



THE C.L.S.



BULLETIN

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Editor of Bulletin:

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

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(Twenty-Ninth Year)

SEPTEMBER, 1964

"THAT LADY": A VISIT TO HER HOME AT CHAWTON

We were all—33 of us—in the best spirits as we started off in the coach on a pouring wet Sunday of mid June, bound for the Hampshire village of Chawton where Jane Austen spent the last eight years of her all too short life.

Mr. Austen-Leigh, in the preface to his memoirs of his aunt, published in 1870, exhorts us to expect nothing from any such trip or still better to refrain from going and stay at home, for he writes:— 'I cannot recommend any of her admirers to undertake a pilgrimage to this spot. The building still stands, but it has lost all that gave it its character'. Quite so, but this is over a century ago, and things are different now, thanks to the devotion and generosity of Mr. Edward Carpenter. The house now is restored and has become a shrine—a somewhat sanctimonious word, and one that Miss Austen would probably have detested—but what else can one call it, it being so full of relics and personal mementoes all of which were pointed out to us by Mr. Carpenter himself, ever at hand to answer questions and see that we missed nothing.

It was a most absorbing and rewarding experience. We were shown many period

pictures, the furniture belonging to Jane's father, her precious work table, the patch-work quilt she and her mother laboured at together, and many other things including a fascinating collection of photostat letters, each of them referring to personal matters in Jane's life or else to events in the world of her day, curiously comparable to those of our own, if one substitutes Hitler for Napoleon.

Was Jane happy at Chawton? Yes, we feel convinced it suited her, as country life always did, and she was certainly busy with this rural, domesticated routine, tending the flower beds, performing none too arduous domestic chores, meandering through the lanes in the small donkey cart (still on show), or walking into Alton, a mile away, for shopping. For companionship she had her mother, her beloved sister Cassandra and a close family friend, Martha Lloyd, and young society, too, was seldom lacking, for a crew of merry nephews and nieces would frequently appear from Chawton House or Godmersham, her brother's estate. They were never tired of romping with Aunt Jane who laid herself out to entertain them, playing the piano for them to dance to, telling them stories, competing with them at battledore and shuttlecock. They would con-

side in her too as they grew older, and with her nieces especially she formed a close and cherished relationship.

What of her work, her beloved writing? For some seven years prior to this final move she had been through a dry and barren period, probably due to lack of encouragement or unsettled conditions in Bath lodgings, but the Chawton home renewed her creative powers for here it was that she produced her three most notable novels—*Mansfield Park*, *Emma* and *Persuasion*, in addition to revising for publication three much earlier works, *Northanger Abbey*, *Sense and Sensibility* and *Pride and Prejudice*, all of which were issued without her name, and the last of them posthumously.

Having seen and heard so much we had all of us considerable food for thought on our homeward journey, incidentally a lovely drive, for the weather had repented and the sun shone gloriously over the quiet peaceful landscape that meant so much to our dear authoress. We pondered as we went over the enigma of her fame, never more firmly established than now but so grudgingly bestowed in her lifetime. True, the Prince Regent had declared himself among her admirers, keeping a set of her novels, apparently, in each of his residences, and accepting most graciously the proposal that *Emma*, on its publication, should be dedicated to His Royal Highness, which must considerably have gratified her author, but it was not till after her death that the general reading public awoke to recognise in any big way her genius.

Mr. Austen-Leigh relates that when, many years after her burial, a gentleman visited her grave in Winchester Cathedral, the verger asked him, 'Pray sir, can you tell me anything particular about that lady? So many wants to know where she is buried', and, adds her nephew sadly, 'that was how it was during her lifetime, the verger's ignorance being shared by most people. Few knew there was 'anything particular about *that lady*'.

May I conclude the above brief report by a quotation from Jane's first novel "no temper could be more cheerful than hers, or possess in a greater degree that sanguine expectation of happiness, which is happiness itself".

Note: It seems worthy of record that Miss Austen and Charles Lamb were born in the same year, as was also Walter Savage Landor. If only he had seen fit to include them in his 'Imaginary Conversations', what would have been more rewarding than a sparring match between this incongruous pair? Jane would soon have disposed of any Elian whimsicalities, howsoever salted with erudition, and might not Charles have retaliated by requesting to 'feel her bumps'? Hm

MADGE K. LEE.

BOOKS RECEIVED

CHARLES LAMB: THE EVOLUTION OF ELIA by George L. Barnett. Indiana University Press, Bloomington. 1964.

Members of the Charles Lamb Society and all lovers of Elia are already deeply indebted to Professor Barnett for his work on Lamb's letters published in the *Modern Language Quarterly* and the *Huntington Library Quarterly*: work which enabled him to correct inaccuracies in the text of Lucas's three volume edition. Again in 1957 we had his invaluable chapter on Lamb biography in *The English Romantic Poets and Essayists*. Now his years of work have given us a full length study of Charles Lamb, the object of which is to interpret Lamb's development as an essayist.

