

THE C.L.S.



BULLETIN



(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

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Editor of Bulletin:

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

No. 186

(Thirtieth Year)

NOVEMBER, 1965

GEORGE IV: PATRON OF THE ARTS AN ADDRESS

by

JOANNA RICHARDSON

9th October

At the time of George IV's Coronation in 1821 Charles Lamb summed up his feelings in a sentence "Long live the Queen! Death to the King!" Vivat Regina. Moriatur Rex. It was one of the few comments he made on a King who—had he known it—shared some of his own best qualities. Both of them loved children, scholarship, reading, conversation and the company of friends, and they both loved to practise charity. In fact George IV was a very different man from the man who was reviled by the press, in scurrilous cartoons and even in Parliament. He was not the man legend has made of him. On the contrary he was the most civilised King since the days of Charles I. George Augustus Frederick, Prince of Wales, was the oldest of the 15 children of George III. With a peaceful rural childhood at Kew Palace he and his younger brother Frederick—the future Duke of York—were educated together

first by Dr. Markham (to whom they were both devoted) and then by Dr. Hurd, the Bishop of Worcester. By the time he was eighteen the Prince of Wales was the most accomplished prince in Europe. With a taste for classical literature, he could speak several languages fluently, he sang very well with a bass voice, and he played the violoncello at public concerts. He could dance elegantly, ride and fence, he could draw and paint, and had a connoisseur's understanding of the visual arts. Well versed in history, he could quote the beauties of English literature, and was also interested in science and medicine. He was an informed amateur of the theatre. What he lacked completely—the fault of his father—was an understanding of the world.

King George III believed the world should be veiled from his eldest son, "veiled" as he said "by all those who surrounded you". While he insisted that the Prince should be educated to a strict regime, he forbade him any human interests. King George and Queen Charlotte led a regular, strictly domestic life—and the Prince was expected to lead it too. His education anticipated the education of King Edward VII, it was so exacting, so restricted, that it was easy to predict the result: the moment the

Prince of Wales had his freedom, he would run wild. Curiously enough all the Georges seem to have hated their eldest sons. George I (who had his wife imprisoned for 32 years) was intensely jealous of George II; George II could only say of his eldest son Frederick Prince of Wales "he is the greatest boor and the greatest beast and the greatest ass in the whole world". It is clear that George III detested his eldest son: the Prince of Wales declared that his father had hated him since he was seven years old. Horace Walpole recorded that the Prince was kept in childish clothes long after he had outgrown childish ways. Such treatment was to have disastrous results.

A passionate, handsome man, the Prince had a number of love-affairs as soon as opportunity arose. When he came of age, he met the woman he loved best of all. Mrs. Fitzherbert was twenty-seven—twice widowed, she was not conventionally beautiful. Different from all the women he had known or was to know, she was maternal, devout and high-principled—her conscience came before material considerations. She was the only woman who loved him purely and simply for himself. Had she been a Protestant princess she would have made him an excellent wife. But she was a Catholic, so official marriage was out of the question, and she was above becoming the Prince's mistress. After two unromantic marriages she wanted a settled life and she wanted children. She refused all the Prince's overtures. After some months the Prince became desperate. One evening his surgeon called on Mrs. Fitzherbert and told her the Prince had stabbed himself and that only her instant presence would save his life. Mrs. Fitzherbert said she would go and see him if she were chaperoned, and the Duchess of Devonshire went with her to Carlton House. The prince, pale and blood-stained, said he did not wish to live unless Mrs. Fitzherbert promised to marry him, and in the emotion of the moment Mrs. Fitzherbert allowed him to borrow a ring from the Duchess and to put it on her finger. Next day she came to her senses, and left the country immediately, determined to stay abroad until the Prince was really married. In his desperation the Prince wrote letter after letter, begging her to return. At last she weakened and in December 1785, on her return from the Continent they were married in her drawingroom. The secret marriage, not valid in law, soon became known. People admired her, brushing aside the thought of any irregularity. Happiness might have come to him, for although he might not have been strictly faithful he would always have considered Mrs. Fitzherbert as his wife.

