

# The Charles Lamb Bulletin

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## Editorial

MARY BLANCHARD BALLE DELIVERED a widely-acclaimed paper at the beginning of the present season to the Charles Lamb Society at their regular venue in London, the Mary Ward Centre in Queen Square. We are pleased to present her paper here, the first study of which we are aware focussed primarily on the relationship of Mary Lamb and Sarah Stoddart.

Isabella Lickbarrow was a contemporary of the Lambs, and shared much in common with them. Like Charles, she had to cope with the incarceration of her sisters during their periods of mental imbalance. But life was evidently much harder for her, as she didn't have a secure job. She would probably have known of Lamb's essays, and I suspect knew Lamb's friend, Wordsworth. Constance Parrish has pursued Lickbarrow through the archives of the north-west, to become the world authority on this writer; we are pleased to present her findings here.

It was a pleasure, in our last, to present Professor Joseph Riehl's argument for attributing 'The Mermaid', a hitherto unattributed essay in the *London Magazine*, to Charles Lamb. John Strachan has snapped at the bait, and presents his own case here for the authorship of Thomas Hood. Professor Riehl has provided a postscript to Strachan's argument. And finally, Melba S. Brandes, an Elian for many years, has contributed to this issue a memoir of her first expedition to the site of many a pilgrimage: the Lamb grave. It is both resonant and haunting.

## Mary Lamb and Sarah Stoddart: An Unlikely Friendship

By MARY BLANCHARD BALLE

IT HAS LONG BEEN my opinion that Sarah Stoddart Hazlitt has been the victim of a 'bad press'. I do not believe that Mary Lamb, who was a shrewd judge of character, would have taken as her best friend someone so singularly unlikeable as the person so often described in most writings concerning William Hazlitt. Surely Mary Lamb would not have been attracted to anyone devoid of 'sensibility', who lacked 'social tact', and disregarded totally 'the ordinary forms and conventions of civilized life'.<sup>1</sup> That Sarah Stoddart was different, and a great deal different, from her contemporaries, I will grant you. But in my opinion that very difference was what attracted Mary Lamb. Mary's early life had been spent either with her grandmother at Blakesware or her parents in the Inner Temple, all older individuals dedicated to upholding the *status quo*. Anyone who flaunted convention, cared little or nothing about social standing, and refused to follow the dictates of fashions was a marvel outside Mary's experience.

What made Sarah Stoddart what she was? And was she really all that different? Her naval officer father, John Stoddart, never attained any choice assignments. On the contrary, he spent most of his career ashore, at half pay. Often assigned the distasteful job of impressment of seaman, he and his family were isolated socially and professionally. John Stoddart probably met his wife in Salisbury, where they lived together without benefit of clergy for some years. Well over a year after the birth of their son, John, they were married on 5 June 1774. Their second child, Sarah, was born that same year, though exactly when and where has not been ascertained.<sup>2</sup>

The household in which Sarah grew up was neither affluent nor particularly social. Like Mary Lamb, she had little formal education, and was largely self-taught. She was highly intelligent and persistent in believing that she could attain anything. From the Pinney Papers, we learn that she read and wrote French, was interested in botany, and intent upon acquiring new areas of expertise. An avid reader of novels, she possessed a quick mind and good memory.

In July 1802 Sarah visited her brother John in London, staying with the family of her brother's friend John Frederick Pinney in Wimpole Street. Sarah had probably heard a good deal about most of John Stoddart's friends, including the Lambs, before she came to London. It would have been with a great deal of curiosity that she approached her first meeting with the Lambs.

The Lambs were then living at 16 Mitre Court, Inner Temple, and it was probably there that Sarah was taken to meet them. From the beginning, Mary was intrigued by the unconventional Sarah, who was totally different from her brother, a very conventional and repressed gentleman. Sarah Stoddart was an exotic, unlike anyone Mary had ever encountered. At the same time, she was real and approachable, radiating a sense of fun and practicality. All of this appealed to Mary, who quickly formed what was to become a life long friendship. Sarah, with her boundless energy, was a complete extrovert. With very definite opinions that she did not hesitate to express, she

<sup>1</sup> Hesketh Pearson, *The Fool of Love (A Life of William Hazlitt)* (New York, 1934).

<sup>2</sup> Stanley Jones, *Hazlitt: A Life* (Oxford, 1991) (hereafter Jones), p. 12. See also PRO Adm. 6/340 Widows' pension papers, 1830 and Buckinghamshire Record Office, Aylesbury. John Stoddart was born on 6 February 1773. Apparently, the illegitimacy of the two Stoddarts was well known. In 1824, John Hunt, angered by John Stoddart's attack on the dead Byron, mentioned it: 'this bastard Englishman, this illegitimate stickler for legitimacy' (quoted Jones, 12).

exuded warmth and reveled in flaunting propriety. Mary described her in a letter shortly after this initial meeting as 'the most amusing, good-humoured, good sister, and altogether excellent girl I know'.<sup>3</sup>

Mary's exuberance is evident in a letter she wrote some five months after the initial encounter:

My poor head is just now full of the memory of our walks together – driving along the Strand so fast (lest the scotch broth should be spoiled in our absence) we were ashamed of shewing of red faces at your friend's in westminster, or bustling down Fleet-Market-in-all-its-glory of a saturday night, admiring the stale peas and co'lly flowers and cheap'ning small bits of mutton and veal for our sunday's dinner's, returning home in all haste, to be scolded for not laying the cloth in time for supper (albeit it being nine o'clock) and then chidden for laughing in an unseemly manner.<sup>4</sup>

The two women shopped in companionable harmony, were attracted to the same things, and were able to turn even commonplace shopping into an adventure. What if dinner was late, and Sarah's brother unhappy? The vivid memory of this outing gave Mary a sense of release and fun many months after the events. Here was a friend with whom she could laugh, share small happinesses, and tell her secrets. Mary had lacked such a confidante in the past.

By 1802 Sarah was 28 years old, and the fresh blush of youth had definitely gone. Long before she met Mary, Sarah had decided that matrimony was what she most desired. She wanted and needed a husband – almost any husband would do. Having decided this, Sarah set about getting her heart's desire. Although she set about this goal with single-minded dedication, her efforts had so far been in vain.

Sarah's approach to husband-hunting was not exactly the orthodox method then favoured by eligible women. She believed in a bold and direct strategy, always keeping her eye on the financial end of the equation. A romantic she was not, but rather a shrewd, pragmatic manager. Her approach to life and to people was practical, unsentimental and businesslike. This is especially clear in her marital advice to her brother. She told him to marry the money and forget love. John's letter in answer to his sister's advice was scathing.

During Sarah's first stay in London, she confided to Mary Lamb her hopes of finding a husband. Mary had probably given up any hope that she might have had for marriage and a family. In all of the Lambs' literary works there is no mention of romance or marriage prospects for her. In addition to her undefined social standing and lack of dowry Mary was by no means a beauty. Physically she was short and small-boned, with dark hair and a square face more suited to a man than a woman. Her family considered her strange. This, too, may have been a factor in her lack of matrimonial prospects. That Mary did consider marriage at one time or another is clear from a letter she wrote in 1806: 'I have known many single men I should have liked in my life (if it had suited them) for a husband: but very few husbands have I ever wished was mine which is rather against the state in general that one never is disposed to envy wives their good husbands'.<sup>5</sup>

Late in July 1802 Sarah returned to her parents' home, in St Anne's Street, Salisbury. Almost immediately, she and Mary began to make plans for her return visit. Mary wrote: 'I rejoice exceedingly to hear you have hopes of being in town again next winter – the evenings we spent

<sup>3</sup> *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* ed. Edwin W. Marris Jr (3 vols., Ithaca, NY, 1975-8) (hereafter Marris), ii. 63.

<sup>4</sup> Marris ii. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Marris ii. 229.

together were the pleasantest I have known for a very long time. . . . If balloons were a common and a cheap conveyance, I would like to come over and make a list'ner of your party, now and then of an evening when I had a few hours to spare'.<sup>6</sup> This letter has a light, playful tone, which Mary used only when writing to Sarah. From the beginning of this protracted correspondence, Mary endeavoured to match Sarah's unrestrained honesty and straightforwardness. The resulting letters reveal aspects of Mary's personality that are seldom, if ever, seen in her other correspondence. For just a moment, she became less controlled and less repressed.

Early in the New Year of 1803, Sarah returned to London, staying with her 'friend's in westminster', Mr and Mrs William Osborne at 3 Barton Street.<sup>7</sup> She and Mary spent their time together happily exploring, taking tea with friends, and sitting for hours talking before the open fire, feet firmly planted on the fireguard, drinking equal amounts of brandy and water. During this time, their friendship was firmly cemented. For both, it was a time of contentment. It is possible that they discussed Mary's recurring illnesses and its consequences (including the death of Mary's mother).<sup>8</sup> In several of her later letters to Sarah, Mary made casual references to her mother and to her childhood indicating that they had at least touched on these matters in conversation, and that Mary felt comfortable discussing them with Sarah.

Shortly after Sarah departed from London, her brother was offered the post of Judge Advocate in Malta. With his prospects vastly improved, John married Isabella Moncrieff. Mary met the young bride in London on her way to Malta. She told Sarah that she had not at first been overly impressed with the lady, but that after some conversation she was convinced that she could make a friend of Isabella, and advised Sarah to do the same.<sup>9</sup> Despite this sage advice Sarah and Isabella never became close companions.

Unfortunately Sarah's husband-hunting was not producing the desired results. With her brother away, she was left alone in Salisbury with her mother, her father having died during the summer of 1803. In an effort to improve her marriage prospects and get away from her mother, she decided to take part of her financial reserve and join her brother in Malta. Mary wrote, wishing her well, and saying 'God bless you, and grant you may . . . return unmarried and penniless'.<sup>10</sup>

At the age of 29, Sarah's personality and value system were established. What was she like? I love small details, but with Sarah Stoddart there are surprisingly few concerning her physical appearance. She had reddish hair, which she wore cut short, in direct defiance of the fashion of that day. She was probably of medium height, with a trim figure, and curves in all the right places. She enjoyed long-distance walking and suffered from no severe physical complaints until late in life. She possessed a *je ne sais quoi* that drew people to her. There is a charming story of her at the Opera in Paris where the crowd was so thick that she could not make her way. Officers of the Gendarmes gallantly lifted her over the barrier to a seat in the gallery with them.<sup>11</sup> At that point she was 50 years old and had lost none of the zest for living. With money she was inclined to be frugal – a trait she shared with Mary. She possessed a wealth of common sense, and was calm and honest in her dealings with others. She had a well-developed sense of the ridiculous and

<sup>6</sup> MARRS ii. 62-4.

<sup>7</sup> MARRS ii. 91.

<sup>8</sup> For more on which, see my 'Mary Lamb: Her Mental Health Issues', *CLB NS* 93 (January 1996) 2-11.

<sup>9</sup> MARRS ii. 123.

<sup>10</sup> MARRS ii. 125.

<sup>11</sup> See *The Journals of Sarah and William Hazlitt 1822-31* ed. W. H. Bonner (University of Buffalo Studies, vol. 24, February 1959), p. 173.

absurd which included many of the social conventions deemed so necessary for young ladies of her day. On an intellectual level, Sarah was rational, logical and reasonable. She was well-read, exhibited a remarkable memory, and could hold her own in any conversation. She was an asset to the Wednesday evening *soirees* held by the Lambs long before she finally met her future husband. Not given to either fainting spells or the vapours, Sarah was endowed with a sense of adventure and a healthy curiosity. Like Mary Lamb, she was an accomplished needlewoman.

Admittedly, Sarah Stoddart also had her faults. She cared little about what she wore and had no sense of style; she simply put on what was handy and comfortable. In effect, she was a fashion misfit. In an attempt to appear forthright and honest, Sarah struck many as being insensitive and unsympathetic for the feelings of others. Certainly, she was not domestic – something to which I shall return shortly. Indifference to the norms of polite society was yet another fault that can be laid at Sarah's door. Perhaps the biggest complaint against her was her indiscretion in dealing with members of the opposite sex. As William Bonner so succinctly put it, 'Sarah, of course, suffered from nothing more than animal spirits, a thing often applauded in men but in formal nineteenth-century British society not easily tolerated in the gentler sex'.<sup>12</sup>

Sarah was the first and perhaps the only person, other than Charles Lamb, with whom Mary was willing to be totally involved. Mary willingly shared with Sarah her own highly personalized philosophy concerning her fellow man. Asked to comment on Sarah's latest suitor, Mary replied: 'as I said before, as I cannot enter into your feelings, and view of things, your ways not being my ways, why should I tell you what I would do in your situation. So child take thy own ways and God prosper thee in them'.<sup>13</sup> In an attempt to explain her methods of dealing with difficult people and thorny situations, Mary told of a 'knack I know I have of looking into peoples real character, and never expecting them to act out of it – never expecting another to do as I would so in the same case'.<sup>14</sup> By using her ability to be non-judgmental, and to set no expectations, Mary was able partially to shield herself from disruptive emotions. Given the precarious state of her mental health, this was certainly, for her, the wisest choice. Mary was also willing to discuss with Sarah how she handled her relationship with Charles:

I make a point of conscience never to interfere, or cross my brother in the humour he happens to be in. . . . Let men alone, and at last we find they come round to the right way, which we by a kind of intuition perceive at once. But better, far better, that we should let them often do wrong, than that they should have the torment of [a] Monitor always at their elbows.<sup>15</sup>

These remarks reveal an embryonic feminist attitude, which ran contrary to prevailing beliefs.

By midsummer, Sarah Stoddart had already eliminated at least one suitor from the ranks of her Maltese dancing partners. He, like most of his fellow bachelors, was interested in marrying only ladies well-endowed with money. Exactly what happened next to Sarah is unclear. Most authorities agree that she was probably sexually assaulted by someone identified only as 'a vile wretch'. We know Sarah was not a virgin at the time of her marriage from ungentlemanly remarks made by Hazlitt at the time of the dissolution of their marriage. It seems logical to conclude them that it was in Malta that Sarah lost her virginity in what would probably be akin to a modern day 'date rape'. She wrote the details of this whole episode to Mary, who choose not

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>13</sup> Marris ii. 123.

<sup>14</sup> Marris ii. 142-3.

<sup>15</sup> Marris ii. 124.

to acknowledge the events by return mail. Sometime later Mary wrote explaining that she had not responded because she feared her response would be read by others. The fun and adventure of Malta was gone now and Sarah was anxious to return home, almost as anxious as her brother was to have her leave.

At the beginning of June 1805 Mary was seriously ill and again confined to an asylum where she was to spend the next two months. It was during these months that word came to Charles that Sarah was returning to England; he lamented:

Poor Miss Stoddart! she is coming to England under the notion of passing her time between her mother & Mary, between London & Salisbury. Since she talk'd of coming, word has been sent to Malta that her mother is gone out of her mind. . . she is coming home, with no soul to receiv[e her.]<sup>16</sup>

Sarah arrived back in Salisbury in August at about the time Mary was able to leave her asylum. Still deep in depression, Mary was unable at first to write Sarah, so Charles was enlisted to carry on the correspondence. It was not until 18 September that Mary felt well enough, in mind and spirit, to pick up her pen and write.

Sarah had come back to Salisbury to find that her mother had descended into some form of senile dementia. She wrote to Mary about this situation and enlisted her aid in obtaining a naval pension for her mother. Mary's empathy with the plight of both mother and daughter was revealed in her close questioning of Sarah with regards to her mother's reactions. These questions were intimate enquiries concerning a disturbed emotional state with which Mary was only too familiar; I do not think she would have made such enquiries of another living soul, except Sarah.

In early November 1805 Mary again wrote to Sarah concerning her mother:

And do not I conjure you let her unhappy malady afflict you too deeply – I speak from experience & from the opportunity I have had of much observation in such cases that insane people in the fancy's they take into their heads do not feel as one in a sane state of mind does under the real evil of poverty the perception of having done wrong or any such thing that runs in their heads.

Think as little as you can, & let your whole care be to be certain that she is treated with tenderness. I lay a stress upon this, because it is a thing of which people in her state are uncommonly susceptible, & which hardly any one is at all aware of, a hired nurse never, even though in all other respects they are good kind of people. I do not think your own presence necessary unless she takes to you very much except for the purpose of seeing with your own eyes that she is very kindly treated.<sup>17</sup>

This letter leaves us to wonder who was insensitive, unsolicitous, or unkind to Mary when she was confined in a similar situation. Mary was aware that Charles acted as her advocate and she tried to impress on Sarah that she must do the same for her mother.

