

that Elia himself had a close acquaintance with the gentleman whose peculiarities he depicts.

His vagaries and antic dispositions were frequently given full play when surrounded by a coterie of hale friends. His hissing his own farce may be termed a queer conceit as much as his hearty encore of his own witty prologue. "Anything awful makes me laugh," he confessed. "I misbehaved once at a funeral," and it was on account of this sad failing that he feared to stand as god-father to a friend's child, fearing he would disgrace himself at the very font! A queer character indeed who could write a playful humorous paper with the tears of sorrow running over his cheeks. As one of his practical jokes he once sent a credulous creature to Primrose Hill at sunrise to see the Persian Ambassador say his morning prayers. "He shrinks instinctively from one who professes to like minced veal; and held that a man cannot have a pure mind who refuses apple dumplings." What could be funnier in its way than his telling of "the thriving haberdasher who retired on one anecdote and £40 a year," and have we not all met the very man or his direct descendant?

"He found his boon companions, he says, 'floating on the surface of society, a ragged regiment in the world's eye.' No wonder then that he had a fondness for choosing the lowly ones of the earth for his texts and friends. Take for instance his complaint of the "Decay of Beggars." "Much good might be extracted from these same beggars—a greasy citizenry. Rags, which are the reproach of poverty, are the beggar's robes, his full dress, the graceful insignia of his profession. He is the only man in the universe who is not obliged to study appearances. He is the only free man in the universe."

And probably he had a fondness as he had a sympathy for "Poor Relations." To my mind his description in this essay is one of his happiest efforts: "A poor relation is the most irrelevant thing in nature, a piece of impertinent correspondence, an odious approximation, a haunting conscience, a preposterous shadow lengthening in the noontide of our prosperity; an unwelcome remembrancer, a perpetually recurring mortification, a drain on your purse, a more intolerable dun upon your pride, a drawback upon success, a rebuke to your rising, a stain in your blood, a blot on your escutcheon, a rent in your garment, a death's-head in your banquet, a murderer in your gate, a Lazarus at your door, a lion in your path, a frog in your chamber, a fly in your ointment, a mote in your eye, a triumph of your enemy, an apology to your friends, the one thing not needful, the hail in harvest, the ounce of sour in the pound of sweet."

In soliloquizing on New Year's Eve he writes, at five and forty: "If I know aught of myself no one whose mind is introspective can have a less respect for his present identity than I have for the man Elia. I know him to be light and vain and humorous, a stammering buffoon." Perhaps Carlyle was right if your confession is a true one, but we would not have you other than your own odd self. Do sun and sky, and breeze and solitary walk and summer holidays and the greenness of fields and the delicious juices of meats, and society and the cheerful glass and candle light and fireside conversations and innocent vanities and jests and even irony itself—do these things go out with life and with the mind who writes of them? Would that the world had more stammering buffoons if Charles Lamb is one!

Elia's pen pictures of his favourite characters are among his choice bits of comedy. "Mrs. Battle, more familiarly old Sarah Battle (now with God)—who loved a good game of whist next to her devotions. She was never seen to take out her snuff-box when it was her turn to play or snuff a candle in the middle of the game as she sat bolt upright at the card table. No, indeed, there was no sick whist when Mrs. Battle was one of the players."

The little black-skinned, white-teethed chimney sweeper, for whom he was willing to have remained his butt and mockery till midnight, when Elia suddenly slipped on a treacherous slide which brought him upon his back: "There he stood pointing me out with his dusky finger to the mob till the tears for the exquisiteness of the fun worked themselves out at the corners of his poor red eyes, yet twinkling through all with a joy snatched out of desolation. There he stood with a maximum of glee and minimum of mischief in his mirth."

His writings were sometimes crude—"a sort of unlicked incondite things, villainously pranked in an affected array

of antique modes and phrases" as penned "by a friend of the late Elia." His spoken jests, too, were often irrelevant and made thick-skinned enemies of some thin-skinned friends.

Though one has ventured to say that his jests are beginning to grow obsolete and his stories to be found out, yet to me the quaint little ex-clerk presents such a rare mixture of wit and wisdom, of merriness and melancholy, of quip and questioning, of trifling and tenderness, of pun and pathos, that I love him for his many-sidedness, for his naturalness, frankness, and kindness of heart, for his everyday humanity that we can all understand, and, above all, for that good spirit of fun which warded off many an evil spirit of depression. The fact that his penchant for joking and punning cost him many a friend had no apparent effect upon this propensity for fun. Perhaps it was with him as with Oliver Wendell Holmes who "never dared to write as funny as he could."

Some letters published in the Atlantic Monthly a couple of years ago from the pen of Lamb reveal many a touch of humour. Even in a letter of condolence to Hood over the death of an infant daughter of the latter, Elia could not refrain from making a pun over a wager as to the sex of the little one. "God bless you and the mother of your sweet girl that should have been. I have won sex-pence from Moxon of Moxon by the sex of the dear one gone." In an invitation to Home he writes: "Put yourself in the coach to-morrow afternoon and come to us. If we are out when you come the maid is instructed to keep you upon tea and proper bread and butter till we come home." Writing to Mrs. Williams, enclosing an acrostic, he says: "I have ventured upon some lines which combine my old acrostic talent with my new profession of epitaph-monger. As you did not please to say when you would die I have left a blank space for the date. May kind heaven be a long time in filling it up." Referring to this acrostic he afterwards writes: "You will see that I am worn to the poetical dregs, condescending to acrostics, which are nine fathom beneath album verses."

At the close of his "Last Essays" the humorous is well uppermost in his "Popular Fallacies," among those enumerated being the old familiar ones: "That a bully is always a coward; that ill-gotten gain never prospers; that a man must not laugh at his own jest; that the poor copy the vices of the rich; that enough is as good as a feast; that handsome is that handsome does; that we must not look a gift horse in the mouth; that home is home though it is never so humble; that we should rise with the lark and lie down with the lamb."

But the end came to this sweet, diffusive, bountiful soul, which passed from its poor tenement of clay in 1834, over sixty years ago, in the little bay cottage at Edmonton, where he lived for some years with his grievously afflicted sister. The building shows but slight evidence of any external change. Situated a few yards from the railway station, the house, with its gable facing the roadway, its red-tiled roof and whitened walls, its narrow doorway and small-paned windows, gives the impression of old world comfort and seclusion. A rowan tree, on the branches of which hang clusters of red berries, stands at the gateway, and its autumnal appearance imparts just now a pictorial attractiveness to the interesting building which is still known as "Lamb's Cottage."

FRANK YEIGH.

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Three Kisses.

Childhood, upon her brow, dropped kisses sweet;
With crooning song, he lingered by her side,
And, with bright hope, her pulses wildly beat;
"Ah! this is Life!" she cried.

Youth, from her gentle lips, drank kisses rare;
As warm as southern winds, that faintly blow,
And with soft fingers stroked her golden hair;
" 'Tis Love," she whispered, low.

Age, with chill kisses, fann'd her furrowed face,
O'er her dim eyes she felt his icy breath;
Gently he clasped her, in a close embrace—
She murmured, "This is Death."

LIZZIE E. DYAS.