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'THE GREAT UN-HANGED': Charles Lamb through the eyes of his Scottish contemporaries

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The phrase 'The Great Un-hanged' is a typical example of Charles Lamb's fondness for word-play. It comes from a paragraph of miscellaneous news and comment in a letter to Bryan Walter Proctor ('Barry Cornwall') written on 22nd January 1829. Lamb is referring to the sensation caused by the revelations concerning the Burke and Hare murders in Edinburgh and also having fun with Sir Walter Scott's popular nickname 'The Great Unknown':

'An't you glad about Burke's case? We may set off the Scotch murders against the Scotch novels - Hare, the Great Un-hanged.'

After what he had said about the Scots in the *London Magazine* of August 1821 and reissued as the essay 'Imperfect Sympathies' in *The Essays of Elia* nearly eighteen months later, Charles Lamb might well have felt that, like Hare, he had been fortunate. If not in danger of the gallows, he had put himself in the way of a sufficiently disagreeable fate: a public pillorying in the kind of savage critique in the pages of a Scottish review which his friends Wordsworth, Coleridge, Hazlitt and Leigh Hunt all experienced at one time or another. For Lamb opens his discussion of the Scottish character in a fashion forthright enough to tempt a burst of critical fire:

'I have been trying all my life to like Scotchmen, and am obliged to desist from the experiment in despair. They cannot like me - and in truth, I never knew one of that nation who attempted to do it.'

Exactly three years after these words were first published a letter was written which seems to bear out Lamb's assertion with painful clarity. The writer had been in London, and had met several literary figures. Addressing a fellow Scot, it gives him evident pleasure to pass on his uniformly unfavourable impressions. In particular:

'Charles Lamb is a ricketty creature in body and mind, sprawls about or walks as if his body consisted of four ill-conditioned flails, and talks as if he were quarter drunk with ale and half with laudanum.'

It should, in fairness, be remarked that by comparison with other things in the same letter this is relatively mild criticism. The dismissal of Lamb's friend Coleridge is briefer, but more damning by far:

'Coleridge is a steam-engine of a hundred horse power - with the boiler burst.'

The writer was, of course, the twenty eight year old Thomas Carlyle, who had taken tea at Lamb's on 5th July 1824 along with Henry Crabb Robinson and Edward Irving. Carlyle's later derogatory remarks on Lamb's personality, appearance and writings are better known (they met more than once in August 1831 and Carlyle visited Lamb at Enfield on 2nd November 1831: these later meetings only seem to have deepened Carlyle's initial prejudices).

Temperamentally they were a thousand miles apart, and though Carlyle could distinguish some of the characteristics of Lamb's wit he was unable to appreciate it at all. He describes Lamb's humour as 'neither more nor less than a fibre of genius shining thro' positive delirium and cracklebrainedness'... 'His speech wriggles hither and thither with an incessant painful fluctuation; not an opinion in it or a fact or even a phrase that you can thank him for'... 'Wearisome, inexpressibly wearisome to me is that sort of clatter: it is not walking (to the end of time these persons indeed have no WHITHER), it is not bounding and frisking in graceful, natural joy: it is dancing - a St. Vitus dance. Heigho!'²

These passages scarcely require any commentary. Carlyle shows some understanding of Lamb's style, but is totally antipathetic to his lack of 'WHITHER' (that ultra-Carlylean concept) and he obviously detests Lamb as a person. Lamb's claim that 'they cannot like me' seems all too true in this case.

But as he so often was, and as he so often chose to be, Carlyle was the odd man out here. When Lamb wrote 'Imperfect Sympathies' in the middle of 1821 he had recently gained some vigorous critical supporters north of the Border. And in any case he was really dealing with general intellectual and artistic differences between 'nations and classes of men' and using a degree of artistic licence and pretended personal involvement to heighten the effect of his argument. In his own private life he might be accused of fibbing if one failed to see the artistic tactic he was employing, for in March 1821 the most distinguished Scot of Lamb's generation had met him in the studio of Benjamin Robert Haydon and they had taken to each other without having to 'attempt to do it' at all. Walter Scott and Charles Lamb probably only met once and they exchanged only one or two letters, but their relationship, though slight, was cordial. Scott invited Lamb to visit Abbotsford, and Lamb, in spite of his declared antipathy to modern works of fiction, seems to have enjoyed dipping into the successive novels in the Waverley series as they appeared on his sister Mary's table. Charles Lamb and Sir Walter had, in any case, literary friends in common among the Lake Poets, with Wordsworth as the most important link of all: and it is in the workings of the group of younger writers and critics who looked up to Wordsworth and Scott as the leaders of a new literary movement that the growth of serious interest in Lamb's writings among the Scots is to be found.

In the opening years of the nineteenth century the city of Edinburgh, which had long been in the forefront of philosophical and economic writing, medical research and religious and legal studies on account of its flourishing university, also became a leading publishing centre. Its most enterprising (and ultimately reckless) publisher was Archibald Constable: a man best known now as Sir Walter Scott's publisher, but celebrated first of all as the publisher of a new kind of critical journal, closely mirroring the Whig, utilitarian and skeptical attitudes of Francis Jeffrey (the original editor) and most of the team he gathered around himself, the *Edinburgh Review*. This great quarterly reflected the attitudes of much of Scottish intellectual life at that time, with its rootedness in the tradition of David Hume, Reid and Dugald Stewart. Scottish empiricism (like the *Edinburgh Review* itself) had certain strengths, and the emphasis which it placed on accurate knowledge and clear thinking was all to the good. But it brushed aside tradition, the historical sense, and any predilection towards the emerging Romantic interest in the workings of the subconscious

mind and the imagination. It set too exclusive a value upon the very real achievements of the Scottish Enlightenment and undervalued other kinds of achievement, such as those of antiquity and pre-eighteenth century English civilisation.

Inevitably the dogmatic Whiggery of Jeffrey and his fellow reviewers produced a reaction. British Tories (including Scott) lost patience with the *Edinburgh's* politics and turned to the other great publisher of the day, John Murray, and the other great publishing centre, London, to establish the rival *Quarterly Review* in 1809. And in Scotland a reaction of a deeper kind, cultural, philosophical and artistic also began to develop among a younger generation than Jeffrey and his friends.

It may be helpful at this point to look at two short quotations from around the year 1820:

'If you venture only to tread upon the hem of that garment of self-sufficiency in which the true Scotchman wraps himself, he is sure to turn round upon you as if you had aimed a dagger at his vitals.'

