

**THE CORRESPONDENCE  
OF LEIGH HUNT. EDITED  
BY HIS ELDEST SON. IN  
TWO VOLUMES; VOL. II**

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The Correspondence of Leigh Hunt. Edited by His Eldest Son. In Two Volumes; Vol. II by Leigh Hunt & Thornton Leigh Hunt

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THE  
CORRESPONDENCE  
OF  
LEIGH HUNT.

EDITED BY HIS ELDEST SON.

"What if some little payne the passage have,  
That makes frayle flesh to feare the bitter wave?  
Is not short payne well borne, that brings long ease,  
And layes the soule to sleep in quiet grave?  
Sleepe after toyle, port after stormie seas,  
Ease after warre, death after life, does greatly please."  
SPENSER'S "FAERIE QUEENE."

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THE  
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LETTERS FROM KENSINGTON.

IN 1840, Leigh Hunt removed from Chelsea to Kensington. The reader already knows that the residence near the river, although not without its hopes of good to come, and its solaces for actual misfortune, had been one of great and increasing trouble. Some of the pains have made themselves understood, others are not to be told. Chelsea was associated with some of Leigh Hunt's dearest recollections; but there was a sense of darkness hanging over the place; and when his affairs took a more favourable turn, he was glad to get away. He moved to higher ground, and to a less confined neighbourhood. The spot he chose was Edwardes Square, in Kensington, and there were several reasons for the choice. He always had a preference for "the old Court suburb." His eldest daughter was living at No. 45 in the same square, with her husband, John Gliddon, one of Leigh Hunt's most esteemed and devoted friends. I had myself lately resigned an engagement in Glasgow, to find one in London, and I had arranged to take a house in the neighbourhood with my double brother-in-

law, for we had married each other's sisters, and had been companions, schoolfellows, and workfellows from childhood to the day of his death, sharing each other's fortunes and thoughts, without a single word of mistrust or difference in the whole forty years. Edwardes Square is in itself rather peculiar. It is of some size; but makes no pretensions to magnificence. At each end, there is a row of houses with gardens in front; the south side is bounded, I think, by the stables of Earle's Terrace, which is itself the boundary to the north, with a front looking on to the main road, and the back gardens towards the square. Instead of being levelled, the plot of ground used as the garden of the square had been left with its natural undulations,—very slight, but sufficient to diminish the formal look; the truly garden-like aspect of the place being increased by some happiness in the original design and a good selection of the plants. Leigh Hunt soon found out that the square and its garden had been planned by a Frenchman, to whom he was emphatically grateful.

Here he resided for eleven years: a period of great industry, and upon the whole of much more success than he had enjoyed for a long time. He arrived while still flushed with the success of *The Legend of Florence*. Through the intervention of Macaulay, he obtained access to write in the *Edinburgh Review*,—a publication whose managers would at one time have thought the founder of the *Examiner* too Radical in his opinions, while he would have thought it too exclusive to feel at home in it. And I may here make a correction of the false estimate which was formed of Leigh Hunt's opinions on political affairs. It has been supposed that he entertained "subversive" ideas, was desirous of "pulling down," and was "democratic" and "levelling" in the policy which he would have promoted. No misconcep-



tion could be greater. The mistake originated partly in a characteristic of his political writings which must be regarded as a deficiency,—a want in his writing of substantive propositions, an absence of what are now called “practical measures;” but still more in the fact that his study of history, including that of our own country, his convictions, and above all his feelings, prompted him to be the antagonist of the party in power during the Tory *régime*. He thus stood before the public as the opponent of persons who happened to be in authority; and their advocates in the press, most falsely, imputed to him an invidious dislike of authority itself. This aspect of oppugnancy was increased by another circumstance, which could only be understood by his most intimate friends. He conscientiously believed it to be his duty to shield his independence, by avoiding even the proximity of all that might have been thought to influence it; and thus he not only repelled overtures of friendly compromise from his warmest political opponents to which I have already alluded, but declined invitations from distinguished persons on the Liberal side, especially when they belonged to the Whig party or to courtly circles. There were several reasons for this shrinking. He held that judgment should be formed on the intrinsic merits of every public question, unqualified by any sense of personal regard or convenience. He thought that if he were to become too much “mixed up” with those who were naturally expecting political office, he might be drawn into an acquiescence in party views which he deemed to be essentially wrong.

His own views may be thus stated:—Tory principles are the relics of an obsolete, kingly, and soldierly despotism, which, when he began political life, was vainly struggling against the natural progress of civiliza-

tion in general, and of the British constitution in particular. Among the members of the Whig party, there was no want of intelligence or of conscientiousness; but they lived in exclusive circles, and thus contracted habits of thought which narrowed the sympathies, and subjected the individual judgment to conventional doctrines, devised for the convenience of party leaders, and the accommodation of party followers. The policy resulting from these habits of thought was naturally exclusive in its tendencies, and those who obeyed it were reluctant to consult the impulses of their own heart, or to repay the support which they received from the great body of the people, by studying the aspirations struggling amid the humbler classes. If Leigh Hunt had been called upon to frame Acts of Parliament embodying his opinions, I believe that he would have entered upon the task with the most generous resolve to extend political privileges, till they ceased to be privileges at all; but he would have shrunk at the suggestion of every doubt, whether particular provisions might not do more harm than good; he would certainly have refused to be the responsible author of any sudden change; and, in short, I believe he would not have gone faster than any other reformer of his day. But Nature, and the course of his studies, had filled him with a conviction that feeling should be much more consulted,—far more reverently and avowedly consulted than it is, in public as well as in private affairs. He admitted his natural inaptitude to deal with any question as soon as it became formally set forth in the technicalities of a Parliamentary Bill. He was so faithful to his reliance upon feeling rather than the letter of laws that, although he did not join in the conventional disclaimer of the Regicides, whom he always lauded for performing a stern duty with firm fidelity,—he repeatedly expressed his

repugnance to Cromwell, and the hard fashions of the Puritans; contrasting them, in tones of affectionate admiration, with the generous and chivalric character of Falkland. These were the grounds on which he declined invitations to visit Holland House, just as at one time he declined the advances of popular actors, whom it was his office to criticise. It will be observed that, blended with the sense of independence, there was also a strong jealous mistrust of the sway which personal sympathy exercised over him; and there was, I think, another motive which he would have been the last to suspect. He piqued himself upon the "address" with which he was prepared to encounter strangers of all orders, on the most sudden demand; and his self-satisfaction was not unwarranted, since, however he might be taken by surprise, he never was without the kindest feeling, the readiest play of ideas, and the most critical sense of fitness. But he had rather an awful sense of his responsibilities on such occasions, and was somewhat anxious on the score of the fitness aforesaid. Upon the whole, he preferred the society of his books, and of familiar friends, who would make no such trying demands upon him. It was not "bashfulness;" it was not even what is called a "retiring disposition;" still less what our admirable friend Hazlitt called his "foppishness;" but, probably, it was the direct effect of a natural modesty which was very marked in his character, exaggerated by the influence of the reaction produced upon his ultra sympathetic impulses by the non-response and misconception with which they had been met in earlier life. All these influences combined tended to make him, who was fond of society, and was popular when he ventured there, more and more of a closet man.

It was from the closet that he looked forth upon public affairs by the light of history and of poetry, taking