Having written so freely and truthfully, Mary, in her next letter, was having second thoughts about being so honest. She pleaded with Sarah to understand:

I have entered very deeply in to your affliction with regard to your Mother, & while I was writing the many poor souls in the kind of desponding way she is in whom I have seen, came afresh into my mind, & all the mismanagement with which I have seen them treated

<sup>16</sup> Marris ii. 170, in a note to Dorothy Wordsworth.

<sup>17</sup> Marris ii. 184-5.

was strong in my mind, & I wrote under a forcible impulse which I could not at that time resist, but I have fretted so much about it since, that I think it is the last time I will ever let my pen run away with me.<sup>18</sup>

To my knowledge, Mary never again wrote so freely of her psychiatric experiences.

Four months passed before Sarah was able to make her long anticipated trip to London. She arrived in time to celebrate the New Year of 1806 with the Lambs. It seems that she at first planned to stay for about three weeks, but her visit was extended and she did not go back to Salisbury until 20 February. She was an easy-going, accommodating house-guest of whom Charles wrote: 'She is one of the few people who are not in the way when they are with you'.<sup>19</sup>

When his sister left Malta, John Stoddart wrote to Mary, asking her to keep a parental eye on Sarah. In this letter, Stoddart pressed Mary to take a firm hand with Sarah and to teach her to act as a lady should.<sup>20</sup> Confident that this could be done, Mary wrote to Sarah: 'I have observed many a demure Lady who passes muster admirably well who I think we could easily learn to imitate in a wee[k or two.]'<sup>21</sup> By the time Sarah's visit took place, there were many more things, beside decorum, for the two friends to discuss. During this visit, the Lambs' social schedule was unusually heavy. They continued their regularly weekly *soirees* but also entertained a number of other guests including the John Hazlitts.<sup>22</sup> Between visitors and visiting, Mary and Sarah found time to inspect a number of picture-galleries and, when tickets were available, they attended the theatre.<sup>23</sup> In good weather, they roamed the city and the countryside.<sup>24</sup> For Mary this visit was an easy, relaxed experience filled with good talk, fun and a sense of personal closeness. Just after Sarah's departure, Mary wrote to her:

. . . my head . . . aches with the thoughts of parting from you, and is perplexed with the idea of I cannot tell what about notion that I have not made you half so comfortable as I ought to have done, and a melancholy sense of the dull prospect you have before you on your return home. . . . we agreed we should miss you sadly, and that you had been, what you yourself discovered, not at all in our way. . . . We praise you for the very friendly way in which you regarded all our whimsies, & to use a phrase of Coleridge's, understood us . . .

You are not yet arrived at the first stage of your journey, yet have I the sense of your absence so strong upon me . . .

The bed was very cold last night.<sup>25</sup>

In her next letter, Mary reported that Charles had finished his farce, and that they were busy arranging to have it produced. While Mary was occupied with that, Sarah was back in Salisbury seeing her mother, and renewing her matrimonial quest. Concerned about her reputation, Mary wrote, admonishing her to pay attention to her behaviour and decorum. However, when Sarah's

<sup>18</sup> MARRS ii. 186.

<sup>19</sup> MARRS ii. 200.

<sup>20</sup> MARRS ii. 184.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> It is likely that Sarah knew his family before meeting William Hazlitt.

<sup>23</sup> Some fine collections were auctioned that spring, some of which they may have viewed. They may have stopped at the Truchessian Picture Gallery in the New Road opposite Portland Place (one of the Lambs' favourites).

<sup>24</sup> They may have journeyed north into Islington (which the Lambs knew well), or gone west to Chelsea to see Chelsea College's bell-house that reminded Charles of Trinity College, Cambridge.

<sup>25</sup> MARRS ii. 210, 211, 212.

letter arrived complaining of a lecturing letter from her brother, Mary hastily wrote seeking to retract her own warning.<sup>26</sup>

When Sarah left London, Mary had pledged to write long, journal-like letters. However, by the middle of March, Mary's letter writing had fallen off dramatically. She explained that since Charles was taking some time off, her time was simply not her own and she worried that without a definite project Charles would renege on his promise to return to his writing. The whole business made Mary anxious and nervous; unfortunately, she read her brother only too well. It is interesting that Mary was willing to share with Sarah her misgivings about the future. With no one else, except Charles, was Mary so free, straightforward, and honest.

In May 1806 Mary was busy producing her share of the *Tales from Shakespear* – a project probably conceived during Sarah's visit. According to Mary the individual tales were to be published and sold separately. Sarah was anxious to read her friend's work in manuscript but was forced to wait until the book was in print. Meanwhile, Sarah was having difficulties with her mother, her maid and an aunt living near the family in Salisbury. On top of this her matrimonial prospects were again in question. Almost by way of a consolation, Mary wrote to suggest that Sarah remain single and after her mother's death come to live with the Lambs in London. Mary was convinced that they could either find her a husband or teach her to live without one.

In a way, the Lambs did find a husband for Sarah. In Mary's letter of 30 May, we find the first mention of William Hazlitt, the gentleman destined to win Sarah's heart and hand in marriage. In October 1806, Sarah seemed on the verge of marrying a Mr Dowling, a man considerably younger and less sophisticated than Sarah. The situation progressed to such a point that John Stoddart wrote to Mary asking her to inspect the prospective groom and to take the writing of a marriage contract in hand. Unfortunately, Sarah misread the situation with Dowling and the engagement fell through.

Despite this latest setback, Sarah planned to visit the Lambs shortly after the New Year of 1807.<sup>27</sup> There is little information about the Lambs' lives during the first six months of 1807, and it could well be that Sarah did visit that spring. If she did, it could have been during this visit that she met Hazlitt. In July, Mary and Charles went to Bury St Edmunds to stay with the Clarksons. Shortly after their arrival, Mary became ill and Charles was forced to return with her to London. It was probably September before she was again well and receiving guests. If she did not visit early in the year, Sarah may have visited in September. Her first meeting with Hazlitt might have occurred then.

Regardless of the date of the meeting, by late November Sarah and Hazlitt had come to some sort of mutual agreement, and Mary was privy to all that had taken place. Writing to Sarah on 28 November, Mary referred to Sarah's romance as 'your comical love affair.' However, at the end of this letter Mary gave Sarah her blessing, saying: 'Determine as wisely as you can in regard to Hazlitt, and if your determ[in]ation be to have him, Heaven send you ma[ny] happy years together. . . . for if I were sure you would not be quite starved to death, nor beaten to a mummy I confess I should like to see Hazlitt and you come together'.<sup>28</sup>

By late December Sarah had not yet informed her brother of her impending marriage to Hazlitt, and Mary was increasingly insistent that this be done. She feared that John might inadvertently hear of the engagement from some other source and be displeased that he had been neither consulted nor informed. Eventually, Mary's advice was acted upon. Unfortunately, John

<sup>26</sup> Marris ii. 212-13.

<sup>27</sup> See Charles Lamb's letter to Sarah of 11 December 1806 (Marris ii. 252).

<sup>28</sup> Marris ii. 262.



Stoddart was not anxious to welcome the impoverished and liberal-minded Hazlitt into his family, and set about postponing the event for as long as he could.

At the time of her engagement Sarah was 32 years old, three years older than Hazlitt. Educated, well-read, and unconventional, Sarah possessed few of the characteristics generally valued by a gentleman seeking a wife. If she was not the conventional fiancée, then Hazlitt – shy, self-absorbed, volatile, and penniless – was hardly a conventional husband. Sarah did possess two attributes that drew the shy and introspective Hazlitt to her. Her sociability and her forthrightness were equally appealing to someone who had little of the former and valued the latter almost beyond reckoning. That she also possessed a small annual income helped her prospects. One of Hazlitt's biographers suggested that he married Sarah because 'he was in an important respect seeking refuge from the world'.<sup>29</sup> He hoped to find that refuge in Sarah's sensible approach to life, her 'brisk bird-like way' of handling everyday situations and her affectionate acceptance of him.<sup>30</sup>

In February, Mary wanted to invite Sarah to London. When the proposed visit was mentioned to Stoddart, he insisted that it would be improper for Sarah to come to London to stay anywhere but at his home. Furthermore, he could not receive her until the end of April. Mary was inclined to go along with him so as to prevent discord. However she ended her letter by saying that she and Charles were willing to do whatever Sarah and Hazlitt wanted: 'Let there be a clearly necessity shewn, and we will quarrel with any body's brother'.<sup>31</sup> Even as Mary was writing these words, Sarah and Hazlitt were together in Salisbury. Early in February, Hazlitt became ill. Unable to care for himself, he went to Winterslow to be nursed by Sarah. He did not tell his friends where he was going and they assumed that he had gone to his father's home in Wem, Shropshire. Eventually, his whereabouts came to light but no one appeared to be unduly distressed about the cohabitation of the two.

Wedding plans continued in mid-March, when Mary wrote to discuss what she should wear as bridesmaid. The wedding was to be held in Winterslow and would be attended by both families. Why Sarah's original plan for a village wedding was not carried out is uncertain.<sup>32</sup> It may be that her brother discovered that the couple had been together in February and insisted that they be wed immediately. On 26 April 1808 Hazlitt applied for and was granted a Special License to marry at St Andrews Holborn.<sup>33</sup> There, on Sunday 1 May, he and Sarah were married in the presence only of a clergyman, John Stoddart, his wife, Isabella, Charles and Mary Lamb. Charles, who always had difficulties containing himself on solemn occasions, laughed several times during the ceremony. He later claimed to have been in danger of being evicted from the entire proceedings.

<sup>29</sup> Jones 10.

<sup>30</sup> Jones 16.

<sup>31</sup> Marris ii. 269.

<sup>32</sup> It is possible that Sarah was pregnant with Hazlitt's child by the end of April.

<sup>33</sup> Jones 17.

The Hazlitts remained in London for about five months, during which Mary enjoyed having them both so near.<sup>34</sup> A month and a half before the birth of their first child they returned to Winterslow.<sup>35</sup> In December, Mary wrote:

You cannot think how very much we miss you and H. of a wednesday evening ---- all the glory of the night, I may say, is at an end. Phillips makes his jokes and there is no one to applaud him. Rickman argues & there is no one to oppose him.

The worst miss of all to me is that when we are in the dismal there is now no hope of relief for any quarter whatsoever.<sup>36</sup>

Mary waited in London for word of her friend's safe delivery. Sarah's son William was born on 15 January 1809. Unfortunately, he failed to thrive and died on 5 July 1809, having lived for only six months. He was never seen by Mary.

The Lambs moved into their new flat at 4 Inner Temple Lane, in June 1809. Exhausted from the experience, Mary suffered another of her periodic emotional illnesses and the carefully planned trip to Winterslow had to be postponed. Not until October was Mary well enough to make the journey. The weather that autumn was particularly glorious, with clear skies and warm temperatures. The visitors spent most of their time out-of-doors in almost marathon-like hikes of eight to 20 miles. Arriving home after their day's walk, all four friends would stroll quietly around the village, admiring the sunsets and searching for mushrooms to incorporate into the evening meal. Dinner was probably eaten late and often consisted of bread, salted butter, boiled beef with mushrooms and vegetables. Afterwards there were endless games of cards. For Mary it was a 'dear quiet lazy delicious month', which lifted the last of her lingering depression and restored her health.<sup>37</sup> It was a happy holiday for all, and one they would repeat a year later.

Unfortunately, before this visit took place, Sarah lost another child. On 6 March 1810 she suffered a miscarriage. A few weeks later she wrote Mary expressing a desire to come to London to recuperate. Naturally, Mary was delighted at the prospects of having her friend for an extended stay. Around 1 April, Sarah arrived to stay with the Lambs and shared Mary's bed, since the Lambs had no separate guest room. For almost a month, Mary and Sarah enjoyed each others' company. Sarah's departure was something of a wrench for Mary. However, since the Lambs were planning a trip to Winterslow, she said goodbye with a light heart and high anticipation of a quick reunion. True to their promise, Mary and Charles arrived in Wiltshire four weeks later. Their stay was pleasant but not as fascinating as their first. On Tuesday 24 July the Lambs and Hazlitt left the village to spend a few days in Oxfordshire. Sarah did not accompany them because she was again pregnant.

On the return trip to London, Charles was extremely unwell and remained so for several days following their arrival. Mary, on the other hand, seemed to survive the trip in good spirits. However, two or three days after their return, while Charles was still indisposed, Mary began to exhibit symptoms of her mental illness. Resigned, she entered the asylum. While she was confined,

<sup>34</sup> That autumn they took up residence at Camberwell Green, which was seen as 'a pleasant retreat for those citizens who had a taste for the country whilst their avocations daily called them to town' (Jones 1). Located to the south east of London, Camberwell Green was three miles from St Paul's, across the Thames. It was within walking distance for the Lambs.

<sup>35</sup> By the middle of November Sarah was far advanced in her pregnancy. In an effort to ensure her rest, and probably in an attempt to economise, the Hazlitts left London (Jones 1).

<sup>36</sup> Marris ii. 286.

<sup>37</sup> Marris iii. 30.

Sarah suffered another miscarriage.<sup>38</sup> Undoubtedly this information was withheld from Mary until she was safely back at home.

On 26 September 1811 Sarah Hazlitt gave birth to a son, William, the only one of the Hazlitts' children who survived to adulthood.<sup>39</sup> Writing to congratulate her, Mary noted:

May he live to be a great comfort to you. I never knew an event of the kind that gave me so much pleasure as the Little-long-looked-for-come-at-last's arrival, and I rejoice to hear his honour had begun to suck. . . . I hope to hear from you soon for I am desirous to know if your nursing labours are attended with any difficulties. I wish you a happy getting up, and a merry christening.<sup>40</sup>

Mary's wishes concerning the christening were premature. This event did not occur until William was a year old and the Hazlitts were in London.

An account of William's supposed christening was written 30 years after the event by Benjamin Robert Haydon using his diary notes as reference.<sup>41</sup> Perhaps Haydon was not the best chronicler; he was known to be rather loose with the truth. The same could be said for Patmore's description of the Hazlitts' under-furnished and cheerless home situation. However, William Bewick and Bryan Waller Procter, both friendly with Hazlitt, also remarked on the lack of decor and creature comforts available in the Hazlitt household. However, Henry Crabb Robinson, who was rather fastidious, particularly about his surroundings, noted in his diary on 2 January 1813: 'In the evening at Hazlitt's. The Burney and Lamb party were there, and I found H. in a handsome room and his supper was comfortably set out.'<sup>42</sup> Although Sarah Stoddart was not a superb housekeeper or manager, the situation was not as awful as biographers of Hazlitt would have us believe. Remember that the Hazlitts' financial resources were precarious: once rent, food, servants and daily living expenses were paid, there would have been no cash available for Sarah to spend on the furnishing of the York Street house. By all accounts, the Winterslow cottage was a warm, cosy establishment, furnished before Sarah's marriage, no doubt with family furniture. With a husband who cares little or nothing about where he lives and uses the very walls of the drawing room to scribble notes to himself, a wife is bound to stop worrying about the house. As for food, it was one of Sarah's greatest pleasures; however, her husband ate and drank what was at hand only when driven to it by hunger or thirst.

Modern day pop psychology has contributed two basic rules on how to handle life. Rule number one: don't sweat the small stuff. Rule number two: it's all small stuff. I think this sums up Sarah Stoddart's approach to married life with Hazlitt. She was not about to 'sweat the small stuff', that is the housekeeping, the daily washing, the shopping and the food. She was and continued all her life to be interested in Hazlitt's writing, looking up references for him and collecting his work even after the marriage was over.

<sup>38</sup> Sarah miscarried on 6 September 1810.

<sup>39</sup> A memorandum, supposedly written by Sarah, is in the British Library (Add. MS 38,898). It gives the grim details of Sarah's miscarriages and child losses. The child, William Hazlitt, married Catherine Reynell, whom the Hazlitts had known from the beginning of the York Street period.

<sup>40</sup> Marrs iii 77.

<sup>41</sup> Haydon, who was not above bending the facts to suit his needs, could not have attended a christening party on 9 April 1813 at 19 York Street, because according to the tax rate books, the Hazlitts did not take up residence there until some time after 3 May 1813 (Jones 94-5). Christening finally took place on 26 September 1814. Martin Burney and Walter Coulson were godfathers; Mary was present, but Charles was ill or detained at the office (Jones 94).

<sup>42</sup> Quoted from P. P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt* (New York, 1922), p. 148.

