

WOMEN IN GEORGE MEREDITH'S NOVELS.

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PREFACE.

The idea of making a study of woman's place in literature has long appealed to me, and since George Meredith is conceded to be unique in his treatment of women, upon the suggestion of Professor R.D.O'Leary, I chose Meredith's novels as the field for my investigation. The investigation is based on a study of all his novels, his Essay on Comedy, his Life, by S.M.Ellis, his Letters, edited by his son, and contemporary and recent criticism. I have not tried to deal with the novels from the standpoint of their literary merit, but only as they depict women, and express Meredith's philosophy and its relation to women. I have tried to show the nature of his women characters, and his ideas about women, and about men in their relation to women.

I wish to express my gratitude to Professor R.D.O'Leary for the suggestion of the subject, to Professor W.S.Johnson for his kindly help in guiding the study, and to Professor J.H.Nelson for suggestions for the final revision of the paper.

TABLE OF CONTENTS.

Chapter.	Page.
I Introduction	
Meredith's Critics.	1
His Life	6
His Unpopularity	18
II The Novels, First Group	27
III The Novels, Second Group	61
IV The Novels, Last Group	78
V Conclusion	105
Bibliography	120

CHAPTER I

Introduction.

"Life, some think, is worthy of the Muse."¹ This, according to Walter Jerrold, is a fitting motto for the novels of George Meredith. That he knew life remains an unchallenged statement among the varying degrees of praise and blame with which critics have regarded him. He has been called the "Browning of novelists."² W.E. Garrett Fisher in a review of The Amazing Marriage³ speaks of him as a "later Shakespere." Stevenson says, "If Shakespere could have read Rhoda Fleming, he would have cried, 'Here's a fellow!'"⁴ James M. Barrie calls him "one of the greatest intellects of the age."⁵ Carlyle, upon hearing Richard Feverel read, said, "This man's no fule."⁶ Mr. William C. Brownell says that the

1—Walter Jerrold, George Meredith, An Essay towards Appreciation, Title Page.

2—Clement K. Shorter, Victorian Literature, p. 61.

3—W.E. Garrett Fisher, "The Amazing Marriage," Academy, XLIX, 28.

4—J.A. Hammerton, George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism, p. 178.

5—J.M. Barrie, "Mr. George Meredith's Novels," Eclectic, CXII, 118.

6—J.A. Hammerton, George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism, p. 178.

"evidence that he knows what he is talking about is prodigiously voluminous, and that to ascribe inferiority of any kind to him would be ludicrous, unless it is constructive talent."⁷ In general, critics seem to feel that it is ludicrous to ascribe not only inferiority, but even mediocrity to Meredith. They exhaust their vocabularies for extravagant phrases to apply to him. In 1896, thirteen years before Meredith's death, Mr. W. E. Garrett Fisher said:

It is only in a rare volume here and there that one has the chance to encounter the large utterance of the early gods, and to approach a book of such transcendent power, sympathy, and insight that in its presence criticism seems to be an impertinence, while the mere reading of it is a liberal education in the art of life. And when one has that happiness in the present generation, it is a safe wager that twice out of three times the name on the title-page will be that of Mr. George Meredith. 8

Most of the critics agree, also, that Meredith knew women as no one with the exception of Shakespeare has known them. This would necessarily be true. He could not know life and be ignorant of the half of it. No writer except Shakespeare presents such a galaxy of brilliant, beautiful, sensible, and human heroines. Mr. J. H. E. Crees says, "Would

7- W. C. Brownell, Victorian Prose Masters, p. 236.

8- W. E. Garrett Fisher, "The Amazing Marriage," Academy, XLIX, 27.

that a novelist could make such paragons walk the earth, not merely tread within the enchanted walls of his own world. There might be fewer bachelors." ⁹ Harriet Waters Preston says: "No other author ever gauged so accurately all that a high-spirited woman feels." ¹⁰ And again: "The author's divination of the probable workings of a brave, blameless, and clairvoyant woman's heart seems at this point little less than daemonic." ¹¹ Elizabeth Luther Cary says: "No writer more than Mr. Meredith has given his heroines their value on all sides. ~~xxx~~ They exist ^{for him} morally and mentally with the same clearness and brilliancy as in their external aspects... They think and observe and reflect as well as feel.... A general enthusiasm for such abstract virtues, not commonly accorded to women in fiction, is one of the distinguishing marks of Mr. Meredith's feminine types." ¹² Miss Flora L. Shaw comments on the "frankness with which he takes them on their merits. He surrounds them with no halo, he wraps them in no mystery, but, approaching them as simply as he approaches man, he lays

9- J.H.E.Crees, George Meredith, a Study of His Works and Personality, p. 87.

10- Harriet Waters Preston, "A Knightly Pen," Atlantic Monthly, XC, p. 513.

11- Ibid., p. 509.

12- Elizabeth Luther Cary, "George Meredith's Heroines," The Critic, XLVII, p. 338, 339.

their strength and their weakness open before us." ¹³ One woman novelist said to Meredith, "Your knowledge of women is almost indecent." ¹⁴ Professor Oliver Elton says that Meredith seems to have "reversed the order of Paradise, and to have created his women first, and so to have had less clay at his disposal for fashioning their mates." ¹⁵ William Sharp says: "Only two writers of our age have depicted women with that imaginative insight which is at once more comprehensive and more illuminative than women's own invision of themselves — Robert Browning and George Meredith." ¹⁶ J.H.E.Crees calls him the "man whose vision can pierce deepest into the penetralia of human nature." ¹⁷ Hugh Walker says that Meredith's "imagination gave him the key; and his extraordinary sympathy gave him the light by which to understand the workings of the human mind." ¹⁸

Meredith had the capacity, rather rare among men,

13— J.A.Hammerton, George Meredith in Anecdote and Criticism, p. 235.

14— Ibid., p. 231.

15— Ibid., p. 233.

16— Ibid.

17— J.H.E.Crees, George Meredith, a Study of His Works and Personality, p. 14.

18— Mr. and Mrs. Hugh Walker, Outlines of Victorian Literature, p. 143.

for friendship with women. He liked them, but he paid them the far greater compliment of understanding them. He possessed in his own temperament equally with James Barrie the fine intuitive quality usually called feminine. "The woman all feminine, the man all masculine are terrors to him."¹⁹ There are certain qualities which he admires in

his women friends, and we find these traits in his charming heroines. "Mrs. Hardman," he says in a letter to Janet Duff Gordon, "is very pleasant, and is one of the rare women who don't find it necessary to fluster their sex under your nose eternally in order to make you like them."²⁰ In a letter to Mr. William Hardman he sends

greetings to Mrs. Hardman, "whose behavior in the boat,²¹ let me add, has proved her to be a companion of men."

His lifelong friendship for Janet Duff Gordon, the original of Rose Jocelyn in Evan Harrington, is typical of the depth and sincerity of his love for his women friends. He meets them on terms of equality, without hint of condescension or patronage, and yet he feels a protective tenderness for feminine charm and delicacy. To Janet he says: "Can I ever forget my dearest and best woman

19-- Richard Le Gallienne, George Meredith: Some Characteristics, p. 86.

20-- Letters of George Meredith, p.47.

21-- Ibid., 128.

friend?"²² And to her on her approaching marriage he writes, "If you don't make a good wife, I've never read a page of woman."²³

He has no patience with women who claim special privileges because of their sex. A woman writer sent a book to him for criticism, and he objected to her exclamatory style. She replied that she thought that was a style peculiar to women. In refutation of the idea he cites the author of Adam Bede, "the foremost female writer of the time," who does not write in that style. "It is," he says, "a literary hysteria to which women may be more subject than men; but they can talk in another tongue, let us hope."²⁴ His faith in women never wavers, and he sees possibilities in them that they do not all see for themselves. His comment on a book written by a woman friend is significant. "Her book," he says, is "a monument of solid labour, speaking more of the power of her sex than loudest shrieks for the suffrage."²⁵

The women in his own family had their part in developing his interest in women. His childhood was lonely

22- Letters of George Meredith, p. 128.

23- Ibid., p. 19.

24- Ibid., p. 163.

25- Ibid., p. 366.

and rather unhappy, partly because of circumstances, and partly because of his supersensitive temperament. His mother died when he was only five years old, and there seemed little sympathy between him and his father. "When I was young," he says, "had there been given me a little sunshine of encouragement, what an impetus to better work would have been mine." ²⁶ He was an only child, imaginative and shy, and did not seem to fit in, with either his family or his boy companions. His father married again when George was thirteen, and he was sent to Germany to school soon after. Here he developed deep religious interests which, while they did not coincide with his later religious views, did fortell his serious outlook on life.

His mother we know little of, but his grandmother, Mrs. Melchizedek Meredith, is a familiar figure in the character of Mrs. Mel, the wife of the great Mel in Evan Harrington. We can easily imagine that this strong, positive character might have helped to form his subsequent ideas of womanhood, and to inspire the first interest in women and their problems, which occupied so large a part in his philosophy and his writings.

When only twenty-one, he met and fell in love with Mrs. Nicolls, sister of Edward Peacock, and daughter of

26- S.M.Ellis, George Meredith, His Life and Friends in Relation to His Work, p. 15.

Thomas Love Peacock. She was a widow, nine years older than he, "a woman of considerable beauty, great intelligence, some literary achievement, and brilliant and irrepressible wit."²⁷ She was a poet also, and they sometimes collaborated. They were married and loved each other devotedly, but were too much alike to be happy together. They were both "highly-strung, nervous, emotional, restless in mind and body. Both were hot in temper, satirical and violent in argument and dispute, quick to imagine offence."²⁸ So, after only nine years of married life, she left him, going away with Henry Wallis, in 1858. His views of women seemed to be somewhat embittered for a time, judging from the tone of Richard Feverel, which was published in 1859. But his wife's strong personality and intellectual brilliance must have added to his impressions of the capacity of the feminine mind.

