



(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

Founder Editor: SAMUEL MORRIS RICH, 1935-1947

President: Prof. GEOFFREY TILLOTSON, M.A., B.Litt.

Vice-Presidents: EDMUND BLUNDEN, C.B.E. J. LEWIS MAY BASIL WILLEY E. LESLIE GRIGGS
SIR ALBERT E. RICHARDSON, K.C.V.O.

Chairman: WALTER FARROW

Vice-Chairman: MISS ANNETTE PARK

Hon. Treasurer:

MISS F. A. PARSONS, 32 Carmel Court, King's Drive, Wembley Park, Middlesex.

Hon. Librarians:

G. M. NOBLE, F.L.A., Central Library, Fore Street, Edmonton, N.9.
S. K. JONES, 14 Gordon Square, W.C.1

Dramatic Group:

Hon. Sec.: MISS G. E. PHILPOT, 26 Cranborne Avenue, Tolworth
Hon. Treas.: MISS AMARITA FERRARO, 87 Stanhope Avenue, N.3

Membership Secretary:

MISS F. S. REEVES, 33 Alma Street, N.W.5

Hon. General Secretary:

E. G. CROWSLEY, 37 Tavistock Square, W.C.1

Editor of Bulletin:

H. G. SMITH, Blakesmoor, 61 Salisbury Avenue, St Albans

THE DRAMATIC GROUP'S PRODUCTION OF "TOM THUMB THE GREAT"

27th and 28th MARCH

A Canadian Member's Impressions

The Portcullis Theatre will always be remarkable in my thoughts for being (a) the most subtly camouflaged theatre in London, hidden as it is behind all sorts of unlikely-looking military signs so that even with the charted directions so kindly supplied by the Dramatic Group of the Charles Lamb Society in one's hand, one does not believe one's eyes; (b) the cheerfulness of a C.L.S. audience in an atmosphere of wet umbrellas, dripping mackintoshes and torrential sounds outside; (c) the most original undertaking of a performance of Fielding's *Tom Thumb the Great*.

The evening began with some beautiful songs by Florence Reeves and piano sonatas by Theodora Croucher, followed by Lamb's *Dick Strype* or *The Force of Habit*, vigorously done by Jack Ford, and Lamb's Prologue to Coleridge's *Remorse*, presented by Walter Leon, from which at least one member of the audience learned that when *Remorse* was performed at Drury Lane in 1813 (where it ran successfully for 20 nights, a long run for those days) it was the first tragedy Drury Lane had ventured on since the re-opening of the theatre in 1811. This first part of the programme was gaily rounded off with a dramatization of Jane Austen's wonderful scene between Elizabeth Bennet and Lady Catherine (played by Gladys Phillips and Marjorie Betteridge) in which

incongruity enhanced comedy, for although an incisive voice was summoned for Lady Catherine, surely those dragonish De Bourgh words never proceeded from so kind a face.

Then, after the interval and the cup that cheers, came *Tom Thumb the Great*. This was immensely enjoyed by the audience as well as by the cast—which cannot always be said of amateur theatricals. The originality in the choice of play (my private poll suggests that no one of this generation outside the C.L.S. has ever seen it done), the care with the costumes, and the pains that had evidently been taken by producer and actors alike to send the words out clearly over the footlights, all combined to make it a lively and highly entertaining evening. The production may not have been exactly verbatim according to the first edition, "A Tragedy as it is acted at the Theatre in the Haymarket", but the burlesque of romantic tragedy was all there in essence, if not heightened even by the exigencies of unprofessional treatment. At moments it wildly suggested the lawless Irish atmosphere—Tom Thumb being received as "The welcome Hero, Giant-killing Lad", and Princess Huncamunca's, "Under my bed you'll find a quart of rum", and Grizzle's line, spoken with such a discreet mixture of sorrow, anger and amazement—"Our queen is drunk" (no connexion with Huncamunca's

rum). But other episodes had an Alice-in-Wonderland quality, especially in the last moments of the play when some eight or more characters must stab one another in rapid succession in order to litter the stage suitably with corpses.

"Kings, Queens and Knaves throw we
another down
Till the whole Pack lies scattered and o'er-
thrown
So all our Pack upon the Floor is cast
And all I boast is, that I fall the last."

