

and coughs and influenza that hold revel.

To the eye of experience, therefore, the fall of the year may rightly have a claim as the most auspicious season. No greater libel was ever uttered than the allegation that the closing days of November, the "saddest of the year," are fairly typical of autumn. It is more than half due to the prejudice of the poets that the "season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" bears so bad a name among its fellows. Whenever a rider of Pegasus feels lachrymose, he is almost sure to work in some slander on the autumn. Thus Tennyson felt:

Tears from the depth of some divine despair  
Rise in the heart and gather to the eyes  
In looking on the happy autumn fields.

No wonder that he confessed he knew "not what they mean." Here in autumn, is found the even tenor of all the year as summer heat melts imperceptibly into the invigorating charm of cooler days. The harvests are all but gathered in. The grapes and apples and nuts presage a cheer that never attaches to the precarious peach crop. Even with its slow progress towards winter, the autumn is prodigal of gifts:

When the frost is on the pumpkin,  
And the corn is in the shock.

As one grows in years, performance and not promise takes an added value. It is broad-shouldered Ceres, with her lap full of good things, not the willowy and changeable "Aprille with his shoures soote," that challenges our regard. We come to dread the sudden change and climatic extremes. "Sometimes too hot the eye of heaven doth shine" for us to remain quite unblinded by his rays. But in the clear light of the hunter's moon we see things as they really are.

#### THOMAS HOOD.

##### I.

It cannot be thought that a new life of Hood was widely desired, nor does the writing\* of Mr. Walter Jerrold show that charm of manner which makes us grateful for unimportant things. Yet, at least, the biography is the result of honest painstaking, and has the solid merit of correcting traditional errors and of offering a considerable amount of new material. It is well enough to be assured that the true date of Hood's birth in London was 1799; to have an exact

relation of his years in Scotland, 1815-1817, when, according to Mr. Jerrold, his determination was formed to devote himself primarily to literature, rather than to engraving; and to know that his marriage, in 1825, was not in opposition to the wishes of Miss Reynolds's people and brought no bitterness to his amiable heart. It may even be that there is still a sufficient number of admirers of Hood's humor and pathos—among whom, indeed, I count myself—to justify the fuller printing of his mad letters and the telling of all his madder practical jokes. There may be some who will welcome the complete story of his stay on the Continent from 1835 to 1840, with its rollicking German friendships; who will read willingly the lengthened record of his struggle against failing health during his last five years in England, and to hear his brave death-bed profession of faith, almost his last remembered utterance:

It's a beautiful world, and since I have been lying here, I have thought of it more and more; it is not so bad, even humanly speaking, as people would make it out. I have had some very happy days while I lived in it, and I could have wished to stay a little longer. But it is all for the best, and we shall all meet in a better world!

Through the troubles and anxieties caused by illness and, it must be added, by imprudence in money matters, Hood preserved this buoyant cheerfulness. One comfort comes from this biography—although Mr. Jerrold did not quite intend it—in dispelling the supposed tragedy of Hood's life, which would have him driven by grinding necessity to the production of vendible comicalities. At the very beginning of his career Barry Cornwall is exclaiming to a friend over the pity "that Hood should have given up serious poetry for the sake of cracking the shells of jokes which have not always a kernel"; and so the tradition has been passed down to us of a fine creative artist who deliberately diverted his talents to the popular market, with all the misery of such a conscious degradation. There was, no doubt, a vein of delicate pathos in his genius, but no one can read this life without feeling that not the hateful *res angusta* but the inevitable bent of his mind made him from boyhood to the fading years of sickness the jester of England. His "National Tales" in prose (published early in 1827), were a deliberate effort to prove his rights to another name.

The serious character of the generality of the stories [he says in his preface], is a deviation from my former attempts, and I have received advice enough, on that account, to make me present them with some misgiving. 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, which has led the buffoon by a rash step into the tragic buskin, that I assume the sadder humor, but because I know from certain passages that such affections are not foreign to my nature. During my short lifetime, I have often been as "sad as night," and not like the young gentlemen of France, merely from wantonness. It is the contrast of such leaden and golden fits that lends a double relish to our days.

