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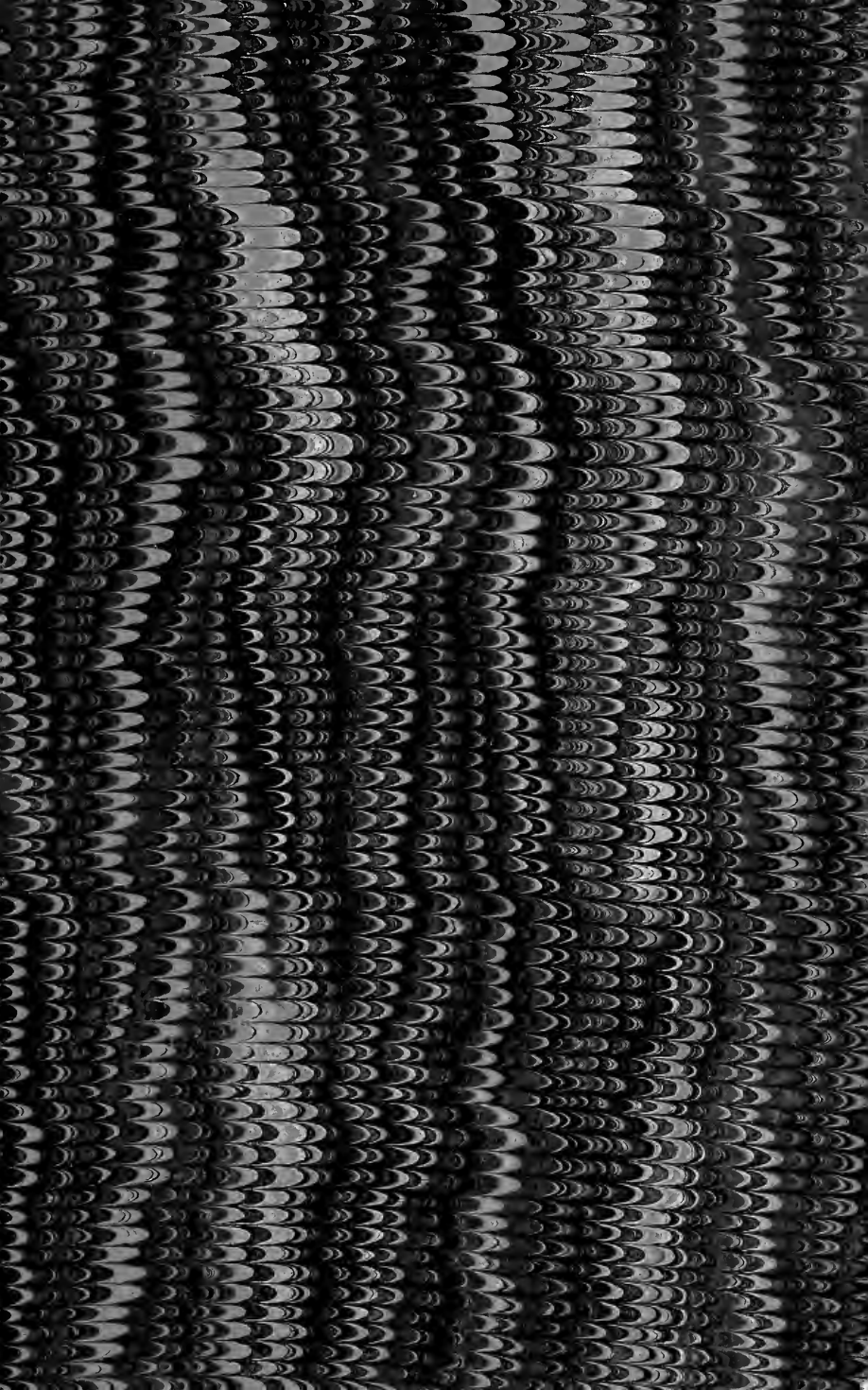
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ESSAYS  
OF  
ELIA

—: BY :—

CHARLES LAMB.

NEW YORK:  
EFFINGHAM MAYNARD & Co.,

SUCCESSORS TO  
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1890.

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# THE ESSAYS OF ELIA.

By CHARLES LAMB.

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SELECTIONS :

A DISSERTATION ON ROAST FIG.	THE SOUTH-SEA HOUSE.
DETACHED THOUGHTS ON BOOKS AND READING.	OLD CHINA.

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With Introduction and Notes,

BY

LOUIS AUGUSTUS BARRY, LL.D.



NEW YORK :

EFFINGHAM MAYNARD & Co., PUBLISHERS,

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father survived but a few months; a sister of his who had formed one of the family died about the same time. Thus Charles and Mary, who had meantime recovered her reason, were left practically alone in the world; for their brother John held aloof, desiring that Mary should remain in the asylum. Charles had had an attack of insanity in the winter of 1795-6; it was, perhaps, in consequence of this, and the care of his sister, that he gave up the idea of marrying the Anna of his sonnets. He had no return of the madness, but Mary had frequent relapses, the approach of which she felt in time to enable her to retire to the lunatic asylum.

It was in 1796 that Lamb first appeared as an author, when four sonnets by him were published in a volume of Coleridge's poems.

Lamb's first attempt in prose, exclusive of letters, was the tale of *Rosamund Gray* (1798), incongruous and improbable, showing the author's weakness in narrative, but exhibiting the pathos, quaintness of description and appropriateness of quotation which form the excellence of the *Essays of Elia*. Of it Shelley wrote: "What a lovely thing is his *Rosamund Gray*! How much knowledge of the sweetest and deepest part of our nature is in it!" In the same year he wrote what is perhaps the best known of his poems, the first stanza of which he afterwards omitted—

"Where are they gone, the old familiar faces?  
I had a mother, but she died and left me—  
Died prematurely in a day of horrors—  
All, all are gone, the old familiar faces."

For the first seventeen years of the present century, Charles and Mary Lamb resided within the precincts of the Temple; first in Mitre Court Buildings, then in Inner Temple Lane. At the beginning of this period, Charles was employed as an occasional writer of trifles for newspapers, but he soon attempted more ambitious work.

*Rosamund Gray* had shown that he was defective in the qualities which a novelist and a dramatist alike must possess.

In 1806 Lamb succeeded in getting a farce accepted at Drury Lane. The following year was published the collection of *Tales from Shakespeare*, the comedies by Mary Lamb, the tragedies by Charles. This was for both a congenial task, and one for which,

from the special bent of their studies, they were thoroughly qualified.

With the exception of Shakespeare, the Elizabethan dramatists and without exception those of the following half century, were unknown to the public of eighty years ago. A rich literary mine was opened to them in Lamb's *Specimens of English Dramatic Poets contemporary with Shakespeare*; and the notes which he added placed him in the first rank of critics.

In 1817 the brother and sister left the Temple for the second time and took lodgings in great Russell Street, Covent Garden, and next year a collective edition of Lamb's works appeared in two volumes.

In January, 1820, appeared the first monthly part of *London Magazine*, though it numbered among its contributors the most eminent literary men of the day, it was never a pecuniary success, and in 1826 ceased to exist. For it Lamb wrote some forty-five essays, beginning in August, 1820, with the one entitled *The South Sea House*; this he signed with the pseudonym *Elia*, the name of the Italian already mentioned as engaged in the South Sea House, but of whom nothing further is known. This word, Lamb tells us, ought to be pronounced Ell-ia. He continued to employ this *nom de plume*, and in 1823 a collection of the essays which had up to that time appeared, was published under the title of *Essays of Elia*.

Owing chiefly to the greater frequency of Mary Lamb's attacks they gave up housekeeping in 1829, and boarded at a house in the same neighborhood. In 1833 they made their last move to the house of Mr. and Mrs. Walden, at Edmonton, that Mary might be continually under their care.

Coleridge died the following year. "Coleridge is dead," Lamb kept repeating; and he survived his friend but a few months. A slight hurt on the face, caused by a fall, brought on an attack of erysipelas, and his life ended December 27, 1834. Mary survived until 1847.

Though, according to Leigh Hunt, "there never was a true portrait of Lamb," we have descriptions by Talfourd, Procter, Hood and others, which enable us to picture him in imagination: "A light frame, so fragile that it seemed as if a breath would overthrow it, clad in clerk-like black, was surmounted by a head of form and expression the most noble and sweet. His black hair

curled crisply about an expanded forehead; his eyes, softly brown, twinkled with varying expression, though the prevalent feeling was sad; and the nose slightly curved, and delicately carved at the nostril, with the lower outline of the face regularly oval, completed a head which was finely placed on the shoulders, and gave importance and even dignity to a diminutive and shadowy stem. Who shall describe his countenance, catch its quivering sweetness, and fix it for ever in words? There are none, alas, to answer the vain desire of friendship. Deep thought, striving with humor; the lines of suffering wreathed into cordial mirth; and a smile of painful sweetness, present an image to the mind it can as little describe as lose. His personal appearance and manner are not unfitly characterized by what he himself says in one of his letters to Manning, of Braham, 'a compound of the Jew, the gentleman, and the angel.'

So Talfourd describes him; and all who knew him intimately note his gravity, sadness and sweetness. Lamb's natural shyness produced a false impression upon strangers, before whom he was either silent or gave utterance to ideas and sentiments quite untrue to his nature. In a Preface to the second series of the *Essays of Elia*, Lamb gives what purports to be a character of Elia. It is of himself that he really makes the following remarks:—

"My late friend was in many respects a singular character. Those who did not like him, hated him; and some, who once liked him, afterwards became his bitterest haters. The truth is, he gave himself too little concern what he uttered, and in whose presence. He observed neither time nor place, and would e'en out with what came uppermost. With the severe religionists he would pass for a free-thinker; while the other faction set him down for a bigot, or persuaded themselves that he belied his sentiments. Few understood him, and I am not certain that at all times he quite understood himself. He too much affected that dangerous figure—irony. He sowed doubtful speeches, and reaped plain, unequivocal hatred. He would interrupt the gravest discussion with some light jest; and yet, perhaps, not quite irrelevant in ears that could understand it. Your long and much talkers hated him. The informal habit of his mind, joined to an inveterate impediment of speech, forbade him to be an orator; and he seemed determined that no one else should play that part

when he was present. He was *petit* and ordinary in his person and appearance. I have seen him sometimes in what is called good company, but where he has been a stranger, sit silent and be suspected for an odd fellow; till some unlucky occasion provoking it, he would stutter out some senseless pun (not altogether senseless, perhaps, if rightly taken) which has stamped his character for the evening. It was hit or miss with him; but nine times out of ten he contrived by this device to send away a whole company his enemies. His conceptions rose kindlier than his utterance, and his happiest *impromptus* had the appearance of effort. He has been accused of trying to be witty, when in truth he was but struggling to give his poor thoughts articulation. He chose his companions for some individuality of character which they manifested. Hence not many persons of science, and few professed *litterati*, were of his councils. They were, for the most part, persons of an uncertain fortune; and as to such people commonly nothing is more obnoxious than a gentleman of settled (though moderate) income, he passed with most of them for a great miser. To my knowledge this was a mistake. His *intimados*, to confess a truth, were in the world's eye a ragged regiment. He found them floating on the surface of society; and the color, or something else, in the weed pleased him. The burrs stuck to him; but they were good and loving burrs for all that. He never greatly cared for the society of what are called good people. If any of these were scandalized (and offenses were sure to arise) he could not help it. When he has been remonstrated with for not making more concessions to the feelings of good people, he would retort by asking what one point did these good people ever concede to him? He was temperate in his meals and diversions, but always kept a little on this side of abstemiousness. Only in the use of the Indian weed he might be thought a little excessive. He took it, he would say, as a solvent of speech. Marry—as the friendly vapor ascended, how his prattle would curl up sometimes with it! the ligaments which tongue-tied him were loosened, and the stammerer proceeded a statist!"

Lamb's generosity was great, even in the days of his pecuniary difficulties; and as his income increased he gave more and more liberally to all who needed help. Nor did he confine himself to giving money, but whenever he could be of use spared neither time nor trouble. He spent little on himself, and before he knew

that the directors of the India House would grant his sister a pension, he had laid by £2,000 for her.

Lamb's position in literature is a remarkable one. We have seen that he was not a dramatist; he could not, like Chaucer, Shakespeare, or such modern novelists as Thackeray and Dickens, throw himself into, and depict with truth, various characters. He could not construct a plot; he had no idea of unity of action. He was not, on the other hand, a subjective poet, like Byron and Shelley, whom he neither understood nor liked. He could not give utterance to great emotions, which were not in his nature. What he could do, and what he did to perfection in the *Essays of Elia*, was to seize on the salient features, good or bad, in individuals or in institutions, and show them to the world in that terse, expressive style which he imbibed in his earliest childhood from the old English pre-restoration authors, whose works he found in Mr. Salt's library. He must not be regarded as a plagiarist or as a mere echo of that literary period, but rather as a distinct and noteworthy genius of the same school. If Lamb uses their language, it is because he has made that language his own; if he quotes them, as he does so often, the very inaccuracy of his quotations proves how spontaneous they were.