Thus King Arthur, complacently removing the crown from his head and placing it on his chest. The applause was so ardently enthusiastic, and so clearly was some of it for the admirable celerity in dying shown by those who, measuring out the distance and trying quickly to find a soft-looking spot on the floor, cast themselves down on it, that the corpses, showing the ultimate in good sportsmanship, arose and did an encore of the dying bit. This was a great burlesque stroke, and brought the whole evening to its hilarious conclusion. I'm sure all those of us who were there would like to say again to the Dramatic Group, Well Done, and Thank you.

KATHLEEN COBURN

MR. BASIL FRANCIS writes:

Tom Thumb is something of a theatrical curiosity. Henry Fielding wrote it in 1730 to satirize the contemporary trend which was flooding the stage with absurd "heroic tragedies." He borrowed characters from a dozen different plays and periods and made them enact a farrago of nonsense around the central figure of the victorious general, whom he portrayed as a midget. There is only one way to tackle a play such as this—with "swash" and braggadocio, and Miss Annette Park is to be congratulated on infusing just these qualities into her cast. The result was highly diverting.

There is no plot worth speaking of but it seemed to revolve around a beautiful princess bearing the outrageous name of Huncamunca who was wooed simultaneously by the miniature General and the dashing Lord Grizzle. Gyp Mallet was the kitten of a daughter; Gwen Jones and George Chadwick her royal parents. Mr. Chadwick cooed like a dove and roared like a lion most nobly as occasion demanded while Miss Jones (who also arranged and composed

the music for the production) revealed an unsuspected vein of comedy as the lachrymose Queen Dollollolla. John Drake gave another of his excellent performances as the perky little general and Leslie Pettit made a dashing and personable knight-at-arms.

Merlin the magician somehow strayed into the play and made some pontifical pronouncements. The part was taken by Maisie Parrott, a newcomer to the Group who will obviously be in demand for future productions. There was the inevitable ghost, a truly terrifying spectre straight from the yawning grave, awe-inspiringly played by that talented veteran Henry C. Chapman. Norah Halliday and Evelyn Gillett fluttered decorously (and, let it be said, decoratively) as ladies-in-waiting while Norman Percival lent moral support from time to time to the gallant knight.

The British Army was represented by four boys from Bancroft School who kindly lent their services and obviously relished their parts. The barrack-square scene with the general drilling his troops was a joy—even though it would have broken a sergeant-major's heart. For no reason at all (if my memory serves me) Fielding introduces an extraordinary character named Glumcalda, a towering Amazonian warrior, played with admirable ferocity by Winifred Woodham. To me she was the only truly Elian character in the whole piece, for was she not the direct forbear of the Widow Blacket, Lamb's "Gentle Giantess"?

To the many backstage helpers who added so much to the success of the production the Group offers its grateful thanks. Fielding's burlesque play really defies coherent criticism and if this account seems a little inadequate your humble reporter craves your kind indulgence for he is still suffering from the delayed-action effects of a fantastic night at the playhouse and of a production that would assuredly have delighted the heart of Charles Lamb.

* *

At the conclusion of Friday's performance bouquets were presented to Miss Gwen Jones, Miss Gyp Mellett and Mrs. Winifred Woodham, and Mr. Ernest G. Crowsley—Chairman of the Dramatic Group—accorded thanks to the members of the cast, the boys from Bancroft School, to Miss Annette Park who produced the play, and also to the members of the Jane Austen Society for their continued support.

JOE MUNDEN, 1758-1832: A BI-CENTENARY TRIBUTE

By W. Macqueen Pope

"The School of Munden began and must end with himself"

In that colonnade which supports the memories of Old Drury stands a figure which is second to none in interest and talent. He was beloved of Charles Lamb, who could not have

enough of him and who has left word pictures of him which glow. He was a comedian and a comedian of the front rank. But he had another talent, too—he was a wonderful penman, his

writing was every bit as good as his acting. His name was Joseph Shepherd Munden.

