

The writer who made the greatest impression on Hunt was Voltaire. He admired his "gay courage and unquestionable humanity; his flashes of wit that discovered lights the most overwhelming." He considered the homely little Frenchman the destroyer of the "strongholds of superstition that were never built up again." He says he was never frightened at Voltaire, but always felt, though Christianly brought up, that true religion would never suffer at his hands.

Hunt's first connection with a newspaper for actual work was when he and his brother John, in 1805, set up a paper called *The News*. Leigh wrote the theatricals for it. In those days dramatists and editors were expected to fraternize for mutual benefit. Puffing and plenty of tickets was the approved system of the day; but the young critic conceived the idea that independence in theatrical criticism would be a great novelty. His idea was correct, and, like the majority of novelties, it proved popular. Everybody read *The News*, and believed every word of it. The proprietors of the paper left the critic to himself, and while he praised what pleased him and lashed severely the shortcomings of the stage, he refused to know an actor personally, and declares he would as lief have taken poison as accepted a ticket from one of the theatres. That he afterward thought he had gone to extremes may be inferred from his half-serious, half-comic exclamation: "Good God! to think of the grand opinion I had of myself in those days, and what little reason I had for it!"

It was in the beginning of the year 1808 that Leigh and John Hunt set up the weekly paper called *The Examiner*. It was named after *The Examiner* of Swift and his brother Tories. The Hunts had no thought of politics—at least Leigh had not. His thought was of the wit and fine writing in the old *Examiner*; and he in his youthful confidence proposed to emulate it.

For a short time before and after the establishment of *The Examiner* the poet was employed in the War Office. His stock of arithmetic, learned for the purpose, was sufficient, but in other respects he made a bad clerk; coming in late to work, and wasting his own time and that of others in continual jesting. These faults in connection with the tone of *The Examiner* respecting the court and the ministry, made him conscious of the necessity of resigning his position rather than have such a course suggested to him. Accordingly, he sent in his resignation, and then, giving his entire time to *The Examiner*, he was soon in the midst of politics. This paper, it will be remembered, was established in the latter part of the reign of George the Third, and two or three years before the appointment of the Regency, and it had several broils with the Ministry.

The Hunts were also proprietors of a quarterly magazine of literature, *The Reflector*. In this periodical were published some of Lamb's liveliest essays, and some of Leigh Hunt's most enduring work; though from his own account of it one is led to suppose that the magazine, in the main, was badly managed. This is his summary: "Having angered the stage, dissatisfied the church, offended the State, not very well pleased the Whigs and exasperated the Tories, I must needs commence the maturer part of my verse-making with 'The Feast of the Poets.'"

The offences of the brothers brought them no very serious consequences until they turned the fulsome praises of the friends of the Prince Regent into ridicule.

From the beginning of this century till the death of Lord Liverpool in 1828, was a terribly hard time for any who dared to advance liberal opinions either religiously or politically. "Leveller," "Atheist," "Incendiary" and "Regicide" were the names freely applied. Not a word could be uttered against any abuse that a rich man inflicted and a poor man suffered. "In one year," says Sydney Smith, "12,000 persons were committed for offences against the game laws."

In France, "Napoleon had cut his way to a throne, and the steel was the surest right"; and in England, a panic about the possible revolution had given the Prince Regent, who has been called the weakest and meanest man that ever sat on the English throne, the most despotic authority. It was in this troubled time that Leigh Hunt lived and battled for humanity. Armed with his types, his moral fearlessness and his hatred of tyranny, he stormed the stronghold of ignorance, vanity and egotism.

When the Prince Regent was shown his character as the editor of *The Examiner* saw it, he had nothing with which to defend himself but fines and imprisonment. On the 3rd day of February, 1818, the Hunt brothers were committed to Surrey jail for a term of two years. Their fine was one thousand pounds. The Government offered to cancel both fine and imprisonment on condition that *The Examiner* should be pledged to refrain from criticisms of the Prince. To this proposition the answer was short and simple.

