THE
WORKS OF
HENRY SMITH

VOLUME I
NICHOL'S SERIES OF STANDARD DIVINES.

PURITAN PERIOD.

With General Preface

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THE

WORKS OF HENRY SMITH.

VOL. I.
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THE WORKS

OF

HENRY SMITH;

SERMONS, TREATISES, PRAYERS, AND POEMS.

WITH LIFE OF THE AUTHOR,

BY THOMAS FULLER, B.D.

AND OTHER BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

WITH NEW INTRODUCTION

BY RANDALL J. PEDERSON

VOL. I.

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INTRODUCTION

Henry Smith (1560-1591) was one of the most influential and prolific Puritan divines during Elizabeth’s reign in England.¹ He was known as “silver-tongued Smith” to his contemporaries, and, according to Thomas Fuller, he was “but one metal below Chrysostom.”² Smith’s practical and experiential sermons were used for family devotions for over a century after his death, and went through numerous editions. He combined the force of language with the force of thought and preached the gospel in its primitive power and simplicity.³ Thompson Cooper, Oxford historian and editor of Athenae Cantabrigienses, wrote: “We are disposed to think that no English preacher has since excelled [Smith] in the proper attributes of pulpit eloquence.”⁴

John L. Lievsay, in his article, “‘Silver-tongued Smith,’ Paragon of Elizabethan Preachers,” wrote: “Here and there amidst the confusion of pulpit oratory and denunciation the patient reader [of Elizabethan literature] will discover an occasional bright rift in the fog of dullness. When he does, the sense of grateful relief may easily lead him to exaggerate the excellence of the particular sermon or preacher responsible for the unwonted gleam. In such circumstances he must look for the corroborative testimony of other readers before

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³ See J.W. Blench’s Preaching in England in the Late 15th and 16th Centuries (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1964) for a thorough discussion of the preaching styles in England from 1450-1600.

⁴ Charles Henry and Thompson Cooper, comps. Athenae Cantabrigienses (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell, and Co., 1861), 2:106.
introduction

he feels free to trust his own benumbed judgment. But when the radiance persists through two fat octavo volumes, he may well spare the other witnesses, however numerous and competent."

The Life and Sermons of Henry Smith

Born in Withcote, Leicestershire, in 1560 (or thereabouts), Henry Smith was the eldest son and heir of Erasmus Smith. He was descended from an honorable line of Smiths in Leicestershire, and was heir to a considerable estate. On July 17, 1573, he was admitted Fellow Commoner to Queens College, Cambridge, but did not stay long at the college. In 1575, when Smith was fifteen years old, he was admitted to Lincoln College, Oxford. It is uncertain whether or not Smith earned his Bachelor of Arts at Lincoln. Historian Anthony á Wood noted that Smith was absent from the college for quite some time, “having some ecclesiastical employment conferred upon him.” Cooper also noted that “for some reason with which we are not acquainted, [Smith’s] father refused to allow him to spend much time in the university.” Cooper, however, wrote that Smith earned his Bachelor of Arts from Lincoln on February 16, 1578-9.

After leaving the college, Smith lived and followed his studies with Richard Greenham, rector of Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire, and sometime fellow of Pembroke Hall. Historians disagree whether or not Smith earned a Master of Arts, though it is probable that he did not. In either case, it is certain that Smith for a time sat under the tutelage of Greenham, the famous Puritan casuist, and was “imbued” with firm puritanical principles.

Some historians have conjectured that Smith was torn between the ministry and a large inheritance from his father, but Thomas

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7 Cooper and Cooper, Athenae Cantabrigienses, 2:103.
Smith, editor of the 1866 edition of Smith’s sermons, noted that Smith was not torn at all—he simply predeceased his father. Had he lived he would have inherited his father’s estate, which, no doubt, would have been an asset in his ministry. Thomas Fuller, Smith’s first biographer, observed that several of Smith’s relatives encouraged him to study law, a profession suited to one with a large inheritance. He also had the option of poetry, which he practiced for some time, though none of his poems survive. Smith was also proficient in Latin and turned *Microcosmographia* into Latin Sapphics, which was translated into English by Joshua Sylvester.

