

THE C.L.S. BULLETIN

(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

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The Youngest of the Gladmans.

Almost every issue of the BULLETIN in recent years has been 'supplemented' by the kindness of Mr. H. G. Smith. We are particularly grateful to him for the opportunity he now gives us to possess that delightful paper by Mr. E. F. Lewis, "The Youngest of the Gladmans." Only those who were present at the July meeting will be enabled to recall the fine quality of Mr. Lewis's reading; but all will be able to appreciate the essay's charm.

The Lamb Tragedy and the Law.

By H. G. L. KING.

Some members of the Society may have wondered why it was that Mary Lamb, after stabbing her Mother to the heart, was not brought to trial. A verdict of lunacy, it will be remembered, was returned at the coroner's inquest. In our own day the inquiry would be followed by criminal proceedings, but the stricken brother was not required to suffer this further anguish, though I do not think that any of Lamb's biographers helps us to discover the reason. A reference to Blackstone's "Commentaries," a work not altogether unworthy of mention in a literary publication, will help to clear up the point. In Volume IV, chapter II, section II, page 24—to be precise—it is written: "Idiots and lunatics are not chargeable for their own acts, if committed when under those incapacities; no, not even for treason itself."

In a work of less extensive renown, "Collinson on Lunatics," which was published in 1812, these words will be found on page 502 of volume I—if it is thought worth while to seek them: "An insane person charged with a criminal offence might formerly have been liberated on security being given that he should properly be taken care of as a lunatic. . . . But now, by the Act of 39 and 40 Geo. III, Chapter 9, it is provided that if any person indicted shall be insane he shall be kept in custody during His Majesty's pleasure."

This Act, affecting the custody of insane persons who commit criminal offences, was passed only three years after the tragedy in the Lamb household. It makes it pretty clear why Mary was not arrested for the murder of her Mother. What perhaps is not quite so clear is why Charles, a mere youth of 21 and earning only £100 a year, should have been entrusted with the care of her. Moreover, it is difficult to believe that those who accepted his undertaking were not aware that he, suffering his one attack from the family malady, had been only a few months before confined within a mad house at Hoxton and was, therefore, not possessed of the highest credentials for being given the custody of an ailing sister. Maybe he was able to influence the authorities in some way. He himself, although the most autobiographical and confidential of all English writers, gives us no clue. Neither the Essays nor his letters provides any reference to this one great chapter in Charles Lamb's life—this one tragic chapter that fashioned all the rest of his book of days.

Nor do we wish to dwell upon the details of the tragedy, but it is important that we should understand the full force of its effect upon Charles Lamb's life in order to realise

how much his sister meant to him. Youthful poets do not usually address their own sisters, but Charles had already written some tender lines to Mary before this awful calamity fell upon their lives—lines which testify to

the mighty debt of love I owe
Mary, to thee, my sister and my friend."

No sacred trust was ever more faithfully, lovingly or nobly fulfilled than that undertaken by Charles Lamb in accepting the care of his sister.

PECCAVI.

A FOOTNOTE TO A PREFACE.

I used to think that Charles Lamb's letter to Thomas Manning, describing how George Dyer's phrenesis came to a crisis when G.D. discovered the fallacy in the preface to his Poems, was one of the most amusing letters that Lamb ever wrote. But I no longer think so.

One day in the spring of 1940, I sat down to write a preface. I felt that I should offer some excuse for publishing a book which I had chosen to call *The Ordeal of Bridget Elia*. On such occasions one is tempted to throw boomerangs at those who have hunted in the same field. I had found Miss Helen Ashton's recently published biography of Mary Lamb so charmingly written, however, that I could only express the regret that it was not longer. Mrs. Anne Gilchrist's biography of Mary Lamb, on the contrary, had been published so long ago, long before much *Eliana* became available to biographers, that I felt one could justly say that it was inadequate and out of date. And I felt that the same thing could be said of any early biography of Mary Lamb.

Little did I suspect that Mrs. Gilchrist, in the spirit, would take revenge. But Mrs. Gilchrist, in the body, had set a trap for careless handlers of the boomerang, by listing in her bibliography "*Six Life Studies of Famous Women*, by M. Betham Edwards, 1880." As soon as I read that notation, I jumped to two conclusions in rapid succession. (1) *Six Life Studies* is listed in a bibliography of Mary Lamb; therefore one of the studies is of Mary. (2) I have found nothing usable in Mrs. Gilchrist's biography of Mary Lamb; therefore I should find nothing usable in Miss Edwards' study of her. As a result of this unscholarly reasoning, I prefatorily cited one part of *Six Life Studies* as an early biography of Mary Lamb, without having examined any part of it.

