THE CHARLES LAMB BULLETIN

The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society

NEW SERIES NO.41 *January 1983*

LAMB AS CRITIC OF WORDSWORTH

The tenth annual Ernest Crowsley Memorial Lecture, given to the Society by Mrs Mary R Wedd on 2 October 1982.

It is a particular honour to give this, the tenth annual lecture dedicated to the memory of Ernest Crowsley. I heard the first, given by Basil Willey, in 1972, the year I joined the Society. I never knew Mr Crowsley but feel as if I had, being in a sense one of his heirs and beneficiaries in inheriting a share in the Society he created and left behind. It seems to me that the Charles Lamb Society has preserved in the twelve years since Mr Crowsley's death those qualities which were characteristic both of him and of Charles Lamb himself, intellectual probity, selfless voluntary work and warm friendliness and humour. Long may it continue, to be a memorial to Ernest Crowsley and to carry on into the future the work he started when he founded the Society in 1935.

From the neglect that Lamb as Critic has suffered, in comparison with Coleridge, Hazlitt or De Quincey, he is beginning at last to be rescued. Roy Park has ably defended him against the charges of "exclusiveness" and of lacking "a theoretical framework", showing that, though the quantity of his published criticism was small because of his full-time employment, the range of his critical sensibilities was wide. In 'Imperfect Sympathies', as elsewhere, Lamb contrasts "the imperfect, or what should be termed the poetic and imaginative mind with the perfect or scientifically rational intellect", as Roy Park puts it, and, in thus distinguishing between "poetry and abstraction", Lamb stresses that opposition which Dr Park says "is, perhaps, the central issue in the Romantic critical tradition", and "the theoretical foundation underlying some of his finest critical essays". Lamb's judgments, he states, "suggest a strong, independent mind, contemptuous of critical fashions, and with a penetrating insight into what is of permanent and lasting value in literature". In collecting Lamb's criticism under one roof in the Routledge Series and in his analysis of it in his Introduction Roy Park has done him and us a great service.

I must also pay tribute to our member, Professor John I Ades, who has drawn attention to Lamb's criticism in a number of discriminating articles, to which anyone talking on this subject must be indebted.

Professor Barnett speaks of Lamb's "sympathetic insight" and affirms boldly "the startling fact" that "Lamb is usually right", and that he "improved Wordsworth" and "refined and guided Coleridge". Perhaps one of the most striking facts that emerges from his letters is that, despite his almost reverential admiration for Coleridge, he does advise him with confident authority. When he says "Cultivate simplicity Coleridge", he is of course only reinforcing the lesson of Boyer, which Coleridge was to praise in *Biographia* but which, as Lamb observed, he often failed to put into practice. Dykes Campbell, with reference to the poems they both contributed to Boyer's manuscript book, says that "the development of Lamb's critical taste was years in advance of Coleridge's - as may be seen by his letters to his friend in 1796, when Lamb was twenty-one and Coleridge twenty-four". One cannot help asking now, with hindsight, whether this did not continue perhaps to be true long after that.

The only criticism of Wordsworth which Lamb wrote for publication was his review of *The Excursion* for the 'Quarterly Review'. This was so much garbled by the Editor, Gifford, that Lamb virtually disowned it. Editors do indeed have a lot to answer for! "I regret only that I did not keep a copy", says Lamb, and we too have reason bitterly to regret it, as no record of the original version has survived. Other than that, his comments on Wordsworth's work appear in letters, which Lamb could never have supposed would be seen in print, or in the reports of his friends. It is interesting, and fortunate for us, that Wordsworth kept most of Lamb's letters, whereas, unless some unknown cache comes to light, Lamb does not seem to have kept his, perhaps because of moving house so often. However, Professor Hill quoted from one newly-discovered one, so more may come to light. After Lamb's death, Wordsworth contributed some of his letters for Talfourd's biography but withheld "every word of criticism upon my own poems...partly because I shrink from the thought of assisting in any way to spread my own praises, and still more as being convinced that the opinions or judgments of friends given in this way are of little value". One can hardly agree that such comments can be disregarded but, in order to get a balanced estimate of them, it is perhaps necessary in such a context to take account of the personal relationships and particular circumstances that may have affected them at any given time. Many of the seeming inconsistences in Lamb's remarks can be explained in this way.

Apart from a promise to Coleridge in May 1796 to return *Guilt and Sorrow; or Incidents upon Salisbury Plain* to Wordsworth, but not in person because he is "too ill", the first mention in Lamb's letters of a poem by Wordsworth is after his visit to Nether Stowey in June 1797. He asks for the return of his overcoat "lingering cunningly behind". He never received it. But his other request, "above all, *that Inscription*", does seem to have been answered. This was 'Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree' and, as Professor Hill said last year, it was "as if they spoke in some special way to his own tragic dilemma". One can see why this poem, which warns against wallowing in grief and disappointment, should have been helpful to Lamb so soon after the family disaster and his taking responsibility for Mary with all the personal sacrifices it entailed. But, in spite of the personal stress he was under, the critic in Lamb was not asleep. Years later, when Wordsworth included this poem in his *Poems* of 1815, Lamb wrote to him to complain of "one admirable line gone (or something come instead of it) the stone-chat and the glancing sand-piper, which was a line quite alive". Wordsworth had substituted in this edition

> The stone-chat and the Landlark, restless Bird
> Piping along the margin of the lake.

The contrast between these two versions illustrates, in little, Roy Park's analysis of Lamb's critical criterion, the championing of the imaginative against the accurately factual. Who can question for a minute Lamb's judgment here? Not Wordsworth, who restored the line in 1820, as Lamb had requested.

On November 8th 1798, in the well-known letter to Southey, Lamb takes him to task for his review of *Lyrical Ballads* in which he calls 'The Ancient

Mariner' "a Dutch attempt at German sublimity". This poem, or course, stood first in the 1798 edition and 'Tintern Abbey' last. Lamb comments, "'The Ancient Marinere' plays more tricks with the mind than that last poem, which is yet one of the finest written". This is the first of a series of ambivalent comparisons of the work of Coleridge and Wordsworth.

Lamb is nothing if not a loyal friend and of all his friends he was to say of Coleridge, "He was my fifty-years-old friend without a dissention". Loyalty is a virtue much underestimated in our time and perhaps little understood. It would never allow Lamb to acknowledge a superior to his friend, yet his critical judgment would not be suborned either. So he asserted and continued to affirm that aspect of Coleridge's poetry which was unassailable. Crabb Robinson tells in his Diary for January 8th 1811 that "We spoke of Wordsworth and Coleridge. To my surprise Lamb asserted the latter to be the greater man. He preferred the 'Ancient Mariner' to anything Wordsworth had written." But Allsop, who shared lodgings with the Lambs at Enfield in 1825, reported Lamb as saying, "Wordsworth, the *greatest* poet of these times. Still he is not, not yet is any man, an 'Ancient Mariner'." By the end of his life, if J F Russell is to be believed, "He had a very high opinion of Wordsworth, saying, 'He is a very noble fellow'. I think he (Lamb) undervalued Coleridge's poetry. He esteemed the 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Christabel' his best productions in verse." These are the poems that cast a spell over the reader, "play tricks with the mind", as Lamb says, rather as their author seems to have done by his conversation. "The rogue gives you Love Powders": and in the manipulation of the mind under the influence of the supernatural he is unsurpassed. But 'Tintern Abbey' was one of the finest poems ever written.

Undoubtedly into his early relationship with Wordsworth an element of jealousy entered. "I hear that the Two Noble Englishmen have parted no sooner than they set foot on German earth." (Nov.28 1798) Or "Dr Manning, Coleridge has left us, to go into the north on a visit to his god Wordsworth". (April 5 1800) There were other causes for a jaundiced view too. On April 16th or 17th, 1800, Lamb sent to Coleridge a copy of his play *Pride's Cure*, later called *John Woodvil*, "which I beg you to present in my name, with my respect and love, to Wordsworth and his sister". He writes to Coleridge on August 6th, "I would pay five-and-forty thousand carriages to read W.'s tragedy, of which I have heard so much and seen so little - only what I saw at Stowey. Pray give me an order in writing on Longman for 'Lyrical Balads'. I have the first volume, and, truth to tell, six shillings is a broad shot". Again on August 26th, he is pleading for "a sight of Wordsworth's Tragedy". On January 30th 1801, Lamb acknowledges Wordsworth's gift of the new edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. "I had already borrowed your second volume." This famous letter, to which we shall return, was full of generous appreciation and constructive criticisms, some - it is true - unfavourable. To Robert Lloyd at this time Lamb commented, "Wordsworth has published a second vol. Lyrical Ballads. - Most of them very good - but not so good as *first* vol." I think that any one of us who has put heart and soul into a piece of creative work will, if he is honest, admit that his first response to unfavourable criticism is to be up in arms in defence of his offspring - as Wordsworth was. If we are big enough, later we make use of such wise advice - as Wordsworth did. What is less easy to forgive is Wordsworth's apparent obliviousness at this time to the fact that there is a reciprocity in these matters. Though *John Woodvil* is no more dramatically suited for the stage than *The Borderers*, there are passages to praise and value in it. One has to sympathize with Lamb's sarcastic PS after some ten months' silence from Wordsworth on the subject, "Thank you for liking my play!!"