Shortly after young William's christening Sarah suffered another miscarriage. Her last child, John, was born on 28 September 1815. At the time of John's birth, Mary was ill and confined to an asylum. It was probably mid-November before she was able to see this latest addition to the Hazlitt household. John died at the age of nine months, on 19 June 1816, in a measles epidemic. Mary had left London, with Charles and the Mortons, for a holiday in Wiltshire, and was not available to comfort her friend on her loss.

For the next few years the Hazlitt marriage bumped along, mostly going downhill. Since Sarah was in London and a regular at the Lambs' frequent entertainment, I have no doubt that Mary knew exactly what was going on and offered her usual wise counsel. It is rather easy to overlook the continuation of this friendship during this period because of the lack of correspondence.

The marriage began to fall apart as early as 1816. Neither Sarah nor Hazlitt ever deliberately made life between themselves unsalvageable, but neither were they capable of a unilateral decision that might have set them on a different, less self-destructive course. Because Hazlitt had fallen badly in arrears with the rent for 19 York Street, he and the family were evicted by the bailiffs toward the end of 1819. It was probably at this time that Sarah decided to move, on her own, into rented rooms. At the time of the separation, there was no talk of a divorce. To what degree Mary was involved as an advisor to Sarah is impossible to say. However, Sarah and Mary were close confidants. It seems reasonable to assume that, from the first, Mary was privy to all that was happening. Sarah was not the type to suffer in silence with her closest friends so near at hand. Renowned for her confidence-keeping ability, and her discretion, Mary may not have even discussed Sarah's problems with Charles. Certainly she never mentioned them to anyone else. Mary's advice to Sarah was practical and supportive, without being detrimental to Hazlitt, of whom Mary was always fond. Conscious of the effects of parent's actions on their children, Mary sought to soften the blow of this separation for the Hazlitt's child, William. After she left Hazlitt, Sarah remained in London and continued to see Mary and Charles, as did her husband.

In September 1820 Mary suffered a recurrence of her illness.<sup>43</sup> Writing to Hazlitt shortly after Mary had been taken ill, Charles expressed his and Mary's pleasure upon reading Hazlitt's newly published 'On the Conversation of Authors'. In this letter Charles remarks, 'The last thing she read was the "Thursday Night", which seem'd to give her unmix'd delight, & she was sorry for what she said to you that night.'<sup>44</sup> The subject Mary regretted having raised was probably the Hazlitts' failure to support his child. It is somewhat surprising that Mary should have tackled Hazlitt on the matter but she may have done so for the child's sake.

The uncomfortable separation of the Hazlitts came to its inevitable conclusion in 1822. Hazlitt was in love and wanted his freedom. Since there was no divorce in England, Hazlitt hoped to obtain a Scottish divorce. It was a complicated endeavour in which he needed the cooperation of Sarah; eventually she acquiesced. On her way north, from Salisbury, she stopped in London for a visit and long conversation with Mary. Henry Crabb Robinson, in his diary entry of 9 April, recorded that Mary had told him of the Hazlitts' affairs and of her 'becoming disgust of this scandalous proceeding.'<sup>45</sup> However Mary would not have let her abhorrence of this difficult

<sup>43</sup> In his biography of the Lambs, Ross states that during this attack Mary 'was cared for at her lodgings in Dalston. There she recovered from the attack by or before the beginning of November'; see Ernest Ross, *The Ordeal of Bridget Elia* (Norman, Oklahoma 142).

<sup>44</sup> Marrs ii. 283. 'On the Conversation of Authors' was published in the *London Magazine* (September 1820).

<sup>45</sup> Henry Crabb Robinson, *Henry Crabb Robinson on Books and their Writers* ed. Edith J. Morley (3 vols., London, 1939), i. 282.

situation detract from her support of Sarah. The non-judgmental Mary might have judged the situation but never her friend.

When the Lambs moved to Colebrooke Cottage, Islington, in 1823, Sarah was among their first visitors. In June 1824 she came to London to tell Mary of her intention to visit Paris. Since Mary had been there just two years previously, she was a good source of information, addresses and advice. However, Mary must have been somewhat concerned for her friend, who spoke little French and who was setting off on this journey alone and with limited financial resources.

In early July, Sarah, confident in her ability to cope, and eager to see every inch of the great French capital, was off. She was still in Paris in September, when Hazlitt and his new wife arrived from Rouen. As anyone who knew Sarah's precarious monetary situation could have anticipated, she was, by September, in rather desperate financial straits. She called on her ex-husband and his wife, whom she had met in London, to ask for the money Hazlitt owed her for their son's schooling. Hazlitt arranged something for her and by 25 September she was back in London, where she took a flat at Mr Baylis's, 51 Stafford Place, Pimlico.

When the Lambs moved further out of London to Enfield, Sarah continued to call. During January and February 1828, she was among several hardy souls who made the coach journey north to visit. In 1830, William Hazlitt died. Sarah noted: 'William Hazlitt, senr., died at his lodgings, No. 6, Frith Street, Soho, London, on Saturday. 18th. September, 1830, at about half-past four in the afternoon, age 52 years, five months, and eight days.'<sup>46</sup> By the time of her husband's death, Sarah had begun to suffer badly from arthritis. At times it was almost impossible for her to move. I seriously doubt that she ever visited the Lambs in Edmonton, although she probably kept up with them through mutual friends. As she grew older, Mary's periodic illness increased in duration. For months at a time she would be unable to receive visitors. Sometime before this, she had given up almost all of her of correspondence, leaving it to Charles. When he died in December 1834, Sarah, no doubt, wrote to Mary concerning her loss. Early in the 1830s, Sarah lived with her old housekeeper, Mrs Tomlinson at Potter's Bar.<sup>47</sup> However, when she died on 2 November 1840, Sarah was living in Place Street, London, with Elizabeth Pinny, who was named as witness on the death certificate. Mary continued on for almost seven years. She moved back to London in 1841 and died there on 20 May 1847.

Theirs had been a friendship of 38 years. Through sickness and health, in good times and bad, they had sustained one another. Their different temperaments served only as a compliment to their relationship, never a detriment. They believed and trusted each other, and so far as I can tell that faith was always justified. Yes, they were unlikely friends, but then again, unlikely friends sometimes make the best friends.

*Stockbridge, Massachusetts*

<sup>46</sup> Howe 426.

<sup>47</sup> Howe 417.

## Isabella Lickbarrow: An 'Unlettered' Poetess

By CONSTANCE PARRISH

ISABELLA LICKBARROW sounds like a name invented by a nineteenth-century writer for the heroine of a novel; but she was a real person living in the Lake District and writing poetry at the same time as Wordsworth. She was alive when Charles Lamb went to visit his friends there, and had a great deal in common with the family problems he faced.

A Kendal poet, she wrote because she was unable to deny herself the indulgence of 'wooing the Muse after the domestic employments of the day', even though the only outlet open to her was the column of a local newspaper. She had to write. Despite the difficulties of her domestic circumstances, her loyalty 'To the Muse' – the subject of her first poem in her *Poetical Effusions* (1814) – never failed. Until the facsimile reprint of her poems in 1994, her verse had lain neglected for 180 years, but it has won her a new audience in the last decade of the twentieth century. Until recently very little was known of her – neither her birth nor death dates, nor her education or parentage.

In the preface of her *Lament for Princess Charlotte* (1818) she is described as 'a young female in humble life, a native of Kendal . . . an orphan, unlettered and of exemplary character'. The description of her as 'unlettered' seemed to be at odds with the many classical allusions in her poetry, as well as with her fluency and command of language. The references in her poem 'The Inquiry' to 'Phoebus' Fire' and 'Parnassian wilds'; in her 'Reflections on leaving the vicinity of Penrith' to the 'Arcadia of the West and gay Elysian mead'; the fact that she wrote a poem 'To the translator of Anacreon's First Ode'; as well as the geographical references in her poem 'The Vision' – implied a better education than that of a domestic servant.

Anglican records proved fruitless, but strangely the first clue came from the vehicle which Isabella herself used to promote her verse – a newspaper. A cutting collected in the *Annals of Kendal*<sup>1</sup> stated that, in a Codicil to his will, the eminent Quaker scientist John Dalton left £900 in third equal parts to his relations – Isabella, Rachel and Margaret Lickbarrow. I have since discovered that this legacy was in fact in the Will proper dated 22 December 1841, and not as stated in the newspaper cutting as being in a Codicil. This revealed Lickbarrow's Quaker birth and upbringing, in addition to the influence of John Dalton's mother's family on Isabella throughout her life.

Quaker records reveal that Isabella Lickbarrow was born on 5 November 1784 to James and Mary Lickbarrow of Market Place, Kendal. James' occupation was described as schoolmaster. He came from Cautley, Parish of Sedbergh, and married Mary Bristo on 24 November 1783. She was the daughter of Samuel and Mary Bristo nee Greenup of Howburn, parish of Caldbeck, in Cumberland. Mrs Samuel Bristo was the elder sister of the redoubtable Quaker Deborah Greenup, mother of John Dalton – sister too of that Thomas Greenup who became a London barrister and advised John Dalton not to take up a scientific career!

James and Mary Lickbarrow had three other daughters: Rachel (b. 1786), Hannah (b. 1787) and Margaret (b. 1789). Sadly, the death of Mary Lickbarrow at the age of 34 was recorded on

<sup>1</sup> Cornelius Nicholson, *The Annals of Kendal* (2nd ed., London and Kendal, 1861) (hereafter Nicholson, *Annals*). This appears in J. F. Curwen's personal copy, now retained at Kendal Record Office, and is marked 304.19 in ink, being a newspaper cutting pasted in by him.

12 May 1790, so that we know that Isabella was motherless at the age of five and a half. Her sister Hannah died on 15 January 1797, aged nine, and her father James Lickbarrow died on 13 June 1805, when Isabella was only 20 years old, so that she entered a life of struggle to support herself and her two surviving sisters, whose health has been described as delicate.<sup>2</sup>

What happened to motherless Quaker children? One thing is certain: given the sect's strong emphasis on education, schooling would be taken care of. Isabella and her sisters would have been taught by their schoolmaster father who came from a strong Quaker family (though, as we shall see, he defected later). James Lickbarrow probably taught at the Kendal Quaker School with John Dalton. The school was just a few hundred yards from their home in Market Place. Dalton had come from Eaglesfield in 1781 to join his stern brother Jonathan to teach in the Quaker school. We are told that Dalton's pupils 'were boys and girls of all ages from infants whom he held on his knee while he taught them their letters, to robust youths . . . and those who saw most of him loved him best, and his friendship once bestowed, was inalienable. He had a high respect for female intelligence, paid to women a chivalrous regard, and honoured some with warm attachment. He was alive to the beauties of nature, enjoyed simple music, and in his youth wrote indifferent poetry.'<sup>3</sup> This man who became a scientist of international renown was bound to have taken notice of his cousin's children who lived close by, especially given the strength of the bonds in Quaker families. The young Dalton was always athirst for knowledge. He was taught Greek, French and Latin by the blind philosopher John Gough, described by Wordsworth in *The Excursion* – though in much Dalton was self-taught. In the Preface to her *Lament for Princess Charlotte* Isabella is described as 'Self-instructed, she is indebted to herself only for what little knowledge she may possess'. In this she was following the example set by Dalton; her seeking of education was in the tradition of Quaker independence. It is important to note that Quaker education has always treated boys and girls alike.

The many biographies of Dalton furnish fascinating details of the curriculum in Kendal Quaker School. The prospectus stated that careful instruction would be given in English, Latin, Greek and French, also in writing, arithmetic, and merchants' accounts. Isabella was therefore not 'unlettered' by modern standards, and later she herself kept a school with her sisters.

Of Isabella's own childhood (which must have been shadowed by her mother's death when she was such a young child), we are given glimpses in her poetry; for example, in 'On seeing some children playing':

The happy hours of childhood pass away,  
 And with the dawn of reason sorrow comes.  
 Oft the first pang the youthful bosom feels  
 Is (the sad hour of separation come)  
 To part from those they love, from playmates dear,  
 Through life's long journey ne'er to meet again.  
 Perhaps a keener wound may yet be given;  
 The kind protectors of their early days,  
 Who formed their tender minds to truth, may die,  
 And leave them in the world without a guide . . .

These lines reveal that Isabella had experienced happiness in her childhood home and felt her mother's death deeply, even though she was only five years old at the time it happened. This

<sup>2</sup> Lancaster Lunatic Asylum, Casebook HRL/1/6, now retained at Lancashire County Record Office, Preston.

<sup>3</sup> DNB.

poem further mirrors her feelings of loss for her younger sister Hannah who died seven years after her mother.

James Lickbarrow must have been hard-pressed in May 1790 when he found himself with the care of four small daughters whose ages ranged from six months to five years. He must have had to turn to the children's grandparents for help. There is a sense in which Isabella left us autobiographical notes in her verse, for example in 'Written on leaving H-----':

Thou dear delightful vale adieu!  
 Sweet spot, from early years beloved . . .  
 To Crossdale's wildly winding stream . . .  
 No more where Lune's transparent flood . . .

This plainly refers to Crossdale Beck (now spelt with one 'S'), which cascades down the fells and enters the River Lune just over a mile northwest of Sedbergh. She must have spent time with her paternal grandparents who lived at Cautley about a mile and a half up the valley of the River Rawthey just northeast of Sedbergh. The Rawthey is a rather larger tributary of the Lune. Isabella was plainly remembering her childhood haunts. The 'H-----' referred to in the title of the poem could have been Howgill (the place), or Howgills Fells which shelter the valleys in this area. She frequently went walking from her grandparents' home, an example occurs in her poem 'A Fairy Tale' which is about Grayrigg Hall, situated seven miles or so from Cautley. According to her own footnote in *Poetical Effusions*, this Hall was purchased from the Lowther family in 1680.<sup>4</sup> As well as her grandparents, there were aunts and uncles living in the vicinity, who would have closed ranks to help care for these motherless children.

Isabella's mother's relations were not slow to help. In John Dalton's biographical notes in the *DNB* we read how his parents walked to Kendal from Eaglesfield, near Cockermouth, 44 miles in a day on several occasions, in order to bring farm produce to help John, Jonathan, and Mary Dalton, who were engaged in running the Quaker School very near to Market Place where the Lickbarrows lived. (James Lickbarrow must have continued to live in the family home there, because the deaths of little Hannah and he himself, are recorded as having taken place in Kendal.)<sup>5</sup> The kindly warmth and sense of duty would also have been extended to her dead niece's children by Deborah Dalton, who is known to have been a strong character. That Isabella spent time staying with her maternal relations near to Penrith is revealed by her poems written in praise of the Eden Valley and in 'Reflections on leaving the vicinity of Penrith'. Some find it mysterious that, despite her impoverishment, Isabella mysteriously found time to explore the countryside, but part of the explanation must have been that she was at the same time accepting the hospitality of her many relations. Her mother had three brothers, two of whom lived in the Greystoke area of Penrith.

It is interesting to note that John Dalton left the largest single legacy in his will to a Trustee for the care of the Lickbarrow sisters, Isabella, Rachel and Margaret, even though the relationship was that they were his cousin's children. Today, we should regard this as a distant relationship. Furthermore, it has been suggested that he helped them throughout his life; there is some evidence for this. *Notes and Queries* for February 1866 indicates that the Kendal Quaker community was supportive of Isabella, and it appears that it was in John Dalton's philosophy that the needy should be cared for. Despite his standing in the world of science he lived a simple life and his own wants were few. He must have kept in touch with Isabella and her sisters during his

<sup>4</sup> See Lickbarrow, *Poetical Effusions* (Oxford, 1994), p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Francis Nicholson and Ernest Axon, *The Older Non-Conformity in Kendal* (Kendal, 1915), pp. 484-5.



lifetime, because a newspaper report states on 13 July 1833, 'We take some credit to Kendal because Dr Dalton once lived in it and still visits it; he is now the first scientific man in England'.<sup>6</sup> In being related to such a man, the Lickbarrow sisters must have basked in some reflected glory, despite their modest Quaker upbringing. The great respect with which he was regarded is shown in the graphic newspaper reports of his funeral in July 1844, which stated that his body lay in state in the Town Hall in Manchester and that mills and workshops were closed to enable many thousands of people to view the coffin.<sup>7</sup> There were 500 members of various societies in the funeral procession.

The references in Isabella's writing to places connected with her relations suggest that ties were strong with all these people. These must have strengthened more after the death of her father. The effect on Isabella of the family deaths so early in her life is reflected in her poems 'On Early Death', 'The Widow', and 'On the Death of an Infant'. The poem 'To the Memory of a Friend' could suggest the death of a lover. There is much underlying sadness in her verse, coupled with a deep and warm humanity.

