

# THE C.L.S. BULLETIN

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## In Memory of "Q"

By THE HON. GILBERT COLERIDGE.

*We have pleasure in reproducing the following moving tribute to our late President, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, written by one of his oldest friends.—Ed.*

It is not easy to write without emotion concerning a man whom I have known as a friend for some 60 years. He came into my life as a red-headed scholar of Trinity College, Oxford, from Clifton. Little did I suppose that this tough youth from the West country, whom I coached for the College boat, and who proved his toughness at the end of an oar, would turn out to be one of the finest figures in English literature. It is not the way of contemporaries at school or college to prophesy future greatness. But we recognised that indefinable quality called character which "scholar Couch" had in abundance. His talk was direct, sometimes original, and tinged with a sunny humour which amused, but never wounded, the soul. Deceit was not in him; he spoke his mind, and he was lovable in that we knew he aimed at truth in his speech.

Soon came "*Dead Man's Rock*," and here I saw that, although he was no "sedulous ape," he had Stevenson in the back of his mind, and I take it that the same patterns of former writers such as Defoe, Sir Thomas Browne, and the like, helped to form his vigorous and lucid style. Who indeed could have better finished the torso of Stevenson's "*St. Ives?*" He is a shining example of that "Discovery" of Ben Jonson (I cannot quote from memory) that one can only write well by studying the best authors. In these days of sloppy and slipshod writing how safe one feels with a book of "Qs." with its orderly sequence, devoid of pedantry! Sometimes he lets himself go in a noble outburst, not a "purple passage," but a breath of inspiration, as in the 3rd page of "*Oceanus*," one of his "*Mystery Stories*." None but a great writer could have writ that page.

Mr. Brittain, a don of Jesus College, Cambridge, who is to write "Q's" life, and whose rooms are on the same staircase, asked me to come and listen with him to the tribute paid to "Q's" work by the B.B.C. Several undergraduates were present, and his spirit seemed to brood over us, happy in the manifest love and respect which he had gained in the College of his adoption. One thing surprised me. The B.B.C. said nothing of his criticism. Had he written naught else, this would still live. How hard to say anything new about Shakespeare or Milton? But "Q" has done it, and made an original triumph of it, not to speak of his criticism of lesser writers.

No dry-as-dust he, for he strove to better his neighbours in many mundane labours. He served a Municipality, like Montaigne, a County Council, Education, and was Commodore of his Yacht Club, for the breath of the sea was ever in his nostrils. His house gave on to the sparkling waters of Fowey Harbour, whose vessels with white and brown sails lay rocking at anchor. He was the friend of all, and if they do not miss him as a writer at Fowey, they mourn him as a man. I am privileged to mourn him in both capacities.

# AT THE CHEMIST'S AN ELIAN PRESCRIPTION.

By E. F. LEWIS.

Have you ever looked down upon Marlborough from the beeches of Savernake, and experienced the beauty of the little town, set cosily with a bloom upon its clustered buildings—a sort of geranium warmth and redness and mellowness? Such a place was our sprawling borough but a few decades ago, before it was deflowered by commercialism between the two great wars. There are traces, still, in its mutilated High Street, of its comely past. Among such survivals is the bow-fronted chemist's shop, three hundred years old. To make a purchase there is to shake hands with a bygone age, while having your breathing needs most efficiently supplied. The carboys and the ornamented pots which have beckoned you through the glass of the front window, before you entered, are close to alluring view as you stand within; then your eye ranges the shelves also, and takes in the idiosyncrasies of pharmaceutical terminology, so neatly engrossed upon the array of drawers and bottles and jars, worn with age, which furnish the wall, ceiling-high, across the counter. On the other side of the shop the living present appeals in contrast: you get a glimpse of young "women in white," busily making up medicines. Their smiles are cordials.

