

# THE CHARLES LAMB BULLETIN

*The Journal of the Charles Lamb Society*

NEW SERIES NO. 77

January 1992

CONTENTS		Page
Lamb's Politics	Mark Garnett	149
Coleridge, Mary Robinson and <i>Kubla Khan</i>	Martin J Levy	156
The Rev. John Brice of Aisholt	Berta Lawrence	167
Book Reviews		170
<i>Society News and Notes from Members</i>		180

.....  
'Let us stimulate the Elian Spirit of friendliness and humour.'  
.....

## A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

As we approach the twentieth anniversary of the inauguration of its New Series under Basil Savage's editorship in January 1973, *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* is in a flourishing condition. Good material comes in with gratifying frequency, our speakers during the year provide copies of their lectures with the greatest willingness and the Editor's correspondence is copious, interesting and uniformly marked by that 'Elian Spirit of friendliness and humour' which remains one of the Society's central aims.

Sometimes, however, this epistolary friendliness must also incorporate an element of charitableness (vide our second, impeccable, Editor, Mary Wedd's note to her sadly-fallible successor in the *Society News and Notes from Members* section this time) and it does seem that a younger pair of eyes could be focused on the proofs with advantage, while a helping hand will soon also need to be involved in editorial correspondence and other matters if the *Bulletin* (as is to be hoped) continues to flourish ever more.

So it is with the greatest pleasure that I am able to announce that at the Council meeting of November 2, 1991, it was agreed that Dr Duncan Wu, of St Catherine's College, Oxford, should join me as the Assistant Editor of the *Charles Lamb Bulletin*. Duncan's articles and notes have already graced its pages on a number of occasions in the past. I am sure that the *Bulletin's* editing will benefit from his scholarship and fresh ideas. I am delighted that we shall be working together in future, and I offer him the warmest of welcomes.

Bill Ruddick

## LAMB'S POLITICS

Mark Garnett

*University of Durham*

Every admirer of William Hazlitt must acknowledge a profound debt of gratitude to Charles Lamb. He was the kindest, cleverest and wittiest of the few resilient individuals who stayed true to Hazlitt to the end – give or take the odd predictable misunderstanding. The necessary trial of patience was perhaps greatest for Lamb; not only had he the erratic temperament of Hazlitt to confront, but he had other friends who were keen to make any breach between them permanent. The way in which Lamb handled this situation was not perfect, but it approached perfection as nearly as any mortal effort could have done. Nothing can do more to confirm Hazlitt's reputation as the fact that such a person as Lamb could risk so much to retain his friendship.

The feud between Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey on one side and Hazlitt on the other is normally attributed to their political differences. As the quarrel progressed, Lamb's acquaintances became increasingly polarised, with the battle-lines corresponding roughly with attitudes for and against the emperor Napoleon. It may be assumed that Lamb's position in this dispute is highly relevant to an understanding not just of his own character and opinions but of Hazlitt and the Lakists as well. How was it that he could stay on friendly terms with both sides? The traditional answer to this problem is that political squabbles could be overlooked by Lamb. On the major public questions of the day he was neutral; at best, these sources of rage in others were to him a reserve fund for humour. This interpretation has been challenged recently, perhaps most notably by Winifred Courtney's account of Lamb's early years.<sup>1</sup> Mrs Courtney presents a young Lamb of quite strong political opinions, whose acquaintances largely shared his radical opinions. Without wishing to anticipate a second volume of this excellent biography, two broad explanations for Lamb's subsequent dealings with Hazlitt and the Lakists suggest themselves on the basis of Mrs Courtney's work; that over time his political commitment diminished, or that he decided to keep himself out of public controversy through fear of hurting his economic prospects – upon which so much depended. His refusal to allow the discussion of political issues at his weekly gatherings might be seen as an ultra-cautious result of this concern.

In addition to these possible explanations, there is another one which has not been widely canvassed so far as I am aware. If it has any credibility this hypothesis would pose a significant challenge to the accepted notions of literature and politics in the aftermath of the French Revolution. This explanation would suggest that Lamb did have strong political views, but he discovered sufficient common ground between the opinions of his friends to feel that he could be comfortable with all of them. If this was the true reason for Lamb's continuing friendship with Hazlitt, Wordsworth and Coleridge we would have to re-examine their quarrel in order to decide whether Lamb was right in his assumption that their positions could have been reconciled with a little goodwill on both sides. I have a personal reason for entertaining this possible explanation, as it would seem to help my attempt to revise the idea that Hazlitt was an extreme radical, but perhaps this self-indulgence might be forgiven since it would add the capacity for acute political wisdom to the long list of Charles Lamb's recognised virtues.

Of course, if it should prove that Lamb's political commitment was very limited from the start, none of these explanations for his behaviour would be relevant. Before we can reach any conclusions on this issue, it would be helpful to examine the grounds for thinking someone 'apolitical'. This question is not so straightforward as it might appear. Political

scientists and theorists have still to establish a unanimous view of the scope covered by their subject; for example, there was much discussion of whether or not the Communist Soviet Union could be counted as a truly political society, and while some thinkers restrict the political sphere to the activities of parties and governments, others believe that actions such as the purchase of a particular brand of coffee are saturated with political meaning. Thankfully we are working on a more prosaic level here. But even on the most widely-accepted notion of politics, there are several possible meanings of 'apolitical'. Some of these refer to the attitudes of office holders, and Lamb's position in India House was hardly important enough to merit consideration under those headings. For the present purpose we might restrict ourselves to three relevant definitions:

- 1) To denote someone who has a minimal interest in or knowledge of matters which are regarded as political; for example, those people who struggle to name five leading politicians, or who reply 'don't know' when asked which party is presently in office;
- 2) Someone who does have views of reasonable strength, but who finds himself unable to participate in the political process because he is dissatisfied with the existing parties and does not wish to undertake less orthodox methods of effecting change;
- 3) Someone who lives through a period when political matters absorb everyone's attention, but refuses to join the chorus of loud advocacy. This person is only *relatively* apolitical; but at times of crisis, well-informed people who do not earnestly debate the issues of the day are treated by their less restrained acquaintances as if they placed politics very low amongst their priorities. To illustrate this point, a year ago I taught a group of Soviet students for a month. When I asked them whether they were interested in politics, one of them replied that it was impossible not to be in the existing state of things back home. This promising opinion was rather contradicted by the fact that the person in question scarcely uttered another syllable about politics for the remainder of her visit. Whatever she thought of herself, I could only regard her as apolitical.

\*\*\*\*\*

'Political Lamb' is the title of a chapter in Mrs Courtney's biography, and she does produce a good deal of material to lend credence to her case. She tells us that Lamb 'was surrounded by Whigs from the cradle'.<sup>2</sup> His closest early friend was the fierce radical Coleridge, and he rapidly became acquainted with Southey, Charles Lloyd, and John Thelwall, who were equally notorious to the pro-establishment press. Although he did not meet the arch-fiend William Godwin before the end of the decade, he had enough contact with the Godwinian circle to attract hostile attention, and his radical credentials were apparently confirmed when he earned the notice of the Anti-Jacobin propagandists Canning and Gillray. Another interesting snippet of evidence which Mrs Courtney does not mention comes from the manuscript recollections of Lord Broughton, the former radical M.P. John Cam Hobhouse. He describes meeting Lamb at the home of the Reverend John Estlin in Bristol, and includes him in a list of men who were opponents of Pitt and very good patriots.<sup>3</sup>

The most interesting support for Mrs Courtney's argument is her attribution to Lamb of an essay on Jacobinism in the *Albion* newspaper. The author of this piece complains about the use of nick-names by the government press as a diversion from the real political issues.

He also takes exception to the abuse of great figures such as Milton, Sidney, Harrington and Locke in the same papers. The English Revolutions of the seventeenth-century should not be brought into disrepute by the unfortunate course of the French one. William Godwin is defended for having upheld the possibility of future improvement in human nature - his only fault was to over-rate the benevolence of mankind in his writings.

Whether this article was composed by Lamb or not, some of his indisputable work was concerned with politics, and has a radical flavour. The Poem on the 'Prince of Whales' was probably not the only cause of Leigh Hunt's imprisonment, but an earlier lampoon on the so-called 'apostate' James Mackintosh provoked the closure of the *Albion*. Lamb's career as a joke-writer for the *Morning Post* did not simply encompass the dress-sense of contemporary ladies; there were also little jibes against Burke, Pitt and Addington. In 1820, Lamb avenged himself upon George Canning in a sonnet which praised Alderman Wood, whose support for Queen Caroline was embarrassing the government. Lamb's anger against Canning is revealed by his reference to the latter's low birth - a particularly unfortunate and tactless remark, since Canning's mother had shared the profession of Lamb's beloved Fanny Kelly. Canning's association with the *Anti-Jacobin* magazine, which had made the singular accusation that Lamb was a wife-deserter, probably provides a full excuse for this outburst, but he might have been wiser to restrict himself to attacks on Canning's 'shallow wit'.

In view of the evidence it is obviously false to claim that Lamb was apolitical in our first sense - that he was utterly indifferent towards politics and ignorant as a result. He was not a complete stranger to theoretical matters, either. His early letters contain many references to the work of Joseph Priestley, whose political and religious thought had provoked the anger of a loyalist mob. He must have been acquainted with Godwin's theories, and his political squibs indicate some knowledge of Burke. The conversations with Coleridge seem to have concerned religion above all, but Lamb did express his appreciation of his friend's angry *Conciones ad Populum*. In other words, Charles Lloyd's protest that Lamb was a 'man too much occupied with real and painful duties .. to trouble himself about speculative matters' is a palpable exaggeration.<sup>4</sup>

If we were to characterize Lamb's political beliefs on the basis of this information, it would be best to describe him as a moderate liberal. His early associates were more extreme than that, as was Priestley. But there is one passage which indicates that he would not have followed the Pantisocratic creed all of the way. In a letter of 1796 he chides Coleridge for the 'gigantic hyperbole by which you describe the evils of existing society: "snakes, lions, hyenas and behemoths" is carrying your resentment beyond bounds'.<sup>5</sup> This statement conveys still more interesting possibilities. Could it be that Lamb sensed a lack of serious commitment in his correspondent? Of course, this advice might simply refer to the fact that the hyperbole was included in Coleridge's 'Religious Musings' - perhaps Lamb believed that this was an unsuitable vehicle for such sentiments. But the original impression is reinforced by a passage from the essay on 'Newspapers of Thirty-Five Years Ago'. Here Lamb relates that his early pieces were inspired by 'Recollections of feelings - which were all that [then] remained from our first boyish heats kindled by the French Revolution, when if we were misled, we erred in the company of some, who are accounted very good men now - rather than any tendency at this time to Republican doctrines.' If we can take this at face value, and not as the apologetic gloss of a writer still not entirely free from the threat of prosecutions, then we must conclude that Lamb did share in the initial enthusiasm for the Revolution, but by the time he had embarked upon his journalistic career his views had mellowed to the extent that he was conscious of his own use of hyperbole in his work for the *Albion*. On the other hand we must take another Elian

remark as a piece of mischief - in the 'Chapter on Ears' Lamb confesses that he could never whistle 'God Save the King' - 'Yet hath the loyalty of Elia never been impeached'.

Lamb's recorded reflections about human nature are further evidence of his moderation. The debate over the French Revolution was largely inspired by this issue: the conservative case was that man could never attain the levels of rationality envisaged by the more enthusiastic liberals. Quite early in his life Lamb betrayed a mild and regretful leaning to the side of pessimism. In 1797 he wrote that 'The world does much to warp the heart of man' in a poem about Charles Lloyd. Later he seems to have absolved 'the world' from much of the blame. Crabb Robinson noted that he did not oppose Dr Aikin's opinion that man was 'unimprovable'.<sup>6</sup> Leigh Hunt believed that Lamb '[had a] wish to make the best of things as they are' in the philosophical rather than the political sense, meaning presumably that one should not expect any great advances from human nature.<sup>7</sup> Finally, William Hazlitt was originally attracted to Lamb when the latter broke into a typical debate on the subject with 'Give me man as is *not* to be' - a quip which probably would not have occurred to one who held optimistic views.<sup>8</sup>

Moderation, then, seems to be the underlying tendency of Lamb's political opinions. This disposes of another definition of apolitical from our list. It would not be correct to say that Lamb abstained from political activism because his own position deviated too widely from that of contemporary parties. Edward Moxon relates that the youthful Lamb once helped to draw Charles James Fox through the streets in triumph; a less effusive sympathy with the general tenets of Whiggism would not be incompatible with his apparent views. Throughout this period the Whig party was more closely united in their antipathies than any positive creed, and Lamb certainly shared their dislike of Canning, Pitt and the turn-coat Prince of Wales. Interestingly, Lamb's support for Queen Caroline should be compared with his opinion that the quite similar royal sex scandal involving the Duke of York's mistress Mrs. Clarke was a 'nonsensical business' - the primary impetus in the latter controversy came from Radical M.P.'s outside the Whig ranks.<sup>9</sup>

But there is another definition of apolitical which still needs to be addressed before we can finally reject the old picture of Lamb. Earlier we suggested that if a person shows only a tepid interest in politics when all around are completely engrossed, then it would be fair to describe him as apolitical. On an absolute scale it may be ridiculous to call Lamb apolitical, but can his interest in public affairs be compared with that of his literate contemporaries? If not, is this *relative* indifference sufficient to justify the label?

