Thomas Hood

His Life and Times

AT the same time that Keats and Lamb were writing there flourished—so thick that even men like these showed little higher than the rest—a whole forest of strenuous and lusty human beings, journalists, artists, or people simply who happened to live then and rear their children, says the London Times. What profuse clamor, what multitudinous swarms of life a wise biographer can call up for us from fields long since shorn and flat if he will take for his subject one of these mortals it is really bewildering for a moment to consider. A student of letters is so much in the habit of striding through the centuries from one pinnacle of accomplishment to the next that he forgets all the hubbub that once surged round the base; how Keats lived in a street and had a neighbor and his neighbor had a family—the rings widen infinitely; how Oxford street ran turbulent with men and women while de Quincey talked with Ann. And such considerations are not trivial if only because they had their effect upon things that we are wont to look upon as isolated births, and to judge, therefore, in a spirit that is more than necessarily dry. Mr. Jerrold's life of Thomas Hood gives rise to a number of such reflections, both because he has written with delightful good taste and discrimination and because his subject, after all, belonged almost the whole of him to the race of the mortals. If it had not been for his two or three poems perhaps he would have sunk with the rest of them, with the load of albums and annuals and their makers, or would have survived as some half mythical comic figure, the father of a few good stories and the author of innumerable puns. There is even something nugatory about the facts of his life; they suggest, in the easy ordinary way in which they fit and succeed each other, that there were hundreds of Thomas Hoods, sons of middle-class parents, apprenticed to engravers, with a turn for writing verse or prose; kindly domestic young men, who if they did take to letters—their parents were well advised in dissuading them—would make no mark there, but fill endless columns satisfactorily. Such, to a great extent, was the life of Hood; but there was just that exaggeration of temper or fortune in it that made him, while he was one of a class, typical of it also. He was impelled by his gifts and his failings to travel the whole course that slighter men trod partly, until he achieved something significant and completed his symbol.

As a boy he showed an abnormal facility; if he went away on a holiday he sent home profuse letters full of descriptions. Already the surface show of life tickled him with its incongruities; and at a time when most boys are aping some older writer he was simply observing with a lively eye what went on round him and scribbling it down in sheets of fresh easy prose. He laughed at his fellow lodgers, or stood at the window and took off the people whom he saw passing on their way to church. "The study of character (I mean of amusing ones) I enjoy exceedingly," he wrote when he was sixteen, and in the same spirit he dashed off a long poem on the town of Dundee, in imitation of the "New Bath Guide." No one could doubt where his gift would lead him, in spite of the engraving; and when he was twenty-two some papers, accepted by the London Magazine, definitely determined him, as Mr. Jerrold thinks, to trust entirely to his pen. From that time onward his life was the complex life of a busy journalist. There was no respite, scarcely any partition; for where are we to seek the events of his life but in his writings? And when we read him we must remember his wife and children, his ill-health, the ceaseless pressure of money cares. If a particular style pleased the public he must continue it, though the mood was spent; and as his first success was made in the "Whims and Oddities" he had still, as he says, to "breathe his comic vein." "Could Hood at this moment have taken some editorial appointment (writes Mr. Jerrold) we might have had more of his best and less of that journeyman work." That is a very moderate statement of the regret that bursts from our lips at many stages of this panting, hard-driven career; but in our desire to round the picture, to possess our tragedy, are we not inclined to fall into the fallacy to which Thackeray gave shape in his paper "On a joke I once heard from the late Thomas Hood?" He speaks of the grinning and tumbling, "through sorrow, through exile, poverty, fever, depression," "the sad, marvellous picture of courage, of honesty, of patient endurance, of duty struggling against pain"—until in our compassion we forget very likely the true spirit of the man, his exuberance and brilliancy, the odd vulgar humor of a cockney life, the practical jokes and the supper parties. "O Hood, Hood, you do run on so!" exclaimed poor Mrs. Hood, half inarticulate, at one of these feasts. The very fact that he gave himself with such pliancy to the drudgery of a journalist's life proves that there was some thing in the nature of his gift and temperament akin to it.

And when we turn to his writing we can surely discover there signs, not only of work "pumped out," but of ideas springing gladly to the surface at the cheerful command of throbbing presses and fast falling sheets. No other invitation could have sounded quite so aptly to a man with a brain full of puns. But it is largely on account of these puns, we are told, that Hood is now so little read. Indeed, the portent is one that strikes the attention directly, and it must be held to typify something fundamental in the constitution of his mind. For his puns divide themselves into two classes or degrees; the greater part of them are simply happy matchings of sound in which there is so thin a burden of meaning that the contrast is almost purely verbal.