At the back of the shop is a glass-framed showcase. On inspection this will reveal more fully than anything else that the place is one where the body and soul of the past are cared for. For among other exhibits set there for you to see—raw materials such as cinchona bark and buckthorn bark, eucalyptus leaves and the like—are old implements, things of beauty in themselves, a mortar and pestle, for example, a pewter measure, an appliance for making pills by hand—and a prescription-dispensing book of the early years of last century. If you gaze at the contents of this showcase with the interest which they deserve, you may attract the chemist's notice, as I did on one fortunate occasion, and he will expound with antiquarian pride and zeal. Do not ask him, however, to allow you to browse in the old prescription book; I beg leave to appropriate the rights in that. Not, indeed, that there is anything remarkable on most of its pages; rather is one impressed by the familiarity of the items. Master Perkins is supplied with opodeldoc for a bruise he sustained a hundred and twenty years ago; there is mention of ipecacuanha for Miss Parker; a paregoric preparation goes to many a home. Generally, the record is kept with clerkly excellence. But in 1831 occur a few—a very few—entries in a different hand: a wayward hand: a poet masquerading as an apothecary?—a hand, it is evident, that was not long employed there. This scribe took the liberty of making notes, not strictly business-like, in the margin of the page.

One such note, in particular, drew me when I examined the book some time ago. Against the "Compound Powder of Rhubarb—for Mr. Glum—at the Hardware Shop," I found copied out the verse:

"Then the clouds part,  
Swallows soaring between;  
The Spring is alive,  
And the meadows are green!"

Do you chance to recognize this, as I did?

It is taken from a poem which appeared in Hone's Book for April 30th, 1831, under the title "The Meadows in Spring." You will allow me, I hope, to improve my page by quoting from it.

'Tis a dull sight  
To see the year dying,  
When winter winds  
Set the yellow wood sighing.

When such a time cometh,  
I do retire  
Into an old room  
Beside a bright fire.

And there I sit  
Reading old things,  
Of knights and lorn damsels,  
While the wind sings.

I never look out,  
Nor attend to the blast;  
For all to be seen  
Is the leaves falling fast.

But close at the hearth,  
Like a cricket, sit I,  
Reading of summer  
And chivalry.

I jump up, like mad,  
Break the old pipe in twain,  
And away to the meadows,  
The meadows again!

Then with an old friend  
I talk of our youth—  
How 'twas gladsome, but often  
Foolish, forsooth.

Or to get merry  
We sing some old rhyme,  
That made the wood ring again  
In summer time.

Then go we smoking,  
Silent and snug:  
Nought passes between us  
Save a brown jug.

Thus, then, live I,  
Till, 'mid all the gloom,  
By heaven! the bold sun  
Is with me in the room.  
Shining, shining!

Then the clouds part,  
Swallows soaring between;  
The Spring is alive,  
And the meadows are green!

Friendship and books and the pastures of Spring: how full of balm is their evocation in these stanzas! So mellow is the sentiment with which they are charged, you would not think that they were written by a "lad, or little more than a lad," would you? This is what Lamb said about them, in a letter to Moxon, dated August, 1831:

"The poem I mean is in 'Hone's Book,' as far back as April. I do not know who wrote it; but 'tis a poem I envy—that and Montgomery's 'Last Man'; I envy the writers, because I feel I could have done something like them."

The verses had been reprinted (with a few verbal changes) in *The Athenaeum* in July, the Editor making it clear in a note that he supposed they had been written by Lamb.

Their author was Edward FitzGerald, then entering upon the long, leisured contemplation which filled the greater part of his life. It may be pleasant, as I wait, now, in the shop for another emollient, to call him to mind in other associations with Charles Lamb. On my shelves, as doubtless on yours, the Letters of the two rub shoulders. There are not to be found in FitzGerald's Letters, or indeed in those of any other master in that line, so far as I know, the particular witty inventiveness and the rapt phrasing which abound in Lamb's; but in the quality and kind of sentiment that make their Letters so endearing, the two men are alike. To each of them some of the best men of the day were drawn in affection and in trust. As Lamb, in the age of Wordsworth, had Wordsworth for his friend, so FitzGerald had Tennyson. Each founded his personal relations in kindness, humour, loyalty and disinterestedness: each measured life in terms of human affection. "My friendships," wrote FitzGerald, "are more like loves, I think." Each valued people for what they were in themselves, and had no use for gauds. Each loved homely living. Each was first and last a humourist in the old sense of the word—lapped in idiosyncrasy.

Of course, their lots in life differed widely. FitzGerald belonged to a landed family, and was endowed with a comfortable competency. He chose to spend his days in his native Suffolk, in or near the pleasant town of Woodbridge, where the river Deben provided him with an anchorage for his sailing yacht, which he called the "Scandal," because (he said) that was the staple product of Woodbridge. "Such as life is," he wrote, "I believe I have got hold of a good end of it": a sentiment which was based upon his knowledge of and compassion for the village poor of that early Victorian time, with their privations. He was no callous rentier, but had a sympathy, quick as Lamb's own, for human hardship and suffering. Withal, he knew what money could not buy, as may be gathered from this allusion:

"I have been looking over the old London Magazine. Lamb's papers come in delightfully: read over the Old China the night you get this. . . ."