'You cannot cry *halves* to anything that he finds. He does not find but bring. You never witness his first apprehension of a thing. His understanding is always at its meridian-- You never see the first dawn, the early streaks. He has no falterings of self-suspicion.'

The writer of the first paragraph above can elucidate this last point:

'You have no chance of making your adversary yield. If he have not justice on his side, he is at least tenacious of his purpose, and it would be a waste of trouble to attempt shaking his opinions either of you or of himself.'

The tone of the two critics quoted above is rather different. The first and final paragraphs are couched in metaphors of conflict; the middle one suggests a meridian splendour of self-sufficiency. But complacent arrogance is what both writers are concerned with, together with the impossibility of getting the Scottish mind, trained up in the school of Hume and the *Edinburgh Review*, to open itself to fresh evidence and new ways of apprehending it.

The first and last paragraphs quoted above are from John Gibson Lockhart's *Peter's Letters to his Kinsfolk*, published in 1819. The middle paragraph is from Lamb's essay 'Imperfect Sympathies' of two years later.

'Imperfect Sympathies' is surely about the Scottish mind as conditioned by the Scottish no-nonsense, pragmatic tradition which found its characteristic voice in the *Edinburgh Review* of the period. Such a conditioning produces a man who 'never hints or suggests anything, but unloads his stock of ideas in perfect order and completeness'. The essay goes on to make fun of Scottish literal mindedness and the lack of wit and imagination that went with it. Lamb claims to doubt whether such minds are 'not rather put together upon principles of clock-work.'

It would be wrong to underestimate the *Edinburgh Review* and the Edinburgh mind, or to exaggerate the prominence of 'clock-work' in Francis Jeffrey's mentality, but Lamb was right to imply that Jeffrey's kind of intelligence had no time for him. One of Jeffrey's early reviewers made free of *John Woodvil* in the second volume of the *Edinburgh Review*, in April 1803, joking about its artistic crudity and ridiculing its occasional stylistic incongruities in the spirit and style of Fielding's *Tom Thumb*

notes. Under Jeffrey's editorship the *Edinburgh* then ignored Lamb's other publications. It was not until 1837, three years after Lamb's death, that it made amends by reviewing T N Talfourd's first volumes. Indeed it rather reverted to a Jeffreyan style four years later when Macaulay fastened on a single essay, 'On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century' and demolished its claim that Restoration Comedy operates in a kind of charming moral vacuum in true no-nonsense *Edinburgh* fashion.

John Gibson Lockhart and his fellow writers for *Blackwood's Magazine*, that recklessly polemical but often brilliant journal which electrified Edinburgh month by month from October 1817 onwards, were engaged in a war against the *Edinburgh Review* from the very beginning. Their motives were partly political (inevitably so at the period of Peterloo); Tories against Whigs; young writers on the make against a complacent literary-critical establishment. But *Blackwood's* also engaged in a vigorous attempt to alter the balance of forces within Scottish culture and to redress the balance between rationalism and the power of the imagination in contemporary criticism generally.

For all their polemical excesses the *Blackwood's* group were genuine in their belief that a new imaginative power, which we now call Romanticism, was at work and in their sense that for years the authority and popularity of the *Edinburgh Review* had been used to distort, deny or suppress altogether public awareness of its importance. Lockhart and John Wilson, the leading spirits of the new magazine, were committed believers in the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott and various lesser writers connected by beliefs and personal friendships with the poets of the Lake School. Both Wilson and Lockhart knew about Lamb's writings long before they began writing for *Blackwood's*. Wilson spent much time at his summer cottage at Elleray, by Lake Windermere, was a friend of Wordsworth and (perhaps more significant as a source of knowledge of Charles and Mary Lamb's domestic circumstances) also a friend of Thomas de Quincey.

Lockhart had first shown interest in Lamb when he wrote to his Oxford friend J H Christie on 25th November 1814:

'You used to be skilled in the Lakish fellows, if I remember. Can you tell me anything of Lambe (sic)? I never read his Specimens of the Old Tragedians till the other day, and have been, I need not say, highly delighted with them.'³

Once *Blackwood's Magazine* was under way, Lockhart and Wilson soon turned their attention to Lamb's writings, treating him as part of the new force in imaginative literature which was making itself felt everywhere, but whose existence was being ignored, or traduced, by writers who should have acted more responsibly in their position as *Edinburgh Reviewers*:

'The Edinburgh Reviewers have not checked or impeded only the influence of particular authors among their countrymen; they have entirely prevented them from ever coming beyond the Tweed. They have willed them to be unknown, absolutely and literally unknown, and so they are at this moment. I do not on my conscience believe, that there is one Whig in Edinburgh to whom the name of my friend *Charles Lamb* would convey any distinct or definite idea. His John Woodville was ridiculed in the *Edinburgh Review*, and the effect of this paltry ridicule has been not only to prevent the Scotch from reading John Woodville, (a tragedy which, although every way worthy of Lamb's exquisite genius, wants very many of the popular charms in which some of his other pieces are rich to

overflowing)- but almost to remembering that such a person as Charles Lamb exists, at least to prevent them most effectually from ever having recourse for delight and instruction to volumes, wherein as much delight and instruction may be found, as in any of similar size, which an English library possesses.'⁴

Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk, published in July 1819, is a book about contemporary Scottish society and the cultural state of the Scottish nation. It also tries to explain why Lockhart thought *Blackwood's Magazine* was necessary, and what (despite mistakes and misjudgements) its cultural policy had been. In August 1818 John Wilson had provided the magazine with a careful and discriminating review of Lamb's *Works* (the 'volumes' praised by Lockhart in the passage just quoted) which contrasts strongly with the impulsive, erratic, violently pro or contra assessments of contemporary writers with which he regularly spiced the pages of *Blackwood's* at that time.

Wilson's review of *The Works of Charles Lamb* was the first comprehensive appraisal of Lamb's writings to appear in a Scottish periodical. It still repays searching out, for it shows Wilson's very considerable sensitivity as a critic at its most sustained, with very few of his characteristic failures of emotional control. Wilson classes Lamb among the writers of 'originality' whose language is pithy, constantly illuminating and constantly capable of surprising and delighting us with 'the glimpses and flashes which he flings over a subject.' He defines Lamb's characteristics very adequately:

'His mind has not a very wide range; but everything it sees rises up before it in vivid beauty... There is in him a rare union of originality of mind with delicacy of feeling and tenderness of heart.'⁵

As a poet, Wilson finds Lamb timid ('He seems to want ambition') yet though neither an original nor a powerful versifier he always shows 'fineness of perception, delicacy of fancy, and pure warmth of heart.' In a sentence which was to influence the next generation of Scottish critics of Lamb considerably Wilson adds:

'We know that no man is more beloved by his friends than Charles Lamb; and it is impossible to read a page of his poetry without feeling that he deserves all their love.'

