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ALL FOOLS' DAY

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When I was first invited to talk to the Charles Lamb Society, the date I was given was April 1st. Huh! thought I, so that's what they think of me! And I determined to take up the gauntlet.

The compliments of the season to my worthy masters, and a merry first of April to us all:

...Do we not know one another? what need of ceremony among friends? we have all a touch of $that \ same - you \ understand \ me - a \ speck of the motley.$

Lamb's essay "All Fools' Day" is, on the face of it, not one of his best. Lamb's style, as he himself put it, "Villainously pranked in an affected array of antique modes and phrases", so acceptable elsewhere, does here sometimes seem uncomfortably mannered. Nevertheless, this essay is full of sign-posts pointing down attractive-looking lanes and its quality perhaps depends on the reader's ability to follow them to familiar destinations, so that a renewal of our acquaintance with these will maybe refresh our pleasure in the essay itself.

After his general introduction and greeting, Lamb's first lane takes us straight to the Forest of Arden: "A fool; a fool! I met a fool in the forest!" Here Lamb seems to be casting us as Jacques and himself as Touchstone, when he says, "He that meets me in the forest to-day, shall meet with no wiseacre, I can tell him". The identification with Touchstone is apt, for Lamb might well have said, "Ay now I am in Arden; the more fool I: when I was at home I was in a better place". Hazlitt reports:

Lamb once came down into the country to see us. He was "like the most capricious poet Ovid among the Goths". The country people thought him an oddity, and did not understand his jokes. It would have been strange if they had; for he did not make any while he staid.²

Lamb himself in a letter makes his opinion perfectly clear.

O let no native Londoner imagine that health, and rest, and innocent occupation, interchange of converse sweet and recreative study, can make the country any thing better than altogether odious and detestable. A garden was the primitive prison till man with promethean felicity and boldness luckily sinn'd himself out of it.

His reaction to romantic scenery is well known. To dare to say to Wordsworth, "Separate from the pleasure of your company, I don't much care if I never see a mountain in my life", was irreverent indeed. Nevertheless, it must be said that, when Lamb actually saw the Lake District, he had to admit that "Such an impression I never received from objects of sight before, nor do I suppose that I can ever again". He says, "We thought we had got into Fairy Land. But that went off..." Though deeply impressed, he knew that he must "conform in time to that state of Life, to which it has

pleased God to call me", and consoled himself by listing the delights of his beloved London. The Lake District, like the Forest of Arden, is a holiday place, from whose magic one must return to everyday life, and it is the relationship between the world of comedy, where "the writ does not run", and what Wordsworth called the "actual world of our familiar days" that is explored in this essay.

At this point, as though by accident, Lamb slips into Latin. But it is no accident. "Stultus sum," he says, "Translate me that"; and he assumes, reasonably enough, that his reader can do so without difficulty. It is part of the joke that he could hardly have made it easier unless he had said "mensam amo"! Though my Latin is rusty now, I would respond to Lamb's challenge by offering, as a free translation, the first line of the Siamese national anthem, which in early schooldays I was tricked into singing:

Ah, wah, tah, nah, Siam.

(As you will notice, its nationals borrowed the tune of our "God save the Queen".) "Translate me that", says Lamb, "and take the meaning of it to yourself for your pains", thus playing the same trick on his readers as my school-mates did on me.

But that is not all he is doing by introducing this simple Latin tag, for not only could he assume a knowledge of the language in his readers but also of its literature. It was not for nothing that the terms Grecian and deputy-Grecian were used at Christ's Hospital. Writing of Shelley's school-days at Eton, André Maurois, in his inimitable style, reports:

In order to crush out any possible republican ardour in the young aristocrats of Eton, their studies were organized on conventional and frivolous lines. At the end of five years the pupil had read Homer twice through, almost all Virgil, and an expurgated Horace; he could turn out passable Latin epigrams on Wellington and Nelson. The taste for Latin quotations was then so pronounced that Pitt in the House of Commons, being interrupted in a quotation from the Aeneid, the whole House, Whigs and Tories alike, rose as one man to supply the end. Certainly a fine example of homogeneous culture. §

In spite of Lamb's fears about the new schoolmaster, this homogeneous culture certainly lasted intact up to my father's generation and even, in a modified form to mine, though I learnt no Greek (but then I was, after all, only a girl!). So Lamb could rely on it that the words "stultus sum" would awake memories of many appropriate and well-known quotations, with all the associations that they would bring with them. As he said, "Rest to the soul of those fine old Pedagogues". Now that very few students learn Latin, such knowledge can no longer be assumed.

The introduction to Lamb's favourite, Burton's Anatomy of Melancholy, which is a catalogue of the foolishness of mankind and to which Elia owes much in this essay, provides innumerable examples of such Latin quotations, as of course does Erasmus in Praise of Folly. But let us confine ourselves, almost at random, to a few very well-known instances, knowledge of which would not be dependent on the sort of esoteric reading which Lamb delighted in. First, Cicero: "Stultorum plena sunt omnia"; 4 which was clearly in Elia's mind as he goes on to translate it in his own way, "What, man, we have four quarters of the globe on our side, at the least computation".

Then, a particularly engaging and Lamb-like Ode of Horace, of which the last three lines read:

nigrorumque memor, dum licet, ignium misce stultitiam consiliis brevem: dulce est desipere in loco.⁵

Mindful of the black fires, while you can, Mix with your wise counsels some brief folly. In due place to forget one's wisdom is sweet.

The black fires were never far from Lamb's consciousness and the sweetness of folly would not have had its full savour without them. For Shakespeare, too, even in his most joyful comedies, the overhanging menace of the shadow is felt. As Eliot puts it, "the darkness declares the glory of light". 6

Lamb often quotes from Horace and would certainly also have taken it for granted that his readers would be familiar with that "most capricious poet, honest Ovid", to whom, misquoting As You Like It, Hazlitt compared Lamb in the country. The popularity of Ovid lasted from mediaeval times, through the Elizabethan period right up to the beginning of this century, particularly in relation to his Metamorphoses, which Shakespeare knew not only in Golding's translation but in the Latin text, where he found the name Titania. Marlowe lends a depth and poignancy not in the original to the line from the Amores which he makes Faustus quote in his last speech: "O lente, lente, currite noctis equi". As well as in "his sugared sonnets", one detects the influence of the Amores in Shakespeare's love-scenes in the plays - "It is the nightingale, and not the lark". Ovid's Fasti, intended to be in twelve books, each one tracing the fixed festivals for one month of the year, though only six were written, described the Lupercalia of 5th February and the expulsion of the Tarquins from Rome on 24th February. This last seems to have caught Shakespeare's imagination, for Tarquin with his accompanying imagery of darkness is not only the subject of The Rape of Lucrece but occurs again and again throughout the plays. It seems that Shakespeare read the Fasti in Latin and certainly "the sweet witty soul of Ovid lives" in his work.

But the quotation from the Fasti, which Lamb might have expected to be conjured up by his Latin tag, is related to the February festival of the Quirinalia, "lux stultorum festa", which brings us to the other phrase that Lamb's use of the word "stultus" would automatically evoke, "stultorum feriae", the Feast of Fools. This Roman festival was so called because any who (like the foolish virgins Lamb later mentions with favour) had neglected their duties earlier, might then catch up with themselves and make their delayed sacrifices. But, though strictly the "stultorum feriae" referred to this particular feast, the name brings with it the memories of others which have contributed to what Lamb calls "the general festival", notably the Saturnalia and the Kalends, the Roman equivalents of our Christmas and New Year. All Fools' Day itself, as we know it, may have acquired its date because March 25th used to be New Year's Day, and consequently April 1st was, as Brewer puts it, "its octave, when its festivities culminated and ended". Also, of course, it is a date associated with fertility renewed, as Chaucer and Eliot, in their different ways remind us.

