

**ENGLISH MEN OF
LETTERS. SIR
THOMAS BROWNE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649235278

English men of letters. Sir Thomas Browne by Edmund Gosse

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EDMUND GOSSE

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SIR THOMAS BROWNE

BY

EDMUND ^{William} GOSSE

LONDON: MACMILLAN & CO., LIMITED
NINETEEN HUNDRED AND FIVE

PR3327
Z5G68
1905a

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PREFATORY NOTE

SIR THOMAS BROWNE has been particularly fortunate in his editors, but there are two among them whose names can never be mentioned by his admirers without gratitude. Each had something of the spirit and the temperament of Browne himself. Simon Wilkin (1790-1862) was a paper-maker and then a printer in Norwich. His tastes were those of a naturalist and an antiquary, and about 1823 he was attracted to the writings of the great local celebrity. He found them in confusion, and he presently began to entertain the idea of collecting and editing them. This task, in the course of twelve years, he accomplished with the help of Thomas Amyot (1775-1850), another enthusiastic Norwich antiquary. Wilkin's edition, in four volumes, appeared in 1835-36, and few English classics have been more admirably presented to the public.

The other great benefactor to the lovers of Sir Thomas Browne is William Alexander Greenhill (1814-1894), who was a physician and a scholar, like Browne himself. Greenhill, an Oxford man, who had been the friend of Newman and Clough, Jowett and Stanley, settled at Hastings in 1851, and soon afterwards began to devote himself to the elucidation of Browne's text. For this kind of work he had nothing less than genius.

He worked very slowly, and it was not until 1881 that he produced his first instalment, containing *Religio Medici*, *A Letter to a Friend*, and *Christian Morals*. He went on steadily, but had not quite finished *Urn-Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus* at the time of his death; these were, however, completed by Mr. E. H. Marshall, and published in 1896. Although Greenhill's annotations cover only a portion of Browne's works, their sagacity and fulness make them, so far as they go, not merely valuable but indispensable. It is much to be regretted that Greenhill did not survive to perform the same office for the *Vulgar Errors* and for Browne's *Correspondence*.

Several learned friends have obliged me with technical information in the course of this little monograph. Acknowledgment is made in due course to Sir Archibald Geikie, to Dr. Norman Moore, and to Dr. John Peile, Master of Christ's College, Cambridge. The zoological pages have undergone the revision of Dr. P. Chalmers Mitchell. Mr. James Fitzmaurice-Kelly has read the proofs throughout, to their substantial advantage. For all this kindness I tender, once more, my warmest thanks.

E. G.

June 1905.

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