

The present race of golfers are among the most equable-tempered and well-poised of mortals. Watch them at their play, and you cannot but be struck with the sedate way in which they go about it. Mental absorption, concentration of the whole physique, intent study of each shot, and a strained following of the flight and fall of the ball—these are the main things that impress the observer, and they are totally inconsistent with the intermittent explosions of ungovernable anger which he may have been led to expect. The devotees of the links exhibit frequent gleams of jollity. They have their jokes with each other, their side remarks, their mock praise, their acid comment—all between intimates, and never violating the etiquette of the game—and a part of their fun is melodramatic posing and violent outcries, when calamity overtakes them, as if despair had seized them for its own. This may mislead the bystander, but the others know that it is only feigning.

Compelled to admit this fact, some persons, steeped in the beloved tradition of the wrathful golfer, put a wrong interpretation upon it. They say that golfers are becoming better tempered. If the Commnatory Service is not so often read on the links as it used to be, it is because men have grown ashamed of their senseless objurgations. They are convicted of sin by quiet and well-behaved companions, or, possibly, by the presence of ladies on the green or on the club-house piazza, and set about mending their manners. Their patience becomes schooled by the discipline of the game itself, and they are less prone than before to let the sun go down upon the links and their wrath at the same time. Now, we are reluctant even to appear to take anything away from the moral glories of golf, and should be only too happy if we could make out the game to be the nursing-mother of all the virtues; but we fear the ugly fact is otherwise. It is not moral striving, but the endless struggle for excellence in the game, that leads the earnest golfer to avoid tempestuous and unseemly raging.

It is a question rather of psychophysics than of morals. The acutest analysis of golf shows it to differ from all other games in the degree of fixed attention it requires at the moment of the stroke. There is no reflex action to help the player. The game never becomes

automatic. The impulse, the initiative, the summoning up of the whole man, have constantly to be under the golfer's control, and he speedily discovers that he cannot get on without a nice nervous poise. He learns that the most trifling external accidents—a temporary indigestion, loss of sleep, business worry—will put him off his game mysteriously, and he is not fool enough to add anything in the way of internal excitement, if he can help it. An oath a hole is almost like giving his opponent a stroke a hole. Hence, the self-restraint and heroic calmness under misfortune which he displays, are only proofs that he is trying to play the game well. It is not a moral scruple that holds him in. If swearing more terribly than the army in Flanders would cut his handicap, the air would be blue about him; but he is well aware that madness lies that way, as well as strokes over bogey. The choice of clubs is not more important than the cultivation of an equal mind. Greater is he that ruleth his spirit, and maketh a fine recovery, than he who taketh a city, or captureth the gallery, by a brilliant drive. Ebullitions of rage mean not only bad taste, but a bad score. Herein lies the explanation of the fact that so many good golfers seem to have steeled themselves to the mischances of their favorite sport, and to have taken as their motto: *Sævis tranquillus in undis*, which may be translated, "Don't get mad even if you drive into a water hazard."

A WORD FOR AUTUMN.

St. Nicholas for September prints a number of brief essays by boys and girls, written in a prize competition, upon the theme, "My Favorite Season—and Why." Their excellence consists in their spontaneity and in their natural, unsophisticated analysis of their delight in the out-of-doors life. The contributions are none the worse that they betray no inkling of a reminiscence of Thomson's "Seasons." But among those deemed worthy of the prizes there is none, if we except one, that sings the glories of Indian summer, which betrays a partiality for autumn. This predilection for one of the other three seasons is characteristic not alone of children, but of their elders.

Autumn is unquestionably the least spectacular season. Spring appeals to

the sense of novelty, to the expectation of release from confinement, to the pleasures of hope. With women, it is almost universally the favorite. To them the earth's "divine renewal" has a symbolical meaning which "mere man" cannot wholly perceive. If, in the spring, the young man's fancy proverbially turns to thoughts of love, it turns thereto "lightly," almost casually, and not improbably because the young man has a touch of spring fever. To the athletic temperament, summer is alluring. The sense of untrammelled freedom in the out-of-doors, the escape from school tasks, the vacation from business, or the unalloyed delight in sport and exercise find in summer their fittest opportunity. On the other hand, winter has a double claim. The æsthetic charm of snow and ice, with their zestful sports, tells in its favor. Winter, moreover, carries for the children the lure of Yuletide festivities, and for their elders the pleasant sense of shut-in isolation and family solidarity peculiar to the open hearth.

But it must not be forgotten that each season has the defects of its qualities. Spring, especially the early spring, is *varium et mutabile semper*. Then you can never tell what a day may bring forth. The one thing certain is that it is dangerous to let the fire in the furnace go out. Neither the ground nor the temperature affords occasion for the hardy sports of winter, nor the vigorous out-of-doors existence that summer brings. The illness that mortal flesh is heir to is always lurking about the turn of the year, and every schoolmaster will bear witness that childhood's epidemics usually cluster around the traditional spring vacation. The joys of summer are often purchased at a heavy cost. The conscious effort after bodily comfort is incessant. To speak of heat and humidity and dust is superfluous; but every one has sympathized with Sidney Smith, who "found there was nothing left for it but to take off my flesh and sit in my bones." But the discomforts of wintertime are worse. Then, if ever, one agrees with Mr. Squeers in his verdict that "natur' is a rum 'un." The white veil of snow which has so often been idealized means weeks of slush. The wizard architecture of Jack Frost means frozen water pipes and plumbers' bills, not to mention the colds

and coughs and influenza that hold revel.

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

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

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

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

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

THOMAS HOOD.

I.

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

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

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

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

The serious character of the generality of the stories [he says in his preface], is a deviation from my former attempts, and I have received advice enough, on that account, to make me present them with some misgiving. But because I have jested elsewhere, it does not follow that I am incompetent for gravity, of which any owl is capable; or proof against melancholy, which besets even the ass. Those who can be touched by neither of these moods rank lower

indeed than both of these creatures. It is from none of the player's ambition, which has led the buffoon by a rash step into the tragic buskin, that I assume the sadder humor, but because I know from certain passages that such affections are not foreign to my nature. During my short lifetime, I have often been as "sad as night," and not like the young gentlemen of France, merely from wantonness. It is the contrast of such leaden and golden fits that lends a double relish to our days.

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

II.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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