

Marx Hardy Machiavelli Joyce Austen  
Defoe Abbot Melville Montaigne Cooper Emerson Hugo  
Stoker Wilde Christie Maupassant Haggard Chesterton Molière Eliot Grimm  
Garnett Engels Byron Schiller  
Goethe Hawthorne Smith Kafka  
Cotton Dostoyevsky Hall  
Baum Henry Kipling Doyle Willis  
Leslie Dumas Flaubert Nietzsche Turgenev Balzac  
Stockton Vatsyayana Crane  
Burroughs Verne  
Curtis Tocqueville Gogol Busch  
Homer Tolstoy Whitman  
Darwin Thoreau Twain  
Potter Zola Lawrence Dickens Plato Scott  
Kant Freud Jowett Stevenson Andersen Burton Harte  
London Descartes Cervantes Wells Hesse  
Poe Aristotle Wells Voltaire Cooke  
Hale James Hastings Shakespeare Chambers Irving  
Bunner Richter Chekhov da Shaw Wodehouse  
Doré Dante Pushkin Alcott  
Swift Chekhov Newton



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# **The Posthumous Works of Thomas De Quincey, Vol. 2**

Thomas De Quincey

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THE POSTHUMOUS WORKS

OF

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

*EDITED FROM THE AUTHOR'S MSS.,  
WITH INTRODUCTIONS AND NOTES*

BY

ALEXANDER H. JAPP LL.D., F.R.S.E.

*VOLUME II.*

LONDON  
WILLIAM HEINEMANN 1893

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CONVERSATION AND COLERIDGE

With Other Essays

*CRITICAL, HISTORICAL, BIOGRAPHICAL, PHILOSOPHICAL,  
IMAGINATIVE AND HUMOROUS*

BY THOMAS DE QUINCEY

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1893

## PREFACE.

All that is needful for me to say by way of Preface is that, as in the case of the first volume, I have received much aid from Mrs. Baird Smith and Miss De Quincey, and that Mr. J. R. McIlraith has repeated his friendly service of reading the proofs.

ALEXANDER H. JAPP.

London,  
*March 1st, 1893.*

## DE QUINCEY'S POSTHUMOUS WORKS.

[Pg 1]

### INTRODUCTION.

All that needs to be said in the way of introduction to this volume will best take the form of notes on the articles which it contains.

I. '*Conversation and S. T. Coleridge.*' This article, which was found in a tolerably complete condition, may be regarded as an attempt to deal with the subject in a more critical and searching, and at the same time more sympathetic and inclusive spirit, than is apparent in any former essay. It keeps clear entirely of the field of personal reminiscence; and if it glances at matters on which dissent must be entered to the views of Coleridge, it is still unvaryingly friendly and reverent towards the subject. It is evidently of a later date than either the '*Reminiscences of Coleridge*' in the '*Recollections of the Lakes*' series, or the article on '*Coleridge and Opium-Eating*,' and may be accepted as De Quincey's supplementary and final deliverance on Coleridge. The beautiful apostrophe to the name of Coleridge, which we have given as a kind of motto to the essay, was found attached to one of the sheets; [Pg 2] and, in spite of much mutilation and mixing of the pages with those of other articles, as we originally found them, it was for the most part so clearly written and carefully punctuated, that there can be no doubt, when put together, we had it before us very much as De Quincey meant to publish it had he found a fitting chance to do so. For such an article as this neither *Tait* nor *Hogg's Instructor* afforded exactly the proper medium, but rather some quarterly review, or magazine such as *Blackwood*. We have given, in an appended note to this essay, some corroboration from the poems of Coleridge of the truth of De Quincey's words about the fatal effect on a nature like that of Coleridge of the early and very sudden death of his father, his separation from his mother, and his transference to Christ's Hospital, London.

