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## Seba Smith Embattled

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CAMERON C. NICKELS

Seba  
Smith  
Embattled

Nearly forgotten at his death in 1868, Seba Smith endures today in anthologies of American literature and collections of American humor as the creator of Jack Downing, the first popular crackerbox philosopher in American literary history and the forerunner of Hosea Biglow, Artemus Ward, Mr. Dooley, and Will Rogers. Yet little is still known of the life of Seba Smith. Scholars who preface his works with a biographical note have depended upon the information in Mary Alice Wyman's *Two American Pioneers: Seba Smith and Elizabeth Oakes Smith* and her sketch in the *Dictionary of American Biography*. From these sources, Smith emerges as a moderate, pacific man, with "a retiring disposition and a natural shrinking from society."<sup>1</sup>

Wyman failed to investigate many important primary resources, however, and thus her account of Smith's life and her judgment of his character remain incomplete, particularly in relation to the early, formative years in Portland. Among other things, her delineation does not take into account two "duels" involving Seba Smith, one in 1824 and another in 1830.<sup>2</sup> It should be said, perhaps, that these incidents were not duels in the strictest sense. No formal challenges were passed, no seconds were named, and the principals did not confront each other

with pistol or sword in a secluded clearing. In each case, however, Seba Smith was held accountable for a public insult, a sufficient cause for the traditional *affaire d'honneur*, and he was ultimately forced to defend himself from physical attack upon a surrogate field of honor, the streets of Portland. While lacking the sanguine romance of the typical Southern affair, these conflicts do provide a fresh and entertaining insight into the life of a significant American writer and an interesting footnote to the history of Portland.

Seba Smith's first duel grew out of Maine's early political wars, waged in large part in the pages of two Portland newspapers: the *Eastern Argus*, owned and edited by Smith and James Todd, and the *Independent Statesman*, edited by Abijah W. Thayer. The latter paper had been established in 1821 to support the candidacy of Joshua Wingate for governor and to contend with the *Argus*, which supported Albion Parris. In 1823 and 1824, the central issue was the Presidential contest, with the *Argus* urging the election of Secretary of Treasury William H. Crawford and the *Statesman* espousing the cause of Secretary of State John Quincy Adams. The awarding of the state printing contract also provided a source of contention, but the journalistic rivalries were so keen that the slightest circumstance could provoke a skirmish. Abijah Thayer, for example, often complained that friends of the *Argus* in the post office were holding back copies of the *Statesman* to its out-of-town subscribers. The firm of Smith and Todd, on the other hand, gave editorial space to the owner of the Portland Museum to refute the *Statesman's* charge that a mummy being shown at the museum was a fake.

Beginning in 1824, the war of words quickened as the state contest for Presidential electors and the election it-

self approached. Diatribes against the integrity of Crawford and Adams led to personal attacks and counter-attacks between Thayer and Smith.<sup>3</sup> Typically, Smith insinuated that because Thayer was intellectually incapable of writing the articles in the *Statesman*, he must have posed merely as the nominal “proprietor” of the paper for anonymous editors from the Customs House Junto.<sup>4</sup> Thayer retaliated with sarcastic references to the better-educated Smith as “*Dr. Smith*” and charged that Junto politicians such as Judge Asher Ware secretly contributed articles to the *Argus*. By August, these verbal assaults erupted into physical conflict.

The battle opened on Tuesday, August 10, when the *Argus* printed an article signed by “Atreus,” who reviewed at length the usual charges against Thayer and the conduct of the *Statesman*. However, his attack upon one of the anonymous editors was more characteristic of the vitriolic journalism of the *Statesman* than the ironic condescension of the *Argus*. According to Atreus:

. . . the *Statesman* exhibits internal evidence, that it is conducted by a young man who *sometimes* makes writs, more distinguished for his *bold, swaggering* manner, than for brilliancy of talents, general knowledge or legal attainments. It is admitted that he possesses respectable talents, and that, if he had improved them in proportion to the advantages he has had, instead of abusing his powers by vicious practices and wicked indulgences, he might have satisfied the reasonable expectations of his friends. It is his depravity that peculiarly fits him for an editor of the *Statesman*;

