

THOMAS HOOD

1799 - 1845

1. The Child and Schoolboy

Thomas Hood was born in London, within the sound of Bow Bells, on 23rd May 1799. A 'blue plaque' on the wall of what was once the site of number 31 The Poultry, now commemorates the event. His father had come south from Dundee to join the London publisher, Vernor, whose partner he was to become in due course. When Thomas was still a child, the family moved out to Islington, then a tranquil rural village on the outskirts of the City. He was described by one of his father's friends as a 'singular child, silent and retired, with much quiet humours and apparently delicate in health.'

In spite of his Scottish ancestry, Hood was always proud to be a Londoner:

Next to being a citizen of the world, it must be the best thing to be born a citizen of the world's greatest city...a literary man should exult rather than otherwise that he first saw the light -- or perhaps the fog -- in the same metropolis as Milton, Gray, De Foe, Pope, Byron, Lamb and other town-born authors...

From an early age Hood enjoyed playing practical jokes. He had a special ability for turning sadness into laughter. The only person he ever frightened with a practical joke was himself, when, as a boy, he traced a diabolical face on the ceiling of the passage outside his bedroom, to frighten his brother as he came to bed. Forgetting his joke, and coming to bed early by mistake, he was so terrified by the phantom of his own making that he fled down the stairs in his nightshirt and burst into the drawing-room, crowded with his father's guests. Forty years later, his childish fears were immortalised in a fine descriptive poem entitled *The Haunted House*:

*Such omens in the place there seemed to be,
At every crooked turn, or on the landing,
The straining eyeball was prepared to see
Some Apparition standing.*

*For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted,
And said, as plain as whisper in the ear,
The place is Haunted!*