Thomas Hood: poet, social thinker, comedian

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THOMAS HOOD
POET, SOCIAL THINKER, COMEDIAN

BY

ERNEST WARNER MOONEY, JUNIOR

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Although Thomas Hood lived an uneventful and somewhat undramatic life, it was not entirely fruitless. His unparalleled misfortune in health and economy was scarcely offset by a felicitous family life; but his poetry—some inane, some mediocre, some excellent—balanced an otherwise pathetic existence. There has been no conscious attempt in this paper to present Thomas Hood as an undiscovered genius. His works and his life have been evaluated for their peculiar merit alone, but a study of those has revealed points hitherto vague and misunderstood as well as forgotten.

As a writer of unmitigated fun, Thomas Hood is hardly excelled. Where he found it impossible to refrain from a characteristic overflow of punning, he neutralized the fault with an equally characteristic grotesque comedy as well as his real talent for logical puns. His poetry is a sort of comic relief in the long and honorable panorama of English Literature.
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Act freely, carelessly, and capriciously; as if our veins ran with quicksilver; and not utter a phrase but what shall come forth steeped in the very brine of conceit, and sparkle like salt in fire.

-Ben Jonson, "Cynthia's Revels."
PART I
Interest in Thomas Hood is sustained because of three or four poems of special merit; but the poet Hood, in his own day, and in a measure today, was noted for work which appealed to all classes. In England, from the time of the Odes and Addresses to Great People until his last contemporary died, he was known as a wit among the rich, a poet among the great, and a friend among the poor. One contemporary critic called him a new Ovid. Hood was no Ovid, but he managed to keep the people of Great Britain laughing, and he succeeded in leaving an honorable amount of good poetry.

Thomas Hood, although born in London, was of Scotch ancestry. His father's family lived close to the little town of Erroll, near the Firth of Fay.¹ Not a great deal is known about the family; but his uncles were "tutor and

¹Charles B. Shaw, "This Fellow of Infinite Jest," Poet Lore, XL, Summer (June), 1929, p. 264.
minister, one a grocer, and one a saddler and butcher.\textsuperscript{1} Hood's father, also called Thomas Hood, by disposition was not a part of that clan. Although he grew up in whatever Scotch tradition the family practiced, he apparently could not bear the farm life, and sometime early in his career left Scotland to seek his fortune in the great city of London. When he left and when he arrived are not known, but he came certainly because of the greater opportunities there. Upon arrival in London, he found the conditions there hardly more favorable to men of letters than they had been at Erroll;\textsuperscript{2} but he found some success later both as a bookseller and publisher and as a writer. Thomas Hood the elder had at least two fairly successful books to his credit, but their names are forgotten.\textsuperscript{3} He also exploited old and rare volumes by rebinding them and selling them at a profit. He was a part of the firm of Vernor, Hood, and Sharpe, whose business was located in the Poultry in London; and it was a well-known establishment to the writers of the day. The \textit{ Beauties of England and Wales}, edited by the elder Hood, is still used.

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., p. 264.

\textsuperscript{2}(Mrs.) F. F. Broderip (Hood), \textit{Memorials of Thomas Hood}, vol. I, p. 3; this work to be referred to hereafter as \textit{Memorials}.

\textsuperscript{3}Ibid., p. 4.
Most of Mr. Hood's friends were probably in the publishing world; and somewhere among them he met a Miss Sands, daughter of a noted engraver. They were eventually married; and she brought to the family a talent for drawing, painting, and engraving. Mr. Hood himself was a writer of some renown, and it seems that the two were not only well pleased with the match but also well suited.

They had six children in the following order: James, Thomas, Elizabeth, Anne, Jessie, and Catherine.¹ Mrs. Broderip mentions that Mrs. Hood, Thomas, and two of the daughters could draw "tolerably" well; and the atmosphere of the Hood household undoubtedly was one of congeniality and encouragement for such activities.

Health, however, is a prime consideration in the life of the Hoods. The son James died of consumption, followed shortly by the father, the mother, and a daughter. Although the family was not completely destitute at this time, the now oldest child, Thomas, felt inclined to work rather than encroach "upon the small family store."² Accordingly, he went to work for his uncle, Mr. Sands, as an apprentice engraver. Young Thomas Hood was only twelve years old at

¹Idem.
²Idem.
the time, but already he was exhibiting the same attitude toward others and their rights which characterized him later. As a child, he was remembered by a friend of his father's as "a singular child, silent and retired, with much quiet humor, and apparently delicate in health."¹ Of course, this is the retrospective observation of an old man after Thomas Hood was dead; and it is subject to question, since Hood's reputation as a funny man was well established by the time the comment was made. It is all the comment there is, however; and it may have been true if later accounts of his personal attributes are considered.

What formal education Thomas Hood had came before his father's death, because after that time, whatever further education he received was self-obtained. He received his formal education at Dr. Wanostrocht's school at Clapham,² and it is to this school that he wrote an ode later in his life. The exact date is uncertain, or at best vague; but the memory of Clapham was still strong. Hood was too

¹ `Ibid., p. 6.
sincere in his serious works to consider education a minor or useless thing, but what he has to say about Clapham throws some light on his work there. In these two verses, at least, the memory is not too pleasant, although the nostalgia may be:

Ah me! those old familiar bounds!
That classic house, those classic grounds
My pensive thought recalls!
What tender urchins now confine,
What little captives now repine,
Within yon irksome walls!

***********

There I was birch'd! there I was bred!
There like a little Adam fed
From Learning's woful tree!
The weary tasks I used to con!—
The hopeless leaves I wept upon!—
Most fruitless leaves to me!—

At any rate, Hood did not consider what he learned at Clapham to be important if this backward look means anything. The "fruitless leaves" seemed useless and irksome, but what he learned there must have been reasonably well retained.

He said himself in a letter to Mr. Wright many years later

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that he had won a Latin prize. Also, he learned and remembered a good deal of classical knowledge somewhere, as is evidenced by the use of it in some of his poetry.

When his father died, Thomas Hood left school and went to work as an engraver. There is little doubt that he did so for the family and that his intentions of supplementing the meagre store were sincere, but it will be remembered that he did not like school. He was probably glad to get away.

His life as an engraver was not a happy one. He was talented, but scratching on steel was not what he wanted. Obviously, he did not know exactly what he wanted to do; but he was still only a boy. He went from Mr. Sand's office to one of the Le Keux. It was the same employment, engraving; and the long, difficult hours of labor began to tell on the youngster. He had ministered to his mother with extraordinary devotion. Her death had been a blow to him. Now, his own health began to decline; and it became imperative that he have a change of scenery. Hood said that

"... By so much sitting, I was hatching a whole brood of complaints."¹ He was cheerful and optimistic in the face of ill health, but he was forced to make a trip to Scotland. Considering the finances of the family, it must have been truly necessary for him to leave London and the exhausting position he held as an apprentice engraver. The pay would have been small but essential if the store was to last.

There were some relatives there whom he had never seen before, so far as is known. It is doubtful that he lived on the charity of these relatives, but just what did happen is not clear, and it is relieved only by these small bits:

He was two years in Scotland, and made his first appearance in print there -- first in the Dundee paper in a letter, and afterwards in a local magazine. He did not, however, he says, adopt literature as a profession till long after.²

¹Thomas Hood, Prose and Verse, "Literary Reminiscences," New York, George Putnam, 1851, p. 52. This work to be referred to hereafter as "Literary Reminiscences."

And in his "Literary Reminiscences":

Like other shipments, I had been regularly addressed to the care of a consignee; -- but the latter, not anxious, probably, to take charge of a hobblede-hoy, yet at the same time unwilling to incur the reproach of having a relative in the same town and not under the same roof, peremptorily declined the office. Nay more, she pronounced against me a capital sentence, so far as returning to the place from whence I came, and even proceeded to bespeak my passage and reship my luggage . . . .

I . . . went on board, but it was in company with a stout fellow who relanded my baggage . . . .

I have a confused recollection of meeting some three or four days afterwards, a female cousin on her road to school, who at sight of me turned suddenly round, and galloped off towards home with the speed of a scared heifer.¹

Hood says in a letter that he was enjoying himself reading and wandering; but again in his "Literary Reminiscences," he says he was a clerk in a merchant's office. Thomas, Junior, refutes that by saying he mentioned it only as an opportunity for punning. It is more probable that he was chiefly concerned with his health, and that the wandering and reading were his favorite pastimes. He returned to London in excellent health.² The trip to Scotland had been a success.

¹"Literary Reminiscences," op. cit., pp. 54-55.
Hood arrived in London in 1817. His health was good, and he went back to work as an engraver. London at that time was reading the best of Keats, Byron, Shelley, Moore, Sir Walter Scott, Wordsworth, Hartley Coleridge, Southey, Lamb's Elia, Hazlitt, De Quincey, Leigh Hunt, and many other lesser lights—chiefly in the four years immediately following Hood's return. He was especially impressed with Keats, and later tried his hand at a dramatic Lamia of his own.

So far, there is still no indication that Hood intended to write for a living. His trade was engraving. He was doing fairly well at it. But he must have thought about writing. In Scotland, he had had something published, an unforgettable impetus; and certainly, writing was on his mind.

Early in 1821, Mr. Scott, who published The London Magazine, was killed in a duel. The fight was a nasty one, caused by a harsh word or two in the beginning and growing to such permanent conclusions. The Messrs. Taylor and Hessey took the magazine after this, and they were in need of another man. They had both been friends of Mr. Hood the elder, and

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1Rosetti, op. cit., p. x.
they both knew young Thomas. They sent for him, and he lost no time in going to work for them as a sort of sub-editor.¹ This was indeed a turning point. He left the engraver's bench with pleasure and took up his duties as proof-reader, selector, and general handyman. Part of his duties was to read over contributions; and in this capacity, Hood began to know some of the best writers of the times: Charles Lamb, Allan Cunningham, Hazlitt, Horace Smith, Thomas De Quincey, and others less well known today. The chief importance here is that he did get to know these men. He was a close friend of Lamb and John Hamilton Reynolds, the latter having been familiar with Keats. Hood probably never met Keats, coming into the circle sometime after Keats died; but he was familiar with his work, as he was with all his contemporaries.

As a personal matter, the most significant friendship which Hood found in these years was that of John Hamilton Reynolds. Reynolds' father was head writing-master at Christ's Hospital;² and the Reynolds family lived in Little

²Ibid., p. 10.
Britain, a section of London peopled with the literati and lawyers.\(^1\) Hood also met Mr. and Mrs. Dilke during this time—a friendship which lasted until Hood's death.

The *London Magazine* afforded Hood not only a livelihood, but also a medium for his ability as a poet. Mr. Hessey has left a list of all Hood's contributions while he was on the magazine.\(^2\) According to Mr. Hessey, Hood never contributed to the magazine after he left it in 1823; but he left quite a few poems before then; and his reputation as a humorist gained much ground.

Hood found a kindred spirit in John Hamilton Reynolds. Together, they composed various little pieces for their own and their friends' amusement. For instance, Hood's tastes took him to the theatre occasionally; and at one performance, Fanny Kemble's last, Miss Kemble threw her bouquet to an eager and appreciative audience. Hood posed as a young man fresh from the country and wrote an amusing account of his part in the scramble that followed. Reynolds posed as a pickpocket and wrote his version.

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\(^2\)See Part II, p. 69.
Hood was a frequent visitor to the Reynolds' home in Little Britain. There, he met and talked to Reynolds' friends while he made new friends of his own. There, he met Reynolds' sister, Jane Reynolds, some five years older than Hood. The difference in age seemed to make no difference to either of them. There is a possibility that the Reynolds family did not exactly approve of a marriage between Thomas Hood, young and with no money, and their cultivated and talented daughter Jane. If there was trouble, however, it was slight; and the friendship between John and Thomas, as well as the love between Thomas and Jane, overcame whatever opposition there may have been. Hood had dedicated his "Lycus the Centaur" to John Hamilton Reynolds, and together they had delighted their friends with their wit. With this marriage, the friendship should have been insoluble.

The month of May was a significant one for Hood. He was born May 23, 1799; he was married May 5, 1824; and he died May 3, 1845.

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In spite of all the sickness and sorrow that formed the after-part of their lives, the union was a happy one. My mother was a woman of cultivated mind and literary tastes, and well suited to him as a companion. He had such confidence in her judgement that he read, and re-read, and corrected with her all that he wrote.¹

Such was the woman he married. Their life together was at times a severe strain on any devotion, but their love seemed to have been made of good stuff. His affectionate term for her was Jenny, and she called him Hood.

...The marriage was a happy one; Mrs. Hood being a tender and attentive wife, unwearied in the cares which her husband's precarious health demanded, and he being a mirror of marital constancy and devotion, distinguishable from a lover rather by his intense delight in all domestic matters than by any cooling down of his fondness.²

After their marriage, the new Mr. and Mrs. Hood moved to Robert Street, Adelphi.

