Horatio Bright about to drive out of Lydgate Hall.

Sheffield Characters

Horatio Bright of Lydgate Hall

PART I

By N. BRADLEY

IN THE STORY of every town and village community, no matter how large or small, the lives of certain of its inhabitants very often considerably affect the course of local history and the well-being or otherwise of the residents in the area—perhaps through a life of service to their fellow-men, or through acts of benefaction or possibly by their outstanding influence in council or committee. Such people are sometimes acclaimed as local 'worthies' and the story of their activities becomes an integral part of local history; some of course achieve fame far beyond their own locality according to whether their activities are of more than local import.

There are, however, others who have merited no such distinction and have probably not influenced the daily lives of the 'local inhabitants' by one jot, yet their way of life is a source of material that by its value as social interest alone, renders it an indispensable part of local history records, yet it is perhaps unfortunate that the reason for this 'acquired' fame is more often than not the result of an unusual way of life or thought that is only too readily classed as 'eccentric', in the unkindest interpretation of the word. Most of these personal histories cannot for obvious reasons be recorded during the lifetime of the subject, or for that matter during the lifetime of two or three generations of surviving descendants, and this has often resulted in the irretrievable loss of a great deal of potential history, and the only source of information to posterity is from residents' reminiscences, a bare and often misleading substitute.

In the local history of Sheffield and in the category of individuals whose way of life may be classed as 'unusual' must be included the name of HORATIO BRIGHT who tenanted Lydgate Hall for many years, until his death in 1906. The fact that his later years are not beyond living memory, and that surviving descendants have been very helpful indeed in volunteering their own personal memories, has enabled a great deal of information to be obtained concerning features of interest in Horatio's life and personality, and with it comes the realization that it is virtually impossible to confine any personal story to details of the individual only. This is particularly true in the case of Horatio Bright—the scanty gleanings from newspaper cuttings and 'hearsay' from elderly residents of the locality infer eccentricity to the extent of amused ridicule, but even from the by no means exhaustive notes and memories that now supplement the original, one realizes the tremendous effect that the impact of his associations, his marriages and immediate family had upon his own personality. A wealthy man indeed, but perhaps with more than an average share of loneliness, personal grief and possibly remorse.

Lydgate Hall, the home of Horatio and his family, was of no pretentious size or style of architecture, and was probably built in the late 1700's. It possessed the usual Lodge and outbuildings associated with the period, but the stables were maintained to a standard of perfection among stables, housing teams of horses that by their splendour became a by-word of the locality. The grounds of the Hall were extensive and included lawns and flower gardens in a style in keeping with the wealth of the occupier, and a considerable establishment of grooms, maids and servants served the fastidious requirements of the household. Whatever the size of the Hall itself, there is no doubt, according to reliable information, that the contents indicated an indulgence of wealth to a considerable degree, almost to the extent of ostentatiousness, and included splendid collections of jewelled ornaments, lavish silverware and china, and many fine pieces of ornate furniture, with expensive paintings decorating the walls.

However, a recital of these things is but to give tangible evidence of Horatio's undisputed wealth, and in order to gain some assessment of his character and personality, one must review the background of his ancestry and the period during which he was born and matured, for it was at that period that success in trade or industry was the sure indication of high personal ability and business acumen.

Of Jewish faith, his predecessors appear to have arrived in Sheffield some few years prior to 1800, probably from abroad, and the obvious query of the surname BRIGHT in connection with Jewish extraction may perhaps be explained as an assumed or altered name, a common practice with such families on arrival from foreign lands, particularly when trade or manufacture of goods was to be the means of livelihood. ISAAC BRIGHT, the original immigrant, had a daughter and three sons, among whom was SELIM, the father of Horatio. That the family were of some considerable integrity and standing is substantiated by the fact that Selim's wife was descended from a Moorish princess, of the name Estella de Lara; one of Horatio's brothers was in fact christened Maurice de Lara BRIGHT, and a beautiful miniature of Estella de Lara is said to have adorned one of the [illegible] Lydgate Hall; its frame, ornate with diamonds, was no doubt considered a suitable setting worthy of the beauty of the subject.

