

or conspiracy was out of the question. Not only had the young woman ever been a harmless, simple creature, but she was evidently laboring under a nervous fever. In the town in which she had been resident for many years as a servant in different families, no solution presented itself. The young physician, however, determined to trace her past life step by step; for the patient herself was incapable of returning a rational answer. He at length succeeded in discovering . . . that the patient—an orphan at the time—had been charitably taken by an old Protestant pastor at nine years of age, and had remained with him some years, even till the old man's death. . . . Anxious inquiries were then, of course, made concerning the pastor's habits; and the solution of the phenomenon was soon obtained, for it appeared that it had been the old man's custom for years to walk up and down a passage of his house, into which the kitchen door opened, and to repeat to himself with a loud voice out of his favorite books. . . . He was a very learned man, and a great Hebraist. Among his books (discovered in a niece's possession) were found a collection of Rabbinical writings, together with several of the Greek and Latin fathers; and the physician succeeded in identifying so many passages with those taken down at the young woman's bedside, that no doubt could remain in any rational mind concerning the true origin of the impression made on her nervous system.

"This authenticated case furnishes both proof and instance, that reliques of sensation may exist for an indefinite time in a latent state, in the very same order in which they were originally impressed; and as we cannot rationally suppose the feverish state of the brain to act in any other way than as a stimulus, this fact (and it would not be difficult to adduce several of the same kind) contributes to make it even probable, that all thoughts are in themselves imperishable; and that if the intelligent faculty should be rendered more comprehensive, it would require only a different and apportioned organization—the body celestial instead of the body terrestrial—to bring before every human soul the collective experience of its whole past existence. And this—this—perchance is the dread book of judgment, in the mysterious hieroglyphics of which every idle word is recorded. Yea, in the very nature of a living spirit, it may be more possible that heaven and earth should pass away, than that a single act, a single thought, should be loosened or lost from that living chain of causes, with all the

links of which, conscious or unconscious, the free will, our only absolute self, is co-extensive and co-present."—COLERIDGE: *Biographia Literaria*, vol. i., First Part, chap. vi.

After the death of Professor John Wilson, Mr. Warren published an account of an interview he once had with the Professor, when Mr. De Quincey was present, and the conversation happened to turn on "forgetting."

"Is such a thing as forgetting possible to the human mind?" asked Mr. De Quincey. 'Does the mind ever actually lose anything for ever? Is not every impression it has once received reproducible? How often a thing is suddenly recollected that had happened many, many years before, but never been thought of since till that moment! Possibly a suddenly developed power of recollecting every act of a man's life, may constitute the great book to be opened before Him on the judgment-day.' I ventured to say, that I knew an instance of a gentleman who, in hastily jumping on board the "Excellent," . . . missed it, and fell into the water of Portsmouth harbor, sinking to a great depth. For a while he was supposed drowned. He afterwards said, that all he remembered, after plunging into the water, was a sense of freedom from pain, and a sudden recollection of all his past life, especially of guilty actions that he had long forgotten. Professor Wilson said, that if this were so, it was indeed very startling; and I think Mr. De Quincey said, that he also had heard of one, if not of two or three, such cases."—"Personal Recollections of Christopher North," *Blackwood's Magazine*, December, 1851.

This extract from Blackwood's Magazine may serve as an appropriate introduction to a passage from Mr. De Quincey's own writings—a passage which cannot fail to suggest what the subject which those quotations are intended to illustrate might have become in the hands of a master. It is from his well-known description of the *Palimpsest of the Brain*:—

"The fleeting accidents of man's life, and its external shows, may indeed be irrelative and incongruous; but the organizing principles which fuse into harmony, and gather about fixed predetermined centres, whatever heterogeneous elements life may have accumulated from without, will not permit the grandeur of human unity greatly to be violated, or its ultimate repose to be troubled in the retrospect from dying moments, or from other great convulsions. Such a convulsion is the struggle of gradual suffocation,