As we have already noted, Hood and Reynolds, his new brother-in-law, thought a good deal alike on many matters, especially their writing. They had been together on The

²Rosetti, op. cit., p. xi.
London Magazine, and now they decided to write together. Conjointly with Reynolds, Hood wrote and published *Odes* and *Addresses to Great People* in 1825. The work was anonymous, but it enjoyed an immense popularity, and there was great speculation concerning the author. Later, in Hood's own hand, there appears a first edition of the work with the various pieces apportioned to the respective authors.¹ The immediate success of this work helped establish Hood's desire to write for a living. There is, of course, no evidence of an exact date when such a decision was reached; but before this time, he was undecided.

Hood's pleasure at the success of the *Odes* was a natural one. He set out immediately to write another similar volume. In 1826, *Whims and Oddities* appeared, "which had a very good sale."² The sale was so good, in fact, that later editions appeared within the same year, and finally, a second series entirely in 1827.

The first series was dedicated to the reviewers:

¹Thomas Hood, *Choice Works*, "Memoir of Thomas Hood," London, Chatto & Windus, 1897, p. xi; this work to be referred to hereafter as *Choice Works*.

What is a modern Poet's fate?
To write his thoughts upon a slate:
The critic spits on what is done,
Gives it a wipe -- and all is gone.¹

The second series was dedicated to Sir Walter Scott,² and
was every bit as well received as the first.

Both series of Whims and Oddities were decorated with
Hood's own clever illustrations. They were hardly more than
illustrated puns; but they were extremely effective, both
when they accompanied a poem or prose story, and when they
were tail pieces. For instance, a sketch of a mermaid to
go with "The Mermaid of Margate," in the first series, has
the caption, "All's well that ends well."

While the young couple were still living in Robert
Street, Adelphi, and while Hood was enjoying his successes,
a child was born. It was a girl, and it hardly survived
its birth. Their second daughter wrote later:

In looking over some old papers, I found
a few tiny curls of golden hair, as soft as the
finest silk, wrapped in a yellow and time-worn
paper inscribed in my father's handwriting:

¹Choice Works, op. cit., Dedication to Whims and Oddities, p. 91.
"Little eyes that scarce did see,
Little lips that never smiled;
Alas! my little dear dead child,
Death is thy father, and not me,
I but embraced thee, soon as he!"

This was in 1827, and even though it had its normal effect on the father, he never stopped his Whims and Oddities. It is a curious thing that Hood could and did continue writing his humorous stories and poems even through his first real grief. Before this time, he had had some illnesses, but nothing alarming. Now, with the death of his first child, Hood continued in the same vein of whimsy for the people of England. It was on this occasion, too, that Lamb sent Hood the lines entitled: "On an infant dying as soon as born."  

No one knows whether or not it was directly due to the death of his daughter, but after Whims and Oddities, Hood did not write humorous works for a while. He thought of himself as a poet—not Shakespearean or Miltonic—but just Thomas Hood, "no great author." Nevertheless, if it had been left to Hood, he would rather have been accepted as a poet than as a humorist; so he began more serious writing.

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2 Idem.
In quick succession, Hood published *National Tales*, a series of stories, and a volume of serious poetry that included "The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies."

The appearance of both these volumes, however, was inopportune. They were dismal failures. Hood liked them, and some later critics agreed with him, but the reception of the *Tales* and the death of the "Plea" were both unfortunate for Hood. He dedicated the poem to Charles Lamb, saying in effect that it was appropriate dedication not only because of their friendship, but also because of Lamb's devotion to "our great Dramatist" whose "Midsummer Night's Dream" had inspired it.¹

Such were the works of Hood after he left *The London Magazine*, and after he had met with such success with the *Odes* and *Addresses* and *Whims* and *Oddities*. They were all ill received; and the new poet had a decision to make: whether he would continue to write as his conscience dictated or write as the public wished. One way he might starve and never be popular. The other way, he would

undoubtedly be giving the people what they wanted and, at the same time, provide a living for himself and his family. It was a difficult decision, but it was not long in coming. In 1829, Hood wrote "Epping Hunt," which brought him back into the fold.\(^1\)

Something should be said about Hood's relationship with Charles Lamb. Accounts of that friendship are rare and sketchy; and for the most part, the only reliable source is Hood's "Literary Reminiscences." In the fourth part of these reminiscences, Hood was writing after 1839, probably early in 1840; and he gave a complete account of his first meeting as well as subsequent meetings with Lamb. They met while Hood was working as sub-editor of The London Magazine, and Lamb was a regular contributor. Hood was a young man twenty-three or twenty-four years old; and after hearing of the great writers of the day, it was a thrill to be able to see and talk to these same men.

Before my departure from England, I was one of the few who saw the grave close over the remains of one whom to know as a friend was to love as a

\(^1\)Shaw, op. cit., p. 271.
relation. Never did a better soul go to a better world; Never perhaps (giving the lie direct to the common imputation of envy, malice, and hatred, amongst the brotherhood), never did an author descend — to quote his favorite Sir T. Browne — into "the land of the mole and the pismire" so hung with golden opinions, and honored and regretted with such sincere eulogies and elegies, by his contemporaries. To HIM, the first of these, my reminiscences, is eminently due, for I lost in him not only a dear and kind friend, but an invaluable critic. . . .

I was sitting one morning beside our Editor, busily correcting proofs, when a visitor was announced, whose name, grumbled by a low ventriloquial voice... did not sound distinctly on my tympanum. However, the door opened, and in came a stranger... He advanced with a rather peculiar gait, his walk was plantigrade, and with a cheerful "How d'ye," and one of the blandest, sweetest smiles that ever brightened a manly countenance, held out two fingers to the Editor. . . . After the literary business had been settled, the Editor invited his contributor to dinner, adding "we shall have a hare —"

"And-and-and-and many Friends!"

The hesitation in the speech, and the readiness of the allusion, were alike characteristic of the individual, whom his familiars will perchance have recognized already as the delightful Essayist, the capital Critic, the pleasant Wit and Humorist, the delicate-minded and large-hearted Charles Lamb! . . . Our first meeting scarcely amounted to an introduction."

Hood enjoyed this first meeting, although there was no more than a conventional greeting. They all went to dinner

L"Literary Reminiscences," op. cit., pp. 75-77.
together that evening, but no amount of trial on Hood's part could get Lamb to notice him. A later contribution of Lamb's to The London Magazine gave Hood another chance, and he wrote a letter of thanks to Lamb for the contribution. It had no effect, apparently, for nothing came of it, until still later:

I had given up all hope, when one night, sitting sick and sad, in my bed-room, racked with rheumatism, the door was suddenly opened, the well-known quaint figure in black walked in without any formality, and with a cheerful "Well, boy, how are you?" and the bland, sweet smile, extended the two fingers. They were eagerly clutched, of course, and from that hour, we were firm friends.  

Hood and Lamb were neighbors at this time; and Lamb invited Hood to his home, Colebrooke Cottage. There he was to "meet Wordsworth." Hood was still not too well; but "with more alacrity than consisted with prudence, stiff joints, and a North wind," he ran to Colebrooke Cottage. Hood had a few things to say about Wordsworth that may be of interest:

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1 Ibid., pp. 77-78.
2 Ibid., p. 78.
He is not the first man by many, who has met with a simple fracture through riding his theory-hack so far and so fast, that it broke down with him. . . . If he has babbled, sometimes, like an infant of two years old; he has also thought, and felt, and spoken, the beautiful fancies, and tender affections, and artless language, of the children who can say "We are seven."!

Thus, the friendship between Lamb and Hood ripened. Lamb was the better known, of course; and for the most part Hood languished in his glory. But the friendship continued with much affection on both sides. When Hood went to Hastings (as he often did) for his health on one occasion, Lamb sent him a tender letter, including the names of some friends for Hood to look up. It was Lamb's desire that these friends would help cheer Hood. Such letters are rare, because they were neighbors most of the time and needed no correspondence. In 1829, Hood moved to Winchmore Hill; and at that time, Lamb was in Enfield. There they were "tolerable" neighbors, and frequent visiting further precluded the necessity for letter writing. In those days, too, letters were long and skillful; and the post was not the best. The railroads were just beginning to come in,

\[1\text{Idem.}\]
not really making a start yet, and not yet carrying mail. As a matter of fact, the railroads were consistently ridiculed; and it was predicted they would not last.

Twice at Colebrooke Cottage, Hood met Samuel Taylor Coleridge, who had come there for dinner with Charles and Mary. The second time there, Coleridge was accompanied by his son, who, not knowing Hood had written the Odes and Addresses, made some remark about those "foolish Odes and Addresses" in Hood's presence. Coleridge, Hood said, had a particular regard for that work, because he had at first attributed them to Lamb;¹ and on this instance, he gave Hood a sly, meaningful look.

Contacts made by Hood while serving on The London Magazine seem to have been materially strengthened by these visits to Lamb's house, where there was always someone dropping in.

By 1829, Hood had decided to write what the public wanted. There were at least two reasons why he chose this road rather than the more serious one. It has already been stated that the serious works were not liked by the public,

¹See Part II, p. 74.
especially the public that knew the humorous Hood and was used to his Odes and Whims. Hood needed money to live on, and he knew he could sell his humorous poetry and prose. As a second consideration, it will be remembered that Hood was frequently in Lamb's company, as well as the company of some of the best known writers of the day. When he thought of them, he realized that his best works were inferior to theirs.¹

In that year, 1829, he published "Epping Hunt." It was the first really funny piece he had written for at least two years—not since Whims and Oddities. It was applauded by everyone. "Obviously common sense -- as opposed to poetic sensibility -- demanded the continued production of funny and saleable verse."² He had made his decision: if the people wanted funny poetry and prose, they would have it.

Also in 1829, Hood became editor of The Gem, an annual to which he also contributed some poetry and prose, among them, the famous "Dream of Eugene Aram."

¹"Literary Reminiscences," op. cit., p. 71.
²Shaw, op. cit., p. 271.
The Hoods now lived at Winchmore; and there in 1830, a second daughter, Frances, was born. It was she who, after her father's death, compiled and edited the only complete account of his life, the *Memorials of Thomas Hood*, which contains notes by her brother, Thomas, Junior. This was a happy event indeed for Hood, who had grieved so over the loss of his first child. Mrs. Hood, his "Jenny," suffered no ill effects from the birth of "Fanny"; and Hood was happy for them both.

Collaborating again with John Hamilton Reynolds, Hood tried his luck with the theatre. Together, they dramatized *Gil Blas*, which was acted at Drury Lane. Hood, alone, wrote the libretto for an English opera;¹ and although its very name is lost now, it had a good run at the time. There were as many as two other stage works which Hood wrote himself, both of which enjoyed some success; but the account of these digressions into the theatre comes only from Hood's daughter, Mrs. Broderip. The *Memorials* was published in 1860, thirty years later; and at the time of Hood's theatrical trials, she was only one or two years old. She gleaned the information from letters of her father and quotations from friends

¹ *Memorials*, vol. I, p. 35.
who remembered and were still alive in the late fifties.

After Winchmore, Hood and his family moved to Lake House, Wanstead; and both places were enjoyed by the entire family. Here they had a small pond which delighted Hood and Fanny; and here, too, Hood continued his practice of playing all sorts of practical jokes on his wife. The Memorials is full of little jokes which amused the whole family as well as their friends, usually at the expense of Mrs. Hood, who must have been another Griselda.

Christmas, 1830, saw the first of the Comic Annuals. This publication appeared every year from 1830 to 1839, inclusive, and again in 1842, eleven volumes in all. It was Hood's most absorbing labor for these years; and almost everything he did usually found its way, in some form, to the Annual. It was a conglomeration of stories, usually short and funny; poetry; Hood's own illustrations; and some older works which he republished. The Annual managed to live through the most trying time of Hood's life; that part which was spent in Germany. It was highly successful, apparently awaited by an eager following every year. Each year, Hood dedicated the Annual to a different person. The first volume was dedicated to Sir Francis Freeling, his close friend and daughter's godfather.
TO SIR FRANCIS FREELING, BART.,

The Great Patron of Letters, Foreign, General, and Twopenny; distinguished alike for his fostering care of Bell Letters; And his antiquarian regard for the Dead Letters; Whose increasing efforts to forward the spread of intelligence, as Correspondent Member of All Societies (and no man fills his Post better), have Single, Doubly, and Trebly Endeared him to every class; this first volume of "The Comic Annual," is with Frank permission, gratefully inscribed by

Thomas Hood

This first volume was sent to the Duke of Devonshire who replied in glowing terms, accompanied by a request for Hood to write something for him. There followed a series of letters between the two, in which Hood wrote for His Grace a list of titles of fictitious works to go on a door which the Duke was having made. The list was gratefully received, and Hood dedicated the second volume to him. The friendship between Hood and the Duke of Devonshire grew and became quite warm. Without solicitation, the Duke extended many courtesies to Hood, including a small loan in 1833.