Leigh Hunt was first placed in a room in the prison where he continually heard the clanking chains, the imprecations, and the ribald laughter of hardened felons. By climbing upon a chair he could look from his window, but it was only to see the men who wore the chains. For a month or more he endured this torture; then he was removed to rooms in the house of the jailor, where he was allowed to walk in the garden and to have his family with him. His eldest daughter was born in the prison. Hunt's story of his prison life is simply exquisite. He made friends with the jailor and his wife, and the latter was always deeply grieved when she failed to turn the key so softly in locking up for the night, that her gentle prisoner should not hear it.

From his prison Hunt dates the beginning of many new friendships. Here he first met Hazlitt, Sir John Swinburne, and his friend of friends, Shelley. Charles Lamb and his sister Mary, he says, came oftener than any others. The weather was never so disagreeable as to keep them away. His school-fellows, Barnes, Mitchell, and many others were frequent visitors. Yet, as was but natural, he suffered from the confinement. He required out-door exercise of more varied character than the prison garden afforded. His forced seclusion developed a morbid liking for inaction; so that when released he felt the whole active business of life to be a great impertinence. He never fully recovered from the effects of his two years in prison.

The next decisive movement he made was to go to Italy to join Byron and Shelley in the publication of the periodical of which so much was expected. It was only a repetition of the old story of failure. Hunt was about thirty-

seven years old when he went to Italy. Five years later he returned to England seemingly worn out with care and disappointment, and already an old man. Shelley and Keats were dead, and Byron had skulked out of his engagement concerning his part in the periodical in the most shameless manner. Yet, though so broken in health that the composition of a single page created great nervous excitement, Hunt produced his best work after this time.

It always seems strange that Leigh Hunt and the saturnine Thomas Carlyle were the warmest of friends. It was a direct meeting of optimist and pessimist; an example of Emerson's quaint saying, "We like the other-est."

"Barry Cornwall" was another of Hunt's dear friends. Perhaps there has never lived another man of genius so universally loved. One friend speaks of him as "catching the sunny side of everything and finding everything beautiful." Hawthorne calls his prose "unmeasured poetry."

His dust lies in Kensal Green Cemetery. There, in the autumn of 1869, on the eighty-fifth anniversary of his birth, was unveiled the monument erected to his memory. The address on this occasion was delivered by Lord Houghton, whom Hunt had known and loved as Richard Monckton Milnes. Moncure D. Curry thus describes the conclusion of the simple ceremony: "When the address was concluded, we all repaired to the grave. Here the bust of the poet, veiled, stood beside a dais or platform. The sculptor, Durham, stood before his work. Lord Houghton, accompanied by Leigh Hunt's son, Thornton Hunt (editor of *The Daily Telegraph*), mounted the platform, and then the former withdrew the covering, saying as he did so: 'In the name of the subscribers to this monument, and the friends of Mr. Leigh Hunt who remember him and are careful of his fame, I present this monument to his family, to the country and to posterity.' The people started as the beautiful face beamed upon them; for the moment it seemed to smile like a spirit newly descended. Eyes grew moist; there was a pause of silent homage. We read the simple inscription taken from his most imperishable poem:

"Write me as one that loves his fellow men."  
MARGRET HOLMES.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

### THE UNION OF ENGLAND AND IRELAND AND ITS HISTORY.

To the Editor of *The Week*:

Sir,—Your correspondent "Fairplay Radical" seems to recommend Dr. Ingram's "History of the Union of Great Britain and Ireland."

Among historians and critics the reputation of this extraordinary book is something like Foxe's "Book of Martyrs" on one side or Cobbett's "History of the Protestant Reformation" on the other.

When Dr. Ingram's book appeared, *The London Guardian*, a just and serious Liberal-Unionist paper, gave it a long review, one of the sadness of its Unionist heart, just because, being on its own side, it did that side such harm and injustice by its condonation of the crime of English Government in Ireland a century ago. The *Guardian* held the book to be the worst blow struck at the union. But the *Guardian* was writing seriously and justly.

The *Athenæum*, more critically neutral, gave up in the middle of its review, saying that perhaps this book was meant as a mere joke.

The author is not Dr. J. K. Ingram, the fellow of Trinity College, Dublin, and political economist.  
FAIRPLAY.