The ghost of Mrs. Gilchrist began to haunt me when S.M.R. became curious about the citation. As many Lambites know, S.M.R. is an omnivorous collector of *Eliana*, no matter how trivial the character. I believe that if he were to find a scrap of paper on the street, bearing only the words "Charles Lamb," or simply "Elia," he would carry it home and preserve it carefully. No sooner had he read my damnable preface than he wrote to me: "Where can I get a copy of 'Six Life Studies of Famous Women'? I have never heard of it before!" Wishing to do S.M.R. a favor, I resolved to get him a copy if one were gettable; but I succeeded only in borrowing a copy from the Library of Congress. Turning to its table of contents, I found the six famous women to be: (1) Fernan Caballero, (2) Alexandrine Tinné, (3) Caroline Herschel, (4) Marie Pape-Carpantier, (5) Elizabeth Carter, and (6) not Mary Lamb, but Matilda Betham, friend of Charles and Mary Lamb.

No, I shall never again laugh whole-heartedly at the phrenesis of George Dyer. Unlike G.D., however, I do not say, "Sir, it's of great consequence that the world is not misled." I say only that it is of great consequence to me that the good will of the Charles Lamb Society is not abused.

ERNEST C. ROSS.

Forthcoming Meetings. The following meetings will be held on Saturday afternoons, at 2-45 p.m. (note the time), at the Plane Tree Restaurant, 106, Great Russell Street, W.C.1 (Tottenham Court Road end). So that arrangements can be made for tea, will members kindly advise Mr. Crowsley a few days in advance if they intend to be present:—

Oct. 10th. "Tracking the Lesser *Eliana*." Mr. S. M. Rich.

Nov. 14th. "Charles Lamb: Some Random Reflexions." Mr. J. Lewis May.

Obituary.

"Deaths over-set me, and put me out long after the recent grief."

THOMAS HOUSTON FRASER (1876—1942).

As briefly recorded in the July BULLETIN, Mr. T. H. Fraser, Vice-Chairman of the Robert Louis Stevenson Club, London, died on June 12th, after an illness of three weeks. The deceased was a well-known Christian and philanthropic worker in the Barnet district, where he resided until eight years ago. Dr. William Robinson, M.A., B.Sc., Principal of Overdale College, who officiated at the funeral at Golders' Green Crematorium, on June 15th, said of him:—"I think of him with his glorious sense of humour; I think of his gaiety; most of all of his loyalty, for never could anyone have such a friend as he was." At the meeting of this Society on July 11th, Mr. Walter Farrow paid the following tribute to Mr. Fraser's memory:—

Many here present will remember that the Vice-Chair at our last Birthday Luncheon was occupied by a gentleman of distinguished appearance and of ready and happy speech. That gentleman was Mr. T. H. Fraser, the Chairman of the R.L.S. Club. It came as a great shock to us all when we learned that he had passed over to the other side, and it is but fitting that we should, here and now, pay a tribute to his winning and manly personality.

Although my own acquaintance with Mr. Fraser began over 20 years ago, it was only recently that our contacts developed into a firm friendship. A year since I found him in the Chair of the Stevenson Club, and a better Chairman, a more genial speaker and a warmer-hearted friend it has never been my privilege to sit under.

Not only was Mr. Fraser chief among the founders of that Club, for nearly 20 years he was its mainstay and support. During that time there gathered around him many men distinguished in literature, law and other walks of life, and to all of them he was an inspiration in his love of Stevenson and of the land which gave him birth.

A few months ago Mr. Fraser joined our own Society, and I had hoped that ere long he would pass on to us some of the ripe wisdom and sound advice he so plentifully bestowed upon the Club over which he presided. Alas! fate decided otherwise and Fraser, "like snow upon the dusty desert's face, lighting a little while" has gone.

To the Stevenson Club the loss of Mr. Fraser is well-nigh irreparable and I am sure you would wish that the fraternal sympathy of this Society shall be conveyed to that Club. And I am equally sure that there is not a heart among us that does not beat with the deepest sympathy towards Mrs. Fraser and those whom our friend has left behind.

Subscriptions for 1942.

Mr. Silas Wegg very properly charged extra for any poetry into which he 'dropped' during his literary ministrations to the Golden Dustman. Our Treasurer, however, does it for nothing. At least one recent overdue account was thus delivered:—

My heart leaps up when I behold
Subscriptions in the mail;
They strike a bliss upon the day,
A charm that does not fail;
And though to importune be rash,
I crave forgiveness,—and the cash.

The recipient, fired to emulation by this 'ephibol' (as Marjorie Fleming might dub it), responded thus:—

Your heart *may* leap—but only just—
When my P.O. shall meet your eye;
For, truth to tell, I'm well nigh bust:
The very minimum seems high.
But you have importuned for cash;
I send herewith—'Tis I am rash!