Well known as it is, I cannot resist reading part of Lamb's letter to Manning of February 15th 1801, in which he reports what had happened next.

> I had need be cautious henceforward what opinion I give of the Lyrical Balads. - All the north of England are in a turmoil. Cumberland and Westmorland have already declared a state of war. - I lately received from Wordsw. a copy of the second volume, accompanied by an acknowledgment of having received from me, many months since a copy of a certain Tragedy, with excuses for not having made any acknowledgment sooner, it being owing to an "almost insurmountable aversion from Letter writing". - This letter I answered in due form and time, and enumerated several of the p(ass)ages which had most affected me, adding, unfortunately, that no single piece had moved me so forcibly as the Ancient Marinere, the Mad Mother, or the Lines at Tintern Abbey. The Post did not sleep a moment. I received almost instantaneously a long letter of four sweating pages from my *reluctant Letterwriter*, the purport of which was, that he was sorry his 2d vol. had not given me more pleasure. (Devil a hint did I give that it had *not pleased me*) and "was compelled to wish that my range of *Sensibility* was more extended, being obliged to believe that I should receive large influxes of happiness & happy Thoughts" (I suppose from the L.B.-) ...
>
> ...This was not to be *all* my castigation. - Coleridge, who had not written to me some months before, starts up from his bed of sickness, to reprove me for my hardy presumption: four long pages, equally sweaty, and more tedious, came from him...
>
> What am I to do with such people? - I certainly shall write them a very merry Letter.

Lamb copies out for Manning from the volume "The best Piece in it", "She dwelt among the untrodden ways". He had singled out for praise in his letter to Wordsworth this poem and lines from 'The Sexton', 'To Joanna' and 'The Brothers'. The modern reader may wonder, with Wordsworth, that Lamb did not immediately respond to the "union of Imagination and Tenderness" in 'Michael', but it is perhaps a poem that "grows on one" and its effect is cumulative, whereas Lamb here is giving his first impressions. Of the two poems from which Lamb tells us Wordsworth quoted in his "castigation", Crabb Robinson writes in a letter years afterwards, "There are two idyls, or pastoral poems, which dear Charles Lamb used to place after the Gospels, which should appertain to a *second course* of Wordsworth... To me they seem perfect - they are 'The Brothers' and 'Michael'." Wordsworth was not the only one to react angrily to criticism and yet benefit from it later.

It is in this letter of January 30th 1801, in response to the new edition of the first volume of *Lyrical Ballads*, as well as to the previously unpublished poems in the second volume, that Lamb takes Wordsworth to task about what has been done at his instigation to Coleridge's great poem. "I am sorry that Coleridge has christened his Ancient Marinere 'a poet's Reverie' - it is as bad as Bottom the Weaver's declaration that he is not a Lion but only the scenical representation of a Lion." He goes on to demolish for all time the criticisms in Wordsworth's Note to the poem added in the 1800 edition, about which Lamb is "hurt and vexed", and sums up his opinion of the second volume by saying, "I do not *feel* any one poem in it so forcibly as the Ancient Marinere, the Mad mother, and the Lines at Tintern Abbey in the *first*." Despite Wordsworth's reaction to this letter at the time, the phrase 'A Poet's Reverie' was erased on page 5 at the head of the poem, though left on the half-title on page 1, for the editions of 1802 and 1805 and Wordsworth's Note was omitted. Lamb also "wished the Critical preface had appeared in a separate treatise" and, as Professor Hill said last year, "How right he was". Coleridge in *Biographia Literaria* puts down "the whole long continued controversy" about Wordsworth's poems to "this preface". In later editions Wordsworth banished it to the end of the volume.

Lamb comments that "The Poets Epitaph is disfigured, to my taste, by the vulgar satire upon parsons and lawyers at the beginning, and the coarse epithet of pin point in the 6th stanza". Wordsworth had earlier written some satires in imitation of Juvenal and sent portions of them to Wrangham, with whom he had planned the project, in letters in November 1795 and February 1797. But when Wrangham wanted him to publish them, Wordsworth replied on 7th November 1806, "I have long since come to a fixed resolution to steer clear of personal satire; in fact, I never will have anything to do with it as far as concerns the *private* vices of individuals on any account: with respect to public delinquents or offenders I will not say the same; though I should be slow to meddle even with these". He seems to have taken to heart Lamb's condemnation of "vulgar satire". As for the scientist who is asked to take his "pin-point of a soul away", Wordsworth later gave him an "ever-dwindling soul" instead!

Reading 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' with students, as it has been my lot to do very frequently in recent years with different groups, though there are variations, a common pattern seems generally to emerge. We start off in a non-committal kind of mood, as approaching something new and unpredictable. "I saw an aged Beggar in my walk." But soon the close observation and psychological realism - as in 'The Idiot Boy' - has at least some of us caught.

> ...from a bag
> All white with flour, the dole of village dames,
> He drew his scraps and fragments, one by one,
> And scann'd them with a fix'd and serious look
> Of idle computation.

And

> ...the crumbs in little showers
> Fell on the ground, and the small mountain birds,
> Not venturing yet to peck their destin'd meal,
> Approached within the length of half his staff.

The next section of the poem which tells how the Beggar brings out the best in ordinary people, both young and old showing him consideration, is also acceptable. Students will say, "It's not like that now, you know. They'd be more likely to beat him up". But they are nevertheless charmed, "Hoping it might be so". Then we come to

> But deem not this man useless - Statesmen! ye
> Who are so restless in your wisdom, ye
> Who have a broom still ready in your hands
> To rid the world of nuisances...

and so on, and so on. We sympathize with his indignation but it's no good, the spell is broken. At that point out comes my copy of Lamb's Letters and we are consoled to find we are not alone.

> I will just add that it appears to me a fault in the Beggar, that the instructions conveyed in it are too direct and like a lecture: they don't slide into the mind of the reader, while he is imagining no such matter.

Here Lamb, like Jane Austen born in the same year, is greatly in advance of his time. He goes on to complain that "This fault, if I am right, is in a ten thousandth worse degree to be found in Sterne and many many novelists and modern poets, who continually put up a sign-post to shew where you are to feel. They set out with assuming their readers to be stupid." Jane Austen and, in a different way, Scott suffer very little from this fault, but after them the novel slides back into it again. Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, for all their virtues, are terrible offenders. Lamb is, in a sense, putting his finger on the problem of point-of-view, which was to be Henry James's particular concern; and Wordsworth's narrative technique does make clever use of shifts in voice, for example in 'The Idiot Boy' and 'Simon Lee'. Since Henry James, and Hopkins perhaps, the discriminating audience has become used to not being underestimated. "An intelligent reader finds a sort of insult in being told, I will teach you how to think upon this subject." The skilful approach of "direction by indirection" could hardly be better described than by Lamb's expression "slide into the mind of the reader while he is imagining no such matter". We are, to some extent at least, conditioned now to subtlety, economy and suggestion rather than statement. Wordsworth at his best employs these methods in a manner second to none. The Lucy poem that Lamb praised is a case in point. But to any creative artist the inspirational moments come not every day. 'The Old Cumberland Beggar' does indeed retrieve itself, as Lamb's other comment on it shows.

> Let him be free of mountain solitudes,
> And have around him, whether heard or not,
> The pleasant melody of woodland birds.

