

THE

C.L.S.



BULLETIN

(Organ of THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY, founded 1935)

President: LORD DAVID CECIL

Vice-Presidents: EDMUND BLUNDEN, J. LEWIS MAY, and S. M. RICH

Chairman: WALTER FARROW

Vice-Chairman: A. F. BISHOP

Treasurer: S. L. G. HUXSTEP

Hon. Secretary: E. G. CROWSLEY, 37, Tavistock Square, W.C.1.

Hon. Librarian: F. E. SANDRY, Central Library, Fore Street, Edmonton, N.9.

MAY, 1947

No. 77 (Thirteenth Year)

MARY LAMB MEMORIAL ADDRESS

BY EDMUND BLUNDEN

We meet in memory of Mary Lamb; the occasion is one of some note in the literary world, since in her time Mary Lamb made enjoyable contributions to literature. Yet probably it is not on that account that we are recalling her—we as a Society. We commemorate not only the Mary Lamb of the collected Works, not the Mary Lamb who occupies students of manic depression; not the Mary who was intensely important to Charles Lamb, nor the old-fashioned woman who lived on when Charles was gone—but Mary Lamb in her complete individuality. Of Mary Lamb also the words of Matthew Arnold speak truly:

In the sea of life enisled
We mortal myriads live alone.

To find Mary Lamb alone, then, is my object in these observations and anthologizings, which are not intended to be a thesis; and the best means is one of her letters, all too few. One good example was first printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 22 September, 1869, and called by the editor "charming and characteristic." It is that long one written to the little girl Barbara Betham on 2 November, 1814, and Mary particularly describes the adventure of adding "four untenanted, unowned rooms" to their set in Inner Temple Lane and of making one of these "the print-room," by stripping Lamb's "old library" of its engraved plates. The letter is filled with those touches which prove Mary Lamb's affectionate understanding of her young correspondent.

When Mary wrote it she was fifty years old. She was born in 1764, well in time to have seen Johnson and Goldsmith on their walk, and in a Johnsonian neighbourhood. Her parents, as everyone knows, lived in the Temple; her father was factotum to one of the Benchers, Samuel Salt. John and Elizabeth Lamb had seven children; two boys grew up, John and Charles, both educated in Christ's Hospital; and one girl outlived them all. These three children of the modest origin, which later on Mary seemed not to like to hear mentioned, all inherited intellect and the literary gift; even John could write strikingly; and it is a notable problem of heredity that from their apparently ordinary parentage came three such noble and potential persons.

Mary's letter to Barbara Betham is not in her full style, but has reminded us of "the fine brain" (Leigh Hunt's term) and the training of the writer. She must have been a willing and clever pupil. Her brother tells us of Mr. William Bird's school off Fetter Lane, and of her unofficial education—she had the freedom of Samuel Salt's library of "good old English reading." (It is C. V. Le Grice who names Salt in this connection.) Perhaps "Mrs. Leicester's School" conceals some experience not as a pupil but as a teacher, but there is no positive evidence of it. Mary herself says that in early life she passed

eleven years using her needle for a livelihood. Eleven years in London; yet for Mary as for Charles the city streets had a rural horizon. Their grandmother in Hertfordshire was an important person in their lives—Mrs. Field, at the great house. Lamb perpetuates Mary's taking him as an infant on "those pretty pastoral walks," and Mackery End and Blakesware were a long way from Bow Church and Crown Office Row.

After 1780, Mary Lamb's history is lost or hidden until about her thirtieth year. She then appears as a professional needle-woman, unmarried, overburdened and strained. Her closest bond is with Charles: "She is all his comfort," writes S. T. Coleridge in 1794, "he hers. They dote on each other. Her mind is elegantly stored, her heart feeling." The home situation was precarious, and on 23 September, 1796, Mary became demented, stabbed and killed her mother. She was consigned to a private asylum, but Charles obtained her liberty. From 1796 brother and sister lived in an alternation of the most charming discourse of reason, and the visitations of Mary's baffling trouble. Their difficulties were many, and society was not always charitable.

C. V. Le Grice wrote, among several excellent things on the Lambs, a good sonnet on their going together to Mary's asylum; it begins, "An angel's wing is waving o'er their head." There are lines of Coleridge's in admiration of Mary's "soul affectionate yet wise" and her "polish'd wit" (1794), and Lamb wrote with simplest distress on Christmas Day 1797, the poem opening "I am a widowed thing, now thou art gone." Despite the visitations Mary and Charles made a home which delighted all sorts of guests, whether they were in Covent Garden, Islington, Enfield, or Edmonton. The astonishing thing is that Mary made all feel what Hazlitt expressed—she was the most rational and wisest woman he had ever known. The contrast between her clear months and the others amazed Lamb; we have the comments of them both on it in their joint letter after the marriage of Emma Isola to Moxon (August 1833). "I feel," wrote Mary, "as if all tears were wiped from my eyes, and all care from my heart," and Lamb exulted, "Never was such a calm, or such a recovery."

