CHAPTER II

SELF AND HIS EARLY WRITINGS
(Miscellaneous Writings)

When Charles left school his father was not keeping well. His health started failing him. The brother and sister had the companionship of sympathy for each other and their intellectual friendship was the most significant factor. Mary Lamb had also generous use of Samuel Salt's library. It was their great solace when they were facing monotony and discomfits at home. There was a taint of mania in the family, inherited from the father's side. It appeared in different shapes in all three children. If to trust a casual remark in one of Charles's letters touching his brother John. But in Mary Lamb it has been there since early period of her life and a source of anxiety for her parents. The responsibility of looking after Mary Lamb fell on Lamb who was still a boy. The lives of brother and sister were so henceforth that it is was rather difficult to stay apart.

Lamb's first years were passed between "cloister and cloister" -- as he describes in "The Temple" and "Christ's Hospital" -- but there were happy holiday seasons when he had spectacles of a very different life. These were the days which he spent with his grandmother, Mary Field, at the old mansion of the plumer family, Blakesware, closely adjoining the pleasant village of Widford, in Hertfordshire. Mrs. Field who was holding the position of a house-keeper, reigned supreme over the old place. Lamb himself
describes his visit in his essay entitled - "Mackery End"

I can just remember having been there, on a visit to a great aunt, when I was a child, under the care of Bridget; who, as I have said, is older than myself by some ten years .... The sight of the old farm-house, though every trace of it was effaced from my recollection, affected me with a pleasure which I had not experienced for many a year. For though I had forgotten it, we had never forgotten being there together, and we had been talking about Mackery End all our lives, till memory on my part became mocked with a phantom of itself, and I thought I knew the aspect of a place, which, when present, O how unlike it was to that, which I had conjured up so many times instead of it:¹

It is worthy of note that Lamb, the "scorner of the field", as Wordsworth termed him, showed a true poet's appreciation of English rural scenery which he himself describes in his essay "Mackery End":

Still the air breathed balmily about it; the season was in the 'heart of June', and I could sing with the poet.²

It looks rather strange witnessing Lamb admiring Nature and getting solace and comfort from it. The only reason that could be given for this change in Lamb is that he was so overpowered by the place of his childhood that its natural surroundings also left a deep impression on his mind. Lamb could not desist
himself and his emotions but to express them with the poet thus:

But thou, that didst appear so fair
To fond imagination,
Doest rival in the light of day
Her delicate creation!

(Wordsworth, on Yarrow visited.)

When Lamb was about to leave Christ's Hospital, the head-
master gave him the chief distinction — as Lamb and his school
fellows would think — that he could. There was an almost sacred
book in Dr. Hoyer's keeping, into which he would sometimes request
his senior students to transcribe their English essays or poems,
and very occasionally one from the lower standard. Lamb was
asked to add a poem to this remarkable anthology. The meter is
good, the style correct, on eighteenth-century lines; but it is a
piece in which an odd humour plays across a "vision" of mortality.
Thus, in 1789 Lamb showed the wit filled with melancholy that
became subtle in years burdened with experience.

Whether is it sound to accept the fact that Lamb's first
known writing is a poem? Lamb for the next ten years or so,
lived inwardly with a natural hesitancy and tried his genius in
expression as a young poet. That period, from 1789 to 1798, was
a curious time for English poetry: while it was difficult to name
any mighty contemporary masters, there was plenty of new writing
in the form of psychologically sensitive verse being composed
both by men and by women. There was a profound development in
these days — in the form of romantic development in England; and
one small volume, Lyrical Ballads, published by Coleridge and Wordsworth in 1798, was ranked as most authentic and influential declaration. So the form of blank verse, sonnet mingled with sensibility became favourite and beloved form with the young poets of that period. Lamb was content with both — blank verse and the sonnet, the meditation in fourteen lines of rhyme.

Here it is pertinent to interpose a few details of his career which have quite a relevance to his literary achievements during the period under consideration. Lamb was first in the office of Joseph Paice, a merchant of unsurpassed gentleness; thence he was sent in 1791 to the South Sea House, where his forceful brother John was prospering. No account of this period is available except from the essay on the "South Sea House", written thirty years later for the London Magazine which was the first place to be signed as Elia.

