

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:

An Anthology

Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL, 1782–99

Lamb and Coleridge entered Christ's Hospital together in 1782, and Leigh Hunt followed them in 1791. Lamb left school in 1789, and by 1792 was in the East India House; Coleridge passed from Christ's Hospital to Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1791, and Hunt, already the author of a volume of *Juvenilia*, left school in 1799.

Lamb's Elia essay *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago* is written to supplement an earlier essay on his old school, and for the greater part of it he is writing from the point of view of Coleridge, the lonely little boy from a distant Devonshire village, in order to contrast Coleridge's situation with his own, which had been explained in the earlier essay.

I

The Frost performs its secret ministry,
 Unhelped by any wind. The owlet's cry
 Came loud—and hark, again! loud as before.
 The inmates of my cottage, all at rest,
 Have left me to that solitude, which suits
 Abstruser musings: save that at my side
 My cradled infant slumbers peacefully.
 'Tis calm indeed! so calm, that it disturbs
 And vexes meditation with its strange
 And extreme silentness. Sea, hill, and wood,
 This populous village! Sea, and hill, and wood,
 With all the numberless goings-on of life,
 Inaudible as dreams! the thin blue flame
 Lies on my low-burnt fire, and quivers not;
 Only that film which fluttered on the grate
 Still flutters there, the sole unquiet thing.
 Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature
 Gives it dim sympathies with me who live,
 Making it a companionable form,
 Whose puny flaps and freaks the idling Spirit
 By its own moods interprets, everywhere

B L F

A

I

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:
 An Anthology
 Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

COLERIDGE

[1782-

Echo or mirror seeking of itself,
 And makes a toy of Thought.

But O! how oft,
 How oft, at school, with most believing mind,
 Presageful, have I gazed upon the bars,
 To watch that fluttering *stranger!* and as oft,
 With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt
 Of my sweet birth-place, and the old church-tower,
 Whose bells, the poor man's only music, rang
 From morn to evening, all the hot Fair-day,
 So sweetly, that they stirred and haunted me
 With a wild pleasure, falling on mine ear
 Most like articulate sounds of things to come!
 So gazed I, till the soothing things, I dreamt,
 Lulled me to sleep, and sleep prolonged my dreams!
 And so I brooded all the following morn,
 Awed by the stern preceptor's face, mine eye
 Fixed with mock study on my swimming book:
 Save if the door half opened, and I snatched
 A hasty glance, and still my heart leaped up,
 For still I hoped to see the *stranger's* face,
 Townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved,
 My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!

Dear Babe, that sleepest cradled by my side,
 Whose gentle breathings, heard in this deep calm,
 Fill up the interspersed vacancies
 And momentary pauses of the thought!
 My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
 With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
 And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
 And in far other scenes! For I was reared
 In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
 And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.

COLERIDGE: *Frost at Midnight* (1798)

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:
An Anthology

Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1791]

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

II

In Mr Lamb's *Works*, published a year or two since, I find a magnificent eulogy on my old school,¹ such as it was, or now appears to him to have been, between the years 1782 and 1789. It happens, very oddly, that my own standing at Christ's was nearly corresponding with his; and with all gratitude to him for his enthusiasm for the cloisters, I think he has contrived to bring together whatever can be said in praise of them, dropping all the other side of the argument most ingeniously.

I remember L. at school; and can well recollect that he had some peculiar advantages, which I and others of his school-fellows had not. His friends lived in town, and were near at hand; and he had the privilege of going to see them, almost as often as he wished, through some invidious distinction, which was denied to us. The present worthy sub-treasurer to the Inner Temple can explain how that happened. He had his tea and hot rolls in a morning, while we were battenning upon our quarter of a penny loaf—our *crug*—moistened with attenuated small beer, in wooden piggins, smacking of the pitched leathern jack it was poured from. Our Monday's milk porritch, blue and tasteless, and the pease soup of Saturday, coarse and choking, were enriched for him with a slice of "extraordinary bread and butter", from the hot-loaf of the Temple. The Wednesday's mess of millet, somewhat less repugnant (we had three banyan to four meat days in the week)—was endeared to his palate with a lump of double-refined, and a smack of ginger (to make it go down the more glibly) or the fragrant cinnamon. In lieu of our *half-pickled* Sundays, or *quite fresh* boiled beef on Thursdays (strong as *caro equina*), with detestable marigolds floating in the pail to poison the broth—our scanty mutton scrags on Fridays—and rather more savoury, but grudging, portions of the same flesh, rotten-roasted or rare, on the Tuesdays (the only dish which excited our appetites, and disappointed our stomachs, in almost

