

THE C.L.S.



BULLETIN



(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

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(Thirtieth Year)

JANUARY, 1965

THE CHARLES LAMB BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION 1965—This year's Celebration will be held on Saturday, 6th February at the Windsor Castle Restaurant, Vauxhall Bridge Road, London S.W.1. (close to Victoria Station) and will be a Luncheon followed by the usual Toasts and concluding with a light tea. Reception from 12-45 p.m. Luncheon at 1-30 p.m.

The Guest of Honour is Dr. Ian Jack, M.A., D.Ph. who is a Fellow of Brasenose College. His publications include "Augustine Satire" and "English Literature 1815-1832" where he has written so understandably on Charles Lamb. Dr. Jack has also written on Pope and Sir Walter Scott.

Owing to increased catering costs the charge for tickets will be twenty-five shillings (25/-) which includes luncheon, tea and tips, but excludes wines. Members should apply immediately to Miss F. S. Reeves, 33 Alma Street, London N.W.5. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to the Charles Lamb Society.

We look forward to a large attendance at this Anniversary with as many as possible of our Provincial members.

MARY LAMB 1764-1847: A BICENTENARY TRIBUTE by EDMUND BLUNDEN

5th December, 1964

It is always difficult to know how much or little the less obvious figures in English literature are now remembered, but in opening my talk on Mary Lamb where she is certainly remembered unfailingly I will mention something which makes me happy. It is just this: my attention was drawn to the fact that this year is the bicentenary of Mary Lamb by one of our quiet young Chinese girl students in Hong Kong. But of course 'Bridget Elia' has not been without her admirers, for a long time now, in the country of Old China and the East in general.

We wondered sometimes, those of us there who regarded academic studies of authors as opportunities for fireside talk, if Mary Lamb ought not to be counted as part author of those Essays first published over the signature Elia. It scarcely needs deliberate proof, but surely she contributed in the course of nature a share of the remembrances and character sketches in those well filled pages. I suppose that Mary Lamb had the passion for noticing the world about her and the gift of hiding it away in her

But in 1796 Mary's symptoms of illness were those of mental illness. They were not disregarded, but bad luck caused Charles to fail in a mission; the day that he tried to get something done, her mind collapsed and she killed her mother—it might easily have been a worse tragedy even. Thenceforward, whatever experiences of joy and bounty life was to bring Charles and Mary, the recurring shadow was not to be denied; Mary was only at intervals obliged to give up liberty, but in one light neither she nor her brother could ever again know true liberty. They were, as he said, marked people. Even Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sara Hutchinson, sensible as she was, would spend one of her London days with Mary Lamb, but admitted that she durst not stay the night in Mary's lodgings. Notwithstanding that attitude, how many valiant people made up the Lambs' parties year after year—and how many persons one would wish to have seen, old and young. Coleridge among them, found the moment for a consultation with Mary by herself on their own affairs and anxieties.

It is in these days sufficiently curious that nobody has fashioned a romantic entertainment out of the diary of Crabb Robinson, who, himself an adviser much in demand, was one of the most earnest applicants to Mary for intimate opinions. How joyously he sets down in his vast diary the occasions when he dines alone with Mary,—once he is even admitted to her own room! But Mary seems to have accepted all along the career of one of those whom Charles calls "incomparable old maids." It is from Crabb Robinson that we know how candid and unexcitable she was about love matters (after all she was William Hazlitt's confidant and not much beyond what he had to reveal was probable). I will just refer to Crabb's diary for 12th January, 1835, when he took the stage-coach to Edmonton for an hour with Mary, solitary Mary. He found her deranged, but only in ways that her friends would observe. She could talk of Charles and she even told their friend about a private view of him indeed—him and his adopted daughter Emma. "She said Charles was shocked at the sight of Moxon's child. He loved the mother (Emma) and she him, but it would not do. The disproportion was too great in their age, but Moxon was not fit for her. 'She is such a nice, elegant creature, and he looks so dirty!' Except this last, every other judgment was, I hardly need repeat here, utterly wild and groundless." But did the diarist know Charles as she did? Is it beyond imagination to see with the mind's eye once more, one of the most momentous occasions of Charles seeking the shelter of his sister's

marvellous sweet sanity?

