

THE C.L.S.



BULLETIN

(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

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(Twenty-Fourth Year)

NOVEMBER, 1958

The Hon. General Secretary's New Address

Will members please note that as from **20th October, 1958** Mr. E. G. Crowsley's address is **Woodstock Residential Hotel, 1 Highbury Grange, London, N.5.**

EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING, OCTOBER 13th

An Extraordinary General Meeting under the Chairmanship of MR. WALTER FARROW was held on 13th October to consider and decide the rate of subscription to operate in 1959. The Chairman explained the need for an increase in the present very modest subscription in order to meet rising costs of printing, postage, etc., and after full discussion he moved the following Resolution:

That on and from 1st January, 1959, item (1) of Rule 3 (a) relative to Annual Subscriptions be amended to read:

For each member residing within a radius of 15 miles of London; 12/6, but for additional members of the same family residing at the same address, 5/-.

This was carried unanimously. There will not, of course, be any alteration in the subscription for Provincial and Overseas members, as they have not the benefit of attending the Society's meetings and visits.

Donations from any member towards the Society's funds will, however, be warmly welcomed by the Hon. Treasurer, Miss F. A. Parsons, 32 Carmel Court, Kings Drive, Wembley Park, Middlesex.

THE SPY IN THE COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC SAFETY

As Address by Miss VERA WATSON, September 13th.

"I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of the day besides my dinner. . . . I want a form for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem."

Charles Lamb was never deeply interested in politics or political philosophy—certainly not to the extent of his friends Wordsworth, Coleridge or Hazlitt. He abused King George IV—a fashionable pastime of the day—and for a short time he was faintly dazzled by Utopian visions of political justice.

In the autumn of 1793 William Godwin (Lamb's uncomfortable friend) published his famous book, and the French Revolution was then entering its most bloodstained period. Louis XVI had been guillotined early that year, and Marie Antoinette was to die in October, her two young children languishing for two years in the Temple prison, one only emerging alive.

The Girondins having overthrown the monarchy had themselves been overthrown by the more extreme party, the Jacobins, led by Robespierre and Saint Just. The Second Committee of Public Safety was tightening its grip on all branches of the Administration until it really became the Government of France.

In February of that year France had declared war on England, for which we were unprepared, and one of our Government's problems was to obtain political and military intelligence from France, for no one knew what the new men there were thinking or planning against us. And then in October, 1793, a document was received at the Foreign Office by Lord Grenville from Francis Drake, our newly appointed Minister Plenipotentiary to the Republic of Genoa, a document described as the "proceedings" of the Committee of Public Safety. Similar documents, or bulletins, arrived regularly for the next two years, and Drake testified to their authenticity, stating on one occasion that the author was a secretary to that Committee.

At this period the Committee consisted of 12 men—Robespierre, Saint-Just, Couthon, Carnot, C. A. Prieur, Billaud-Varenes, Prieur (de la Marne), Jeanbon Saint-Andre, Lindet, Collot d'Herbois, Herault de Sechelles and Barere. When they became aware of the leakage, they were convinced that one of their members was a traitor, and they sent Herault de Sechelles to the guillotine. But he was not the spy for the bulletins continued after his death.

Drake did not obtain these documents direct from Paris but through an intermediary, the Comte d'Antraigues, an emigre living in Venice, who in turn received intelligence from a royalist espionage agency in Paris. The agency's directors were Des Pommelles, Lemaitre, Brotier and Sourdat, and their headquarters

were in the cellars of a convent where there was a printing press which turned our counter-revolutionary literature. They all had excellent political contacts, but they did not fulfil Drake's description of the author of the bulletins as a secretary to the Committee. There was, however, another informant and this, d'Antraigues stated, was Carnot and this the Committee shortly before the despatch of Drake's first bulletin. It would have been dangerous for Carnot to communicate directly with the agency, so he may have used a secretary as an intermediary.

However, apart from d'Antraigues' statement, no evidence has yet come to light to prove that Carnot was the spy. But research has proved that these bulletins contain much accurate military intelligence (and Carnot was in charge of the French armies) and political information which could only have been supplied by someone who was intimately connected with the Committee.

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Miss Annette Park was in the chair, and the Elian Reading, an extract from *Grace before Meat* was given by Mr. E. G. Crowsley. Mr. Dewsnap thanked Miss Watson for her most interesting and intriguing address, and Mr. Drake voiced the thanks of the meeting to Miss Park for her duties as Chairman.

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ESSAYS AND STUDIES, 1958: Volume Eleven of the new series. John Murray, London, 12s. 6d.