Concerning these lines Lamb speaks of "the delicate and curious feeling in the wish for the Cumberland Beggar, that he may have about him the melody of Birds, altho' he hear them not. - Here the mind knowingly passes a fiction upon herself, first substituting her own feelings for the Beggar's, and,in the same breath detecting the fallacy, will not part with the wish". Geoffrey Hartman comments, "This kind of fiction, closely related to surmise, is among the subtlest and least appreciated characteristics of Romantic poetry... There is, one might say, a 'Romantic' conceit that should be compared in degree and quality of self-consciousness to the 'Metaphysical' conceit..." Lamb with his acute perception was able to recognize this mental interplay and to appreciate its sensitive and original nature.

So, far from saying that the second volume had not pleased him, Lamb had paid it the compliment of penetrating criticism and in the case of 'The Old Cumberland Beggar', as Professor Ades says, "Few subsequent readers have failed to agree with Lamb". In view of all the causes he had at this time for feeling less than loving towards Wordsworth personally, he shows a generous and objective spirit in that letter of January 1801. No wonder, then, that he lets himself go in his correspondence with Manning and admits that

> Writing to *you*, I may say, that the 2d vol. has no such pieces as the 3 I enumerated ('The Ancient Mariner', 'The Mad Mother', 'Tintern Abbey'). It is full of original thinking and an observing mind, but it does not often make you laugh or cry. - It too artfully aims at simplicity of expression. And you sometimes doubt if simplicity be not a cover for Poverty.

There are poems in this collection which have a certain thinness, notably perhaps some 'On the Naming of Places'. But I would put in a plea for the Matthew Poems, from which Lamb quotes in 'All Fools' Day' and he himself later praised to Crabb Robinson 'Hartleap Well' and 'The Two Thieves'. By the time a number of the poems from the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* appeared in Wordsworth's *Poems* of 1815, Lamb writes with the obviously genuine affection of familiarity about many more of them. He asks why Wordsworth has left out 'A Character' and the moral at the end of 'Rural Architecture', both of which were restored in later editions. He applauds Wordsworth's decision to omit the last verse of 'Poor Susan', in a most telling piece of criticism. At least one poem, he admits, does make him cry, as he praises "that delicacy towards aberrations from the strict path which is so fine in the Old Thief and the boy at his side, which always brings water into my eyes". Laughter, though not of the humorous kind evoked by 'The Idiot Boy' in *Lyrical Ballads* 1798, is aroused too by that missing ending to 'Rural Architecture', which Lamb slightly misquotes, obviously from memory.

> I only know that no line oftener or readier occurs than that 'Light-hearted boys I will build up a giant with you'. It comes naturally with warm holyday and the freshness of the blood. It is a perfect summer Amulet that I tye round my legs to quicken their motion when I go out a maying. - (N.B.) I don't often go out a maying.

So it does not seem that we can suppose Lamb to have endorsed Manning's reaction. "So you don't think there's a Word's-worth of good Poetry in the great L.B.! - I daren't put the dreaded Syllables at their just length, for my *Arse tickles red* from the northern castigation -." Or that he meant more than that "Tis half past 12 oClock & all sober people ought to be abed", when he said, "Between you & me the L. Balads are but drowsy performances". Moreover, Lamb's pique with Wordsworth did not last, and from the summer of 1802 a much closer relationship of mutual affection and respect grew up between the Lambs and the Wordsworths. As Professor Hill put it, "the situation was radically transformed".

During the next few years a critical influence of another kind seems to have flowed from the Lambs to Wordsworth. As early as November 1801, Lamb uses the expression in a letter to Robert Lloyd, "Earth cannot shew a more venerable sight", and Professor Marrs comments, "One wonders if Wordsworth did not see this letter within the next few months, remember this passage, and turn it into the opening line of 'Composed upon Westminster Bridge, September 3, 1802' - 'Earth has not anything to show more fair'."

On 5th March 1803, Lamb copies out for Wordsworth verses 21-53 from Charles Cotton's *Winter*, among other selections, "the best things in the verse way, I have lit upon for many a day. I believe they will be new to you. You know Cotton, who wrote a 2d part to Walton's Angler. A volume of his miscellaneous poems is scarce." In Wordsworth's 1815 Preface he quotes from these very stanzas as "a general illustration of the characteristics of Fancy" and praises "a rapidity of detail, and a profusion of *fanciful* comparisons, which indicate on the part of the poet extreme activity of intellect, and a correspondent hurry of delightful feeling". By the time a catalogue was made of the books at Rydal Mount, Wordsworth had acquired Cotton's *Poems on Several Occasions*, 1686, and *Poetical Works*, 1725, but it is more than likely that Lamb in this letter first drew his attention to them. "I just excerp here & there, to convince you, if after this you need it, that Cotton was a first rate," and "In your obscure part of the world, which I take to be ultima Thule, I thought these verses out of Books which cannot be accessible, would not be unwelcome."

The death of John Wordsworth in February 1805 seems to have proved the culmination of a process in Wordsworth, already detectable in the 'Intimations Ode', 'Resolution and Independence' and the 'Ode to Duty', which made it necessary for him to rethink his whole view of life. His letter to Sir George Beaumont of 12th March 1805 wrestles with the insuperable problem of unmerited suffering and premature death. "Why have we sympathies that make the best of us so afraid of inflicting pain and sorrow, which yet we see dealt about so lavishly by the supreme governor?" He can see no answer "except upon the supposition of *another* and a *better world*". He had always been concerned with the grievous aspects of the human lot and had struggled to come to terms with them in various ways, by the hope of amelioration from political change, by several kinds of attempts to find consolation in Nature, by the transforming power of the Imagination in art, but now he turns to a more overtly religious solution. No longer can he see Nature as entirely benevolent - the sea had proved otherwise. Once he would have drawn a very different picture from Sir George Beaumont's stormy scene.

> AH! THEN, if mine had been the Painter's hand,
> To express what then I saw; and add the gleam,
> The light that never was, on sea or land,
> The consecration, and the Poet's dream...
>
> A Picture had it been of lasting ease,
> Elysian quiet, without toil or strife;
> No motion but the moving tide, a breeze,
> Or merely silent Nature's breathing life.
>
> Such in the fond illusion of my heart,
> Such Picture would I at that time have made:
> And seen the soul of truth in every part
> A stedfast peace that might not be betrayed.
>
> So once it would have been, - 'tis so no more;
> I have submitted to a new control:
> A power is gone, which nothing can restore;
> A deep distress hath humanized my soul.

He falls back on Fortitude, a virtue he had always admired in others, in Lamb not least, and, as we know, Lamb was able to be very helpful to him at this time with his enquiries about the shipwreck. But this fortitude does not remain as mere stoicism; it merges into religious faith, and the poem in which Wordsworth explores the nature of this process is *The White Doe of Rylstone*.

In Mary Lamb's letter to Dorothy Wordsworth of May 7th, 1805, she writes with wonderful wisdom and delicacy of feeling and includes her poem regretting that Coleridge is not with the Wordsworths at this time.

He'd tell them that their brother dead
When years have passed o'er their head,
Will be remember'd with such holy,
True & perfect melancholy,
That ever this lost brother John
Will be their hearts companion.
His voice they'll always hear, his face they'll always see,
There's nought in life so sweet as such a memory.

Between October 1807 and January 1808, Wordsworth wrote his first version of *The White Doe of Rylstone*. The "mere business parts" of the poem, as Wordsworth admitted later, were not entirely successful, by which he means the "physical action". This tells of the 1569 Catholic Rising in the North in which, in the ballad version he followed, the whole Norton family were wiped out, except for Emily who was left alone and homeless. The interest, both for Wordsworth and the reader, is that "the true action of the poem was spiritual - the subduing of the will, and all inferior passions, to the perfect purifying and spiritualising of the intellectual nature". The question that Wordsworth tries to answer is, how can a human being come to terms with total loss? Emily is stripped of everything earthly, except her companion, the White Doe, which seems to represent some spiritual principle. Amid the ruins of her life, and particularly in the loss of her favourite brother Francis,

Behold her, like a virgin Queen,
Neglecting in imperial state
These outward images of fate,
And carrying inward a serene
And perfect sway, through many a thought
Of chance and change, that hath been brought
To the subjection of a holy,
Though stern and rigorous melancholy.

But, with the coming of the Doe, this solitary fortitude becomes softened,

With her companion, in such frame
Of mind, to Rylstone back she came;
And, ranging through the wasted groves,
Received the memory of old loves,
Undisturbed and undistrest,
Into a soul which now was blest
With a soft spring-day of holy
Mild, and grateful melancholy:
Not sunless gloom or unenlightened,
But by tender fancies brightened.