His limitations as a critic are well put by Mr. Ainger: "Where his heart was, there his judgment was sound. Where he actively disliked, or was passively indifferent, his critical powers remained dormant. He was too fond of paradox, too much at the mercy of his emotions or the mood of the hour, to be a safe guide always. But where no disturbing forces interfered, he exercised a faculty almost unique in the history of criticism."

The *Essays of Elia* are in great part biographical; but so much does Lamb delight to mystify the reader, that he makes numerous fictitious statements, and when he records facts he hints that he is inventing. He delights to alter names and dates, and even to speak of the same person under different names in different essays. Were it not for outside information we should be at a loss to distinguish truth from fiction.

Not only ought the study of these selected Essays to lead to a more thorough investigation of the *Essays of Elia*, but Lamb ought to be regarded as an easy introduction to those authors who were his models and in whose works the English language arrived at maturity.

# SELECTIONS FROM CHARLES LAMB.

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## A Dissertation Upon Roast Pig.

MANKIND, says a Chinese manuscript, which my friend M. was obliging enough to read and explain to me, for the first seventy thousand ages ate their meat raw, clawing or biting it from the living animal, just as they do in Abyssinia to this day. This period is not obscurely hinted at by their great Confucius in the second chapter of his "Mundane Mutations," where he designates a kind of golden age by the term Chofang, literally the Cooks' Holiday. The manuscript goes on to say, that the art of roasting, or rather broiling (which I take to be the elder-brother) was accidentally discovered in the manner <sup>10</sup> following. The swineherd, Ho-ti, having gone out into the woods one morning, as his manner was, to collect mast for his hogs, left his cottage in the care of his eldest son, Bo-bo, a great lubberly boy, who being fond of playing with fire, as younkens of his age commonly are, let some sparks escape into a bundle of straw which, kindling quickly, spread the conflagration over every part of their poor mansion, till it was reduced to ashes. Together with the cottage (a sorry antediluvian make-shift of a building, you may think it), what was of much more importance, a fine litter of new-farrowed pigs, <sup>20</sup> no less than nine in number, perished. China pigs have been esteemed a luxury all over the east, from the remotest periods that we read of. Bo-bo was in the utmost consternation, as you may think, not so much for the sake of the tenement, which his father and he could easily build up again with a few

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1. **Says a Chinese Manuscript.** A dignified manner of attempting to give the appearance of historic accuracy to the rest of the narrative.

12. **Mast.** Literally, nourishment. Here referring to nuts, acorns, etc.

15. **Younkers.** Youngsters, a colloquial term applied to young persons.

dry branches, and the labor of an hour or two, at any time, as for the loss of the pigs. While he was thinking what he should say to his father, and wringing his hands over the smoking remnants of one of those untimely sufferers, an odor assailed  
 30 his nostrils, unlike any scent which he had before experienced. What could it proceed from?—not from the burnt cottage—he had smelt that smell before—indeed this was by no means the first accident of the kind which had occurred through the negligence of this unlucky young fire-brand. Much less did it resemble that of any known herb, weed, or flower. A premonitory moistening at the same time overflowed his nether lip. He knew not what to think. He next stooped down to feel the pig, if there were any signs of life in it. He burnt his fingers, and to cool them he applied them in his booby  
 40 fashion to his mouth. Some of the crumbs of the scorched skin had come away with his fingers, and for the first time in his life (in the world's life indeed, for before him no man had known it) he tasted—*crackling!* Again he felt and fumbled at the pig. It did not burn him so much now; still he licked his fingers from a sort of habit. The truth at length broke into his slow understanding, that it was the pig that smelt so, and the pig that tasted so delicious: and, surrendering himself up to the new-born pleasure, he fell to tearing up whole handfuls of the scorched skin with the flesh next it, and was  
 50 cramming it down his throat in his beastly fashion, when his sire entered amid the smoking rafters, armed with retributory cudgel, and finding how affairs stood, began to rain blows upon the young rogue's shoulders, as thick as hail-stones, which Bo-bo heeded not any more than if they had been flies. The tickling pleasure, which he experienced in his lower regions, had rendered him quite callous to any inconveniences he might feel in those remote quarters. His father might lay

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26. **A few dry branches and the labor of an hour or two.** A definition of what is above dignified by the name of mansion.

39. **Booby.** Dunce, derived from the name given to a species of water-fowls that are regarded as stupid. The word is suggestive of the origin of Bo-bo's name.

43. **Crackling.** The rind of roasted pork.

43. **Fumbled.** Well illustrating how accidental was the discovery that followed.



on, but he could not beat him from his pig, till he had fairly made an end of it, when, becoming a little more sensible of his situation, something like the following dialogue ensued. 60

“You graceless whelp, what have you got there devouring? Is it not enough that you have burnt me down three houses with your dog’s tricks, and be hanged to you! but you must be eating fire, and I know not what—what have you got there, I say?”

“O father, the pig, the pig! do come and taste how nice the burnt pig eats.”

The ears of Ho-ti tingled with horror. He cursed his son, and he cursed himself, that ever he should beget a son that should eat burnt pig. 70

Bo-bo, whose scent was wonderfully sharpened since morning, soon raked out another pig, and fairly rending it asunder, thrust the lesser half by main force into the fists of Ho-ti, still shouting out, “Eat, eat, eat the burnt pig, father; only taste—O Lord!”—with such-like barbarous ejaculations, cramming all the while as if he would choke.

Ho-ti trembled in every joint while he grasped the abominable thing, wavering whether he should not put his son to death for an unnatural young monster, when the crackling scorching his fingers, as it had done his son’s and applying the same remedy to them, he in his turn tasted some of its flavor, which, make what sour mouths he would for pretense, proved not altogether displeasing to him. In conclusion (for the manuscript here is a little tedious), both father and son fairly sat down to the mess, and never left off till they had despatched all that remained of the litter. 80

Bo-bo was strictly enjoined not to let the secret escape, for the neighbors would certainly have stoned them for a couple of abominable wretches, who could think of improving upon the good meat which God had sent them. Nevertheless, 90 strange stories got about. It was observed that Ho-ti’s cottage was burnt down now more frequently than ever. Nothing but fires from this time forward. Some would break out in

broad day, others in the night-time. As often as the sow farrowed, so sure was the house of Ho-ti to be in a blaze : and Ho-ti himself, which was the more remarkable, instead of chastising his son, seemed to grow more indulgent to him than ever. At length they were watched, the terrible mystery discovered, and father and son summoned to take their trial  
 100 at Peking, then an inconsiderable assize town. Evidence was given, the obnoxious food itself produced in court, and verdict about to be pronounced, when the foreman of the jury begged that some of the burnt pig, of which the culprits stood accused, might be handed into the box. He handled it, and they all handled it ; and burning their fingers, as Bo-bo and his father had done before them, and nature prompting to each of them the same remedy, against the face of all the facts, and the clearest charge which judge had ever given,—to the surprise  
 110 of the whole court, townsfolk, strangers, reporters, and all present—without leaving the box, or any manner of consultation whatever, they brought in a simultaneous verdict of not guilty.

The judge, who was a shrewd fellow, winked at the manifest iniquity of the decision ; and when the court was dismissed, went privily, and bought up all the pigs that could be had for love or money. In a few days his Lordship's town-house was observed to be on fire. The thing took wing, and now there was nothing to be seen but fires in every direction. Fuel and pigs grew enormously dear all over the district. — The insurance-  
 120 offices one and all shut up shop. People built slighter and slighter every day, until it was feared that the very science of architecture would in no long time be lost to the world. Thus this custom of firing houses continued, till in process of time, says my manuscript, a sage arose, like our Locke, who made a discovery, that the flesh of swine, or indeed of any other animal, might be cooked (*burnt*, as they called it) without the necessity of consuming a whole house to dress it. Then first began the rude form of a gridiron. Roasting by the string, or

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119. **The insurance offices.** An anachronism that only lends to the absurdity of the whole paragraph.

spit, came in a century or two later, I forget in whose dynasty. By such slow degrees, concludes the manuscript, do the most <sup>130</sup> useful, and seemingly the most obvious arts, make their way among mankind.

Without placing too implicit faith in the account above given, it must be agreed, that if a worthy pretext for so dangerous an experiment as setting houses on fire (especially in these days) could be assigned in favor of any culinary object, that pretext and excuse might be found in ROAST PIG.

Of all the delicacies in the whole *mundus edibilis*, I will maintain it to be the most delicate—*princeps obsoniorum*.

I speak not of your grown porkers—things between pig and <sup>140</sup> pork—those hobbydehoys—but a young and tender suckling—under a moon old—guiltless as yet of the sty—with no original speck of the *ammmor iunditiæ*, the hereditary failing of the first parent, yet manifest—his voice as yet not broken, but something between a childish treble and a grumble—the mild forerunner, or *præludium*, of a grunt.

*He must be roasted.* I am not ignorant that our ancestors ate them seethed, or boiled—but what a sacrifice of the exterior tegument!

There is no flavor comparable, I will contend, to that of the <sup>150</sup> crisp, tawny, well-watched, not over-roasted, *crackling*, as it is well called—the very teeth are invited to their share of the pleasure at this banquet in overcoming the coy, brittle resistance—with the adhesive oleaginous—oh call it not fat! but an indefinable sweetness growing up to it—the tender blossoming of fat—fat cropped in the bud—taken in the shoot—in the first innocence—the cream and quintessence of the child-pig's yet pure food—the lean, no lean, but a kind of animal manna—or, rather, fat and lean (if it must be so) so blended and running into each other, that both together make but one <sup>160</sup> ambrosian result, or common substance.

138. *Mundus edibilis*. Literally, the edible world, the sum total of all things eatable.

139. *Princeps obsoniorum*. The chief of delicacies.

143. *Amor immunditiæ*. Love of uncleanness.

146. *Præludium*. Prelude.

150. Note the mock heroic throughout this and the following paragraph.

Behold him, while he is "doing"—it seemeth rather a refreshing warmth, than a scorching heat, that he is so passive to. How equably he twirleth round the string!—Now he is just done. To see the extreme sensibility of that tender age! he hath wept out his pretty eyes—radiant jellies—shooting stars.

See him in the dish, his second cradle, how meek he lieth!—wouldst thou have had this innocent grow up to the grossness and indocility which too often accompany maturer swinehood? Ten to one he would have proved a glutton, a sloven, an obstinate disagreeable animal—wallowing in all manner of filthy conversation—from these sins he is happily snatched away—

Ere sin could blight or sorrow fade,  
Death came with timely care—

his memory is odoriferous—no clown curseth, while his stomach half rejecteth, the rank bacon—no coalheaver bolteth in reeking sausages—he hath a fair sepulcher in the grateful stomach of the judicious epicure—and for such a tomb might be content to die.

He is the best of sapers. Pine-apple is great. She is indeed almost too transcendent—a delight, if not sinful, yet so like to sinning, that really a tender-conscienced person would do well to pause—too ravishing for mortal taste, she woundeth and excoriateth the lips that approach her—like lovers' kisses, she biteth—she is a pleasure bordering on pain from the fierceness and insanity of her relish—but she stoppeth at the palate—she meddleth not with the appetite—and the coarsest hunger might barter her consistently for a mutton chop.

Pig—let me speak his praise—is no less provocative of the appetite, than he is satisfactory to the criticalness of the censorious palate. The strong man may batten on him, and the weakling refuseth not his mild juices.

Unlike to mankind's mixed characters, a bundle of virtues and vices, inexplicably intertwisted and not to be unraveled

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182. **Sapers.** Flavors.

193. **Batten.** Fatten.

without hazard, he is—good throughout. No part of him is better or worse than another. He helpeth, as far as his little means extend, all around. He is the least envious of banquets. He is all neighbors' fare. 200

I am one of those who freely and ungrudgingly impart a share of the good things of this life which fall to their lot (few as mine are in this kind) to a friend. I protest I take as great an interest in my friend's pleasures, his relishes, and proper satisfactions, as in mine own. "Presents," I often say, "endear Absents." Hares, pheasants, partridges, snipes, barn-door chickens (those "tame villatic fowl"), capons, plovers, brawn, barrels of oysters, I dispense as freely as I receive them. I love to taste them, as it were, upon the tongue of my friend. But a stop must be put somewhere. One would not, 210 like Lear, "give everything." I make my stand upon pig. Methinks it is an ingratitude to the Giver of all good flavors, to extradomiciliate, or send out of the house slightly (under pretext of friendship, or I know not what), a blessing so particularly adapted, predestined, I may say, to my individual palate. It argues an insensibility.

I remember a touch of conscience in this kind at school. My good old aunt, who never parted from me at the end of a holiday without stuffing a sweet-meat, or some nice thing, into my pocket, had dismissed me one evening with a smoking 220 plum-cake, fresh from the oven. In my way to school (it was over London Bridge) a gray-headed old beggar saluted me (I have no doubt at this time of day, that he was a counterfeit). I had no pence to console him with, and in the vanity of self-denial, and the very coxcombrity of charity, schoolboy-like, I made him a present of—the whole cake! I walked on a little, buoyed up, as one is on such occasions, with a sweet soothing of self-satisfaction; but before I had got to the end of the bridge, my better feelings returned, and I burst into tears, thinking how ungrateful I had been to my good aunt, to go 230

205. **Presents endear absents.** Note the play upon words.