In this essay Lamb says little or nothing about himself. Lamb takes the fine fascination in taking the case of bachelors with a great fascination being a bachelor himself. Lamb's portrait of these days emerges thus:

This (South Sea House) was a stately old fashioned leisurely place run by a handful of odd and elderly officials, whose habits and manners amused the boy clerk as much as had those of his school masters. From there, in April 1792, he made a final move to become an apprentice clerk in the Accounts Department of the East India Company in Leadenhall Street. He was to stay there for the rest of his working life. 4
So from South Sea House Lamb moved to the East India House, through the influence, it is believed, of Samuel Salt. In India House, Charles Lamb remained, and his portrait remains. His clerkship there began in 1792.

The year 1792 was an eventful year for Lamb. In February Samuel Salt died. He left some money for the family, this added to their savings. But their family patron had gone and this broke up the long established pattern of life; they also started thinking of leaving the house which had been their home so long. Ultimately they had to leave their home in Temple. It was most hospitable, most intelligent; but John Lamb the elder was losing his mind. His sister, "Aunt Hetty", was loving, simple, unnecessary. His wife, Elizabeth, was socially remote from her sister-in-law, but her strong character came out most in rebuffs for her daughter Mary. Charles had his own claims on Mary's uncommon unselfishness; he confided in her while he was in love with a "fair-hair'd maid" in Hertfordshire. Lamb was to remember 1792 for more romantic reasons. We do not know much about his romance, the information could only be collected by putting together a few references in poems and letters. On his visit to grandmother Mrs. Field at Blakesware in the previous summer he came into contact with a girl called Ann Simmons who was living in a cottage near the neighbouring village of Widford. Ann was seventeen years old, the correct age for first love. Unfortunately, the relationship never got further than day dreams and country walks. Ann Simmons's family intervened firmly to discourage it. After he started work
in April he hardly ever got long enough holidays to leave London; in August his grandmother Field died which meant no more visits to Blakeswore.

Ann Simmons and Lamb's relationship has been considered as "Calf-love". Calf-love is a pretty sentiment, but too airborne and fanciful, too little in reality, to be lasting. But in reality Ann remained a living phenomenon with Lamb as reflected in his essay - "Dream Children". Although in the essay he mystifies us by changing her name. Lamb depicts her in his essay thus:

Then I told how for seven long years, in hope sometimes, sometimes in despair, yet persisting ever, I courted the fair Alice W-n; and, as much as children could understand, I explained to them what coyness, and difficulty, and denial meant in maidens -- when suddenly, turning to Alice, the soul of the first Alice looked out at her eye with such a reality of representation, that I became in doubt which of them stood there before me, or whose that bright hair was; ... 5

Ann's family as well as Lamb's grandmother discouraged him from cherishing in thoughts of matrimony as it might reveal that there was a streak of madness in his family. This amounted to suggest Lamb that he should never marry anyone. Now onwards he engaged himself with his family, his friends and above all his sister Mary.

Lamb himself admitted that in the winter of 1795-96, he yielded to the family malady. The fact had been revealed in his
letter to Coleridge which was written by him on May 17, 1796 which states that his life has been somewhat diversified of late. He confessed that he was mad and many a vagary of his imagination played with him. He spent six weeks in a mad house at Hoxton. He wrote to inform Coleridge that now he got somewhat rational.

There may be some reasons behind his derangement. He left school which deprived him of Coleridge's company and his books and always kept him in good humour and happiness. His source of joy was not with him. Lamb's realisation later on that he had been denied love by Ann Simmons ever haunted him.

In the same letter he wrote few very touching lines to Coleridge from his prison house depicting his state of mind and affairs alike. These few lines written for his sister gives us an opportunity to understand how Lamb projected self in his very early literary works:

TO MY SISTER
If from my lips some angry accents fell,
Peevish complaint, or harsh reproof unkind,
'Twas but the error of a sickly mind
And troubled thoughts, clouding the purer well,
And waters clear, of Reason: and for me
Let this my verse the poor atonement be --
My verse, which thou to praise wert e'er inclined
Too highly, and with a partial eye to see
No blemish. Thou to me didst ever show
Kindest affection: and would'st oft-times lend
An ear to the despairing, love-sick lay,
Weeping my sorrows with me, who repay
But ill the mighty debt of love I owe,
Mary, to thee, my sister and my friend.6