Professor Barnett first examines and then defines Lamb's position in the history of the essay, pointing out that Lamb's essays were not a sudden and new creation, but the logical result of his personal temperament. He was thus enabled to mould the familiar essay from his own experiences, and to shape the subjects he chose in a way which is unique.

Lamb's upbringing, first in the Temple, then at Christ's Hospital, and later at the South Sea House, fostered his interest in tradition and the past, and this was reinforced by his reading of old authors. Professor Barnett shows how these influences inevitably appeared in his written work, and particularly in his choice of subject. His friends, too, had great influence on both the development of his personality and on his literary work. Coleridge, of course, first springs to mind, but his sense of humour received considerable encouragement from his friendship with both James White and Thomas Manning, and the conversation of others was equally stimulating in a different way. The importance of his reading on his essays was great, for "reading was Lamb's chief delight in life". The origins of most of the essays will also be found in Lamb's experiences, in the talk of his friends and in his reading.

It is well known that many of Lamb's letters contain first sketches for the essays, but a more detailed examination of this relationship is carried out in this book than ever before. It is possible to trace the evolution of some of the essays through these first drafts, and it is a fascinating exercise. Not all the drafts are in the letters, some of the material in the early essays was used again in a more elaborate form in the Elia essays. In this book Professor Barnett studies this evolution and the development of Lamb's ideas, and he also examines the influence of Lamb's home and his office on his literary work.

An interesting chapter deals with such questions as "When did he find time for his literary work? Where did he write? What was his own attitude to his literary creations?" It is emphasised that these questions should be answered since Lamb did his best work during the years he was employed at the East India House. "Not only letters, but poems, jokes and probably more than one essay was penned at the office."

One of the most valuable parts of this book is the chapter headed "The Craftsman". Here Professor Barnett examines Lamb's method of writing and does so by a study of more than twenty manuscript essays. The actual process of composition is examined by means of the clues left in the manuscripts—the blots, cancellations, revisions and alterations—for Lamb worked and re-worked carefully over his manuscripts. Through this examination we are virtually watching Lamb at work and how fascinating it is. Unfortunately only two of the illustrations in this book reproduce manuscripts—portions of "Dog Days" and of "Poor Relations"—it would have been interesting to see more facsimiles, but no doubt additional illustrations would have added greatly to the cost of the book. In the examination of the manuscript of "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig" we see many interesting amendments made by Lamb, for example, for "untimely sufferers" he originally wrote "unfortunate little victims", and again "a sweet feeling of self-appropriation" which he subsequently changed to "a sweet soothing of self-satisfaction" to avoid a repetition of the use of the word "feeling", thus greatly improving the phrase. There are numerous other alterations of an equally felicitous nature.

Professor Barnett makes the interesting suggestion that Lamb may have used capitals for shades of meaning which we do not now perceive when they are not reproduced in modernized texts. A further fact which emerges from the study of the manuscripts is that Lamb was peculiarly sensitive to the sound of words and made many changes to avoid the unpleasant repetition of sound. Some of the alterations examined by Professor Barnett are shown in parallel columns and they are much easier to follow in this tabular form than when they are part of the text of the book. Of course not all Lamb's alterations were made on the manuscripts, for he was quite capable of making author's corrections on the proofs, and even later by letter to the publisher. Again essays which had appeared in magazines were sometimes revised when collected in book form. From this detailed examination it is deduced that "Lamb customarily wrote with difficulty

and that many of his most delightful lines were the product of long thought and tedious trial and error", and it is pointed out that he was his own most exacting critic.

The final chapter in the book is devoted to a study of Lamb's style and the analysis indicates some of the factors which influenced it. Detailed examination is made of the early influences, mainly from Lamb's training at Christ's Hospital, of his very extensive reading and of his use of quotation. Professor Barnett points out that it is a tribute to Lamb's critical appreciation that in quotation his emphasis was on the literature whose worth has been confirmed by time. This chapter closes with the claim that "the perfection of Lamb's work . . . is owing to his painstaking attention to the details of literary expression and to his refusal to publish an essay until he had perfected it by arduous labour and careful revision to conform to his own high standards."

The book contains an interesting appendix showing additional examples of changes which Lamb made in the interests of perfection. The notes quoting sources are particularly valuable for the list of locations of manuscripts which have been examined. The book also prints as part of the text several hitherto unpublished letters from Charles Lamb.

In a book as detailed as this it would be surprising if a few errors had not crept in, but the only one noticed on a first reading is the statement that Hazlitt, Procter and Wainwright withdrew from the staff of *The London Magazine* following John Scott's death. Perhaps it is splitting hairs to question whether they were ever actually "on the staff", but all three certainly contributed to the magazine for some time after February 1821. Hazlitt had twenty-six items in it between that date and November 1823, Wainwright eleven contributions up to February 1823 and Procter went on until July 1825.