207. **Villatic.** Pertaining to a village.

209. **Brawn.** The meat of the boar.

211. **Lear.** Shakespeare's character King Lear.

and give her good gift away to a stranger that I had never seen before, and who might be a bad man for aught I knew ; and then I thought of the pleasure my aunt would be taking in thinking that I—I myself and not another—would eat her nice cake—and what should I say to her the next time I saw her—how naughty I was to part with her pretty present!—and the odor of that spicy cake came back upon my recollection, and the pleasure and the curiosity I had taken in seeing her make it, and her joy when she had sent it to the oven, and  
 240 how disappointed she would feel that I had never had a bit of it in my mouth at last—and I blamed my impertinent spirit of alms-giving, and out-of-place hypocrisy of goodness ; and above all, I wished never to see the face again of that insidious, good-for-nothing, old gray impostor.

Our ancestors were nice in their method of sacrificing these tender victims. We read of pigs whipt to death with something of a shock, as we hear of any other obsolete custom. The age of discipline is gone by, or it would be curious to inquire (in a philosophical light merely) what effect this process  
 250 might have towards intenerating and dulcifying a substance, naturally so mild and dulcet as the flesh of young pigs. It looks like refining a violet. Yet we should be cautious, while we condemn the inhumanity, how we censure the wisdom of the practice. It might impart a gusto.

I remember an hypothesis, argued upon by the young students, when I was at St. Omer's and maintained with much learning and pleasantry on both sides, "Whether, supposing that the flavor of a pig who obtained his death by whipping (*per flagellationem extremam*) superadded a pleasure upon  
 260 the palate of a man more intense than any possible suffering we can conceive in the animal, is man justified in using that method of putting the animal to death?" I forget the decision.

His sauce should be considered—decidedly a few bread crumbs, done up with his liver and brains, and a dash of mild sage. But banish, dear Mrs. Cook, I beseech you, the whole

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250. *Intenerating*. Making tender. *Dulcifying*. Making sweet.  
 259. *Per flagellationem extremam*. Through excessive whipping.

onion tribe. Barbecue your whole hogs to your palate, steep them in shallots, stuff them out with plantations of the rank and guilty garlic; you cannot poison them, or make them stronger than they are—but consider he is a weakling—a flower.

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### Detached Thoughts on Books and Reading.

To mind the inside of a book is to entertain one's self with the forced product of another man's brain. Now I think a man of quality and breeding may be much amused with the natural sprouts of his own.—Lord Foppington, in "*The Relapse*."

AN ingenious acquaintance of my own was so much struck with this bright sally of his Lordship, that he has left off reading altogether, to the great improvement of his originality. At the hazard of losing some credit on this head, I must confess that I dedicate no inconsiderable portion of my time to other people's thoughts. I dream away my life in other's speculations. I love to lose myself in other men's minds. When I am not walking, I am reading; I cannot sit and think. Books think for me.

I have no repugnances. Shaftesbury is not too genteel for me, nor Jonathan Wild too low. I can read anything which I call *a book*. There are things in that shape which I cannot allow for such.

In this catalogue of *books which are no books—biblia a-biblia*—I reckon Court Calendars, Directories, Pocket Books (the Literary excepted), Draught Boards bound and lettered on the back, Scientific Treatises, Almanacs, Statutes at Large: the

4. **The Relapse**, a comedy, by Sir John Vanbrugh (1666-1726). Lord Foppington, one of the characters, is an empty coxcomb.

14. **Shaftesbury** (1671-1713), Third Earl. Author of *Characteristics of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times*.

15. **Jonathan Wild**, the history of a police spy, an ironical panegyric, intended to expose "the motives which actuate the unprincipled great in every walk and sphere of life." The author, who is mentioned further on in this Essay, was Henry Fielding (1707-1754), whose greatest novel was *Tom Jones* (1749), also mentioned in this Essay.

18. **Biblia a-biblia**. (Gk.) books, not-books; *i.e.* which do not deserve the title.

20. **Literary excepted**. Lamb was a contributor to the *Literary Pocket-book*,

works of Hume, Gibbon, Robertson, Beattie, Soame Jenyns, and generally, all those volumes which "no gentleman's library should be without:" the Histories of Flavius Josephus (that learned Jew), and Paley's Moral Philosophy. With these exceptions, I can read almost anything. I bless my stars for a taste so catholic, so unexcluding.

I confess that it moves my spleen to see these *things in books' clothing* perched upon shelves, like false saints, usurpers  
 30 of true shrines, intruders into the sanctuary, thrusting out the legitimate occupants. To reach down a well-bound semblance of a volume, and hope it some kind-hearted playbook, then, opening what "seem its leaves," to come bolt upon a withering Population Essay. To expect a Steele or a Farquhar, and find — Adam Smith. To view a well-arranged assortment of block-headed encyclopædias (Anglicanas or Metropolitanas) set out in an array of Russia or morocco, when a tithe of that good leather would comfortably re-clothe my shivering folios, would renovate Paracelsus himself, and enable old Raymund Lully  
 40 to look like himself again in the world. I never see these impostors, but I long to strip them, to warm my ragged veterans in their spoils.

22. **Hume, David** (1711-1776), author of the well-known *History of England*, and a *Treatise on Human Nature*.

22. **Gibbon, Edward** (1737-1794), noted for his great history of the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*.

22. **Robertson, William** (1721-1793), author of *History of Scotland*, during the Reigns of Queen Mary and of King James VI., *History of the Reign of Charles V.*, *History of America*.

22. **Beattie, James** (1735-1803), a poet, author of the *Minstrel*.

22. **Soame Jenyns** (1704-1787), author of *Enquiry into the Origin of Evil*, and *View of the Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion*.

24. **Flavius Josephus**, author of *Antiquities of the Jews*, and *Wars of the Jews*. He died about A.D. 100.

25. **Paley, William** (1743-1805), author of *Principles of Moral and Political Philosophy* (1785), alluded to here.

27. **Catholic**, in the literal sense, *universal*.

34. **Population Essay**, probably referring to the *Essay on the Principle of Population*, by Thomas Malthus (1766-1834).

34. **Steele, Sir Richard** (1675-1729). Founder of the periodicals *Tatler*, *Spectator*, *Guardian*, and author of several comedies.

34. **Farquhar, George** (1678-1707), a dramatist.

35. **Adam Smith** (1720-1790), founder of the science of Political Economy.

39. **Paracelsus, Philip Aureolus Theophrastus** (1493-1541), a native of Switzerland, a wandering quack physician and a diligent chemist. He excited animosity by opposing the theory and practice of medicine in vogue in his time.

39. **Raymund Lully** (1234-1315). Author of *Ars Magna*. The great idea of his life was the conversion of the Mussulmans.



To be strong-backed and neat-bound is the desideratum of a volume. Magnificence comes after. This, when it can be afforded, is not to be lavished upon all kinds of books indiscriminately. I would not dress a set of magazines, for instance, in full suit. The dishabille or half-binding (with Russia backs ever) is *our* custom. A Shakespeare or a Milton (unless the first editions), it were mere foppery to trick out in gay apparel. The possession of them confers no distinction. The exterior <sup>50</sup> of them (the things themselves being so common), strange to say, raises no sweet emotions, no tickling sense of property in the owner. Thomson's *Seasons*, again, looks best (I maintain it) a little torn and dog's-eared. How beautiful to a genuine lover of reading are the sullied leaves and worn-out appearance, nay, the very odor (beyond Russia) if we would not forget kind feelings in fastidiousness, of an old "Circulating Library," Tom Jones, or Vicar of Wakefield! How they speak of the thousand thumbs that have turned over their pages with delight! of the lone seamstress, whom they may have cheered <sup>60</sup> (milliner, or hard-working mantua-maker) after her long day's needle-toil, running far into midnight, when she has snatched an hour, ill spared from sleep, to steep her cares, as in some Lethean cup, in spelling out their enchanting contents! Who would have them a whit less soiled? What better condition could we desire to see them in?

In some respects the better a book is, the less it demands from binding. Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and all that class of perpetually self-reproductive volumes—Great Nature's Stereotypes—we see them individually perish with less regret, <sup>70</sup> because we know the copies of them to be "eterne." But

48. **Shakespeare** (1564-1616), generally admitted to be the greatest creator of characters.

48. **Milton** (1608-1674), not in the least a dramatist, but the greatest English epic poet. Of his prose works, the *Areopagitica*, in favor of unlicensed printing, is the most celebrated.

53. **Thomson's Seasons**. Besides the *Seasons*, James Thomson (1700-1748) wrote *Liberty*, *The Castle of Indolence*, and some plays.

58. **Vicar of Wakefield** (1766), the well-known novel, by Oliver Goldsmith (1728-1774).

61. **Mantua-maker**, dressmaker.

64. **Lethean**, causing to forget.

68. **Smollett**, Tobias (1721-1771), a novelist, contemporary with Fielding.

68. **Sterne**. See *Essay on My Relations*.

71. **Eterne**, old form of eternal.

where a book is at once both good and rare—where the individual is almost the species, and when *that* perishes,

We know not where is that Promethean torch  
That can its light relumine—

such a book, for instance, as the Life of the Duke of Newcastle, by his Duchess—no casket is rich enough, no casing sufficiently durable, to honor and keep safe such a jewel.

Not only rare volumes of this description, which seem hope-  
80 less ever to be reprinted, but old editions of writers, such as Sir Philip Sydney, Bishop Taylor. Milton in his prose works, Fuller—of whom we *have* reprints, yet the books themselves, though they go about, and are talked of here and there, we know—have not endenized themselves (nor possibly ever will) in the national heart, so as to become stock books—it is good to possess these in durable and costly covers. I do not care for a First Folio of Shakespeare. [You cannot make a *pet*  
90 book of an author whom everybody reads.] I rather prefer the common editions of Rowe and Tonson, without notes, and with *plates*, which, being so execrably bad, serve as maps or modest remembrancers to the text; and without pretending to any supposable emulation with it, are so much better than the Shakespeare gallery *engravings*, which *did*. I have a community of feeling with my countrymen about his Plays, and I like those editions of his best which have been oftenest tumbled about and handled. On the contrary, I cannot read Beaumont and Fletcher but in Folio. The Octavo editions are painful to look at. I have no sympathy with them. If they were as much read as the current editions of the other poet, I

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75. **We know not.** . . . . Imperfectly remembered from *Othello*,  
"I know not where is that Promethean heat  
That can thy light relume."

81. **Sir Philip Sydney**, better written Sidney (1554-1586), killed at the battle of Zutphen.

81. **Bishop Taylor** (1613-1667). Jeremy Taylor, Bishop of Down and Connor, author of *Holy Living*, *Holy Dying*, etc.

82. **Fuller**. See Essay on "Christ's Hospital," note 151.

84. **Endenized**, made themselves denizens or naturalized citizens of.

89. **Tonson**, publisher of Rowe's, Pope's, and Theobald's editions of Shakespeare.

97. **Beaumont and Fletcher**, dramatists, who, working together, produced thirteen plays, the best known of which are *Philster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *A King and no King*, *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*.

should prefer them in that shape to the older one. I do not <sup>100</sup> know a more heartless sight than the reprint of the Anatomy of Melancholy. What need was there of unearthing the bones of that fantastic old great man, to expose them in a winding-sheet of the newest fashion to modern censure? What hapless stationer could dream of Burton ever becoming popular? The wretched Malone could not do worse when he bribed the sexton of Stratford Church to let him whitewash the painted effigy of old Shakespeare, which stood there, in rude but lively fashion depicted, to the very color of the cheek, the eye, the eyebrow, hair, the very dress he used to wear—the only au- <sup>110</sup>thentic testimony we had, however imperfect, of these curious parts and parcels of him. They covered him over with a coat of white paint. By —, if I had been a justice of peace for Warwickshire, I would have clapped both commentator and sexton fast in the stocks, for a pair of meddling sacrilegious varlets.

I think I see them at their work—these sapient troubletombs.

Shall I be thought fantastical if I confess that the names of some of our poets sound sweeter, and have a finer relish to the ear—to mine, at least—than that of Milton or of Shakespeare? <sup>120</sup> It may be that the latter are more staled and rung upon in common discourse. The sweetest names, and which carry a perfume in the mention, are Kit Marlowe, Drayton, Drummond of Hawthornden, and Cowley.

Much depends upon *when* and *where* you read a book. In the five or six impatient minutes, before the dinner is quite ready, who would think of taking up the Faerie Queene, for a stop-gap, or a volume of Bishop Andrews sermons?

106. **Malone**, Edmund (1741–1812), a Shakespearian editor and commentator.

116. **Varlet**, now used contemptuously, but originally a youth or groom.

123. **Kit Marlowe**, Christopher Marlowe (1564–1593), the dramatist, under the influence of whose majestic, but often bombastic style, Shakespeare composed his earliest historical plays.

123. **Drayton**, Michael (1563–1631), author of *Polyolbion*, a poetical description of England and Wales.

123. **Drummond**, William, of Hawthornden (1585–1649), author of sonnets and other short poems.

