it is, however, and we must all bear it as well as we can and find compensation in and from each other, where I know there will be no disappointment' [40].

Although his official work was at an end he still continued working for his cause and in the remaining few years of his life he travelled a good deal to places like Manchester, Liverpool, Bradford and Edinburgh, advising local authorities and addressing meetings. In 1856 he visited Florence, where his second daughter, Emily, had established herself as a teacher among the English colony of writers and artists there. She had become a passionate supporter of Italian Union and was a

personal friend of Mazzini. Caroline was living at Weybridge, where, in 1857, she nursed her daughter, Octavia Hill, through a severe illness. Octavia (still only 18) and a sister had been running the Ladies' Sanitary Guild in Fitzroy Square for a mere pittance until it closed down in 1856 and the girls were again dependent upon their grandfather. Looking back on these years later she wrote that 'We were so poor at that time, so very poor that I cannot bear to speak of it' [41, p 49]. In 1856 a public subscription was being raised for Southwood Smith, organized by Dr Waller Lewis and Mr R D Grainger. Chadwick's name was kept off the Committee 'lest it should ruin the whole proceedings' and a good sum was collected. Shortly afterwards we find Smith giving money to Octavia and her sisters to set up a home for themselves in London. There she was to carry on her grandfather's work with metropolitan housing and other sanitary causes. In 1858, when he was 70, the Government at last acknowledged its gratitude by awarding him a pension of £300 a year. His health was not good, and after a serious illness in the autumn of 1861 he again visited his daughter in Florence to recuperate. In early December he fell ill with bronchitis and died on December 10, 1861. He was buried in the Protestant Cemetery in Florence, where his grave lies only about a hundred yards from that of Elizabeth Barrett Browning. An obelisk, with his portrait in bas-relief, marks the spot where he is buried, and rising from the foot is a pine-tree. The memorial was designed by Margaret Gillies; the tree was planted as a reminder of Weybridge.

It is far from being his only memorial. His work was carried on by his granddaughter Octavia, who bore a strong resemblance to him. She too worked with Shaftesbury and did great pioneer work in London's slums. Caroline, who died in 1901 at the age of 92 and saw the fruits of her daughter's work, wrote, 'Dear child, the mantle has fallen upon her!' [41, p 115]. Octavia also inherited Smith's love of nature and the countryside. When only 16 she had taken parties of slum children to play in the fields at 'Hillside' and she wrote to her sister, 'I hope that I may never, as long as I live, forget the sunny, bright, happy hours I have passed there. There remains in my mind a recollection, a vision of beauty connected with it which can never be effaced' [42]. From this 'vision of beauty' sprang the great idea which she realized in the foundation of The National Trust. There is no Southwood Smith Trust – as there is a Chadwick Trust – for he died almost as poor as he began, but his life and the spirit which inspired it have their memorial in this and many other of the practical achievements of what Chadwick had once called 'merely benevolence'.

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