The year 1795-96, as very striking in the life history of
brother and sister. The family condition was also not satis-
factory. They had to move also to Little Queen Street with their
mother who was permanently invalid and father with gradually
coming to the stage of second childhood. Mary Lamb had to work
very hard to make both ends meet and pull on the sources to main-
tain the house. Lamb's household condition was lamentable. As
his father was growing senile, with mind and memory nearly gone.
At the same time Mrs. Lamb was suffering from a complaint which
partially paralysed her. This meant that Mary, who shared her
home and even her bed, passed most of her days and nights nursing
her mother. Mary had no one around with whom she could unburden
her secrets and wishes. It is judged. Mary herself had a love,
and had nobody to tell it to -- and she was overworked and was
a teacher of dressmaking as well. All this and much else came
to a head "in a day of horrors" in September 1796. Suddenly, an
event took place in his family which was so horrible and tragic
that a news item was published in the White Hall Evening Post on
Monday, September 26, 1796:

... her daughter yet wildly standing over
her with the fatal knife, and the venerable
old man, her father, weeping by her side,
himself bleeding at the forehead from the
effects of a severe blow he received from
one of the forks she had been madly hurling
about the room.7
That day Lamb, on his way to the office, had tried to catch the family physician so that he might call on Mary, who had been suspiciously quiet. When he returned home, he found Mary brandishing a carving knife over her mother, whom she had just stabbed to death.

Lamb was all alone left to deal with the situation. He kept calm. He had to make arrangements for the funeral. He had to see that his father and aunt were looked after properly. At the same time he paid regular visits to the private asylum to check that his sister got proper attention and care in the asylum.

The madness of which this was the tragic discovery was never cured, but was not incessant. Charles, who did what his elder brother probably ought to have done, accepted the guardianship of his sister; and that was in the end a security for all that was great in himself. Their father died in 1799, and thenceforward it was Charles and Mary Lamb.

At this point the theme of Lamb as a young poet is resumed -- a character that, in the winter of 1796, he declared he had cast away forever with other vanities, but soon found to be a necessity. Probably he destroyed some note books, and there is no great quantity of his early work. He published some of it in Coleridge's *Poems On Various Subjects* (1796); some more in Charles Lloyd's *Poems on the Death of Priscilla Farmer* (1796) and Blank Verse (1798), where his name appeared with Lloyd's on the title page; and for some time he contributed to a new and agreeable periodical, the *Monthly Magazine*. These appearances and his
association with two young poets of a slightly revolutionary outlook in politics called some attention to Lamb's name. The delicacy and the religious quality of his poetry made its appeal to a few readers. Coleridge both encouraged and disheartened him, by being his senior and by his restless power and ideas, now praising, now rewriting, and at last imitating Lamb's verses. What distressed most Lamb was not implied literary criticism but hiding his honest feelings.

These sonnets of lost or fancied love, these soliloquies on altered fortune, on family history, on friendship, on loneliness form Lamb's development of poetry. Lamb at that moment had not the original art, bold observation or strange way of presentation but quite satisfied by presenting his sonnets in general and melodious simplicity; and sometimes his simple lines surpassed owing to the emotion they rendered.

Such unforced speech may go deep. In January 1798, Lamb seemed to sum up what he had known of life, with its ups and downs, in the musical composition without preparation that became a classic, "The Old Familiar Faces". For instance in the following lines:

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother!
Why were thou not born in my father's dwelling?
So might we talk of the old familiar faces.
For some they have died, and some they have left me,
And some are taken from me; all are departed
All, all are gone. the old familiar faces."
Lamb wrote light verses in the Latin meter then being adapted to English poetry by his friend Robert Southey and others, and suddenly, when a new disappointment in friendship was on his mind, the thought of the past fitted the tune exactly: "All, all are gone, the old familiar faces". In a way it was good bye to youth. It was composed in the Inner Temple. Lamb through these early sonnets clearly projected his self. Every rendering speaks itself about self -- his different moods, his emotions, his surcharged sentiments and feelings. In every way self is projecting itself in different ways of his life.

