



ESSAYS

OSCAR
WILDE

TACET BOOKS

ESSAYS

Oscar Wilde

EDITED BY

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Introduction

by Edmund Gosse¹

As a form of literature, the essay is a composition of moderate length, usually in prose, which deals in an easy, cursory way with the external conditions of a subject, and, in strictness, with that subject, only as it affects the writer. Dr Johnson, himself an eminent essayist, defines an essay as “an irregular, undigested piece”; the irregularity may perhaps be admitted, but want of thought, that is to say lack of proper mental digestion, is certainly not characteristic of a fine example. It should, on the contrary, always be the brief and light result of experience and profound meditation, while “undigested” is the last epithet to be applied to the essays of Montaigne, Addison or Lamb. Bacon said that the Epistles of Seneca were “essays,” but this can hardly be allowed. Bacon himself goes on to admit that “the word is late, though the thing is ancient.” The word, in fact, was invented for this species of writing by Montaigne, who merely meant that these were experiments in a new kind of literature. This original meaning, namely that these pieces were attempts or endeavours, feeling their way towards the expression of what would need a far wider space to exhaust, was lost in England in the course of the eighteenth century. This is seen by the various attempts made in the nineteenth century to coin a word which should express a still smaller work, as distinctive in comparison with the essay as the essay is by the side of the monograph; none of these linguistic experiments, such as *essayette*, *essaykin* (Thackeray) and *essaylet* (Helps) have taken hold of the language. As a matter of fact, the

journalistic word *article* covers the lesser form of essay, although not exhaustively, since the essays in the monthly and quarterly reviews, which are fully as extended as an essay should ever be, are frequently termed “articles,” while many “articles” in newspapers, dictionaries and encyclopaedias are in no sense essays. It may be said that the idea of a detached work is combined with the word “essay,” which should be neither a section of a disquisition nor a chapter in a book which aims at the systematic development of a story. Locke’s *Essay on the Human Understanding* is not an essay at all, or cluster of essays, in this technical sense, but refers to the experimental and tentative nature of the inquiry which the philosopher was undertaking. Of the curious use of the word so repeatedly made by Pope mention will be made below.

The essay, as a species of literature, was invented by Montaigne, who had probably little suspicion of the far-reaching importance of what he had created. In his dejected moments, he turned to rail at what he had written, and to call his essays “inepties” and “sottises.” But in his own heart he must have been well satisfied with the new and beautiful form which he had added to literary tradition. He was perfectly aware that he had devised a new thing; that he had invented a way of communicating himself to the world as a type of human nature. He designed it to carry out his peculiar object, which was to produce an accurate portrait of his own soul, not as it was yesterday or will be tomorrow, but as it is to-day. It is not often that we can date with any approach to accuracy the arrival of a new class of literature into the world, but it was in the month of March 1571 that the essay was invented. It was started in the second story of the old tower of the castle of Montaigne, in a study to which the philosopher withdrew for that purpose, surrounded by his books, close to his chapel, sheltered from the excesses of a fatiguing world. He wrote slowly, not

systematically; it took nine years to finish the two first books of the essays. In 1574 the manuscript of the work, so far as it was then completed, was nearly lost, for it was confiscated by the pontifical police in Rome, where Montaigne was residing, and was not returned to the author for four months. The earliest imprint saw the light in 1580, at Bordeaux, and the Paris edition of 1588, which is the fifth, contains the final text of the great author. These dates are not negligible in the briefest history of the essay, for they are those of its revelation to the world of readers. It was in the delightful chapters of his new, strange book that Montaigne introduced the fashion of writing briefly, irregularly, with constant digressions and interruptions, about the world as it appears to the individual who writes. The *Essais* were instantly welcomed, and few writers of the Renaissance had so instant and so vast a popularity as Montaigne. But while the philosophy, and above all the graceful stoicism, of the great master were admired and copied in France, the exact shape in which he had put down his thoughts, in the exquisite negligence of a series of essays, was too delicate to tempt an imitator. It is to be noted that neither Charron, nor Mlle de Gournay, his most immediate disciples, tried to write essays. But Montaigne, who liked to fancy that the Eyquem family was of English extraction, had spoken affably of the English people as his "cousins," and it has always been admitted that his genius has an affinity with the English. He was early read in England, and certainly by Bacon, whose is the second great name connected with this form of literature. It was in 1597, only five years after the death of Montaigne, that Bacon published in a small octavo the first ten of his essays. These he increased to 38 in 1612 and to 58 in 1625. In their first form, the essays of Bacon had nothing of the fulness or grace of Montaigne's; they are meagre notes, scarcely more than the headings for discourses. It is possible that when he wrote them he was not yet familiar with the style of his