As developed by later writers the personal approach to Lamb's writing was to do much damage, burying appraisal beneath sentimental, ultimately patronizing gush, but though Wilson planted the seed he should not be blamed too harshly for what grew from it: his remark on Lamb's loveableness is his first and last venture into biography and he moves on briskly (after quoting some of Lamb's poetry) to consider *John Woodvil* which (like Lockhart) he valued for its beauty of language and sentiments.

Lamb's humour was not (perhaps surprisingly) very much to either Lockhart's or Wilson's taste. Writing here, pre-*Elia*, Wilson finds that Lamb's occasional essays for *The Reflector* and other periodicals rather force his humorous vein:

'When he gets hold of an odd and outrageously absurd whim or fancy, he is beside himself, and keeps in an eternal dalliance with it till it is absolutely pawed to pieces.'

Writing in *Blackwood's* after *Elia's* publication Lockhart also surprises the modern reader by declaring it to be 'an excellent thing assuredly' but not

equal to *John Woodvil* by any means. Whimsical humour, as Lamb discerned, was not really the thing for even advanced Scottish tastes in the early 1820s.

But when Wilson came to treat the serious critical essays he was back on solid ground, and he responded with notable discrimination and generosity of spirit. There are warm appraisals of Lamb's writing on Shakespearean tragedy, on Hogarth and the *Specimens* (from which an earlier writer in *Blackwood's* - possibly Wilson himself - had drawn material during 1817-18 for a series of 'Analytical Essays on the Old English Drama'). Lamb's famous assertion that Shakespeare's tragedies can only be fully appreciated in reading leads Wilson into a long, serious and intelligent justification of the power of dramatic poetry to affect an audience during a performance, and from this he goes on to an equally critical but appreciative scrutiny of Lamb's essay on Hogarth, with which the long and carefully-written review concludes.

The distance between the *Edinburgh's* cavalier dismissal of *John Woodvil* in 1803 and Wilson's thoughtful essay of August 1818 is immense. *Blackwood's Magazine* went on reminding its readers of Lamb's importance from time to time, and treated both Lamb and his writings with an almost total freedom from politically-inspired carping or quizzing which seems all the more remarkable (given the wild bursts of vituperation with which the magazine assailed almost everyone at some point or other in its erratic early days) when one recalls that Lamb numbered several members of what *Blackwood's* ridiculed as 'The Cockney School' among his close friends. The *Blackwood's* group respected Lamb, perhaps through knowing of his domestic difficulties, perhaps because of admiration for his work, or (most likely) from a mixture of both motives. When Lockhart went south to edit the *Quarterly Review* in 1825 he continued to watch out for Lamb's now increasingly rare publications. An appreciative paragraph on Lamb's 'Verses in an Album' contributed to *The Bijou* for 1828, which appears in the *Quarterly* for January 1828 is from Lockhart's pen. But the next main burst of critical activity north of the Border did not come till after Lamb's death, when the appearance of the first volumes of biographical and literary materials edited by Talfourd stimulated some interesting new reviews and revealed some significant changes of attitude.

By the time T N Talfourd's *Letters* began to appear, the bitter political animosities of the 1810s and 1820s were no longer playing so significant a part in literary reviewing and the battle to establish a new school of writers asserting the primacy of the individual imagination could be taken as won. But a new obstacle in the way of just appraisal of Lamb's works shows itself in the first review to draw upon newly-published material concerning Lamb's life: W Empson's review of Talfourd's *Letters* in the *Edinburgh Review* for October 1837; a review which was to get in the way of true criticism for many a long year afterwards.

Empson's review uses the material made available by Talfourd to treat Lamb's writings to a critique which is based upon biographical considerations:

'This predilection for, and concentration in the scenes immediately around him, and even the books to which he had got accustomed, narrowed his literary pleasures. He stuck to Fielding and Smollett, and would not be at the trouble of embarrassing himself with the new plots and new faces provided for the world by Scott. Modern poetry met with the same

ungracious reception, except when it came recommended to him by his partiality for the author...

...Lamb's sympathies were more with the barn-door fowl than with the eagle; and it is evident that he preferred sauntering, as it were, about home with Bernard Barton, to venturing his tranquillity in more vertiginous and distant flights. Within this circle, it is true that he indemnified himself to the uttermost by the liberties he took with every domestic incident and familiar form. He turned them inside out and made gentlefolks of them all. It was this double character which mystified strangers so.⁶

This article seeks to make amends for the *Edinburgh Review's* long neglect of Charles Lamb. In its way it is warmly appreciative of his qualities (bar the drinking, on which Empson comes down heavily), but it uses biography to construct an image of Lamb as a miniaturist: a critic who played safe, keeping within a narrow range, and an intellectually timid, if not lazy, man. Though Wilson and Lockhart might occasionally chaff at Lamb's friendship with the poets and critics of Cockaigne, they treated Lamb as an adult, essentially manly writer, and a critic of power and discrimination. Wilson had declared Lamb to be 'beloved by his friends' and deserving of 'all their love'. The sentimentalism of an often extremely sentimental critic goes no further than that. But W Empson's article caricatures Lamb's capacity for friendship, reducing a group who included Coleridge, Wordsworth and Hazlitt to a set of domestic cronies of whom only the minor writer Bernard Barton is named. He begins the process which later Scottish critics (soon joined by others, south of the Border) continue, of turning Lamb into a sentimentalized caricature of his real self: a caricature based on his fictionalised self in the *Essays of Elia*; cosy, charming, dainty-minded and more than a touch childish.