Forsaking all other occupations, Smith devoted himself to the ministry of the Church of England, but upon considering his disagreement with various practices and ceremonies, he contented himself with the lectureship, a common Puritan practice.

For some time Smith was affiliated with the Husbands Bosworth Church, which was in his father’s patronage, though it is uncertain whether he became rector there.

In continuing his studies with Greenham, Smith’s anti-Episcopal leanings were strengthened. Both individuals shared, however, a strict stance in regards to church division; thus Smith, like Greenham, believed that sectarians, such as the Brownists and Barrowists, were enemies of the true church and liable to just persecution. Consequently, Smith sought to reform the English church from within, believing that it was utterly unlawful to make a separation.

At some point in 1582 Smith’s uncle, Bryant Cave, High Sheriff

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12 The Brownists, a group of radical Puritans, followed the impetus of Robert Browne (1549-1630), who at one time was a disciple of Richard Greenham. Browne is noted for leading the first exodus from the English church since the Reformation. Ironically, in 1589 Browne renounced his separatist views and was reconciled to the church he once denounced.

13 Led by the teaching of Henry Barrowe (1550?-1593), the Barrowists were a prominent group of Elizabethan Separatists that flourished from 1587-1593. One of the most popular Barrowists of the seventeenth-century was Henry Ainsworth (1571-1622?), who contributed to Barrowist literature from 1593-1620. For an interesting discussion of Barrowism and early English dissent, see Champlin Burrage’s two volume set, *The Early English Dissenters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912).
of Leicestershire, became acquainted with the deluded youth Robert Dickons, an apprentice at Mansell in Nottinghamshire. Dickons, though intelligent and knowledgeable, believed that he was the prophet Elijah, and that he had been visited by angels in a series of visions. Presumably, Cave arranged for his Puritan nephew to counsel Dickons. Smith opened the Scriptures to Dickons and was able to persuade Dickons of his error. Concerning this event, Fuller noted that Dickons “was reclaimed, renouncing his blasphemies by subscription under his own hand.”14 Upon the occasion, Smith preached the sermon “The Lost Sheep Is Found,” on 1 John 4:1, “Try the spirits whether they are of God.”

Subsequently, Smith preached in and about London with great success, and in 1587, upon Greenham’s recommendation, was elected lecturer at St. Clement Danes, London, by the rector and congregation. Smith’s sermons were highly blessed to his hearers; in fact, Fuller noted that “persons of good quality brought their own pews with them I mean their legs to stand there upon in the aisles, [and] their ears did so attend his lips, their hearts to their ears, that he held the rudder of their affections in his hand, so that he could steer them whether he pleased, and he was pleased to steer them only to God’s glory and their own good.”15

Smith’s popularity as a preacher increased so much that he was called “the prime preacher of the nation.” Wood said that he was “esteemed the miracle and wonder of his age, for his prodigious memory, and for his fluent, eloquent, and practical way of preaching.”16 His character was such that he feared dissention among his brethren; he sought to maintain peace as much as plausible, thus the Nonconformist historian, Benjamin Brook,

16 Wood, Athenae Oxon. 1:603.
noted: “It may be truly said of him, that he was a man peaceable in Israel.”

The relative freedom of the Puritan lectures in the 1570s came to a dramatic decline in 1577, when Archbishop Grindal, a man somewhat sympathetic to the Puritan cause, fell into disfavor with the Queen. Consequently, the Bishop of London, John Aylmer made a series of investigations to ensure that “proper” conformity was being adhered to by its preachers. Furthermore, in 1583 the Puritans suffered greatly from Grindal’s death, as he was replaced by the vigorous and determined Archbishop John Whitgift, an opposer of Puritanism in all its forms.

In 1588 Bishop Aylmer was informed, erroneously, that Smith had slandered the Book of Common Prayer in one of his sermons, and that he had not subscribed to Whitgift’s articles, which insisted on the supreme authority, under God, of the monarchy, the use and promotion of the prayer-book, and subscription to the Thirty Nine Articles of religion. Moreover, Smith was not licensed by Aylmer, his diocesan. Accordingly, Smith was suspended from preaching. He made a brief vindication of himself to Lord Treasurer Burghley, Elizabeth’s most trusted advisor and some time uncle of Smith himself, in which he stated that Aylmer had personally called him to preach at St. Paul’s Cross. Furthermore, Smith denied the accusation that he spoke against the prayer-book; he said that he had subscribed to all the articles of “faith and doctrine,” but had avoided the issue of discipline. The parishioners of Clement Danes also sent a testimonial and supplication on his behalf; thus combined with Burghley’s influence at court, Smith, in due course, was restored to the lectureship.

