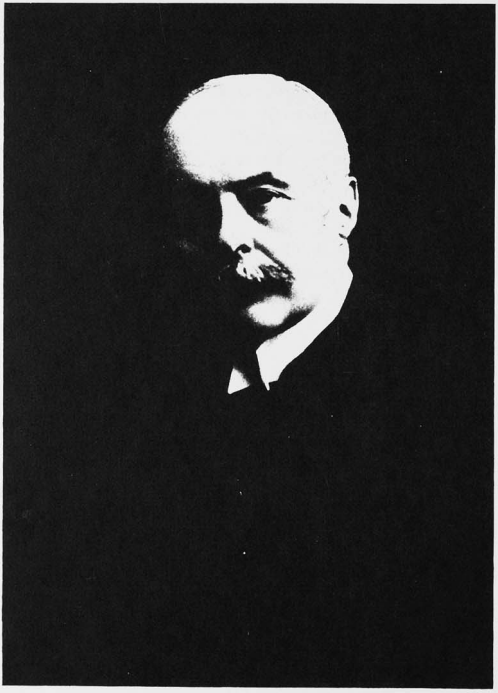

ARTHUR HAMILTON SMITH
1918

ARTHUR HAMILTON SMITH

1860–1941

ARTHUR HAMILTON SMITH was a member of a family with a distinguished intellectual record. His father, Archibald Smith (1813–72), of Trinity College, Cambridge, was Senior Wrangler and 1st Smith's Prizeman in 1836, Fellow of Trinity, and, in addition to being a Chancery barrister with a good practice, subsequently became a Fellow of the Royal Society, being specially noted for his work on the deviation of the compass. His mother was Susan Emma, daughter of Vice-Chancellor Sir James Parker. His eldest brother, James Parker (1854–1929), was a scholar of Winchester, scholar and Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge, 4th Wrangler and 2nd Smith's Prizeman, entered Parliament, where he represented the Partick Division of Lanarkshire as a Liberal from 1890 to 1906, and was made a Privy Councillor in 1904. His younger brother, Henry Babington (1863–1923), was a scholar of Eton and Captain of the School, scholar and Fellow of Trinity, with first classes in both parts of the Classical Tripos and 2nd Chancellor's Medallist, entered the Civil Service, and held high posts of a financial character, which earned him the K.C.B. Three other brothers achieved distinction in the Church, the Navy, and the Army.

Arthur, the fourth son, was born at 14 Ashley Place, Westminster, on 2 October 1860, but in the following year the family moved to Riverbank, Putney, an early Georgian house commanding a view of the start of the University Boat Race, and this continued to be his home till 1895. After a year at a day school he went in 1871 to Dr. Spyer's school at Weybridge, whence he obtained a scholarship at Winchester in 1874. His school career was creditable without being remarkable. He obtained a form prize or two, and played football in College Fifteen; but his school career, and indeed his whole life, was affected by an attack of

mumps in 1876, which, being treated too lightly, destroyed the hearing of one ear, leaving him with the affliction of a continual whistling sound in the head. This hampered all social intercourse, and contributed greatly to the reserve and self-suppression which became marked characteristics in later life. He entered for the Indian Civil Service examination, and was successful; but he decided not to embark on this career, and in October 1879 he went up to Trinity College, Cambridge, as a commoner.

At Cambridge he was a contemporary of Prince Edward of Wales, and was one of a group of twelve undergraduates selected by J. W. Clark to be the special associates and companions of the young prince. He was also a member of the 'Apostles', a proof at once of distinction and sociability. A new interest developed here was rifle shooting. He became captain of the Cambridge shooting eight, and in 1883 won the Peek Challenge Cup at Wimbledon. He took the Classical Tripos and was placed in the first class in Part II in 1883. The class was a distinguished one, including Sir Thomas Heath, Dean Inge, Prof. A. Platt, Prof. E. J. Rapson, and Mr. Charles Whibley. Smith's special interest was in classical archaeology, and on leaving Cambridge he plunged straight into it. After travelling in Italy and Sicily in the spring of 1884, he obtained from Cambridge a grant to enable him to accompany W. M. Ramsay in a tour of exploration in Asia Minor. Joining Ramsay at Smyrna towards the end of May, they travelled up the valley of the Maeander, identifying sites and copying inscriptions, as far as Kestel Gol and Buldur (north of Adalia). Returning thence to Smyrna, Smith had a sharp attack of fever (apparently mishandled by a Greek doctor), and although he started out again with Ramsay he was too weak to continue the expedition, and finally left for home on 21 July.

