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THE EAST INDIA COMPANY

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Charles Lamb, after leaving Christ's Hospital, worked for a year or two as a clerk at South Sea House, where his elder brother also worked. He then took up his real, permanent job as a clerk in the Accountant's department of the East India Company. Here he spent his days for thirty-three years, from 1772 to 1825.

It is not easy to establish his real standing in the Company. Partly this is because of his own dual accounts of his life, one under the guise of "Elia" in the Essays, and one under his own name, as in the Letters. Partly, too, he continually smudges the picture by his all-pervading humour. I, at any rate, cannot always tell when he is being serious, and when he is pulling the reader's leg.

His references to his work often seem contradictory. In "The Superannuated Man" he speaks of "thralldom" and "captivity", but he also says, "I gradually became content." He rails against the drudgery of keeping books, but also refers with some pride to the rows of folio volumes which he calls his "true works".

There is in fact a certain element of enigma and self-mockery in Lamb's business life, as in everything else about him. My own opinion, after putting together various shreds of evidence, is that he attained a very responsible status in the Company, and was a valued employee. Otherwise, why did they suffer his extraordinary ways? Robert Lynd in his preface to the 1929 edition of the Essays quotes a superior's reproof: "I notice Mr. Lamb, that you come very late every morning," and Lamb's retort, "But see how early I go." On the other hand, he refers in the letters to sometimes working to 10 and 11 o'clock at night.

The best evidence to me, however, is that when he retired prematurely at the age of 50, he was earning £730 a year, a handsome sum, possibly equal to a salary of £10,000 to £14,000 a year in 1979. The pension granted to him by the Company was no less than £450 a year, reduced to £441 so that it would continue in his sister Mary's lifetime, if he predeceased her.* It is true that there may have been special reasons for such a very generous pension, some question of political or other influence (he wrote some political pamphlets), or by way of encouragement of the arts, but I believe a commercial concern would hardly be so lavish without being able to show a commercial justification for it. In "The Superannuated Man" again, Lamb refers to the granting of the pension being accompanied by "a formal harangue to me on the length of my services, and my very meritorious conduct during the whole of the time."

What sort of a place was East India House, where Lamb worked for so long?

* Letter to Wordsworth, 29.3.1825.

What sort of a company was the East India Company? One reason this intrigues me is that I spent the whole of my business life in St Mary Axe, just around the corner from where East India House stood in Leadenhall Street. The site is, I assume, now the short road leading into Leadenhall Market, which itself stands on the foundations of the old Roman forum. I started in St Mary Axe just 99 years after Lamb retired from Leadenhall Street, not a very great gap, historically speaking.

A greater attraction, however, is the extraordinary nature of the Company itself, controlling from that London office the affairs of a whole sub-continent through its own government, army and navy. And this at a time when a letter from London to India could not be answered inside four months!

The building, according to C H Philips (in *The East India Company, 1784 to 1834*, published in 1940) was on the south side of Leadenhall Street. It was a plain four-storey stone building, serviceable but not beautiful. Although it originally had a narrow frontage of only 70 feet, it extended backwards for over 300 feet, and contained a spacious hall, a garden and a courtyard, rooms for the Directors and offices for the clerks, as well as several large warehouses. Between 1796 and 1799 the front portion was reconstructed and enlarged, to a width of 200 feet, with a substantial but gloomy facade 60 feet high, and a portico was formed with emblematic devices representing the commerce of the East, protected by an ungainly, unwarlike figure of George III. Most of the offices were on the upper floor. This part of the building was dark and dingy, intersected with long corridors and badly lit staircases.

Lamb wrote of "the labyrinthine passages and light-excluding pent-up offices where candles for one half of the year supplied the place of sun's light."

This was the unprepossessing scene of Lamb's labours, in a post to which he was nominated by his father's employer Samuel Salt MP, a bencher of the Inner Temple. Yet this was the base for one of the most colourful and extraordinary operations recorded in history. And it was also the scene for a long struggle for power between the Directors and Proprietors of the Company and the UK government.

The original charter to what was then the London East India Company was dated December 31, 1600. It gave the company the exclusive privilege of trading to all parts of Africa, Asia and America beyond the Cape of Good Hope, eastwards of the Straits of Magellan. It has been said that the British acquired their empire in a fit of absence of mind. Certainly the charter of the East India Company gives no hint of territorial ambitions. It was strictly a trading venture.

At that time, the Portuguese were already in India. Vasco da Gama arrived back in 1498. Goa was captured in 1510. I was in Goa a few years ago, and it is still superficially Portuguese in most respects, especially of course in surnames, due to the policy of intermarriage. As regards deeper influences, the main one is religion. The Catholic church is a powerful force, and I attended the public exhibition in the Cathedral (made once every ten years) of the body of St Francis Xavier, preserved - miraculously, say the faithful - for 400 years.

The Dutch, too, were then in Java, India and Ceylon, and in the East Indies they held a virtual monopoly. The Dutch East India Company was a powerful

body, with ten times the capital of the English company. The English therefore concentrated on India as a second best, second best because India had no spices, and they could only be bought there on re-sale. India's products for export were chiefly textiles, saltpetre for gunpowder, and sugar.

The spice trade was of course the main incentive for the trade drive to the East. The only ways to preserve meat or fish in Europe then were salting or smoking, except perhaps for the ice-houses of a few country landowners. Spices, especially pepper, were essential to disguise the taste of over-ripe flesh. Nations rose or fell by the degree to which they controlled the spice trade, the Venetian Republic being a classic example. This was the big prize for which unwieldy ships set out on long eastern voyages, with perils we can today hardly visualise.

Lord Elton writes in *Imperial Commonwealth*:*

One Ralph Fitch left England with three companions by the overland route for the Far East in 1583, and was long given up for lost. In 1591, however, he reached home again, with a strange tale of his journey by way of the Euphrates and the Persian Gulf, and eventually, in manacles, to Goa; of his release through the influence of an English Jesuit resident there, of his visit to the Mogul court of Agra, and of the riches, iniquity and incompetence of the Portuguese. Reports such as these were eagerly circulated.

The already impatient merchants of London in 1591 despatched three trading vessels to the Far East. One survived to load a cargo of pepper and spices. On the homeward voyage she was swept across the Atlantic to Hispaniola and Labrador.

