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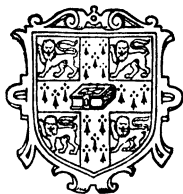
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FIVE ESSAYS

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NOTE

JOHN FLORIO (1553?–1625), reader in Italian to Queen Anne, and dictionary-maker, rendered a service to English literature which few translators have been so happy as to equal. Fortunate both in time and in subject, he led the way into that upper chamber in the tower of the château near Bordeaux from whence Michel Eyquem, seigneur de Montaigne (1533–1592) looked abroad over ‘a farre-extending, rich and unresisted prospect.’ In that famous panelled library, with a thousand well-loved books around him, and with an intimate knowledge of his own nature, Montaigne saw how wonderfully *vain, divers, et ondoyant* is man, constructing a full-length portrait of himself, his preferences, his doubts, ‘the very genius of qualification’ following ‘him through all his keen, constant, changeful consideration of men and things.’ Montaigne’s essays are ‘*un livre de bonne foi*’; their honesty and sincerity, their humanism, have, from the first, influenced and captivated English writers: even if the signature of Shakespeare on a copy of Florio in the British Museum be an eighteenth-century forgery, there appears to be little doubt that Florio, as well as North, among the Tudor translators, was familiar to Shakespeare; the signature of Ben Jonson on another copy is probably genuine; Bacon and Cowley, Sir William Temple and Halifax are in the direct succession; to Edward FitzGerald, he was ‘my dear old Montaigne’; to Emerson, one of his

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NOTE

'Representative Men'; 'Montaigne and Howell's Letters,' says Thackeray, 'are my bedside books. If I wake at night, I have one or other of them to prattle me to sleep again. They talk about themselves for ever, and don't weary me' (*Round-about Papers*); having Montaigne for its subject, chapter five, 'Suspended Judgment,' in Walter Pater's *Gaston de Latour* is one of the classics of interpretation.

Books One and Two of Montaigne's *Essays* were first published in 1580. Book Three was added in 1588 to a revised text of the earlier Books. The first edition of Florio's translation was published in 1603. He translated from more than one of the French editions, probably mainly from the posthumous edition of 1595, edited by Montaigne's *filie d'alliance* Mlle de Gournay and Pierre de Brach. The text of the five essays which follow is that of the third edition of Florio (1632).

It should be remembered that Montaigne not infrequently altered to suit his purpose the text of writers from whom he quoted.

A. R. W.

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