

**THE WORKS OF GEORGE
MEREDITH. MEMORIAL
EDITION, VOLUME XXIII**

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The works of George Meredith. Memorial edition, volume XXIII by George Meredith

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GEORGE MEREDITH

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GEORGE MEREDITH

MEMORIAL EDITION

VOLUME

XXIII

GEORGE MEREDITH

Memorial
Edition

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
ESSAY: ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND OF THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT	3
INTRODUCTIONS:	
INTRODUCTION TO THE LETTERS OF LADY DUFF GORDON	59
INTRODUCTION TO W. M. THACKERAY'S 'THE FOUR GEORGES'	65
INTRODUCTION TO 'THE JAPANESE SPIRIT'	68
INTRODUCTION TO A VOLUME OF THE POEMS OF DORA SIGERSON SHORTER	71
REVIEWS:	
'HOMER'S ILIAD IN ENGLISH RHYMED VERSE'	77
'LA MAISON FORESTIERE'	81
'TRAINING IN THEORY AND PRACTICE'	87
'SAINT PAUL'; A POEM	92
'REMINISCENCES OF A SEPTUAGENARIAN FROM 1802 TO 1815'	96
MR. ROBERT LYTTON'S POEMS	103
MRS. MEYNELL'S TWO BOOKS OF ESSAYS	128

	PAGE
SHORT ARTICLES :	
A PAUSE IN THE STRIFE	143
CONCESSION TO THE CELT	146
LESLIE STEPHEN	153
CRITICISM : FINE PASSAGES IN VERSE AND PROSE	157
CORRESPONDENCE FROM THE SEAT OF WAR IN ITALY :	
LETTERS WRITTEN TO THE 'MORNING POST' FROM	
THE SEAT OF WAR IN ITALY	163

ILLUSTRATION

FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION OF A PAGE FROM AN EARLY

NOTE-BOOK □ □ □ □ *Facing page 78*

ESSAY

ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND OF THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT¹

GOOD Comedies are such rare productions, that notwithstanding the wealth of our literature in the Comic element, it would not occupy us long to run over the English list. If they are brought to the test I shall propose, very reputable Comedies will be found unworthy of their station, like the ladies of Arthur's Court when they were reduced to the ordeal of the mantle.

There are plain reasons why the Comic poet is not a frequent apparition; and why the great Comic poet remains without a fellow. A society of cultivated men and women is required, wherein ideas are current and the perceptions quick, that he may be supplied with matter and an audience. The semi-barbarism of merely giddy communities, and feverish emotional periods, repel him; and also a state of marked social inequality of the sexes; nor can he whose business is to address the mind be understood where there is not a moderate degree of intellectual activity.

Moreover, to touch and kindle the mind through laughter, demands more than sprightliness, a most subtle delicacy. That must be a natal gift in the Comic poet. The substance he deals with will show him a startling exhibition of the dyer's hand, if he is without it. People are ready to surrender themselves to witty thumps on the back, breast, and sides; all except the

¹ A lecture delivered at the London Institution, February 1, 1877.