Of the East India Company, he writes:

The profit on the first two voyages totalled something like 95 per cent., but with their money locked up eight years /when the ships did return, the huge quantities of spices had to be fed into the market slowly to avoid a collapse in price/ the members' actual net gain was reduced to rather less than twenty per cent., by no means an extravagant return for the risks they had run.

The merchants took big risks, but what of the seamen? I recommend for a picture of their risks Daniel Defoe's largely historical novel *The Life and Piracies of Captain Singleton*. In the seventeenth century, piracy, mutiny and treachery were commonplace. So, too, were scurvy, shipwrecks and savages. And navigation was so primitive that Singleton could as easily miss as hit an objective as large as Madagascar.

The qualities of the men who met such difficulties, conquered them, and survived must have been remarkable.

In 1613 the Company established a "factory" or trading post at Surat, north of Bombay, chief outlet for the Hadj to Mecca. In 1618 Sir Thomas Roe made an agreement with the Mogul emperor, the Company getting trading privileges in exchange for an undertaking to protect the empire's commercial and pilgrim traffic from the Portuguese. Under the Moguls, who ruled much of India, there was of course a largely Hindu population, ruled by Muslim invaders from the North-West. The language of the Court and the

* Collins, 1945.

administration was Persian. India still has a large Muslim element today, even after the principal Muslim areas broke away as Pakistan and later Bangladesh. The minority is still large enough for the pilgrim trade to be important, and a good part of it is handled by the Mogul Line of Bombay.

In the same century, the three major bases of the Company were founded - in 1640 a factory on leased land at Madras; in 1674 Bombay became a territory of the British crown as part of the dowry of Charles II's queen, Catherine of Braganza, and was transferred to the Company; the third factory was Calcutta, again on leased land, in 1690.

Incidentally, there are still many traces of Bombay's link with Portugal today, three centuries later. A Bombay lawyer (his name is da Silva) told me that the Portuguese legal forms for buying and leasing property were in common use in Bombay up to the twentieth century. There is a strong Catholic community. When Pope Paul visited Bombay in 1964 my wife and I were among an audience of 100,000 in the Oval Maidan, the central park of the City, when 35 couples were married at a nuptial mass by five bishops. Nearly all the couples had Portuguese surnames. The hymns were sung in Hindi, Sanskrit and English.

The later history of the Company falls into two halves. First comes about half a century, from 1750 to 1818, of progressive acquisition of territory, and the slow transformation of a trading company into a great commercial-cum-political power. In the course of this, there were numerous wars, both with the French and other rival colonial powers, and with many local kings and chieftains. In the latter, to begin with, the Company's forces would be thrown in on one side of a disputed succession, or to resist invasion by Moguls, Afghans or Mahrattas; later, they were directly in furtherance of the Company's own interests, to secure trade, and progressively to control territory.

Then follows another half-century which (again by gradual stages) really represents the take-over of the Company by the British Crown and government, completed after the Indian Mutiny in 1857.

The story is studded with famous names: Robert Clive; Warren Hastings (not to be confused with the later Marquess of Hastings, Lord Moira); Cornwallis; Henry Dundas; Lord Melville; Lord Mornington, later Marquess of Wellesley (not to be confused with his young brother Arthur Wellesley, who made his name in India long before he became the first Duke of Wellington); Wilberforce; Lord William Bentinck; and Macaulay, who had a notable spell of service in India some years before he published his *History of England* and *The Lays of Ancient Rome*. But I will not fatigue you with potted biographies of all these gentlemen, or a year-by-year analysis of the long transition from the first toe-holds of the trading posts to the "Indian Empire" which Disraeli dreamed up for Queen Victoria. A few salient points are quite enough.

The first great name is Clive, the "writer" or clerk, turned soldier and administrator, the first to prove that a few British regiments, well led, could defeat large ill-disciplined armies, and maintain control afterwards over the lands of the defeated enemy. Arcot, 1751, and Plessey, 1757, not only did this, but broke the French power in India, and established the British as the dominant power. His main aim was to secure the Company's trade, and he accepted that conquest was the only way. Success was established when the Emperor Shah Alam ceded to the Company the trade and the control of taxes in Bengal and Bihar. But Clive bled Bengal. His

personal share of that conquest was £234,000 and a large land grant. The mansion he bought in 1770 still stands in Berkeley Square.

Warren Hastings followed, becoming Governor of Bengal in 1772. In the words of Percival Spear in *A History of India*, published by Pelican in 1965, he made "an adventurer's tour-de-force into a solid political fact." European supervision of Indian agencies became a principle of administration. Repulse of attacks by Indian kings and chieftains, conquest of the more difficult areas for trade, usually setting up puppet rulers, began to develop into a permanent structure. But Hastings fell a victim to the strife of British factions, at home and abroad. The attempt to impeach him failed, but left him a soured man. Perhaps the campaign against him, which split not only the Company in London and in India, but virtually the whole nation, can be seen as the first stage towards full Government control of the Company and all its works.

The third major expansion came between 1796 and 1803 under the Wellesley brothers, the arrogant Marquess set on conquest and backed (usually) by Henry Dundas in the Government at home, and Arthur, whose brilliant generalship made all possible. The future Duke of Wellington not only frustrated the recurring French threats in the East, but developed the strategy, the tactics and the logistics which eventually destroyed Bonaparte's power in Europe. He was particularly strong on bullock carts.

It is impossible in a short paper to give an adequate picture of the scale and the extraordinary nature of the Company's achievements. "The Honourable Company" was one of its designations. "John Company" was the half-affectionate, half-derisive term used by outsiders. But picture for a moment the red-coated regiments, some brown-faced, some white, wheeling and marching over the hot plains, the padded war-elephants, the thunder of the irregular cavalry of Scindia and the Mahrattas, the fighting ships, with rows of cannon grinning from their painted sides through the smoke of the black powder, the forts which were also trading stations and the seats of government, the "nabobs" in velvet and brocade, with their boxes of diamonds and throngs of native servants, the magistrates and tax-collectors riding thousands of miles to control two hundred million people, a fifth of mankind. It is a far cry from that to the small man in the black suit, perched at a Leadenhall Street desk, or even to the indigo, silks and spices in the warehouses nearby, which he recorded.