The year 1964 has reminded us of the death of John Clare a century ago, and of the birth of Mary Lamb a century earlier—the poet from the country places has left us just a phrase of admiration for her in his joyous description of her brother off duty. It is a sad reflection that both Clare and Miss Lamb were doomed to pass their latter days "with reason gone", and it is curious that with their intellect so darkened or bowed down both had a fancy for historical visions. Clare was apt to startle those who fell into conversation with him by his vigorous accounts of British battles, at sea, in which he had the feeling that he had served. Mary Lamb, as T. N. Talfourd was able to say from experience, was bewilderingly apt to describe and make beautiful *her* "long ago". In Talfourd's words, "She would fancy herself in the days of Queen Anne or George the First; and describe the brocaded dames and courtly manners, as though she had been bred among them, in the best style of the old comedy. It was all broken and disjointed, so that the hearer could remember but little of the discourse; but the fragments were like the jewelled speeches of Congreve, only shaken from their setting. There was sometimes even a vein of crazy logic running through them, associating things essentially most dissimilar, but connecting them by a verbal association in strange order."

It is, however, with Mary Lamb as with John Clare; we must regard their distinction as arising not from their minds in disturbance but from their minds in full strength and order. In a poem on women writers, which appeared in the days of Mary Lamb's obscurity, Leigh Hunt mentioned her very briefly, calling her "the fine brain". That note was sounded by many who knew her (and the tributes to her in verse especially are not few.) If it was not a case of speaking of her apart, the eulogy of Charles Lamb would often be combined with one of her. Here is a simple instance. It is the dedication of William Hone's delightful miscellany (for ever a treasure to the desultory reader) called "The Every-Day Book", 1826. Hone prefixes these words:

To Charles Lamb, Esq.

Dear L—, Your letter to me, within the first two months from the commencement of the present work, approving my notice of St. Chad's Well, and your daring afterwards to publish me your friend, with your proper name annexed, I shall never forget. Nor can I forget your and Miss Lamb's sympathy and kindness, when glooms outmasters me; and that your pen spontaneously sparkled in the book, when my mind was in clouds and darkness. These 'trifles' as each of you would call them, are benefits

scored upon my heart, and
I dedicate this volume
To you and Miss Lamb
with affectionate respect,
May 8th, 1826 W. HONE.

In 1844 Wordsworth added a note to his poem about Charles Lamb which was to have appeared on his grave-stone but which was curtailed,

"Were I to give way to my own feelings, I should dwell not only on her genius and intellectual powers, but upon the delicacy and refinement of manner which she maintained inviolate under most trying circumstances. She was loved and honoured by all her brother's friends; and others, some of them strange characters, whom his philanthropic peculiarities induced him to countenance . . ."

Another sidelight on Mary Lamb is given in her letter of 1820 to Mrs. Novello:

It is so many years since I have been out of town in the Spring, that I scarcely knew of the existence of such a season. I see every day some new flower peeping out of the ground, and watch its growth; so that I have a sort of an intimate friendship with each. I know the effect of every change of weather upon them have learned all their names, the duration of their lives, and the whole progress of their domestic economy.

But the full and sincere appreciation of Mary Lamb is contained in "Recollections of Writers" by Charles and Mary Cowden Clarke where Mrs. Cowden Clarke writes:

Miss Lamb bore a strong personal resemblance to her brother; being in stature under middle height, possessing well-cut features, and a countenance of singular sweetness, with intelligence. Her brown eyes were soft yet penetrating; her nose and mouth were shapely; while the general expression was mildness itself. She had a speaking voice, gentle and persuasive; and her smile was her brother's own—winning in the extreme. There was a certain catch or emotional breathingness, in her utterance, which gave an inexpressible charm to her reading of poetry, and which lent a captivating earnestness to her mode of speech when addressing those she liked She had a mind at once noble-toned and practical, making her ever a chosen source of confidence among her friends, who turned to her for consolation, confirmation, and advice, in matters of nicest moment, always sure of deriving from her both aid and solace. Beneath the sparing talk and retired carriage, few casual observers would have suspected the ample information and large intelligence, that lay comprised there Few who did not know her would have imagined the excellent understanding, the altogether rarely-gifted being, mentally and morally, that Mary Lamb was. Her apparel was always of the plainest kind. She took snuff liberally—a habit

that had evidently grown of her propensity to sympathize with and share all her brother's tastes . . . She had a small white, and delicately formed hand, and as it hovered above the tortoise shell box in search of the stimulating pinch, the act seemed another link of association between the brother and sister . . . there was a certain old-world fashion in Mary Lamb's diction which gave it a most natural and quaintly pleasant effect, and which heightened rather than detracted from the more heartfelt or important things she uttered. She had a way of repeating her brother's words assentingly when he spoke to her. He once said (with his peculiar mode of tenderness, beneath abrupt, blunt speech), "You must die first Mary". She nodded, with her little quiet nod and sweet smile "Yes, I must die first, Charles."

Mary Lamb's place as writer may change but she deserves to be remembered: She was Charles Lamb's incomparable sister.