In the closing years of the 1580s, the rector of St. Clement Danes, William Harward, grew increasingly ill until his death some time in 1589. Strenuous efforts were made by the parishioners of St. Clement Danes to obtain Smith as their rector, but he refused the preferment and subsequently resigned his lectureship in 1590, due to failing health. He retired to Husbands Bosworth,

18 Cf. Seaver, The Puritan Lectureships, where Seaver discusses the “politics” of the Puritan lectures. In short, the lectures were a convenient way for nonconforming preachers to speak to the populace without ecclesiastical censure; that is, until 1577 when Archbishop Whitgift, an enemy of the Puritan party, replaced the more sympathetic Edmund Grindal.
Leicestershire, and busied himself in preparing his works for the press and in revising his sermons. He dedicated his collected sermons to Lord Burghley, but died before the collection was published. According to Thompson Cooper, Smith was buried at Husbands Bosworth on July 4, 1591. He was universally lamented by both the Anglican and Puritan parties; in fact, even Thomas Nashe, the “hard bitten sinner,” and hater of the Puritans, saw in Smith’s death an occasion for “the general tears of the muses.”

**The Sermons of Henry Smith**

So popular were the sermons of Henry Smith that they won for him not only the respect of the commoner, but also the admiration of the greatest literary geniuses of his age; in fact, by the early seventeenth-century Smith’s sermons had gone through more than eighty-five editions, and his fame as a preacher was known throughout the British Isles.

While many of Smith’s sermons were published in his lifetime (and a few of them without his consent), a complete collection was not printed until 1675 under Thomas Fuller’s editorship. In fact, Fuller supplied the first written biography of Smith in three and a half pages, drawing from Wood’s history and his correspondence with individuals who still remembered the “silver-tongued” Smith. Thomas Smith reissued Fuller’s edition in 1866 with minor linguistic changes and added several pages of commentary to Fuller’s account. The 1866 edition, printed in James Nichol’s Series of Standard

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19 Cf. Cooper, *Dictionary of National Biography*, 18:435. Historians have debated the exact date of Smith’s death: Thomas Nashe implied that Smith had died by 1592, Anthony Wood gave the date 1593, and Thomas Fuller, in *The Church History of Britain*, wrote that Smith died about 1600, reaffirmed by the Nonconformist historian Benjamin Brook in his *Lives of the Puritans*. Thomas Tanner, in his *Bibliotheca Britannico-Hibernica* (London: William Bowyer, 1748), gave the late date of 1613. However, there was an edition of Smith’s sermons printed in 1591 with the note that they were “perused by the author before his death,” thus confirming Cooper’s thesis that 1591 is the latest possible date for Smith’s demise.

20 Quoted in Lievsay, “Silver-tongued Smith,” 36. Thomas Nashe (1567-1601), an Elizabethan satirist, was generally disliked in his lifetime; it was only posthumously that his writings grew in popularity, even though Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop Bancroft decreed that “all [of] Nashe’s books…be taken wherever they may be found and none of [his] books be ever printed hereafter.”
Divines in two volumes, remains “the fullest, the most accurate, and the most elegant,” edition ever published.

A similar edition was likewise published in 1866 by William Tegg, which purports to be “an exact reprint of the edition which was printed according to the Author’s corrected copies in his lifetime,” though since it was not under Thomas Smith’s editorship it does not contain his extensive commentary on Fuller’s short biography. The editor of the Tegg edition, Edwin Davies, made minor linguistic changes in the text (for instance, “thorow” was changed to “thorough”), but left Fuller’s archaisms alone. That two London publishers would issue Smith’s sermons in the same year, under different editorships, is interesting, to say the least, though it does affirm the popularity that Smith had even in the nineteenth-century.