Undoubtedly Lamb *was* far less interested in politics than those his name is associated with. Wordsworth, Coleridge, Southey, Godwin and Hazlitt all engaged in a furious and lasting controversy which left Lamb relatively unruffled. And here we should take note of testimony from other friends. Thomas de Quincey asked rhetorically 'Politics? What cared he for politics?' Edward Moxon's story about Charles Fox begins with the statement that Lamb 'was no politician'.<sup>10</sup> After the 'Prince of Whales' squib had appeared, Crabb Robinson noted that 'the conversation [took] more of a political turn than [was] usual with Lamb'.<sup>11</sup> Daniel Stuart lamented that 'Of politicians he knew nothing: they were out of his line of reading and thought'.<sup>12</sup> And earlier Charles Lloyd had defended his friend from the anti-Jacobins by claiming that 'he is a man too much occupied with real and painful duties...to trouble himself about speculative matters'.<sup>13</sup>

Since these commentators lacked our present purpose and our tedious list of definitions, it would be unfair to make much of their woeful imprecision. Lamb's attitude is variously ascribed to ignorance, indifference and pre-occupation, and I doubt whether all or even any of the remarks hit the true root of the matter. But there are too many verdicts of this

general type for them to be safely ignored as flawed testimony. It is plausible to suggest that however much they differed in their interpretations of Lamb's motives, De Quincey, Stuart et al took for granted a certain level of political interest among educated men, and that Lamb's failure to rise above this plimsoll line of commitment was peculiar enough to deserve notice. That a single member of their tribe could live through an evening without letting loose a passionate oration on the fashionable issues demanded an explanation. Not one of these witnesses is noted as a profound contributor to political debates; that they regarded Lamb's interest as minimal compared to their own unremembered musings is surely significant. It is also interesting that their combined years of acquaintance with Lamb span almost his whole career as a writer.

The most important testimony comes from Lamb himself. As early as 1799 he denied that he read any newspapers. In the following year he told Manning that he could not 'whip up' his mind to take any interest in public affairs. This statement contains a significant qualification; his interest, he said, was confined to issues which touched upon him, 'and so turn into private'.<sup>14</sup> In this case, the war against France had raised the price of necessities, and this forced him to take note of this otherwise trivial contest.

The qualification could be read as a piece of typical Elian self-mockery. To a certain extent everyone must feel that a public issue concerns himself 'privately' before he can take much interest in it. But in Lamb's case the statement has more than a tautological significance. His most interesting excursions into politics do seem to have had unusually strong personal motivations. The attacks on Canning cannot have been unaffected by a desire for humorous revenge; the epigram on Mackintosh would surely never have been written if Lamb had disliked Godwin, who had been publicly attacked by the Scotch 'Judas'. If he did write the piece about Jacobinism, his primary intention must have been the defence of both his friends and himself. There is no evidence that he had a personal grudge against the 'Prince of Whales', but the doom of that victim must have been decreed by another of Lamb's personal attributes; his inability to resist a pun.

There is a final gambit for those who see Lamb as a truly political figure. They might agree that he paid little attention to party politics. This, they would add, is to miss the point. At this period an essential aspect of politics was a person's attitude to the lower orders. Lamb was a consistent humanitarian who frequently showed his anger at the condition and treatment of the poor. He was no respecter of mere rank or of the selfish rich. Surely this places him firmly on the political left? Was not Lamb a *practical* radical - something far better than the armchair philanthropists of the day?

Although this position might be regarded as unacceptably close to the extreme 'Hot beverages are politics' school of thought, it cannot be disputed that attitudes towards economic inequalities are an important indicator of a political position. But unless the agent in question places his views in a theoretical form, or shows us the *underlying reasons* for his convictions, his concern for the plight of the poor proves very little: after all, it was shared by good men across the political spectrum - and even by Malthus. It would be useful to know that Lamb disagreed *in principle* with economic inequality, and hated the system which produced it. But the evidence suggests that he was offended by the *abuse* of privilege and the neglect of the poor. This is compatible with an acceptance of the social and economic status quo. In turn, it would be absurd to call Lamb a social conservative on this basis; I doubt whether he would have eulogised the contemporary situation as the very best possible, or merely in need of a few minor adjustments. But he does not offer any alternative visions, and his profound sense of human frailty would have prevented him from dreaming of reforms which might build a new Jerusalem.

It may now be possible to suggest a few conclusions about Lamb's politics. It is not true that Lamb was wholly ignorant of public affairs because of the unavoidable distractions of his early life. Neither was he unequal to the more speculative aspects of the subject. But he chose to place politics low on his list of priorities, while it was at the top for almost everyone that he knew. In this sense he was apolitical, and it is a valid sense. His leanings were Whiggish, but he did not lean very far. When he felt personally involved he reached for the pen, just as he was obliged to rebuke Southey for impugning his religious commitment. But unlike most of his contemporaries, he was disinclined to drag every political happening into his private experience, to make the puny activities of unknown statesmen into deeply-felt concerns. He was temperamentally averse to politics; for him they were a tedious piece of theatre, badly scripted. We can hardly have a political Lamb if we are to record his various concerns as he saw them himself; a political Lamb seems to almost entail a philosophical Paul Gassaigne, or Margaret Thatcher as literary critic. The old idea of apolitical Lamb should be revised to stress that this is no indication of intellectual weakness, but simply a matter of personal taste and, some would say, a high degree of common sense. With this proviso, I believe that it should stand.

This judgement has implications for an understanding of the political and literary squabbles which Lamb could not entirely avoid. He could order the exclusion of political conversation from his whist-table without pain; he was more hurt by the fact that the quarrels of his friends dictated such a ban. But his weakly-held political views must have played some role in his continuing friendship with both Hazlitt and the Lake Poets. It is unrealistic to think that he could have tolerated their incessant bickerings on an uncongenial subject for very long unless he felt that there was some common ground between their beliefs and his own. Old loyalties meant a great deal to him, but his patience with familiar faces was not inexhaustible, as his relationship with Charles Lloyd reveals. Possibly there is a delicate suggestion that the political differences between the so-called radicals and reactionaries was merely an outpouring of sound and fury, signifying little more than personal antipathy. But that is a subject for a more lengthy study, since unlike Lamb his friends generally had no idea at all that there can be a distinction between the political and the personal.

---

A lecture delivered to the Charles Lamb Society on October 5, 1991

---

#### NOTES

1. Winifred F. Courtney, *Young Charles Lamb 1775-1802*, (1982).
2. Courtney, p.4.
3. Quoted by R.E. Zegger, *John Cam Hobhouse: A Political Life, 1819-32*, (1973), p.37.
4. Courtney, pp.147-48.
5. To Coleridge, May 30-31, 1796. *The Letters of Charles and Mary Ann Lamb*, ed. Edwin W. Marris, Jr., (1975), vol.1, p.10.
6. Crabb Robinson's *Diary* under May 28, 1814.
7. Quoted by E.V. Lucas, *The Life of Charles Lamb*, (1905), vol.1, p.404.
8. P.P. Howe, *The Life of William Hazlitt*, (revised edition, 1947), p.75.
9. To Manning, March 28, 1809, *Letters*, ed. Marris, vol.III, p.4.
10. Lucas, vol.11, pp.57 and 251.
11. Quoted by Lucas, vol.1, pp.373-74.
12. Quoted by Courtney, p.323.

13. Quoted by Courtney, pp.197-98.
14. To Manning, March 1, 1800. *Letters*, ed. Marrs, vol.1, p.187. Interestingly, in the same letter Lamb explains his preference for Bishop Burnet as an historian over Gibbon, Robertson etc. on the grounds that Burnet deals with personalities and scandal.
15. In the discussion which followed the delivery of this paper it was suggested that Lamb's poem 'The Three Graves' does not fit in precisely with this explanation. It does seem that there were certain political events and practices which particularly affected Lamb; but it still appears to me that one is justified in saying that in general Charles Lamb needed unusual provocation before he would declare an interest in political matters.

## COLERIDGE, MARY ROBINSON AND *KUBLA KHAN*

Martin J Levy

One of the enduring mysteries of Coleridge scholarship is the nature of Mary Robinson's connection with *Kubla Khan*. Scholars have long known that it is in her ode 'Mrs Robinson to the Poet Coleridge' that we find the first published references to the poem but they do not know why he allowed her to see it.<sup>1</sup> Even Elisabeth Schneider, who published a virtually encyclopaedic study of the poem in 1953 in which Robinson was several times mentioned, did not address the problem of purpose. Though, as we shall see, she did hint at 'some stronger link' binding a story she read in Mrs Robinson's *Memoirs* to Coleridge's famous preface of 1816, she did not take the matter further.<sup>2</sup>

Although the beginnings of Coleridge's relationship with Mary Robinson (1758?-1800) can plausibly be traced back to the mid 1790s, it is not until January 1800 that they can be said to have become properly acquainted.<sup>3</sup> During that month he was at least twice in her company, on both occasions with Godwin who may well have introduced them.<sup>4</sup> He had arrived in London during late November 1799 in order to take up a staff position on the *Morning Post* to which Robinson was a regular contributor. His task was, chiefly, to provide articles on political subjects while Robinson, who was widely known as a writer and socialite, filled Southey's old job of chief contributor of poems. On 25 January 1800 he sent a letter to Southey praising her as a woman of 'undoubted Genius' and enclosing the first of two poems which she would eventually give him for the second volume of the *Annual Anthology*: 'She overloads every thing;' he wrote, in reference to a poem published in that day's paper, 'but I never knew a human Being with so *full* a mind - bad, good, & indifferent, I grant you, but full, & overflowing'.<sup>5</sup>

At this time Robinson was living in a house in South Audley Street and struggling to keep up appearances. Having long outgrown the limitations of her best-known real-life role of 'Perdita' to the Prince of Wales's 'Florizel', she had established herself as an exceptionally industrious poet and novelist. Since 1792, she had published seven novels including *Vancenza; or, The Dangers of Credulity* and the highly autobiographical *The Natural Daughter*. She had contributed regularly to the *World*, the *Morning Post* and the *Oracle*, and written the occasional pamphlet. Among her closest friends were Samuel Jackson Pratt and the satirist 'Peter Pindar'. She also knew many close friends of Godwin including Mary Hays, John Opie and John and Eliza Fenwick. Following what appears to have been a bungled miscarriage in 1783, she had gradually lost the use of her legs so that by the time Coleridge met her she was to all intents and purposes a cripple. She took opium as an analgesic and in order to combat depression and anxiety.



On an artistic level, Coleridge was particularly impressed by her metrical skills, for, like Southey, she was able to produce large quantities of accessible verse often of some technical competence. During late February, for instance, she introduced a new metre in a poem entitled 'The Haunted Beach' which so impressed him that he wrote to Southey: 'Ay! that Woman has an Ear'.<sup>6</sup> He seems also, if we are to believe a letter he sent to her daughter Maria Elizabeth Robinson in 1802, to have believed that he could offer her some kind of religious consolation: '[I was] thrice happy,' he wrote, 'if I could have soothed her sorrows, or if the feeble Lamp of my Friendship could have yielded her one ray of Hope & Guidance'.<sup>7</sup>

For her part, Robinson clearly admired Coleridge both as an intellectual and as a poet. She had a weakness for intellectuals of all kinds but especially those like Coleridge who could combine their keen intelligence with poetry or some other form of creative activity. During the spring and summer of 1800 she so admired *Lyrical Ballads* that she put together a collection of *Lyrical Tales*, mostly from poems already published in the *Morning Post* or the *Monthly Magazine*, using the same typography and the same press at Bristol. Possibly Coleridge advised on their arrangement for when the volume appeared, during late November, the longest poem in the collection, a 'Gothic Swiss' tale of five sections called 'Golfre' was placed not at the front of the volume like 'The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere'; but at the back where neither its length nor any other perceived difficulty would be likely to discourage potential readers. For a while, the title, coupled with the choice of press (Cottle's) and publisher (it was to be published by Longman) led Wordsworth to consider changing the title of the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* to 'Poems by W. Wordsworth'.<sup>8</sup> However, as is well-known, he went ahead with the old title anyway, doubtless trusting Robinson's volume to sink quickly into oblivion.

Following a further meeting, noted by Godwin, when he and Coleridge supped with Robinson on 22 February we do not know of any other occasions when they met together.<sup>9</sup> However, as she is known to have met Sara Coleridge, who was not present at any of these meetings, at about this time, there may well have been other occasions.<sup>10</sup> They could have met at the offices of the *Morning Post* or at the homes of mutual acquaintances such as the *Post's* editor Daniel Stuart, the publisher Richard Phillips, or at Longman's. Certainly, the world of London's literary culture was small enough for there to be frequent contact.