It is indeed ironical to see how, in trying to make amends for its long neglect of Lamb during his lifetime the *Edinburgh Review* did him more injustice still. Twelve years after Empson's essay a review of Lamb's *Works* and the *Final Memorials of Charles Lamb*, edited by Talfourd, appeared in *Blackwood's Magazine* for August 1849. It was written by W H Smith and it shows several ominous developments away from *Blackwood's* notable stance of thirty years before towards the line indicated by Empson's article:

To Charles Lamb shall be allotted-- general assent has already assigned it to him, and we have no wish to dispute his claim-- a quiet, quaint niche, apart to himself, in some odd nook or corner in the great temple of English literature.⁷

Smith asserts that he never met Lamb or any of his friends, and therefore 'to us he is a purely historic figure.' It might be added that for Smith he was a historic figure who played no real part in the transformation of attitudes towards genius and the imagination which his friends Wordsworth, Coleridge and Scott effected. Since Lockhart and Wilson wrote the reputations of the great Romantics had been rising. Lamb's, however, had dwindled into a figure who shows 'a range of thought most singularly contracted, considering the times in which he lived, and the men by whom he was surrounded'... 'on whose merits there is so little difference of opinion.' These merits, Smith declares, are 'a charming subtlety of observation, and a most felicitous humour.' His view of Lamb, which is essentially Empson's, is made crystal clear when he remarks that 'It is time that we turn from the biography to the writings of Charles Lamb - to

Elia, the gentle humorist.' In the company of the writer of 'the essays of Elia and the letters of Lamb (whom Smith takes to be in every respect the same person) 'Criticism...would willingly throw away those scales with which, like Justice, we suppose, she is symbolically supplied, and, embracing the man as he is, laugh and be pleased with the rest of the world, without further thought.' At which point the essay ends.

But before leaving this dispiriting picture of Charles Lamb and his doppelganger self Elia, set firmly in the hands of a new generation of patronising critics whose ignorance of the hard, vigorous world in which he actually wrote and lived was to prettify and colour the attitudes of later writers until well into the twentieth century, it is a relief to turn to another, rather unexpected quarter for a more penetrating appraisal of Lamb and a refutation of the Empsonian interpretation carried out with the very tools of sentiment and style which characterise Lamb's mid nineteenth century patronising critics.

The Reverend George Gilfillan's *A Gallery of Literary Portraits* appeared in 1845. If Gilfillan resembles any other Scottish critic of the time it is surely the now elderly but still active John Wilson: like Wilson, Gilfillan can be intemperate, impulsive, erratic in his judgements and excessively sentimental. But like Wilson he can also be strikingly acute in his judgements, and he had a surer grasp than Wilson of the new pictorial - descriptive, figurative style which was affected by critics of the day when they wanted to involve their readers' emotions in order to influence their critical and moral opinions.

In his *Edinburgh Review* essay of August 1849, W H Smith used a pictorial image to describe the 'quiet, quaint niche' in the 'great temple of English literature' which he felt Lamb deserved:

'It shall be carved from the solid oak, and decorated with Gothic tracery; but where Madonnas and angels ordinarily appear, there shall be all manner of laughing cherubs - one amongst them disguised as a chimney-sweep - with abundance of sly and humorous devices.'⁸

Beneath its Dickensian playfulness Smith's tone is patronising, almost dismissive. But already, in 1845, Gilfillan had beaten him at his own game, using similar pictorial language (though with biblical rather than mediaeval architecture) to present a view of Lamb diametrically opposed to W H Smith's:

'And we know not how much greater he might have become, had he received a diverse training, and instead of being the slave of a counting-room, had been free of that city, the builder and maker of which is God.'⁹

Gilfillan uses sentiment (even sentimentality) to suggest the qualities which distinguish Lamb's life and writings, but his interpretation is at the opposite extreme from Empson's or W H Smith's prettifications:

'He reasoned with his heart - with his heart he loved, with his heart he laughed, in heart he lived, moved, and had his being. And what a strange, wild, hot, large heart Lamb's was!'

He goes on to compare Lamb's strength of feeling with Robert Burns' in a passage which still surprises and provokes reflection. This leads into a succession of paragraphs aimed at suggesting the qualities of Lamb's work through analogies and comparisons which, at their best, remind one of the best essayists of Lamb's own generation. Gilfillan can combine assertion and figurative language effectively;

'As a critic, Lamb's *forte* lay in seeing and showing new and unsuspected beauties in his author... No man has ever seen Hogarth so clearly, or brought out so eloquently the moral and tragical qualities which lie like abysses beneath the thin, light transparent ice of his humour.'

Gilfillan draws on W Empson's 1837 review (giving an account of the characteristics and virtues of Lamb's letters, for example, as Empson had done) but he interprets the evidence differently. Whereas Empson stresses Lamb's intellectual timidity, Gilfillan asserts 'the fine subtlety of his critical judgment'. He finds the letters not cosy but energetic: 'tartly singular in their spirit and style', 'deliciously fresh and rich'. His final sentence brushes aside Empson's strictures on Lamb's drunkenness and leaves a very different impression from W H Smith's patronising farewell of a few years later:

'For the dead, we may not, and need not pray; but surely, as we wave farewell, we may say - Blessings on thy kind heart, oblivion to thy errors, immortality to thy name.'

From the *Edinburgh's* ridicule and neglect of Lamb to mid-century Scottish condescension and the long period of sentimental enthusiasm for Lamb as Elia which followed is a rather dismal perspective. But there had been more vigorous minds and more active intelligences at work in Scottish literary journalism from quite an early period, and their judgements are the ones which have, ultimately, prevailed. Surveying the history of Charles Lamb's Scottish reputation during the first half of the nineteenth century one finds that even in his own lifetime he had no grounds for declaring 'They cannot like me - and in truth, I never knew one of that nation who attempted to do it.' But then, the 'in truth' surely warns us that, as so often, Lamb was up to rather more than he chose to let on to.

NOTES

- 1 In a letter of Thomas Carlyle to Thomas Murray, 24.8.1824. *The Collected Letters of Thomas and Jane Welsh Carlyle* ed. C R Sanders and K J Fielding. (North Carolina, 1970) Volume 3. p.139.
- 2 Passages brought together in Carlyle, *Collected Letters*, Introduction p.xxxvii.
- 3 *The Life and Letters of John Gibson Lockhart*, edited by Andrew Lang, London 1897, vol. I, p.77. This and other comments on Lamb are conveniently brought together in *Lockhart's Literary Criticism*, edited by M Clive Hildyard, Oxford 1931, pp.94-5.
- 4 John Gibson Lockhart, *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk*, edited by William Ruddick, Edinburgh 1977, p.85.
- 5 For this and subsequent quotations from John Wilson's review of *The Works of Charles Lamb* see *Blackwood's Magazine*, August 1818, pp.599-610.
- 6 W Empson's (attributed) review of *The Letters of Charles Lamb, with a Sketch of his Life* by T N Talfourd (1837) can be found in *The Edinburgh Review* for October 1837.
- 7 W H Smith's article 'Charles Lamb' opens *Blackwood's Magazine* for August 1849.
- 8 *Ibid.*

- 9 George Gilfillan, *A Gallery of Literary Portraits*, Edinburgh, 1845, volume I, pp.25-8.