Selim was a jewel merchant of great distinction and character, and it is note-

Josephine Corri, wife of Sam Bright, at the age of 34.

worthy that Isaac's descendants quickly made names for themselves in the world of jewellers, watch-makers, etc., and Waingate High Street (viz. Bright's Court) and Market Place in Sheffield all have their early records of premises associated with the Bright family. As the years progressed other towns received the benefit of their skills and the family name became acknowledged as the 'hall-mark' of outstanding and meticulous workmanship, some examples of their craft achieving the standard of collectors' pieces.

Into this atmosphere of successful and affluent family business life Horatio Bright was born in 1828, and although he doubtless inherited a keen business instinct along with the integrity of his father and grandfather, he was also personally fired with a determination to be as successful as the other members of his family. He was well-educated, and whilst still a young man became a representative (a comparatively recent innovation in industry) of the iron and steel firm of Turton Bros. and Mappin, who then occupied the old-established Sheaf Works. It must be remembered that the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth saw the realization in Sheffield of the tremendous potentialities in 'outside' markets, and the growing preoccupation of heavy industry was steel, with its rapidly improving production techniques. Those astute enough to be 'in on the ground floor' were destined to be numbered among the wealthy citizens of Sheffield!

Whether any question of cause and effect was involved or not, the fact remains that not only was Horatio's connection with the firm a success from a business point of view, but it also led to his marriage to the daughter of Thomas B. Turton, respected both for his associations with the firm and as a citizen of some standing; he was Master Cutler in 1846, and Lord Mayor of Sheffield in 1850—a truly influential father-in-law! Horatio Bright and Mary Alice Turton were married in 1849, when Horatio would be in his twenty-first year and his bride in her eighteenth; romantic ages made doubly so by the intriguing note that in the same year (but surely not as a double wedding?) Horatio's brother Maurice also married a daughter of the same Thomas Turton, Harriet Ann by name. What fascinating possibilities of family history lie in such brief records!

After-events show that Horatio's love for his wife Mary was deep and lasting, and those early days of his marriage must have been doubly satisfying in that his business life continued to achieve considerable success. His tremendous business drive led to the promotion of the firm of Turton, Bright and Co. (Steel Manufacturers), with premises in Cross Smithfields, and a speciality of the firm was the manufacture of steel dies for the Royal Mint of England and of several foreign countries. So successful were the general activities of the firm that he was able to accumulate a considerable personal fortune from this time onwards.

Apart from his business ability, Horatio was of unusual intelligence, of outstanding personal appearance and gifted in many ways; he was, however, more respected for his wealth and achievement than liked as a person. He had a tendency towards impatience and domination of character, and this may perhaps explain what appeared to be an under-lying loneliness throughout his life that neither wealth nor success in the standards by which he lived could compensate. He ensured that his employees were of the best by remuneration above normal standards, but his imperious nature probably prevented that association of something closer than mere master and servant. Local 'hearsay' implies that Horatio was a harsh task-master, and many illustrations of this have been forthcoming, but it is apt to be forgotten that in the period in question, conditions were only too often the normal and accepted state of affairs between 'man' and 'master'.

He lived up to his wealth and was able to indulge his life-long passion for horses; he became a familiar figure with his 'four-in-hand', unique in the whole of Sheffield, and until eventual failing health curtailed so many of his activities, loved to take the whip himself and revelled in demonstrating his prowess in horsemanship. On occasion, for some special event, there would be the full splendour of coach and outriders, with a magnificent team of splendidly-matched horses, groomed to perfection. Stories are told of guests being met by this 'panoply of state' and still further regaled on arrival by the welcome of a brass band. Stirring times indeed for the village of Lydgate! Such display of pomp and affluence was alone sufficient to impress the local populace, always ready to endow the wealthy with traits of 'peculiarity', and eager to embellish the most ordinary events to the extent of making them subject for gossip. Many are the tales told, some true, no doubt, but many probably pure fabrication related for the self-glory of the narrator.

One would expect, from a person of such affluence and importance in the business world, aspirations towards becoming a public figure in the manner of his father-in-law and so many of his contemporary peers. That Horatio had no such aspiration may have been the result of lack of time, for he always had several interests not directly concerned with his firm's activities, or it may have been another example of his tendency towards aloofness in any but business affairs. Although Jewish and supporting many Jewish organisations and charities, it is significant that either he did not agree with the remainder of the Jewish community in Sheffield in more than trivial considerations, or that the position was 'vice-versa'; he chose deliberately to purchase land for the burial of no one but his immediate family, and in this plantation, situated on the bleak moors beyond Hollow Meadows, erected a private mausoleum. Nearby was the spacious house used by himself and family as a 'summer residence'.