As we have seen, she refers to herself and her orphan sisters in the Preface to *Poetical Effusions* in such a way that it appears that she was deeply conscious of her vulnerable and impoverished position, finding herself without the protection of parents or a husband. Means of support must have been difficult to find and it was necessary for the sisters to seek work of some kind. I find evidence that they kept a school, but because of their financial need, in 1811, Isabella began, at first somewhat diffidently, to publish verse in the *Westmorland Advertiser*, which had begun to appear under Isaac Steele's proprietorship earlier that year. Steele came from a noted Unitarian family in Kendal. Records show that soon after his wife's death James Lickbarrow refrained from attending Quaker Meetings. Minutes of those meetings show that his absence was investigated by two members of the Society. His strong character was shown when he informed them that he has 'joined in worship with another Society whose principles more nearly co-incided with his Judgement'. In fact he had joined himself to the Unitarian Chapel which was adjacent to his home in Market Place and continued his association with this sect, the records of which record his burial in 1805. The congregation of this Chapel was peopled with the merchants of Kendal, cotton-dealers, drapers and dyers, wine merchants, mercers and woollen drapers; there were doctors and lawyers too. It is not surprising, therefore, that Isabella turned to Isaac Steele, editor of the *Westmorland Advertiser*, whose father was a Trustee of the Chapel, to publish her poetry. Steele appreciated the quality of her verse and published more. Thus the seeds of *Poetical Effusions* were sown, and when Steele handed over the *Advertiser* to M. and R. Branthwaite in 1813 they continued to publish Isabella's poems. On 26 February 1814 the Branthwaites placed an advertisement in the newspaper under the heading 'Proposals for publishing—By Subscription—*Poetical Effusions*—by Isabella Lickbarrow'. The price was five shillings. The Preface states:

The benevolence of kind friends suggested the present publication, to the Authoress, who after domestic employments of the day had secretly indulged herself in 'wooing the Muse' at intervals from repose. And the intention of those kind friends was, to assist the humble labours of herself and her orphan sisters by raising from the generosity of the public, a little fund, which would increase their family comforts and better their conditions of life.

<sup>6</sup> *Local Chronology; being Notes of the Principal Events published in the Kendal Newspapers* (London, 1865), p. 91.

<sup>7</sup> See Nicholson, *Annals*, 304.19.

These remarks reveal Isabella's concern and earnest responsibility for the upkeep of her younger sisters, which was evident throughout her life. It appears that the sisters lived together in Greenhow yard off Highgate in Kendal. J. F. Curwen's *Kirkbie Kendal* lists their address as '95/99 Soutergate – the East side' (later known as Highgate). Curwen says that Greenhow Yard 'has always been considered one of the nicest in Kendal, the houses not being too rank, and by reason of the tall poplars that used to flourish there'. He adds: 'Miss Isabella Lickbarrow the poetess lived there.' So it appears that Isabella had established herself locally as a poet of some note. This was entirely due to the support of the Kendal newspaper proprietors.

The list of subscribers to *Poetical Effusions* was impressive. There were names from London, Liverpool, Yorkshire, as well as from the county gentry in Westmorland and Cumberland. John Dalton, supportive as ever, bought four copies. Wordsworth bought a copy; as a regular reader of the *Advertiser*,<sup>8</sup> he would have read Isabella's poetry when it appeared from time to time on the fourth page of that broadsheet. Members of the Wordsworth circle also bought copies of *Poetical Effusions* in 1814, perhaps on his recommendation – among them, Thomas Cookson, De Quincey, Southey, and Basil Montagu. All of which would seem to indicate that Wordsworth thought well of the book. As well as his friends, Mrs Watson of Calgarth, wife of Wordsworth's one-time adversary the Bishop of Llandaff,<sup>9</sup> felt inclined to join with the rest, for her name also appears on the list of subscribers.

Isabella's sense of humour and her appreciation of her debt to the *Westmorland Advertiser* is gently revealed in her poem, 'On the fate of Newspapers', published in that journal on 1 February 1812, and later in *Poetical Effusions*. According to the subscription list more than 460 copies of this book were sold, but there was no reprint, though Isabella's verse continued to be published in the *Advertiser* until 1815. During these years the broadsheets were full of reports about the Napoleonic Wars, and in her poem, 'Written after the News of a Battle', Isabella shows a deep understanding of the suffering of the common people of whatever nation, in time of war.

Thou seest full many a soldier brave,  
Expiring on the field of death,  
Imploring mercy for his babe  
And widow with his latest breath.

Oh! turn thee from the dreadful plains  
Where Europe's sons unburied lie,  
The view would thy pale lustre stain  
And give thy beams a crimson dye.

Ye sons of wealth, on beds of down  
Who undisturbed by grief repose,  
Pity the fallen soldier's child  
Pity his friendless widow's woes.

Her lively intelligence and interest in current affairs is evident in her 'Lines on the Comet' and 'On the Slave Trade' (a poem written to Thomas Clarkson, the reformer and philanthropist), written July 1814, where she refers to 'The cause of Africa's much injured sons'. It is known that

<sup>8</sup> See Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1800-1815* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 238-9.

<sup>9</sup> Wordsworth composed his spirited response to Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, in 1793; see *The Prose Works of William Wordsworth* ed. W. J. B. Owen and Jane Worthington Smyser (3 vols., Oxford, 1974), i. 17-66.

posters appeared in Kendal urging the inhabitants to support the abolition of the slave-trade.<sup>10</sup> Local people were very aware of transatlantic trade links. Mahogany, which provided the doors and furniture of many elegant Kendal houses, entered the country through the nearby port of Lancaster, and tradition says that Sambo, the slave who is buried at Sunderland point near the mouth of the River Lune, was on the ship which landed the first bale of cotton into this country from America.

At this time Kendal was a busy thriving town. During Isabella's lifetime the population increased from approximately 7,500 to 12,000, in keeping with the national trend, due to improvements in public health and sanitation. Local factories manufactured woollen cloth, and were engaged in spinning, weaving and dyeing. During the Napoleonic Wars, Kendal hosiers were busy. In 1801 orders for 2,400 pairs of stockings for the Army were received. As well as woollen cloth, high quality goods were made, such as Valencia waistcoating made from silk mixed with wool and cotton. Kendal manufacturers were alert to all innovations which promoted their trade. The town was the hub of the transport system for the area, and coaching advertisements reveal strong connections with Lancaster, Preston, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham and London. Kendal was also an important staging post between London and Scotland. It is hardly surprising that Wordsworth travelled from Kendal on his journeys to Coleorton and London. Isabella lived in a bustling community, and it is easy to see why her poetry reflected news of the Napoleonic Wars, and why she was keenly aware of a world outside the Cumbrian town where she spent her life.

In 1818 a slim volume by Isabella entitled *Lamentations on the Death of Princess Charlotte and Alfred – a Vision* was issued by a Liverpool publisher. It reflected the shocked emotions of the entire nation, which had been devastated by the death in childbirth, at the age of 21, of Princess Charlotte of Wales. The poem reflects some knowledge of the topography of Wales and strangely at the same time coined the phrase 'Royal Rose of England' which has its echo in the popular culture of today which responded to the death of another Princess of Wales.

Until recently it was thought that the publication of this book was the end of Isabella's career as a poet, for there was less and less verse published in the local newspaper, but in August 1818 *The Monthly Repository* published her 'Lines occasioned by the death of Dr Thomson of Leeds'. Dr John Thomson had died tragically from typhus fever at the age of 36. He had been born in Stricklandgate, Kendal, and so had grown up near to the Lickbarrows and John Dalton; in fact, he knew John Dalton at Manchester College. Two years later, from March to May 1820, Isabella published poems in the *Lonsdale Magazine* (a monthly publication), and such was her reputation that the Lancaster poet James Grocott published a poem of praise 'To Miss Lickbarrow – On her Ode to Sensibility' in that journal.

1818 was a momentous year in the history of Kendal, for in the run-up to the election, in February, there were serious riots. The worst encounter was between the mob supporting Henry Brougham against the mounted supporters of Lord Lowther, which took place at Nether Bridge. This was not 300 yards from Greenhow Yard in Highgate where Isabella and her sisters lived. The carriages in which Colonel Wilson of Dallam Tower (who had subscribed to *Poetical Effusions* in 1814) and others were travelling were pelted with stones and overturned. The situation must have been frightening, but here the very architecture of the yards must have given protection. There were often gates at the narrow points of entry from the main street Stricklandgate/Highgate, which were closed at 10 pm. Kendal's history had not always been peaceful and

<sup>10</sup> Roger Bingham, *Social History of Kendal* (Milnthorpe, Cumbria, 1995), p. 276.

it has often been said that its streets were built to withstand raids, and the yards were planned so that they could be closed off in times of invasion of the town, but most of Kendal's yards resulted from the medieval burgesses' plots being built over in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, entrance gates and doors being installed for domestic security. Even now, some yards are to be seen in Highgate, and Dr Manning's or Braithwaite's yard near to where Greenhow Yard once was, has been restored, and its neat houses along both sides of the courtyard leading down to the river, are occupied today. It is easy to imagine that supportive little communities of good neighbours existed in Isabella's day. Large and small houses were built side by side, and often the mill-owner lived beside his workers in some of the yards.

As is well-known, Wordsworth was involved in these 1818 elections, and Mary Moorman tells us that when Brougham made his public entry into Kendal on 23 March 1818, Dorothy watched the proceedings from a window with Mary Wordsworth's brother Henry Hutchinson and some Kendal friends. Isabella must have seen (and perhaps met) Wordsworth on his visits to Kendal. *The Older Non-Conformity of Kendal* tells us that 'William Wordsworth when staying in Kendal with his friend Thomas Cookson, a Trustee of the Chapel, was an occasional worshipper at this Chapel' (The Unitarian Chapel in Market Place). He must have made visits to the office of the *Kendal Chronicle* in connection with his correspondence with that newspaper, especially during the 1818 Election, and we know that when *The Westmorland Gazette* came into being in that year, it was through his influence that De Quincey was appointed Editor. It is even possible that Isabella encountered Wordsworth in the newspaper's offices when she delivered her poems for publication.

In 1820 Isabella was struck by ill-health, as she mentions in her 'Stanzas written in Long Sleddale', published in *The Advertiser* on 1 July 1820:

Vain all their aids to soothe and charm,  
Lost health and vigour to restore,  
Till He who made them, bids them heal  
And blesses with reviving power.

If this his Sov'reign will permit,  
If such his gracious purpose be,  
That these, his works and servants, prove  
The ministers of health to me.

Yet may I seek to tune the chords  
Of my neglected lyre again, –  
Yet may I teach it's humble voice  
A longer and a worthier strain.

Worse misfortune befell her sisters, for on 28 June 1820 her sister Margaret was admitted to Lancaster Lunatic Asylum; five days later Rachel Lickbarrow was also admitted. The casebooks describe them as schoolmistresses. Both were described as suffering from hereditary melancholia. This must have been a tremendous blow to Isabella, for all three lived together and kept a school. Her livelihood had disappeared, and hard times were to follow. She could only rely on the kindness of friends to suggest employment. She must have been sad to give up teaching, for she was deeply fond of children and dedicated to her work as is shown her poem – 'An Elegy':

Say hast thou known in blooming grace  
A lovely, active, ardent boy,

His happy father's dearest joy,  
 Expression on his artless face,  
 His dawning faculties of mind  
 Expanding like the buds of spring,  
 His fancy ever on the wing  
 New scenes of knowledge still to find . . .<sup>11</sup>

She had a great love of music, as is revealed in her poem 'On Music', where she refers to 'enchancing harmony' and at the end, says quietly of her subject:

If e'er loved poesy should cease to charm,  
 One solace may yet remain in thee.<sup>12</sup>

Just as she had used her pen to help her finances, so, full of ingenuity, she would use her other talents. Perhaps she resorted to child-minding and certainly took in various types of sewing, in which her sisters joined when they could, as Mary Lamb had used her needle to help the family income. However, Charles Lamb had the steady income from his clerkship at East India House, and compared with the poverty of the Lickbarrow household, Charles and *his* mentally-ill sister were in comfortable circumstances.

Rachel and Margaret Lickbarrow remained in Lancaster Asylum until 16 May 1822, when they were discharged. Extracts from the Physician's Report on Margaret Lickbarrow state that she was suffering from 'Hereditary Mania and inclined to melancholia, but the symptoms with which she was affected became gradually milder and she was described if not perfectly restored to sound reason, at least materially improved. . . . For my own part I conceived that she required little more than moral treatment.'<sup>13</sup> The treatment of lunatics in the early part of the nineteenth century was enlightened. 'Moral management' was the abolition of mechanical restraint in public asylums and 'substituted close supervision and paternal concern for physical restraint and harsh treatment in an effort to re-educate the insane in habits of industry, moderation and perseverance.'<sup>14</sup> It was said that 'melancholia might be brought on by moral causes . . . especially poverty . . . the unceasing, and in too many cases, the hopeless struggles of the poorer and middle classes for a bare existence necessarily dispose the brain to a diseased action.'<sup>15</sup> No doubt this accounts for the illnesses of Margaret and Rachel Lickbarrow.

This must have been a source of anxiety to Isabella, and the *Advertiser* did not publish another poem until December 1822 – that is, after the discharge of her sisters from the asylum. The poem which then appeared was entitled 'Retrospections on visiting Ullswater 1822', and provides much insight into her mind at this anxious time:

Enchanting scene of calm sublimity,  
 Nature's most lovely vision – fare thee well!  
 How shall I frame the song of thee to tell  
 And paint the grandeur of thy scenery,  
 While strong emotions in my bosom swell,

<sup>11</sup> *Poetical Effusions*, p. 36.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Lancaster Lunatic Asylum, Admissions and Discharge Book 1816-24; Physicians Report Books QAM.1/30/11-15 (1816-40); Casebooks HRL/1 - HRL13 (1821-45), now retained at Lancashire Record Office, Preston.

<sup>14</sup> Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness. English Culture 1830-1980* (London, 1986), p. 28.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

While doubts and fears alternate hold the sway,  
 As I life's future, unknown path survey,  
 Subject to constant change? ah, how unlike to thee.

Thoughts of Dorothy Wordsworth come into our minds as we read,

Gowb'rows tall rock aspiring to the sky,  
 Waves to the sporting breeze slow passing by

and a passing reference to Aira Force. Isabella contemplates the future with sadness:

Age may find me desolate and poor . . .

This must have been a bleak time for her because several of her mother's family had died in 1820.

After the publication of her poem 'For and Against England – a poem In imitation of a poem For and Against Life' in 1823 it is not possible to trace any further verse by Isabella till June 1837. Probably her own health suffered as a result of the reduced circumstances in which the sisters found themselves, for in June 1829 disaster struck again when Rachel was re-admitted to Lancaster Asylum, this time described as a pauper<sup>16</sup> (although her occupation was recorded as dressmaker). This casebook entry reveals that the sisters were living in great poverty, by this time earning a pittance by taking in sewing. No doubt they clothed themselves by making over clothes handed down to them by their Quaker relations. Quaker womens' dress was plain and distinctive. De Quincey in his remarks about Charles Lloyd's wife Sophia (who was of a different social class from the Lickbarrows) says, 'so it is, however that the female Quaker by her dress seems even purer than other women. . . . This transcendent purity, and a nun-like gentleness, self respect and sequestration from the world – these are all that her peculiarity of dress expresses.' Perhaps, despite their poverty, this is the impression that the Lickbarrow sisters conveyed; the Lancaster Asylum records thrice contain the observation that Rachel Lickbarrow was of 'particularly clean habits'. She was discharged from the Asylum in October 1829, only to be readmitted on 21 May 1833, again described as a pauper; this time the record shows that she had tried to commit suicide. By 1 July it was reported that she was 'gradually improving and is now much better. Is constantly employed sewing.' This would lead to the supposition that she felt the urgent need to sew in order to provide a livelihood. These facts paint a bleak picture of what Isabella's life must have been like, with two sisters suffering from mental illness, and the needs of subsistence somehow to be provided.

This was not the end of Rachel's illness. She was admitted to the asylum again in November 1834. Her occupation this time was given as 'Staymaker', who had 'very lately attempted to commit suicide' (that is, for the second time), but by 2 February 1835 she was described as 'more lively lately, generally employed on needlework'. By March she was much improved and was discharged on 7 April 1835. It would almost appear that her mental illness improved because she was properly fed. One can only imagine how hard was the work of stay making, resulting in sore fingers. This was much rougher work than dressmaking. Life must have been very miserable for all the sisters.

The effect of such illnesses and the poverty in the household must have strained Isabella Lickbarrow's mental and physical resources to the utmost. In fact, a correspondent to *Notes and*

<sup>16</sup> Casebook HRL/4.