Nichol’s two volume set contains all of Smith’s extant works: 56 sermons with their original prefaces; Smith’s account to the Lord Justices concerning Robert Dickons; Smith’s treatise God’s Arrow Against Atheism and Irreligion; eight prayers for various occasions; “A Comfortable Speech, taken from a Godly Preacher lying upon his Deathbed; Written for the Sick;” “A Letter to One’s Friend in Sickness;” eight epigrams; the poem Microcosmographia: The Little World’s Description; or, The Map of Man, from the Latin Sapphics of Henry Smith, translated by Joshua Sylvester; the original biography of Smith by Fuller; eleven pages of notes by Thomas Smith; extensive indices and textual references.

It is impossible to ascertain the exact dates or chronological order for all of Smith’s sermons, though R. B. Jenkins, relying somewhat on the work of Thomas Ehret, attempts to do this. The following dates are a breviary of Jenkins’s work:

1. “The Lost Sheep Is Found,” is dated some time in 1582, shortly after Smith’s examination of Robert Dickons, and deals directly with that event.
2. The two sermons on “The Art of Hearing” are dated 1587

by Ehret, though Jenkins notes that it “is impossible to ascertain the year in which these sermons were preached, but certainly one followed the other.”

3. “The Sinful Man’s Search,” is dated on January 1, 1588 by Ehret, with Jenkins’s affirmation.

4. “Satan’s Compassing the Earth,” and “The Trial of the Righteous,” are both dated some time in 1588 because of their seeming reference to the Spanish Armada.

5. “The Dialogue between Paul and King Agrippa,” was preached, presumably, after July 29, 1588, the defeat of the Armada. Both Ehret and Jenkins place “The Ladder of Peace,” in the same time period as it too refers to the defeat of the Armada.


7. The series of sermons on Nebuchadnezzar are dated in close proximity to the Armada incident.

8. The four sermons on Jonah are dated some time after July 1588, for Smith writes: “As surely as Jonah thought to arrive at Tarshish, so surely the Spaniards thought to arrive in England; but as Jonah’s company wondered at this tempest, so at these Spaniards’ destruction their fellows at home wondered, yea, were astonished, how their invincible power could be destroyed.”

9. “The Christian’s Sacrifice,” which Smith called the sum of “all the lessons together which ye have heard since I came [to St. Clement Danes],” is dated some time before Smith’s retirement, though its first printing was in 1589, after his retirement.

10. “The Petition of Moses to God,” is classified as Smith’s last sermon at St. Clement Danes, though it scarcely bears the mark of a farewell sermon. Near the end of the sermon, however, Smith states plainly enough: “Now it resteth that I should encourage Joshua, which succeeddeth me.” The remaining 39 sermons are impossible to date, and neither Ehret nor Jenkins attempt to do so, though it is fairly certain they were preached during Smith’s lectureship at Clement Danes, with the possible exception of “The Trumpet of the Soul Sounding to Judgment.”

25 Jenkins, *Henry Smith*, 64.
29 Millard Maclure, in *The Paul’s Cross Sermons*, contends that this sermon
CLOSING THOUGHTS

Henry Smith did not leave the Anglican Church, but he did promote a moderate Puritanism within its borders, and in this regard he may be likened to his mentor Richard Greenham, and even to William Perkins, who believed that until the Church of England separates from Christ, none should separate from it. While Smith is not as well known in our day as he was in his, it is to be hoped that the current reprint will prove a timely corrective. In fact, the Puritan Richard Baxter in his *magnum opus* of practical divinity, *Christian Directory*, recommends Smith’s sermons as essential even for the “smallest library that is tolerable.” Smith’s sermons were also among the list of books in the records of the Virginia Company prior to 1624.