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THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CONTENT OF LAMB'S LETTERS

D C Saxena

The early biographers of Lamb did not have access to most of his letters, because Talfourd, his friend and hagiographer, on essentially prudish considerations, withheld from publication those which revealed some 'unsavoury' aspect of his life. But even those available, apart from being used as occasional embellishments, were not minutely examined for their biographical wealth. Lucas was Lamb's first biographer to sift this epistolary ore and consciously correlate the known biographical facts with the information garnered from it. However, in 1907, when he wrote his *Life of Charles Lamb*, Lucas could draw upon less than seven hundred letters then extant. Since this work was not fundamentally revised, the letters which Lucas himself discovered subsequently find no place in it.*

Nevertheless, the corpus of the letters provides a fascinating insight into his personality, for, it has been observed, not without justification, that "We draw near to the heart and soul of such writers as Charles Lamb not by reading *about* them, but by reading them, for their words *are themselves*."¹ Lamb explicitly disdained concealment, remarking that he loved to "give a faithful account of what passes within me."² In another letter, written almost twenty years later, he reiterated this point: "I should wish my thoughts to flow in a sort of undress..."³

The "flavour" of the writer's personality emanates from most writing, but with Lamb, more than with any other, the letters that he wrote were the faithful repositories of life's vicissitudes. It is worthwhile to examine whether he fully realised this aim, or, as J E Stevens would have us believe, are there "whole areas of Lamb's interior life"⁴ which he omitted?

In the first letter extant, Lamb professes to have spent six weeks "very agreeably in a mad house at Hoxton"⁵ and follows it up by dwelling on the blessings of madness:

...while it lasted I had many many hours of pure happiness. Dream not Coleridge, of having tasted all the grandeur and wildness of Fancy, till you have gone mad. All now seems to me vapid...⁶

One may be justified in taking this assertion with more than the proverbial pinch of salt. It is unbelievable that the confinement at Hoxton left no scar on his personality. Does he then frolic to mitigate the gloom that might otherwise crush? This seems more plausible, in view of Lamb's subsequent admission: "God bless us all, and shield us from insanity, which is 'the sorest malady of all'."⁷

The reason is not far to seek. In the intervening period, Lamb had undergone a traumatic experience, which changed the whole course of his life. Here, in

*Prof. Edwin W Marrs' edition of *The Letters*, (Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1975-) will, it is hoped, repair this omission, apart from including the letters rescued from "dusty recesses" later.

Lamb's own words, is an account of this episode:

My poor dearest sister in a fit of insanity has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a mad house, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital...My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt.⁸

Lamb's elder brother, John, who was "not fit himself to struggle with difficulties, nor...much accustomed himself to throw himself into their way,"⁹ suggested that Mary should go into an hospital. Charles Lamb strongly resisted, as he felt that she was more sinned against than sinning:

Poor Mary, my Mother indeed *never understood* her right... Never could believe how much *she* loved her - but met her caresses, her protestations of filial affection, too frequently with coldness and repulse...she would always love my brother above Mary, who was not worthy of one tenth of that affection, which Mary had a right to claim.¹⁰

Much as John made eloquent speeches on this subject, Charles, who regarded Mary as "thoroughly devoid of the least tincture of selfishness," took on himself the responsibility of caring for her. "I am wedded, Coleridge, to the fortunes of my sister,"¹¹ he wrote about his decision to undertake this awesome charge. Indeed, his devotion to Mary is one of the most poignant aspects of his letters. Childhood associations made her a sort of mother-surrogate and, in a letter to Wordsworth, Lamb paid tribute to her in the following words:

She is older, and wiser, and better, than me, and all my wretched imperfections, I cover to myself by resolutely thinking on her goodness. She would share life and death, heaven and hell, with me. She lives but for me... But even in this up-braiding of myself I am offending against her, for I know that she has cleaved to me for better, for worse; and if the balance has been against her hitherto, it was a noble trade.¹²

To Maria Fryer, Lamb asserted that "When she is not violent her rambling chat is better to me than the sense and sanity of the world."¹³ Indeed he found "something of dishonesty in any pleasure I take without her."¹⁴ Wordsworth's epitaph written after Lamb's death, while regretting that Charles never knew the joys of marriage and children, yet pays tribute to Mary: and perhaps remembers Dorothy.

Unto thee,
Not so enriched, not so adorned, to thee
Was given...a sister.....
In whom thy reason and intelligent heart
Found - for all interests, hopes and tender cares
All softening, humanizing, hallowing powers -
More than sufficient recompence.

However, his attachment to Mary in no way diminished his filial feelings. He feelingly remembered the days of "a mother's fondness for her *school-boy*," and craved pardon for "all those little asperities of temper which, from time to time, have given her gentle spirit pain."¹⁵ He put up uncomplainingly with his querulous old father. After getting home at night "o'erwearied, quite faint," he played cards with him "to keep him in good humour," as his father's 'unanswerable' argument was "If you won't play with me, you might as well not come home at all."¹⁶

These minor irritations apart, sorrows, in Hamlet's celebrated phrase, came

to Lamb not singly, but in battalions. A wealthy relation, who had taken Hetty off his hands, "in the beginning of the trouble," sent her back, saying sardonically that he would rejoice to receive her again. While, on the one hand, Lamb was happy to "transplant the poor creature from the chilling air of such patronage,"¹⁷ he realised that it was an unconscionable strain on his precarious finances. Aunt Hetty was to him the "cherisher of infancy," for when he was a student at Christ's Hospital, she often toddled there "with some nice thing she had caused to be saved for me."¹⁸ These memories Lamb could not help treasuring, but fortunately for his predicament, she "ended all her days of suffering and infirmity" in less than three months of this transition.

This may have palliated, but certainly did not end Lamb's financial stringency. For all his longing to revive "Salutation scenery", he was at first unable to respond to Coleridge's invitation because of "the expense, which is not nothing."¹⁹ For similar reasons, he requested him, to send his great coat, as "The snow and the rain season is at hand, and I have but a wretched old coat, once my father's, to keep them off..."²⁰ Naturally, he had a pragmatic attitude towards money, instead of decrying its pursuit as Wordsworth did. Writing to Coleridge of his plans to make money for his prospective requirements, he remarked:

O money, money, how blindly thou hast been worshipped, and how stupidly abused! Thou art health, and liberty, and strength; and he that has thee may rattle his pockets at the foul fiend!²¹

Thus, though no greedy Midas, Lamb realised that in the world money makes the mare go.

