

THE C.L.S. BULLETIN

(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

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Elia, the Eternal Child.

By MARGARET BROWN.

Whenever I read Elia I am confronted with a succession of friends, each more human and endearing than the last. Why are they so lifelike? I ask myself. What is the power which enables them to step from the book as fresh and as vital as on the day they were painted?

Musing thus on one occasion, I seemed to see a small boy with dark hair and large wistful eyes standing in the room where I was sitting with an illustrated copy of "Elia" open on my lap. We gazed at each other in silence; then, with childlike trust, he came up to my knee. I thought that the summer breeze from the window rustled the pages of "Elia," but it was the boy turning over the leaves with slight, thin fingers. I thought he was dressed as a bluecoat boy, but it did not seem at all odd. I kept still, hoping that when he had got over his shyness he would talk to me. He looked intently at the bright coloured pictures, and then said quietly: "I knew these people. I saw them and spoke to them and touched them. They are real now because they were real then. I created no make-believes. I wrote of the people I knew and loved, altering and mixing them perhaps a little here and there, but at bottom they are the same."

"You!" I whispered incredulously, for by now I had recognized the boy Charles. "But you are only a child! When I think of Lamb I picture a greying, stooping, tired clerk, his features showing marks of care, yet lit with a delicate humour."

"Then, however many times you may have read the Essays," the boy corrected me with grave and childlike dignity, "and however much you may pride yourself on being recently elected a member of the Co-Council of the Charles Lamb Society, you have not known the true Elia. I am the spirit of Charles and I am eternally youthful."

"A kind of Peter Pan?" I put in, trying to make the little fellow see that I understood him.

He gravely shook his head. "Quite, quite different. Peter Pan lived in a fairy world. I took the world I lived in, that we all live in—the world of human nature inhabited by people I saw about me every day. I may not have written about them till I dressed myself up as a middle-aged clerk, but I was still only a child playing at being a man. But they weren't all gentle, those whom I loved. Grandmother Field was a fierce old Spartan and liked her grandchildren to be the same. The tender mercies of the wicked are cruel—so are those of Grandmothers. Mine had never-failing pretexts of torturing children for their good. Once, when a chit of a child, I ran to her, saying that I had a fly in the corner of my eye. The Old Lady placed two ounces or more of the finest sugar on delicate white paper, and, with a full breath, blew the whole saccharine contents into the part afflicted, saying, 'There now—the fly is out!' 'Twas most true—a legion of blue bottles, with the prince of flies at their head, must have dislodged with the torrent and deluge of tears which followed. I kept my own counsel, and my fly in the eye, when I had got one in future. But nothing came up to her Saturday night's flannel thrust into the corners of a weak child's eye with soap that might have whitened the hands of Duncan's she-murderer and scoured away Original Sin itself.

"Then there was a proud poor relative, an aged gentleman clothed in neat black, who was to be found every Saturday at my father's table (no very splendid one). A sort of melancholy grandeur invested him. For some inexplicable doom I fancied him obliged to go about in an eternal suit of mourning—a captive, a stately being, let out of the Tower on Saturdays. A special kind of sweet appeared on the table whenever he visited us. Once my Aunt mortally offended him when pressing him overmuch to the delicacy. She said, 'Come, now. You don't get pudding every day.' He said nothing. But later in the evening, on some small pretext, he said to my Aunt, 'Woman, you are superannuated!'"

"Was that the Aunt," I asked, "the good and dear one whom single blessedness had soured to the world? The one who was a steadfast friendly being, and said that you were the only one she loved in all the world?"

"Yes, it was Aunt Hetty," agreed Charles. "Yet her love for me took a practical turn. When I was sent as a boarder to Christ's Hospital, which was very near my home at the Inner Temple, my Aunt would often come with gifts of pies and cakes which she had baked herself, so that I had juicier things to eat than most of the other boys. I remember the good old relative (in whom love forbade pride) squatting down upon some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters, disclosing the viands, and the contending passions of mine unfolding. There was love for the bringer, shame for the thing brought and the manner of the bringing; sympathy for those who were too many to share in it, and, at top of all, hunger (eldest, strongest of the passions) predominant, breaking down the stony fences of shame and awkwardness, and a troubling over-consciousness."