predecessor, which was first made popular in England, in 1603, when Florio published that translation of the *Essais* which Shakespeare unquestionably read. In the later editions Bacon greatly expanded his theme, but he never reached, or but seldom, the freedom and ease, the seeming formlessness held in by an invisible chain, which are the glory of Montaigne, and distinguish the typical essayist. It would seem that at first, in England, as in France, no lesser writer was willing to adopt a title which belonged to so great a presence as that of Bacon or Montaigne. The one exception was Sir William Cornwallis (*d.* 1631), who published essays in 1600 and 1617, of slight merit, but popular in their day. No other English essayist of any importance appeared until the Restoration, when Abraham Cowley wrote eleven "Several Discourses by way of Essays," which did not see the light until 1668. He interspersed with his prose, translations and original pieces in verse, but in other respects Cowley keeps much nearer than Bacon to the form of Montaigne. Cowley's essay "Of Myself" is a model of what these little compositions should be. The name of Bacon inspires awe, but it is really not he, but Cowley, who is the father of the English essay; and it is remarkable that he has had no warmer panegyrists than his great successors, Charles Lamb and Macaulay. Towards the end of the century, Sir George Mackenzie (1636–1691) wrote witty moral discourses, which were, however, essays rather in name than form. Whenever, however, we reach the eighteenth century, we find the essay suddenly became a dominant force in English literature. It made its appearance almost as a new thing, and in combination with the earliest developments of journalism. On the 12th of April 1709 appeared the first number of a penny newspaper, entitled the *Tatler*, a main feature of which was to amuse and instruct fashionable readers by a series of short papers dealing with the manifold occurrences of life, *quicquid agunt homines*. But it was not until Steele, the founder of

the *Tatler*, was joined by Addison that the eighteenth-century essay really started upon its course. It displayed at first, and indeed it long retained, a mixture of the manner of Montaigne with that of La Bruyère, combining the form of the pure essay with that of the character-study, as modelled on Theophrastus, which had been so popular in England throughout the seventeenth century. Addison's early *Tatler* portraits, in particular such as those of "Tom Folio" and "Ned Softly," are hardly essays. But Steele's "Recollections of Childhood" is, and here we may observe the type on which Goldsmith, Lamb and R. L. Stevenson afterwards worked. In January 1711 the *Tatler* came to an end, and was almost immediately followed by the *Spectator*, and in 1713 by the *Guardian*. These three newspapers are storehouses of admirable and typical essays, the majority of them written by Steele and Addison, who are the most celebrated eighteenth-century essayists in England. Later in the century, after the publication of other less successful experiments, appeared Fielding's essays in the *Covent Garden Journal* (1752) and Johnson's in the *Rambler* (1750), the *Adventurer* (1752) and the *Idler* (1759). There followed a great number of polite journals, in which the essay was treated as "the bow of Ulysses in which it was the fashion for men of rank and genius to try their strength." Goldsmith reached a higher level than the Chesterfields and Bonnel Thorntons had dreamed of, in the delicious sections of his *Citizen of the World* (1760). After Goldsmith, the eighteenth-century essay declined into tamer hands, and passed into final feebleness with the pedantic Richard Cumberland and the sentimental Henry Mackenzie. The *corpus* of eighteenth-century essayists is extremely voluminous, and their reprinted works fill some fifty volumes. There is, however, a great sameness about all but the very best of them, and in no case do they surpass Addison in freshness, or have they ventured to modify the form he adopted for his lucubrations. What has survived of