II. *Mr. Finlay's 'History of Greece.'* This essay is totally different, alike in the advances De Quincey makes to the subject, the points

taken up, and the general method of treatment, from the essay on Mr. Finlay's volumes which appears in the Collected Works. It would seem as though De Quincey, in such a topic as this, found it utterly impossible to exhaust the points that had suggested themselves to him on a careful reading of such a work, in the limits of one article; and that, in this case, as in some others, he elaborated a second article, probably with a view to finding a place for it in a different magazine or review. In this, however, he either did not succeed, or, on his own principle of the opium-eater never really finishing anything, retreated from the practical work of pushing his wares with editors even after he had finished them. At all events, we can find no trace of this article, or any part of it, having ever [Pg 3] been published. The Eastern Roman Empire was a subject on which he might have written, not merely a couple of review articles, but a volume, as we are sure anyone competent to judge will, on carefully reading these articles, at once admit. This essay, too, was found in a very complete condition, when the various pages had been brought together and arranged. This is true of all save the last few pages, which existed more in the form of notes, yet are perfectly clear and intelligible; the leading thoughts being distinctly put, though not followed out in any detail, or with the illustration which he could so easily have given them.

III. '*The Assassination of Cæsar.*' This was clearly meant to be inserted at the close of the first section of 'The Cæsars,' but was at the last moment overlooked, though without it the text there, as it stands in the Collected Works, is, for De Quincey, perhaps too hurried and business-like.

IV. The little article on '*Cicero*' is evidently meant as a supplementary note to the article on that eminent man, as it appears in the Collected Works. Why De Quincey, when preparing these volumes for the press, did not work it into his text is puzzling, as it develops happily some points which he has there dwelt on, and presents in a very effective and compact style the mingled feelings with which the great Proconsul quitted his office in Cilicia, and his feelings on arriving at Rome.

V. *Memorial Chronology.*—This is a continuation of that already published under the same title in the Collected Works. In a note

from the publishers, preceding the portion already given in the sixteenth volume of the original edition, and the fourteenth of Professor Masson's edition, it is said: 'This article was written [Pg 4] about twenty years ago [1850], and is printed here for the first time from the author's *MS*. It was his intention to have continued the subject, but this was never done.' From the essay we now present it will be seen that this last statement is only in a modified sense true—the more that the portion published in the Messrs. Black's editions is, on the whole, merely introductory, and De Quincey's peculiar *technica memoria* is not there even indicated, which it is, with some degree of clearness, in the following pages, and these may be regarded as presenting at least the leading outlines of what the whole series would have been.

De Quincey's method, after having fixed a definite accepted point of departure, was to link the memory of events to a period made signal by identity of figures. Thus, he finds the fall of Assyria, the first of the Olympiads, and the building of Rome to date from about the year 777 b.c. That is his starting-point in definite chronology. Then he takes up the period from 777 to 555; from 555 to 333, and so on.

De Quincey was writing professedly for ladies only, and not for scholars; and that his acknowledged leading obstacle was the semi-mythical wilderness of all early oriental history is insisted on with emphasis. The way in which he triumphs over this obstacle is certainly characteristic and ingenious. Though the latter part is fragmentary, it is suggestive; and from the whole a fair conception may be formed of what the finished work would have been had De Quincey been able to complete it, and of the eloquence with which he would have relieved the mere succession of dates and figures.

It is clear that in the original form, though the papers were written for ladies, the phantasy of a definite 'Charlotte' [Pg 5] as fair correspondent had not suggested itself to him; and that he had recourse to this only in the final rewriting, and would have applied it to the whole had he been spared to pursue his plan of recast and revision for the Collected Works, as it was his intention to have done. Mrs. Baird Smith remembers very clearly her father's many conversations on this subject and his leading ideas—it was, in fact, a

pet scheme of his; and it is therefore the more to be regretted that his final revision only embraced a small portion of the matter which he had already written.

It only needs to be added that, at the time De Quincey wrote, exploration in Assyria and Egypt, not to speak of discovery in Akkad, had made but little way compared with what has now been accomplished, else certain passages in this essay would no doubt have been somewhat modified.

VI. The article entitled '*Chrysomania; or the Gold Frenzy at its Present Stage*', was evidently written after the two articles which appeared in *Hogg's Instructor*. Not improbably it was felt that the readers of *Hogg's Instructor* had already had enough on the Gold Craze, and this it was deemed better not to publish; but it has an interest as supplementing much that De Quincey had said in these papers, and is a happy illustration of his style in dealing with such subjects. Evidently the editor of *Hogg's Instructor* was hardly so attracted by these papers as by others of De Quincey's; for we find that he had excised some of the notes.