124. **Cowley**, Abraham (1618–1667), author of *Poetical Blossomes*, a collection of poems published when he was only fifteen.

128. **Andrews**, Launcelot (1565–1626), Bishop of Winchester, a celebrated Anglican theologian.

Milton almost requires a solemn service of music to be  
 130 played before you enter upon him. But he brings his music,  
 to which, who listens, had need bring docile thoughts, and  
 purged ears.

Winter evenings—the world shut out—with less of ceremony,  
 the gentle Shakespeare enters. At such a season, the *Tempest*,  
 or his own *Winter's Tale*.

These two poets you cannot avoid reading aloud to yourself,  
 or (as it chances) to some single person listening. More than  
 one—and it degenerates into an audience.

Books of quick interest, that hurry on for incidents, are for  
 140 the eye to glide over only. It will not do to read them out.  
 I could never listen to even the better kind of modern novels  
 without extreme irksomeness.

A newspaper, read out, is intolerable. In some of the bank  
 offices it is the custom (to save so much individual time) for  
 one of the clerks—who is the best scholar—to commence upon  
 the *Times* or the *Chronicle* and recite its entire contents aloud,  
*pro bono publico*. With every advantage of lungs and elocu-  
 tion, the effect is singularly vapid. In barbers' shops and  
 public-houses a fellow will get up and spell out a paragraph,  
 150 which he communicates as some discovery. Another follows  
 with *his* selection. So the entire journal transpires at length  
 by piece meal. Seldom-readers are slow readers, and, without  
 this expedient, no one in the company would probably ever  
 travel through the contents of a whole paper.

Newspapers always excite curiosity. No one ever lays one  
 down without a feeling of disappointment.

What an eternal time that gentleman in black at Nando's  
 keeps the paper! I am sick of hearing the waiter bawling  
 out incessantly, "The *Chronicle* is in hand, Sir."

160 [As in these little diurnals I generally skip the Foreign  
 News, the Debates, and the Politics, I find the *Morning Herald*  
 by far the most entertaining of them. It is an agreeable mis-  
 cellany rather than a newspaper.]

147. **Pro bono publico** (Lat.) for the general good.

157. **Nando's**, a coffee house.

160. **Diurnals**, journals. Both words are from Lat. *diurnalis*, but the  
 second comes through the French.

Coming into an inn at night—having ordered your supper—what can be more delightful than to find lying in the window-seat, left there time out of mind by the carelessness of some former guest—two or three numbers of the old *Town and Country Magazine*, with its amusing *tête-à-tête* pictures—“The Royal Lover and Lady G—:” “The Melting Platonic and the old Beau,”—and such-like antiquated scandal? Would you exchange it, —at that time, and in that place—for a better book.

Poor Tobin, who latterly fell blind, did not regret it so much for the weightier kinds of reading—the *Paradise Lost* or *Comus*, he could have *read* to him—but he missed the pleasure of skimming over with his own eye a magazine, or a light pamphlet.

I should not care to be caught in the serious avenues of some cathedral alone, and reading *Candide*.

I do not remember a more whimsical surprise than having been once detected, by a familiar damsel, reclined at my ease upon the grass, on Primrose Hill (her *Cythera*) reading—*Pamela*. There was nothing in the book to make a man seriously ashamed at the exposure; but as she seated herself down by me, and seemed determined to read in company, I could have wished it had been—any other book. We read on very sociably for a few pages; and, not finding the author much to her taste, she got up and went away. Gentle casuist I leave it to thee to conjecture, whether the blush (for there was one

168. **Tete-a-tete** (Fr.) head to head; used of two persons conversing apart from others.

173. **Tobin**, John (1770–1804), a dramatist. His *Life* had been published two years before this Essay appeared.

175. **Paradise Lost, or Comus**. The former, Milton's great epic, published 1667; the latter, a masque, acted at Ludlow Castle, 1634.

179. **Candide**, a tale written by Voltaire to ridicule Christianity.

182. **Primrose Hill**, north-west of London.

182. **Cythera**. One of the Ionian Isles sacred to Venus.

183. **Pamela** (1740). The first modern novel. It is in the form of letters. Pamela, the heroine, is a servant girl, whose virtue triumphs over great temptation.

Richardson, Fielding, and Smollett were the great eighteenth century novelists.

188. **Casuist**, one who decides cases of conscience.

between us) was the property of the nymph or the swain in  
 190 this dilemma. From me you shall never get the secret.

I am not much a friend to out-of-doors reading. I cannot settle my spirits to it. I knew a Unitarian minister who was generally to be seen upon Snow Hill (as yet Skinner's street *was not*) between the hours of ten and eleven in the morning, studying a volume of Lardner. I own this to have been a strain of abstraction beyond my reach. I used to admire how he sidled along, keeping clear of secular contacts. An illiterate encounter with a porter's knot, or a bread basket, would  
 200 have quickly put to flight all the theology I am master of, and have left me worse than indifferent to the five points.

I was once amused—there is a pleasure in *affecting* affectation—at the indignation of a crowd that was jostling in with me at the pit-door of Covent Garden Theater, to have a sight of Master Betty—then at once in his dawn and his meridian—in *Hamlet*. I had been invited, quite unexpectedly, to join a party, whom I met near the door of the playhouse, and I happened to have in my hand a large octavo of Johnson and Steevens' *Shakespeare*, which, the time not admitting of my  
 210 carrying it home, of course went with me to the theater. Just in the very heat and pressure of the doors opening—the *rush*, as I term it—I deliberately held the volume over my head, open at the scene in which the young Roscius had been most cried up, and quietly read by the lamp-light. The clamor became universal. “The affectation of the fellow,” cried one. “Look at that gentleman *reading*, papa,” squeaked

190. *Swain*, a boy or servant. Swain and nymph are poetically used for man and woman.

191. *Dilemma*, properly an argument by which the opponent is *caught between* two conclusions, either of which he must admit, and both of which tell against him.

194. *Snow Hill*, the old route from Holborn Bridge to Newgate, superseded by Skinner-street in 1802.

196. *Lardner*, Nathaniel (1684-1768), a theologian of Unitarian views.

198. *Sidle*, to move sideways.

199. *Porter's knot*, a pad on the head to support burdens.

201. *Five Points*, the leading tenets of Calvinists, *Original Sin*, *Predestination*, *Irresistible Grace*, *Particular Redemption*, *Final Perseverance*.

205. *Master Betty*, a boy of thirteen, who appeared as a tragic actor at Covent Garden and excited great enthusiasm (1806-7).

209. *Johnson and Steevens*. Johnson's edition of Shakespeare appeared in 1765. His work was united with that of Steevens some years later.

a young lady, who, in her admiration of the novelty, almost forgot her fears. I read on. "He ought to have his book knocked out of his hand," exclaimed a pursy cit, whose arms were too fast pinioned to his side to suffer him to execute his kind intention. Still I read on—and, till the time came to pay my money, kept as unmoved as St. Anthony at his holy offices, with the satyrs, apes, and hobgoblins, mopping and making mouths at him, in the picture, while the good man sits as undisturbed at the sight as if he were the sole tenant of the desert. The individual rabble (I recognized more than one of their ugly faces) had damned a slight piece of mine a few nights before, and I was determined the culprits should not a second time put me out of countenance.

There is a class of street readers, whom I can never contemplate without affection—the poor gentry, who, not having wherewithal to buy or hire a book, fileh a little learning at the open stalls—the owner, with his hard eye, casting envious looks at them all the while, and thinking when they will have done. Venturing tenderly, page after page, expecting every moment when he shall interpose his interdict, and yet unable to deny themselves the gratification, they "snatch a fearful joy." Martin B——, in this way, by daily fragments, got through two volumes of *Clarissa*, when the stall-keeper damped his laudable ambition by asking him (it was in his younger days) whether he meant to purchase the work. M. declares, that under no circumstance in his life did he ever peruse a book with half the satisfaction which he took in those uneasy

219. **Pursy**, short-winded.

219. **Cit**, short for citizen or city man.

222. **St. Anthony** (251–356), the founder of monasticism in the East. He is represented as hindered in his devotions by demons in various forms.

223. **Satyrs**, Greek wood-gods.

223. **Hobgoblin**, specially applied to Puck or Robin Goodfellow.

223. **Mopping**, grimacing.

227. **Slight piece**, Lamb's farce, entitled *Mr. H——*. It failed from want of interest in the plot.

238. **Snatch a fearful joy** :

"Still as they run, they look behind,  
They hear a voice in every wind,  
And snatch a fearful joy."

Gray's Ode on *Eton College*.

238. **Martin B——**, Martin Charles Burney, son of Admiral Burney. He died in 1852.

snatches. A quaint poetess of our day has moralized upon  
 245 this subject in two very touching but homely stanzas :

## THE TWO BOYS.

<p>I saw a boy with eager eye          Open a book upon a stall,          And read, as he'd devour it all;          Which, when the stall man did            espy,          Soon to the boy I heard him call,          "You, sir, you never buy a book,          Therefore in one you shall not            look."          The boy pass'd slowly on, and with            a sigh          He wished he had never been taught            to read,          Then of the old churl's books he            should have had no need.</p>	<p>Of sufferings the poor have many          Which never can the rich annoy.          I soon perceived another boy,          Who look'd as if he had not any          Food—for that day at least—enjoy          The sight of cold meat in a tavern            larder.          This boy's case, then, thought I, is            surely harder,          Thus hungry, longing, thus without            a penny,          Beholding choice of dainty-dressed            meat;          No wonder if he wish he ne'er had            learn'd to eat.</p>
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The South Sea House.<sup>1</sup>

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 thy suburban retreat northerly,—didst thou never observe a melancholy-looking, handsome, brick and stone edifice, to the left—where Thread-needle-street abuts upon Bishopsgate? I dare say thou hast often admired its magnificent portals ever gaping wide, and

244. **Quaint poetess**, Mary Lamb. This poem, entitled *The Two Boys*, is in the *Poetry for Children*, by Charles and Mary Lamb.

1. This was the house of business of the notorious South Sea Company, established in 1711, as a means of relieving the public burdens. This Company undertook to pay the interest of the National Debt, and was granted in return the monopoly of a trade to the coast of Peru. The single voyage of one ship in 1717 was all the South Sea Trade attempted. In any history of the reign of George I., may be read an account of the fraudulent proceedings, in consequence of which this speculation is known as the South Sea Bubble.

2. **Bank**, Bank of England.

4. **Lean annuitant**, one who draws a small yearly income. Contrast the expression 'a fat living.' Lamb's salary in the India House was not small at the time this was written. But he writes in the character of Elia.

4. **Flower Pot**, the inn from which started the coach for the North.

5. **Dalston or Shacklewell**, north suburbs of London where the rents are low, likely, in consequence, to be the residence of "lean annuitants."

5. **Some other thy**, a construction common in Elizabethan dramatists, whose style Lamb often follows.



disclosing to view a grave court, with cloisters, and pillars, <sup>10</sup> with few or no traces of goers-in or comers-out—a desolation something like Balclutha's.

This was once a house of trade—a center 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 with venerable faces of beadles, door-keepers—directors <sup>20</sup> 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 ink-stands 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, <sup>30</sup> short of the last, conflagration:—with vast ranges of cellarage 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.

12. **Balclutha.** “I passed by the walls of Balclutha, and they were desolate.” Ossian (Lamb's note). Balclutha means *Town on the Clyde*.

29. **Buckets,** to be employed in case of fire

32. **Pieces of eight.** The Spanish coin *piastre*, so called as worth *eight reals*. The dollar of the United States was taken from this, and is of about the same value.

33. **Unsunned heap,** hidden hoard, which the sun does not shine on.

“You may as well spread out the *unsunn'd heaps*  
Of misers' treasure by an outlaw's den,  
And tell me it is safe, as bid me hope,  
Danger will wink on opportunity.”

Milton's *Comus*, l. 398.

33. **Mammon.** The Syrian's god of riches. Probably suggested to Lamb by the word “unsunned,” for Spenser describes Mammon as “sunning his treasure hoar.” *Faerie Queene*. ii. 7.

35. **Bubble.** The South Sea Bubble. See note 1.

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 fresh-  
 40 ened 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 accumu-  
 50 lated 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  
 60 mysteries of that tremendous HOAX, whose extent the petty speculators 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  
 60 hey-day of present prosperity, with their important faces, as

37. **When I knew it.** Lamb had been employed there for a short time some thirty years before the publication at this Essay. Elia too, in whose name it was written, held a subordinate post there.

42. **Battenning**, to batten (from *bat.*, root of *better*) signifies *to grow fat, feed luxuriantly.*

44. **Fretwork.** The pages eaten through by moths would have this appearance.

50. **Tremendous hoax.** The South Sea scheme.

54. **Titan-size**, like a Titan, gigantic. In the same sense we generally say *colossal.*

54. **Vaux.** Guido Vaux, or Guy Fawkes, the agent of the conspirators for blowing up the Houses of Parliament, 1605.

55. **Manes**, a Latin word signifying benevolent spirits as opposed to the *larvæ* and *lemures*; also the souls of the dead. The latter sense is of course that of the text.

59. **'Change**, an abbreviation commonly used for the Royal Exchange.