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1 Ibid., vol. I, p. 28.
2 Idem.
3 Ibid., p. 34.
These matters took up little of his time, however; and Hood was chiefly concerned with *The Comic Annual*, his dramatizations, his health, and a little later, his finances. There seem to have been periodical lapses in his health; and whenever it was possible, as he had done in the past, he would take a vacation either at Brighton or at Hastings. He was fonder of the latter, it seems, since it gave him a better chance to see the sea, its ships, its moods, its perfection. He learned to sail there, with the help of Tom Woodgate and became, "for a landsman, a tolerable boatman."¹ There he could swim, too, being fond of sailing out from shore a little way and swimming from the boat. Once, he came up from a dive directly under the boat; but he managed to get down and up again in safety.² He was constantly refreshed by the air of the sea, and never seemed to tire of these side trips to Hastings. Even after his unfortunate crossing to Rotterdam, he never lost his love for the sea; and while still in Germany, he wrote a sonnet which reflects his love for it.

¹"Literary Reminiscences," *op. cit.*, p. 53.
In 1832, he wrote *Tynex Hall*, a novel, which had a good sale and gave Hood, according to one later critic, a place "among the highest class of English novelists."¹ It appeared in three volumes; and it, too, was dedicated to the Duke of Devonshire. That was in 1832, and *The Comic Annual* for that year was dedicated to King William the Fourth.

The "Comic Annual" of 1832 was dedicated by permission to King William the Fourth, who received the dedication and a copy of the work very graciously, and eventually expressed a desire to see my father. He accordingly called upon His Majesty by appointment at Brighton. My father was much taken with His Majesty's cordial and hearty manner, and I believe he was very well received.²

Certainly this was something approaching success in the literary world, to be received by the King; but nowhere in any of Hood's later writings is the incident referred to. His daughter says that he merely talked about it at the time, indicating that he had been favorably received, and that he had liked the King.

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Somewhere in these years, Hood and John Hamilton Reynolds, his brother-in-law, had some sort of disagreement; and there was a complete rupture which never healed. They had been friends when Hood was connected with *The London Magazine*; and the friendship was further strengthened when Hood married John's sister, Jane. Later, they collaborated on *Odes and Addresses to Great People*, and, still later, on several stage productions. What the trouble was is not at all clear, or even fully stated; but "... It was a pity it did not survive to the end."¹ Hood referred to Reynolds as "John" in his letters; but from somewhere around 1833 until he died, Hood never mentioned him again. The pity of the estrangement is in the fact that certain of Hood's letters to Reynolds were not available to his children when they were compiling the *Memorials*. Apart from that, the children, at least, are loyal to the memory of their father and apparently do not blame him for anything. Furthermore, from what can be surmised from the life of Hood, both in the facts and in his works, he was not a man for arguments or disputes.

In 1834, a serious turning point came in the fortunes of the Hood family. Although somewhat vague, the facts seem

¹Ibid., p. 10.
to be that Hood had invested in a publishing concern which failed, leaving him, along with others, in great debt.¹ From this bit of misfortune, Hood hardly recovered. He never made a great deal of money, but to lose what he had and start all over again from scratch was quite an undertaking for a man thirty-five years old. His creditors could be satisfied legally by simple bankruptcy proceedings, but Hood would not hear it. Against the wishes of his friends, he would never be legally absolved of his debts, preferring rather to take it upon himself to answer his creditors, regardless of how long it took. Consequently, he decided to live cheaply, work hard, and pay back every shilling.

"For some months he strove with his embarrassments, but the first heavy sea being followed by other adversities, all hope of righting the vessel was abandoned. In this extremity had he listened to the majority of his advisers, he would have at once absolved himself of his obligations by one or another of those sharp but sure remedies, which the legislature has provided for all such evils. But a sense of honour forbade such a course, and emulating the illustrious example of Sir Walter Scott, he determined to try whether he could not score off his debts as effectually and more creditably, with his pen, than with the legal white-wash or a wet sponge. He had aforetime realised in one year a sum equal to the amount in arrear,

and there was consequently fair reason to expect that by redoubled diligence, economising, and escaping costs at law, he would soon be able to retrieve his affairs. With these views, leaving every shilling behind him derived from the sale of his effects, the means he carried with him being an advance upon his future labours, he voluntarily expatriated himself and bade his native land good night." (sic.)

This is extracted from a letter of his own in which he describes the whole course of his affairs.¹

By these measures, then, Hood hoped to escape debt and dishonor with one blow. At the same time, he knew it would be a difficult and a long task. He decided upon Germany as the best place for him to be. There, he believed, living was cheap; and taking the advice of a dear and good friend, Dr. Dilke, then editor of The Athenaeum, Hood decided to live at Coblenz.² Before he could leave, further woes were added to those already suffocating him. Mrs. Hood bore a son; and she had a difficult time of it, becoming very ill as a direct result.³ The son, to be called Thomas, Junior, was born January 19, 1835; and it was at

²Second letter from Thomas Hood to his wife, quoted in Memorials, vol. I, p. 56.
³Ibid., p. 47.
this time that the Hoods met and loved Dr. and Mrs. Elliot. The friendship ended only with Hood's death, beginning as it did, with the recovery of Mrs. Hood. Hood waited only until his Jenny was a little better, and he left for the continent.

Hood himself could not deny it: the trip across the North Sea seriously impaired his health. The crossing was made on the Lord Melville in March of 1835, and the storm they met in the middle of the North Sea was one of the worst that sea had ever seen. Occurring on the fourth and fifth of March, the storm lasted from Wednesday night through Thursday; and during it, eleven vessels were lost. Fond as Hood was of the sea, this storm affected him; and he never forgot it. Later works mention it in one way or another, including an account of a big overbearing German who became desperately sick.

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1Idem.
3"Literary Reminiscences," op. cit., p. 69.
Hood traveled from England to Rotterdam, and from there to Cologne, Mainz, and Coblenz entirely by water. In his first letter home, Hood tells the whole story from the time of the storm in the North Sea until his arrival at Coblenz the following week. As a matter of fact, the only account of Hood's sojourn in Germany is contained in the letters from and to him and his wife which are quoted in the Memo-
rials. Each letter is extremely long and comprehensive, covering practically everything that took place since the preceding letter. Hood had many devoted friends who wrote to him, and to whom he wrote, taking time out from his fever-
ish labor on the Comic Annual and the days on end which he spent in bed with one thing or another. These letters sometimes contain a pathetic account of a lapse in health that has cost him many days of work. From the beginning, he had contemplated a new book which would tell the story of life on the Rhine. While working on that, he also wrote various articles for Dilké, wrote constantly for the Annual, and considered many different projects. Some of these turned out to be profitable; some did not. The point is that he was working almost always. When he was not working, he was taking healthful walks up some of the surrounding mountains. He tells of incidents that delight and amuse the
reader. Hood, not knowing a great deal of German and few Germans knowing much English, found ample opportunity to exploit the funny things that happened.

Mrs. Hood left England soon after Hood arrived in Coblenz, and he met her and the two children at Cologne. It was a strenuous trip for a mother just over a severe illness, and with one small daughter and one infant, to make. They arrived safely, however; and Hood took them down to Coblenz where they took three rooms, engaged a maid, and tried to fit into the strange life around them. At this time, the English favored this section of Germany whenever they traveled on the continent; and as a consequence, prices were a third higher for Englishmen than they were for the native Germans.¹ Hood makes numerous references to this practice in subsequent letters, but he also mentions later that he managed to outdo the Germans by learning a little of their language and demanding their prices. He was assisted in this and other things by an Englishman serving in the Prussian Army, Lieutenant De Frank. De Frank and Hood became very good friends and had many good times together.

¹Letter from Hood to Dilke, June 20, 1836, quoted in Memorials, vol. I., p. 137.
My father found in M. De Frank a very pleasant and agreeable friend, and a great help in all difficulties of German usage and language. He was his constant companion in all his fishing rambles and excursions, and used to drop in, in a quiet family way, of an evening, and play cribbage with my father and mother.¹

The lieutenant came to Hood's little apartment often from his base at Ehrenbreitstein across the river, even though at times the bridge had been washed away; and he was forced to come by boat. They were mutually attracted to each other, being Englishmen away from England.

Hood's health up to this point had been reasonable. At least, there were times when he could be up and around more often than he could later. Therefore, during one of his better times, he undertook a long trip with De Frank.

In the beginning of October [1836], the 19th Polish Infantry were ordered to march to Bromberg, and my father was induced, by the invitation of his friend Frank (and indeed of all the officers of the regiment), to march with them... These were almost the last of my father's days of health, and henceforward -- although there have been occasional mentions of illness before -- the letters will record the gradual but sure decline of it.²

¹Ibid., vol. I, p. 74.
The trip was a memorable one for Hood, traveling on horseback with the regiment whose Colonel had translated Hood's "Eugene Aram" into German.\(^1\) Hood was to have all the comforts possible, traveling fifteen or twenty English miles per day and resting one, and going from Coblenz to Bromberg to Berlin, and from thence "he goes to Kustrin, Frankfort-on-the-Oder, Breslau, Dresden, Frankfort-on-the-Main, and then back to Coblenz."\(^2\) It was just what Hood needed to supplement the material he had for his contemplated book on Germany. In Berlin, Hood was introduced to and invited to dine by Prince William Radziwill, "the head of the family." The entire family seems to have been enthralled at the chance of meeting Hood, and "they had even read 'Tylney Hall!"\(^3\)

The return to Coblenz from Berlin left Hood lonely for De Frank. They had had many good times together, and now

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\(^1\)Letter, Mrs. Hood to Mrs. Elliot, October 29, 1836, \textit{ibid.}, vol. I, p. 173.

\(^2\)\textit{Idem.}

Hood had no one to talk to who even knew English. Hood had his family, of course; but they did not go fishing with him; and Hood and De Frank were devout disciples of Izaak Walton.1 Hood missed his "Johnny."

The Comic Annual was completed soon after his return to Coblenz in December, 1836; and with that finished, Hood's spirit soared as usual. It was always a relief to complete the manuscripts and send them off to England, but the mail to and from England was tedious. Sometimes there were customs difficulties that delayed everything, and Hood began the habit of having a copy of everything he wrote for the Annual with him in the event that something happened to the copy sent to England.2 In addition to the Annual, by the end of 1836, Hood was also working on his new book, Up the Rhine. He had been gathering material and making little drawings for it for some time, settling down now at the end of this year to complete it if possible.3

Whatever other reasons Hood may have had for moving from Coblenz to Ostend, the matter of mail to England was one of

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them. He was still working on Up the Rhine, and occasionally sending some of the drawings to his friend Wright for his criticism. Hood asked that they be engraved, since they were more like the real people of Germany and less like "mere jokes" than those of the Comic Annual were. Wright was handling the publication of the Annual, too; and he had been doing a satisfactory job of it.

Sometime in May or June of 1837, Hood moved to Ostend, a Flemish city on the North Sea. One letter to Wright was dated Coblenz, May 4, 1837; and the next in sequence is also to Wright, dated Ostend, June 28, 1837.

Hood's health was steadily declining, according to his letters. There was more frequent mention of spitting, pain, spasms, and so forth; and the atmosphere at Ostend certainly did him no good. "Miasmic swamps and mists" surely aggravated his consumptive lungs. Hood himself said the weather was "so moist that it's drier when it rains than when it don't."

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1Ibid., vol. I, p. 222.
3Ibid., vol. I, p. 246.
He never stopped working, however; and now added to his *Up the Rhine* and *The Comic Annual*, was the work on the forthcoming periodical, *Hood's Own*, which "put to a trial even his unrivalled fertility in jest."¹ And in spite of the adverse weather, Hood's liking for Ostend was next to his love for the sea.² Certainly, he was glad to leave Germany. There are many side glances at the two types of Germans: "German Jews and Jew Germans," by which Hood only meant their practice of charging more than one price for everything.³ The Germans that he found on his trip to Berlin, he liked somewhat better; but he was glad to leave the Rhine and made a "mental vow never to enter the Prussian dominion again."⁴

I found the wide green landscapes of Belgium very refreshing. . .after the delusive sordiness of Rhenish Prussia. The extreme cleanliness, too, as, for instance, between Bruges and Ghent, was a delicious feature after the German filth. . . . It is no slight relief to hear English and French, and even Flemish, instead of that detestable gabble of gutturals. . . . The people here are notoriously favorable to the English. . .[and] if they cheat us, which I do not yet know, they do it with more civility

¹Rosetti, *op. cit.*, p. xix.
²Idem.
³See note (1), page 34.
and a better manner, which is something per contra.¹

The year 1837 saw more than the usual amount of work from Hood.² He mentioned several times that his health was better, and that he was capable of even more work. Certainly, he said, he could spend only a quarter of the time on the Annual, leaving the rest of the time free for other matters.³ He had sincere hopes of being better by 1838.

