

**APPLETONS' NEW HANDY-  
VOLUME  
SERIES. THE ESSAYS  
OF ELIA. FIRST SERIES**

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**CHARLES LAMB**

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VOLUME  
SERIES. THE ESSAYS  
OF ELIA. FIRST SERIES**



*APPLETONS' NEW HANDY-VOLUME SERIES.*

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THE  
ESSAYS OF ELIA.

BY  
CHARLES LAMB.  
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*FIRST SERIES.*

NEW YORK:  
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## 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.<sup>1</sup>

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,

<sup>1</sup> I passed by the walls of Balclutha, and they were desolate.—OSSEAN.

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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 collarage 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 BUBBLE.—

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-peculators 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