

THE C.L.S. BULLETIN

(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

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An Editorial Confession

With this issue we complete the first year of the BULLETIN in printed form. The Editor is painfully aware of its many editorial imperfections. There have been a number of inexcusable misprints, such as "visomy" for "visnomy" in the January issue. It is the fashion nowadays to blame the War for everything that in peace time was obviously due to neglect or carelessness; but we are not so brazen-faced as to advance this plea, so popular with those who "serve" in the shops. "Don't you know there's a war on?" covers a multitude of transgressions, but not ours. We can only confess our shortcomings, and promise to amend. Who knows? We may one day produce an issue entirely free from misprints,—or almost!

S.M.R.

"Continual Consciousness of Difference"

A NOTE ON CHARLES LAMB'S STAMMER.

By DR. EDWARD J. BOOME.

In the past we have been satisfied to look on stammering as a defect of the speech apparatus. To-day we know that it is much more than this. It is a disorder of the whole personality and colours the life of the sufferer to his detriment.

The most diligent search could hardly yield a better example of a stammerer than that of Charles Lamb, whether studied from the point of view of his neuropathic inheritance or from that of his personality and temperament. Fitzgerald's absorbing biography reveals this in abundant detail.

Charles Lamb's father was in a state of doddering imbecility during his last years; a querulous old bore whose one object in life was cribbage. Charles, then a young man, hardly more than a boy, was frequently dragged from his evening meal and kept up late at night by his father's passion for the game; in fact, "If you won't play with me, you might as well not come home at all." Charles says, in a letter to Coleridge, "I get home at night o'erworn, quite faint, and then to cards with my father, who will not let me enjoy a meal in peace; but I must conform to my situation. I hope I am, for the most part, not unthankful."

Mrs. Lamb was an invalid, suffering from an infirmity, presumably of nervous origin, which deprived her of the use of her limbs. She had three children, of whom the eldest, John, was her favourite. This son was an overbearing individual. Procter wrote of him: "I do not retain an agreeable impression of him. If not rude, he was sometimes, indeed generally, abrupt and unprepossessing in manner. He was assuredly deficient in that courtesy which usually springs from a mind at friendship with the world." Mary, Charles' sister, ten years his senior, suffered from recurring attacks of insanity, during one of which she killed their mother.

Charles himself was, as a child, small for his age, physically delicate and psychologically almost morbidly sensitive and shy. In spite of this he was popular at school, as is shown by a fellow scholar, Charles Le Grice, who wrote: "Lamb was an amiable, gentle

boy, very sensible, and keenly observing, indulged by his schoolfellows and by his master on account of his infirmity of speech. . . . His step was plantigrade, which made his walk slow and peculiar, adding to the staid appearance of his figure. . . . His delicate frame and his difficulty of utterance which was increased by agitation, unfitted him from joining in any boisterous sport." This 'difficulty of utterance' also prevented him from gaining an exhibition; and instead of going to the University when he left school, he became a clerk in the South Sea House, and later in the East India Company. In his "Recollections of Christ's Hospital" Lamb wrote of the Blue Coat boy: "Within his bounds he is all fire and play; but in the streets he steals along with all the self-concentration of a young monk. He is never known to mix with other boys; they are a sort of laity to him. All this proceeds, I have no doubt, from the continual consciousness which he carries about him of the difference of his dress from that of the rest of the world." Thus he wrote of the Christ's Hospital boy in general, but it would be hard to find a more apt description of Lamb himself, or one more typical of a stammerer, with his "continual consciousness . . . of difference," due to his infirmity of speech. Lamb gives us a further glimpse of his attitude towards life in his "Maria Howe." "They (his family) loved pleasures and parties, and visiting, but as they found the tenor of my mind to be quite opposite, they gave themselves little trouble about me, but on such occasions left me to my choice, which was much oftener to stay at home, and indulge myself in my solitude, than join in their rambling visits."

Lamb's intellectual powers were of the highest order and he had a lively sense of humour; his conversation, among friends, often sparkles with wit in spite of his disability. He was temperamentally volatile and excitable, easily uplifted and easily downcast, sensitive and emotional; and yet, like so many stammerers, he possessed an underlying strength of character. In Lamb's case this last quality manifested itself in his sympathetic tolerance towards his father and brother, and in the undying devotion to his sister. From a letter to Coleridge, written after the tragedy of his mother's death, we learn: "God be praised, Coleridge! Wonderful as it is to tell, I have never once been otherwise than collected and calm; even on the dreadful day, and in the midst of the terrible scene, I preserved a tranquility which bystanders may have construed into indifference. . . . I know John will make speeches about it, but she shall not go into an hospital." Nor did she. Charles undertook the responsibility of caring for his sister and, except for her periodical relapses, when she had to return temporarily to the 'mad house,' the two lived together until his death, which, contrary to expectation, preceded hers.