On 2 April Coleridge left London for the Lake district, spending time at Grasmere, Bristol and Nether Stowey, before returning to Grasmere and then, on 24 July, settling down at Keswick. He did not forget Robinson however for he left her the sole manuscript of his play *Osorio* which he asked her to hand on to Godwin. Although they did not make plans to correspond he remained keenly interested in her welfare, discussing, for instance, her illness at Bristol with Humphrey Davy. When, on 21 May, he wrote to Godwin, he asked to be remembered to her in 'the kindest & most respectful phrases' adding:

I wish, I knew the particulars of her complaint. For Davy has discovered a perfectly new Acid, by which he has restored the use of limbs to persons who had lost them for many years, (one woman 9 years) in cases of supposed Rheumatism. At all events, Davy says, it *can* do no harm, in Mrs Robinson's case - & if she will try it, he will make up a little parcel & write her a letter of *instructions &c.* -

Then, he wrote, 'Tell her, & it is the truth, that Davy is exceedingly delighted with the two Poems in the Anthology. - N.B. Did you get my Attempt of a Tragedy from Mrs Robinson? -'.<sup>11</sup>

Probably sometime during August he also invited her to stay with the family at Keswick, for she wrote to Pratt on 31 August mentioning that she had some plans of making 'an hasty journey to visit Coleridge, the Poet, and his amiable little wife, in Cumberland'.<sup>12</sup> Ill health however precluded the opportunity and instead she passed the summer at a cottage ornée she shared with her daughter at Englefield Green near Windsor. In any case, it is difficult to see how she would have found the time, as in addition to her commitments to the *Morning Post*, she was working flat out for Phillips, producing short biographies, a translation of Hagar's *Picture of Palermo* and a series of articles on the 'Present State of the Manners, Society, &c. &c. of the Metropolis of England'. The latter however did give her the opportunity of flattering her friends, and on 1 August she published an article describing Coleridge as 'the exquisite poet'.<sup>13</sup>

In the meantime Coleridge experienced at Keswick a long period of intense physical discomfort coupled with a highly charged sense of the wildness of the Cumberland landscape. He complained repeatedly of swollen eyelids and of rheumatic pains, which may have been at least in part psychosomatic. In rapturous, if repetitive terms, he wrote to various friends describing the view from his house Greta Hall, with Skiddaw rising at its back 'the Lake of Bassenthwaite, with its simple and majestic *case* of mountains, on my right hand; on my left, and stretching far away into the fantastic mountains of Borrowdale, the Lake of Derwent-water; straight before me a whole camp of giants' tents, - or is it an ocean rushing in, in billows that, even in the serene sky, reach halfway to heaven?'.<sup>14</sup> He battled too with his writers' block, struggling to complete *Christabel*. Only during October do we hear more of their relationship when following a letter to Daniel Stuart on 7 October, in which he spoke of his grief on hearing of 'poor Mrs Robinson's illness', a flurry of poems appeared in the *Morning Post* with Robinsonian connections.<sup>15</sup>

Of these poems: 'Alcaeus to Sappho', 'The Voice from the Side of Etna; or, The Mad Monk. An Ode, in Mrs. Ratcliffe's Manner;' 'The Solitude of Binnorie, or the Seven Daughters of Lord Archibald Campbell. A Poem' and 'Ode, Inscribed to the Infant Son of S.T. Coleridge, Esq. Born Sept. 14, at Keswick, in Cumberland' only one 'The Mad Monk' has any claim to be entirely by Coleridge; Robinson wrote the poem inscribed to Derwent Coleridge while the other two, bar the title and perhaps one or two lines of the 'Sappho' poem, were written entirely by Wordsworth. They were however almost certainly sent in by Coleridge who wanted help fulfilling his commitments.

To take the poems one by one: 'Alcaeus to Sappho' was written by Wordsworth. Described by him as not worth a farthing, it is only remarkable for its frank lesbian content. Coleridge probably gave it the title of 'Alcaeus to Sappho' because 'Sappho' was one of Robinson's pseudonyms and because both poets were famous metricists.<sup>16</sup> It was not published by Stuart until 24 November.

The chief argument so far adduced for 'The Mad Monk' as being a poem by Coleridge is that an expanded version of it was subsequently published under Coleridge's name in an anthology of poems edited by Robinson's daughter called *The Wild Wreath* in 1804, whereas when it appeared in the *Post* on 13 October it was under the pseudonym of 'Cassiani jun.'<sup>17</sup> Set on Mount Etna, it describes, partly in 'melody most like to old Sicilian song;' an hermit's affection for his murdered Rosa - a figure in a famous mediaeval Sicilian love poem by Cielo d'Alcambo. As Robinson was about to publish *The Picture of Palermo* which reproduced d'Alcambo's poem one might well wonder if she had given him advance notification or an advance copy. Otherwise, it is difficult to explain either the Sicilian locale or the significance of the name.<sup>18</sup>

The connection of Wordsworth's 'The Solitude of Binnorie' with Robinson stems from the fact that the metre derives from 'The Haunted Beach'. This was made quite clear in an introduction appended to the poem when it appeared on 14 October:

Sir,

It would be unpardonable in the author of the following lines, if he omitted to acknowledge that the metre (with the exception of the burthen) is borrowed from "The Haunted Beach of Mrs. ROBINSON;" a most exquisite Poem, first given to the public, if I recollect aright, in your paper, and since re-published in the second volume of Mr. SOUTHEY'S Annual Anthology. This acknowledgment will not appear superfluous to those who have felt the bewitching effect of that absolutely original stanza in the original Poem, and who call to mind that the invention of a metre has so widely diffused the name of Sappho, and almost constitutes the present celebrity of Alcaeus.

The introduction was signed with the initials 'M.H.' which one writer has suggested may stand for 'Mountain Hermit', a not unlikely possibility as so many of the poems with Coleridge/Robinson connections do indeed have mountain and hermit associations.<sup>19</sup> Wordsworth probably wrote the poem sometime between 31 July 1800, when Coleridge brought a copy of the *Anthology* to Grasmere, and 17 August, when he read a version of it to Dorothy.<sup>20</sup> There is however no evidence that Robinson suspected his authorship; most likely she thought it a further contribution by Coleridge.

Her own 'Ode, Inscribed to the Infant Son of S.T. Coleridge, Esq.' appeared on 17 October, apparently five days after its composition and slightly more than a month after Derwent's birth. Appearing so shortly after 'The Mad Monk' and 'The Solitude of Binnorie' one must suspect that it was meant as some kind of reciprocal contribution. Possibly Stuart had forewarned her that the poems were about to appear, thus giving her the idea of putting together a poem for Derwent. Perhaps the most interesting section is the final part where she briefly describes her predicament, a 'stranger' on the edge of Windsor Forest, and shows herself more or less familiar with the topography of the Keswick area:

SWEET BOY! accept a STRANGER'S SONG,  
 Who joys to sing of thee,  
 lone her forest haunts among,  
 The haunts of wild-wood harmony!  
 A stranger's song by falsehood undefil'd,  
 Hymns thee, O! INSPIRATION'S darling child!  
 In thee it hails the GENIUS of thy SIRE,  
 Her sad heart sighing o'er her feeble lyre,  
 And, whether on the breezy height,  
 Where Skiddaw greets the dawn of light  
 Ere the rude sons of labour homage pay  
 To summer's flaming eye, or winter's banner grey;  
 Whether by bland religion early taught,  
 To track the devious pilgrimage of thought;  
 Or borne on FANCY'S variegated wing,  
 A willing vot'ry to that shrine,  
 Where ART and SCIENCE all their flow'rs shall bring,  
 Thy temples to entwine:  
 Whether LODORE for thee its white wave flings,  
 The brawling herald of a thousand springs;

Whether smooth BASENTHWAITE, at eve's still hour  
 Reflects the young moon's crescent meekly pale,  
 Or MEDITATION seeks her silent bow'r  
 Amid the rocks of lonely BORROWDALE;  
 Still may THY FAME survive, SWEET BOY, till time  
 Shall bend to KESWICK'S vale thy SKIDDAW'S brow sublime.

Also, apparently during October Robinson wrote, perhaps the best known of her poems at least as far as Coleridge scholars are concerned, her 'Mrs. Robinson to the Poet Coleridge'. This poem shows that she was clearly acquainted with 'Kubla Khan' far earlier than most other writers. It first appeared during July 1801 in the fourth volume of her posthumous *Memoirs*, edited by her daughter, where it sits uncomfortably amongst more than a score of 'Tributary Lines addressed to Mrs. Robinson, during her Lifetime, by Different Friends, with her Answers'. There it's signed 'Sappho' and given the date of 'Oct.1800'. Presumably she sent a version of it to Coleridge, for it seems to have elicited from him, apparently during November, a response entitled 'A Stranger Minstrel. By S.T. Coleridge, Esq. Written to Mrs. Robinson a few Weeks before her Death'.

Before looking at the poem, it's worth addressing the question as to why Coleridge allowed her to see *Kubla Khan* in the first place. After all, it was not essential to any interchange of compliments that she should see it nor was it a poem that he was otherwise inclined to let people read. I think that most of the answer must lie in the fact that she too was a poet manifestly interested in the effects of opium.

Although the evidence for Robinson's use of opium is necessarily patchy, the evidence we do have would suggest that during the 1790s she was a pretty regular user. As we have seen, since 1783 she had been suffering from a painful paralytic complaint while she also experienced continual trouble with what might best be described as nerves. Indeed, as a writer and as a woman who had been more tenderly educated than most, she saw herself as a martyr to her feelings; - one of the chief characteristics of her work is the continually reiterated complaint that she was suffering from a wealth of present ills and from the accumulated miseries of the past. It was this which led her not just to use the drug as an analgesic but also as a tranquillizer in order to keep unpleasant thoughts and memories at bay.

The earliest documented occasion on which she is known to have taken opium was during the summer of 1791 when she was staying at 10 North Parade in Bath. She'd gone there in order to seek relief from her illness, floating, in the words of her Della Cruscan friend James Boaden 'in the fragrance of the rubied ROSE'.<sup>21</sup> Apparently, having been taken with the sight of an 'unfortunate Maniac' called 'mad Jemmy' who haunted the streets between the Pump Room and her house, she would often wait 'whole hours' for his appearance gazing upon his 'venerable but emaciated countenance with sensations of awe almost reverential'. On one occasion however:

Having suffered for her disorder more than usual pain, she swallowed by order of her physician, near eighty drops of laudanum. Having slept for some hours, She awoke, and, calling her daughter, desired her to take a pen and write what she should dictate. Miss Robinson, supposing that a request so unusual might proceed from the delirium excited by the opium, endeavoured in vain to dissuade her mother from her purpose. The spirit of inspiration was not to be subdued, and she repeated, throughout, the admirable poem of The Maniac, much faster than it could be committed to paper.

She lay, while dictating, with her eyes closed, apparently in the stupor which opium frequently produces, repeating like a person talking in her sleep. This affecting performance, produced in circumstances so singular, does no less credit to the genius than to the heart of the author.

On the ensuing morning Mrs. Robinson had only a confused idea of what had past (sic), nor could be convinced of the fact till the manuscript was produced. She declared, that she had been dreaming of mad Jemmy throughout the night, but was perfectly unconscious of having been awake while she composed the poem, or of the circumstances narrated by her daughter.<sup>22</sup>

Whether or not this anecdote had any powerful influence on Coleridge's own accounts of the origin of *Kubla Khan* is not a question that can be easily decided. Certainly there are similarities, with the 1816 preface especially (for instance, the sound of Coleridge's sentence: 'On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, ...' would seem to recall the lines in the *Memoirs*: 'On the ensuing morning Mrs. Robinson had only a confused idea of what had past, ...'), yet the underlying intention was different. As Elisabeth Schneider has remarked, the anecdote in the *Memoirs* was introduced as an 'example of the facility and rapidity' with which Robinson composed whereas Coleridge of course wrote his accounts in order to elucidate his poem.<sup>23</sup>

Other material which provides strong evidence for Robinson's interest in opium can be easily found, where so far scholars have failed to look, among the plentiful pages of her poems. Sometime between the years 1798 and 1800, for instance, she added the following lines to a poem of 1792 written in order to celebrate the recovery of her daughter from an inoculation:

Nor in these ALONE I find  
Charms to heal the wounded mind;  
From the POPPY I have ta'en  
Mortal's BALM, and mortal's BANE!  
Juice, that, creeping through the heart,  
Deadens ev'ry sense of smart;  
Doom'd to heal, or doom'd to kill;  
Fraught with good, or fraught with ill.  
THIS I stole, when WITCHES fell,  
Busy o'er a murd'rous spell,  
On the dark and barren plain,  
Echo'd back the NIGHT-OWL'S strain!  
While the winking stars withdrew,  
Shock'd, their horrid rites to view!<sup>24</sup>

While in the *Morning Post* on 1 July 1800 she published these lines from a poem called 'Ode to Apathy' which actually described the physical effects of the drug:

Thy poppy wreath shall bind my brows,  
Dead'ning the sense of pain;  
And while to thee I pay my vows,  
A chilling tide shall rush thro' ev'ry vein,  
Pervade my heart, and ev'ry care beguile,  
While my wan cheek shall bear the vacant smile.

Most remarkable of all however were these lines she published on the drug's effect on the creative imagination which appeared in the same paper on 6 September 1800 in a poem entitled 'The Poet's Garret':

On a shelf -

(Yclept a mantle-piece), a phial stands,  
 Half-fill'd with potent spirits! - spirits strong,  
 Which sometimes haunt the poet's restless brain,  
 And fill his mind with fancies whimsical.  
 Poor Poet! happy art thou, thus remov'd  
 From pride and folly! - for in thy domain  
 Thou canst command thy subjects; - fill thy lines -  
 Wield the all-conq'ring weapon heav'n bestows  
 In the grey goose's wing! which, tow'ring high  
 Bears thy rich fancy to IMMORTAL FAME!<sup>25</sup>

Although we can't be entirely certain that Coleridge read any of these poems, taken together with other evidence we've looked at, it doesn't seem unlikely. As a contributor himself to the *Morning Post* we know that he would have received copies from Stuart.