The last fifty years of the Company, before its powers were finally surrendered to the Crown, were not merely a matter of the politicians gradually overriding and assuming the powers of the Court of Directors. There were two other contests.

The first (which began even earlier) was an internal one, between different groups of interests within the Company itself. The more powerful and profitable the enterprise became, the more violently different people sought to control it. Besides the Court of Directors, there was the General Court of Proprietors of the Company through which power could be exercised. It was made up, says Philips, by two main groups. One was the City and shipping interest, which included directors of the Company, captains of Indiamen, shipowners and ships husbands. Many of them were influential City merchants or bankers.

Incidentally, under the Merchant Shipping Acts today, for every British ship afloat some person must be registered as the ship's husband, who has

certain particular duties to fulfil.

The second main group was the Indian interest, popularly termed the "Bengal Squad", made up of the "nabobs" and their relatives. A "nabob", of course, as any reader of *Vanity Fair* knows, was a merchant who had made a fortune in India, a fortune which he often buttressed by a shareholding in the Company. The Indian interest was sub-divided into groups, in particular the Arcot interest (creditors and agents of the Nawab of the Carnatic, a ruler in central India with whom the Company was much involved from Clive's time onwards), and the Hastings interest (personal friends and supporters of Warren Hastings, the Governor-General). The influence of these groups can be indicated by the fact that in 1783 there were 31 members of the Indian interest in parliament, and 27 members of the City and Shipping interest. Fox's India Bills, intended to give the Government effective control of the Company, were defeated in the House of Lords, and the Government fell. Pitt's government, following, introduced a weaker bill, which was agreed to by the Company in advance. Yet, as the years went by, the government encroached more and more.

Fascinating light on the relationship between Government and Company is given in the correspondence between Henry Dundas, chairman of the Government's Board of Control from 1784 to 1801, and for three later periods, and the Marquess of Wellesley, Governor-General from 1796 to 1805. Here you will see it all, love and hate, the jockeying for control, the interplay of personal and corporate ambition.

The other mighty contest was over the principles upon which the enterprise should be conducted, and on which India should be governed. There were four factions. One was the Conservatives, of whom Warren Hastings was one. They wanted to preserve the old Indian religions and social institutions. The second was the Evangelicals, including Wilberforce and Charles Grant, chairman of directors. They wanted to give India the Gospel, and an end to idolatry and to suttee, the burning of widows on their husbands' funeral pyres. The third comprised the Radicals and Utilitarians. No gospel for them, but humanism, free trade and the rapid spreading of western ways. The fourth comprised the young Company servants - Elphinstone, Metcalfe, Malcolm and the like. They were for slow progress and gradual improvement.

An alliance of Radicals and Evangelicals won the day, to offer western ways, but not to enforce them. Lord William Bentinck, Governor-General from 1828 to 1835, spoke of "a great moral duty to perform in India". He introduced Indian judges, and suppressed suttee and thuggee (religious murders).

Macaulay, as law member of the Council from 1834, introduced English style education, western medicine, and English legal procedures. They persist today, 30 years after independence. Driving through towns in the afternoons, you will see swarms of children in their neat school uniforms. Educated Indians speak with pride of attending English style (and often British-run) schools. The law courts, though they fuss about details just as ours do in England, are, like ours, a formidable force for human rights and basic freedoms. Minorities are protected. Religious tolerance is usually practised.

Gradually, the Company's staggering powers were taken over by the UK government and the Queen's Council in India. Its standing at one time was immense. When it began to fail, its struggles shook the home government. But eventually 250 years of historical development overcame it, and it

quietly expired.

I can only speculate on how these great events (at least, until 1825) impinged on Charles Lamb, but perhaps others can give indications of this. The City men bustling in and out of East India House, and the portly nabobs in their silks and velvets, the government messengers, the Company's chairman hastening up to Westminster, hotly disputed meetings of the Directors or the Proprietors, and always the despatches streaming to and from India, the dignified captains of Indiamen reporting at head office on return from their voyages - what did Charles make of it? That keen observer cannot have ignored it all. Perhaps he brushed it aside. Much of it may have seemed merely an aspect of human folly. Meanwhile, he had his duty to do, his books to keep, his writing and reading in which (with his care for Mary and the good company of his friends) was perhaps to him the real world. I can picture the slender figure, with his feet twisted round the high stool (as I sat myself a hundred years later), but there is an enigmatic air about him, as well as a whimsical one.

I wonder, too, what he would think of India today. Most of the outward signs of the Company have gone, but it seems to me that the character of the Indian people is in some ways indelibly marked by some features of their 400-year association with England. In a country where the banknotes have to bear their denomination in 15 languages, English is still the link language. A Bombay insurance man told me, "We do our business in English, of course - with a little Hindi, Urdu, Marathi and Gujarati to make it more interesting." An Indian editor described to me how his father quoted Shelley on his deathbed. Democratic ideals strike as deep there as here. Mahatma Gandhi said that the mainly non-violent campaign for independence could have succeeded against no other people but the British. There are more British in India today (mostly on short contracts) than when we ruled the country. The Company is gone. British rule is gone. But Charley (as his East India House colleagues called him) would have understood, with his sensitivity to words and to ideas, why something of Britain remains.

Based on a talk given to the Society on 7 April 1979

Note

When this paper was presented to the Society, it was followed by a brisk discussion. I am indebted to Basil Savage, Mrs A Terry and others for points made then and later.

It was pointed out that the East India Company, although a commercial concern, also had to a great degree the nature and characteristics of a public office, almost a government department, such as one reads about in the works of Trollope and Dickens. One characteristic was the over-manning, which left Lamb time for his own correspondence and other writing done in office time. Another was the acute class distinctions between the gentlemen and the clerks and other workers.

On the other hand, Charles must have been a noteworthy clerk, with a very good education behind him. He wrote a good hand, was extremely intelligent, had literary activities which were widely recognized, and knew many people of note in different sections of society. He must therefore have had a unique standing amongst his fellow clerks.

PEOPLE ONE WOULD HAVE WISHED TO HAVE KNOWN

A short paper given on September 8th, 1947 to the Society, by F S Reeves

HESTER

When maidens such as Hester die,
Their place ye may not well supply,
Though ye among a thousand try
 With vain endeavour.

