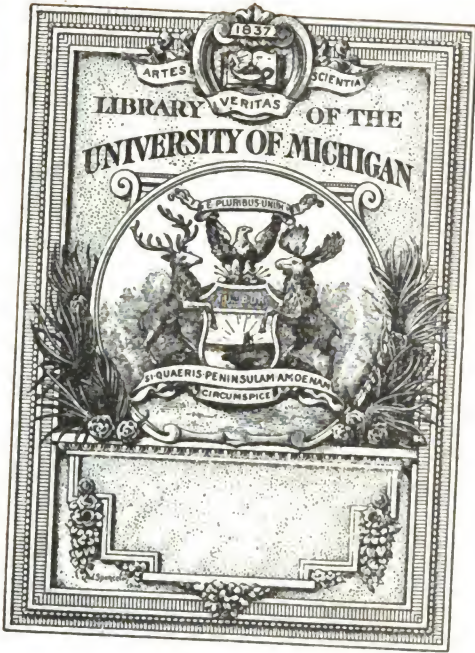


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THEODORE HOOK:

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EDITION THIRD.

*by John G.
Lockhart*

LONDON:
JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE STREET.

1852.

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REPRINTED FROM THE QUARTERLY REVIEW.

LONDON : PRINTED BY WILLIAM CLOWES AND SONS, STAMFORD STREET

THEODORE HOOK.

THEODORE EDWARD HOOK was born in Charlotte Street, Bedford Square, on the 22nd of September, 1788;—the son of a musical composer who enjoyed in his time success and celebrity, by his first wife (Miss Madden), a woman distinguished for beauty, talents, accomplishments, and genuine worth. There was but one other child of that marriage, Dr. James Hook, Dean of Worcester, and he, being Theodore's senior by not less than eighteen years, had left the paternal roof long before the latter was sent to school.

The Dean, with a great deal of the wit and humour that made his brother famous,* and with perhaps much the same original cast of disposition and temper generally, had possessed one great advantage over him at the start of life. He had the benefit of an excellent mother's watchfulness all through the years of youth and early manhood. Theodore could

* Dr. Hook amused himself, about 1821 or 1822, by writing two novels—Pen Owen, and Percy Mallory—which at the time were commonly ascribed to Theodore, and which would hardly have done him any discredit. They have been not long since republished by Messrs. Blackwood—as they well deserved to be—in a cheap form. The picture of the Cato-street Conspiracy in one of them is most striking.

only remember her—and fondly and tenderly he did so to the last—as the gentle parent of a happy child. He had just approached the first era of peril when this considerate and firm-minded woman was lost to her family. The composer soon married again; but Theodore found not—what in spite of a thousand proverbs many men have found under such circumstances—a second mother. But for that deprivation we can hardly doubt that he might, like his more fortunate brother, have learned to regulate his passions and control his spirits, and risen to fill with grace some high position in an honourable profession. The calamitous loss of his mother is shadowed very distinctly in one of his novels; and the unlucky hero—*Gilbert Gurney*—is represented as having a single prosperous brother, exactly eighteen years older than himself. But indeed that novel is very largely autobiographical: when his *Diary* alludes to it as in progress the usual phrase is ‘working at my *Life*.’

Born in the same year with Lord Byron and Sir Robert Peel, he was their schoolfellow at Harrow—but not in the same memorable form:—nor do we see any trace of his having been personally acquainted in those days with either of them, though he often alluded to the coincidence of dates with an obvious mixture of pride and regret, perhaps we ought to say, remorse. We have met with no account of him whatever by any one who knew him familiarly at that period. That he was as careless and inattentive to the proper studies of the place as he

represents his *Gurney* to have been will not be thought improbable by most of his readers. But his early performances, now forgotten, display many otiose quotations from the classics, and even from the modern Latin poets; and these specimens of juvenile pedantry must be allowed to indicate a vein of ambition which could hardly have failed, with a mind of such alacrity, to produce some not inconsiderable measure of attainment. The author of the *Sayings and Doings* had, no doubt, outlived all his Greek and most of his Latin. But how many men are there of good, even of great talents, who, long before they reach middle life, have forgotten far more than he ever knew of either! Let any scholar of mature standing run over a list of his contemporaries at the University, and think how few of them could now construe a strophe of Æschylus, or even a page of Livy, were some lost Decade to be dug up to-morrow at Pompeii, or a Trilogy deciphered on a Palimpsest of Moscow.

Mrs. Hook died in 1802: and the widower, a clever but weak man, was easily persuaded not to send Theodore back to Harrow. He was proud already of his boy—found his company at home a great solace at first—and, even before the house received its new mistress, had begun to discover that one of his precocious talents might be turned to some account financially. Theodore had an exquisite ear, and was already, living from the cradle in a musical atmosphere, an expert player on the piano-forte: his voice was rich, sweet, and powerful: he

could sing a pathetic song well, a comic one charmingly. One evening he enchanted the father especially by his singing, to his own accompaniment, of two new ballads, one grave and one gay. Whence the airs—whence the words? It turned out that verse and music were alike his own. In the music the composer perceived much that might be mended: but the verses were, to him, faultless:—the meaning probably not much—but nothing more soft than the liquid flow of the vocables—nothing more easy than the balance of the lines. Here was a mine for the veteran artist: hitherto he had been forced to import his words: now the whole manufacture might go on at home. Snug, comfortable, amiable domestic arrangement! The boy was delighted with the prospect—and at sixteen his fate was fixed.

‘I remained at home,’ says *Gurney*, ‘and was my father’s darling; he fancied nothing on earth was like me: I was the wittiest, if not the wisest, fellow breathing—and I have seen my respectable parent shake his fat sides with laughing at my jokes and antics till the tears ran down his cheeks.’ This beardless merry-maker was now in fact a partner in his father’s business. Whatever there had been of authority was virtually at an end. Whenever Mr. Hook got his five guineas, two perhaps were of right Theodore’s. He felt the joy, the pride, the exultation of independence: he could make money—he must of course be a man and entitled to a man’s privileges. And what were the privileges he was most likely to covet and seize upon?

His father's friends and boon-companions were musicians and players, male and female. He was a comely youth, in all respects precocious. The talents of so mere a stripling were eagerly appreciated, rapturously commended; he had not written three songs that took on the stage before he was the little pet lion of the Green-room. Free admission before the curtain and behind it was a thing of course. Night after night he hung about the theatres; popular actors laughed at his jokes, and pretty actresses would have their bouquets handed them by nobody but Theodore.

One effort was made to stop this headlong career. It was, we believe, on the very urgent remonstrance of his brother, already advancing in the Church, that his father agreed to continue his education with a view to the bar; and accordingly in 1804 he went down with the future Dean to be entered at Oxford. But, accustomed to be his own master with his father, he was not likely to treat a brother, though twice his own age, with much submission. He carried the spirit of rebellious frolic with him. When the Vice-Chancellor, noticing his boyish appearance, said, 'You seem very young, Sir; are you prepared to sign the Thirty-Nine Articles?' 'Oh yes, Sir,' answered Theodore briskly—'quite ready—*Forty*, if you please.' The Dignitary shut the book;—but the brother apologized—the boy looked contrite:—the Vice-Chancellor (John Parsons, Master of Balliol College, afterwards Bishop of Bristol) was always, in spite of eyebrows as stern as

Thurlow's, indulgent to youth—and in the end the ceremony of matriculation was completed. The solemn monastic quadrangles, however, had made no very favourable impression on the juvenile intransigent. He was not to reside until after the expiration of a couple of terms:—which interval was to be devoted to a certain prescribed course of reading. He parted with his brother and returned to London—his head full of nothing in fact but an embryonic farce. He had not been an inattentive loungee at Drury Lane and Covent Garden. He had released his father from the necessity of fitting music to other people's words:—why might he not emancipate himself from the drudgery of adapting songs to other people's dialogues? 'Few men of great abilities are modest,' says Sydney Smith;—'Few clever boys are modest,' would, we think, have been a safer maxim. Theodore Hook in our opinion lived to be a modest man; but he considered himself at seventeen as quite on a level with the best melodramatists of the time; and, after all, so the case turned out to be when he made his attempt. The truth is, the literature of the stage was at the beginning of the century almost as bad as it is now: it could hardly have been worse.

The little back drawing-room was now allotted to Theodore, and we have before us an early associate's reminiscences of the sanctum of Christmas 1804. 'Tables, chairs, mantelpiece, piano, were all covered with a litter of letters, MS. music, French plays, notes, tickets, rhyming-dictionaries—not a seat to be had.'

‘Already,’ this gentleman continues, ‘he possessed all the powers of entertainment which have since made him so celebrated as a table-companion, and in the confined circle of the family he would exhibit them with the same zeal and effect as when in the most brilliant society, with the eyes of the gifted and the great upon him. His wit was never dependent upon excitement, but flowed spontaneously on every occasion, early or late. He was from the first enthusiastically loyal—and if during dinner a street-organ played *God save the King*, he would insist on everybody standing up, lead the chorus, and not sit down till the anthem was closed.*

‘To work I went,’ says *Gurney*, ‘bought three or four French vaudevilles, and, filching an incident from each, made up my very effective drama.’ This was ‘*The Soldier’s Return, or What can Beauty do?*’ a Comic Opera in Two Acts, as performed at the T. R. Drury Lane:—the Overture and Music entirely new, composed by Mr. Hook.’ Theodore is not named on the title-page (1805)—but the success was totally unlike what is described in *Gurney*—it was great—the applause vociferous; and the author’s secret was not kept for a day. The contempt, however, with which Mr. Gurney de-

* This reminiscent was Mr. S. Beazeley, the architect and dramatist, who, it is not doubtful, was also the *Daly* of *Gilbert Gurney*. Though a clever and very voluble person, he always seemed to us under a certain check when in the company of his chief, the unrivalled *Gamin de Londres*. He died late in 1850, but his epitaph had been many years before written, or rather spoken, by Theodore:—

*Here lies Sam Beazeley,
Who lived hard and died easily.*

scribes his *coup d'essai* was, we have no doubt, an exact transcript of the writer's own feelings on that subject in 1837. It would be as absurd to criticise such a piece as last year's pantomime—like that, it answered its purpose and its author's, and no more is to be said. At the same time, amidst all its mad impudent nonsense, there are here and there jokes which deserved the applause of the pit. A traveller coming up to an inn-door says, 'Pray, friend, are you the master of this house?'—'Yes, Sir,' answers Boniface, 'my wife has been dead these three weeks.' We might quote one or two more apparently genuine Theodores. The dialogue, such as it is, dances along, and the songs read themselves into singing.

Among other advantages this trifle brought him into contact with two bright theatrical stars, neither as yet advanced to the destined zenith: these were Mathews and Liston, both considerably his seniors, but both still wantoning in animal spirits almost as wild as his own. These first-rate comedians excelled in totally different styles, and the peculiar capacity and resources of neither were fully apparent until they trod the stage in juxta-position. It was for this purpose that Hook planned his second after-piece—*Catch Him who Can* (1806)—in which abundant opportunity was contrived for exhibiting the grave irresistible drollery of Liston in contrast with the equally matchless vivacity and versatility of the prince of mimics and ventriloquists. In the course of the farce Mathews figured in some six or seven different disguises. Such acting would have

insured the triumph of even a worse thing than the *Soldier's Return*—but this was better than that in every respect. One of Liston's songs was long in vogue—perhaps still survives:—

I sing the loves, the smiling loves,
Of Clutterbuck and Higgenbottom.

And there are not a few meritorious points in the dialogue. It is, however, unsafe to depend on the originality of anything in these early pieces of Hook's. He steals as audaciously as any of his valets, and uses the plunder sometimes with a wonderful want of thought. Liston's sweetheart, for example, a tricky chambermaid, knocks him down with *Every man has just as much vanity as he wants understanding*:—Pope's famous saying, to which Pope's history lends no authority.

The Invisible Girl soon followed—the idea taken from a newspaper account of a new French vaudeville, but cleverly worked out. The fun is that, with a crowd of dramatis personæ, a rapid succession of situations, and even considerable complication of intrigue, no character ever gets out more than *yes, no, a but, a hem, or a still*—except the indefatigable hero Captain Allelack—for whose part it is difficult to believe that any English powers but Jack Bannister's in his heyday could ever have been adequate. This affair had a great run; and no wonder. If anybody could play the Captain now, it would fill the Adelphi for a season.

We are not very sure about the chronology of

various farces and melodramas which Hook poured out in hot succession during the next two or three seasons—*Music Mad*—*Darkness Visible*—*Trial by Jury*—*The Fortress*, &c. &c. *Tekeli*, though more successful than any of its predecessors, is now remembered only by some lines in Byron's early satire :—

Gods! o'er those boards shall Folly rear her head
Where Garrick trod, and Kemble lives to tread?
On those shall Farce display Buffoonery's mask,
And Hook conceal his Heroes in a cask?

We might name, we believe, several others equally defunct—besides two that have been revived with approbation within these few years—*Exchange no Robbery*, and *Killing no Murder*. In the former Terry, another intimate associate from that time forth, had in Cranberry a character excellently adapted to his saturnine aspect and dry humour; and Liston was not less happily provided for in Lamotte. In the other, Liston as Apollo Belvi, and Mathews as Buskin, filled the town with merriment, such as had hardly perhaps been equalled since the days of Foote. Almost all these were written before Hook was twenty years of age. There can be no doubt that if he had gone on he must have rivalled any farce-writer that ever wrote in any language.

In his twentieth year (1808) Theodore also made his first essay as a novelist, under the pseudonyme of Alfred Allendale, Esq. The work (3 vols. 12mo.) was a mere farce, though in a narrative shape—and

as flimsy as any he had given to the stage. As if the set object had been to satirize the Minerva Press School, everything, every individual turn in the fortunes of his *Musgrave* is brought about purely and entirely by accident. The sentimental hero elopes with his mistress. A hundred miles down the North road they stop for a quarter of an hour—order dinner, and stroll into the garden. Behold, the dreaded rival happens to be lodging here—he is lounging in the inn-garden at this moment. The whole plan is baulked. Some time afterwards they elope again—and reach Gretna Green in safety.

‘Cruel mothers—chattering friends and flattering rivals—all were distanced—the game was run down, he was in at the death, and the brush was his own.—False delicacy at Gretna is exploded: a woman, when she goes into Lanchester’s, is known to want millinery—(people say something more); —when she lounges at Gray’s she is understood to stand in need of trinkets; when she stops at Gattie’s she wants complexion; when she goes to Gretna she wants a husband!—That being the case, *not* to talk of marriage is as absurdly *outré* as not to call for supper; and therefore Musgrave, with a sly look at his blushing bride, ordered a couple of roasted fowls and a parson to be ready immediately. The waiter, perfect in his part, stepped over to the chandler’s shop, hired the divine, and at half-past ten the hymeneal rites were to be solemnized.’—(vol. i. p. 84.)

The fowls are put to the fire—the blacksmith appears—the ceremony has just reached the essential point—when a chaise dashes up to the door;—out spring the heroine’s mother and the rival again.—Farther on, the hero comes late at night to another inn, and is put into a double-bedded room, in which the rival happens to be fast asleep. The rival gets up in the morning before the hero awakes, cuts his thumb in shaving, walks out, sees a creditor, jumps on the top of a passing stage-coach, and vanishes. The hero is supposed to have murdered him;—the towel is bloody;—he must have contrived to bury the body; he is tried, convicted, condemned;—he escapes;—an accident brings a constable to the cottage where he is sheltered;—he is recaptured—pinioned—mounts the drop;—he is in the act of speaking his last speech, when up dashes another post-chaise containing the rival, who had happened to see the trial just the morning before in an old newspaper. And so on through three volumes. But the oddest part of the whole is that Hook himself, sixteen years afterwards, thought it worth while to recast precisely the same absurd fable, even using a great deal of the language, in his *Sayings and Doings*—series first, vol. iii. *Merton*. Of course the general execution of that tale is vastly superior to the original edition; but some of, all things considered, its most remarkable passages are transcribed almost *literatim*. For instance:—

‘Self-opinionated, with complete self-possession,
‘a sarcastic sneer, and a bewitching smile, a good

‘ person, and many accomplishments, this young
‘ woman was known as a *genius*. She was a con-
‘ noisseur in painting, an amateur in music, a perfect
‘ dancer, an exquisite performer on the piano, and a
‘ Billington in singing. She wrote tales and poems
‘ published on wove paper with broad margins in
‘ Bond-street, made designs for furniture, dressed in
‘ the most outré costume to set fashions—and in
‘ short was a *fine, dashing, animated* girl. But with
‘ all this blaze of notoriety, did anybody esteem her
‘ particularly? Was there any ONE man upon earth
‘ who on his pillow could say—My God! what an
‘ angel is Fanny Wilding? Had she ever refused
‘ an offer of marriage? No! for nobody ever had
‘ made her one. She was like a fine firework, en-
‘ tertaining to look at, but dangerous to come too
‘ near to; her bouncing and cracking in the open
‘ air gave a lustre to surrounding objects, but there
‘ was not a human being who could be tempted to
‘ take the exhibition into his own house.’—(vol. i.
p. 232.)

