

Next to reading the works of a favourite author, I think the desire is particularly strong within us all, to know something of the life and personal history of the man or woman who amuses us during the hours of our leisure. We like to know how Gibbon lived and worked, how Goldsmith wrote, of the long and entertaining walks which DeQuincey and bluff Kit North used to take together across the moors and fells of Scotland, of the regular habits of composition which Southey had, and of the struggles of the Grub street coterie. We love to read about the great breakfasts at the Banker poet's, and the grand old dinners at Holland House, about Macaulay's horror of cold boiled veal, of Johnson's copious potations from the steaming urn, of the one-dish dinners which poor Charles Lamb used to eat, and of Sydney Smith and his private beef-steak. What would we not give to hear Walter Scott recite, as he used to fifty years ago, one of his own ringing ballads, or a song of Burns', or the tender "Braes o' Balquhither" of the misfortunate Tannahill, or to hear Macaulay recite lines from the "Judicious Poet," or to hear the Ettrick Shepherd's lofty dissertation on the beauties of his own poetry, or to hear Tennyson read or rather drone "Locksley Hall." And we all like to know something about the houses in which these men of genius lived, and the little nooks and corners, which were at times their favourite haunts. We are interested in knowing who were the companions of Landor, and of Byron, and of the mystical Coleridge, and every glimpse which it may be our privilege to steal of their inner life, their personal and private life, interests us afresh, and sends us again to our libraries that we may read anew, with our added information, those splendid things of which we seem never to tire. And then when we are fortunate enough to know the primary cause of anything, the reason why such a thing came to be written, the origin of a poem, or of a story, or of a bit of essay-writing, how fresh and delightful and delicious the