A month or more hath she been dead,
Yet cannot I by force be led
To think upon the wormy bed
 And her together.

A springy motion in her gait,
A rising step, did indicate
Of pride and joy no common rate
 That flush'd her spirit:
I know not by what name beside
I shall it call: if 'twas not pride,
It was a joy to that allied
 She did inherit.

Her parents held the Quaker rule,
Which doth the human feeling cool,
But she was train'd in Nature's school,
 Nature had blest her.

A waking eye, a prying mind,
A heart that stirs, is hard to bind;
A hawk's keen sight ye cannot blind,
 Ye could not Hester.

My sprightly neighbour! gone before
To that unknown and silent shore,
Shall we not meet, as heretofore,
 Some summer morning -
When from thy cheerful eyes a ray
Hath struck a bliss upon the day,
A bliss that would not go away,
 A sweet fore-warning?

It is this lady I should have liked to have known. She crossed Lamb's path, brightened his way for a little, and then is gone. Many years after, only two years before his own death, Lamb remembered the little Quakeress, dressed in white, who looked kindly on him in his extremity, and cheered him by her presence. For one evening in 1832, we are told by John Payne Collier in his 'Old Man's Diary', a dinner was given at W Harness's to meet Mary Russell Mitford and others. "In the evening the Lambs joined the party, and Lamb was joked about the charming young quakeress who had lived in the same street in Pentonville where Lamb had lodged; she generally wore white, and somebody present called her 'a white witch'. 'No', said Lamb, 'if a witch at all, as she lived at the *Last* house in our street, she must be the Witch of End-door'". This pun is the last mention Lamb makes of Hester Savory. That his friends remembered his affection for the Islington Quakeress is obvious, from the above reference. Yet Lamb never spoke to her, for at her death in 1803 he writes to Manning "I send you some verses I have made on the death of a young Quaker you may have heard me speak of as being in love with for

some years while I lived at Pentonville, though I had never spoken to her in my life." These two references and the poem, are the only mention we have, I believe, in Lamb's works of this young lady with her 'bright-eyed gipsy face' as Canon Ainger describes her. What was the secret of her charm? She is a person one would like to have known more about.

Indeed, so strong was my desire to ferret out more details of her story, that during the war, when flying bombs were menacing London, I spent several mornings in the Library at the Friends Meeting House looking over Quaker records. It was a strange experience to sit in the quiet room, with the scent of roses drifting from the bowls on the table, searching out facts about an almost unknown Quakeress who had died over a hundred years ago, while at any moment a bomb might have put an end to my research. And little enough I found, although the Librarian put at my disposal all the records he had available that might have enabled me to have filled out her story. The result of my search can quickly be given, and will add little to the account already given by Lucas.

Hester Savory was the daughter of Joseph Savory, who was well known as an active and influential Friend, to whose house many of the American Ministering Friends came when they journeyed to England on religious visits. He was a gold and silversmith. His first wife's name was Bellamy, and by her he had three daughters and one son. The eldest of these daughters was Hester. They lived in Chapel Street, Pentonville, a very different place in those days from the street market of today, with its stalls, its throngs of people pushing their way along the crowded pavements eager to buy, its road jammed with lorries. In the year 1796 it had a quiet suburban calm, attractive and harmonious, and at the end of the year, Charles Lamb moved here to No.45, and later to No.36, to be near his sister Mary, who was in an Islington madhouse following upon the tragic death of her mother. Lonely and desolate as Lamb was at this period, the little Quakeress, dressed in the white costume of the Friends of that period, with her sweet face whose beauty, we are told "consisted more in expression than in regularity of features" must have given him exquisite pleasure. How much of his story did she know? I should like to ask her that. Did she wish to speak to him to offer help to his sister when she came to live with Charles, did she notice him as much as he evidently noticed her? Or did she smile at him because life was pleasant to her? Both were young - she was 19 and he was 21, and in deep need of sympathy. Did he read more in her gracious face than she intended? He was at this time strongly inclined towards the Society of Friends, through Charles Lloyd and John Woolman. His interest in the Quaker family in the end house would have been stimulated and encouraged by such contacts. But the demure little Quakeress disappeared from his life. On July 1st 1802 she married Charles Dudley a merchant of Chester Place, Lambeth. In 1803, on February 9th she died of a fever, and was interred at Bunhill Fields on February 13th. It was in March of that year that Lamb wrote to Manning and sent the poem by which the name of Hester Savory is remembered.

One other fact about her I discovered. William Savory, of the American Society of Friends was her second cousin. In 1797 he and an American sailing master were visiting England, and with them Hester made a journey to Bristol starting at four in the morning, and travelling 116 miles in 16½ hours.

Living as a member of such a family, meeting and conversing with other leading Quaker families, and continually coming into contact with Friends

from America, Hester Savory must have had much to interest such an inquiring mind as Lamb's. What did she think of him, and what would she say now if she knew that the quiet sad young man who watched for her so eagerly had made her name a familiar one to all lovers of lyric poetry?

BOOK REVIEWS

Donald H. Reiman: *English Romantic Poetry, 1800-1835: a Guide to Information Sources*. Gale Research Co., Detroit, 1979 pp.xx. 294. Price \$24. Cloth bound. Vol.27 in the American Literature, English Literature, and World Literatures in English Information Guide Series, Gale Information Guide Library.

Romanticists are already in Dr Reiman's debt for his nine volume compilation of *The Romantics Reviewed* (1972), only one of a number of substantial contributions he has made to the field, both as editor and critic. Now appears, in the well-known Gale series, an eminently practical and incisive annotated bibliography of the romantic poets. There are eight chapters, the first two covering background studies and the romantic movement, the next five being devoted to major figures, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron, Shelley and Keats, while a concluding chapter deals with 'secondary and minor' poets, twelve in all, among whom are Hood, Leigh Hunt, Peacock, Scott and Southey. This section, which has seen rather less bibliographic activity in the past, will be especially useful, and the compiler, as editor of Garland's facsimile-reprint series 'Romantic Context: Significant Minor Poetry, 1789-1830' could hardly be better qualified. Blake and Crabbe are excluded from this guide on chronological grounds, but work by the elder romantics before 1800 is included, as are their prose works. Annotations are frequent but discrete, highly effective in the main and only rarely so general as to verge on the superfluous, as in the note to G Wilson Knight's *Neglected Powers*: 'A collection of recent lectures and essays on various topics'. Symbols are used to highlight works basic to all, or for the advanced student, or of a popular or introductory nature, underlining the active way in which this guide retails the material selected. Coverage seems effective up to about 1976; inevitably a work like this is somewhat out-of-date on publication. UK users should be warned that where a work by an American author appeared simultaneously here and in the US, the American imprint is preferred, though the British imprint is used for a British author. There are three indexes, by author, title, and subject. The title listing will be a boon to the librarian on a day of less than total recall!