If modern methods of treatment for stammering had been available, Lamb would probably have lost his, together with the "continual consciousness of difference" it induced. Would the cure have been all gain to him,—and to us?

Annual Celebration of Charles Lamb's Birthday.

Saturday, February 14th, 1942

MR. WALTER FARROW presided over a large gathering of members belonging to either or both bodies, with their friends, when the Robert Louis Stevenson Club joined the Society in a combined celebration at the Winston Hotel, Haymarket, on the afternoon of February 14th, the Saturday following the one-hundred-and-sixty-seventh anniversary of the birth of Charles Lamb. After the luncheon, which turned out to be a Barmecide feast for the unlucky ones, as well as a slow motion event for all, there followed a double ration of toasts to make up (as it were) for the absence of wine in which to honour them. These circumstances did nothing to damage the Elian good humour of the meeting; and the indefatigable E.G.C. never ceased to wear his smile during his finally successful efforts to seat 102 people in a space much less than suitable for that number.

Mr. H. G. Smith proposed "The Immortal Memory of Charles Lamb," appropriately using the occasion for illuminating comment on Lamb's corrections in the manuscript of "Dream Children," recently bought by Dr. Rosenbach for 7,500 dollars at the A. E. Newton sale, the catalogue of which contained a facsimile. With his usual thoughtfulness for the convenience of his fellow Elians, Mr. Smith had enlisted the good offices of Mr. Arthur Swann,—the producer of the catalogue,—to supply him with a copy of the facsimile for each guest. These did not reach England, however, till a day or two after the luncheon*

* Copies are available for members present at the Luncheon, on application to Mr. Crowsley at any future meeting.

and so it was not possible to see Lamb's second thoughts on "Dream Children," as well as to hear about them.

Then followed the Rev. R. J. Scott, who proposed "The Immortal Memory of Robert Louis Stevenson" in a most eloquent and moving address, the effect of which was enhanced by Mr. T. H. Fraser's noble rendering of Stevenson's own "Requiem," while all present remained standing. Greetings from absent members at home and abroad were read by the common Secretary of both Societies,—Mr. E. G. Crowsley, who pledged them all in a comprehensive toast.

By this time it was the turn of what may be termed the mutual admiration Toasts, proper to an occasion when two literary Societies join forces to circumvent a common foe,—wartime lack of restaurant accommodation. And so Mr. S. M. Rich gave "The R.L.S. Club," in which task he did as well as could be expected (or nearly), after which Mr. Walter Scott retaliated by proposing 'The C.L.S.,' without any ill-feeling whatever. These toasts evoked appropriate responses from Mr. E. C. Thomas (for the home team) and Mr. T. H. Fraser (for the "visitors"). Sandwiched between these speeches was Lamb's favourite air, "Passing By," delightfully sung by Mr. Fraser. Mr. J. Hall, Treasurer of the R.L.S. Club, wound up the afternoon's Toasts by proposing "The Chairman," after which the proceedings were concluded by the singing of "Auld Lang Syne."

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New Members: The Officers and Council extend a cordial welcome to the following new members, elected since the beginning of the year:—

Mrs. Badcock, 196, Randolph Avenue, W.9.
Mr. and Mrs. T. H. Fraser, 13, Winterstoke Gardens, N.W.7.
Miss F. Jolly, 32, Vauxhall Grove, S.W.8.
Mrs. McKeen, 15, Doughty Street, W.C.1.
Mrs. H. G. Smith, 61, Salisbury Avenue, St. Albans.

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Programme of Meetings for 1942

The following meetings are all to be held on Saturday afternoons, at 2-45 p.m., at the Plane Tree Restaurant, 106, Great Russell Street, W.C.1 (Tottenham Court Road end). Nearest Underground Station, Tottenham Court Road. So that arrangements can be made for tea on each of these occasions, will members kindly notify Mr. Crowsley a few days in advance if they intend to be present.

April 11th: Opening Address by Mr. J. Lewis May (Vice-President).
"Charles Lamb: Some Random Reflexions."
May 9th: "Dr. Johnson, the Burneys and Others." Mr. A. Lloyd-Jones.
June 13th: "The London Charles Lamb Knew." Mr. W. Kent.
July 11th: Symposium: "My Favourite Character in the Essays of Elia." Short papers by members.
Aug. 8th: Under Arrangement.
Sept. 12th: "Charles Lamb and the Press of his Day." Mr. J. P. Collins.
Oct. 10th: "Tracking the Lesser Elia." Mr. S. M. Rich.
Nov. 14th: "Alfred Ainger." Mr. H. G. Smith.

Gifts to the Society's Collection: Mr. Arthur Swann has presented a copy of the noble three-volume illustrated Catalogue of the A. E. Newton Collection of rare books, original drawings, autograph letters and manuscripts, sold in New York in 1941. Pages 186/211 of Volume II contain detailed descriptions, some illustrated, of 49 books and manuscripts of Elian interest.