His second wife was of a different sort, more congenial to his rather difficult temperament. His letters to her and about her in the days before their marriage are full of the beauty and poetry of ardent love. He realizes the effect that congenial companionship will have on his life and work. "They see that I shall now first live."²⁹

27- Letters of George Meredith, p. 5.

28- S.M.Ellis, George Meredith, His Life and Friends in Relation to His Work, p. 90

29- Letters of George Meredith, p. 146.

And although his warmth of expression lessens, he retained the deep affection, admiration, and tenderness of the early days toward her till her death. He writes of her just before their marriage: "My thrice darling - of my body, my soul, my song."³⁰ In the same letter he says, "And she has humor, my friend. She is a charming companion." He speaks often of her courage, common sense, and simple goodness of heart. "She was the best of wives, truest among human creatures,"³¹ he says of her after her death.

He had said to his friend Maxse three years before he met his wife that a good friendship would satisfy him. But it was not only the capacity for intellectual companionship that he valued in her, although she seemed able to share all his interests with him. He valued most highly her courage, common sense, and affectionate disposition. He says of her: "She has strong common sense as have all real emotional natures."³² Her practical nature tempered his imaginative qualities rather than inspired them. Something of this sort is suggested by his remark, "She says that she is happy, and I believe the woman.

30- Letters of George Meredith, p. 154.

31- Ibid., p. 373.

32- Ibid., p. 149.

Whither has the philosopher in me fled?"

Meredith's interest in women arose from his acquaintance with women of remarkable charm and ability, and his natural insight into their character. From these his interest widens as he observes the condition of women in general. He says in a letter commenting on Diana, and Clara Middleton:

Since I began to reflect, I have been oppressed by the injustice done to women, the constraint put upon their natural aptitudes and their faculties, generally much to the degradation of the race. I have not studied them more closely than I have men, but with more affection, a deeper interest in their enfranchisement and development, being assured that women of the independent mind are needed for any sensible degree of progress. They will so educate their daughters, that these will not be instructed at the start to think themselves naturally inferior to men, because less muscular, and need not have recourse to particular arts, feline, chiefly, to make their way in the world. 34

In a letter to Mrs. Leslie Stephen he says:

The case with women resembles that of the Irish. We have played fast and loose with them, until now they are encouraged to demand what they know not how to use, but have a just right to claim. If ... professions had been ... opened to them, they might have learnt the business of the world ... to help in governing. But these were closed, women were commanded to continue their reliance upon their poor attractions. Consequently, as with the Irish, they push to grasp the bagnettes which gives authority. And they will get it; and it will be a horrible time. But better that than present

33- Letters of George Meredith, p. 158.

34- Ibid., p. 562.

sights.

Although he has no illusions about women, he has a deep sympathy for them. He writes to a Miss Price, who had expressed pleasure in reading his books:

I have this feeling for women, because, what with nature and the world, they are the most heavily burdened. I can foresee great and blessed changes for the race when they have achieved independence; for that must come of the exercise of their minds—the necessity for which is induced by their reliance on themselves for subsistence. Thus they will work out their problems. 36

And in working out their problem, he expects them to measure up to the standards he has set for them, at the same time that he is putting the blame for their frailties on the shoulders of men, who have been responsible for their false education. His uncompromising attitude is explained very clearly by Miss Harriet Waters Preston in her article, "A Knightly Pen," in the Atlantic Monthly:

"For the woman who is unable to defend herself, he has infinite pity, but — he leaves her to her fate." 37

Garnet Smith says, "Meredithian heroines must have strength of character." 38 Mr. J.H.E. Crees thus sums up the characteristics of a Meredithian heroine by saying that she is a

35— Letters of George Meredith, p. 426.

36— Ibid., p. 419.

37— Harriet W. Preston, "A Knightly Pen," Atlantic Monthly, XC, p. 513.

38— Garnet Smith, "The Women of George Meredith," Fortnightly, LXV, p. 775.

fair maiden gifted with a woman's finest charm who refuses to base her dominion on sex or superficiality, not content in matters of the mind to be man's obedient slave. 39

He goes on to say:

Almost first with Meredith was the question of the relation of the sexes, involving as it does so many questions, ... [woman's] place in the world, her attitude towards man, man's attitude towards her, the mode and form of their association, the right conception of marriage. 40

At first Meredith's interest is in individual women and their problems. He portrays women as he sees and knows them, with no thought of them as types, or as representing any class or theory. Later, as his philosophy of life develops and observation grows, he sees the position of women in relation to men and to the general scheme of things. And finally, he represents women in revolt against the false conventions of society and the domination of man, and challenges them to work out their destiny on a higher plane for the higher development of man and the betterment of the race.

In order to interpret Meredith's novels correctly, we must understand his philosophy. It is not a very complicated system, but it is a little difficult to find a clear statement of it. It is threaded through all his novels in a greater or less degree, from the first to the

39- J.H.E.Crees, George Meredith, a Study of His Works and Personality, p. 18.

40- Ibid., p. 86.

last and is closely connected with his views of women.

In his Essay on Comedy, he says:

The laughter of comedy is impersonal and of unrivaled politeness, nearer a smile -- often no more than a smile. It laughs through the mind, for the mind directs it; and it might be called the humor of the mind.

One excellent test of the civilization of a country, as I have said, I take to be the flourishing of the comic idea and comedy; and the test of true comedy is that it shall awaken thoughtful laughter.

If you believe that our civilization is founded on common sense (and it is the first condition of sanity to believe it), you will, when contemplating men, discern a Spirit overhead; not more heavenly than the light flashed upward from glassy surfaces but luminous and watchful; never shooting beyond them, nor lagging in the rear; so closely attached to them that it may be taken for a slavish reflex, until its features are studied. It has the sage's brows, and the sunny malice of a faun lurks at the corners of the half-closed lips drawn in an idle wariness of half-tension. That slim feasting smile, shaped like the long-bow, was once a big round satyr's laugh, that flung up the brows like a fortress lifted by gunpowder. The laugh will come again, but it will be of the order of the smile, finely-tempered, showing sunlight of the mind, mental richness rather than noisy enormity. Its common aspect is one of unsolicitous observation, as if surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness. Men's future upon earth does not attract it; their honesty and shapeliness in the present does; and whenever they wax out of proportion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical, hypocritical, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idolatries, drifting into vanities, congregating in absurdities, planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they are at variance with their professions, and violate the unwritten but perceptible laws binding them in consideration one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice; are false in humility or mined with conceit,

individually, or in the bulk; the Spirit overhead will look humanely malign, and cast an oblique light on them, followed by volleys of silvery laughter. That is the Comic Spirit. 41

We have to distinguish between comedy and humor. He says:

Humorists touching upon history or society are given to be capricious. They are, as in the case of Sterne, given to be sentimental; for with them the feelings are primary, as with singers. Comedy, on the other hand, is an interpretation of the general mind, and is for that reason of necessity kept in restraint. 42

Constantin Photiades says that Meredith conceives of the Comic Spirit as a judge,

registering the vicissitudes of certain relations between humanity and earth. It compares that variable relationship with the constant relationship which ought to unite the human race to earth. It compares, calculates, appreciates and evaluates. And, in doing this, it enunciates the measure according to which each individual should conform to his duty towards the human race....The proper function of the Spirit of Comedy is not to excite laughter....It is no more jocular than is common sense. Sometimes only, if it compares our conduct with that which should take place in a society better adapted to its functions, it notices the deviation....And then,...in order to safeguard the indefeasible rights of Earth, the Comic Spirit makes use of its weapon: it smiles....Little does it matter whether Goethe is disappointed, whether Edward Blacove is publicly accused or Sir Austin Feverel weeps over the dead body of innocent Lucy Desborough! The injury is nevertheless done. Outraged Earth demands an atonement. 43

41- George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy, p. 141.

42- Ibid., p. 138.

43- Constantin Photiades, George Meredith, His Life, Genius and Teaching, pp. 224, 226, 233.

There is a large class of men and women, Meredith says, who "have a sentimental objection to face the study of the actual world.... They live in a hazy atmosphere that they suppose an ideal one."⁴⁴ He says that they have a shivering dread of comedy, "for comedy enfolds them with the wretched host of the world, huddles them with us in an ignoble assimilation, and cannot be used by any exalted variety as a scourge and a broom. Nay, to be an exalted variety is to come under the calm, curious eye of the Comic Spirit, and be probed for what you are."⁴⁴ They live in the "peculiar paradise of the wilful people who will not see."⁴⁴

These people are the sentimentalists, the self-deceivers. They are merely playing at life, denying their feelings, unsteadfast and undisciplined. They are capable of high resolves but not of carrying them out. Their imagination runs riot, unchecked by a true estimate of the facts of life, or proper consideration for others. Self-satisfaction, snobbery, egoism, smugness, complacency, conceit and selfishness are different aspects of sentimentalism. The sentimentalist has no clear-cut purpose or force of character to unify his life. Sentimentalism is the result of a long period of prosperity in a nation. And men, being products of a more complicated civilization

44— George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy, p. 91.

than are women, are more given to sentimentalism. (I wonder if Meredith would have thought that if he could have known the modern American club woman?) They do not have the direct contact with reality, with Mother Nature, that women have. And nowhere is man more vulnerable to the shafts of the Comic Spirit than in his treatment of woman. When he assumes superiority or dominion over her, and refuses to her the free development of her faculties and personality, he is letting sentiment blind him to the facts of life, offending Mother Earth, and laying himself open to the attacks of the Comic Spirit.