them all is the lightest portion, but it should not be forgotten that a very large section of the essays of that age were deliberately didactic and "moral." A great revival of the essay took place during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, and foremost in the history of this movement must always be placed the name of Charles Lamb. He perceived that the real business of the essay, as Montaigne had conceived it, was to be largely personal. The famous *Essays of Elia* began to appear in the *London Magazine* for August 1820, and proceeded at fairly regular intervals until December 1822; early in 1823 the first series of them were collected in a volume. The peculiarity of Lamb's style as an essayist was that he threw off the Addisonian and still more the Johnsonian tradition, which had become a burden that crushed the life out of each conventional essay, and that he boldly went back to the rich verbiage and brilliant imagery of the seventeenth century for his inspiration. It is true that Lamb had great ductility of style, and that, when he pleases, he can write so like Steele that Steele himself might scarcely know the difference, yet in his freer flights we are conscious of more exalted masters, of Milton, Thomas Browne and Jeremy Taylor. He succeeded, moreover, in reaching a poignant note of personal feeling, such as none of his predecessors had ever aimed at; the essays called "Dream Children" and "Blakesmoor" are examples of this, and they display a degree of harmony and perfection in the writing of the pure essay such as had never been attempted before, and has never since been reached. Leigh Hunt, clearing away all the didactic and pompous elements which had overgrown the essay, restored it to its old *Spectator* grace, and was the most easy nondescript writer of his generation in periodicals such as the *Indicator* (1819) and the *Companion* (1828). The sermons, letters and pamphlets of Sydney Smith were really essays of an extended order. In Hazlitt and Francis Jeffrey we see the form and method of the essay beginning to be

applied to literary criticism. The writings of De Quincey are almost exclusively essays, although many of the most notable of them, under his vehement pen, have far outgrown the limits of the length laid down by the most indulgent formalist. His biographical and critical essays are interesting, but they are far from being trustworthy models in form or substance. In a sketch, however rapid, of the essay in the nineteenth century, prominence must be given to the name of Macaulay. His earliest essay, that on Milton, appeared in the *Edinburgh Review* in 1825, very shortly after the revelation of Lamb's genius in "Elia." No two products cast in the same mould could, however, be more unlike in substance. In the hands of Macaulay the essay ceases to be a confession or an autobiography; it is strictly impersonal, it is literary, historical or controversial, vigorous, trenchant and full of party prejudice. The periodical publication of Macaulay's Essays in the *Edinburgh Review* went on until 1844; when we cast our eyes over this mass of brilliant writing we observe with surprise that it is almost wholly contentious. Nothing can be more remarkable than the difference in this respect between Lamb and Macaulay, the former for ever demanding, even cajoling, the sympathy of the reader, the latter scanning the horizon for an enemy to controvert. In later times the essay in England has been cultivated in each of these ways, by a thousand journalists and authors. The "leaders" of a daily newspaper are examples of the popularization of the essay, and they point to the danger which now attacks it, that of producing a purely ephemeral or even momentary species of effect. The essay, in its best days, was intended to be as lasting as a poem or a historical monograph; it aimed at being one of the most durable and precious departments of literature. We still occasionally see the production of essays which have this more ambitious aim; within the last quarter of the nineteenth century the essays of R. L. Stevenson achieved it. His *Familiar Studies* are of the same class as those of

Montaigne and Lamb, and he approached far more closely than any other contemporary to their high level of excellence. We have seen that the tone of the essay should be personal and confidential; in Stevenson's case it was characteristically so. But the voices which please the public in a strain of pure self-study are few at all times, and with the cultivation of the analytic habit they tend to become less original and attractive. It is possible that the essay may die of exhaustion of interest, or may survive only in the modified form of accidental journalism.

The essay, although invented by a great French writer, was very late in making itself at home in France. The so-called *Essais* of Leibnitz, Nicole, Yves Marie André and so many others were really treatises. Voltaire's famous *Essai sur les mœurs des nations* is an elaborate historical disquisition in nearly two hundred chapters. Later, the voluminous essays of Joseph de Maistre and of Lamennais were not essays at all in the literary sense. On the other hand, the admirable *Causeries du lundi* of Sainte-Beuve (1804-1869) are literary essays in the fulness of the term, and have been the forerunners of a great army of brilliant essay-writing in France. Among those who have specially distinguished themselves as French essayists may be mentioned Théophile Gautier, Paul de Saint-Victor, Anatole France, Jules Lemaître, Ferdinand Brunetière and Émile Faguet. All these are literary critics, and it is in the form of the analysis of manifestations of intellectual energy that the essay has been most successfully illustrated in France. All the countries of Europe, since the middle of the 19th century, have adopted this form of writing; such monographs or reviews, however, are not perfectly identical with the essay as it was conceived by Addison and Lamb. This last, it may be supposed, is a definitely English thing, and this view is confirmed by the fact that in several

European languages the word “essayist” has been adopted without modification.

In the above remarks it has been taken for granted that the essay is always in prose. Pope, however, conceived an essay in heroic verse. Of this his *Essay on Criticism* (1711) and his *Essay on Man* (1732-1734) are not good examples, for they are really treatises. The so-called *Moral Essays* (1720-1735), on the contrary, might have been contributed, if in prose, either to the *Spectator* or the *Guardian*. The idea of pure essays, in verse, however, did not take any root in English literature.

