

**LETTERS OF DE QUINCEY, THE  
ENGLISH OPIUM-EATER,  
TO A YOUNG MAN WHOSE  
EDUCATION HAS BEEN  
NEGLECTED**

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Letters of De Quincey, the English Opium-eater, to a Young Man Whose Education Has Been Neglected by Thomas De Quincey

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**THOMAS DE QUINCEY**

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PHILADELPHIA:  
JOHN PENNINGTON,  
169 CHESTNUT STREET.  
1843.

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## PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

THE Quarterly Review, notoriously chary of its praise when in political opposition, after a copious extract from the English Opium-Eater's recent notice of Shakspeare,\* exclaims, "Who, after reading such passages as these, does not regret that the author has written so little!" This sentiment will be emphatically echoed by those readers of the following letters who can appreciate the depth of thought they evolve, the peculiar raciness of the style, and who can sympathize with their writer in his enthusiastic love of learning.

They originally appeared in the London Magazine for 1823, when English magazine literature was in its zenith. Among the writers whose contributions at this period placed and maintained the

\* In the Encyclopædia Britannica, 7th edit.

London in the front rank of British periodicals were Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey, "the English Opium-Eater." The productions of the first two have all, it is believed, appeared in separate forms, but only a portion of those of the latter. This hiatus it is the object of the present and of a future publication to fill up.

*Indocti discant* should form the epigraphe to "Letters to a Young Man whose Education has been Neglected;" but men of mature age and scholarship will feel in the following pages the necessity of preserving in its integrity the oft quoted line—

*Indocti discant, et ament meminisse periti.*

November, 1842.



# LETTERS

TO

A YOUNG MAN, ETC. ETC.

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## LETTER I.

MY DEAR SIR,

When I had the pleasure of meeting you at Ch——, for the second time in my life, I was much concerned to remark the general dejection of your manner. I may now add, that I was also much surprised; your cousin's visit to me, having made it no longer a point of delicacy to suppress that feeling. General report had represented you as in possession of all which enters into the worldly estimate of happiness,—great opulence, unclouded reputation, and freedom from unhappy connexions. That you had the priceless blessing of unfluctuating health, I know upon your own autho-

rity. And the concurring opinions of your friends, together with my own opportunities for observation, left me no room to doubt that you wanted not the last and mightiest among the sources of happiness—a fortunate constitution of mind, both for moral and intellectual ends. So many blessings as these, meeting in the person of one man, and yet all in some mysterious way defeated and poisoned, presented a problem too interesting both to the selfish and the generous curiosity of men—to make it at all wonderful, that at that time and place you should have been the subject of much discussion. Now and then some solutions of the mystery were hazarded: in particular I remember one from a young lady of seventeen, who said with a positive air, “That Mr. M——’s dejection was well known to arise from an unfortunate attachment in early life,” which assurance appeared to have great weight with some other young ladies of sixteen. But upon the whole, I think that no account of the matter was proposed at that time which satisfied myself, or was likely to satisfy any reflecting person.

At length the visit of your cousin L—— in his road to Th—— has cleared up the mystery in a way more agreeable to myself than I could have ventured to anticipate from any communication short of that which should acquaint me with the entire dispersion of the dejection under which you laboured. I allow myself to call such a disclosure agreeable, partly upon the ground that where the grief or dejection of our friends admits of no important alleviation, it is yet satisfactory to know, that it may be traced to causes of adequate dignity: and, in this particular case, I have not only that assurance, but the prospect of contributing some assistance to your emancipation from these depressing recollections by co-operating with your own efforts in the way you have pointed out for supplying the defects of your early education.

L—— explained to me all that your own letter had left imperfect; in particular how it was that you came to be defrauded of the education to which even your earliest and humblest prospects had entitled you: by what heroic efforts, but how vainly, you laboured to