All which is perfectly true, but it did not save the "National Tales" from being a flat failure. As for "Tynney Hail," his attempt at sustained fiction, its character is indicated by Dickens's praise of it as "the most extraordinary jumble of impossible extravagance and especial cleverness"; or by Lamb's admiration of its puns as "so neat, that the most inveterate foe to that sort of joke, not being expectant of 'em, might read it all thro' and not find you out."

##### II.

It was as the inimitable equivocator in words that Hood won a reputation among his contemporaries, and will be remembered. In *Blackwood's Magazine* for April, 1830, an unknown rhymster hit off a number of English writers in quatrains, ending with Hood:

Impugn I dare not thee  
For I'm of puny blood  
And thou would'st punish me  
With pungent hardihood.

The foolish lines show the place of Hood in literature, though the puns employed are, as Mr. Jerrold rightly says, not at all of the genus that gave Hood his fame. His letters overrun with quibbling conceits; his pencil could scarcely draw a picture without a play in forms; his practical jests were a kind of amphibology in act—"the equivocation of the fiend!" we are likely to exclaim at the last, in wonder and dismay.

The fact is the pun has got a bad name in society, and Hood—dare we add Lamb also?—as its devotee would probably be shunned to-day as a bore in any club of London or New York. There is some reason for this unpopularity of a once admired species of wit, for it is subject to a woeful abuse. In his "Shirley Brooks of *Punch*" Mr. G. S. Layard gives too numerous illustrations of what the profession of punning soon came to be; for horrid example:

One summer evening Thackeray arrived late at the *Punch* dinner. He had given up a lady's dinner for a dinner with Lord John Russell, and the little statesman had left him in the lurch. "So," he said, "I come as a *peas-aller* to Mr. P. to eat my peas in peace."

"But you must mind your Q's as well," said Shirley, "and you must take your cues from me or I shall not excuse you."

Peculiar taste in entertainment! Let us pray for it an everlasting *requiescat in pace*. It should be added that the Victorian afterwits were not the first

\**Thomas Hood: His Life and Times.* By Walter Jerrold. New York: John Lane Co. \$5 net.

or only ones to bring the double-tongued Muse into contempt. Early in the forties of the eighteenth century, Mrs. Elizabeth Carter had planned a *jeu d'esprit* on "The Whole Art and Mystery of Punning," calculated "to furnish the sweet *nepenthe* of nonsense in such copious streams as to water the face of the whole earth." The prospectus should be perused by all intending sinners. "To so great a height of perfection," she declares, "have the authors of this work carried their design, as to lay down rules to divide, subdivide, compound, recompound, decompound, rack, torture, strain, and quodlibetificate any word into a pun by nineteen several ways of false spelling."

### III.

But the pun is not necessarily and was not always this criminal act of verbicide, as Oliver Wendell Holmes has called it; an evening with Theodore Hood, we may remember, could wring from Coleridge the exclamation that he was as great a genius as Dante. There is a pleasant reward in going back now and then to the group of wits who treated punning with the scrupulous delicacy of a fine art; and of this practice Hood, at least, so far as the *litera scripta* can decide, was the incomparable master. There is some exaggeration in saying, as a reviewer in the *Spectator* wrote not long ago, that "Hood's pioneer work—Hood's own unique work—was the punning ballad, which may be said not only to have begun, but in its best form to have died, with him." That is to pass a little too lightly over the work of many writers before Hood's day; more particularly it is to forget the ballads of Goldsmith, such, for instance, as the stanzas on "Mrs. Mary Blaize," which would seem quite in place if found in "Hood's Own." It is to forget also the excellent absurdities of the "Ingoldsby Legends" and other later works. Yet it is true that Hood remains the inapproachable master of the pun in all its shades of excellence, and to understand his humor, and indeed his fancy, is to practise a useful discrimination among the different kinds of equivocation. Charles Lamb, as a connoisseur in the art, pointed the way to the right classification, when, in his remarks on the "Odes and Addresses," he censured his friend not for excess of wit, but for the occasional use of the wrong sort of wit.