59. **India House.** Offices of the East India Company founded 1600. It governed India until 1858, when its authority was transferred to the Crown.

60. **Hey-day.** The interjection *hey-day* is from Ger. *heida*: the mode of spelling is probably due to a supposed connection with *high-day*.

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 <sup>70</sup> 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 can look upon these defunct dragons with complacency. The heavy odd-shaped ivory-handled pen-knives (our ancestors had <sup>80</sup> everything on a larger scale than we have hearts for) are as good as anything from Herculaneum. The pounce boxes of our days have gone retrograde.

The very clerks which I remember in the South Sea House—I speak of forty years back—had an air very different from those in the public offices that I have had to do with since. They partook of the genius of the place!

69. **Tomes**, volumes.

72. **Rubric**. Lat. *rubrica*, red chalk, and then the title of a law because written in red. Lamb here uses the word as an adjective.

73. **Triple columniations**. The three columns, *£ s. d.*

74. **Superfluity of ciphers**, 00, when there was nothing to record in one of the columns.

78. **Better library**. Perhaps suggested by the phrase "better world." The binding gave them the air of something better than ledgers.

79. **Defunct dragons**. The ledgers no longer in use. "Living accounts," he says above, puzzled him. They were like live dragons.

82. **Herculaneum**. This town, Pompeii and Stabies were overwhelmed by an eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. They remained buried beneath sand and ashes until after 1700.

82. **Pounce boxes**, boxes with perforated lid for sprinkling pounce or powder (originally powdered pumice stone) to dry ink.

83. **Retrograde**, backwards; an adj. used adverbially. The pounce boxes were smaller than of yore

They were mostly (for the establishment did not admit of superfluous salaries) bachelors. Generally (for they had not  
 90 much to do) persons of a curious and speculative turn of mind. Old-fashioned, for a reason mentioned before. Humorists, for they were of all descriptions; and, not having been brought together in early life (which has a tendency to assimilate the members of corporate bodies to each other), but for the most part placed in this house in ripe or middle age, they necessarily carried into it their separate habits and oddities, unqualified, if I may so speak, as into a common stock. Hence they formed a sort of Noah's ark. Odd fishes. A lay-monastery. Domestic retainers in a great house, kept more  
 100 for show than use. Yet pleasant fellows, full of chat—and not a few among them had arrived at considerable proficiency on the German flute.

The cashier at that time was one Evans, a Cambro-Briton. He had something of the choleric complexion of his countrymen stamped on his visage, but was a worthy sensible man at bottom. He wore his hair, to the last, powdered and frizzed out, in the fashion which I remember to have seen in caricatures of what were termed, in my young days, *Maccaronies*. He was the last of that race of beaux. Melancholy as a gib-  
 110 cat over his counter all the forenoon, I think I see him, making up his cash (as they call it) with tremulous fingers, as if he feared every one about him was a defaulter; in his hypochondry ready to imagine himself one; haunted, at least, with the idea of the possibility of his becoming one; his tristful

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89. **Bachelors.** They were too poor to marry.

91. **Reason mentioned before.** Six lines higher, "I speak of forty years back."

103. **Evans.** Six clerks are described, and two merely mentioned.

103. **Cambro-Briton,** a Welshman. Cambria, the ancient name of Wales.

108. **Maccaronies.** A name given to fops in the last century; dandies, swells, mashers, are their successors. The term is said to be derived from the Maccaronic Club, which was formed by gentlemen who had traveled in Italy, and who introduced into England the use of macaroni.

110. **Gib-cat,** a he-cat. Gib is short for Gilbert. So we say a tom-cat.

"I am as melancholy as a gib cat."

Henry IV., Part i., i., 2, 78.

111. **Cash,** orig. a case or chest for money; then the money.

113. **Hypochondry** The usual word is *hypochondria*, which means *under the cartilages*, then the digestive organs generally, and a derangement of them causing melancholy.

114. **One,** i.e., a defaulter.

visage clearing up a little over his roast neck of veal at Ander-ton's at two (where his picture still hangs, taken a little before his death by desire of the master of the coffee-house, which he had frequented for the last five-and-twenty years), but not at-taining the meridian of its animation till evening brought on the hour of tea and visiting. The simultaneous sound of his <sup>120</sup> well-known rap at the door with the stroke of the clock an-nouncing six, was a topic of never-failing mirth in the families which this dear old bachelor gladdened with his presence. Then was his *forte* his glorified hour! How would he chirp, and expand, over a muffin! How would he dilate into secret history! His countryman, Pennant himself, in particular, could not be more eloquent than he in relation to old and new London—the site of old theaters, churches, streets gone to decay—where Rosamond's pond stood—the Mulberry gardens—and the Conduit in Cheap—with many a pleasant anecdote, <sup>130</sup> derived from paternal tradition, of those grotesque figures which Hogarth has immortalized in his picture of *Noon*—the worthy descendants of those heroic confessors, who, flying to this country from the wrath of Louis the Fourteenth and his dragoons, kept alive the flame of pure religion in the sheltering obscurities of Hog-lane and the vicinity of the Seven Dials.

115. **Tristful visage.** Another Shakespearian expression. "With tristful visage." *Hamlet*, iii. 4, 51. Tristful (Lat. *tristis*) means sad.

116. **Ander-ton's.** A coffee-house.

119. **Not attaining.** This refers to the "tristful visage."

126. **His countryman, Pennant.** Thomas Pennant (1726-1798), a Welsh antiquarian and naturalist. Among his minor works was "*Some Account of London*," which is alluded to in the text.

129. **Rosamond's pond.** A pond in St. James's Park, filled up in 1770. Pope mentions it at the end of the *Rape of the Lock*—

"This the blest lover shall for Venus take,  
And send up vows from Rosamonda's lake."

129. **Mulberry gardens.** Public gardens frequented in the time of the Stuarts, so called from mulberry trees planted by James I. They are now the gardens of Buckingham Palace.

131. **Conduit in Cheap.** Cheap meant a sale or bargain. Cheapside was a market place. Formerly there was a conduit or water-course there.

132. **Hogarth (1697-1764).** An English engraver and painter. His pictures are chiefly in series, intended to satirize some class or custom, with a good moral end in view.

132. **Picture of Noon.** This is one of a series. The scene is a French Huguenot chapel in Hog lane.

133. **Heroic confessors.** French Protestants who had taken refuge in London in consequence of the *dragonnades* of Louis XIV. and the Revoca-tion of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

136. **Seven Dials.** The meeting of seven streets in London. A column with seven sun-dials has been the origin of the name. In this neighborhood many French refugees settled.

Deputy, under Evans, was Thomas Tame. He had the air and stoop of a nobleman. You would have taken him for one, had you met him in one of the passages leading to Westminster Hall. By stoop, I mean that gentle bending of the body forwards, which, in great men, must be supposed to be the effect of an habitual condescending attention to the applications of their inferiors. While he held you in converse, you felt strained to the height in the colloquy. The conference over, you were at leisure to smile at the comparative insignificance of the pretensions which had just awed you. His intellect was of the shallowest order. It did not reach to a saw or a proverb. His mind was in its original state of white paper. A sucking-babe might have posed him. What was it then? Was he rich? Alas, no! Thomas Tame was very poor. Both he and his wife looked outwardly gentlefolks, when I fear all was not well at all times within. She had a neat meager person, which it was evident she had not sinned in overpampering; but in its veins was noble blood. She traced her descent, by some labyrinth of relationship, which I never thoroughly understood,—much less can explain with any heraldic certainty at this time of day,—to the illustrious, but unfortunate house of Derwentwater. This was the secret of Thomas's stoop. This was the thought—the sentiment—the bright solitary star of your lives, ye mild and happy pair,—which cheered you in the night of intellect, and in the obscurity of your station! This was to you instead of riches, instead of rank, instead of glittering attainments: and it was worth them all together. You insulted none with it; but, while you wore it as a piece of defensive armor only, no insult likewise could reach you through it. *Decus et solamen.*

137. **Thomas Tame** was deputy cashier in 1793 in succession to Evans.

140. **Westminster Hall.** Built by William II.; now used as an entrance to the Houses of Parliament.

148. **White paper.** The comparison used by Locke to illustrate the condition of the human mind before the use of the senses. He denied the existence of innate ideas.

149. **Posed,** puzzled by *putting* a question (Fr. *poser*, to put).

158. **Derwentwater.** The last Earl of Derwentwater was executed in 1716, for having supported the Pretender in the preceding year.

158. **Secret of Thomas's stoop.** Lamb mentioned above that Tame had the stoop of a nobleman.

166. **Decus et solamen** (Lat.), glory and comfort.

Of quite another stamp was the then accountant, John Tipp. He neither pretended to high blood, nor, in good truth, cared one fig about the matter. He "thought an accountant the greatest character in the world, and himself the greatest ac-<sup>170</sup>countant in it." Yet John was not without his hobby. The fiddle relieved his vacant hours. He sang, certainly, with other notes than to the Orphean lyre. He did, indeed, scream and scrape most abominably. His fine suite of official rooms in Threadneedle-street, which, without anything very substantial appended to them, were enough to enlarge a man's notions of himself that lived in them (I know not who is the occupier of them now), resounded fortnightly to the notes of a concert of sweet "breasts," as our ancestors would have called them, culled from club rooms and orchestras—chorus singers—first<sup>180</sup> and second violoncellos—double basses—and clarionets—who ate his cold mutton and drank his punch, and praised his ear. He sat like Lord Midas among them. But at the desk Tipp was quite another sort of creature. Thence all ideas, that

167. **The then accountant, John Tipp.** He was accountant in 1792. His successor in the office of Deputy Accountant was John Lamb, the author's brother.

169. **Cared one fig.** In this expression fig = *fico*, a fillip. The transition form is seen in Shakespeare—

"Figo for thy friendship."

*Henry V.*, iii., 6, 57.

171. **Hobby**, an ambling nag, a toy like a horse, a favorite pursuit.

173. **Orphean lyre.** A reminiscence of Milton—

"With other notes than to th' Orphean lyre  
I sung of Chaos and eternal Night."

*Paradise Lost*, iii., 17.

177. **Occupier.** When this essay first appeared, there was a note here, afterwards suppressed—"I have since been informed that the present tenant of them is a Mr. Lamb, a gentleman who is happy in the possession of some choice pictures, and among them a rare portrait of Milton, which I mean to do myself the pleasure of going to see, and, at the same time, to refresh my memory with the sight of old scenes. Mr. Lamb has the character of a right courteous and communicative collector." This was John Lamb, of whom, and of whose love for pictures, we read more in the essay on *My Relations*.

179. **Breasts.** Used in Elizabethan writers for ability in singing—

"By my troth, the fool hath an excellent breast."

*Twelfth Night*, ii., 3, 19.

180. **Culled**, collected. Both words come from Latin *colligere*.

183. **Like Lord Midas**, i.e., without any skill in judging. Justice Midas, in a play by Kane O'Hara (1764), awards the prize for singing to Pan: the other competitor turns out to be Apollo. In the classical story, Midas is King of Phrygia, the same whose touch turned everything into gold. He received asses' ears from Apollo, because he maintained that that god was surpassed in singing and flute-playing by Pan.

were purely ornamental, were banished. You could not speak of anything romantic without rebuke. Politics were excluded. A newspaper was thought too refined and abstracted. The whole duty of the man consisted in writing off dividend warrants. The striking of the annual balance in the company's books (which, perhaps, differed from the balance of last year in the sum of £25 1s. 6*d.*) occupied his days and nights for a month previous. Not that Tipp was blind to the deadness of *things* (as they called them in the city) in his beloved house, or did not sigh for a return of the old stirring days when South Sea hopes were young—(he was indeed equal to the wielding of any the most intricate accounts of the most flourishing company in these or those days):—but to a genuine accountant the difference of proceeds is as nothing. The fractional farthing is as dear to his heart as the thousands which stand before it. He is the true actor, who, whether his part be a prince or a peasant, must act it with like intensity. With Tipp, form was everything. His life was formal. His actions seemed ruled with a ruler. His pen was not less erring than his heart. He made the best executor in the world; he was plagued with incessant executorships accordingly, which excited his spleen and soothed his vanity in equal ratios. He would swear (for Tipp swore) at the little orphans, whose rights he would guard with a tenacity like the grasp of the dying hand that commended their interests to his protection. With all this there was about him a sort of timidity—(his few enemies used to give it a worse name)—a something which, in reverence to the dead, we will place, if you please, a little on this side of the heroic. Nature certainly had been pleased to endow John Tipp with a sufficient measure of the principle of self-preservation. There is a cowardice which we do not despise, because it has nothing base or treacherous in its elements; it betrays itself, not you; it is mere temperament; the absence of the romantic and the enterprising; it sees a lion in the way, and will not, with Fortinbras “greatly find quarrel

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211. Worse name, cowardice.

219. Fortinbras. Hamlet is informed that Fortinbras is leading his army “to gain a little patch of ground” which is of no value. He feels this a re-



in a straw," when some supposed honor is at stake. Tipp<sup>220</sup> never mounted the box of a stage-coach in his life; or leaned against the rails of a balcony; or walked upon the ridge of a parapet; or looked down a precipice; or let off a gun; or went upon a water-party; or would willingly let you go, if he could have helped it: neither was it recorded of him, that for lucre or for intimidation, he ever forsook friend or principle.