Enid Welsford, in her invaluable book *The Fool*, tells us that it is to the Greek Xenophon's description of a banquet held in 421 BC that we must go for "our first glimpse" of a *particular* laughter-maker, a buffoon called Philip, whom even Socrates could not deflate - and what pleasure to think that there was at least one whom he could not! Nevertheless, for our derivation of whole days of "general festival", we must look to the Roman

jollifications, when normal social values were reversed, servants became masters, there were no laws and "a mock-king ruled over a topsy-turvey world". Like the Saturnalia and the Kalends, this Stultorum Feriae was taken over by the mediaeval Church and some alarmingly blasphemous goings-on were permitted, with mock-bishops and even a mock-Pope.

So far, then, Lamb's sign-posts have taken us to Shakespeare via the Forest of Arden and into the classical world to the Roman origin of the Lord of Misrule and the Feast of Fools. But he does not neglect to hint us also to the indigenous version of these festivities.

Remove your cap a little further, if you please; it hides my bauble. And now each man bestride his hobby, and dust away his bells to what tune he pleases.

At once we are in the world we now associate with Sir Edmund Chambers and his book *The Mediaeval Stage*, the world of folk festivals, morris dancers and mummers' plays. These holidays, in an agricultural community, were, of course, centred on the seasons of the year and the stages of the crops, with the parallel cycle of human birth, marriage and death. Their rituals were relics of sympathetic magic and old fertility rites, which survived in pastoral England right up to my own childhood. No one gives the atmosphere of them better than Shakespeare, who grew up in the heart of rural Britain. Along with the plot from Platus or the story from Ovid, he drew upon this deeply loved environment of the countryside and its festivals, whose influence C L Barber has examined so creatively in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*.

Nor was Lamb's London, the place of his "kindly engendure", deprived of such celebrations or of the fools and hobby-horses that haunted them. Shortly after his visit to the Lakes, Lamb writes to Coleridge, still under the spell of his holiday.

I feel that I shall remember your mountains till the last day I live. They haunt me perpetually. I am like a man who has been falling in Love unknown to himself, which he finds out when he leaves the Lady.

But then, cheering himself with London, he tells how the Wordsworths have dined with the Lambs, "& I was their guide to Bartlemy fair!" Wordsworth does not seem to have been favourably impressed and contrasts it in The Prelude with a country fair at the foot of Helvellyn. Nevertheless, he has given a vivid account of it and its foolery, "with buffoons against buffoons /Grimacing," to set against Ben Jonson's a couple of centuries earlier. The hobby-horse, in folk-festivals was, of course, often a man dressed in a kind of crinoline suspended from the shoulders. His function, like that of Antony at the Lupercalia, was to cure barrenness by covering the afflicted lady with his skirt for a moment. Ben Jonson's stage-keeper says. "Nor has he the canvas - cut i' the night, for a hobby-horse-man to creep in to his she-neighbour, and take his leap there"; 10 and I have always suspected that this was how that fertility magic was achieved! The little hobby-horses that children go astride also seem to have been a feature of the fair, and many of the old customs have, as Barber says, "survived as singing games of children", "I those that the farm-children played with me as a child and that I in turn passed on to my class in a village school. Superstitions attached to particular festivals have also lived on. I remember a little boy of about eight who walked several miles to school with his eyes shut on St Valentine's day, descendent of the Lupercalia, to make sure that the first girl he saw when he opened them

would be the right one.

Even the mediaeval religious drama had its evil characters and its Vices who were figures of fun, which gave Hamlet his protest, "it out-Herods Herod" and Dr Faustus his pageant of the Seven Deadly Sins. In the deeply serious and touching play of *Everyman*, there is yet the Cousin who has "a speck of the motley". When asked to accompany Everyman on his road to death, she is suddenly disabled: "No, by our Lady; I have a cramp in my toe". Then she says, anyway, you're better off without me, I'd only let you down; but calls on God to look after her, without any sense of incongruity.

Trust not to me, for, so God me speed, I will deceive you in your most need.

The function of such characters is to keep our feet firmly on the ground, lest we should float away on a cloud of idealism. In the same way, this is one function of Shakespeare's fools in the Forest of Arden, where, you remember, Lamb brought us in.

The liberty of Arden, like the freedom of the Saturnalia, the country holiday or April Fools' Day, has to be tempered with reminders of those restrictions that bind us all. In Lamb's case, there was no permanent escape from his responsibility for Mary or from his daily labour, either, at least until he became "The Superannuated Man". "I had grown to my desk, as it were; and the wood had entered into my soul." The darker side of life is not forgotten in As You Like It: it is always a little surprising to find how the first act of this joyful play is so much concerned with man's inhumanity to man, suffering and the fear of death.

Even in the speech that Lamb first quotes, Jacques reports Touchstone as stressing the fate of all mortals.

And so, from hour to hour, we ripe and ripe, And then from hour to hour, we rot and rot.

He forever reminds us of hard facts, stripped of any halo of pastoral romance. "I care not for my spirits if my legs were not weary." Or, "I think you have no money in your purse". Even love is not all that it is cracked up to be: "as all is mortal in nature, so is all nature in love mortal in folly". In relation to his own marriage, he has no illusions: he sees the full force of the second cause for which Matrimony was ordained, as set out in the Prayer Book.

It was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry and keep themselves undefiled.

Sex is one of the crosses we have to bear, as my grandmother would have put it.

As the ox hath his bow sir, the horse his curb, and the falcon her bells, so man hath his desires, and as pigeons bill, so wedlock would be nibbling. 12

As Miss Welsford says, an essential and "most disagreeable" quality of a buffoon "is his complete heartlessness". Shakespeare, in converting Till Eulenspiegel into Puck, allows him to acquire "a little friendliness and sympathy"; though, she goes on, the "momentary relief from the pressure of sympathy and fear is surely one of the secrets of comedy". It was to this relief that Lamb was appealing in this essay we are examining and in that "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century", where he speaks of

"that happy breathing-place from the burthen of a perpetual moral questioning." It is in this spirit that we look at and delight in Sir John Falstaff, one of those creatures who "do not offend my moral sense; in fact they do not appeal to it at all". Miss Welsford attributes his final defeat mainly "to the flaw in his egoism. The complete success of a buffoon depends on his inhumanity. The facts of life are tragic, and the human heart is proof against the comic spirit." A statement this that deserves deep pondering. The logical consequence of Shakespeare's realization of it was, of course, the fool in Lear.

But in Arden there is also another, different kind of fool, Jacques, the melancholy man, who delights to point out what in Lear we shall see more mercilessly displayed.

When we are born, we cry that we are come To this great stage of fools. 14

"All the world's a stage", says Jacques, and proceeds to show us a pageant of foolishness from the cradle to the grave. Yet, as the play proceeds, we see that he himself is more of a fool than he realizes. Helen Gardner compares him in this respect with Malvolio: both are self-satisfied and incapable of change and remain "outsiders" in their respective plays. She says

It is characteristic of Shakespeare's comedies to include an element that is irreconcilable, which strikes a lightly discordant note, casts a slight shadow, and by its presence questions the completeness of the comic vision of life. 15

An illustration of the difference of atmosphere between As You Like It and Twelfth Night is that Jacques' presence casts only "a slight shadow", whereas, as she says, "The impotent misery and fury of the humiliated Malvolio's last words, 'I'll be revenged on the whole pack of you', call in question the whole comic scheme..."

What Lamb thought about the way in which Malvolio should be acted we know. "I confess that I never saw the catastrophe of this character, while Bensley played it, without a kind of tragic interest." He mentions later in the All Fools' Day essay, a "Malvolian smile" and links this with Don Quixote, as he does also in the description of Bensley's acting of the part. But, in this early passage, he says, in effect, away with such characters as Jacques and Malvolio, flies in the ointment of our holiday:

Fill us a cup of that sparkling gooseberry - we will drink no wise, melancholy, politic port on this day - and let us troll the catch of Amiens - duc ad me - duc ad me - how goes it?

There shall he see

Gross fools as he.

Typically, Lamb has no hesitation in deriving that "Greek invocation to call fools into a circle" from the Latin, an explanation scorned by our modern editor, Miss Latham. No matter. We know to what he is summoning us.

