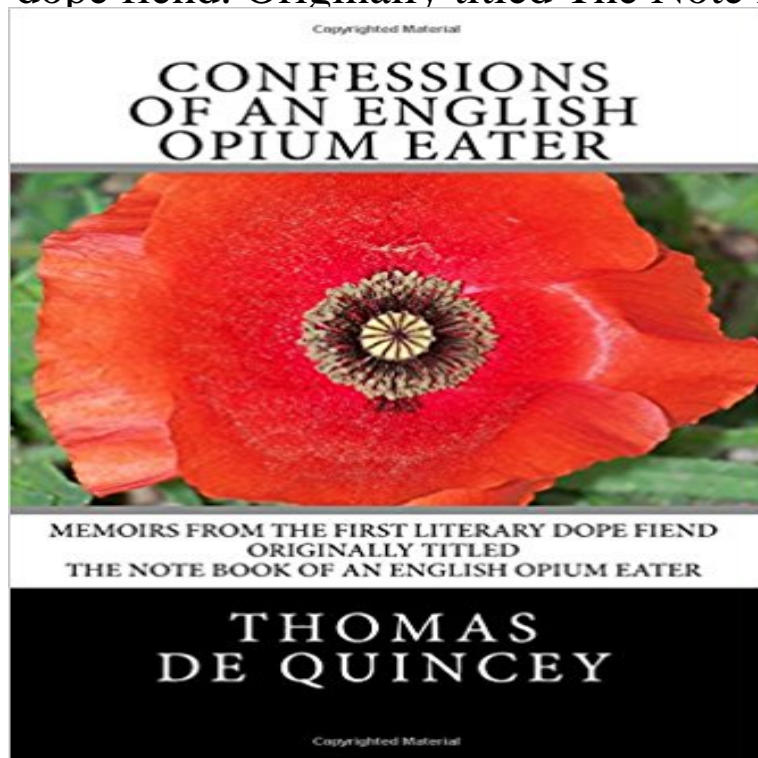


Confessions of an English Opium Eater: Memoirs from the first literary dope fiend. Originally titled The Note Book of an English Opium Eater



Sociology informs us that junkies lead chaotic lifestyles. Thomas de Quincey was the prototype of this, as in so many other things. He was the first and still is the finest literary dope fiend, in a lineage leading through to William Burroughs. He mined his own psyche for material because that was what he had to hand when he needed cash to buy drugs; he made no claim that the confessions will do us or him any good at all. There was a good deal of psychological trauma to mine. De Quincey never recovered from the shock of his sisters death when he was a child and he dwelt on the details of her corpse and post-mortem to a disquieting degree. He was bullied by his elder brother and, in defense, developed a mean, despicable personality, hoping his brother would consider him so contemptible he would not want to play with him. His mother taught him he was worthless, he felt he was the refuse of the universe. De Quincey ran away from school and took up with noble-minded Ann of Oxford Street, a 15-year-old prostitute, his partner in wretchedness, who shared what little she had with him. He first took opium as a treatment for pain and immediately discovered it was the drug for him, as he put it in typically unrestrained prose: Here was the secret of happiness, about which philosophers had disputed for so many ages, at once discovered: happiness might now be bought for a penny, and carried in the waistcoat pocket. He believed it elevated his moral affections and enhanced his intellect. He first started taking opium holidays every three weeks; then Saturday night was opium night. Inevitably, his intake became daily, and then virtually hourly. In his *Confessions of an Opium Eater*, De Quincey gives us his life story and shares such opium-induced reveries as travel with the goddess Levana in her three kingdoms of grief.

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