There will never be civilization where comedy is not possible; and that comes of some degree of social equality of the sexes. 45

He sights Germany as an example.

The poor voice allowed to women in German domestic life will account for the absence of comic dialogues reflecting upon life in that land. 46

And of the Turks:

Where the veil is over women's faces, you cannot have society, without which the senses are barbarous and the Comic Spirit is driven to the gutters of grossness to slake its thirst. Arabs in this respect are worse than Italians — much worse than Germans — just in the degree that their system of treating women is worse. 47

But where women are on the road to an equal foot—

45— George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy, p. 118.

46— Ibid., p. 116.

47— Ibid.,

ing with men, in attainments and in liberty — in what they have won for themselves, and what has been granted them by a fair civilization — there, and only waiting to be transplanted from life to the stage, or novel, or the poem, pure comedy flourishes, and is, as it would help them to be, the sweetest of diversions, the wisest of delightful companions. 48

He goes further and says that no man can reach his own highest development unless he has the right attitude toward women. If he puts her on a low plane, he necessarily puts himself beside her when he loves her. If he regards her as simply a means to the satisfaction of his physical pleasure, he debases his own nature — drags his higher nature down to the level of the physical. Mr. Elmer J. Bailey, in The Novels of George Meredith, expresses this idea:

His hope was to make mankind see that passion must be subdued to intellect before there can be any great growth of soul; and that, as a necessary corollary, woman will remain the temptress, just so long as men act upon the tacit understanding that she exists as the coy but willing victim of his pleasure. 49

The equality of women and men will foster what he thinks to be the supreme goal in the development of the individual: "a more sincere alliance between the three domains of our being: body, mind, and soul." ⁵⁰ Society is at fault in not giving women the training necessary to maintain

48— George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy, p. 118.

49— Elmer J. Bailey, The Novels of George Meredith, p. 121.

50— Constantin Photiades, George Meredith, His Life, Genius and Teaching, p. 234.

their place of equality with men. They must be independent, economically and mentally.

Meredith, like Browning, had a deep faith in the ultimate rightness of the universe, and the progress of mankind onward and upward. But his was no easy plan of salvation. Mother Earth demands that her children work out their own salvation and rewards only those who obey her laws. And some have to pass through a long and strenuous ordeal before they attain the development and degree of adjustment necessary to claim the reward. Mr. G.M. Trevelyan says that the theme of Meredith's novels is "The growth of the undesirable young, through suffering, to spiritual manhood..... The sufferings by which callow youth wins wisdom and strength, if the victim is not broken to pieces in the process of the Ordeal, are the central theme of Mr. Meredith's novels. And personal history is the epitome of the history of the race." ⁵¹ Some are broken to pieces; either they do not have the courage to face facts and reach their goal, or they have not the strength to persevere to the end.

Meredith's philosophy is not one ever to be popular with the masses. As he says, "Not many look abroad with their own eyes - fewer still have the habit of thinking

51- J.W. Beach, The Comic Spirit in George Meredith, p.170.

for themselves." And fewer still can stand to see their folly held up as a mark for "silvery laughter."

You may estimate your capacity for comic perception by being able to detect the ridicule of them you love without loving them less; and more by being able to see yourself somewhat ridiculous in dear eyes, and accepting the correction their image of you proposes. 53

This is too hard a test for most people. They do not like to be made uncomfortable by a too close scrutiny of the picture of their real selves. Meredith's readers are almost always driven to self-analysis, ⁵⁴ and this is not a popular pastime. They see their own folly represented in Meredith's comic characters, and it makes them squirm. So they turn to writers who dangle before them ideal scenes that soothe their vanity and lull them away from the hard facts of reality. Meredith was in line with the modern psychologists who see sanity for humanity only in a brave facing of reality.

The majority of the critics, too, have failed to appreciate Meredith's philosophy and its relation to his novels. Arthur Symons, in 1891, in a review of a book by Richard Le Gallienne, George Meredith: Some Characteristics, laments the fact that critics have dealt with

52- George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy, p. 95.

53- Ibid., 133.

54- Elmer J. Bailey, The Novels of George Meredith, p. 134.

Meredith so inadequately. They speak of individual books and characteristics, but do not attempt to place him in literature. His friends seem to feel the hopelessness of bringing the public to appreciate him as they do. J.H.E. Crees expresses it in figurative language, a medium to which Meredith's admirers seem drawn in discussing him:

With Meredith we climb to the Andes of the intellect, and the vastness of the prospect, the radiance of the sun illumining so many different intellectual kingdoms, atones for the touch of frost in the air. But the thin aether is a trial for weak hearts and lungs. Not all can scale these heights, still fewer can abide on these lone tablelands of intellect. 56

The pioneer of intellect ploughs a lonely furrow.

This is the cause, he feels, of the lack of appreciation, generally, of Meredith's genius.

Mr. G.K. Chesterton calls his novels hampers of good things but fails to see a unifying element, and seems unaware of the Comic Spirit. He spends much effort and ingenuity trying to explain what relation there might be between Meredith's recognized championship of women and his statement in Richard Feverel that "Woman will be the last thing civilized by man." 57 Knowing his conception

55- Arthur Symons, review of Le Gallienne's George Meredith: Some Characteristics, Academy, XXXIX, p. 81.

56- J.H.E. Crees, George Meredith, a Study of His Works and Personality, p. vi.

57- G.K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 141.

that women are not yet advanced to as complicated a social system as man, are nearer the natural heart of the universe, we can understand this statement. It is a rather cynical expression of the idea that is found in different forms throughout the novels. And knowing his idea that this artificial civilization to which men have attained has drawn them into a ridiculous variance from reality, we can reconcile the statement with his chivalric attitude toward women; even supposing we are to take the statement as expressing his own ideas and not those of the disgruntled Sir Austin, whose wife had run off with another man. Mr. Chesterton says further that Meredith "may yet suffer for his chivalric interference, as many champions do," and that "he, at any rate, has not doubled Cape Turk."⁵⁸ And Mr. William C. Brownell says that "women themselves...cannot be relied upon... to take his views..."⁵⁹

These men, it seems, are denying to women the very qualities that Meredith is insistent upon. If women were the shallow creatures that they are too often thought to be, it would be true that they might take exception to the comments of their champion. For he does not flatter them and humor them for their traditional weakness and

58- G.K.Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p.148.

59- Wm.C. Brownell, Victorian Prose Masters, p. 276.

helplessness. He realizes that true women do not want flattery but understanding, and he is not writing about or for the class of women who are satisfied with anything less than the truth and does not care for their opinion. He sees high possibilities in women, and he expects them to live up to them. To the woman that thinks for herself, and has the courage that a Meredithian heroine must have, the challenge is an inspiration, and she appreciates to the full the writer with an understanding mind. There is no pleasure to a woman in being thought an enigma, even a beautiful one.

Critics like Mr. Brownell who do not understand Meredith's attitude toward women are themselves rather near to becoming marks for the shafts of the Comic Spirit. One reason for their lack of understanding of Meredith's ideas is probably that they cannot grasp his imaginative treatment of the Comic Spirit. Mr. Brownell asks, "Who can take seriously the prelude of the Egoist, for example?"⁶⁰ To a mind and temperament like Brownell's the playful, whimsical tone seems to denote nothing but arrant nonsense. But underneath the figurative language, if you can get into his mood, you find a fairly comprehensive treatment of his philosophy. Arnold Bennett also ignores the Comic Spirit. Paul Elmer More, ^{in the Shelburne Essays,} seems not even to be

60- Wm.C.Brownell, Victorian Prose Masters, p. 261.

aware that Meredith was a philosopher, and sidesteps the woman question entirely.

Miss Adeline Sargent does what Mr. Brownell and Mr. Chesterton predicted that women would do. She speaks of
ever

his failure to discern the lasting differences between the natures of women and men. Under no circumstances will women ever be the mates of men in the sense which Meredith attaches to the words. A woman's physical constitution alone disables her from becoming what is usually called the equal of man. But the words "equal," "superior," or "inferior," are utterly out of place when used of creatures so different in capacity and temperament. The same laws and the same moralities will never fit the two. George Meredith forgets that where there are root-differences of physical constitution there are also sure to be root-differences of mind and temperament. No amount of intellectual training will obliterate these distinctions of sex. 61

I do not think that he forgot that there are supposed to be differences but he tried to make women forget them. He believed that most of the apparent difference was not inherent, but caused by centuries of repression and false education. And the essentially feminine qualities — an intuitive directness of approach to truth — he thinks has no bearing on the question of woman's place in society or equality with men. He does not forget that there is a root-difference of mind and temperament between the sexes, but, in the sense that Miss Sargent means, he does not believe that there is. In the Essay on Comedy, we

find this:

Comedy is an exhibition of their battle with men, and that of men with them; and as the two, however divergent, both look on one object, namely, life, the gradual similarity of their impressions must bring them to some resemblance. The Comic poet dares to show us men and women coming to this mutual likeness; he is for saying that when they draw together in social life their minds grow liker; just as the philosopher discerns the similarity of the boy and girl, until the girl is marched away to the nursery. 62

Another cause for Meredith's unpopularity is, quite naturally, his style. In an otherwise extremely favorable article, Miss Harriet Waters Preston delivers herself of this satisfying arraignment of his style:

Nowhere is he so resolutely, rudely, disdainfully, I may say, insolently enigmatical as in all but the concluding passages of One of Our Conquerors. An author who has a message has no moral right to cast it in crabbed conundrums, and swaddle it in reams of allusive, illusive and irrelevant verbiage. 63

To one who has labored through whole sentences and even pages of this truly majestic drama of life without getting a single lucid idea, this forceful denunciation makes a satisfying appeal. Meredith had been criticized so consistently for his obscure style that he grew tired of it and wrote One of Our Conquerors with the purpose of confounding the reviewers — giving them something to cry for.