The two opening chapters on 'General and Background Studies' and 'The Romantic Movement' are well set out and divide into lettered sub-sections, ranging from basic tools every student must know about, to items of special contributory interest, whether historical or critical. Reiman resourcefully includes a section on 'British Commercial Directories and Histories', which is just the sort of prompting a good bibliography should be capable of. There is a useful section covering printing, publishing and reviewing. Works dealing with an individual poet's relations with his publisher go here rather than in the poet's own section, but they can be traced through the subject index. Coverage of the sublime and picturesque is disappointing: I would have liked to see mentioned the important works by Hussey, Monk and Hipple in this field. The section on painting is also rather barer than I could have hoped. Only one study, and that no more recent than 1950, is given for Constable, though K Kroeber's impressive *Romantic Landscape*

Vision (1975) can be found in the Wordsworth chapter. There is a helpful list of specialist romantic journals in Chapter Two (including this *Bulletin*), and good coverage of important background theoretical and critical studies. Inevitably, annotations here tend to the conservative, but at least the student likely to be fatally disorientated by Harold Bloom and the like cannot say he was not forewarned! I was sorry M Krieger's important *Theory of Criticism* (1976) was not included, though his earlier works are. One final cavil for this section: A O Lovejoy's still important article 'On the Discrimination of Romanticisms' (1924) is mentioned, together with its original source, in a note to R Wellek's 'The Concept of "Romanticism" in Literary History', but is not indexed here. It can, in theory, be traced to its reprinting in M H Abrams' *The English Romantic Poets* but here the annotation does not identify it by title.

The five chapters devoted to the major poets are the heart of this work, but there isn't space to review each in detail, unfortunately. They are all thorough and reliable, divided into sections on concordances and bibliographies, studies of reputation and influence, individual and collective editions, and biographies and criticisms. There is good coverage both of monographs and collections of essays, but periodical articles are cited only very selectively, though many reappear in reprinted form. There are judicious annotations to older works indicating which sections still deserve attention, though comment on more recent work is inevitably more generalised. It is perhaps not surprising, given Reiman's close connection with the field, that the Shelley annotations should be especially helpful and acute. Is it a coincidence, though, that the only example of Scholar Press's excellent facsimiles of original editions to be mentioned is *Epipsychidion*? I would have liked to see them in the Keats and Wordsworth sections also, though the Shelley volume does contain in addition manuscript draft material. Coverage of such a wide and complex field is bound to reveal some unevenness of treatment. If this reviewer may indulge his own bias by turning to the Wordsworth section, I regret the absence of M Wildi's 'Wordsworth and the Simplon Pass', unrivalled for helpfully displaying the topographic structure of the scene in *Prelude*. VI. G A Hartman's *Wordsworth's Poetry, 1787-1814* should have been cited in its Fourth Printing, since this includes an important extra essay 'Retrospect, 1971'. Alas, Reiman treads on dangerous ground in claiming the de Selincourt/Darbishire *Poetical Works* is still available. One would have thought such a description would remain current for a long while, and can only hope some enterprising reprint firm will negotiate the rights. One minor slip: the author of *Wordsworth's Anti-Climax* is given as William rather than Willard L Sperry.

Obviously, the Lamb student will not turn to this bibliography as a primary resource. Its value will lie in its treatment of his close associates, both major and minor. Be it noted, though, that Lamb receives fourteen direct references in the subject index. More generally, this guide is likely to earn a place for itself, since it is handy for the librarian and approachable for the relatively inexperienced student. Advanced students will still need MLA's *The English Romantic Poets* (ed. F Jordan, 1972) whose discursive style allows of much more detailed analytical coverage, and is better for articles and foreign language items. This can be supplemented by the annual listings of ELN. It is easy enough to pick on the occasional regrettable omission from Dr Reiman's guide, but one can only end by thanking him for pointing out much more that one did not know before, and for displaying so clearly the bibliographic structure of the subject.

John Clare: *The Midsummer Cushion*. Edited by Anne Tibble; Associate Editor, R K R Thornton. Illustrations by Birtley Aris. *Mid Northumberland Arts Group in association with Carcanet Press*. £8.

A new book of poems by John Clare 115 years after his death is an event. Well, not quite all new: of the 361 poems in the collection we are told that almost a third are published for the first time. It is a pity that the editors have not indicated which these are, for though lovers of Clare will recognise many old friends, not all readers have immediate access to all Clare's printed work, and it would have been interesting to know which of these poems have never appeared before.

The title of the book is Clare's own, thus explained:

It is a very old custom among villagers in summer time to stick a piece of greensward full of field flowers & place it as an ornament in their cottages which ornaments are called Midsummer Cushions.

He goes on to explain that "as these trifles are field flowers of humble pretensions & of various hues" he thought the custom gave the opportunity for a title "not inapplicable to the contents of the Volume."

Clare had rocketed to fame in 1820 with the publication of his first book, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, published by Taylor and Hessey, but the book had proved disappointing financially. The second book, *The Village Minstrel and Other Poems* (1821), did not do well, and *The Shepherd's Calendar, with Village Stories and Other Poems* (1827), did rather worse. Taylor, preoccupied with monetary and other worries, was unwilling to take on further works of Clare, who had been hoping to do better with his next projected work, *The Midsummer Cushion*, a compilation of poems written over several years, some already published in periodicals. Clare therefore determined to produce it himself, by subscription, and edited by himself without the arguments with his publisher over diction, vocabulary and content which had bedevilled his earlier works. Mischievous reports in newspapers concerning Clare's financial affairs and relations with his publishers caused further withdrawal by the offended Taylor, and Clare's attempt at independence came to nothing. However, by the middle of 1833 friendly relations had been re-established with Taylor, who agreed to interest himself in the book at proof stage.