It is a characteristic of fools that they sing, and, when he has dusted his bells, Lamb chooses his song. It is, in a way, unexpected. He quotes from one of his friend Wordsworth's Matthew poems, *The Fountain*,

The crazy old Church clock And the bewildered chimes.

This poem, like so many of Wordsworth's, is about fortitude, against an unblinking recognition of heartbreaking reality. The old man, Matthew, is, it is true, a jester. His young companion expects to be amused by an unfailing cheerful jollity.

"Now, Matthew," said I, "let us match This water's pleasant tune With some old border-song, or catch That suits a summer's noon;

Or of the church-clock and the chimes Sing here beneath the shade, That half-mad thing of witty rhymes Which you last April made:"

But, for once, the seventy-two-year-old poet and clown is unable to oblige. Like his counterpart in I Pagliacci, he is overcome by his own inner sufferings.

"And here on this delightful day, I cannot choose but think How oft, a vigorous man, I lay Beside this fountain's brink.

My eyes are dim with childish tears, My heart is idly stirred, For the same sound is in my ears Which in those days I heard.

Thus fares it still in our decay; And yet the wiser mind Mourns less for what age takes away Than what it leaves behind."

He sees around him the freedom from care and the apparent permanence of Nature and contrasts it with human life.

> "But we are pressed by heavy laws; And often, glad no more, We wear a face of joy, because We have been glad before.

If there be one who need bemoan His kindred laid in earth, The household hearts that were his own; It is the man of mirth."

One can see now the appropriateness of this poem to Lamb's mood and circumstances. Moreover, by the end of the ballad, the old man has picked himself up and bravely returned to normal. "On with the motley!"

We rose up from the fountain-side; And down the smooth descent Of the green sheep-track did we glide; And through the wood we went;

And ere we came to Leonard's rock, He sang those witty rhymes About the crazy old church-clock And the bewildered chimes. Lamb may also have been relying on our recognition of a quotation from Wordsworth to bring with it memories of the poem with which he particularly associated himself and which most scandalized some of his contemporary readers, *The Idiot Boy*. Relevant too to Lamb's subject are the poet's comments in reply to criticism of it.

I have often applied to Idiots, in my own mind, that sublime expression of scripture that "their life is hidden with God". They are worshipped, probably from a feeling of this sort, in several parts of the East. Among the Alps, where they are numerous, they are considered, I believe, as a blessing to the family to which they belong. I have indeed often looked upon the conduct of fathers and mothers of the lower classes of society towards Idiots as the great triumph of the human heart.

From as far back as Ancient Egypt, the physically or mentally handicapped seem to have been venerated and regarded as privileged; and it was from their ranks that Court Fools throughout history were often chosen. Miss Welsford suggests that, among the multiplicity of confused reasons for this, was the idea that their misfortunes were such that the gods could not possibly envy them or accuse them of hubris, the fatal pride by which mortals think themselves equal with the divine. As Erasmus puts it,

It is also significant that fools have always given great pleasure to God, and this, I fancy, is the reason. Great princes eye men who are too clever with hostility and suspicion, as Julius Caesar did Brutus and Cassius, though he had no fear of drunken Antony. If

If that vice which is above all others the means of separation from God is removed by their disability, what is to prevent their living always in the light of his face?

Not all half-wit fools, however, have this elevated nature. Miss Latham puts Touchstone firmly among the ranks of the "allowed fool" whose "low mentality was what earned him his place as a kind of household pet":17 he is "nature's natural", "the roynish clown", and his "loving voyage/Is but for six months victualled". Like the child in the story, this simpleton sees that the Emperor has no clothes. However, it did not take long for some clever fellow to notice the advantages of being such a permitted enfant terrible and to imitate his folly, while observing the King's nakedness from quite another point of view. We see this kind of wise fool also in Shakespeare, and in a sense Elia was created for just such a function.

"Now", says Lamb, "would I give a trifle to know historically and authentically, who was the greatest fool that ever lived."

Like all of us, he can make a good guess.

"Marry, of the present breed, I think I could without much difficulty name you the party."

Uneasily, we wonder, does he mean himself - or me? My choice would, less modestly, be whoever happens at the moment to be Secretary of State for Education - though probably I ought to be looking for some masked guiser among the corridors of the DES, a more permanent Feast of Fools.

Lamb then goes on to invite to his party a collection of silly asses which illustrates the variety available.

He begins with, of all people, Empedocles, the Greek philosopher who, to

make it appear that he had not died but had been translated, threw himself into the crater of Etna. Then Cleombrotus, who drowned himself after taking too literally what he read in Plato's Phaedo about the joys of the afterlife! And then the builders of the tower of Babel are welcomed into Lamb's select company. The choice of these apparently odd and disconnected characters is made clear by the sign-post in Lamb's note which refers us to $Paradise\ Lost\ Book\ III\ (1.466-473)$. There we read how Satan visits the outermost orb of the earth, at that time uninhabited, but later to become a Limbo of fools, after Satan had effected the fall of man. Among future inhabitants were to be

hee who to be deemd A God, leap'd fondly into Aetna flames Empedocles, and hee who to enjoy Plato's Elysium, leap'd into the sea, Cleombrotus, and many more too long...

Milton sees such foolishness, *sub specie aetermitatis*: the real fools are those who imagine that rewards, either in this world or the next, are the point of it all.

Both all things vain, and all who in vain things Built their fond hopes of Glorie or lasting fame, Or happiness in this or th'other life; All who have thir reward on Earth, the fruits Of painful Superstition and blind Zeal, Naught seeking but the praise of men, here find Fit retribution, emptie as thir deeds.

Setting aside any theological considerations - since Lamb rebukes both Lully and Duns Scotus for their seriousness, later in the essay, who am I to dare? - is it not a fact that from a merely worldly point of view, success achieved often proves worthless? Garlyle says of Wordsworth that he "took his bit of lionism very quietly, with a smile sardonic rather than triumphant".18 No sooner does recognition come than one finds oneself unable to respect those who give it - because of their lack of discrimination! The reductio ad absurdum of it in our age is the television personality. The only hope is to take delight, as Lamb does, in the vanity of us all.

Good master Empedocles, you are welcome. It is long since you went a salamander-gathering down Aetna. Worse than Samphire-picking by some odds.

The picture of the philosopher as a collector of flora and fauna, who happened to lean over a little too far in his scientific enthusiasm to grasp a fiery lizard, is pleasing enough; though with a hint of darker undertones in the reference to blind Gloucester, on his way also to attempt suicide from Dover cliff.

How fearful
And dizzy 't is to cast one's eyes so low!
The crows and choughs that wing the midway air
Show scarce so gross as beetles. Halfway down
Hangs one that gathers sampire, dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head. 19

Empedocles too seems to have suffered similar diminution, as Lamb's concern is with only minor mishaps.

'Tis a mercy your worship did not singe your moustachios.

Ha! Cleombrotus! and what salads in faith did you light upon at the bottom of the Mediterranean? You were founder, I take it, of the disinterested sect of the Calenturists.

To "fancy the sea to be green fields and desire to leap into it" is a folly, no doubt, but no worse than that, for example, of dumping nuclear waste that is virtually indestructable in it and imagining that it can do no harm.

Lamb then turns to those whom Milton describes as

The builders next of Babel on the plain Of Senaar, and still with vain design New Babels, had they wherewithal, would build.

If we look at the original story, as told in *Genesis* XI, 1-9, we may see what the follies were that brought such dire punishment upon men.