But, above all, in the early novel we read as follows:—‘ Are not the brightest talents made nothing
‘ worth by perpetual intoxication? Is not the states-
‘ man degraded, and the wit rendered contemptible,
‘ by a constant and habitual use of wine? Have we
‘ not examples before us where every earthly quali-
‘ fication is marred by it, and where poverty and
‘ ignominy are the reward of exertions weakened by
‘ its influence, which, used with sobriety and temper-
‘ ance, would deserve, and might have received, the

‘meed of honour and the wreath of fame?’—(vol. i. p. 174).—And the same is repeated in the work of 1824! Who that knew him will not echo it now?

Mr. Allendale’s novel, we conclude, excited little or no attention, and remained unacknowledged. It is worthless—except that in the filling up occasionally we have glimpses of the author’s early habits and associations, such as he was in no danger of recalling from oblivion in the days of *Sayings and Doings*. When the hero fell in love, for example, ‘Bond-street lounges became a bore to him—he sickened at the notion of a jollification under the Piazza—the charms of the pretty pastrycooks at Spring Gardens had lost their piquancy.’ A Viscountess’s fête at Wimbledon has all the appearance of having been sketched after a *lark* at Vauxhall with a bevy of singing-women. In the recast, it is right to say, he omitted various gross indecencies, some rude personalities, and a very irreverent motto.

But the real farce at this time was Theodore’s own life. It was one uninterrupted succession of boisterous buffoneries—especially of what the future lexicographer might almost be pardoned for supposing to have been called after him—*Hoaxes*. Of these—his true *Sayings and Doings*—his own talk *inter pocula* was the only adequate memorial. We may catch some outlines in his Gurney and Daly—but even his pen was too slow and cumbrous for the vital reproduction of such scenes. They are nothing without the commentary of that bright eye—the

deep gurgling glee of his voice—the electrical felicity of his pantomime—for in truth he was as great an actor as could have been produced by rolling up Liston and Terry and Mathews into one. So told, no mirth in this world ever surpassed the fascination of these early mountebankereries. We have seen austere judges, venerable prelates, grand lords, and superfine ladies, all alike overwhelmed and convulsed as he went over the minutest details of such an episode as that, for example, of his and Mathews, as they were rowing to Richmond, being suddenly bitten by the sight of a placard at the foot of a Barnes garden,—*Nobody permitted to land here—Offenders prosecuted with the utmost Rigour of Law*—their instant disembarkation on the forbidden paradise—the fishing-line converted into a surveyor's measuring-tape—their solemn pacing to and fro on the beautiful lawn—Hook the surveyor, with his book and pencil in hand—Mathews the clerk, with the cord and walking-stick, both soon pinned into the exquisite turf:—the opening of the parlour-window and fiery approach of the napkined alderman—the comedians' cool, indifferent reception of him and his indignant inquiries: the gradual announcement of their being the agents of the Canal Company, settling where the new cut is to cross the old gentleman's pleasure:—his alarm and horror, which call forth the unaffected regrets and commiserations of the unfortunate officials, 'never more pained than with such a duty:—the alderman's suggestion that they had better walk in and

talk the matter over:—their anxious examination of watches, and reluctant admission that they might spare a quarter of an hour—‘but alas! no use, they fear, none whatever:’—the entry of the dining-room—the turkey just served—the pressing invitation to taste a morsel—the excellent dinner—the fine old madeira—the bottle of pink champagne, ‘a present from my lord mayor’—the discussion of half-a-dozen of claret and of the projected branch of the canal—the city knight’s arguments getting more and more weighty—‘Really this business must be reconsidered—One bottle more, dear gentlemen’—till at last it is getting dark—they are eight miles from Westminster Bridge—Hook bursts out into song, and narrates in extempore verse the whole transaction, winding up with—

And we greatly approve of your fare,
 Your cellar’s as prime as your cook;
 And this clerk here is Mathews the player,
 And my name, Sir, is—Theodore Hook.—[*Exeunt.*]

That name was already enough to put any wig in Guildhall out of curl. But the crown and consummation of all this work was the ‘Berners Street Hoax,’ in 1809. It, too, is shadowed in the *Gurney*—but very faintly—and no one need hope to supply the deficiency. It is recorded that in walking down that street one day his companion (no doubt either Mathews or Beazeley) called his attention to the particularly neat and modest appearance of a house, the residence, as was inferred from the door-plate, of some decent shop-keeper’s widow. ‘I’ll lay you

a guinea,' said Theodore, 'that in one week that nice quiet dwelling shall be the most famous in all London.' The bet was taken;—in the course of four or five days Hook had written and despatched *one thousand* letters, conveying orders to tradesmen of every sort within the bills of mortality, all to be executed on one particular day, and as nearly as possible at one fixed hour. From 'waggons of coals and potatoes (says Gurney) to books, prints, feathers, ices, jellies, and cranberry tarts'—nothing in any way whatever available to any human being but was commanded from scores of rival dealers, scattered over our *province of bricks* from Wapping to Lambeth, from Whitechapel to Paddington. In 1809 Oxford Road was not approachable either from Westminster or from the City otherwise than through a complicated series of lanes. It may be feebly and afar off guessed what the crash and jam and tumult of that day was. Hook had provided himself with a lodging nearly opposite the fated No. —; and there, with a couple of trusty allies, he watched the development of his midday melodrame. But some of the *dramatis personæ* were seldom if ever alluded to in later times. He had no objection to bodying forth the arrival of the Lord Mayor and his Chaplain, invited to take the death-bed confession of a peculating Common-councilman; but he would rather have buried in oblivion that no less liberty was taken with the Governor of the Bank, the Chairman of the East India Company, a Lord Chief Justice, a Cabinet Minister—

above all, with the Archbishop of Canterbury and His Royal Highness the Commander-in-Chief. They all obeyed the summons—every pious and patriotic feeling had been most movingly appealed to. We are not sure that they all reached Berners Street; but the Duke of York's military punctuality and crimson liveries brought him to the point of attack before the poor widow's astonishment had risen to terror and despair. Perhaps no assassination, no conspiracy, no royal demise or ministerial revolution of recent times was a greater godsend to the newspapers than this audacious piece of mischief. In Hook's own theatrical world he was instantly suspected—but no sign escaped either him or his confidants. The affair was beyond that circle a serious one. Fierce were the growlings of the doctors and surgeons, scores of whom had been cheated of valuable hours. Attorneys, teachers of all kinds, male and female, hair-dressers, tailors, popular preachers, parliamentary philanthropists, had been alike victimized—and were in their various notes alike vociferous. But the tangible material damage done was itself no joking matter. There had been an awful smashing of glass, china, harpsichords, and coach-panels. Many a horse fell, never to rise again. Beer-barrels and wine-barrels had been overturned and exhausted with impunity amidst the press of countless multitudes. It had been a fine field-day for the pickpockets. There arose a fervent hue and cry for the detection of the wholesale deceiver and destroyer.

Mr. Theodore, we believe, found it convenient to be laid up for a week or two by a severe fit of illness, and then promoted re-convalescence by a country tour. He is said to have on this occasion revisited Oxford, and professed an intention of at length commencing residence under the discipline of Alma Mater. But if this was so, it went no farther: by and by the storm blew over—as it would have done had Berners Street been burnt to the ground and the Lord Mayor's coach blown up with all its cargo—and the Great Unknown reappeared with tranquillity in the Green Room.

The gambol once shown, it was imitated *ad nauseam* in many English towns, and also in Paris, with numberless unmeritorious variations. Gilbert Gurney expresses high scorn of these plagiarists.

Some two or three years later Hook performed another hoax more limited in scale, but to our mind quite as inexcusable. The Regent gave a fête of surpassing magnificence at Carlton House, on the 17th of June. *Romeo Coates* was then in his glory—murdering Shakspeare at the Haymarket, and driving the bright pink cockle-shell with the life-large chanticleers in gilt brass about the streets and park. Theodore, who could imitate any handwriting, contrived to get one of the Chamberlain's tickets into his possession for an hour, and produced a facsimile commanding the presence of Signor Romeo. He then equipped himself in some scarlet uniform, and delivered in person the flattering missive. The delight of Romeo must be imagined. Hook was

in attendance when the time for his sallying forth arrived, and had the satisfaction of seeing him swing into his chariot, bedizened in all his finery, with a diamond-hilted sword and the air of Louis le Grand. The line of carriages being an Alexandrine, Theodore was also by the 'care colonne' * when the amateur's vehicle reached its point—saw him mount up the broad slabs and enter the vestibule. The stranger, it is known, passed into the interior without remark or question; but when he had to show his ticket to the Private Secretary, that eye caught the imposture. Mr. Coates was politely informed that a mistake had occurred—and had to retrace his course to the portico. The blazoned chariot had driven off—in wrath and confusion he must pick his steps as he might to the first stand of hackney-coaches. Hook was at his elbow well muffled up. No such discomfiture since the Knight of the Woeful Countenance was unhorsed by the Bachelor Sampson Carrasco. We must not omit that the Prince, when aware of what had occurred, signified extreme regret that any one of his household should have detected the trick, or acted on its detection. Mr. Coates was, as he said, an inoffensive gentleman, and his presence might have amused many of the guests, and could have done harm to no one. His Royal Highness sent his Secretary next morning to apologize in person, and to signify that as the ar-

* The forecourt of Carlton House was divided from Pall Mall by a long range of columns, handsome in themselves, but supporting nothing: hence the once famous—

Care Colonne, qui state qua? &c.

rangements and ornaments were still entire, he hoped Mr. Coates would come and look at them. And Romeo went. In this performance Hook had no confidant. To do him justice, we believe he never told the story without some signs of compunction.

We must refer such as desire more of these achievements to the first volume of *Gurney*, where, partly as the hero himself and partly as his Achates, Mr. Daly, the inveterate offender stands self-portrayed; or, better still, to the second volume of Mrs. Mathews's *Memoirs of her husband*, the chief crony and most efficient accomplice of the period. The lady has painted many of these their frolics with a sort of pensive gusto which we must call inimitable — at all events the parallel records in *Gurney* seem to us far less attractive. We must not be tempted to quote any of her hoax-chapters, but we are glad to produce her account of one of the most remarkable displays of Hook's talents as an *improvisatore*; for she had of course witnessed hundreds of similar exhibitions, and expresses without the slightest exaggeration what must have been felt on the great occasion in question by everybody in the room, from the prompter up to Sheridan. The Drury Lane company gave a dinner to their brilliant proprietor and irregular paymaster, in honour of one of his electioneering successes; and the young author of *Killing no Murder* was invited to attend, and presented to the great man of the evening:—

‘ In the course of it many persons sung ; and Mr. Hook—being in turn solicited—displayed, to the delight and surprise of all present, his wondrous talent in extemporaneous singing. The company was numerous, and generally strangers to Mr. Hook ;—but, without a moment’s premeditation, he composed a verse upon every person in the room, full of the most pointed wit, and with the truest rhymes—unhesitatingly gathering into his subject, as he rapidly proceeded, in addition to what had passed during the dinner, every trivial incident of the moment. Every action was turned to account ; every circumstance, the look, the gesture, or any other accidental effects, served as occasion for more wit ; and even the singer’s ignorance of the names and condition of many of the party seemed to give greater facility to his brilliant hits than even acquaintance with them might have furnished. Mr. Sheridan was astonished at his extraordinary faculty, and declared that he could not have imagined such power possible, had he not witnessed it. No description, he said, could have convinced him of so peculiar an instance of genius, and he protested that he should not have believed it to be an unstudied effort, had he not seen proof that no anticipation could have been formed of what might arise to furnish matter and opportunities for the exercise of this rare talent.’—(*Life of Mathews*, vol. ii. p. 59.)

As far as our knowledge goes, England never

had a really successful performer in this way except Theodore Hook. Of course he failed occasionally—either early in the evening or very late he did it but indifferently. When the call was well-timed and the company such as excited his ambition, it is impossible to conceive anything more marvellous than the felicity he displayed. He accompanied himself on the pianoforte, and the music was frequently, though not always, as new as the verse. He usually stuck to the common ballad-measures;—but one favourite sport was a mimic opera, and then he seemed to triumph without effort over every variety of metre and complication of stanza. About the complete extemporaneousness of the whole there could rarely be the slightest doubt; if he knew who were to be there, he might have come provided with a few palpable hits—but he did the thing far the best when stirred by the presence of strangers, and as Mrs. Mathews observes, the staple was almost always what had occurred since he entered the room—what happened to occur while he was singing. A friend says—‘The first time I ever witnessed it was at a gay young bachelor’s villa near Highgate,* when the other lion was one of a very different breed, Mr. Coleridge. Much claret had been shed before the *Ancient Mariner* proclaimed that he could swallow no more of anything, unless it were punch. The materials were forthwith produced—the bowl was

* The residence of the late Frederick Mansell Reynolds—then a gay character enough, though best known as author of the novel entitled *Miserrimus*. He was son to the popular dramatist.

planted before the poet, and as he proceeded in his concoction, Hook, unbidden, took his place at the piano. He burst into a bacchanal of egregious luxury, every line of which had reference to the author of the *Lay Sermons* and the *Aids to Reflection*. The room was becoming excessively hot:—the first specimen of the new compound was handed to Hook, who paused to quaff it, and then, exclaiming that he was stifled, flung his glass through the window. Coleridge rose with the aspect of a benignant patriarch, and demolished another pane—the example was followed generally—the window was a sieve in an instant—the kind host was farthest from the mark, and his goblet made havoc of the chandelier. The roar of laughter was drowned in Theodore's resumption of the song—and window and chandelier and the peculiar shot of each individual destroyer had apt, in many cases exquisitely witty, commemoration. In walking home with Mr. Coleridge, he entertained * * * and me with a most excellent lecture on the distinction between talent and genius, and declared that Hook was as true a genius as Dante—*that* was his example.' But this was many a long year after the reckless day of the mystifications.

Both in the *Life of Mathews* and in *Gilbert Gurney* considerable space is given to the most patient and long-suffering of all their victims—the late Mr. Thomas Hill—the most innocent and ignorant of the bibliomaniacs—the *Hull* of the novel—the Tom Hill of all the realm of Cockayne. Hook has painted that good-natured, harmless little gossip to the life

—we could add nothing to his delineation of the undoubted original of Paul Pry—but it is proper to say that the chapters in question were read in MS. to Mr. Hill himself in the presence of a friend of ours, when he interrupted him ever and anon with ‘Oh, Hook, what a memory you have! All true, every word correct!’—was, in short, delighted and flattered, and gave a joyful *imprimatur*.* The introduction to the sheriff took place, exactly as described, at Hill’s cottage at Sydenham, and the invitation to eat marrow puddings at the Old Bailey is equally authentic—but we hope some of the judicial details of the ensuing day are overcharged. Hook, however, was further invited to attend the execution at which this sheriff presided the week afterwards, and in the words given, ‘We hang at eight, breakfast at nine, sir;’—but he has omitted in the book what we have heard him mention as the circumstance that most affected him on that occasion. Among

* Mr. Hill died about 1840 or 1841—aged, we believe, not more than eighty-three, though Hook and all his friends always affected to consider him as quite a Methuselah. James Smith once said that it was impossible to discover his age, for the parish-register had been burnt in the fire of London; but Hook capped this:—‘*Pooh, pooh!*—(Tom’s habitual exclamation)—He’s one of the Little Hills that are spoken of as skipping in the Psalms.’ As a mere octogenarian he was wonderful enough. No human being would, from his appearance, gait, or habits, have guessed him to be sixty. Till within three months of his death, he rose at five usually, and brought the materials of his breakfast home with him to the Adelphi from a walk to Billingsgate; and at dinner he would eat and drink like an adjutant of five-and-twenty. One secret was, that a ‘banyan-day’ uniformly followed a festivity. He then nursed himself most carefully on tea and dry toast, tasted neither meat nor wine, and went to bed by eight o’clock. But perhaps the grand secret was, the easy, imperturbable serenity of his temper. He had been kind and generous in the day of his wealth; and though his evening was comparatively poor, his cheerful heart kept its even beat.

the prisoners led forth at the awful hour appeared, to his surprise and horror, a young mercantile man convicted of forgery, whom he had several times met in the society of his theatrical companions. The unhappy person recognised Theodore just as he was on the threshold of the Debtor's Door, and said placidly, 'Good morning, Mr. Hook—good bye, sir.' Hook, in great agitation, turned his back. 'In about one minute,' said he, 'I looked again—he was swinging like a bit of timber within six feet of me, and a fly quietly feeding on his neck.' This, we believe, was the first and the last time that he witnessed that spectacle.