Turning now to consider Robinson's poem, the first point that needs to be made is that she appears to accept that *Kubla Khan* was indeed a poem composed in a 'profound sleep' (1816) or a 'sort of reverie'.<sup>26</sup> Not only does she begin her poem with the lines: 'Rapt in the visionary theme! SPIRIT DIVINE with thee I'll wander!' but she concludes it with a phrase describing *Kubla Khan* as an 'airy' dream - thus providing firm evidence that, whatever the truth about the date of the poem, the story that it emerged from the world of dreams was current reasonably early.

Secondly, that to her at least, if not to Coleridge, the poem was patently a new production. On three occasions she uses the phrase 'NEW PARADISE' to describe Xanadu.

Thirdly, that Kubla's 'sunny Pleasure-Dome' was to her a gorgeous auric building: 'studd'd o'er/With all PERUVIA'S lust'rous store!'

Fourthly, that to some extent she identified herself with the injunction towards the end of the poem to 'Weave a circle round him [Coleridge?] thrice':

And now I'll pause to catch the moan  
 Of distant breezes, cavern-pent;  
 Now, ere the twilight tints are flown,  
 Purpling the landscape, far and wide,  
 On the dark promontory's side  
 I'll gather wild-flow'rs, dew besprent,  
 And weave a crown for THEE,  
 GENIUS OF HEAV'N-TAUGHT POESY!

And fifthly, that to her Coleridge's 'Abyssinian Maid', whose 'Symphony and Song' he wants so desperately to revive within himself, had already succeeded in inspiring him to create, the product of the dream itself being evidence:

I hear her voice! thy "sunny dome,"  
 Thy "caves of ice," aloud repeat,  
 Vibrations, madd'ning sweet!

Calling the visionary wand'rer home.  
 She sings of THEE, O! favour'd child  
 Of minstrelsy, SUBLIMELY WILD!  
 Of thee, whose soul can feel the tone  
 Which gives to airy dreams a MAGIC OF THY OWN!

Coleridge's putative response to Robinson's poem also appeared in the fourth volume of the *Memoirs*<sup>27</sup>. It's a poem which, like 'The Mad Monk', includes a great deal of mountainous scenery, though here the site is not Etna but Skiddaw. Essentially, it's an invitation in verse, couched in visionary terms, imploring her to leave Englefield Green for Greta Hall:

As late on Skiddaw I lay supine  
 Midway th'ascent, in that repose divine,  
 When the soul, centr'd in the heart's recess,  
 Hath quaff'd its fill of Nature's loveliness,  
 Yet still beside the fountain's marge will stay,  
     And fain would thirst again, again to quaff; -  
 Then, when the tear, slow travelling on its way,  
     Fills up the wrinkle of a silent laugh,  
 In that sweet mood of sad and humorous thought -  
 A form within me rose, within me wrought  
 With such strong magic, that I cry'd aloud,  
 Thou ancient SKIDDAW! by thy helm of cloud,  
 And by thy many-colour'd chasms so deep;  
 And by their shadows, that for ever sleep;  
 By yon small flaky mists, that love to creep  
 Along the edges of those spots of light,  
 Those sunshine islands on thy smooth green height;  
     And by yon shepherds with their sheep,  
     And dogs and boys, a gladsome crowd,  
     That rush even now with clamour loud  
     Sudden from forth thy topmost cloud;  
     And by this laugh, and by this tear,  
     I would, old Skiddaw! SHE were here!

One point of mild interest is that Coleridge used the poem to mention the two Robinson poems in the *Anthology*, quoting the title of 'The Haunted Beach' and a favourite line: "Pale moon, thou spectre of the sky!" from 'Jasper'.

During Robinson's final weeks, when she knew that she was dying, she wrote to Coleridge expressing what she called her 'death bed affection & esteem' for him. Although their personal acquaintance had been short, it had certainly been long enough for her to think of him with genuine affection. Part of her letter he quoted in a letter to Tom Poole on 1 February 1801, a little more than a month after her death on Boxing Day 1800.

My little Cottage is retired and comfortable.  
 There I mean to remain (if indeed I live so long) till Christmas. But it is not surrounded with the romantic Scenery of your chosen retreat: it is not, my dear Sir! the nursery of sublime Thoughts - the abode of Peace - the solitude of Nature's Wonders. O! Skiddaw! - I think, if I could but once contemplate thy Summit, I should never quit the Prospect it would present till my eyes were closed for ever!

'O Poole!', wrote Coleridge, 'that that Woman had but been married to a noble Being, what a noble Being she herself would have been. Latterly, she felt this with a poignant anguish. - Well! -

O'er her pil'd grave the gale of evening sighs;  
 And flowers will grow upon it's grassy Slope.  
 I wipe the dimming Water from mine eyes -  
 Ev'n in the cold Grave dwells the Cherub Hope!<sup>28</sup>

---

## Appendix

### Mrs Robinson to the Poet Coleridge

Rapt in the visionary theme!  
 SPIRIT DIVINE with thee I'll wander!  
 Where the blue, wavy, lucid stream,  
 'Mid forest glooms, shall slow meander!  
 With THEE I'll trace the circling bounds  
 Of thy NEW PARADISE extended;  
 And listen to the varying sounds  
 Of winds, and foamy torrents blended!

Now by the source, which lab'ring heaves  
 The mystic fountain, bubbling, panting,  
 While gossamer its net-work weaves,  
 Adown the blue lawn, slanting!  
 I'll mark thy "sunny dome," and view  
 Thy "caves of ice," thy fields of dew!  
 Thy ever-blooming mead, whose flow'r  
 Waves to the cold breath of the moon-light hour!  
 Or when the day-star, peering bright  
 On the grey wing of parting night;  
 While more than vegetating pow'r,  
 Throbs, grateful to the burning hour,  
 As Summer's whisper'd sighs unfold  
 Her million-million buds of gold!  
 Then will I climb the breezy bounds  
 Of thy NEW PARADISE, extended,  
 And listen to the distant sounds  
 Of winds, and foamy torrents blended!

SPIRIT DIVINE! with THEE I'll trace,  
 Imagination's boundless space!  
 With thee, beneath thy "sunny dome,"  
 I'll listen to the minstrel's lay,  
 Hymning the gradual close of day,  
 In "caves of ice" enchanted roam,  
 Where on the glittering entrance plays  
 The moon's-beam with its silv'ry rays;  
 Or, when the glassy stream,  
 That through the deep dell flows,  
 Flashes the noon's hot beam;  
 The noon's hot beam, that midway shows



Thy flaming temple, studd'd o'er  
 With all PERUVIA'S lust'rous store!  
 There will I trace the circling bounds  
     Of thy NEW PARADISE, extended,  
 And listen to the distant sounds,  
     Of winds, and foamy torrents blended!

And now I'll pause to catch the moan  
     Of distant breezes, cavern-pent;  
 Now, ere the twilight tints are flown,  
 Purpling the landscape, far and wide,  
 On the dark promontory's side  
     I'll gather wild-flow'rs dew besprent,  
 And weave a crown for THEE,  
 GENIUS OF HEAV'N-TAUGHT POESY!  
 While op'ning to my wond'ring eyes,  
 Thou bidst a new creation rise,  
 I'll raptur'd trace the circling bounds  
     Of thy RICH PARADISE, EXTENDED,  
 And listen to the varying sounds  
     Of winds, and foamy torrents blended.  
 And now, with lofty tones inviting,  
 Thy NYMPH, her dulcimer swift-smiting,  
 Shall wake me in extatic measures,  
 Far, far removed from mortal pleasures!  
     In cadence rich, in cadence strong,  
 Proving the wond'rous witcheries of song!  
     I hear her voice! thy "sunny dome,"  
 Thy "caves of ice," aloud repeat,  
 Vibrations, madd'ning sweet!  
     Calling the visionary wand'rer home.  
 She sings of THEE, O! favour'd child  
 Of minstrelsy, SUBLIMELY WILD!  
 Of thee, whose soul can feel the tone  
 Which gives to airy dreams a MAGIC ALL THY OWN!

#### NOTES

1. *Memoirs of the late Mrs. Robinson, Written by Herself. With some posthumous Pieces*, edited by Maria Elizabeth Robinson, 4 vols (London, 1801), IV, 145-149.
2. Elisabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan*, (Chicago, 1953), p.216.
3. The best discussion of the Coleridge/Robinson relationship during this period can be found in an article by David V. Erdman, 'Lost Poem Found. *The cooperative pursuit & recapture of an escaped Coleridge "sonnet" of 72 lines*, *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, LXV (1961), 249-268.
4. Bodleian Library, Abinger Manuscripts, Godwin's Journal, 15 and 18 January 1800, Dep.e204.
5. *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by E.L. Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford, 1956-71), I, 562.
6. *Coleridge Letters*, I, 576.
7. *Coleridge Letters*, I, 904. On the question of whether or not Coleridge and Robinson discussed their religious beliefs see Godwin's letter to Robinson,

- 4 September 1800, where he writes: 'God (the God of Coleridge & Spinoza) bless you both [Robinson and her daughter]'. Abinger, Dep. b227/8.
8. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth, The Early Years: 1787-1805*, edited by E. de Selincourt; second edition, revised by Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), p.297. See also *Coleridge Letters*, I, 620-621.
  9. Abinger, Godwin's Journal, Dep.e204.
  10. See below, 12.
  11. *Coleridge Letters*, I, 589.
  12. Robinson to S.J. Pratt, 31 August 1800, *Shelley and His Circle, 1773-1822*, edited by K.N. Cameron, later D.H. Reiman, (Cambridge, Mass., 1961- ), I, 232.
  13. *Monthly Magazine*, X (1800), 35.
  14. Coleridge to James Webbe Tobin, 25 July 1800, *Coleridge Letters*, I, 612-613.
  15. *Coleridge Letters*, I, 629.
  16. Following the publication of her sonnet sequence *Sappho and Phaon, in a Series of Legitimate Sonnets, with Thoughts on Poetical Subjects, and Anecdotes of the Grecian Poetess* (London, 1796), Robinson was often referred to as the 'English Sappho'. During 1800 she adopted it as one of her regular pseudonyms.
  17. For a discussion of the authorship of 'The Mad Monk' see Stephen Parrish and David Erdman, 'Who wrote The Mad Monk?'; *BNYPL*, LXIV (1960), 209-237.
  18. Possibly a version of it appeared under Coleridge's name in *The Wild Wreath* as a kind of quid pro quo for Maria Elizabeth Robinson agreeing to drop Coleridge's 'A Stranger Minstrel' from the 1803 edition of the *Memoirs*. He certainly objected to its inclusion in the 1801 edition, going so far as to describe it as an 'excessively silly copy of Verses'. See *Coleridge Letters*, II, 904.
  19. Carol Landon, 'Wordsworth, Coleridge, and the *Morning Post*: An Early Version of "The Seven Sisters"', *Review of English Studies*, XI (1960), 392-402 (p.397).
  20. *Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, edited by Mary Moorman, second edition (Oxford, 1981), 32, 34.
  21. 'To Mrs. Robinson, on her visiting Bath, in Ill-Health', *Memoirs*, IV, 14. A version of the poem first appeared in the *Oracle*, 8 June 1791, under Boaden's regular pseudonym of 'Arno'.
  22. *Memoirs*, II, 131-132. The original of this poem was almost certainly published in the *Oracle*, during September 1791 where it was given the title of 'Insanity'. As 'The Maniac', it appeared in Robinson's *Poems* (London, 1793) and *The Poetical Works of the late Mrs. Mary Robinson: Including many Pieces never before Published*, edited by Maria Elizabeth Robinson, 3 vols (London, 1806), II. It has been described by Alethea Hayter (*Opium and the Romantic Imagination*, revised edition (London, 1988), p.292) as 'no masterpiece ..., though there is one interesting stanza ... which contains the ideas of watching eyes, of cold, of petrification, so often found in opium dreams'.
  23. Schneider, p.87. The quotation is from the *Memoirs*, II, 129.
  24. Originally published in the *Oracle*, 15 March 1792, under the title of 'Invocation'. *Poetical Works*, II, 52-53.
  25. Significantly, between 1804, when it was republished in *The Wild Wreath*, and 1806, when it appeared in the *Poetical Works*, the final line was changed to read 'Bears thy sick fancy to IMMORTAL FAME'. Either Maria Elizabeth had two versions of the poem or she made this alteration herself.
  26. Quoted from the 'Crewe Manuscript' reproduced by John Shelton, 'The Autograph Manuscript of "Kubla Khan" and an Interpretation', *A Review of English Literature*, VII (1966), 32-42. All of my quotations of Coleridge's poem are drawn from this version, with the exception of the name 'Kubla Khan'.
  27. *Memoirs*, IV, 141-144.