Whom next shall we summon from the dusty dead, in whom common qualities become uncommon? Can I forget thee, Henry Man the wit, the polished man of letters, the *author*, of the South Sea House? who never enteredst thy office in a<sup>230</sup> morning, or quittedst it in midday—(what didst *thou* in an office?)—without some quirk that left a sting! Thy gibes and thy jokes are now extinct, or survive but in two forgotten volumes, which I had the good fortune to rescue from a stall in Barbican, not three days ago, and found thee terse, fresh, epigrammatic, as alive. Thy wit is a little gone by in these fastidious days—thy topics are staled by the "new-born gauds" of the time:—but great thou used to be in Public

proof of his own neglect to avenge his father's death. For mere honor men will fight about a straw—

"Rightly to be great,  
Is not to stir without great argument,  
But greatly to find quarrel in a straw,  
When honor's at the stake."

*Hamlet*, iv., 4, 53.

227. **Dusty dead.** Cf. *Macbeth*, v., 5, 22.

"And all our yesterdays have lighted fools  
The way to dusty death."

229. **Henry Man**, Deputy Secretary in 1793.

232. **Quirk**, a quick turn, cavil, subtle question.

232. **Gibes**, taunts, sneers. It is from a root meaning *mouth*. *Gabble*, *gobble*, *jabber*, are from the same root.

234. **Two forgotten volumes.** These do not seem to be now extant.

235. **Barbican.** Here Milton was living in 1645 and sheltered some of the cavalier relations of his wife.

237. **Staled**, rendered old fashioned:

"Age cannot wither her nor custom stale  
Her infinite variety."

*Antony and Cleopatra*, ii., 2, 240.

238. **New-born gauds.** A gaud is an ornament, a trifle.

"One touch of nature makes the whole world kin,  
That all, with one consent, praise *new-born gauds*  
Though they are made and molded of things past."

*Troilus and Cressida*, iii., 3, 175.

Ledgers, and in Chronicles, upon Chatham, and Shelburne, and Rockingham, and Howe, and Burgoyne, and Clinton, and the war which ended in the tearing from Great Britain her rebellious colonies,—and Keppel, and Wilkes, and Sawbridge, and Bull, and Dunning, and Pratt, and Richmond—and such small politics.

A little less facetious, and a great deal more obstreperous, was fine rattling, rattle-headed Plumer. He was descended—not in a right line, reader (for his lineal pretensions, like his personal, favored a little of the sinister bend), from the Plumers of Hertfordshire. So tradition gave him out; and

239. **Public Ledger and Chronicle**, newspapers of the last century.

239. **Chatham** (1708-1778), William Pitt, made Earl of Chatham 1766. His second son was the William Pitt famous at the end of the century.

239. **Shelburne** (1737-1805), William Petty, second Earl of Shelburne, afterwards Marquis of Lansdowne. As Prime Minister in 1782 he arranged the treaty which recognized American independence.

240. **Rockingham** (1730-1782), Charles Wentworth, Marquis of Rockingham, was Prime Minister in 1765 and again in 1782. He died in office, and was succeeded by Shelburne.

240. **Howe**. There were two brothers, Sir William Howe, a General in the war with the American colonies, who died in 1814, and Richard, Earl Howe, the Admiral, who gained the brilliant victory over the French off Ushant 1794, and died 1799. The General is probably meant here, as the other names are those of persons noted in connection with the American war of independence.

240. **Burgoyne**, John, an English General, who surrendered to the American colonists at Saratoga in 1777.

240. **Clinton**, Sir Henry, another English General in the same war.

241. **The war**. It began in April 1775 with a skirmish at Lexington, and was practically over after the capitulation of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown, October, 1781. The British losses in the field during the war are estimated at 25,000 men; those of the Americans at 8,000.

242. **Keppel**. An English Admiral.

242. **Wilkes**, John (1727-1797), editor of the *North Britain*, in the 45th number of which (1763) he charged the king with uttering a falsehood from the throne. He was arrested on a general warrant, but liberated as being a member of Parliament. He obtained £1,000 damages, and general warrants were declared illegal.

243. **Sawbridge and Bull**, Lord Mayors of London in the last century.

243. **Dunning**, John (1731-1783), author of the motion carried in the House of Commons, 1780, "that the influence of the crown has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished." He was raised to the peerage with the title of Ashburton. 1782.

243. **Pratt**, Charles (1713-1794). As Chief Justice he ordered the release of Wilkes, and declared general warrants to be illegal. He was made Lord Chancellor in 1766, and ultimately Earl of Camden.

243. **Richmond**. Perhaps a member of the Rockingham ministry is meant.

246. **Plumer**, Richard, Deputy Secretary in the South Sea House in 1800.

248. **Sinister bend**, a stripe extending diagonally across a shield beginning at the top corner which is to the left (Lat. *sinister*) of the person wearing the shield. This kind of bend denotes illegitimacy.

249. **Plumers of Hertfordshire**. Lamb's grandmother, Mary Field, had been housekeeper to this family at Blakesware. He mentions her in the essay on *Dream Children*. Walter Plumer was not the bachelor-uncle that Lamb calls him, if we are to believe the existing pedigree of the family.

certain family features not a little sanctioned the opinion.<sup>250</sup> Certainly old Walter Plumer (his reputed author) had been a rake in his days, and visited much in Italy, and had seen the world. He was uncle, bachelor-uncle, to the fine old Whig still living, who has represented the county in so many successive parliaments, and has a fine old mansion near Ware. Walter flourished in George the Second's days, and was the same who was summoned before the House of Commons about a business of franks, with the old Duchess of Marlborough. You may read of it in Johnson's Life of Cave. Cave came off cleverly in that business. It is certain our Plumer did nothing<sup>260</sup> to discountenance the rumor. He rather seemed pleased whenever it was, with all gentleness, insinuated. But, besides his family pretensions, Plumer was an engaging fellow, and sang gloriously.

Not so sweetly sang Plumer as thou sangest, mild, childlike, pastoral M—; a flute's breathing less divinely whispering than thy Arcadian melodies, when, in tones worthy of Arden, thou didst chant that song sung by Amiens to the banished Duke, which proclaims the winter wind more lenient than for a man to be ungrateful. Thy sire was old surly M—, the<sup>270</sup> unapproachable churchwarden of Bishopsgate. He knew not what he did when he begat thee, like spring, gentle offspring of blustering winter:—only unfortunate in thy ending, which should have been mild, conciliatory, swan-like.

251. **Author.** Here equivalent to father.

255. **Ware.** A town in Hertfordshire where still exists the great "Bed of Ware," which is twelve feet square.

258. **Business of franks.** This alludes to the privilege which members of Parliament had of sending their letters free by post. The system of franking was restricted in 1837, and abolished in 1840 on the establishment of the penny post.

261. **Rumor.** Of his connection with the Hertfordshire family.

266. **Pastoral M.** T. Maynard, Chief Clerk of the Old Annuities and Three-per-Cents. from 1788 to 1793.

267. **Arcadian.** Pastoral; from Arcadia in the Peloponnesus, a pastoral region.

267. **Arden.** The forest of Arden in France is the scene of much of Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

268. **Song sung by Amiens:—**

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,  
Thou art not so unkind  
As man's ingratitude."—*As You Like It*, ii., 7, 174.

273. **Unfortunate in thy ending.** Maynard hanged himself.

274. **Swan-like.** The ancient poets supposed that swans sang their own dirge. Cf. *Merchant of Venice*, iii., 2, 44

"Then if he lose he makes a swan-like end,  
Fadug in music."

Much remains to sing. Many fantastic shapes rise up, but they must be mine in private:—already I have fooled the reader to the top of his bent;—else could I omit that strange creature Woollet, who existed in trying the question, and *bought litigations?*—and still stranger, inimitable, solemn  
 280 Hepworth, from whose gravity Newton might have deduced the law of gravitation. How profoundly would he nib a pen—  
 —with what deliberation would he wet a wafer!

But it is time to close—night's wheels are rattling fast over me—it is proper to have done with this solemn mockery.

Reader, what if I have been playing with thee all this while?—peradventure, the very *names* which I have summoned up before thee are fantastic—insubstantial—like Henry Pimpernel and old John Naps of Greece.

Be satisfied that something answering to them has had a  
 290 being. Their importance is from the past.

277. **Top of his bent.** As far as he will bear; the greatest bend that can be given the bow without breaking it.

“They fool me to the top of my bent.”

*Hamlet*, iii., 2, 385.

278. **Trying the question.** Solving legal difficulties.

279. **Bought litigations.** Buying another's interest in a lawsuit on the chance of being successful.

280. **Newton**, Sir Isaac (1642-1727). He discovered the law of universal gravitation, which was explained in his great work the *Principia*, published 1687.

281. **Gravity. . . . gravitation.** One of the few puns to be found in these essays, though in Lamb's letters and conversation they formed a prominent feature.

283. **Night's wheels.** Night was supposed to travel in a chariot from east to west between sunset and sunrise.

285. **Playing with thee.** Lamb is so fond of mystification that when he gives facts he tries to make them pass for fiction.

287. **Henry Pimpernel. . . .** In the *Induction* to the *Taming of the Shrew*, these are mentioned as not existing.

“Why, sir, you know no house, nor no such maid,  
 Nor no such men, as you have reckon'd up,—  
 As Stephen Sly, and old John Naps of Greece,  
 And Peter Turf, and Henry Pimpernell,  
 And twenty more such names and men as these,  
 Which never were, nor no man ever saw.”

*Taming of the Shrew*, *Induction*, Scene 2, 91.

### Old China.

I HAVE an almost feminine partiality for old china. When I go to see any great house, I inquire for the china-closet, and next for the picture-gallery. I cannot defend the order of preference, but by saying that we have all some taste or other, of too ancient a date to admit of our remembering distinctly that it was an acquired one. I can call to mind the first play, and the first exhibition, that I was taken to; but I am not conscious of a time when china jars and saucers were introduced into my imagination.

I had no repugnance then—why should I now have?—to those little, lawless, azure-tinctured grotesques, that, under the notion of men and women, float about, uncircumscribed by any element, in that world before perspective—a china tea-cup.

I like to see my old friends—whom distance cannot diminish—figuring up in the air (so they appear to our optics), yet on *terra firma* still, for so we must in courtesy interpret that speck of deeper blue, which the decorous artist, to prevent absurdity, had made to spring up beneath their sandals.

I love the men with women's faces, and the women, if possible, with still more womanish expressions.

Here is a young and courtly Mandarin, handing tea to a lady from a salver—two miles off. See how distance seems to set off respect! And here the same lady, or another—for likeness is identity on tea-cups—is stepping into a little fairy boat, moored on the hither side of this calm garden river,

12. **Notion.** The word *likeness* would not suit; they are so unlike.

13. **Perspective.** The art of representing objects on a plane surface so as to make them appear at their proper distances. More distant objects must be drawn smaller in proportion. The Chinese do not observe this; therefore Lamb's expression: 'whom distance cannot diminish'

17. **Terra firma.** Steady ground, opposed to sea or air.

22. **Mandarin.** A Chinese governor of a province.

26. **Hither side.** The side nearer to the spectator.

with a dainty mincing foot, which in a right angle of incidence (as angles go in our world) must infallibly land her in the midst of a flowery mead—a furlong off on the other side  
30 of the same strange stream !

Farther on—if far or near can be predicated of their world—see horses, trees, pagodas, dancing the hays.

Here—a cow and rabbit couchant and co-extensive—so objects show, seen through the lucid atmosphere of fine Cathay.

I was pointing out to my cousin last evening, over our Hyson (which we are old-fashioned enough to drink un-  
mixed still of an afternoon), some of these *speciosa miracula*  
upon a set of extraordinary old blue china (a recent purchase)  
which we were now for the first time using ; and could not  
40 help remarking, how favorable circumstances had been to us  
of late years, that we could afford to please the eye sometimes  
with trifles of this sort—when a passing sentiment seemed to  
overshade the brows of my companion. I am quick at detect-  
ing these summer clouds in Bridget.

“I wish the good old times would come again,” she said,  
“when we were not quite so rich. I do not mean that I want  
to be poor ; but there was a middle state”—so she was pleased  
to ramble on—“in which I am sure we were a great deal hap-  
pier. A purchase is but a purchase, now that you have money  
50 enough and to spare. Formerly it used to be a triumph.  
When we coveted a cheap luxury (and O ! how much ado I had  
to get you to consent in those times !)—we were used to have

27. **Mincing.** Cutting up small, taking very short steps

28. **Angle of incidence.** Properly the angle formed by one object striking another, a mathematical term. The meaning here is that a line drawn in the direction the foot is taking, would terminate a furlong off ; no mincing step.

32. **Pagoda.** (Port. *pagoda*. Pers. *but-kadah* an idol-temple.)

32. **Hays.** An old English dance.

33. **Couchant.** A term of heraldry, lying down with head raised.

33. **Co-extensive.** Drawn the same size.

