

I have had playmates; I have had companions,  
In my days of childhood, in my joyful school-days—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have been laughing, I have been carousing,  
Drinking late, sitting late, with my bosom cronies—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I loved a love once, fairest among women,  
Closed are her doors on me, I must not see her—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces.

I have a friend, a kinder friend has no man.  
Like an ingrate, I left my friend abruptly;  
Left him, to muse on the old familiar faces.

Ghost-like, I paced round the scenes of my childhood.  
Earth seemed a desert I was bound to traverse;  
Seeking to find the old familiar faces.

Friend of my bosom, thou more than a brother!  
Why wert 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.

The refrain of this poem might fittingly be the utterance of one looking back along the perspective of many years. It was penned by a man of twenty-three. Surely he was "furrowed by days, not years," to use such language at such an age. Charles Lamb lived much in the past by reason of his natural bent, for he was a student of the classics and of the earlier English literature. Indeed he and his friend Coleridge did much to revive the interest in Elizabethan and Jacobean writers. Yet this studious proclivity cannot fully explain the sadness of this youthful poem.

In fact, Lamb's share of sorrow was already such as seldom falls to the lot of gray hairs. Less than two years before he wrote the poem there had fallen upon him a sudden bolt from the cloud which was to hang over him all his life. This was the death of his mother, who "died prematurely in a day of horrors" at the hands of Mary Lamb, her loving, but demented daughter. This familiar face, the first he had ever learned to know, was gone. Very soon that other "face as gay as Garrick's," that of him who had been "the liveliest little fellow breathing," but was now an aged infant—that face, too, disappeared from the family circle. Now Charles was an orphan and sole guardian of a single trust, his unfortunate sister, Mary. There was an older brother, John,