Besides his pieces for the public stage, he appears to have produced many in those days for the 'private theatricals' of certain friends at their rural villas. Mrs. Mathews dwells particularly on those enacted at the residence of a Mr. Rolls:—

'It was at the *Grange Theatre* that Mr. Theodore Hook, then a slim youth of fine figure, his head covered with black clustering curls, made his "first appearance upon any stage," and in no instance do I remember a more decided case of what is called *stage-fright*. He had been as bold and easy during the rehearsals as if he had been a practised stager. All the novices seemed fluttered but himself; but when he entered at night as *Sir Callaghan O'Brallaghan*, he turned pale at the first sight of the audience, and exhibited such palpable terror, that I almost supported him on my arm; his frame shook, his voice failed him,

‘ and not a word of his first scene, nor a note of
‘ the song he attempted at the pianoforte (which
‘ he had sung so well in the morning) were audible
‘ to anybody except myself. It was curious to see
‘ a person of Mr. Hook’s wondrous nerve and
‘ self-possession suddenly subdued in such a
‘ way, at a mere *make-believe* in a room, contain-
‘ ing only friends — invulnerable as he was to
‘ fear in all things else! Few, however, who wit-
‘ ness in a theatre of any kind the timidity of a
‘ debutant, can form the remotest idea of the dread-
‘ ful feeling of stage-fright. I know but one thing
‘ with which to compare it, and that is the first sen-
‘ sation of sea-sickness; and like that, with some
‘ people it is never overcome. Mr. Hook, however,
‘ recovered before the piece concluded, and after-
‘ wards acted *Vapour*, in the farce of *My Grand-*
‘ *mother*, imitating Mr. Farley excellently; and
‘ a character in an admirable burlesque tragedy
‘ of his own writing, called *Ass-Ass-ination*, pre-
‘ viously to which he hoaxed the audience with a
‘ prologue, purposely unintelligible, but speciously
‘ delivered; the first and last word of each line
‘ were only to be distinguished, bearing in them all
‘ the *cant* and *rhymes* of such addresses (some heard
‘ and others guessed at, as the speaker’s ingenuity
‘ served, for of course all was extempore). At the
‘ close of this, great applause followed; and one
‘ elderly, important gentleman was heard to whisper
‘ to another sitting next him, “An excellent pro-
‘ logue, but abominably inarticulate!” ’

Up to this time Hook, though his name was already blown far and wide, had seen little or nothing of what in his later days he would himself have been weak enough to call exclusively *society*. His wonderful conversational and convivial talents—far superior, in fact, to any that he ever exhibited in writing—had hitherto been the delight of theatrical circles only—in which we include, of course, the abundant hospitalities of many such play-going, green-room-haunting virtuosos as Tom Hill and his friend, the anonymous sheriff. In company with brother wits and wags he had explored many of the suburban regions and made merry with their natives. He was familiar with the banks of the Thames from Eel-pye Island to Margate—had gone the northern and western circuits with Mathews—and seen enough of Brighthelmstone to be fonder of it than he ever came to be of Brighton. But to the world of aristocracy, even of aristocratical pretensions, he had not been introduced. We believe he owed his first *entrée* to the impression made on Sheridan by his improvisation at the Piazza Tavern. He soon afterwards became familiar with Sheridan's amiable and richly-gifted son Thomas, and through him with various young men of his own standing, who moved in the atmosphere of fashion. Some of these made mention of him to the Marchioness of Hertford, and after he had justified their eulogies by the display of his musical and metrical facility in her ladyship's presence, he was called upon to minister in like fashion to the amusement of the

Regent at a supper in Manchester Square.* We have heard him describe his presentation to the Prince:—his awe at first was something quite terrible—but good-humoured condescension and plenty of champagne by and by restored him to himself, and the young man so delighted his Royal Highness, that as he was leaving the room he laid his hand on his shoulder and said, ‘Mr. Hook, I must see and hear you again.’ After a few more similar evenings at Lady Hertford’s, and, we believe, a dinner or two elsewhere, the Regent made inquiry about his position, and, finding that he was without profession or fixed income of any sort, signified his opinion that ‘something must be done for Hook.’

The delicate and fastidious, but on the whole very dull world of fashion never wants more than a decent pretext to receive with alacrity a recruit possessing any considerable faculty of entertainment, not overbalanced by gross untowardness of aspect, manner, or temper. Hook’s personal appearance was good, his demeanour naturally easy, his disposition sweet and gentle. With such quickness of parts and such inherent good-humour, he could hardly mix for a week in any new variety of social arrangement without learning how it was to be conciliated, and instinctively exemplifying sure methods of attraction. The ladies’ tact soon discovered that, though there might be something like petulance in

* ‘O! who will repair
To Manchester Square,
And see if the gentle Marchesa be there?’ &c. &c.
Moore’s Twopenny Post-bag.

his first address, there was no real presumptuousness in his composition. The wonder had passed rapidly into a favourite throughout Mayfair. He had seen its boudoirs as well as its saloons—and narrowly escaped various dangers incidental to that career—among the rest, from at least one duel (with General Thornton), in which transaction, from first to last, he was allowed to show equal spirit and temper. We have some records of this airier existence also in the Gilbert Gurney. The whole scene of the Countess of Wolverhampton's party at the end of volume the first is copied from what occurred at the late Lady Buckinghamshire's—not forgetting the bullock substituted for the cow, and the royal duke's supper devoured by the Pandæans. But the richness of the harvest he had gathered is apparent in the whole series of his novels. It was in the midst of these gaieties that the Regent smiled on him.

Whether any subsidiary influence had been brought into play, we know not—nor are we at all aware in how far Mr. Hook's education and early history and habits had been explained to his royal patron—but late in 1812 he received an appointment far more valuable than he could have ventured to hope for—that of Accountant General and Treasurer to the Colony of the Mauritius, with a salary and allowances amounting to nearly 2000*l.* per annum. After a long voyage, including an entertaining and profitable halt at Madeira, he reached his destination in October, 1813.

Of the five years which he spent in that beautiful island we know but little. His Journal is before us, but it is filled chiefly with ludicrous descriptions of individuals concerned in the administration of the colony and their woman-kind, which we have no more wish to meddle with than with the smart caricature drawings that now and then decorate the page. He had evidently gone farther than most amateurs do in the use of the pencil—and indeed he could strike a likeness so happily, that many of his friends at first suspected him of being HB. A favourite subject was himself—and *there* certainly the true man did not equal him—for the solitary HB. in which Hook figured was a failure.* Dr. James Hook had married a daughter of the late physician, Sir W. Farquhar. A general officer of that family was Governor of the Mauritius when Theodore arrived there, which must have afforded him additional advantages, if he had needed them, in his official *début*.† But we have not the means to attempt any outline of his colonial existence. The reader must be contented with a few passages from a letter which he addressed to Mathews after he had been absent from England about a year:—

* This represents Hook walking down St. James's Street arm-in-arm with the then Speaker, Mr. Manners Sutton (afterwards Viscount Canterbury), who—otherwise a fine-looking man—had a notable squint; hence the title of the engraving—'Hook and Eye!'

† It is very possible, therefore, that in the original appointment the personal favour of the Regent may have been directed to that particular locality by the influence of the Farquhar family in London.

‘ You have read enough of this island, I dare say,
‘ not to imagine that we live in huts on the sea-
‘ coast, or that, like our gallant forefathers, we paint
‘ ourselves blue, and vote pantaloons a prejudice.
‘ We are here surrounded by every luxury which
‘ art can furnish or dissipation suggest, in a climate
‘ the most delightful, in a country the most beauti-
‘ ful, with society the most gay, and pursuits the
‘ most fascinating.

‘ This is, by heavens, a Paradise, and not without
angels. The women are all handsome (not so
handsome as English women), all accomplished,
‘ their manners extremely good, wit brilliant, and
‘ goodnature wonderful : this is picking out the best !
‘ The *οί πολλοί*, as we say at Oxford, are, if I may
‘ use the word, mindless — all blank — dance like
‘ devils, and better than any people, for, like all
‘ fools, they are fond of it, and naturally excel in
‘ proportion to their mental debility ; for the greater
‘ the fool the better the dancer.

‘ In short, the whole island is like fairy-land ;
‘ every hour seems happier than the last ; the mild-
‘ ness of the air (the sweetness of which, as it passes
‘ over spice-plantations and orange-groves, is hardly
‘ conceivable), the clearness of the atmosphere, the
‘ coolness of the evenings, and the loveliness of the
‘ place itself, all combine to render it fascination.
‘ The very thought of ever quitting it is like the
‘ apprehension of the death or long parting with
‘ some near relation, and if it were not that this
‘ feeling is counteracted by having some friends at

‘ home, there is no inducement that would draw me
‘ from such a perfect *Thule*.

‘ Make my kind remembrances to Mrs. Mathews,
‘ and tell her that I hope to shake hands with her
‘ when we are both twaddlers—that is, when she is as
‘ much of a twaddler as old age can make her ; and
‘ that when I return upon crutches from foreign
‘ parts, I trust she will direct her *son* to pay me
‘ every attention due to my infirmities.

‘ We have operas in the winter, which sets in
‘ about July ; our races too begin in July ; we have
‘ an excellent beef-steak club, and the best Freema-
‘ sons’ lodge in the world. We have subscription con-
‘ certs, and balls, and the parties in private houses
‘ here are seldom less than from two to three hundred.
‘ At the last ball given at the Government-house
‘ upwards of seven hundred and fifty ladies were
‘ present, which, considering that the greater pro-
‘ portion of the female population are *not admis-*
‘ *sible*, proves the number of inhabitants and the
‘ extent of the society.

‘ I dare say some of my fat-headed friends in that
‘ little island where the beef grows fancy that I am
‘ making a fortune, considering that I am Treasurer !
‘ and Accountant-general ! Fresh butter, my dear
‘ fellow, is ten shillings per pound ; a coat costs
‘ thirty pounds English ; a pair of gloves fifteen
‘ shillings ; a bottle of claret, the best, ten-pence ;
‘ and pine-apples a penny a piece. Thus, you see,
‘ while the articles necessary to existence are exorbi-
‘ tant, luxuries are dirt cheap—and a pretty life we

‘ do lead. Breakfast at eight, always up by gun-
 · fire, five o’clock ; bathe and ride before breakfast—
 ‘ after breakfast lounge about ; at one have a regu-
 ‘ lar meal, yclep’d a tiffen—hot meats, vegetables,
 ‘ &c.—and at this we sit generally through the heat
 ‘ of the day, drinking our wine and munching our
 ‘ fruit ; at five, or half past, the carriages come to
 ‘ the door, and we go either in them or in palan-
 ‘ quins to dress, which operation performed we drive
 ‘ out to the race-ground, and through the Champ
 ‘ de Mars, the Hyde Park here, till half-past six ;
 ‘ come into town, and at seven dine, where we re-
 ‘ main till ten or eleven, and then join the French
 ‘ parties, as there is regularly a ball somewhere or
 ‘ other every night : these things, blended with
 ‘ business, make out the day and evening.’

It may be supposed that if he was delighted with the Mauritius, its society was enchanted with him. He was but twenty-five when he arrived—and the sudden advancement of his position and enlargement of his resources must have had rather an exciting than a sobering influence on such a temperament at that buoyant age. He was, of course, the life and soul of the hospitalities of the place and all its amusements and diversions—the phoenix of his *Thule*. He became, among other things, a leading man on the Turf—and repeatedly mentions himself as having been extremely successful in the pecuniary results of that dangerous pursuit. His own hospitality was most liberal. Many an Indian veteran yet delights to recall the cordial welcome

he found at *La Réduite* during a brief sojourn at the Mauritius; and not a few such persons were unconsciously sitting for their pictures in crayon then, and in pen and ink afterwards, while they displayed their Oriental airs before the juvenile 'Treasurer, their profuse Amphitryon. His Journal would make it easy enough to identify not a few of the *Quihis* in his Sayings and Doings and other novels of later life—but perhaps their spectres still haunt the Long Walk at Cheltenham—*requiescant!*

Towards the end of 1817 General Sir R. Farquhar found it necessary, from the state of his health, to repair for a time to England, and Major-General Gage John Hall was sworn in as Deputy-Governor during his absence. On this occasion the Governor appointed a Commission, consisting of five of the principal official men in the colony, to examine the accounts and contents of the Treasury, in order that the finance department might be handed over to his successor in a condition of ascertained correctness. The Commissioners signed a Report that they had examined the whole accordingly, and that books and chest were all in the proper state. Their Report was dated November 19th; and Sir R. Farquhar sailed.

On the 15th of January, 1818, Lieutenant-Governor Hall received a letter from William Allan, a clerk in the Treasury-Office, announcing that, notwithstanding the Report, a grave error existed and had been passed over in the Treasurer's accounts. No credit had been given for a sum of

37,000 dollars, which sum he, Allan, knew to have been paid in at the Treasury some fifteen months before.

General Hall instantly communicated this information to Mr. Hook, and appointed another Commission to re-examine the condition of the public chest and accounts. The Commissioners began their work on the 11th of February. Allan was examined *vivâ voce* before them on that and on several successive days. He addressed, while his examination was in progress, letters upon letters to the Deputy-Governor and also to the Commissioners, in which he reiterated his assertions that a large deficiency existed, that its existence had been known to himself during many succeeding quarters, and that he had so long concealed it from reluctance to bring himself into collision with his superior, the Treasurer. His letters, from the first very strangely written, became wilder at every step; and, on the morning of the 27th, before the Commissioners met, he shot himself. His last letter alleged that he had been tampered with by Hook, who offered to pay him thenceforth an allowance of 25 dollars per month, if he would instantly make his escape from the Mauritius, and never re-appear there: but the person whom he named as having brought Hook's message instantly contradicted the statement *in toto* on oath before the Commissioners. There were many other witnesses; and the result was the detection of not a few irregularities, omissions, and discrepancies in the books of the Treasury.

The inquiry proceeded till the 9th of March. At eleven that night Hook was arrested at a friend's house, where he was supping, and dragged by torchlight through crowded streets to the common prison. The town having shortly before been the scene of a terrible conflagration, the prison had been almost entirely destroyed. There was only one cell in which the Treasurer could be placed, and that was in so wretched a condition that at three in the morning he was admitted to bail, escorted to the house of his bailman, and left there under his surveillance, by the police. After a few days he was handed over to the care of a military detachment, and embarked with them for England as a culprit, to be tried for *crimes*. Before he sailed his property in the island was disposed of, and the whole amount placed to the public credit in the Treasury. Even the minutest articles belonging to him were seized. After he was on board ship, a negro slave came alongside to beg his acceptance of his writing-desk, which the poor fellow had bought at the auction for ten shillings.

He had a protracted and most unhappy voyage of nine months. For one whole month they were tossed in a hurricane off the Cape of Good Hope, and for six weeks reduced to the allowance of half a pound of mouldy biscuit and half a pint of water by the day. While refitting at the Cape, however, Hook, who had by that time conciliated the regard of his keepers by his unshaken fortitude and good-humoured submission, was made their companion

on shore, on *parole*; and how completely he could, under such calamitous circumstances, exert his faculties of observation, we may judge from the most picturesque sketches of the Cape, the capital, and its inhabitants, which occur in one of his subsequent stories—*Maxwell*. The ship also stopped for a day or two at St. Helena; and, by the kindness of the officers, Hook accompanied them when they went to Longwood to be presented to Napoleon. We have before us a clever coloured drawing by him of the ante-room at the ex-emperor's levee, which ought to be engraved—it is the best specimen we have seen. A slighter sketch of the great man solus, inscribed 'Fatty, late Boney,' was etched many years ago. It represents a most uncouth obesity, and a dismal sulkiness of visage. Here he encountered the late Lord Charles Somerset, on his way to assume the governorship of the Cape. Lord Charles, who had met him in London occasionally, and knew nothing of his arrest, said, 'I hope you are not going home for your health, Mr. Hook.' 'Why,' said Theodore, 'I am sorry to say, they think there's something wrong in the chest.'

The ship reached Portsmouth in January, 1819; and the warrant of arrest and other documents were thence transmitted to London and referred to the law-officers of the Crown. The Attorney-General reported that, however irregular Mr. Hook's official conduct might have been, and however justly he might be prosecuted for a civil debt, there was no apparent ground for a criminal pro-

cedure. He was therefore liberated ; and reaching London with *two gold mohurs* in his pocket, was immediately subjected to the scrutiny of the Audit Board—a scrutiny which did not terminate until after the lapse of nearly five years.

