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*List 173: An Adam Smith Rarity*

*A Letter to the Authors.*

63

A LETTER to the Authors of the  
*Edinburgh Review.*

GENTLEMEN,

*By Dr Adam Smith*

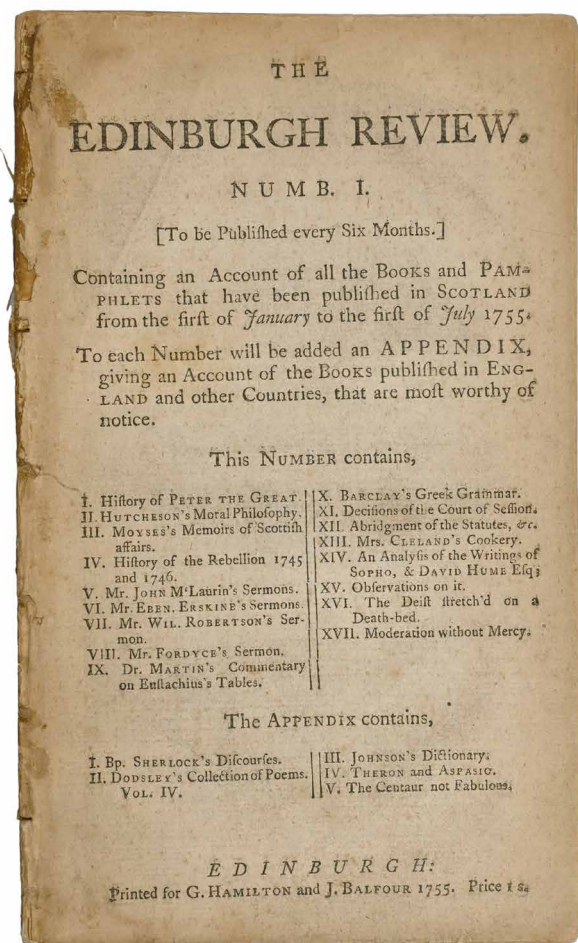
**I**T gives me pleasure to see a work so generally useful, as that which you have undertaken, likely to be so well executed in this country. I am afraid, however, you will find it impossible to support it with any degree of spirit, while you confine yourselves almost entirely to an account of the books published in

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ADAM SMITH JOINS THE SCOTTISH ENLIGHTENMENT

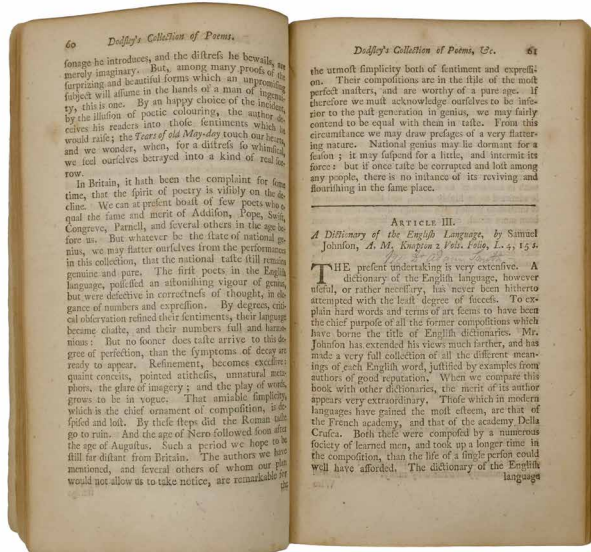
1. [SMITH, ADAM]. The Edinburgh Review. Numb. 1. {To be Published every Six months} Containing an Account of all the Books and Pamphlets that have been published in Scotland from the first of January to the first of July 1755. To each Number will be added an Appendix, giving an Account of the Books published in England and other Countries, that are most worthy of notice. [And:] The Edinburgh Review, from July 1755 to January 1756. [Caption title]. [All published]. Edinburgh: Printed for G. Hamilton and J. Balfour, 1755, [1756].



2 vols., bound as 1. 8vo, pp. [ii], iv, 77, [1], 79, [1, ads].  
 Extracted from a volume. A little toned, first and last leaves dustsoiled, a few openings a little marked. Final leaf detached and a little chipped to edges. Several contributors, including Adam Smith, identified in pencil. £75,000

ESTC P2185.

The complete run of this famously rare, short-lived but enormously important Scottish Enlightenment periodical, containing not only what has been called 'a manifesto of the Scottish enlightenment' but also Adam Smith's first published works of philosophical interest - the review of



Johnson's Dictionary in the appendix to no. 1 and the letter to the authors that concludes no. 2. Smith's first publication of any kind was his edition of the poems of William Hamilton in 1748, accompanied by a brief preface; this, his second, eight years later, established him as a rising star of the Scottish Enlightenment.

Smith's letter, running to 17 pages, displays a breadth of interest and reading, taking in an overview of French philosophy and thought, including his thoughts on the Encyclopedie project of Diderot and the recently-published discourses of Rousseau, and comparing the state of French thought with that in England and Scotland. The review of the Dictionary in the prior issue is shorter and more constrained in its focus, but does represent the first published critical work of a giant of 18th-century economics and philosophy. Other contributors to the periodical include William Robertson, who contributes eight pieces mostly on historical subjects, and Hugh Blair, and its editor was Alexander Wedderburn, 1st Earl of Rosslyn, whose introduction to the project was described as a manifesto of the Scottish Enlightenment by Mossner in his biography of Hume.

The importance of Smith's contributions, and the rarity of the pages in which they were published, were recognised early on: the 'Letter' was translated into French by Pierre Provost and published in his edition of the Essays on Philosophical Subjects in 1797, with a note that the original edition was rare and he expended significant effort in finding one to borrow. There was then a second English edition in 1818, the preface stating that the first has 'now become so rare that it is not to be found in the Libraries of some of the most curious Collectors'.

Enough copies have trickled into institutions over the years for ESTC to locate around a dozen holdings of both issues (albeit with notable absences on both sides of the Atlantic), but the early assessment of its scarcity is upheld by its minimal appearances in market records: we have found a copy of the first issue only in a Maggs catalogue of 1963, an example in modern half calf at Sotheby's in 1979, and Hume's copy in 1987 (described as 'a noted rarity' and estimated at £20-25,000). We have traced nothing further in the four decades since.