*Queries* (17 February 1866)<sup>17</sup> suggests that Isabella herself had been admitted to Lancaster Asylum, but it has not been possible to confirm this. She does not appear in the Casebook records.

In spite of the difficulties she had experienced, in 1837 she began publishing again, and her charming poem, 'The Minstrel's Apology', appeared in the *Kendal Mercury* on 24 June 1837. This is a flashback to her old style and shows a gentle humour and tranquil philosophy. Perhaps the title contains her own apology for her absence from her minstrelsy, which can resume now that she is able to roam the hills again. It reads:

With lover's eye and something of the rage,  
Long have I looked on Nature's ample page;  
And in that bright and beauteous page I read  
How instincts strong all ranks of creatures lead: –  
From the slow mole, that, lodged beneath the ground,  
Industrious miner, heaves the tiny mound,  
Up to the deep-learned wight, whose thought can pierce  
To read the movements of the universe.  
Some strong prevailing influence all obey.  
By force unseen propelled upon their way;  
And each in one congenial sphere alone  
Moves free where that sure impulse guides him on.  
Place on Chamouni's peaks the timid mole,  
And lodge the bounding chamois in his hole; –  
Reverse kind nature's beauteous harmony –  
Be wiser than her laws and both would die!  
When the exalting carol, rich and sweet,  
The mounting sky-lark leaves his lowly seat,  
And, kindlier into raptures as he soars,  
High o'er the dewy plains his morning anthem pours;  
Should some harsh hand his towering flight arrest, –  
Bring back the warbler to his grassy nest,  
And clip his buoyant wing – ah, ne'er again  
Would the sad minstrel pour that thrilling strain!  
Denied to stretch his pinions in the sky,  
The bird would languish and the song would die.  
And thee the hill-born bard, by nature's law,  
From the wild height sublime alone can draw  
Th'etherial spirit which his song inspires,  
And there alone can feel poetic fires: –  
The rock, the mountain breeze and liberty  
Alone can wake the strain, rich, full and free!

I.L.

By now Isabella was 53 years old, and in writing patriotic poems to celebrate the Accession and Coronation of Queen Victoria the warm kindness of her nature shows through.

<sup>17</sup> *N&Q* (3rd Series) 9 (17 February 1866) 145.

Even the lone matron, o'er whose brow  
 Are thinly spread the locks of snow, –  
 Still warm of heart, – leads by the hand  
 Her grandchild dear – her best loved treasure now: –  
 Her earthly hope, a blooming boy;  
 And while he dances round her feet  
 Exalting with an infant's artless joy,  
 His Sovereign-Lady's name she helps him to repeat.

Although Isabella showed herself to be aware of national and international events, she was above all a poet who reflected in her work the great natural beauty of the English Lake District and her work is appreciated by present-day lovers of that region. For one so girt about with domestic difficulties and the need to support herself she seems to have travelled widely in the then counties of Westmorland and Cumberland, sometimes with friends (some of whom must surely have lived at Underbarrow or Levens),<sup>18</sup> and at other times visiting her many relations, especially those in the Penrith and Sedbergh area. Like Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy, she enjoyed walking, and, after all, walking is the cheapest form of transport. Her lovely poem 'On Esthwaite Water', obviously written after travelling down the east side of that lake, could have been written after walking beside the lake *en route* to the Quaker Meeting House in Colthouse, near Hawkshead. As a former schoolmistress she visited Bowness in 1837 to see the new school there and published a poem in the *Kendal Mercury* on 2 September to celebrate the event. She then echoed the feelings of many visitors to Windermere by writing 'Disappointment – on seeing Windermere from above Bowness in unfavourable weather'; Isabella's acute awareness colours all her poetry, even when commenting on such a mundane subject as the Lake District weather.

On the same day, 9 September 1837, she published a poem 'To a friend – on our return from Bowness'. *Poetical Effusions* contains another poem 'To a Friend', written much earlier, followed by 'Thoughts on Friendship'. It is evident from these and other poems that Isabella placed a high value on friendship, and her talent for it is demonstrated by references in the Preface to *Poetical Effusions* to 'The benevolence of kind friends [who] suggested the present publication to the authoress.' Isabella enjoyed the kindness of friends throughout her life, for without their help and support, she and her sisters, despite their efforts to help themselves, would not have survived.

In her last known poem, 'The Lodge of Wilderness', published in the *Kendal Mercury* in 1840, Isabella speaks of

The lodge of the wilderness! – blooming and bright,  
 'Mid wild crags, and mosses all rugged and lorn; –  
 Its rose bowers of beauty burst forth on the sight,  
 As breaks on the weary eye, watching through night,  
 The welcome, the beautiful blush of the morn.  
 They tell the worn pilgrim who toils 'mid the waste,  
 Of affection and home – of enjoyment and rest.

Isabella was weary and in need of rest. Alleviation of their poverty came to the Lickbarrow sisters in 1844 on the death of John Dalton. As we have seen, the careful provision of a trust in

<sup>18</sup> See Isabella's 'The Spirit of the Rock' and 'The Reply of the Wood Nymph', in *The Lonsdale Magazine* 1 (March 1820) 124; 1 (April 1820) 174.



his Will which meant that the £900 which he had left to them in three equal parts was to be administered by Isaac Wilson, gentleman, a respected citizen of Kendal who lived in a large house near to the river in that town, not far from the sisters' home. John Dalton must have been aware of the mental instability of Rachel and Margaret Lickbarrow, because this is the only Trust he formed in his Will. He also clearly stated that if any of the sisters died, her share should be used for the benefit of the surviving sisters. Unlike the £900 which Wordsworth received from Raisley Calvert which helped him to realise his destiny, John Dalton's £900 legacy came too late for Isabella. Given legal delays, it is likely that the benefits to the sisters did not filter through until 1845. By 10 February 1847, Isabella had died of a wasting disease,<sup>19</sup> possibly tuberculosis, at Under-barrow, Kendal, in the presence of her sister Rachel. Her illness was no doubt brought about by the hardships of her life and her cares relating to the health of her sisters over many years. She showed the same devotion to her sisters, typical of orphaned siblings, as did Charles Lamb for his sister Mary, in similar though more tragic circumstances. He, too, predeceased his sister, to whose care he had devoted his life.

Rachel and Margaret Lickbarrow must have greatly benefited from their better circumstances. In the 1849 *Kendal Directory* their names appear in the list comprising the addresses of 'Clergy, Gentry, Partners in Firms not arranged under the classifications of Trades and Professions', and in the 1851 Census they were shown as living in Greenhow Yard in the same house, and are described as 'annuitants'. Their new-found prosperity seems to have contributed to their well-being, for they survived Isabella by another 23 years, Rachel dying in 1870 and Margaret in 1871. Their devotion to each other was acknowledged by their burial in Isabella's grave in Castle Street Burial Ground in Kendal.

In his introduction to the facsimile reprint of Isabella's *Poetical Effusions* in 1994 Jon-athan Wordsworth wrote: 'Lickbarrow is a poet of genuine individuality – a poet well worth reading, resurrecting', and points out that in her poem 'To an opening Rose' Isabella says regretfully

I, like the wild flowers of the mountains,  
That unknown unheeded die  
Like them shall leave a name, unhonoured  
And like them forgotten lie.

Through immense difficulties Isabella remained loyal to her Muse. This was a poet who was writing in the Lake District at the same time as Wordsworth, who was close to the common people because she had known hardship and poverty. She was a sensitive and courageous woman, whose love of natural beauty shone through her verse, and who has until now been unjustly neglected. Her poetry deserves greater recognition.<sup>20</sup>

#### *Ambleside, Cumbria*

<sup>19</sup> Described on her death certificate as 'atrophy'. In the *Fourth Annual Report of the Registrar-General of Births, Deaths, and Marriages in England* (London, 1842), this is defined as 'emaciation . . . usually the result of tuberculosis or of some other chronic disease' (p. 153).

<sup>20</sup> There is, alas, no standard collected edition of Isabella's poetry. Her *Lament upon the Death of Princess Charlotte and Alfred: A Vision* (Liverpool, 1818) has never been reprinted; her *Poetical Effusions* (1814) was reprinted in facsimile by Woodstock Books in 1994. Other works by her can be found in the following: Duncan Wu, 'Isabella Lickbarrow and the *Westmorland Advertiser*: A Literary Partnership', *The Wordsworth Circle* 27 (1996); Constance Parrish, 'Postscript on Isabella Lickbarrow, "the unlettered poetess"', *The Wordsworth Circle* 28 (1997) (this article contains errors introduced during its production, but is nonetheless useful for containing a number of poems not available elsewhere); *Romantic Women Poets: An Anthology* ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, 1997), pp. 471-9; and Constance Parrish, 'Isabella Lickbarrow, Lakeland Quaker Poet: More Facts', *Notes and Queries* 45 (1998).

## The St James's Street Mermaid and the Case for Thomas Hood's Authorship of 'The Mermaid'

By JOHN STRACHAN

IN HIS ABSORBING ESSAY<sup>1</sup> in the last *Charles Lamb Bulletin* in which he attributed the December 1822 *London Magazine* essay 'The Mermaid' to Charles Lamb, Joseph Riehl asks 'What was this mermaid? The question awaits further research'. I recently spent some time tracking down this elusive creature, in the process of editing William Frederick Deacon's *Warreniana* (1824), a collection of parodies which envisages notable contemporary writers (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hunt and Byron amongst them) being paid to provide advertising copy – in their own particular styles – for the noted producer of shoe polish, Robert Warren, whose famous puffs often employed jocular eulogistic verse. Deacon's 'Warren', a parody of Washington Irving's 'Roscoe', an essay from the *Sketch Book of Geoffrey Crayon, Gent.*, contains a brief reference to the mermaid. 'W. I.' declares that advertisements for Warren's blacking 'have elbowed Doctor's Solomon's elixir,<sup>2</sup> pushed Day and Martin<sup>3</sup> from their stools, and taken the wall of that interesting phenomenon, the Mermaid. Such is the triumph of genius. Doctor Solomon is dead and gone, and there is no balm in Gilead,<sup>4</sup> but Warren's Blacking will be immortal'.<sup>5</sup> Not wishing to resort to that bane of the annotator's life, 'untraced', I set off in search of the mermaid, uncov-

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Riehl, "'The Mermaid': A Newly Identified Lamb Essay', *Charles Lamb Bulletin* NS 105 (January 1999) 28-31.

<sup>2</sup> Dr Samuel Solomon published a highly successful *Guide to Health* (1795) and marketed a patent medicine. In November 1820 Byron wrote to John Murray condemning the praise of 'that little dirty blackguard KEATES in the Edinburgh', adding 'Why don't they review & praise "Solomon's Guide to Health" it is better sense – and as much poetry as Johnny Keates'.

<sup>3</sup> A rival blacking firm. Byron himself was accused of composing blacking puffs for the company. In the 'Appendix' to *The Two Foscari* (1821), he writes: 'Whilst I have been occupied in defending Pope's character, the lower orders of Grub-street appear to have been assailing mine. . . . One of the accusations in the nameless epistle alluded to is still more laughable: it states seriously that I "received five hundred pounds for writing advertisements for Day and Martin's patent blacking!" This is the highest compliment to my literary powers which I ever received' (Byron, *The Complete Poetical Works* ed. Jerome J. McGann (7 vols., Oxford, 1980-93), vi. 222).

<sup>4</sup> The brand name for Dr Solomon's elixir was the 'Cordial Balm of Gilead'. In the chapter on quacks in *Letters from England* (1807), Southey writes that 'The most notorious of these worthies who flourishes at present calls his composition the Cordial Balm of Gilead, and prefaces every advertisement with a text from Jeremiah, "Is there no balm in Gilead; is there no physician there!"'. Solomon even named his premises accordingly, as an April 1813 advertisement in *The Star* demonstrates: 'Dr. Solomon, when consulted, expects the usual fee of £1, to whom such letters should, for safety, be addressed: – "Money Letter, Dr. Solomon, Gilead-House, near Liverpool. Paid double postage"'. The product was puffed thus: 'CORDIAL BALM OF GILEAD. This Medicine has been uncommonly successful with young people, who have the appearance and air of old age; who are pale, effeminate, benumbed, stupid, and even imbecile; whose bodies are become bent, whose legs are no longer able to carry them. . . . The virtues of the Cordial Balm of Gilead are daily demonstrated in eradicating the worst and most dangerous symptoms of nervous debility; and nothing has tended so much to establish the fame of this medicine, as its certain success in those complaints which strike their roots so deep in the constitution, and are so fatal to the happiness of mankind'.

<sup>5</sup> William Frederick Deacon, *Warreniana* ed. John Strachan (London, 1999), pp. 22-3. *Warreniana* is Vol. 4 of *Parodies of the Romantic Age* ed. Graeme Stones and John Strachan (5 vols., London, 1999).

ering what seemed to me to be a fascinating story in the process. All of which, of course, ended up compressed into a one-sentence footnote in the edition.

Leaving aside the occasional press descriptions of supposed human encounters with mermaids and the showing of unfortunates born with fusion of the legs in freak shows, there is a long history of 'mermaids' being displayed in England. The 1822 specimen is only one of a series of mermaid exhibitions: the 1737 Exeter mermaid, the 1775 London mermaid and the Exmouth mermaid of 1812 (this one boasting a feathered plume). The St James's Street mermaid was one of the sights of London in late 1822. It was promoted in a well-judged advertising campaign: teasing puffs in the newspapers (sometimes tailored to the preoccupations of individual publications, as the example from the *Sporting World* cited in 'The Mermaid' demonstrates), scientific endorsements (probably manufactured by copywriters) forwarded to the public prints, handbills and wall posters. The puffing was successful. Large numbers of sightseers visited Watson's Turf Coffee House to inspect the 'mermaid' and there was a considerable amount of press attention to the creature. Apart from the pieces in the *London*, there are descriptions in the *Times*,<sup>6</sup> *New Monthly*<sup>7</sup> and *Evangelical Magazine*,<sup>8</sup> and a glancing reference in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.<sup>9</sup> There was also a heated correspondence, both for and against the mermaid, on the issue in the pages of the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Advocates hailed the showing of the mermaid as marking an important moment in natural history; sceptics argued that it was nothing more than a fraud: the upper portion of an ape, probably a baboon, cleverly attached to the lower portion of a large fish, which was displayed in a glass case attended by curators who prevented viewers from touching it. Apart from the journalistic interest in the mermaid, there are several cartoons of the creature, two by no less a figure than George Cruikshank ('The Mermaid! Now exhibiting at the Turf Coffee-House, 39 St James's Street' and 'A Mermaid in Chancery holding in tail'). And the mermaid also inspired an 'entirely new laughable harlequinade', *The Mermaid; or, Harlequin Odd-fish*, first performed at the Royal Coburg Theatre in January 1823 (the burletta theatres in this period were always quick to exploit the latest fashionable diversions).

One of the earliest references to the mermaid is found in the *Gentleman's Magazine* for July 1822, in a letter dated 28 April 1822 from the Revd. Dr Philip, Representative of the London Missionary Society at Cape Town, where the mermaid was being exhibited by its proprietor, an American sea captain called Captain Eades (as Hood comments in the 'Lion's Head', 'The Mermaid', in fact, comes very suspiciously, per the Americans'). A believer, Philip gives a useful description:

I have to day seen a Mermaid, now exhibiting in this town. I have always treated the existence of this creature as fabulous; but my scepticism is now removed. As it is probable no description of this extraordinary creature has yet reached England, the following particulars respecting it may gratify your curiosity and amuse you. The head is almost the size of that of a baboon. It is thinly covered with black hair, hanging down, and not inclined to frizzle. . . . The forehead is low, but, except in this particular, the features are much better proportioned, and bear a more decided resemblance to the human countenance than those of any of the baboon tribes. . . . It bears the appearance of having died in great agony. The ears, nose, lips, chin, breasts, nipples, fingers, and nails, resemble those of a human figure. . . .

<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, 16 November 1822.

<sup>7</sup> *New Monthly Magazine* 6 (1 September 1822) 403, and (1 October 1822) 450.

<sup>8</sup> *Evangelical Magazine* 30 (September 1822) 364.

<sup>9</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 12 (November 1822) 660.