"I have had friends and relatives somewhat similar to yours," I put in. "Most people have. Though the style of dress may alter, the people themselves remain in different guise. When I was a child I had a dear old Nannie. I remember to this day the shame and horror which overcame me when I was called from the classroom and found a mistress and Nannie in the hall, and one or two girls peeping at them from behind doors. Nannie unwrapped a parcel and produced a flannel petticoat which I had deliberately discarded that morning and hidden behind the bath, thinking that she would never find it. I felt humiliated beyond words and would not even take the toffee she handed to me as a peace offering."

Charles smiled. "Your old Nannie sounds something like Aunt Hetty," he said. "Once when I was ill my Aunt grieved over me with a mother's tears." We were silent for a while.

I hope I have long since put away childish things. Lately I have taken to study the outline of psychology. I am told in books and lectures that Freud, Jung and Adler are the fathers of modern psychology, that Freud was the first to point out the importance of dream life and the light it throws on human nature, and that Jung was the first to write about the theory of the archetype. I had looked up a Dictionary of Psychological Terms, published in 1933, and read the definition of the archetype as 'according to Jung, the content of the racial unconscious; that is inherited modes of thought and feeling.' Here, I thought, was my chance to impress the little boy with something of my newly-acquired knowledge.

"I have only skimmed your essay on 'Witches and Night Fears,' Charles," I said. "In it you wrote that after looking at the bloodcurdling picture of the Witch raising up Samuel in Stackhouse's History of the Bible, you used to creep upstairs to your lonely room a small and petrified child to meet the terrible hag which sat every night on your pillow. You were clammy with fear. But had you not seen that picture you would have been just as terrified, for you inherited all the legendary beliefs of the race in demons and evil spirits—the archetypes as they are called."

To my surprise, Charles suddenly burst into laughter. "Your m-memory isn't nearly as good as that of a member of the Charles Lamb Society should be," he gurgled. I felt a little hurt at his lack of interest in my knowledge. A strong breeze from the garden caused the book to shut together on my lap. Looking round for Charles, I found that he had vanished as suddenly as he had come. "Oh, well," I thought, "I mustn't expect him to understand such things. He wrote the essays as long ago as 1821 and Jung did not publish anything until the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th. Freud died only since the beginning of this year. But what did Charles mean about my poor memory? I had better look up the essay."

Accordingly, turning to his "Witches and other Night Fears," I read:—

"Had I never met with the picture, the fears would have come self-pictured in some shape or other, headless bear, black man or ape, but, as it was, my imaginations took this form. It is not book or picture, of the stories of foolish servants, which create these terrors in children. They can at most but give them a direction. Gorgons and Hydras and Harpies may reproduce themselves in the brain of superstition—but they were there before. They are transcripts, types—the *archetypes* (Lamb actually used the word) are in us, and eternal. How else should the recital of that which we know in a waking sense to be false come to affect us at all? Is it that we naturally conceive terror from such objects, considered in their capacity of being able to inflict upon us bodily injury? Oh, least of all! These terrors are of older standing. They date beyond body—or without the body they would have been the same." Lamb goes on to write of the importance of dreams in the creation of poetry—a theory held first to have been propounded by Freud, who died only a few years back. I might indeed feel small; the child Elia had known it long ago!

Report of Recent Meetings.

The April Meeting.

Notwithstanding the unfortunate absence of Mrs. Oglethorpe (who asks us to apologise to members for her share in the mistake which caused it), the meeting proved enjoyable. This was due to the able chairmanship of Miss Annette H. Park and the ready co-operation of those present. Mr. E. F. Lewis, Mrs. C. Badcock and Messrs. W. Farrow, A. F. Bishop, H. Edwards, A. Lloyd-Jones and E. G. Crowsley each made a contribution of interest to the meeting. Mr. Farrow paid a fitting tribute to the late Miss Mary R. Jones. The meeting was opened by the reading of a passage from Lamb's writings by Mr. E. F. Lewis, and a very cordial vote of thanks was accorded to the Chairman.

