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Library Notes

The Peal Collection of Lamb Letters*

Edwin W. Marrs, Jr.

The collection of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb letters that W. Hugh Peal presented to the University of Kentucky is the second largest in the world. Of the ninety-six letters, four are copies, three of those made for the Lambs' friend the author and judge Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd when he was preparing the first (1837) and second (1848) editions of Lamb letters. Of the ninety-two original Lamb letters in Mr. Peal's collection, eighty-nine or eighty-seven are separate and textually whole, while three or five are separate and textually not whole (not whole because of parts, in three instances certainly, having been lost or misplaced). One letter is written on a letter from the statistician John Rickman to Charles Lamb, and another is written on a letter to him from the poet Samuel Rogers. The collection is exceeded only by that at the Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, and thus exceeds such other wonders as the collections of Lord Abinger (of Bures, Suffolk), the British Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the New York Public Library, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the Philip H. & A.S.W. Rosenbach Foundation, Mr. Robert H. Taylor (of Princeton), the Victoria and Albert Museum, Dr. Williams's Trust and Dr. Williams's Library (London), and the university libraries of Brown, Harvard, Leeds, New York State at Buffalo, Princeton, Texas, and Yale.

Mary and Charles were the joint writers of one of the letters in the Peal Collection—a letter to the actress and singer Frances Maria Kelly, to whom Charles once proposed marriage. Mary was the writer of three of the letters—to Coleridge; Miss Kelly; and Jane Norris, the elder daughter of the Lambs' old friends, the Inner Temple librarian and subtreasurer Randal Norris and his wife. Charles was the writer of the rest—of ninety-two of the letters. Of those, the recipient of ten was Thomas Allsop, the stockbroker who, in 1836, became the editor of *Letters, Conversations and Recollections of S. T. Coleridge*. The recipient of seven—which

Oxford University Press published, in 1931, as *Seven Letters from Charles Lamb to Charles Ryle of the East India House, 1828-1832*—was the member of the audit department of the East India House Charles Ryle. Miss Kelly and John Bates Dibdin were also each the recipients of seven. He, a son of the proprietor and acting manager of Sadler's Wells Theatre, the younger Charles Dibdin, worked as a clerk in a London firm that did business with the East India House. Among the recipients of fewer of the letters were the poet Bernard Barton; the miniaturist and woman of letters Mary Matilda Betham; William Blackwood of *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*; Charles Chambers, a schoolmate of Lamb's at Christ's Hospital who became a surgeon; Keats's friend the author and lecturer Charles Cowden Clarke; Coleridge; the miscellaneous writer Allan Cunningham; the painter and engraver George Dawe; William and Mary Jane Godwin; the Christ's Hospitaler, publisher, bookseller, and editor John Mathew Gutch; the bookseller and publisher James Augustus Hessey; the dramatist Thomas Holcroft's daughter Louisa, who became the wife of Carlyle's friend John Badams; William Hone; Thomas Hood; Mary Wordsworth's sister Sara Hutchinson; Mary Lamb's nurse Sarah James; Frances Manning, sister of the mathematician, traveler, and Chinese scholar Thomas Manning; William and Mary Wordsworth's friends Basil and Anna Montagu; the publisher Edward Moxon and his wife, Emma, the Lambs' informally adopted daughter; the publisher Charles Ollier; the author Peter George Patmore; the author and journalist John Scott, first editor of *The London Magazine*; Southey; Hazlitt's brother-in-law the journalist and judge Sir John Stoddart; Talfourd; and John Taylor, coproprietor with Hessey of the publishing establishment of Taylor and Hessey and of *The London Magazine*.

The earliest of the letters in the collection is one from Charles to Coleridge postmarked 24 August 1797, and the latest is one Mary wrote to Jane Norris on Christmas Day 1841. Thirteen of the letters are unpublished. Seven of the eighty-three published letters are not in the most recent and most nearly complete edition of Lamb letters—the fourteenth—Edward Verrall Lucas's *The Letters of Charles Lamb: To Which Are Added Those of His Sister, Mary Lamb* (1935).