Surely the similarity to Mary Lamb's poem and letter, not only in the word echoes but also in the changing sentiments cannot be a mere coincidence. She had written, "feeling that I was doing an improper thing to intrude upon your sorrow, I wished to tell you that you would one day feel the kind of peaceful state of mind, and sweet memory of the dead which you so happily describe as now almost begun, but I felt it was improper, and most grating to the feelings of the afflicted, to say to them that the memory of their affliction would in time become a constant part not only of their 'dream, but of their most wakeful sense of happiness'. That you would see every object with, & through your lost brother, & that that would at last become a real and everlasting source of comfort to you, I felt, & well knew from my own experience in sorrow, but till you yourself began to feel this I did not dare tell you so."

Emily, Wordsworth wishes us to believe, comes through at last to an even better way:

> Even such this blessed Pilgrim trod
> By sorrow lifted towards her God;
> Uplifted to the purest sky
> Of undisturbed mortality.

The poem, as we have it, though not entirely successful, contains passages of great interest and beauty. As it was in its original form both Coleridge and Lamb were very unhappy with it.

In the meantime, relations between the Lambs and the Wordsworths had been more than cordial and Wordsworth had even learnt to reciprocate admiration! Mary sends Mrs Clarkson Charles's poem about tobacco, saying "Wordsworth likes it very much". But when Wordsworth came to London because Coleridge was reported very ill and to see the *White Doe* through the press, Lamb writes to Manning on February 26th 1808, "Wordsworth the great poet is coming to town... He says he does not see much difficulty in writing like Shakespeare, if he had a mind to try it. It is clear that nothing is wanting but the mind."

What has happened? I think the unfavourable reception of the *Poems in Two Volumes* of 1807 has made Wordsworth regress and overcompensate again. The same thing was to happen in 1818, after the severe criticism of *The Excursion, The White Doe* and *Poems*, when Keats spoke sadly of the bad impression he left "where-ever he visited in town by his egotism, Vanity and bigotry. Yet he is a great poet..." Of course, Lamb hated any kind of pretension and could never resist a dig at it.

When Wordsworth went back to Grasmere on April 3rd because Sara Hutchinson was ill, he left *The White Doe* in Coleridge's hands to be seen through the press. But Coleridge was uneasy. Wordsworth had read the first canto to Lamb while he was in London and then Lamb had borrowed the manuscript from Coleridge and read it twice. It seems that, knowing Wordsworth's respect for Lamb's judgment, Coleridge hoped his opinion would reinforce his own and persuade Wordsworth to revise the poem. For this reason he passed on Lamb's criticisms to Wordsworth. Their exact nature we do not know, though it rather appears that his objection was exactly that which Wordsworth was later to state himself, namely that he had skimped the "physical action" in his "anxiety to 'get on' with the more important parts". But at this stage, "Let Lamb learn to be ashamed of himself... -As to the principal characters doing nothing it is false and too ridiculous to be dwelt on for a moment... let him see if there are no victories in the world of the spirit..." As if Lamb did not live every day with such victories! But that recognition did not make the first draft of *The White Doe* necessarily a good poem. Wordsworth ends this letter to Coleridge, "of one thing be assured, that Lamb has not a reasoning mind, therefore cannot have a comprehensive mind, and, least of all, has he an imaginative one. Farewell." Surely another "very merry letter" was called for! Poor Coleridge, whose efforts in the short term had been counter-productive, had to fall back on saying that "Lamb and Miss Lamb...are for the very reason that disqualifies them as Judges concerning its *true merit*, no unfair Specimens of perhaps the majority of readers of Poetry..."

To cut a long story short, Wordsworth withdrew the poem and it was not published until 1815. No manuscript of the early version survives but it is a fair guess that the final poem was very much altered. The double echo of Mary Lamb's lines remained - or became, I think probably remained - key passages in the printed poem.

Friendly intercourse between the Lambs and the Wordsworths continued, with admiration, now mutual, for their works. Lamb praised the Convention of Cintra pamphlet and the second Essay on Epitaphs, in which Wordsworth had incorporated Lamb's saying, "Where are all the *bad* people buried?" Wordsworth particularly liked a "Tale in Prose" from *Mrs. Leicester's School*, which Lucas says was *Arabella Hardy: The Sea Voyage*.

On 9th August 1814, Lamb acknowledges "the receipt of the great Armful of Poetry... and to get it before the rest of the world too!" This is a change from the time when Lamb had to plead for copies of Wordsworth's poetry and borrow the second volume of *Lyrical Ballads* before his own came. The "Armful" was, of course, *The Excursion*, which Lamb reported he had already read right through - their stamina was greater than ours in those days - and had meant to start on a second reading at once. Martin Burney, however, "came in the night (while we were out) and made holy theft of it". He passed it on to Hazlitt, who used it to write *his* review for *The Examiner*. Only when he got it back from them was Lamb able to respond to Wordsworth's request through Southey to review it for the *Quarterly Review*. Curious that Wordsworth should have wished Lamb to do so if he really thought he had neither a reasoning, comprehensive nor imaginative mind! From the first reading, however, Lamb was able to say, "It is the noblest conversational poem I ever read. A day in heaven."

As for the review itself, whatever Gifford may have done to it, it does still convey clearly what Hartman calls "the lineaments of the conception" on which *The Excursion* is built, whereas Hazlitt's, despite his sporadic brilliance, does not. Like Jeffrey, Hazlitt could not stomach the Pedlar - "we take leave of him when he makes pedlars and ploughmen his heroes" - whereas Lamb ably and justly defends him. Scornfully he advises readers who "feel scandalized at a *name*" "to substitute silently the word *Palmer*, or *Pilgrim*, or any less offensive designation, which shall connect the notion of sobriety in heart and manners with the experience and privileges which a wayfaring life confers". Hazlitt, as one might expect, finds that "One of the most interesting parts of this work is that in which the author treats of the French Revolution", in Book III and part of Book IV. Lamb says, "The fourth book, entitled 'Despondency Corrected', we consider the most valuable part of the poem". As with 'Lines Left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree', one can see why this should particularly appeal to him, but he was not alone in his choice. Keats also loved this book, particularly the passages about Greek mythology, as Leigh Hunt noted (lines 718-62 and 847-87). Haydon wrote in his copy of the poem against lines 858-64, "Poor Keats used always to prefer this passage to all others", and the influence of lines 753-62, which Lamb quotes in his review, on the 'Ode to a Nightingale' is well known. It remained for Byron to demonstrate the negative pole of Lamb's criterion as a critic, "the pride of calculating *understanding*", when he quoted from Keats' favourite passage

> Rivers and fertile plains and sounding shores
> Under a cope of variegated sky . (IV 719-20)

only to point out that "The rivers are dry half the year, the plains are barren, the shores *still* and *tideless* as the Mediterranean can make them; the sky is anything but variegated, being for months and months 'darkly, deeply, beautifully blue'". With similar factual corrections about Turkish cemetaries, in relation to the *Essay on Epitaphs*, Byron showed himself blood-brother to those Caledonians who told Lamb that his wish to meet Burns was impossible because he was dead.

Lamb, on the contrary, in his Review, both illustrated and affirmed the positive aim of his criticism as of Wordsworth's *Excursion*, "to reinstate the *imagination* and the *affections*".

Lamb writes to Wordsworth (January 7th 1815) in grief at Gifford's mutilations. "But worse than altering words, he has kept a few members only of the part I had done best which was to explain all I could of your 'Scheme of harmonies' as I had ventured to call it between the external universe & what within us answers to it. To do this I had accumulated a good many short passages, rising in length to the end, weaving in the Extracts as if they came in as part of the text, naturally, not obtruding them as *specimens*." Nevertheless, the very choice he makes of quotations shows his unerring judgment. As Professor Ades says, "Lamb has selected with accuracy what posterity has judged excellent - no mean accomplishment at a first reading". He includes the now famous passage about the child with the shell, which ends with some of the best lines Wordsworth ever wrote

> Authentic tidings of invisible things;
> Of ebb and flow, and ever during power;
> And central peace subsisting at the heart
> Of endless agitation. (IV 1144-7)

Of the creator of that "scheme of harmonies", Lamb says, "To such a mind... the visible and audible things of creation present, not dim symbols or curious emblems, which they have done at all times to those who have been gifted with the poetical faculty; but revelations and quick insights into the life within us, the pledge of immortality". I doubt if a better description than this of the distinctive quality of the poetry of Wordsworth has ever been written.