What we allude to [he writes] is a mixture of *incompatible* kinds; the perpetual recurrence of *puns* in these little effusions of humor; puns uncalled for, and perfectly gratuitous, a sort of make-weight; puns, which, if *missed*, leave the sense and the drollery full and perfect without them. You may read any one of the addresses, and not catch a quibble in it, and it shall be just as good, nay better; for the addition of said quibble only serves to puzzle with an unnecessary double meaning. A pun is good when it can rely on its single self; but,

called in as an accessory, it weakens—unless it *makes* the humor, it *enfeebles* it.

What Lamb means, as becomes evident from his comment on the humor of the "Ode to Joseph Grimaldi, Senior," but what he does not quite say, is that the pun succeeds when it plays primarily on the double sense of a single word and not on the mere similarity in sound of two words. The late Canon Ainger, in his "Life of Hood," comes closer to the real distinction, while hinting at a larger classification:

Herbert, Crashaw, Donne [Lamb had made the same comparison with the "metaphysical" poets], in like manner, have their abundant and perishable affectations. Yet all of these in turn show how true wit may subserve the highest aims of the Poet; and that in fact, so far from Wit and Poetry being irreconcilable, they shade and pass into one another by gradations quite imperceptible. Who shall decide, on the moment, whether Waller's couplet—

The soul's dark cottage, battered and decayed,  
Let in new light through chinks which time had made—

is to be pronounced witty or poetical? The truth is that it is both; and that the two are fused, beyond possibility of separation, by the intensity and sincerity of the Truth enforced.

Now Waller's couplet, as Canon Ainger might have pointed out, is at once both poetical and witty just because it contains an uncertain play on words hovering midway between the true metaphor and the avowed quibble. Its position is clearer if we compare it with two stanzas which turn on different equivocations of the same word. In Cardinal Newman's hymn—

Lead, kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom,

Lead thou me on;  
The night is dark, and I am far from home;  
Lead thou me on.

we have sheer poetry, with no suspicion of wit. The pun, if we may use the term in so generic a sense, lies in those physical qualities of light which the mind has always and instinctively associated with the moral qualities of the spirit. There is an equivocation of ideas, if you insist; but without the element of surprise, and springing from a deep similarity of emotional content. This is, properly speaking, metaphor. At the other extreme lies such a stanza as this epitaph on a lamp-lighter:

Faithful at lighting lamps thou wast,  
Till soul and body grew so light,  
That one is wafted now with dust,  
While t'other shines a star of night.

Here is the pun in its vulgarest form—a pure quibble, whose whole force is in the unity of sound of two distinct words "light" as opposed to dark and to heavy, and whose wit, if it have any, rests on the element of surprise alone. Between these two, the metaphorical and the quibbling use of the word, stands Waller's witty comparison, which

is raised by its play on sense rather than sound above the quibble, yet which so dwells on the physical accessories of light, and so depends for its effect on the unexpected turn, as to be strictly, not a poetical metaphor, but a conceit.

### IV.

These are the three terms of figurative speech—the quibble or base pun, the conceit, and the metaphor. For the most part Hood ranges on a ground below the middle term and above the lowest—on a ground which may be designated the legitimate pun. Not always, indeed; for at times, he, like other wits, forgets to resist the first temptation of his own cleverness. Thus a catch in an old Scotch ballad, "cauld, cauld, he lies beneath the deep," may set him off on a long chase after words whose only association is their similarity of sound:

But still that jolly mariner  
Took in no reef at all,  
For, in his pouch, confidently,  
He wore a baby's caul;  
A thing, as gossip-nurses know,  
That always brings a squall!

The ensuing wave, with horrid foam,  
Rush'd o'er and cover'd all.—  
The jolly boatman's drowning, scream  
Was smother'd by the squall,—  
Heaven never heard his cry, nor did  
The ocean heed his *caul*.

But more often there is a kind of accompanying twist in the situation itself, playful or grotesque, which raises the humor above the exasperation of sheer verbicide, as in "Faithless Nelly Gray" or the less grewsome "Sally Brown":

O Sally Brown, O Sally Brown,  
How could you serve me so?  
I've met with many a breeze before,  
But never such a blow.

