

**PERSONAL
RECOLLECTIONS OF
THOMAS DE QUINCEY**

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Personal Recollections of Thomas De Quincey by John Ritchie Findlay

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JOHN RITCHIE FINDLAY

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EDINBURGH
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1886

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ILLUSTRATIONS.

BUST OF DE QUINCEY BY SIR JOHN STEELL,
R.S.A. *Frontispiece*

MEDALLION BY SHAKESPEARE WOOD
Title-page

CHALK DRAWING BY JAMES ARCHER, R.S.A.
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Bayer 29 Dec 1938

INTRODUCTION.

SOME explanation of the origin of this little volume may be expected and permitted.

An elegant edition of the *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* has lately appeared,¹ to which are appended some interesting notes of conversations with De Quincey from the pen of a Mr. Richard Woodhouse, barrister of the Temple, a young man of literary tastes, who, says Mr. Garnett, "himself wrote nothing for publication, but mingled with the brilliant literary circle which, about the year 1820, gathered round Messrs. Taylor and Hessey, publishers of the *London Magazine*, in which the *Confessions* originally appeared."

¹ *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*. Edited by Richard Garnett. London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Co. 1885.

The perusal of these notes induced me to turn to notes which I myself had taken of conversations held with De Quincey thirty years later. I do not profess—indeed I desire explicitly to disclaim—the art and practice of note-taking of this kind: an art and practice which the late Mr. Nassau Senior, for example, carried to the utmost stretch and perfection. Though I have had the honour and pleasure of knowing and talking familiarly with many men of considerable distinction in letters and in public life, the desire to record such intercourse never overcame me save in this one instance. This of itself may be taken as a humble testimony to the singularly attractive and impressive character of De Quincey's talk. The notes were taken at the time merely and solely for the refreshment of my own memory; if it ever afterwards occurred to me that they might be of other use, I always felt that they could be so used only after a consider-

able lapse of years. With the lapse of thirty years or thereby reasons against publication have lapsed likewise, and there now seems to me nothing to prevent those scanty jottings being given to the world of De Quincey's admirers, to be taken for what they are worth.

The notes extend over a period of seven years—1852-59—the last years of De Quincey's life. They were mere memoranda pencilled on scraps of paper, sufficient to refresh an originally vivid and retentive memory, until, fearing its failure to keep hold of connecting links, I found leisure fifteen years ago to put the scraps into shape and write them out clearly and fully. In this state they have been seen and read over by one or two of my friends who knew and admired De Quincey; I think only by John Hill Burton, Alexander Russel, and John Brown—all now, alas! no more. I have recently felt it my duty to submit them to