62— George Meredith, An Essay on Comedy, p. 93.

63— Harriet W. Preston, "A Knightly Pen," Atlantic Monthly, XC, p. 509.

Arthur Symons, in the introduction to Diana of the Crossways, gives a sympathetic and seemingly rational explanation of the difficulties of Meredith's style. He says that Meredith is essentially a poet, not a novelist. He has the "elliptical brain of the poet, not the slow, cautious, logical brain of the novelist." ⁶⁴ G.K. Chesterton comments on the fact that the writer with the healthy and manly outlook (Meredith), has the crabbed and perverse style, and the one with the crabbed and perverse outlook (Hardy), has the manly and healthy style. Mr. James Barrie very aptly says that "Meredith reaches his thoughts by means of ladders which he kicks away, letting his ⁶⁵ readers follow as best they can."

Among the seventy-five or eighty women characters in the fourteen novels one must expect to find all sorts and conditions of women: women with brains and women of impulse; courageous women and pitifully weak ones; women in society and women below stairs; the seductive siren and chaste Diana; women fit to be the companions of men, and superficial sentimentalists. There are comments on education, manners and customs as they have a bearing on the

64- Arthur Symons, Introduction to Diana of the Crossways, published by Boni and Liveright, N.Y., 1917, p. X.

65- J.M. Barrie, "Mr. George Meredith's Novels," Eclectic, CXII, 118.

position of women. In the pages which follow will be traced the different periods of development of Meredith's ideas about women to the final challenge to society to right the wrongs that have been done them.

CHAPTER. II

The Novels, First Group.

I have divided the novels into three groups, according to the nature of Meredith's interest in the Woman Question, and ^{the} ^{the} stage of ^{the} development of his ideas. The first group consists of seven novels, ^{which I name} in the order of their appearance: The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, Evan Harrington, Sandra Belloni (Emilia in England), Rhoda Fleming, Vittoria, The Adventures of Harry Richmond, and Beauchamp's Career. In this group we do not find a conscious treatment of the woman question as such. The heroines are splendid examples of womanhood, but they do not exemplify any particular phase of the struggle between women and men or women and society. Meredith is simply trying to show us the possibilities of women. Perhaps for this reason, the heroines are more spontaneous and natural, in general — more individualized — than in the later novels. However, we find well advanced theories about women: their education, friendships and interests in politics. We also find a discussion of the problems of erring girls and an exposition of sentimentalism.

In the second group I have put three novels: The Egoist, The Tragic Comedians, and Diana of the Crossways. This group appears after the publication of the Essay on Comedy, 1879. Here appears the consciousness of a woman

question, and also of its relation to Meredith's philosophy: the Comic Spirit proclaims itself the champion of women. The women of this group are more mature than those of the first group. They have more poise, self-assurance, and are more conscious of their importance. They are beginning to see themselves in relation to their world, and to dare to think for themselves about that relationship. They are becoming independent in action as well as thought, developing a soul and getting ready for the revolt shown in the last group.

The last group consists of One of Our Conquerors, Lord Ormont and His Aminta, and The Amazing Marriage. Now woman is definitely in arms against her master, man, and against society. In the cause, Meredith nearly loses sight of the individual. The heroines are married women who boldly question the sacred institution of matrimony to the discomfiture of man whose mandates they defy and of society whose laws they disobey. Here, too, we find the reaction on man of his subjugation of women.

There remains the unfinished Celt and Saxon, which scarcely belongs in this sort of grouping. Meredith is still interested in woman and her problems, but not in her revolt from society, nor in her contests with man. The woman question has given way to other themes.

Richard Feverel, Meredith's first novel, is his most popular one. In the simplicity of its tragic elements and

its artistic construction, only Rhoda Fleming and One of Our Conquerors compare with it. The heroine, Lucy Feverel, does not measure up to the standards of a Meredithian heroine. She has beauty and charm, a certain degree of courage, and steadfast loyalty, but not sufficient forcefulness to conquer circumstances and overcome the effects of her youthful weak impulsiveness. This is the only story in which the hero and heroine are not given another chance to outlive their mistakes and reach a plane of peace and contentment.

Although the woman question is not dealt with in Richard Feverel, the idea of the Comic Spirit is fairly launched with a perfect victim in the person of Sir Austin Feverel, Richard's father. He has a wonderful "system" of education for boys, which causes the tragedy for Richard and Lucy. He has the boy's life mapped and charted: there is a set time for him to fall in love and to get married. And before that time comes, he must be kept from the companionship of girls. Boys' minds, he thinks, may be as pure and innocent as girls' if they are properly trained. When the time arrives, Richard is to be taken on a tour of inspection to find the girl who, by birth and a similar training, is fit to become his mate. A sight of his father kissing the hand of Lady Blandish, and the chance meeting with pretty Lucy Desborough, a niece of one of his father's

tenants, upset the perfect working of the system. After their runaway marriage, Sir Austin plays the part of fate and contrives the separation of the young people, thus displaying an egoism that makes him vulnerable to the attacks of the Comic Spirit. And Richard, in allowing himself to come under the spell of the fascinating but unscrupulous Mrs. Mount, shows both the weakness of the system and his own weakness. The essential nobility of his character and the seriousness of youth keep him from going back to Lucy after he has been false to his marriage vows, although his father has decided — too late — that it is now time for him to reap the rewards of his ordeal and thus show the merits of the system. The punishment of the Comic Spirit is not expressed in a volley of "silvery laughter," but in a sardonic and twisted leer, at the insult of man's daring to oppose an artificial scheme to the laws of Mother Nature.

The ultra-sophisticated, intriguing Mrs. Mount is a sharp contrast to the sweet, ineffectual Lucy. She is skilled in all the ways of deceiving a man. "She could make you forget she was a woman, and then bring the fact startlingly home to you."¹ "Her manlike conversation, which he took for honesty,"² put him off his guard. Then there

1- Richard Feverel, p. 360.

2- Ibid., p. 353.

is the harmless coquette, Lady Blandish, who pricks the bubble of Sir Austin's conceit at times, and at others builds it up by her pretense of humility and feminine weakness.

In Clare Forey, Richard's cousin, we find a conventional Victorian type; she dies of a broken heart because her cousin does not love her. Such is the simplicity and restraint of the narrative that we do not question the accuracy of the portrayal, but merely feel its power. Here is an example of quiet pathos which James Barrie says Meredith does not have.

There is the first of a series of delightfully drawn servant characters in Mrs. Berry. Her bits of philosophy drawn from her own rather disappointing experiences with men are characteristically expressed. In speaking to Lucy about cooking, she says: "That tells ye it's the duty of all women! Such is man: no use in havin' their hearts if ye don't have their stomachs. Kissing don't last: cookery do!"³

Although Meredith is not thinking yet of the injustice done to women, he recognizes high qualities in them;

Intellect may subdue women -- make slaves of them, but they only love forever and are mated when they meet a noble nature. 4

3- Richard Feverel, p. 227.

4- Ibid., p. 88.

Lord Mount says of Lucy,

You talk of this little woman as if she and other women were all of a piece. 5

Richard says, "But I love the women who are not cowards." 6

So far, Meredith is not concerned so much with woman's intellect as with her intuition:

And there I admire the always true instinct of women, that they all worship strength in whatever form, and seem to know it to be the child of heaven. 7

The cynical Adrian warns Richard:

Mystery is the great danger to youth, my son. Mystery is woman's redoubtable weapon, O Richard of the Ordeal. 8

The idea that women are nearer nature, have advanced less in the progress of civilization, is expressed in various ways:

Has it never struck you that woman is nearer the vegetable than man? 9

Man has learned a lesson from time. Man grows, woman does not. 10

On the generic woman one could calculate. She is always at Nature's breast. 11

5- Richard Feverel, p. 337.

6- Ibid., p. 304.

7- Ibid., p. 185.

8- Ibid., p. 181.

9- Ibid., p. 154.

10- Ibid., p. 267.

11- Ibid., p. 391.

Women, rapid by nature, have no idea of science. Meredith is thinking of the same type of woman when he calls her the practical animal:

A reputation for understanding men; and that with these practical creatures, means ... managing them.

The far sight, the deep determination, the resolute perseverance of her sex, where a daughter is to be provided for and a man to be overthrown. 13

The tone of cynicism ~~is taken~~ by Adrian and Sir Austin may be accounted for by the fact that Meredith's wife had deserted him for another man just a year before, in somewhat the same manner that Sir Austin's had, leaving him with a small son.

In Evan Harrington, we find the most likable of the younger heroines, in my opinion, until we come to Nesta Radnor in One of Our Conquerors. Rose Jocelyn is courageous and independent in a natural, boyish fashion. She has a high sense of honor and remarkable poise for one so young. "A young lady who can have male friends, as well as friends of her own sex, is not usually pressing and se-
14
cret in her confidences." She is entirely unconscious of a woman question, or of any antagonism toward man or society. This is due in great part, of course, to her

12- Richard Feverel, p. 295.

13- Ibid., p. 6.

14- Evan Harrington, p. 173.

surroundings. Lady Jocelyn and Sir Franks live in an atmosphere of mutual confidence, respect, and independence. Lady Jocelyn is the first of the women with brains. Her actions are directed by reason, even when her intuition tells her that her reason is at fault, as in the case when she accepts Evan's word that he wrote the forged letter, although she read honesty in his eyes.