VII. '*The Defence of the English Peerage*' is printed because, although it does not pretend to much detail or research, it shows anew De Quincey's keen interest in the events of English history, and his vivid appreciation [Pg 6] of the peerage as a means of quickening and reviving in the minds of the people the memorable events with which the earlier bearers of these ancient titles had been connected.

VIII. The '*Anti-Papal Movement*' may be taken to attest once more De Quincey's keen interest in all the topics of the day, political, social, and ecclesiastical.

IX. The section on literature more properly will be interesting to many as exhibiting some new points of contact with Wordsworth and Southey.

X. The articles on the '*Dispersion of the Jews*,' and on '*Christianity as the result of a Pre-established Harmony*,' will, we think, be found interesting by theologians as well as by readers generally, as attesting not only the keen interest of De Quincey in these and allied subjects, but also his penetration and keen grasp, and his faculty of felicitous illustration, by which ever and anon he lights up the driest subjects.

## I. CONVERSATION AND S. T. COLERIDGE.

Oh name of Coleridge, that hast mixed so much with the trepidations of our own agitated life, mixed with the beatings of our love, our gratitude, our trembling hope; name destined to move so much of reverential sympathy and so much of ennobling strife in the generations yet to come, of our England at home, of our other Englands on the St. Lawrence, on the Mississippi, on the Indus and Ganges, and on the pastoral solitudes of Austral climes!

What are the great leading vices of conversation as generally managed?—vices that are banished from the best society by the legislation of manners, not by any intellectual legislation, but in other forms of society, and exactly as it approaches to the character of vulgarism, disturbing all approaches to elegance in conversation, and disorganizing it as a thing capable of unity or of progress? These vices are, first, disputation; secondly, garrulity; thirdly, the spirit of interruption.

I. I lay it down as a rule, but still reserving their peculiar rights and exceptions to young Scotchmen for whom daily disputing is a sort of daily bread, that the man who disputes is a monster, and that he ought to be expelled from civilized society. Or could not a compromise be effected for disputatious people, by allowing a private disputing room in all hotels, as they have private rooms for smoking? I have heard of two Englishmen, gentlemanly persons, but having a constitutional *furor* for boxing, who quieted their fighting [Pg 8] instincts in this way. It was not glory which they desired, but mutual punishment, given and taken with a hearty goodwill. Yet, as their feelings of refinement revolted from making themselves into a spectacle of partisanship for the public to bet on, they retired into a ball-room, and locked the doors, so that nothing could transpire of the campaigns within except from the desperate rallies and floorings which were heard, or from the bloody faces which were seen on their issuing. A limited admission, it was fancied, might have been allowed to select friends; but the courteous refusal of both parties was always 'No; the pounding was strictly confidential.' Now, pray, gentlemen disputers, could you not make your pound-

ing 'strictly confidential'? My chief reasons for doing so I will mention:

1. That disputing is in bad tone; it is vulgar, and essentially the resource of uncultured people.

2. It argues want of intellectual power, or, in any case, want of intellectual development. It is because men find it easier to talk by disputing than by *not* disputing that so many people resort to this coarse expedient for calling the wind into the sails of conversation. To move along in the key of contradiction is the cheapest of all devices for purchasing a power that is not your own. You are then carried along by a towing-line attached to another vessel. There is no free power. Always your antagonist predetermines the course of your own movement; and you his. What *he* says, you unsay. He affirms, you deny. He knits, you unknit. Always you are servile to *him*; and he to *you*. Yet even that system of motion in reverse of another motion, of mere antistrophe or dancing backward what the strophe had danced forward, is better after all, you say, than standing stock [Pg 9] still. For instance, it might have been tedious enough to hear Mr. Cruger disputing every proposition that Burke advanced on the Bristol hustings; yet even *that* some people would prefer to Cruger's single observation, viz., 'I say *ditto* to Mr. Burke.' Every man to his taste: I, for one, should have preferred Mr. Cruger's *ditto*. [1] But why need we have a *ditto*, a simple *affirmo*, because we have *not* an eternal *nego*? The proper spirit of conversation moves in the general key of assent, but still not therefore of mere iteration, but still each bar of the music is different. Nature surely does not repeat herself, yet neither does she maintain the eternal variety of her laughing beauty by constantly contradicting herself, and quite as little by monotonously repeating herself. Her samenesses are differences.