Descriptions of Mary's appearance and manners by B. W. Procter and Mary Balmano refer to Mary's constant "upward look of peculiar meaning" to her brother and to her apparently knowing what he was saying or wished to say even in another part of the room. The two managed to be considerable travellers, even reaching Paris; in England they explored many places, from the Lakes to Penshurst, from Salisbury Plain to Margate. Like Charles, Mary had the gift of almost child-like enjoyment, and at Brighton in 1797 "the first week I never took my eyes off the sea, not even to look in a book." At Cambridge in 1815, she "liked *all* the Colleges best," and went about as if Charles had been in truth a Cantab.

It is time to look at another aspect: Charles and Mary Lamb wrote at least three noted books together, "Tales from Shakespear," "Poetry for Children" and "Mrs. Leicester's School"; and in these Mary is the dominant author. For her spacious and powerful prose style the end of "Pericles" is excellent, and the beginning of the "Midsummer Night's Dream" has her polished wit. Her skill in drawing a child's character is well displayed in "Louisa Manners"; she does not deny to the young their dignity and earnestness. Her qualifications for novel-writing were ample; and humour was one (witness her letter on Godwin's "Essay on Sepulchres," which most graciously leaves very little of Godwin.) Probably she preferred reading novels to the dangerous imaginative labour of writing them.

Was she a poet? Maybe in many of her verse pieces she lacked the necessary under-song of rhythmic music. At any rate she achieved inclusion in the "Golden Treasury" with one poem, "A child's a plaything for an hour." It may be that the child remembered in these stanzas as something much more was young Charles. And thirty years after writing the poem Mary was really and materially alone. Her mental cloud mercifully descended on her when "young Charles" died. She never again was that wonderful intelligence and wise counsellor that she had been; probably never again in her last twelve years thought of herself as one of the authors of England; but she never forgot the friends of Lamb. Her mind proved not inexhaustible, but her heart never failed in affections. For these she had long subdued her own intellectual aspirations, once Charles's genius shone out. In the end we may say of her what he did, using a curious and just name for her quality: "Epistemon is well."

THOMAS HOOD.

The meeting on April 12th opened with a reading by Miss Reeves from Thomas Hood's Reminiscences taken from *Thomas Hood and Charles Lamb*, by Walter Jerrold. The Chair was taken by Mr. E. G. Crowsley (in the unavoidable absence from town of Mr. Peschmann). Miss MARGARET WILLY in introducing her talk on Thomas Hood, referred to his firm and intimate association with Charles Lamb, commencing at the time when he was assistant editor of the *London Magazine* and continuing until Lamb's death in 1834. Hood's *Reminiscences* place in high relief the characteristics of the two friends: from the start their liking for each other had been spontaneous and instinctive. When they became neighbours in Islington there followed good talk, good food, good laughter and nonsense, with frequent interchange of visits, and there was also a warmth of affection between Mary Lamb and Jane Hood. Lamb's verses "On an Infant dying as soon as born" were composed on the death of Hood's first child. Thomas Hood has received recognition for his aptitude in the art of punning, but he was more than a punster: he possessed a working philosophy which resisted manfully all the ills and frustrations to which he was subject throughout his working life, and his achievements in pure poetry, though small in number, are high in quality. His philosophy was contained in a sentence of his own: "The raven croaked, but I persuaded myself it was the nightingale; there was the smell of the mould but I remembered that it nourished the violets." He faced and overcame the future with a mighty heart; his was a rare spirit which endured much and embraced the inevitable with cheerfulness and a jest. No sentimentalist refusing to accept sombre realities, his life is among the most moving in the annals of English literature. He preserved intact his gift of a delicate and individual lyricism, and as an even greater achievement, a warm humanity of outlook.