15

The shafts of the Comic Spirit find a two-fold mark in Evan and his sister, the preposterous Countess de Saldar. Evan is a handsome, athletic, clean, intelligent boy, but does not measure up to the standard set by Rose. He is naturally democratic and honorable, but his love of the ease and comfort of a society above his station lets him drift into his sister's schemes for passing themselves off for members of the nobility. This pretense brings about some uncomfortable situations before he exerts himself, braves his sister's wrath and contempt, renounces Rose, and puts himself where he belongs, in his father's tailor shop. The double existence - in society and the tailor shop - had been possible to the stronger character of the great Mel, but was impossible to Evan's simple nature. At last, his natural manliness prevails; he will not let his pride stand in the way of his and Rose's happiness; so their ordeal is a short one.

The oblique light shed by the Comic Spirit turns to direct rays on the person of the Countess de Saldar de Sancorvo, who tries to draw her entire family under the influence of her own self-deception. And such is the force of her character, her nimble wit and brazen self-assurance, that she almost succeeds. But she goes too far, shocks Evan's manliness into wakefulness and arouses the determination of her resolute, sham-hating mother, who resolves that Evan shall not be put into the equivocal position that his father had gloried in. So the Countess is forced to retreat, and consoles herself in the Catholic Church, which alone has the power "to wash out
16.
the trade stain." The Countess, like Harry Richmond's father, is almost a caricature, yet her little artifices are often true to life. She, like Mrs. Mount, has the happy faculty of gaining the admiration of men by talking to them in their own language, and assuming that she is not so delicate as other women and can understand them better. "A lady approaches. 'We must be proper,' says the Countess, and her hearty laugh dies with suddenness
17
and is succeeded by the maturest gravity." This flatters the men, and she easily excuses herself. "But a woman must now and then ingratiate herself at the expense of

16- Evan Harrington, p. 471.

17- Ibid., p. 248.

her sex."

The strongest character in the story is the redoubtable Mrs. Mel. We see in her the result of years of repression and struggle against the uncomfortable situations brought about by her husband's compromise with reality. She cannot be blamed for her determination to rescue her son from the clutches of the Countess, but she is, possibly, too unsympathetic with his desire to live in a society for which both his natural inclination and his training have fitted him.

Although the woman question is not mentioned¹⁸ in Evan Harrington, it is significant that the heroine is the stronger character -
 19
 Evan must "play second fiddle to Rose." Aside from this fact and the portrayal of the masculine intellect of Lady Jocelyn, Meredith seems not to question the conventional conception of women. They are not supposed to be interested in sports, and when they go to watch a cricket game, it is simply "another beautiful instance of the generous yielding of the sex simply to grace our amusement."²⁰ Aunt Bel, an old maid, discourages the girls from studying Latin.
 21
 "Do you want to graduate for my state with your eyes open?"

18-Evan Harrington, p. 146.

19- Ibid., p. 280.

20- Ibid., p. 132.

21- Ibid., p. 168.

Sandra Belloni (Emilia in England) could appropriately be called The Sentimentalists, for nearly all the characters belong to Meredith's "little people." It is a detailed study of sentimentalism and the way it works in the lives of his characters. The discussions on the workings of the mind might serve as a textbook for students of psychology today, for in psychology, as in some other fields, Meredith anticipated modern theories. Men and women are ^{in this book} equally the victims of the Comic Spirit, although men are more prominent. "Women are never quite so mad in sentimentalism as men," ²² because women are supposed to live closer to nature than men - closer to reality. The Pole sisters are almost too weak to be worth the attention of the merry sprite. Wilfrid Pole has a certain dignity of character and loyalty to the better qualities of his nature that hold out a hope of improvement. "He who can unite prudence and madness, sagacity and stupidity, is the true buffoon." ²³ His sentimentalism could never quite obscure his better qualities, and after defeat he arose a little higher, until at the end of the story he has developed a man-sized soul.

It is in his love for Emilia that his sentimentalism displays itself. His feeling for her was not true

22- Sandra Belloni, p. 423.

23- Vittoria, pp. 426.

love, but uncontrolled desire having its origin in senti-
²⁴ment. Sentiment held him at its mercy and shifted and
 turned him as a leaf in a breeze, except when he escaped
 its influence and mounted the "Hippogriff," which is "the
²⁵madness of desire unhindered by sentiment."

Those who have true passion are not at the mercy
 of Hippogriff ... They have a reverence for the
 laws of their being, obedience to common sense. Are
 subject to storm, but need no lesson of devotion.²⁶

Wilfrid was at the mercy of the two natures within him.
 He must struggle on till he "gets to that oneness of feel-
 ing which is the truthful impulse. At last, he will stand
²⁷high above them that have not suffered." He is so far
 divorced from reality that his perception of an undoubted
 fact left him awestruck. Because he had this capacity to
 see a real fact, he suffered much more keenly than did his
 sisters, who remained to the end securely wrapped in their
 "Nice Feelings and Fine Shades." Although partly stripped
 of his sentimentalism, and able to appreciate what he has
 lost in Emilia, Wilfrid remains vulnerable to the Comic
 Spirit to the end. In the last battle between the Aus-
 trians and the Italians we see him the butt of the jokes
 of both sides, carrying his white umbrella, riddled by

24- Sandra Belloni, p. 399.

25- Ibid., p. 365.

26- Ibid., p. 399.

27- Ibid., p. 445.

bullets, wherever the danger is greatest. But he is always turned toward, not away from danger. No one ever questioned his courage.

The three Pole sisters were, like the Countess de Saldar, trying to gain a higher social position -- "perpetually mounting." And their sense of inferiority was balanced by their superior appreciation of matters of sentiment.

They supposed that they enjoyed exclusive possession of the Nice Feelings, and conclusively comprehended the Fine Shades. 28

A degrading circumstance dignified by tragic feelings gave them a certain kind of enjoyment. Meredith is not lacking in sympathy for the sentimentalists. He does not ruthlessly condemn them, for he sees a certain fineness in their nature that is of merit.

The sentimentalists are ahead of us, not by weight of brain, but through delicacy of nerve, and like all creatures in the front, they are open to be victims. 30

At times, I see that sentiment approaches too near the Holy of earthly Holies for us to laugh at it; It has too much truth in it to be denounced. Nay, if we are not alert, and quick of wit, we shall be deceived by it, and wonder in the end, as the fool does, why heaven struck that final blow; concluding that it was but another whimsey of the Gods. 31

28-- Sandra Felloni, p. 4,5,

29-- Ibid., p. 133.

30-- Ibid., p. 163.

31-- Ibid., p. 118.

Sentimentalists do not try to deceive others, but are victims of the self-deception which is an inevitable part of their natures.

Sentimentalism of a different type is shown in Sir Purcell Barrett and Cornelia Pole. Weakness, it could be called, but weakness due to a false relation to reality. Despairing of developing a soul in his "ideal" on whom in his inefficiency he leans, Sir Purcell kills himself. Cornelia, herself unequal to the responsibilities of life, and trusting to him to supply the strength that she lacks, realizes too late that she is responsible for his death. Possessed of pure love for each other, a high sense of honor and an appreciation of the finer things of life, they fail each other where each is weak.

Emilia, the sweet singer, with her naturalness and unaffected simplicity is in sharp contrast with the group surrounding her. She is a creature of impulse, and passion, which Meredith calls noble strength on fire; a true child of nature, the personification of unspoiled, feminine charm, embodied in a beautiful, responsive body. She has the trustfulness and naturalness of a child, the simplicity and beauty of a wild rose, and the burning, steadfast purpose of a bright morning star. She is as true to the law of her nature as her heartbeats to the law of her physical body. She is not merely loyal, she is loyalty; not in love, she is love. She is a glowing, throbbing bit of

nature carved out of the big heart of the universe and clothed in a beautiful body and given a glorious voice that carries with it all the power and charm of her nature. And yet she is human. She makes the mistakes that an untrained mind would naturally lead her into. She is stubborn and obstinate till her mind develops and gives her better judgment. She is entirely devoid of the arts that the cynic in Richard Feverel attributes to the "practical animal."

She is not what man has made of your sex; and she is brave of heart. 32

This tribute from the cynical Italian, Marini, carries added weight.

In Vittoria, the sequel to Sandra Belloni, Emilia, or Vittoria, as she is now called, is taken to Italy to have her voice trained, and to realize her hope of aiding the Italians in their insurrections. Largely because of Wilfrid's weak and vacillating allegiance, she has grown from an unsophisticated, undisciplined girl to a self-possessed woman. She has outgrown her love for the sentimental Wilfrid, ³³ has remained true to her friendship for Merthyr Powys, and has emerged almost unaware of the insults of Mr. Pericles, her patron, who,

32- Sandra Belloni, p. 310.

33- Ibid., p. 360.

When he thought her voice was gone, said to her, "Like
 ze rest of women! You are game."³⁴ The secret of her
 power, aside from her marvelous beauty and voice, is her
 unquestioned sincerity.

She has no shame, and thus, believing in, she
 never violates nature, and offends no law, wild
 as she may seem.³⁵

No petty motives move her. She can neither deceive her
 friends nor distrust them, though she sometimes lets her
 loyalty influence her judgment, and refuses to be guided
 by the advice of her friends. She is universally attrac-
 tive to men, but is too intense to be an altogether com-
 fortable companion.