Lamb shrewdly feels an incongruity in the story of Margaret, "a very old acquaintance even as long back as I saw you first at Stowey", becoming part of the first book and in the review feels that it might have blended in better if it had been put later when the poet's philosophy had been established. The problem, of course, that Lamb put his finger on, was that the poet's philosophy had changed since he first wrote *The Ruined Cottage* and the two viewpoints do not blend.

Both in the letter and in the review Lamb praises the "Tales of the Churchyard" and says of the village priest, "With heaven above his head, and the mouldering turf at his feet - standing betwixt life and death - he seems to maintain that spiritual relation which he bore to his living flock, in its undiminished strength, even with their ashes; and to be in his proper cure, or diocese, among the dead." Gifford's damage notwithstanding, that reads like a sample of "the prettiest piece of prose I ever writ", and is appropriately reminiscent of Sir Thomas Browne's *Urn Burial*. Lamb seems genuinely to have admired and loved *The Excursion* and, as Keats called it one of the "three things superior in the modern world", I wonder whether our knowledge of *The Prelude*, which they did not have, may not have blinded us to the virtues of Wordsworth's other long poem.

Roy Park feels that Lamb's early fine criticism of Wordsworth became modified by his friendship as time went on and brings as evidence the "more frank and rather sharper" views recorded in Crabb Robinson's *Diary* "than those communicated to Wordsworth himself". Robinson himself, reporting Hazlitt's comment "that if Lamb in his criticism had found but one fault with Wordsworth, he would never have forgiven him", calls it an "extravagant statement" and only admits "some truth in it". We know enough about Hazlitt's character and relationships, particularly his persistent attacks on Wordsworth, which led Robinson eventually to "cut" him, to realize that he is not a reliable witness. In the incident where Lamb said, "If we are to talk in this strain, we ought to have said Grace before we began our conversation", the rest of the passage makes it perfectly clear that De Quincey, "who spoke with much warmth on the subject, and complained that Lamb did not do Wordsworth justice", had overdone it and aroused Lamb's inevitable iconoclastic instincts. In the very year, 1815, when Hazlitt made his remark, Lamb in his two letters about Wordsworth's volume of *Poems* had some very downright objections to make along with his praise. Some of them we have already noticed. A particularly interesting example is Lamb's protest about the change in 'The Blind Highland Boy'. In the version published in 1807, Wordsworth had followed the story as told him by an eye-witness. The blind boy had launched himself upon the Loch in

> A household Tub, like one of those
> Which women use to wash their clothes.

Coleridge had objected to this mundane object and suggested that Wordswoth substitute a turtle-shell, which he did in 1815. Lamb says, "I am afraid lest that substitution of a shell (a flat falsification of the history) for the household implement as it stood at first, was a kind of tub thrown out to the beast, or rather thrown out for him. The tub was a good honest tub in its place, & nothing could fairly be said against it." He is afraid that Wordsworth, in pandering to Jeffrey and his ilk, had actually given them a weapon to use against him. In this instance, where Coleridge held an opposite opinion to Lamb, though Barron Field later supported him, Wordsworth did *not* restore the earlier version, though he told Field he would not have altered it in the first place if he had known "such judges would object".

With regard to the difference in tone of Lamb's remarks to Robinson from those to Wordsworth, *Peter Bell* is a case in point. On June 6th 1812, Robinson notes in his *Diary*, "Lent 'Peter Bell' to Charles Lamb. To my surprise, he does not like it. He complains of the slowness of the narrative, as if that were not the *art* of the poet. He says Wordsworth has great thoughts, but here are none of them. He has no interest in the Ass." The poem was not published for seven years after this, until 1819, and on May 3rd of that year Robinson noted, "Wordsworth has set himself back ten years by the publication of this work". On May 11th, he says, "L. spoke of 'Peter Bell' which he considers as one of the worst of Wordsworth's works. The lyric narrative L. has no taste for. He is disgusted by the introduction, which he deems puerile and the story he thinks ill told, though he allows the idea to be good". Lamb's comments on the Highland Boy's tub show that it is not the lowly subject that he objects to in *Peter Bell* but the treatment.

In his letter in two inks of April 26th, 1819, Lamb does not, it is true, tell Wordsworth that it is the worst poem he ever wrote! He perjures himself to the extent of calling it "excellent" - but very quickly qualifies this. "For its matter, I mean," which corresponds to "he allows the idea to be good". He goes on, "I cannot say that the style of it quite satisfies me. It is too lyrical." In other words, "The lyric narrative L. has no taste for". Then he deals with the introduction, not by saying it is "puerile" but, "The auditors to whom it is feigned to be told, do not *arride* me. I had rather it had been told me at once". Roy Park is, of course, perfectly correct in remarking "the more frank and rather sharper" comments to Robinson, but Lamb has not ceased to convey to Wordsworth the essence of his complaints about the poem.

By June 11th 1820, Crabb Robinson records that Wordsworth "has resolved to make some concessions to public taste in 'Peter Bell' ... I never before saw him so ready to yield to the opinion of others. He is improved not a little by this, in my mind". On December 30th 1817, three years before, Robinson had spent the evening at Lamb's and "I heard at one time Coleridge quoting Wordsworth's verses, and Wordsworth quoting *not* Coleridge's but his own". Yet by June 2nd 1820, again at Lamb's, "Lamb was in a good humour; he read some recent compositions, which Wordsworth cordially praised... Not much was said about his new volume of poems". And on June 21st, "Wordsworth was very pleasant. Indeed he is uniformly so now. And there is absolutely no pretence of what was always an exaggerated charge against him, that he could talk only of his own poetry, and loves only his own works. He is more indulgent than he used to be of the works of others, even contemporaries and rivals, and is more open to arguments in favour of changes in his own poems. Lamb was in excellent spirits." Mary Moorman suggests that "Perhaps the more favourable reception of the *River Duddon* volume, which appeared in May 1820, was partly responsible for the change".

For whatever reason, two things seem to have happened. Lamb had learnt to convey his criticisms with tact and Wordsworth had learnt to accept them with grace. When *The Waggoner* was published, at Lamb's suggestion, in June 1819, it was dedicated to him, with a generous tribute to Lamb's own writings. In his letter of acknowledgement - one of his most delightful - Lamb suggests a better opinion of the Prologue to *Peter Bell* than he had previously, yet he qualifies this immediately too. "I do not know which I like best, the prologue (the latter part specially) to P. Bell, or the Epilogue to Benjamin. Yes, I tell stories, I do know. I like the last best, and the Waggoner altogether as a pleasanter remembrance to me than the Itinerant. If it were not, the page before the first page would and ought to make it so."

Was Lamb right about *Peter Bell* or did he here reveal a blind spot? Opinions about the poem still differ and there have been some very distinguished apologists for it but Lamb's criticisms seem to me to be valid. As to the Prologue, though the self-mockery is appealing, what Coleridge called "dear William's Sky Canoe" and its voyage strike a note of whimsy unusual for Wordsworth, while Lamb's comment about the audience in the garden waiting for the poet to descend from his celestial trip is surely entirely justified. The Squire, his little daughter Bess and Harry the Churchwarden, who were listed thus in all the early versions, as well as the Vicar and his Dame, add nothing to the poem, while Stephen Otter is obviously only put in to rhyme with "potter". But also, at the end of the Prologue, are the beautiful stanzas, not part of the original poem, which I think must have been in Lamb's mind when he compared them to the Epilogue to Benjamin.

> Long have I loved what I behold,
> The night that calms, the day that cheers;
> The common growth of mother-earth
> Suffices me - her tears and mirth,
> Her humblest mirth and tears.
>
> The dragon's wing, the magic ring,
> I shall not covet for my dower,
> If I along that lowly way
> With sympathetic heart may stray,
> And with a soul of power.

At first, tiresome references to his audience interrupt the tale. "Hold! cried the Squire" or "(and now my little Bess! / We've reached at last the promised tale;)" or "what ails you now, my little Bess?" or "Kind Listeners that around me sit". But as the poem goes on Wordsworth seems to forget them and it ends abruptly and extremely implausibly.

> And Peter Bell, who, till that night,
> Had been the wildest of his clan,
> Forsook his crimes, renounced his folly,
> And, after ten months' melancholy,
> Became a good and honest man.