Here it seems appropriate to transcribe a letter by each of the Lambs from Mr. Peal's collection. The selection by Mary is a letter, which has been published, to Coleridge, who had returned from Malta to England on 17 August 1806, and after some wanderings

Mary Lamb sends her love to Miss Kelly, and
she and her whole little Household will be most glad to
see her at Infield, and still more if she will favour upon
Mrs. Bryan to accompany her; she has beds at their service
and hope they will make what stay they can with her.
A coach will bring them from the Bell, corner of Leathers
Lane, Holborn, we believe at nine in the morning, and
set them down at the cottage, on the Pleace, next door to
Mr. Westwood's, Insurance office.

Emma joins us in kindest thanks
to Mrs. Bryan for the trouble she took so kindly for
her young friends, and we all wait in a pleasant expectation
of it on day. —

The morning coach, we think ^{comes} goes at 1/2 past
8, and the afternoon at 1/2 past 3 and 1/2 past 4,
whichever may best suit the Ladies. —

Pray come — it is more
than convenient, I assure you
in my own hand.
Ever yours affectionately
M^r Lamb

A letter from the Peal Collection written jointly by Charles and Mary Lamb to Frances Maria Kelly, postmarked 28 March 1828. Mary's portion is formed of the last four lines and her signature

there taken lodging at 348 Strand, London. He had neither written nor gone home to the family waiting for him in Keswick, Cumberland—his wife and their children, David Hartley, Derwent (nicknamed Pypos), and Sara.

[16 Mitre Court Buildings
Inner Temple, London
Early to mid-September 1806]

Dear Coleridge

I have read your silly very silly letter & between laughing & crying I hardly know how to answer it. You are too serious & too kind a vast deal, for we are not much used to either seriousness or kindness from our present friends and therefore your letter has put me into a greater hurry of spirits that [for "than"] your pleasant Segar did last night for believe me your two odd faces amused me much more than the mighty transgression vexed me. If Charles had not smoked last night his virtue would have not lasted longer than tonight, and now perhaps with a little of your good counsel he will refrain. But be not too serious if he smokes all the time you are with us—. A few chearful evenings spent with you serves to bear up our spirits many a long & weary year. And the very being led unto the crime by your Segar that you thought so harmless, will serve for our amusement many a dreary time when we can get no letter nor hear no tidings of you.— —

You must positively must write to Mrs Coleridge this day, and you must write here that I may know you write or you must come and dictate a letter for me to write to her. I know all that you would say in defence of not writing & I allow in full force every thing that [you] can say or think, but yet a letter from me or you *shall go today*.

I wanted to tell you but feared to begin the subject how well your children are how Pypos thrives & what a nice child Sara is and above all I hear such favorable accounts from Southy from Wordsworth & Hazlitt of Hartley.

I have got Wordsworths letters out for you to look at but you shall not see them or talk of them without you like—. Only come here as soon as you receive this, and I will not teize you about writing, but will manage a few lines Charles and I between us, but something like a letter shall go today.

Come directly

Yours affectionately
MLamb

On 16 September, Coleridge, presumably in obedience to Mary's bidding, wrote at last to his wife.

The selection by Charles is a copy made for Talfourd of a letter, which has not been published, to Sarah James in which Charles mentions his old Inner Temple schoolmistress and aged pensioner Elizabeth Reynolds; William Burke and William Hare, the murderers who smothered their victims and sold the bodies for dissection; Louisa, the wife of the dramatist James Kenney; and the Lambs' servant Becky.

[Chase Side, Enfield]
Mr 5th 1829

I (C.L.) shall be in town about quarter day, and then I will see Mrs. Reynolds, and try if I can pacify her landlady. By the way, those Scotch mur[d]er[er]s seem to have borrowed from my plan for you to sit upon M[r]s. Reynold's Head, but Burke and Hare do not seem to have had the candour to acknowledge that they took the idea from me, so I have lost the credit of the invention. You will do me the justice to explain that the first thought was mine, tho' my agent wanted courage to execute it. You would have got four pounds at St. Thomas's Hospital for the subject.

Tis bitter cold, & bitter dull.

Mrs. Kenny gets damn'd ugly: She was always, but then her spirits would light up a beauty of expression that kept you from examining her features. Now her face is as inexpressive as a cold pancake. Tis a judgment upon her for her behaviour to you. She declares that England is no longer England since we left London—. She is a liar. Becky is going to be married and starved—that is in the Summer.

So good b'ye
C Lamb

*This note is adapted from a speech given at the Seminar on the Early English Romantics, part of the dedication of the W. Hugh Peal Collection, 15 October 1982. A few marks of punctuation have been inserted, silently, in the transcriptions of the two letters.