

(editor's note: This paper was transcribed from a handwritten cursive copy with various difficulties. For a perfect rendition, the reader might wish to consult the original, itself a copy, in the volume entitled *Literary Club Papers I*, 1885 – 1886 Oct 3, '85 to May 29, '86) The original is very badly faded.

### Three Bohemians

They all once lived in this city, and one of them is still a resident of Cincinnati. One is dead, and the third is an editorial writer on a New Orleans paper. Two of them, when I knew them most intimately were in that chrysalid state familiar to most men who have successfully struggled from a college diploma to an editorial commission. Both are believed to be still nursing the eccentricities which made them conspicuous as Bohemians, and which afford an excuse for this, their ante-mortem biography.

The dead man was John Houghton. He came to Cincinnati from some town in Canada, where he was said to have left a wife and the conventional three children. This was a tradition; nothing more; and it was popular among Cincinnati newspaper fraternity. In this city he was a hale fellow well met; – and a recluse, he was lavish with his money; anon he was a niggard; his ignorance of the most commonplace things was dense; and again he was philologist, statesman, combined.

A woman-hater, he suffered a woman to lead him to a church against which he had waged a bitter and incessant war. In a word, he was an animate and highly educated contradiction. A hundred times has the writer seen him so convivial that the veriest bagger became a companion, then when the wine was out, no man in Cincinnati was learned enough and sufficient social position to assure him of a cordial reception in familiarly addressing John Houghton. When the wine was in the most public places, Vine Street was his haunt; sober, he retired to a room which a Fouche with a search warrant could not find. It was his pride, when in his normal condition, to live without a known habitation. Repeatedly did he give up his last dime to relieve human suffering, and repeatedly was he found denying himself clothing, food, and the common necessities of life, that he might hoard the wealth which it was easy for him to earn. Of figures he was phenomenally ignorant. The multiplication table was to him no clearer than a table of logarithms, and a simple problem in long division never failed to puzzle him. At the same time he was conversant with nearly every tongue spoken in Europe and was as familiar with European history and European politics, as any ordinary man is with the history and opinions of his own household. Robert Burton,

author of the “anatomy of Melancholy” never possessed a greater fund of useless information than did this homeless and friendless Bohemian. Asked for the name of the Emperor of China in the 5th Dynasty he was as prompt with a correct answer as he would have been if asked the name of the ruling house in his native British Isles. The details in Rawlinson's Monarchies were as household words to him. In Asiatic, Egyptian, and American history as in European, he was at home. They were his hobbies, and he wrote them all, while the study of mental philosophy was to him a recreation. He could repeat Milton's Comus, and page after page of the Iliad and the Odyssey in their original. His memory was a record. Born in England and under the influence of England's church, he was early taught a hatred for the church of Rome. In Cincinnati, for years his narrow circle of acquaintances, he was regarded as a typical woman-hater. At the end of one of his violent debauches he was carried in what was thought to be a dying condition to the Good Samaritan Hospital, where, under the tender nursing of Sister Anthony, he revived. In his convalescence, there was [no] one but this kind woman to endure patiently his impatience. He tolerated, respected, and honored her, and with no proselytizing on her part, suffered her to lead him to the cross and into the Catholic church.

Nature was lavish in gifts to John Houghton; he turned and spat upon her by taking his physical frame to the limit. His recovery from one debauch was followed by another debauch and another recovery. He became provoking the unreliable. Management of the paper on which he was employed as an editorial writer suggested to him that he choose some specified day of the week during which to obey the dictates of his appetites, and then to hold himself ready for duty on the other six. He chose Thursday, and the first Thursday that rolled around found him most abstemious. He was ridiculously temperate, so much so that on the following day the reaction came with the inevitable results. There was a great deal for Houghton to do on that Friday, but Houghton was as drunk as a lord. Finally the climax drew near, the Bohemian was removed to the City Hospital, perishing with consumption. Thence he went to New York, and while the shadow of death was hovering over him, took a steamer for England. A few weeks later the craft in Cincinnati learned that poor John Houghton finally ended his tedious journey in the home of his father, Lord Houghton, and died a few hours after. For the man who delights in moralizing, Houghton's misspent life is a volume of texts. In spite of his brain with all its rich endowments, his work was ephemeral. Save a history of the Books of the Bible, there is nothing from his pen that is not already forgotten.