He would have earned fame as an inspired amateur and patron of the arts. He gave

patronage to Conway, the miniature painter, Reynolds, Gainsborough and Hoppner, and Henry Holland the architect. Hepplewhite made him a set of chairs, and it became the fashion to have a set of chairs with the Prince of Wales's feathers carved on the back.

He entertained Haydn at Carlton House and they performed together at musical soirées. He invited actors to give performances. He visited the Royal Academy and the opera. These early years with Mrs. Fitzherbert were among his happiest.

But—the Prince could not resist paying court to attractive women, and he became involved with Lady Jersey. He was also heavily in debt and his father refused to help unless he agreed to a dynastic marriage. The Prince decided to marry Caroline of Brunswick, without having met her—Lady Jersey is said to have had a hand in this, possibly through self-interest. The Prince married Caroline, unattractive and unbalanced, in April 1795. It was a disastrous marriage. George had already known insanity and Caroline's brothers were imbeciles. Within three weeks they were living apart and in 1796 after the birth of their only child, Princess Charlotte, the Prince wrote her announcing their permanent separation.

The prince, tired of Lady Jersey, wished to go back to Mrs. Fitzherbert, but in spite of the Queen's appeal, Mrs. Fitzherbert was not amenable. A priest went to Rome for the Pope's consent and he after some months agreed that she might return to the Prince.

At this time the Prince occupied himself with scholarship and the arts and largely helped to establish the Royal Literary Fund for giving help to distressed authors. He sat for his portrait to Vigée le Brun, he commissioned a Life of Nelson, and began to collect the papers of the House of Stuart. Through his zeal the papers of King James II were recovered and a Life of James II was published. He also determined to rescue the Herculaneum manuscripts which had been uncovered in 1752 and for this purpose he subsidised the Herculaneum Mission. As a lover of scholarship he received his honorary degree from Oxford.

By 1811 Mrs. Fitzherbert had been relegated to the background and he had fallen for Lady Hertford, and her influence, cold and ambitious, remained throughout the Regency for George III had lapsed into insanity. From 1811 to 1820, one of the most glorious periods in our history, the Regent was unfortunately the most unpopular. In 1814 he tried to marry his daughter Princess Charlotte to Prince William of Orange, but she broke off the engagement pleading her wish to be a moral support to her mother who, following the official enquiry into her conduct, had been ostracised. In 1814 she

Princess of Wales went abroad and there lived with an Italian courtier, Bartolomeo Bergami, to the scandal of Europe.

In 1816 Princess Charlotte was married to Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg, a German princeling. And so the Prince Regent settled down more happily. He patronised Jane Austen suggesting she should dedicate her next novel (*Emma*) to him, he commissioned some sculpture from Canova, he met Lord Byron, and gave a dinner party to Walter Scott who was delighted with him and who used the friendship to the limit. Having knighted Herschel and Humphrey Davy, he shewed himself the patron of Lawrence whom he sent to paint the allied sovereigns (after the Napoleonic War) and the most famous generals and ministers. The portraits were to hang in Windsor.

In 1817 Princess Charlotte died giving birth to a still-born son. This left him disconsolate and ill and indeed more unpopular. He wanted to divorce his wife but could not risk a public discussion about this. So he carried on with Lady Hertford while his younger brothers made dynastic marriages to ensure the future of the monarchy. The Duke of Kent married the sister of Prince Leopold and their child became Queen Victoria.

The deaths of the Duke of Kent and of George III took place and thus the Regent became George IV. One of his first acts was to make Walter Scott a baronet, another was to welcome Lawrence home from the Continent and to give him a gold medal and chain, worn ever since by the Presidents of the Royal Academy. John Nash had already become the Royal architect, his inspiration can still be seen in the royal Pavilion at Brighton and in the noble buildings in Regent's Park. Regent Street, destroyed earlier this century, was a monument to the taste and encouragement of George IV.