Wright, who was handling most of Hood's publications while he was in Germany and Belgium, also was scheduled to handle the publication of Hood's Own. In one letter to him, Hood could not thank him enough for what he had done already;⁴ but Wright was the best man for this favor as he had been for others. Hood had been working on material for his new magazine when he was taken ill and hardly had the strength to lift his head. The effects of this sort of relapse are amply described by Mrs. Hood:

¹ Idem.
² Letter, Hood to Dr. Elliot, ibid., vol. I, p. 270.
³ Letter, Hood to Wright, ibid., vol. I, p. 266.
On the Wednesday morning we sent for Dr. B., in hopes that he might suggest something serviceable. All Tuesday Hood had been in such an exhausted state he was obliged to go to bed; but I was up all night, ready to write at his dictation if he felt able; but it was so utter a prostration of strength, that he could scarcely speak, much less use his head at all. The doctor said it was extreme exhaustion, from the cold weather, want of air and exercise acted upon by great anxiety of mind and nervousness. The shorter the time [for the post] became, the more nervous he was, and incapable of writing. I have never seen Hood so before; and his distress that the last post had come without his being able to send, was dreadful.1

In spite of his ill health, however, he continued to work on three current items: Up the Rhine, The Comic Annual, and Hood's Own. With mail to and from England taking only three or four days, where in Coblenz it had taken a month, that part of his worries was over. The letters were more frequent, and there was a constant stream of them concerning the forthcoming magazine. In the preface to Hood's Own, he said, "However my body might cry craven, my mind had no mind to give in";2 and so it was. He worked when he had little strength to do it; and since his mind kept clear during all this time, he seldom faltered in his work except when it was physically impossible to go on. The amazing


2Choice Works, op. cit., p. 3.
part of the whole history is not Hood's illness or his writing, but that he could write such humor and wit while suffering such ill health.

Hood's Own finally appeared in the spring of 1838; and Hood was pleased with it as well as with the Preface, which was partially reprinted in the Athenaeum.1 Regarding the Comic Annual, Hood called for more advertisements, since they had been getting notices "more frequent and favorable"; and a magazine with such notices ought to be able to move.2 In this same letter, he also inquires about the progress of "B-----" abroad. Apparently, Hood was anxious for a foreign market.

As his health continued to decline, his writings seemed to improve. Up the Rhine sold its entire first edition of 1,500 copies in two weeks.3 Hood's Own was doing well, but it was a strenuous task to continue two magazines while out of the country. Also, his health prevented his doing as much work as he desired. It was a bitter dose for him to have the will but not the power.

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2Letter, Hood to Wright, April, 1838, ibid., vol. I, p. 279.
3Shaw, op. cit., p. 273.
The "Comic" is always a lay miracle, and done under very peculiar circumstances. ... But somehow it always is done, and this time apparently by a special Providence. God knows what I did, for the "Hood's Own" was the utmost I could do. ... But I literally could do no more, however willing; the more's the pity for my own sake, for it was a very promising spec. (sic)

Although it sounds a little like self-pity, there is no reason to suppose that it really was. He was writing to a good friend who understood his illness; but at the same time, a man who was obligated to publish whatever Hood sent him on time.

In the spring of 1838, Jane Hood made a short visit to England; and she wrote back excitedly about the coming coronation. This pleased Hood, and he was more anxious than ever to get back to England. He had not seen his native land for three years, and he was homesick.

Early in 1839, Hood himself paid a short, three weeks' visit to England. He went primarily for business reasons, desiring to look into the affairs of Hood's Own himself. Until now, he had supervised none of the work on the magazine,

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leaving it entirely in the hands of Wright. A "B-----,"
whom Hood mentioned often but never identified, had apparently asked for more money; but Hood and the magazine were not doing so well financially; and it could not be spared. Although the magazine sold well, like the Annual, it was sadly lacking in advertising; and it was not as profitable as it might have been.¹ In addition to business, however, Hood had to see a good doctor. He had never had a great deal of confidence in the doctors on the continent, though he did trust those in Belgium more than the ones he had met in Germany. Consequently, while he was in England on this visit, he went to see his old friend, Dr. Elliot, who gave him a complete physical examination.

Dr. Elliot now made a medical examination of Hood's condition. He pronounced the lungs to be organically sound;² the chief seat of disease being the liver, and the heart, which was placed lower down than usual. At a later stage of the disease, enlargement of the heart is mentioned, along with haemorrhage (sic) from the lungs consequent on that malady, and recurring with terrible frequency; to these dropsy, arising from extreme weakness, was eventually superadded. Indeed, the catalogue of the illnesses of the unconquerably hilarious

²Nevertheless, Hood's symptoms pointed directly to tuberculosis.
Hood, and the details of his sufferings, are painful to read.¹

Hood jokes when he writes to his wife from England, telling her the enlarged heart was merely capable of giving her more love;² but he could not escape the facts. His optimism was unbounded even in the face of eventual, inevitable death. Nevertheless, wherever his Jenny was concerned, he continued to smooth over the discomforts which beset him. Back in Ostend, he came slowly to realize that the weather in Belgium was no better than it had been in Germany.³ He always wrote to his friends, and to Mrs. Hood when she visited England again to see her relatives, as if he were always just temporarily ill. He spoke of a touch of rheumatism, caused by "the sudden cold," or a coughing spell that came on just as the weather changed. These remarks were a part of Hood's nature. He wrote freely of his illnesses to his friends, but it was not in a complaining manner. It was simply a statement, usually of a condition with which they were already only too familiar. To Wright, he was often compelled to write some reason for being late in his work. Wright always waited patiently, and Hood's excuses

¹Rosetti, *op. cit.*, p. xx.
of sickness were always short and true.

All this time, Hood was finishing his German book. *Up the Rhine* was finally published in 1839 with the immediate popularity already mentioned. *Hood's Own* was progressing normally, and still he turned out material for the *Comic Annual*.

I have had a sad nine or ten months of it, almost always ill, and then having to do everything in haste by day and night. I think my liver complaint is tolerably cured, and I have not spit any blood for a very long while, but the curing has half killed me. I am as thin as a lath and weak as plaster. Perhaps I have no blood left to spit. . . .

By the bye, this very day, I am forty. . . . I am two score, and sometimes, am ready to call them the Forty Thieves, having stolen away all my youth and health.¹

Thus Hood wrote to his old friend De Frank.

Throughout the remainder of 1839, Hood lived in Ostend working under a desperate handicap. The dampness, even to a healthy man, would be maddening. A heavy fog arose regularly, and the ground in the yard was as wet as if it had

rained. Hood said he could tell, for a wager, whether or not the stones in the yard were damp, by the way he felt.¹

In December of that year, the Comic Annual appeared for the last time until 1842. Just why there is a gap is never made clear, but perhaps his health or other pressing matters prevented his working on it. In 1840, he made another trip to England and was taken ill in Stratford, luckily in the home of Dr. Elliot, where he writes he had the very best care and attention.² Only Mrs. Hood, he said, could have given him more loving care. This was a severe attack, accompanied by much loss of blood and excruciating pain. He eventually recovered from it, but it was a slow and tedious process. The panacea of those days was blood-letting; and even though Hood had lost much blood from his frequent hemorrhages, Dr. Elliot took still more from his arm until Hood was weak and dizzy. Allegedly, this was to save him more blood later on.

While recovering in England, Hood saw that the weather there was the best possible for him. He wanted to come back

¹Letter, Hood to Dr. Elliot, March 1840, ibid., vol. II, p. 47.
²See note (2) p. 45.
to England and stay. He had been away voluntarily for five years, and it was time for him to come home and try his luck again. He sent for Mrs. Hood and the children.

Late in the year, he made one more trip back to Ostend after seeing Mrs. Hood settled in England. He had sent for her in the first place—without going back for her—because he himself could not leave right away. His friend and great helper, Wright, died between October 1 and November 1, 1840. Also, the mysterious "B----" had not been exactly fair to Hood.¹

At last, by the middle of November, they were all established at Camberwell, back in England.

Now, Hood's troubles began doubling and tripling. The publisher of Up the Rhine, a work that had cost Hood much in time and effort, had been cheating him; and Hood was realizing nothing like what he should out of it.²

Owing to the confused and unsatisfactory state of his accounts, and the undeserved shipwreck of "Up the Rhine" which ought to have paid well, my father's affairs were in anything

¹Letter, Jane Hood to De Frank, August, 1840, Memorials, vol. II, p. 70.
²Shaw, op. cit., p. 273.
but a flourishing condition. He had reasonably calculated that a work, on which he had bestowed the labour of so many painful hours, would have retrieved his expenses, and enable him to go on easily enough. Instead of this, his health had been still farther reduced by a dangerous illness, aggravated by anxiety and mental toil; and a tedious lawsuit for the fruits of his hardly earned labours was commenced, fated to drag on its attendant care to the end of his short life, and then remain unfinished. With all this... he was then obliged to write hard, and, during the intervals of pain and languor, to procure the necessary means of existence.¹

My sister and I are glad to report... publicly, the gratitude we have... to Mr. Hook, Hood's professional advisor, who conducted the case with skill and energy, and who firmly and consistently declined remuneration for labours severe enough, and time and study long enough, to ensure success in a difficult suit.²

Hood was forced to work harder than ever for the mere necessities of life just when he should have been able to rest, and just when the disease he suffered grew worse, hastened, as it were, by increased mental anxiety. These were the times during which Hood composed such works as "Miss Kilmansegg and Her Precious Leg" and "Rhymes for the Times" for The New Monthly Magazine.

¹Memorials, vol. II, p. 76.
²Idem., note.
The New Monthly Magazine enjoyed some popularity, was published by a Mr. Colburn, and was edited by Theodore Hook. Hood began writing articles for it soon after his return to England, and he continued to contribute to it for three years.

Late in 1840 and early in 1841, Hood had been confined to his bed so long that when he was allowed to go out, walking seemed to be a "strange exercise" to him. As usual, as soon as he was able, he threw himself into his work in order to finish something that was incomplete or to write something new. In this particular case, it was the popular "Miss Kilmansegg," which he published in The New Monthly.

From this point until his death, most of the poems for which Hood is remembered were written. Masterpieces such as "The Song of the Shirt," "The Bridge of Sighs," and "The Lay of the Laborer," which always appear in any reasonably comprehensive anthology, were written before Christmas, 1844.

In January, 1841, Hood was offered a £ 50 grant from the Literary Society, but he refused it, because "..."

1Letter, Hood to Dr. Elliot, February, 1841, ibid., vol. II, p. 79.

2Rosetti, op. cit., p. xxii.
Sickness is too common to humanity, and poverty too old a companion to my order to justify such an appeal."¹ He refused it at a time when his finances were at their lowest; when, in order to get a little more money for his family, he sold the copyright to Tylney Hall.² Certainly, this bas-reliefs a humanitarian side of the Hood personality which throws some light on his capacity for social poetry. He was able to compose a tribute to the Laborer, and he was able to write about poverty.

Theodore Hook, editor of The New Monthly, was noted for his humor, too; but his was a different kind. Whereas Hood was never known to bite or claw verbally at another person, Theodore Hook's wit was a caustic, enemy-baiting stab whenever the opportunity presented itself.³ He died in 1841, conveniently for Hood, to whom Mr. Coburn offered the editorship at £200 per year. This was no fortune; and even at this time, it was not enough for a man, his wife, and two children. Hood refused.⁴ Eventually, since Hood's name

¹Shaw, op. cit., p. 274.
²Idem.
³Horne, op. cit., p. 223.
⁴Shaw, op. cit., p. 274.
still drew quite a following, Mr. Colburn relented, but only £100; and Hood was forced to accept the job at £300 per year. This was no fortune either, but it came opportunely.

By the middle of 1842, Hood was carrying on a lively correspondence with Charles Dickens; but there is no record of where or how they met. It was a friendly exchange of letters, in which some nonsensical banter goes back and forth, and once, at least, an invitation to dinner,¹ as well as a request for Dickens' "American Notes" which Hood wanted for a review in the New Monthly.² Something came of that:

I hope you did not dislike the notice in the "N.M.M." I could not pretend to a review, or to extract much, the dailes and weeklies having sweated your Notes as if they had been sovereigns.³

The year 1843 entered; and Hood had published the last Comic Annual in December, 1842. This year, as for the last two, Hood suffered more frequent and more serious physical relapses. He continued in his capacity as editor of the


²Letter, Hood to Dickens, October, 1842, ibid., vol. II, p. 128.

³Letter, Hood to Dickens, probably October, 1842, ibid., vol. II, p. 130.
New Monthly, gaining in popularity as a writer and as a man. His contacts while editor again led him to some of the best writers of the time, and he was still on the best and most friendly terms with Dickens.

In late summer, Hood went back to Scotland. This time, he took his young son Tom, Junior, and visited some of his relatives. The name of Hood was magic in Scotland as it was in England; and since he had some Scotch blood himself, Hood had no trouble in returning the friendliness of the Scots.

Hood was now contemplating a new magazine of his own. He was by no means satisfied with his arrangements with Mr. Colburn, and he asked Dickens what he thought of the salary agreement. Dickens' answer was short but perfectly clear:

There can be no doubt in the mind of any honourable man, that the circumstances under which you signed your agreement are of the most disgraceful kind in so far as Mr. Colburn is concerned. There can be no doubt that he took a money-lending, bill-broke, Jew-clothes-bagging, Saturday-night-pawnbroking advantage of your situation.1

1Shaw, op. cit., p. 275.
Thus confirmed in his own opinion, Hood began plans for his new magazine; and at the same time, he received an offer from still another publisher.\(^1\) Of course, he decided to start his own, Hood's Magazine, the first issue of which appeared in January, 1844.