One of the characteristics of Lamb's literary company was that most were devoted to English authors of a remoter time than their own century, from J.M. Gutch, with whom he sometimes lodged, a Blue and an editor, to William Godwin, the political philosopher and novelist, all of them had their idolatries of the ages of Shakespeare and Milton. Lamb became less interested in what appealed to him so important. He enjoyed something intensely if it appealed to his heart and his sensibilities. Lamb's affectionate contemplations were not confined to the present and to the world he saw around him. The man Lamb, like the boy Lamb, lived largely in the past, the historic past as recorded in books and his own past as preserved in his memory. His inner life of memory and reflection was always the main object of his attention.

Lamb read only that material which moved or amused him. The books which only informed or instructed never appealed to him. Lamb's range of reading was very wide and it included in it
stories, plays, poems and essays. He enjoyed very much the great eighteenth century novels, *Moll Flanders* and *Tom Jones* because these novels exhibited crowded life of London streets where he himself grew up. And the literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries appealed to Lamb's fanciful and poetic strain as they suggested the enchantment of a bygone and picturesque age. He admired Shakespeare and Milton for this reason also. Lamb loved to go to theatres. He could very well be seen regularly amongst the audience in two London theatres: Drury Lane and Covent Garden. Lamb had great love for going to the theatres and his response to the performance was apt and pointed.

He had learned to enjoy the theatre not as reality but as art. Lamb was a born critic of the art of acting, readily responsive but always discriminating. Luckily this gift of his got every chance to exercise itself, for playgoing in those days coincided with a great period of English theatre. Mrs. Siddons and Mrs. Jordan, John Kemble and Dodd, Munden and Dickie Suett, Bowley and Jack Bannister and Parsons Young Charles Lamb saw them all in their heyday and they made so deep an impression on him that thirty years later, he could recall precisely the details of their performances in such a way as to convey them to us today.

In December 1794 the *Morning Chronicle* printed a poem by Charles Lamb. Lamb's inspiration for this creative piece was largely owing to his interest in literature and theatre. This very poem depicted the shudders and tears roused in him by the acting of Mrs. Siddons. During these years the creative strain
aroused in him. He wrote more poems. Lamb's verses were as unpretentions and sincere and pleased such friends, as he chose to show them to.

Lamb had many, and among his "antiques" the dramatic poets of the early seventeenth century. It was a consequence to this effect that in 1798 this young enthusiast began work on a play in an old manner, entitled Price's Cure but subsequently and on publication John Woodvil. It could hardly be forced to be judged as drama now, but as a work of art - a form in which the poet conveyed the sense of the qualities he loved in the old plays, and in addition -- something of himself. It was written in a clear style, not the healthy profusion, that he still liked most, and followed delightfully. How Lamb projected his 'self' could be traced out in one of Margaret's speeches (or was it Lamb's Anna in Hertfordshire, whom he imagined speaking to himself?):

Dost yet remember the green arbour, John,
In the south gardens of my father's house.
Where we have seen the summer sun go down.
Exchanging true love's vows without restraint?
And that old wood, you call'd your wilderness,
And vow'd in sport to build a chapel in it,
There dwell

"Like hermit poor
In pensive place obscure",
And tell your Ave Maries by the curls
(Dropping like golden beads) of Margaret's hair;
And make confession seven times a day
Of every thought that stray'd from love and Margaret;
And I your saint the penance should appoint -
Believe me, sir, I will not now be laid
Aside, like an old fashion. 9

When John Woodvil was published in 1802, the reviewers missed
the point and ridiculed it. But they had their own ideas of
Elizabethan tragedy, and above all Lamb called it "a tragedy".
This was the work of an aesthetic fineness and criticism was
needed than in the book-reviewing organisations of Lamb's day.

In verse as well as in prose, Lamb's first attempts were for
his responsiveness to style. He had that responsiveness from the
hours he spent in Samuel Salt's library and through his book-
hunting vacations. His own work sprang up with this kind of out-
look usually and not as imitation but as variation.

Of greater importance and personal significance was A Tale of
Rosamund Gray and Old Blind Margaret, written in 1797 and 1798,
and published in the latter year. It is a kind of novel, though
not occupying many pages. It was, however conceived as a story
of innocence and calamity in the light of sensibility, an experi-
ment in method and style. Lamb in his work contrived to digress
even within those narrow limits chosen for the whole; much in it
was brief and homely, and yet there are interludes of romance and
of speculation. The work plainly puts forward his notion about
prose that it (prose) should be elaborate in design and the
theme may have a specially imaginative movement. The third
chapter is a sort of song for Rosamund Gray, and then an invo-
cation to the moon shining upon the writer's window is harmo-
nized with that song. But Lamb ends his book with a paragraph
of four words only: "Matravis died that night."