Clare in the meanwhile had made a beautiful fair copy of his poems in a finely bound manuscript book, and arrangements for publication were made by his friends the Emmersons with How, who was connected with the publisher Whitaker, and bought the copyright for £40. But what was eventually published in 1835 under the title of *The Rural Muse* was only a selection from the manuscript, chosen by Mrs Emmerson, and despite some sympathetic reviews the book was not a success.

In the years preceding publication Clare had suffered from endless financial and other difficulties, not least that of finding himself a displaced person. The community of farm labourers and other village dwellers among which he had grown up had little to offer him in the way of intellectual companionship, and he had little in common with his neighbours. For all he had himself had little formal education, he was widely read in some respects and had had the opportunity to meet and make friends with a number of literary and artistic contemporaries. He could not earn a living by his pen, yet could not deny his inner self as a poet and become simply a farm worker. The allowances made by his aristocratic patrons kept him and his large

family barely at subsistence level. In any case, the situation had changed since his childhood by reason of the enclosures which had taken place in his part of Northamptonshire. The old way of life had largely gone, and work was hard to find. In 1832 he moved from Helpston to Northborough, three miles away, to a cottage built for him by the landlord, Lord Milton, where he was to set up as a cottage farmer and hoped to achieve independence at last. Although in some moods he seemed to think that the new project would be the turning over of a new leaf that would bring him a sunny prospect, and that he would not miss his old associations unduly, in the event the new venture did not prosper, and the wrench of parting from his childhood haunts was deeply felt. He had been often ill and depressed, and had already suffered from delusions, and within two years of the publication of *The Rural Muse* had sunk into the madness from which he was never to recover.

To non-specialist readers (with no easy access to out-of-print publications) Clare is known mainly through various collections and selections, but not all editors indicate the actual source of each poem offered. We must be grateful to Mrs Tibble and Mr Thornton for presenting us now with a printed version of this complete Clare manuscript, even though some of the poems have appeared before. The object of the editors has been to present Clare as precisely as possible as he wrote, with the minimum of editorial interventions. It has become recent editorial practice with Clare to preserve not only his not always conventional grammar and syntax and his original dialect vocabulary (often altered by his early editors) but also his bad spelling and lack of punctuation. In his early days as a published poet Clare licensed his publishers to correct bad spelling (I take it this extends to the insertion of appropriate apostrophes) but not to alter *words*. This seems to me fair, and considering that the aim of present editors and critics is to rid Clare of the "peasant" associations which dogged the publicity given to him in his early days in favour of treating him as a "poet", it seems to me inconsistent to emphasise the spelling errors. He said himself, when this book was in view, "all I wish now is to stand on my own bottom as a poet without any apology as to want of education or anything else & I say it not in the feeling of either ambition or vanity but in the spirit of common sense."* Many people are poor spellers, but one does not insist on printing their mistakes; there are grounds, it seems to me, for differentiating between, say, the letters and other private writings of an author, which present the man in his habit as he lived, and those compositions intended for publication. It is true that the practised reader of Clare perhaps finds no great difficulty in assimilating his idiosyncratic spellings, but this policy could do him a disservice with new readers, which would be a pity. In the present book, the occasional stop or comma, even in brackets, would prevent one's having to read some lines more than once to get the right sense.

The poems in *The Midsummer Cushion* are divided into groups according to Clare's own arrangement, preceded by a longish poem invoking the blessing of the Rural Muse on "these late offerings", and 'The Pleasures of Spring', a long and derivative poem full of Clare's characteristic descriptions of flowers, plants, birds and animals, and the reactions to them of Shepherd Boys, Milkmaids and other rural inhabitants. Like the "boy", it "neer mends

*Unsent letter to Eliza L. Emerson, Nov. 13 1832. *The Letters of John Clare*. Edited by J. W. and Anne Tibble. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951.

its pace but soodles on", though agreeably enough. A short section of *Tales* includes 'Valentine's Eve', based on a story, suggested to Clare by Taylor, of a young man disguised as a harvester who wooed a farmer's daughter (one is reminded of the "Cottage Countess" story told of Burleigh - had Clare heard of this?) and 'The Adventures of a Grasshopper', an original version of the fable written for his children. There follows a long miscellaneous collection of 'Poems', which includes jolly narratives of rustic events, like 'Helpstone Statute, or the Recruiting Party', 'St Martins Eve', character sketches like 'The Village Doctress', 'The Cottager', or 'The Old Shepherd', and a large number of descriptive and reflective poems. This is followed by 'Ballads and Songs', and a final section of 219 sonnets.

This rich collection includes some of Clare's best known and finest work, exhibiting increasing technical mastery of his chosen verse forms, especially in the sonnets, with their many varied rhyme schemes, which perfectly suit his "nature" themes. We have a version of 'Summer Images' and 'Autumn', those two odes written under the influence of Collins, and the laments for the changes brought by enclosure. 'Remembrances' is included, with its litany of loved places and landmarks now despoiled:

By Langley bush I roam but the bush hath left its hill
 On cowper green I stray tis a desert strange & chill
 & spreading lea close oak ere decay had penned its will
 To the axe of the spoiler & self interest fell a prey
 & crossbery way & old round oaks narrow land
 With its hollow trees like pulpits I shall never see again
 Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain
 It levelled every bush & tree and levelled every hill
 & hung the moles for traitors - though the brook is running still
 It runs a naked brook cold & chill

and 'The Flitting', written at Northborough, with its yearning for his old home:

Alone & in a stranger scene
 Far far from spots my heart esteems
 The closen with their ancient green
 Heaths woods & pastures sunny streams
 The awthorns here were hung with may
 But still they seem in deader green
 The sun een seems to loose its way
 Nor knows the quarter it is in

We are reminded here of his childish search across Emmonsales Heath for the world's end at the horizon when he got out of his knowledge and "the very sun seemed to be a new one & shining in a different quarter of the sky".*

'Emmonsales Heath' has miraculously survived unharmed:

Grasses that never knew a scythe
 Waves all the summer long
 & wild weed blossoms waken blythe
 That ploughshares never wrong

*From *The Autobiography - The Prose of John Clare*. Edited by J W and Anne Tibble. Routledge & Kegan Paul 1951.