There are three immediate reasons why Smith should be studied by scholars, pastors, and laymen, respectively. First, for scholars, no dissertation exists that exhaustively examines Smith’s place in his Elizabethan context. Ehret’s work, while critically examining four of Smith’s sermons, does not deal with his entire prose. The best work on Smith to date is R.B. Jenkins’s, published in 1983, which filled many gaps in Ehret’s edition and supplemented the latter’s work with a more inclusive grasp of Smith’s place in Elizabethan England. But even Jenkins’s work is sketchy at times and does not give full consideration to the intricacies of politics and religion in the 1580s. Secondly, for pastors, Smith exemplifies an early Puritan ideal: simplicity, intelligence, and heart. “Nowadays,” said Smith, “men take upon them to reprove others for committing such things as themselves have practiced, and do practice without amendment, notwithstanding their diligence in teaching others their duty; they can teach all the doctrine of Christ saving three syllables, that is, *Follow-me.*” And thirdly, for laymen, Smith’s sermons provide an indelible treasure trove of inspiration and contemplation. For instance, in Smith’s sermon, “The Art of Hearing,” he admonishes those who are quick to remember old

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tales and equally quick to forget sermons: “Therefore, that you may not hear us in vain, as you have heard others, my exhortation to you is, to record when you are gone that which you have heard.” Also, in reference to conjugal love, Smith admonishes that “man must take heed that his love toward his wife, be not greater than his love toward God, as Adams and Samsons were.”

Smith called the masses to consider the world as a place of vanity and sorrow, and equally called them to fight their way towards the heavenly city, a place that contains their true happiness. His hearers, from all stations in life, asserted that “his preaching, living, and sound doctrine had done more good among them than any other that had gone before or, which they doubted, could follow after.” Smith was not an ignorant man; he was conscientious of the faults of the English Church, and yet he sought first a reformation of individuals and only secondarily, a reformation of churches. This motif, in essence, was the heart of moderate Puritanism in Elizabeth’s reign.

Randall J. Pederson
Grand Rapids
2002

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### CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life of Mr. Henry Smith, by Thomas Fuller, B.D.</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplementary Notes by the Editor</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SERMONS, &amp;c.</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Preparative to Marriage</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Treatise of the Lord's Supper. In Two Sermons—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Sermon</td>
<td>1 Cor. XL. 23, 24. 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Sermon</td>
<td>1 Cor. XL. 25–28. 63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Examination of Usury. In Two Sermons—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Sermon</td>
<td>Ps. XV. 1–5. 88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Sermon</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian's Sacrifice</td>
<td>Prov. XXIII. 26. 109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The True Trial of the Spirits.</td>
<td>1 Thes. V. 19–22. 127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wedding Garment</td>
<td>Rom. XIII. 14. 145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Way to Walk in</td>
<td>Rom. XIII. 13. 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebuchadnezzar. In Three Sermons—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pride of Nebuchadnezzar</td>
<td>Dan. IV. 29, 30. 169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Fall of King Nebuchadnezzar</td>
<td>Dan. IV. 31–33. 180</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Restitution of Nebuchadnezzar</td>
<td>Dan. IV. 34–37. 190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Dissuasion from Pride, and an Exhortation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to Humility</td>
<td>1 Pet. V. 5. 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Young Man's Task</td>
<td>Eccles. XII. 1. 215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trial of the Righteous</td>
<td>Ps. XXXIV. 19. 221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Christian's Practice</td>
<td>Rom. XII. 2. 249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Pilgrim's Wish</td>
<td>Philip. I. 23. 259</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Godly Man's Request</td>
<td>Ps. XC. 12. 279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Page</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noah's Drunkenness</td>
<td>Gen. IX. 20, 21. 291</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Glass for Drunkards</td>
<td>Gen. IX. 21–27. 304</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Art of Hearing: In Two Sermons—</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The First Sermon</td>
<td>Luke VIII. 18. 319</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Second Sermon</td>
<td>Luke VIII. 18. 380</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Heavenly Thrift</td>
<td>Luke VIII. 18. 389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Magistrates' Scripture</td>
<td>Ps. LXXXII. 6, 7. 355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Trial of Vanity</td>
<td>Eccles. I. 2. 371</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Ladder of Peace</td>
<td>1 Thes. V. 16–18. 389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Betraying of Christ</td>
<td>Mat. XXVII. 1–4. 407</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Petition of Moses to God</td>
<td>Deut. III. 23, 24. 421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Dialogue between Paul and King Agrippa</td>
<td>Acts XXVI. 27–29. 433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Humility of Paul</td>
<td>Rom. XII. 1, 2. 453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Looking-Glass for Christians</td>
<td>Rom. XII. 3. 467</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food for New-Born Babes</td>
<td>1 Peter II. 2. 488</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>