Lamb picked up the name of the villain Matravis from one of his Elizabethan authors. *Rosamund Gray* is told in simple prose interwoven with literary phrase and a tragic narrative. The theme of the work undeserved ill-fate and misfortune overpowering the young and innocent, Lamb must have his own experiences in mind. This work is the true reflexion of 'self' of the narrator. Allan Clare's (the survivor of his elder sister and his dead love) giving up himself to his circumstances and his utterings were none of his but by Lamb himself:

I gave my heart to the Purifier, and my will to the Sovereign Will of the Universe.
The irresistible wheels of destiny passed on in their everlasting rotation, - and I suffered myself to be carried along with them without complaining.¹⁰

The scene of the story is Widford: Blakesware, the home of Allan and Elinor Clare - the narrator visited in memory. The misfortuned Rosamund is none other than the Alice of Elia. The relation of Elinor with Allan resembles that of Mary Lamb and Charles had. In this manner Lamb showed his vast capacity of transforming his own pleasures and sorrows into the garb of imagination. There is a very fine delicacy between truth and fiction. Even in his mood of sadness he had the power of gentle touches and balancing the two universal truths of human life -- comic and tragic. Lamb was really a superb artist. He first wrote verse and then plays. But before doing so he had done
intense ground work of reading immensely and deeply the works of "antique" authors.

His leisure time from the India House he gave to the dramatists and after an immense range of intense reading, he put forth in 1808 the most striking anthology. It was called Specimens of English Dramatic Poets. In it selections were made covering the whole field of the English drama from Gorboduc to Shirley. The selection was done with fullest discrimination. He had the enthusiasm of the discoverer. In later life Lamb read and chose supplementary passages -- for he could not pretend that his book was other than a masterpiece of inquiry into a magnificent and neglected subject. His prose notes that accompany the poetic selections were noteworthy. Whether they are always considered as principles of criticism or not but one fact is established about his prose, that, it sounded like the voice of a full intellectual and spiritual devotion. One of the most congenial criticisms delivered by Lamb was prompted by Thomas Middleton's play The Witch and some prevailing talk about Shakespeare's indebtedness to Middleton. Lamb clears that away. His notes on Marlowe, John Webster, George Chapman and the rest established the fact that they could only be written by a man of grave and energetic spirit. Lamb constantly seeks comparisons from the greatest of dramatists and finds in his words a never-failing source of apt expression. He was at his best in his notes on Webster, his prose becomes lyric. Lamb's self is revealed here also. His grave nature, which was ingrained because of his placement under such unnatural circumstances, played in his works -- even in his
comments on dramatists. Lamb was always overpowered by sentiments. And under this power when he used to become lyrical while writing, he never knew. At that moment he used to be totally influenced by his own self. This is his fine projection of self in his works.

Lamb contributed two long critical essays in 1810-1811 to *Reflector*, a quarterly edited by Leigh Hunt, *On the Genius and Character of Hogarth* and *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare, considered with Reference to Their Fitness for Stage-Representation*. Both pieces were paradoxical or aggressively unorthodox. Lamb set out to demonstrate that the common view of Hogarth as a mere comical painter, as one whose chief aim was to raise a laugh, was wrong and instead of it Hogarth's works were a grand school of life. In the other essay he maintained that Shakespeare was reduced by the details of the material stage from that infinite scale on which he addresses the imagination of his reader. In both instances, whether we concede his argument or not, the vitality of critic's mind is established. His criticism is full of freshness and proves his ability in it beyond the ordinary. The two essays served at once as classics often quoted by Lamb's contemporaries.

