

WORKS of Charles Lamb

The works of Lamb divide themselves naturally into three periods. First, there are his early literary efforts, including the poems signed "C. L." in Coleridge's poems on various subjects (1796), his romance Rosamund Gray (1798), his poetical drama John Woodvil (1802), and various other immature works in prose and poetry. This period comes to an end in 1803, when he gave up his newspaper work, especially the contribution of six jokes, puns and squibs daily to the Morning Post at sixpence a piece. The second period was given largely to literary criticism and the Tales from Shakespeare (1807) written by Charles and Mary Lamb, the former reproducing the tragedies and the latter the comedies may be regarded as his first successful literary venture. The book was written primarily

for ~~most~~ children but so thoroughly had brother and sister steeped themselves in the literature of the Elizabethan period that young and old alike were delighted with this new version of Shakespeare's stories and the Tales are still regarded as the best of their kind in our literature. In 1808 appeared his Specimens of English Dramatic Poets Contemporary with Shakespeare. This carried out the splendid critical work of Coleridge and was the most noticeable influence in developing the poetic qualities of Keats as shown in his last volume. The third period included Lamb's criticisms of life, which are gathered together in his Essays of Elia (1823) and his last Essays of Elia which were published ten years later. These famous essays began in 1820 with the appearance of the new London magazine and were continued for many years.

Such subjects as the "Dissertation on Roast Pig", "Old China", "Praise of Chimney Sweepers", "Imperfect Sympathies", "A Chapter on Ears", "Mrs. Battle's opinions on Whist", "Mackery End", "Grace Before meat", "Dream Children" and many others being chosen apparently at random, but all leading to a delightful interpretation of the life of London, as it appeared to a quiet little man who walked unnoticed through its crowded streets. In the first and last essays which we have mentioned, "Dissertation on Roast Pig" and "Dream Children" we have the extremes of Lamb's humor and pathos.

The style of all these essays is gentle, old-fashioned, irresistibly attractive. Lamb was especially fond of old writers and borrowed unconsciously from the style of Burton's Anatomy of Melan-

Chaucer and from Browne's *Pedagogia* and from the early English dramatists. But this style had become a part of Lamb by long reading and he was apparently unable to express his new thought without using their old quaint expressions. Though these essays are all criticisms or ~~essays~~ appreciations of the life of his age, they are all intensely personal. In other words they are an excellent picture of Lamb and of humanity. Without a trace of vanity or self-assertion, Lamb begins with himself with some purely personal mood or experience and from this he leads the reader to see life and literature as he saw it. It is this wonderful combination of personal and universal interests together with Lamb's rare old style and quaint humor, which make the essays remarkable. They continue the best tradi-

Page (05)

tion of Addison and Steele,
our first great essayists, but
their sympathies are broader
and deeper, and their humor
more delicious, than any
which preceded them.

The end.

Munee Bhushan Sinha
Deptt. of English
S.B. College, Jabalpur