II. Of the evils of garrulity, which, like the ceaseless droppings of water, will eat into the toughest rock of patience and self-satisfaction, I have spoken at considerable length elsewhere. Its evils are so evident that they hardly call for further illustration. The garrulous man, paradoxical as it may seem to say it, is a kind of pick-pocket without intending to steal anything — nay, rather he is fain to

please you by placing something in your pocket—though too often it is like the egg of the cuckoo in the nest of another bird.

III. Now, as to *Interruption*, what's to be done? It is a question that I have often considered. For the evil is great, and the remedy occult. I look upon a man that interrupts another in conversation as a monster far [Pg 10] less excusable than a cannibal; yet cannibals (though, comparatively with *interrupters*, valuable members of society) are rare, and, even where they are *not* rare, they don't practise as cannibals every day: it is but on sentimental occasions that the exhibition of cannibalism becomes general. But the monsters who interrupt men in the middle of a sentence are to be found everywhere; and they are always practising. Red-letter days or black-letter days, festival or fast, makes no difference to *them*. This enormous nuisance I feel the more, because it is one which I never retaliate. Interrupted in every sentence, I still practise the American Indian's politeness of never interrupting. What, absolutely *never*? Is there *no* case in which I should? If a man's nose, or ear, as sometimes happens in high latitudes, were suddenly and visibly frost-bitten, so as instantly to require being rubbed with snow, I conceive it lawful to interrupt that man in the most pathetic sentence, or even to ruin a whole paragraph of his prose. You can never indeed give him back the rhetoric which you have undermined; *that* is true; but neither could he, in the alternative case, have given back to himself the nose which you have saved.

I contend also, against a great casuist in this matter, that had you been a friend of Æschylus, and distinctly observed that absurd old purblind eagle that mistook (or pretended to mistake) the great poet's bald head—that head which created the Prometheus and the Agamemnon—for a white tablet of rock, and had you interrupted the poet in his talk at the very moment when the bird was dropping a lobster on the sacred cranium, with the view of unshelling the lobster, but unaware that at the same time he was unshelling a great poet's brain, you would have been fully justified. An impertinence it [Pg 11] would certainly have been to interrupt a sentence as undeniable in its Greek as any which that gentleman can be supposed to have turned out, but still the eagle's impertinence was greater. [2] That would have been your excuse. Æschylus, or my friend the casuist, is not to be listened to in his very learned arguments *contra*.

Short of these cases, nothing can justify an interruption; and such cases surely cannot be common, since how often can we suppose it to happen that an eagle has a lobster to break just at the moment when a tragic poet is walking abroad without his hat? What the reader's experience may have been, of course, is unknown to me; but, for my own part, I hardly meet with such a case twice in ten years, though I know an extensive circle of tragic poets, and a reasonable number of bald heads; eagles certainly not so many—they are but few on my visiting list; and indeed, if that's their way of going on—cracking literary skulls without leave asked or warning given—the fewer one knows the better. If, then, a long life hardly breeds a case in which it is strictly lawful to interrupt a co-dialogist, what are we to think of those who move in conversation by the very principle of interruption? And a variety of the nuisance there is, which I consider equally bad. Men, that do not absolutely interrupt you, are yet continually *on the fret* to do so, and undisguisedly on the fret all the time you are speaking. To invent a Latin word which ought to have been invented before my time, 'non interrumpunt at *interrumpunt!*' You can't talk in peace for such people; and as to prosing, which I suppose you've a right to do [Pg 12] by *Magna Charta*, it is quite out of the question when a man is looking in your face all the time with a cruel expression in his eye amounting to 'Surely, that's enough!' or a pathetic expression which says, 'Have you done?' throwing a dreadful reproach into the *Have*. In Cumberland, at a farmhouse where I once had lodgings for a week or two, a huge dog as high as the dining-table used to plant himself in a position to watch all my motions at dinner. Being alone, and either reading or thinking, at first I did not observe him; but as soon as I did, and noticed that he pursued each rising and descent of my fork as the poet 'with wistful eyes pursues the setting sun,' that unconsciously he mimicked and rehearsed all the notes and *appoggiaturas* that make up the successive bars in the music of eating one's dinner, I was compelled to rise, and say, 'My good fellow, I can't stand this; will you do me the favour to accept anything on my plate at this moment? And to-morrow I'll endeavour to arrange for your being otherwise employed at this hour than in watching *me!*' It seems a weakness, but I really cannot eat anything under the oppression of an envious *surveillance* like that dog's. A man said to me, 'Oh, what need you care about *him?* He has had *his* dinner long ago.' True, at