## 28. Coleridge Letters, II, 669.

## THE REV. JOHN BRICE OF AISHOLT

Berta Lawrence

Although it is situated only a few miles from the towns of Bridgwater and Taunton, the Quantock village of Aisholt seems as remote and sequestered as when the poet Henry Newbolt wrote of it in 1931; 'unspoiled by the conveniences of today, it gives a great deal of that sense of safety, of the absence of the Enemy - let no one hear of it while the earth remaineth'. As its name testifies, the village was built among the ash-woods of the Quantocks. (The slightly affected pronunciation 'Aysh-olt' has grown up in recent years but many people still use the long-standing 'Asholt' which was the common pronunciation in Coleridge's time; Sara Coleridge always spelt the name phonetically as Asholt in her letters). The road through the Aisholt valley is shaded by ash-trees and beeches that shelter the red deer; a babbling stream runs near it. Most of the village clings to a very steep hillside; the church perches near the summit, tops of the trees almost level with its tower. Cottages, farmhouses, barns are built of red Quantock sandstone, many of them thatched, and the landscape makes a red-and-green patchwork. The soil is a rich red. Lanes run between high banks on which grow primroses and ferns encouraged by the many little streams trickling down the slopes. There is no shop, no school, no public-house, and today no Rectory. It is not surprising that Sara Coleridge vehemently rejected Coleridge's proposal, in 1799, that they should rent a cottage in 'the deep romantic chasm' he found so charming. Even Nether Stowey, then an animated small market-town, had been for her an uncongenial place after the shops and diversions of her native Bristol. 'The situation is delicious', Coleridge wrote of Aisholt, 'but Sara being Sara and I being I, we must live in a town or close to one so that she may have neighbours and acquaintances.....the situation which suits me does not suit my wife.'

The cottage that Coleridge proposed renting is now known as the Old School House. Some years ago it was extended and upgraded into a more impressive house, but many people, like myself, remember it as Lawrence Whistler described it in his moving autobiographical book *The Initials in the Heart*. Here, in 1942 he brought his beautiful wife Jill Furse, a young and talented actress who died a few years later, for the first days of their honeymoon. It was lent by her grandparents Sir Henry Newbolt and his wife Margaret. Lawrence Whistler described it as: 'A cottage at the bottom of a hollow end-on to the lane, small casements under heavy-lidded thatch, interior dark and low.' This is how many of us remember the poet Newbolt's summer cottage with its low ceilings, open fire-places, and Newbolt's study furnished with his books, brass and blue china. In her old age it sheltered Newbolt's Somerset servant Lizzie Haspe who welcomed the Whistlers. Newbolt, who adored this refuge, wrote lyrically in his letters about the goldcrests in the cherry-tree, the dipper 'giving a recital' from a stone platform above the waterfall, of kingfishers 'conducting their kinglets' to the brook after bringing them from the pool in front of the Rectory (the Old Rectory now) that stands on higher ground on the opposite side of the road alongside a barn that has openings for pigeons.

In 1799 the Rectory was still occupied by the Rev. John Reeks who on a summer day in 1794 encountered in Nether Stowey the young university students Coleridge and Southey, visiting during vacation the philanthropic tanner Thomas Poole, the Coleridges' lifelong benefactor. Mr Reeks, appalled by the 'Democratick' opinions put forward by these young men, went a further two miles to Marshmill House in Over Stowey to express his

indignation to the Rev. John Poole (Tom's cousin) a stiff-necked young Tory who through all his long life would show antagonism towards Coleridge.

The Rev. John Reeks had married a Betty Brice and through this connection came to the living of Aisholt. In the year 1800 he died from *delirium tremens* called 'the horrors' by the Rev. William Holland, Vicar of Over Stowey and curate of Aisholt, in his entertaining, informative *Diary* published in 1984. This *Diary* presents a portrait of Mr Reeks in his last years, a confirmed alcoholic, often 'unfit for duty', often needing physical restraint. The Rev. John Brice, then Vicar of Porlock, succeeded him as Rector of Aisholt in 1800 at the age of fifty. His youngest daughter Catherine had died at Porlock at the age of fifteen. Her sisters Penelope and Mary became friends of Coleridge and his wife.

The Rev. William Holland who inducted Mr Brice into the living of Aisholt served as his curate for years afterwards. In his *Diary* he complains bitterly of Mr Brice's laziness and selfishness as very often, on a Saturday night, Mr Brice sent a message requesting him to take the Sunday service at Aisholt when perfectly fit to do so himself, falsely pleading ill-health, so that the conscientious Mr Holland, who suffered from 'face-ache' or *tic douloureux*, would take only a little soup after his own morning service at Over Stowey and then set out to ride four miles to Aisholt, sometimes in winter weather, to conduct the afternoon service. (At that time there were no evening services). This might be followed by a churching, a baptism, a funeral, (the favourite day for a funeral was Sunday) - even by all three. His *Diary* is full of complaints about Mr Brice's readiness to shelve his duties out of sheer idleness. On one occasion when he had pleaded illness Mr Holland found him dressed up 'like a great Beau' and in perfect health. The Brices' bedroom, according to Mr Holland, was shabby and ill-furnished, without bed-curtains and wall-paper. Occasionally the Rev. William Holland and his wife were invited to stay the night after dining with the Brices. On one occasion they dined lavishly off a haunch of venison, from a Quantock deer. Mr Brice got up early next morning to look at his sheep and lambs. Mr Holland grudgingly admitted that Mr Brice farmed his glebe very well and was attentive to his sheep and the lambing.

John Brice came of a long line of Somerset parsons and was also descended from the famous Blake family. Two brothers of the great Admiral Blake are buried in Aisholt church. It is probable that John Brice first met Coleridge at Tom Poole's hospitable house. The *Holland Diary* reveals that Mr Brice dined there at intervals, sometimes in the company of Mr Holland who disliked Tom Poole and Coleridge, both 'Democrats', or with the Rev. James Newton of Old Cleeve who befriended Sara Coleridge in 1799, or with the Rev. Henry Poole (Tom's cousin), Coleridge's old college friend who first brought him to Nether Stowey. Mr Brice attended the annual dinner of Poole's Book Club and bought books there. At such functions he was a convivial guest, much too fond of the bottle, according to Mr Holland, sometimes given to telling anecdotes most unsuitable for a clergyman to relate, which 'made his listeners stare'. He 'bragged egregiously', says Mr Holland, and boasted of his close acquaintance with such local gentry as the Luttrells of Dunster Castle, and as Commissioner of the Peace 'knows all law matters'.

Yet perhaps Mr Brice was indeed a sparkling talker since Coleridge, young enough to be his son, enjoyed his society. Mr Holland admits that he was a more agreeable conversationalist when not in a large gathering. It is not likely that he could talk Coleridge down!

During his last visit to Stowey in the summer of 1807, Coleridge took a wandering walk one August evening through Quantock lanes, his thoughts absorbed by his personal and financial problems. According to a letter written to Mary Cruikshank he was trying to

reach Stowey by an unfamiliar route when he lost his way and found himself in a steep hedged lane leading to Aisholt. He called at the Rectory and was invited to dinner. Mr Brice was his usual lively self; after dinner they consumed two bottles of port and several glasses of mead, although Mr Brice's daughters (Penelope 22, Mary 21) had counselled moderation. Coleridge became friendly with Mary Brice, who owned a first edition copy of his poems and dismayed him by lending it to Lady Elizabeth Percival, sister of his friend Lord Egmont of Enmore Castle. Fearing that one sonnet implied that he held revolutionary views, he sent Mary a copy of the second edition for Lady Elizabeth.

Poole wrote a letter to Wedgwood that June saying that Mrs Coleridge and the children were staying with him, Coleridge spending three days at Mr Brice's.

Mrs Coleridge too was acquainted with the Brice daughters; her letters to Poole sometimes contain inquiries about them and their health. 'I do not know what is the matter with Miss Brice', 'Penelope is a sad sufferer' (she reached a ripe old age), and in 1814, 'Is Miss Brice married yet?' - repeated in 1818.

Mr Brice died in 1832. In his little whitewashed, unpretentious church (lit, until a few years ago by candles and oil-lamps) he is handsomely commemorated. A marble tablet on the chancel wall is incised, beneath a shield of arms, with the following:

Sacred to the Memory of the Rev. John Brice  
thirty-two years Rector of Aisholt.

He succeeded to the Rectory as the last Male  
Heir, in descent from the Rev. Nathaniel  
Blake, Rector in 1660.

He was also Rector of Greinton in this  
County, 48 years, and only son of the  
Rev. John Brice, Rector of Greinton, and  
Mary his wife. He died May 24th 1832  
aged 80.

Also to the memory of Grace his  
wife, daughter of Simon Oland Esq.  
She died May 6th 1823 aged 70.

A brass tablet on the sanctuary wall commemorates Mr Brice's daughters:

Penelope Brice, died March 14th 1872  
aged 87, buried at Uphill, Somerset.

Mary Ann Heath Colston  
relict of William Hungerford Colston DD  
Rector of West Lydford, Somerset  
Died Nov. 17th 1865 aged 79.

Catherine Wentworth Brice  
died October 24th 1803 aged 15  
Buried at Porlock, Somerset

These sisters are commemorated further by the stained glass east window (set in 15th century tracery of Ham stone) which displays three women in floating robes, a red-robed Christ, and an inscription:

'I go to prepare a place for you.'

A brass tablet on the wall is inscribed:

To the Glory of God, and to the Memory  
of the three daughters of the Rev. John Brice,  
Rector of Aisholt, and Grace his wife, this  
window was erected by Georgiana Sophia Knifton  
of Uphill Castle, Somerset.

Ann.Dom. 1898.

Uphill Castle is 'a castellated residence', (says Kelly's Directory 1897), set in parkland. It is a 'sham castle'. Uphill is near Weston super Mare.

Aisholt Church has a Brice's Charity, £3 per annum for Bread.

In recent years the Rev. Arthur Moss, a Vicar retired from a large parish, ministered devotedly to Aisholt Church which was restored and rehabilitated during his ministry, attracting a congregation of surprising size. Among Mr Moss's published poems there is one entitled 'Aisholt Church' which begins:

Have you seen it where  
it squats on the edge  
Of its vast green nest,  
Musing hymns, compulsively  
through the brooding years?  
Sometimes the close air  
Stills within the palisade  
Of lusty trees on the steep  
Where we climb to the cool  
White shadows waiting there  
behind the church door  
with its sliding latch.

.....

N.B. Lawrence Whistler is famous as an exquisite engraver of glass. He engraved the wonderful glass windows, which replaced others shattered by a bomb, for Moreton Church, Dorset, and a memorial window for the poet Edward Thomas at Eastbury, Hampshire. He was also a considerable poet.

So the cottage coveted by Coleridge has sheltered other poets since his time.

.....

#### BOOK REVIEWS

Barry Webb. EDMUND BLUNDEN: A Biography. Yale University Press, 1991. xiii+361pp. £18.50 hardback. ISBN 0-300-04634-0.

Barry Webb's biography of a much-loved Vice President of the Charles Lamb Society will give pleasure to members of the Society who enjoyed his friendship and encouragement over the years. Mr Webb records his first meeting with Blunden in 1966 - he was nineteen, Blunden sixty-nine - when 'the lunch lasted three hours - three hours which changed my

life.' Twenty-five years later, that seminal meeting has given us this splendid account of Edmund Blunden's life and work.

My personal memories go back nearly thirty years before that meeting in 1966. On Monday 13th September 1937, on holiday from Christ's Hospital, I began my diary 'Today is the most wonderful day of my life'. At the Oval for the Challenge Match between Middlesex and Yorkshire, I sat on the grass (you could in those days) next to a middle-aged man who kindly told me who was bowling. We got talking: I thought he might be a journalist, for much of the time he was writing, in a minute but neat hand, an account of the match on a luggage label. Previously I had noticed him, copying out notes from a book about Lord Byron on a scrap of paper. Talking about autographs (I was an avid collector), I mentioned I had 'Q's' (Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's) autograph from a Charles Lamb Society dinner. My companion said he was a member of the Society and in fact a Vice-President. When he mentioned that he had been at Christ's Hospital, I ventured to ask his name. 'Blunden' was his reply.

We talked for the rest of the afternoon, although dire things were happening on the field: the light was appalling and Middlesex were 33 for 4 in answer to Yorkshire's 401! We talked about cricket and how he had been introduced to Frank Woolley, the celebrated Kent cricketer, with the words 'This is Mr Blunden, the poet'. Woolley looked blank, then repeated 'Poet?!' Edmund Blunden had hopes of one day coming out onto the field from the Pavilion at the Oval - a hope not, alas realised. I thirstily drank in ideas on libraries and book collecting, along with reminiscences of authors - Aldous Huxley, the Sitwells, Katherine Mansfield. My diary continues for page after ecstatic page: thoughts on the cinema and the theatre; France and the pleasures of food and wine; politics and the prospects for peace. Finally 'bad light stopped play' and we took the bus for Victoria in pouring rain, and there we parted. Echoing Hazlitt's 'My First Acquaintance with Poets', 'I could not have been more delighted if I had heard the music of the spheres. Poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced.... I returned home well satisfied.'

Tuesday 14th September: to the Oval again and another meeting. I had brought with me my Penguin *Undertones of War*, still on my bookshelves today, and inscribed

Madeline Bishop  
Wishing her all happiness  
Edmund Blunden  
The Oval: last match of the season 1937.