Possessing a school-boy's sense of fun, he had an insatiable aptitude for punning which came readily on every possible occasion—he said he had to be a lively Hood "for a livelihood"—yet some of his puns had a depth of pathos and a felicity of double meaning linking them to the humanities. This is particularly noticeable in the *Song of the Shirt*, in which the swallows *twit* the poor seamstress with the Spring. As Lamb wrote, "A pun should fill the mind." His puns too, were innocent of the barb of malice and irony. Like Lamb he was not a brilliant conversationalist—in so-called good company he would sit silent and be suspected for an odd fellow. He would jest at his own melancholy, but for the misfortunes of others he wrote from the heart; witness his poem *The Bridge of Sighs*, a poem that wrings the heart of the reader through a simplicity achieved by the skilled mastery of a difficult and haunting metre. Again his *Ode to Autumn* might have been ascribed to Keats, though it has not so sustained a note, and one wonders how such lines came from the same pen that wrote *Miss Kilmansegg*. Another mood is seen in the *Dream of Eugene Aram*, where the unknown unmentionable horror, never stated, is vividly insinuated through a series of images of decay. He had the misfortune to live in an age of giants in world literature, yet his voice rings with a quiet assurance. One thing is certain, Hood's human attainment in a struggle with poverty, frustration and sickness will endure through the history of literature. Hood wrote his own dry, unself-pitying epitaph: "Here lies one who spat more blood and made more puns than any man living", but his tombstone bears the inscription, "He sang the Song of the Shirt". Lamb's verdict on him as man and poet was "A fertile genius and a quiet good soul withal". Miss WILLY read with a rare understanding "The Bridge of Sighs", and the sad little poem *Autumn*; and her Address was tinged with a fineness of expression and phrasing revealing a poetical imagination.

The subsequent discussion added to the gaiety of the afternoon's proceedings, with sparkling comments from Messrs. A. F. Bishop, Pine, Fitzgerald, W. Kent, Owen Roberts, and Miss Wedd and Miss Faraday. Mr. Postans proposed a vote hearty of thanks to Miss Willy for her delightful address, and to the Chairman for his friendly efficiency. H.G.S.

* * * *

Summer Visits:— May and June, 1947

Saturday, 10th May. Visit to Keats Museum conducted by Mr. J. H. Preston, Curator of the Museum.

Meet at Hampstead Underground Station at 3 o'clock. Inclusive charge for tea, donation to the Museum and tips—2s. 6d.

Participating members should notify Mr. Crowsley by 5th May.

Saturday, 14th June. The Chairman's "AT HOME" at "Falaise", Harmer Green Lane, Welwyn, Dramatic items by members of the Dramatic Group of the Society.

Frequent trains from King's Cross Station. Members should select trains in order to arrive at "Falaise" not later than 4 o'clock.

Participating members must notify Mr. Crowsley by 4th June.

Details of arrangements for Saturdays 12th July and 9th August will appear in our next issue. Copies of full Summer Programme can be obtained on application to Mr. Crowsley.

* * * *

New Members

Mrs. L. A. M. Baker, 97, Highbury Hill, N.5. W. G. Bebbington, 127, Peascod Street, Windsor. Miss C. Crowe, 2, Lownds Avenue, Bromley, Kent; Mrs. E. M. Dowdell, 14, Mount Nod Road, Stratford, S.W.; Mr. H. Forbes, 14, Fairfax Road, Bedford Park, W.4.; Miss F. R. Foxhall, 75, Beatrice Court, Wembley Park, Middx.; Miss M. C. Foxell, 44, Woodberry Avenue, North Harrow; Mr. A. N. W. Heard, c/o Firth, 8, Melbourne Place, Bradford; Mr. S. McKechnie, 71, Beverley Gardens, Stanmore, Middx.; Mr. R. H. Mottram, 4, Poplar Avenue, Eaton, Norwich; Miss E. M. Pendreigh, 43, Charlwood Street, S.W.1; Mrs. M. Phillips, 39, Blenheim Road, Bradford; Mr. and Mrs. A. Rodell, 24, Bramley Hill, Croydon; Miss E. M. Scantlebury, The Homestead, Gordon Avenue, Stanmore; Miss A. Souter, c/o Mrs. Paratt, Elm Bank, Dollar; Mr. L. L. Thomas, 46, Albion Road, Sutton; Mrs. W. Turfus, 10, William Street, Hamilton; Miss Withey, 15, Berkeley Road, South Tottenham, N.15.

OBITUARY

"Deaths overset me, and put me out long after the recent grief."

MISS FRANCES JOLLY

With the passing of Miss Frances Jolly, who joined the Society in 1942, we have lost an active and enthusiastic member. She was the daughter of the late John Brown Jolly, a Captain in the Merchant Navy. Her chief interests were in the Dickens Fellowship of which she had been a member for over twenty-seven years.

MRS. GRACE GILCHRIST FREND (1859—1947).