Life favoured Horatio with ever-prospering fortune and accumulation of treasures, with the family interest centred upon the only child of this marriage, Sam Sykes Turton Bright, who in maturity was reputed to have been of magnificent appearance, intelligence and integrity, having acquired the finest of his forebears' traits. Sam was the apple of his father's eye, and great was Horatio's disappointment when his son, for whom he had had hopes of a marriage that would equal the fortunes of his own family, married an actress from the local theatre. Sam, however, had different thoughts on the matter; like his father (who was a silver ticket-holder at the Theatre Royal) he was a keen enthusiast of the stage, and after watching many performances of the brilliant young actress and singer, Josephine Corri, particularly as 'Bo-Peep' in the current pantomime, determined that she was to be his wife. An introduction by the manager of the Theatre sealed the romance and the marriage that followed. Contrary to Horatio's assertation that his son had married a common actress, the Corri family were well-known as of the highest character and integrity; many people will remember the name of her brother, Eugene Corri, famous boxing referee, and also that of her father, Patrick Corri, a talented musician. *(to be concluded).*

Lodge and entrance to Lydgate Hall.
Courtesy Mrs. V. M. Leigh

Sheffield Characters

HORATIO BRIGHT

OF LYDGATE HALL — Part II

By N. BRADLEY

IT IS SAID that in his stubbornness Horatio was never reconciled to Josephine as a daughter-in-law and seized every opportunity for causing unpleasantness. This continuous demonstration may have been fostered by snobbery, deep disappointment or a sense of frustration in that Sam produced a considerable family in comparison with Horatio's only child. However, perhaps for his son's sake, or because he saw in the children of this marriage something of himself in character and personality, Horatio adored his grandchildren, particularly the eldest child, Mary, who became his constant companion around the Hall and stables. Even at the age of five or six years, she was allowed to sit at dinner and imbibe the odd glass or two of port—unprecedented behaviour among genteel circles of the period!

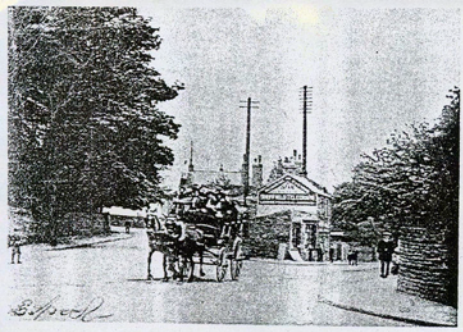
In the year 1891, when the granddaughter Mary was barely twelve years old, sudden and dire tragedy interrupted the idyllic life at Lydgate Hall, in the death of Horatio's wife, from influenza caught from his grandchild. So great was his grief at this personal loss that he temporarily forgot to notify the death of his housekeeper, a Mrs. Booth, to her relatives—she, too, was a victim of the epidemic of influenza, and died the day after Horatio's wife.

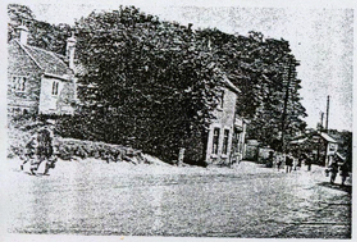
In his grief and determination to carry out the last rites himself, Horatio had her body interred in the family mausoleum without service or public attendance—it was this that gave rise to the local gossip that he had renounced all religious beliefs, and it was through his deep sense of refusal to accept that he should never see his wife again, that the coffin was made with a glass window. Not content with this tragedy, Fate dealt Horatio a further equally cruel blow, within three months of his wife's death, in the death of his beloved son, Sam. His death, although not entirely unexpected, was no less a loss; some time previously he had contracted tuberculosis, and despite a period abroad and the personal attention of a specialist of high repute and known to the royal heads of Europe, returned home destined to depart this life at the early age of thirty-eight. His body was also interred in the family mausoleum.

