

HUMOROUS POEMS

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Humorous poems by Thomas Hood

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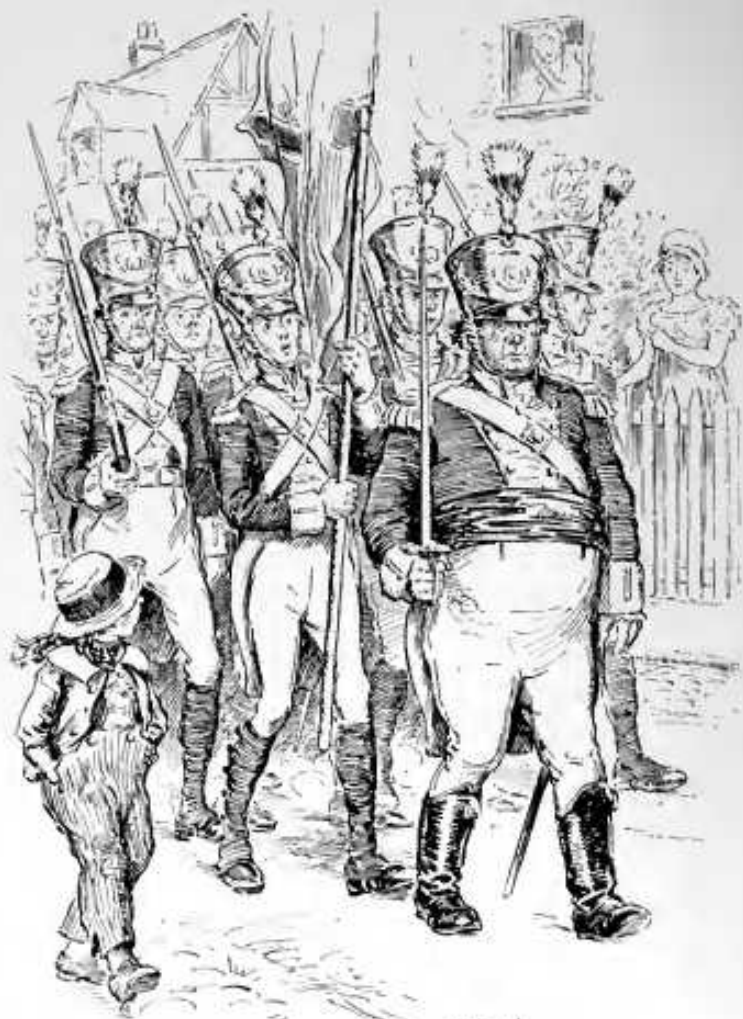
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THOMAS HOOD

**HUMOROUS
POEMS**



'Marched as mourners march.'

HUMOROUS POEMS

BY

THOMAS HOOD

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1893
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WITH A PREFACE BY
ALFRED AINGER