Punch was now in its third year; and the Christmas issue of 1843 ran Hood's "Song of the Shirt,"\(^2\) which had an unbounded popularity.\(^3\)

And Hood's Magazine appeared on time with many good wishes for success:

**HOOD'S MAGAZINE**

On the First of January, 1844, Price 2s. 6 d.,

**HOOD'S MONTHLY MAGAZINE**

and

**COMIC MISCELLANY\(^4\)**

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\(^1\)Letter, Hood to Dr. Elliot, *Memorials*, vol. II, p. 162.

\(^2\)Ibid., vol. II, p. 165.

\(^3\)Rosetti, *op. cit.*, p. xxii.

Its Prospectus gave a succinct account of what could be expected, saying that "...A critical eye will be kept on our current literature, a regretful one on the drama, and a kind one for the fine arts..."¹ Hood himself contributed some of his best works to this periodical, including "The Haunted House" and "The Bridge of Sighs."

By now, Hood was being known more as a poet and less as a humorist, but he was having uncommon ill luck with his new venture. Hood's Magazine, although it enjoyed a favorable reception, was suffering from a bad shock. One of Hood's partners, whom he took in without sufficient inquiry, was found to have only about £100, when he had promised much more.² Furthermore, the partner was taking money as it came into the office--money, of course, that Hood never even saw. The following is a part of a letter from Jane Hood to Dr. Elliot recounting the unfortunate state of affairs that beset the magazine:

You will be sorry to hear that Mr. , the proprietor of "Hood's Magazine," has engaged in the speculation without sufficient means to carry it on -- having been

²Shaw, op. cit., p. 276.
tempted by the goodness of the speculation, and hoping to scramble through it. Hood is obliged of course to get rid of him, and find someone else. The first alarm we had, was his quarrelling with Bradbury and Evans, the printers, about payment. This was on the 27th of January; he then got another man in February, who could not manage it; and on the 12th he engaged another, who had new type to buy, and he could not begin to print until the 16th -- this is the shortest month of the year. The worry laid Hood up; and all these things of course prevented the magazine coming out on time. It is doing well. B---- told Mr. Phillips he never before heard of such a sale as 1500 for the first number... Hood will be obliged to compel Mr. to pay him -- he owes him nearly £100... The man's behavior has astonished us, having started apparently with much plenty.1

In the face of all this, and in the midst of increasingly failing health, Hood managed to write "The Bridge of Sighs."2 However, the magazine continued to struggle through succeeding issues without funds.

Meanwhile, Hood's illness was worse, according to another letter by Mrs. Hood. The failure of the magazine, as usual, aggravated Hood's condition:

1Quoted in Memorials, vol. II, pp. 177-178.
2Shaw, op. cit., p. 276.
Last night he fretted dreadfully, and at one this morning, was seized so suddenly with short breathing, and fullness of the chest, I thought he could not live.

He lies very quietly in his bed, not speaking, but I fear he is very ill. I do not write this to ask you to come, dear Dr. Elliot, for what can be done to relieve his poor mind, which feels cruelly this failure of a work, he has laboured at night and day, and which would have been a good property if carried on

This was enough for several men, and it always seemed as if Hood suffered financial setbacks through no fault of his own. In addition, he just could not work constantly without breaking down in health; and the failure of something he loved, like Hood's Magazine, obviously and understandably reacted emotionally within him.

Hood's plight became well-known among his friends, and together they helped publish the magazine a little longer.

In the midst... of this sickness and distress, my father's friends rallied around him. Mr. F. C. Ward installed himself as

\[^{1}\text{Memorials, vol. II, p. 182.}\]
Dickens, too, found time from his mountainous labors to contribute some works over his name to the dying *Hood's Magazine*, one of which was entitled, "A Threatening Letter to Thomas Hood, from an elderly gentleman, by the favor of Charles Dickens, Esq." This was a clever satire on the rage which was then going on in London over Tom Thumb. Dickens railed against the folly of this childish admiration of "the abridgement of all that is pleasant in man."2

*Hood's Magazine* continued to run throughout 1844, and managed to go at least through the April, 1845, issue. It was a trying year, however. Hood's health continued to go from merely bad to exceedingly worse. Mr. Ward's generosity in pushing the magazine through was appreciated beyond account; but it must have been a bitter time for all concerned when he was compelled to insert in the June, 1844, issue, an announcement that Hood's health was so bad that he could not manage the magazine. It was a sincere and touching announcement to the public that the renowned editor and

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1Ibid., vol. II, p. 182.
2Ibid., vol. II, p. 185.
humorist was on the brink of death, or certainly, too ill to write more for a while, since his physicians had cautioned him against it.\(^1\)

In July, after another serious illness, Hood went to Blackheath, living at Vanbrugh House.\(^2\) The bracing air and the view did him much good; and he returned to London in September, again to take up his duties with _Hood's Magazine_. He was weak, however, and still avoided excessive exercise. This period was sprinkled with numerous invitations to dinner, to hunt, and so on; but each time, Hood was forced to decline with regrets and characteristic humor, because whenever he did go out, he was certain to be taken ill.

\[
\ldots \text{He was forbidden even to write, though he did break through the injunction. He was more seriously ill than ever I saw him, -- for three weeks in extreme danger, three physicians attending. Dr. Elliot came daily ten miles to see him.} \quad \ldots \quad \text{Hood suffered dreadfully from spasmodic shortness of breath, and the doctors are astonished at his recovery; but he is sadly shaken and reduced in strength.} \quad \ldots \quad \text{I am sorry to say he is never well now -- unable to walk the shortest distance without suffering, and feeling every change of weather.}\(^3\)
\]

\(^1\)Ibid., vol. II, p. 188.

\(^2\)Ibid., vol. II, p. 198.

\(^3\)Letter, Mrs. Hood to De-Frank, _ibid._, vol. II, pp. 206-207.
To this, Hood himself added a postscript:

Three doctors could not kill me, so I may live a year or two. But I almost went a-fishing in Lethe for forgotten fishes. You talk of my excess! Why, I am hardly allowed table-beer and water, and never go out to balls!¹

With the magazine not doing so well as it might, judging from the popularity and support, Hood's finances, of course, were also none too good. He was working as hard as he possibly could, and working much harder than he should in order to keep his family well provided; but it was not by any means a bright situation. Accordingly, friends of the family began a campaign to secure for Hood and his family a government pension. The only ground they had for that was the fact that he was a literary man; and, of course, Hood would be setting no precedent with a government pension on those grounds. Most of the friends who were doing this for Hood are not mentioned by name; but whoever they were, they sent their request to Sir Robert Peel, then Prime Minister of England. This was fortunate for Hood, because

¹Ibid., vol. II, p. 207.
Sir Robert Peel had not only heard of Hood, but he also admired his work greatly. As early as the preceding summer, Hood apparently had an intimation of getting a pension, judging from a letter to Dr. Elliot in which he mentions "Sir Robert" jokingly. The appeal for a pension went through and was granted. The efforts of the Earl of Ellesmore, Lord Wharncliffe, Mr. R. Monckton Milnes, Mr. F. O. Ward, and others, had not been in vain.

Whitehall, November 16th, 1844

Sir,

I have the satisfaction of acquainting you that the Queen has approved of my proposal to Her Majesty, that a pension of one hundred pounds per annum for her life should be granted to Mrs. Hood, on the grounds mentioned in my former communication to you.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,
Your obedient servant,

ROBERT PEEL

This grant will take effect from June last.

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2 Letter, Hood to Dr. Elliot, July, 1844, *ibid.*, vol. II, p. 199.
In view of the precarious state of Hood's health, it was thought advisable to confer the pension on Mrs. Hood, instead of on Hood himself. It was an ominous but wise decision.

Hood's good friend and medical advisor, Dr. Elliot, had, as early as 1840, advised Hood that his condition was bad enough to warrant his prescription of complete rest. It was this letter that was used in securing the pension.

[hood] is suffering from organic disease of the heart, -- and enlargement and thickening of it, -- with contraction of the valves, and from hemorrhage of the lungs, or spitting of blood, recurring very frequently. There is also disorder of the liver and stomach. These diseases have been greatly aggravated of late years by the nature of his pursuits, -- by the necessity, which, I understand, has existed, that he should at all times continue his literary labours, being under engagements to complete certain works within a certain period. The great and continued excitement attendant on such compulsory efforts, the privation of sleep and rest thereby entailed on him, and the consequent anxiety, depression, and exhaustion have had a most injurious effect on these diseases, bringing on renewed attacks, and reducing him to such a state that he has been rendered utterly incapable of mental effort. The conviction, that literary effort is necessary and urgent, renders the effort fruitless. You must have remarked how generally these dangerous attacks have commenced at a period preceding the publication of his books;

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1 Ibid., vol. II, p. 214.

2 Idem.
you have seen him break down under the struggle, and reduced to the brink of the grave by repeated attacks of hemorrhage of the lungs, attended by palpitation of the heart.

The statement of these facts points out to you that his attacks of disease are caused, or aggravated, in a peculiar degree, by anxiety, and depression of mind . . . . So long as he continues borne down by an overpowering sense of the necessity of exertion . . . so long will he be liable to these dangerous attacks.¹

In such condition, Hood could hardly be expected to live long; and there are numerous hints in his letters that he himself knew he was slowly dying.

Christmas, 1844, came, and Hood was in bed, confined to his room. He managed to get up for a little while, perhaps more for the children than for himself; but "it was a painful mockery of enjoyment."² It was a memorable Christmas for his family, most of whom were aware that it was his last. Tom, Junior, the younger child, was ten years old—old enough to remember, to know what was going on. The daughter, Frances, was fifteen years old. It was she who wrote most of the Memorials to her father, rejoicing in the good name that

¹Letter, Dr. Elliot to Mrs. Hood, May, 1840, ibid., vol. II, pp. 215-216.
²Ibid., vol. II, p. 228.
was "the better part of his children's inheritance."\(^1\) She remembered that Christmas:

I think at this time that he first realized -- not the certain ultimate issue of his illness, because this he had long known to be mortal, and only a question of a few years -- but the actual presence of a certain and near death. Now he saw that a few months -- possibly a few weeks -- must end his labours and sufferings, and his life with them.\(^2\)

The new year came with Hood in bed. He never again left his room alive, and his literary effort until his death was meager. It was a period of agonizing waiting, not daring to hope, by the entire family. He never lost the full use of his mind, however, except in periods of intense pain, when he was slightly delirious. It was in one of these deliria that he repeated Burns' words:

I'm fading awa', Jean,
Like snow wreaths in thaw, Jean!
I'm fading awa' --
To the land o' the leal!

But weep na, my ain Jean, --
The world's care's in vain, Jean,
We'll meet and aye be fain
In the land of the leal!\(^3\)

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\(^1\) Letter, Hood to Sir Robert Peel, November, 1844, \textit{ibid.}, vol. II, p. 223.

\(^2\) \textit{Ibid.}, vol. II, pp. 228-229.

\(^3\) \textit{Ibid.}, vol. II, p. 245.
Since Mrs. Hood's Christian name was Jane, it was particularly appropriate.

In the February, 1845, issue of Hood's Magazine, these few last lines appeared as a sort of farewell salute. The first stanza expresses more of Hood's own sensations; the last, somewhat more of a foretaste of the next world:

Farewell Life! my senses swim;  
And the world is growing dim;  
Thronging shadows cloud the light,  
Like the advent of the night, --  
Colder, colder, colder still, --  
Upwards steals a vapour chill --  
Strong the earthy odour grows --  
I smell the Mould above the Rose!

Welcome Life! The Spirit strives!  
Strength returns, and hope revives;  
Cloudy fears and shapes forlorn  
Fly like shadows at the morn, --  
O'er the earth there comes a bloom --  
Sunny light for sullen gloom,  
Warm perfume for vapours cold --  
I smell the Rose above the Mould!

These were the last lines he ever wrote.

Deeply religious, Hood faced death unshaken by the prospects of the unknown. "I have had some very happy days while I lived. . . . and I could have wished to stay a little

\[^{1}\text{Ibid.}, \text{vol. II, p. 232.}\]
longer. But it is all for the best, and we shall all meet in a better world."

He was heard to whisper as he lay dying: "O, Lord! say, 'Arise, take up thy cross, and follow me!'" At noon, Saturday, May 3, 1845, he died.

On the tenth of May, he was buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, where nine years later a monument to the great humorist was unveiled. The monument had been raised through voluntary public subscription from people in all vocations and from all social levels. It bears the inscription: "He sang the Song of the Shirt."

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2 Ibid., vol. II, p. 246.
PART II
Thomas Hood did sing the "Song of the Shirt," but he also did a great deal more.

While he was associated with The London Magazine, Hood's poems presaged the various types which he wrote later. Nearly all the different kinds are represented in the two years, 1821 to 1823; and all are printed in the one magazine. The list of these publications was supplied by Mr. Hessey, then publisher of The London Magazine, and a lifetime friend of the elder Hood.