. . .<sup>5</sup>

Although Atreus did not name the editor, every reader in Portland surely knew that the person described was James Parker Vance, a Portland lawyer who had graduated in 1818 from Bowdoin College in the same class as the *Argus* editor, Seba Smith. The *Argus* had alluded to Vance’s influence upon the *Statesman* as early as May 25,

1824, in a reference to “a lawyer who writes more newspaper paragraphs than he fills writs.”<sup>6</sup> Again, on July 13, the name of “Mr. V\*\*\*\*” was linked with Thayer’s as editor of the *Statesman*.<sup>7</sup> And so that no one would miss Atreus’s intentions on August 10, a report of a caucus of the Customs House republicans — a report printed on the same page as the article by Atreus — explicitly referred to “James P. Vance Esq., who is reputed to be one of the editors of the *Statesman*.”<sup>8</sup>

Vance could tolerate these trifling allusions, but not slander. He drew the line at “depravity.” Atreus had predicted that the young man would recognize himself in the delineation, that he would “wince, bluster and *swear* great swelling oaths prodigally — and that in a *bullying* and *threatening* manner” he would demand the identity of Atreus. Accordingly, on Wednesday, August 11, between eleven and twelve in the morning, James Vance did precisely that, approaching Seba Smith at the head of Exchange Street and initiating the following confrontation:

Vance—Who was the author of the communication signed ‘Atreus’ in the last *Argus*?

Smith—I do not consider myself at liberty to disclose the name of the author without his consent.

Vance—Are you determined not to give me his name?

Smith—That must depend upon the wishes of the writer, and —

Vance—(interrupting me:) I now give you notice that unless I have the name of that writer *by two o’clock this afternoon*, or the promise of a full apology in the next *Argus* for the insertion of the communication, the first time I catch you out any where alone I will cane you, or you shall me; and I shall do this, whether you have a cane with you or not. If you are without one it will be your own fault.

Smith—If you are prepared to descend to such low and con-

temptible conduct, and are determined to pursue the course you have promised, do it as you please. The threats of a thousand persons like you, will have no effect upon me, nor cause me to move a single step from what I consider the path of propriety.

Vance—I will positively do what I tell you, unless you accede to my proposition by two o'clock.

Smith—Now, Vance, you had better hearken to reason one moment. If you persist in your determination, depend upon it you are going to ruin yourself before you are aware of it; and I advise you —

Vance—(interrupting me:) I will not reason about it: I will not take advice from anyone; I have made up my mind, and you may depend upon what I have told you.<sup>9</sup>

With this final warning, the two departed to their separate camps for counsel. Some of Smith's friends urged him to have Vance jailed; others advised him to provide himself with a weapon. Smith chose neither course, determined instead to ignore the threat, "feeling neither fear nor malice, and not being disposed to endanger the life of another." Thus at two o'clock he repaired to the *Argus* office on Exchange Street to attend to his usual duties. As Smith stood in conversation on the sidewalk opposite the office, James Vance, carrying a large cane or club, passed by on the opposite side, then stepped into the middle of the street and dared Smith to come to him. "I replied," Smith reported, "that if he had any thing to say he must come to me; and that after that had occurred, I should neither go a step towards him nor a step from him." Urged on by "a large collection of the Customs House Junto and the old and young leaders of the Wingate faction," Vance could not back down, and in Smith's version, he approached him "with a pallid complexion and trembling limbs":

Vance—You have not acceded to my proposition, and I shall

therefore fulfill the promise which I made in the forenoon. You have come out in a most *cowardly* manner this afternoon, without a cane, thinking, probably, that I should not attack you unarmed; but I shall pay no regard to that circumstance; you knew what to depend upon.

Smith—Mr. Vance, if you expect me to meet a person of your character, or any other persons, with weapons in this manner you propose, you greatly mistake my character;

Vance—Then you may take the consequences; I shall do as I have stated. (Here, like a true assassin, he practised a deception to throw me off my guard, in order to give me a deadly blow.) He proceeded — I am not going to make a disturbance here in this public street amongst these people, but if you will take a walk with me alone, I will chastise you. Will you walk with me?