A visit to Egypt early in 1885 was followed by an examination which admitted him to the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities in the British Museum, where he

began duty on the last day of April. His life's work was thus found. Sir Charles Newton was then Keeper of the Department, but in the following February he was succeeded by A. S. Murray, and it was under Murray that Smith served his apprenticeship. Murray's great work was the rearrangement of the collections, and especially of the sculpture, most of which had been left in detached fragments as they had entered the Museum; and in dealing with the sculpture Smith was his principal assistant. An official of the British Museum, for the most part, learns his work by doing it, under the guidance of his seniors; and the most productive years of his life are generally those during which he is a subordinate, undisturbed by the duties of administration. For anyone who is interested in his work, it is an almost ideal situation, since he is free to devote himself uninterruptedly to the study of his subject, with first-hand material to work on, and with all the relevant literature at his elbow. He has the sense at once of constantly improving his own knowledge and of making contributions to the advancement of science. Moreover, since the work can only be done in official hours (which when Smith entered the Museum were only six *per diem*, subsequently increased to seven), ample leisure was left for pursuing his own studies in his evenings, and men were encouraged to undertake private work of a kindred character to their official pursuits, which increased their experience and added something to their then very scanty official pay.

Smith's first official publication was a *Catalogue of Engraved Gems in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities* (1888). Of this a greatly enlarged edition appeared in 1926, after he had left the Museum, but largely based (as stated in the preface) on materials collected by him for a revision of his original work. His principal interest and work, however, lay in the Greek sculpture, a department in which the British Museum is supreme, through its possession of the Elgin and Phigaleian marbles and the remains of the Mausoleum and the temples of Ephesus. All these were

included in Murray's rearrangement of the collections, and the task of producing a catalogue of all the Greek sculpture in the Department was entrusted to Smith. A Museum catalogue is much more than a summary of contents; it is rather a detailed study of the whole material. Smith's *Catalogue of Sculpture in the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities, British Museum*, occupies three substantial volumes which appeared in 1892, 1900, and 1904. In addition to the collections mentioned above, they include the Townley Collection, purchased in 1805, the Lycian sculptures (including the Harpy Tomb and the Nereid Monument) acquired by Sir Charles Fellows in 1838–42, the sculptures of Branchidae and Cnidos obtained (in addition to the Mausoleum remains) by Newton in 1856–9, and the sculptures brought from Cyrene by Smith and Porcher in 1860–1. These were the days when the Turkish authorities readily gave permission (for a consideration) for the export of antiquities from the lands under their control, and when the services of Her Majesty's ships, sailors, and Royal Engineers were placed at the disposal of excavators. The British Museum was first in the field, and benefited accordingly; and Smith's volumes give business-like descriptions of all of these collections with sketches of their history and references to the more important relevant literature. Like all his work, they are thorough, trustworthy, and unsensational.

During this same period he was mainly responsible for the *Guide to the Department*, which went through five editions in his time, and had some hand in the *Guide to Greek and Roman Life*. A special product, rather off the main line of his work, was a volume of *Designs from White Athenian Vases* (1896). This was the outcome of one of his hobbies, photography. He had invented an apparatus, to which he gave the name of Cyclograph, for giving a continuous representation of curved surfaces, which was particularly serviceable for reproducing the designs on Greek vases. The apparatus was exhibited at the Royal Photographic Society

in May 1895, and was awarded a gold medal at the Berlin Photographic Exhibition in 1896. The volume just mentioned included a selection of the white Athenian vases in the Museum reproduced in this way. It is said that once, when travelling, a German fellow passenger, not knowing who he was, spoke to him of the merits of this new invention. According to one version of the story, Smith listened politely, and did not enlighten him; according to another, he claimed the authorship—and was disbelieved.

