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Scrapbook Material

Hannah Whital Smith

1983

Box 10_17 (Scrapbook Materials- All Trivia and Words and Idioms- LPS-1933)

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Rather forced - don't return.

In Re: Logan Pearsall Smith

By CHRISTOPHER MORLEY

NOTE: In his letter accompanying this MS. Mr. Morley writes: "It was written as a place-card for the guests at a dinner given to L. P. S. when he was in New York about the beginning of 1922—his first visit to the U. S. in many years; indeed I think his only visit here since he left Haverford and went abroad."

We scarcely need to remind you that Logan Pearsall Smith is one of Haverford's best-known alumni and a distinguished writer. His *Trivia*, *More Trivia*, and *On Reading Shakespeare* may be found in the Haverford Library.

[[Extract from *A Conspectus of English Literature in the Twentieth Century*, published by Frank Shay's Sons and Harcourt, New York, 2010.]]

. . . The period we are now considering—in general the 'teens of the past century—was meagre in first rate work. The novelists were bombastic and blowsy; the poets uncertain and dense; the essayists, for the most part, were described as being near-Beerbohm. But among the few writers of that period who still repay critical examination and remain the subject of active controversy we may mention Logan Pearsall Smith.

Our readers are familiar with the acrimonious quarrel that arose in the closing years of the century as to whether Smith was an English or American writer. Claims were advanced on both sides; it would have been more generous on the part of British litterateurs to have conceded him to the United States, that country being sadly in need of ironists; but European critics, after an exhaustive exploration of the texts (1) and careful notation of the internal evidence, have agreed that he must properly be considered as an integral part of England's heritage. It is true that Smith was born in America (2), but in such matters it is the source of inspiration that is operative rather than mere statistics of birth.

Of Smith's life, little is known definitely (3). Of his person, he described himself as "a large carnivorous mammal" and a cognate of the Kallipygian

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baboon; but this, one hopes, was but pleasantry, and the passage (4) in which this confession occurs seems to support *in toto* those Darwinian hypotheses that were still current in the early twentieth century. There is abundant evidence in his writings that he was of a social disposition and moved (but not without pangs of internal disquiet) in cultivated circles; he alludes frequently to dinner parties and afternoon teas; evidently he mingled with the beau monde of his day, and much zeal has been shown by the critics in identifying the story of *The Goat at Portsmouth* (5), which, apparently, he was fond of telling.

But to the antiquarian the chief interest will remain in the two volumes, *Trivia* (1917) and *More Trivia* (1922). During the period of neo-Puritanism which took possession of the United States in the third and fourth decades of that century (1920-40) these works were suppressed; it was thought that they constituted too subtle and unsettling a mockery of civilization to be encouraged by The State. Smith's commentaries on Religion also were found disconcerting, particularly by Episcopalians, and in the editions used among schools these passages are generally excised (6). In spite of suppression, however, the books continued to circulate among a few enthusiasts, and together with his *Stories from the Old Testament* (7), constituted a form of advanced aesthetic skepticism that did much to undermine the earnestness of successive generations.

The consensus of the best scholars at the present time is that "Logan Pearsall Smith" was a pen-name; it has been persuasively argued that in that era of timid and conventionalized speculation no writer would have dared advance over his own name such delicately sharpened ironies and such dissolvent acids of observation. But the cautious critic must also take account of the minority of conscientious students who hold other views. Professor Mandrake of Oxford thinks that not only was there an actual Logan Pearsall Smith, but that he was chiefly notable as a humorist, not at all a penetrating social critic. Dr. Thaddeus Polsky of Halle has written an interesting brochure to suggest that the books are written in an elaborate cipher, and that when properly interpreted they constitute an impassioned defence of the English Vicar. Professor Isabel Jennings of Ohio State University considers that Smith was a sentimental euphuist and that his works are unintelligible; Professor Jennings is the leader of those who maintain that Smith's vogue was the work of an assiduous cult (8) and that posterity has been imposed upon. She points, moreover, to the exorbitant egotism of the writer who would beg Posterity to "hurry up and get born that they may

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have the pleasure of reading *More Trivia*" (9). But even if only as a subject of controversy, the work of this curious and enigmatic writer remains of durable interest and value (10).

1. See *Beiträge zur Erklärung Logan Pearsall Smith*, Wien, 1960, and *Marginal Glosses Upon Smith's Trivia*, Manchester, 1968.

2. *Vital Statistics of the State of New Jersey*.

3. But see, for an ingenious conjectural monograph, *Lives of Anglo-American Bachelors*, vol. 3, and *Logan Pearsall Smith von Seinen Vornehmsten Schriftstellungen Redintegriert und Aufgebaut*, Freiburg, 1973.

4. *Trivia*, p. ix.

5. *More Trivia*, p. 18.

6. The necessity of this will be realized by an examination of such dangerous passages as *A Precaution* and *The Vicar of Lynch*.

7. Suppressed 1925; and still only circulated furtively.

8. Professor Jennings lists in her appendix a number of minor writers who are now only remembered for their violent indorsement of Smith's writings.

9. This regrettable lapse of taste brought Smith into conflict with the American Birth Control statutes.

10. For further information the student will consult *Réflexions sur l'Art de Logan Pearsall Smith*, Paris, 1988.

Nulla Apologia

Being A Refutation of a Theory That Has Been Cast into the Author's Teeth at Least Seven Times, Proclaiming that THE HAVERFORDIAN Should Endeavor to be a Comical Magazine, Such as, for Example, Other Publications.

By ROBERT M. ZUCKERT

*Humour, you say? You'd like a little
Less of the lugubrious in art;
More vigour, life, and levity,
And satire's sharpened dart?*

*More spice, perhaps, a sprightly fare
To pique your jaded appetite;
These pages steeped in waggery
With colours, various and light?*

*We are the dull, you think, who write
The chronicles of darker things,
And do not tell of gay wassail,
Or chant the joy of wedding-rings?*

*Young man, we have a higher task
Than being smart and singing glee.
We cannot waste our treasured lives
In brightening humanity.*

*We write of life quite as it seems,
Though it be bleak or it be stark . . .
We think we shall remain the owl,
And you may be the chirping lark.*

NOTE: The editors desire to have it distinctly understood that Mr. Zuckert's views are his own, and not representative of the HAVERFORDIAN.

Well, come to think of it, maybe he's right at that.