twelve or one o'clock; but at six he might want another; but, if he thinks so himself, the result is the same. And that result is what the whole South of Frankistan [3] calls the *evil eye*. Wanting [Pg 13] dinner, when he sees another person in the very act of dining, the dog (though otherwise an excellent creature) must be filled with envy; and envy is so contagiously allied to malice, that in elder English one word expresses both those dark modifications of hatred. The dog's eye therefore, without any consciousness on his own part, becomes in such a case *an evil eye*: upon me, at least, it fell with as painful an effect as any established eye of that class could do upon the most superstitious Portuguese.

Now, such exactly is the eye of any man that, without actually interrupting one, threatens by his impatient manner as often as one begins to speak. It has a blighting effect upon one's spirits. And the only resource is to say frankly (as I said to the dog), 'Would you oblige me, sir, by taking the whole of the talk into your own hands? Do not for ever threaten to do so, but at once boldly lay an interdict upon any other person's speaking.'

To those who suffer from nervous irritability, the man that suspends over our heads his *threat* of interruption by constant impatience, is even a more awful person to face than the actual interrupter. Either of them is insufferable; and in cases where the tone of prevailing manners is not vigorous enough to put such people down, or where the individual monster, being not *couchant* or *passant*, but (heraldically speaking) *rampant*, utterly disregards all restraints that are not enforced by a constable, the question comes back with greater force than ever, which I stated at the beginning of this article, 'What's to be done?'

I really cannot imagine. Despair seizes me 'with her icy fangs,' unless the reader can suggest something; or unless he can improve on a plan of my own sketching. [Pg 14]

As a talker for effect, as a *bravura* artist in conversation, no one has surpassed Coleridge. There is a Spanish proverb, that he who has not seen Seville, has seen nothing. And I grieve to inform the present unfortunate generation, born under an evil star, coming, in fact, into the world a day after the fair, that, not having heard Coleridge, they have *heard*—pretty much what the strangers to Seville

have *seen*, which (you hear from the Spaniards) amounts to nothing. *Nothing* is hardly a thing to be proud of, and yet it has its humble advantages. To have heard Coleridge was a thing to remember with pride as a trophy, but with pain as a trophy won by some personal sacrifice. To have heard Coleridge has now indeed become so great a distinction, that if it were transferable, and a man could sell it by auction, the biddings for it would run up as fast as for a genuine autograph of Shakespeare. The story is current under a thousand forms of the man who piqued himself on an interview which he had once enjoyed with royalty; and, being asked what he could repeat to the company of his gracious Majesty's remarks, being an honest fellow he confessed candidly that the King, happening to be pressed for time, had confined himself to saying, 'Dog, stand out of my horse's way'; and many persons that might appear as claimants to the honour of having conversed with Coleridge could perhaps report little more of personal communication than a courteous request from the great man not to interrupt him. Inevitably, however, from this character of the Coleridgean conversation arose certain consequences, which are too much overlooked by those who bring it forward as a model or as a splendid variety in the proper art of conversation. And speaking myself as personally a witness to the unfavourable impression [Pg 15] left by these consequences, I shall not scruple in this place to report them with frankness.