Included in these Essays and Studies collected by Prof. Basil Willey (a Vice-President of the Charles Lamb Society from 1950) is a Lamb-Coleridge study which will greatly appeal to our members and to all scholars and students of Lamb's letters and writings: *Coleridge's Debt to Charles Lamb* by Prof. George Whalley. The author is not unknown to the Society for on 18th March last year he gave a lecture entitled *Charles Lamb and Coleridge's Annus Mirabilis*, an account of which appeared in the C.L.S. Bulletin for May, 1957. In an extended form Prof. Whalley now traces the Lamb-Coleridge association from Christ's Hospital days and its friendship, to manhood with evenings at the Salutation and Cat Tavern in receptive companionship beguiled with egg-hot and Wordsworth and Southey. From such formative days came the later critical intercourse. Lamb's first preserved letter to Coleridge was written 27th May, 1796, and the succeeding thirty three letters covering with a few gaps about two years are informed with warm affection and guileless admiration. His first letters are almost exclusively on literary and critical matters. Then came the Lamb family tragedy, with a gap in correspondence from April to June 1797 due

to Coleridge's preoccupation with the Wordsworths. Further gaps occurred but Prof. Whalley asserts that undoubtedly Lamb's formative literary influence upon Coleridge can be traced in the letters written by him between 27th May 1796 and the middle of February 1797, a period of gestation lasting exactly nine months. Regarding his critical function as a privilege and a pleasure Lamb is at the same time unflinchingly honest and forthright, judging not by rule or principle but by nerve and touch and a sense of integrity, a judgment personal and sincere. Pointing out radical defects he refines Coleridge's taste, forcing him to renounce rhetoric, "cultivate simplicity, Coleridge, or should I say banish elaborateness, for simplicity springs spontaneous from the heart." And then on 10th January 1797 Lamb finds the thing he had been looking for: "Coleridge, I want you to write an Epic poem. Nothing short of it can satisfy the vast capacity of true poetic genius. . . . you have strength and amplitude of wing enow for flights like those I recommend." In his next letter he returns to it: "when in town (in 1794) you were talking of the Origin of Evil as a most prolific subject for a long poem. Why not adopt it? there would be room for imagination. An imagination like yours may expand into a thousand great ideas." From these hints came the miracle of *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*, and Lamb alone instantly recognised the achievement.

Prof. Whalley shews step by step the development and influence of Lamb's criticism and suggestions on Coleridge's mind until all his imaginative powers came to fruition, "concentrated at full stretch, responsive as a fiddle-string," the outcome of that wonderful nine-months correspondence between them.

The other essays in the book by various writers deal with Piers Plowman, The Elizabethan Madrigal, Paradise Lost, Swift, Dickens, and George Henry Lewes, and are in the admirable tradition maintained by the English Association Studies.

WINTER PROGRAMME: Future Meetings

Saturday, 8th November, 1958—"Harriot Mellon, Lamb's *Melesinda*," by Mr. Basil Francis. *Chairman*: Mr. R. Meadows White

Monday 8th, December 1958—An Address by the President of the Society, Professor Geoffrey Tillotson, M.A., B.Litt. *Chairman*: Mr. Stephen K. Jones, B.A., F.L.A.

The November meeting will be held in the Library of the Mary Ward Settlement, 5 Tavistock Place, W.C.1., and will commence at 2-45 p.m. The December meeting will be held at Dr. Williams's Hall, 14 Gordon Square, W.C.1. and will commence at 6-30 p.m.

Charles Lamb Birthday Celebration, 1959

The 1959 Charles Lamb Birthday Celebration will be held on Saturday, 14th February when the Guest of Honour will be Sir Sydney C. Roberts, M.A., Hon. LL.D., F.R.S.L. Full details later.

Christmas Cards

The Society's Christmas Cards are now available. All members who have ordered cards should have received them by the time this Bulletin is published. An order somewhat in excess of present requirements was placed with the printers, so if any other members wish to purchase cards they should make immediate application to Mr. Crowsley at his new address. The cost of the cards, including envelopes and postage, is six shillings per dozen. No money should be sent with the order.

OBITUARY—It was only recently we learnt that Mr. Bernard Drew had died on 9th March last, and although belated we do tender our sincere condolences to his sister. Bernard Drew had been a member of the Society since March 1936, and many interesting communications have passed between him and the Society. In one letter he told us that through marriage his family was connected with the Le Grice family—a name wellknown to students of Charles Lamb. Mr. Drew was for many years secretary and producer of a Dramatic society in London. He had written several volumes of poems and dramatic pieces. During recent years failing health had prevented him from playing an active part in the Society although his interest was maintained as witnessed by a letter we received a few days before he died.