Smith—I shall not.

Vance—You will not? and why?

Smith—It is sufficient for me to say that I shall not stoop to such degradation.

Upon this, Vance drew back a little, with the appearance of turning to go away; but raised his club with a very sudden motion, having both hands hold of the smaller end, and aimed a blow with his utmost force at my head.<sup>10</sup>

Although Seba Smith had not provided himself with a weapon, he had, fortunately, equipped himself with a firm hat that protected him from a blow he believed could have been fatal. Earlier in the day he had told friends that he did not fear attack with a common walking cane, but after the clash with Vance he learned that the lawyer had gone “twice during the forenoon of that day to shop to procure one more suited to the ruffian adventure which he was contemplating.” In any case, Smith was not seriously injured, and he indignantly objected that he was not given an opportunity to defend himself, for the bystanders interfered and hastened to

settle the affair through another channel.

Formal justice was speedy if not equitable. Within fifteen minutes, Smith was summoned to appear as a witness in the Court of Sessions, where James Vance stood on trial for a breach of the peace. The proceedings were clearly rigged in the defendant's favor. The plaintiff in the case, for example, was none other than Smith's rival, A. W. Thayer, and the judge, Woodbury Storer, had earlier in the month been elected president at the caucus of the Customs House Junto in Portland, where James P. Vance had been elected secretary. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that for his attack upon Seba Smith, James Vance was fined a dollar and costs, *sine die*, for a breach of the peace. Yet the affair was far from concluded, for the political feuding that had led to the attack was to foster further conflicts including litigation for several more weeks.

Because of the political controversy that lay behind the attack, interest spread beyond the streets of Portland and the State of Maine. The Newburyport *Herald*, in reporting "the caning of an *Argus* editor," remarked, "'We have seen the editor's statement of the affair, which, if correct, places his conduct in a most contemptible light'"<sup>11</sup> The Boston *Commercial Gazette* reprinted this opinion and added, "We think so too — we hope there is not another editor in the Union who would patiently submit to a severe caning." A. W. Thayer, in turn, happily repeated both of these remarks and added the sarcastic judgment of the *Hallowell Gazette*: "'Cicero somewhere says that no person ventured to molest him with accounts of *assaults* and *batteries*, and the other gossips of the day. (Happy man!) But now-a-days, we see whole newspapers, in close brier, nearly fitted for weeks with long details about a recounter between a couple of lads



in Portland. Such *important* events must be vastly interesting to the public'. ”<sup>12</sup>

Back in Portland, as the *Gazette* complained, the battle continued in the weekly issues of the *Argus* and the *Statesman*. Published on Friday, the *Statesman* was able to draw first blood on August 13 with an attack upon Atreus by “Gracchus” for allowing “a puny editor of the *Argus*” to suffer chastisement for a misdemeanor not his own.”<sup>13</sup> The *Argus* had to wait until Tuesday to respond, but on August 17 it launched a full-scale assault, including Smith's own account of the attack, communications by “Rusticus,” “Atreus,” and “Fabricus,” as well as appropriate quotations from Milton, Lucian, and Roman law. A brief paragraph acknowledged that the paper was crowded with more personal comments than would normally be agreeable to its readers, “but the violent outrage of the Wingate party last week has excited so much indignation amongst our friends that they demand an opportunity to ‘chastise’ not with canes or clubs, but with their pens . . . .”<sup>14</sup>

The chastisement seems rather moderate, with Atreus and Rusticus returning to the patronizing irony that usually characterized the journalistic style of the *Argus*. Vance — and Gracchus as well — are pictured as essentially good men, although the weak-willed tools of the Wingate faction Customs House Junto. Fabricus, however, opened a new front with an attack upon Justice Storer that included a veiled suggestion that he had taken a bribe.<sup>15</sup> The *Statesman* ignored this serious insinuation in its reply, printing instead a brief caustic rebuttal to Atreus by “Philo-Gracchus” and an interesting poem, “To S. S., Jr.” Posing as a friend of Smith's, the author says he was prepared to wreak havoc upon the man who had attacked his comrade, but upon reading the offend-

ing paper and an account of the affair, he was surprised to learn that Smith was still among the living. The poem concludes:

I'd now advise (an Frien' pray reck it)  
That if agen ye'd be respect;  
To own your fauts ye'll na negleckit  
Free unrestrain'd  
Then wi faint hopes ye may expeckit  
A frien' regained.<sup>16</sup>

The poem, a worthy imitation of Burns' poetic epistles, indicates the high level of art that political satire could take in the early nineteenth century.

The *Argus* offered no appropriate response, and toward the end of August the battle dwindled to a brief exchange between Philo-Gracchus and "Philo-Atreus." The lull was only temporary, however, for a parting shot by the *Argus* in its August 31 issue renewed the conflict between James Vance and Seba Smith. An anonymous correspondent from Norridgewock, Maine, complained that he had been coerced into subscribing to the *Statesman*, and he did not want to be listed as a subscriber to that paper if, as the *Argus* had earlier alleged, James P. Vance acted as an assistant editor. The Maine correspondent revealed that a man named Vance had purchased a horse at St. Andrews a few years earlier and had then refused to pay for it by "pleading baby," that is by declaring himself a minor and thus not responsible for the debt. If this were not the same James P. Vance, the writer agreed to keep his name on the *Statesman's* lists for a little longer, but he insisted upon "due trial and fair investigation" before he would pay his subscription.<sup>17</sup>

Offended by the letter (although the accusations were apparently true), James Vance sought satisfaction, this time in the courts. On Wednesday or Thursday, Septem-

ber 1 or 2, he filed a suit for libel against James Todd and Seba Smith in the court of Judge Woodbury Storer — “Where else could he go?” asked the *Argus*.<sup>18</sup> James Todd being absent, Seba Smith faced the charge alone. Upon receiving the warrant, he asked that the case be heard before one of the other judges of the Court of Sessions. Each judge refused, and thus on Saturday, September 4, Smith once again stood in the courtroom of Judge Storer, who promptly ordered him to post five hundred dollars bond to guarantee his appearance at the October session of the Court of Common Pleas.<sup>19</sup>

The *Argus*, of course, was quick to point out the wide discrepancy between the five hundred dollar bond against Smith and the one dollar fine that had been earlier levied against Vance for assault.<sup>20</sup> Surveying the whole *Argus-Statesman*, Crawford-Adams, Smith-Vance controversy, the *Argus* took the high moral road, presenting the libel suit as only one part of a great conspiracy by a rich aristocracy to “trode the *Argus* under foot,” and to destroy a free press that represented the will of the people.<sup>21</sup> The *Argus* stepped up the attack on September 28 with communications from “Falmouth” and “One of the People” which proposed an investigation of judicial improprieties on the part of Woodbury Storer.<sup>22</sup> Leaping to the counterattack, the *Statesman* identified the author of the Norridgewock letter as Samual Woodman, “a ‘gentle beast,’ and a mere tool in the hands of certain knaves.”<sup>23</sup> Again ignoring the insinuations against Storer, Thayer, in another issue of the *Statesman*, ridiculed Smith’s attempt to connect the assault by Vance to the later libel suit. “His only object now is to give an apparent affinity to transactions entirely separate to enlist the passions of the people in his favor, to excite their prejudices and embitter their minds, and

thus prevent the selection of a fair and impartial jury . . .”<sup>24</sup> However, the libel suit against Smith never reached a jury; at least the list of indictments of the October Session of the Court of Pleas published in the Portland papers gives no result of the trial, perhaps because the story of the horse purchase was true. Yet it seems odd that neither the *Argus* nor the *Statesman* mentioned the trial, whatever the circumstances were.