¹ *Recollections of Christ's Hospital.*

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:
An Anthology

Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald

Excerpt

[More information](#)

LAMB

[1782–

equal proportion)—he had his hot plate of roast veal, or the more tempting griskin (exotics unknown to our palates), cooked in the paternal kitchen (a great thing), and brought him daily by his maid or aunt! I remember the good old relative (in whom love forbade pride) squatting down upon some odd stone in a by-nook of the cloisters, disclosing the viands (of higher regale than those cates which the ravens ministered to the Tishbite); and the contending passions of L. at the unfolding. There was love for the bringer; shame for the thing brought, and the manner of its bringing; sympathy for those who were too many to share in it; and, at top of all, hunger (eldest, strongest of the passions!) predominant, breaking down the stony fences of shame, and awkwardness, and a troubling over-consciousness.

I was a poor friendless boy. My parents, and those who should care for me, were far away. Those few acquaintances of theirs, which they could reckon upon as being kind to me in the great city, after a little forced notice, which they had the grace to take of me on my first arrival in town, soon grew tired of my holiday visits. They seemed to them to recur too often, though I thought them few enough; and, one after another, they all failed me, and I felt myself alone among six hundred playmates.

O the cruelty of separating a poor lad from his early home-
stead! The yearnings which I used to have towards it in those unfledged years! How, in my dreams, would my native town (far in the west) come back, with its church, and trees, and faces! How I would wake weeping, and in the anguish of my heart exclaim upon sweet Calne in Wiltshire!

To this late hour of my life, I trace impressions left by the recollection of those friendless holidays. The long warm days of summer never return but they bring with them a gloom from the haunting memory of those *whole-day leaves*, when, by some strange arrangement, we were turned out, for the live-long day, upon our own hands, whether we had friends to go to, or none. I remember those bathing-excursions to the New River, which L. recalls with such relish, better, I think, than he can—for he was a home-seeking lad, and did

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:
An Anthology

Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1791]

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

not much care for such water-pastimes:—How merrily we would sally forth into the fields; and strip under the first warmth of the sun; and wanton like young dace in the streams; getting us appetites for noon, which those of us that were penniless (our scanty morning crust long since exhausted) had not the means of allaying—while the cattle, and the birds, and the fishes, were at feed about us, and we had nothing to satisfy our cravings—the very beauty of the day, and the exercise of the pastime, and the sense of liberty, setting a keener edge upon them!—How faint and languid, finally, we would return, towards night-fall, to our desired morsel, half-rejoicing, half-reluctant, that the hours of our uneasy liberty had expired!

It was worse in the days of winter, to go prowling about the streets objectless—shivering at cold windows of print shops, to extract a little amusement; or haply, as a last resort, in the hopes of a little novelty, to pay a fifty-times repeated visit (where our individual faces should be as well known to the warden as those of his own charges) to the Lions in the Tower—to whose levée, by courtesy immemorial, we had a prescriptive title to admission.

L.'s governor (so we called the patron who presented us to the foundation) lived in a manner under his paternal roof. Any complaint which he had to make was sure of being attended to. This was understood at Christ's, and was an effectual screen to him against the severity of masters, or worse tyranny of the monitors. The oppressions of these young brutes are heart-sickening to call to recollection. I have been called out of my bed, and *waked for the purpose*, in the coldest winter nights—and this not once, but night after night—in my shirt, to receive the discipline of a leathern thong, with eleven other sufferers, because it pleased my callow overseer, when there has been any talking heard after we were gone to bed, to make the six last beds in the dormitory, where the youngest children of us slept, answerable for an offence they neither dared to commit, nor had the power to hinder.—The same execrable tyranny drove the younger part of us from the fires, when our feet were perishing with snow; and, under the

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:
An Anthology

Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald

Excerpt

[More information](#)

LAMB

[1782-

cruellest penalties, forbade the indulgence of a drink of water, when we lay in sleepless summer nights, fevered with the season and the day's sports.