We talked about letters: he said he nearly always kept his, and since he had a very large correspondence he collected masses. We exchanged impressions of Christ's Hospital. He and another boy used to walk across the fields to the village to buy sweets for the other boys on commission: his pocket money was four shillings (20p!) a term. He talked again about his best friend Siegfried Sassoon and his Wiltshire estate with its cricket ground; about fishing, which he had given up because it seemed wrong to deceive the fish with food; about cricket. He and an Oxford team were once playing a village team of which the Squire was Captain. The Squire regretted he could only provide bread and a bit of ham for lunch. The village batted first - mostly out first ball - until the Squire came in. The Oxford bowlers bowled very soft ones well on the leg side, so eventually he scored twenty five not out! The Squire was so delighted that he furnished the visitors with a splendid feast (as intended!) ... We talked about fame and favourite authors - Lamb, Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, Byron; about the hazards of authorship, and the help he had received from

Rupert Brooke's estate and from Arnold Bennett. He quoted Robert Bridges' advice: 'Always write while you are young and still have ideas. Always take your opportunities.'

About hand-writing: 'Writing is one of my accomplishments of which I am really proud. Sassoon and I used to have competitions with our writing by each copying out one of our poems, only Sassoon was always able to illustrate his with a surround of coloured sketches, using all sorts of coloured mediums such as coffee'. He felt that love of art had been hammered out of him at school, where 'ART' was a rather frightful affair: but we both admired Titian's *Bacchus and Ariadne*, so praised by Lamb. A comment on Laurence Binyon survives: 'A sleepy old man, terribly wrapped up in art. He had had a lucky break with those lines 'For the Fallen', but he wasn't really a great poet'.

'And did you once see Shelley plain?' summed up my feelings - even wiping out the fact of Middlesex's ignominious defeat!

After this auspicious beginning, Edmund became a friend of my family, always a welcome visitor at our home in Maida Vale, whether seeking a bed for the night, literary discussions with my father (A.F. Bishop, sometime Chairman of the Charles Lamb Society), or impromptu cricket in the garden. The War came the year I went up to Oxford. One last reminiscence: my copy of Edmund Blunden's *Poems 1930-1940* is inscribed

Madeline  
in revenge for her contribution  
at p. 251  
with continued regrets from  
the Author.

Curiously, my Diary of fifty-four years ago touches on many of the themes dealt with so fully and sympathetically by Barry Webb: Edmund's friendships, his vast correspondence, his love of Christ's Hospital, his devotion to cricket, his literary tastes...

A member of a large family, Edmund grew up in the village of Yalding in Kent, where his life-long love of nature (and cricket) took firm root. In 1909 he entered Christ's Hospital (Coleridge A), carrying in his luggage a volume of selections from Charles Lamb. Here he was unusually fortunate in the perceptiveness of his housemaster and his subject teachers, including 'Teddy' Edwards, who is affectionately remembered as a Charles Lamb Society member. Having attained the eminence of Senior Grecian (denied, alas, to Charles Lamb), won an Oxford scholarship and published his first collection of poems (1914), he left in the Summer of 1915. As with Lamb, his years at Christ's Hospital were a lasting influence, culminating in his *The Dede of Pitie*, a masque performed in 1953 to celebrate the four hundredth anniversary of the 'royal, religious and ancient foundation'.

In August 1915, Edmund was commissioned in the Army, 'a harmless young shepherd in a soldier's coat'. He recorded the horrors of Ypres, Passchendale and the Somme in *De Bello Germanico* and the later *Undertones of War*. Even here, his delight in nature did not desert him; nor did his genius for distilling his experiences into poetry. Edmund's horrifying experiences in the Great War may perhaps explain his anti-war stance in the late 1930s, and his failure to recognise the true evil of the Nazi regime.

Barry Webb meticulously records Edmund Blunden's post-1918 career: his enormous and varied literary output; the vicissitudes of his personal life; his sojourns in Academia in Japan and Hong Kong; and what should have been a culmination - his election in February



1966 as Professor of Poetry at Oxford University. Alas! What should have been a prestigious academic cap was soon to become a crown of thorns.

The author refers to ten thousand letters, plus notes and memoranda, which he has consulted. To these might be added the numerous letters exchanged between Edmund Blunden, F.A. Downing and A.F. Bishop, now in the Charles Lamb Society archive. In these days of FAX and telephone calls, how pleasant it is to encounter someone who relied on pen and paper, in the tradition of Charles Lamb. Edmund's elegant script, even in the most hurried note, was always immediately recognisable.

There are generous quotations from Blunden's letters and poems in this new biography. A generation brought up to a harsher view of the human condition may find it difficult to empathise with his pastoral lyrics, but as with any stimulating biography, this one must surely move us to read (again?) what its subject wrote. We all know (and love) the much-anthologised 'Almshouses' and 'Report on Experience', but venture forth, also, into 'Serious Call from a Neglected Bookcase' for example. You will be well rewarded.

In any biography errors inevitably occur. Here there is an irritating confusion between the Elian Club - a dining society limited to fifty-nine members, founded in March 1925, which faded out in 1940 - and the Charles Lamb Society, founded in February 1935, which is still flourishing. A glance at C.A. Prance's *Companion to Charles Lamb* would have avoided the error.

This handsomely-produced and well-illustrated book deserves an honoured place on the book-shelves of all Elians. 1996 approaches, when we shall hope to celebrate the centenary of the birth of Edmund Blunden in style. 'He's a very remarkable child' said the midwife presciently; just one of a multitude of good things, quoted now at the beginning of this excellent new biography.

Madeline Huxstep (née Bishop)

#### BLUNDEN ON LAMB: A Note

Over the years Edmund Blunden wrote prolifically (and excellently) on Charles Lamb and his Circle. Among more substantial works, are:

*The Last Essays of Elia*, edited by Edmund Blunden (notes by F. Page), 1929.

*Charles Lamb and His Contemporaries*, 1933.

*Charles Lamb, his life recorded by his contemporaries*, 1934.

'Bibliography of Charles Lamb' in *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature*, Volume III, 1940.

*Charles Lamb*, 1954. This was a contribution to the once well-known series of 'British Council Pamphlets' and, as is noted in a later section of the present *Charles Lamb Bulletin*, it is still currently available.

In addition to his work on Lamb, Edmund Blunden was a notable pioneer in modern studies of Leigh Hunt. A full bibliography of his work on Lamb, Hunt and others of their group can be found on pp.32-33 of Claude Prance's *Companion to Charles Lamb*: this also

lists reviews and magazine articles. Some of the best of his early pieces were collected by Blunden himself in *Votive Tablets*, 1931, one of the finest (and most delightful) collections of short literary essays to have appeared in the inter-War years.

W.R.

Jane Aaron. *A DOUBLE SINGLENESS: Gender and the Writings of Charles and Mary Lamb*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991. 220pp. £27.50 hardback. ISBN 019-812890 8.

Successive waves have swept over the foreshore of English critical studies in the twenty years since *The Charles Lamb Bulletin* was refounded. Structuralism, Deconstruction, New Historicism, Feminism...as the first powerful surge of each has in turn receded, it has left the familiar coastline looking not just as it did. So we can no longer read the *Essays of Elia* in quite the way that Lucas or Blunden taught us (sound though it was) and we can no longer feel content to read Charles Lamb without turning our attention to the writings of his sister Mary at certain points.

Jane Aaron's new study of the two writers brings 'feminist and psychoanalytic literary theory' to bear on the lives and work of Charles and Mary Lamb and offers 'an entirely new perspective' on each. This seems to be based on the idea that they shared a common sense of inferiority and the need for self repression. In Mary's case, Jane Aaron argues, this was because of her sex, which compelled her to accept a subservient rôle which her writing could not break free from: only in her manic fits could she burst forth with the full power of her energetic and witty intelligence. For Charles, the conflicting demands of masculinity (as currently envisaged) and the inferior social rank which he occupied as a clerk with the East India Company produced comparable tensions which drink could only alleviate, and from which he took refuge in the 'feminine' rôle playing of such texts as the *Elia* essays. Both Charles and Mary suffered further in being the children of servants, brought up to accept servitude as the norm, and also from the repression exercised on both of them (but particularly Mary) by a dominant and unresponsive mother, which could only add to their dilemma.

Jane Aaron argues her case with ingenuity and learning, marshalling a formidable battery of psychological theory in its support. But the reader may perhaps feel troubling doubts concerning the historical focusing of her argument. Was social stratification as absolute in the 1770s and '80s as Dr Aaron assumes? It surely was much less troublesome then than in the mid 1830s, when Mary Lamb, after Charles's death, wished his occupation as a clerk had been omitted from Wordsworth's memorial verses. And were not all children taught the lesson of obedience in church and school when the Lambs were young, whatever attitudes may have been like at home? Jane Aaron makes much of the fact that Charles resisted promotion at work, seeing in this a sign of his crippling sense of social inferiority; but are there not other possible explanations (not wanting to be placed above a congenial group of fellow clerks, for example)? And does the way he was treated when he wanted early retirement not indicate that he was by no means looked upon as a mere pen pusher in the East India House?

In any case, we may ask, were Charles and Mary Lamb much bothered by matters of social status in their best years? Circumstances allowing, what a later generation might have thought of as a cheerful, mild bohemianism seems to have suited them best, just as it evidently did so many of their friends.

Similarly, one cannot help wondering how repressed Mary Lamb felt herself, or wished to feel herself, to be? One could argue a very different case from Dr Aaron's by looking

upon Mary's career as a writer simply as representing a series of responses to the felt needs of other people: to help Charles make a little money, to assist the Godwins with their children's bookshop, to argue the case for sympathetic understanding of the host of impoverished needlewomen, from whose ranks Mary had been saved by her brother's benevolence. Like Dorothy Wordsworth, Mary seems to have found all the self-release on paper that she required in private correspondence for most of her life. Though arguing all this does, it must be admitted, leave Jane Aaron's very strong case for Mary's being unable to release a significant part of her psychic personality except in the uncontrollable high spirits and reckless wit which characterised her periods of mental breakdown unanswered. And clearly this is a very important point.

The foregoing comments may suggest what kind of a response is stimulated in at least one reader by *A Double Singleness*. A rather difficult style, much inlaid with the encoded language of feminist and psychoanalytical theorizing, does sometimes throw a veil between reading and comprehension; and when close attention to a particular text is being offered, it is easy to feel that one interpretation is being privileged at the expense of others no less possible because of the chosen language of discourse. Yet at the same time, Jane Aaron's book is valuable because of the way it forces us to attend to the nature, not just the circumstances, of Mary Lamb's tragedy and Charles's involvement with it; and the literary and well as the familial pressures evident in their lives and work. *Mrs Leicester's School* (to take a single example) is rightly promoted to representing a key text for our understanding of their development as both writers and people. In particular, the way *Elia* records the double nature of 'play' (cards, rôle playing through reminiscence, reshaping the past) for Mary as well as Charles is shown to offer important insights.

Not an easy book to see whole, perhaps, *A Double Singleness* nevertheless stimulates the reader with point after point that demands thought and close attention. Above all, in stressing the closeness of the bond which linked the creativity of Charles Lamb with that of his sister, emphasising the way his writings are 'stylistically and thematically opposed to the masculinist stance currently considered characteristic of Romantic writers' (even if one may need to silence the question 'is it?' or 'was it ever?'), Jane Aaron opens the way for fresh modes of seeing and a fresh set of possibilities. Her book has been extensively researched and carefully pondered. It has been worth waiting for.

Bill Ruddick

Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1989. pp.xx, 525. £17.90 (paperback, 1990. £8.95).

This is a long, though not a monstrous life. Its subject is important enough to justify over five hundred pages (the last hundred are notes, bibliography and index) and Wordsworth, after all, lived to be eighty, even if much of his second forty years is felt to be monotonous, dreary, or at least irrelevant to the poet (part of Stephen Gill's strength lies in making those later years interesting). Mary Moorman split her two (roughly equal) volumes at 1803; Gill's chronological division is much the same. With Wordsworth's marriage in 1802 we are half way through the book and thirty-two years through the life. The first forty-seven years get 323 pages, while the last thirty-three are covered in a hundred pages. These proportions seem right and one advantage presumably of Gill's single volume over Moorman's two is that we are more likely to be led on to read the life complete, rather than to feel that volume 2 can be safely left undisturbed (an impression borne out by library date stamps in Moorman's volumes). Gill does not reject or ignore the later years. Rather, his selective process lets the highlights shine out. For example, whatever the extenuations, Gill finds it 'difficult to imagine a more wrong-headed

judgement' than Wordsworth's on the authors of the 1832 Reform Bill (men 'committing a greater political crime than any recorded in History') nor one that indicates 'more dismayingly how sterile Wordsworth's political imagination had become' (p.363). Yet this pungent observation is played off against Wordsworth's abiding and intense sympathy for the poor and the working class, which Gill has constantly kept before the reader.

