In his interesting introductory essay to the new reprint of Florio's Montaigne, Mr. Thomas Seccombe speaks as a lover of Montaigne, but not as an idolater. "Montaigne," he says, "reminds us of the solitary Robinson on his island, meditating always upon the same theme of the singular adventures and melancholy fate of man. To show us how whimsical a creature man is, how infinite in his variety and insatiable in his desires, he takes himself and exhibits the creature to us. He lives before us. He tells us what an indecent old fellow lurked behind the fur and velvet of his ceremonial manner. He tells us how gluttonously he ate, how he crossed himself when he yawned, said 'God be wi' ye!' when he sneezed, and how fond he was of scratching." The world had always had its frank speakers, but never, until Montaigne, a speaker whose frankness, untouched by compunction, dealt zestfully with his own foibles. "To 'pour oneself out like Old Montaigne,'" says Mr. Seccombe, "has become, consciously or unconsciously, the ideal of every personal writer from La Bruyère and Pascal onwards. He has indeed cast his pollen over La Bruyère, Montesquieu, Rousseau, Sterne, Charles Lamb, Thoreau, and Emerson." This is a passable generalization; but not one of these writers,

*THE ESSAYES OF MICHAEL LORD OF MONTAIGNE. Done into English by John Florio. With an Introduction by Thomas Seccombe. In three volumes. New York: E. P. Dutton & Co.

after all, has the bland ingenuousness of the Lord of Montaigne. There is a radical difference between the man who prattles about himself for love of the theme, and the man who announces, "I am about to commit an amiable indiscretion: listen and you shall hear what a sad dog I really am." The one writer who resembled Montaigne in his manner of self-revelation was Mr. Secretary Pepys, who had probably never read a line of the Essays, and had no notion of writing for any eye but his own.

Mr. Seccombe's sketch of Montaigne's life and genius is admirable for the most part, being disfigured only by an occasional ebullience of style, and by one or two momentary debauches of metaphor, such as, "He finds the living nerve in the old flint classics, which are to him no mere dried specimens of literary form, but human documents palpitating with life." A passage more fairly representing him would be, "Montaigne possesses every quality appropriate to a great prose-writer with one single exception, the poetic quality and its accompanying gift of ideality." We do not understand Mr. Seccombe to be the editor of the present text, which is a reprint of the third edition of Florio (1632), but he is frankly a Florio partisan. "Florio's Montaigne," he declares, "still ranks as the great outstanding and standard English rendering . . . the regnant Montaigne, the most popular rendering in the market on both sides of the Atlantic." Whatever may be true of its market value, the supremacy of Florio is hardly an acknowledged fact on other grounds. His Elizabethan English is often, with all its elaboration, brilliantly faithful to the meaning of the original. But in a multitude of instances it expresses anything but that meaning. He was at all events the pioneer; and the edition of 1603 had a further sentimental interest. Its effect upon Elizabethan literature was instant and powerful. Bacon quoted it; Ben Jonson had a copy; and whether the Shakespeare autograph in the British Museum is genuine or not, the subsequent plays are full of reminiscences of the Essays. However, it is not the version Shakespeare knew which is now put before us in modern dress, but a later edition, much revised yet still far from perfect. Some half century later, Cotton puts forth his translation, with the admission that although he is confident he understands French "as well as any man," he has "sometimes been forced to grope at" his author's meaning. Sometimes he left out passages which were too much for him; his interpolations are far fewer than Florio's. Both Florio and Cotton are, says Mr. Seccombe, very inaccurate: "No successor, however, has arisen, and we must make the best we can of them." This seems to put them in the same class, as to be taken or left in their original form. But in fact a number of attempts have been made, with fair measure of success, to approximate a perfect version by the emendation of Cotton, — as it stands, certainly not less a masterpiece than Florio. Toward such a version the revisions of the Hazlitts made a good deal of progress. Apart from the question of accuracy, there is no version of Montaigne so delightful to read as that of the elder Hazlitt. W. Carew Hazlitt has, by repeated revision, produced a text no doubt greatly more accurate, but also far less spirited and idiomatic.

However, it is certainly true that Florio has a place of his own which is far more independent of revision than that of Cotton. He is, if nothing else, an Elizabethan classic; and he is best reprinted, as in the present instance, word by word, with the old spelling, and with all the crimes upon the original frankly unavenged. This limited edition is beautifully made, and of those eleven hundred and fifty copies printed for sale in England and America "before the type was distributed," none are likely to find their way to the second-hand counters. "Reader" (how ingratiating that old familiar address!) "Reader, loe heere a well-meaning Booke!"

H. W. Boynton.