Alas; they've taken my beau Ben
To sail with old Benbow.

But there are others in which the pun is the result of some strange association in Hood's mind of two remote ideas, which it is his singular gift to illustrate by a corresponding coincidence of language.

Even the bright extremes of joy
Bring on conclusions of disgust;
Like the sweet blossoms of the May,
Whose fragrance ends in must.

These lines are taken from one of his most serious poems, that on Melancholy, and serve to illustrate, compactly, a remarkable tendency—perhaps it is the remarkable tendency—of his thought. They show how the original leaning of his mind was really to wild and incongruous associations, grotesque and monstrous conceits, not in words only, but in human life, such as those we see so strikingly displayed in poems like "Eugene Aram," "The Haunted House," and "The Last Man." And also we may discover a certain superficiality of conception, which suffers him to find such contrasts as the verbal one of "may" and "must" adequate, and makes him so supersensitive to the surface inflections of language as he was sensitive to the influence of contemporary writers. The influence of Lamb is clear in his prose, of Keats in his verse, and Coleridge one may guess affected his thought more deeply than either.

From these poems Sir Francis Burnand has lately published in the Red Letter Library a selection which gives a fair representation of the different moods in which Hood sang. They are broadly farcical, or romantic, or satirical or wildly fantastical; and there are the two famous poems which admirers of Hood will scarcely classify at all except by calling them inspired. The "Song of the Shirt" in particular makes Sir Francis "positively disinclined to dwell upon any other serious poems of Hood's, be it even the 'Bridge of Sighs'"; and he has some quarrel with Thackeray for the way in which he dwelt upon Hood's perverse love of "comicalities." He points out that it was the jesting that paid, and that Hood was forced to make an income. But what perhaps is overlooked is the necessary relationship between Hood's fun and Hood's tragedy; you could not have the one without the other—if he laughed in this way he must cry in that—and the faults which we find in his light verse surely reproduce themselves in his serious poems. Thus, the reason why we cannot, with deference to Sir Francis Burnand, accept the "Song of the Shirt" as an enduring masterpiece is because of the slight cheapness of effect, tending to the melodramatic, which has something in common with the verbal dexterity, the supersensitive surface of mind already noticed. Such lines as

Sewing at once, with a double thread,
A shroud as well as a shirt.

or,

A little weeping would ease my heart,
But in their briny bed
My tears must stop, for every drop
Hinders needle and thread!

go straight, as he says, to our hearts; but not to the noblest part of them. "Ruth" or "The Death Bed" touches a higher note. You must honor and pity so fine a nature, so honest and brilliant a mind, stung now to impulsive and passionate utterance by the sorrows of the world, now to irrepressible showers of merriment by its oddities. But in the most solid of his work the sharp blade of his own circumstance is always wearing through. You do not find all of him in his work; you rise from it unsatisfied, to ask what were the accidents of his life that made him write so. Mr. Jerrold's book, then, is a valuable addition to our knowledge of Hood, and any one who has had occasion to consult the Memorials by his son and daughter will perceive at once how much all readers in the future must be indebted to Mr. Jerrold's laborious research and good judgment. A life was needed, and he has provided it.

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Christmas, 1907, broke all previous post-office records. On Christmas Day, in London alone, over thirteen thousand postmen, the largest number ever sent out at any one time, were engaged in delivering a record mail, and nearly four million letters and postcards, and about three hundred thousand parcels were dealt with on every day of the Christmas week. It is estimated that the figures for 1906 have been surpassed by several millions. Over 10,000 extra assistants were engaged.

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Wills proved during the year just ended show bequests for religious, charitable and public uses amounting to almost 6,000,000 pounds sterling, nearly a million more than in 1906, and very considerably more than the average for the twenty years preceding 1906, which did not exceed 2,500,000 pounds sterling. Nearly half of the total was made up of six bequests of 100,000 pounds sterling and upwards, the largest single bequest being that of Mr. William Whiteley for 'Whiteley Homes.'