First of all, they invented the high-rise building, hoping to reach right up to heaven, which is another way of saying that they tried to make themselves equal with the gods. Lamb feels ashamed to compare their tower to the Monument to the Great Fire, in the City of London; "Yet we think it somewhat". It is hard to-day to imagine how it could ever have seemed tall, dwarfed as it is by the towers of Babel we have built all round it. If there is one sin more than another that our age is guilty of, surely it is that most unforgivable of crimes, hubris. No wonder God said, "and this they begin to do". Clearly it was necessary for him to take them down a peg, but the means he chose whereby to do it was a punishment to fit the crime. For they were seeing themselves as herrenfolk, potentially invincible: "let us make a name" - and as a consequence they were "scattered abroad upon the face of the earth", "because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth". But, instead of learning their lesson, it has delighted men ever since, by the very language they use, to sow dissention and hatred, between nation and nation, race and race, class and class. Even if the Lord had not created many languages, "that they may not understand one another's speech", we find it quite easy, within our own language of English, to create impassable barriers between one and another, by the use of technical or literary critical jargon to exclude the uninitiated, for example, or by loaded political cliché.

But let us not linger on the darker side of the follies and vices of mankind, for Lamb, God bless him, is doing his best to laugh. Dredging up from his schooldays at Christ's Hospital his memories of Herodotus, he refers us to him for details of the building of Babel; and it is interesting to note how exactly his account of the constitution of bricks and mortar tallies with that in the Bible and that given by modern archaeologists. What the Bible calls "slime", and Herodotus "hot bitumen for mortar" was actually asphalt. He has often been accused of being a liar, though in this case he seems to have been reasonably accurate, but what one reads him for nowadays is entertainment and he is particularly likeable when he tells what seems to him to be a tall story and then adds, unconvincingly, "but I do not believe it". According to one of these, the goings on on the top level of the tower he describes were of a very dubious nature.

The shrine contains no image and no one spends the night there except (if we may believe the Chaldaeans who are the priests of Bel) one Assyrian woman, all alone, whoever it may be that the god has chosen.

The Chaldaeans also say - though I do not believe them - that the god enters the temple in person and takes his rest upon the bed.²⁰

Lamb, however, is more concerned about how the workmen at the top, during building, got their lunch. "Bless us, what a long bell you must have pulled ... Or did you send up your garlic and onions by a rocket?" Lamb, of course, means a firework, not the sort of rocket one of the children in my class drew, on its launching pad, among Roundheads and Cavaliers on horseback, in his picture of the Civil War.

In relation to the Tower of Babel, Lamb goes on to think of other means of mystification by language, for example Landor's *Gebir*, published in the same year as *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) and, in its way, perhaps almost as revolutionary. Colvin said that in it Landor "calls things by their proper names, admitting no heightening of language that is not the natural expression of heightened thought".²¹ Nevertheless, unfortunately, the curious progress of its composition, first intended to be in Latin, then written in English, the manuscript left behind and lost on a fishing expedition, then found, condensed and revised, and finally translated back into Latin, left the published English poem a strangely difficult work to unravel. Reviewers, on the whole, were scornful. One says,

It wants commonsense, there are exquisitely fine passages; but they succeed each other by such flea-skips of association, that I am unable to track the path of the author's mind, and verily suspect him of insanity.

Another calls the poem "a jumble of incomprehensible trash..."22

Southey, however, admired it and reviewed it well in the Critical Review (in 1799), and a friendship grew up between him and Landor which was a credit to both of them. Landor's tribute to Southey after his death is one of the few, it seems, that did him justice, calling him "poet, sage and saint". Lamb did his best to share Southey's enthusiasm for Gebir but was, at first, unsuccessful. He writes to Southey in October 1799, "I have seen Gebor! Gebor aptly so denominated from Geborish, quasi Gibberish. But Gebor hath some lucid intervals". Later he came to value these lucid intervals and to return again and again to them. Crabb Robinson wrote to Landor in October 1831, "I find your poems lying open before Lamb. Both tipsy and sober he is ever muttering Rose Aylmer. But it is not those lines only that have a curious fascination for him. He is always turning to Gebir for things that haunt him in the same way". The following year, Crabb Robinson took Landor to see Lamb and, after his death, Landor remembered and commemorated the occasion. Writing to Lady Blessington on April 9th, 1834, he said,

I do not think that you ever knew Charles Lamb, who is lately dead. Robinson took me to see him.

Once, and once only, have I seen thy face, Elia! once only has thy tripping tongue Run o'er my heart, yet never has been left Impression on it stronger or more sweet. Cordial old man! what youth was in thy years, What wisdom in thy levity, what soul In every utterance of thy purest breast! Of all that ever wore man's form, 'tis thee I first would spring to at the gate of Heaven.

I say tripping tongue, for Charles Lamb stammered and spoke hurriedly.

In his All Fools' Day essay Lamb had yoked together at the building of his Tower of Babel both the gibberish and flea-skips of Gebir and his own stammer, as mystifiers by means of imperfect language.

Gebir, my old free-mason, and prince of plasterers at Babel, bring in your trowel, most Ancient Grand'. You have claim to a seat here at my right hand, as patron of the stammerers.

Not that his stammer did not often stand him in good stead. If there was ever a man who transformed his misfortunes into assets, it was Charles Lamb.

No one ever stammered out such fine, piquant, deep, eloquent things in half a dozen half sentences as he does. His jests scald like tears: and he probes a question with a play upon words 23

The slight hesitation over an awkward consonant must have added spice to many of his famous remarks: for example, in answer to Coleridge's question, "Charles, did you ever hear me preach?" - "I never heard you d-do anything else."

It is typical of Lamb to include his own disability among the confusions of Babel and it is equally characteristic of him that, unawed by grandeur, he puts next in his gallery of fools Alexander the Great, the most admired, the most famous of military conquerors. The epitome of his greatness was always supposed to be the fact that "he wept because there were no more worlds to conquer". What more impressive achievement could there be than to be master of all the known world? Yet how does Lamb see him?

What, the magnanimous Alexander in tears? - cry, baby, put its finger in its eye, it shall have another globe, round as an orange, pretty moppet!

How deliciously does Lamb cut the great conqueror down to size! After all, collecting countries is no more admirable than collecting stamps; and weeping in grown men is not in the English tradition: they should keep a stiff upper lip. One excused Alexander, among one's childhood heroes, because of course he was "only a foreigner". But Lamb applies British standards to him and by them he does not pass. Why, the man's a fool! Only fit to be treated to the nursery gibe one applies to tearful infants. Miss Welsford tells us that laughter-makers were kept at Alexander's court and that of his father, Philip of Macedon. Little did they think that it was really they who were the fools.

The Show is not the Show But they that go. 25

Lamb is certainly remembering Burton here and following in his footsteps, as he in those of Seneca.

Alexander was sorry because there were no more worlds for him to conquer; he is admired by some for it, animosa vox videtur, et regia, 'twas spoken like a prince; but as wise Seneca censures him, 'twas vox inquissima et stultissima, 'twas spoken like a bedlam fool; and that sentence which the same Seneca appropriates to his father Philip and him, I apply to them all, non minores fuere pestes mortalium quam inundatio, quam conflagratio, quibus, etc., they did as much mischief to mortal men as fire and water, those merciless elements when they rage. 26

Lamb's next guest is at quite the other end of the scale. As Erasmus says, "the biggest fools of all appear to be those who have once been wholly possessed by zeal for Christian piety", 27 and such a one is Parson Adams, Fielding's Quixote, an example of God's fool. Miss Welsford tells us how Till Eulenspiegel "took service with various types of tradesmen, but always got himself into trouble by obeying their orders literally, with very absurd and unfortunate results". This is what Parson Adams does: he takes literally the commands of his Master, and quite expects that others will do the same.

When he runs out of money and hears that there is a local curate who is well-to-do, it never occurs to him but that his troubles are at an end, though anyone more wordly-wise would know that one does not become wealthy by giving one's money away. The consequence of this error of judgment is the "very absurd and unfortunate" incident of Parson Trulliber and the pigs, which ends with Adams deciding that his fellow-clergyman is not even a Christian. Though Trulliber boasts, "I believe I am as warm as the vicar himself, or perhaps the rector of the next parish too; I believe I could buy them both", nevertheless he will not help Adams, while paying lipservice to his creed. '"Do you disbelieve the Scriptures?" cries Trulliber. "No, but you do," answered Adams, "if I may reason from your practice."' The innocence of God's fool shows up Trulliber for the self-seeking hypocrite he is. By contrast, Adams, who is on his way to London to sell his sermons for publication for "a considerable sum", "would not leave Joseph in his present condition; finally, he told him, he had nine shillings and threepence half-penny in his pocket, which he was welcome to use as he pleased."