In Carlo, Vittoria's Italian patriot husband, the
 Comic Spirit finds another victim. He is to her a per-
 fect gentleman, a perfect lover, but a prison for her
 mind. He will not listen to her advice about the con-
 duct of the conspiracy, and her ideas would have aided
 him, for her judgment was more sound than his. Carlo
 was the husband of her body, but Merthyr continues the
 companion of her soul. She was merely Carlo's wife, a
 creature to love and inspire him and to perpetuate the
 noble Italian family. He trusts "not a single woman in

34- Sandra Belloni, p. 333.

35- Ibid., p. 365.

the world! that is, for a conspiracy." This, coming from such a sweet-natured, high souled character, shows the force of the tradition she was fighting vainly against. For not recognizing the true worth of this child of nature, Carlo brings on himself the vengeance of the Comic Spirit, and the beloved but headstrong patriot dies for his country, leaving Vittoria with Merthyr to help her overcome her grief as he has helped her in every other crisis of her eventful life.

In Merthyr Powys we have the first of the "Friends of Women." Meredith has been given due credit for his splendid examples of womanhood, but his equally splendid men have almost escaped notice. They are always minor characters as far as plot is concerned, but in the life of the heroine they are most important. In fact, it is hard to see how some of the heroines could have developed to such perfection without the influence of these "men who understand women." We have all probably dreamed at sometime in our lives of possessing such a friend: one who sees our faults and loves us still; one who sees our faults but sees also our possibility of overcoming them, and becoming the ideal that he has of us. The faith he has in us is our strength during our struggles. What Meredith offered to women in general, his "friends of women" gave to

the heroines in his stories, in their struggle to develop a soul. These men express Meredith's attitude toward life in their dominance of mind over passion. They are not devoid of passion, but they have a dependable self-control. Emilia "felt herself so low before this man who would not be played upon as an instrument — who would not leap into ardour for her beauty." ³⁷ Women can trust them always, for even when they are in love, they think first of what is for the woman's best interest, and wait for their own reward till she has grown to understand and appreciate them.

The type of love experienced by these friends of women receives the stamp of Meredith's approval in almost every novel.

Love, the charioteer, is easily tripped, while honest jog-trot Love keeps his legs to the end. ³⁸

Almost invariably the heroine outgrows her first impulsive passion and comes to care for the self-controlled, mature man. On her way to Italy, Emilia expresses her final reaction to Wilfrid in a letter to Merthyr:

Must we half despise a man to love him? May no dear woman that I know ever marry the man she first loves! ³⁹

37— Sandna Belloni, p. 398.

38— Richard Feverel, p. 212.

39— Sandra Belloni, p. 461.

And where the chief character is a man, as in Beauchamp's Career and Harry Richmond, he has the same experience. In fact, Meredith seems to be challenging men and women to put intellect and self-control first. He does not despise impulse, emotion, and passion in men and women; he can understand and appreciate the so-called "red-blooded" hero, but he makes him learn some degree of self-control before he allows him to share in life's rewards. And Emilia, too, must go through her ordeal; must outgrow two unsatisfactory love affairs before she finally takes her place beside Merthyr Powys, with whom she lives another kind of existence because her mind is given as much consideration as her body. ⁴⁰ Merthyr perhaps represents the highest type of manhood of all Meredith's men characters. He has none of the littlenesses that cling to most of the others in some degree. He is high-souled, forceful but sensitive and sympathetic, wholly worthy of the worship of his intellectual sister and the companionship of the child of nature, Emilia.

Georgiana Ford is the woman with brains whom we usually find in each story. She has little else, except a supernatural love for her half brother, Merthyr. She "might be a woman if she liked," but has an insane prefer-

ence for celestial neutrality," said the poet of her. She is heartless and inconsiderate of every one who interferes with her brother's interests. She can so far measure up to Merthyr's nobility as not to be jealous of Emilia, but is utterly unsympathetic with Emilia's budding love for him.

"So, then, you love my brother?" she coldly asked. Emilia could have retorted, "Cruel that you are!" The pain of having an unripe feeling plucked at without warning, was bitter. 42

Lady Charlotte Chillingworth is another cold-blooded, self-controlled woman. She has little depth of emotion, but is frankly envious of Emilia's power of inspiring Wilfrid's passionate love. Her common sense tells her that she is a better mate for him than Emilia; so she unscrupulously sets out to entangle him, disillusion Emilia, and keep him for herself, though rather appalled at the ignominy of seeming to struggle with another woman for a man.

Two women who are delightfully free from sentimentalism are Mrs. Chump, the special scourge of the Pole sisters, the blunt and vulgar antithesis of all that was included in the Fine Shades and Nice Feelings; and the insignificant little aunt who presided over the household of the Poles. Mrs. Chump, the "simmering pot of Emerald

41- Sandra Belloni, p. 359.

42- Ibid., p. 436.

broth," as Wilfrid calls her, in spite of her uncultivated brogue, is full of a homely philosophy that passes over the heads of the "little people." She wanted to be friends with Pole's "garls" and could not quite see why they repelled her.

And twenty shindies per dime we've been havin' and me such a placable body, if ye'll oonly let m'explode. I'm all powder, every bit, and might ha' been christened Saltpetre, if born a boy. 43

Mrs. Chump's unconscious witticisms have a disturbing effect on the little woman with an irrepressible sense of humor, who is sadly out of place in this house of Sentimentalism. Mrs. Lupin is unobtrusive almost to extinction, but in choice bits of description here and there we get vivid glimpses of her sitting quietly at table, napkin in hand and eyes sparkling, painfully convulsed at the absurdities that are merely disgusting to her nieces. The terrific struggle between nature and outraged proprieties is almost too much for her frail constitution.

Never did nun of the cloister fight such a fight with the flesh, as this poor little woman, that she might not give offense to the Tribunal of the Nice Feelings. 44

Rhoda Fleming belongs between Sandra Belloni and

43- Sandra Belloni, p. 105.

44- Ibid., p. 208.

Vittoria. It is the most readable, in some respects, of all the novels: ~~it is the~~ most spirited and least artificial. The theme is the injustice done to erring girls. Frequently we find such remarks as: "It's ignorance that leads to the unhappiness of girls.... How can girls know what men are."⁴⁵ The beautiful Dahlia, Rhoda's sister, is the central figure of the story. She is deceived by Edward Blancove; he repents and wants to marry her, but she remains with her sister till she dies, leaving the message with Robert, Rhoda's husband, that he is to "help ⁴⁶ poor girls."

Rhoda has a very attractive personality, but, like Georgiana Ford, she is completely dominated by her intellect. Her father is so impressed by the strength of her intellect that he attributes all ^{her} freaks and vagaries of manner to it.⁴⁷ She is like Georgiana, too, in her absorbing love for her sister Dahlia. She loves her devotedly, but she is constitutionally unfitted to feel for her in her trouble, and, free from emotion herself, she rides ruthlessly over Dahlia's feelings and compels her to a course which any shred of sympathy would have told her was unnecessary torture. Rhoda has in a marked degree

45- Rhoda Fleming, p. 330.

46- Ibid., last page.

47- Ibid., p. 368.

the characteristic which Meredith ascribes to all women: a simple directness of thought and action. In her case it is joined to a puritanical religious fervor that gives it a terrible force. She offers a good example of the error into which intellect untempered by feeling can be driven by a relentless purpose. Her deep convictions and sound logic compel submission from others. Even the clear-headed Robert is in the habit of considering Rhoda's decisions always correct. The mistakes had all been made when she finally realizes the horror of the situation into which she had forced Dahlia: marriage with an unscrupulous scoundrel.

As Rhoda Fleming is not like the rest of Meredith's stories, we do not expect to find the Comic Spirit behaving in its customary manner. Edward Blancove and his cousin Algernon are the comic characters. The variance from reality, in Edward's case, comes from the struggle between his love for Dahlia, a poor country girl, and his sense of loyalty to his wealthy father, who expects him to marry a girl with a socially desirable background. He has not the courage either to give up the girl he loves or brave the wrath of his stern father. So he tries to compromise. And when he comes to his better self, it is too late. Algernon's difficulty is money. He has the tastes of a gentleman without the money to indulge them. He does less harm than his cousin, and finds a reasonable

degree of happiness.

One of the most attractive of all Meredith's men is Robert Eccles, who works for Rhoda's father on the farm. By his kindness to Dahlia in her trouble he wins Rhoda's confidence and discovers beneath her unemotional exterior a heart of love. In his ability to understand women and be their friend, he is like Merthyr Powys, but he is more temperamental, passionate, and headstrong. He has a hot temper and a passion for drink that has made his father drive him from home. But such is his control of himself that Rhoda never sees anything in him but calm docility. He is the most vividly portrayed of all the men, the only one who talks about himself and discloses at first hand the real man. We can divine the character of Evan Harrington from his actions and what others say of him, but we see him indistinctly as if half concealed behind a screen. But Robert strides and blusters across the pages in full view of the audience; we feel the presence of his fiery nature. He is portrayed with the same dramatic touches that make the heroines so real. In a degree, too, he possesses the directness of approach to truth that characterizes the women. He says of himself: "I'm like
48
a woman in seeing some things." Robert's passionate forcefulness is peculiarly fitted to arouse the deeply

hidden emotion of the intellectual Rhoda.

The golden haired Dahlia is as different from the dark Rhoda in nature as she is in appearance. She is weak and spoiled because of her beauty and easily led astray by an appeal to her feelings, but she has too much bodily strength and good Kentish red blood to die of a broken heart in the approved Victorian fashion. And she has enough sweet womanliness to be true to her love for Edward and to recognize at its true worth the change in his character and that his love for her is real. She is human enough, too, even in the midst of her terror at the approach of her brutish substitute husband, to reproach Rhoda with deceiving her. It is the author himself who steps in at the end and decrees that, although all misunderstandings are cleared up, and the lovers' faith in each other restored, they must pay the penalty exacted by offended Mother Nature, and, forgoing their happiness, be satisfied with the growth of their souls.

