

Research Paper

Charles Lamb's Reminiscences in "South-Sea House"

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Charles Lamb has rightly been called "The Prince of English Essayist." Lamb was one of the most autobiographical of the English essayists and his essays at every step reflect his nobility of soul, his good nature and his charity. Essays of Elia reconstructs the whole of his life from the beginning to the end. The South-Sea House, from the essays of Elia is an autobiographical essay which presents the glorious past of South-Sea House Company and its inglorious end. He vividly describes his co-workers in this essay.

Charles Lamb is undoubtedly the master of English essay as Canon Ainger rightly observes, "Lamb's place in literature is unique and unchallengeable." His Essays of Elia B appeared in London Magazine in 1820. The South Sea house is the first essay in the collection Essay of Elia. Lamb was a clerk in the Examiner's office at South Sea-House from September 1791 to February 1792. So this essay reveals Lamb's reminiscences of the South- Sea House. Here he portrays with words the past glory of the South-Sea house, which is now fallen into neglect.

The essay begins with the location of South-Sea Company. It was situated between the Bank of England and the Flowerpot inn, where the readers (passers) must have watched 'a melancholy- looking handsome brick and stone edifice.' Forty years back, it was a glorious centre of trade and commerce. It used to remain crowded with big businessman, average merchants and industrialists. But now this building has lost its soul and life. In the past its 'stately porticoes', 'imposing staircases' used to remain crowded. But now a total silence prevails there. It's big rooms used to remain busy with business activities of businessmen, clerks, accountants, and officers. The employees were formerly busy with their books and ledgers but now their books and ledgers have fallen a prey to insects and worms. The chairs are now covered with layers of dust. The big inner room, which used to be occupied with attendants, are now deserted. It's walls were decorated with the photographs of governor, sun-governor, emperor and Queen Anne, which used to shine but now they are also covered with layers of dust and have become dim. So, it is now 'a magnificent relic!' and 'silence and destitution are upon thy walls, proud house, for a memorial!'

His memory recalls his fellow workers and in an intimate mood with wit and humour he describes them. They were mostly bachelors with speculative type of mind. They had their own habits and oddities. Lamb calls them 'sort of Noah's ark, Old fishes.' He confesses that he finds a great difference between the clerks and accountants of past and the clerks of public offices now. They believed in the principle of dignity of work. Those co-workers of Charles Lamb are:

1. Evans: He was the head cashier. He was a man of melancholic mood and irritable nature but by heart he was gentle. He used to keep long hair, used to apply powder so he looked like Maccaronies. He was an honest cashier. He was

like store of information as he knew everything about old streets, old church, old theatres and legends.

2. Thomas Tame: He was deputy accountant. He had the air and stoop of a noble man but he was poor by birth. He had mastered the art of conversation and language which helped him developing friendly relations with the customers.

3. John Tipp: he was an accountant. He believed that the community of accountants is the greatest community and he himself the greatest among them. But he never extends this belief to others. He utilized his leisure time in playing upon fiddle. He never discussed anything (nonsense) like romance or politics or newspaper at office hours. He had mastery over the art of figuring and he used to prepare the annual account of the company single-handed. Even Lamb was also helped by him in figuring. He was suffering from a notable fear of death so he remained away from the parapet of wall, railing of balcony, or never looked down a precipice or go for swimming or let off a gun.

4. Henry Man: he was deputy secretary with a good sense of humour and wit. He used to write for periodicals. He wrote two volumes, which contained his satirical remarks and jokes. Though years passed, yet it's fresh and appealing.

5. Richard Plumer: he was also deputy secretary in the South-Sea House. He was a noble man, belonging to a traditional family. He possessed the art of singing. He was pure and simple-minded person.

While, closing the essay Charles Lamb says that much remains to sing but it's an essay. It's night and he is feeling sleepy but he is sure that a day will come when the South-Sea House will regain it's lost life and glory. Charles Lamb is a visualizer of memories and very poetically here he has presented the past glory of South-Sea House. He was a tender hearted sentimental person so, he has presented only the positive sides of the clerks and company. He overlooks the scandals of the company. His sense of wit and fun is also evident in metaphors and comparisons. The essay also shows an undercurrent pathos of Charles Lamb as the South-Sea House has lost its glory.

References:

1. Lamb, Charles. Essays Of Elia Surjeet Publication.