LAMB: *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago*

III

Come back into memory, like as thou wert in the day-spring of thy fancies, with hope like a fiery column before thee—the dark pillar not yet turned—Samuel Taylor Coleridge—Logician, Metaphysician, Bard!—How have I seen the casual passer through the Cloisters stand still, entranced with admiration (while he weighed the disproportion between the *speech* and the *garb* of the young *Mirandula*), to hear thee unfold, in thy deep and sweet intonations, the mysteries of Jamblichus, or Plotinus (for even in those years thou waxedst not pale at such philosophic draughts), or reciting Homer in his Greek, or Pindar—while the walls of the old Grey Friars re-echoed to the accents of the *inspired charity-boy!*—Many were the “wit-combats” (to dally awhile with the words of old Fuller) between him and C. V. Le G—, “which two I behold like a Spanish great galleon, and an English man of war: Master Coleridge, like the former, was built far higher in learning, solid, but slow in his performances. C. V. L., with the English man of war, lesser in bulk, but lighter in sailing, could turn with all times, tack about, and take advantage of all winds, by the quickness of his wit and invention”.

LAMB: *Christ's Hospital Five and Thirty Years Ago*

IV

The Upper Grammar School was divided into four classes or forms. The two under ones were called Little and Great Erasmus; the two upper were occupied by the Grecians and Deputy Grecians. We used to think the title of Erasmus taken from the great scholar of that name; but the sudden appearance of a portrait among us, bearing to be the likeness of a certain Erasmus Smith, Esq., shook us terribly in this opinion, and was a hard trial of our gratitude. We scarcely

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:

An Anthology

Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1799]

CHRIST'S HOSPITAL

relished this perpetual company of our benefactor, watching us, as he seemed to do, with his omnipresent eyes. I believe he was a rich merchant; and that the forms of Little and Great Erasmus were really named after him. It was but a poor consolation to think that he himself, or his great-uncle, might have been named after Erasmus. Little Erasmus learned Ovid; Great Erasmus, Virgil, Terence, and the Greek Testament. The Deputy Grecians were in Homer, Cicero, and Demosthenes; the Grecians, in the Greek plays and the mathematics.

When a boy entered the Upper School, he was understood to be in the road to the University, provided he had inclination and talents for it; but, as only one Grecian a year went to College, the drafts out of Great and Little Erasmus into the writing-school were numerous. A few also became Deputy Grecians without going farther, and entered the world from that form. Those who became Grecians always went to the University, though not always into the Church; which was reckoned a departure from the contract. When I first came to school, at seven years old, the names of the Grecians were Allen, Favell, Thomson, and Le Grice, brother of the Le Grice above mentioned, and now a clergyman in Cornwall. Charles Lamb had lately been Deputy Grecian; and Coleridge had left for the University.

The master, inspired by his subject with an eloquence beyond himself, once called him, "that sensible fool, Collë-ridge", pronouncing the word like a dactyl. Coleridge must have alternately delighted and bewildered him. The compliment, as to the bewildering, was returned, if not the delight. The pupil, I am told, said he dreamt of the master all his life, and that his dreams were horrible.

I do not remember seeing Coleridge when I was a child. Lamb's visits to the school, after he left it, I remember well, with his fine intelligent face. Little did I think I should have the pleasure of sitting with it in after-times as an old friend, and seeing it careworn and still finer. Allen,¹ the Grecian,

¹ Allen went to Oxford when Coleridge went to Cambridge, and it was in his rooms at University College that Coleridge first met Southey.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:
 An Anthology
 Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

HUNT

[1791-

was so handsome, though in another and more obvious way, that running one day against a barrow-woman in the street, and turning round to appease her in the midst of her abuse, she said, "Where are you driving to, you great hulking, good-for-nothing—beautiful fellow, God bless you!" Le Grice the elder was a wag, like his brother, but more staid. He went into the Church, as he ought to do, and married a rich widow. He published a translation, abridged, of the celebrated pastoral of Longus; and report at school made him the author of a little anonymous tract on the *Art of Poking the Fire*.

LEIGH HUNT: *Autobiography*

PANTISOCRACY

This amusing letter from Coleridge to Southey, with its jumble of love, poetry and pantisocracy, illustrates excellently the youthful enthusiasms of the two undergraduate poets. Their plan was to found a pantisocratic colony on communistic lines in America, and among the recruits were to be the two sisters, Sara and Edith Fricker, mentioned in the letter, whom they shortly afterwards married.