His last official publication was a complete edition of the Parthenon Marbles. This had been planned by Murray towards the end of his Keepership, and preparations for it occupied some years between 1903 and 1909. It consists of a portfolio of 92 large-scale plates, in which every fragment of the sculptures is reproduced, with detailed descriptions on 70 pages of the same size. The letterpress is entirely objective; it does not deal with the history of the acquisition of the marbles by Lord Elgin, nor does it embark on aesthetic criticism or archaeological controversy, but it places the whole material at the service of the student in the best possible reproduction. In this connexion it may be mentioned that Smith was himself responsible for an addition to the Parthenon marbles in the Museum. In 1902 he chanced to see a piece of sculpture found on a garden rockery at Colne Park, Essex, which he recognized as a part of the great procession of horsemen on the Parthenon frieze. With it was an Attic inscription which had been last seen in 1771 in the garden of a Mr. Jones of Finchley, and which was identified as having been put on board ship for Smyrna by Stuart, and as having been subsequently given to Mr. Jones by a naval captain. From Mr. Jones it passed into the possession of Thomas Astle, whose son was the owner of Colne Park. It is probable that the Parthenon fragment followed the same course leading to the Colne Park rockery, and thence in 1919 by the generosity of the owner, J. D. Dumville Botterell, Esq., to the British Museum. Fortunately it had been embedded face down in

the earth, and so had escaped damage by exposure; and it fitted exactly into its place in the frieze.

Parallel with his official work as an Assistant in the Museum, Smith undertook private work of the same nature, and produced catalogues of the Lansdowne, Yarborough, and Woburn Abbey collections. In the winter of 1893–4, and again in 1896, he took part in excavations for the Museum at Amathus, Curium and Enkomi, in Cyprus, the results of which were published in an official volume, *Excavations in Cyprus* (1900). The second expedition ended, like his former visit to Asia Minor, in a bad attack of malaria, which, however, had a fortunate consequence, for during his convalescence he became engaged to his future wife, Gertrude, eldest daughter of Prebendary Blomfield Jackson, who had come out with his sister to join him for a tour in Italy. They were married on 28 April 1897. There was one daughter of the marriage. His home had removed from Putney to Weybridge in 1895, and he now set up house at 121 Bedford Court Mansions, whence he moved in 1902 to 22 Endsleigh Street, where he lived until he obtained an official residence in the Museum.

In 1904, on the death of Murray, Smith became Assistant Keeper of his Department; but his prospects of further promotion seemed to be completely blocked by the presence of his namesake and Winchester contemporary, Cecil Harcourt Smith (now Sir Cecil), who had entered the Department a few months before him and who had succeeded Murray in the Keepership. When, however, Harcourt Smith was appointed Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum in 1909, the way was cleared, and Arthur Smith entered on a sixteen-year period as Keeper. Administrative duties and the superintendence of the publications of others practically put an end to publication on his own account, but at the very end of his Keepership he produced (in collaboration with F. N. Pryce) the two first fascicules of the British Museum contribution to the *Corpus Vasorum Antiquorum*, an international undertaking sponsored by the

Union Académique Internationale. It may be mentioned that it was he that suggested the device (Poseidon holding the trident, from a Greek vase) which distinguishes the British fascicules in this series.

As Keeper he was a thoroughly capable head of his Department. His knowledge was wide and his judgement sound, and he could be counted on to give good advice to the Director of the Museum. He was a good companion to his staff, and was never himself the cause of friction. No outstanding new acquisitions came his way, but the collections, especially of vases, were steadily augmented, and the exhibitions were intelligently arranged and displayed to the public.

