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A Strange Case of Debility

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He had again taken up arms in support of efforts to complete the unification of Italy, and (before his defeat by French forces in November 1867) he wrote a simple message of acknowledgment to an Englishman named Samuel Timings. England had long been the friend of Italian freedom. Unforgettable in Garibaldi's mind was the most tangible evidence of this good will, shown when, during the vivid campaign of 1860, English ships had shielded from hostile war vessels the landing of the Thousand Red Shirts at the shore of Marsala. The letter reads:

Caprera

April 9, 1866

Mr. Samuel Timings

Dear Sir,

You offer me a rifle—and I accept it. This will be a further reason, among so many that I have had in the past, for my warm gratitude for English generosity.

Your servant,

G. GARIBALDI*



A STRANGE CASE OF DEBILITY

By AARON POLONSKY

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, two brothers, James and Horatio Smith, were the reigning wits of London. Not many fashionable parties were held without the added lustre of their presence. Their hostesses included such eminent literatae as the Countess Guiccioli and Lady Blessington, both known as friends of Lord Byron. It is reported that John Keats met them at such a

* Garibaldi of course wrote in Italian. What I have translated above reads thus in the original autograph: "Caro Signore, Voi mi offrite un fucile—ed io l'accetto. Sarà questo un nuovo pegno di gratitudine ai tanti da me ricevuti dalla generosità Inglese. Vogliate comandarmi, Vostro G. Garibaldi."

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gathering and found their humor insufferably shallow.

Of the two brothers, James seems to have impressed his contemporaries as the Smith with the greater talent and the finer wit. Perhaps it is because of his public geniality that the myth of James's constant and unwaivering optimism arose. John Timbs, one of Smith's biographers, even goes so far as to expand the legend, telling us that the popular punster led an "easy, social bachelor-life" despite his chronic and painful gout. He bore his suffering, we are told, *without complaint*, because illness was a questionable luxury in the life of a man whose *raison d'être* was to dispense drollery.

A letter of Smith's, addressed to the popular English actor, Charles Mathews (1776-1835) and now in the possession of the Colby College Library, may well lead a reader to ask how far John Timbs' picture of James Smith may be regarded as accurate. The letter reads:

18 Austin Friars [London]

Friday [circa 1829-1833]

Dear Mathews

I regret extremely that I cannot fulfil my business with you tomorrow. I am suffering with such a debility of the lower limbs that I have not been able to quit my bedroom floor for about a fortnight past.

Believe me to remain

Yours very truly

JAMES SMITH.



RECENT GIFTS TO THE LIBRARY

A RECENT reference to preparations to observe the centenary of Whittier's *Snow-Bound* has resulted in a number of Whittier gifts, the most interesting of which is a copy of his *Poems* as published in Boston by Benjamin B. Mussey & Co. in 1849. (This Mussey firm has made its appearance in our library long before this, for B. B. Mussey was one of Jacob Abbott's publishers.) We are indebted