The overriding problems for the biographer of Wordsworth are the source and the nature of the materials for the earlier life. Stephen Gill begins by confronting the problem head on, in his Introduction. The writer of the poet's life is up against the fact that Wordsworth 'spent a lifetime sifting, selecting, and ordering much of the material for it himself', and while other writers have done this, honestly or dishonestly in varying degrees (most notoriously, perhaps, Thomas Hardy) they usually did so in the retrospect of an established career. As well as that difference of perspective (and its consequences for approaching the material), the very autobiography that Wordsworth produced is central to his poetic achievement. As Gill rightly states, 'autobiography was the well-spring' of Wordsworth's creative powers. It is perhaps a shock to be reminded by Gill that such questions necessarily arise for the biographer as whether Wordsworth did steal a boat or whether he did get lost on Penrith Beacon. These episodes, so firmly established in Wordsworth's life that to doubt them seems ludicrous, are yet as Gill stresses only known through poetic 'evidence', itself known to be rewritten and reshaped as *The Prelude* was reshaped and rewritten. But not only incidents are in question (though Gill accepts, in some form, both those mentioned). The very shape of events, their meaning as offered by Wordsworth, Gill asserts, needs to be resisted, however persuasive. Such a shape, which Gill calls the 'teleological key' of the 1805 *Prelude*, is the sense of noble purpose to which Providence has called Wordsworth and the poem's assertion that he is equal to that 'High-calling'. Such a claim is unsurprising in a man who sought to justify (to himself as much as to family and friends) an apparent failure to establish himself in life or to achieve anything. Yet if that shaping is resisted - and throughout the earlier years Gill skilfully and largely successfully negotiates the snares of the poetry's autobiographical blandishments, the twin difficulties still remain, first that *The Prelude* is often the only source for events and second that in its various versions *The Prelude*, together with the rest of the poetry, is the reason for any biography of Wordsworth and must bulk centrally as poetry. Mary Moorman too often, it seems to me, quoted the poetry as though it were illustrative confirmatory evidence. Gill is much more alert to the pitfalls here, while of course never rejecting the poetry.

Take, for example, Gill's notable consideration of the events of 1792, one of the most important years in Wordsworth's life, yet about which, says Gill, 'it is impossible to be certain of the significance of almost everything about it' (p.56). Gill sensitively considers how *The Prelude* shapes the account of residence in France, what we can factually know, what is reasonable certainty or reasonable assumption or reasonable speculation, and then explores with tact the significance of the experience both at that time and twelve years later when Wordsworth was writing the 1805 *Prelude*. Constantly, one period of Wordsworth's life envelops or overlies another, in this writing process, and the result is like a series of rooms in which we must look back and forward along vistas as well as scrutinize the space in which we stand. A biography conducted in such a way will not be to every reader's taste, but the recognition of this vista and the handling of it makes for Gill's success. What also is recognized in this is how far Wordsworth's life is a life of writing. To begin, as Gill has to do, with *The Prelude*, in clearing ground before the biography proper, is to alert the reader to what is central in Wordsworth, the processes of writing and the greatness (if sometimes the strangeness) of that writing. Wordsworth's life is treated in terms of writing not from any fashionable following of critical theory, but because Wordsworth long ago insisted upon this, as when the Alps show forth 'Characters

of the great Apocalypse'. Experience was to be interpreted and Gill does not shirk interpretation.

Wordsworth's was a life of intense creativity and of intense relationships. How a biographer handles each of these will be crucial. Of the women in Wordsworth's life, Annette Vallon and Dorothy have evoked most interest. Gill declares himself at odds with Moorman and F.M. Todd on how to understand the Annette relationship. If he also decides that 'we do not know how Wordsworth felt about Annette at the end of 1792 nor what his state of mind was when he returned to England' (p.67), the way by which he comes to a seemingly disappointing conclusion is subtle and delicate, teasing out possibilities, while also making clear why we should not, as others have done, transmute conjecture into fact. On Dorothy, where too many have been hysterical and downright silly, Gill looks at what is known with steadiness and interprets with decency and sense. First, the love of Wordsworth and Dorothy is described as very strong and, more importantly, as domestic. Then, the love (at least, on Dorothy's side) was 'profoundly sexual'. But as Gill goes on, pointing to contiguous diary entries, if the love was intense, 'it was not exclusive' (p.203). They lived their lives with other people. No physical intercourse is suggested by Gill, but an acceptance of the intensity of lives lived together and for each other. On other figures, Godwin, for example, and Coleridge, Gill treads dangerous paths fealty and draws us into the ways of the poetry.

Gill handles well how, as *Lyrical Ballads* progressed, through the first and second editions, Wordsworth established a dominance over Coleridge as the productive poet, while the problems of *The Recluse* and the writing and revisions of the great body of Wordsworth's work is expertly discussed, even if I want to dispute details: *Salisbury Plain*, for example, whatever its importance in Wordsworth's intellectual development, is surely a poetic failure, and there is the terrible damage done in 1845 to Book 1 of *The Excursion* by the Christian addition. Not only does this intrude 'rhythmically brutal lines', but is at odds with the whole conduct and meaning of the tale, as well as being a direct lie by the Wanderer about Margaret. Such challenges come, though, from the stimulus of Gill's range and intelligence.

What conclusion? It should be noted as a cause of concern in a work of such value that the Index is defective: Robespierre is omitted (he is certainly on p.87 and a figure of importance) and the notes are only patchily represented (George Eliot from p.479, for example, but not Juvenal, p.441). The Notes themselves, a rich and integral part of the work, are difficult to use. They have only a chapter number at the beginning of each section (without the date titles used in the main text) and while the date titles serve as running headlines to the body of the work, there are no headlines of any kind to the notes. Without a system of pieces of paper and strict discipline, the Notes are uneasy reading. But to the main achievement. To claim any biography as definitive is an absolute best avoided. Other lives of Wordsworth will be written, and one or some be better than Gill's. What is clear is that this replaces Moorman as the current essential life, in its handling of more recent scholarship and in its responses to the life and poetry of one of our greatest poets (one of the triumvirate with Chaucer and Milton, below Shakespeare). It places Wordsworth centrally as a poet, is a fine achievement biographically and critically, and will for long be *the* life of Wordsworth, for scholar, student, and general reader.

Angus Easson  
University of Salford

*Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream*. Essays in Honor of Walter Jackson Bate. Edited by J Robert Barth, SJ, and John L Mahoney. University of Missouri Press, Columbia & London, 1990.

Among its many merits this book has one conspicuous demerit: it bears at least one title too many, not counting the titular dedication on the title page. The title is effectively a series of mini-titles informing us successively that the book is about (1) Coleridge and Keats, (2) Imagination, (3) Romanticism, and (4) what Keats meant by remarking on Imagination that 'The Imagination may be compared to Adam's Dream - he awoke and found it truth'. So long a series seems to create a sort of penumbral continuance - one almost hears a lame 'and everything' attaching itself after a further, and slightly longer, pause. Sadly, of course, a book called, simply and elegantly, *Adam's Dream*, which one conjectures to have been the editors' real intent and inspiration, would have been overlooked in the catalogues and lost in a thousand libraries.

What elegance has been forfeited here, however, is fully compensated in the strategy of the work. *Adam's Dream* (to restore its spiritual title) celebrates the achievement and inspiration of Walter Jackson Bate, and its contributors are all former beneficiaries of his teaching skills. Professor Bate's career - which is profiled by David Perkins - has of course encompassed major editorial labours on Johnson and Coleridge. But he is best known for a series of critical and biographical studies to which virtually everybody with an interest in literature has been at some stage indebted: *From Classic to Romantic* (1946), *The Achievement of Samuel Johnson* (1955), the magnificent and methodologically original *John Keats* (1963), the positively svelte sequel on *Coleridge* (1968), the seminal essay on *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (1970), and a return to Johnson in *Samuel Johnson* (1977).

Jack Stillinger provides an engaging ho**d'**oeuvre to this worthy series of essays, taking the legendary encounter between Coleridge and Keats as his starting point for a spritely review of Coleridge's impact upon his younger contemporary. The essay helpfully details the references to Coleridge in Keats's work - contrasting the 'Gothic' writings of the two in terms of Keats's greater concern with the human world and with mortality (this polarisation of Coleridgean transcendence and Keatsian immanence does not pass unchallenged within the book), and identifying the contributions of Coleridge to Keats's concept of 'Negative Capability'. If Stillinger appears, rather oddly, to confuse this concept with the quite separate issue of lack of identity, the volume rectifies that misconception (if it is one) in Laurence Lockridge's examination of 'The Ethics of Imagination'. Lockridge claims quite properly that Keats's conception of identity was at centre an ethical one, and that it was 'the most sophisticated to be found among the Romantic authors', accommodating 'both permanence and change'. Keats, he argues, both confronted the fact that the poet cannot 'evade the ethical', and demonstrated the perils (for the poet) of too great a commitment to the ethical.

In a major statement, Thomas McFarland responds to recent criticism (Paul de Man's particularly) of the Romantic and Coleridgean elevation of symbol. To support his strong argument, that the structure of symbol 'is one of cognitive synecdoche', rather than of 'rhetorical mystification' as is fashionably alleged, McFarland deftly marshals De Quincey, William James, Gadamer and late Benjamin, in refutation of Paul de Man, Gadamer and early Benjamin. Later in the volume, J Robert Barth contributes an exemplary expository essay on a cognate theme, recalling us to the text (rather than the more fashionable appendices) of *The Statesman's Manual*. Barth's explanation of Coleridge's account of biblical symbols, that they 'not only reveal ... some truth about God but at the same time reveal God himself working in and through these temporal realities' not only supports

McFarland's essay - it also offers a welcome reminder of how much can be said in seven pages, and of what elucidation means.

Douglas Wilson contributes what most readers will find the most difficult of the essays (difficult because of its demanding nature, but also at times avoidably difficult, because of Wilson's tendency to suppose too generously that we all have his own range of reading at our mental fingertips and can intuit precisely what track he is pursuing). His essay 'The Dreaming Imagination' is, however, a powerful and imaginative argument about imagination and power, in which Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, is used to explore the tension between Apollonian surface and Dionysiac depths in the dream-poetry of Coleridge, Keats (briefly) and Wordsworth. Coleridge, on the whole, is found less able to abide the vagaries of imagination, and hence inclined to manufacture such bromides as the theosophic gloss to the *Ancient Mariner* and a (projected) happy ending for Christabel. Wordsworth's imagination by contrast is disturbingly ready to seek out the sublime: his Salisbury Plain visions of sacrifice are at the heart of Wilson's argument, as is his quest to submit his sublime vitality to 'stoical control'.

Individual poems by Coleridge and Keats come in for a variety of detailed readings. James Engell's 'Imagining into Nature' is a Berkeleyan study of *This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison*, beginning with a discussion of the poem's liberating conflation of genres and discussing its background in, and its processes of, philosophical enquiry. Paul Sheats approaches *Ode to a Nightingale* - read as 'an attempt to enlist [imagination] on behalf of the wholeness of the soul' - via a reminder of how soiled rhetorical and politically compromised a genre the ode had become before Keats undertook to renovate it, and a history of that renovation in a surprisingly extended series of odal compositions. John L Mahoney surveys a selection of Coleridge's later poems, carrying conviction as to their continuity with the earlier work, and their greater preoccupation with 'the tragic notes of human experience', but less, I fear, when he claims for them an effective 'new' style, suggestive of 'the bleak and jarring world of T S Eliot' and 'the troubled fantasies of Lowell'.

I have no doubt, however, that Elians (and Elia) would most enjoy David Perkins's delightful miniature on *Kubla Khan* and its introductory note. In ten pages, each of them properly laden with critical ore, Perkins first surveys the debate that has, from the beginning, surrounded such matters as the Person from Porlock, Coleridge's 'anodyne', and the generic associations of 'vision', 'dream' and 'fragment', and then produces a reading of the relation between the prose and the poem which - while quite properly raising more questions than it seeks to answer - will have the salutary effect of reanimating for many readers the poem itself, the issues entailed in the note, and Coleridge's mischievous conjunction of the two.

Professor Bate himself is given the last word in an interview with John Paul Russo, ranging over the past and future of the humanities. The last word, by the way, is that 'If there can be simply a facing up to the essentials of common experience, the humanities can almost in a moment shake themselves into sanity'. One can only hope, given the Babel-like condition of contemporary criticism which the interview appears to have in mind, that Bate's Imagination is itself 'like Adam's Dream'.

Richard Gravil

## SOCIETY NEWS AND NOTES FROM MEMBERS

## PROFESSOR KATHLEEN COBURN

It was my sad duty, as Chairman of the first meeting of the 1991-92 season of lectures on Saturday, 5 October, to announce to the Society that its distinguished Vice-President, Professor Kathleen Coburn, had died on September 23, aged 86.

Kathleen Coburn did more to inaugurate the modern age of Coleridge scholarship than any other individual, and she did it with a rare combination of dauntless energy and charm which are vividly remembered by many members of the Charles Lamb Society. Her curiosity about Coleridge's life and works, which was to grow into a life-long editorial involvement with his unpublished remains, began in her student days in Toronto in the late 1920s. She came to Oxford in 1930 and began to make Coleridgean contacts almost by chance. Her autobiographical *In Pursuit of Coleridge* (1977) tells the story of how she charmed the notably un-literary Lord Coleridge into permitting the *Notebooks* to be photographed, how she found the manuscript of the *Philosophical Lectures* in the depths of a cupboard in Gerard Coleridge's house, and of how she was almost defeated by an inbuilt resistance on the part of the British literary establishment to the idea of a woman being able to undertake editorial work on a large scale which now (happily) seems to belong to another age. Kathleen Coburn's lasting monuments will be the editions of Coleridge's *Notebooks* (1957-90) and the *Collected Coleridge* (1960- ) of which she was General Editor.