While studying the two essays, one special trait of Lamb's personality attracts the reader—his manner of convincing. He puts forward his own thoughts, ideas and opinions in such a way that they seem genuine and realistic to the reader. In his criticism, points are placed in this manner that they appear fresh
and full of vitality. Here in this particular essay, Lamb expresses the difference between seeing Shakespeare acted and reading him in terms that must move us strongly, even if the conclusion is not accepted:

The state of sublime emotion into which we are elevated by those images of night and horror which Macbeth is made to utter, the solemn prelude with which he entertains the time till the bell shall strike which is to call him to murder Duncan, -- when we no longer read it in a book, when we have given up that vantage - ground of abstraction which reading possesses over seeing, and come to see a man in his bodily shape before our eyes actually preparing to commit a murder, if the acting be true and impressive, as I have witnessed it in Mr. K's performance of that part, the painful anxiety about the act, the natural longing to prevent it while it yet seems unperturbed, the too close pressing semblance of reality, give a pain and uneasiness which totally destroy all the delight which the words in the book convey, where the deed doing never presses upon us with the painful sense of presence: it rather seems to belong to history, -- to something past and inevitable, if it has anything to do with time at all. The sublime images, the poetry alone, is that which is present to our minds in the reading.  

It is the beauty of his 'self' that could put forth striking judgements such as "sublime images, the poetry alone", which is remembered even today.
Tales from Shakespeare, Mrs. Leicester's School, and the like, written before 1811, have carried the names of Charles and Mary Lamb into reading circles where his theories about Hogarth and Shakespeare do not arise. The Tales, undertaken for some desirable financial gains, were completed with many groans, for Lamb saw that the task was really impossible, but, as his sister commented, "he has made something of it", and of her share people say the same.

Tales from Shakespeare have had a very different treatment. The tale must attract the reader for its own sake; the tale loses if it could not attract the reader to further study its source. In this manner the task becomes more difficult because the originals are the greatest gifts of dramatic poetry. For it, Lamb had to interwoven Shakespeare's language with the story and required a selection of phrase which could draw the attention of a young reader without burdening his intelligence. The familiarity with old literature which Mary had possessed in Samuel Salt's bookshelves and Charles had improved in the library at Blakesware put them both in good shape. Till that time they had the ability to bring, to the plays the impressions of childhood, to reproduce in simple prose the phrases that had awakened their imaginations and to supply that commentary, upon characters and incidents which a child needs, without over-burdening the easy narrative. The collections itself is a landmark in the history of romantic movement. This book appealed the general public and made Shakespeare a familiar and popular author. Lamb's work asserted the claims of the older literature which was nothing more than a mere name.
Both Lamb and Mary had a profound and intimate acquaintance with the original source which set them apart from those usual compilers who were having an infinite distance while compiling books for children. Lamb's self is projected when he discusses the themes of the plays in this manner that could be easily understandable to children. He wrote in a style simple and pure which could be easily compared with the style of Wordsworth. Lamb wrote with the full knowledge of child psychology. He presented the whole matter without any appearance of condescension. Tales from Shakespeare presents before readers Lamb's another aspect of his 'Self' -- that he can deal the complex and subtle matter in a very simplified manner and designed in such a way that is suitable for young children as well as for advanced people. It could be said that these Tales work as an introduction to the study of Shakespeare.

The first decade of the nineteenth century was spent by the Lambs mainly in their old home, the Inner Temple, though for a time Lamb tried going off to a room or two away from it so that he might write with less interruption. Her sister was sometimes absent for the more melancholy reason that her mind was occasionally darkened again; she well knew when she must place herself under restraint for a period. She superintended while she enjoyed the great hospitality of the house-hold; she was the counselor of Coleridge, of William Hazlitt, and foremost of her brother. When she wrote, as in Mrs. Leicester's School, the calm beauty of her nature achieved completeness of style and story. Her few poems
also were simple and wise. In *Mrs. Leicester's School*, Mary Lamb had the principal share. Lamb wrote three of the ten stories, anecdotes of childhood supposed to be related by the pupils of a ladies' school at Amwell in Hertfordshire and writing process accomplished by one of their teachers. Self enters mostly into these charming stories: in *The Young Mahometan*, Mary wrote her memories of Blakesware. The *Witch Aunt* was founded by Lamb upon a reminiscence to which he referred later in *Witches and Other Night Fears*, and *First Going to Church* blends memories of the Temple church with Coleridge's youth at Ottery st. Mary. With *Mrs. Leicester's School* and *Poetry for Children*, mostly tales in which the moral element, intermingled with humour and softened by pathos, plays a large part, the joint work of the brother and sister came to an end.