One more battle in the war was yet to be fought. Angry with the injustice of Storer’s handling of the assault by Vance, Seba Smith had taken the case to the Maine Supreme Court, where it was heard before Chief Justice Mellen on November 10, 1824. Vance first pleaded the previous conviction — for breach of the peace — whereupon the government replied “that the assault was high and aggravated and of course not within the jurisdiction of a Justice of the Peace.” After the testimony of two witnesses, James Vance changed his earlier plea and threw himself upon the mercy of the court. In rendering sentence, Chief Justice Mellen considered that Vance’s crime had been committed by a man “highly excited by a supposed provocation and in the heat of a youthful blood which gave him more claims to pardon than an old offender.” Thus the judge was moved to set the fine as low as possible and still “preserve the dignity of the law.”<sup>25</sup> Three months to the day after the publication of the article that had led to the attack upon Seba Smith, James Vance was fined fifteen dollars and court costs.

Considering the attack itself and the events following it, the decision was anti-climactic. Only the *Argus* printed a brief notice of it, without comment, and returned to the unrelenting political wars with A. W. Thayer and the *Statesman*. In March, 1826, Smith resigned as editor of

the *Argus*, apparently compelled by the hostile reaction to his incautious attack upon the Maine Senate. Abijah Thayer, who had become publisher of the *American Patriot* in 1825, saved his most caustic prose for a farewell to Smith. In a long survey of Smith's career, he concluded, "In strength, he was an insolent oppressor; in weakness, a fawning sycophant. Destitute of any settled principles of action, his eccentricities were justly alarming to his political friends; and his flagrant inconsistencies destroyed all confidence."<sup>27</sup> This proved to be Abijah Thayer's parting shot at Seba Smith, for his name does not appear on the masthead of the *Patriot* the following week.

As for James P. Vance, the dispute with Seba Smith was apparently only one of the "dark clouds," which, according to one source, "rested upon his character and prospects" in his early years. His reform, although sudden, was lasting, and "he became an earnest and eloquent advocate of virtue and temperance."<sup>28</sup> Ultimately he gave up his law practice in Maine and moved to Illinois, where he became a Methodist minister.

Seba Smith's second *affaire d'honneur* on July 12, 1830, grew out of circumstances rather different from those of six years earlier. Following his resignation in March, 1826, Smith retired to a house on Back Cove where he dedicated himself, fruitlessly it seems, to the writing of *belles lettres*. He had not retired from journalism permanently — he would publish and edit intermittently for over thirty more years — but his experience with the political wars of the *Argus* left him with a firm commitment to avoid the perils of party politics.

This commitment is clearly evident in Smith's next publishing venture, begun in October, 1829, as owner

and editor of the *Daily Courier*, the first daily newspaper east and north of Boston, and the *Family Reader*, a weekly that reprinted selected items from the *Courier*. To bolster the appeal of these papers, he published the Jack Downing letters beginning in January, 1830. Editorially, Smith often repeated his pledge to avoid party politics and promised to publish a paper with "character and dignity," a policy that would be reflected in tasteful advertisements as well. "If someone wants to advertise his ability to swallow a two-edged sword a foot and a half long, his notice will not appear in the *Daily Courier*," Smith promised with a certain smug good humor.<sup>29</sup>

Smith's moderate political stance, so different from the belligerent diatribes in the style of "Atreus," points up the irony of the events that followed the 4th of July celebration in Portland in 1830. Reporting the politically-charged celebration of that year called for all of Seba Smith's skills at circumspection. There were, in fact, two celebrations, one sponsored by town officials and another by Jackson men who objected to the choice of James Brooks, editor of the *Gazette*, as the principal orator. Smith gave both equal coverage and avoided the touchy issue of judging which parade was the longer. "Either procession was long enough," he concluded characteristically if somewhat enigmatically.<sup>30</sup> Having sidestepped the most obvious political pitfalls of the day, Smith surely saw no danger in printing the following brief social anecdote:

*A little too much 4th of July.* — It is rumored that during the festivities of dinner hours on Monday afternoon, a little difficulty arose between two young men of *official station*, about singing a *song*, which resulted in a challenge from one to the other to settle the matter according to the laws of *honor*. The issue will be anxiously waited for in order that the world may know which

of the two is the *better singer*; for surely, nothing short of powder and ball can decide the question.<sup>31</sup>

Yet the paragraph did prove offensive, and in less than a week Seba Smith found himself again accosted in the streets of Portland, only a block away from the scene of the earlier affair.