The Soul of Man Under Socialism

The chief advantage that would result from the establishment of Socialism is, undoubtedly, the fact that Socialism would relieve us from that sordid necessity of living for others which, in the present condition of things, presses so hardly upon almost everybody. In fact, scarcely any one at all escapes.

Now and then, in the course of the century, a great man of science, like Darwin; a great poet, like Keats; a fine critical spirit, like M. Renan; a supreme artist, like Flaubert, has been able to isolate himself, to keep himself out of reach of the clamorous claims of others, to stand "under the shelter of the wall," as Plato puts it, and so to realise the perfection of what was in him, to his own incomparable gain, and to the incomparable and lasting gain of the whole world. These, however, are exceptions. The majority of people spoil their lives by an unhealthy and exaggerated altruism - are forced, indeed, so to spoil them. They find themselves surrounded by hideous poverty, by hideous ugliness, by hideous starvation. It is inevitable that they should be strongly moved by all this. The emotions of man are stirred more quickly than man's intelligence; and, as I pointed out some time ago in an article on the function of criticism, it is much more easy to have sympathy with suffering than it is to have sympathy with thought. Accordingly, with admirable though misdirected intentions, they very seriously and very sentimentally set themselves to the task of remedying the evils that they see. But their remedies do not cure the disease: they merely prolong it. Indeed, their remedies are part of the disease.

They try to solve the problem of poverty, for instance, by keeping the poor alive; or, in the case of a very advanced school, by amusing the poor.

But this is not a solution: it is an aggravation of the difficulty. The proper aim is to try and reconstruct society on such a basis that poverty will be impossible. And the altruistic virtues have really prevented the carrying out of this aim. Just as the worst slave-owners were those who were kind to their slaves, and so prevented the horror of the system being realised by those who suffered from it, and understood by those who contemplated it, so, in the present state of things in England, the people who do most harm are the people who try to do most good; and at last we have had the spectacle of men who have really studied the problem and know the life - educated men who live in the East End - coming forward and imploring the community to restrain its altruistic impulses of charity, benevolence, and the like. They do so on the ground that such charity degrades and demoralises. They are perfectly right. Charity creates a multitude of sins.

There is also this to be said. It is immoral to use private property in order to alleviate the horrible evils that result from the institution of private property. It is both immoral and unfair.

Under Socialism all this will, of course, be altered. There will be no people living in fetid dens and fetid rags, and bringing up unhealthy, hungerpinched children in the midst of impossible and absolutely repulsive surroundings. The security of society will not depend, as it does now, on the state of the weather. If a frost comes we shall not have a hundred thousand men out of work, tramping about the streets in a state of disgusting misery, or whining to their neighbours for alms, or crowding round the doors of loathsome shelters to try and secure a hunch of bread and a

night's unclean lodging. Each member of the society will share in the general prosperity and happiness of the society, and if a frost comes no one will practically be anything the worse.

Upon the other hand, Socialism itself will be of value simply because it will lead to Individualism.

Socialism, Communism, or whatever one chooses to call it, by converting private property into public wealth, and substituting co-operation for competition, will restore society to its proper condition of a thoroughly healthy organism, and insure the material wellbeing of each member of the community. It will, in fact, give Life its proper basis and its proper environment. But for the full development of Life to its highest mode of perfection, something more is needed. What is needed is Individualism. If the Socialism is Authoritarian; if there are Governments armed with economic power as they are now with political power; if, in a word, we are to have Industrial Tyrannies, then the last state of man will be worse than the first. At present, in consequence of the existence of private property, a great many people are enabled to develop a certain very limited amount of individualism. They are either under no necessity to work for their living, or are enabled to choose the sphere of activity that is really congenial to them and gives them pleasure. These are the poets, the philosophers, the men of science, the men of culture - in a word, the real men, the men who have realised themselves, and in whom all Humanity gains a partial realisation. Upon the other hand, there are a great many people who, having no private property of their own, and being always on the brink of sheer starvation, are compelled to do the work of beasts of burden, to do work that is quite uncongenial to them, and to which they are forced by the peremptory, unreasonable, degrading Tyranny of want. These are the poor, and amongst them there is no grace of manner, or

charm of speech, or civilisation, or culture, or refinement in pleasures, or joy of life. From their collective force Humanity gains much in material prosperity. But it is only the material result that it gains, and the man who is poor is in himself absolutely of no importance. He is merely the infinitesimal atom of a force that, so far from regarding him, crushes him: indeed, prefers him crushed, as in that case he is far more obedient.

