

**FINAL MEMORIALS OF CHARLES LAMB;
CONSISTING CHIEFLY OF HIS LETTERS
NOT BEFORE PUBLISHED, WITH SKETCHES
OF SOME OF HIS COMPANIONS; IN TWO
VOLUMES. VOL. II**

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Final Memorials of Charles Lamb; Consisting Chiefly of His Letters Not Before Published, with Sketches of Some of His Companions; In Two Volumes. Vol. II by Thomas Noon Talfourd

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THOMAS NOON TALFOURD

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BY

THOMAS NOON TALFOURD,

ONE OF HIS EXECUTORS.

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VOL. II.

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1848.

FINAL MEMORIALS
OF
CHARLES LAMB.

CHAPTER I.

THE LONDON MAGAZINE—CHARACTER AND FATE OF MR. JOHN SCOTT,
ITS EDITOR—CHARACTER AND HISTORY OF MR. THOMAS GRIFFITHS
WAINWRIGHT, ONE OF ITS CONTRIBUTORS—MISCELLANEOUS LETTERS
OF LAMB TO WORDSWORTHE, COLERIDGE, AND OTHERS;—1818
TO 1825.

LAMB'S association with Hazlitt in the year 1820 introduced him to that of the "London Magazine," which supplied the finest stimulus his intellect had ever received, and induced the composition of the *Essays* fondly and familiarly known under the fantastic title of *Elia*. Never was a periodical work commenced with happier auspices, numbering a list of contributors more original in thought,

more fresh in spirit, more sportive in fancy, or directed by an editor better qualified by nature and study to preside, than this "London." There was Lamb, with humanity ripened among town-bred experiences, and pathos matured by sorrow, at his wisest, sagest, airiest, indiscreetest, best; Barry Cornwall, in the first bloom of his modest and enduring fame, streaking the darkest passion with beauty; John Hamilton Reynolds, lighting up the wildest eccentricities and most striking features of many-coloured life with vivid fancy; and, with others of less note, Hazlitt, whose pen unloosed from the chain which earnest thought and metaphysical dreamings had woven, gave radiant expression to the results of the solitary musings of many years. Over these contributors John Scott presided, himself a critic of remarkable candour, eloquence, and discrimination, unfettered by the dogmas of contending schools of poetry and art; apt to discern the good and beautiful in all; and having, as editor, that which Kent recognised in Lear, which subjects revere in kings, and boys admire in schoolmasters, and contributors should welcome in editors—*authority*;—not manifested in a worrying, teasing, intolerable inter-

ference in small matters, but in a judicious and steady superintendence of the whole; with a wise allowance of the occasional excesses of wit and genius. In this respect, Mr. Scott differed entirely from a celebrated poet, who was induced, just a year after, to undertake the Editorship of the "New Monthly Magazine," an office for which, it may be said, with all veneration for his poetic genius, he was the most unfit person who could be found in the wide world of letters—who regarded a magazine as if it were a long affidavit, or a short answer in Chancery, in which the absolute truth of every sentiment and the propriety of every jest were verified by the editor's oath or solemn affirmation; who stopped the press for a week at a comma; balanced contending epithets for a fortnight; and, at last, grew rash in despair, and tossed the nearest, and often the worst article, "unwhipped of justice," to the impatient printer. Mr. Scott, indeed, was more fit to preside over a little commonwealth of authors than to hold a despotic rule over subject contributors; he had not the airy grace of Jeffrey by which he might give a certain familiar liveliness to the most laborious disquisitions, and shed the glancing light of fancy

among party manifestoes ;—nor the boisterous vigour of Wilson, riotous in power, reckless in wisdom, fusing the production of various intellects into one brilliant reflexion of his own master-mind ;—and it was well that he wanted these weapons of a tyranny which his chief contributors were too original and too sturdy to endure. He heartily enjoyed his position ; duly appreciated his contributors and himself ; and when he gave audience to some young aspirant for periodical honours at a late breakfast, amidst the luxurious confusion of newspapers, reviews, and uncut novels, lying about in fascinating litter, and carelessly enunciated schemes for bright successions of essays, he seemed destined for many years of that happy excitement in which thought perpetually glows into unruffled but energetic language, and is assured by the echoes of the world.

Alas ! a few days after he thus appeared the object of admiration and envy to a young visitor, in his rooms in York-street, he was stretched on a bed of mental agony—the foolish victim of the guilty custom of a world which would have laughed at him for regarding himself as within the sphere of its opinion, if he had not died to

shame it! In a luckless hour, instead of seeking to oppose the bitter personalities of "Blackwood" by the exhibition of a serener power, he rushed with spurious chivalry into a personal contest; caught up the weapons which he had himself denounced, and sought to unmask his opponents and draw them beyond the pale of literary courtesy; placed himself thus in a doubtful position in which he could neither consistently reject an appeal to the conventional arbitrament of violence nor embrace it; lost his most legitimate opportunity of daring the unhallowed strife, and found another with an antagonist connected with the quarrel only by too zealous a friendship; and, at last, met his death almost by lamentable accident, in the uncertain glimmer of moonlight, from the hand of one who went out resolved not to harm him! Such was the melancholy result—first of a controversy too envenomed—and afterwards of enthrallment in usages, absurd in all, but most absurd when applied by a literary man to a literary quarrel. Apart from higher considerations, it may befit a life destined for the listless excesses of gaiety to be cast on an idle brawl;—"a youth of folly, an old age of cards" may be no great

sacrifice to preserve the hollow truce of fashionable society; but for men of thought—whose minds are their possession, and who seek to live in the minds of others by sympathy with their thoughts—for *them* to hazard a thoughtful being because they dare not own that they prefer life to death—contemplation to the grave—the preparation for eternity, for the unbidden entrance on its terrors, would be ridiculous if it did not become tragical. “Sir, I am a metaphysician!” said Hazlitt once, when in a fierce dispute respecting the colours of Holbein and Vandyke, words almost became things; “and nothing makes an impression upon me but abstract ideas;” and woeful, indeed, is the mockery when thinkers condescend to be duellists!

The Magazine did not perish with its Editor; though its unity of purpose was lost, it was still rich in essays of surpassing individual merit; among which the masterly vindication of the true dramatic style by Darley; the articles of Cary, the admirable translator of Dante; and the “Confessions of an English Opium Eater;” held a distinguished place. Mr. De Quincy, whose youth had been inspired by enthusiastic admiration of Coleridge, shown in contributions to