

**GEORGE MEREDITH;
SOME EARLY
APPRECIATIONS**

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George Meredith; some early appreciations by Maurice Buxton Forman

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MAURICE BUXTON FORMAN

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SELECTED BY

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PREFACE

THE twenty-three articles contained in this volume have been chosen from a collection of over one hundred as worthy of preservation in a form more accessible than that in which they originally appeared. For various reasons it has been necessary to withhold several interesting papers which I should like to have included; but those gathered here fairly represent critical judgment on George Meredith's writing from the year 1851, when his first book was published, till 1883, when he issued his "Poems and Lyrics of the Joy of Earth," the volume which immediately preceded "Diana of the Crossways"; and it will hardly be disputed that these papers from a select band of Meredith's early admirers will help the Meredith student of to-day towards a better understanding of the last of the great Victorians.

James Thomson, summarizing George Meredith's position in a review of the second edition of "The Ordeal of Richard Feverel," in May, 1879, spoke of "about thirty years' high-minded and miserably appreciated labour," and again, a few months later,

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referred to William Ernest Henley's article on "The Egoist" in *The Athenæum* * as "the first clear light" he had seen, the first public utterance on Meredith "evincing the critic's familiarity with all the writer's works." Had the author of that lurid poem "The City of Dreadful Night" and the magnificent ottava rima story of "Weddah and Om-El-Bonain" gone a little further afield in his search for what had been written about Meredith between 1851 and 1879, he could not have failed to be pleased on encountering other notable Victorians who, like himself and Meredith, combined the offices of poet and critic. He would have discovered Richard Garnett, author of "Io in Egypt, and Other Poems," setting out to criticize "Emilia in England" thus:—"The announcement of a new work by Mr. George Meredith is necessarily one to provoke much curiosity and expectation," an assertion which, coming from a man of Dr. Garnett's position in the world of letters, clearly indicates that George Meredith had even then his band of admirers, in spite of the undoubted fact that his books were "caviare to the general." The admirable "B. V." would have found in that band such practitioners of both prose and verse as William Michael Rossetti (still happily active among us), Marian Evans, gone before her time, and that supreme master of song-craft, Algernon Charles Swinburne, who so lately finished his splendid career with stately utterances in prose on

* November 1, 1879, p. 555. Extracts from this review are printed in "Views and Reviews," First Series, 1890.

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"The Age of Shakespeare," and immediately preceded Meredith to join the band of the immortals.

From the nature of the present compilation it necessarily happens that the pleasant duty of acknowledging obligations extends to a considerable number of friends and correspondents. It will perhaps suffice to name specifically those who have done me the courtesy to accede to my request for authority to reprint the several papers in which copyright still exists; and I accordingly thank heartily for this courtesy, Mr. W. M. Rossetti, Mr. Theodore Watts-Dunton as representative of the late Mr. Swinburne, Mr. Robert Singleton Garnett as his father's representative, Miss Elizabeth M. Roscoe and Mr. J. St. Loc Strachey in respect of the late Richard Holt Hutton's article, Mr. Bertram Dobell, Mr. William Reeves, and the Directors of Cope Brothers and Company, Limited, in regard to the essays of James Thomson ("B. V."), the editors of *The Times*, *The Saturday Review*, *The Morning Post*, *The Daily News*, and *The Academy*, and last, but not least, the proprietors of *The Athenæum*, without whose kind permission I must have omitted two papers which it seemed very desirable to include. To Mr. William Maxse Meredith, who has authorized me to reprint the poems by his father quoted in this volume, I have also to express my thanks.

MAURICE BUXTON FORMAN.