At the same time, having been heretofore publicly misrepresented and possibly because misunderstood as to the temper in which I spoke of Coleridge, and as though I had violated some duty of friendship in uttering a truth not flattering after his death, I wish so far to explain the terms on which we stood as to prevent any similar misconstruction. It would be impossible in any case for me to attempt a Plinian panegyric, or a French *éloge*. Not that I think such forms of composition false, any more than an advocate's speech, or a political partisan's: it is understood from the beginning that they are one-sided; but still true according to the possibilities of truth when caught from an angular and not a central station. There is even a pleasure as from a gorgeous display, and a use as from a fulness of unity, in reading a grand or even pompous laudatory oration upon a man like Leibnitz, or Newton, which neglects all his errors or blemishes. This abstracting view I could myself adopt as to

a man whom I had learned to know from books, but not as to one whom I knew also from personal intercourse. His faults and his greatness are then too much intertwined. There is still something unreal in the knowledge of men through books; with which is compatible a greater flexibility of estimate. But the absolute realities of life acting upon any mind of deep sincerity do not leave the same liberty of suppression or concealment. In that case, the reader may perhaps say, and wherever the relations of the writer to a deceased man prescribe many restraints of tenderness or delicacy, would it not be better to forbear speaking at all? Certainly; and I go on therefore to say that my own relations to Coleridge were not of that [Pg 16] nature. I had the greatest admiration for his intellectual powers, which in one direction I thought and think absolutely unrivalled on earth; I had also that sort of love for him which arises naturally as a rebound from intense admiration, even where there is little of social congeniality. But, in any stricter sense of the word, *friends* we were not. For years we met at intervals in society; never once estranged by any the slightest shadow of a quarrel or a coolness. But there were reasons, arising out of original differences in our dispositions and habits, which would probably have forever prevented us, certainly *did* prevent us, from being confidential friends. Yet, if we had been such, even the more for that reason the sincerity of my nature would oblige me to speak freely if I spoke at all of anything which I might regard as amongst his errors. For the perfection of genial homage, one may say, in the expression of Petronius Arbitrarius, *Præcipitandus est liber spiritus*, the freedom of the human spirit must be thrown headlong through the whole realities of the subject, without picking or choosing, without garbling or disguising. It yet remains as a work of the highest interest, to estimate (but for that to display) Coleridge in his character of great philosophic thinker, in which character he united perfections that never *were* united but in three persons on this earth, in himself, in Plato (as many suppose), and in Schelling, viz., the utmost expansion and in some paths the utmost depths of the searching intellect with the utmost sensibility to the powers and purposes of Art: whilst, as a creator in Art, he had pretensions which neither Plato nor Schelling could make. His powers as a Psychologist (not as a Metaphysician) seem to me absolutely unrivalled on earth. And had his health been better, so as [Pg 17] to have sustained the natural cheerfulness towards which his

nature tended, had his pecuniary embarrassments been even moderately lightened in their pressure, and had his studies been more systematically directed to one end — my conviction is that he would have left a greater philosophic monument of his magnificent mind than Aristotle, or Lord Bacon, or Leibnitz.

With these feelings as to the pretensions of Coleridge, I am not likely to underrate anything which he did. But a thing may be very difficult to do, very splendid when done, and yet false in its principles, useless in its results, memorable perhaps by its impression at the time, and yet painful on the whole to a thoughtful retrospect. In dancing it is but too common that an intricate *pas seul*, in funambulism that a dangerous feat of equilibration, in the Grecian art of *desultory* equitation (where a single rider governs a plurality of horses by passing from one to another) that the flying contest with difficulty and peril, may challenge an anxiety of interest, may bid defiance to the possibility of inattention, and yet, after all, leave the jaded spectator under a sense of distressing tension given to his faculties. The sympathy is with the difficulties attached to the effort and the display, rather than with any intellectual sense of power and skill genially unfolded under natural excitements. It would be idle to cite Madame de Staël's remark on one of these meteoric exhibitions, viz., that Mr. Coleridge possessed the art of monologue in perfection, but not that of the dialogue; yet it comes near to hitting the truth from her point of view. The habit of monologue which Coleridge favoured lies open to three fatal objections: 1. It is antisocial in a case expressly meant by its final cause for the triumph of sociality; 2. It refuses all [Pg 18] homage to women on an arena expressly dedicated to their predominance; 3. It is essentially fertile in *des longueurs*. Could there be imagined a trinity of treasons against the true tone of social intercourse more appalling to a Parisian taste?

