

see him.' The servant carried the message in, and presently returned with his master's permission to introduce the stranger. On entering the room where the poet was sitting, William Crotch walked up to him, and, without any other salutation, took him by the hand, and sat down by his side. For one whole hour they thus sat hand in hand, without speaking a word. In relating the circumstance, William Crotch said that during the time that they thus sat in solemn silence a clear conviction was afforded him of the extraordinary purity of Cowper's mind. He at length addressed the poet, and, having in this way disburdened his spirit, he took leave of him, well satisfied that he had obtained the interview."

Copied from *A Memoir of James Hurnard*, 1883, p. 51.

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## Frederick Smith and the Poet Cowper

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Haymarket

19<sup>th</sup> of 3<sup>rd</sup> mo. 1792.

Respected Friend

W<sup>m</sup> Cowper Esq

Olney,

Bucks.

Having accidentally heard some days since whilst on the borders of your County a report which afflicted me with a degree of concern, I thought I should not be satisfied without informing thee of it, as it certainly militates against thy repeated sentiments of Liberty and directly opposes the Idea thou hast given in some of thy excellent poems, that "the slave trade is oppressive and cruel and ought to be done away from this Country." What I heard is as follows, "that on reading the History of Africa thou had found that formerly the Species increased so fast that they were under the necessity of destroying or eating one another lest the country should be overstocked with Inhabitants, and on this ground thou objected to move in a petition to Parliament saying that the present mode of the slave Trade was preferable thereto;" the report came through a channel that rendered it exceedingly specious, it would give me much satisfaction to contradict it, and which I certainly mean to use every endeavour to do, if thou wilt favour me with materials for the purpose. I trust thou wilt excuse the liberty I have taken as I can assure thee it arises from an esteem I have felt towards thee on account of thy Philanthropic and Christian sentiments and which as I doubt not thou art really possessed of, thou wilt not lose thy reward in publishing to the world.

With much regard, I remain,

Thy friend

FREDERICK SMITH.

To Fred<sup>k</sup> Smith

Chemist

Haymarket.

DEAR SIR,

I hold myself truly obliged to you for giving me an opportunity to contradict a report as false as it is injurious to me, I live in the neighbourhood of an ingenious people, and who seem daily to exercise their ingenuity in the fabrication of some falsehood or other, I have not very often been the subject of their Aspersions myself, but by this which they have now treated me with, they make me ample amends for all past omissions.

I have not these many years read a history of Africa, and when I read that history last I found no such assertion ; neither is it probable that any writer on that subject should have been silly enough to make it ; Having never in my life met with it till I found it in your letter, it is of course impossible that I can ever have made the speech or entertained the vile opinion imputed to me. In fact I abhor the slave trade to such a degree, that even if the abolition of it were sure to leave them under a necessity of devouring each other, which is absurd to suppose, I had much rather that they should, than that we should devour them——

The only reason why I did not sign the petition was, that not living in the Parish of Olney, it was not brought to me.

I am, dear Sir, with great respect and many thanks,

Your obliged humble servant

WILLIAM COWPER.<sup>1</sup>

Weston-Underwood, near Olney

March 20, 1792.

<sup>1</sup> From copies given by F. Smith to Morris Birkbeck, now in D.

Frederick Smith (1757-1823) was born in London, of non-Quaker parents. After school days he entered the General Post Office, a relative of his being Controller at the time. In his autobiography he writes of his early "career of wickedness" and gives a full account of various baptisms of spirit before he reached light on religious matters. Before knowing aught of Friends he became convinced of the impropriety of judicial swearing and lost his position in the Post Office in consequence. He joined Friends in 1786, and became a Minister. He was a chemist in the Haymarket till he retired to Croydon in about 1806. He wrote numerous pamphlets, referring to card-playing, fashion, parental instruction, peace, swearing, wifely duty, prostitution, laboring people, "Saints" in Norway, medicine chests, and also a book titled *Reason and Revelation*. His autobiography was edited by Thomas Chalk in 1848. He left a wife and family.

Frederick Smith's son Edward (1787-1834) carried on his father's business. He married, secondly, Eliza, daughter of Joseph Fry Gundry, of Calne, Wilts. Haydon's picture of the "Quiet Hour" is said to represent Edward and Eliza Smith (*Essayist and Friends' Review*, 1893, p. 37 ; *Biog. Cata. Lond. Fds.' Inst.*, p. 635.