The new reign was disfigured by the trial of Queen Caroline, with the public on her side, but the Government Bill of Pains and Penalties was luckily withdrawn by the Prime Minister. George IV was crowned on 19th July 1821 without a Queen at his side, and within three weeks Caroline was dead, being buried in Brunswick. The King was in Ireland at the time and came back to visit Hanover; the following year he visited Scotland where he won the hearts of the people.

Another distraction now arose. Tiring of Lady Hertford he found a new object for his affection, Lady Conyngham. But he was growing old and often in poor health. Without wife, or daughter, and isolated by his sovereignty, he required a settled domestic life; Lady Conyngham and even her husband provided this. . . He was really a most affectionate man,

immensely kind; he gave with pleasure and without condescension and was shy of thanks. His concern was to help any one in distress, to give sympathy, and he asked the Home Secretary to give "active humanity" to all prisoners and to help in the royal prerogative of mercy. Children's parties gave him great happiness. He took pleasure in his patronage of Jeffrey Wyatville who remodelled the uncomfortable old Windsor Castle into the Castle we know today. He founded the Royal Society of Literature, and gave his father's library to the British Museum—now the King's Library. He was a giver of tone, and did more than any man before him, or after him, to encourage the art of living in England. He died in 1830, mourned by many. Round his neck from a ribbon hung a miniature of Mrs. Fitzherbert. He was constant in his fashion. The King whom Charles Lamb had derided certainly deserves to be better known.

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MR. ARTHUR F. BISHOP, in the Chair, welcomed MISS RICHARDSON who was to speak on George IV about whom Charles Lamb held a decidedly unfavourable opinion. Miss Richardson's talk would undoubtedly be both enlightening and interesting.

After listening to an admirable address Mr. A. G. Clarke proposed warm thanks to Miss Richardson, supported by Mr. Norman Nash, Hon. Secretary of the Robert Louis Stevenson Club (London) and a new member of the Society. The Elian Reading "The Triumph of the Whale" was given by Miss Annette Park.

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THE QUEEN OF CLUBS A VISIT TO THE GARRICK CLUB, 9th October by MADGE KENDAL PEMBERTON

For the inaugural dinner of the Garrick in the year 1831 Canon Barham—famous for his *Ingoldsby Legends*—indited verses in which he refers to it as *The Queen of Clubs*. Queens are privileged to be patronising, and this one ran true to form, for she forthwith proclaimed that the Garrick was to be a Club in which 'actors and men of education and refinement might meet on equal terms'. They did. They still do.

On Saturday, October 9th we band of ardent Elians were invited to prowl around the precincts where these goings on continue to go on. Our genial guide, Commander E. S. Satterthwaite—himself an 'old blue' of Christ's