About his love affairs with Ann Simmons, Lamb is extremely reticent in the letters, calling it "a passion of which I retain *nothing* ... Thank God, the folly has left me for ever; not even a review of my love verses renews one wayward wish in me..."²² Coleridge is informed in another letter that Lamb has "burned a little journal of my foolish passion which I had a long time kept."²³ The embers of this "foolish passion" kept smouldering till much later as is evidenced by the essay, "Dream Children." Hazlitt reputedly told his grandson that "Lamb was seen ... subsequently to his Alice becoming Mrs Bartrum, to wander up and down outside the shop, in the hope of catching a glimpse of the object of his passion..."²⁴ Even more interesting is the fact that Lamb was not above repeating this 'folly' when past the middle age. His epistle to Fanny Kelly, proposing marriage, runs -

We had the pleasure, *pain* I might call it, of seeing you last night in the new Play...it has given rise to a train of thinking, which I cannot suppress... In many a sweet assumed character I have learned to love you, but simply as F.M. Kelly I love you better than them all. Can you quit these shadows of existence, & come & be a reality to us?²⁵

However, it must be said to his credit, that he accepted the rejection of his proposal with good grace, assuring her that "Your injunctions shall be obeyed to a tittle."²⁶ Nonetheless, it is apparent that although Lamb claimed to have found "quiet dignity in old bachelorhood,"²⁷ his depressions, "black as a Smith's head, Vulcanic, Stygian," may, at least partly, be attributed to the deprivation of a normal family life. Almost in the vein of his "Dream Children," in a letter to Sir John Stoddart, he expressed "reluctance to offend the feelings of a father. I might a' been one if xxxx had let me."²⁸ The adoption of Emma Isola, an orphan, brought an evanescent

gleam of sunshine into his old age, but with her marriage to Moxon, the Lambs were left again "quiet as death and lonely as his dark chambers."²⁹ The feeling of loneliness, exacerbated by Mary's frequent confinements, preyed heavily upon Charles Lamb, making him, in Bacon's phrase, cannibal of his own heart. In two letters to Barton, he gave expression to his feeling: "Here is a comfortable house, but no tenants. One does not make a household."³⁰ Again, "Home have I none - and not a sympathising house to turn to in the great city. Never did the waters of heaven pour down on a forlorn head."³¹ Notwithstanding his determination to "live a merry life in the midst of sinners,"^{31a} the grim realities of life were too insistent to be wished away. Lamb admitted as much to Sarah Hutchinson: "...my own calamities press about me and involve me in a thick integument not to be reached at by other folk's misfortunes."³² However, it is true that, as alleged by J E Stevens, the letters are coy on one count - they throw almost no light upon the natural sexual frustration of Lamb's 'dual loneliness.' One is tempted at this stage to explain away such a state of mind in psychological terms, but this should be avoided, because there are certain regions of human personality inaccessible even to psycho-analysis. Why, in his otherwise 'faithful account' he glossed over this 'area' of his personality is one of those tantalising questions which evade a definitive answer.

Lamb suffered a series of bereavements in quick succession - that of Jim White (the hero of the *Elia* essay on chimney-sweepers), Admiral Burney, and his brother John. When his last link with the Temple was snapped by the death of Norris, he lamented: "In him I have a loss the world cannot make up... I have none to call me Charley now."³³ Even if the following lines of *John Woodvil* -

I want some seasonings of adversity -
Some strokes of the old mortifier Calamity,
To take those swellings down divines call Vanity -

are taken as proof of how well he felt the uses of adversity, the "old mortifier calamity" certainly made him "weary of the world."³⁴ As he wrote to Wordsworth:

Spring cheers not, nor winter heightens our gloom. Autumn hath foregone its moralities, they are hey-pass re-pass (as) in a show-box. Yet as far as last year occurs back, for they scarce shew a reflex now, they make no memory as heretofore - It was sufficiently gloomy.³⁵

Moreover, Lamb was temperamentally averse to change. "My household gods," he stated in "New Year's Eve," "plant a terrible fixed foot, and are not rooted up without blood."³⁶ Yet Mary's malady made this "ugly wrench" inevitable, not once but seven times, impelling him to remark to Thomas Hood, "To change habitations is to die in them, and in my own time I have died seven deaths."³⁷

Apart from being plagued by ill-health in old age - "My bedfellows are Cough and cramp, we sleep 3 in a bed"³⁸ - Lamb found little recompense in authorship. *Mr. H.* was hooted off the stage - "a hundred hisses outweigh a 1000 claps" he told Wordsworth - and *John Woodvil* received a cool reception. His review of Wordsworth's *Excursion* in the *Quarterly* with "every pretty expression, every warm expression...vulgarized and frozen"³⁹ by Gifford, occasioned bitterness and misunderstanding. And when Moxon, Lamb's son-in-law, was about to bring out the *Last Essays of Elia*, John Taylor, claiming

copyright on the essays published in the *London Magazine*, threatened to apply for injunction: "The son of a bitch in a manger! neither to print himself, nor *let print*," Lamb complained to Talfourd. Even the sales of the *Essays of Elia* were disappointing enough to convince Lamb that "Nothing with my name will sell, a blast is upon it."⁴⁰

So daunting was his personal experience of authorship, that he strongly advised Barton against attempting to live by his pen:

Throw yourself rather, my dear Sir, from the steep Tarpeian rock, slap-dash headlong upon iron spikes. If you had but five consolatory minutes between the desk and the bed, make much of them, and live a century in them, rather than turn slave to the Booksellers. They are Turks and Tartars, when they have poor Authors at their beck... You know not what a rapacious, dishonest set these booksellers are.⁴¹

Bereavement, pain, all grief and misery, stultified Lamb's resolve to "take what snatches of pleasure we can between the acts of our distressful drama."