10 o'clock, Thursday morning, *September 18, 1794.*

Well, my dear Southey! I am at last arrived at Jesus. My God! how tumultuous are the movements of my heart. Since I quitted this room what and how important events have been evolved! America! Southey! Miss Fricker! Yes, Southey, you are right. Even Love is the creature of strong motive. I certainly love her. I *think* of her incessantly and with unspeakable tenderness,—with that inward melting away of soul that symptomatizes it.

Pantisocracy! Oh, I shall have such a scheme of it! My head, my heart, are all alive. I have drawn up my arguments in battle array; they shall have the *tactician* excellence of the mathematician with the enthusiasm of the poet. The head shall be the mass; the heart the fiery spirit that fills, informs, and agitates the whole. Harwood—pish! I say nothing of him.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:

An Anthology

Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald

Excerpt

[More information](#)

1794]

PANTISOCRACY

SHADGOES WITH US. HE IS MY BROTHER! I am longing to be with you. Make Edith my sister. Surely, Southey, we shall be *frendotatoi meta frendous*—most friendly where all are friends. She must, therefore, be more emphatically my sister.

Brookes and Beardmore, as I suspected, have spread my opinions in mangled forms at Cambridge. Caldwell, the most pantisocratic of aristocrats, has been laughing at me. Up I arose, terrible in reasoning. He fled from me, because “he could not answer for his own sanity, sitting so near a madman of genius”. He told me that the strength of my imagination had intoxicated my reason, and that the acuteness of my reason had given a directing influence to my imagination. Four months ago the remark would not have been more elegant than just. Now it is nothing.

I like your sonnets¹ exceedingly—the best of any I have yet seen. “Though to the eye fair is the extended vale” should be “to the eye though fair the extended vale” I by no means disapprove of discord introduced to produce *effect*, nor is my ear so fastidious as to be angry with it where it could not have been avoided without weakening the sense. But discord for discord’s sake is rather too licentious.

“Wild wind” has no other but alliterative beauty; it applies to a storm, not to the autumnal breeze that makes the trees rustle mournfully. Alter it to “That rustle to the sad wind moaningly”.

“’Twas a long way and tedious”, and the three last lines are marked beauties—unlaboured strains poured soothingly along from the feeling simplicity of heart. The next sonnet is altogether exquisite, the circumstance common yet new to poetry, the moral accurate and full of soul. “I never saw”, etc., is most exquisite. I am almost ashamed to write the following, it is so inferior. Ashamed? No, Southey! God knows my heart! I am *delighted* to feel you superior to me in genius as in virtue.

No more my visionary soul shall dwell
On joys that were; no more endure to weigh

¹ The poems referred to are nos. vi and viii of Southey’s *Sonnets*. Although he altered his original drafts, he did not accept Coleridge’s emendations.

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-107-45064-6 - Literary Friendships in the Age of Wordsworth:
 An Anthology
 Selected and Edited by R. C. Bald
 Excerpt
[More information](#)

COLERIDGE

[1794-

The shame and anguish of the evil day.
 Wisely forgetful! O'er the ocean swell
 Sublime of Hope, I seek the cottag'd dell
 Where Virtue calm with careless step may stray,
 And, dancing to the moonlight roundelay,
 The wizard Passions weave an holy spell.
 Eyes that have ach'd with sorrow! ye shall weep
 Tears of doubt-mingled joy, like theirs who start
 From precipices of distemper'd sleep,
 On which the fierce-eyed fiends their revels keep,
 And see the rising sun, and feel it dart
 New rays of pleasance trembling to the heart.

I have heard from Allen, and write the third letter to him. Yours is the second. Perhaps you would like two sonnets I have written to my Sally. When I have received an answer from Allen I will tell you the contents of his first letter.

My compliments to Heath.

I will write you a huge, big letter next week. At present I have to transact the tragedy business, to wait on the Master, to write to Mrs Southey, Lovell, etc., etc.

God love you, and

S. T. Coleridge

LAMB'S TRAGEDY

To COLERIDGE

P.M. *September 27, 1796.*

My dearest Friend,—White or some of my friends or the public papers by this time may have informed you of the terrible calamities that have fallen on our family. I will only give you the outlines. My poor dear dearest sister in a fit of insanity has been the death of her own mother. I was at hand only time enough to snatch the knife out of her grasp. She is at present in a madhouse, from whence I fear she must be moved to an hospital. God has preserved to me my senses,—I eat and drink and sleep, and have my judgment I believe very sound. My poor father was slightly wounded, and I am left to take care of him and my aunt. Mr Norris of the Bluecoat School has been very very kind to us, and we have