We are told nothing of the effect of this stunning conclusion upon the audience in the garden, the Squire, the Churchwarden, the Vicar, his Dame, et al., and above all little Bess. Perhaps they have got bored and gone away. The only possible justification for the Prologue and the auditors, who "do not *arride*" Lamb, is that they should set an anti-heroic tone and provide a, literally, down-to-earth frame for the body of the poem. One has to remember, of course, that *Peter Bell* was first written in 1798 at the time when Wordsworth was involved in "an experiment, with a view to ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure" and that it was his counterpart in the everyday world to the "ambitious Youth" of line 128, namely Coleridge, whose *Ancient Mariner* portrays a similar conversion, but by means of the supernatural.

But, whereas in other daring poems such as 'Simon Lee' and 'The Idiot Boy' a strong case can be made for Wordsworth's success in what he set out to do, I have never been able to feel convinced about *Peter Bell*. Lamb's criticism of the structure, that the story is ill told, is borne out by the absence of the frame at the end, and, as he says, by the slowness of the narrative, though Crabb Robinson was also right in seeing that this is Wordsworth's intentional method.

Lamb's lack of interest in the ass surely gets to the root of what is wrong with the poem. The pony in 'The Idiot Boy' is an endearing character, the most intelligent person in the poem, as Robert Langbaum called him. The similar last lines in the introduction of the White Doe and Peter's donkey invite contrast. Here is the White Doe.

> And through yon gateway, where is found
> Free entrance to the Church-yard ground -
> Comes gliding in with lovely gleam,
> Comes gliding in serene and slow,
> Soft and silent, as a dream,
> A solitary Doe!

In *Peter Bell*

> Across the deep and quiet spot
> Is Peter driving through the grass -
> And now has reached the skirting trees;
> And turning round his head he sees
> A solitary Ass.

Of course, Wordsworth is doing two quite different things and in *Peter Bell*, as in 'Simon Lee', is tempting us to laugh but, whereas in the latter we are pulled up short by the deeply touching ending, in *Peter Bell* we tend indeed to laugh, to stave off boredom. One is totally unconvinced by the psychology of Peter's conversion from a lifetime of insensitive vice and by the ass's agency in it. Wordsworth's use of deliberate comedy and both subtle and broad humour, which seem so successful in 'The Idiot Boy', have not yet seduced me into enjoying *Peter Bell*. But perhaps it would be wise to suspend judgment, since Coleridge in a notebook entry called it, "Wordsworth's most wonderful as well as admirable poem".

In January 1823 Lamb sent Wordsworth a copy of *The Essays of Elia* and in May 1833 thanked him for his "cordial reception" of the *Last Essays*. Wordsworth wrote to Crabb Robinson on 14th November 1833, "We were delighted to have so good an account of the Lambs. -Give our kindest love when you see them and tell L. that his Works are our delight, as is evidenced better than by words - by April weather of smiles and tears whenever we read them". It seems fitting that Wordsworth applies to *Elia* the very criterion that Lamb had earlier used of the *Lyrical Ballads*, whether they "often make you laugh or cry".

Professor Barnett analyzes the quotations used by Lamb in his essays and says that "Of writers contemporary with Lamb, Wordsworth is most quoted with Coleridge a close second". Lamb, in a letter to Barton of May 15th 1824, wrote, "Why, a line of Wordsworth's is a lever to lift the immortal spirit!" Yet I think it is clear that neither Lamb's reverence for Wordsworth as a poet nor love for him as a man prevented him from being his consistently shrewd and honest critic and that, as Professor Barnett affirms, his criticism "improved Wordsworth". May I end with a quotation from Lamb's letter to Barton of April 1823, which seems to sum up his final reciprocal relationship with Wordsworth. "It is a lie that poets are envious, I have known the best of them, and can speak to it, that they give eachother their merits, and are the kindest critics as well as best authors."

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL CONTENT OF LAMB'S LETTERS (Continued)

D C Saxena

Romancer of the City Streets

Like a "mussel glued to his impassable rocky limit, two inch square,"[42] Lamb passed the major part of his life in London, whose very smoke was "the medium most familiar" to his vision. The Temple and its environs: this was the fairyland of his childhood dreams which he wove into the varicoloured fabric of his writings. Of the Temple he wrote in the Elia essay on "The Old Benchers of the Inner Temple;"

> Its church, its halls, its gardens, its fountains, its river, I had almost said - for in those young years, what was this king of rivers

> to me but a stream that watered our pleasant places? - these are my oldest recollections.[43]

In a letter to Southey, he confessed that he was "Christian, Englishman, Londoner, Templar,"[44] in that order. His genius, as his first biographer aptly phrased it, was "formed to nestle rather than to roam."[45] London was Lamb's"little bit of ivory," providing the staple for his essays and letters and he "contrived to weave its tritest traditions into a bright and endless romance."[46]

The essays are sufficient proof of Lamb's love of London, but in the letters the expression of this life-long love is rather more uninhibited. In one of the earliest letters, he describes London as "the only fostering soil for Genius."[47] After consigning "Hills, woods, lakes, and mountains to the eternal devil," he thus catalogues the pleasures of London to Manning:

> Streets, streets, streets, markets, theatres churches, Covent Gardens, shops sparkling with pretty faces of industrious milliners, neat sempstresses, ladies cheapening, gentlemen behind counters lying, authors in the street with spectacles, George Dyers ... lamps lit at night, pastry-cooks' and silver-smiths' shops, beautiful Quakers of Pentonville, noise of coaches,... inns of court with their learned air... old book-stalls, Jeremy Taylors, Burtons on Melancholy, and Religio Medicis on every stall. These are thy pleasures, O London with-the-many sins.[48]

In like vein he writes to Lloyd:

> Let them talk of lakes and mountains and romantic dales - all that fantastic stuff; give me a ramble by night, in the winter nights in London... I have lent out my heart with usury to such scenes from my childhood up, and have cried with fulness of joy at the multitudinous scenes of Life in the crowded streets of ever dear London.[49]

Thus we find Lamb unabashedly praising the "gay life of London."[50] including those conventionally regarded its seamier aspects.

Making no bones about his "intense local attachments," he writes to Wordsworth, that high-priest of nature:

> Your sun & moon and skys and hills & lakes affect me no more, or scarcely come to me in more venerable characters, than a gilded room with tapestry and tapers, where I might live with handsome visible objects. I consider the clouds above me but as a roof, beautifully painted but unable to satisfy the mind, and at last, like the pictures of the apartment of a connoisseur, unable to afford him any longer a pleasure.[51]

Frankly incredulous, Wordsworth responds with the lines -

Thou wert a scorner of the fields, my friend,
But more in show than truth.

But Wordsworth's opinion appears to be simplistic, in the light of Lamb's stated reasons for being "an absolute and proudly impenitent Londoner"[52] in *The Londoner*, No.1:

> I was born (as you have heard), bred, and have passed most of my time, *in a crowd*. This has begot in me an entire affection for that way of life, amounting to an almost insurmountable aversion from solutude and

> rural life.[53]

If he finds no night walk "comparable to a walk from St Paul's to Charing Cross,"[54] and tells Manning that "All the streets and pavements are pure gold,"[55] the reason is that they are transmuted into that metal by the alchemy of "a mind that loves to be at home in crowds."[56] Naturally "his delineation of London and its inhabitants is romantic in its sympathy and invested charm..."[57]

Whether this was just a natural love, or a case of making the best of circumstances, is open to some question; because Lamb wrote to Sir Walter Scott -

> My disparagement of heaths and highlands - if I said any such thing in half earnest - you must put down as a piece of the old Vulpine policy. I must make the most of the spot I am chained to, and console myself for my flat destiny as well as I am able. I know very well our mole-hills are not mountains, but I must cocker them up and make them both as big and as handsome as I can, that we may both be satisfied.[58]

On shifting to Enfield after retirement, he remarked to Barron Field that "an angel shall not persuade me to wicked London again."[59] However, the attraction of "dull Enfield" soon wore off and Lamb often got dreams of being in Fleet Street, "but I wake and cry to sleep again."[60] To Wordsworth he had no hesitation in admitting that for no native Londoner "health, and rest, and innocent occupation, interchange of converse sweet and recreative study, can make the country any thing better than altogether odious and detestable. A garden was the primitive prison till man with promethean felicity and boldness luckily sinn'd himself out of it."[61]

Lamb's preference for "old London at Fire and Plague times rather than these tepid gales, healthy country air," was so overwhelming that he would walk "3 or 4 miles nearer the Great City,"[62] and find unutterable solace. Like all first loves, London cast its seductive spell on his old age, prompting him to remark that he "would live in London, Shirtless, bookless,"[63] as "London streets and faces cheer me inexpressibly." "A town bird in grain, gristle and feather,"[64] nursed amidst her noise, her crowds and her smoke, no wonder Lamb lent out his "heart with usury to such scenes."