That appears in a letter, written in 1843, to Bernard Barton: another link with Lamb. Barton also lived at Woodbridge, and was employed in the Bank there. Both Lamb and FitzGerald, by reference to him, "suffered long" perhaps, "and were kind." Barton may have been admirable, but can hardly have been enlivening. He laid upon FitzGerald, after his death, the charge of his daughter as a ward; and FitzGerald, not knowing what else to do with Miss Barton, married her: a mistaken course for a born bachelor, one of whose sayings was: "A humourist is best by himself."

In one respect the friendship of Barton would bring a boon to FitzGerald, if we may picture the future poet of Omar Khayyam being regaled by his friend with the sight not (as usual) of the manuscript outpourings of Barton's own tepid muse, but of the originals of the letters he had received from Charles Lamb.

A hand is outstretched towards me. My ointment is ready. I take it, and step out along time-track 1944. Overhead, the British bombers, flying low and outward bound, roar a sterner chemistry.

## ON READING LAMB IN BED

By A. F. BISHOP.

A diverting chapter might be written on "Reading in bed through the centuries." A beginning could be made with Chaucer's Clerk of Oxenford, who

"Wold liefer have at his beddes hed  
Twentie bokes, clad in blak or red  
Of Aristotle and his philosophye,  
Than robes or fiddle or gay sautrye."

and an ending with an Oxford scholar of later time, Mark Patisson, who during his last illness gazed upon his favourites, saying, "I am to leave my books; they have been more to me than my friends."

What qualities does one require of the ideal bedside author? There are many answers, dependent upon a wide variety of taste and circumstance. Have you a tendency towards the sombre and the morbid? Then Young's "Night Thoughts" or Harvey's "Meditations among the Tombs" will be your nocturnal cup of tea; or do you favour the mellifluously soporific?—then poesy furnishes you with

"The moan of doves in immemorial elms  
And murmuring of innumerable bees."

and

"Music that gentlier on the spirit lies  
Than tired eyelids upon tired eyes."

Or perchance the excitements of the detective novel attract? Then mental exhaustion may accompany the pursuit of the elusive criminal.

Devotees of Charles Lamb have surely a wiser choice than any of these: for he satisfies the conditions required by the discriminating reader-in-bed. First with regard to format. Your chosen author must be available in a volume amenable to manipulation by one hand outside the coverlet (chronic addicts have recourse to a single mitten in the winter solstice). No one is better served than Lamb in this regard. His writings are available in a plentitude of editions meeting the requirements of good print, good paper and lightness of weight, and ranging from the modest to the de luxe "where a neat rivulet of text shall meander thro' a meadow of margin."

Even the most devoted enthusiast would not advocate an indiscriminate perusal of the "Works" at bedtime. The Dramatic Specimens make too great a mental demand at half after ten, and noble

pronouncements like the judgment on Marlowe's Edward: "The reluctant pangs of abdicating royalty furnished hints which Shakespeare scarce improved in Richard II" are not to be lightly absorbed by the tiring brain. But the essays, the letters, the Tales from Shakespeare—each of these constitutes an entity admirable in completeness and satisfying quality.

Psychologists, we are told, advocate pleasant thoughts at bedtime in order to encourage untroubled slumber. The content of the essays and letters reveals their author's embracing and pervasive humanity. He gently chides Wordsworth for his attachment to "dead nature" and sings the praises of "London, itself a pantomime and a masquerade."

It is the more humane and gracious aspects of life on which his genius loves to dwell. (A revealing commentary is afforded by the circumstance that although the Napoleonic wars were being waged throughout the two middle decades of his life, practically no echo of these epic events obtruded itself into his writings.)

How admirably, moreover, the style is wedded to the matter. It is on record that on the occasion of the young clerk at India House being asked to write a report on the year's cotton production, he was reproved by a Director on the ground that "it may have had literary merits, but the style the Board preferred was the humdrum." Fortunately for posterity, our author continued his reading in the Elizabethans and Sir Thomas Browne, with the result that his style (outside office hours) developed that quaint archaism which was not a mere foible or mannerism but the result of loving study which became part of the stuff and texture of his thinking.