Few scholars can have been the subject of warmer and more appreciative obituaries in the press than Professor Coburn (including one, in *The Independent*, by our President, Professor John Beer). The Society is honoured by her Vice Presidency for many years.

Bill Ruddick

## LECTURE PROGRAMME

The new series of lectures began on October 5th with Mark Garnett's talk on 'Lamb's Politics', printed in the current *Bulletin*, which stimulated a very animated discussion. The meeting of November 2nd, commemorating the centenary of the death of Emma Isola Moxon was also an afternoon of unusual interest. Our Chairman, David Wickham, spoke on Emma's life and produced, at dramatic intervals, original letters, books and other relevant materials to illustrate his narrative. The Editor spoke briefly on Edward Moxon's importance as a publisher and his faithful service to the memory of Charles Lamb, and Mr John E. Moxon, the great-great-grandson of Emma and Edward, produced his own display of letters, books and family photographs to tell the story of his ancestors' later years and the subsequent history of the Moxon family. It was indeed a rich afternoon.

By the time the January *Charles Lamb Bulletin* appears, Cecilia Powell's talk on 'The Romantic Rhine: Turner, Wordsworth and their Contemporaries' will already have taken place; but there will still be time to rush to the Tate Gallery before Cecilia's exhibition 'Turner's Rivers of Europe: the Rhine, Meuse and Mosel' (illustrating Turner's Continental tours of 1817, 1824 and 1839) closes on 26th January 1992. It should not be missed.



## ROMANTIC ECOLOGY: AN IMPORTANT CORRECTION

This does look like a case of 'Imperfect Sympathies' when taken in conjunction with what happened to the text of Mary's lecture in the January *Bulletin*. It wasn't, of course; just the typist's eye jumping to a repeated phrase, which is understandable, and the Editor's failing to see that a quotation which turned Professor Hartman into a New Historian at the expense of the Imagination couldn't possibly be right, which can only be described (and lamented) as a Regrettable Lapse. But let Mary Wedd's note speak for itself:

Why is it that I seem to attract misprints like a magnet? I am sorry, but I must correct a serious error in my review of Jonathan Bate's *Romantic Ecology* in the October *Bulletin*. A line has been omitted so that nonsense is made of the sentence beginning on my eighth line (page 143). This sentence should read

As against Hartman, who 'threw out nature to bring us the transcendent imagination' or McGann, who 'throws out the transcendent imagination to bring us history and society', Professor Bate suggests that we should 'relearn Wordsworth's way of looking at nature'.

## NEWS AND NOTES FROM OUR HON. SECRETARY

1. THE BELL AT WIDFORD For about six years this historic inn, frequented by Charles Lamb, had been boarded up and its fate uncertain. But now it has been reopened as a hostelry, some of the memorabilia which used to grace 'Lamb's Corner' recovered, and Mr and Mrs Wilkins are enthusiastically collecting items of Elian interest. Visitors will be assured of a warm welcome - the telephone number is 0279-842594. (For much detail about the Bell in particular and Widford's other Lamb associations see Reginald Hine's *Charles Lamb and His Hertfordshire*). Widford is a few miles east of Ware on the Bishop's Stortford road.

2. HAZLITT'S TOMBSTONE Visitors to the churchyard (now a garden) of St. Anne's, Soho, were distressed to see the poor state of Hazlitt's tombstone. As Hazlitt has no Society of his own, we felt that Charles Lamb would want us to help restore this memorial to one of his closest friends. We are in touch with the Soho Society and hope that before long restoration will be carried out.

3. MISS H.G. WATTS We record with gratitude a legacy to the Society of £1000, bequeathed by the will of Miss Watts, an early Member who joined in December 1938 and mostly lived in Croydon and West Norwood. Miss Watts was a friend of Ernest Crowsley.

4. BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION LUNCHEON Charles Lamb's birthday will be celebrated a little early next year, on Saturday 1st February, as this is the nearest date on which the Royal College of General Practitioners can entertain us. We are delighted to have as our Guest of Honour our former Chairman, Tim Wilson. All UK members should have received a booking form with their October *Bulletin*. If you have not already applied for tickets, please telephone the Secretary (081-940-3837) to make sure that tickets are still available.

5. 1991-92 PROGRAMME Lamb's 'fantastic Duchess', Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, will be the subject of our lecture on January 11th, to be delivered by Kathleen Jones, author of *A Glorious Fame: The Life of Margaret Cavendish*.

6. RECENT ELIAN REFERENCES      Elians will be interested in a reference to Mary Lamb in Kathleen Jones's latest biography, *Learning Not To Be First: A Life of Christina Rossetti*. Christina was invited to contribute a volume of Adelaide Proctor to a series called 'Eminent Women', edited by J.H. Ingram. She replied:

Mrs Fry I would gladly try..I should decline the two Georges (Sand and Eliot) and would prefer leaving Miss Martineau. Mary Lamb I should think would be both manageable and well worth trying.

The volume on Mary Lamb was eventually written by Anne Gilchrist.

Charles Lamb was praised in *The Guardian* on two days running in early October. A long extract about London from Paul Bailey's book *Whose Cities?* (Penguin £5.99) printed on the 18th culminates in a lengthy section from Lamb's famous letter to Wordsworth in praise of Covent Garden, Fleet Street and 'the motley Strand'. The following day, Roy Hattersley's weekly 'Endpiece' includes a short but choice list of 'great light essays' which begins with Lamb's 'A Dissertation upon Roast Pig'.

Madeline Huxstep

#### CHAIRMANLY ERUDITION

A mention of Robert Lynd's essay 'On Moving House' in Roy Hattersley's list reminds me to include a typically thorough explanation by David Wickham of the 'Lamb, Lynd, Kittens and Babies' conundrum presented on page 147 of the October *Bulletin*.

As to the *Bulletin* reference, about a kitten rising three weeks, I thought it was Hazlitt, then that it must be Leigh Hunt, then that it had to be Southey - which it is. Lucas misquotes it completely in *The Life of Charles Lamb*, two-thirds of the way through the 1803 chapter (page 295 in my 1921 reprint). It sounded as though it came from *The Doctor*; but what does not? This put Claude France's name into my mind and I plumbed the Indexes of his *Peppercorn Papers*, *The Laughing Philosopher* and *The Charles Lamb Companion*, before running the mention to ground in an article he contributed to *The Private Library*, Summer 1981, Series III, Vol.4, No.2, which was doubtless reprinted in his recent collection of essays which has now been deposited in the Guildhall Library. That took me to my own copy of *The Doctor* (which belonged to Augustine Birrell before it belonged to the Rich family)...and there it is! Volume 4, page 328, just after the locus classicus of 'Goldilocks and the Three Bears'. The book was anonymous, so I suppose Southey was speaking of himself:

It is said to be a saying of Dr Southey's that 'a house is never perfectly furnished for enjoyment, unless there is a child in it rising three years old, and a kitten rising six weeks'.

#### A LIFE OF CHARLES LAMB

D E Wickham

Our member Mr Frank Ledwith made the excellent suggestion that the Society's proposed series of Elian Booklets should include a brief ('16 page') *Life of Charles Lamb*.

However, we have since discovered that our former Vice President Edmund Blunden's booklet entitled *Charles Lamb* (referred to earlier in the short bibliography which follows Madeline Huxstep's review of Barry Webb's biography of Blunden) which includes a

bibliography, originally issued in 1960 by Longman for the British Council as 'Writers and their Work No.56', unexpectedly remains in print and was certainly available in June 1991 at £1.99.

In the circumstances, the Charles Lamb Society will not publish its own short biography in the foreseeable future, and Mr Ledwith is happy about this. The current details are that the booklet, code O 582 01056 X, is published by Longman's subsidiary, Northcote House Publishers Ltd., from Plymbridge House, Estover, Plymouth, PL6 7PZ. Tel: 0752-707251.

ALL IN A GOOD CAUSE

D E Wickham

It is, I suppose, something of an honour, when the Toast Master knows you. That is why my former colleague, brooking no correction, introduced me loudly as the Archivist of The Clothworkers' Company when I had actually been invited as Chairman of the Charles Lamb Society.

Anyway, I progressed up the staircase, dispensing handshakes and how-de-dos as required, before joining about eighty other members of the literary good and the literary great of the City of London in the Old Library at Guildhall. This was on 25 July 1991. It was for a Dinner of the Libraries, Art Galleries and Records Committee of the Corporation of London in honour of its Past Chairman. Since the Old Library is like a fair section of Westminster Abbey, in both appearance and proportions, you will understand that we had a reasonable amount of space in which to circulate and to drink a little champagne. Or orange juice, if that was preferred.

I was there for you, naturally. I remembered this as the Tiger Prawns with Lime Chartreuse (and the Bourgogne Chardonnay 1987) passed before me. I regret that it slipped slightly during the Noisettes of Lamb Foie Gras with a Selection of Seasonal Fresh Vegetables (and the Château Roc 1982). Indeed I can remember only the purée of carrots and parsnips from the Seasonal Fresh Vegetables - perhaps the other one was broccoli - but there were no potatoes at all (Yippeel!). I tried to remember that my figure and my liver were going on the line for all the members of the Charles Lamb Society as the Iced Raspberry Souffle followed (with the Charles Lafitte Rosé).

The same memory was kept in hand as the Coffee and Chocolate Truffles were served and I managed to get it back after choosing the Dows Late Bottle Vintage 1984 Port (the Clothworkers are still drinking the 1970) rather than the Courvoisier. Then there were the Cigars, four Speeches, including one by the Minister for the Arts, and a Stirrup Cup.

At that point I had a good long talk with Ms Irene Gilchrist who is in overall charge of the Charles Lamb Society Library, which is kept within the Guildhall Library. She said that matters are now progressing satisfactorily and that she really hopes soon to be able to ask us for some money for the cataloguing and binding/conservation of our books, which seem to have hung fire lately but for which we do have funds available. At the last, therefore, I learned something that could be reported back to the Committee on behalf of the Society and which they all wanted to hear.

So you see, it was a simple working dinner, like politicians have. Being there on behalf of all the members of the Charles Lamb Society, eating all those rich foods, drinking all that alcohol, was my duty as Chairman. I would not want you to think that I made any attempt to enjoy myself!

## HAZLITT, THE STAGE - AND PEGGY RAMSAY

D E Wickham

The *Times* obituary for Peggy Ramsay, the West End literary agent, published on 10 September 1991, ended: 'She wrote as she spoke. After the dismissal of an early David Hare piece she wrote: "Well, it will soon be an all-revival West End, and critics will be reassessing the judgements of Hazlitt and Agate".'

Parts of the *Daily Telegraph* obituary (7 September 1991) seemed downright odd? It described her loftily as Margaret Ramsay and, perhaps accepting that most people might know her name only from *that Orton film* (not one for Aunt Edna), in which she was played by Vanessa Redgrave, felt it necessary to remark that the actress was far too tall for the role. On the other hand, perhaps that is what is known as high camp. It is certainly true. In the film *Wagner* she plays Cosima and makes her first entrance turned away from the camera, which allows her to be instantly recognised *by the back of her neck*, with which she is acting remarkably well: you will not believe it unless you watch it. When I saw the nine-hour version, (?) Vernon Dobtcheff, who was sitting right behind me, asked Gordon Jackson, who was sitting right behind him, what he thought of the Redgrave performance. 'We-e-e-ll', said Jackson, at his most Highland, 'I think dearr Vanessa is grrrowing tallerrr by the minute'. A digression, yes, but suppose that it had been Elliston and Munden speaking of Fanny Kelly.

## HOROSCOPE AND THE LAMBS

D E Wickham

Charles Lamb was born on 10 February 1775 and so towards the end of the zodiacal house of Aquarius - arguably the one who carries the can. I asked a colleague to sum up Aquarians. They are very hard to pin down, she said. Mercurial? Yes, mercurial.

In fact this note developed from a suggestion that there was a Year of the Lamb in the Chinese Zodiac and that we might consider celebrating the next time it appears in the twelve-year cycle.

There seems to be more than one tradition at work in the Chinese Zodiac. By a useful coincidence, the sign for 1775 is the same as for 1991. Sometimes it is recorded as the Goat, sometimes as the Ram. In neither case is it called the Lamb, so we are let off that problem.

\*\*\*\*\*

Mary Lamb, for the record, was born on 3 December 1764: Sagittarius and the Year of the Monkey, which occurs next in 1992. No-one will tell me about Sagittarians but Jim Davidson, the - ah - comedian, claims to be typical of his sign.

## ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS TO THE CHARLES LAMB SOCIETY remain as follows:

<i>Personal</i>	U.K. (single) £8.00	(Double) £12.00	
	Overseas		US\$14.00
<i>Corporate:</i>	U.K.		£12.00
	Overseas		US\$21.00

Cheques should be made payable to the Charles Lamb Society and sent to the Hon. Treasurer, Nicholas Powell, ~~30 Camberwell Grove, London SE5 8RE~~. Existing subscriptions should be renewed in January. New address: 28 Grove Lane, London SE5 8ST.