From that time onwards, Horatio's pre-occupation was visiting the mausoleum, the interior of which was sumptuously furnished with family portraits, jewelled ornaments, beautiful mosaics and statuary, with iron trestle tables for the coffins. A groom usually accompanied him on these visits, his duty being to dust the coffins and furnishings, whilst Horatio invariably played the organ that he had had specially installed within the mausoleum. Occasionally his granddaughter would also accompany him on these, to some extent, morbid visits to the burial ground, and it was perhaps reaction that led him to spend the evenings following such visits at the theatre with his grand-daughter still with him for company.

Even in the light of today's more civilised aspect of the area, the burial ground and mausoleum still present an atmosphere of oppressing solitude, and the surrounding overgrown trees, shrubs and undergrowth that both crowd and protect the mausoleum appear as though resentful of intrusion. Lonely indeed must have been the heart that sought comfort in the companionship of the dead amid such solitary and eerie surroundings.

Horatio's double loss of his wife and son so affected him as to take away all interest in outside affairs, and for the last ten years of his life he took little part





Crosspool at the turn of the century. The entrance to Lydgate Hall is on the extreme left of the picture.
Courtesy Mr. E. Curbishley

An old photograph of Crosspool showing the old and new Tavern.
Courtesy Miss M. Brightmore

Miss H. M. Brunt (great-grand-daughter of Horatio Bright) and Mrs. Gray Brunt, of Sheffield.
Courtesy Mrs. V. M. Leigh

in the business affairs of the town, eventually relinquishing all hold on his working interests for 'little more than a song'. Meanwhile life continued at Lydgate Hall with all the loneliness of irretrievable loss, and the thoughts that obsessed him appeared to cause a wish to recapture in some form or other, through frustration or for reasons known only to himself, some aspect of earlier days. In 1899 he carried out that for which he had blamed his son so many years before—he married an actress from the local theatre. Horatio was now seventy years of age and his new bride, Minnie-Harl, no more than twenty-five, and three children were born of this marriage.

Horatio, now in failing health, was no longer able to take the reins in his drives from the Hall, and eventually suffered the indignity and chagrin of having to be helped to and from the carriage on his now rare visits to Broomhill and Sheffield. After a further period of rapidly deteriorating health, his death came suddenly but peacefully at the age of seventy-seven. In anticipation of his own death, and possibly in humility of thought, he had already given strict instructions that neither his life, career nor burial were to be given publicity, and in accordance with these wishes, the burial was arranged to take place at an early hour of the day, and apart from the caretaker of the mausoleum, the only persons actually in attendance were the undertaker and his assistants. There was no religious service, and less ceremony than would have been given to a pauper's burial.

His estate was valued at £137,000 and his will prescribed that the sum of £1,000 be invested for the upkeep of the mausoleum by a caretaker, a reasonable sum in those days, but inadequate by present standards of maintenance.

To Sam's widow, the Hall must have appeared desolate in its memories, and when still only thirty-four years of age, Josephine re-married. Her husband was a well-known auctioneer, and they made their home at Ashopton. A descendant of Horatio's favourite grand-daughter well remembers visiting her there in her last days and found her, even in her advanced years, still of remarkably good looks and enchanting to talk to.

Barely twelve months after Horatio's death, Lydgate Hall was empty, a desolate shell, devoid of its former splendour of furnishings and activity. Tenanted at spasmodic intervals afterwards, plans were eventually made that incorporated the demolition of the Hall, Stables and Lodge to make way for a complete housing estate, the road names commemorating the old Hall. The shop that stands adjacent to Crosspool Tavern almost coincides with the site of the Lodge.

Many details of family incidents of the type that provide the 'pith' of any family history have been omitted from these notes for obvious reasons, yet the author feels that even the sketchiest records of such homes and their occupiers should receive some kind of perpetuation in local history. The story of Horatio Bright, in its entirety, with its scope of characters, the wide-spread associations of family activities in all their far-reaching influences and contacts is so vast that there is material for the basis of virtually another *Forsythe Saga*. There is its equal in romance, in pathos, in family hopes and fears, frustration and fulfilment, through the Victorian and Edwardian years to current times, a story beyond mere local history that in competent hands would provide a family saga of real life that would leave the chronicler loathe to end his narrative.