During this long suspense, eternal examinations and cross-examinations before the Auditors of public accounts, and a very voluminous series of correspondence with them and with others on the subject of the defalcation, had not occupied the whole of Hook's attention. If they had, he must have starved ; for—though his successor was not appointed till late in the inquiry—he never received a farthing in his official capacity from the hour of his original arrest.

We are not able to trace him very exactly through several months following his return. His father had died shortly before he reached England. He makes his long-expatriated hero, Maxwell, devote his first hour in London to a walk to visit the well-known street in which his youthful hours were passed :—‘ He stopped before and gazed upon ‘ the door, and on the very steps that led to it, and ‘ a thousand reflections and remembrances came ‘ into his mind. There *was* a time when he was ‘ welcomed into it by the cheering looks of friend- ‘ ship and the sweet smiles of love : now it stood ‘ sullenly shut upon him—the closed windows ‘ seemed to announce the death of all his hopes ‘ and pleasures. There *are* streets and houses in this ‘ great city of ours which cannot fail to conjure up

‘ such thoughts as these in minds not given much to sorrow, and strike daggers into hearts which those who know them not believe incapable of such a feeling.’

By the end of 1819, we believe, he had established himself in a very humble cottage at Somers Town, where his household consisted of a single maid-servant, and formed connections with newspapers or magazines, which supplied the small necessities of the passing day. He seems at first to have felt his position far too painfully to think of reclaiming any but a few of his older, and, comparatively speaking, humble allies—such as Mathews, Terry, and good little Hill; the last of whom had encountered sad reverses during his absence, and was now perhaps, except himself, the poorest of the set. On their kindness he might rely implicitly—as well as upon the cordial friendship and sound professional advice of his solicitors, Messrs. Powell and Broderip. Among other experiments, he tried to set up a tiny Magazine of his own—*The Arcadian*—price, we think, one shilling; but we know not how many numbers of it were issued before the publisher lost heart. We never saw but one, and remember nothing of that, except that it contained a long ballad of provoking pungency, satirizing Holland House, and styled *The Silver Po*. In the course of the winter a farce, written at the Mauritius, was brought out at one of the theatres under the name of *Pigeons and Crows*;—but we never saw a copy of it, nor do we know what

measure of success attended it. He was well advised to keep his *incognito* in respect to a piece bearing such a title.

In April, 1820, Sir Walter Scott happened to visit London, and, dining with his old henchman Daniel Terry one day, met Mathews, whom he had long appreciated, and, for the first time, Hook. Terry's account of Theodore and his distresses had much interested Scott; his conversational resources produced their usual effect; and of course it did no harm to find that, in the midst of all his griefs and losses, and—as he and his friends represented the matter—the most cruel persecution at the Audit Board, Hook had kept his political faith unshaken, and was at that tempestuous era among the staunchest of Tories, gratefully mindful of his personal obligations to the sovereign, and most indignantly opposed to the pretensions and partizans of Queen Caroline.

A day or two afterwards, a nobleman of influence and talents called on Sir Walter, and asked if he could find him at Edinburgh some clever fellow to undertake the editorship of a newspaper about to be established in an English county-town. Sir Walter suggested that his lordship need not go so far a-field—described Hook's situation, and the impression he had received of him from his table-talk and *The Arcadian*. This was all that occurred. Sir Walter heard no more of the provincial paper; but confessed when, towards the end of the year, JOHN BULL electrified London, that he

could not help fancying his mention of Theodore to this noble lord might have had its consequences. His lordship enjoyed much of the personal notice of George IV., and indeed could hardly have failed to meet Hook himself at Hertford House before he started for the Mauritius.

During the summer of 1820 Hook opened his campaign against the Queen by a thin 8vo., which at the time made some noise, but of which we have in vain endeavoured to recover a copy. It was entitled 'TENTAMEN; or an *Essay towards the History of Whittington and his Cat: by Dr. Vicesimus Blenkinsop.*' The Whittington, of course, was Alderman Wood, and Caroline was the cat. We copy from a magazine of the time some stanzas of the venerable 'Minstrely' on which Dr. Blenkinsop offered his lucid commentary:—

Ye citizens of London town,
And wives so faire and fatte,
I sing a guest of high renowne,
Wise Whyttington his Catte.

The Kyng hath in his Towers of State
Bears, lyons, and all thatte,
But boasteth not a beaste so grete
As Whyttington his Catte.

This Catte doth scarce a Catte appear,
She is too bigge for thatte;
But her companyons all do beare
Some tokyn of a Catte.

The chief hath whyskers thicke as burre,
Most seemely to looke att:
Another weareth gowne of furre
For lyverie of the Catte.

She doth not creep upon the floors,
 But standeth or lyes flatte ;
 And they must gambol on all fours
 Whoso would please the Catte.

A crafty monkey of the law,
 As by the fire he satte,
 To picke his nutts out used the paw
 Of Whyttington his Catte. &c. &c.

This 'relique' was, it seems, from 'a MS. volume in the British Museum (*Messalina*, 2).'—Throughout the whole *libellus* there was a prodigious rattle of puns and conundrums—but the strong points of the case against Whittington and Co. were skilfully brought out nevertheless. Hook being as yet quite *in obscuro*, nobody suspected him. We think it was pretty generally ascribed to the manufacturers of the 'New Whig Guide'—one of which fraternity, by the way, has since set up for a new Whig guide in right earnest.*

This was the prelude of JOHN BULL. The Queen's affair had gone on all the summer and autumn; the madness of popular exacerbation gaining new intenseness with every week that passed. None who remember the feelings and aspects of the time will think it possible to exaggerate either in description: but we shall make no such attempt. The explosion scattered brilliant terror far and wide. No first appearance of any periodical work of any class whatever has, in our time at least, produced

* Lord Palmerston *to wit*. The *New Whig Guide* was understood to be a joint-performance of Mr. Croker, Sir Robert Peel, and his Lordship. The inimitable 'Trial of Henry Brougham for Mutiny'—certainly the *prose* gem of the collection—was always given to Peel.

such a startling sensation—it told at once from the convulsed centre to every extremity of the kingdom. There was talent of every sort, apparently, that could have been desired or devised for such a purpose. It seemed as if a legion of sarcastic devils had brooded in synod over the elements of withering derision. But, as far as Hook's MSS. allow us to judge, he was really and truly alone; and, at all events, they exonerate most completely certain other persons who were at first saddled with a large share of the merit and the obloquy of the BULL. Of the famous songs during the winter of 1820-21—only one, he used to say, was an extraneous contribution—he never had the least notion whence it came: this was 'Michael's dinner—Michael's dinner.' Was it from the mint of The Anti-jacobin? *

In addition to its wit, its humour, its blazing audacity of invective, its curious delicacy of persiflage, its strong caustic satire, and its keen dissections of evidence—the paper at first, and for a considerable time even, was remarkable as a specimen of dexterous getting up: most carefully edited throughout—no department neglected. No wonder that it almost instantly reached, and long maintained, a

* We have recently seen this song ascribed confidently to the late unfortunate Sir Alexander Boswell; but, though he wrote many clever songs, we have not the least belief that he wrote this. The probability is, that *Michael's Dinner*, and many other pieces, have been attributed to him merely because his great amusement was the private press of Auchinleck, and worshipping friends decreed that every good thing of unascertained origin there printed must have come from the Baronet's own pen. His humour was wholly Scotch. Our own strong impression is, that the song, if not Hook's own—which, notwithstanding his talk, is very possible—was really Mr. Canning's.

very great circulation. Upon what arrangements it was established ; who supplied the capital for the start—in what way it was settled that the property should ultimately be divided—the MSS. intrusted to us supply no information. All that appears distinctly from Hook's diaries is, that at one period his receipts from *John Bull* were as high as 2000*l.* per annum ; and that, years before his death, they had dwindled to a comparatively trifling amount.

Undoubtedly the King personally was served in the most essential manner by this paper. It is impossible to deny that *Bull* frightened the Whig aristocracy from countenancing the Court of Brandenburgh House—and that the non-appearance there of the female branches of the noble families on that side of the question was the one circumstance which gradually worked into the minds of the decorous middle classes the conviction that, however indefensible the King might have been at an earlier stage in his treatment of his wife, there was now rottenness at the bottom of her cause. The parliamentary speeches and votes of the Whig leaders were thus reduced to their intrinsic value as parts of the usual unscrupulous routine of the warfare of factions. The national movement was arrested ; and George IV. had mainly *John Bull* to thank for that result. No organ of a graver class, none of more frequent appearance, could have effected the same purpose, even had the conductors been willing to attempt it. It must be an engine that should strike frequent blows, yet with intervals that might allow

one wound to cicatrize ere another was inflicted ; and it must be one that would not hesitate whereabouts its blows fell. It must be a weekly organ—and the organ of a man who, from circumstances, had the means as well as the motives for entire concealment of himself. Hook had been long enough absent to be pretty well forgotten before he came back. He had come back covered with suspicion, with disgrace, with degradation—those who heard of him at all conceived of him as a wretched culprit wearing out in anxiety or despondence the weary deferment of a ruinous sentence. That he should be the one mainspring of this eternal machinery of political merriment, all working apparently towards the benefit of the party by whose chiefs the sword was kept hanging over his head—this was hardly dreamt of, until the grand business for which ‘ Bull ’ was originated had been brought near its conclusion.

When his name was first hinted at, the disclaimer in the paper itself was framed with consummate coolness, it must be owned. The *italics* are Bull’s :—

‘ MR. THEODORE HOOK.

‘ The conceit of some people is amusing. Our readers will see we have received a letter from ‘ *Mr. Hook* disavowing and disclaiming all connexion with this paper. Partly out of good nature and partly from an anxiety to show this gentleman how little desirous we are to be associated with him, we have made a declaration which doubtless will be

‘ quite satisfactory to his morbid sensibility and
 ‘ affected squeamishness. We are free to confess
 ‘ that two things surprise us in this business: the
 ‘ first, that anything *we* have thought worth publish-
 ‘ ing should have been mistaken for *Mr. Hook’s*, and
 ‘ secondly, that *such a person as Mr. Hook* should
 ‘ think himself disgraced by a connexion with JOHN
 ‘ BULL.’

Nevertheless, as Asmodeus says, ‘ Enfin, tout est connu.’ By and by, by slow degrees, imaginary culprits were cleared one after another: the weight of irresistible suspicion rested on the right head—and one consequence was, that certain victims of ‘ Bull’ began to bestir themselves in the House of Commons, touching the protracted investigation of the Audit Board.* Hook, with his native sense and now ample experience of this world’s ways, must have felt, the minute that work began, that every blow he had been dealing against the Whigs had tended to rivet his own fetters. Nothing but

* In an article entitled ‘ Court of Claims,’ where various persons were represented as offering their services at Queen Caroline’s *Coronation*, the most prominent claimant was thus recorded:—

‘ Mr. Joseph Hume claimed to be carver, because he had been a surgeon.—Rejected.

Mr. Joseph Hume claimed to say grace, because he had been a chaplain.—Rejected.

Mr. Joseph Hume claimed to hire quadrupeds for the day, on the ground that he did so in India.—Rejected.

Mr. Joseph Hume claimed to supply beef for the Queen’s table, because he had been a commissary.—Rejected in favour of Mr. Slade, of St. Giles’s, her Majesty’s friend and butcher.

Mr. Joseph Hume claimed the upright props of the platform, because he had been a postmaster.—Rejected.

Mr. Joseph Hume prayed that a list of his claims be printed.—Rejected.’

bare justice need be hoped for now—mercy to him would be gratitude for ‘Mrs. Muggins’ Visit to the Queen,’ ‘Humpty-Dumpty,’ ‘Ass-ass-ination;’ last, not least, for that true *chef d’œuvre*, worth all that Hanbury Williams ever penned—the Hunting of the *Hare* :—

Would you hear of the triumph of purity?
 Would you share in the joy of the Queen?
 List to my song; and, in perfect security,
 Witness a *row* where you durst not have been :
 All kinds of Addresses,
 From collars of SS.
 To venders of cresses,
 Came up like a fair ;
 And all thro’ September,
 October, November,
 And down to December,
 They *hunted this Hare*.

* * * * *

Damsels of Marybone, deck’d out in articles
 Borrow’d of brokers for shillings and pence—
 The eye of vulgarity anything smart tickles ;
 Drabs love a *ride* at another’s expense—
 So swarming like loaches,
 In ten hackney coaches
 They make their approaches
 And pull at the bell ;
 And then they flaunt brave in,
 Preceded by CRAVEN,
 And clean and new shaven,
 Topographical GELL.

Next came a motley assemblage of what I call
 Mummers and mountebanks, wildly array’d ;
 Hod-men, and coal-heavers, landmen and nautical,
 Tag-rag and bobtail, a strange masquerade !
 A rout of sham sailors
 Escap’d from their jailors,
 As sea-bred as tailors
 In Shropshire or Wilts :

But mark Oldi's smile and hers,
 Greeting, as Highlanders,
 Half a score MILE-ENDERS,
 Shivering in kilts !

NOEL and MOORE are the pink of her quality,
 Judge what must be the more mean partisans !
 What sweepings of kennels—what scums of rascality—
 Hired and attired to enact artisans ;
 Sham painters, and stainers,
 Smiths, coopers, cordwainers,
 And glaziers—chief gainers
 In such a turmoil ;
 Though chandlers and joiners,
 And forgers and coiners,
 And pocket-purloiners
 All share in the spoil.

Verdant green-grocers, all mounted on Jack-asses,
 (Lately called *Guildfords*, in honour of FRED,)
 Sweet nymphs of Billingsgate, tipsy as Bacchuses,
 Roll'd in like porpoises, heels over head !
 And the better to charm her,
 Three tinkers in armour,
 All hired by HARMER,
 Brave Thistlewood's friend ;
 Those stout men of metal,
 Who think they can settle
 The State, if a kettle
 They 're able to mend.

Next come the PRESENTS—Whitechapel (where Jews
 bury)
 Sends needles to hem Dr. FELLOWES's lawn ;
 Cracknels from Cowes—sweet simnels from Shrews-
 bury—
 Rump-steaks from Dublin—and collars of brawn—
 A pig—and a blanket—
 A sturgeon from Stangate—
 The donors all thank-ed
 By Royal desire !
 Old PARR gave his benison
 To PARKINS's venison—
 But the pamphlet of TENNYSON
 He threw in the fire. &c., &c.

There is plenty more—and better too ; but we do not choose, even at this distance of time, to quote the most stinging stanzas of this master-piece of insult.

There is little to be said in defence of the early virulences of *John Bull*, except that they were, we believe without exception, directed against the Queen and her prominent partisans ; and that the Whig leaders, both in parliament and in society, had, from the commencement of the regency, countenanced attacks equally malignant on the private life and circle of George IV.—nay, encouraged, in times then freshly remembered, the long series of libels by which the virtues and the afflictions of King George III. were turned into matter of contemptuous sport. The truth is, the Liberals—as they about this period began to style themselves—had shown a fervid desire to domineer in a haughty monopoly of wicked wit : their favourites among the literati almost resented any interference with it as an intolerable invasion of ‘vested rights.’ The ultimate result of the struggle was, we think, highly beneficial to both parties.

‘ As work like this was unbecoming,
And flesh and blood no longer bore it,
The Court of Common Sense then sitting
Summon’d the culprits both before it.’—*Moore*.

On either side, when there came coolness enough for measuring the mutual offences and annoyances, all persons of influence seem to have concurred in the determination that such things should no longer be

patronized. The trade of defamation has sunk, for many years past, into hands fit for nothing better ; and when any man of mark permits himself to be betrayed into a momentary outburst of 'sweltering venom' against a political rival or antagonist, he is regarded by friends with regret, and by foes as well as friends with compassion.

