

# **MONOLOGUES**

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Monologues by Richard Middleton

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**RICHARD MIDDLETON**

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BY  
RICHARD MIDDLETON



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# MONOLOGUES

## I

### THE DECAY OF THE ESSAY

Owing to the general laxity with which men and women use the language they inherit, in the course of years words are apt to be broadened and coarsened in their meaning. Striving against this tendency, every scrupulous writer is in danger of robbing words of a part of their birthright: through fear of letting them mean too much he makes them mean too little. Ultimately, of course, the popular meaning prevails, and we suck our fountain-pens in vain who seek to preserve a kind of verbal aristocracy; but it is a pleasant game while it lasts, and it does no one any harm.

For instance, there is this word "essay." It is used to-day loosely to mean almost any

kind of prose article, especially when such articles are rescued from periodical literature and reprinted in book form. Mr. Chesterton's twisted allegories are essays, and so are Mr. Lucas's pleasant pilferings from queer books, and Mr. Shaw's dramatic criticisms. So, too, for that matter, are Earle's characters, and the Roger de Coverley papers, and Swinburne's laudations of the Elizabethan dramatists. Confronted with this embarrassing promiscuity, the critic who really wishes the word "essay" to mean something is forced to give it a purely arbitrary meaning, and this I have ventured to do in choosing a title for my lament. To say that the art of writing little articles for the newspapers and republishing them in modest volumes is decaying would be absurd ; but to say that at the present time very few people are trying to write like Charles Lamb is patently true. To me, essays are such leisurely expressions of a humane and agreeable personality as we find in the works of Elia. They may criticize and rhapsodize and narrate, but the reader is always conscious of the individuality that controls the pen.