Sir W. Foster on E.I.H. Authors.

There was a large attendance on May 8th, when Sir William Foster, C.I.E., addressed the Society on "Men of Letters of the East India House." Sir Frank Brown, C.I.E., presided. The Chairman's impressive details of the lecturer's work as historian of the East India Company, and of his numerous publications, raised expectations which were fully justified by Sir William's paper. For he presented us with a gallery of literary figures, some well known to fame, and others less notable, but all made interesting and living by the speaker's skilful arrangement of his abundant material, and his keen sense of humour. Among those known to Lamb were James Cobb, the playwright, P. S. Dupey, Walter Wilson, and W. G. Broughton. These, and a number of others, were brought forward to testify to the fact that the Company's staff during the last century of its existence included a record number of men devoted to literature. The discussion was worthy of the occasion, and included contributions by Dr. Shakani (author of "An Indian Pilgrimage"), Prof. W. Connely, Mr. J. P. Collins, Mr. W. Kent, Mr. H. J. Cowell, F.R.L.S., and Mr. S. M. Rich. Mr. Walter Farrow and Mr. F. E. Sandry expressed the thanks of the meeting to Sir W. Foster, and Mr. H. G. Smith and Mr. E. F. Lewis to Sir Frank Brown. The preliminary reading from Lamb was spoken by Mr. H. Edwards.

Dr. Boas on Lamb and the Elizabethan Drama.

About fifty members and friends were present on June 5th, when Dr. F. S. Boas, LL.D., D.Litt., gave an address on "Charles Lamb and some Elizabethan Dramatists." Mr. Stephen K. Jones, B.A., presided, and referred briefly to the lecturer's eminent services to the study of English literature for over half a century. Dr. Boas began with a short outline of the inception and history of Lamb's "Specimens," and it was with these in mind that he made his remarks. While not always approving of or agreeing with Lamb's selection or criticism, he paid a warm tribute to his keen insight and critical faculty. The lecturer himself exhibited these qualities as he proceeded to deal with Kyd, Marlowe, Peele, Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Greene, Dekker, Chapman, Middleton, Ford, Webster and Thomas Heywood. As Dr. Boas observed, the wide range of Lamb's Specimens clearly demonstrates his catholicity of taste and his eagerness to rescue from neglect any worthy dramatist. His selections showed, too, that they sprang, not merely from his reading of the plays but from his experience of life. Charles Lamb's "Specimens," with their interpretive notes opened a new phase in the appreciation of Elizabethan Drama, for which we owe Lamb an everlasting debt. Mr. J. P. Collins and Mr. W. Kent expressed their pleasure for a very fine and inspiring address, so that when Mr. E. C. Thomas rose to propose a vote of thanks to Dr. Boas, he feared that they had not left him much to say. He intended to re-read his copy of Lamb's "Specimens" with more understanding. Mr. E. F. Lewis seconding the vote, referred to the speaker's learning, wit and discriminating criticism, which had delighted all present. Miss A. H. Park expressed the meeting's thanks to the Chairman. Miss Margaret Brown gave the Lamb reading from the preface to "Tales from Shakespeare."

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F.R.S.L. We offer congratulations to Professor Connely and Mr. H. J. Cowell on being elected Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature.

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Summer Programme. Will members kindly note that, owing to circumstances ruling at present, there will be no meeting in August. All other meetings, including that on July 10th, will take place as arranged.

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Subscriptions. In view of the increased expenditure incurred this year, the Hon. Treasurer, Mr. E. F. Lewis, 12, Christchurch Gardens, Epsom, Surrey, would be greatly obliged if those who have not yet paid their subscriptions would do so at their earliest convenience.

Obituary.

"... gone before
To that unknown and silent shore."

MARY RACHEL JONES (1881-1943).