34. **Cathay.** Chinese Tartary, called Khitai by the Tartars. The word is used by Tennyson in Locksley Hall.

‘Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay.’

35. **My cousin.** Bridget Elia, the reference being as elsewhere to Mary Lamb, the author’s sister.

36. **Hyson,** a kind of green tea, named from the season of its gathering. The word in Chinese means *spring-time*.

37. **Speciosa miracula** (L.) beautiful wonders. An expression used by Horace of the stories of the Odyssey.

debate two or three days before, and to weigh the *for* and *against*, and think what we might spare it out of, and what saving we could hit upon, that should be an equivalent. A thing was worth buying then when we felt the money that we paid for it.

“Do you remember the brown suit, which you made to hang upon you, till all your friends cried shame upon you, it grew so threadbare—and all because of that folio Beaumont and Fletcher which you dragged home late at night from Barker’s in Covent Garden? Do you remember how we eyed it for weeks before we could make up our minds to the purchase, and had not come to a determination till it was near ten o’clock of the Saturday night, when you set off from Islington, fearing you should be too late—and when the old bookseller with some grumbling opened his shop, and by the twinkling taper (for he was setting bedwards) lighted out the relic from his dusty treasures, and when you lugged it home, wishing it were twice as cumbersome—and when you presented it to me—and when we were exploring the perfectness of it (*collating*, you called it), and while I was repairing some of the loose leaves with paste, which your impatience would not suffer to be left till day-break, was there no pleasure in being a poor man? or can those neat black clothes which you wear now, and are so careful to keep brushed, since we have become rich and finical—give you half the honest vanity with which you flaunted it about in that overworn suit—your old corbeau—for four or five weeks longer than you should have done, to pacify your conscience for the mighty sum of fifteen or sixteen shillings was it?—a great affair we thought it then—which you had lavished on the old folio. Now you can afford

60. **Folio Beaumont and Fletcher.** See Essay on *Detached Thoughts*, note 97, p. 20.

65. **Islington.** Lamb was not there at the time referred to; but for a few years before this Essay was written, he used occasionally to retire to a rural lodging at Dalston. In August, 1823, he became a householder for the first time, taking a cottage in Colebrook Row, Islington.

68. **Taper . . . bedwards.** Perhaps an echo of—

“And tapers burn’d to bedward.”

*Coriolanus*, i, 6, 32.

71. **Collating.** Comparing different texts of a work.

78. **Corbeau.** French for *raven*; applied to an old coat.

to buy any book that pleases you, but I do not see that you ever bring me home any nice old purchases now.

“When you came home with twenty apologies for laying out a less number of shillings upon that print after Lionardo, which we christened the “Lady Blanche;” when you looked at the purchase, and thought of the money—and thought of the money, and looked again at the picture—was there no pleasure  
90 in being a poor man? Now, you have nothing to do but to walk into Colnaghi’s, and buy a wilderness of Lionardos. Yet do you?”

“Then, do you remember our pleasant walks to Enfield, and Potter’s bar, and Waltham, when we had a holiday—holidays and all other fun are gone now we are rich—and the little handbasket in which I used to deposit our day’s fare of savory cold lamb and salad—and how you would pry about at noontide for some decent house, where we might go in and produce our store—only paying for the ale that you must call  
100 for—and speculate upon the looks of the landlady, and whether she was likely to allow us a table-cloth—and wish for such another honest hostess as Izaak Walton has described many a one on the banks of the Lea, when he went a-fishing—and sometimes they would prove obliging enough, and sometimes they would look grudgingly upon us—but we had cheerful looks still for one another, and would eat our plain food savorily, scarcely grudging Piscator his Trout Hall? Now, when we go out a day’s pleasuring, which is seldom, moreover, we *ride* part of the way, and go into a fine inn, and order  
110 the best of dinners, never debating the expense, which, after all, never has half the relish of those chance country snaps,

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86 **Lionardo** (1452-1519) called *da Vinci*, from the place of his birth in the Val d’Arno. He was a painter, sculptor, architect, engineer, and exhibited talent for music and poetry. Among his paintings may be mentioned the *Last Supper*, a fresco, and the *Battle of the Standard*, a cartoon. He wrote a *Treatise on Painting*. Lionardo da Vinci is one who may take rank with Raphael and Michael Angelo.

91. **Wilderness of Lionardos**. Suggested by Shylock’s remark: “I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys.”

102. **Izaak Walton** (1593-1683) author of the *Complete Angler*: a work noted for its descriptions of rural scenery. The Lea is a tributary of the Thames, in which he often fished. *Piscator* the angler, and *Viator* the traveler, are characters of the *Complete Angler*. Trout Hall was an inn where they met.



when we were at the mercy of uncertain usage, and a precarious welcome.

“ You are too proud to see a play anywhere now but in the pit. Do you remember where it was we used to sit when we saw the *Battle of Hexam* and the *Surrender of Calais*, and *Bannister* and *Mrs. Bland* in the *Children in the Wood*—when we squeezed out our shilling a-piece to sit three or four times in a season in the one-shilling gallery—where you felt all the time that you ought not to have brought me—and <sup>120</sup> more strongly I felt obligation to you for having brought me—and the pleasure was the better for a little shame—and when the curtain drew up, what cared we for our place in the house, or what mattered it where we were sitting, when our thoughts were with *Rosalind in Arden*, or with *Viola at the court of Illyria*? You used to say that the gallery was the best place of all for enjoying a play socially—that the relish of such exhibitions must be in proportion to the infrequency of going—that the company we met there, not being in general readers of plays, were obliged to attend the more, and did attend, to <sup>130</sup> what was going on, on the stage—because a word lost would have been a chasm, which it was impossible for them to fill up. With such reflections we consoled our pride then—and I appeal to you whether, as a woman, I met generally with less attention and accommodation than I have done since in more expensive situations in the house? The getting in, indeed, and the crowding up those inconvenient staircases, was bad enough—but there was still a law of civility to woman recognized to quite as great an extent as we ever found in the other passages—and how a little difficulty overcome heightened the <sup>140</sup> snug seat and the play, afterwards! Now we can only pay our money and walk in. You cannot see, you say, in the gal-

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116. *Battle of Hexam* and *Surrender of Calais*, comedies by George Colman the younger (1762-1836).

117. *Bannister*, John (1760-1836), a comic actor.

117. *Mrs. Bland*, an actress at the beginning of the present century.

117. *Children in the Wood* (1815), a comedy by Thomas Morton (1764-1838).

125. *Rosalind in Arden*. Shakespeare's *As You Like It*.

125. *Viola at the Court of Illyria*. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*.

leries now. I am sure we saw, and heard too, well enough then—but sight, and all, I think, is gone with our poverty.

“There was pleasure in eating strawberries, before they became quite common—in the first dish of peas, while they were yet dear—to have them for a nice supper, a treat. What treat can we have now? If we were to treat ourselves now—that is to have dainties a little above our means, it would be  
 150 selfish and wicked. It is the very little more that we allow ourselves beyond what the actual poor can get at, that makes what I call a treat—when two people, living together as we have done, now and then indulge themselves in a cheap luxury which both like; while each apologizes, and is willing to take both halves of the blame to his single share. I see no harm in people making much to themselves, in that sense of the word. It may give them a hint how to make much of others. But now—what I mean by the word—we never *do* make much of ourselves. None but the poor can do it. I do  
 160 not mean the veriest poor of all, but persons as we were, just above poverty.

“I know what you were going to say, that it is mighty pleasant at the end of the year to make all meet,—and much ado we used to have every Thirty-first Night of December to account for our exceedings—many a long face did you make over your puzzled accounts, and in contriving to make it out how we had spent so much, or that we had not spent so much, or that it was impossible we should spend so much next year—and still we found our slender capital decreasing—but then—  
 170 betwixt ways, and projects, and compromises of one sort or another, and talk of curtailing this charge, and doing without that for the future, and the hope that youth brings, and laughing spirits (in which you were never poor till now), we pocketed up our loss, and in conclusion, with ‘lusty brimmers,’ (as you used to quote it out of *hearty cheerful Mr. Cotton*, as

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174. **Lusty brimmers**, glasses filled to the brim. The expression is from lines entitled *The New Year*, by Charles Cotton (1630-1687), a burlesque poet and angler.

you called him), we used to welcome in the 'coming guest.' Now we have no reckoning at all at the end of the old year—no flattering promises about the new year doing better for us."

Bridget is so sparing of her speech on most occasions, that when she gets into a rhetorical vein, I am careful how I interrupt it. I could not help, however, smiling at the phantom of wealth which her dear imagination had conjured up out of a clear income of poor—hundred pounds a year. "It is true we were happier when we were poorer, but we were also younger, my cousin. I am afraid we must put up with the excess, for if we were to shake the superflux into the sea, we should not much mend ourselves. That we had much to struggle with, as we grew up together, we have reason to be most thankful. It strengthened and knit our compact closer. We could never have been what we have been to each other, if we had always had the sufficiency which you now complain of. The resisting power—those natural dilations of the youthful spirit which circumstances cannot straiten—with us are long since passed away. Competence to age is supplementary youth, a sorry supplement indeed, but I fear the best that is to be had. We must ride where we formerly walked; live better and lie softer—and shall be wise to do so—than we had means to do in those good old days you speak of. Yet could those days return—could you and I once more walk our thirty miles a day—could Bannister and Mrs. Bland again be young, and you and I be young to see them—could the good old one-shilling gallery days return—they are dreams, my cousin, now—but could you and I at this moment, instead of this quiet argument, by our well-carpeted fireside, sitting on this luxurious sofa—be once more struggling up those inconvenient stair-cases, pushed about and squeezed, and elbowed by the poorest rabble of poor gallery scramblers—could I once more hear

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176. *Coming guest* :—

"True friendship's laws are by this rule expressed,  
Welcome the coming, speed the parting guest."

Pope's *Odyssey*, xv.. 83.

The second line is quoted by Lamb in the Essay on *New Year's Eve*.

those anxious shrieks of yours, and the delicious *Thank God*  
 210 *we are safe*, which always followed when the topmost stair,  
 conquered, let in the first light of the whole cheerful theater  
 down beneath us—I know not the fathom line that ever  
 touched a descent so deep as I would be willing to bury more  
 wealth in than Cræsus had, or the great Jew R—— is sup-  
 posed to have, to purchase it.

“And now do just look at that merry little Chinese waiter  
 holding an umbrella, big enough for a bed-tester, over the  
 head of that pretty insipid half-Madonna-ish chit of a lady  
 220 in that very blue summer-house.”

214. **Cræsus.** A king of Lydia in the sixth century B. C. noted for his wealth.

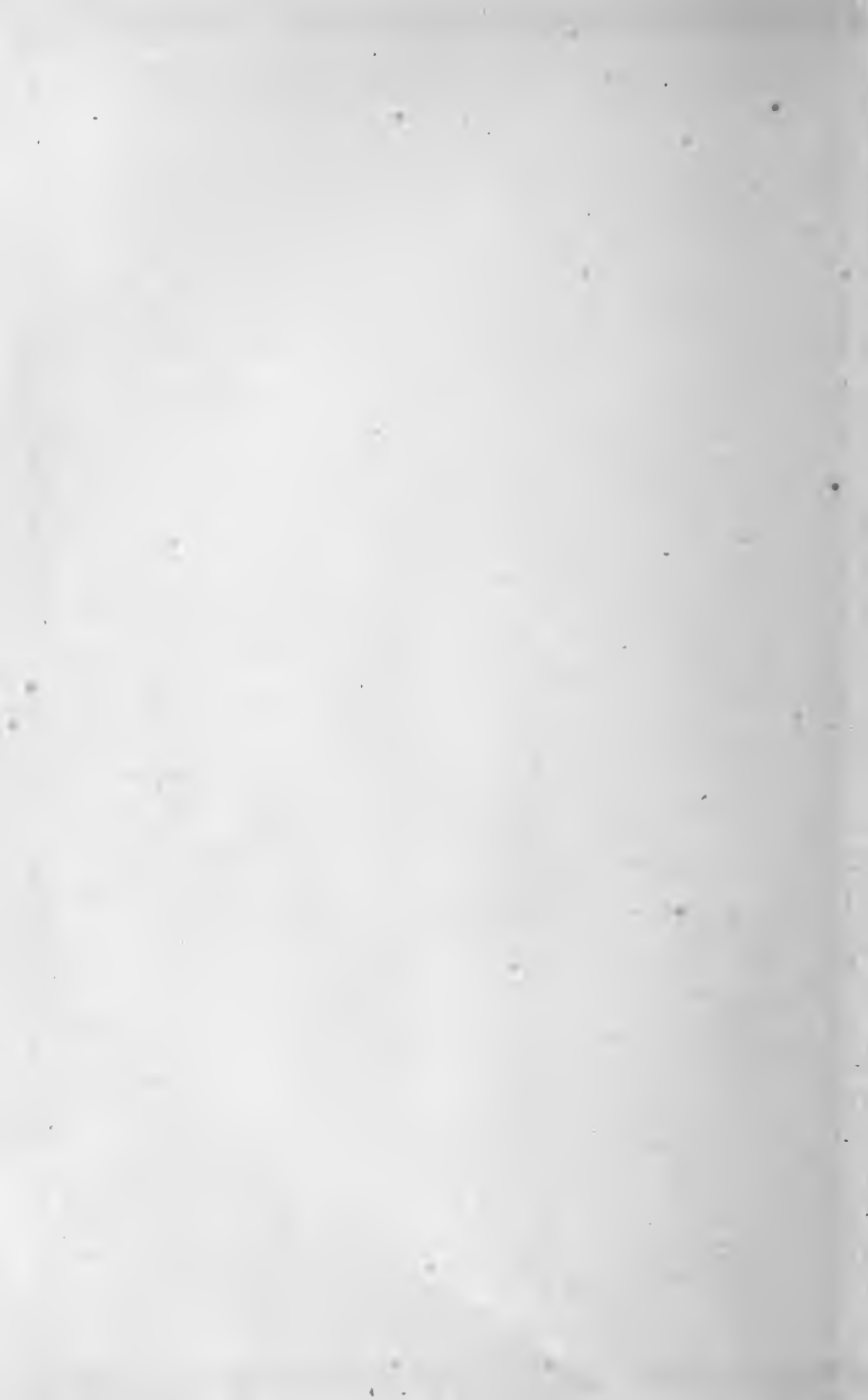
214. **R——**, Rothschild.