At this meeting the Chair was occupied by Mr. A. G. Clarke who as an Old Blue said his association with Mr. Blunden began many years ago. At the close of the address he thanked him for an entrancing talk. Mr. Arthur Bishop also expressed his gratitude to Mr. Blunden. The Rev. Doubleday accorded thanks to the Chairman for his felicitous duties. Over seventy members and friends attended the meeting.

The Elian Reading was given by Miss Margaret Brown who had chosen a passage from the essay on Mackery End.

WORDSWORTH'S "PEELE CASTLE",
AN ADDRESS by
PROF. GEOFFREY TILLOTSON, M.A.,
B.Litt.

16th November, 1964

Our President Prof. Geoffrey Tillotson discussed Wordsworth's "Peele Castle" and in his inimitable manner outlined the meaning and purpose of this poem.

Last year he gave us a talk on Wordsworth's "Elegiac Verses in Memory of my brother, John Wordsworth". This year he took another of the poems that sprang from the death of John Wordsworth, "Elegiac Stanzas, suggested by a Picture of Peele Castle, in a Storm," painted by Sir George Beaumont." So many critics, he noted, had misunderstood the poem—one of the latest said it was about Wordsworth's loss of creative power. If we read the poem carefully its meaning is clear—it concerns a

contrast, as other poems of Wordsworth do, between youth and maturity, and recounts what Wordsworth encourages us to call his humanization:

A deep distress hath humaniz'd my Soul.
When Wordsworth first saw Peele Castle, in wonderful summer weather, he thought the sea at its foot was "the gentlest of all gentle things". Since then it had drowned John and he now saw it differently. His former view of it was a "delusion"—a "fond" delusion because it had been so nice while it lasted. The poem renounces the well-meaning but ill-informed things that Wordsworth had said about nature up to then. He had said in "Tintern Abbey", for instance that

Nature never did betray
The heart that loved her.

But here, as if recalling the earlier passage he writes

Such, in the fond delusion of my heart,
Such Picture would I at that time have made:
And seen the soul of truth in every part;
A faith, a trust, that could not be betray'd.

Nature had betrayed him. Keats and Tennyson could have told him that it was his own fault. Wordsworth had taken nature piecemeal. He had selected the nice things and built his philosophy on them. But Keats and Tennyson knew, nature, besides being sunsets and roses, was red in tooth and claw.

The role of the castle in the poem is interesting to watch—Wordsworth steadies himself by the sight of its fixity in the midst of a storm. We can see him steadying himself in such lines as:

This, which I know, I speak with mind serene.
He keeps referring to himself in the midst of his description of the pictured storm until he forgets the picture in his welcome to 'fortitude and patient cheer,' and is final statement:

Not without hope we suffer and we mourn.

Wordsworth's greatness is nowhere clearer than in the architecture of his poems. This poem is marvellously constructed except for what the lecturer could not but think a mistake. Wordsworth says in a famous stanza that if he had painted a picture of Peele Castle when he saw it in that splendid summer, he would have expressed "what then I saw". But he goes on to say that on top of expressing what he saw he would

add the gleam,
The light that never was, on sea or land,
The consecration, and the Poet's dream.

He says this because of the theory that poets threw a colour of the imagination over the thing they described. The view in its general form goes back to Aristotle and Wordsworth later came to see that it was mistaken, or that if true once, was true no longer. The world had now come to be seen as so beautiful that no poet could improve its beauty. His task was mainly that of seeing what is there. But although Wordsworth recoiled from the view he had expressed, it had no rightful place whether true or false, in the argument of the poem. All he needed to say was that if he had painted a picture of Peele Castle when he had seen it on that earlier occasion he would have painted it differently from the way Sir George had painted it. That was all that needed to be said on this occasion. He then would have gone on to the stanza quoted above about the fond delusion of his heart.

* * *

The meeting was ably presided over by Mrs. Katherine Moore who encouraged a lively discussion which followed the lecture.

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The Elian Reading was given by Mr. F. E. Sandry who selected part of Charles Lamb's letter, dated 20th March, 1822 to Wordsworth. Mr. H. W. Meyer moved the vote of thanks to the lecturer while Mrs. H. Lehane performed a similar duty to the Chairman.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Monday, 11th January, 1965—"Humphry Davy, 1778—1829" by Mr. T. R. Barnard.
Chairman: Miss Florence S. Reeves

Saturday, 6th February, 1965—The Charles Lamb Birthday Celebration. Guest of Honour Dr. Ian Jack, M.A., D.Ph. See front page for special announcement.

The January meeting will be held at Dr. Williams's Hall, 14 Gordon Square, W.C.1., at 6-30 p.m.

SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1965—With the arrival of a New Year members are reminded that their annual subscriptions are now due and should be sent, *immediately* to our Hon. Treasurer, Miss F. A. Parsons, 32 Carmel Court, Kings Drive, Wembley Park, Middz.

The various subscription rates are as follows:
(a) 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 the sum is 5/-.

(b) For each Provincial Member, residing beyond a 15 mile radius of London, and for each Overseas member—7/6. For additional members of the same family residing at the same address the rate is 3/6.

(c) Corporate Bodies, wherever located—15/-.

May we ask our American members when paying by dollar cheque kindly to add 30 cents to help cover bank clearance charges.

Do please remit your dues at once.

NEW MEMBERS

Miss E. M. Bryant, 7, Dalebury Rd., S.W.17

Mr. H. A. Burton, 33a Deans Way, East Finchly, N.2.

Mr. Wah-Ching Chau, Merton College, Oxford

Miss C. A. Drury, 1, Polperro Mansions, Lyncroft Gardens, N.W.6.

Mr. E. W. Easter, 33, Elmhurst Rd., Enfield, Middlesex.

Miss L. N. Landon, Orchard Cottage, Checkendon Nr. Reading, Bucks.

Miss A. Rennards, 2 Paulet House, Cromwell Rd. Basingstoke, Hants.

Miss M. Yu, Crosby Hall, Chelsea, S.W.3.

DRAMATIC GROUP: NINETEENTH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION

19th October, 1964

Those members who attended the 19th Birthday Celebration were amply rewarded. Miss Philpot after endless pains had secured the same rooms as previously in Courtauld House in spite of its passing under new management; she had also persuaded Miss Margaret Brown to be the Guest of Honour. Mr. E. G. Crowsley as Chairman called upon Miss Theodora Croucher to open the proceedings which she did with a brilliant rendering of Grieg's *Preludium*. Miss Florence F. Reeves whose songs are always appreciated again gave with exquisite grace Rutland Boughton's *Fairy Song; Primroses deck the Bank's Green Side* (Linly)—a song possibly heard by Lamb—and later in the evening Schubert's *The Green Ribbon and the Bird*. Miss Gwendoline Jones provided spirited and fascinating readings of *Poems by Charles and Mary Lamb*; Miss Croucher's final item was John Ireland's *Island Spell*, a delicate musical poem full of atmosphere.

Miss Margaret Brown's theme was *Children of Lamb's Day*, which she illustrated with many evocative pictures from her collection. Her mastery of her subject and its underlying humanity and the many asides in support were delightful; children are much the same down the ages as evidenced by poems and passages by

Charles and Mary Lamb as well as references to Hogarth. The terrible plight of poor children of the day and the abandonment of babies led Captain Coram to take action and the Foundling Hospital was a practical outcome, the first indiscriminate admission became unmanageable and resulted in a death rate of about 79%, so a restriction in admissions had to be adopted.

Reform of the methods concerning children in public schools had to follow for there was too much flogging, bullying, brutal sports, etc. particularly for boys. Girls were educated at home with governesses or at expensive boarding schools and led restrictive lives, reading books meant to be of later practical domestic use—Lamb's dictum was that the best education for a girl was to turn her loose in a good library... thereby making "incomparable old maids".

Miss Brown in conclusion quoted Mary Lamb's preface to the *Tales from Shakespeare*—her wish that those Tales for younger readers would enrich the fancy, strengthen virtue, remove selfish and mercenary thoughts, replacing these with courtesy, generosity and humaneness.

Mr. Arthur F. Bishop thanked Miss Brown for her talk and for her valuable associations with the Society and the Dramatic Group and especially her play *Brilliant Water* read by members of the Group in 1950. Miss Annette Park accorded thanks to all who had provided such a pleasurable evening and to Miss Philpot for all the trouble she had taken to ensure the success of the Birthday Celebration. The party then proceeded to the Dining Room where refreshments were served.

A. PARK.

On 19th February 1965, the 19th Annual General Meeting will be held at 7 p.m. in the Clans Room at the Royal Scottish Corporation, Fleur-de-lis Court, Fetter Lane, E.C.4. The nearest Underground Station is Chancery Lane. On the conclusion of official business an Address will be given by Mr. R. Meadows White "The School for Scandal in its Glory." Playbills and prints will be on exhibition.

Nominations are invited for the vacancy on the Committee to replace the retiring Associate Member. These should be sent to Miss Edna Philpot as soon as possible after ensuring that the nominee is prepared to stand for election.

Group Members are reminded that subscriptions for 1965 are now due and should be sent to the Honorary Treasurer, Miss A. M. Bazell, 9, Holland Park Mansions, Holland Park Gardens, W.14. Associate Members subscribe 2/6d; Acting Members 3/6d.