and Clare can still find comfort 'On Visiting a Favourite Place':

There is a breath - indeed there is
Of eden left - I feel it now
Of something more than earthly bliss
That falls & cheers my sullen brow

but he has much to grieve over in the waning of poesy in 'Decay - a Ballad':

The sun those mornings used to find
When clouds were other-country-mountains
& heaven looked upon the mind
with groves & rocks & mottled fountains
These heavens are gone - the mountains grey
Turned mist - the sun a homeless ranger
Pursuing on a naked way
Unnoticed like a very stranger
O poesy is on its wane
Nor love nor joy is mine again

Yet in another mood he can celebrate, in 'Pastoral Poesy', the power of poesy:

True poesy is not in words
But images that thoughts express
By which the simplest hearts are stirred
To elevated happiness

as also the autobiographical 'The Progress of Ryhme', with its reference to "Mary", to whom several of these poems allude

I saw thy beauty grow with days
& tried song-pictures in thy praise
.....

With hopes that I should one day be
Beloved Mary een by thee
But I mistook in early day
The world - & so our hopes decay
Yet that same cheer in after toils
Was poesy - & still she smiles
As sweet as blossoms to the tree
& hope love joy are poesy

In this book there is a great deal of that love for and joy in nature which made Clare such a splendidly observant naturalist, and inspired him with some of his most telling touches. In the above poem there is a quite remarkable representation of the nightingale's song:

The more I listened & the more
Each note seemed sweeter than before
& aye so different was the strain
She'd scarce repeat the note again
- "Chew-chew chew-chew" & higher still
"Cheer-cheer cheer-cheer" more loud and shrill
"Cheer-up cheer-up cheer-up" - & dropt
Low "Tweet tweet jug jug jug" and stopt
One moment just to drink the sound
Her music made & then a round
Of stranger witching notes was heard

As if it was a stranger bird
 "Wew-wew wew-wew-chur-chur chur-chur"
 "Woo-it woo-it" - could this be her
 "Tee-rew tee-rew tee-rew tee-rew"
 "Chew-rit chew-rit" - and ever new
 "Will-will will-will grig-grig grig-grig"
 The boy stopt sudden on the brig
 To hear the "tweet tweet tweet" so shrill
 The "jug jug jug" & all was still
 A minute - when a wilder strain
 Made boys & woods to pause again

There are several poems about birds' nests - the 'Pewits Nest' for instance:

Here did I roam while veering overhead
 The Pewet whirred in many whewing rings
 & "chewsit" screamed & clapped her flapping wings
 To hunt her nest my rambling steps was led
 Chance found four eggs of dingy dirty green
 Deep blotched with plashy spots of jockolate stain
 Their small ends inward turned as ever found
 As though some curious hand had laid them round
 Yet lying on the ground with nought at all
 of soft grass withered twitch & bleached weed
 To keep them from the rain storms frequent fall
 & here she broods on her unsavory bed
 When bye & bye with little care & heed
 Her young with each a shell upon its head
 Run after their wild parents restless cry
 & from their own fears tinea shadows run
 Neath clods & stones to cringe & snugly lie
 Hid from all sight but the all seeing sun
 Till never seeming danger seemeth bye

(we've long known about that shell from Shakespeare)
 or 'The Yellowhammers Nest':

- Aye here it is stuck close beside the bank
 Beneath the bunch of grass that spindles rank
 Its husk seeds tall & high - tis rudely planned
 Of bleached stubbles & the withered fare
 That last years harvest left upon the land
 Lined thinly with the horses sable hair
 - Five eggs pen-scribbled over lilac shells
 Resembling writing scrawls which fancy reads
 As natures poesy & pastoral spells
 They are the yellowhammers & she dwells
 A poet-like - where brooks & flowery weeds
 As sweet as Castaly to fancy seems

and the more unusual 'Nightingales' Nest':

There have I hunted like a very boy
 Creeping on hands & knees through matted thorns
 To find her nest & see her feed her young

Among the many birds is the 'Sand Martin':

Thou hermit haunter of the lonely glen

.....

Drilling small holes along the quarrys side
More like the haunts of vermin than a bird...

In contrast to this lonely creature "flirting about the unfrequented sky"
is 'The Happy Bird':

The happy whitethroat on the sweeing bough

.....

Singeth right joyously & now reclined
Croucheth and clingeth to her moving seat
To keep her hold -

Full of charm are the insect portraits:

Thou tiney loiterer on the barleys beard
& happy unit of a numerous herd
Of playfellows the laughing summer brings
Mocking the sunshine in their glittering wings
How merrily they creep & run & flye

And the 'Wild Bees':

The white nosed bee that bores its little hole
In mortared walls & pipes its symphonies
& never absent couzin black as cole
That indian like bepaints its little thighs
With white and red bedight for holiday
Right earlily a morn do pipe & play
& with their legs stroke slumber from their eyes...

or "The butterflye in wings of brown" that appears with the 'Sabbath Bells'.

Although the furze blazes golden through many of Clare's poems he seems
less concerned with individual flowers, which perhaps is why one remembers
the thistles that dominate 'The Fear of Flowers': and

..... wear their heavy knobs of bloom
Proud as the war horse wears its haughty plume
& by the road side dangers self defies
On commons where pined sheep & oxen lie
In ruddy pomp & ever thronging mood
It stands & spreads like danger in a wood
& in the village street where meanest weeds
Can t stand untouched to fill their husks with seed
The haughty thistle oer all danger towers
In every place the very whasp of flowers

Happy as Clare is with these present pleasures he also looks back
nostalgically to the joys of the past, as in 'Childhood' yet is even here
ever conscios of the changes time can bring:

The past it is a majic word
Too beautiful to last
It looks back like a lovely face
Who can forget the past...

When we look back on what we were
& feel what we are now
A fading leaf is not so drear
Upon a broken bough...

Like withered wreaths in banquet halls
 When all the rout is past
 Like sunshine that on ruins falls
 Our pleasures are at last
 The joy is fled the love is cold
 & beautys splendour too
 Our first believings all are old
 & faith itself untrue

But against this he can set 'The Eternity of Nature'

Leaves from eternity are simple things
 To the worlds gaze whereto a spirit clings
 Sublime and lasting - trampled underfoot
 The daisy lives & strikes its little root
 Into the lap of time - centurys may come
 & pass away into the silent tomb
 & still the child hid in the womb of time
 Shall smile & pluck them when this simple ryhme
 Shall be forgotten like a churchyard stone
 Or lingering lie unnoticed & alone...