Of course, it might be said that the Individualism generated under conditions of private property is not always, or even as a rule of a fine or wonderful type, and that the poor, if they have not culture and charm, have still many virtues. Both these statements would be quite true. The possession of private property is very often extremely demoralising, and that is, of course, one of the reasons why Socialism wants to get rid of the institution. In fact, property is really a nuisance. Some years ago people went about the country saying that property has duties. They said it so often and so tediously that, at last, the Church has begun to say it. One hears it now from every pulpit. It is perfectly true. Property not merely has duties, but has so many duties that its possession to any large extent is a bore. It involves endless claims upon one, endless attention to business, endless bother. If property had simply pleasures, we could stand it; but its duties make it unbearable. In the interest of the rich we must get rid of it. The virtues of the poor may be readily admitted, and are much to be regretted. We are often told that the poor are grateful for charity. Some of them are, no doubt, but the best amongst the poor are never grateful. They are ungrateful, discontented, disobedient, and rebellious. They are quite right to be so. Charity they feel to be a ridiculously inadequate mode of partial restitution, or a sentimental dole, usually accompanied by some impertinent attempt on the part of the sentimentalist to tyrannise over their private lives. Why should they be grateful for the

crumbs that fall from the rich man's table? They should be seated at the board, and are beginning to know it. As for being discontented, a man who would not be discontented with such surroundings and such a low mode of life would be a perfect brute. Disobedience, in the eyes of any one who has read history, is man's original virtue. It is through disobedience that progress has been made, through disobedience and through rebellion. Sometimes the poor are praised for being thrifty. But to recommend thrift to the poor is both grotesque and insulting. It is like advising a man who is starving to eat less. For a town or country labourer to practise thrift would be absolutely immoral. Man should not be ready to show that he can live like a badly-fed animal. He should decline to live like that, and should either steal or go on the rates, which is considered by many to be a form of stealing. As for begging, it is safer to beg than to take, but it is finer to take than to beg. No; a poor man who is ungrateful, unthrifty, discontented, and rebellious is probably a real personality, and has much in him. He is at any rate a healthy protest. As for the virtuous poor, one can pity them, of course, but one cannot possibly admire them. They have made private terms with the enemy and sold their birthright for very bad pottage. They must also be extraordinarily stupid. I can quite understand a man accepting laws that protect private property, and admit of its accumulation, as long as he himself is able under these conditions to realise some form of beautiful and intellectual life. But it is almost incredible to me how a man whose life is marred and made hideous by such laws can possibly acquiesce in their continuance.

However, the explanation is not really so difficult to find. It is simply this. Misery and poverty are so absolutely degrading, and exercise such a paralysing effect over the nature of men, that no class is ever really conscious of its own suffering. They have to be told of it by other people, and

they often entirely disbelieve them. What is said by great employers of labour against agitators is unquestionably true. Agitators are a set of interfering, meddling people, who come down to some perfectly contented class of the community, and sow the seeds of discontent amongst them. That is the reason why agitators are so absolutely necessary. Without them, in our incomplete state, there would be no advance towards civilisation. Slavery was put down in America, not in consequence of any action on the part of the slaves, or even any express desire on their part that they should be free. It was put down entirely through the grossly illegal conduct of certain agitators in Boston and elsewhere, who were not slaves themselves, nor owners of slaves, nor had anything to do with the question really. It was, undoubtedly, the Abolitionists who set the torch alight, who began the whole thing. And it is curious to note that from the slaves themselves they received, not merely very little assistance, but hardly any sympathy even; and when at the close of the war the slaves found themselves free, found themselves indeed so absolutely free that they were free to starve, many of them bitterly regretted the new state of things. To the thinker, the most tragic fact in the whole of the French Revolution is not that Marie Antoinette was killed for being a queen, but that the starved peasant of the Vendee voluntarily went out to die for the hideous cause of feudalism.

It is clear, then, that no Authoritarian Socialism will do. For while under the present system a very large number of people can lead lives of a certain amount of freedom and expression and happiness, under an industrial barrack system, or a system of economic tyranny, nobody would be able to have any such freedom at all. It is to be regretted that a portion of our community should be practically in slavery, but to propose to solve the problem by enslaving the entire community is childish. Every man must be left

quite free to choose his own work. No form of compulsion must be exercised over him. If there is, his work will not be good for him, will not be good in itself, and will not be good for others. And by work I simply mean activity of any kind.