Mr. H. G. Smith has presented the typescript of his address at the Anniversary Luncheon on February 14th, 1942: "Second Thoughts: A Commentary on 'Dream Children.'"

Charles Lamb's Grave: Mr. Charles Walter Berry, of Calcot, near Reading, a member of this Society who died last year, has left £200 to the Council of Almoners of Christ's Hospital for keeping in good repair the grave and monument of Charles Lamb.

Subscriptions for 1942: Mr. E. F. Lewis, Treasurer, will be pleased to acknowledge subscriptions for the current year addressed to him at 12, Christchurch Gardens, Epsom.

Charles Lamb at Eastbourne.

Eastbourne was visited for health and recreation by a goodly number, and among those who came was Charles Lamb, who wrote: 'We have been dull at Worthing one summer, duller at Brighton another, *dullest at Eastbourne a third*, and are at this moment doing dreary penance at Hastings!' This was probably about the year 1820. But how could we expect 'the gentle Elia' to take kindly to a quiet retreat like Sea Houses? All his life he had been accustomed to the noisy city's din, and, as he himself said, was 'saturated with human faces (*divine* forsooth)'. 'I am never C.L.', he used to say, 'but always C.L. and Co. He who thought it not good for man to be alone preserve me from the more prodigious monstrosity of being never by myself.' Whether Lamb's dictum was just or not, we prefer the vivid description of Eastbourne's charms portrayed by Charlotte Smith during this period. In every rustic hedge and wayside flower she saw the beauty which dwells in common things. In the fields and on the downs she was conscious that Nature had a voice for all, and gave of her best here without stint. She saw, because she *felt*, an intensity of colour so characteristic of the open downs, and 'all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being' in the early summer was hers to enjoy.

Upland solitudes, warren, and heaths,
And yellow commons, and birch-shaded hollows,
And hedgerows, bordering unfrequented lanes,
Bowered with wild roses and the clasping woodbine,
Where purple tassels of the tangling vetch
With bittersweet and bryony inweave,
And the dew fills the silver bindweed's cups;
The rudest scenes, and brooks whose humid banks
Nourish the harebell and the freckled fragil.

Charles Lamb notwithstanding, it is no marvel, that surroundings so delightfully fresh and health-inspiring, 'the lodging-houses were well occupied during the summer by those who prefer retirement and rural scenery at a watering-place.' 'The heated politician, the wearied philanthropist, the clerk jaded with uncongenial work at the India Office, the ever-charming gentle Charles Lamb sought here to recolour his blanched cheeks and brace his lax nerves with the invigorating and balmy breezes of the South Downs and the tonic of the sea-air.' May one other qualification be added? Charles Lamb would be among the first to acknowledge, if he could once more visit 'the front,' that modern Eastbourne has cheerfulness of surroundings combined with all the amenities of twentieth-century civilisation, and that 'dullest Eastbourne' is no more

Extracted from pages 64, 66, and 185 of "BYGONE EASTBOURNE," by J. C. Wright (1902.)

Elia Society's Double Loss.

We record with deep regret the passing of two prominent Elians, members of the Executive Committee of the Elia Society responsible for the Charles Lamb Centenary Memorial erected in 1935 at Christ Church, Greyfriars. Kenneth Willis Cotton, Librarian of the Bank of England, died on February 9th, after a very short illness, and Edward Charles Fâche (Past-President of the Elia Society) on March 24th. In this double loss to the senior body of Lamb enthusiasts the C.L.S. offers heartfelt sympathy to its members and to the bereaved families. Mr. E. J. Finch (Vice-President) represented the Elia Society at the funeral of the late E. C. Fâche on March 27th.

CURRENT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES LAMB FROM FEBRUARY 1st, 1935 (contd.)

(b) Articles.

CHARLES LAMB IN SUSSEX, by H. C. P. Smail (*Sussex County Magazine*, January, 1942).

CHARLES LAMB—A STORY OF LIFE-LONG DEVOTION, by Norman Hillson (*Everybody's Weekly*, 17.1.1942).

BOOKS—AND MANY OTHER THINGS, by Aidan Clarke (*Brentford and Chiswick Times*: 13.12.1941 and 13.2.1942).

*A Commentary on Charles Lamb's essay, "The Good Clerk."

SOME OLD ESSAYISTS, by A.T.S.J. (*Christian World*: 18.12.1941).

(c) Reports of Lectures and Meetings.

STEVENSON AND LAMB—JOINT LUNCHEON OF TWO SOCIETIES (*Manchester Guardian*: 16.2.1942).

LITERARY ENTHUSIASM (*Yorkshire Post*: 16.2.1942).

The Editor will be grateful for items or news of items for inclusion in this Bibliography. The co-operation of overseas members is especially solicited. Cuttings should be addressed to Mr. S. M. Rich, 67, Cricklade Avenue, London, S.W.2.