AN EXCITING BALLOON ADVENTURE

THE HON. MRS. ASSHETON HARBORD, who left Battersea in a balloon on Friday night in an attempt to win the Northcliffe Challenge Cup, has given the following detailed account of her voyage, says the London Times of February 3:

"I left Battersea Gasworks in my balloon, the Valkyrie, 60,000 cubic feet, at 9.45 on Friday night, January 31, to make an attempt to win the Northcliffe Challenge Cup for the longest distance travelled during the present year. Mr. J. F. Pollock accompanied me as pilot, this being his seventh crossing and my third. We had considerable difficulty in getting away owing to the high wind that prevailed; but taking advantage of a momentary lull we cleared a very high gasometer and went straight up to a height of 2,500 feet. We took with us 17 45-lb. bags of ballast, four of which we used in the first three-quarters of an hour. At 10.30 the Valkyrie encountered a violent squall which caused the car to sway to such an extent that we had to hold on to avoid being thrown out. We sighted the coast at 10 minutes to 11 and left it at 11.7, an hour and 20 minutes from the time of starting from Battersea. We were then at a height of 3,700 feet. The night was very dark, but we gathered from the bend of the coast that we were leaving the land to the right of Dungeness. In the middle of the Channel we could see the revolving lights on both coasts, and recognizing Boulogne we concluded that we were passing over the French coast near Le Touquet, which we afterwards found to be correct. We sighted the land at 11.20 and reached the coast at two minutes to 12 at a height of 3,700 feet, the crossing having taken 51 minutes. The sea crossing was the quietest and the most uneventful part of the voyage, for at 1.30 we experienced strong vertical currents which made the balloon shoot up very rapidly, and when it encountered a downward vertical current it fell with great speed, making a continuous discharge of ballast necessary. There was a good deal of sheet lightning and the atmospheric conditions were very curious. The car hoop and neck of the balloon seemed illuminated as if by electric light, which, when I rubbed it, made my glove appear alight. At 2 o'clock we encountered a terrific snow storm, which covered us and half filled the balloon, which was considerably affected by the extra weight thus thrown upon it. Subsequently we again found ourselves rising very rapidly, and after attaining an altitude of 8,000 feet we discovered that we were falling rapidly. The discharge of five bags of ballast in four minutes had no effect in checking the descent, and suddenly at a height of 1,500 feet the bottom of the car crashed down on something with great force. The trail rope then began catching in everything it could find, giving the car very violent jerks. We were dashing along at a terrific speed, and the night was so dark that I could scarcely distinguish Mr. Pollock, the roaring of the wind combined with the heavy snow making us extremely anxious, as the last bag of ballast had not the slightest effect on the balloon, and having only three bags left we realized there was no alternative but to make a descent and chance where we should land, as we were completely enveloped in darkness. So Mr. Pollock opened the valve while I crouched low down in the car, feeling rather thrilled at what might happen. Down we crashed with great force straight into some trees. Mr. Pollock ripped at once, but the wind carried us up again, and down we came with the basket overturned. Mr. Pollock shouted out, "Are you in?" and I called back "Yes," for I was holding on for all I knew, the violent encounters with the trees making it very difficult to avoid not being thrown out. At last a tree caught the envelope, causing a large tear, which, combined with the rip, brought us to a standstill. After we had collected our senses we got out and found we were in a dense forest, far away from any habitation. There was nothing for it but to wait till dawn, and conjecture what country we had descended in. At about 6 it became light, so we started off to get out of the forest, and after half an hour's walking we found ourselves on a main road, along which we walked for an hour. At last we discovered a man cutting trees, whom we hailed, and discovered from him we had descended in the department of the Meuse near the small village of Haudiomont. We made him walk back with us to show him where we had descended, and he promised to return with a cart, which he did in three hours. In the meantime we had been discovered by more wood-cutters, who set to work to help us, and with their assistance we packed up the balloon. The envelope being high above us on the trees it was with much difficulty we got it down, and also the trail rope, which was stretched far away on the tree tops. We also had to collect various pieces of the balloon envelope, which we discovered hanging from branches, on one of which we found the feed pipe, which had been entirely torn off. Unluckily we smashed all our instruments, the first crash quite settling the statoscope. The drive of ten kilometres to Verdun took eight hours, as the horses went at a snail's pace, and a remarkably cold drive it was in a bitterly cold wind. If we could possibly have weathered the storm we could have had a tremendously long run, but there was no alternative for us under the circumstances but to descend. A great deal was due to Mr. Pollock for his presence of mind and quick action when every minute was of the utmost importance, for it takes a good deal of nerve to make a descent in a pitch-dark night without the faintest idea of what one will land on. It was a thrilling experience, and, though the distance accomplished will, no doubt, soon be beaten, it was a very sporting run and one always to be remembered."

