ECLECTIC ENGLISH CLASSICS

ELIOT'S
SILAS MARNER

MCCORMICK

From 3 to 5 pages.

Any kind of story

Next Friday

4/19/25

① The story opens in about the beginning of the 19th Century.

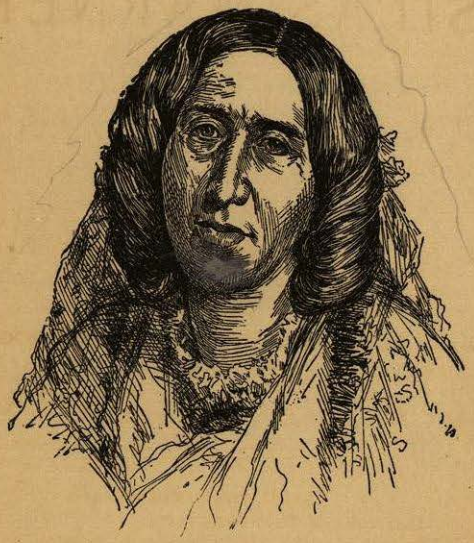
② The people at that time were very superstitious and looked on every stranger as an evil man.

③ At this time every body was happy having a merry time for there was plenty of money.

④ Silas moved from Lantern Yard to Ravelot.
He lost all belief in God and men.

⑤ Silas loved his money at first for what it was worth in giving it to others now he loved it for himself.

6. Liberal.



"GEORGE ELIOT."

ECLECTIC ENGLISH CLASSICS

GEORGE ELIOT'S

SILAS MARNER

EDITED BY

MAY McKITRICK

HEAD OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH, CLEVELAND TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOL

"A child, more than all other gifts
That earth can offer to declining man,
Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts."

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ELIOT—MARNER

W. P. 21

INTRODUCTION.

MARY ANN EVANS, more generally known by the literary pseudonym of George Eliot, was born in Warwickshire, England, Nov. 22, 1819. The uneventful life and monotonous landscape of the remote pastoral district in which her childhood was passed would have presented very few subjects of inspiration to ordinary minds; but it was there that her transcendent genius found the characters and scenes which she afterwards transfigured into idyllic pictures in her earlier and most popular stories. There was but little in the years of her girlhood that indicated the possession of superior talents or distinguished her especially from other children of her age. She learned slowly and was described as "an old-fashioned child, living in a world of her own imagination, impressible to her finger tips, willing to give her views on any subject," passionately fond of books, and reading everything that came in her way. At school she excelled in English composition and in music, and was probably very much like the Maggie Tulliver of whom she afterwards wrote in "The Mill on the Floss,"—a creature "full of eager, passionate longings for all that was beautiful and glad; thirsty for all knowledge; with an ear straining after dreamy music that died away and would not come near to her; with a blind, unconscious yearning for some-

thing that would link together the wonderful impressions of this mysterious life, and give her soul a sense of home in it."

In later years, with the full development of her intellectual powers, her attainments were in the highest degree remarkable. There was no art nor science with which she had not some sort of acquaintance; no creed nor system of philosophy in whose history and tenets she was not versed; no important European language, whether classical or modern, with which she was not practically familiar. She seemed to learn by a species of intuition, and knowledge once acquired was never forgotten.

In 1846 Miss Evans's first book was published. It was a translation of Strauss's "Life of Jesus," and was followed in 1853 by an English version of Feuerbach's "Essence of Christianity." There was of course nothing in these translations to foreshadow the character of those purely original products of the imagination which were afterwards to make their writer famous; but they indicated Miss Evans's early interest in the philosophy of religion, and the bent of her mind towards what is usually designated as "advanced thought." At about this time she contributed several articles, chiefly on philosophical subjects, to the "Westminster Review," and in September, 1851, she accepted a position as assistant editor of that periodical. Her duties in this connection opened the way to an acquaintance with many of the leading thinkers and foremost men of the time. An intimate friendship with Herbert Spencer led finally to her meeting with George Henry Lewes, and that familiar association with him which, more than anything else, determined her literary career, and which was to be ended only with his death, a quarter of a century later.

It was Mr. Lewes who, in 1857, sent the manuscript of her first imaginative work, "Scenes of Clerical Life," to "Blackwood's

Magazine" for publication; and it was in this work that she first used the *nom de plume* George Eliot. The three stories comprising the "Scenes" were received with many expressions of favor, as giving promise of rare literary and imaginative powers. Two years later "Adam Bede" was published, and attained to an immediate popularity, placing its writer at once among the foremost of English novelists. Then followed "The Mill on the Floss," "Silas Marner," and "Middlemarch." In all these novels the writer, unconsciously as it were, draws her materials from the impressions and recollections of her childhood. The quaint provincial manners of agricultural England sixty years ago, the rich fields of Warwickshire, the country squires and old-fashioned gentlefolk, the humble tradespeople and village mechanics,—such are the scenes and characters introduced into all of these incomparable narratives, forming the common background for what have been not inaptly characterized as tragedies of human life. These novels of reminiscence are distinguished for their nobility of tone, for their delicate touches of sympathy, for their subtle insight into human motives, and for a truly artistic conception and completion almost unparalleled in the domain of fiction.