Hospital, was indefatigable in showing us all that was to be seen in one short hour. We enjoyed ourselves enormously. We hope to go again. For the theatrically minded it is a joy; for everyone a delight, for treasure abounds both in pictures and personal relics. I am one of the theatrically minded, for my father, Edgar Pemberton, was a dramatic critic of whom William Archer—a potent colleague of that day—declared that he knew more about the theatre than any other critic of his acquaintance. But—alas—his health broke at a comparatively early age, and I remember him mostly as a gallant invalid confined to his study that was hung around with photographs of most of the theatrical celebrities of his era, all of them personal friends—Charles Wyndham as David Garrick, Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth, Sir John Hare as Eccles, in Robertson's play 'Caste', George Alexander, the Kendals, the Bancrofts, and many others. They meant little to me, for our home was in the heart of the Cotswolds, far beyond the pale of theatre going, but occasionally these mysterious 'stars' would materialise in person and call on my father unexpectedly, much to his pleasure. I remember a visit from Sir Johnston Forbes Robertson and thought he had the loveliest face I had ever seen. With him came Mrs. Patrick Campbell who made a dramatic entry into our play-room. I was not sure about her and still am not. Sir Arthur Pinero, in need of a quiet village in which to concentrate on a new play, is another memory. I found him somewhat formidable with his heavy dark eyebrows and piercing eyes, but I was a shy and retiring child, the shyest, in fact, he had ever seen, as he told my mother. This had repercussions, for, years later, when he was gravely ill in a nursing home, he looked up from the paper he was reading, exclaiming to his step-daughter—'Myra! That shy child has written a play!' The 'shy child' turned out to be me and he actually left instructions that I was to have a wire from him wishing me luck on my first night, whether he were living or not. The wire duly arrived, when he had been dead two days. It is one of my most cherished possessions. He was indeed a kind and a generous man, as the Garrick Club was to find when his will was made known.

One of my liveliest memories is that of a week-end visit from Ellen Terry. It really was exciting, as she brought with her unheralded and unannounced, not only a maid but a large Pomeranian dog that fought with all our dogs so that they all had to be kept in separate rooms. As for Miss Terry herself I was both flummoxed and bewildered, having hitherto never met anyone so completely uninhibited, impulsive and emotional. In her presence I was monosyllabic and even faintly hostile, but

after an hour, or less, I was completely spell-bound, I was at her feet, a willing captive, and have remained so ever since. It gave me the utmost pleasure to see on our club visit the famous painting by Collier of Sir Beerbohm Tree as Falstaff, partnered by his two Merry Wives, played by Ellen Terry and Madge Kendal. One of these gay ladies was my god-mother, but—alas!—it was not my god-mother, but—alas!—it was not my dear E.T.! How I wished it had been!

But my father's greatest hero was Henry Irving. I think he almost worshipped him. When my father died the first telegram my mother received was from him, and two months later he too was dead. Many years after this I happened to be typing letters in a dressing room of the Theatre Royal, Bradford—for at that time I was secretary to an illustrious matinée idol, then on tour—and looking up suddenly saw a notice on the wall: 'In this room Henry Irving was taken ill after his performance and was carried to the Midland Hotel where he expired'. It gave me quite a shock and I was reminded forcefully of this when on Saturday we were shown the actual chair in which he died, bought by Sir Seymour Hicks and presented to the Club. But another relic of quite a different kind reduced us all to laughter, for it was actually the written rejection of his application for Membership of the Club! Apparently, in the year 1874—despite his recent Lyceum triumphs—he was not considered "up to snuff". It seems scarcely credible, but within a year they had seen the light and were pleased to gather him within the fold—as well they might be! Needless to say he was one of the most illustrious and diverting of their members, and a beautiful portrait of him by Sir John Millais portrays, in some inexplicable way, what surely must have been the very essence of his genius.

Would I had space to dilate on many more of these delectable treasures. It cannot be, for obvious reasons, but Charles Lamb at least must be mentioned, however briefly, for all the old comedians he has made immortal by his pen hang on these walls and are the actual portraits that inspired him, though when he saw them they were owned by Charles Mathews, the fashionable comedian, hung in his house at Highgate, eventually to be bought at his death by a founder Member and donated to the Club. Lamb declares this collection of pictures to be among the most delightful he had ever seen, and they served to trigger off his all but faded memories of that famous galaxy of old troupers—Munden—'not so much a comedian as a Company, for he alone *made faces*'; Bensley, the celebrated Malvolio, 'with something in him beyond the coxcomb'; Dickey Suett, 'whom Shakespeare foresaw when he framed his clowns and jesters'—and so on. What a mem-

ber might not Lamb himself have been of that Club, had he not died so soon after its foundation! Garrick himself had been dead then for over fifty years, but even so might still be recalled by some of the older members, that included, amongst others, William Linley, Sheridan's brother in law, whom he surely must have known, while some of his old contemporary players still lingered on. His immortal memory remains, whether or no, kept green by the many notable portraits by Zoffany and others of that great genius, his numerous leading ladies and his devoted wife. One particular tiny portrait of him arrested my notice, for it is made—credible thought!—from the actual hairs of Garrick and his wife! Who made it and how on earth was it done? We do not know but the result is rewarding and curiously touching.