It is fair to recollect, too, that in the case of Theodore Hook, when he was making his paper so formidably famous, there really could not have been any true personal malignity at work. He was fresh from a colonial life, in which few men's passions are ever much disturbed by sympathy with the ups and downs of the great parties at home. He had sustained no sort of injury as yet at the hands of either Whigs or Radicals. He knew little, and could have cared nothing, about those who became the objects of his satire. Exquisitely cruel as it often seemed, it was with him a mere *skiomachy*. Certain men and women were stuck up as types of certain prejudices or delusions ; and he set to knocking them down with no more feeling about them, as individual human-creatures, than if they had been nine-pins. In all this there was a culpable recklessness—a sad want of thought ; but, at the same time, want of reflection is not exactly to be confounded with deliberation of malice. And we should make some allowance for the habits of a farce-writer, accustomed to live and move in a perpetual atmosphere of practical jokes and horse-play. The higher victims were to him on a par with Huncamunca and the lords and

generals of *Tom Thumb*; while with such people as Alderman Wood and his rabid enemy in the House of Commons, Joseph Hume, he fancied it was no great matter to take the same sort of liberties in print, that would have passed for laudable fun in the real tavern-life of the Gurneys and Dalys.* Finally, if, as the game proceeded, Theodore Hook's personal passions did become deeply engaged, be it remembered that there were fierce combatants all the while on the other side, and no part of his personal character or history was spared by them. The wheel of wit, even if left to itself, can rarely be in motion long without getting into a glow: but there

* Many of Bull's songs, in construction and even in execution, are very little different from those which Hook used to *improvise* in the course of a festive evening. We do not know that a person who never witnessed that marvellous performance could take a better notion of what it was than from such a piece as the Visit of Mrs. Muggins—in *thirty-one* stanzas—*e.g.*—

Have you been to Brandenburgh, heigh, ma'am, ho, ma'am?
 Have you been to Brandenburgh, ho?
 O yes, I have been, ma'am, to visit the Queen, ma'am,
 With the rest of the gallantee show, show—
 With the rest of the gallantee show.

And who were the company, heigh, ma'am, ho, ma'am?
 Who were the company, ho?—
 We happened to drop in with gemmen from Wapping
 And ladies from Blowbladder-row, row—
 Ladies from Blowbladder-row.

What saw you at Brandenburgh, heigh, ma'am, ho, ma'am?
 What saw you at Brandenburgh, ho?—
 We saw a great dame, with a face red as flame,
 And a character spotless as snow, snow—
 A character spotless as snow.

And who were attending her, heigh, ma'am, ho, ma'am?
 Who were attending her, ho?—
 Lord Hood for a man—for a maid Lady Anne—
 And Alderman Wood for a beau, beau—
 Alderman Wood for a beau. &c. &c.

was no want of hostile ingenuity to quicken the dangerous friction.

By his flagellations of the Whigs, meantime, Hook had shut the gates of forbearance at Whitehall. He might have thought himself well off, if he had not tempted harshness into play against him. He thought he had: he always persisted that the Auditor's final Report on him was an unjust deliverance; and he maintained equally the opinion that the measures of the Government consequent on that Report were unusually severe. The award was at last given in the autumn of 1823; and it pronounced him a debtor to the Crown for 12,000*l*.

If we could afford time and room for a full statement of the result of our own examination of the printed documents in his case, we are well aware that few readers would be induced to thank or accompany us. We shall merely offer a few suggestions on some of its most prominent features, such as *sautent aux yeux*.

That the Books of the Treasury at the Mauritius had been kept with most culpable and scandalous carelessness there is no question. Hook admitted all along that he was bound to make good a deficiency, which was real as well as apparent, but which, he persisted, had originated in no degree from any other cause than his over-confidence in the honesty and regularity of inferior officers in his department—persons for whom he was and must be responsible, though none of them had owed their appointments to himself. But if the irregularity be

clear, it is not less so that it had been a general irregularity. If payments that ought to have appeared on the credit page did not appear there, neither did disbursements that ought to have been no less regularly recorded on the debit side of the book. The proof of this is very simple. The result of the Colonial research on the subject was, we find, that the balance against the Treasurer came to about 20,000*l.* Upon more deliberate investigation at home this was reduced to 15,000*l.* At last, the extent was issued for only 12,000*l.*; Hook admitting from an early date 9000*l.*, and strenuously asserting, to the last hour of his life, that a just scrutiny must have struck another sum of 3000*l.* from the account.

The difference between 20,000*l.* and 12,000*l.* is a great one. How did it come to pass that practised men of business could strike the first balance in 1818—the Audit Board descend by and by to 15,000*l.*—and finally, in 1823, report a debt of 12,000*l.*? Only, it is obvious, because the Treasurer's books had teemed with errors *against* himself, which errors were, by various accidents, discovered to be such in the course of the long inquiry. Take one example:—On a certain page there appeared as paid in to the credit of the Crown two different sums—one of Spanish dollars—the other of sicca rupees. Hook had nothing to object—there was the record, with his own signature at the foot of the page. Far down in the process of the investigation *here*, in the spring of 1823, it chanced that

Hook one morning had occasion to look over a totally different document, in which appeared numerous entries both of sums in dollars and sums in rupees. He had to ascertain the precise relative value of these coins at the specified date. A little later in the day that particular page fell, for perhaps the hundredth time, under his eye—he was fresh from the comparative computation—behold the sum in dollars and that in rupees, entered one immediately under the other on that same page, being turned into sterling money, produced each to a minute fraction the same identical amount. It was *primâ facie* impossible that two payments, one from America, one from India, of precisely the same amount to sixpence three-farthings, should have been made at the Mauritius treasury on the same day, one immediately after the other. By what was in this case a singular piece of good fortune, the clerk who made the entries was in England, and could be got at. After rubbing his head for a time, he remembered distinctly that the money was paid in dollars, and immediately turned into rupees for the governor's convenience in some bill negotiation with Calcutta. The two entries ought to have been on opposite pages. And the sum was struck off Hook's debt the moment these facts were made intelligible to the Commissioners. On how narrow a pivot may the question of conviction or acquittal turn in such a case as this!

In like manner, as to the original statement of the deficiency of 37,000 dollars communicated by

Allan to General Hall. There is no entry, certainly, of those 37,000 dollars: but, strange to say, the sheet which should have contained that entry does contain the entry of the premium paid for converting the said dollars into coin of another denomination: so that, as Allan himself pointed out, and as the London auditors admitted, the negligent sheet itself contained clear and direct proof, such as any examiner ought at a glance to have detected and understood, not only of the existence but of the exact amount of the error. Nobody ever suspected Theodore Hook of being an idiot.

However, a large deficiency there was; and since he could not explain how and why, in a manner clear, consistent, and entirely exculpatory of himself, he had no reason to hope that he should go scatheless. His office was lost of course. Supposing the deficit to have been 12,000*l.*—and that he had abstracted that sum from the chest—it must be allowed that he had made a bad bargain in sacrificing, at the age of 30, for 12,000*l.*, a post *ad vitam aut culpam* worth 2000*l.* per annum. Is it possible that he should have fancied he could take large sums without being at no very distant date found out by some means or other?—or that, deliberately contemplating the all-but certainty of detection, he should have begun and persisted in such a ruinous procedure?—that after so unexpectedly receiving that for him splendid permanent provision at twenty-four, he should have, in the full possession of his faculties, flung away that, and with that every

reasonable chance of ever again attaining to any station whatever of pecuniary independence?

He could not tell what had become of the money. It is fair to observe, on the other hand, that every direct attempt to connect him with its expenditure entirely failed. General Hall, for example, intimated a strong suspicion that Hook had remitted considerable plunder to England. On examination it turned out that he had sent home 1900*l.* in all—and that very soon after his arrival in the colony. He stated in explanation that he had left debts in England to about the amount, and he proved, to the satisfaction of the Board, that he had borrowed the 1900*l.* from a Mauritius merchant, and repaid by instalments on every quarter-day till the whole was liquidated. Was this the procedure of a man *profligately* careless about pecuniary obligations—of a man who had the Colonial treasure in his keeping and no scruple about abstracting thousands from it for his own purposes in the lump? Another and a more feasible suggestion was, that the money had gone in the course of a brief but reckless career of personal extravagance. The Governor stated that Hook's habits of horse-racing and gambling, though *he* had had no personal knowledge of such things, were notorious. Hook in his printed Reply treats this with a somewhat haughty vagueness. He complains of the allusions to his 'private foibles and faults,' as uncalled for and irrelevant; of the estimation of his property by what it brought at a forced sale, as unfair; asserts himself to have *proved* that

he had actually been a great gainer by his turf-speculations, as far as they could then be traced ; and concludes by a solemn re-assertion of his innocence as to irregular application of public money to his own purposes of any sort, at any time.

But if he did not take the money, who else could have taken it ? In the documents there is a heap of evidence on this head, from which, without accurate acquaintance with the localities of the Mauritius, and the internal details of colonial administration, it seems to us impossible to extract any distinct conclusion. There was a great fire, as already mentioned, at Port Louis, and, among other public buildings, the Treasury Office was destroyed. This was in 1816. After that the money appears to have been kept partly in a new hired Office of inadequate dimensions, partly in Hook's own house—in his bed-room—in a large chest, of which, when he happened to go into the country for a visit, the keys were left with some one or other of his people. During one whole year it seems he himself seldom or never slept in town—somebody or other had at all times access. But, we repeat, it is impossible for us to unravel all this story of the localities and the treasure-boxes. What we see on the surface is that he placed a most rash reliance on the honour and honesty of a numerous band of subordinates—not one of them, as far as we can discover, English :—French clerks—Indians—mulattoes ;—that several of these, by their own showing, had neglected their duties—for otherwise a general confusion

could never have come to characterise the books, whereof every individual among them was specially intrusted with some one ;—that a change of governors occasioned a more than usually solemn overhauling of the books ;— that no error was then detected ;—that one clerk, by his own story, knew a very serious defect to have existed for at least fifteen months, and to be proveable from *the books themselves*, to say nothing of a comparison of the books with the chest ;—that shortly after the revision, this black man, Allan, in a panic or agony of some sort, revealed the deficit—and that when the really rigid examination which that gave rise to approached its conclusive stage, he, having down to that week been considered as a steady cool man, falsely accused Hook of tampering with his evidence ; and on the detection of that falsehood, destroyed himself.

We must ask whether, on the face of this story, it is *impossible* to believe in the perfect innocence of Theodore Hook, as respects all but gross negligence ? Some subordinate seems always to have been intrusted with access to the treasure. If Allan was not (which does not clearly appear), was it impossible that counterfeit keys might have been manufactured among the native artificers of Port Louis ? In a word, our own strong ultimate suspicion is neither more nor less than that a *general laxity* had prevailed from the time when these motley myrmidons of the money-bags hailed the arrival of the raw treasurer-in-chief, and took cognisance of his habits and manners—his utter igno-

rance of business and of account-books—his open, unmistrusting disposition—his gay, pleasure-hunting existence in his new Eldorado—‘*perdundæ pecuniæ genitus, vacuus à curis nisi instantibus.*’ Let him be blamed as he deserves; but we may be pardoned for asking upon what principle, if he was ultimately considered as guilty of more than negligence, he was not ultimately dealt with as a *criminal*? The authorities again arrested him, and issued an extent against his property—which property enriched the British exchequer by about 40*l.*; but if he was really held guilty of having abstracted 12,000*l.*, why was he not brought to justice for a most serious crime? Why, finally, if he was not held to have been guilty of more than negligence, was he dealt with so much more sharply than several other involuntary defaulters had been not very long before?

On his arrest under the Exchequer writ (August, 1823), he was taken to the dwelling and spunging house of the sheriff’s-officer, his captor, by name Mr. HEMP;—and, still hoping that a protracted imprisonment was not seriously intended, he chose to remain there week after week, and month after month, until Easter. The expense of board and lodging at a house of that class is always heavy; his accommodations were mean, and the situation about the worst in London—Shire Lane—(so named as separating part of the City from Middlesex)—a vile, squalid place, noisy and noxious, apparently almost inaccessible either to air or light, swarming

with a population of thief-catchers, gin-sellers, and worse. But his spirit was not yet to be broken. He endured the unwholesome confinement with patience—no sooner was hope knocked down in one quarter than it sprang up again in another—he kept himself steadily at work in the mornings, and his few intimates commonly gathered round him in the evening. It was while shut up in Shire Lane that he made acquaintance with a man hardly—if at all—less remarkable than himself for natural talents, and infinitely his superior in all the knowledge that can be acquired from books—the late Dr. William Maginn. The doctor, by several years his junior, had then recently come over from Ireland to take his chance as a literary adventurer in the great city. He seems to have soon undertaken some share, we know not what, in the affair of the ‘John Bull.’ The editor’s confinement must have made such assistance indispensable; and he might have searched Europe over without finding another spirit more congenial to his own. Dr. Maginn is mentioned as a daily, or rather a nightly, visitor throughout Hook’s Diary, for a long series of months. Subsequently they were separated by circumstances; but their mutual kindness seems never to have been disturbed. They died about the same time.*

* We hope to see some collective publication of Dr. Maginn’s learned and witty Essays in verse and prose, scattered over our monthly Magazines during nearly a quarter of a century. We are confident that enough might be selected to establish for his name a distinguished place in English literature; and such a work, judiciously superintended, could hardly fail to be of essential service

In April, 1824, then, Hook at last took his leave of Shire Lane. He had, as usual, made himself a great favourite with Hemp and his family, and such a guest could not be allowed to depart without a farewell banquet. The company exhibited in harmonious contrast Mr. Hook's theatrical and literary confidants of the time, and sundry distinguished ornaments of his hospitable landlord's own order. The sederunt did not close without a specimen of the improvisatore; and his ballad 'showed up' Mr. Hemp and his brethren, as intrusted with the final offices of the law in the case of the grand culprit before them:—

to the Doctor's family:—for we are sorry to know that he left his widow—a most respectable gentlewoman—and three children, all utterly unprovided for.—(1843.)

The writer of this sketch, now that Sir R. Peel is no more among us, takes this perhaps his only opportunity of mentioning the generosity of that statesman's conduct towards Maginn. The Doctor, having always retained the strong feelings of an Irish Orangeman, was one of those who condemned with severity Sir Robert's pro-Catholic policy of 1829; nor, perhaps, was there any one writer of the time by whom the personal motives of the minister were more unmercifully dealt with. The Doctor assailed them with unwearied pertinacity, in various newspapers and magazines—but especially in rhymes only less galling than the fiercest of Swift's. He had never been personally acquainted with Peel, who could have known nothing about him so distinctly as this hostility. Yet when, a few years before Maginn's death, some of his friends were privately making a subscription to relieve him from some pressing difficulties, Sir Robert, casually hearing of it, immediately sent through the writer of this sketch, with a stipulation for secrecy, the sum of 100*l.*, as a contribution to the fund. The writer believes that Sir Robert on various subsequent occasions interfered on the Doctor's behalf in a manner not less liberal, and with the same delicate precautions. At all events, when the Doctor was near his end, Sir Robert forwarded for his use a similar benefaction of 100*l.* The writer has no reason to suppose that Maginn was ever aware of any of these kind deeds. It remains to be added that, some years after Dr. Maginn's death, his only son, on attaining the requisite age, received a cadetship in the East Indies from Sir Robert Peel's last government.—(1852.)

CHORUS.

Let him hang with a curse,—this atrocious, pernicious
Scoundrel that emptied the till at Mauritius! *

The close confinement in the bad air of Shire Lane had affected his health, and indeed his personal appearance was permanently damaged in consequence of the total disuse of exercise for so many months, and the worry of mind which even he must have been enduring. He came out pale and flabby in the face, and with a figure fast tending to corpulence. He was transferred to the Rules of the King's Bench—within which he hired a small sepa-

* It may seem strange enough that he should have been capable of thus making sport to the Philistines out of his own calamity and disgrace. But it is stranger still that he is said to have in fact adopted some hints from a version of Allan's suicide, which found favour with the lowest only of his political haters, and the circulation of which in a street broadside had seemed to give him very serious annoyance. We quote some verses of this doggrel, just to show that Hook had to take as well as give:—

Then Hook says to Allan, ' We're blown, my poor nigger,
We at last are found out to be loose in the figure;
We have sacked it and spent it, and cannot repay,
So let's e'en hop the twig in the old Roman way!'

' O massa!' says Allan, ' whatever you do,
It will comfort my heart to accompany you.
That there grog at the governor's! O what a goose!
Which is best, steel or lead, or a drop of the juice?'

' First a drop of the juice this here bottle contains—
And then barkers, like gemmen, to blow out our brains!
Here they are, fill your glass, to that bed-room retire—
Make ready, present, and when mine goes off—fire!'

Humble Allan then manfully emptied his glass,
And with pistol on cock to the bed-room did pass;
In a moment he heard massa's *bang*, and the nigger
In his mouth clapp'd the muzzle and drew back the trigger.

Then the beaks tumbled in, black and bistre and yellow,
And found Hook in great horror beside the poor fellow.
His own bullet of course perforated the floor—
And the peacher could now be cross-questioned no more.

rate lodging, in an airy enough situation, Temple Place.