In Mrs. Lovell we have the coquette who almost unconsciously attracts men, and in some undefinable manner sets them against each other. She is not, however, unscrupulous, like Mrs. Mount in Richard Feverel, or Violetta in Vittoria, and she has a real understanding sympathy for her frail sisters, and a sense of fair play which save her character from littleness. Robert, though deeply in love with another woman, feels her power:

"-it aint a matter of reason at all - she fascinates me....Some women you have a respect for; some you like or you love; some you despise; with her I just feel I'm intoxicated." 49

She has the directness of purpose and intuitive knowledge of men characteristic of her type.

Two interesting examples of the servant class are Mrs. Boulby, landlady of the Pilot Inn, who is Robert's self-appointed champion, and Mrs. Sumfit, who has the same blind devotion to "her Dahly." These characters are as sharply individualized as the more important women. Mrs. Boulby is capable of holding her own equally in an argument or in a fist battle.

In Harry Richmond men are given the most prominent place; although we find here women of exceptional courage, independence, and strength of character. There is a rather exceptional friendship between two girls. Janet Ilchester, Harry's playmate, and the Princess Ottilia are both in love with Harry, but their admiration for the excellent qualities in each other make them loyal friends. They share the honors of the story equally, and both eclipse Harry in forcefulness and strength of character. Their different natures make them better friends, for they see in each other qualities that they miss in themselves. Janet is an impulsive, rather headstrong

girl with a boyish sense of justice and fair play, and a very high sense of honor. She is unemotional and self-controlled but sensitive to another's pain. She is guided by her intuition rather than her intellect, though she is not lacking in intelligence - no Meredith heroine is. She is like the "friends of women" in the patience with which she waits for Harry to recognize the impossibility of marrying the German Princess and to come to think of her as a woman instead of a congenial playfellow. She always sees her course straight and clear before her and is never in doubt about the rightness of her conduct. She is a little stronger, a less feminine, and a more positive Rose Jocelyn.

Poor Ottilia, a slave to her sovereign duties, cannot display the fearlessness that came easily to Janet. She has the same lofty purpose and high sense of honor, but is guided solely by her intellect, which was overdeveloped by her training as a Princess. Harry realizes that Ottilia's reason must be satisfied as well as her emotion, and feels himself unequal to her demands, a feeling that accounts for the lack of fervor and initiative in his wooing. Meredith says of her:

The Princess could only love intelligently. She had the power of passion and it could be stirred, but he who kindled it wrecked his chance if he could not stand clear in her intellect's unsparring gaze. 50

Richmond Roy, the father of Harry, is almost as perfect a mark for the attacks of the Comic Spirit as the Countess de Saldar. Almost too fantastic to be real, he is yet human, and we understand his attraction for the little boy who idolized him and the woman who gave him a life's devotion. His dramatic instincts and his absurd claims of royal connection create a situation entirely removed from reality. He is a charlatan and a mountebank, yet a loving father and charming companion. It was his scheming, often at the expense of strict honor, that fostered the alliance with the German Princess.

Dorothy Beltham, Harry's aunt, is a true Victorian type in her secret devotion to the fantastic pretender. If she had had the courage that Janet had, she would have openly defied her father and kept affairs from the tangle that her secret supplying of funds to Richmond brought about.

Mable Sweetwinter was another conventionally weak character, a prey to the passions of man, and deserving, according to Meredith, the fate that befell her. The Gypsy girl, Kiomi, deserves mention as a distinctly individual type, and not the least interesting of the women who influenced Harry Richmond. Untaught but loyal, by her wild free courage she strengthened his character.

Janet's courage and independence enable her to cope with any situation and inspire respect even in Harry's

friend whose "talk of women suggested the Hawk with the downy feathers of the last little plucked bird sticking to his beak."⁵¹ Most of the heroines are of this type, but when a woman shows weakness of character, Meredith puts at least half the blame for it on her false education. For, he says, "Absolute freedom could be the worst of perils for women as they are educated now."⁵²

Beauchamp's Career is primarily about man and politics, but the subject of the education of women is given more prominence here than in any previous novel. Meredith expresses this discouraging view of the general condition of women of the day.

Alas for us! - this our awful baggage in the rear of humanity, these women who have not moved on their own feet one step since the primal mother taught them to suckle, are perpetually pulling us backward on the march. 53

He makes Nevil say: "I say that the education of women is to teach them to rely on themselves."⁵⁴ But Meredith is not discouraged by the condition of women. He says that Mr. Austin, one of the minor characters, saw more certain indications of progress among

51- Harry Richmond; p. 527.

52- Ibid., p. 542.

53- Beauchamp's Career, p. 517.

54- Ibid., p. 169.

women than any at present shown by men. He was but for opening avenues to the means of livelihood for them, and leaving it to their strength to conquer the position they might wish to win. 55

The importance of woman's intelligence and independence is merely hinted at so far in the novels. In the second group woman begins to receive the larger share of Meredith's attention.

Nevil Beauchamp is sympathetic and fair toward women, but he does not realize their true worth. He says, "There may be women that think as well as feel; I don't know them."⁵⁶ He does not recognize this ability even in Jenny Denham, the most intellectual of the women characters. Nevil is almost as vividly portrayed as Robert Eccles. He is supposed to be modeled after Meredith's friend Maxse, which fact may account for his being flesh and blood. Like Harry Richmond, he does not marry his first love, nor yet his second. He outgrows^{his} early romantic passion for the little French coquette, Renee', who, repressed by the traditions of her country, does not have the necessary courage to brave the displeasure of her father and brother and marry the man she loves. By the time she has become tired of the dullness of life with her elderly husband and has run away to Nevil for solace, he has learned the bareness

55- Beauchamp's Career, p. 252.

56- Ibid., p. 166.

of a feeling based only on physical attraction, and sends her back to her family. He explains his infatuation for Renee' to Cecilia:

"Men who are open to passion have to be taught reflection before they distinguish between the woman they should sue for love because she would be their best mate, and the woman who has thrown a spell on them." 57

But the rumors of this scandal, which his chivalry will not permit him to explain, have cooled the ardour of the heiress, Cecilia Halkett, whom he wishes to marry. She is also annoyed by his radical political views and fails to give him the sympathy and support that he needs when disappointments and trouble are assailing him from all sides. Cecilia wants peace. She has the characteristic English trait of wanting to be comfortable. She has not been trained to independent thinking so that she can enter into his life and see his point of view. ~~She has been fas-~~ cinated by his charm but unable to sympathize with his deepest feelings and convictions, and to sacrifice her peace and security for his sake. And she is too weak to withstand the pleas of her father, who believes all the exaggerated stories about him. ⁵⁸ So through a series of misunderstandings and indecisions they are separated, and he is thrown with Jenny Denham, who is the sort of companion he needs to encourage him and steady his impulsive

57- Beauchamp's Career, p. 299.

58- Ibid., p. 253.

aggressiveness. She is a girl of the people and so more capable of appreciating his championship of the lower classes. She is possessed of high courage and sufficient intellect to be a companion to a politician, and in the end comes under the spell of his charm and loves him as devotedly as she has hitherto been devoted to his career.

Rosamond Culling, Nevil's and his uncle's housekeeper, has one predominating characteristic - devotion to Nevil. It is a devotion half maternal and half lover-like. It is as intense and elemental as an animal's mother love, more instinctive than intelligent.

The fiery Lord Rumfrey, Nevil's uncle, is the only well-defined victim of the Comic Spirit. He will not see the justice in Nevil's socialistic views nor any worth in his radical friends. He finally apologizes to Dr. Schrapnel, Nevil's friend, for the horsewhipping he had given him because Rosamond, now Lord Rumfrey's wife, fancied the doctor had insulted her. He is moved to this tardy act of justice because of fear for the welfare of the coming heir. But the Comic Spirit is not appeased: the child dies a few hours after birth, Nevil is drowned while rescuing a poor boy, and Lord Rumfrey is left with no one to continue his line.

In these seven novels we learn that the essential characteristics of Meredithian heroines are courage,

charm, intelligence and self-reliance. We find these traits in Rose Jocelyn, Janet Ilchester, Rhoda Fleming, Emilia, and Jenny Denham, all young girls. Then there is the group of women who are dominated by intellect alone: Lady Jocelyn, Georgiana Ford, Ottilia, and Rhoda. Another group who have the possibilities of heroines but do not live up to them are: Lucy Feverel, Dahlia Fleming, and Cecilia Halkett. We have the Victorian type in Clare Forey, Dorothy Beltham, and Mabel Sweetwinter; the coquette in Lady Blandish, Mrs. Lovell, and Renee; the vampires in Mrs. Mount and Violetta. In the servant class are Mrs. Waddy, Mrs. Boulby, Mrs. Sumfit, Mrs. Berry, and Polly Wheedle. And in a class by themselves are the inimitable Mrs. Chump, the Nemesis of the Pole sisters, and little Mrs. Lupin.

The education of women and sentimentalism have been thoroughly discussed. Ideas about women, both the current cynical type and the more encouraging Meredithian type, are plentiful. Meredith's ideas as to the ideal relation between men and women are shown, and the beginning of the connection between the cause of women, and the Comic Spirit.

Among the men characters we find three examples of the conventional young man, fine and true, but falling just a little below the heroine in initiative and force of character: Richard Feverel, Evan Harrington, and Harry Richmond. More forceful and compelling are Robert

Eccles and Nevil Beauchamp. The sentimentalists are Sir Austin Feverel, Wilfrid Pole, and Richmond Roy. The "friends of women" are Merthyr Powys in Sandra Belloni and Mr. Austin in Beauchamp's Career.