What of the non-actor Members, the 'Literary Gents'? Their names are many and various, chief among them being Charles Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade—to say nothing of Tom Taylor who wrote seventy plays, Gilbert à Beckett—known as 'the perambulating philosopher'—with fifty or more to his credit, and Mark Lemon who landed up a cool sixty, besides being Editor of *Punch*! How did they find time to eat or sleep, and what became of all those plays?

A thought arose in my mind and would not be denied. What a thing it would be if all these ghosts should foregather for one night in the year! What weird hilarity might then ensue! Perhaps it even does happen. Nothing in this odd world is too strange to be true. Might I only be there to see it, stowed away as an invisible spectator! My thoughts were interrupted by our guide who was handing out cards from a pack lying on a table, suggesting we might like to take one as a souvenir of our trip. One of them was handed to me, I put it in my pocket and looked at it when I got home. It was *The Queen of Clubs*! Odd coincidence—or is it?

Is something peculiar destined to happen to me? One day shall I behold those posturing wraiths, hear those vociferous voices?

I must surely burn a candle to the Patron Saint of Actors! But who is he?

FUTURE MEETINGS

Monday, 8th December, 1965—"Wordsworth's Immortality Ode" by Professor Geoffrey Tillotson, M.A., B.Litt. (President of the Society). Chairman—Mr. F. E. Sandry, F.L.A. Members attending the meeting are asked to bring a copy of the poem.

Saturday, 4th December, 1965—"Gstentatious Trumpery" by Mrs. Anne Renier. Chairman—Miss Margaret Brown. Members should note that this meeting takes place on the first Saturday in the month.

The November meeting will be held at Dr. Williams's Hall, 14 Gordon Square, London, W.C.1 at 6-30 p.m. The December meeting will be held at the Mary Ward Centre, 9 Tavistock Place, W.C.1 at 2-45 p.m.

NEW MEMBERS

Miss J. A. Derriman, 45, Beaufort Mansions, Beaufort Street, S.W.3.

Miss H. N. Sykes, 45, Beaufyrt Mansions, Beaufort Street, S.W.3.

Mr. N. Nash, 37, Olam's Close, Luton.

DRAMATIC GROUP

Friday, 26th November, 1965: Mrs. Violet Anderson and Miss Anne Jones (Non-Members of the Society) will present a poetical evening with the Romantics—"Gigantic Shadows"—in the "Clans" Room, The Royal Scottish Corporation, Fleur-de-Lis Court, Fetter Lane, E.C.4—7-0 p.m. All Members are invited.

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On Monday, 20th September a party of Group Members and friends spent a pleasant evening at The Savoy Theatre when they saw Andrew Cruickshank in the Comedy "Alibi for a Judge". Members were delighted to see Mr. R. Meadows White (a Member of the Society and Group) in the cast as "Ernest Mott".

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FROM THE EDITOR'S CHAIR

In the September Bulletin, page 500, third paragraph from the end, there is a slight error—whilst the Lambs in 1809 did stay for a short time at Southampton Buildings they did not leave Enfield until 1830, the year in which Hazlitt died.

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"Apropos the Society's visit to the Garrick Club so entertainingly recounted on another page by our member, may we add that Commander E. S. Satterthwaite further increased our indebtedness to him for not only giving up his time for our entertainment but also for so thoughtfully arranging for coffee and biscuits to be served at the termination of the visit. A typical Garrick touch—and one that was highly appreciated."