Some Very Human Weaknesses

Lamb was no paragon of virtue, nor did he wish to be considered as one. In fact, he resisted his friends' attempts to place him on a moral pedestal. When Coleridge lauded him as "gentle-hearted Charles," in "This Lime Tree Bower My Prison," he felt acutely embarrassed and asked Coleridge to desist from making him more ridiculous in print: "I hope my virtues have done sucking."[65] The reason was that he had an inborn aversion to "virtue that's thrust upon us."[66]

Although Lamb was essentially a good man, "his goodness left much room for gusty minor vices."[67] Unfortunately his early biographers tried to either gloss over his foibles as "common - the *lues bibendi*,"[68] or euphemistically dubbed them as "genial" frailties. Such attempts at palliation are a disservice to Lamb, justified neither by respect for memory of the dead, nor by the partiality of friends, for as Lynd has pointed out, "His readers... love him too well to wish him other than he was.[69]

The letters leave one in no manner of doubt that Lamb was addicted to alcohol. Inviting Manning to stay with him in London, he says:

> You shall drink rum, brandy, gin, aquavitae, usquebaugh, or whiskey a' nights; and for the after-dinner trick I have eight bottles of genuine port, which, if mathematically divided, gives 1 1/7 for every day you stay, provided you stay a week.[70]

Writing to Coleridge, Lamb remarks that -

> *one* pipe is wholesome, *two* pipes toothsome, *three* pipes noisome, *four* pipes fulsome, *five* pipes quarrelsome... But that is deciding rather upon rhyme than reason... Wine, I am sure, good, mellow, generous Port, can hurt nobody, unless they take it to excess...[71]

Much later, full of cramp and rheumatism, he moans: "Must I then leave you, Gin, Rum, Brandy, Aqua Vitae - pleasant jolly fellows - Damn Temperance and them that first invented it, some Anti Noahite."[72] Lamb confesses to William Upcott that he is "a small eater, but not drinker..."[73] Rev. H F Cary,the last person to relish it, receives an epistle from Lamb declaiming on the "necessity for my drinking too much." Lamb requires "spirits at night to allay the crudity of the weaker Bacchus; and in the morning to cool my parched stomach with a fiery libation. Then I am aground in town, and call upon my London friends, and get new wets of ale, porter, & c; then ride home, drinking where the coach stops, as duly as Edward set up his Waltham Crosses."[74] Lamb disagrees with Dr Ashbury that moderation in wine is good, observing: "There is a smoothness and oiliness in wine that makes it go down by a natural channel, which I am positive was made for that descending. Else, why does not wine choke us? could Nature have made that sloping lane, not to facilitate the down-going?"[75] He advises Barton that for longevity he should "take a little more spirituous liquors, learn to smoke..."[76]

Apart from the letters cited above, in many others Lamb dwells upon his liking for tobacco. Thus, in a letter to Wordsworth, he writes: "like Milton's devil (turned truant to his old Brimstone) I am purging off the foul air of my once darling tobacco in this Eden... like old worn out Sin playing at being innocent, which never comes again, for in spite of good books and good thoughts there is something in a Pipe that virtue cannot give tho' she give her unendowed person for a dowry.[77]

Lamb is aware of the ill effects of his indulgences. The refrain in his poem "The Gipsy Malison" runs -

> Black Manhood comes when riotous guilty living
> Hands thee the cup that shall be death in taking.

After being "drunk two nights running" at Coleridge's, he tells Manning that "Liquor and company and wicked tobacco a' nights, have quite dispericraniated me..."[78] He writes to Barton that he is "scribbling a muddy epistle with an aking head, for we did not quaff Hippocrene last night. Marry, it was Hippocras rather."[79] In another letter, Lamb informs Manning that "My habits are changing, I think, i.e. from drunk to sober," adding however that "whether I shall be happier or not remains to be proved."[80] Similarly, in a letter to Wordsworth he claims to have "left off spirituous liquors for 4 or more months, with a moral certainty of its lasting."[81] But obviously such pious resolutions to be "incredibly sober and regular" are no sooner made than forgotten. After every fit of periodic abstinence, Lamb returns to the bottle with renewed vehemence, to the extent that on one occasion he had to apologise to Cary for being "seen deliberately to go out of the house of a clergy man drunk."[82] In truth, Lamb needs little provocation for taking wine, e.g., "Dry Salters, what a word for this thirsty weather! I must drink after it."[83] Whether or not "it was the relaxation, the forgetfulness of care... the ready flow of words to embody the conceptions of his ever-fruitful fancy that gave an almost irresistible charm to alcoholic drinks,"[84] in his case, it is probable that the "pressure of shyness, anxiety and low spirits," gave an edge to his craving for wine.

However, as Morpurgo rightly avers[85] Lamb was not a drunkard. Had he been one, he would not have been allowed to continue at East India House for 32 years and superannuated with generous pensionary benefits. Occasional lapses aside, he drank in moderation and in the company of friends; nor did it interfere either with his official duties or his literary pursuits.

Tobacco was Lamb's "evening comfort" and "morning curse," equally difficult to give up. In a letter to Wordsworth he encloses the poem "Farewell to Tobacco" prefacing it with the remark that "now I have bid farewell to my 'Sweet Enemy' Tobacco, as you will see in my next page..."[86] Recalling his decision to leave off smoking, he admits to Hazlitt that "In the meantime am so smoky with last night's 10 Pipes, that I must leave off."[87] It goes without saying that late night drinking sessions and incessant inhalations of the Pipe told heavily upon his frail health; "these Attic pleasures, nocturnal raptures... ate up, as in a devouring flame, the energies."[88] These personal failings, nevertheless, do not detract a whit from Lamb's charm as a writer. Not icily regular or splendidly null, he comes out as a warm, pulsating human being. His very imperfections prompt the reflection that "the world is a better place because of the weaknesses of its gentle sinners, who so often are the gentler saints."[89]

(To be concluded)

NOTES

42 Lucas, *Letters*, II, p.101.
43 W Macdonald, *The Works*, I, p.166.
44 Lucas, *Letters*, II, p.164.
45 Ibid.
46 George Gordon (ed.), *Charles Lamb: Prose & Poetry*, Oxford, 1937, p.19.
47 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.21.
48 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.223.
49 Ibid., p.244.
50 Mario Praz, *The Hero in Eclipse in Victorian Fiction*, 1956, p.71.
51 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.241.
52 G H Lewes, "Charles Lamb: His Genius & Writings", *British Quarterly Rev.*, 1848, Rep. in *C L Bulletin*, Jan. 1963.
53 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.305.
54 Ibid., p.23.
55 Ibid., p.251.
56 Ibid.
57 George L Barnett, *Charles Lamb: The Evolution of Elia*, Bloomington, 1964, p.35.
58 Lucas, *Letters*, II, 344.
59 Ibid., III, p.136.
60 Ibid., p.241.
61 Lucas, *Letters*, III, p.242.

62 Ibid., p.371
63 Ibid., p.244.
64 W Macdonald, *The Works*, Vol.II, p.xci.
65 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.198.
66 Ibid., p.179.
67 B Jessup, "The Mind of Elia," *Journal of the Hist. of Ideas*, April 1954, p.251.
68 W C Hazlitt, *The Letters of C. Lamb*, Vol.II, p.284.
69 Robert Lynd (ed.) *The Essays of Elia*, Intr. p.xix.
70 Lucas, *Letters*, I, 202.
71 Ibid., p.345.
72 Lucas, *Letters*, II, p.108.
73 Ibid., III, p.82.
74 Ibid., p.167.
75 Ibid., p.265.
76 Ibid., II, p.410.
77 Lucas, *Letters*, II, p.195.
78 Ibid., I, p.311.
79 Ibid., II, p.377.
80 Ibid., I, p.316.
81 Ibid., II, p.155.
82 Lucas, *Letters*, III, p.405.
83 Ibid., p.51.
84 H S *Elia and Eliana*, London, 1903, Introduction, p.xxii.
85 J E Morpurgo, *Charles Lamb and Elia*, 1948, p.13.
86 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.401.
87 Lucas, *Letters*, I, p.424.
88 "Last Essays of Elia," *Quarterly Review*, No.384, p.328.
89 C E Lawrence, "Charles Lamb," *Quarterly Review*, Oct. 1934, p.217.