Munden was born in Brook's Street, Holborn, in 1758, the son of a purveyor of poultry: Brook's Street saw also the death of that genius, the poet Chatterton. His father died when Joe was an infant, his mother bringing him up with the best education she could—one result was that he wrote a wonderful hand. Leaving school at the age of twelve, she apprenticed him to an apothecary, but he left after a month. Next came a spell with an attorney in New Inn, but he left that, so she bound him for five years with a law stationer in Chancery Lane. Not much success here, for Joe had become stage-struck and paid surreptitious visits to Drury Lane and Covent Garden, to "The Lane" for preference, seeing the glory that was Garrick. The stage called him strongly and he ran off with a band of strolling players, later getting a job on the stage at Liverpool. Here his penmanship came in useful and he was engaged to write out the parts for the players at eighteen pence a night. A crowd part followed, and he was on the "boards", in the Land of Illusion. The company breaking up he returned to London, where he got two parts in *King Henry IV*: He was a real actor now.

Now came work with a company at Rochdale, then on to Liverpool, where he worked for two years in the Town Clerk's office—the vicissitudes of theatre life were almost unbelievable in those days. But the actor's life was in his blood and he found himself at Chester, but with no luck, and he was soon back at home in London; his mother treated him as the prodigal son and placed him with the law stationer again. Once more the theatre claimed him and he joined a company at Leatherhead at six shillings a week and two candles—a recognised perquisite. Soon a return to London followed and then came an engagement as comedian at the Canterbury Theatre, where he really tasted the joys of success in a real theatre.

His next job was in Brighton, in 1780, a big success, followed by a call to the Chester circuit where he was immensely popular, and luck was with him for he became joint manager of the Chester theatre. Finding acting more to his taste than being a manager, he came back to London and obtained an engagement at Covent Garden, making his first appearance there in 1790, playing a tremendous round of comedy parts. In *The Road to Ruin* he made the character of Old Dornton his *chef d'oeuvre*. In 1813 Alexander Pope and Munden came to Drury Lane, where Joe played both comedy and other Shakespearean parts: his *Witch* in *Macbeth* was said to be perfectly terrifying.

At Drury Lane, where he played for eleven years, his career was long and distinguished and he rose to be the finest comedian of his day. Charles Lamb had the highest admiration for him and devoted a whole essay to this versatile

actor. Munden had a complete understanding of the actor's art, to conquer which he had surmounted difficulties which would have defeated an ordinary man. A great favourite with his audiences he said goodbye at Drury Lane on 31st May, 1824, playing two characters, Sir Robert Bramble in *The Poor Gentleman* and Old Doxey in *Past Ten o'Clock*, a famous drunken part. When the curtain fell all his actor's art vanished and he made his adieu as a simple ordinary man in deeply moving words. It was a real farewell, for unlike many actors, he did not come back.

Munden excelled in comedy, in farce, and in facial expression, clowning with artistry, whilst his Shakespearean performances showed his art as an actor outside farce. Careful over money matters, having known what it was to be penniless and wanting food and shelter, he was in retirement a good host when entertaining friends.

Joseph Shepherd Munden was indeed a Pillar of Drury Lane: he meant to be an actor and an actor he became, to stand high in his Profession, leaving Drury Lane as Principal Comedian. He is part of the atmosphere of Old Drury, his work is woven in its fabric, and somewhere his spirit still exists to give a touch of kindness and a smile in that unique atmosphere which graces the oldest theatre in the world still used as such.

* * *

MR. MEADOWS WHITE (in the Chair) introduced MR. MACQUEEN POPE as an old friend of the Society and congratulated him on achieving his 70th birthday a few days earlier: his charming articles in the *London Evening News* on scenes and manners of other times had been a delight to many readers. Mr. Pope was a life-long man of the London theatre and its erudite historian and the talk he was to give on Joe Munden would without doubt warm the heart of every Elian. Mr. Meadows White showed a medal which had been struck in 1799 in honour of Munden, one side bearing his portrait and the reverse the inscription "Exposer of folly and dispeller of sleep".

* * *

At the conclusion of his address Mr. Pope showed an example of Munden's handwriting of a song he probably sang: also a letter to Elliston in 1824, and another letter of 1815 indicating that an actor of those days had to learn over a hundred roles, mainly from Shakespeare. Mr. Pope who started in the theatre with Ben Greet's company at sixteen years of age was linked with Mrs. Pope of Drury Lane fame, and his great-great-grandfather was the redoubtable actor Alexander Pope who was a friend of Edmund Kean. Mr. Pope related some striking stories about this ancestor who was a supreme judge of food and cooking and was buried in Westminster Abbey along with members of his family.