The parson's hopes for the publication of his sermons were not fulfilled, partly because it seemed after all that there was no sale for such a commodity and partly because he had inadvertently left them behind at home! Adams is by no means perfect and a certain absent-mindedness is one of his most inconvenient faults. Also, though he does "turn the other cheek" in his parting from Trulliber, he is quite capable of considerable violence when rescuing virtue in distress. He even believes on one occasion that he has really overdone it.

Adams got up and called aloud to the young woman, 'Be of good cheer damsel', said he, 'you are no longer in danger of your ravisher, who, I am terribly afraid, lies dead at my feet; but God forgive me what I have done in defence of innocence.'

Fortunately, a little later,

This fellow, who had a readiness at improving any accident, thought he might now play a better part than that of a dead man, and, accordingly, the moment the candle was held to his face, he leapt up, and, laying hold on Adams, cried out, 'No, villain, I am not dead.'

The combination of Adams' "goodness", as Fielding puts it, and of these failings, of "inadvertency" and of insufficient moderation in his rescuings, bedevil his relations with Mrs Slipslop. Certainly she had inclinations which the innocent parson never dreamed of.

The truth is, she was arrived at an age when she thought she might indulge herself in any liberties with a man without the danger of bringing a third person into the world to betray them. She imagined that by so long a self-denial she had not only made amends for the

small slip of her youth above hinted at, but had likewise laid up a quantity of merit to excuse any future failings. In a word, she resolved to give a loose to her amorous inclinations, and to pay off the debt of pleasure which she found she owed herself as fast as possible.

Nevertheless, she had not in her wildest thoughts imagined herself in bed with Parson Adams any more than he had. Yet this was what occurred. The confusion of beds and bedrooms is of the sort we have come to connect with a Ben Travers farce and, needless to say, the parson was entirely guiltless. However, this chapter adds point to Lamb's comments, as he welcomes Adams into his feast of fools.

Mister Adams - 'odso, I honour your coat - pray do us the favour to read to us that sermon, which you lent to Mistress Slipslop - the twenty and second in your portmanteau there - on Female Incontinence - the same - it will come in most irrelevantly and impertinently seasonable to the time of day.

Mr Adams' "coat" or "cloth", you remember, is a very dilapidated cassock, whose condition leads people to doubt his *bona fides*. Parson Trulliber comments, "I perceive you to have some cassock; I will not venture to caale it a whole one".

Adams answered it was indeed none of the best, but he had the misfortune to tear it about ten years ago in passing over a stile.

On another occasion, on the first meeting with Mr Wilson, his host is puzzled to see the parson travelling on such equal terms with a footman and a maid. Adams replies,

I should be ashamed of my cloth if I thought a poor man who is honest below my notice or my familiarity. I know not how those who think otherwise can profess themselves followers and servants of Him who made no distinction, unless, peradventure, by preferring the poor to the rich.

When his host, still doubting that Adams really is a clergyman, tests him by enquiring about the classics and asks him "what part of the *Iliad* he thought most excellent", he is treated to a speech on classical literature in general and Homer in particular that lasts for two pages; after which

Adams then rapped out a hundred Greek verses, and with such a voice, emphasis and action that he almost frightened the women, and as for the gentleman, he was so far from entertaining any further suspicion of Adams that he now doubted whether he had not a bishop in his house.

We can see now why Lamb puts Parson Adams in the same galere as his next two guests. Lully and Duns Scotus, for "Mr Abraham Adams was an excellent scholar".²⁹ It is a great pleasure to find Miss Welsford including the learned among her laughter-makers, particularly in the Italian courts of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In fact, the job of fool was such a paying proposition that a learned man might with advantage espouse it. We have always known that academics may be fools but it is delightful to find that fools may be academics.

I particularly like the story of the "extempore poet" and "gifted exponent of law and philosophy", of whom someone detected that "there were seeds of folly in him worthy of cultivation" and who became a buffoon at the court of Grand Duke Ferdinand I at Florence. When he "wanted to go to Pisa to obtain his Doctorate of Law", his patron would not give him permission. So

he slipped away secretly, "got an excellent degree there and returned to Florence armed with his diploma and riding in triumph upon an ass". 30

Lamb catches out Lully (Franciscan missionary and academic) in a serious look. "Pray correct that error."

The next philosopher to receive his reprimand, in the original version of the essay in the *London Magazine*, was Hazlitt. "Mr Hazlitt, I cannot indulge you in your definitions." Lucas comments that "This was at a time when Lamb and Hazlitt were not on good terms". But this capacity for maddening people with his logic-chopping philosophizing seems to have been a characteristic of Hazlitt's. One remembers Wordsworth being exasperated by him into writing Expostulation and Reply and The Tables Turned, poems which, in their reaction against excessively cerebral ways of thinking that take no account of the "primary passions" of the human heart, have led to much misunderstanding of Wordsworth's position. As Mary Moorman says, "No candid student of Wordsworth can suppose that he is here declaring himself an enemy to literature". 31 Nor is Lamb. When he changes his reference to Hazlitt into a mention of Duns Scotus, he makes it clear that he is asserting the claims of paradox and intuition against "definitions" and "syllogisms" on this day of release. If you have noticed a display of non sequiture in both Lamb's essay and this paper, you are quite right: it is part of what Lamb is celebrating on All Fools' Day. He is anticipating, as he often does, T S Eliot - and many another twentieth century writer who can claim that

The reader has to allow the images to fall into his memory successively without questioning the reasonableness of each at the moment; so that, at the end, a total effect is produced. Such selection of a sequence of images and ideas has nothing chaotic about it. There is a logic of imagination as well as a logic of concepts. 32

As Lamb says, "Remove those logical forms, waiter, that no gentleman break the tender shins of his apprehension stumbling across them."

We have met the melancholy Jacques, most expert in his humour and extremely well satisfied with himself. But Ben Jonson's Stephen, whom Lamb summons next, is a very different example of the type. In the same play, Every Man in His Humour, Jonson makes Cob ask, "what is that humour? some rare thing, I warrant," and the answer he gets suggests the mode in which the play as a whole is written. "Marry, I'll tell thee, Cob: it is a gentleman-like monster, bred in the special gallantry of our time, by affectation; and fed by folly". But Stephen is so diffident, so simple in his chosen role, so like a child who, in a craze for yo-yos, cannot be sure his will dance as it should, or that, in whipping a top, he can make it spin, that he emerges as a somewhat sympathetic figure, arousing our protective affection rather than our contempt. If he had a skate-board, he would certainly fall off and break his neck.

My name is Master Stephen, sir; I am this gentleman's cousin, sir; I am somewhat melancholy, but you shall command me, sir, in whatsoever is incident to a gentleman.

When offered the use of Matthew's study, he replies,

I thank you, sir, I shall be so bold, I warrant you; have you a stool there to be melancholy upon?

At the end of the conversation he appeals to his kinsman to know how he is

doing.

Cousin, is it well? Am I melancholy enough?33

Cokes, whom Lamb next calls from Bartholomew Fair, is similarly such a complete nit-wit and, on the whole, so good natured and dependent on his repellent "Numps", Wasp, that, faute de mieux, one finds oneself liking him or at least feeling a slightly milder distaste for him than for anyone else in the play.

Lamb is scornful of those who judge the characters in artificial comedy by the standards of the "all devouring drama of common life; where the moral point is every thing; where, instead of the fictitious half-believed personages of the stage (the phantoms of old comedy) we recognize ourselves ..." He tells us, "We dread infection from the scenic representation of disorder; and fear a painted pustule". He, on the contrary, is glad "now and then, for a dream-while or so, to imagine a world with no meddling restrictions... I come back to my cage and my restraint the fresher and more healthy for it."