In a case such as this, where Coleridge was the performer, I myself enter less profoundly into the brilliant woman's horror, for the reason that, having originally a necessity almost morbid for the intellectual pleasures that depend on solitude, I am constitutionally more careless about the luxuries of conversation. I see them; like them in the rare cases where they flourish, but do not require them. Not sympathizing, therefore, with the lady's horror in its intensity, I

yet find my judgment in harmony with hers. The evils of Coleridgean talk, even managed by a Coleridge, were there, and they fixed themselves continually on my observation:

I. It defeats the very end of social meetings. Without the excitement from a reasonable number of auditors, and some novelty in the composition of his audience, Coleridge was hardly able to talk his best. Now, at the end of some hours, it struck secretly on the good sense of the company. Was it reasonable to have assembled six, ten, or a dozen persons for the purpose of hearing a prelection? Would not the time have been turned to more account, even as regarded the object which they had substituted for *social* pleasure, in studying one of Coleridge's printed works?—since there his words were stationary and not flying, so that notes might be taken down, and questions proposed by way of letter, on any impenetrable difficulties; whereas in a stream of oral teaching, which ran like the stream of destiny, impassive [Pg 19] to all attempts at interruption, difficulties for ever arose to irritate your nervous system at the moment, and to vex you permanently by the recollection that they had prompted a dozen questions, every one of which you had forgotten through the necessity of continuing to run alongside with the speaker, and through the impossibility of saying, 'Halt, Mr. Coleridge! Pull up, I beseech you, if it were but for two minutes, that I may try to fathom that last sentence.' This in all conversation is one great evil, viz., the substitution of an alien purpose for the natural and appropriate purpose. Not to be intellectual in a direct shape, but to be intellectual through sociality, is the legitimate object of a social meeting. It may be right, medically speaking, that a man should be shampooed; but it cannot be right that, having asked him to dine, you should decline dinner and substitute a shampooing. This a man would be apt to call by the shorter name of a *sham*.

II. It diminishes the power of the talking performer himself. Seeming to have more, the man has less. For a man is never thrown upon his mettle, nor are his true resources made known even to himself, until to some extent he finds himself resisted (or at least modified) by the reaction of those around him. That day, says Homer, robs a man of half his value which sees him made a slave. But to be an autocrat is as perilous as to be a slave. And supposing Homer to have been introduced to Coleridge (a supposition which a

learned man at my elbow pronounces intolerable—'It's an anachronism, sir, a base anachronism!' Well, but one may *suppose* anything, however base), Homer would have observed to me, as we came away from the *soirée*, 'In my opinion, our splendid friend S. T. C. would [Pg 20] have been the better for a few kicks on the shins. That day takes away half of a man's talking value which raises him into an irresponsible dictator to his company.'

III. It diminishes a man's power in another way less obvious, but not less certain. I had often occasion to remark how injurious it was to the impression of Coleridge's finest displays where the minds of the hearers had been long detained in a state of passiveness. To understand fully, to sympathise deeply, it was essential that they should react. Absolute inertia produced inevitable torpor. I am not supposing any indocility, or unwillingness to listen. Generally it might be said that merely to find themselves in that presence argued sufficiently in the hearers a cheerful dedication of themselves to a dutiful patience.

The mistake, in short, is to suppose that the particular power of talk Coleridge had was a *nuance* or modification of what is meant by conversational power; whereas it was the direct antithesis: it differed diametrically. So much as he had of his own peculiar power, so much more alien and remote was he from colloquial power. This remark should be introduced by observing that Madame de Staël's obvious criticism passes too little unvalued or unsearched either by herself or others. She fancied it an accidental inclination or a caprice, or a sort of self-will or discourtesy or inattention. No; it was a faculty in polar opposition to the true faculty of conversation.

Coleridge was copious, and not without great right, upon the subject of Art. It is a subject upon which we personally are very impatient, and (as Mrs. Quickly expresses it) peevish, as peevish as Rugby in his [Pg 21] prayers. [4] Is this because we know too much about Art? Oh, Lord bless you, no! We know too little about it by far, and our wish is—to know more. But *that* is difficult; so many are the teachers, who by accident had never any time to learn; so general is the dogmatism; and, worse than all, so inveterate is the hypocrisy, wherever the graces of liberal habits and association are supposed to be dependent upon a particular mode of knowledge.