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Warm cream should never be mixed with cream already cooled.

The Diamond

Its Artificial Reproduction

DR. A. E. H. TUTTON, F. R. S., writes in the London Times as follows:

This prince among gems, the transparently crystalized form of the chemical element carbon, has been so much before the public during the last few weeks, and, exaggeration and romance have been so current concerning it, that it is well to remind ourselves of such facts as rest on the secure foundation of the researches of authoritative men of science, published in the archives of the responsible learned societies. When pruned of all romance it will be found indeed that 'truth is stranger than fiction," for the solid facts relating to this fascinating crystal form a continuous record of the superlative.

The natural diamond exhibits the high symmetry of the cubic system of crystals, the most commonly developed form being the octahedron, parallel to whose faces good diamonds of all forms readily cleave, a property which saves the diamond-cutter infinite labor by enabling him to chip away corners or flawed parts preparatory to facetting. The cubic system, however, includes five classes of varying degrees of symmetry consistent with the minimum high amount required by the system, and there is some evidence, in the occasional grooving of the octahedral edges and the finding of a few simple tetrahedra, that the diamond does not belong to the holohedral class possessing the maximum of crystal symmetry, the characteristic form of which is the 48-sided hexakisoctahedron, but to the second class characterized by the 24-sided hexakistetrahedron, and that the octahedron is really built up of two interpenetrating twin tetrahedra. The 48-sided form has, however, been found developed on some notable diamonds of considerable size, and the octahedral cleavage, the etched-figures on the faces, and particularly the absence of any proof of electric polarity, are all consistent with holohedral symmetry, that is, with the highest of all the 32 classes of crystal symmetry.

The natural faces are frequently curved and dull, although the interior is perfectly limpid and transparent; but truly plane and brilliant-faced crystals are not uncommon. There is no evidence that a diamond was ever attached to a support during growth; for the face by which a crystal has been attached to the well or floor of the vessel or cavity containing the crystallizing liquid or solution is usually marked with contour lines, indicating a series of shallow steps leading to a central depression, formed as the crystal is pushed away from the surface by predominating growth at the edges of the face. Moreover, drop-shaped diamonds are frequently discovered. All these facts indicate that diamonds are formed by the crystallization of liquefied carbon in the midst of an environment of other fused material, such as molten iron or highly ferruginous rock. For a transparent substance, the density of the diamond is very high, 3.5, a fact which has doubtless something to do with its ready floating in the midst of the molten magma during growth, rather than rising and attaching itself to the rofo of the cavity. Moreover, although a cubic crystal should be isotropic, that is, should exhibit no double refraction or play of color when examined in the dark field between the crossed Nicol-prisms of the polariscope, many diamonds do show birefringence and color in polarized light; but ample proof is afforded by the irregular and varying nature of the phenomenon, and by the fact that some diamonds with truly plane faces do not exhibit it at all, that it is simply due to a state of internal strain, due to crystallization from the liquid state by relatively rapid cooling while under high pressure. For carbon can only be liquified at all by adding pressure to high temperature. This condition of internal strain is not unfrequently so extreme that the diamond explodes soon after its removal from the enveloping matrix, the so-called "blue ground," in which it was found.

The hero of the hour among diamonds is the great "Cullinan," the largest yet discovered, found on January 25, 1905, in the Premier mine situated 20 miles from Pretoria. It was the half only of an enormous octahedron which had probably split owing to internal strain, and, although externally somewhat distorted as usual, was internally wonderfully pure and limpid and practically colorless with the valued faint tinge of blue. Its recent presentation by the Transvaal Government to His Majesty the King was a graceful act which has evoked universal pleasure among His Majesty's subjects and especially delighted those who value diamonds for their scientific interest, and who rejoice that this monarch of crystals is to find its rightful place among the British Crown jewels. It measured before cutting, which it is understood is now in progress, 4 in. by 2 1-2 in. and 2 in., and weighed nearly a pound and a half (622 grammes). It was bounded by four natural octahedron faces and four octahedral cleavage surfaces. The octahedron faces exhibited striations parallel to the edges and little triangular etched depressions characteristic of the diamond. The pipe of "blue ground" in which it was found, the breccia material in which the Transvaal diamonds occur, was over half a mile in cross-section, much larger than the pipes of the Kimberley region. The diamonds were not formed in these pipes, but were ejected into them along with the accompanying now brecciated materials from considerable depths, where they had been formed in highly ferruginous molten magmas under the influence of both high temperature and pressure. Quite recently blocks of one of the original rocks, an eclogite containing much iron, have been discovered in the blue ground of Kimberley, and they have been actually found to contain small diamonds, thus affording the final proof that such was the mode of origin of the diamond.