I hardly think that any Socialist, nowadays, would seriously propose that an inspector should call every morning at each house to see that each citizen rose up and did manual labour for eight hours. Humanity has got beyond that stage, and reserves such a form of life for the people whom, in a very arbitrary manner, it chooses to call criminals. But I confess that many of the socialistic views that I have come across seem to me to be tainted with ideas of authority, if not of actual compulsion. Of course, authority and compulsion are out of the question. All association must be quite voluntary. It is only in voluntary associations that man is free.

But it may be asked how Individualism, which is now more or less dependent on the existence of private property for its development, will benefit by the abolition of such private property. The answer is very simple. It is true that, under existing conditions, a few men who have had private means of their own, such as Byron, Shelley, Browning, Victor Hugo, Baudelaire, and others, have been able to realise their personality more or less completely. Not one of these men ever did a single day's work for hire. They were relieved from poverty. They had an immense advantage. The question is whether it would be for the good of Individualism that such an advantage should be taken away. Let us suppose that it is taken away. What happens then to Individualism? How will it benefit?

It will benefit in this way. Under the new conditions Individualism will be far freer, far finer, and far more intensified than it is now. I am not talking of the great imaginatively realised Individualism of such poets as I have

mentioned, but of the great actual Individualism latent and potential in mankind generally. For the recognition of private property has really harmed Individualism, and obscured it, by confusing a man with what he possesses. It has led Individualism entirely astray. It has made gain not growth its aim. So that man thought that the important thing was to have, and did not know that the important thing is to be. The true perfection of man lies not in what man has, but in what man is. Private property has crushed true Individualism, and set up an Individualism that is false. It has debarred one part of the community from being individual by starving them. It has debarred the other part of the community from being individual by putting them on the wrong road and encumbering them. Indeed, so completely has man's personality been absorbed by his possessions that the English law has always treated offences against a man's property with far more severity than offences against his person, and property is still the test of complete citizenship. The industry necessary for the making of money is also very demoralising. In a community like ours, where property confers immense distinction, social position, honour, respect, titles, and other pleasant things of the kind, man, being naturally ambitious, makes it his aim to accumulate this property, and goes on wearily and tediously accumulating it long after he has got far more than he wants, or can use, or enjoy, or perhaps even know of. Man will kill himself by overwork in order to secure property, and really, considering the enormous advantages that property brings, one is hardly surprised. One's regret is that society should be constructed on such a basis that man has been forced into a groove in which he cannot freely develop what is wonderful, and fascinating, and delightful in him in which, in fact, he misses the true pleasure and joy of living. He is also, under existing conditions, very insecure. An enormously wealthy merchant may be - often is - at every moment of his life at the mercy of things that are not under

his control. If the wind blows an extra point or so, or the weather suddenly changes, or some trivial thing happens, his ship may go down, his speculations may go wrong, and he finds himself a poor man, with his social position quite gone. Now, nothing should be able to harm a man except himself. Nothing should be able to rob a man at all. What a man really has, is what is in him. What is outside of him should be a matter of no importance.

With the abolition of private property, then, we shall have true, beautiful, healthy Individualism. Nobody will waste his life in accumulating things, and the symbols for things. One will live. To live is the rarest thing in the world. Most people exist, that is all. It is a question whether we have ever seen the full expression of a personality, except on the imaginative plane of art. In action, we never have. Caesar, says Mommsen, was the complete and perfect man. But how tragically insecure was Caesar! Wherever there is a man who exercises authority, there is a man who resists authority. Caesar was very perfect, but his perfection travelled by too dangerous a road. Marcus Aurelius was the perfect man, says Renan. Yes; the great emperor was a perfect man. But how intolerable were the endless claims upon him! He staggered under the burden of the empire. He was conscious how inadequate one man was to bear the weight of that Titan and too vast orb. What I mean by a perfect man is one who develops under perfect conditions; one who is not wounded, or worried, or maimed, or in danger. Most personalities have been obliged to be rebels. Half their strength has been wasted in friction. Byron's personality, for instance, was terribly wasted in its battle with the stupidity, and hypocrisy, and Philistinism of the English. Such battles do not always intensify strength: they often exaggerate weakness. Byron was never able to give us what he might have given us. Shelley escaped better. Like Byron, he got out of England as soon as possible. But