In "Romola" (1863) and "Daniel Deronda" (1876) George Eliot ventured into new and altogether different fields. These are imaginative historic romances, the products of studied invention rather than of unconscious recollection. "Romola" is a picture of life and manners in Florence in the time of Savonarola and Lorenzo the Magnificent, and is the result of months of painstaking study and research. It is regarded by many of the foremost critics as George Eliot's most masterly work. "Daniel Deronda" is remarkable for its display of scholarship, for its subtlety of motive, and its artistic daring; but to most novel-

readers it lacks the essential quality of being interesting. In "Felix Holt, or the Radical," published in 1866, she attempted still another picture of English provincial life; but the story is unevenly written, and is not such as appeals to the sympathies, or pleases the understanding, of large classes of readers. "The Spanish Gypsy" (1868) is George Eliot's most ambitious attempt at the writing of poetry. Had it been written in prose it might have rivaled "Romola" in point of interest and in artistic construction; but, contrary to her dearest hopes and expectations, it proved conclusively that a mind so analytical as hers was incapable of producing a poetic masterpiece. Her last work, "The Impressions of Theophrastus Such" (1879), was a complete disappointment. Instead of a novel it is only a series of carefully constructed analyses of character,—a product of the intellect rather than of the feelings, and it touches no chord of sympathy in the human heart.

A pen portrait of George Eliot in her later years represents her as "a frail-looking woman, who would sit with her chair drawn close to the fire, and whose winning womanliness of bearing and manners struck every one who had the privilege of an introduction to her. Her long, pale face, with its strongly marked features, was less rugged in the mature prime of life than in youth, the inner meanings of her nature having worked themselves more and more to the surface. Her abundant hair, untinged with gray, whose smooth bands made a kind of frame for the face, was covered by a lace or muslin cap, with lappets of rich point or Valenciennes lace fastened under her chin. Her gray-blue eyes, under noticeable eyelashes, expressed the same acute sensitiveness as her long, thin, beautifully shaped hands. She had a pleasant laugh and smile, her voice being low, distinct, and in

tensely sympathetic in quality. Though her conversation was perfectly easy, each sentence was as finished, as perfectly formed, as the style of her published works."[1]

George Henry Lewes, to whose encouragement and influence must be ascribed not a little, perhaps all, of George Eliot's success in literature, died in 1878. Eighteen months afterwards she was married to John Walter Cross, a London banker, who had long been an enthusiastic admirer of her genius and an intimate friend of both her and Mr. Lewes. On the 22d of December in the same year (1880) she died. The best record of her life is that contained in her Letters and Journals, arranged and edited by her husband. Of the underlying character and purpose of her works no criticism, however exact or impartial, can give a clearer and more succinct idea than the statement which she has left on record: "I will never write anything to which my whole heart, mind, and conscience don't consent, so that I may feel that it was something—however small—which wanted to be done in this world, and that I am just the organ for that small bit of work." And again: "My books were written out of my deepest belief, and, as well as I can, for the great public."

"Silas Marner," published in 1861, is the shortest of George Eliot's novels, and in some respects the most evenly constructed and the most entertaining. The reader, in being introduced to the study of this delightful story, will need no further explanation of its plan and import than that which is afforded in a few brief extracts from her own letters. In a note to her publisher, Mr. John Blackwood, dated Jan. 12, 1861, she mentions it for the

[1] Mathilde Blind.

first time: "I am writing a story which came across my other plans by a sudden inspiration." A little later she writes: "It seems to me that nobody will take any interest in it but myself, for it is extremely unlike the popular stories going. It is a story of old-fashioned village life, which has unfolded itself from the merest millet seed of thought." And in another letter she says: "It came to me first of all quite suddenly, as a sort of legendary tale, suggested by my recollection of having once in early childhood seen a linen weaver with a bag on his back. . . . It sets, or is intended to set, in a strong light the remedial influences of pure, natural, human relations. The Nemesis is a very mild one. I have felt all through as if the story would have lent itself best to metrical rather than prose fiction, especially in all that relates to the psychology of Silas; except that, under that treatment, there could not be an equal play of humor."

SILAS MARNER:

THE WEAVER OF RAVELOE.

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

IN the days when the spinning wheels hummed busily in the farmhouses—and even great ladies, clothed in silk and thread lace, had their toy spinning wheels of polished oak—there might be seen in districts far away among the lanes, or deep in the bosom of the hills, certain pallid, undersized men, who, by the side of the brawny country folk, looked like the remnants of a disinherited race. The shepherd's dog barked fiercely when one of these alien-looking men appeared on the upland, dark against the early winter sunset; for what dog likes a figure bent under a heavy bag? and these pale men rarely stirred abroad without that mysterious burden. The shepherd himself, though he had good reason to believe that the bag held nothing but flaxen thread, or else the long rolls of strong linen spun from that thread, was not quite sure that this trade of weaving, indispensable though it was, could be carried on entirely without the help of the Evil One. In that far-off time superstition clung easily round every person or thing that was at all unwonted, or even intermittent and occasional merely, like the visits of the peddler or the knife grinder. No one knew where wandering men had