The War of 1914–18, however, brought the problem of the protection of the Museum collections against air-raids; and the Department of Greek and Roman Antiquities possessed in the Elgin Marbles some of the most valuable objects in the whole Museum, and some of the most fragile in the large collection of Greek vases. Early in 1915 the Parthenon frieze was protected by a considerable depth of sandbags, and the pediment sculptures, with the Caryatid from the Erechtheum and the Demeter of Cnidos, were removed to the basement; while the best of the vases were placed in a deeply vaulted strong room. At the end of 1917, however, the danger of air attack was reported to be greater and more imminent, and it was decided to remove the main bulk of the collections to places of greater safety. The sculptures in the basement were covered with a great depth of sandbags, but the slabs of the frieze, with about 95 per cent. of the objects in gold, silver, ivory, and porcelain, and of the gems, about 75 per cent. of the bronzes and vases of the best period, and about 50 per cent. of the other vases, the terracottas, and the contents of the Room of Greek and Roman Life, were removed in 422 cases to a recently constructed Post Office Tube station below the surface adjoining Holborn. The packing of the vases was a particularly delicate task, for which purpose Smith recruited a corps of

ladies, headed by his wife, who performed their task under his direction with such skill that when the vases were restored to their places after the war, the damage found was infinitesimal (a few old fractures had reopened) and none of it was irreparable. Such success could not have been reckoned on, and it reflected great credit on all concerned.

Concurrently with his official work Smith made valuable contributions to classical studies by his services to the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies. He joined this Society almost at its commencement, and was a member of Council from 1888 onwards. He was a member of the Editorial Committee from 1892 to 1898, and on his retirement from it was elected an Honorary Life Member of the Society. He was Honorary Librarian from 1896 to 1908, and again from 1912 to 1926. He became a Vice-President in 1908, and held the Presidency from 1924 to 1929. Throughout the whole of this time his services were very much more than nominal; he was one of the mainstays of the Society's work, a most wise counsellor, and a competent and business-like administrator. Mr. John Penoyre, who was the chief executive officer of the Society as Librarian and Secretary for many years, pays a warm tribute to him as the best and most loved of his various chiefs, alike from his personal friendliness, his knowledge of the work and the collections of the Society, his invariable willingness to help, and the certainty that he would perform whatever he undertook.

His most important contribution to the publications of the Society arose directly out of his official work on the Parthenon Marbles. The year 1916 was the centenary of this greatest acquisition ever made by the Museum, and although the war made any celebration of the occasion impossible, Smith set himself to put on record a full history of the affair. Much criticism has from time to time been directed against Lord Elgin for his action, generally by people who had little or no knowledge of the circumstances. They did not realize that in 1800, when, as Ambassador at

Constantinople, he directed his attention to the ruined temples of Athens, no one could have foreseen the revolution that broke out twenty years later and which recreated an independent Hellas after an interval of a thousand years. For nearly 350 years northern Greece had been part of the Turkish empire, and for 250 years before that it had been under Western rulers. Athens was a Turkish town no less than Constantinople or Ephesus, and seemed likely to remain so. The Parthenon was a ruin since the Turks had used it as a powder magazine in 1687, and was suffering continual deterioration from neglect, weather, and deliberate damage. Few people could see the sculptures and no one, Greek or Turk, cared about them. To the outside world they were unknown, and the frieze, in particular, was invisible. To Lord Elgin is due all possible credit, first for recognizing the value of the sculptures, and next for rescuing them.

This was the story which Smith set out to reconstruct from the contemporary records. He tells it objectively and impartially, with full citations of the correspondence and other documents, and with little comment. It fully vindicates Elgin, and shows how his operations met with no opposition other than that of officials who desired to extract more bakhshish. The Greeks themselves recognized that the sculptures were being saved from destruction. But whatever conclusions may be drawn, Smith's article makes the actual facts available, and is the indispensable basis for any future discussion of the subject.

