

**THE STUDENT'S SERIES OF
ENGLISH CLASSICS. GEORGE
ELIOT'S SILAS MARNER: THE
WEAVER OF RAVELOE**

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The Student's Series of English Classics. George Eliot's Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe by George Eliot & Mary Harriott Norris

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GEORGE ELIOT & MARY HARRIOTT NORRIS

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The Students' Series of English Classics

GEORGE ELIOT'S
SILAS MARNER:
THE WEAVER OF RAVELOE.

EDITED BY

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PREFACE.

GEORGE ELIOT'S writings may be studied in respect to form under five heads: translations, essays, poems, short stories, and novels. The foundation of her reputation rests on the short stories called "Scenes of Clerical Life." Her cosmopolitan reputation was made by her first two novels, "Adam Bede" and "The Mill on the Floss." Her fame culminated in "Daniel Deronda." Her last work, "Theophrastus Such," exhibits her powers in decline. She was a good translator. She was an appreciative and acute critic. She was too analytic and constructive to be a great poet. Her poems exhibit a fine blending of erudition, taste, and sympathy, but they lack the highest creative spirit; they never glow with that transfused fire of the imagination found in the foremost epic poets, dramatists, and lyrists. As a novelist, she is to be grouped with but two other women in the world of fiction — George Sand and Charlotte Brontë. As a writer of short stories, she has not been surpassed. "Silas Marner, the Weaver of Raveloc," is, perhaps, the most finished short story in the English language. "Silas Marner," therefore, properly takes its place in "The Students' Series of English Classics."

MARY HARRIOTT NORRIS.

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GEORGE ELIOT.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

MARY ANN EVANS was born on November 22, 1819. She died on December 22, 1880. Her *nom de plume* is George Eliot.

When she was an infant, Sir Walter Scott was publishing the Waverley Novels, Thackeray and Dickens were schoolboys, Balzac "had not yet discovered the true bent of his genius," George Sand was an unformed girl, Mrs. Browning was but ten years old, Mary Somerville, at the age of thirty-nine, was still unknown. George Eliot outlived all of these brilliant contemporaries. Who can be justly said to have taken either her place or theirs?

The Warwickshire country about Griff House, George Eliot's early home, was in that pastoral portion of England which Mrs. Browning calls "a nature tamed and grown domestic as a barn-door fowl;" but, to the genius of the great novelist, this "sweet familiar nature" was sufficient to supply her with the setting for her best stories.

Throughout life, she exhibited the need of some one person on whom to lean. She lost her mother in her

sixteenth year; from this time, her father gradually became her intimate as well as most tenderly beloved companion. After Mr. Evans's death, years of painful solitude followed. Later, her alliance with George Henry Lewes gave her the required companionship, and finally her marriage with Mr. J. W. Cross made the last months of her life happy.

To years of association with the versatile mind of George Henry Lewes, to a long intimacy with Herbert Spencer and her publisher, Mr. John Blackwood, to pleasant friendship and correspondence with Mr. Frederic Harrison and many others eminent in the literary and scientific world, was doubtless due much of the mental stimulus required by George Eliot, who was at once highly self-conscious, ambitious, and self-distrusting.

She was not a precocious child, although she could read at three years of age. As a schoolgirl, she was well educated in French, German, and music, and in English composition was always far in advance of her companions. As a mature writer of English, George Eliot is far more scholarly in a precise use of words, than in construction: in the latter, she is often extremely awkward and faulty; in the former she is learned. Her knowledge of French, German, Spanish, Italian, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew must have assisted her greatly in the acquisition of a wide vocabulary, accurately employed. In her early youth, she seems to have had a dim prevision of more than ordinary capacity, and this capacity was happily partially developed by her ambition. In

"Daniel Deronda," she says: "You may try, but you can never imagine what it is to have a man's force of genius in you, and yet to suffer the slavery of being a girl." Mr. Cross, the editor of her life, in quoting the above passage as descriptive of his wife, adds: "This is a point of view that must be distinctly recognized by any one attempting to follow the development of George Eliot's character, and it will always be corrected by the other point of view which she has made so prominent in all her own writing—the soothing, strengthening, sacred influences of the home life, the home loves, the home duties." She was an eager, constant reader; at nineteen, she says of herself: "I am generally in the same predicament with books as a glutton with his feast, hurrying through one course that I may be in time for the next." In mature life, she was rather a student of books than a reader. The diary she kept of her reading for sixteen years shows a wide and varied range of authors and great and persistent industry. Her health was frail; but her head usually remained clear, and often, when confined to her bed, she was able to pursue her daily severe intellectual life. Her love of music was rather that of a highly æsthetic nature than of one endowed with musical talent, although she performed the most difficult compositions for the piano correctly and skilfully. Still music served her chiefly for inspiration. It quickened her imagination and refreshed her mind; it was an intellectual stimulus to her as long as she lived.

The spiritual struggles of Maggie in "The Mill on the