The story appeared on the morning of July 8, and that afternoon a Captain Howard of the revenue cutter *Detector* called at the Courier rooms on Exchange Street. It was generally known, he told Smith, that during the July 4 celebration he and a Lieutenant Meade had had a "difficulty" similar to the one reported, although no challenge had been passed.<sup>32</sup> The affair had been settled amicably, and he insisted that the report of a challenge be retracted. Smith replied that he "never wished to publish any thing but what was *correct* and *just*" and thus printed the following correction on Friday, July 9:

The Challenge. — The rumour of a challenge having been given for a duel, mentioned in yesterday's Courier came to us under circumstances which induced a full belief of its correctness. We have since however been assured, and requested to state, that though a little difficulty arose on the occasion alluded to, yet *no challenge was given*.<sup>33</sup>

In reporting the details of the incident, the *Independent Chronicle* and *Boston Patriot* observed that Smith had "contradicted the rumor in a manner not calculated to give offense to any one and expected to hear no more of the matter."<sup>34</sup> Seba Smith's relief was short-lived, however. The retraction apparently satisfied Captain Howard, for no more was heard from him, but the other party, Lieutenant Meade, was not so easily mollified and demanded further satisfaction. The *Courier* had hardly been distributed on the morning of July 9 before Smith received the following note:

Sir, — The excitement caused by your interference in a matter which did not at all concern you, authorizes me, as I feel myself sensibly injured, to demand of you a proper acknowledgment for the sarcastic remark in your paper of the 8th inst. which you have silently passed over in to day's paper. Sir, you must be sensible that, besides interfering with what did not concern you, your paper contained a most palpable falsehood. You are willing to acknowledge so much undoubtedly, — but sir, you have had no regard for my feelings or those of the other gentleman concerned. Sir, it must be hoped that you will not deny what every gentleman of *honor* is bound to give, — an acknowledgement.

Address me at the Exchange Coffee House.

I have the honor to subscribe myself  
yours,                    R. W. Meade<sup>35</sup>

The tone and choice of words here suggest that Lieutenant Meade was trying to goad Seba Smith into a true duel. Smith, of course, had acknowledged his error in reporting the challenge, but he refused to recognize Meade's demands for an acknowledgment of any insult. (For one thing, to have done so would have surely led to a formal challenge from the officer.) Having made inquiries into the character and standing of Lieutenant Meade, Smith decided to ignore him. No doubt he hoped the matter would quietly end, yet he had little comfort during the weekend with reports of occasional threats by the belligerent lieutenant.

Unfortunately for Seba Smith, the officer's passion had indeed not cooled over the weekend. About noon on Monday, July 12, he appeared in person at the *Courier* office to demand an answer to his letter and an apology. He had "considerable to say," Smith later reported, "about his having been brought up in the south, and having very nice sensibilities, and high feelings of honour, and that he could never submit to have his feelings or character touched with 'impunity'; that he was



sometimes pretty desperate, and did things very rashly, and if we did not give him satisfaction, we '*must look out*' " Smith replied that it would be fruitless to attempt to frighten him and that no apology would be printed, for he could not see how the *Courier* had been in the wrong. Lieutenant Meade "renewed some of his menaces," and again demanding a reply to his letter, withdrew.<sup>36</sup>

Seba Smith spent the remainder of the afternoon preparing the next issue of his paper, no doubt wondering what to do about the irascible Southerner. Before leaving for the day at five o'clock, Smith wrote the following note:

Mr. Meade,

Sir, — Before I can with propriety reply to your note of the 9th inst. I must request you to retract, or disavow, or explain the *threats*, which you made when you called on me this day.

An answer to this is requested to be returned by the bearer, who will wait to receive it.