And for those of us who would have our day close with a smile, the gentle humour with which the essays are suffused is an unfailling delight. You will recall how in New Year's Eve, Lamb, being prompted by the occasion to thoughts of human mortality, "relucts at the inevitable course of destiny" and asks "Does irony itself go out with life? Can a ghost laugh or shake his gaunt sides?" and then follows the confession, not of a drunkard, but of a reader-in-bed, when he apostrophises his books, his midnight darlings, and their intense delight.

Something of this delight we may recapture in his pieces, and not the least appropriate time for this diversion is to read them in bed. Here, to adapt Dryden's comment on Shakespeare, is God's plenty, for the pillowed head.

### Report of September Meeting.

Like Kipling's mariner, our Hon. Secretary is a fellow of infinite resource and sagacity; so that when he heard, almost at the last minute, that Dr. Ranjee G. Shahani was not prepared to give his lecture on September 9th, he coolly called upon several members to produce short papers on "Charles Lamb—The Ideal Bedside Author." The result was one of the most pleasant meetings the Society has ever held. Mr. S. M. Rich, who never reads in bed, was an odd choice for Chairman at such a meeting, but at least he was impartial. The proceedings opened by a reading by Miss Ruby M. Budd, not from Lamb's Works, but from a sonnet on Lamb by Lord Houghton. Then Mr. Walter Farrow gave the first of the talks, in which he asked (and answered) the question, "What is a good bedside book?" His favourites were Elia, Pepys and Montaigne. Miss Annette Park and Miss Florence Reeves followed with delightful papers prefaced by entirely unnecessary apologies. Mr. A. F. Bishop's paper is given on another page. So is that read by Mr. E. F. Lewis, who admitted that his effort was not strictly relevant to the subject of the symposium. "Strictly" is good! There was a very good discussion, in which Miss A. F. Wedd, and Messrs. H. C. Chapman, E. F. Lewis, J. M. McNulty and L. Raymond took part. A vote of thanks to Speakers and Chairman was moved by Mr. E. G. Crowsley and seconded by Miss Mary C. Henderson.

### New Members.

We heartily welcome the following new members on behalf of the Officers and Council: Mr. D. Barry, Southwark House, S.E.1; Mr. S. W. Hart, 7, Burder Street, N.1; Rev. H. Lightburne, The Vicarage, Upchurch, Sittingbourne; Mr. B. Mehta, 29, Marineline, Bombay, 1, India; Major L. H. Mitchell, 16, Fitzjohn's Avenue, N.W.3; Miss P. Quelch, 418, Lordship Lane, S.E.22; Mrs. W. Sheppard and Miss W. M. Sheppard, 12, Swanfield, Ystalyfera, nr. Swansea.

### Future Meetings.

**14th October.** "William Macdonald, Brave and Buoyant Spirit." Frank Swinnerton. (Chairman: E. F. Lewis.)

**11th November.** "Charles Lamb's Poetical Career." Edmund Blunden. (Chairman: A. F. Bishop.)

**9th December.** "C.L.S. Brains Trust." (Question Master: Walter Farrow.)

All above meetings at Central Club, Y.W.C.A., Gt. Russell Street, W.C.1, commencing at 2-45 p.m. precisely. Mr. Crowsley will welcome questions for submission to the Brains Trust.

### Gifts.

The Hon. Librarian gratefully acknowledges the following additions to the Society's Collection of Elia:—

From Mr. S. Austen.—"The Blue Coat Boys," or School Life in Christ's Hospital, by W. H. Blanch (1877).

From Mr. A. C. Denham.—"Essays of Elia" (1823). Printed for Taylor and Hessey. First Edition.

"Last Essays of Elia." Edward Moxon (1833). First Edition.

Both above, crown 8 vo. Calf extra, gilt edges, bound by Bedford. These volumes, so generously given by Mr. Denham, form the most notable item in the Society's collection.

### Current Bibliography of Charles Lamb. From February 1st, 1935 (contd.).

#### (a) Books and Pamphlets.

Charles / Lamb / and His / Friends. / By / Will D. Howe / The Bobbs-Merrill Company / Indianapolis, New York. // Published March 15th, 1944. Pp. xii + 364; 19 illustrations.