Grace Gilchrist Friend, who has passed on at the age of 88, on March 28th, 1947, was a member of the C.L.S. Many members will recall her paper on "Fanny Kelly", read by Miss Pattie Butcher at a meeting during the war. Mrs. Friend was the last surviving child of Alexander and Anne Gilchrist, inheriting her gifted parents' love of art and literature; her father is best remembered for his life of William Blake, of her mother as inspired by the genius of Walt Whitman. Mrs. Friend's hospitality and friendship were given freely to those who shared her literary tastes, her love of the country and her interest in old buildings. She asked no other entertainment than a fireside circle of friends, or a ring of garden chairs on the lawn, and long hours of freedom for talk and exchange of memories and ideas. She was an excellent correspondent, and had perhaps as many friends in America as here. An appreciation by Mrs. Sophie Hine appeared in the *Times* of April 11th.

DR. JAMES CRUICKSHANK SMITH

On November 7th, 1946, Dr. J. C. Smith of Edinburgh, passed away. He had been a member of the C.L.S. for little over a year. He was educated at Edinburgh University and Trinity College, Oxford, which he entered with a Vans Dunlop Scholarship. Throughout his life his personal interests were in letters and philosophy. His leisure was given to the study of the English poets, Spenser, Shakespeare and Wordsworth, on the last of whom he wrote an illuminating study. Among his valued friends were men like Laurence Binyon and Walter de la Mare.

THE FATE OF LAMB'S LONDON.

In *The Lost Treasures of London*, (Phoenix House, Limited, 12/6), Mr. W. Kent has given us a detailed record of the effect of the German raids on London, that will never be superseded. Londoners of the future will find here a full and trustworthy assessment of the extent of that widespread destruction, recorded soberly and interestingly by a great and discerning lover of London. Members of the C.L.S. will turn first to the record of those places associated with Lamb. His birthplace, No. 2 Crown Office Row, was badly damaged, and what remained was demolished; but although the memorial tablet was broken, it was not destroyed. The Lamb Memorial in the Temple Gardens is safe, as it had been removed. Though the Temple Church suffered badly, the stone heads mentioned by Elia in *My First Play* are intact. On the other hand there is nothing left of the Inner Temple Library of which Lamb wrote in *The Old Benchers*. The lost "winged horse," rediscovered and installed on the Library staircase some ten years ago, sustained some damage. Further east, Christ Church, Newgate, attended by Lamb during his seven years as a Bluecoat boy, has been reduced to a shell. James Boyer's tombstone remains, though cracked in several places. The bust of Lamb, unveiled by Lord Plender on behalf of the Elian Club in 1935, was unhurt and removed to Christ's Hospital at Horsham. This Society's meeting place at the Gatehouse Restaurant was destroyed, as was Essex Hall, the scene of its inauguration in February, 1935. Mr. Kent's book will add to his fame as a recorder of London, and should be in the hands of all its lovers. That is, if they can get it; for though it was published as recently as April 3rd, three large impressions totalling 15,000, have already been called for. We offer hearty congratulations to Mr. Kent. S.M.R.

* * * *

MARY LAMB CENTENARY.

On another page is an abstract of the Memorial Address by Mr. EDMUND BLUNDEN, marking the Centenary of the death of Mary Lamb (1847-1947), given at the meeting on Monday, March 10th, with Mr. S. M. RICH in the Chair. Over one hundred members and friends braved the evening's appalling weather. Miss Mayre Lawson opened the proceedings by reading Mary Lamb's witty and shrewd letter of 21st September, 1803, to Sarah Stoddart, who became Mrs. William Hazlitt.

Mary Lamb, said the CHAIRMAN, was too often referred to as merely Charles Lamb's sister, yet in her own right she was a great figure; she inspired some of the foremost writers and herself produced much that was enduring. Probably the best book yet written about her is from the pen of one of our members, Dr. Ernest C. Ross of Oklahoma University, and the Memorial Address celebrating her qualities was to be given that night by Mr. Edmund Blunden, who, in addition to being a Vice-President of the Society was an acknowledged authority on the Lambs.

Mr. BLUNDEN'S Address repaid all listeners, conveying to them a sense of beauty in a life often frustrated by periodical malady, but which evoked spontaneous tributes of affection and esteem from all who met Mary and Charles at those friendly meetings in their rooms in The Temple precincts. In an Address exquisite in phrasing and, supplemented with extracts from Mary's writings, Mr. BLUNDEN invested the various facets of her work with a masterly touch—a touch impossible to transfer to cold print—and revealed the true Mary Lamb.

Mr. Stephen K. Jones added to the interest of the meeting by reading Crabb Robinson's description of his visit to Mary Lamb on 12th January, 1835, following Charles death a fortnight earlier. The later discussion included comments by Messrs. Thomas, Foyle, Bishop, Miss Lawson, and the Chairman. Votes of thanks to Mr. Blunden and the Chairman were proposed by Mr. A. E. Bishop and Mr. Restrevor-Hamilton respectively.