

Thomas Hood (1799-1845)

2 *The Duel*

A Serious Ballad

‘Like the two Kings of Brentford smelling at one nosegay.’

In Brentford town, of old renown,  
There lived a Mister Bray,  
Who fell in love with Lucy Bell,  
And so did Mr. Clay.

To see her ride from Hammersmith, 5  
By all it was allow’d,  
Such fair outsides are seldom seen,  
Such Angels on a Cloud.

Said Mr. Bray to Mr. Clay,  
You choose to rival me, 10  
And court Miss Bell, but there your court  
No thoroughfare shall be.

Unless you now give up your suit,  
You may repent your love;  
I who have shot a pigeon match, 15  
Can shoot a turtle dove.

So pray before you woo her more,  
Consider what you do;  
If you pop aught to Lucy Bell, —  
I’ll pop it into you. 20

Said Mr. Clay to Mr. Bray,  
Your threats I quite explode;  
One who has been a volunteer  
Knows how to prime and load.

And so I say to you unless 25  
Your passion quiet keeps,

I who have shot and hit bulls' eyes,  
May chance to hit a sheep's.

Now gold is oft for silver changed,  
And that for copper red; 30  
But these two went away to give  
Each other change for lead.

But first they sought a friend a-piece,  
This pleasant thought to give —  
When they were dead, they thus should have 35  
Two seconds still to live.

To measure out the ground not long  
The seconds then forebore,  
And having taken one rash step,  
They took a dozen more. 40

They next prepared each pistol-pan  
Against the deadly strife,  
By putting in the prime of death  
Against the prime of life.

Now all was ready for the foes, 45  
But when they took their stands,  
Fear made them tremble so they found  
They both were shaking hands.

Said Mr. C. to Mr. B.,  
Here one of us may fall, 50  
And like St. Paul's Cathedral now,  
Be doom'd to have a ball.

I do confess I did attach  
Misconduct to your name;  
If I withdraw the charge, will then 55  
Your ramrod do the same?

Said Mr. B., I do agree —  
But think of Honour's Courts!  
If we go off without a shot,

There will be strange reports.

60

But look, the morning now is bright,  
Though cloudy it begun;  
Why can't we aim above, as if  
We had call'd out the sun?

So up into the harmless air  
Their bullets they did send;  
And may all other duels have  
That upshot in the end!

65

*1839*

(From *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood*. Ed.  
with Notes by Walter Jerrold. Oxford UP, 1911)