Before his connection with that magazine, Hood's excursions into the literary world were meager. Just what he had published in Scotland is far from clear, but it probably had no particular value. Certainly, he wrote a letter to a local editor deploring some current situation; and vaguely it appears he had an article published in a magazine; but information concerning both of these early ventures is not only confusing but inaccurate. Hood himself leaves the impression that he was concerned chiefly with his health and had no idea
of becoming a writer. On the contrary, he occupied himself with reading and wandering; and that reading, incidentally, undoubtedly led him into some of the best and richest literature of the times. His vocation, however, was still "engraver"; and whatever writing he did was for amusement and as an avocation. His livelihood would be from the engraver's bench; not from his pen.

Back in London, he was still perhaps a little unprepared for the opportunity which presented itself in 1821.

...My vanity did not presume to think...that I 'had a call' to hold forth in print for the edification of mankind. Perchance, the very deep reverence my reading had led me to entertain for our Bards and Sages, deterred me from thrusting myself into the fellowship of Beings that seemed only a little lower than the angels.1

Nevertheless, Hood jumped at the chance; and while he was with the magazine as sub-editor, he wrote his representative number of poems. Some of them are good; some are bad; but they do reflect the versatility of Hood and, in a measure, are miniatures of things to come.

1"Literary Reminiscences," op. cit., p. 71.
Vol. IV, July to December, 1821

Page 85. To Hope.
483. Ode to Dr. Kitchener.
493. Departure of Summer.
508. Sentimental Journey from Islington to Waterloo Bridge.

Vol. V, January to June, 1822

Page 3. "Please to ring the Belle."
203. Faithless Sally Brown.
269. The Sea of Death.
311. To Celia.
375. To an Absentee.
422. The Stag-eyed Lady.
427. On Mr. Martin's Pictures and the Bonassus.

Vol. VI, July to December, 1822

Page 141. Lycus the Centaur.
276. Hymn to the Sun.
304. The Two Peacocks of Bedfont.
388. "Now the loud cry." -- Nimrod.
494. Midnight.
497. On a Sleeping Child.
517. Presentiment, A Fragment.
536. Sonnet, "Most Delicate Ariel."

Vol. VII, January to June, 1823

Page 96. Fair Ines.
187. Ode to Autumn.
215. Sonnet to Silence.
541. Sonnet written in Keats' "Endymion."
565. Sonnet to an Enthusiast.
636. Sonnet -- Death.
660. To a Cold Beauty.1

Presumably, there was no conscious effort on Hood's part to represent so many different forms; but he did achieve them all later.

Perhaps the most famous of the above list is "Faithless Sally Brown," which appeared early in 1822. In it, Hood displayed his talent for clear and logical punning that marked his entire career. However, because he did make a career out of punning, it is only natural that there are times when it could have been left out or considerably softened without serious loss to literature. His faculty for incessant punning was sometimes excessive; and the result was tiring; but for the most part, his style is provocative a century later:

"Oh, Sally Brown, Oh, Sally Brown,
How could you serve me so,
I've met with many a breeze before,
But never such a blow!"

***

His death, which happened in his berth,
At forty-odd befell:
They went and told the sexton, and
The sexton toll'd the bell.¹

¹Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 361.
In the summer of the same year, "Lycus the Centaur" appeared. It is anapestic tetrameter with a classical atmosphere, complete with preceding argument. It is the story of Lycus, detained by Circe and enamored of a nymph who wished to make him immortal. Using an incantation given her by Circe, the nymph intended to make Lycus a horse; but the horrible effect of the change caused her to stop in the middle of it; and Lycus was a centaur. Wainewright, a contemporary critic, thought that "Lycus" was "without mate!"

Still later, in Volume VII of *The London Magazine*, appeared a series of unconnected sonnets, among them, one to "Silence." Written with a conventional Italian octave and a Shakespearean sestet, it has a charm all its own; and it seems inspired:

There is a silence where hath been no sound
There is a silence where no sound may be
In the cold grave -- under the deep, deep sea,
Or in the wide desert where no life is found.
Which hath been mute, and still must sleep profound,
No voice is hushed -- no life treads silently,
But clouds and cloudy shadows wander free,
That never spoke, over the idle ground:
But in green ruins, in the desolate walls
Of antique palaces, where Man hath been,
Though the dun fox, or wild hyena, calls,
And owls, that flit continually between,

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Shriek to the echo, and the low winds moan,
There the true Silence is, self-conscious and alone.¹

"It is a matter of reproach to us that Thomas Hood should have won his reputation principally as a humorist when he had given to the world such a masterpiece as the above."² Of course, Hood is not remembered solely today because of his humor. As a matter of fact, few of his really humorous poems are known at all; but his reputation during his lifetime, at the time of his death, and for at least a half of a century afterwards, rested on his aptitude for punning. It will be readily noticed, however, that his humor is not a shallow affair always. Often, indeed most of the time, his fun has a pathetic quality. Sally Brown has jilted her sailor-lover. The lover himself dies. Other poems mirror a humanistic feeling that became characteristic of Hood as much as his more apparent comedy. In "Sally Simpkin's Lament," Jones, the hero, appears to Sally with only half of his body left, the other half—the bottom—having been eaten by sharks. Although the effect is funny and the poem fairly sparkles with Hood's wit, a little though reveals no pleasure in having no bottom.

¹Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 196.
Conspicuous among the titles listed above are such poems as the fragment, "The Sea of Death," and the sonnet on "Death." A hasty glance at the table of contents of a collection of Hood's poems reveals many more such titles. These are not leisure poems written when his vein of humor was exhausted. These are poems full of inspiration, hard work, and talent. Their gloom and heavy atmosphere suggest the so-called "graveyard school," or the Gothic novelists who flourished just prior to Hood's birth.

Methought I saw
Life swiftly treading over endless space;
And, at her foot-print, but a bygone pace,
The ocean-past, which, with increasing wave,
Swallowed her steps like a pursuing grave.

* * * * * * *

So lay they garmented in torpid light,
Under the pall of a transparent night,
Like solemn apparitions lulled sublime
To everlasting rest, -- and with them Time
Slept, as he sleeps upon the silent face
Of a dark dial in a sunless place.¹

These and others indicate another side of the many-sided Hood. When he did not write these wholly morbid pieces, he was able to couple the grotesque with the ludicrous. The more familiar "Last Man" is an excellent example of Hood's ability to combine a fantastic situation with an animated wit.

Up to this point, Hood’s writings were known only to readers of *The London Magazine*; and at twenty-five years of age, Hood wished for a larger following. His friend and brother-in-law, John Hamilton Reynolds, together with Hood, wrote sundry pieces for the group of wits that grew up around Lamb and other contributors to the magazine. Both Hood and Reynolds were well-known among them, and the scintillation of the group was contagious. His serious poetry in the magazine had been received without excessive praise. On the other hand, his humor had been noted; and when the name "Hood" was mentioned, the hearer began chuckling to himself without apparent provocation. To capitalize on this reputation, Hood, with Reynolds, wrote and published *Odes and Addresses to Great People* in 1825. It was released anonymously, and it created no little discussion and speculation. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was convinced that Charles Lamb had written it:

My dear Charles,

This afternoon, a little, thin, mean-looking sort of foolscap sub-octavo of poems, printed on dingy outsides, lay on the table, which the cover informed me was circulating in our book-club, so very Grubstreetish in all its exteriors, internal as well as external, that I cannot explain by what accident of impulse (assuredly there was no motive in play) I came to look into it. . . . But my dear Charles, it was certainly written by you, or under you, or
una cum you. . . . Gillman, to whom I read
the spirited parody on the introduction to
Peter Bell, the "Ode to the Great Unknown,"
and to Mrs. Fry -- he speaks doubtfully of
Reynolds and Hood. . . .

No! Charles, it is you. I have read
them over again, and I understand why you
have anon'd the book. The puns are nine in
ten good, many excellent, the Newgatory
transcendant! And then the exemplum sine
exemplo of a volume of personalities, and
contemporaneities, without a single line that
could inflict the infinitesimal of an unplea-
sance on any man in his senses-- . . .
Then moreover and besides, to speak with
becoming modesty, excepting my own self, who
is there but you who could write the musical
lines and stanzas that are intermixed?. . . .

These excerpts show a little of the surprised enthusiasm
with which the poems were received by at least one critical
mind, and the immense sale of the volume is a guage of its
popularity. Coleridge also mentioned that he suspected--
if Lamb did not write it--someone had taken the style of
Lamb for his own use; but it is more likely that Hood and
Reynolds, both of whom knew Lamb and his coterie, were using
the style of a social group and not of a specific man.

The "Odes" themselves are not especially noteworthy
because the "Great People" are no longer great. The sharp
wit that tickled London then is somewhat dulled by time;

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1Letter of Coleridge to Lamb, quoted in Memorials, vol. I,
pp. 15-17.
but the point of most of the puns, though sometimes obscure, is still understandable.

Sometime later, Hood marked a copy of the first edition himself, apportioning the pieces to the respective authors:

Ode to Mr. Graham • T.H.
Ode to Mr. M'Adam • J.H. Reynolds
Epistle to Mrs. Fry • T.H.
Ode to Richard Martin • T.H.
Ode to the Great Unknown • T.H.
To Mr. Dyneke • • J.H.R.
To Grimaldi • • T.H.
To Sylvanus Urban • • J.H.R.
To the Steam-Washing Company • T.H.
To Captain Parry • • T.H.
To Elliston • • J.H.R.
To Maria Darlington • • Joint
To the Dean and Chapter • • J.H.R.
T. H. Bodkin, Esq. • • Joint

Thus, half belong to Hood, less than half to Reynolds, and the remainder belong to both.

The success which this volume enjoyed prompted Hood to write another somewhat similar volume. The second work was not concerned so much with specific personalities, however. Instead, it was a hodgepodge which was embellished with Hood's own peculiar illustrations. Whims and Oddities appeared in 1826, the first of two series. The second series, a kindred work, appeared the following year, 1827. Both of these collections were successful, and both established

Hood as a humorist. Both, too, included some works that had appeared before in The London Magazine; but that was not an uncommon practice. In looking at a collection of the works appearing in Whims and Oddities, the unique characteristic that strikes the eye is the unusual set of illustrations. Although Hood was an artist, he chose to decorate his works with ridiculous but appropriate sketches.

One reprint that appeared in the Whims had also appeared in The London Magazine: "The Stag-eyed Lady." The poem was probably a good deal funnier then than now, but about four lines will help illustrate the reserved and unforced pun which shows Hood at his best:

Twins! female twins! -- it was enough to stun Their little wits and scare them from their skins To hear their father stamp, and curse and swear, Pulling his beard because he had no heir.¹

Regarding this constant punning, Hood makes a small attempt to apologize for it in the preface to the second series. He does not desist, however. As long as the public

¹Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 141.
liked his work as it was, there seemed to be little need for change or for more than a peremptory apology. After a preliminary excuse for his illustrations, he said:

In the literary part, I have to plead guilty, as usual, to some verbal misdemeanors; for which I must leave my defence to Dean Swift, and other great European and Oriental Pundits. Let me suggest, however, that a pun is somewhat like a cherry: though there may be a slight outward appearance of partition -- of duplicity of meaning -- yet no gentleman need take two bites at it against his own pleasure.¹

There are also prose selections in Whims and Oddities. For the most part they are rambling things without much point. Some of them are in the manner of the late Robert Benchley: Hood would take a current news story and twist any possible ambiguity around to fit his own feelings on the matter and always with overtones of careful satire.

Perhaps the best known of all of the Whims and Oddities is Hood's "The Last Man." The accompanying illustration pictures the last man sitting calmly on top of the scaffold, smoking a pipe, and paying no attention to the sky full of buzzards overhead. Here again, Hood combines a sense of death with his particular wit. It seemed to have

been on Hood's mind often. There is still another poem in the second series called "Death's Ramble." It is the same sort of weird combination; and its vein of unspoiled humor, verse after verse, is something of a contradiction. It is a stretch of the imagination to picture Death as such a gay old man; but in another poem, more serious, Hood is conscious of this incongruous mixture:

There's not a string attuned to mirth,  
But has its chord in Melancholy.\(^1\)

It can reasonably be concluded that nearly all of Hood's humorous poetry is coupled with something else, usually a sad, unhappy situation. In spite of that, or because of it, his reputation grew; and the poetry itself is skillful enough to avoid any hint of morbidity.

"Epping Hunt" was Hood's first attempt to write a sustained narrative poem with equally sustained humor. It was immensely successful. Perhaps one reason for its popularity was that Hood had just concluded a solid period of writing in a strictly serious mood. He had tried following his conscience by writing serious works for what he

thought would be appreciative readers. He was not successful. The works themselves were not so much inferior that they deserved no recognition, but the public had been used to the funny side of Hood's genius, and it was disappointed in what he turned out from 1827 to 1829. In that latter year, perhaps realizing that his fortune and fame lay not in what his spirit dictated, but in what the public would read, he wrote "Epping Hunt" for a delighted public. Although the poem is burdened with puns, it has a Gilpinesque quality which runs along, carrying the reader with it, through all the trials of the merchant, John Huggins. Huggins had no business going on the hunt, but he just could not abstain, and the result is worth more than the time it takes to read the poem. Here are some samples:

All poets' wit hath ever writ
In dog-rel verse of hounds.

