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978-1-108-06424-8 - *Consolations in Travel: Or, the Last Days of a Philosopher*

Humphry Davy

Frontmatter

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Consolations in Travel

Arguably the first celebrity scientist, and the epitome of the 'Romantic' natural philosopher, Sir Humphry Davy (1778–1829) was a brilliant lecturer whose popularising of science made him famous. He pioneered electrochemistry, befriended the Romantic poets, invented a safety lamp for miners and even wrote on angling (see *On the Safety Lamp* and *Salmonia*, also reissued in this series). Described as 'the last words of a dying Plato', *Consolations in Travel* was published posthumously in 1830. It is an intriguing mixture of poetry, autobiographical sketches, descriptions of dreams, philosophical musings on the afterlife and, in the view of one contemporary review, 'some [matter] which sober reason must dissent as extravagant, and almost bordering on the absurd'. Here, in his final months, Davy turns to the eternal, believing that through science all the questions of the universe could be answered. It remains a poignant and controversial postscript to an illustrious life.

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Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town,
Singapore, São Paulo, Delhi, Mexico City

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781108064248

© in this compilation Cambridge University Press 2013

This edition first published 1830

This digitally printed version 2013

ISBN 978-1-108-06424-8 Paperback

This book reproduces the text of the original edition. The content and language reflect the beliefs, practices and terminology of their time, and have not been updated.

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CONSOLATIONS IN TRAVEL,

OR

THE LAST DAYS

OF

A PHILOSOPHER.

BY

SIR HUMPHRY DAVY, BART.

LATE PRESIDENT OF THE ROYAL SOCIETY.

LONDON:

JOHN MURRAY, ALBEMARLE-STREET.

MDCCCXXX.

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As is stated in the Preface which follows, this work was composed during a period of bodily indisposition;—it was concluded at the very moment of the invasion of the Author's last illness. Had his life been prolonged, it is probable, that some additions and some changes would have been made. The editor does not consider himself warranted to do more than give to the world a faithful copy, making only a few omissions and a few verbal alterations. The characters of the persons of the Dialogue were intended to be ideal, at least in great part;—such they should be considered by the reader; and, it is to be hoped, that the incidents introduced, as well as the persons, will be viewed only as subordinate and subservient

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to the sentiments and doctrines. The dedication, it may be specially noticed, is the author's own, and in the very words dictated by him, at a time when he had lost the power of writing except with extreme difficulty, owing to the paralytic attack, although he retained in a very remarkable manner all his mental faculties unimpaired and unclouded.

JOHN DAVY.

London,
January 6th, 1830.

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TO
THOMAS POOLE, ESQ.
OF NETHER STOWEY,
IN REMEMBRANCE OF
THIRTY YEARS OF CONTINUED AND FAITHFUL
FRIENDSHIP.

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P R E F A C E.

SALMONIA was written during the time of a partial recovery from a long and dangerous illness. The present work was composed immediately after, under the same unfavourable and painful circumstances, and at a period when the constitution of the author suffered from new attacks. He has derived some pleasure and some consolation, when most other sources of consolation and pleasure were closed to him, from this exercise of his mind; and, he ventures to hope that these hours of sickness may be not altogether unprofitable to persons in perfect health.

Rome,
February 21, 1829.

b

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