

COLERIDGE, LAMB AND THE YEAR 1834.

WHEN, in 1835, James Hogg, the "Ettrick Shepherd," died, Wordsworth composed what he called an "Ex-tempore Effusion" on his death—meaning by extempore I know not what, for all inspiration is sudden and there is every trace of polish in the lines—in which two of the stanzas run thus :

Nor has the rolling year twice measured,
From sign to sign, its stedfast course
Since every mortal power of Coleridge
Was frozen at its marvellous source ;

The rapt one, of the godlike forehead,
The heaven-eyed creature, sleeps in earth ;
And Lamb, the frolic and the gentle,
Has vanished from his lonely hearth.

It is to the honour and glory of the "rapt one" and the "frolic and the gentle" that the portraits in this room have been assembled.

In the manuscript diary of Thomas Moule, the antiquary and topographer, who died in 1851 and who was in the habit of noting these annual losses, I find a formidable list of the deaths of 1834, beginning with Lord Grenville in January and ending with Charles Lamb on December 27th. Between these extremes are John Thelwall, the editor of *The Champion*, whose portrait will be found in this room, George Cooke, the engraver, Rudolph Ackermann, the printseller, Francis Douce, F.S.A., Lord Wodehouse, the Rev. James Dalloway, historian of Sussex, Lord Arundell, the Countess of Antrim, Earl Bathurst, Monsieur de la Fayette, Michael Angelo Taylor, the politician, S. T. Coleridge, W. Crawshay, the ironmaster, William Blackwood, the publisher, Thomas Telford, the engineer, the

12th Earl of Derby, the Duke of Gloucester, James Heath, the engraver, Thomas Park, the antiquary, Alexander Chalmers, the Scottish writer, and Prince Hoare, the actor. If, however, 1834 took so much away, it also gave us much, including Lord Avebury, the banker and naturalist, J. E. Boehm, the sculptor, William Morris, the poet and decorator, Charles Santley, the singer, James McNeill Whistler, George du Maurier, C. H. Spurgeon, the preacher, and Frank R. Stockton and Artemus Ward, the American humorists.

The present Centenary Exhibition not only marks the close of the lives—one can hardly say careers in connection with such unworldly men—of two of the most individual and interesting figures in English literature, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the romantic poet, metaphysician and critic, and Charles Lamb, the author of the "Elia" essays, but it celebrates also one of the most notable and enduring of friendships. Coleridge, who was born in 1772, went to Christ's Hospital in July, 1782, and Lamb, who was born in 1775, joined him there in the following October. How soon they found each other, we do not know; but once the contact was made, it was for ever; for the breach in 1798 may be considered negligible. On his death-bed, Coleridge, re-reading an early poem in which Lamb was mentioned, wrote in the margin: "Charles and Mary Lamb—dear to my heart, yea, as it were my heart," and in his Will he left a mourning ring to "my close friend and ever-beloved school-fellow." What Lamb thought of Coleridge can be gathered from the Essays and Letters and from the little passage on his death written in an album late in 1834: "His great and dear spirit haunts me. . . . He was my fifty-years old friend without a dissension."

Both passed away on the confines of the city they knew so well but could now visit so seldom—Coleridge at Highgate and Lamb at Edmonton: both unhappy and ready to go, Coleridge because, as Lamb wrote of him a month before his own death, "he had a hunger for eternity"; Lamb because his sister was now rarely herself, his adopted daughter was married, his friends were far away and his work was done. But for Coleridge's death he might have lived longer, yet it was hardly to be wished. John Forster, who knew him well and saw him in the last days as often as anyone, writing in February, 1835, said that from Coleridge's death Lamb never fully recovered: "He thought of little else (his sister was but another portion of himself) until his own great spirit joined his friend."

The reunion in this room of the Coleridge and Lamb circles is not complete, but it is as complete as the resources of the National Portrait Gallery will allow. Hazlitt, for example, their intellectual equal and the painter of one of the portraits of Lamb, is only on loan; James White, whom Lamb encouraged in his *Falstaff's Letters* and with whom once a year he gorged the little chimney-sweeps, is not here; George Dyer, who fell into the New River in front of Lamb's Cottage, is not here; Thomas Manning, who gave Lamb the idea for the dissertation on Roast Pig, is not here; Bernard Barton, to whom Lamb wrote so many good letters, is not here; the Rev. H. F. Cary, who translated Dante and was helped to fame by Coleridge, and whose son painted the picture of Charles and Mary Lamb together, is not here. But the company in which we find ourselves is representative and distinguished; and such a collection should do more to reconstruct the past than much writing.

E. V. LUCAS.

CHARLES LAMB.

- 1775 Born in London.
 1782-9 Christ's Hospital.
 1792 Obtained his post in the India House.
 1796 Death of his mother at the hands of his sister Mary during an attack of insanity.
 1807 Published with his sister the *Tales from Shakespeare*.
 1808 Published *Specimens of Dramatic English Poets*.
 1820-22 *Essays of Elia*.
 1825 Retired from the India House.
 1834 Died at Edmonton.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

- 1772 Born in Devonshire.
 1782-90 Christ's Hospital.
 1791-93 Jesus College, Cambridge.
 1797 Wrote *The Ancient Mariner* and *Kubla Khan*.
 1798-9 Travelled in Germany with Wordsworth.
 1800 Settled at Keswick with his family.
 1803 Became a slave to opium.
 1808-13 Lectured in London on Shakespeare and other poets.
 1816 Settled at Highgate with friends.
 1828 Published his *Collected Works*.
 1834 Died at Highgate.

A set of postcard photographs of portraits of Charles and Mary Lamb, Coleridge, Leigh Hunt, Keats, Southey, Wordsworth and De Quincey, with specially written miniature biographies by a leading modern writer, together with this notice, by E. V. Lucas, of the Lamb-Coleridge centenary exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery, is on sale at 1s.