Among nearly 400 poems not every one shows Clare at the top of his form, but there is so much in this book of the essential Clare, that if one could have only one of the now numerous anthologies of his poems, *The Midsummer Cushion* would be the one to choose. We are much indebted to the editors and publishers for giving it to us.

The book is decorated with a number of delicately drawn black and white illustrations by Birtley Aris which reflect its main natural subjects, but which appear to have been inserted at random where there is room rather than in any proximity to any specific subject. Nevertheless the general effect is agreeable.

Stella Pigrome

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Society was held on 3 May 1980, at the Mary Ward Centre.

The Minutes were read and signed and the Chairman gave his report on the past year. The removal of the Society's Library, on loan, to the Guildhall Library had been completed, where it will be catalogued and made ready for use. The programme of meetings over the year had been most successful and well attended. There was some discussion of the change of venue for the Annual Luncheon and plans for the next would be carefully considered nearer the time. The Hon. Secretary was thanked for all her work of organisation.

The Annual Accounts were approved and thanks given to the Hon. Treasurer. Subscriptions will remain the same for 1981 but may have to be raised in 1982. The Society's gratitude was expressed to those who had given donations to ease the burden of inflation.

The Membership Secretary gave her report, including details of the variety of membership and its proportions. Means of publicising meetings were discussed and appreciation was shown for the Hon. Membership Secretary's indefatigable efforts.

The Editor reported on the Bulletin and asked for comments and suggestions. Copy for the next Bulletin needs to reach the Editor not later than one month after receipt of the current one. Particular tribute was paid to the quiet, efficient work of Miss Ezard behind the scenes in sending out the Bulletins to members. Without her self-effacing dedication the Bulletin might get printed but no one would receive it!

As reported at the Birthday Luncheon, Professor Ian Jack has retired as President of the Society after ten years. Our warm thanks and good wishes go with him on his forthcoming visit to America. The Chairman had great pleasure in announcing that Dr John Stevens of Magdalene College, Cambridge, has been invited to become our new President and has accepted. Members will remember that Dr Stevens gave the Crowsley Memorial Lecture in 1977. He is now the Professor of Medieval and Renaissance English in the University of Cambridge and he is an Old Blue. The meeting was very happy to welcome him.

We heard with regret that Mr Sandry was not standing again as Vice-Chairman - see note from Miss Reeves below - but were glad to endorse the election of Mr Frank Ledwith to that position.

We acknowledge with gratitude the never-failing presence at meetings of Miss Gadbury in her office as registrar.

After some consideration of possible future meetings and activities of the Society, the meeting broke up to the pleasant sound of tinkling tea-cups!

FROM MISS REEVES

At the Annual General Meeting of the Society on Saturday, May 3rd, the resignation of the Vice-Chairman was announced. Mr Frank Sandry, a Founder Member, has played an important part in the affairs of the Charles Lamb Society. In 1935 he was a member of the Council and in 1937 he became the Society's Librarian at Edmonton Library until he retired in 1956. In 1964 he became Vice-Chairman and continued in that post until 1980.

At nearly 88 years of age he is fit and able to enjoy life, but finds travelling tiring. We are most grateful for his wise counselling over the years, for many witty speeches at the Luncheons, and his care of the Library during his years of office.

We wish him good health and happiness.

Another senior member of the Society is to be congratulated for Mr Frank Swinnerton is celebrating his 96th birthday this summer. In his Introduction to a new edition of *Tokefield Papers, Old & New*, written when he was 65, he says of himself, "I have had a happy and well-occupied life". His achievements in the literary world prove this to be true. What would he write in his 96th year? Shall we ever know?

We remember with gratitude that in 1964 he nobly took over, at very short notice, the place of Sir Albert Richardson as Guest of Honour, and in 1944 he gave the Society a lecture on William Macdonald, editor of Lamb's works published by Dent.

A very happy birthday to you, Mr Swinnerton, and thank you for all you have done for us.

NOTES FROM MEMBERS

Mr Kenneth Jones writes to report a reference to Charles Lamb in a past *Journal of the Royal Horticultural Society*, as follows.

E A. Bowles (1865-1954): The Man and his Garden.

In 1918, his father, Henry C.B. Bowles died, leaving him the contents of Myddelton House, Enfield... Bowles mostly entertained his guests in the Library, where long ago, according to tradition, Henry Carrington Bowles used to entertain Charles Lamb.

Mr Jones wonders whether there is any supporting evidence for this in the literature.

Mr D E Wickham draws our attention to a pamphlet first published in 1971. He says

The Toucan Press, Mount Durand, St Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands, have issued a small booklet entitled 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Mary Lamb'.

It contains a reproduction of what is perhaps rather fancifully claimed to be a newly-discovered oil painting of Mary Lamb, with details supporting the identification; and two STC poems from 'The Weekly Entertainer' said to pre-date all other 'first publications' and to contain variant readings.

The booklet is perhaps expensive at £1.10 (post free) from the Press - it only contains 16 pages - but no Lamb or Coleridge collection is complete without it.

Some members will already know this booklet but some may not.

THE CROWSLEY MEMORIAL LECTURE

For your diaries: The Crowsley Memorial Lecture will take place this year on Saturday, 4 October.

BOOK MARKET

The Editor would like to express thanks to Miss Kathleen Coburn and Mr Basil Savage that, due to their kind response to the advertisement in the last Bulletin, she is now the proud possessor of the volumes of Coleridge Notebooks II that have been sought for so long.

WANTED

Mr D E Wickham, 116 Parsonage Manorway, Belvedere, Kent (Daytime Tel: 01-623 7041 - at most CLS Meetings) is looking for the following.

Charles Lamb's Essay entitled *The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple*, in the edition with Annotations by Sir F D Mackinnon: Clarendon Press, 1927.

Samuel McKechnie: Charles Lamb at East India House

Geoffrey Keynes: Edward Gibbon's Library: 1940

Francis Wormald and C E Wright: *The English Library before 1700*: 1958.