Nevertheless, one can see why, from the range of characters available in Ben Jonson's plays, Lamb made the choice he did, of Stephen and Cokes, for this light-hearted festival, and then passed on to Shakespearian hangers-on at the courts of those Lords of Misrule, Sir Toby Belch and Sir John Falstaff.

Aguecheek, my dear knight, let me pay my devoir to you. - Master Shallow, your worship's poor servant to command. - Master Silence, I will use few words with you. - Slender, it shall go hard if I edge not you in somewhere. - You six will engross all the poor wit of the company to-day.

At first one thinks Lamb has chosen these characters largely for their names, so convenient for playing with. But it is not this alone. For Sir Andrew is another innocent, though "he's as tall a man as any's in Illyria", "has three thousand ducats a year", "plays the viol-de-gamboys, and speaks three or four languages word for word without book and has all the good gifts of nature". Indeed, as Maria points out, he is "a natural", which is to say a fool, who helps Sir Toby to counter the kill-joy, another figure from folk-festival.

Dost thou think because thou are virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale 34

This is another aspect of Malvolio, the Puritanism that we see threatening people's fun also in Bartholomew Fair, the self-righteousness that is "sick of self-love".

There are other forms of self-love and few of us are entirely without it. Even Sir Andrew sighs and says, "I was adored once too". As we get older, we tend to love our past. Can it really have been as good as we think it was? And, even if not, does it matter? As Lamb says, "I would scarce now have any of those untoward accidents and events of my life reversed". I remember my father saying that, as life went on, his interest shifted from the Engagement column in *The Times* to the Marriages, and so to the Births, "and now", he said, "I look at the Deaths". As Lamb found in 1830, "There are not now the years there used to be". Nobody displays this common human failing more delightfully than Justice Shallow.

"Jesus, the days that we have seen!"35

No wonder Lamb had a fellow-feeling with him.

I am naturally, beforehand, shy of novelties; new books, new faces, new years, - from some mental twist which makes it difficult in me to face the prospective. I have almost ceased to hope; and am sanguine only in the prospects of other (former) years.

Slender is another innocent abroad who, like Cokes, does not get his intended wife and really does not mind. Like Cokes, too, he gets his pocket picked and even that, more serious, loss does not greatly disturb him.

"They carried me to the tavern and made me drunk, and afterwards picked my pocket."

(Bardolph) "You Banbury cheese!"

"Ay - 'tis no matter."³⁶

After the simpletons come two eccentrics, whom Lamb finds among his contemporaries. One, Lamb's note tells us, was Ramsay, Librarian of the "London Library, Ludgate Street; now extinct". It is fascinating to realize that the London Library had already been established at 5, Ludgate Street in 1785 and Lamb's "now extinct" in 1821, of course, only applies to the location, not the Library itself. Lucas says, "Later the books were lodged at Charles Taylor's house in Hatton Garden, and were finally removed to the present London Institute at Finsbury Circus", where of course they did not stay, as those of us who have belonged to the library know. The other eccentric, whom Lamb mentions, was Granville Sharp. He was a Quaker, who worked with Thomas Clarkson, the Wordsworths' friend, for the abolition of the slave-trade. He did admirable and effective work in this cause but was also known as an original, which is why Lamb chooses him for his gallery.

Ha: Honest R -, my fine old Librarian of Ludgate, time out of mind, art thou here again? ... Thy customers are extinct, defunct, bed-rid, have ceased to read long ago... - Good Granville S -, thy last patron, is flown.

King Pandion, he is dead All thy friends are lapt in lead.

In Lamb's quotation here from Richard Barnfield's poem "Philomel", that story is brought to the reader's mind, as this poem surely must have been in Eliot's when he was writing *The Waste Land*. But, lest melancholy should creep back in, Lamb goes on:

Nevertheless, noble R - , come in, and take your seat here, between Armado and Quisada...those accomplished Dons of Spain.

In referring us to Love's Labour's Lost, Lamb introduces yet another kind of foolery. Barber relates the unmasking of the suitors in Act IV Scene 3 to "the sotties presented by the French fool societies on their holidays, where the outer garments of various types of dignified pretension were plucked off to reveal parti-coloured cloaks and long-eared caps beneath". 37 As Lamb says, "Remove your cap a little further, if you please; it hides my bauble". Miss Welsford compares the masque and the sottie thus: "One glorifies, the other burlesques, the passing moment; but both transform the hum-drum practical life of every day, and refuse to take the solemn gravity of the world at its own valuation". 38 Hazlitt, describing Lamb's evening parties, stresses the dislike of pretension there.

When a stranger came in, it was not asked, "Has he written anything?"

 $^{\sim}$ we were above that pedantry; but we waited to see what he could do. If he could take a hand at piquet, he was welcome to sit down. 39

In Love's Labour's Lost, too, we see the positive counterpart to the Tower of Babel, the use of variety in language for delight rather than dissension. As Don Armado puts it,

"Now by the salt wave of the Mediterraneum, a sweet touch, a quick venue of wit: snip, snap, quick and home! It rejoiceth my intellect; true wit:

Don Armado, of course, was a direct descendent of the Italian *Commedia del'* Arte, the Harlequinade which made such a large contribution to the pantomime of Lamb's time and which he found so eminently forgettable.

Robinson Crusoe followed; in which Crusoe, man Friday, and the parrot, were as good and authentic as in the story. - The clownery and pantaloonery of these pantomimes have clean passed out of my head.

Alas, for the Drury Lane pantomime of which my father used to tell me! The very name of Dan Leno was enough to make his face crinkle into laughter. I myself remember a clown making much amusement with a string of sausages, but I must have been younger than Lamb at his first play, for very soon the panto became transformed into a risque revue and, as my mother said, "quite unsuitable for children".

As for Don Armado, "his humour is lofty, his discourse peremptory, his tongue filed, his eye ambitious, his gait majestical, and his general behaviour vain, ridiculous and thrasonical".40 As a purveyor of "eruptions and sudden breaking out of mirth", he is a fit member of Lamb's holiday entourage, and, as the Cophetua-like wooer of a beggar maid, he has some fellowship with Don Quisada, as Lamb calls him, and his Dulcinea. The samples we are given of the style of the chivalric books Don Quixote admired remind us irresistibly of Don Armado. We are told, "Aristotle himself would never have unravelled or understood them, even if he had been resurrected for that sole purpose".41 Dorothy van Ghent says of Don Quixote, "the perspectives that it affords are constantly reversible".42 This, as we have seen, is the very essence of the fool.

Lamb's picture of the Quixotic Ramsay, the dried-up old stick of a man, performing from *The Beggar's Opera*, with an equally dessicated old maid on either side of him, is very kindly, "with that Malvolian smile - as if Cervantes, not Gay, had written it for his hero". Imagine this scene presented by Dickens or W S Gilbert, grotesque rather than, as in Lamb's hands, innocent and charming.

Lamb's roll-call is at an end, "for I fear the second of April is not many hours distant" and, with a passing glance at people in the Parables with whom he quite improperly identified "When a child, with child-like apprehensions, that dived not below the surface of the matter", he confesses what we might have guessed, that "I love a Fool - as naturally as if I were of kith and kin to him".

I do not remember being troubled by the inner meaning of "Build on the Rock" myself, though I tried for some time to explain it to my class of Juniors before I had the sense to see that they were incapable of understanding it. But I do remember, as a child, being very uneasy about the man with "that one talent which is death to hide". I felt sure that, if I had tried to trade with mine, I should certainly have lost it, for I knew

I was no business-woman. Even more, like Lamb, I felt that among those virgins with lamps I should certainly have been caught without paraffin and then have been late after going back for it. This was the kind of thing that was always happening to me in relation to gym-shoes, school-hat or text-books, the kind of thing that was always earning me order marks, late marks, or, horribile dictu! conduct marks. So my heart warms to Lamb when he says

I grudged the hard censure pronounced upon the quiet soul that kept his talent; and - prizing their simplicity beyond the more provident, and, to my apprehension, somewhat unfeminine wariness of their competitors - I felt a kindliness that almost amounted to a tendre, for those five thoughtless virgins. - I have never made an acquaintance since, that lasted; or a friendship, that answered; with any that had not some tincture of the absurd in their characters.