The length of the animal is three feet; but not having been well preserved it has shrunk considerably, and must have been both longer and thicker when alive than it is now. Its resemblance to the human species ceases immediately under the *mammæ*. On the line of separation, and directly under the breast, are two fins. From the point where the human figure ceases, which is about 12 inches below the vertex of the head, it resembles a large fish of the salmon species. . . . The pectoral fins are very remarkable; they are horizontal, and evidently formed as an apparatus to support the creature when in an erect posture, like that in which it has been sometimes represented combing its hair. The figure of the tail is exactly that which is given in the usual representation of the mermaid.<sup>10</sup>

The correspondent adds that the mermaid was 'caught somewhere on the north of China by a fisherman, who sold it for a trifle' and was then sold on to Eades at Batavia for '5000 Spanish dollars'. Philip concludes by stating that Eades was to leave South Africa for America in May, but intended to travel via London where the mermaid 'will probably be soon exhibited'.<sup>11</sup> By the October of 1822, the mermaid had arrived in London and was being shown at Watson's Turf Coffee House in St James's Street. It actually was, to quote from 'The Mermaid', a 'ward of Chancery', being the subject of an ownership dispute. The eulogy by Dr Rees Price<sup>12</sup> mentioned in the *London's 'Lion's Head'* article of November 1822 had been sent to many London journals and had already been published entire in the *Gentleman's Magazine*. Price declares that 'When examining this singular phenomenon, what excited my astonishment most was the external covering from the chest upwards, to be such an exact representation of that of a human being, whilst the whole of the body below was enveloped with the scaly covering of a fish'.<sup>13</sup> He offers an enthusiastic description of the mermaid and ends by declaring that 'The introduction of this animal into this country will form an important æra in natural history'.<sup>14</sup> Sceptics soon emerged; as 'The Mermaid' declares, 'Sir Everard Home questioned her haddock moiety'. Home argued that 'this representation of a creature of the poet's brain is no more than a composition, consisting of the head, arms, and trunk of one of the monkey class, joined to the lower extremity of a fish'.<sup>15</sup> The controversy over what critical voices called 'the contrivance practised in the exhibition of what is now shewn in this metropolis as a Mermaid'<sup>16</sup> carried on for several months. One J. Murray, F.L.S. (presumably the 'great surgeon who thought her to be half a baboon and half a gudgeon' referred to in 'The Mermaid'), wrote a letter to the *Hereford Journal* which was reprinted in the *Gentleman's Magazine*: 'On my arrival in London, I hastened to see the so-called *Mermaid*. . . . The *capitol* [is] that of an *Ape* (the long-armed Baboon) . . . [which] seems to have been *purposely* put to a *violent* and *cruel death* in order to obtain this *hideous caricature*'.<sup>17</sup> Murray 'consign[s] the *Mermaid* with the *Sphinx* and the *Centaur*, to the creation of a fabulous age, to the non-entity whence first they sprung'.<sup>18</sup> In the following month, one 'E.L.' replied to Murray, declaring his faith in the mermaid and offering a point-by-point re-

<sup>10</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 92, Part II (July 1822) 82-3.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 83. Philip sounds suspiciously like a barker here and it is not impossible that the letter is a fabrication, the first part of the London advertising campaign.

<sup>12</sup> It is unclear if this personage was a figment of the imagination of one of the mermaid's promoters.

<sup>13</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 92, Part II (October 1822) 366.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 366.

<sup>15</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 92, Part II (November 1822) 461.

<sup>16</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 92, Part II (December 1822) 515-16.

<sup>17</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 92, Part II (December 1822) 548-9. 'The first thing which struck me was the utter incongruity of the piece', argues Murray: 'The *fish part* should have been at least *quadruple* the size it is' (p. 549).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 549.

puddiation of Murray's arguments. E.L. ends with a resounding rhetorical flourish: 'That a regular gradation of animals from the sublime master-piece of the Creator – man, down to the brute creation, exists on land, cannot be disputed. Why, then, should we doubt the preservation of the same order in the ocean? particularly when it is known that duplicates of most *other* land-animals exist in the sea'.<sup>19</sup> After that the mermaid controversy dies down, and the mermaid presumably left England with its American owner. It is probable that the St James's Street mermaid eventually found its way into P. T. Barnum's hands, and was the creature displayed by the showman in his American Museum during the 1840s as the 'Feejee mermaid'. *Blackwood's* February 1855 article, 'Revelations of a Showman', mines Barnum's autobiography for the details of his mermaid:

The story of the mermaid is rather a curious one. It was, says Barnum, 'an ugly, dried-up, black-looking and diminutive specimen, about three feet long. Its mouth was open, its tail turned over, and its arms thrown up, giving it the appearance of having died in great agony.' This interesting exile from the bowers of Amphitrite was in reality neither more nor less than an ingenious manufacture, composed of the head, body, and arms of an ape, and the tail of a fish, and was said to have been brought from Japan. An ordinary showman would probably have rejected it as little likely to prove attractive. Barnum, however, saw his way at once, and hired it for his museum.<sup>20</sup>

Whilst Professor Riehl makes a strong and powerfully argued case for Lamb's authorship, I propose to conclude by articulating a possible alternative attribution for 'The Mermaid'. Rather than Lamb being prompted into composition by Hood's reference to the mermaid in the 'Lion's Head', as Riehl argues, it is possible that Hood himself wrote the second piece. The essay's puns are coarser than is usual in Lamb's work and instead of being, as Riehl argues '(rather bad) Lamb-style' puns, it might be argued that these are typical groan-inspiring Hoodian puns, replete with Hood's customary emphatic italicisation. The reference to the Stirling newspaper also suggests Hood, given that the poet, whose father was Scottish, lived with a relation in Dundee for two years from 1817, contributed his first published work to local journals and still had connections in Scotland, both familial and journalistic, who may have sent him the clipping about John Monro.

It should also be registered that Hood made comic sport with mermaids in his 'The Mermaid of Margate', published in the first series of his *Whims and Oddities* (1825). The poem describes exactly the same scenario as that set out in the middle section of 'The Mermaid', a romantic encounter between a mermaid and a man. One of the most compelling points to be made in favour of Hood's authorship is to be found in a striking textual echo in the poem. The *London* essay envisages the mermaid and Mr Monro, married on St Swithin's day, 'set[ting] off for the Goodwin Sands to pass the honeymoon'. In 'The Mermaid of Margate', the siren mermaid tempts Peter

<sup>19</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine* 93, Part I (January 1823) 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 77 (February 1855) 197. Unless there is a remarkable textual coincidence here, Barnum's 'the appearance of having died in great agony' is borrowed verbatim from Philip's letter of April 1822. In a manner reminiscent of the puffing of the 1822 showing of the mermaid, Barnum had his assistant Lyman write to the newspapers in the guise of a 'Dr Griffin' of the 'Lyceum of Natural History' explaining the discovery of a mermaid. Soon afterwards there appeared press announcements that the creature would, should Dr Griffin be prevailed upon to allow it, shortly be shown in the United States. Unsurprisingly, 'Griffin' was agreeable to the proposal.

Fin thus: 'Come, love, with me; I've a bonny house / On the golden Goodwin Sand'.<sup>21</sup> Other evidence, albeit less striking, might also be cited in Hood's favour:<sup>22</sup> Hood also 'misquoted and adapted' from a play featuring Sir John Falstaff, this time from *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, in the epigram to his 'An Address to the Steam Washing Company' (published in his 1825 collaboration with John Hamilton Reynolds, *Odes and Addresses to Great People*). The poet also wrote an 'Ode to St Swithin', and the reference to the *Sporting World* might suggest Hood, a writer closer to the pleasures of the Fancy than Charles Lamb, one who wrote for several sporting newspapers during his career and based several poems on horse-racing themes.

*University of Sunderland*

<sup>21</sup> 'Sand' rather than 'Sands' – to facilitate the rhyme, of course. Thomas Hood, 'The Mermaid of Margate' 27-8, in *The Complete Poetical Works of Thomas Hood* ed. Walter Jerrold (London, 1935), p. 46. The Goodwin Sands appear elsewhere in Hood's work, in his 1844 poem 'The Mary. A Sea-Side Sketch': 'No goodly houses on the Goodwin Sand' (l.52).

<sup>22</sup> One other name might be mentioned, on the basis of stylistic similarity, as a possible author of 'The Mermaid', albeit with less strong claims than Hood's. This is that of James Smith, co-author of the *Rejected Addresses*, who was active in the *London* in the winter of 1822 and according to Claude Prance and Frank Riga's *Index to the London Magazine* (New York, 1978) contributed to the November issue. Smith published several prose parodies of sensational journalism in the *New Monthly* in the early 1820s, most notably his sprightly 'Annus Mirabilis' series, month-by-month farewells to the previous year entirely composed in spoof journalese. These employ a prose manner close to that of the middle section of 'The Mermaid' (the passage which reports the marriage between the mermaid and John Monro). The following extracts from the January 1823 'Annus Mirabilis; or, A Parthian Glance at 1822' give a flavour of Smith's methodology: 'Country Gentlemen "combining and confederating" like so many defendants in a suit at Chancery . . . seven bachelors were married in one day, at the parish church of St Andrew's Holborn. A clergyman attended to give the unhappy wretches the last consolations of religion . . . one Simon Spade, a body-snatcher, while sounding for subjects in St Martin's church-yard, dug up his own wife. The poor man has been inconsolable ever since'. Finally, if the reference to the mermaid's 'At Home' invokes Charles Mathews's successful entertainments, then one might recall that Smith collaborated with Mathews on several of his shows. This notwithstanding, there is little more than internal evidence to suggest Smith and the evidence for Hood is more pressing.

The St James's Street Mermaid  
and the Case for Thomas Hood's Authorship  
of 'The Mermaid': A Postscript

By JOSEPH RIEHL

JOHN STRACHAN'S FINE ARTICLE presenting evidence supporting Hood's authorship of 'The Mermaid' sent me back to Lamb's letters. The following fragments will not settle the question, but may throw a further light on *both* Hood's and Lamb's interest in sea creatures.

In August 1824 Hood visited the resort of Hastings, which Lamb had visited in June 1823. Lamb writes to Hood about hometown trivia and recommends the sights of Hastings. Two passages in the letter are pertinent to 'The Mermaid'. In the first, Lamb refers to 'novelties' of the New River, which is a likely reference to an event of November 1823, George Dyer's celebrated tumble into that body of water which fronted Lamb's lodgings, but it is also perhaps a hint of Lamb's and Hood's shared interest in things aquatic:

Thy old New River has presented no extraordinary novelties lately. But there Hope sits day after do, speculating upon traditionary gudgeons. I think she has taken the fisheries. I now know the reason why our forefathers were denominated East & West Angles.

Yet is there no lack of spawn, for I wash my hands in fishets that come through the pump every morning thick as motelings [here Lamb has drawn some little fishes]—little things like that, that perish untimely, & never taste the hook—

Lamb seems to be sharing some private joke with Hood, and the reference to 'gudgeons' echoes 'The Mermaid', which describes the creature as 'half a baboon and half a gudgeon'.

A second paragraph elaborates further on Lamb's and, presumably, Hood's interest in 'marine monstors' and 'mer-people':

You should also go to No 13 Standgate Stree, a Baker's, who has the finest collection of marine monstors in ten sea counties, sea-dragons, polypi, mer-people, most fantastic. You have only to name the old gentleman in black (not the devil) that lodged with him a week (he ll remember us) last July (12[])] and he wi[ll] show courtesy. He is flattered by the . . . of the scavans. His wife is the funnies[t] little thwarting animal—they are decidedly the lions of green Hastings.—

Since Hood was the original author of the first article on the mermaid to appear in the *London*, Lamb's reference to mer-people can be understood either as Lamb's attempt to find a subject which he knew would be of interest to his correspondent, Hood, or as an expression of Lamb's own continuing interest in mermaids, or as both. Unfortunately, this tantalizing letter does little to settle the 'The Mermaid' in her rightful place in the nautical canon.<sup>1</sup>

*University of Southwestern Louisiana*

<sup>1</sup> The letter appears in *The Letters of Charles and Mary Lamb* ed. E. V. Lucas (3 vols., New Haven, 1935), ii. 434. The full text will appear in *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb* vol. 5 (forthcoming), and the transcription above is from that work.

## 'Into the Edmonton Churchyard': My Visit to the Grave of Charles Lamb

By MELBA S. BRANDES

I AM A CEMETERY VISITOR. Not ghoulishly, I hope, but curiously and respectfully. And not to graves of those recently dead but to ancient ones, particularly of the famous and illustrious. The visit described here took place in a suburb of London on a drippy Sunday afternoon of December 1963.

Twenty years before, at Vanderbilt University, I had written a master's thesis on Charles Lamb, the English essayist, most widely known to Americans as the author of 'Dissertation upon Roast Pig' and 'Dream Children'. During my studies of Lamb and his work, I became completely saturated with the flavour of his life and that of his sister Mary to whom he gave uncommon care and devotion for almost 40 years. Mary suffered frequent attacks of insanity, during one of which she stabbed their invalid mother with a kitchen knife. Charles kept her, when she was ill, at private asylums, refusing to commit her to the public madhouse at Bedlam. When she was well, they lived together, spinster and bachelor, until his death in December 1834. She lived until 1847 and was buried beside her brother in a churchyard cemetery in Edmonton, a small village when the Lambs lived there. Now it can be reached by a London city bus.

On the Sunday of my adventure, I walked to the stop nearest my hotel and boarded a waiting bus, empty except for the driver. When it was time to depart, he cranked up and left. The two of us rode in silence for about ten blocks before the first customer waved us to a halt. Gradually then, stop after stop, the bus filled up and almost immediately, stop after stop, began to empty. Most of the riders were couples in their twenties or thirties who, I supposed, were on their way to a pub or to visit friends. It was too wet and cold to go sightseeing or to a park, so in my imagination I created destinations for them all. Soon the bus driver and I were again the only occupants.

I had been following our route on a greater London map; and when I knew that we were nearing Edmonton, I screwed up my courage to ask the driver whether he knew the location of a churchyard cemetery there. He said that there were several churches in the area but that he hadn't the slightest notion where the graves were that I was looking for. He would let me out at the most central stop, he said, and I could enquire. He gave me a look of some concern. My accent had given me away. I was an American. Besides that I was a woman and alone, and very likely to get lost.

I stepped down on a street very like all those we had ridden through on the way, lined with continuous apartment houses and office buildings which were dull in colour and subdued in decoration. At first I saw absolutely no one, but after walking about half a block, I saw two men working on a car. I asked them my question, and had the distinct feeling that neither of them knew who Charles and Mary Lamb were. One said that there was a church farther on around the curving street and that nearby there was a house with a sign on the gateway which said, 'The Lamb Cottage'. This, I knew, would be the Waldens' house where Charles and Mary were living at the time of his death.

I crossed the street because I saw another sign of life – an open candy store with three or four occupants. Yes, they said, the church was a bit farther on in the direction I was headed, and the cottage was on the opposite side of the street. I decided to go to the cemetery first and try for the cottage if there were time. The afternoon was growing dark and the rain, which had been only



a mist, now began to come down in real drops. I put up my umbrella. Rounding another curve in the sidewalk, I saw the crenellated church. It was larger than I had expected and completely surrounded by an extensive graveyard, all of which was knee deep in weeds except that part immediately surrounding the building.

I can't say just when I became aware of the two children who were following me, a boy about eleven and a girl about nine, both bareheaded. As I approached the church, I heard faint organ music. I knew that I would never find the graves by myself. So I went to a side door of the church and tried to turn the big handle. It wouldn't budge. I knocked, and after several minutes, a woman lifted the latch inside and cautiously opened the door, just a crack at first, then wider. The music continued. She said that she knew that the graves were out there somewhere, but she had no idea of their locations. She was sorry.

Turning from the door, I saw the children who had come into the churchyard with me and were now not very far away. I don't recall who spoke first, but I believe I did. I asked whether they knew where the Lambs were buried. And they did! Exactly. We walked together through the tall grass and weeds, all dripping wet. I was protected by a plastic raincoat and galoshes, but they were soaked. The two graves were somewhat cleared of the great tangle of vegetation around them, as though someone had been trying to take care of them. They were entirely covered by stone slabs and each had an unpretentious headstone with clearly visible inscriptions: Mary, 1764-1847; Charles, 1775-1834.

Although the children had known the location of the graves, they did not know the story of the Lambs. I told them, among other things, about Mary's periods of insanity and about the tragedy of the mother's death. The girl who was the more talkative of the two said, after I'd finished, 'Barmy, eh?' Then we read the epitaph on Charles' headstone aloud together, the rain coming down steadily now:

Yet art thou not all lost; thro' many an age  
With sterling sense and humour shall thy page  
Win many an English bosom, pleased to see  
That old and happier vein revived in thee.

How strange a trio we must have appeared!

