

Classic Poetry Series

Henry Sambrooke Leigh
- poems -

Publication Date:
2012

Publisher:
Poemhunter.com - The World's Poetry Archive

Henry Sambrooke Leigh(29 March 1837-1883)

Henry Sambrooke Leigh was a writer and playwright.

Life

Leigh, son of James Mathews Leigh, was born in London on 29 March 1837. At an early age he engaged in literary pursuits. From time to time appeared collections of his lyrics, under the titles of 'Carols of Cockayne', 1869 (several editions); 'Gillott and Goosequill', 1871; 'A Town Garland. A Collection of Lyrics', 1878; and 'Strains from the Strand. Trifles in Verse', 1882. His verse was always fluent, but otherwise of very slender merit.

For the stage he translated many French comic operas. His first theatrical essay was in collaboration with Charles Millward in a musical spectacle for the Theatre Royal in Birmingham. His 'Falsacappa,' music by Offenbach, was produced at the Globe Theatre on 22 April 1871; 'Le Roi Carotte' at the Alhambra on 3 June 1872; 'Bridge of Sighs,' opera-bouffe, at the St. James's, 18 Nov. 1872; 'White Cat,' a fairy spectacle, at the Queen's, Long Acre, on 2 Dec. 1875; 'Voyage dans la Lune,' opera-bouffe, at the Alhambra, on 15 April 1876; 'Fatinitza,' opera-bouffe (the words were printed), adapted from the German, at the Alhambra on 20 June 1878; 'The Great Casimir,' a vaudeville, at the Gaiety, on 27 Sept. 1879; 'Cinderella,' an opera, with music by J. Farmer, at St. James's Hall, on 2 May 1884 (the words were published in 1882); 'The Brigands,' by H. Meilhac and L. Halévy, adapted to English words by Leigh, was printed in 1884. For 'Lurette,' a comic opera, Avenue, 24 March 1883, he wrote the lyrics; and with Robert Reece he produced 'La Petite Mademoiselle,' comic opera, Alhambra, on 6 October 1879. He edited 'Jeux d'Esprit written and spoken by French and English Wits and Humorists,' in 1877, and wrote Mark Twain's 'Nightmares' in 1878.

His last theatrical venture—a complete failure—was 'The Prince Methusalem,' a comic opera, brought out at the Folies Dramatiques (now the Kingsway), Great Queen Street, London, on 19 May 1883. He was a Spanish, Portuguese, and French scholar, a brilliant and witty conversationalist, and a humorous singer.

He died in his rooms in Lowther's private hotel, 35 Strand, London, on 16 June 1883, and was buried in Brompton cemetery on 22 June.

A Scientific Drinking Song

Go, bring me the goblet that maddens my soul:
Where the sulphate of copper lurks deep in the bowl;
Where the saccharine matter tastes richly intense,
And the brain-turning alcohol threatens the sense.
Deleterious acids, I laugh ye to scorn,
For one alkali kills ye, when taken at morn;
And I know that a towel tied wet round my brow,
May demolish the headache that hangs o'er me now.

No matter what vintage—no matter what name—
To the brave Bacchanalian all wines are the same:
For the best of Champagne and the mildest of Cape
Are alike manufactured from juice of the grape.

What matters it whether the North or the South
May have yielded its blood for the epicure's mouth?
What matters it whether the East or the West
May have sent the rich fluid that gladdens this breast?

Amidst Burgundy's hills or the plains of Bordeaux
May the national fruit long continue to grow.
May the art of fermenting improve day by day,
And the vatting take place in its usual way.
And, oh! may the heads of our State persevere
In their efforts to crush the rude stimulant, Beer,
By providing Great Britain the means to import
A superior claret at ninepence a quart!

Henry Sambrooke Leigh

Cod-Liver Oil

ON the bleak shore of Norway, I've lately been told,
Large numbers of cod-fish are found,
And the animals' livers are afterwards sold
At so many "pfennigs" per pound;
From which is extracted, with infinite toil,
A villainous fluid called cod-liver oil!

Now, I don't mind a powder, a pill, or a draught—
Though I mingle the former with jam—
And many's the mixture I've cheerfully quaff'd,
And the pill I have gulp'd like a lamb.
But then I envelop my pills in tin-foil,
And I can't do the same with my cod-liver oil!

In the course of my lifetime I've swallow'd enough
To have floated a ship of the line,
And it's purely the fault of this horrible stuff
That I've ceased to enjoy ginger wine.
For how can you wonder to see me recoil
From a liquor I mix'd with my cod-liver oil?

There are few deeds of daring from which I should quail—
There are few things I'd tremble to do—
But there 's one kind of tonic that makes me turn pale,
And quite spoils my appetite, too;
But, you see, just at present, I've got none to spoil—
So I don't mind alluding to cod-liver oil!

Henry Sambrooke Leigh

My After-Dinner Cloud

Some sombre evening, when I sit
And feed in solitude at home,
Perchance an ultra-bilious fit
Paints all the world an orange chrome.

When Fear and Care and grim Despair
Flock round me in a ghostly crowd,
One charm dispels them all in air,—
I blow my after-dinner cloud.

'Tis melancholy to devour
The gentle chop in loneliness.
I look on six—my prandial hour—
With dread not easy to express.

And yet for every penance done,
Due compensation seems allow'd.
My penance o'er, its price is won,—
I blow my after-dinner cloud.

My clay is not a Henry Clay,—
I like it better on the whole;
And when I fill it, I can say,
I drown my sorrows in the bowl.

For most I love my lowly pipe
When weary, sad, and leaden-brow'd;
At such a time behold me ripe
To blow my after-dinner cloud.