(To be continued)

NOTES

- 1 J L May, *Selected Essays, Letters & Poems by Lamb*, London, 1953, p.14.
- 2 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.43-44.
- 3 *Ibid.*, III, p.47.
- 4 J E Stevens, "Charles Lamb, The Romantic Humourist," *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, April 1978, p.115.
- 5 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.2.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p.17.
- 7 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.107.
- 8 *Ibid.*, p.39.
- 9 *Ibid.*, p.47.
- 10 *Ibid.*, p.47.
- 11 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.58.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p.395.
- 13 *Ibid.*, III, p.401.
- 14 *Ibid.*, I, p.193.
- 15 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.58.
- 16 *Ibid.*, p.60.
- 17 *Ibid.*, p.67.
- 18 *Ibid.*, p.94.
- 19 Lucas, *Letters*, I, 108.
- 20 *Ibid.*, p.117.
- 21 *Ibid.*, II, pp.74-75.
- 22 *Ibid.*, I, p.55.
- 23 *Ibid.*, p.73.
- 24 W F Courtney, "Charles Lamb and Ann Simmons," *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, Jan. 1975, pp.14-15.
- 25 Lucas, *Letters*, II, p.254.
- 26 *Ibid.*, p.255.
- 27 *Ibid.*, I, p.377.
- 28 *Ibid.*, III, p.115.
- 29 *Ibid.*, p.160.
- 30 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.144.
- 31 *Ibid.*, p.224.
- 31a *Ibid.*, I, p.172.

- 32 Ibid., II, p.181.
 33 Lucas, *Letters*, III, p.67.
 34 Ibid., II, p.413.
 35 Ibid., III, p.241.
 36 W Macdonald, *The Works of C. Lamb*, Vol.I, p.58.
 37 Lucas, *Letters*, III, p.131.
 38 Ibid., p.367.
 39 Lucas, *Letters*, III, p.358.
 40 Ibid., p.328.
 41 Ibid., II, p.363.

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READING FOR PLEASURE: Shared Pleasure (*Reprinted by kind permission from the BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL, Volume 284, 20 March 1982*)

D G Wilson

This series of articles has, I am sure, given great enjoyment to many medical people with its happy combination of thoughts and suggestions - some so familiar and some pointing out new paths for exploration. One aspect, however, does not seem to have been discussed - that of the ways in which reading may be made a social and not a solitary pleasure. There has always been a complicated mixture of emotions for me in my own deep satisfaction in reading. Firstly and inevitably, the act of reading excludes doing, and, secondly, the marvellous ideas and fantasies evoked by a book cannot immediately be shared by another.

A new type of literary journey

My wife and I found some years back that after watching the television news we each blankly asked the other, "What was the news?" As we also hated being tied down to set times for programmes or series, it seemed an obvious step to remove the damned thing. Thus began for us a new type of literary journey. Though we have not always read the same books, usually we have read four or five of the same books within a few weeks. As when we have explored a Greek island, complementary ideas and feelings emerge. Sometimes this will happen during the reading. One will quote a sentence or paragraph (this is an acquired art: normally interruption of reading is a bad thing, and one has positively to learn and accept that a worthwhile result will follow) and a resonance in the other book will appear surprisingly often, rather like noticing a Celtic motif when looking at Mayan art. To have a literary critic of one's own, resident in the same room, is an added bonus, preventing the kind of reading that is an infinite extension of one's ego.

What do we read? There is no system, I am glad to say, but a pattern has nevertheless arisen. My basic interest since Cambridge has been the Romantic School with an emphasis on Lamb, Hazlitt, and Leigh Hunt, and, not far behind, the Bloomsbury school, set, or coterie. Clearly, this is hopelessly serious and intense, so we have always sought out novelists, catching up with the major ones and discovering neglected and modern ones. For a doctor to meet literary people is a pleasure but one mixed with envy - they are paid to read, while we hoard precious time to do so. It is thus only fair to pick their brains, and at the twice-yearly functions where we meet such lions we shamelessly insist on their yielding up their treasure.

Some nuggets from this trove are Bainbridge (bitter, silly, and surrealist, and at the same time so real that it hurts); Ian McEwan (whose *Cement Garden*, like Golding's *Lord of the Flies*, tells us something about children and about ourselves that is most productively uncomfortable); and, our latest find, Willa Cather, floreat circa 1920, though you would not know it from a casual read - her characters live today. She expresses a sense of loss for the original American "frontier spirit" - probably we are all for ever losing that valuable commodity. In parenthesis, this loss points a parallel to that shallow philosophy of life that causes so much trouble for our patients, that tomorrow something wonderful will be discovered so that illness and pain and suffering will disappear with no cost to anyone. I regard this view as hopelessly naive; everything has its price, succinctly expressed in Wilson's Law: "Side effects will always keep us where we are."

Another thread that my wife and I have shared comes from the Folio Society: commercial good quality ought to be a contradiction in terms, but in the case of these books the money buys real worth. We concentrate on out-of-the-way books - mainly travel - that otherwise we should miss. The chief delight here has been Mary Kingsley; her *Travels in West Africa* issued by the Folio Society in 1976 led me to get both this book and her *West African Studies* in the original and full editions. They are both pure gold; one could never have guessed that a Victorian spinster could be so funny (as well as brave to the point of foolhardiness). One sample only: "The natural sweetness of my disposition is most clearly visible to the naked eye when I am quietly having my own way" - I know a few people like that, including myself. An addiction to first editions afflicted me early, but at least Judith and I read them. Rather an eclectic collection is the result - Edward Lear's travel books, for example, are a joy, full of his literalisms and sly digs at his aristocratic friends; on Corfu, Lady Young used to refer to "awngé trees" and when someone came to call on Lear there was "a nokkat the daw."

For the mainstream novelists, we tend to collect a pile of paperbacks for a holiday, concentrating on one author - Thomas Mann, for example. Luckily we began with *Buddenbrooks*, the humour of this sad tale quite effacing the stern image of Mann that we had previously. Still awaiting its "holiday slot" is *Joseph and His Brothers*, surely at £3.50 for 1207 pages the best book buy of recent times, though I recall too clearly the hundred or more Penguins on my shelves at Cambridge at 6d a volume, and Pelicans too, I think - all very intellectual. Medical students then did have some culture (pace C P Snow, who was my tutor). Sadly I saw him seldom; presumably he was busying himself in some corridor of power at the time. Herman Hesse, too, has kept us going on many a beach and at many an airport - though this latter opportunity for reading leads to some divergence of taste between us. I prefer to start on the meat, the Mann or the Hesse or the Forster; while Judith likes to anaesthetise herself with the likes of Arthur Hailey. I never could feel that *Airport* was an appropriate choice for that venue. These Germanic novels of giant stature (your *Magic Mountains* and your *Glass-Bead Games*) intimidate at first, grip and enthrall secondly, and amaze and enrich finally.