In 1925 he retired from the Museum on reaching the age limit of 65, and took up his abode at Weybridge, with which place he had early associations. Here he interested himself in local affairs, notably in the hospital; but his services to archaeology did not cease. Besides the Hellenic Society, he had long been active in connexion with the British School of Archaeology in Rome. On its foundation in 1901 he became its Assistant Secretary, and when in 1912 the School was absorbed into the larger foundation now known

as the British School at Rome, with faculties of Architecture, Painting, Sculpture, and Engraving, in addition to that of Archaeology, he became a member of the Council and Executive Committee and took an active part in its work. He was Treasurer of the Faculty of Archaeology (which had its own separate funds) from 1910 to 1922, and Chairman from 1922 to 1928. But a further call came after his retirement from the Museum, and in 1928 he accepted an invitation to undertake the Directorship of the School in Rome itself. He held this for two years (1928–30), residing with his family in the School building in Valle Giulia; and in 1932, at a time of sudden difficulty, he went out again to fill a gap for some months—a great service to the School, at a considerable sacrifice of his own convenience.

The position of a Director of the School at Rome after the reconstruction in 1912 was by no means an easy one. The interests of the students of the several faculties were very different, and while the archaeologists were prepared by their previous training to make full use of the opportunities offered to them, many of the art students lacked the necessary background of general education, and had little idea how to profit by their residence in Rome. Some were inclined to think that they had little to learn from the study of the past, even in their own branch of art, and were not much disposed to look to an archaeologist for guidance. More than one student subsequently confessed that he had passed his first year before he realized what Rome had to teach him. From time to time also there were difficulties in matters of discipline. Smith's quiet manner was not at first impressive to a recalcitrant student; but tact and patience and essential goodness of heart won their way, and he gradually acquired the full respect and confidence of the students, and their gratitude for his indication of the ways in which Rome could help them. Mr. Evelyn Shaw, the General Secretary of the School, writes:

No one has rendered more devoted or consistent service to the

School than Arthur Smith. His long and intimate association with the administration and with the archaeological activities of the School began in the early days of the School's establishment in the Odescalchi Palace in Rome and ended only with his death. . . . The unselfish motives that prompted him to take charge of the School in Rome on two separate occasions during a critical period of its career, and the admirable order in which he left the administration to his successors, won the highest praise and gratitude of the Council, who, wishing to mark their appreciation of his outstanding services in promoting the objects of their Charter, conferred on him in 1934 the Honorary Fellowship of the School.

A special side of the work of the School was its relation with the similar institutions of other nations. For such international relations Smith was particularly well fitted from his command of languages. He spoke French, German, and Italian fluently (he could read aloud in idiomatic translation from books in these languages), and this gift was of great value in the meetings of the various Schools and the more formal congresses which were rather frequent at this time. Smith enjoyed such meetings with his foreign colleagues, and it is certain that they appreciated his sympathetic attitude and his ability to converse with them in their own languages.

After his return from Rome in 1932 he settled down at Weybridge, where the remainder of his life was spent. His health began to fail, and he was for some years unable to continue activities which involved a journey to town. Here he lived quietly, and here quietly he died on 28 September 1941.

His work did not pass without recognition. On his retirement from the Museum he received the honour of the C.B. He was a Corresponding Member of the German and Austrian Archaeological Institutes, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, and an Honorary Associate of the Royal Institute of British Architects. He became a Fellow of the British Academy in 1924. But he never courted publicity, and his real worth was known only to those who were

closely associated with him. Never was a useful life less spectacular. ἔλαθε βιώσας.

F. G. KENYON

[I have to thank Mrs. Smith for much assistance in preparing this memoir; also, for particular contributions, Brigadier-General G. E. Smith, C.M.G., D.S.O. (brother of A. H. S.), Mr. John Penoyre, and Mr. Evelyn Shaw.]