217. **Bed-tester.** Canopy over a bed (O. F. *testiere*, a head piece, from *teste* a head, L. *testa*).

218. **Madonna-ish**, like a Madonna in a picture.

218. **Chit** (A. S. *cith*), a shoot or bud, then a forward child.





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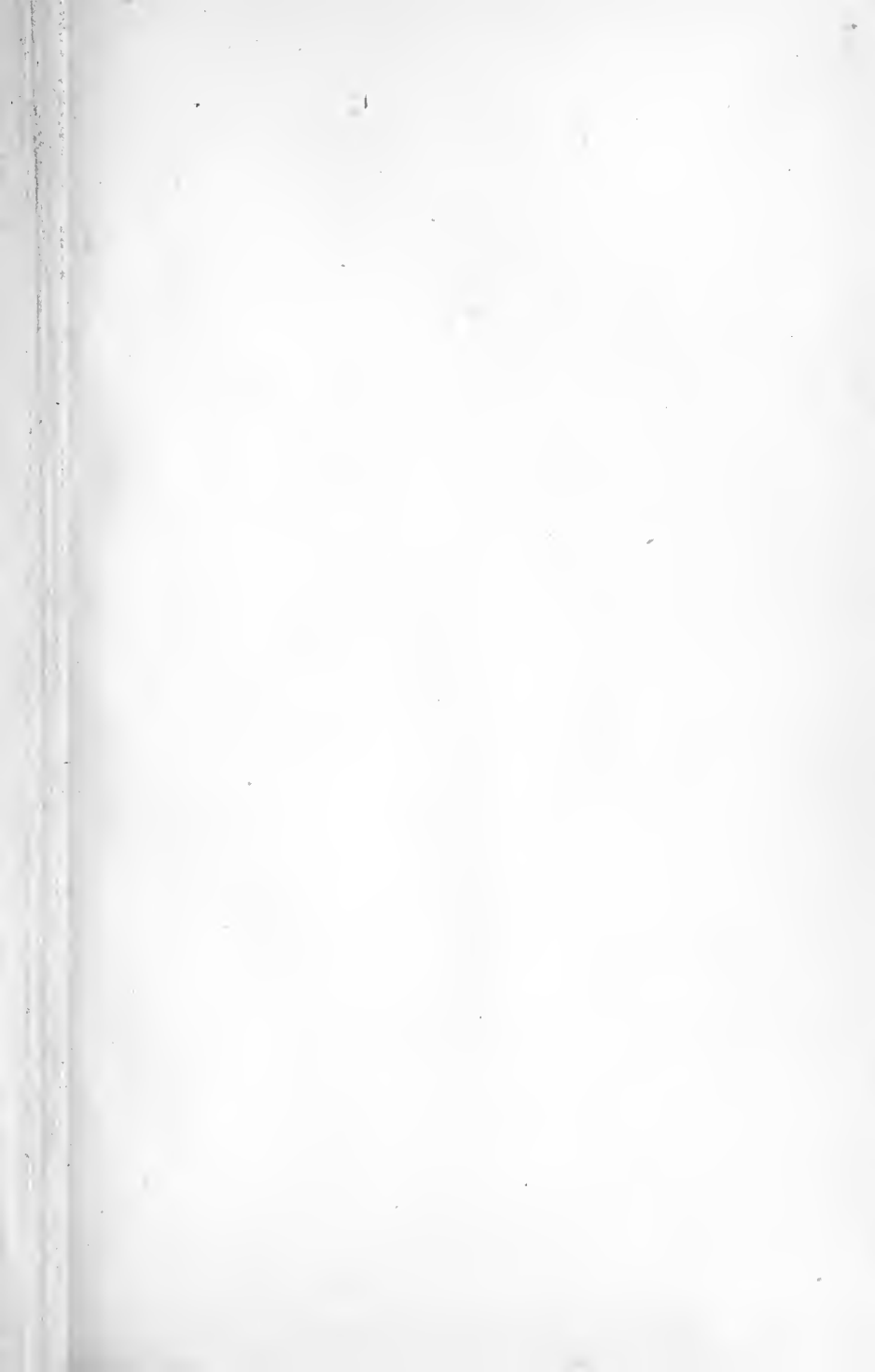
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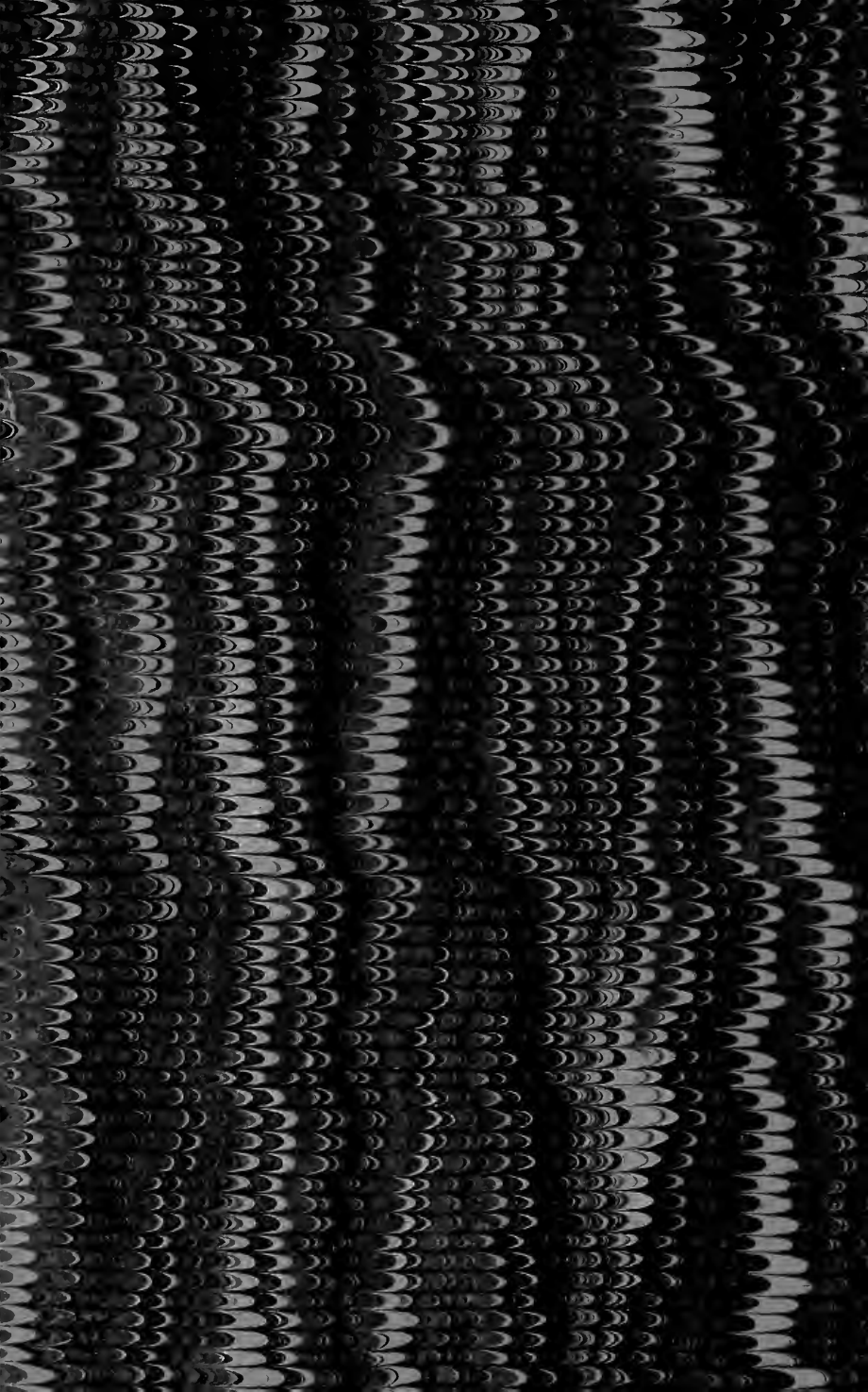
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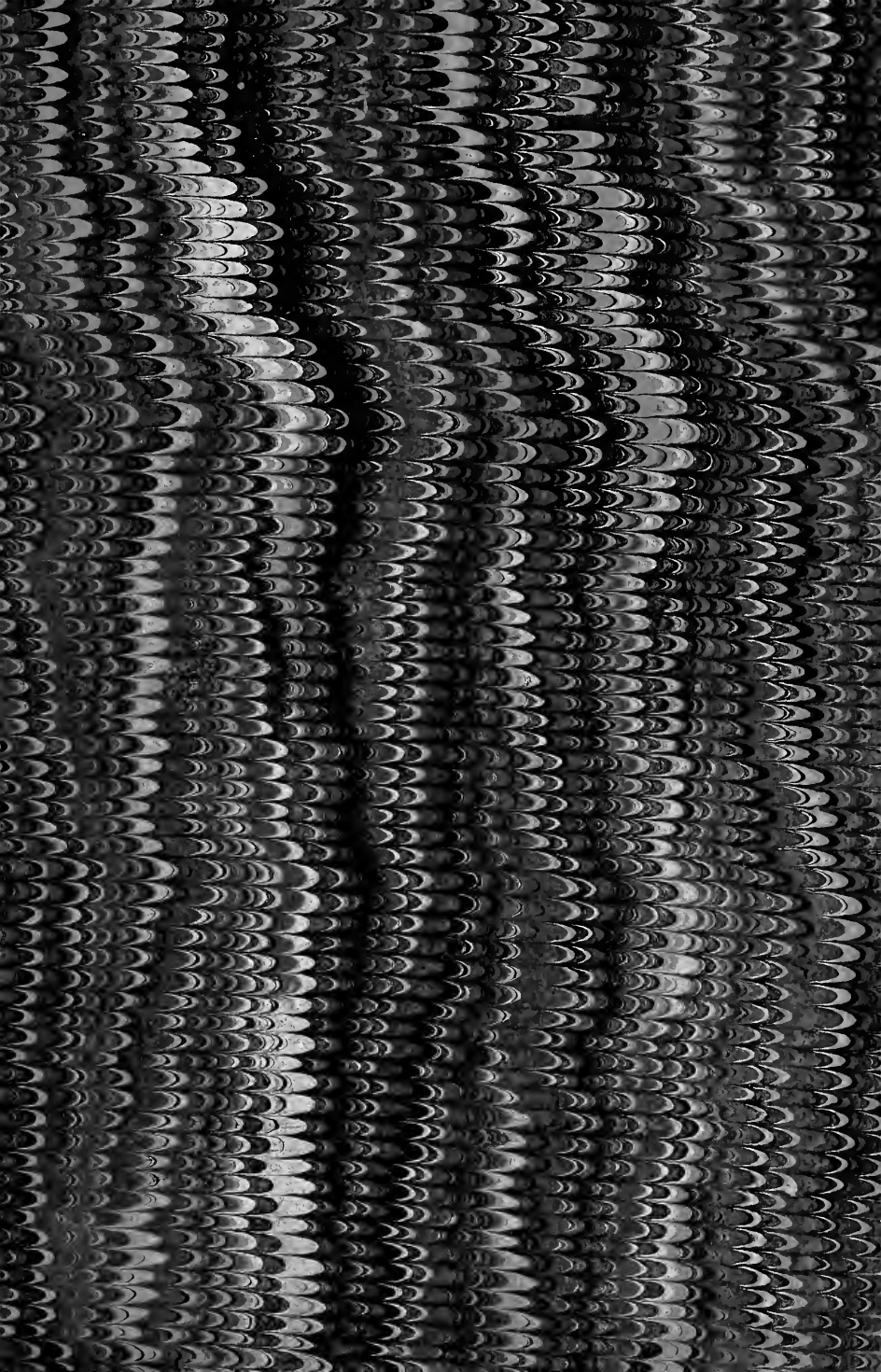












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