

**EMINENT WOMEN  
SERIES.  
GEORGE ELIOT**

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Eminent Women Series. George Eliot by Mathilde Blind & John H. Ingram

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**MATHILDE BLIND & JOHN H. INGRAM**

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*Eminent Women Series*

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GEORGE ELIOT

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## PREFATORY NOTE.

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DETAILED accounts of GEORGE ELIOT'S life have hitherto been singularly scanty. In the dearth of published materials a considerable portion of the information contained in this biographical study has, necessarily, been derived from private sources. In visiting the places connected with GEORGE ELIOT'S early life, I enjoyed the privilege of meeting her brother, Mr. Isaac Evans, and was also fortunate in gleaning many a characteristic fact and trait from old people in the neighbourhood, contemporaries of her father, Mr. Robert Evans. For valuable help in forming an idea of the growth of GEORGE ELIOT'S mind, my warm thanks are especially due to her oldest friends, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Bray, and Miss Hennell of Coventry. Miss Jenkins, the novelist's schoolfellow, and Mrs. John Cash, also generously afforded me every assistance in their power.

A great part of the correspondence in the present volume has not hitherto appeared in print, and has been kindly placed at my disposal by Mrs. Bray, Mrs. Gilchrist, Mrs. Clifford, Miss Marks, Mr. William

M. Rossetti, and the late James Thomson. I have also quoted from letters addressed to Miss Phelps which were published in *Harper's Magazine* of March 1882, and from one or two other articles that have appeared in periodical publications. For permission to make use of this correspondence my thanks are due to Mr. C. L. Lewes.

By far the most exhaustive published account of GEORGE ELIOT'S life and writings, and the one of which I have most freely availed myself, is Mr. Call's admirable essay in the *Westminster Review* of July 1881. Although this, as indeed every other article on the subject, states GEORGE ELIOT'S birthplace incorrectly, it contains many important *data* not mentioned elsewhere. To the article on GEORGE ELIOT in *Blackwood's Magazine* for February 1881, I owe many interesting particulars, chiefly connected with the beginning of GEORGE ELIOT'S literary career. Amongst other papers consulted may be mentioned a noticeable one by Miss Simcox in the *Contemporary Review*, and an appreciative notice by Mr. Frederick Myers in *Scribner's Magazine*, as well as articles in *Harper's Magazine* of May 1881, and *The Century* of August 1882. Two quaint little pamphlets, 'Seth Bede: the Methody,' and 'George Eliot in Derbyshire,' by Guy Roslyn, although full of inaccuracies, have also furnished some curious items of information.

MATHILDE BLIND.

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# GEORGE ELIOT.



## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTORY.

SPEAKING of the contributions made to literature by her own sex, George Eliot, in a charming essay written in 1854, awards the palm of intellectual pre-eminence to the women of France. "They alone," says the great English author, "have had a vital influence on the development of literature. For in France alone the mind of woman has passed, like an electric current, through the language, making crisp and definite what is elsewhere heavy and blurred; in France alone, if the writings of women were swept away, a serious gap would be made in the national history."

The reason assigned by George Eliot for this literary superiority of Frenchwomen consists in their having had the courage of their sex. They thought and felt as women, and when they wrote, their books became the fullest expression of their womanhood. And by being true to themselves, by only seeking inspiration from their own life-experience, instead of servilely copying that of men, their letters and memoirs, their novels and pictures have a distinct, nay unique, value, for the student of art and literature. Englishwomen, on the other hand, have not followed

the spontaneous impulses of nature. They have not allowed free play to the peculiarly feminine element, preferring to mould their intellectual products on the masculine pattern. For that reason, says George Eliot, their writings are "usually an absurd exaggeration of the masculine style, like the swaggering gait of a bad actress in male attire."

This novel theory, concerning a specifically feminine manifestation of the intellect, is doubly curious when one compares it with Madame de Staël's famous saying, "*Le génie n'a pas de sexe.*" But an aphorism, however brilliant, usually contains only one half the truth, and there is every reason to think that women have already, and will much more largely, by-and-by, infuse into their works certain intellectual and emotional qualities which are essentially their own. Shall we, however, admit George Eliot's conclusion that Frenchwomen alone have hitherto shown any of this original bias? Several causes are mentioned by her in explanation of this exceptional merit. Among these causes there is one which would probably occur to every one who began to reflect on this subject. The influence of the "Salon" in developing and stimulating the finest feminine talents has long been recognised. In this school for women the gift of expression was carried to the utmost pitch of perfection. By their active co-operation in the discussion of the most vital subjects, thought became clear, luminous, and forcible; sentiment gained indescribable graces of refinement; and wit, with its brightest scintillations, lit up the sombre background of life.

But among other causes enumerated as accounting for that more spontaneous productivity of Frenchwomen, attributed to them by George Eliot, there is