Which teaches us that if we wish to avoid receiving poetical effusions together with an implied challenge to retort in kind, we should post overdue subscriptions without delay to Mr. E. F. Lewis, 12, Christchurch Gardens, Epsom.

Report of Recent Meetings.

The meeting on July 11th took the form of a Symposium, with the general title, "My Favorite Character in the Essays of Elia." Before the meeting, the Chairman, (Mr. W. Farrow), paid a moving tribute to the late T. H. Fraser. Five members took part in the Symposium. Mr. E. F. Lewis's Paper on "The Youngest of the Gladmans" (reproduced as a Supplement), was followed by Mr. H. G. Smith, whose contribution of which was that Mr. Smith's favourite character in Elia is Elia himself. This was also the theme of Miss Margaret E. Brown's contribution whose imaginary conversation with the spirit of the boy Charles Lamb was marked by much beauty and insight. Mrs. Oglethorpe and Mr. S. M. Rich, however, really addressed themselves to the matter in hand, Mrs. Oglethorpe speaking on "Bridget Elia" and Mr. Rich on "George Dyer." Five papers at one meeting left little time for discussion, but Mr. Bernard Nutter (whose return to the Society we are glad to record) made some interesting comments on his favourite "G.D." What shall we say about the Chairman's 'At Home' on August 8th which has not already been said about earlier editions of this most enjoyable annual? We can only repeat that this year's social, as usual, was highly charged with vitamin E, which, of course, stands for the Elian spirit of friendliness. We missed Mrs. Farrow, the wife of our genial host, but her message of goodwill read at the meeting, indicated clearly that her mind and spirit were with us. Other greetings were received from absent members, including one from Miss V. Wakelin, of New Zealand, and another from Mr. H. G. Smith in verse. On September 12th, the Society created a precedent,—for the first time a lady presided, in the person of Miss Margaret E. Brown. The occasion was a lecture by Mr. J. P. Collins, on "The Press of Charles Lamb's Day." The proceedings were opened by a reading from Lamb's letter to S.T.C. of June 7th, 1809, by Mr. E. F. Lewis. Mr. Collins delighted the meeting with his address,—the sort of talk that only a master of anecdote and reminiscence could give, full of information (and pithy asides) on the press-men of the early nineteenth century, Southey, Gifford, Gillray, the two Scott's, Hazlitt, Lockhart, Murray, Mackenzie and the rest. Mr. W. Kent and Mr. Simmons (of the *Sunday Times*) made appropriate comments on points in the address. Mr. S. M. Rich voiced the thanks of the meeting to the speaker, and Mr. W. Farrow to the Chairman.

On September 9th Mr. E. G. Crowsley delivered a lecture on Charles Lamb at the Women's Institute, Goff's Oak. * * *

At the invitation of The Church of St. Andrew Society, Mr. S. M. Rich gave an address on Charles Lamb on September 2nd, at the Parish Hall, Guildersfield Road, Streatham. * * *

New Members. The Council cordially welcome the following new members:—

Mr. G. Dodsworth, 35, Wickham Avenue, Shirley.

Miss M. L. Loosmore, 3, Higher Green, Ewell, Surrey.

Mr. S. Bernard Nutter, Hill Crest, Royston, Herts. (rejoined).

CURRENT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES LAMB.

FROM FEBRUARY 1st, 1935 (contd.)

(b) **Articles.**

LAMB DIED 107 YEARS AGO TO-DAY, by Narcisse Davis (*Melbourne Argus*: 27.12.1941).

LAMB AND HAZLITT, by Rev. Richard Pyke (*Joyful News*: 20.8.1942).

WILLIAM BLAKE'S CATALOGUE: A NEW DISCOVERY, by Geoffrey Keynes and Ruthven Todd (*Times Literary Supplement*: 12.9.1942).

*With a newly discovered leaflet. LAMB TO BARTON, 15.5.1824:—"His pictures—one in particular, the Canterbury Pilgrims (far above Stothard's)—have great merit, yet hard dry, yet with grace. He has written a Catalogue of them with a most spirited criticism on Chaucer, but mystical and full of Vision." Charles Lamb bound his copy of this catalogue with Elia's "Confessions of a Drunkard," Southey's "Wat Tyler" and the "Poems" of Rochester and Lady Winchelsea. This volume has not been traced.

(h) **Short Notes.**

A CUT OFF THE ROAST (*Daily Mirror*: 25.8.1942).

*Paraphrase of "A Dissertation upon Roast Pig."

(j) **Sales Announcements.**

Sotheby's: May 4/5, 1942.

Hazlitt's last illness. LETTER FROM LAMB TO BASIL MONTAGU, one page, 8vo. (? 1830) about £10. 10s. od.