The diamond is still the hardest material known to us, although carbide of silicon, commercially known as "carborundum," and the metal tantalum now replacing carbon filaments in electric glow lamps, approach it very closely. The saying "diamond cut diamond" is still, however, as a propos to the truth as ever, although there are such variations in hardness among diamonds themselves that the powder of a diamond from one locality, such as the Transvaal, will not always prove efficient on the diamond-cutter's wheel (really a grinding lap) for the cutting of one from another part of the world, New South Wales for instance, and the speed of revolution of the wheel has sometimes to be raised from the normal 2,400 revolutions per minute to over 3,000 before any impression is produced. The black opaque form of diamond known as "carbonado," although useless as a gem, is usually so hard—much harder than the impure variety termed "boart"—that it is the most efficient substance known for rock-drilling, and has been of the utmost service in all recent important tunnelling operations.

Although so hard, the diamond is very brittle, so that a sharp blow will often fracture it. But Sir William Crookes, who has devoted much time during many years to the scientific study of the diamond, has shown that if a good one is placed between the steel jaws of a hydraulic press, and the pressure is applied without a jerk so as to avoid fracture due to brittleness, the jaws may be made to meet without the slightest injury to even the edges of the diamond, the hard steel closing round it and taking an impression of the much harder diamond just like so much wax.

The diamond possesses the greatest power of refracting light of all known colorless substances, its refractive index for sodium light being 2.4699. The index of the highly refractive glass or "paste" used for imitation diamonds rarely exceeds 1.8. The dispersion (0.063) or length of spectrum produced is also abnormally large, conferring on the diamond its peculiar "fire." It is, moreover, pre-eminently reflective, and this, combined with its powerful refraction, causes all light which penetrates the crystal to be totally reflected internally again whenever the angle of internal incidence on a face or artificial facet exceeds the small angle of 24 degrees 13 minutes. The diamond-cutter takes advantage of this in the cutting of a brilliant by arranging his facets in two pyramidal series inverted base to base, so that no light is transmitted except a little through the centre, through the "table" or flat top of the upper pyramidal series and the parallel smaller terminal plane or "culette" of the lower inverse series. All the rest of the light is partly reflected from the exterior as white light and partly repeatedly reflected internally, and eventually refracted outwards as a blaze of spectrum colors.

One of the most interesting of all the wonderful properties of the diamond is its phosphoresence in the dark after exposure to the sun or to friction. The phosphorescence is even greater, sometimes enough to read by, when the diamond is subjected to the high tension electric discharge in a vacuum tube. The color of the light emitted may be blue, red, or green, according to the locality from which the diamond was derived. The proximity of radium naturally produces the same result, the phosphorescence being remarkably brilliant; for the B-rays emanating from radium are similar to the negative electrons of the Crookes tube. More singular still, if the action is prolonged the diamond becomes colored bluish green under the influence of radium, but blackens under the bombardment of the electrons of the Crookes tube. In the latter case, carried to the extreme, Parsons and Swinton have just shown (see Engineering Supplement of January 22nd) that with a current of 11,200 volts and 48 milliamperes the diamond is rapidly converted by the bombardment into graphitic coke, a temperature of 1,890 degrees C. being attained and the diamond swelling up in the process just as when it is placed in an electric arc.

Besides its phosphorescence the diamond is distinguished from "paste" imitations by its perfect transparency to Rontgen rays, highly refractive as well as ordinary glass being more or less opaque to them, whilst it is almost unnecessary to say that "paste" does not glow under the influence either of radium or of the cathode rays.

In the above description of the properties of the diamond, emphasis has been laid on such as throw light on its mode of origin, and which are therefore highly suggestive as to the line of operations most likely to be successful in reproducing it in the laboratory. In a second article an account will be given of the authoritative researches which have been carried out, and which have been completely successful from the purely scientific point of view.

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Messrs. Beardmore, of Glasgow, have booked orders for guns for the Admiralty, which will be the largest and heaviest in the British navy. Their construction will be proceeded with at once. Messrs. Beardmore have also secured the order for the armored plates for the British battleship to be built by Vickers & Sons, Barrow.