

THOMAS DE QUINCEY.

IF we look back but a short distance through the mist of receding years and take a glance at those whose names are not among the millions of forgotten dead, we shall see one who, though not remarkable for imposing stature, yet towers aloft a giant in intellectual strength, the ablest exponent perhaps this century has ever seen of stately, eloquent and impassioned English prose. Whether we take our place with him on the outside of a Royal Mail coach and roll along the highways of rural England, scattering in our course the latest news of Trafalgar or Talavera and awakening the slumbering villages as we pass with clattering of horses' hoofs and flourishing of trumpets; whether we listen to him discoursing humorously on the artistic merits of a murder as though it were the product of a painter's or a poet's skill; or whether betaking ourselves to his cottage home at Grasmere, we peep into his study and see him snowed up with books and heaps of MSS., a volume of German metaphysics before him and a bowl of dark-brown fluid by his side—we have ever the same odd, unique, original genius, Thomas De Quincey—opium-eater extraordinary.

What most magnificent delusions, what glorious visions, what dread array of horrid fantasies, what agonies of terror does he reveal to us in his Confessions! When has the boundless regions of dreamland been so extensively traversed as by him who was so richly gifted with the faculty of "dreaming splendidly?" Who can forget the glamour of æsthetic refinement thrown about the most horrible of subjects in his strangely humorous dissertation on murder; the calm, cool way in which the lecturer speaks of the manner in which a certain deed of blood was done as "mere plagiarism, base plagiarism, from hints that I threw out;" or the air of complacency with which he repudiates any notion of allowing his would-be coachman to put his fine theory into practice. "I set my face against it *in toto*. For if once a man indulges himself in murder, very soon he comes to think little of robbing and from robbing he comes next to drinking and Sabbath-breaking, and from that to incivility and procrastination. *Principiis obsta*—that's my rule." Is there not something very extravagant, it may be, yet very fascinating in that Avenger of his whose designs are