After our little ceremony, the boy asked me if I were an American, knowing full well that I was. The girl said, 'Why don't the newspapers stop putting in President Kennedy's picture? Don't they know that it just makes Mrs Kennedy feel worse and worse?' 'But', I said, 'if someone had shot and killed your Queen, don't you suppose that her pictures would still be in the papers?' It had been less than a month since the assassination, and the extent of its publicity abroad had astonished me as well as these two urchins. The boy said: 'Do all Americans have guns?' I assured him that they did not, but his question has often rung in my ears since that day.

Since the children had known where the graves were, I asked them what they knew of the cottage. I said I wanted to go in. 'Oh, she won't let you do that. She's mean, that one! She won't ever let me in.' But they showed me the direction to take, back toward my bus stop.

As I turned to walk away, the girl asked me whether I would like to buy a small diary. They were selling them for their uncle, she said, and they had only two left. I bought one for two shillings and sixpence, and said that I would keep it to remember them by. The transaction made, the two ran away, glad, it seemed, to be rid of me.

I decided to go back through the church to tell the woman who had met me at the door that I had found the graves. She was still there, busying herself with preparations for a baptism. I told her about the children and their help, and about the sale of the diary. She shook her head and said,

'They'd no business! They took you on that one, they did. Probably buying the books for one and six, and making a shilling.' I said I was more gratified than a shillings' worth. 'Before you go', she said, 'I must ask you whether you have ever been here before today.' I said that I had not. 'I have an odd thing to tell you', she said. 'For several weeks now we have been missing some of the money collected in the alms basins at the Sunday morning services, and we're very puzzled. I always return here about this time on Sunday afternoons to put away the communion vessels and linens and to prepare for evening prayer. For the past three Sundays at almost exactly the time you arrived, someone has tried to come in that very door. I have not given a look before, being a bit frightened, but today I decided I would. I expected to find a big burly man perhaps, and instead there you stood, a harmless American woman in search of Charles Lamb's grave.'

My excursion had taken longer than I thought it would, but I decided that before getting a bus back, I would knock at the door of the cottage to see whether 'she' would let *me* in.

There it was, a small two-storey house, hemmed in by large brick buildings and looking rather forlorn. A wrought iron fence and gate protecting it from the sidewalk. I walked up a short brick walk to the porch and knocked. A pleasant woman answered and invited me in, explaining that she and her sister lived there as caretakers of the Lamb Society. She let me wander about as I would. But I was increasingly aware of the need to hurry because it was growing late, and somehow this part of my adventure was an anticlimax after the church, the cemetery, and the children. The ghosts were over there, with them, not here. So I soon thanked the sisters and took my leave, never determining which of the two was the 'mean one'.

A bus came soon after I reached my stop; the driver was not the same one who had brought me out, and I was sorry. I wanted him to see that I had found what I had come searching for. I settled into a seat, holding on to my diary which I have to this day. The rain had tapered off somewhat, and the sky even brightened a bit as we approached the city.

*Chapel Hill, North Carolina*

## Reviews

CHRISTOPHER J. P. SMITH, *A Quest for Home: Reading Robert Southey*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997. Pp. xii + 372. ISBN 085323-511-2. £30 hardback; £17.50 paperback.

IN 1796 CHARLES LAMB read Robert Southey's recently published *Joan of Arc, an Epic Poem* (1796). His response, sent to Coleridge (who had contributed a couple of hundred lines to the volume), was one of amazement and delight: 'I had not presumed to expect any thing of such excellence from Southey.' It is fair to say that Lamb's low expectations are far from unique and that, until the late 1980s, writers on British Romanticism displayed a marked reluctance to expect any thing positive from the pen of the third member of the 'Lake School'. Whilst his immediate contemporaries Wordsworth and Coleridge were enshrined as central figures in, and touchstones for, the development of late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century literary culture, discussions of Southey tended to remain at the level of anatomising and condemning his unacknowledged borrowings from *Lyrical Ballads* (1798). Fortunately over the past ten years the tendency to use Southey as a whipping-boy for canonical 'Romantic' genius has been increasingly questioned, and critics such as Marilyn Butler and Mark Storey have begun to reassess his reputation and to rethink his complex, frequently contentious, relationship to his own equally complex and contentious times. Christopher Smith's *A Quest for Home* is both a product of such current dis-ease with the Romantic canon and, moreover, appears at a time when interest in Southey continues to increase rapidly.

Smith's book has two main, inextricably linked, aims: to 'look at the poetry itself' and to make a case for a modern critical edition of Southey's early works, the poetry, plays and prose he produced between 1793 and 1805. As Byron's public rebuke for writing 'too often and too long' so maliciously exposed, Southey was notoriously prolific, and the first decade of his publishing career was no exception. Sensibly recognizing the need to limit his field of investigation, Smith therefore centres on what he identifies as the key theme in this early work, Southey's 'gradual reconciliation of the private ideal of home with the public (even vulgar) voice of saleable poetry'. This trope is pursued through close readings of, amongst other texts, 'The Retrospect', *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794), 'Hymn to the Penates', the 1796 and 1798 editions of *Joan of Arc*, and Southey's numerous contributions to the *Morning Post*. It culminates in an analysis of his problematic magnum opus *Madoc*. Smith has extremely interesting things to say about Southey's revitalisation of the political inscription, and makes good use both of unpublished manuscript letters and of a number of less familiar works, including the first surviving version of *Madoc* (1794) and the unjustly neglected *Letters written during a Short Residence in Spain and Portugal* (1797). Connections with his literary precursors and peers are also not forgotten. Throughout its 361 pages, *A Quest for Home* presents a writer whose work is haunted by the 'obtrusive presence of both the living and the dead'. Allusions to Shakespeare, Milton, Cowley and Akenside (to name but four) are keenly hunted down, and a great deal of attention is paid to Southey's professional and personal interactions with Wordsworth and Coleridge. Although somewhat less space is devoted to his connections with Lamb, Smith assures us that the latter's 'corrective laughter' at the fashionably excessive misery and absurd metrics of Southey's dactyls 'must accord him [Lamb] a secure place in the assessment of Southey's verse.'

Nevertheless, as such comments on the Lamb-Southey relationship reveal, *A Quest for Home* is not without problems. Smith rightly challenges the fact that 'readers are often introduced to [Southey] . . . through his humiliations and failures'. Yet his own analysis is distinctly reluctant to rid itself of such 'Romantic' ways of reading. To take one example. An otherwise interesting

and provocative 'Epilogue' concludes that the 'most profound and enduring verdict of all' on Southey's poetry is Wordsworth's:

Southey's Poems . . . are read once but how rarely are they recurred to! how seldom quoted, and how few passages, notwithstanding the great merit of the works in many respects, are gotten by heart.

Smith's refusal to interrogate Wordsworthian opinion seems to me to be at odds with his overall aim. He may want to persuade us to re-read Southey, but Wordsworth proclaims the impossibility of such an activity, literally inscribing the unmemorable nature of Southey's works. Such a fundamental tension between the need for reading Southey and over-subscription to the kind of (sadly all too familiar) criticism which insists that such an activity is not worthwhile is not resolved within these pages. Like many Southeyans, Smith has much of interest to say but lacks a basic confidence in the overall viability of both his subject and his own narratives.

In May 1815 Lamb recorded his response to Southey's oriental romance *The Curse of Kehama* (1813):

I dont feel that firm footing in it that I do in Roderick, my imagination goes sinking and floundering in the vast spaces of unopened-before systems & faiths, I am put out of the pale of my old sympathies, my moral sense is almost outraged, I can't believe or with horror am made to believe, such **desperate chances** against omnipotence, such disturbances of faith to the centre - !

Lamb's sense of dislocation is shared, I suspect, by many late twentieth-century readers of Southey. As Smith points out, at 'the side of Wordsworth's poetry, Southey's speaks a different language'. Yet such a 'radical Difference', the ability to disturb our faith in the cultural certainties enshrined in the Romantic canon, needs to be seen for what it really is - a strength rather than a weakness. Reading Southey (the activity advocated in the subtitle of Smith's volume) should be a productive, rather than a negative, exercise; one which expands, rather than contracts, our literary horizons. It should permit us not just to reconsider Coleridge and Wordsworth's activities in the light of Southey's, but also to place Romantic culture itself in a new light. When looked at from outside of the 'pale of [our] . . . old sympathies', Southey's poetry, especially the problematic 'epics' *Joan of Arc* and *Madoc*, takes us beyond the confines of canonical Romanticism and offers tantalising, hitherto unexplored, connections with the wider cultural and political debates of the time - crucial, but now forgotten, arguments on definitions of literature, the poet, patriotism and, ultimately, 'Britishness' that drew in figures from all sides of the literary and political spectrum. When read, re-read and placed in a more fully developed cultural, political and historical context, Southey's literary career can reveal not a society on the verge of a 'Romantic revolution', but one that, whilst seeking to construct images of national and cultural unity, was bitterly divided and in which 'Poetry' itself was 'a word of very disputed meaning'. It is this contextualised, controversial and exciting Southey, not the uninspired hack of conventional demonology, that demands critical attention.

*A Quest for Home* is therefore a timely and engaging study of Southey's early career. It also indicates just how far the quest to restore the works and reputation of this most unjustly neglected of writers has still to go.

LYNDA PRATT

JONATHAN BATE, *The Cure for Love*. London: Picador, 1998. Pp. 267. ISBN 0-330-34731-4. £15.99 hardback.

'THERE AIN'T no cure for love', goes the song by Leonard Cohen. That the title of Jonathan Bate's first novel should be an unacknowledged quotation is entirely symptomatic. The book is a tissue of quotations, with the interesting twist that they are not recognized as such by the character doing the quoting. Briefly, the novel represents the writing cure of a man who has lost his memory after taking a blow to the head, and who attempts to recover it – and himself – under the instruction and diagnosis of his therapist, Laura (a name, we may note, famously linked with love and writing). What he recovers, however, is only very ambiguously and intermittently his own. Here is a man who unconsciously thinks he is, not a hat, but a Hazlitt. That this code is not officially cracked until the Epilogue is a plot-sustaining device, but even readers unfamiliar with the voluminous nineteenth-century essayist can hardly fail to pick up the wayside clues or distinguishing italics. (Conveniently, amnesia coincides with a photographic memory; though surprisingly, perhaps, the patient's suppression of Hazlitt's name – and indeed of names generally – is not taken up as a subject for analysis.)

The proposed cure for love involves writing a book of love, which repeats, in occasionally lurid detail, Hazlitt's own *Liber Amoris*. As its Latin title implies, this book too has venerable predecessors, reaching back at least as far as Ovid – who happens to be one of Professor Bate's wide-ranging interests. But Hazlitt's is not, like the classical 'Ars Amores', a lover's guide or manual of technique; rather it is the chronicle of an obsession so tormenting and disturbing as actually to threaten insanity. 'William's' traumatic loss of identity in 'love' is apparently radically at odds with the therapeutic task of 'giving him back his identity'. Furthermore, in regaining an identity, he is led to speculate about the absence of 'self' that lies at the heart of his, or his voices's, former interests. That 'William' does not 'feel secure in the identity of the voice' in which he writes links up, successively, with Hazlitt's philosophy of disinterestedness, with 'that empathic imaginative power which marks our humanity', with the definition of the writer 'as a chameleon', and, lastly, with a professed escape from 'egotism' altogether (the final grace of the 'voices' – here, specifically, Rimbaud's 'je est un autre').

'William's' cure ends, not so much with Woolf's attempt to write without a self, as with a determination not to be bothered by such things in future – more positively, to be content that 'My very being is woven by them, by what I have read'. The statement made early on in the novel, that 'distant objects please', is finally revealed as coming (of course) from Hazlitt; and, having been recognized, is turned into a conscious request: 'distant objects, please'. The main agent of this desirable distance is writing itself, a catharsis endorsed by Aristotle and Freud alike. The language of therapy starts an interesting conversation with the parallel language of literature (it is unfortunate, to my mind, that the two discourses are uncoupled as the writing cure gets underway, since Laura's professional competence, and the hospital setting, are both convincing and compelling). All three terms – therapy, memory, and writing – have in common an idea of 'distance', or the purchase that such perspectives can bring to passionate and painful experience. Herein lies the looked-for 'cure for love'.

How much of the salt of irony is rubbed into the re-enactment of Hazlitt's scarifying experience is hard to say: by current mores, its sexual politics would seem to require a barrowload. It remains disturbing that this disturbance is at least nominally rubbed out – though the therapist's Epilogue cannily suggests otherwise. ('Hazlitt', here, is a kind of screen memory for a more personal trauma and tragedy.) In any case, the ubiquity of the ur-text makes the point that love is the oldest song in the book, hackneyed to everyone but the victim of its obsessions.

Predictably, too, it reminds us about the status of the 'first novel', which notoriously talks to and about itself. As a form of autobiography, this novel's focus is on the self's 'story', a fictiveness that is established from the start. And, thanks to Hazlitt's ghost-writing, Bate ingeniously takes the identity question to an extreme: when I speak or write, are my feelings, thoughts, my most intimate gestures and signatures, my own, or merely the repetition of someone else's? In asking this question, the novel is strewn with references to quotation, copy, imitation, translation, repetition, cliché, and (with a nod or two towards Julian Barnes's postmodern model) parrots.

What oft was thought was always already expressed, perhaps. But a commitment to the power and status of literature continues to be felt. Good writing, we are told, can make real or unreal events, past or imaginary experience, live in and for us – a capacity for which the novel offers two great erotic symbols, Pygmalion's Venus and (another of Bate's own passions) Shakespeare's Hermione. Literature, like love, can be life-giving. But this very power immediately begs the further, negatively spun, question: namely, whose line is it anyway? Reading between the lines, we may see here the trepidation and excitement of the first-time novelist. Bate's crossing of the critical-creative divide is fraught with the critic's dilemma. To speculate a little further: 'Hazlitt' is the name of this dilemma, and its suppression the sign of the critic's wish to become more than the medium of other people's writing. As 'Sarah' puts it to 'William', 'You're a critic, aren't you? That's just books about books.' (Her caustic remark is complicated by the fact that she is herself named after a character in a book – none other than Hazlitt's innamorata in the *Liber Amoris*.) In relation to criticism, the novel's questioning of identity can be posed in a number of ways: in the jargon of the anxiety of influence, are all texts rewritings of other texts? in the jargon of post-structuralism, is language speaking me, rather than the other way round? in the jargon of neo-historicism, am I uncritically absorbed in and mimetic of the past's own self-representations?

Such posings make the novel sound impossibly prissy and highbrow. It is neither. Like Bate's own criticism, one might say, it wears its apparatus lightly. What is more, *The Cure for Love* is also subtly, poignantly, amusingly itself.

NICOLA TROTT

SUSAN M. LEVIN, *The Romantic Art of Confession: De Quincey, Musset, Sand, Lamb, Hogg, Frémy, Souliè, Janin*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 1998. ISBN 1-57113-189-2. £35 hardback.

SUSAN M. LEVIN's *The Romantic Art of Confession* consists of lucid and detailed close readings of eight works entitled 'confessions' written during the course of the nineteenth century. She examines the way in which each engages with the problems of 'self'-explication which the once-sacramental title 'confession' invokes, and, especially, with the challenging model of secular and intimate revelation presented by Rousseau. In looking at a trajectory which spans England and France and can encompass both De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater* (1822) and George Sand's *La Confession d'une jeune fille* (1865), Levin seeks to establish the particularity and importance of the confessional mode. Confession, she argues, redefines autobiographical writing. Based upon narratives which stem from the life of the author, each text displaces aspects of the factual self, creating a fictive narrator whose excesses can be alienated even as their likeness to others arouses sympathy. Romantic confessions 'expose the possible fallacy of autobiographical completeness' and suggest through their discontinuities the fragmented and emotionally labile experience of selfhood.

Lamb's 'Confessions of a Drunkard' (1813), the earliest work to be scrutinised, fits into Levin's pattern of intimate 'self'-formulation, alienation and sympathy: 'like other romantic con-

fessors, the Drunkard is a constructed part rather than a transparent whole'. Although often read as an autobiographical essay, and frequently published as one of the *Essays of Elia*, since Lamb allowed it to be reprinted in the *London Magazine* in 1822, the 'Confessions of a Drunkard' was first written for a magazine entitled the *Philanthropist*, and reappeared the following year in a pamphlet called *Some Enquiries into the Effects of Fermented Liquors*. Lamb was irritated during his lifetime by the assumption, made by the *Quarterly Review*, that the relationship between his life and the art of the 'Confessions' was linear and that they were 'a genuine description of the state of the writer'. In fact, as Levin points out, the 'Confessions' bear a complex relationship to reality which may embrace a parodic stance toward the Utilitarian dogma of self-improvement preached by the *Philanthropist*, and popular Evangelical and Methodist tub-thumping accounts of redemption from the evils of alcohol. The relationship between Lamb's confessor and alcohol is an equivocal one and deserves comparison with that between De Quincey's confessor and opium. On the one hand inebriation is a wellspring of creativity and social self-realisation; on the other it opens the mind to abysses of depression, humiliating lack of self-control and disgust. Levin situates Lamb's exploration of the horrors and temptations of irrational behaviour within the difficult dialogue between orderliness/restraint and anarchy/mad-ness at the core of his domestic paradigm. She also brings out the importance of Lamb's love of Rousseau's *Confessions*, which he compared to his intimate exchanges with Coleridge: 'the same frankness, the same openness of heart, the same disclosure of all the most hidden and delicate affections of the mind'.