As gracefully the smoke ascends
In columns from the weed beneath,
My friendly wizard, Fancy, lends
A vivid shape to every wreath.

Strange memories of life or death
Up from the cradle to the shroud,
Come forth as, with enchanter's breath,
I blow my after-dinner cloud.

What wonder if it stills my care
To quit the present for the past,
And summon back the things that were,
Which only thus in vapor last?

What wonder if I envy not
The rich, the giddy, and the proud,
Contented in this quiet spot
To blow my after-dinner cloud?

Henry Sambrooke Leigh

My Three Loves

When Life was all a summer day,
And I was under twenty,
Three loves were scattered in my way—
And three at once are plenty.
Three hearts, if offered with a grace,
One thinks not of refusing;
The task in this especial case
Was only that of choosing.
I knew not which to make my pet,—
My pipe, cigar, or cigarette.

To cheer my night or glad my day
My pipe was ever willing;
The meerschaum or the lowly clay
Alike repaid the filling.
Grown men delight in blowing clouds,
As boys in blowing bubbles,
Our cares to puff away in crowds
And vanish all our troubles.
My pipe I nearly made my pet,
Above cigar or cigarette.

A tiny paper, tightly rolled
About some Latakia,
Contains within its magic fold
A mighty panacea.
Some thought of sorrow or of strife
At ev'ry whiff will vanish;
And all the scenery of life
Turn picturesquely Spanish.
But still I could not quite forget
Cigar and pipe for cigarette.

To yield an after-dinner puff
O'er demi-tasse and brandy,
No cigarettes are strong enough,
No pipes are ever handy.
However fine may be the feed,
It only moves my laughter

Unless a dry delicious weed
Appears a little after.
A prime cigar I firmly set
Above a pipe or cigarette.

But after all I try in vain
To fetter my opinion;
Since each upon my giddy brain
Has boasted a dominion.
Comparisons I'll not provoke,
Lest all should be offended.
Let this discussion end in smoke
As many more have ended.
And each I'll make a special pet;
My pipe, cigar, and cigarette.

Henry Sambrooke Leigh

On Corpulence

THE town's in a panic, from peer to mechanic,
 Since Banting has issued his Tract
 for the Times;
That queer publication made such a
 sensation,
 That corpulence now seems the greatest of crimes.
Folks fancy good feeding a proof of ill breeding,
 And stick to low diet through thick and through thin,
Till they find that their best coats, and trousers, and waistcoats,
 Are perfectly "done for," if not "taken in."

Each day it grows harder to find a good larder.
 And lean diners-out will, of course, suffer most;
For those who are thinnish won't care to diminish
 What little they 've got for the sake of the host.
But the House of Correction will grant them protection,
 (Supposing Society starves them outright,)
Where pickers and stealers and such evil dealers
 Are feasted like aldermen morning and night.
Sincerely I pity our friends in the City,
 And Mansion-House banquets cut short in their prime,
Where, 'mid roses and myrtle, the love of mock-turtle
 "Now melts into sorrow, now maddens to crime."
If I were a sheriff, I 'd never be terrified
 Into adopting this Barmecide tone;
For I 'd throw up my station in their corporation
 Before they induced me to part with my own!

If you wish to grow thinner, diminish your dinner,
 And take to light claret instead of pale ale;
Look down with an utter contempt upon butter,
 And never touch bread till it's toasted—or stale.
You must sacrifice gaily six hours or so daily
 To muscular exercise, outdoor and in;
While a very small number devoted to slumber
 Will make a man healthy, and wealthy, and thin!

Henry Sambrooke Leigh

Rhymes?

My life - to Discontent a prey -
Is in the sere and yellow leaf.
'Tis vain for happiness to pray:
No solace brings my heart relief.
My pulse is weak, my spirit low;
I cannot think, I cannot write.
I strive to spin a verse - but lo!
My rhymes are very rarely right.

I sit within my lowly cell,
And strive to court the comic Muse;
But how can Poesy excel,
With such a row from yonder mews?
In accents passionately high
The carter chides the stubborn horse;
And shouts a 'Gee!' or yells a 'Hi!'
In tones objectionably hoarse.

In vain for Poesy I wait;
No comic Muse my call obeys.
My brains are loaded with a weight
That mocks the laurels and the bays.
I wish my brains could only be
Inspired with industry anew;
And labour like the busy bee,
In strains no Genius ever knew.

Although I strive with all my might,
Alas, my efforts all are vain!
I've no afflatus - not a mite;
I cannot work the comic vein.
The Tragic Muse may hear my pleas,
And waft me to a purer clime.
Melpomene! assist me, please,
To somewhat higher heights to climb.

Henry Sambrooke Leigh

The Twins

In form and feature, face and limb,
I grew so like my brother,
That folks got taking me for him,
And each for one another.
It puzzled all our kith and kin,
It reached a fearful pitch;
For one of us was born a twin,
Yet not a soul knew which.

One day, to make the matter worse,
Before our names were fixed,
As we were being washed by nurse,
We got completely mixed;
And thus, you see, by fate's decree,
Or rather nurse's whim,
My brother John got christened me,
And I got christened him.

This fatal likeness even dogged
My footsteps when at school,
And I was always getting flogged,
For John turned out a fool.
I put this question, fruitlessly,
To everyone I knew,
'What would you do, if you were me,
To prove that you were you?'

Our close resemblance turned the tide
Of my domestic life,
For somehow, my intended bride
Became my brother's wife.
In fact, year after year the same
Absurd mistakes went on,
And when I died, the neighbors came
And buried brother John.

Henry Sambrooke Leigh