

On the Feelings of Immortality in Youth

— William Hazlitt

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Introduction :- William Hazlitt is one of the greatest essayist of English literature. He is also considered one of the greatest critics and essayists in the history of the English language. As an essayist he enjoys infallible reputation. His contribution to the English essay is noteworthy. He was the son of a Unitarian minister. After a brief stay at America he returned to England where his literary genius ultimately flowered. Coleridge also influenced his mind and art to a great extent. From 1814 till his death he contributed to the Edinburgh Review, The Examiner, The Times and The London Magazine. His well known essays were collected in the "Round Table", Table Talk, or Original Essays on Men and Manners and The Spirit of the Age or Contemporary Portraits. By his bold and radical views, Hazlitt attracted a lot of attention and criticism. He was a prolific writer. He was a keen observer of life. His sharp memory remembered the past incidents with astonishing vividness and detail. He was eager to inquire into human life with all its variety. Thus, he wrote on a vast range of topics as for examples:- socials, spiritual, etc.

His works deals with the world of men and women. It records their action, assigns their motives and exhibits their whims. He writes on books of all kinds, politics, sports, stage etc. He writes on them with equal wit and wisdom. The views he expresses are his own.

In short, all these things impart a rare charm to his essays. Hazlitt puts his ideas in an informal manner. But it is not Lamb's informality. Hazlitt's informality depends upon systematic enquiry into the topic. In spite of this informality Hazlitt's essays are not light in nature. They are serious and thought provoking. They show his philosophic bent of mind. Hazlitt is more interested in ideas than form. A large number of his essays are on abstract ideas such as Egotism, Reason, Imagination, the fear of Death etc. Hazlitt wrote with convictions which were deep and firm. He wrote with an aim to communicate with his readers. He had a style of his own. It is called the familiar style. There is no affectation or vulgarity in it. Hazlitt's sentences are brief and abrupt, vigorous and direct. He often writes balanced, antithetical sentences to present the contrasting ideas. He is also praised for the use of epigrams and paradoxes. Like Bacon, he is aphoristic. Another distinctive features of his style is the use of quotations.