Visual art and the writer

There is a peculiarly British vein of biography that is superb for joint or shared reading - our chief successes have been with Michael Holroyd (when will his *Bernard Shaw* appear?). We alternated our reading of his *Lytton Strachey* with various of Strachey's own works; and as a pickle for this

sandwich Holroyd's *Augustus John* gave added insights. Such reading provokes a whole field of thought and study - the relation between visual art and the writer. Hazlitt, the essayist, was at heart a painter (his portrait of Lamb is at the National Portrait Gallery), and he remained fascinated by artists all his life, writing himself into *Conversations with James Northcote*. Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant had a fierce influence on all the Bloomsbury writers. We can all, to some extent, translate what our eye sees into words; can we, however, do this in a valid way for music (or indeed for the taste of vintage port)? Grove's new *Dictionary of Music* (if I win the pools) will cost me £850 - money spent, to some degree, on the description of sound in words. Ian Oswald has written in these pages that the work of the brain may be measured by the blood flow through its different parts; when I listen to music that blood flow is greater in my right hemisphere, but when I listen to speech then the flow is greater on the left. A simple chap might therefore conclude that it is a waste of effort to write about music - the experience itself, I mean, rather than about musicians or concert halls. Maybe, but Bernard Levin, that super-goat of *Times* past, makes a good stab at it in *Conducted Tour*. He is so good at conveying pleasure that one forgives the name dropping and the almost forced feeding.

There is one last "pleasure in reading" for me to present; I do it with a rather selfish, hugging-to-myself sort of feeling, at least with respect to all you unlucky doctors out there who will still be working on 1 January 1983. Since I have decided to retire during this year, it seems sensible to lay up some stores of fodder for our minds (no doubt we will get a television set too, later); so we are gloating over our new shelves and their riches. The Nonesuch edition of Dickens does not quite count, since I bought this a few years back, and have reread a few volumes each year. Again the Folio Society has come up trumps and given us special offers for Pepys's *Diary* and for Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, both in new editions or translations. Dante, Chaucer, and Jane Austen have also arrived in the same way. Lack of system, did I say? A positive anti-system it resembles when spelt out, since naturally I have been unable to include all our favourites - Anthony Powell, Mary Renault, and Russell Hoban being merely some of the cream. Shakespeare did I hear you say? Well, yes, I do have the Nonesuch and the Folio Shakespeare. Did you know that the great polymath himself had given us a clear forewarning of glossy health-screening programmes? He says through Cymbeline, "O, this life is nobler than attending for a check."

I have shared with you some words about a special kind of shared pleasure; sorry you cannot join us tonight, with the snow and the blizzard whistling outside, a glass of an appropriate material beside us, the radio helping us along with Mozart probably (yes, we can use both hemispheres at once). I shall be reading Parson Woodford, some John Fowles, and *The Discovery and Conquest of Peru*, a few chapters of each in turn; Judith will be finishing Gavin Young's *Slow Boats to China*. Both of us are cherishing the prospect of further evenings exploring - well, we don't know what yet: we do not meet our next professor of English literature till Saturday week.

NOTES

SUMMER OUTING

Our summer visit this year was again to Hertfordshire, where our Chairman, Dr Wilson, and Mrs Wilson generously entertained us at their home. The sun

shone just long enough for us to explore their enchanting garden, where each time one thought one had seen it all another secret entrance led to another beauty, and for us to marvel at all the hard work that must have gone into its creation and upkeep. For the sumptuous lunch we were cleverly disposed about the apparently elastic house before adjourning to the Library. Here we enviously pored over our Chairman's antiquarian collection of books and letters, his Lamb, his Hazlitt, his...need one say more! Moreover, to know that these books are lovingly read, "where a book is at once both good and rare", what can be better?

It seems most fortunately appropriate that we are able to include in this *Bulletin* Dr Wilson's heart-warming article from the *BMJ*'s Series 'Reading for Pleasure'.

Basil Savage was heard to remark at tea - tea? surely that was a bonus at the end of our day - that, in addition to being an Elian celebration, this was a kind of retirement party. For our Chairman and our Editor have both, this summer, become "Superannuated People", leaving their respective professional obligations for activities, no doubt, no less weighty and not difficult to predict. Dr and Mrs Wilson will be moving to Cambridge and we wish them every happiness in their new home. Fortunately, they will continue as before their much valued work for the Society. We are most grateful for all they do for us and would like to thank them warmly for a delightful day in Hertfordshire.

THE LEWIS CARROLL SOCIETY

The Society is appealing, in this 150th anniversary of the birth of Lewis Carroll, for the sum of £3,000 to place an engraved stone in his memory in Westminster Abbey. Cheques and postal orders should be made payable to THE LEWIS CARROLL MEMORIAL APPEAL and sent to: The Hon. Treasurer, 47 Summerville Gardens, Cheam, Sutton, Surrey SM1 2BU.

NATIONAL BOOK LEAGUE

The Mark Longman Library (a collection of books about books) is housed in the fine premises of the National Book League at 45 East Hill, Wandsworth, SW18 2QZ (01-870 9055) and is open to all for reference and for loans to NBL members, from Monday to Friday, 9 am to 5 pm. The Library includes sections on Book Production & Printing History, Book Illustration, Bibliography, Book Collecting and numerous journals of interest to bibliophiles. The NBL also provides bibliographical information by telephone, post or personal visit.

THE CLS LIBRARY

(To any members who did not read, mark, learn and inwardly digest the item in the July *Bulletin*)

Two Council members who visited the Guildhall Library in May were much impressed by the high quality of the restoration of some of the items referred to in an earlier *Bulletin*. Donations towards the cost (an average of £7.36 per volume) of restoring other books by Charles Lamb will be much appreciated. Please give the Deputy Librarian (606 3030 ext.2852) at least 24 hours' notice if you wish to consult books in the CLS Library.

1982/3 PROGRAMME

Members should have received with their July *Bulletin* a copy of our current programme. If you can dispose of additional copies to local libraries, friends etc. please contact the Hon. General Secretary.

150th ANNIVERSARY OF CHARLES LAMB'S DEATH - 27th DECEMBER 1984

We are indebted to David Wickham for a list of more than twenty ways in which this important anniversary could be commemorated. Your Council will be urgently considering this but, meantime, the Secretary would be glad to hear from members who may be able to organise a particular event (01-940 3837) or suggest useful contacts.

NEW MEMBERS

Ian Bain, New Cottage, Newnham, Baldock, Herts.
 A F Coster, 12 Saltash Road, Barkingside, Ilford, Essex.
 Dr Marilyn Gaull Howard, 637 Addison Street, Philadelphia, PA 19122, USA
 R W Kerr, Waterways Cottage, Powdermill Lane, Waltham Abbey, Essex EN9 1BN
 The Library of Congress, Washington DC, USA.

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