And this twist may become the very substance of the humor, so that the play on words is lost in what may be called the equivocation of circumstances, or the pun in things themselves. So it is throughout the "Parental Ode":

Thou little tricky Puck!  
With antic toys so funnily bestuck,  
Light as the singing bird that wings the air—  
(The door! the door! he'll tumble down the stair!)

### V.

Hood's manner of punning is an old story no doubt, and needs no interpreter. But it may not have been so often remarked that the trick pursues him even into his solemn moods; is, indeed, in more or less disguised form, one of his efficient instruments of pathos. There was a vein of melancholy in the man, nor was he, as he says, "incompetent for gravity." He was in this respect like other humorists who have turned lightly from laughter to tears, but he differed from others in his ability to measure sadness with a conscious pun:

All things are touch'd with Melancholy,  
Born of the secret soul's mistrust,  
To feel her fair ethereal wings  
Weigh'd down with vile degraded dust;  
Even the bright extremes of joy  
Bring on conclusions of disgust,  
Like the sweet blossoms of the May,  
Whose fragrance ends in *must*.  
O give her, then, her tribute just,  
Her sighs and tears, and musings holy!  
There is no music in the life  
That sounds with idiot laughter solely;  
There's not a string attuned to mirth,  
But has its chord in Melancholy.

Perhaps it is the fatalistic pun lurking the mind from beneath the more manifest metaphor of *may* and *must* that gives a peculiar piquancy to these lines, as if under a masquerade of sorrow we should catch glimpses of a face not smiling, but itself sorrowing. Such an audacious quibbling with melancholy leads one to reflect on the intimate mixture of laughter and tears in some forms of art, on the slender partition in human life between joy and sadness, or what may be called the ambiguity of the emotions. They stand so near together and pass so easily one into the other for the reason that their cause is so ambiguous; for regret and disappointment, like the merry accidents of life, though to different ends, spring from a kind of disparity between expectation and event. The only peculiarity of Hood is that he uses the juggling with words more consciously than other poets to express the juggling realities of fate. Thus, were it not for the harshness of the term, the ambiguity of sleep and morn and the soul's secret mistrust in "The Death-Bed" might almost be called punning:

We watch'd her breathing thro' the night,  
Her breathing soft and low,  
As in her breast the wave of life  
Kept heaving to and fro!

So silently we seem'd to speak—  
So slowly moved about!  
As we had lent her half our powers  
To eke her living out!

Our very hopes belied our fears,  
Our fears our hopes belied—  
We thought her dying when she slept,  
And sleeping when she died!

For when the morn came dim and sad—  
And chill with early showers,  
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had  
Another morn than ours!

Is our perception here merely quickened by our familiarity with the equivocating habit of the writer, or has this habit really led him on more audaciously than others to that verge of sentiment where the instrument of pathos is almost confused with that of humor? The latter is the case, I think; for I observe that he carries this same tendency not only into his other pathetic poems (making of this same likeness of sleep and death in one passage of his "Hero and Leander," at least, a pure conceit), but into all the emotions. It would be tedious to hunt

out the various illustrations of this lurking wit in his poems of awe and regret and indignation and fancy; it would even tend to disconcert us in our enjoyment of his delicate craftsmanship. Only one example I cannot pass over, for its comment on the ambiguous charm of beauty:

O saw ye not fair Ines?  
She's gone into the West,  
To dazzle when the sun is down,  
And rob the world of rest:  
She took our daylight with her,  
The smiles that we love best,  
With morning blushes on her cheek,  
And pearls upon her breast.