Revealing as it is to afford this early piece of Lamb's a space for analysis and contextualisation, there is a certain frustration as well as interest inherent in focussing on the wide variety of texts presented here through the single lens of the confessional mode. It would be tempting to extend reflections on Lamb's often ironical, at once frank and evasive process of 'self-construction to his later Elian writing. The French texts here could equally constitute a separate discussion; the book, because of the discrete quality of its chapters, does not demand a continuous reading.

Nonetheless, *The Romantic Art of Confession* makes a valuable and clearly-argued contribution in identifying the qualities of confession as a significant Romantic discourse and the shared strategies which confessional texts use to problematise the reading and writing – and hence primary perception – of self in the early to mid-nineteenth century.

SARA LODGE

DAVID BROMWICH, *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1998. ISBN 0-226-07556-7. Pp. xi + 186. £19.95 hardback.

'What kind of solidarity with other persons is Wordsworthian solidarity supposed to produce'? Despite Wordsworth's famous declaration that 'we have all of us one human heart', this is by no means an easy question to answer, and indeed tends to become more difficult as one becomes more deeply acquainted with Wordsworth's work. In *Disowned by Memory: Wordsworth's Poetry of the 1790s*, David Bromwich gracefully addressed this and a series of related questions regarding Wordsworth's portrayals of human loss and social sympathy. Noting that in Wordsworth 'the defeat of human aspirations, which might seem a subject of tragic awareness, seldom produces a feeling close to that of tragedy', Bromwich probes the sometimes 'strange . . . didacticism' of Wordsworth's poetry of human suffering, in which elements of abstraction or distance

often appear at unexpected moments. For Bromwich the seed-time of Wordsworth's preoccupation with suffering was his time in France in the early 1790s, a period in which Wordsworth experienced powerful feelings of bewilderment, guilt, and anxiety. But even as he offers some speculations on the biographical record itself, Bromwich is finally more interested in the way these events burdened and stimulated Wordsworth's poetic imagination.

Beginning with 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', and moving through a dozen of Wordsworth's works, including several of the most familiar ('Tintern Abbey', 'The Thorn', 'Nutting', 'Michael', 'The Ruined Cottage'), Bromwich probes Wordsworth's attempts to represent the suffering of others in ways that are consonant with the memory and prerogatives of his own feelings. Though Wordsworth felt a strong sense of identification with the outcasts of his early poetry, his notion of sympathy, Bromwich suggests, was sometimes 'tentative', and necessarily included a sense of distance; it is 'feeling for another person', yet it 'does not include the possibility of feeling *as* another person. Nor does it imply an expectation of reciprocal feeling'. As with the beggar, Wordsworth is always cautious about the dangers of assuming a false intimacy with his subjects; by decade's end, this caution and 'reticence' is employed towards developing a different notion of sympathy: a sympathy towards himself and the failings of his own past. By the time of 'Michael', 'The Ruined Cottage', and the 1799 *Prelude*, which Bromwich terms the 'memory-fragment', Wordsworth has started to imagine that there might be ways for him to find private poetic pleasure, even against a backdrop of suffering in the world.

In the background to Bromwich's discussion throughout is the contentious nature of Wordsworth criticism over the past 15 years, in which Wordsworth has been taken to task for perceived inadequacies in his social and political vision. Weary of recent critics who have subjected Wordsworth to various socio-political tests and found him wanting, Bromwich notes early on that 'We bring our own moralism to poetry, a dingy certitude that presents an encumbrance of its own'. No poem has been more central to the debate than 'Tintern Abbey', and it is no surprise that in his discussion of the poem Bromwich is clearest about his critical allegiances. For Bromwich, 'Tintern Abbey' is, in fact, a poem rooted in Wordsworth's experience in France; it is a poem 'about the peace and rest that one can know only by a sublimation of remembered terror'. But if it is an acutely defensive poem, it is certainly not a work that ought be waved around as proof of apostasy. Bromwich instead reads 'Tintern Abbey' as a response to Wordsworth's troubled realization that, after the revolution's failure, his hopes for himself and his hopes for humanity 'no longer seem[ed] identical'. Having lost any belief that life could be governed by 'an abstract standard of sheer humanity', Wordsworth's poem is at once a consolation, a justification, and a plan for trying to preserve 'the ideals of the revolution most truly'. While the 'still, sad music' remains 'the cry of human suffering and human need', it is a cry, Bromwich says, 'that Wordsworth now treats as the impulse for the creation of a quite small society of two persons, himself and Dorothy, with their individual and almost identical experiences of nature. What is chastened and subdued – and it is important for Wordsworth to imply without saying this – is the desire to participate in any larger human community'. The 1798 return to the banks of the Wye is a way to 'include and yet transform all the secrets of experience it has been asked to heal'. As should be clear from these excerpts, Bromwich is no apologist for all of Wordsworth's manoeuvrings here, especially as they involve the backdoor route through which he finally seeks to make himself 'indispensable' to Dorothy.

Bromwich's subtlety and finesse as a close reader of individual poems can hardly be overstated, and the book is full of marvellous formulations about poems whose gradations of tone and argument are notoriously difficult to judge. For example, in considering the mysterious causal relationship between the two stanzas of 'A Slumber Did My Spirit Seal', Bromwich says



the poem offers us 'no *but* or *although* or *since* or *because*, and it would need several of each to pass into a common language of grief, to which it does not aspire.' He skilfully employs Coleridge as a means of sharpening his readings, as when he compares the notions of action, culpability, and regret which underscore the 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Nutting': 'The mariner was more innocent and more haunted than this boy; he recognized the necessity that governs nature is a power outside himself. But the spirit in the woods is in the boy; that is why he is sure of being forgiven'. Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey are present here as well, in their capacities as particularly shrewd and perceptive critics of Wordsworth.

Towards the latter part of his discussion, Bromwich observes that Wordsworth 'is starting to ask, in these poems of the nineties, how far a testimony from another life, or even a testimony from one's own life at a different time, can be absorbed into a single continuous thought. He is starting to cherish a personal knowledge that separation – from nature, from a loved person, or from oneself – is a disaster only in experience. Something besides the loss persists in consciousness'. It is one of the book's innumerable fine moments, one that captures both the scope of Bromwich's inquiry and the qualities of his prose. Bromwich has a gift for casting familiar problems into a new and powerfully suggestive language, and for gathering together into coherent thematic strands the parts of Wordsworth's work which often seem in opposition. *Disowned by Memory* addresses some of the most fundamental and fundamentally difficult issues in Wordsworth's poetry, and it manages to de-polemize these issues while maintaining a sense of their absolute urgency. And it also does so, it should be added, while communicating the extraordinary richness and complexity of Wordsworth's work.

SCOTT MCEATHRON

## Society Notes and News from Members

FROM THE HON. SECRETARY

### *The Annual General Meeting 1999*

The Annual General Meeting takes place at the Mary Ward Centre on Saturday 8 May at 2.30pm. The Council are bringing forward radical proposals for the future of the Society and we hope for a full attendance. Nominations for the Officers – Chairman, Vice-Chairman, Treasurer, Membership Secretary, Editor of the *Bulletin*, and General Secretary, and for up to ten members of the Council should reach me by 1 May, the consent of the persons nominated having first been obtained.

### *Elian Excursions*

We will be visiting Kensal Green Cemetery, Harrow Road, London W10 (see *CLB* 105) on Saturday 10 April 1999, providing there is sufficient response (so far – since February – I have had only one enquiry). On the expectation that the visit will take place, we will gather at the Cemetery gates at 2pm. The Cemetery is only 10 minutes' walk from Kensal Green tube station (on the Bakerloo line).

### *St Sepulchre without Newgate Church*

Elian booklet no. 2 (*Charles Lamb's London*) at page 5 describes the portrait bust of the young Charles Lamb now on the wall of the Watch House in Giltspur Street. It was a pleasant surprise to have an enquiry about the bust from the Revd. Peter Mullen, parish priest of St Michael's, Cornhill and St Sepulchre's. We are planning an early evening meeting on a weekday at St Sep-

ulchre's in the latter part of June. The suggested programme is readings and music in the church, followed by a prayer by the bust in thanksgiving for Lamb's work and example, followed by a glass of wine in the Watch House. I shall be informing London and Hoine Counties members of the date nearer the time; if you live further afield and would like details, please let me know (tel.: 0181 940 3837). Older members may remember that Florence Reeves used to place a wreath on the bust, and we are grateful to the Revd. Peter Mullen for inviting us to renew our contact with this piece of Eliana.

#### *George Eliot Country*

I have copies of the 1999 programme of guided tours. Please send a large SAE if you would like one.

#### *Helen Stutfield*

Her many friends in the CLS were saddened to learn of Helen's death on 31 December 1998, just a few weeks after she had delighted us with her Elian reading before the November lecture. She was recruited as a member in 1980 by Florence Reeves and was for a time a member of our Council. She enjoyed our monthly lectures and the Birthday Celebration Luncheon, as well as Lamb-related courses at the Coleridge Weekend at Kilve and the Book Festival at Grasmere. Some years ago she entranced us with her talk on 'My life in the theatre'. Her sister writes: 'It is a great comfort to us to hear from her many friends. Helen always enjoyed the meetings of the Charles Lamb Society and the friends she met there.'

She will be sadly missed by us all.



*Above: Helen Stutfield engaged in spirited Elian conversation with Tim Wilson at the 1995 Charles Lamb Birthday Luncheon (photo: Madeline Huxstep).*

## FROM THE EDITOR

*John I. Ades: The Mattress Game and Other Sketches Mostly Droll*

Congratulations to retired Elian John I. Ades, who continues in the tradition of our writer by publishing his own essays, most recently under the title, *The Mattress Game and Other Sketches Mostly Droll*. The collection is to be commended for its wide range, including pieces on a minstrel show, old sheet music, baseball caps, student 'bloopers', life in the 1930s, a sailor who folds in front of the Secretary of the Navy, and why you should not wear a beret in Paris. There's also a counterfeit poem by Shelley, and a reply, printed here for the first time. The volume is published by Minerva Press at £7.99 (ISBN 0754-105342).

*The Charles Lamb Birthday Luncheon*

Charles Lamb's birthday was celebrated this year at the Royal College of General Practitioners in London on Saturday 20 February. The speaker was Reggie Watters, who replied admirably to John Beer's toast. The food and wine were excellent: Lamb would have approved. The proceedings will be published in the July *Bulletin*. In the meantime, thanks are due to Dr D. G. Wilson for his able administration of this year's event.

## SOCIETY NOTES AND NEWS FROM MEMBERS

*Friends of Coleridge: Tour to Germany*

To celebrate the two hundredth anniversary of Coleridge and the Wordsworths' time in Germany, the Friends of Coleridge are planning a coach trip to Goslar and Göttingen from 6-12 July. Duncan Wu and Rosemary Ashton (Professor of English at University College, London, and a biographer of Coleridge) will be the scholars in residence. If you would like to join the party please telephone Group Travel Connection Ltd. (01225 466620) for a booking form as soon as possible. Firm bookings are required by 29 April. Shirley Watters will be happy to provide further information (tel.: 01278 733338).

Reggie Watters

## FROM D. E. WICKHAM

*Fornham All Saints and Emma Isola*

Mr Graham K. Scott, a bookseller who wanted a copy of Elian booklet No.1, wrote from his home in Fornham All Saints near Bury St Edmunds in Suffolk to say that the Old Rectory, where Emma Isola had a situation as a governess and Charles Lamb visited her, is still in existence. It was there that Emma suffered an attack of brain fever and was brought home with the joke about turnips and boiled legs of mutton. Chapters 46 and 48 of Lucas' *Life* refer.

*Charles Lamb and Chimney Sweepers: An Elian Precursor*

In *Notes and Queries* (10th ser.) 5 (1906) 5, E. V. Lucas quotes from a letter which was published in *The Scourge in Vindication of the Church of England* by T[homas] L[ewis], 1717 and 1720: 'Well I shall live to be revenged of all the Chimney Sweepers in England and only for Charles Lamb; I do love that dear fellow; I did not care if they were all hang'd and damn'd'. As Lucas adds, 'One can simply rub one's eyes in the presence of so odd an anticipation of Charles Lamb's championship of chimney-sweepers'.

*Charles Lamb and the Personalised Numberplate*

On 9 December 1994 Christie's branch at 85 Old Brompton Road in London auctioned a series of what are called attractive registrations released by the DVLA. They included 1 BA, 1 CD, 1 J, D1 ANA, 1 E, 1 MA, MGM 1, M1 CKY, M1 KES, M15 SPY, RLS 1, and 1 RR.

I was taken aback to learn that 1 CL, surely of fairly limited attraction, fetched no less than £19,800 nett, i.e. that hammer-price figure plus (at least) 10% buyer's premium and 17½% VAT on the premium.

*'Janus Weathercock' and his Letters from Charles Lamb*

*The Charles Lamb Bulletin* NS 86 (April 1994) prints on pages 74-5 a letter dated 29 May 1823 from Charles Lamb to Thomas Griffiths Wainwright, which is in my collection, and my commentary upon it.

When drafting those notes I did not know that the letter had been in Phillips' sale on 12 November 1992, as part of Lot 123. Nor had I then seen our member Wallace Nethery's contribution to *Notes and Queries* NS 9 (May 1962) 182-3. There he drew together the reasons for believing that the dinner invitation printed by E. V. Lucas as Letter 386 (Vol. II of his 1935 edition, page 297), dated to 'May 1821' and supposed to be addressed to Bryan Waller Procter, may be about right as to date but was actually sent to Thomas Griffiths Wainwright. It was the only communication known to exist between Lamb and 'Janus Weathercock' and had then been missing for decades.

Whether or not that letter has reappeared since and without following the trail further, one sees that my letter gains considerably in importance, being apparently the second communication known to exist between Lamb and Wainwright and perhaps the only one currently traceable.

*Christchurch, Newgate Street*

Christchurch Insurance was formed in 1992 and, in that year, took up a 125-year lease from the City Corporation on the tower of Christ Church, Newgate Street. This surviving part of the war-ruined church built by Sir Christopher Wren in 1687 would have been well-known to Charles Lamb, since it and its medieval predecessors stood beside the entrance to Christ's Hospital before it moved to Horsham.

A spiral staircase was installed in the tower and cabling and computer equipment introduced. Together with the adjoining vestry the tower now forms the Christchurch Insurance City offices with panoramic views and with memorial tablets on the office walls. According to an article in *The Daily Telegraph* of 26 April 1997, the T and M sections of the office filing system are often muddled or found to have sections missing: above the filing cabinets is the tablet of Thomas Misenor, died 1779.

## 50 Years Ago: *CLS Bulletin* no. 88 (March 1949)

*My first introduction to Charles Lamb* [by the Hon. Gilbert Coleridge, great-great-nephew of the poet and in his 90th year] It was in the 80s and in America that I met a charming young lady with whom I talked literature. . . . Suddenly she said, 'Have you read the *Essays of Elia*?' I admitted this impeachment delivered in the soft tones of Maryland. 'You don't say, and he the friend of S.T.C.' 'I'll repair the omission', I said hastily, nothing the pitying surprise in her lustrous eyes . . . [She sent him the *Essays* as a gift.] From that time forth I haunted Holywell Street in a new spirit. That quiet 'Booksellers' Row' part of old London, the Mecca of bibliophiles since blotted out by the London County Council, brought Elia back to me. Here was a man who loved, as I did, the smell of old books, chocolate print and yellow paper: this *Breeches Bible*[,] with a paper marker in the Book of Genesis, may have been handled by his sensitive fingers. I almost heard over my shoulder, 'Mr Ridler, I think I'll take this Q-Q-Quarles' *Emblems*, ninepence isn't it?' 'Lucky dog!', 'mine cost me half a crown.' [And a copy would doubtless cost several hundred pounds in the 1990s!]