He remained here till May, 1825 ; but during term time a rule, or permission to spend the day beyond the precincts, may be obtained by any prisoner who alleges urgent business with his legal adviser and is willing to pay for the indulgence. While established at Temple Place, accordingly, he dined out now and then in town, and more frequently passed a day with a friend at Putney ; but in general he stayed at home, and worked hard : that was, indeed, we believe, the busiest period of his literary career. The *Bull*, gradually dropping its venomous personal satire, but not as yet by any means declining in the attractions of wit and humour, was fast gaining the character of a respectable and authoritative organ of Toryism. But the ever-perplexing correspondence with the Auditors being now closed, he had time for other things besides his paper ; and early in 1824 he made, as was supposed, his first appearance as a novelist : an appearance which at once placed him far above any novel-writer then in activity, with the one exception, of course, of the author of *Waverley*.

The popularity of the first series of *Sayings and Doings* (3 vols.) may be estimated from his diary, which records the profit to the author as 2000*l*. There were, we believe, three considerable impressions before the Second Series, also in 3 vols., was ready in the spring of 1825. And shortly after that publication he was at length released from cus-

tody—with an intimation, however, that the crown abandoned nothing of its claim for the Mauritius debt.

He now took a cottage at Putney, of which neighbourhood he had always been fond ; and may be said to have re-entered society, though his circle of acquaintance continued limited for a couple of years more. While at Putney, in 1826, he from motives of pure kindness re-wrote—that is to say, composed from rough illiterate materials—the very entertaining ‘Reminiscences’ of an old theatrical and musical friend of his—Michael Kelly. The book was received with astonishment, for he generously kept his own secret. There was a notice of it in the *Quarterly Review* (vol. xxxiv.), from the pen of Sir Walter Scott:

In 1828 Hook published the third series of *Sayings and Doings*, 3 vols. ; in 1830, *Maxwell* (ditto) ; in 1832, *The Life of Sir David Baird*, 2 vols. large 8vo. ; in 1833, *The Parson's Daughter*, and *Love and Pride*, each 3 vols.* In 1836 he became editor of *The New Monthly Magazine*, and contributed to its pages, in chapters, *Gilbert Gur-*

* Among Mr. Hook's papers his executors found a packet, inscribed ‘Letters sent to me as the author of *The Doctor*.’ They were in number about a score, from eminent literary persons and a few others of political or fashionable celebrity, each acknowledging the receipt of the first two volumes of the book, *ex dono auctoris*, with the favoured name printed in red letters at the beginning. Theodore knew nothing whatever about the authorship of the work—nor was there in all England a man more unlikely to have penned any one page of it. But it had struck Mr. Southey, as a fit climax for the trickeries with which he had chosen to amuse himself, to make his publishers forward to the old arch-boaxer all letters addressed ‘to the Author of *The Doctor*.’

ney—and the far inferior sequel, *Gurney Married*: each afterwards collected into a set of 3 volumes. In 1837 appeared *Jack Brag*, 3 vols.; in 1839, *Births, Deaths, and Marriages* (ditto). *Precepts and Practice*, and *Fathers and Sons*, 3 vols. each, were originally published in the Magazine of 1840;—and some months after his death appeared *Peregrine Bunce*; but evidently, as we think, not all written by Hook. Towards the beginning there are a few flashes of his old merriment, but the general effect is poor and dull. Above all, we look in vain for any of those pithy *obiter dicta*, or brief rapid sketches of character, which in the better day startled us ever and anon in the midst of his broadest extravaganzas: marking with what acute sagacity life had been analyzed by one who passed with many for a mere sportive satirist of its surface.

We have thought it convenient to name these works together: their sequence—thirty-eight volumes within sixteen years—he being all the while editor, and almost sole writer, of a newspaper, and for several years the efficient conductor of a magazine—affords sufficient proof that he never sank into idleness;* but in other respects there had been great changes within that period.

It began with two unhappy errors—we might call them both by a harder name. Before he was arrested in 1823, he had formed a connexion with

* It is probable that Hook contributed a good deal to other journals than his own: he wrote one—and but *one*—article for the Quarterly Review, that on Prince Puckler-Muskau's English Tour, in vol. xlvi.—1832.

a young woman until then of unblemished reputation, and whose unwearied attention to his interests during his confinement and distress was exemplary, and to him invaluable. In his position at Somers Town many will see much to palliate the original folly: but he persisted in it until the righteous consequences of guilt could not be averted. This connexion soon became such as, under his circumstances, and with the kind and manly feelings which adhered to him, made it impossible for him to marry in his proper condition; and though he often thought of atoning to his partner, and in some sort to the children she had borne him, by making her his wife, he never took courage to satisfy his conscience by carrying that purpose into effect. This tie was error the first. The other regarded the debt to the Crown. He never denied that he was in justice responsible for a deficit of 9000*l.*; they who had the sole authority to judge of the matter pronounced the rightful claim to be for 12,000*l.* After a long and harassing period of investigation, the award was given, and he was incarcerated, and all his apparent property, a mere trifle, seized. He was kept in confinement for a considerable time; but it was obvious from his modes of life and accommodation during confinement, that, whatever his resources might be, he had abundant resources of some kind at his command. When he was released from the King's Bench, he was told distinctly that the debt must hang over him until every farthing was paid. Now it is very true that

he had not any hidden money-capital, as perhaps the Auditors may have allowed themselves to suspect ; but we know that he had in his great and various talents, left from that hour at his free command, the means of earning far more than enough for his own decent maintenance, even including the unfortunate family ; and most clearly every shilling that he could make beyond that ought to have been, from time to time, paid into the Exchequer towards the liquidation of the debt. We cannot doubt that if the Lords of the Treasury had found him to be paying in but a very moderate sum every Christmas during a very few years, they would have felt the strongest desire to interpret in his favour whatever circumstances of a doubtful aspect had seemed to attend the original creation of the deficit. It is, in our opinion, most probable that had their Lordships found themselves enabled to show in Parliament that the defalcator's industry was devoted to the obliteration of the debt, they would also have felt themselves entitled to appeal to the merciful consideration of honest men of all parties in his behalf ; and we have not the slightest suspicion that, in case of such an appeal so founded, it would—after the John Bull had dropped its first pestilential acerbity—have met with a cold reception — no, not even from Mr. Joseph Hume. But Hook never took this view of the matter at all. He obstinately clung to the delusive hope, bottomed apparently on some mere flying misrepresentations, or at least gross exaggeration, of loose

expressions of royal concern and benevolence, that sooner or later the debt was to be wiped out *in toto* by a donation from the privy purse. If that were done, good and well—he should be grateful, but at the same time consider himself as having earned the boon. If it were not done—in the loss of his office, and the subsequent mortifications and degradations, he had paid his sufficient penalty—he would pay no more. He therefore entered on his new course of life with another black cloud suspended over him, through his own unhappy choice. He had thrown away the only chance before him of effectually vindicating his character; and with that he had, in the opinion of all dispassionate observers, nay, even of his own warmest friends, thrown away all reasonable chance of ever again profiting by the open patronage of either the Crown or its ministers.

We see that from *John Bull*, in its palmy days, he received full 2000*l.* per annum; and that he got a similar sum by the first series of *Sayings and Doings*. With his naturally sanguine temper, and just confidence in extraordinary talents now universally recognized, he must have counted on earning a very large income so long as health and vigour should last. Suppose he had resolved to confine his expenses to 1000*l.* per annum—but why not to 500*l.*?—until he should have paid off the debt. That a man of thirty-five, who saw and felt, as he must have done, that it depended on himself, on the strength or weakness of his moral pulse, on the indulgence or resistance of trivial vanities

during but four, five, or at most six years—whether he was to stand for the rest of his life erect in tranquil honour, or continue in a perpetual fret, never emancipated from suspicion, never aspiring beyond sufferance—that a man conscious of such energies, and so sure, had the case been presented to him as another's, to judge of it as he ought—that he should have even hesitated what to do, seems truly wonderful.

‘ At some predestined point of life’s brief span
His own resolve decrees the fate of man.
The fiend is at his mercy then. To miss
The occasion binds him slave to Nemesis.’

Among Mr. Hook’s frequent visitors, during the period of his obscurity, there were some who must have seen all these things in the true light. Whether they were sufficiently intimate to *tell* him what they thought, we cannot say; but one there was who took a very effectual way of signifying his sentiments. The late Mr. Nash, as the Diary states, offered to advance to Hook 2000*l.*, at the time when he was leaving the King’s Bench. The offer was not accepted. What could it have meant but that the generous architect wished to give his friend the means of paying a handsome instalment the moment after his personal liberty was restored?*

He hired a good house at Putney, as already

* Since this sketch was first published, its writer has been told by one who lived familiarly with the King, with Nash, and also with Hook, that Hook in his own mind ascribed this offer of 2000*l.* to his Majesty. But there is not the least hint of that in his Diary—on the contrary, it seems inconsistent with the general strain of that record. (1852.)

mentioned ; and, by degrees, again mixed more and more freely and largely in society. Though, down to a much later period, he affected to preserve his incognito as the conductor of *John Bull*, that paper was now obviously the vehicle through which many considerable Tories chose to communicate both facts and opinions to the public ; and as his control over the paper was no longer doubted in circles like theirs, it may be inferred that such persons were willing to cultivate, to a certain extent, his acquaintance. His Diary leaves little doubt that this was so.* His fame as a novelist, of course, opened to him various circles of another class ; and wherever he was once admitted, bringing with him elements of amusement not surpassed certainly during this generation, he soon made rapid progress. But for some time he does not seem to have lived much with any associates whom we could call highly distinguished, excepting one or two active politicians on the Tory side : after theirs, the most prominent names that occur are from his own original world, that of the theatre and its precincts. He appears to have set out with a neat bachelor's establishment in all respects, equipage included, and to have been more hospitable than any bachelor, not of very large fortune, is ever expected to be in London or its vicinity.

* He says, in one of his later tales, of Downing Street, 'There is a fascination in the air of that little *cul-de-sac* ; an hour's inhalation of its atmosphere affects some men with giddiness, others with blindness, and very frequently with the most oblivious forgetfulness.'

In 1827 he took a higher flight. He became the tenant of a house in Cleveland Row—on the edge, therefore, of what in one of his novels he describes as ‘the real London—the space between Pall Mall on the south, and Piccadilly on the north, St. James’s Street on the west, and the Opera House to the east.’ The residence was handsome, and to persons ignorant of his domestic arrangements, appeared extravagantly too large for his purpose:—we have since heard of it as inhabited by a nobleman of distinction. He was admitted a member of divers clubs; shone the first attraction of their House-dinners; and, in such as allowed of play, he might commonly be seen in the course of his protracted evening. Presently he began to receive invitations to great houses in the country, and, for week after week, often travelled from one to another such scene, to all outward appearance in the style of an idler of high condition. In a word, he had soon entangled himself with habits and connexions which implied much curtailment of the time for labour at the desk, and a course of expenditure more than sufficient to swallow all the profits of what remained.

New debts began to accumulate so rapidly that, about 1831, he found it necessary to get rid of the house at St. James’s, and removed to one of more modest dimensions, close to Fulham Bridge, with a small garden towards the river. Here he remained to the end; but, though he took advantage of the

change to drop the custom of giving regular dinners, and probably to strike off some other sources of expense, he not only continued his habits of visiting, but extended them, as new temptations offered, until his *Book* came to contain an array of names which, after some observation both of him and of London, it surprised us to go over. Long before the close it included various members of the royal family*—numerous representatives of every rank in the peerage—with few exceptions, all the leading politicians on the Tory side—not a few of their conspicuous opponents in both houses—a large proportion of what attracted most notice at the time in the departments of art, literature and science—and, lastly, whatever flaunted and glittered in the giddiest whirl of the *beau monde*. Comparatively few of these admirers, we suspect, ever knew exactly where Mr. Hook lived. His letters and cards were left for him at one or other of his clubs; and we doubt, in fact, if the interior of his Fulham cottage was ever seen by half-a-dozen people besides the old confidential worshippers of the ‘Bull’s-mouth.’ To the upper world he was visible solely as the jocund convivialist of the club—the brilliant wit of the lordly banquet—the lion of the crowded assembly—the star of a Christmas or Easter party in a rural palace—the unfailing stage-manager,

* Theodore was honoured with the special notice of the late Duke of Cumberland—ultimately King of Hanover. At his royal highness’s small Sunday dinners at Kew he was for years an almost constant attendant, in company with a few other stout *Brunswickers*.

prompter, author, and occasionally excellent comic actor, of the Private Theatricals, at which noble Guardsmen were the valets, and lovely peeresses the soubrettes.*

He kept his Diary more regularly than could have been expected in the midst of such a feverish life, and occasionally the entries are pretty full: but little of them, we think, could be with propriety made public as yet. Taken in connexion, however, with the published works of the corresponding period, and with what common acquaintances had access to see of his personal existence, the record is certainly a very curious one on the whole—many passages pregnant with instructive warning—the general effect most melancholy. In every page we trace the disastrous influence of both the grand original errors perpetually crossing and blackening the picture of superficial gaiety—indications, not to be mistaken, of a conscience ill at ease—of painful recollections and dark anticipations rising irrepressibly, not to be commanded down—of good, gentle, generous feelings converted by stings and dartings of remorse into elements of torture. If we were to choose a motto for this long line of volumes, it would be a maxim so familiar to himself, that it is repeated over

* We have on our table several light and easy little melodramas, which he composed at the request of the late amiable and excellent Marchioness of Salisbury, for the amusement of Hatfield House. On some of those occasions the scenery and dresses were, it seems, got up under the direction of that grave presbyterian Sir David Wilkie; and not the least of the comedy, we should suppose, must have been the contrast between Manager Hook and his Property-man.

and over in his tales of fiction—hardly omitted in any one of them—‘ *Wrong never comes right.*’

It is obvious that his affections were twice during this period deeply and seriously engaged. On both occasions he seems to have felt that if he ventured to declare himself, the reception was not likely to be cold ; and though young men will dream dreams, and even old men see visions now and then, it is, we suppose, very possible that he was not mistaken. But ever, when the temptation to speak out had all but reached the point, there occurred something to press on him the claims of that which, as he words it, he ‘ felt to be, yet could not bear to call, *his home.*’ He paused and drew back—some unfettered competitor intervened—the prize was carried off—and nothing remained for him but a cruel mixture of self-reproach, that he had so far indulged the fancy as perhaps to betray somewhat of his secret, and of bitter agony in brooding over the stern necessity that had sealed his lips when his heart beat tumultuously towards the avowal. Revisiting, for example, a friendly villa after some lapse of time, he says in his Diary, ‘ They put me in what used to be her room. I lay in her bed, ——’s bed ! ‘ Oh, God ! what a night ! ’ Not many of those who mingled in his society would have guessed that such feelings as these were at any time uppermost in his bosom. The dates of the entries remind ourselves, in both cases, of scenes as gay as might well be, in which he as usual played a most airy and fascinating part. Hear the *Novelist* :—‘ Rely upon it that

‘*wrong never comes right*, and that no man is truly
 ‘respectable until he marries, and devotes his cares,
 ‘his attentions, and his anxieties to a gentle and
 ‘confiding partner, whose virtues and merits soothe
 ‘him in adversity and give new brightness to pros-
 ‘perity.’ (*Gurney*, ii. p. 294.)

Nor will some of his intimates be surprised that we should also quote what follows:—‘Such is
 ‘human nature, such the happy construction of our
 ‘minds, that we go on ridiculing the personal im-
 ‘perfections of others, whose deformities are beauties,
 ‘when compared with our own; censuring in our
 ‘acquaintance follies which we are daily perpetr-
 ‘ing; holding up to contempt their faults, while we
 ‘are committing precisely the same: believing our
 ‘own cases exceptions to general rules, and flattering
 ‘ourselves, even though our conduct should produce
 ‘similar results to those we abhor and detest in
 ‘others, that *we* have been ourselves victims, and led
 ‘into all manner of vice upon the impulse of feelings
 ‘originating in sentiment and virtue.’