To Poe these lines had "an inexpressible charm"—as indeed to whom have they not?—and I think it is not extravagant to say that some part here of that "petulant, impatient sorrow" (the word is too strong) which Poe connected with the incomplete realization of beauty in art, is due to the teasing duplicity introduced by the word "West." The emotional impression of the whole poem is too fine and pure to class it as a conceit; it is metaphor of the truest sort. Yet withal the realism of the action of the second line, the insistence on the similarity of physical motion, adds a certain whimsical element, as if a metaphor might at the same time be a conceit and—let us not say a pun, but—a play on words. Not the least of the interests attaching to Hood's work is this persistent amphibology of his genius. Better than in almost any other writer, we can, in him, follow poetic wit through all its gradations of quibbling and conceit and metaphor, where, indeed, these are not blended together in a kind of sublimated punning. We seem thus at times to come very close to the equivocation that lies in the human heart, too close, it may be, for the uses of great poetry. We are reminded too coarsely that the powers of literature are only figures of speech, just as Brutus, after serving virtue for a lifetime, found it in the end, not a thing, but a word. P. E. M.

#### NEWS FOR BIBLIOPHILES.

In a recent letter giving some notes about that famous Italian book of wood-engravings, the "Hypternomachia Poliphili," Venice, 1499, it is said that "an example has been acquired recently by Mr. J. Pierpont Morgan." As a matter of fact, Mr. Morgan owns, and has owned for a long time, three copies of the first edition. One of these, in an old blue morocco eighteenth century binding, is perhaps the tallest copy known, the leaf measuring full 12½ inches in height. It is from the Brayton Ives Library, and in the sale catalogue was described as "large paper" and as having been "bought from Morgand of Paris, and said by him to be unique." All copies were no doubt originally alike as to paper, some having been trimmed closer than others. Mr. Morgan acquired the book with the Theodore Irwin collection. His second copy,

only one-eighth inch shorter, is in citron morocco by Roger Payne, a fine and authentic specimen of the work of this famous binder. It was formerly in the collection of Mark Masterman Sykes, and later in that of James Toovey. The third copy, from the Richard Bennett collection, is in a superb binding of brown morocco, richly tooled, and bearing on each cover the famous device of Demetrio Carnevari, physician to Pope Urban the VIII. Examples of books bound for him are as rare and as highly prized by collectors as those from the libraries of Grolier and Maioli.

The book seems to have been of so much interest, even in early days, that special bindings were put upon many copies. In the strictest use of the word it is not at all a rare book—probably a hundred copies might be traced—and while its value seems to hold in the auction room, it does not materially increase. The Beckford copy, in an old Venetian binding, brought £130 in 1883, and the Turner copy £137 in 1888. These prices have, we believe, been only twice exceeded at public sale. Charles V's copy brought £151 in the Earl of Ashburnham's sale, June, 1897, and on November 3 of last year, £159 was paid for the Newton copy, in blue morocco by Derome. This was a very tall copy, 12¾ inches, the same height as the Toovey-Morgan example.

Of the second edition of the book, which is no doubt actually rarer than the first, and which was printed in Paris in 1545, Mr. Morgan has two very fine copies. One is in an Italian binding of brown morocco of the sixteenth century, the back and sides very richly gilt and painted in colors. This volume was exhibited at the Burlington Fine Arts Club Exhibition in 1891. The second copy is in the original vellum covers.

The Third Quarterly Part of Karslake's "Book-Auction Record," covering sales in London from April 1 to June 30, 1909, and recording 5,511 lots, is just ready. But few items of exceptional rarity or interest are included in this part, the most notable being the volume in old binding containing five pieces (or, more correctly, four, two having been published together) from the press of William Caxton. This volume, one of the most interesting of Caxton books to come into the auction market in recent years, was sold on May 21 to "Stanley" for £2,600. It was, it is now reported, "bought in" for the owner, and has since been disposed of privately to Mr. J. W. Ellsworth of New York city. Mr. Ellsworth is perhaps best known as the owner of the Brinley-Cole-Ives copy of the Gutenberg Bible and of the Daly set of the Four Folios of Shakespeare, although he is the owner of many other rare books.

## Correspondence.

### PRACTICAL EDUCATION.

TO THE EDITOR OF THE NATION:

SIR: Your editorial of August 5, upon "Student Activities," continuing as it does a long series of adverse criticisms upon our present college administration, states what is patently true, but fails, it seems to me, to give the fundamental reason for the eclipse of the curriculum by the "activities," or to suggest any useful remedy. If the undergraduates at our colleges or in