Lamb points out the advantages of a fool for a friend: he cannot threaten you. He might remove your chair from under you but will never oust you from your job. He does not compete. Lamb was such an one, according to Hazlitt.

He is endeared to his friends not less by his foibles than his virtues; he insures their esteem by the one, and does not wound their self-love by the other. He gains ground in the opinion of others by making no advances in his own. We easily admire genius where the diffidence of the possessor makes our acknowledgment of merit seem like a sort of patronage or act of condescension.

Moreover, Lamb goes on, the chances are that a fool is good-natured, unlike some more serious and determined persons.

The more laughable blunders a man shall commit in your company, the more tests he giveth you, that he will not betray or overreach you... And take my word for this, reader, and say a fool told it you, if you please, that he that hath not a dram of folly in his mixture, hath pounds of much worse matter in his composition.

"What", he asks, "are commonly the world's received fools, but such whereof the world is not worthy?"Surely this essay of Lamb's would be justified by this sentence alone.

So, to sum up, if we follow Lamb's signposts down their respective lanes, what sort of landscape has he set before us? Is it not, as Miss Welsford says of the *sottie*, a "roll-call of all the different types of fool", and "the reduction of all the apparently divergent classes of humanity to one single type: the man in cap and bells"?⁴⁴ Admittedly he has not done it systematically, that is not his way. He does not like the painstaking pedantry of those who always reason logically from one thing to another, such a man as

never hints or suggests anything, but unlades his stock of ideas in perfect order and completeness. He brings his total wealth into company, and gravely unpacks it. His riches are always about him. He never stoops to catch a glittering something in your presence, to share it with you, before he quite knows whether it be true touch or not.

Lamb and I are deterred by no such inhibitions. How we both have suffered at times from the literal accuracy of the scientific mind:

I was present not long since at a party of North Britons, where a son of Burns was expected; and happened to drop a silly expression (in my

South British way), that I wished it were the father instead of the son - when four of them started up at once to inform me that "that was impossible, because he was dead".

Nevertheless, in the course of this essay, Lamb has given us some hint of the scope of his reading and, if we follow his clues, we may call upon the wealth of association that he could assume would come with the throw-away references he makes.

Perhaps, then, we should not dismiss Lamb's essay on *All Fools' Day* quite so readily, lest we should be making fools of ourselves, but nor should we, on the other hand, take it with inappropriate seriousness. "Reader, if you wrest my words beyond their fair construction, it is you, and not I, that are the *April Fool*!"

(Based on a lecture given to the Charles Lamb Society on 15 April 1978.)

NOTES

(To save space, I have thought it unnecessary to give Lamb or Wordsworth references.)

- 1 As You Like It II.vii.12 and II.iv.13-15 (Arden Edition)
- 2 On the Conversation of Authors (Continued)
- 3 Ariel Penguin Edition pages 11-12
- 4 Epistolae ad Familiares
- 5 Odes IV.12
- 6 Murder in the Cathedral (Final chorus)
- 7 As You Like It III.iii.5
- 8 Fasti II.513
- 9 Enid Welsford The Fool (Faber 1935) pages 5 and 199
- 10 Bartholomew Fair (The Revels Plays) The Induction on the Stage 1.20
- 11 C L Barber Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton 1959) page 18
- 12 As You Like It II.vii. 26-27, II.iv. lines 2, 11, 5, 52, III.iii.71
- 13 The Fool pages 50, 51, 52.
- 14 King Lear IV.vi.180-181 (Arden Edition)
- 15 As You Like It by Helen Gardner in Shakespeare's Comedies Ed. Laurence Lerner (Penguin 1967) pages 259-260
- 16 Erasmus *Praise of Folly* Translated by Betty Radice (Penguin Classics 1971) page 197
- 17 As You Like It (New Arden Edition) page lxxiv
- 18 In his Reminiscences, quoted by Edith Batho in The Later Wordsworth (Cambridge 1933) page 20
- 19 King Lear IV.vi.11-16
- 20 Herodotus *The Histories* Translated by Aubrey de Selincourt (Penguin Classics 1972) pages 113 and 114.
- 21 Landor by Sidney Colvin (Macmillan 1909) page 27

- 22 William Taylor and W Gifford, quoted in Landor: a biographical anthology Ed. Herbert van Thal (Allen and Unwin 1973) pages 33-35
- 23 Hazlitt Op. cit.
- 24 The Fool page 4
- 25 The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson Ed. Thomas H. Johnson (Faber 1970) Number 1206 page 532
- 26 The Anatomy of Melancholy Ed. Holbrook Jackson (Everyman one-volume edition) page 60
- 27 Praise of Folly page 201
- 28 The Fool page 45
- 29 Joseph Andrews Book II, chapter XIV, Book I, chap.XV, Book II, chaps IX & X, Book I, chap. VI, Book IV chap. XIV, Book II, chap. XIV, Book III, chap. II, Book I. chap. III
- 30 The Fool page 16
- 31 Wordsworth: A Biography Vol. I. The Early Years (Oxford 1957) page 381
- 32 From Eliot's Introduction to St John Perse's Anabase
- 33 Every Man in His Humour III.ii and III.i.
- 34 Twelfth Night I.iii and II.iii
- 35 Henry IV Part II. III.ii
- 36 Merry Wives of Windsor I.i
- 37 Shakespeare's Festive Comedy page 90
- 38 The Fool page 229
- 39 Hazlitt Op.cit.
- 40 Love's Labour's Lost V.i. lines 54 and 9
- 4] Cervantes *Don Quixote* translated by J M Cohen (Penguin Classics 1976) page 32
- 42 Dorothy van Ghent *The English Novel*, Form and Function (Harper Torchbooks 1961) page 15
- 43 Elia in The Spirit of the Age
- 44 The Fool page 218.

THE ELIAN

Claude A Prance

On 30 March 1925 the centenary of Charles Lamb's retirement from the East India House was celebrated by a dinner in the Hall of the Inner Temple, adjacent to Lamb's birthplace, No. 2 Crown Office Row. The Chairman was Augustine Birrell and the Hon. Secretary was F A Downing. Many distinguished people attended, among whom were the Earl and Countess of Winterton, Sir Frederick and Lady Pollock and Lady Spencer Churchill. Literature was represented by A St John Adcock, Robert Lynd, G K Chesterton, J C Squire, E V Lucas, C E Lawrence, Clement Shorter and George Sampson.

As a result of suggestions made at this dinner a meeting was later held in Downing's flat in Grays Inn Road and the society known as The Elian was founded. It was to consist of those who loved Charles Lamb and his works and originally it was intended to limit it to fifty-nine members (Lamb's age at the time of his death).

Dinners were to be given at a tavern in Fleet Street three or four times a year, but the venue was varied later. A special occasion was to be made each year of Lamb's birthday, 10 February. Papers were to be read by members and there were to be guest speakers. The annual subscription was five shillings.

The first dinner was held on November 6, 1925 at the Cheshire Cheese, Fleet Street. Augustine Birrell, the first President of The Elian, presided and a short paper on Lamb was read by a member. A further meeting took place on December 10, and on February 10, 1926 the first Birthday Dinner was held, not in Fleet Street, but at the Comedy Restaurant, Haymarket. Again Birrell was in the Chair and the speakers included A G Gardiner, the Dean of St Pauls, George Sampson, A St John Adcock and Mrs Robert Lynd (who replied to the toast of the guests).

To the function held on March 29, 1926 ladies were invited. On December 2 the members met in the Chapter Room at Anderton's Hotel, Fleet Street and the Secretary's letter to members stated that "those sources of Elian inspiration, The Pun, The Pipe and The Pint would be discussed by Brothers E V Knox, J B Priestley and G K Chesterton." The Birthday Dinner on February 10, 1927 was evidently a more elaborate affair for the Secretary's notice stipulated "Dinner Jackets or Tails." For seven shillings and six pence the members had a six course meal plus dessert and coffee! The speakers included Augustine Birrell, Dr George Wherry (a Cambridge Elian), Wilfred Whitten (John O'London), Gerald Gould, E Charles Fache, Beatrice Kean Seymour and J P Collins.