MEMOIR OF BASIL WILLEY

Two good friends of our Society come together in a British Academy pamphlet *Basil Willey 1897-1978* by John Beer (1982 - Price £1.25). In this Memoir the younger scholar celebrates and evaluates the life and work of the elder, who incidentally supervised his own early research. As well as providing a short biography and tribute to Professor Willey, the paper gives a fascinating account of an era, with all its changes, encompassing two world wars and a revolution in moral climate. In particular, light is thrown on the Cambridge English School during this period.

There is a sense in which the very changes in "climate of opinion", illustrated by Basil Willey's lifetime, and in his reputation as a scholar vindicate his approach. It requires an effort of "historical imagination" for today's academics in their thirties - say - who tend to hint at lack of "originality" - whatever that is - to understand the impact that *The Seventeenth Century Background* had on undergraduates when it was first published. I know, as I was one of them, though at "the other place". Without this pioneering work the "originality" of many who came after would have been impossible.

John Beer does not fall into any such trap but gives us an account of Basil Willey which is both balanced and fully appreciative. The character of the man comes through, his honesty, integrity, tolerance and dedication to humane values; his love of the writers of the Romantic period, in particular of Wordsworth (and his Lake District), and his struggle to reconcile "the Christianity of the heart" with a world which seemed to deny it.

This pamphlet must surely be of particular interest to all our members.

M W

MISS PHYLLIS G MANN

Further to our short Obituary in the July *Bulletin*, we are now able to quote, by kind permission, from the *Malvern Gazette*. After working some time as an artist and art-teacher and after war work with the WVS, Miss Mann turned from art to literature and

> was mainly responsible for the authorship of such short plays for the BBC as "The Man without a Foe", a study of Charles Lamb, and another on William Cowper. Both were broadcast on Children's Hour and attracted much notice.
>
> One result was honorary membership of the Lamb Society, involving invitations to address the society in London; another deriving from Miss Mann's careful delving into family trees, was a Fellowship of the Society of Genealogists.
>
> Among the subjects she studied in depth was the 18th century diarist Fanny Burney, who had once lived in a house in Barbourne, Worcester, later occupied by Miss Mann and her sister. Much of the material she produced, some of it new to historians, was used in lectures to learned societies.
>
> One of the London City companies commissioned a study of the poet Keats at the same time as Miss Mann was working on the essayist Charles Lamb and delivering lectures to the Lamb Society.
>
> She was invited to New York, to assist in editing some volumes of the Shelley Circle, but had to decline on account of ill health. About 1957 she spent much time at the India Office Library, working on a collection of manuscripts there, the result being erudite essays published in "Country Life".
>
> Of late years, being more or less housebound, she did much research into the life of Elizabeth Barrett Browning, who in her youth lived at Hope End, near Colwall. Miss Mann's special knowledge of genealogy and her study of a long-hidden journal kept by the poetess, enabled her to make valuable contributions to a published "Diary by E.B.B." issued by the Ohio University Press. This help was duly acknowledged in the introduction.
>
> She also lent her influence to the Browning Societies of London and America at the time of the Casa Guidi appeal, which secured for posterity the Browning apartments in Florence.

Reference and acknowledgement to Miss Mann's research on Lamb is made in a number of instances in Winifred F Courtney's new book *Young Charles Lamb 1775-1802*. In Miss Mann we have lost an honoured member of the Society and a scholar whose work deserved to be more widely known.

NOTES FROM MEMBERS

VISIT TO "LILIES" - 18th September 1982

The autumn sun shone benignly on our visit to "Lilies" in the hamlet of Weedon, near Aylesbury, enabling some of our party to picnic under the splendid trees in the park before assembling for our visit to the house. Peter Eaton first gave us a delightful and discursive account of the chequered history of the house, before taking us on a lightning tour of the many rooms, bulging with pictures, carvings, posters, documents, and books, books and yet more books.

Afterwards we were at liberty to browse among the books and to buy any we wished. At 4 pm we were reunited for a delicious tea and literary chat with Peter and Margaret Eaton.

We all enjoyed this visit (which it is hoped may be repeated in the future) and are grateful for the genial hospitality of the owners.

Madeline Huxstep

FROM OUR FIRST TASMANIAN MEMBER

Mrs Doris A Cranswick, who has just joined the Society writes:

You may be interested to learn, if you do not already know, that Lamb's friend Judge Barron Field visited Hobart from 2nd January 1819 to 7th February 1819 in order to preside over the first sitting of a Supreme Court in Van Dieman's Land. An historian by the name of Giblin noted in his *The Early History of Tasmania*: "Before closing the Court, Field a wayward and somewhat bumptious character, thought himself called on to deliver a homily to the settlers".

Finally, in 1824, as a result of Field's recommendations a Supreme Court was established in Van Dieman's Land.

OVERHEARD IN A RESTAURANT

Between an Englishman and a foreign visitor.

"What is your first name?" the Englishman asked.

"Ilya."

"Ah, Elia: yes, a very interesting name. It often appears in the *Daily Telegraph* crossword puzzle."

"Really?"

"Yes. It means a lamb. So that if you lived in England your first name would be 'lamb'."

"Indeed!"

THE W HUGH PEAL COLLECTION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY

On 15th October 1982, the University of Kentucky Library Associates held a day of celebration to honour Mr and Mrs W Hugh Peal on the occasion of the generous gift of their library of rare books and manuscripts to the university. Charles Lamb looms large in the catalogue, being one of Mr Peal's chief collecting interests, and in the Seminar on the Early Romantics held that day Professor Marrs was billed to speak on "The Peal Collection of Lamb Letters". We have to go to press before further news of this occasion can reach us, but we hope to be able to bring you more details later.

APRIL MEETING OF THE SOCIETY

The title of Miss Lucy Newlyn's talk to the Society on 9th April 1983, which was not announced in the programme, will be "Lloyd, Lamb, London: A Perspective on Book Seven of *The Prelude*.

BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION LUNCHEON

SATURDAY 12th February 1983 - 12.30 for 1.15 pm.

This year we are happy to welcome as our Guest of Honour, Dr GILLIAN BEER, Fellow of Girton College, Cambridge.

For 1983 a new venue - thanks to the initiative of Angus Cheyne. It is: The Garden Room, FREDERICK'S, Camden Passage, Islington - real Charles Lamb territory as Colebrook Cottage is hard by! We are sure members will enjoy the good food and delightful ambience. Accommodation is limited to 70 so apply early to avoid disappointment.

Tickets from Madeline Huxstep, 1a Royston Road, Richmond, Surrey (01-940 3837) at £10 each. This includes the following menu

Soup
Poussin Roti (garnished); Pommes Frites; Choux de Bruxelles
Profiteroles Coffee

and wine or soft drinks with luncheon. This is an innovation we think members will appreciate. (Pre-prandial drinks and port/liqueurs are *not* included.) Please enclose a stamped, addressed envelope with your application and, as most seating will be at tables for 8, indicate your preferred table companions.

Camden Passage is near Angel Northern Line Station and many bus routes. Parking (metres up to 1.30 pm) in the Duncan Terrace area.

(Those applying for luncheon tickets may include their Annual Subscriptions and Donations on the same cheque. Cheques for subscriptions *only* should be sent to the Hon. Treasurer.)

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS FOR 1983

Members are reminded that annual subscriptions are due on 1 January 1983 and the rates are as follows.

Personal:	London	(single)	£4.50
		(double)	£6.00
	Provincial	(single)	£3.00
		(double)	£4.50
	Overseas		$12.00
Corporate:	U K		£7.50
	Overseas		$18.00

Members will notice that subscriptions have not gone up this year and are modest by to-day's standards. May we again ask that any members who feel they can would generously add some small donation to their normal subscription? We have been most grateful for kind help given in this way in the past.

Cheques should be made payable to the Charles Lamb Society and sent to the Hon. Treasurer, R Houston Wallace, Flat 3, 47 Sussex Square, Brighton, Sussex, BN2 1GE unless they are included when paying for luncheon tickets.