The Lambs were theatregoers and made friends with many men and women connected with the stage; it is not surprising that Lamb tried to write for it. A success there would have golden effects on the spirit of their days and on the question of paying their bills, although Lamb was gradually rising in the ranks of the East India House clerks, the money came in slowly. In 1806 his farce *Mr. H.* -- was accepted at Drury Lane, and on 10 December it was acted. In contains plenty of amusing dialogue and light satire, but depends on the delayed revelation of *Mr. H.*--'s name in full, and when it comes, it is insufficient to justify all the expectation. Consequently the audience at Drury Lane first applauded briskly; but when *H.*-- was found to be only Hugflesh,
they hissed, and so did the author, seated near the orchestra. Mr. H -- was withdrawn. Its failure was very near indeed to a lasting popularity. Although Lamb returned to dramatic writing now and then, he never produced another play of such kind.

From Mitre Court Buildings the Lambs moved -- but still within their accustomed range -- to 4, Inner Temple Lane, where they remained until 1817. The Plan of their life was unchanged. It allowed a number of journeys and visits outside London. Lamb's only sojourn among Wordsworth's lakes and mountains had satisfied Wordsworth that he could take a delight in such scenes in spite of his usual protestations, but probably his contentment was fullest in less romantic regions, such as the Thames Valley or near the southern coast of England. Lamb meanwhile produced articles for newspapers and miscellanies, and was valued by most of those who knew him not only for those but also for his conversation on writers and books.

The sign of Lamb's recognition as a "great contemporary" was the publication, arranged by others, of his two-volume Works in 1818. Here were some poems to prove that he had enlarged his scope and released his imagination since 1798. The new sonnets were of a new energy. But the longest and the best of poems, "A Farewell to Tobacco", won many admirers. In meter it was a revival of seventeenth century verse. The "Great Plant" in that poem, as Lamb said, made a bold attempt to overcome the imagery of the god of the vine and grape.
One of the prose pieces was a typical appreciation of a forgotten writer. It was George Wither, the seventeenth-century poet, whom Lamb's school fellow Gutch collected and privately reprinted about 1810. The reader of this beautiful criticism will notice that Lamb was not merely a hunter of rare poetry in distant places, for he makes a comparison between the spirit of liberty in Wither and that in "every page of our late glorious Burns". Before long he was to read John Keats and announce his excellences in a quite poetical review.

Between 1799 and 1825, Charles Lamb's life general pattern did not change. Under the pattern his literary as well as personal story diversified now and again by an event. The literary events have not satisfied him. He wanted to be a creator of something unique. He wanted to work as a creative writer. That urge was there in him. But his friends and circumstances were not allowing him to fulfil his mission. These hinderances were preventing him to come out with something substantial.

Just to enhance their modest income he collaborated with Mary in some books for children: Tales from Shakespeare, The Adventure of Odyssey, and some stories for girls, Mrs. Leicester's School. Out of these Tales from Shakespeare were a success. It achieved the status of a children's classic and continued to be reprinted for at least a century.

The biography of Lamb cannot be condensed here, but the reappearance of his sonnet to the actress Fanny Kelly in his Works requires the mention of one of its principal episodes. In
1819, having been secretly haunted by Miss Kelly's kind nature and unassuming genius for years, Lamb sent her his proposal of marriage after watching her performance in a new play:

In many a sweet assumed character I have learned to love you, but simply as F.M. Kelly I love you better than them all. Can you quit these shadows of existence, and come and be a reality to us?" \(^{12}\)

To this proposal, Fanny Kelly felt like not accepting it, mainly because of the taint of insanity in his family, although she did not give him this reason. But she refused the proposal with the plea that she had been in love with someone else. She further added that the subject would never crop up again between them. They remained good friends, however, for the rest of his life and in 1827 she was staying at his house and continued to visit Mary Lamb after her brother's death.

Even then Miss Kelly declined the offer. Out of this disappointment, like others, Lamb appears even to have gained in fortitude, but perhaps toward his death the accumulation of "failures" told on him.
NOTES

1. Lamb, Charles

2. Ibid.,
   p.112.

3. Ibid.,
   p.112.

   A Portrait of Charles Lamb: p.33.

5. Lamb, Charles.
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