

**THE
ESSAYS OF ELIA**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649008018

The essays of Elia by Charles Lamb

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

CHARLES LAMB

**THE
ESSAYS OF ELIA**

APPLETONS' NEW HANDY-VOLUME SERIES.

THE
ESSAYS OF ELIA.

BY
CHARLES LAMB.

FIRST SERIES

NEW YORK:
D. APPLETON AND COMPANY,
540 AND 551 BROADWAY.
1870.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
THE SOUTH-SEA HOUSE	5
OXFORD IN THE VACATION	15
CHRIST'S HOSPITAL FIVE-AND-THIRTY YEARS AGO	22
THE TWO RACES OF MEN	39
NEW-YEAR'S-EVE	46
MRS. BATTLE'S OPINIONS ON WHIST	54
A CHAPTER ON FEARS	63
ALL-FOOLS'-DAY	69
A QUAKERS' MEETING	74
THE OLD AND THE NEW SCHOOLMASTER	80
VALENTINE'S-DAY	91
IMPERFECT SYMPATHIES	95
WITCHES, AND OTHER NIGHT-FEARS	105
MY RELATIONS	113
MACKERY END, IN HERTFORDSHIRE	121
MODERN GALLANTRY	127
THE OLD BENCHERS OF THE INNER TEMPLE	133
GRACE BEFORE MEAT	147
MY FIRST PLAY	155
DREAM-CHILDREN: A REVERIE	161

M236.168

	PAGE
DISTANT CORRESPONDENTS	165
THE PRAISE OF CHIMNEY-SWEEPERS	173
A COMPLAINT OF THE DECAY OF BEGGARS IN THE METROPOLIS	183
A DISSERTATION UPON ROAST-FIG	193
A BACHELOR'S COMPLAINT OF THE BEHAVIOR OF MARRIED PEOPLE	202
ON SOME OF THE OLD ACTORS	211
ON THE ARTIFICIAL COMEDY OF THE LAST CENTURY	226
ON THE ACTING OF MUNDEN	236

THE ESSAYS OF ELIA.

THE SOUTH-SEA HOUSE.

READER, in thy passage from the Bank—where thou hast been receiving thy half-yearly dividends (supposing thou art a lean annuitant like myself)—to the Flower Pot, to secure a place for Dalston, or Shacklewell, or some other suburban retreat northerly, didst thou never observe a melancholy-looking, handsome, brick-and-stone edifice, to the left—where Threadneedle Street abuts upon Bishopsgate? I dare say thou hast often admired its magnificent portals ever gaping wide and disclosing to view a grave court, with cloisters, and pillars, with few or no traces of goers-in or comers-out—a desolation something like Balclutha's.¹

This was once a house of trade—a centre of busy interests. The throng of merchants was here—the quick pulse of gain—and here some forms of business are still kept up, though the soul be long since fled. Here are still to be seen stately porticoes; imposing staircases, offices roomy as the state apartments in palaces—deserted, or thinly peopled with a few straggling clerks; the still more sacred interiors of court and committee-rooms,

¹ I passed by the walls of Balclutha, and they were desolate.
—OSBLAN.

with venerable faces of beadles, door-keepers—directors seated in form on solemn days (to proclaim a dead dividend), at long, worm-eaten tables, that have been mahogany, with tarnished gilt-leather coverings, supporting massy silver inkstands long since dry; the oaken wainscots hung with pictures of deceased governors and sub-governors, of Queen Anne, and the two first monarchs of the Brunswick dynasty; huge charts, which subsequent discoveries have antiquated; dusty maps of Mexico, dim as dreams, and soundings of the Bay of Panama! The long passages hung with buckets, appended, in idle row, to walls, whose substance might defy any, short of the last, conflagration: with vast ranges of cellarage under all, where dollars and pieces-of-eight once lay, an “unsunned heap,” for Mammon to have solaced his solitary heart withal, long since dissipated, or scattered into air at the blast of the breaking of that famous BUNDLE.—

Such is the SOUTH-SEA HOUSE. At least, such it was forty years ago, when I knew it, a magnificent relic! What alterations may have been made in it since, I have had no opportunities of verifying. Time, I take for granted, has not freshened it. No wind has resuscitated the face of the sleeping waters. A thicker crust by this time stagnates upon it. The moths, that were then battenning upon its obsolete ledgers and day-books, have rested from their depredations, but other light generations have succeeded, making fine fretwork among their single and double entries. Layers of dust have accumulated (a superfetation of dirt!) upon the old layers, that seldom used to be disturbed, save by some curious finger, now and then, inquisitive to explore the mode of book-keeping in Queen Anne’s reign; or, with less hallowed

curiosity, seeking to unveil some of the mysteries of that tremendous HOAX, whose extent the petty speculators of our day look back upon with the same expression of incredulous admiration, and hopeless ambition of rivalry, as would become the puny face of modern conspiracy contemplating the Titan size of Vaux's superhuman plot.

Peace to the manes of the BUBBLE! Silence and destitution are upon thy walls, proud house, for a memorial!

Situated as thou art, in the very heart of stirring and living commerce, amid the fret and fever of speculation—with the Bank, and the 'Change, and the India-house about thee, in the heyday of present prosperity, with their important faces, as it were, insulting thee, their *poor neighbor out of business*—to the idle and merely contemplative, to such as me, old house! there is a charm in thy quiet: a cessation—a coolness from business—an indolence almost cloistral—which is delightful! With what reverence have I paced thy great bare rooms and courts at eventide! They spoke of the past: the shade of some dead accountant, with visionary pen in ear, would flit by me, stiff as in life. Living accounts and accountants puzzle me. I have no skill in figuring. But thy great dead tomes, which scarce three degenerate clerks of the present day could lift from their enshrining shelves—with their old fantastic flourishes and decorative rubric interlacings, their sums in triple columniations, set down with formal superfluity of ciphers, with pious sentences at the beginning, without which our religious ancestors never ventured to open a book of business or bill of lading; the costly vellum covers of some of them almost persuading us that we are got into some *better library*—are very agreeable and edifying spectacles. I

can look upon these defunct dragons with complacency. Thy heavy, odd-shaped, ivory-handled penknives (our ancestors had everything on a larger scale than we have hearts for) are as good as anything from Herculaneum. The pounce-boxes of our days have gone retrograde.

The very clerks which I remember in the South-Sea House—I speak of forty years back—had an air very different from those in the public offices that I have had to do with since. They partook of the genius of the place!

They were mostly (for the establishment did not admit of superfluous salaries) bachelors. Generally (for they had not much to do) persons of a curious and speculative turn of mind. Old-fashioned, for a reason mentioned before. Humorists, for they were of all descriptions; and, not having been brought together in early life (which has a tendency to assimilate the members of corporate bodies to each other), but, for the most part, placed in this house in ripe or middle age, they necessarily carried into it their separate habits and oddities, unqualified, if I may so speak, as into a common stock. Hence they formed a sort of Noah's ark. Odd fishes. A lay monastery. Domestic retainers in a great house, kept more for show than use. Yet pleasant fellows, full of chat—and not a few among them had arrived at considerable proficiency on the German flute.

The cashier at that time was one Evans, a Cambro-Briton. He had something of the choleric complexion of his countrymen stamped on his visage, but was a worthy, sensible man at bottom. He wore his hair, to the last, powdered and frizzed out, in the fashion which I remember to have seen in caricatures of what were termed, in my young days, *Macaronis*. He was the last