

**IN THE FOOTPRINTS
OF CHARLES LAMB**

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In the Footprints of Charles Lamb by Benjamin Ellis Martin

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BENJAMIN ELLIS MARTIN

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CHARLES LAMB.

DURING the half-century since the death of Charles Lamb, an immense mass of matter has been gathered about him and about his writings. In burrowing among the treasures and the rubbish of this mound, I have been struck by the total absence of what may be called a topographical biography of the man, or of any accurate record of his writings: with the exception of that necessarily brief one contained in Mr. Laurence Hutton's invaluable "Literary Landmarks of London." Such a shortcoming is the more marked, inasmuch as Lamb is so closely identified with the Town. Not one among the men of letters, whose shadows walk the London streets with us, knew them better, or loved them more, than he did. In following his footsteps, I have found still untouched many of the houses that harboured him; and I have taken delight in the task, before the restless hand of reconstruction shall have plucked them forever away, of helping to keep alive the look of all that is left of the walls within which he lived and laboured.

From this mere memento of brick-and-mortar—all my original intent—I have been led on to a study of

the man himself, from our more modern and more humane point of view. The time has long gone by for that kindly compact of reticence which may have been becoming in the years directly after his death. Nothing need be hidden now about the madness of Mary, about the terrible taking-off of her mother, about the early insanity of Charles himself, or his later weaknesses. And, in telling the entire truth, I have found comfort and cheer in the belief that neither apology nor homily can ever again be deemed needful to a decorous demeanour beside these dead.

So that I have sketched him just as he lives for me—the lines and the wrinkles of his aspect, the shine and the shadow of his soul: just as he moved in the crowd, among his friends, by his sister's side, and alone. To show exactly what he was, rather than what he did, I have used his own words wherever this was possible; altering them as to their letter alone, where it has seemed essential. In this spirit of affectionate allegiance I have followed him faithfully in all his wanderings, from his cradle close by the Thames to his grave not far from the Lea.

B. E. M.

NEW YORK, October, 1890.

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