When the present editor of one of the Cincinnati Dailies was in college, he was regarded by his classmates as being as brilliant as a meteor, and just as transitory. Without any apparent effort he could lead all his competitors; by his indifference to college rules he kept at the foot of this class. With difficulty he graduated, and an hour after receiving his diploma, sold it for a dime. He became a Bohemian and while making an income of two thousand or twenty five hundred dollars per annum, resigned his opportunities to accept the position of advance agent for a band of Ethiopian minstrels, at a salary of twenty dollars a week. For him it was but a step, the position of advance agent to a place in a pulpit. From minstrelsy to Methodism was no radical change for this eccentric. He preached a gospel for a few years, and finally, for insisting that Adam had no more sense than a mule, was not only expelled from the pulpit, but from his church. The young man, during his college days had plighted his troth to the only daughter of one of New York's wealthy men. The engagement was heartily endorsed by the young lady's parents, but was broken off by the party of the first part, who assigned no other reason for the folly man that he was poor, and that his motives in marrying the lady of wealth might be misinterpreted. He finally married a Connecticut school-maam. It was during those months of lightning changes that this Bohemian developed a taste for invention, but he never suffered his mind to dwell long on any thing practical. He became responsible for the existence of a device for opening and shutting a door without touching it, the machinery operating the device being governed by a pedal located near the floor, and in the door casing. He argued that there were times when a man's hands were full of books or babies and when such a device would be of great value. His model is now in Washington, and his initial royalty [has] not arrived. He next applied for a patent on a scheme for faithfully announcing whenever the little corner room in every railroad passenger coach is occupied. The scheme was ingenious, and served only to excite a grin on the face of every railroad official asked to adopt it. Not a week passed that he didn't discover some new and useless machinery. Once or twice he was caught studying upon plans which, if perfected, would have made him a fortune. The work was tedious however, and was abandoned almost before it was begun. This kind of work yielded no income, and the family flour barrel became empty. It was while his family was hungry and his purse was collapsed utterly that the inventor was approached by the writer, and offered a creditable position on a daily newspaper on condition that he would shear, and shave and dress up. There was then a prejudice against on daily newspapers a man with long hair, and who insisted in wearing his

pantaloons tucked into his boot legs. The position and the salary it insured were wanted by the man to whom they were tendered, but not on the conditions which accompanied them. He wanted bread, but he wanted his hair and old clothes more. As a penny a liner he existed and invented, and finally disappeared from his well-known haunts altogether. After a few weeks a search was made for him ending in his discovery in a dismal garret on Third Street, where he had been attempting to devise some means of supplying nature's wastes without food. When found he was lying prostrate on the floor, exhausted and semi-conscious. This was a culmination of his eccentricities. Some friends again rallied to him, and he was next heard of in the position he now occupies.

About fifteen years ago Rev. Tom Vickers employed at the extravagant salary of three dollars a week, a little stoop shouldered, dark-complexioned, one-eyed man, who had just arrived in the city from London. His duty was to translate French into English or vice versa. The situation did not last long, presumably because of an effort to raise or cut down the compensation, and the translator soon found himself reduced to the cheap comforts found in cheap boarding houses. In payment for the accommodations he built the boarding house fires. The means to an end were most miserable, and in as much as the latter was a simple existence, the Drudge didn't believe the former justified it, and so he swallowed a heavy dose of morphia. The act was at once succeeded by an attack of remorse, and by a little manipulation of the throat, the stomach was induced to move for a reconsideration, and the convalescent lived to be known in Cincinnati as Lafcadio Hearne, an Enquirer bohemian. To the few home he made believe he was taking into his confidence, he told that he was a native of Greece, that his father was a British officer, and his mother was a Greek. A man direct from London passed through Cincinnati a few years ago, saw Hearne, recognized him at once, and called him Pat O' Hearn. The situation was of course embarrassing, but the Cincinnati who witnessed the interview locked the secret in his breast, until a few months later, and after the man most interested had left for his future home in New Orleans. Like Houghton, Hearne was a living and moving paradox. He would walk around a whole Square to avoid stepping on an angle worm. I have seen the tears well in his eyes at sight of a suffering cat or dog, and I have known him to rub his hands in glee at the recital of some human woes. After prosperity had smiled upon him, no man could be more fastidious than he, over the supplies and appointments of his dining-room. When the atrocious Schilling murder occurred, Hearne was in an ecstasy of delight, for to him was assigned the duty of graphically

describing the horror, [and] of securing a photograph of the charred and disgusting remains. In the performance of the latter duty he could not conceal his pleasure. It wasn't the blunted indifference which a Burking ghoul would have exhibited on such an occasion; it was as positive a delight as any boy ever manifested over the possession of a long coveted toy. Necessarily the hands and fingers of the intellectual buzzard became badly soiled, as he arranged and rearranged the dismembered body. I hope I may be pardoned for continuing this disgusting chapter to the end, and adding that Hearne actually boasted of and paraded those soiled finger nails days after the charred remains had been buried. A dirty story would provoke nothing but a sneer on his face. He despised a man who would tell such a story, but a Minotaurus was never more lecherous than was this Hearne. The shocking announcement was common from his lips that a scarlet woman was better than one respectable and in proof of his atrocious position he at last married in this city the colored inmate of a George Street brothel. It was for this that the fraternity of Cincinnati discarded him, and because of his ostracism that he left for a place where this outrage upon decency should be unknown. Profanity was a stranger to his lips except as he blasphemously announced his radical atheism. Void of human sympathy he could be more pathetic than any of the newspaper writers who ever lived in this city. Totally blind in one eye, and with only obscured vision in the other, he could describe a golden sunset or picturesque nature in a style to excite the envy of a Cox or Lindsay. No kind of literature excited his devotion however, but the weird. He made a demi-god out of that literary alchemist Gautier, and translated every thing he wrote. One of these translations Worthington of New York found it profitable to publish. Among those who have never seen Gautier in the original and those who know Hearne intimately, there is a good deal of curiosity to know how many liberties the translator took with the author's text. A fancy obtains among many that the weird translator improved somewhat on the weird writer— I have written of Hearne in Cincinnati. — I know nothing of him in New Orleans. He is not a reporter there, he is an editorial writer, it is said respectable and one much sought after by many of the Eastern Magazines. It is possible that the New Orleans Hearne and the Cincinnati Hearne are two different persons; — that indeed the leopard has changed his spots.

George Mortimer Roe

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