

LEIGH HUNT AND HIS FRIENDS.

Margret Holmes in The Week.

In thinking of this man who loved his fellow men there always comes a mixture of emotions. One can never tell where ends the admiration for his poetical genius, and where begins the love for his independence of spirit and unbounded goodness of heart.

Leigh Hunt was born on the 19th of October, 1784, at Southgate, in the county of Middlesex—an out-of-the-way place, he calls it, "with the pure, sweet air of antiquity about it." In speaking of his family, he tells us: "On the mother's side we seem all sailors and rough subjects, with a mitigation, on the female part, of Quakerism, and on the father's side we are Creoles and claret-drinkers, very polite and clerical." There is no period of Hunt's life that is not interesting.

One loves the gentle, delicate little boy, the youngest and least robust of his parents' sons, over whom the sympathetic lodging-house keeper wept because he was sick and a heretic. She was sure he would die, and Hunt's words are, "she thought I would go to the devil." Instead of feeling anger at her intolerance, he pities the torments the good woman must have endured, and congratulates himself that his hostess was a gentle instead of a violent bigot, susceptible of those better notions of God which are intuitive in the best natures. This was at Calais when he was being sent to France on account of ill-health. Referring to this period he says: "I have sometimes been led to consider this as the first layer of that accumulated patience with which in after life I had occasion to fortify myself, and the supposition has given rise to many consolatory reflections on the subject of endurance in general."

He describes himself as having been crabbed, or at least irritable enough until sickness; imagination and an ultra-tender rearing rendered him fearful and patient. He was the son of mirth and melancholy. He never saw his mother smile excepting in a sorrowful, tender fashion, while his father's exuberant spirits burst forth in shouts of laughter on the slightest provocation. Hunt's prevailing temperament he inherited from his father, and this strength and elasticity of spirit, joined with the patience, charity and tenderness that came from his mother, made him the delightful character that he was. So great was his affection and reverence for his mother, he felt a sort of pride in the infirmity she bequeathed him.

Being the youngest son he received his share of the playful persecutions visited by elder brothers on the babies of the family. Because of his delicacy he escaped bodily inflictions, but as boys intuitively discover troublesome facts, an older brother found out that the little one had imagination, and Hunt says: "I might confront him by daylight and endeavour to kick his shins; yet on the 'Night side of Nature' he had me."

He feared not only ghosts and all pertaining to the supernatural, but anything strange or uncouth. On his return from France with his brother they stopped at Deal. One evening the two stood on the beach looking at a shoal of porpoises. Of these creatures the brother had given him some tremendous and mysterious notion. In recalling this occurrence when he was an old man he said: "I remember as if it was yesterday feeling the shadows of evening and the solemnity of the spectacle with an awful intensity. There they were, tumbling along in the foam, what, exactly, I knew not, but fearful creatures of some sort. My brother spoke to me of them in an undertone of voice, and I held my breath as I looked. The very word porpoise had an awful, mouth-filling sound." Grotesque or horrid pictures were enough to fill the night with terror, though doubtless possessing an irresistible fascination by day.

On being sent to Christ Hospital to school, and, associating with other boys, he grew out of his timidity in a measure. He slept in a room with sixty others, and for a time he forgot the fears that the night brought him, but when about thirteen years of age he went to spend a vacation at the country home of his aunt in Surrey, and was greatly surprised and chagrined to find his old terrors of the night

came back as soon as he shut himself in his sleeping room. It was during this visit that he fell in love with his cousin, Fanny Dayrell, older than himself by two years. He calls her his first love, and he always cherished for her the warmest affection.

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, 1813, 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.

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."

Christian Leader: We know of a hospital in the south of England where the managers refuse to give any accounts because it is "the Lord's work." Donors had better be on the watch for the devil's work.

Christian Endeavor.

TOPIC OF WEEK.

BY REV. W. S. M'TAVISH, B.D., ST. GEORGE

Feb. 26.—Sending portions to others. What have we sent? Neh. 3: 10; Acts 3: 5-9.

The poor have never ceased out of the land. We have them with us always. But wherever the authority of the Word of God has been properly recognized they have been treated with consideration, and as long as the spirit of the Gospel prevails they will be clothed, fed and visited. When the law was first given, God's people were taught that they must neither reproach nor neglect the needy. The Israelites were taught that they must make provision for the poor, and this they did by leaving the corners of the fields uncleaned, and by leaving also whatever fruit escaped their notice when they first gathered the crop from the orchards and vineyards. Not only so, but at the celebration of their feasts they kindly remembered their poorer brethren. When the worship of God was re-established at Jerusalem after the captivity, the people sent portions from their feasts to those for whom nothing had been prepared. The same custom prevailed also in the time of Esther. (Esth. 9. 19, 22).

The very genius of the Gospel is kindness to the poor and unfortunate. Matthew Henry says, "True grace does not wish to eat its morsel alone." Shakspeare reminds us that we are born to do benefits, and he further reminds us that what is ours to bestow is not ours to reserve. But a greater than Shakspeare teaches us that we are not to withhold good from him to whom it is due when it is in the power of our hand to do it. (Prov. 3. 27). Still further, Christ Himself enjoins us to give to him who asks, and not turn away from him who would borrow of us. (Matt. 5. 42). But are we to give to men indiscriminately? Are we to give a meal, lodging or money to every tramp who asks for it? No. "If a man work not neither shall he eat." The example of Job is very suggestive on this point. (Job 29. 12-17).

What are we to give? It is obvious that we can only give such things as we have. It is equally obvious that needs vary, and that, therefore, the help we give should be in accordance with the needs of the individual. Peter had neither gold nor silver to bestow upon the lame man, but such a blessing as he could give he gave cheerfully. Andrew, knowing the special needs of his brother Peter, brought him to Jesus. Dorcas made coats and garments for the widows and orphans near her home. Aquila and Priscilla gave instruction to Apollos. Lydia gave lodgment to the apostles. In all these cases, what was given was in accordance with the needs of the several individuals.

Why should we help those who require assistance? 1. Because by so doing we commend the Gospel to others. (Mat. v., 16). It is well when unbelievers are constrained to say, "See how these Christians love one another." 2. Because God enjoins us to do so, and is pleased with us when we do. If there were no other reason this is surely a sufficient motive. (Deut. xv: 7-11; Gal. vi: 10; Heb. xiii: 16). 3. Because of the reflex influence for good upon ourselves. "It is more blessed to give than receive."

"What's God's own bliss? The bliss of doing good

Unlimited and perfect. Next to God Who stands in happiness pre-eminent? The favored spirit that from God enjoys The largest share of delegated power, To guide the currents of His boundless love."

One of our Portage la Prairie exchanges has the following remarkable paragraph: Mrs. W. Miller went to Brandon on Wednesday to spend a short vacation with Mrs. J. W. Fleming. It is worthy of note that this very able organist of Knox church has not been absent from her organ during a church service or choir practice except in case of illness for the past thirteen years. This is Christian service in truth."