On November 29 the Elians met at Anderton's Hotel and welcomed Edmund Blunden to their midst on his return from Japan. He gave a talk on Leigh Hunt on whom he was no doubt working at the time, for his book on Hunt appeared a few years afterwards. Evidently the sartorial request for the earlier dinner had not met with universal approval for the Secretary's letter now stated "Morning dress".

A special Ladies' Dinner was held on March 21, 1928 at the Comedy Restaurant when Augustine Birrell and Professor Edith J Morley spoke on Crabb Robinson; other speakers were A Tresidder Sheppard, Edmund Blunden, William Kean Seymour and George Sampson. On September 24 a dinner was held at the Mitre Tavern, Ely Place at which John Freeman spoke on Goldsmith, whose bicentenary occurred in 1928. The Birthday Dinner in 1929 was held at Anderton's Hotel when Walter Jerrold spoke on Thomas Hood.

Similar meetings continued over the years and among the speakers were Edmund Blunden, A J Cronin, F Harvey-Darton, J P Collins, E V Knox and J B Priestley. In February 1934 a main subject for discussion was the best way of commemorating the centenary year of the deaths of Charles Lamb and S T Coleridge. Prominent among suggestors for this was E V Lucas.

Augustine Birrell ceased to be President of The Elian in 1932 and J P Collins took his place. Later Presidents were E Charles Fache and J G Wilson (of Bumpus fame).

In 1934 meetings were being held at the old Cheshire Cheese in Little Essex

Street, Strand. A notable meeting in later years must have been that in March 1938 when F C Owlett spoke on "Shakespeare and Charles Lamb". This lecture was subsequently printed as a separate pamphlet and published by Herbert Joseph Ltd.

A memorable achievement was the commissioning of the portrait bust of Charles Lamb which was erected on the wall of Christ's Church, Greyfriars and was unveiled by Lord Plender on November 5, 1935. A wreath was at the same time placed on the memorial in the name of the Charles Lamb Society, founded the same year. It will be remembered that this bust was removed to Christ's Hospital, Horsham for safety during the War, but that it has now been re-erected on the Watch House of the Church of St Sepulchre, Giltspur Street.

The Elian was undoubtedly responsible for a number of pleasant and convivial meetings for lovers of Charles Lamb and the speeches must have been notable. No doubt the fortunes fluctuated with changes in membership, particularly when it lost some of the most active and enthusiastic members. As some resigned or died others were elected by the Committee, but when the War came difficulties increased and the Society finally ceased to meet in April 1940. Meetings were not resumed after the War. Perhaps, too, there was no need of two societies devoted to one author, for the Charles Lamb Society was then only five years old and the enthusiasm of its members, particularly Ernest Crowsley, enabled it to survive the War and to move to fresh strength.

During the life of The Elian it must have included the names of at least as many famous contemporaries as any other similar society. Much of its success was no doubt due to the enthusiasm of its first secretary, F A Downing, and of those who came after, J P Collins and S M Rich. All three of them became members of the Charles Lamb Society.

A glance at the list of the fifty-nine members of The Elian as at January 15, 1926 makes interesting reading. There was so much talent. I have added occupations for most of them, from which it will be seen that literature was very well represented. They were:

Rt Hon. Augustine Birrell J C Squire A St John Adcock G K Chesterton C E Lawrence Robert Lynd

Walter de la Mare Rt Hon. J M Robertson W Kean Seymour Dr Hubert Norman Alfred Noyes Eugene Mason Gerald Gould John Freeman Thomas Sharp Cecil Palmer R Cobden-Sanderson Geoffrey Dearmer John Henderson F G Bettany Statesman and essayist
Poet, critic and editor of The London Mercury
Journalist, editor of The Bookman
Essayist, novelist and poet
Joint-editor of The Quarterly Review
Essayist, Literary editor of The News
Chronicle
Poet and novelist
Politician and critic
Poet
Doctor of medicine, bibliophile
Poet
Poet and essayist

Publisher Poet

Poet

Journalist and poet

Poet and critic

Dramatic critic of Illustrated London News

E V Knox Clennell Wilkinson H M Tomlinson Philip Tomlinson J G Wilson Walter Jerrold E Gilpin S M Ellis Dr G Wherry George Sampson James Bone

W H Pratt
Edmund Blunden
John Hassall
E Charles Fache
T Michael Pope
A J MacDowell
Milton Waldman

A G Gardiner B Anderson G L Stampa George Morrow Robin Flower

Rolf Bennett
John Hart
E J Finch
W W Jacobs
Keighley Snowden
W L Courtney
James Milne
R Ellis Roberts

James Greig
J M Bullock
Gerald Barry
R P Cowl
J P Collins
Crawford Snowden
J B Priestley
F A Downing

Later editor of Punch

Novelist, travel writer, critic

Bookseller, later Chairman of Bumpus Miscellaneous writer

Biographer and journalist Surgeon, author of *Charles Lamb and Cambridge* Educationist and man of letters Journalist, London Editor of *The Manchester* Guardian

Poet and critic Artist

Author and Publisher, Assistant Editor of The London Mercury Journalist and essayist, editor of Daily News

Artist Artist Scholar and poet, Deputy Keeper of Manuscripts, British Museum Novelist

Print collector and Lamb scholar Short story writer Novelist and journalist Editor of *The Fortnightly Review* Literary editor of *Daily Chronicle* On staff of *Pall Mall Gazette*, author of Samuel Rogers and his Circle

Editor of *The Graphic*Editor of *The Saturday Review*Man of letters
Journalist

Novelist, dramatist and essayist Business man and Lamb collector

Although it was proposed to limit the numbers to fifty-nine, the Committee later decided to accept others and among those later members were Lewis Melville (biographer and man of letters), Herman Finck (musician and composer), R L Hine (solicitor and author of Charles Lamb and his Hertfordshire), Basil Francis (author of Fanny Kelly of Drury Lane, Hon. Treasurer of the Society for Theatre Research), Kenneth Willis Cotton (librarian of the Bank of England) and S M Rich (schoolmaster, Lamb scholar and collector and author of The Elian Miscellany).

Since one of the objects of The Elian was to bring together lovers of Charles Lamb and his works, it does seem that a very real tribute to Elia is indicated by the meetings and the enthusiasm of so many distinguished people.

NEWS

THE ANNUAL CROWSLEY MEMORIAL LECTURES

This year's Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture will be given on October 6th at 2.45 pm at the Mary Ward Centre, 9 Tavistock Place, London WC1. The speaker will be Professor Angus Easson of Salford University and his subject will the "The Lover and the Nightingale: Charles Lamb and the Elizabethan Drama."

BULLETINS

Our member Mr D E Wickham, 116 Parsonage Manorway, Belvedere, Kent (office telephone 01-623 7041) is anxious to complete his collection of C L S Bulletins and would be pleased to offer a good home to the following, numbers at a price to include a donation to the Society's funds. *Old* Series Nos 1-90 (complete or longish runs), 93-96, 102, 104, 107-109 and 114, and certain Supplements, especially Elian Sidelights Nos 1, 2, 6, 7 (9 onwards, if they continue).

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The portrait sketch by John Chubb in the July Bulletin was reproduced by kind permission of Mr John Chubb of Petersfield, Hants. We apologise for not having included this note with the picture, and are most grateful to have been allowed to use it.

NEW MEMBER

The Librarian, Periodicals Dept, Reid Library, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, Western Australia, 6009.

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS

Members are reminded that subscriptions for 1980 fall due on 1 January. The rates of subscription for 1980 are as follows:

Corporate Members Overseas	\$10	
Other Corporate Members	£5	
Individual Members - London	£3 (doubles £4)	
- Provincial	£2 (doubles £3)	
- Overseas	\$7 (doubles \$10	