With due respect,  
Seba Smith, Jr.<sup>37</sup>

Still uncertain whether to send the note or to present the issue to the constable and have the lieutenant taken into custody, Smith dropped the note into his hat and stepped into Exchange Street. As he turned into Middle Street, Lieutenant Meade unexpectedly stepped from a shop doorway and approached with a menacing appearance. Smith warned him that if his object was assault he had better keep his distance. Suddenly the officer sprang toward Smith, who repulsed him with a blow from a walking stick. The details of the ensuing conflict are best told by the editor himself:

Finding him still furiously approaching us, and detesting above all things bullying and brawls, we retreated to the middle of the

street, occasionally in order to keep him at a distance giving him a cut with the walking stick across the arm or over the head. Having reached the middle of the street we struck our foot against some impediment, and fell backwards, with our feet towards him; he rushed upon us, and we were reduced to the awkward necessity of keeping him at arm's length for a moment or two with our feet; upon which in order to give more length to his arms, he off hat, and like a mad man, or rather like a mad boy robbing a nest of bees in a mowing field, he thrashed his hat upon our feet and legs till he almost spoilt it. At which we were exceedingly sorry, for it was a new white hat of the latest dandy style.<sup>38</sup>

At this point, with Seba Smith on his back parrying off the blows of Lieutenant Meade's new hat with his feet, onlookers stepped in, taking Meade away and taking possession of Smith's walking stick, "which was a needless precaution," according to Smith, "for it was a kind of game and a kind of sport, which we have no inclination to pursue and should never *run* after."<sup>39</sup> (Readers who recalled the earlier conflict with Vance no doubt appreciated the significance of the cane that Seba Smith had provided himself with and had so easily relinquished after the encounter with Meade.) Apparently the conflict ended here, for an examination of the *Courier* and other Portland papers for the following weeks reveals no further strife and no litigation.

In the *Courier* of Tuesday, July 14, Smith surveyed the events of the week and concluded by consigning the whole affair "over to the tribunal of public opinion, which seldom errors when rightly informed."<sup>40</sup> And public opinion did side with the confident editor. During the week a number of leading gentlemen of Portland stopped at the *Courier* office and sent letters, not only to approve his conduct but also to subscribe to the *Courier*. By Friday, over two dozen new names had been added to

the subscription lists. In a related story on the general topic of dueling, also published July 14, Smith wrote that the practice had never flourished on New England soil. "Our state, so far as our knowledge extends, has never been stained with a duel, and we hope and trust it may never be."<sup>1</sup> As one who had twice been nearly provoked into an *affaire d'honneur*, Seba Smith must have written these words with a silent prayer that his prediction would prove true.

— NOTES —

<sup>1</sup> Mary Alice Wyman, *Two American Pioneers, Seba Smith and Elizabeth Oakes Smith* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1927), p. 8. A biography of Smith by Milton and Patricia Rickels for the Twayne Series on United States Authors is in preparation.

<sup>2</sup> Wyman, p. 29, gives a brief but inaccurate account of the first conflict.

<sup>3</sup> James Todd, a journeyman printer, probably had little to do with the editing responsibilities of the *Argus* and thus escaped the ire of the *Statesman's* editor.

<sup>4</sup> The Customs House Junto, which included the Wingate Faction, consisted of a heterogeneous collection of Federalists and neo-Federalists. The Junto, on the other hand, was made up of the "regular" Republicans, the reigning political bosses in Maine. See Louis C. Hatch, *Maine, A History* (New York: American Historical Society, 1919), I, pp. 178-9.