NEW MEMBERS—Mrs. C. O. Little, 435 North Meridian, Valley Center, Kansas. Dr. Clifton J. Malone, 1757 University Av., Abilene, Texas. Mr. H. W. Meyer, 16 Annette Road, N.7

DRAMATIC GROUP

Friday, 14th Nov.—"Puppets and Drama in New Zealand"—Mrs. Violet Potter at Courtauld House, 7-0 p.m.

Sat. evening 8th Nov.—A party of Members of the Dramatic Group are visiting Old Vic to see "MARY STUART" by J.C.F.V. Schiller.

Monday, 19th January, 1959—Evening—A party of Members of the D.G. are visiting Drury Lane to see "MY FAIR LADY".

Please note that no further applications for tickets can be accepted for the two theatre parties mentioned above.

Friday, 30th January, 1959—13th Annual General Meeting of the Group to be followed by a reading given by Members of Group of "JOHN WOODVIL" by Charles Lamb.

Members of the Society are reminded that by payment of a small annual subscription of 2/6d they can become Associates of the Dramatic Group and thereby receive advance information of theatre visits etc., etc.

ALLAN CUNNINGHAM AND LAMB'S JOKES

One of the delighted readers of Thomas Hood's "Literary Reminiscences" was Allan Cunningham. On 28th May 1840 he wrote to Hood thanking him for a copy of *Hood's Own*, which included the Reminiscences. His letter includes the following evocative phrase—"how welcome are your recollections of the Taylor and Hessey days when Lamb scattered his bright though dilatory jokes about, and Hazlitt sat with his foxlike eyes looking direct at nothing and yet seeing all." The manuscript of this letter is now at the National Library of Scotland.

From P. F. MORGAN.

TENNYSON AND A POEM BY LAMB

Lamb's poem, "On an Infant dying as soon as born", was suggested by F. T. Palgrave for inclusion in *The Golden Treasury*. As Palgrave noted in the manuscript original of the anthology, now at the British Museum, "the final verdict" on poems put forward was given by Tennyson at Christmas 1860. Palgrave observes of Lamb's poem, "to (Tennyson) and Mrs. T. it was new, and appeared excellent—as well as eminently true and affecting. They lost their first child thus at Twickenham."

From P. F. MORGAN.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

"Harmonies may be in things unlike."

On 30th April Mr. Arthur F. Bishop lectured to the St. Marylebone Society at the Marylebone Town Hall on "Benjamin Robert Haydon and his Friends", the latter including, of course, Charles and Mary Lamb. Haydon's studio in Lisson Grove was very near 41 Alpha Road where Mary Lamb spent her closing years.

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Our Swedish member and keen Elian Mr. Alex Sjogren is also an artist of distinction, and at a recent sketching exhibition at the Kalmar Art Museum many of his sketches were given a special setting in a separate hall of the museum. Local landscape scenes predominated, his personal interpretation of natural experience: there were also town pictures from Uppsala and the outskirts of Copenhagen. We offer good wishes for further successes in his chosen media.

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We regret to hear that Mr. William Kent, our member since 1935 has been in hospital in Norfolk since April 1957, and that Mrs. Kent died in August last year. Until his illness Mr. Kent was a frequent attender at our meetings and was ever ready to join in discussions with forthright opinions. An authority on London and its history and notabilities he has written many books on that subject. We wish him an early return to health.

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We are pleased to learn that Mrs. Walter Farrow has most satisfactorily recovered from her severe illness, and we send our congratulations on her recovery and best wishes on her Birthday recently celebrated.

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The following is an extract from an interesting letter received from our member Dr. Mary Cathryne Park of Florida, U.S.A.

'My work at Florida Southern College where I am associate Professor of English, has been most interesting and absorbing, but confining. I have been slowly collecting material on Joseph Priestley, in preparation for a literary biography of him. He became connected with our family in his plan for setting up a community in Pennsylvania, to which Coleridge and Southey hoped to come in their pantisocratic dream, and we still visit there in the summer.

I have also become interested in the life of Thomas Cooper, who helped Priestley in this plan, and who after Priestley's death, became a teacher at Univ. of Pennsylvania, Dickenson College, and then President of the University of South Carolina and practically author of the statutes of the States.

I hope within the next couple of years to be able to come to England and complete this research.

I should be happy to help any of our members to track down their own research in this country.'

ENVOI. *Lamb lives and will live by virtue of being himself and expressing this self in a series of prose essays unsurpassed in their charm, prodigality of fancy and literary artifice, marked by profound common sense, and starred with passages of great beauty, dazzling insight and kindly capricious humour.*

E. V. Lucas.