We announce with sincere regret the sudden death on April 1st of Miss Mary Rachel Jones, sister of Mr. Stephen K. Jones, of Dr. Williams's Library. Miss Jones joined the Society in September, 1941; and although perhaps not so well known to members as her brother, she possessed that none-too-common gift of bringing and finding affection and happiness wherever she went. An indication of her keen zest in life may be gained from the circumstance that she was met on her way to her War work during the period of the heavy raids *singing*, "I'm sixty, and I like it!" This work was membership of a First Aid Post of the Holborn district, in which she was active till the last. Miss Jones was a life-long admirer of Charles Lamb, and, among the books found at her bedside after her death were the two small volumes of the Temple edition of "The Essays of Elia."

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Gifts. The following items have recently been added to the Society's collection of Eliana:—

From Sir William Foster, C.I.E.:—

"Men of Letters at the East India House" (typescript).

From Mr. E. G. Crowsley:—

"On Sentence Length as a Statistical Characteristic of Style in Prose," by G. Udney (Yale: *Biametrika*, Vol. 30, Pts. 3 and 4, 1939). Contains a Statistical Analysis of Lamb's Essays.

C.L.S. List of Lectures, 1935-1942 (typescript).

From Mr. H. G. Smith:—

Bennett (J. O'Donnell). *Much Loved Books: Essays of Elia* (1928).

May (J. Lewis). *Charles Lamb: Some Random Reflections* (1942).

Rich (S. M.). *Some Elian Pamphlets* (1943).

Connely (Prof. W.). *Address to the Immortal Memory of Charles Lamb* (1943).

Bibliographies of Charles Lamb and George Dyer extracted from "The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature," Vol. III (1940).

From Mr. W. Farrow:—

Sunday Times, 15th Nov., 1942. Ruins of Christ Church, Newgate Street.

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New Members. The Officers and Council extend a cordial welcome to the following members elected recently:—

Mr. C. BADDELEY, Penn, Bucks.

CPL. P. L. BELL, Mytchett, nr. Aldershot.

Mr. C. V. BOLTON, 1, Lord Street, Leigh.

Mr. H. D. CAMERON, 137, Dunbabin Road, Childwall, Liverpool, 16.

SGT. M. CARR, Willesden, N.W.10.

Mr. G. M. FREWER, 56, Colne Road, Winchmore Hill, N.18.

Miss A. H. HOLLAND, 49, Avondale Road, Southport.

Mr. F. C. LINES, 112, Montrose Avenue, Luton.

Mr. W. A. GIBSON MARTIN, Whinmoor Court, Sandfield Park, West Derby.

Miss K. PEPPER, 44, Harlech Road, Old Southgate, N.14.

Mr. E. W. SACRE, 167, Offerd Road, Islington, N.1.

Miss E. WEBB SAMUEL, 12, Carlton Drive, Putney, S.W. 15.

Miss K. WHITE, 12, Coleraine Road, Blackheath, S.E.3.

Miss L. P. WILD, Alexandra Court Hotel, Finsbury Park, N.4.

Miss K. WILDMAN, 78, Westward Road, South Chingford, E.4.

Miss E. WRIGHT, Lamb's Cottage, Church Street, Edmonton, N.9.

CURRENT BIBLIOGRAPHY OF CHARLES LAMB.

FROM FEBRUARY 1st, 1935 (contd.)

(b) **Articles.**

LETTERS OF CHARLES LAMB, signed B. (*Notes and Queries*, 24.4.1943).
*Notes on ten letters in Lucas's Edition (1935).

THE GENTLEMAN OF ENGLISH LITERATURE, by H. M. Cashmore (*The Central Literary Magazine*, Birmingham, January, 1941).

THE LEGEND OF BEN, by James Agate (*Sunday Times*: 4.4.1943).

(c) **Unsigned Reviews.**

BREAKFAST WITH CHARLES LAMB (*Public Opinion*: 26.3.1943).
*On a recent reprint of N. P. Willis's, *Pencillings by the Way*.

(h) **Short Notes.**

LITERARY COMPETITIONS: SONNET ON CHRISTIAN NAMES (*John o' London's Weekly*: 26.2.1943 and 26.3.1943).
*After the manner of Charles Lamb's "In Christian world Mary the garland wears."

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