Alas! there was no warning voice
To whisper in his ear,
Thou art a fool in leaving Cheap
To go and hunt the deer!

Thence slowly on through Laystonstone
Past many a Quaker's box, --
No Friends to hunters after deer,
Though followers of a Fox.

Bakers intent upon a buck,
Neglectful of the dough!
Towler and Jowler -- howlers all,
No single tongue was mute;
The stag had led a hart, and lo!
The whole pack followed suit.\(^1\)

These and more, pun following pun, verse after verse for
one hundred and twenty-three verses, Hood went on with his
sustained narrative-joke. Every verse has its quota of puns,
usually more than one to a verse. It was inevitable that
some of his work would be bad when he produced so much of it,
but his ease in expressing much in a few words reveals it-
self in occasional flashes, and it is this occasional flash
of genius that makes Hood's humorous poetry of some worth.

The work which cost Hood the most in money, time, and
health was the **Comic Annual**, which appeared from 1830 to
1842, with the exception of 1840 and 1841. Every year he
wrote and wrote through all the hardships he himself was
suffering and undergoing at the time to produce a magazine
that was awaited with eager expectancy by the English people.
Every year the **Annual** appeared on time, due much to the help
which his friend Wright gave so generously. Every year Hood
drained his own strength to produce enough to fill the maga-
zine with laughable material. It was a conglomeration

\(^1\)Rosetti, *op. cit.*, p. 405.
containing the best humor his pen produced, flowing with wit and whimsy; and although it occupied only ten years of his life, it was virtually his life's work, leaving him little other time for anything else. While it was appearing with expected regularity, Hood was undergoing varied and touching hardships. His finances took a fall from which they never recovered; and during half of the Comic Annual's existence, he was living as economically as possible in Germany, a land with which he was completely unfamiliar. In addition, and far greater in importance to Hood, his health steadily declined. Yet, "by the subtlest alchemy, sighs and pains and sorrows have been transmuted into these bonbons."

In England, it was the period of his greatest popularity; but for Hood, it was the beginning of a long, downhill struggle—a steady physical decline. Nevertheless, with few references to his physical condition, he continued to write his comical poetry. "To be forced or predetermined is death to most men's efforts; for inspiration comes rarely and arises out of junctures which are occasional, and cannot be contrived of a man's providence"; and yet Hood managed to do just that.

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Although he was forced to write constantly, he never faltered except when his health absolutely demanded it. And throughout his career, the quality of his comic poetry changed little, unlike his health. It is an enormous paradox.

The contents of the Annual reveal an overflow of spirits. Hood was not content with a few funny stories and a few humorous poems. He had to fill each issue with more and better material than the last one. He drew ideas from contemporary life, things and events with which the people of England were familiar. In that way, he was always close to them. That, too, was a peculiarity that marked all his writings. Even the more famous works, such as "The Lay of the Laborer," "The Bridge of Sighs," and "The Song of the Shirt" dealt with problems that everyone knew about, but about which no one had written so well. Yet, his poetry suffers from that very affluence that made Hood the most popular humorist of his day. These defects "have sprung not from penury but from luxuriance of thought."\footnote{"Hood's Poems," The Edinburgh Review, vol. 83, April, 1846, p. 275.} While he touches so many things, he injects his constant punning, which tires the modern reader. In spite of that, however,
his poetry contains more worthy material than is readily recognized. The bad puns can easily be overlooked and lost in the overshadowing good ones.

Late in his career, after he had returned to England, and in the midst of grave financial reverses, Hood wrote "Miss Kilmansegg and Her Precious Leg." It is an extremely long poem, humorous in atmosphere, but carrying a moral against the love of gold. While he himself was in dire need of it, he managed to write this against the acquisition and hoarding of it. It is another paradox. As a poem, it suffers from its length more than anything else; and, too, the subject is too small for the effort which Hood obviously put into the work.

Hood's more serious writings demand some study. There are times when the separation of Hood's serious and comical poetry is artificial; but at other times, the more serious works stand out by themselves as complete abandonments of the pose he assumed because of vox populi. Between 1827 and 1829, Hood tried several times to interest the public in Hood, the serious poet. He failed completely in this; and afterwards, he never attempted serious writing for the public. He left the feeling that what he wrote after 1830 that was not funny was more of an exercise than an attempt to satisfy
public demand. "The Song of the Shirt," for example, was first published anonymously. Hood eventually acknowledged all of his anonymous publications, but it seemed that he was not too concerned with the reception which these works received.

Not so in 1828. It was then he published such works as "The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies" and "Hero and Leander." It is a reasonable guess that Hood was heavily influenced by Keats. He wrote a dramatic poem called "Lamia." He was a friend and brother-in-law of John Hamilton Reynolds, a close friend of Keats. He wrote a sonnet on Keats' "Endymion."

"The Plea" and "Hero and Leander" are both classical in form, though antiquated in style; but the atmosphere of both suggest Keats' influence. It is little more than a suggestion, however, since Hood was incapable of such poetic heights; but the poems have charm and respectability. Already, in The London Magazine, Hood had published "Lycus the Centaur."

These three form a body of classical poems which stand somewhat apart from the remainder of Hood's poems.

"The Plea of the Midsummer Fairies" was a favorite with Hood, but the public did not agree with him. "... The

conception was a little too ingeniously remote for the public to ratify the author's predilection."1 The poem was dedicated to Lamb, which certainly indicates that Hood did think much of it; but that it was a failure is amply evidenced by the fact that later, Hood was forced to buy up the remaining copies to prevent their being used as wrapping paper for butter.2 Nevertheless, it is a quaint and enjoyable poem, suggested perhaps by the great dramatist and Midsummer Night's Dream, as he mentions in the dedication to Lamb. It was a poem which could be read on a trip in those days of increasing speed without having to break any train of thought.3 By the poem, Hood hoped to revitalize childhood interest in the little people; but it just was not well received; although it "will live as a fullest example of sweet union of affection and fancy in Hood's nature."4 Perhaps if Hood had not already gained the reputation he had, it might have been more favorably received.

1Rosetti, op. cit., p. xii.
2Shaw, op. cit., p. 270.
4Shelton, op. cit., p. 487.
Appearing in the volume with the "Plea," was "Hero and Leander," another classical theme with a skillfully sustained mood.

The "Hero and Leander" will at once be recognized as modelled on the style of the Elizabethan narrative poems. . . . Hood's is a most astonishing example of revivalist poetry: it is reproductive and spontaneous at the same time. It resembles its models closely, not servilely -- significantly, not mechanically; and has the great merit of resembling them with moderation.¹

Hood rose to great heights in this poem; and his descriptions of the water, of Leander's death, and of the love of the sea nymph are among his best. He creates and maintains a feeling of unattainable love near the middle of the poem; and by the time the nymph realizes her mistake, the pathos is deep indeed. The entire picture is artfully drawn.

The most famous of Hood's poems dealing with death is "The Dream of Eugene Aram," which was first published in The Gem, an annual which Hood was editing in 1829. As a departure from the ill-received serious poems that had gone immediately before, "Eugene Aram" was hailed and praised.

¹Rosetti, op. cit., pp. mii-xiii.
from all quarters. It reflects a humanity and depth of feeling that few of his whimsical poems could do, peering into a man's brain and manifesting a real understanding of human nature, both normal and abnormal. Eugene Aram was a real person, not a part of Hood's imagination; and he had actually killed a man. But the story of what he thought is Hood's own. Years later, when Hood was in Germany, he met a colonel, a friend of De Frank, who had translated the poem into German. It was officially translated, too, and published in the German periodicals.

At least twice, Hood strongly satirized the church. It is quite clear that he was not taking issue with the legitimate Christian "doers," but with the "false prophets" who were contaminating the ignorant. "The Romance of Cologne" pictures a coy young girl, her lover, their death; and at the end, catching up the stray ends to make the story complete, Hood tells the reader that the girl cannot reveal her love to the young man because she is scheduled to enter a convent. Thus, she is trapped between her lover's vow and the vow she has made to the church. The lover kills himself because he cannot have her love, and she dies when she is rebuked by the church for loving him. Hood handled this delicate theme with becoming reserve, but he spared no one in his somewhat frenzied ending:
And side by side the hapless lovers lie;
Tell me, harsh priest! by yonder tragic token,
What part hath God in such a bond, whereby
Or hearts or vows are broken?¹

The second significant religious poem is the "Ode to Rae Wilson." When Hood was in Germany, he heard via letters from some of his friends, that Rae Wilson, a critic, was spreading unhealthy rumors about Hood and his connection with the church. Just what Wilson had been writing is never made clear, and Hood himself had never seen whatever it was when he composed the ode. It is long and vehement, touching many phases of church life, with suggestions for more Christian-like attitudes. He also suggested the use of the church for the poor at a time when it was convenient for them to use it. The suggestion was later followed,² but there is little reason to suspect that Hood was more than a minor influence.

Hood's religion apparently was a personal one. He led his children by example, and lived a blameless life himself. In the "Ode to Rae Wilson," Hood said:

I consider faith and prayers
Amongst the privatetest of men's affairs.³

¹Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 219.
³Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 453.
And further on, he flies at the hypocritical church leaders:

For man may pious texts repeat,
And yet religion have no inward seat;
'Tis not so plain as the old Hill of Howth,
A man has got his belly full of meat
Because he talks with victuals in his mouth!

The same sort of criticism continues, stressing always the importance of the little man, the laborer, and his place in the church.

"The Bridge of Sighs" has long been recognized as a poem full of understanding, humaneness, and pathos. Hood was a true democrat, regarding all human beings with the same tenderness and love. Here is a woman of unknown and questionable background who has plunged into the cold Thames to end her life. Again, it was a true story to which Hood added the wordless thoughts of many. By this time, Hood's works were received with a proper regard for the merit of each piece. "The Bridge of Sighs" received some praise, but not as much as it later enjoyed.

The poem which held the greatest popularity, more than any other single work of his, was the memorable "Song of the Shirt." The unbelievable conditions of workers, especially

\[1\]Idem.
women, preyed on Hood until obviously he could contain himself no longer. The fledgling Punch ran the poem in the Christmas, 1843, issue.

It was, of course, inserted anonymously, but it ran through the land like wildfire. Paper after paper quoted it, and it became the talk of the day. There was no little speculation as to its author, although several, I believe Dickens among the number, attributed it at once to its right source. At last my father wrote to one of the daily papers and acknowledged it. He was certainly astonished, and a little amused, at its wonderful popularity, although my mother had said to him, when she was folding up the packet ready for the press: "Now mind, Hood, mark my words, this will tell wonderfully! It is one of the best things you ever did!" This turned out to be a true prophecy. It was translated into French and German; and even, I believe, into Italian.¹

Hood's strong feelings on the subject contained in the poem were aptly expressed with violent words, a rhythm that forces the reader to see just the right word with just the right amount of emphasis on such things as "work! work! work!" His insight into the real feelings of the workers themselves exposes a vivid imagination, since Hood himself had never worked in the shops; but his sense of justice and fair play, his humanity and sincerity needed only the strength

¹Memorials, vol. II, pp. 165-166.
of words to make the poem. "As a poet in the conventional and restricted sense, he was graceful, delicate, and tender, but not very powerful"; and yet "The Song of the Shirt" is not tender, but powerful.

The first collection of Hood's poems was published early in 1846. The Edinburgh Review printed a review of this collection in which it refused to share the general acclaim for "The Song of the Shirt" and "The Bridge of Sighs":

We respect the generous and humane feeling that dictated both; we grant that the former produces a heart-rending impression upon the feelings; that it paints with a stern and gloomy touch a scene of misery and suffering, too common, but alas! we fear, unavoidable and irremediable. All this we grant, but we cannot recognize -- or at least in any high degree -- its claims to poetry. To be the mouthpiece of such a wail of distress already felt generally, though inarticulately, and thus to strike home to the public sympathy, demands honesty and strength of language; but it requires but little aid from poetry, and we must add, in all candour, in this instance it has received but little.  

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If it is permissible to criticize a critique, then this one is merely too far behind Hood's prophetic social thinking. What he had to say about the shop conditions was true; he said it "articulately"; that it should not be the theme of a poem is utter nonsense, if the development of poetry within the past century is valid. Furthermore, the conditions which struck home to the public sympathy in the poem were proven avoidable and remediable. Hood was simply beyond his critics in this case.