His pecuniary embarrassments became deeper and darker every year. Even in the midst of his abundant dissipation he worked hard in the mornings—certainly he covered with his MS. more paper than would have proved, in almost any other man’s case, the energetic exertion of every hour in every day that passed over his head;—and little did his fine friends understand or reflect at what an expense of tear and wear he was devoting his evenings to their amusement. The ministrants of pleasure with whom

they measured him were almost all as idle as themselves—elegant, accomplished men, easy in circumstances, with leisure at command, who drove to the rendezvous after a morning divided between voluptuous lounging in a library-chair and healthful exercise out-of-doors. But he came forth, *at best*, from a long day of labour at his writing-desk—after his faculties had been at the stretch—feeling, passion, thought, fancy, excitable nerves, suicidal brain, all worked, perhaps well nigh exhausted;—compelled since he came at all, to disappoint by silence, or to seek the support of tempting stimulants in his new career of exertion. For, however unconscious of effort such a social performer may be, he is all the while tasking the machinery of nature, the most delicate of mysteries. How many admire and enjoy the dazzling light—how few trouble themselves to consider that it may be a candle burning at both ends!—He undoubtedly contrived to get through a vast deal of literary labour;—but soon the utmost he could hope to achieve by it all was the means of parrying off one urgent creditor this week, another the next, while he knew that scores and scores remained behind, each waiting the turn to advance on him with an unavoidable demand. Hear again the Novelist:—‘The wretched nervousness of a life
‘of pecuniary embarrassment more than outweighs
‘the unfair enjoyment of unjustifiable luxuries.
‘Would an alderman relish his turtle if he were
‘forced to eat it sitting on the tight rope? Answer
‘me that question; and I will tell you the sort of

‘splendid misery which that man enjoys who spends double his income, and is indebted to his goldsmith, his tailor, and his coachmaker, not for his dishes, his clothes, and his carriages only, but for the privilege of using them at liberty.’

Whenever an author gets into debt with his publisher, he ceases to be dealt with, as to new or projected books, as he might otherwise have counted upon. Whenever an author, having reason to suspect that he has pressed rather too much on the liberality and forbearance of one publisher, yet, bound to that publisher by literary engagements not yet fulfilled, is tempted to enter into negotiation with another of the trade, concerning a MS. which the first might naturally have expected to be offered to himself, there arises a jealousy and rivalry which brings in its train most humiliating disputes, altercations, entanglement upon entanglement of bargains and counter-bargains, anger, reproach, crushing degradation in a hundred shapes.

The secret history of Hook reveals much of this ; and we may guess what must have been the effect on his mind of the consciousness, while seated among the revellers of a princely saloon, that next morning must be—not given to the mere toil of the pen, but—divided between scenes like these in the backshops of three or four eager, irritated booksellers, and weary prowlings through the dens of city usurers for means of discounting this long bill, staving off that attorney’s threat : not less commonly, even more urgently, of liquidating a debt of honour

to the grandee, or some of the smiling satellites of his pomp. 'He felt' (like one of his heroes) 'that aching sensation, that sickening pang which those who have wasted what can never be retrieved are sure, sooner or later, to experience; and yet, after a whole day's conversation with his lawyer and his banker, and after having made sundry sage and serious resolutions, the thought that the — would rejoice in his distress, and the — exult at his fall, flashed across his mind, and he resolved to fight on, and hope for better times.'

There is recorded, in more than usual detail, one winter visit at the seat of a nobleman of almost unequalled wealth—evidently particularly fond of Hook, and always mentioned in terms of real gratitude, even affection. Here was a large company, including some of the very highest names in England; the party seem to have remained together for more than a fortnight, or, if one went, the place was filled immediately by another not less distinguished by the advantages of birth and fortune; Hook's is the only untitled name—except a led captain and chaplain or two, and some misses of musical celebrity. What a struggle he has to maintain! Every Thursday he must meet the printer of *John Bull* to arrange the paper for Saturday's impression. While the rest are shooting or hunting, he clears his head as well as he can, and steals a few hours to write his articles. When they go to bed on Wednesday night he smuggles

himself into a post-chaise, and is carried fifty miles across the country to some appointed Blue Boar or Crooked Billet. Thursday morning is spent in overhauling correspondence, in all the details of the editorship. He with hard driving gets back to the neighbourhood of the castle when the dressing-bell is ringing. Mr. Hook's servant has intimated that his master is slightly indisposed : he enters the gate as if from a short walk in the wood : in half an hour behold him answering placidly the inquiries of the ladies—his headache fortunately gone at last—quite ready for the turtle and champagne—puns rattle like a hail-shower—‘ that dear Theodore ’ had never been more brilliant. At a decorous hour the great lord and his graver guests retire ; it is supposed that the evening is over—that the house is shut up. But Hook is quartered in a long bachelors' gallery with half-a-dozen bachelors of far different calibre. One of them, a dashing young earl, proposes what the Diary calls ‘ something comfortable ’ in his dressing-room. Hook, after his sleepless night and busy day, hesitates—but is persuaded. The broiled bones are attended by more champagne—Roman punch—hot brandy and water finally ; for there are plenty of butlers and grooms of the chamber ready to minister to the delights of the distant gallery, ever productive of fees to man and maid. The end is that they play deep, and that Theodore loses a great deal more money than he had brought with him from town, or knows how to come at if he were there. But he rises next morn-

ing with a swimming, bewildered head, and as the fumes disperse, perceives that he must write instantly for money. No difficulty is to be made; the fashionable tailor (*alias* merciless Jew) to whom he discloses the case must *on any terms* remit a hundred pounds by return of post. It is accomplished—the debt is discharged. Thursday comes round again, and again he escapes to meet the printer. This time the printer brings a payment of salary with him, and Hook drives back to the castle in great glee. Exactly the same scene recurs a night or two afterwards. The salary all goes. When the time comes for him at last to leave his splendid friend, he finds that he has lost a fortnight as respects a book that *must* be finished within a month or six weeks—and that what with travelling expenses hither and thither (he has to defray the printer's too), and losses at play to silken coxcombs—who consider him as an admirable jack-pudding, and also as an invaluable pigeon since he drains his glass as well as fills it—he has thrown away more money than he could have earned by the labour of three months in his own room at Fulham. But then the rumble of the green chariot is seen well stocked with pheasants and hares, as it pauses in passing through town at Crockford's, the Carlton, or the Athenæum;* and as often as the Morning

* It is said that at the Athenæum the number of *dinners* fell off by upwards of 300 per annum after Mr. Hook disappeared from his favourite corner, near the door of its coffee-room. That is to say, there must have been some dozens of gentlemen who chose to

Post alluded to the noble peer's Christmas court, Mr. Theodore Hook's name closed the paragraph of 'fashionable intelligence.'

Yet his real tastes were simple enough: as to cookery we never did suspect him of caring about it; and now we see by his *Diary* that whenever he wished to give himself and a true friend a treat, his mind recurred to early days—'Ordered my old favourite, pease-soup'—'To-day my dear mother's favourite dish, a boiled leg of mutton and turnips, which I had not had for many weeks, and enjoyed much.' His taste in potations may be gathered from that of his hero *Godfrey Moss*, who was in truth a most congenial comrade of his own—a clergyman, by name Cannon—the best singer of

dine there once or twice every week of the season, merely for the chance of his being there, and permitting them to draw their chairs to his little table in the course of the evening. Of the extent to which he suffered from this sort of invasion, there are several bitter, oblique complaints in his novels (see, for instance, *Births, Deaths, and Marriages*, vol. ii. p. 65). The *Corner* alluded to will, we suppose, long retain the name which it derived from him—*Temperance Corner*. Many grave and dignified personages being frequent guests, it would hardly have been seemly to be calling for repeated supplies of a certain description; but the waiters well understood what the oracle of the Corner meant by 'Another glass of toast and water,' or 'A little more lemonade.' We may add here a bit of his club-house criticism, from *Gurney*, vol. ii. p. 301:—'People who are conscious of what is due to themselves never display irritability or impetuosity; their manners ensure civility—their own civility secures respect: but the blockhead or the coxcomb, fully aware that something more than ordinary is necessary to produce an effect, is sure, whether in clubs or coffee-houses, to be the most fastidious and factious of the community, the most overbearing in his manners towards his inferiors, the most restless and irritable among his equals, the most cringing and subservient before his superiors.' No man could utter such criticism with more complete safety from being answered with a *Tu quoque*.

the old English ballad that we ever heard—an ‘ unattached parson ;’ but if he had been to get a living, no doubt the very thing would have been ‘ the rectory of Fuddley-cum-pipes.’ * And though Hook unquestionably was fitted, in the highest degree, to enjoy as well as to make joyous really good society of every class and description, it is very clear that what he liked the best was to take his ease in his inn with one or two unceremonious companions. Other things might be well for a variety, but for the staple of pleasure this was his ideal. Above all, the gaudy formality of grand set parties, however duly blazoned in the papers, was at bottom his abomination. ‘ Here I am,’ he says, ‘ in my own house and my own room. How happy could I be if I were but let alone, to work for those I love, though I dare hardly call them mine!’ ‘ A snug pleasant day—worked all morning, doing much, I hope tolerably. Justice B. [Broderip] † and the Major [Shadwell Clerke] came to dine—small leg of pork and some eels—one bottle sherry, two port—a little punch to wind up. I think they found things comfortable, and enjoyed themselves—God

* This divine always went in the Hook circle by the name of *the Dean*. Queen Caroline having, it was understood, instituted an Order of St. Caroline, Hook arranged an Order of St. Theodore, whereof he himself was *Grand-Master* and Cannon *Dean*. The latter seemed pleased to retain the title. There was a regular decoration ; but of that Theodore dropt the use (the very private use) on receiving a real star and ribbon from Don Miguel! He was, we are told, delighted to sport these Portuguese ornaments when surrounded by his old intimates ; and we doubt not they set him off to much advantage. —(1852.)

† Mr. W. J. Broderip, the esteemed Police Magistrate, author of ‘ *Zoological Recreations*,’ &c. &c.—(1852.)

bless them both!’ What a contrast are the many, many entries that record his reluctant going forth to some ducal feast, and his heart-broken reflections next morning on the mad night-scene that closed the brilliant evening! But there is no need to dwell on extreme cases. ‘Who,’ he says, in one of his tales, ‘after retiring from a party blazing in all the splendour of feathers, finery, dress, diamonds, gewgaws, and gaiety, has not felt the exquisite charm of the quiet repose of *home*? Who has not experienced the joy of casting off restraint, and throwing one’s self into one’s own comfortable chair by one’s own fireside, and thanking one’s stars that the trouble of pleasure is over?’ That novel, *Danvers*, has indeed many not less noticeable glimpses of his real feeling. How neatly he arranges the set on a certain great occasion:—‘Our hero and heroine, two Cabinet Ministers and their ladies, a leash of Earls, a Countess and two daughters, one English Baron, two Irish ditto, a Judge and daughter, a full General; together with a small selection of younger scions of noble stock, and a couple of established wits to entertain the company.’ Or take this from a much later one—*Passion and Principle*:—‘Between *diners-out* and the common mountebanks of the theatres, the only difference is, that the witling of the drawing-room wears not the merry-andrew’s jacket, and is paid in *vol-au-vents*, *fricandeaus*, *Silleri*, and *Lafitte*, instead of receiving the wages of tumbling in pounds, shillings, and pence.’ And was it all for this? Mo-

ralists may lecture against Pride to their hearts' content ;—but is not that vice already pretty well beaten out of the field by Vanity ?

Both in his novels throughout, and in *John Bull* (so long as he kept the theatrical article to himself), we see not less plainly than in these Diaries, a fixed and rooted aversion for the stage, and a consummate contempt for the player's profession as a school of character and manners ; an absolute physical loathing, as it were, for everything connected with the green-room, from the mouthing art of managers to the melancholy pirouettes of the ' poor plastered things with fringes to their stays, which they call petticoats.' Our ' bright *occidental* star' herself, overcoming so many proud and glorious associations, had not sickened of it more heartily ;* he had lived not only to express over and over again (as in *Gurney*) his wonder that there ever could have been a time when that world was all in all to him, but to keep himself out of it and away from it, as if there were contamination and degradation in the very smell of the lamps :—he mentions in one of his last Diaries, that he had not been twice in a playhouse during eight preceding years. But he had only passed into another world, which, as far as he was concerned, was equally a theatrical one—a sphere to which, as a habitual one, he was admitted only as a player ; and he understood this too quite as perfectly as the other—understood his own fated part in it too—rebelled in spirit against the whole affair,

* See Mrs. Fanny Kemble's *American Journal*.

when his pen was in his fingers, or a *friend* at the other side of his round table—but could not shake off the chain. Well did he understand the feelings towards him, and such as him, of his magnificent ‘Plinlimmons,’ his mysterious majestic ‘Borrowdales’—of the ‘old painted Cockatoos, whose gabble would drive any man mad in a week,’—of the duchesses—‘a tête-à-tête with whom would freeze a salamander’—‘gorgeous fillets of veal upon castors with diamond-heads to the skewers,’—and so on, *passim*. He thoroughly understood the whole; but not even when he saw most clearly and felt most painfully the cruel consequences of the delusion of fashion—not even then could he say sternly to the false Dalilah—

‘Out, out, Hyæna!—thou and I are twain;
Thy fair enchanted cup and warbling charms
No more on me have power.’

We used to consider him as labouring under another equally silly delusion, for to the last he clung to the persuasion that he was some day or other to be released from his difficulties by the patronage of his friends among the Conservatives. Of course all his well-wishers had much gratification in feeling, when certain eminent persons admitted him freely to the society of their own families in town and in country, that they had made up their minds that he was guiltless of the heavier imputations connected with the Mauritius deficit:—but the negligence remained. Nothing, in short, surprised us more in his Diaries than some entries, from which

it appeared that he had not latterly been considered as beyond the pale. It is gratefully recorded that when Sir R. Peel's first government was formed in 1834, the Earl of Jersey, Lord Chamberlain, sent immediately for Hook, and tendered him the office under that department of the household, then held by George Colman *the younger*, in case the ailing veteran could be prevailed on to resign. The office was one—perhaps the only one—which he might have received, without exposing his patrons to any disagreeable comment: their kindness was judicious—and it was fruitless. George Colman was an old friend—Hook felt it a delicate matter to communicate on an affair of this sort with him—and the government was again changed before the negotiation could be completed. Almost immediately afterwards Colman died—Mr. Charles Kemble was most fitly appointed Inspector of Plays in his room; and he again had resigned in favour of his accomplished son before Lord Melbourne's ministry was finally displaced. Their fate was announced on the 30th of August, 1841—but ere then Theodore Hook's hopes and fears were at an end. The two last entries of his Diary are as follows:—

‘ *Tuesday, June 15th.*—Sent Mrs. H. [his father's widow] 5*l.*—Lady Follett's dinner.

‘ *Sunday, June 20th.*—To-day ill—but in to dinner to Lord Harrington's to meet the Duke of Wellington. There D. and Duchess of Bedford, Lord and Lady Southampton, Lord Londonderry, Lord Canterbury, Lord Lyndhurst, Lord Redes-

‘dale, Lord Charleville, Lord Strangford, Lord
‘Stuart de Rothesay, Count D’Orsay, Lord Ches-
‘terfield, and Fitzroy Stanhope. I and Lord Can-
‘terbury* away early — so for five minutes to
‘Carlton.’

He dined out at least once after that. It was at the house of his dear and ever-helpful friend, that gallant and accomplished veteran, the late Major Shadwell Clerke, in Brompton Grove, on the 14th of July. But he did not appear until dinner was nearly over, and his appetite seemed to be entirely gone. He ate nothing but some fruit, and drank many large glasses, half brandy half champagne, in which he regularly mixed some chemical powder. He tried to be gay,—called the effervescing powder his *fizzick*, and so on—but the effort was visible. As he stood up with his coffee in his hand in the drawing-room, he suddenly turned to the mirror and said, ‘Ay, I see I look as I am—done up in purse, in mind, and in body too at last.’ He was indeed a ghastly figure. None of those then present ever saw him again.

Toward the middle of the following month he requested the Rev. G. R. Gleig—then Chaplain of Chelsea Hospital, now Chaplain General of the Army—who, though an old acquaintance, had never been in his house, to pay him a visit. Mr.

* Paying his last visit to the Speaker’s house after the fire of 1837, he was received, it seems, in an apartment which had escaped, but bore sad marks of the surrounding devastation. It was the break up of many kind and grateful associations. The Diary says, ‘I turned after leaving them and kissed the threshold. I shall be there no more.’

Gleig being known to his servant, who did not doubt that he came in his clerical capacity, he was admitted somewhat abruptly. Hook betrayed some confusion at being caught in *deshabille*—but rallied after a moment, and said, ‘Well, you see me as I am at last—all the bucklings, and paddings, and washings, and brushings, dropt for ever—a poor old grey-haired man, with my belly about my knees.’ He had latterly been much *made up*. But he was too weak for conversation; whatever of a serious sort he had meant to say remained unsaid; and he was utterly reduced before Mr. Gleig returned, as he did frequently during the brief sequel.

