

INTRODUCTION

THE concluding volume of any collected edition is unavoidably fragmentary and desultory. And if this particular volume is no exception to a general tendency, it presents points of view in the author's literary career which may have escaped his greatest admirers and detractors. The wide range of his knowledge and interests is more apparent than in some of his finished work.

What I believed to be only the fragment of an essay on *Historical Criticism* was already in the press, when accidentally I came across the remaining portions, in Wilde's own handwriting; it is now complete though unhappily divided in this edition.¹ Any doubt as to its authenticity, quite apart from the caligraphy, would vanish on reading such a characteristic passage as the following:—'. . . For, it was in vain that the middle ages strove to guard the buried spirit of progress. When the dawn of the Greek spirit arose, the sepulchre was empty, the grave clothes laid aside. Humanity had risen from the dead.' It was only Wilde who could contrive a literary conceit of that description; but readers will observe with different feelings, according to their temperament, that he never followed up the particular trend of thought developed in the essay. It

¹ See Lord Arthur Savile's *Crime and other Prose Pieces* in this edition, page 223.