However, Hood wrote another less famous poem on the same subject which treats the problem with a different perspective. In "The Lady's Dream," a shorter, and to the reviewer in The Edinburgh Review, a more poetic work, Hood took one lady of wealth and pride for a central figure. Through her, the picture of the misery and suffering which he handled so forcefully in "The Song of the Shirt," is presented again as a dream. The lady awakens in terror:

From grief exempt, I never dreamt
Of such a world of woe!1

1Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 150.
Psychological in treatment, the poem gathers vividness as the lady repeats her dream to herself, scarcely able to believe the things she has seen:

Disease, and Hunger, and Pain, and Want,
   But now I dreamt of them all.¹

Repentance comes to the lady. Her dream, like most dreams, was confused but striking; and she is remorseful, hardly able to wait for the chance to do a little for the miserable people she has seen:

The naked, alas! that I might have clad.
   The famished I might have fed!²

The lady fears no hell more than having to face "that crowd of human kind"; and at last, she closes with the crux of the poem that leaves no room, no loophole for the wealthy that may have thought as she did:

   . . It never was in my soul
   To play so ill a part:
   But evil is wrought by want of thought,
   As well as want of heart!³

¹Idem.
²Idem.
³Ibid., p. 153.
It may be a better poem, but it needs "The Song of the Shirt" as a companion piece for full explanation.

Hood published "The Lay of the Laborer" in the November, 1844, number of Hood's Magazine. The poem was inspired by an actual case involving a young worker who was sentenced to transportation for life for sending an alleged threatening note to the farmers of Bluntisham. Actually the letter was more of a request for fairer treatment; but in the court proceedings, the young man pleaded guilty and received the excessive sentence. The case impressed Hood so deeply that he kept an account of it on his mantle from the spring of the year when the excitement was high, until he wrote and published the poem.¹ He wrote a strong plea to the court, but his appeal "drew out no more than a few inches of red tape by way of reply."² Hood also wrote letters to the Times;³ but apparently, nothing ever came of that either. The poem was circulated among several newspapers, reminiscent of "The Song of the Shirt"; and in it, Hood explained the view of the young man as it was expressed in the letter.

²Idem.
There is no evidence that Hood had seen the letter; but he must have been acquainted with it if the poem is near the truth.

My only claim is this,
With labor stiff and stark
By lawful turn my living to earn,
Between the light and dark.¹

Thus, in the poems immediately preceding, Hood covered the social evils which touched him most deeply. As a social thinker, he found ample subjects for the few worthy social poems he left. In addition, he veiled other pressing matters in his humorous poetry. It is unfortunate that his literary legacy has been shorn down to a half a dozen poems which by no means represent the bulk of his work, and hardly his best work.

In 1831 and 1832, Hood was connected with the theatre. Although his work there was nominal and never spectacular, he did seem to possess a feeling for the theatre. How he came to be connected with the stage is not known, but he did gain some success. He wrote a libretto for an English opera

¹Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 159.
which appeared at the Surrey,¹ but the very name is lost now. Hood also assisted Reynolds in dramatizing Le Sage's *Gil Blas*, which was produced at Drury Lane.² Hood wrote an entertainment for Charles Matthews the Elder and a pantomime for Mr. Frederick Yates.³ These are all that Mrs. Broderip mentions in her slight account of Hood's days with the stage, except for the unhappy conclusive announcement that she has been able to trace none of the writings themselves.⁴

By 1838, two novels had been added to Hood's long list of accomplishments. The first was *Tylney Hall*, written while Hood was living at Wanstead and published in 1832. It sold moderately but steadily for years. Later Hood was forced to sell his copyright to the novel in order to have some ready money. The novel was well received; and according to one critic, it was a novel of genius, giving Hood a position "among the highest class of English novelists."⁵ When he was living in Germany, Hood wrote *Up the Rhine*, a humorous

¹Memorials, vol. I, p. 35.
²Idem.
³Ibid., vol. I, p. 36.
⁵Horne, op. cit., p. 223.
story of life in Germany that sold all fifteen hundred copies of the first edition within two weeks. It was just the kind of book Hood the humorist was expected to write. Not so with Tylney Hall, a serious work which he felt demanded some explanation. In a too cheerful introduction that offsets what he is trying to say, Hood explains:

So, if a man be alive to the ludicrous, by your lop-sided theory he can have no sympathy with the pathetic: because he is sometimes in jest, you will never allow him to be serious.1

All of which is true, but it does not make Tylney Hall a good novel. Perhaps later, after his harassing experience in Germany, he might have been able to write a better serious novel; but in 1832, he was not ready for so heavy a work. Up the Rhine was better in all respects but one: it is sadly dated, and the humor is not so clear to us.

In the years when Hood was attempting more earnestly a career as a serious writer, he published National Tales. In a more solemn mood than his introduction to Tylney Hall, the preface to National Tales explains Hood's position as a serious writer:

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1Thomas Hood, Tylney Hall, "Introduction," p. vi; Hartford, S. Andrus & Son, 1850.
I make, therefore, no excuses for this production, since it is a venture at my own peril. The serious character of the generality of the stories, is a deviation from my former attempts; and I have received advice enough, on that account, to make me present them with some misgivings. But because I have jested elsewhere, it does not follow that I am incompetent for gravity, of which any owl is capable; or proof against melancholy, which besets even the ass. Those who can be touched by neither of these moods, rank lower indeed than both of these creatures. It is from none of the player's ambition... that I assume the sadder humour, but because I know from certain passages that such affectations are not foreign to my nature... A life of mere laughter is like music without its bass; or a picture (conceive it) of vague unmitigated light; whereas the occasional melancholy, like those grand rich glooms of old Rembrandt, produces an incomparable effect and a very grateful relief.¹

The Tales appeared to Hood's daughter to be "somewhat in the manner of Boccaccio,"² but Mrs. Broderip was prejudiced in her father's favor. The National Tales have no more in common with the tales of Boccaccio than the one fact that they are both tales. They are fiction; they are prose; and they are serious. Hood's prose in these stories is fluent, clear, with little wasted effort; and the tales


themselves are short but complete in detail and sequence. These tales, while they make pleasant reading, can be discounted along with the other prose works as innocuous. Neither of his novels nor these tales has any great idea to tell the reader.

A hasty review of the versatility of Hood's genius reveals poetry of many types, and the more serious of his poems survived the past century more readily than those which at the time gave England one of her greatest periods of literary laughter. It is a natural but unfair consequence to suppose that the less known poetry is also the inferior poetry. The "Ode to Melancholy" is little known today, yet to one of Hood's critics, it alone would earn for Hood the name of "Poet."¹ Many of his sonnets possess the pointed treatment and skillful handling that a periodical writer like Hood should use. Many do not, it is true. The sonnet perhaps is the most difficult of all verse forms, and Hood did not have the power of a Shakespeare or a Milton. Yet occasionally he manipulated the sonnet with the touch of the true artist.

¹Shelton, op. cit., p. 484.
Look how the lark soars upward and is gone, 
Turning a spirit as he nears the sky!
His voice is heard, but body there is none
To fix the vague excursions of the eye.
So, poets' songs are with us, though they die
Obscured and hid by Death's oblivious shroud,
And earth inherits the rich melody,
Like raining music from the morning cloud.
Yet few there be who pipe so sweet and loud,
Their voices reach us through the lapse of space:
The noisy day is deafened by a crowd
Of undistinguished birds, a twittering race;
But only lark and nightingale forlorn
Fill up the silences of night and morn.¹

Unfortunately for Hood, what he felt was all important
and had to be said in serious poetry, had all been said before. The so-called Romantic poets left Hood their ideas
and emotions to ponder; and pondering them, Hood rewrote
many of them into his own works, however unaware of it he
may have been. Although his poetry is "often deep, and of
much tenderness, occasional sweetness of expression, and full
of melancholy memories,"² it still lacks the aura of originality; hence, the sparkle and verve that would be needed to
niche Hood among the immortals is lacking. If poetry,

¹Poetical Works, op. cit., p. 226.
²Horne, op. cit., pp. 221-222.
according to Hazlitt, is the language of the emotions, then certainly Hood was a poet, "genuine, real, true"; but it is something of a pity that his entire reputation should rest upon only a few serious poems. By excluding all the prose and other miscellaneous works, Hood still has left enough whimsical poetry to win a different kind of niche in England's roomy hall of fame. Let the few humorous poems that are known and his serious poems stand, both those that are known to every school boy and girl today and those that are hidden in musty library books—they are worthy of study and immortality. In spite of what Hood himself thought, his comical poetry contains much of his best work. It is equally unfortunate that Hood should have been unable to reject one single pun whenever it occurred to him. His poetry would be better if he had been more selective and a little more self-critical. However, Hood wrote his comical poetry throughout a life that belied his pen. Whenever his personal life was at a new low, it seems that was the cue for him to write a funny story or poem. He surmounted all manner of physical ills, economic depressions, and editorial worries to make England laugh.

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1Dudley, op. cit., p. 720.
His excessive and immeasurable addiction to rollicking fun, to the perpetual "cracking of jokes" . . . is a somewhat curious problem, taken in connection with his remarkable genius as a poet, and his personal character as a solid housekeeping citizen, bent chiefly upon rearing his family in respectability, and paying his way. . . . Perhaps there was something in the literary atmosphere or the national tone of the time which gave comicality a turn of predominance after the subsiding of the great poetic wave which filled the last years of the eighteenth and the first quarter of nineteenth century in our country. . . . Hood is a central figure in the group and in the period, and the tendency of the time may be almost as much due to him as he to the tendency.¹

Hood has also been compared with Charles Lamb, but Hood's was a different sort of humor: "The humor of Hood lay nearer the abstract."² It contained more than superficial punning.

We do not at the present day need to be told that there is no incompatibility between wit and pathos . . . for we have been rendered familiar with such associations in the character of our greatest writers. But in Hood this alliance is more than usually conspicuous. . . . He can call up the most grotesque conceptions, -- the most incongruous and ludicrous imagery; whole trains of comic and mirth-inspiring fancies wait upon his will

¹Rosetti, op. cit., p. xiii.
without an effort. . . . The quaintest allusions, quips and cranks of all kinds, stand side by side with thoughts of earnest interest. . . .

It is a consequence of this enlarged and liberal view of human nature, and this happy accommodation of the spirit of humour with feeling, that while Hood indulges in a constant under current of satire in his comic poems, that satire has nothing in it one-sided or malignant. 1

To us, naturally, many of the allusions are insignificant; but the undated humor is more than worthwhile. His abundant supply of conceit sparkles "like salt in fire," is not always unwelcome; and occasionally, it adds to the brilliancy of the poem. "Mr. Hood's sympathies are with humanity; they are not often genial because of a certain grotesque sadness that pervades them; but they are always kindly." 2 His contemporary reputation as a joker was due in part to the pointedness and timeliness of his work; but his right to remain among the greatest of the comic writers is due to the logical, clear, well-defined manner in which he punned or presented a situation. All of his comic poetry was not confined to the promiscuous use of puns.

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Many of them--"The Last Man" and "The Grave Robber," for example--contain the comedy of situation as well as containing their share of puns.

In speaking of his little fancies, Hood once said that he had caught them running around in his brain like grasshoppers and clapped them down on paper; and he cautioned his readers to treat them accordingly, and not to expect from them "the flights of poetical winged horses."¹

Nevertheless, Hood's very nature, his personality, his pranks and practical jokes indicated that his forte was comic poetry. It is there he does his best work--always excepting a few serious poems--and it is there he has earned for himself "a rightful place among the great jesters of the world."²

Because most anthologies include only a smattering of his works, Hood is regarded by the casual student as a serious poet who wrote an occasional pun. "The Bridge of Sighs" and "The Lay of the Laborer" are referred to as the works of Hood, because they are the ones appearing with the

²Shaw, op. cit., p. 280.
most regularity. Yet the remembrance of Hood as a serious poet is hardly appropriate or fair. During his lifetime, he made a business out of his talent for punning, carrying it through almost all of his poetry and prose; and he was actually a comic poet who wrote an occasional serious poem. No one doubts that the serious writings of the poet Hood deserve a place in an anthology; but the comic poetry deserves a place, too. George Saintsbury tried to fix Hood's fame on his serious poetry in the face of popular sentiment for his comic poetry. That was in 1895, and somehow since then—perhaps due to Saintsbury—Hood has been considered more and more of a serious poet to the virtual exclusion of his whimsical poetry. With the exception of "Sally Brown" and a few others, Hood's comic poetry remains hidden; and this paper is an argument against the exclusion of such poems as "Death's Ramble" while "The Bridge of Sighs" continues to appear.

There is no argument against much of Hood's serious poetry; and there is no attempt here to subject the comic poetry to a false popularity; but Hood's nature demands consideration of his comic poetry, the output of a lifetime. He was a practical joker, a punster in his conversation and in his letters; and his manner was the cause, not the effect,
of his success as a comic writer. Certainly, puns are out of fashion now; but sympathetic reading of Hood is rewarding.

It is Hood the comic writer, the unsurpassed jester of *Whims and Oddities*, the master poet in "Faithless Sally Brown" whom we salute with a laugh of his making in our throat.
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VITA

The author was born in Newport News, Virginia, February 15, 1922; and after living there and attending the first and second grades of public schools, he moved to Petersburg, Virginia, where his public education was completed in January, 1939. Transferring from the University of Virginia after one year, he entered the University of Richmond in September, 1940, and received the Bachelor of Arts degree in January, 1943. The author served in the Army for two years, seven and one half months as an infantry private, re-entering the University of Richmond as a graduate student in the summer of 1946.