The Elia Reading was given most appropriately at the conclusion of Mr. Pope's address by Mr. Basil Francis: he had chosen Lamb's "Autobiography of Mr. Munden" which appeared in the *London Magazine* in February 1825

VISITS TO PLACES OF LITERARY INTEREST: THE LONDON UNIVERSITY

"They breathe a learned and collegiate air."

On arrival at the Senate House of the London University on 17th May the party was met by Mr. Pafford, Goldsmiths Librarian, and conducted to the room housing the Durning Lawrence Library: this collection belonged to Sir Edward Durning Lawrence and came from 13 Carlton House Terrace. The books comprise history and theology, etc., and the famous collection of volumes on the Shakespeare-Bacon theory, a fiercely contentious subject, of which Sir Edward in his later years was an enthusiastic exponent. There are also a number of Emblem Books on the 17th century, and numerous editions of Defoe. The bookcases, table, chairs and carpet came with the books, and provide a real Victorian atmosphere.

Mr. Pafford gave a brief but most interesting talk about the various libraries in the University, which now comprises about 59 colleges and institutions in and around London, each college possessing its own specialist library. Since the Society's previous visit in 1948 there has, of course, been a great increase in the contents of the University Library both in books and accommodation and in the number of students using the facilities. Many generous gifts of books have been received, an outstanding one being the library of Sir Louis Sterling, a collection of about 4000 volumes of very fine quality, including first editions and early editions of English classics, Shakespeare folios and quartos, Milton, Byron, Burns' Kilmarnock edition, and also Charles Lamb. (Sir Louis died on 2nd June). There have also been many gifts to the Music Library which is the only music library in the University.

Another library donated to the University came from Fulham Palace and was the property of the Church Commissioners: this was the library of Bishop Porteous who was a great protagonist of the anti-slavery campaign, and included about 4000 books and pamphlets on that subject.

The Goldsmiths Library of Economic Literature was presented in 1903 by the Worshipful Company of Goldsmiths and is in a separate room erected in 1937: a wonderful collection.

Mr. Pafford and his assistant Mr. Dobb had arranged an exhibition of Elia and other important books for the benefit of the party and these aroused great interest. Among the items on display were the following first editions:

to celebrate Munden's retirement and farewell to the stage in 1824.

Mr. Stephen K. Jones gave warm thanks to Mr. Pope for his entrancing address, and Mr. Crowsley thanked Mr. Meadows White for his duties as Chairman.

Elia, also in the Gregynog edition; Prince Dorus; The King and Queen of Hearts (2nd edition); Tales from Shakespeare; The Adventures of Ulysses; Satan in Search of a Wife; Album Verses; First Book of Poetry (Mylius); Specimens of Dramatic Poets, a copy presented by Lamb to Southey; and several Coleridge items.

Mr. Carpenter on behalf of the members warmly thanked Mr. Pafford for a most interesting afternoon and for which he had sacrificed his leisure, his kind reception and delightful talk had been a pleasure to all. Among those present was Miss Elizabeth Brown, the granddaughter of Bishop Porteous.

* *

WINTER PROGRAMME 1958-1959

The next Winter Programme is now being prepared, and details will be published in the next Bulletin. In the meantime members might like to know that the Winter Session commences on **Saturday, 13th September** with a lecture by Miss Vera Watson entitled "The Spy in the Committee of Public Safety."

* * *

THE SOCIETY'S CHRISTMAS CARD 1958

In view of the members' approval of the 1957 Christmas Card the Council has decided to produce another for this year. The "theme" for this year's card will be John Lamb, father of Charles Lamb, and will include his portrait and an excerpt from one of his poems. This is considered an appropriate choice in view of last year's acquisition by the Society of John Lamb's "Poetical Pieces".

The cost of the cards, including envelopes and postage, will be six shillings per dozen. It is hoped that members will support this venture and forward their orders to Mr. E. G. Crowsley immediately, so that an appropriate order can be placed, in good time, with the printers. No money should be sent at this juncture.

* * *

Congratulations to Mr. Farrow on celebrating his ninety-first birthday on 16th June: may his youthful spirit and Elia interest continue as strong as ever. A collective greeting card signed by the members who visited Ampthill on June 14th was sent to Mr. Farrow, and he expresses his gratitude for such congratulations, as he is unable to reply individually.