On Friday the 13th of August he spent many hours at his writing-desk—and retired in great exhaustion to his bed. In the opinion of his attendants the symptoms became within the next two or three days imminently alarming; and as he had made himself most sincerely beloved in his neighbourhood, there was deep and general distress all over Fulham. On hearing of his condition, the Bishop of London called, and wrote also to offer his personal ministrations in the offices of religion; but before that communication arrived the fatal delirium had declared itself. It is satisfactory to know that on his own request the prayers of the Church had been repeatedly read by his bedside, ere sense was thus fled, by his nephew Mr. Robert Hook. On the evening of the 24th, he expired apparently without pain. Indeed the friends who watched were not aware of the moment of release. He had not quite

completed his 53rd year. There had been a total disorganization of the liver and other viscera. He must have endured great physical suffering for several of his later years—of mental pain and anguish few perhaps more.

We subjoin a few detached and miscellaneous entries from the long series of his Diaries:—

‘ *Jan. 1st, 1824.*—I begin this diary under no very propitious circumstances, for I am in prison for a debt said to be due to the crown for 12,000*l.*, incurred during my treasurership at the Mauritius. I never had any of the money, and I have already suffered the heavy process of extent, already been a prisoner for ten months before this. However I shall not despair—*spero meliora*—and in the hope and belief that truth and justice will ultimately prevail, begin the year with a general forgiveness of all my enemies.

‘ *Aug. 12th.*—This is the birth day of George IV. **GOD SAVE MY DETAINING CREDITOR!**

‘ *Jan. 1st, 1825.*—Thanks to God for it, I am enabled at the commencement of another year to begin a new diary, and *that* I do before going to bed, because it was always a custom with my excellent father to sit up until the first hour of a new year. I follow his example in this respect, although I fear I should find it difficult to follow all the examples he set me in his blameless and irreproachable life. I merely register the commencement of 1825, and lest I should not be permitted by Providence to rise again in the morning, regis-

‘ter here, as I love to do, a general forgiveness of
 ‘all my enemies, persecutors, and slanderers. I
 ‘never injured any human being deliberately,
 ‘although I may have done so inadvertently; and
 ‘as for those who have injured, and are even now
 ‘labouring to injure me, I do solemnly declare,
 ‘before my Maker, that I most freely pardon them,
 ‘as far as my pardon can avail them, if they have
 ‘assailed me willingly and unjustly.

‘*Sept. 22nd, 1831.*—My birthday—why to be
 ‘kept joyously I know not, and yet I thank God
 ‘humbly and heartily for all the blessings he has
 ‘been pleased to vouchsafe to me and those whom I
 ‘scarcely dare call mine.

‘*Oct. 9th, 1835.*—To-day to work in various
 ‘ways. I am anxious and unhappy; but God, who
 ‘knows my heart, and to whom I devoutly pray,
 ‘not for myself but for others who are, as they are
 ‘concerned, innocent children of mine—well, that
 ‘sounds presumptuous—but I have faith in his good-
 ‘ness, and sinner as I am—I do hope that he will
 ‘preserve me for their sakes. . . . To-day caught
 ‘the white sparrow I had long wished to catch, per-
 ‘haps typical of success.

‘*Jan. 1st, 1836.*—I begin this year ill, both
 ‘bodily and mentally, and have not improved my
 ‘health in either particularly by looking over heaps
 ‘and bundles of bills and—thank God so far—of
 ‘receipts, which afford the most incontestable evi-
 ‘dence of my carelessness and improvidence. How-
 ‘ever, I have done and will do right and justice to

‘ everybody in my worldly transactions, and set out
‘ upon a new journey of twelvemonths with a prayer
‘ to God for his mercy and assistance, and with a
‘ very strong presentiment that I shall not live to
‘ complete the circle.

‘ *Jan. 19th, 1837.*—Another dreadful, miserable, dark, and dreary day. Letter from my sister-in-law—she praises my industry, and pities my poverty. My poverty is painful, not on my own account, but on that of others; and because though I have, through God’s goodness, been most fortunate in my literary undertakings, I have uselessly wasted not only money to a great extent in useless things, but have also wasted the time which would have reimbursed me. It is never too late to mend; and I now work night and day, and only wonder, when I look back, that I should have been so foolish as to waste the prime of life in foolish idleness.

‘ *Aug. 23rd, 1838.*—To-day not into town, but forcing myself against my inclination to write. A man who has been hurried into signing a paper, like that I signed last night, in the worry of other pressing business, by which I admit a debt of 800*l.* which I do not owe—is not in the humour to write fiction. F. Broderip cautioned me to sign nothing without him, and I have signed this. The reflection that at forty-nine years of age, and with what everybody calls a knowledge of the world and human nature, I should have permitted myself to be harassed into doing what even at the moment

‘ I knew was not just or right to myself, does not
 ‘ diminish the sinking agitation which weighs me
 ‘ down, and I verily believe will kill me.

‘ *Sept. 6th.*—To-day invited by Sir Edward Sug-
 ‘ den to meet Lord Granville Somerset, De Ros,
 ‘ Croker, and others agreeable—but said no. In
 ‘ fact I am not well enough to go to town—but gave
 ‘ Hill his choice of this evening or to-morrow to
 ‘ come down to me. How little people think of the
 ‘ griefs and sorrows of those of whom they only hear
 ‘ in public, and then not always favourably !

‘ *Sept. 8th.*—To-day the old faintness and sick-
 ‘ ness of heart came over me, and I could not go
 ‘ out—No—it is only as I believe into the grave
 ‘ that I am to go, whither I must be carried. If my
 ‘ poor children were safe I should not care. God
 ‘ *bless* and help *them*. I cannot do the latter as I
 ‘ wish.

‘ *Jan. 1st, 1839.*—I never began a year with less
 ‘ shining prospects, yet I trust in God who, through
 ‘ all my follies, vanities, and indiscretions, knows
 ‘ that my heart is right and my intentions just. To
 ‘ Him I look with confidence for help, not for my
 ‘ own sake, but for those unoffending dear ones who
 ‘ have been brought into the world by my means. I
 ‘ will not despair then, but look forward with hope,
 ‘ and perhaps the clouds which hang over the dawn
 ‘ of 1839 may, by the blessing of Providence, clear
 ‘ away by its noon ————— Still hoping
 ‘ at fifty !!!

‘ *Jan. 1st, 1840.*—To-day another year opens

‘ upon me with a vast load of debt and many
‘ encumbrances. I am suffering under constant
‘ anxiety and depression of spirits, which nobody
‘ who sees me in society dreams of: but why should
‘ I suffer my own private worries to annoy my
‘ friends?’

We might give many more entries of the like character. These Journals abound in tokens of what many have been prepared to hear of as an element in Hook’s composition—a deep and strong vein of superstitious feeling. The white-sparrow omen does not stand alone. He seems to have believed in signs and portents to an extent which we do not choose to exemplify here on such an occasion. In dreams his faith was, apparently, not to be disturbed. It will not surprise so many to be told that he was a great speculator in lotteries. As long as they lasted he regularly spent a good deal of money in the purchase of tickets—being influenced in the selection of the numbers by very curious and fantastical analogies.

He was buried in Fulham churchyard, in the presence of a very few mourners—none of them of rank or known to fame. His executors found that he had died very deeply in debt. His books and other effects produced 2500*l.*, which sum was of course surrendered to the Crown as the privileged creditor. There was some hope that the Lords of the Treasury might grant a gift of this, or some part of it, to the five children, who were left wholly unprovided for—(one, the eldest of his two boys, had

a year before gone to India with a cadetship, bestowed by the kindness of Mr. Marjoribanks);—but this expectation was disappointed. A subscription was by and by opened at Messrs. Ransom's. The executors (Mr. Powell and his partner Mr. Francis Broderip), and two or three other old friends in middle life, headed it by very liberal sums—100*l.* each; but few, very few, of those who had either profited as politicians by Theodore Hook's zeal and ability, or courted him in their lofty circles for the fascination of his wit, were found to show any feeling for his unfortunate offspring. We must mention one very generous exception—His Majesty the King of Hanover, the instant he understood the circumstances, transmitted 500*l.* Two members of Mr. Hook's own family came forward also in a manner worthy of their high characters, to an extent, we believe, not altogether convenient for their means. But still, down to this hour (March, 1843), the result is trifling—wholly inadequate to the necessities of the afflicting case.

Such was the end of this extraordinary man's often brilliant, but seldom, we should think, happy existence in this world. In natural gifts he was perhaps inferior to very few of his contemporaries. His countenance was open and engaging—his figure tall and well-knit—his constitution vigorous—his temper sweet—his heart warm. He was humane, charitable, generous. We do not believe that his wit ever lost him a friend; and there was that about him which made it hard to be often in his society without re-

garding him with as much of fondness as of admiration. That he was viewed with painful compassion also by those who at all penetrated the secrets of his life, will now be readily believed.

His career, throughout its most sparkling period, must have been beset with manifold anxieties. As a Public Journalist, he must often, when one considers his social connexions, have had a very difficult course to steer. It was plain-sailing in the days of the Queen or the Reform Bill, or when the Whigs were in power ; but far different at various other seasons during the career of his Bull. In reference to the Roman Catholic Question, for example, his personal relations must have occasioned many a painful hitch. But on that head he never swerved at all—and as to most of the other great and grave questions on which different Conservatives avowed or betrayed opposite leanings, he must be allowed to have conducted his paper with a very uncommon combination of sense, tact, firmness, and suavity. His own strong predilections for the older school of Toryism were never concealed ; but he was not unaware that all political theories must be considered by those who have the responsibility of action under aspects not contemplated by the mere student of the closet. His temperate tone of management, in respect of doctrines and men, secured for him a species of influence, during not a few memorable years, most entirely unlike what had been dreamt of in the young days of *John Bull*. Even the gravest of his party became steady patrons of the print : while

with 'men about town' it had, nearly to the last, a vogue almost exclusively its own, from the accurate acquaintance with the talk of the club-houses, which peeped out continually in allusions, phrases, epithets, that were, as they were meant to be, caviare to the million. In what is called 'the public press' of this country he vacated a place that is not likely to be filled again in the time of his surviving admirers.

His name will be preserved. His political songs and *jeux d'esprit*, when the hour comes for collecting them, will form a volume of sterling and lasting attraction; and after many clever romances of this age shall have sufficiently occupied public attention, and sunk, like hundreds of former generations, into utter oblivion, there are tales in his collection which will be read with, we venture to think, even a greater interest than they commanded in their novelty. We are not blind to his defects. The greatest and the most prevailing blemish is traceable to his early habits as a farce-writer: he too often reminds us of that department of the theatre, both in the flagrancy of his contrasts in character, and the extravagant overcharging of particular incidents. He is tempted to pile absurdity on absurdity till all credibility is destroyed—and if it were not for the easy richness of his language, ever pregnant with byeplay, the *incredulus* would toss the volume down with *odi*. We may instance the reception of the King by the Marquis of Snowdon—that great lord's adventures in the Richmond Omnibus—the arrival of the old East Indian's menagerie at Mr. Danvers's cottage:

—in these, and in many other cases, admirable conceptions are all but smothered amidst the overcrowdings of an inebriated fancy; and it is difficult for the reader who has seen Liston, and Mathews, and Bannister, to doubt that when the vision first took shape he had in his mind the peculiar resources of one or other of these familiar *graciosos*. His defects are great; but Theodore Hook is, we apprehend, the only male novelist of this time, except Mr. Dickens, who has drawn portraits of contemporary English society destined for permanent existence.* A selection from his too numerous volumes will go down with Miss Edgeworth and Miss Austin. His best works are not to be compared with theirs, either for skilful compactness of fable or general elegance of finish. His pace was too fast for that. But he is never to be confounded for a moment either with their clumsier and weaker followers, or with the still more tedious imitators of their only modern superior. He understood London thoroughly, with all the tributary provinces within reach either of St. Peter's bell or St. Paul's. The man of that world was known to him *intus et in cute*, and its woman also, or at least not a few of the most interesting, amusing, and absurd varieties of its woman-kind. Strong, terrible, sinful, and fatal passions were not beyond his sphere—witness especially *Cousin William*; but his serious power is more usually revealed in brief

* This was written long before Mr. Thackeray made a full revelation of his talents in *Vanity Fair*. (1852.)

pauses of commentary on the tragic results of trivial machinery. He is to the upper and middle life of that region, what Dickens alone is to its low life—a true authentic expositor; but in manner he is entirely original, and can be likened to no one. In the exuberance of exulting glee with which he elaborates detached scenes of pretension, affectation, the monomanias of idiosyncrasy, he has had no parallel since Smollett and Foote; and he perhaps leaves even them behind him in the magical felicity of phrase with which he brings out the ludicrous picturesque. Like all other first-rate humourists, he betrays everywhere the substratum of solid sagacity; and like them all, except Swift, he is genial. He comprehends human nature, and no one makes better sport with it; but it is never doubtful that he loved his kind, and contemplated the follies of others with a consciousness of his own frailty. That with such an education, and such an external course of life, he should have left so little to be complained of in the morality of his fictitious narratives, seemed to us one of the least intelligible things in the history of literature, until these careless diaries—for we never saw any that could be less supposed to have been written with any view to inspection—withdrew in part the veil under which the natural shyness of genius and the jealousy of conscience had concealed very much of the man from many who thought they understood him.

We have already expressed our opinion, however, that Theodore Hook's ability in conversation was

above what he ever exemplified in his writings. We have seen him in company with very many of the most eminent men of his time; and we never, until he was near his end, carried home with us the impression that he had been surpassed.* He was as entirely, as any parent of *bon-mots* that we have known, above the suspicion of having premeditated his point; and he excelled in a greater variety of ways than any of them. No definition either of wit or humour could have been framed that must not have included him; and he often conveyed what was at once felt to be the truest wit in forms, as we believe, entirely new. He could run riot in conundrums—but what seemed at first mere jingle, was often perceived, a moment after, to contain some allusion or insinuation that elevated the vehicle. Memory and knack may suffice to furnish out an amusing narrator; but the teller of good stories seldom amuses long if he cannot also say good things. Hook shone equally in both. In fact he could not tell any story without making it his own by the ever-varying, inexhaustible invention of the details and the aspects, and above all, by the tact that never failed to connect it with the persons, the

* The allusion in the text was to the only two occasions when he sat at meat with the Reverend Sydney Smith—since also lost to us. Political prejudice had kept them apart, though they had always had many friends in common. Towards Theodore's end the late amiable Lady Stepney hazarded the experiment of inviting to the same small dinner-party. They were both delightful, and mutually delighted; but the palm rested with Sydney. Soon after, Sir Roderick Murchison brought them together again at a somewhat larger party; but Theodore had in the interim declined still further. By that time he could drink nothing but brandy, and the effect was too visible. (1852.)

incidents, the topics of the evening. Nothing was with him a patch—all was made to assert somehow its coherence with what had gone before, or was passing. His play of feature, the compass and music of his voice, his large and brilliant eye, capable of every expression from the gravest to the most grotesquely comical, the quiet aptness of every attitude and gesture, his power of mimicry, unrivalled but by Mathews—when to all this we add the constant effect of his innate, imperturbable good humour—the utter absence of spleen—and ever and anon some flash of strong sterling sense, bursting through such an atmosphere of fun and drollery—we still feel how inadequately we attempt to describe the indescribable. The charm was that it was all Nature, spontaneous as water from the rock. No wonder that he should have been courted as he was: but the most honourable part is, that he was, far from assentation. There was sad weakness in allowing himself to be hunted out for the amusement of others, at such a heavy sacrifice of time and health and ultimate peace of mind: but once in society, of whatever class, he showed no shabby weakness of any sort. He had undoubtedly a degree of respect for mere rank and worldly splendour, which savoured of his humble origin and early associations; but his abstinence from all the arts of meanness was the more remarkable and creditable, for being shown in the midst of a superstition that otherwise brought much damage to him. Well says *The Rambler*—‘It is dangerous for mean minds



to venture themselves within the sphere of greatness. Few can be assiduous without servility, and none can be servile without corruption.' He was never servile. Those who did not know with what pertinacity he was sought, might speak of him as a tuft-hunter—but neither ignorance nor envy ever presumed to class him with toad-eaters.

We have not endeavoured to conceal or even palliate his errors. To do so, even in the slightest biographical sketch, seems to us most culpable. We believe we have by our—however rapid—retrospect both afforded evidence of good feelings and good principles, preserved and cherished where they had been commonly supposed to be obliterated, and recalled many forgotten circumstances which must be considered as likely to operate powerfully and permanently on the development of any character, however originally amiable and upright. The example of such talents, exerted so much to the delight of others, so little to their possessor's profit—of a career so chequered by indiscretion and so darkly closed at a period so untimely—ought not, at all events, to be destitute of instructiveness. May it have its effect with those who knew Theodore Hook only afar off. We are not afraid that any of his real friends will suspect us of regarding his memory without tenderness, because we have discharged our duty by telling what we believed to be the truth.