<sup>5</sup> *Eastern Argus*, August 10, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Eastern Argus*, May 25, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> *Eastern Argus*, July 13, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>8</sup> "The 'Grand Caucus'," *Eastern Argus*, August 10, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Seba Smith, "Assault and Battery," *Eastern Argus*, August 17, 1824, p. 3. All of the details of the attack are taken from this account.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Boston Commercial Gazette*, August 25, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Independent Statesman*, September 3, 1824, p. 3. For obvious reasons Thayer chose not to print the notice of the affair in the *Boston Courier*, August 16, 1824, p. 2. The editors of the paper received a letter from Portland, dated August 12, postage unpaid and signed by an unfamiliar correspondent. The letter reads, "Yesterday we had the pleasure of seeing the insignificant S. S. Jr., one of the editors of that disgraceful paper the *Argus*, caned in public by a gentleman, who is supposed to be an assistant editor of the honorable paper the *Statesman*.'" The *Courier* replied, "Whether such an event happened, or not, is no affair of ours. We give this notice of the letter, that those concerned may, if they think proper, deal with the writer, if they can find him, according to his deserts and own honor."

<sup>13</sup> "To 'Atreus,'" *Independent Statesman*, August 13, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Eastern Argus*, August 17, 1824, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Independent Statesman*, August 20, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> *Eastern Argus*, August 31, 1824, p. 3.

<sup>18</sup> *Eastern Argus*, September 7, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>19</sup> The *Portland Advertiser*, which had stayed out of the conflict, merely reported the results of the trial, September 4, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> *Eastern Argus*, September 7, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>21</sup> "The Conspiracy," *Eastern Argus*, September 14, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>22</sup> "Court of Sessions," *Eastern Argus*, September 28, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> "The Norridgewock Letter," *Independent Statesman*, September 10, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> *Independent Statesman*, September 17, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>25</sup> Seba Smith, "Assault and Battery," *Eastern Argus*, November 11, 1824, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> For Smith's account of this, see *Eastern Argus*, March 21, 1826, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *American Patriot*, March 24, 1824, p. 2.

<sup>28</sup> Nehemiah Cleaveland and Alpheus Spring Packard, *History of Bowdoin College with Biographical Sketches of the Graduates*

(New York: James Ripley Osgood and Co., 1882), p. 210. In a letter to Cleaveland dated February 6, 1854, Seba Smith gave the following brief biography of his former classmate and antagonist: "Vance had a good share of native talent, with plenty of brass, but was not very studious. With proper application and steady and correct habits he might have made a shining mark. He was wild in college and wilder afterwards. I have heard however that for some years past he has reformed, and has been a Methodist preacher in the Western states." The letter is in the Special Collections of the Bowdoin College Library.

<sup>29</sup> *Daily Courier*, October 13, 1824, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> "The Celebrations," *Daily Courier*, July 7, 1830, p. 2. Jack Downing was equally politic in his report to Uncle Joshua. Noting that there was considerable disputing about which procession was the longer, he concluded that "they were both of 'em as big as all out doors." *Daily Courier*, July 9, 1830, p. 2.

<sup>31</sup> *Daily Courier*, July 8, 1830, p. 2.

<sup>32</sup> "The Affair of 'Honor'," *Daily Courier*, July 13, 1830, p. 2. The details of the incident are taken from this account, which was reprinted in the *Family Reader*, July 20, 1830, p. 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Daily Courier*, July 9, 1830, p. 2.

<sup>34</sup> *Independent Chronicle and Boston Patriot*, July 17, 1830, p. 1.

<sup>35</sup> "The Affair of 'Honor'."

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> "Public Opinion," *Daily Courier*, July 14, 1830, p. 2. Upon the advice of "a gentleman of high judicial standing, copies of the report in the July 13 *Courier* were sent to President Jackson and, mistakenly of course, to the Secretary of the Navy. Whether under official pressure to do so or not, Richard Meade resigned his commission in early August. In a letter dated August 9, 1830, Portland Customs Collector John Chandler advised Secretary of the Treasury Samuel Ingham not to appoint a young midshipman to the vacant post: "although there is smartness enough about them, still I do not think they have as much discretion as

is necessary, and I feel that parade and show will cost the Government more than it will be worth to them." *Correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury with Collectors, 1789-1833*, General Records of the Department of the Treasury, Record Group 56, National Archives Microfilm Publication M178, Roll 24.

<sup>41</sup> "Duelling," *Daily Courier*, July 14, 1830, p. 2.

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