AND ONE HUNDRED AND THIRTY ILLUSTRATIONS

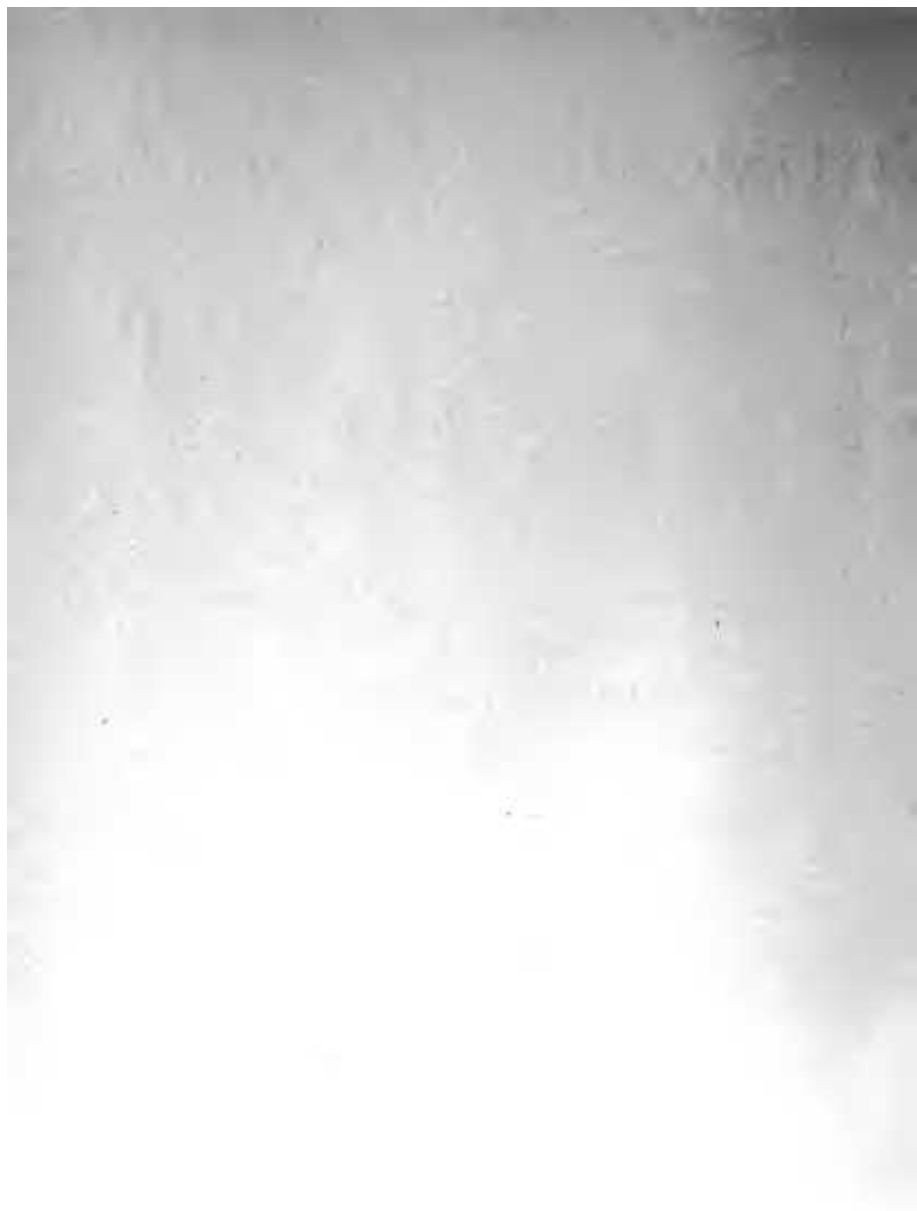
BY

CHARLES E. BROCK

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1893

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SOME time in the year 1825 there was published in London a thin duodecimo volume having for title Odes and Addresses to Great People. It bore no author's name on the title-page,—only a quotation from the Citizen of the World, "Catching all the oddities, the whimsies, the absurdities and the little-nesses of conscious greatness by the way." The little book proved, on examination, to contain some fifteen humorous poems addressed to various public characters of greater or less claim to distinction at that day. There was one to Mr. Graham, the aeronaut; another to Mr. Adam, the maker of roads; another to Mrs. Fry, the Quaker philanthropist; another to Grimaldi, the clown, and so forth. An acute critic might, even then, I think, have detected not only that these fresh and amusing productions were of unequal

merit, but that they were not all by the same hand. But he would, most assuredly, have allowed that wit and ingenuity of a rare kind were to be found among them.

The little volume quickly attracted attention, and was soon in a second edition. Among those into whose hands it fell was Samuel Taylor Coleridge, then residing under Mr. Gillman's roof at Highgate. His delight was great; and in the absence of any information as to the authorship, he at once assumed that such mingled fun and poetry could have emanated from but one living man—and that, the author of Elia. Accordingly Coleridge wrote off at once to Charles Lamb:—

MY DEAR CHARLES—This afternoon a little thin mean-looking sort of a foolscap sub-octavo of poems, printed on very dingy outsides, lay on the table, which the cover informed me was circulating in our book-club, so very Grub Streetish in all its appearance, internal as well as external, that I cannot explain by what accident of impulse (assuredly there was no motive in play) I came to look into it. Least of all the title, Odes and Addresses to Great Men, which connected itself in my head with Rejected Addresses, and all the Smith and Theodore Hook squad. But, my dear Charles, it was certainly written by you, or under you, or unâ cum you. I know none of your frequent visitors, capacious and assimilative enough of your converse, to have reproduced you so honestly, supposing

you had left yourself in pledge in his lock-up house. Gillman, to whom I read the spirited parody on the Introduction to Peter Bell, the Ode to the Great Unknown, and to Mrs. Fry—he speaks doubtfully of Reynolds and Hood. . . .

Thursday night, 10 o'clock—No! Charles, it is you! I have read them over again, and I understand why you have anoned the book. The puns are nine in ten good—many excellent,—the Newgatory, transcendent! And then the exemplum sine exemplo of a volume of personalities and contemporaneities without a single line that could inflict the infinitesimal of an unpleasance on any man in his senses—saving and except, perhaps, in the envy-addled brain of the despiser of your Lays. If not a triumph over him, it is, at least, an Ovation. Then moreover and besides (to speak with becoming modesty), excepting my own self, who is there but you who could write the musical lines and stanzas that are intermixed?

Lamb writes back on the second of July from Colebrooke Row, Islington, and after telling Coleridge of his own recent illness and the weariness of being without occupation—he had just retired from the India House—he proceeds:—

The Odes are, four-fifths, done by Hood—a silentish young man you met at Islington one day, an invalid. The rest are Reynolds's, whose sister Hood has lately married. I have not had a broken finger in them. . . . Hood will be gratified, as much as I am, by your mistake.

And Lamb is able to add at the close of his

letter: "Hood has just come in; his sick eyes sparkled with health when he read your approbation."

The "silentish young man—an invalid" was then just six-and-twenty years of age. He had been forced to abandon, for health's sake, the engraver's desk to which he had been bound; had become in 1821 sub-editor of the London Magazine, and in that service, and at the hospitable table of the publishers, Taylor and Hessey, had both practised his poetic gift and made the most valuable and inspiring friendships of his life,—with Hazlitt, De Quincey, Hartley Coleridge, and, above all, in Hood's affection and admiration, Charles Lamb, then just beginning to contribute his essays to the magazine. One greater genius than any in the list it was not given to Hood to know in the flesh. John Keats had closed his brief life of suffering at Rome in the February of the year in which Hood joined the staff. But it was under the spell of that poetic genius that Hood began his career as poet. Among the friends he owed to the magazine was John Hamilton Reynolds, his future brother-in-law. Reynolds had been one of Keats's closest friends, and himself wrote verse of considerable merit, bearing strong marks of the Keatsian influence. Hood