This book is certainly a most interesting and valuable study of Charles Lamb, from an angle not much worked over before. True Elians will revel in it.

C. A. PRANCE.

NEW VICE-PRESIDENT—We have pleasure in announcing that Mr. John Betjeman, C.B.E., D.Litt. has accepted our invitation to become a Vice-President of this Society.

NEW MEMBERS

Mrs. E. Philby-Smith, 66 Water Lane, Seven Kings, Essex; Miss G. Durdle, 53 Chatsworth Road, Bournemouth; Miss R. Russell, The Hill Farm, St. Ippolyts, Hitchin, Herts.

WINTER PROGRAMME 1964-1965

"I am always longing to be with men more excellent than myself"—CHARLES LAMB.

Saturday, 10th October 1964—"The Genius and Character of Hogarth"—William Gaunt, M.A.

Chairman: Arthur F. Bishop.

Monday, 16th November 1964—"Wordsworth's 'Peele Castle'"—Professor Geoffrey Tillotson, M.A., B.Litt.

Chairman: Mrs. Katherine Moore.

Saturday, 5th December 1964—"Mary Lamb: A Bi-Centenary Tribute"—Edmund Blunden, C.B.E., M.A., C.Litt.

Chairman: A. G. Clarke.

Monday, 11th January 1965—"Humphry Davy, 1778-1829"—T. R. Barnard.

Chairman: Miss Florence S. Reeves.

Saturday, 6th February 1965—The Charles Lamb Birthday Celebration.

Monday, 8th March 1965—"Walter Savage Landor: A Centenary Tribute"—Sir George Rostrevor Hamilton, F.R.S.L.

Chairman: F. E. Sandry, F.L.A.

Saturday, 10th April 1965—"A Sovereign Star: Christopher Marlowe"—John Trewin, F.R.S.L.

Chairman: A. J. White.

Saturday, 15th May 1965—Annual General Meeting.

Monday Meetings are held at Dr. Williams's Hall, 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C.1 and commence at 6-30 p.m. Saturday meetings (excluding the February Meeting) are held at the Mary Ward Centre, 9 Tavistock Place, London, W.C.1 and commence at 2-45 p.m.

SUMMER VISIT—SATURDAY, 12th SEPTEMBER—Visit to the Sir John Soane's Museum, Lincoln's Inn Fields, W.C.2 under the guidance of Sir John Summerson, Director of the Museum. Members should assemble at the Museum at 2-30 p.m., but please inform Miss F. S. Reeves if you intend to be present so that appropriate arrangements can be made for tea at the Bonnington Hotel, Southampton Row, W.C.1. Inclusive charge 5/- per head.

CHRISTMAS CARDS FOR 1964—Will members wishing to purchase the Society's Christmas Cards kindly inform Mr. E. G. Crowsley as soon as possible. No money is required at present. The illustration appearing on this

year's card is Christ's Hospital in Charles Lamb's day. The cost will be 7/- per dozen including envelopes.

DRAMATIC GROUP

Friday, 16th October: 19th Birthday celebrations. We are pleased to announce that on this occasion Miss Margaret Brown will be the Group's Guest of Honour. The Celebration will take place at Courtauld House, Byng Place, W.C.1 at 6-30 for 7 o'clock. Tickets 10/- each (including Buffet Supper) can be obtained from Miss G. Edna Philpot, 26, Cranborne Avenue, Tolworth, Surrey.

Wednesday, 4th November: Theatre Party. "The Barber of Seville" (Rossini)—Sadler Wells Theatre. Tickets 11/- (reduced party rate). Cheques and postal orders should be made out in Miss Philpot's name please.

FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

The following tribute to the late Mr. Walter Farrow has been received from Mr. William Kean Seymour, our member since 1948:

"I was deeply grieved to learn from the May and July Bulletins of the passing of our Chairman, Mr. Walter Farrow, at an age and after a long tenure of office which made him almost legendary in the history of The Charles Lamb Society. It is not often in these days that cultural societies are blessed with such devoted service as Mr. Farrow gave so unstintingly; and ours has been particularly fortunate since its inception in the work given by the late Samuel Morris Rich, by Mr. Crowsley, by yourself and by the new Chairman Mr. Arthur F. Bishop. It is this devotion, of course, that accounts for the splendid continuance of the work for nearly thirty years."

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Congratulations and good wishes to Mr. Frank Swinnerton who celebrated his eightieth birthday on 12th August. Our members will recall that Mr. Swinnerton was the Society's Guest of Honour at the Charles Lamb Birthday Celebration on February 8th last when he made a delightful speech prior to proposing the "Toast to the Immortal Memory."

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Another of our members, Professor Tsutomu Fukuda, of Kobe University, has recently published "A Study of Charles Lamb's Essays of Elia", a review of which will appear in our next Bulletin. This work is published by the Hokuseido Press, Tokyo. Members who participated in the visit to Canonbury Tower, Islington last year will recall meeting Prof. Fukuda on that occasion.