CHAPTER III

The Novels, Second Group.

In the second group of novels we find a complicated style to match the increasingly complicated natures of the characters. The simple narrative style has gone. And the treatment of the woman question is also becoming self-conscious. The characters are older and more self-possessed than those of the first group — both the men and women. And there are no more of the delightfully natural old servants that seem to have stepped out of life on to the pages of the story. From now on, with a few exceptions, the characters seem to be, if not manufactured, at least artificially grown. The women are poetically described ideas, and the men, with the exception of the "Friends of women," are more or less indistinct. We know their qualities; they are true to life and logically conceived, but they do not make us feel, as do Nevil Beauchamp and Robert Eccles. Meredith has too many descriptive adjectives at his command, and too much time to experiment in their different combinations. He is not only playing with words, but with ideas as well, and with his characters. The criticism that all Meredith's characters talk Meredith is beginning to impress the reader. We feel Meredith's personality more strongly than that of any of his characters. He is, as Brownell

1
 says, "a host having a good time at his own party." The general opinion of Meredith seems to have been formed by reading The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways, the most artificial and self-conscious of all the novels, though the most polished. The simple charm of Evan Harrington and Rhoda Fleming, and the penetrating psychology of Sandra Belloni, if these books were more widely read, would, or ought to, give the public a different impression of Meredith.

The Egoist, published the same year as the Essay on Comedy, is the meeting place of the cause of women and the Comic Spirit. They are never subsequently divorced. The Egoist is a satire — almost a burlesque. The hero, like the Countess de Saldar and Richmond Roy, barely escapes being a caricature. He is a handsome, proud, spoiled, young nobleman, devoid of a sense of humor. He commits the unpardonable sin of taking himself too seriously. And he has the sensitiveness that goes with a serious temperament. His inflated ego must be constantly nourished by the admiration of women. And his god-like conception of himself demands the highest type of woman for the sacrifice. His ego is completely satisfied by the charming

Clara Middleton, the "dainty rogue in porcelain."² But she, unfortunately for him, possesses an Irish sense of humor, and fails to fall at his feet in worship. It taxes her patience and ingenuity to secure her release from their engagement, for she cannot convince him or her scholarly father that her wish to be free is not just a notion characteristic of the changeable, capricious nature of women. The only one who takes her seriously is the unromantic Vernon Whitford, who "talks sense to women."³ She has to combat not only Sir Willoughby's stupendous egotism, but the prevalent ideas concerning women's subordinate position, ideas held even by her beloved father. Other women also were shocked and grieved at her unparalleled audacity in wanting to break her engagement, and especially to so fine a young man. The pressure brought to bear on her was almost more than she could withstand. But the situation was so unendurable - their natures so uncongenial - that she was compelled to develop the courage to break away. And, too, the realization that Vernon was silently watching her to see if she was going to display the courage and independence that he expected of her acted as a challenge to her spirit. She did not want to meet his look of disappointment if she failed to measure up to his expecta-

2- The Egoist, p. 40.

3- Ibid., p. 297.

tions. So Sir Willoughby was forced to admit the appropriateness of the term "rogue," and set her free, on condition that she marry Vernon, not knowing that that was the greatest service he could render her.

When you finish a Meredith novel, close the book and shut your eyes, you see the lovely heroine full of vivacity and healthy animal spirits striding across fields and meadows with the swinging motion of an athlete — always in motion, purposeful motion. Her strength of body is equal to her strength of character, and that in a day when physical weakness and helplessness were held up as the feminine ideal. So we see Clara Middleton, who was one, at least, of Meredith's favorite heroines, romping over the country with young Crossjay Patterne, or keeping pace with Vernon Whitford, the inveterate pedestrian, and looking sidewise at him in a shy, boyish manner not unlike that of his pupil, Crossjay. She is seen at a disadvantage with her hand demurely on Sir Willoughby's arm, trying to disguise her contempt for his unheroic egotism. She cannot worship at his feet; so she is dumb. She feels that her "mind is her own,"⁴ but she dares not say so, not because of fear, but because of the utter futility of trying to make him comprehend her meaning. We see her again wheedling her devoted old father and aping his abstruse

4— The Egoist, p. 75.

Johnsonian language. She is on the borderland between girlhood and womanhood, with all the charms of both. She is young enough to have retained her girlhood enthusiasm and love of fun, and old enough to begin to sense the seriousness of life and to enjoy the maturer pleasures of women. She is independent and courageous but not boldly so. She is not a paragon of all the virtues, but a charming, boyish, mischievous, and perfectly human girl. She is equally attractive whether she trips daintily along beside Vernon, ready to ridicule his awkwardness, or strives to keep from wounding Sir Willoughby, whom she honestly admires, though she is at the same time determined not to lose her self-respect by acting a lie. She is aptly called a "dainty rogue in porcelain," for it would be hard to find a more charming character.

The other women characters present a sharp contrast to Clara. Letitia Dale, the woman with brains, who has spent her life feeding Sir Willoughby's egoism, is lacking in both physical and moral strength. She is Sir Willoughby's punishment for his self-deception and utter inability to comprehend the worth and dignity of women. He has the narrow view of women characteristic of his type. He thinks of them only in relation to himself. If he should allow Letitia to marry, would she lose her worshipful attitude toward him? She becomes thoroughly disillusioned about him but is too weak-willed to resist his

wooing; so each becomes a punishment for the other. She saves him from the ignominy of being thrice jilted. The Egoist is an extremely well depicted character. His egoism is so interwoven with a fineness of nature and a real generosity of spirit and a pathetic sensitiveness that we cannot help being sorry for him, and we see so many of our own pretensions and subterfuges in him that we squirm when he comes to grief. We lay down the story with an uncomfortable feeling. He tried desperately hard to live up to his ideal of himself as a generous-hearted patron of his little world, but failed.

Mrs. Mountstuart is the type of woman who figures prominently in all the earlier novels. Her conversation is the epitome of Meredith's clever wit: terse, epigrammatic and elliptical; the "dainty rogue in porcelain" is hers. She tags Sir Willoughby with, "You see he has a leg." The general conversation follows the lead of Mrs. Mountstuart. It is a series of unfinished sentences and ejaculations. One guesses at the conclusion of the other's remark and interrupts with another unfinished sentence. The ladies Isabel and Eleanor, with their gentle idolatrous worship of their nephew, Sir Willoughby, are perfect Victorian types, and the gossips, Lady Culver and Lady Busshe, are true to type.

Meredith's

As is usual with her heroines, Clara has to grow into an appreciation of the friend of women, and their

life together begins on a foundation of mutual respect and congenial tastes. Vernon is a more awkward, shy, and self-conscious Merthyr Powys, seemingly not a match for the dainty rogue in porcelain; but as he challenges her to live up to a higher standard of womanhood than was generally expected of women, so her love encouraged him to assert himself and cast off the yoke of dependence imposed by Sir Willoughby, and Meredith's final comment on the couple is: "Sitting beside them the Comic Muse is grave and sisterly."⁵

The Tragic Comedians is a different type from The Egoist. It is a short historical novel coming between The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways. The setting is historical, but seems made to order to exemplify Meredith's theory. The hero, Alvan, is a sort of romantic, glorified egoist. His self-confidence is justified in everything except in his relations with women. He had the conventional male egoist's opinion of women's nature and capacity; he could love them devotedly and passionately,⁶ but was incapable of understanding them. If he had trusted himself less and Clotilde's intuition and practical common sense more, the tragic outcome could have

5- The Egoist, p. 523.

6- The Tragic Comedians, p. 71.

been averted. He realized too late that "Surely women,⁷ weak women, must be at times divinely inspired." He recognized a kindred spirit in Clotilde, but,

Among Alvan's gifts the understanding of women did not rank high. He was too robust, he had been too successful. Your very successful hero regards them as nine-pins destined to fall, the whole tune-ful nine, at a peculiar poetical twist of the bowler's wrist.... He would have stared like any Philistine at the tale of their capacity to advance to a likeness unto men in their fight with the world. 8

Clotilde is the strong-minded, impetuous type, not unlike Diana, with a brilliant intellect and quick wit, but often irrational, as people swayed by their impulses must be. But she is weak. Her weakness is due in great part to the dominating influence of her father over her. If Alvan had trusted her as he would if he had understood her, she would have been able to withstand the tyranny of her father, but she felt herself deserted by him and was not strong enough to extricate herself alone. Then he accused her of falseness for not overcoming difficulties that his stupidity had plunged her into.⁹

The woman with brains is present in the person of the Baroness, a friend of Alvan. He says of her: "You meet now and then men who have the woman in them without being

7- The Tragic Comedians, p. 86.

8- Ibid., p. 66.

9- Ibid., p. 91.

womanized; they are the pick of men. And the choicest women are those who yield not a feather of their womanliness for some amount of manlike strength. And she is one; man's brain, woman's heart."¹⁰ In another place she

is spoken of as having "a man's head, capable of inspiring manlike friendships, and of entertaining them."¹¹

That the brain makes mistakes as well as the heart is shown by her inability to understand Clotilde.¹²

The style changes to suit the nature of the story and the characters, which are simple in manner, forceful, and lacking in self-consciousness. The author is scarcely visible. The narrative moves swiftly forward with no impeding digressions, a simply and forcefully told story of two very interesting characters and the forces that separated them. There is no humor or brilliant wit in the story; there is good conversation, but it is dependent on substance and not on wittily turned phrases or involved metaphor.

In Diana of the Crossways we go back to the light brilliance of the Egoist; but the general tone is deeper, more serious. The independence of woman is advanced a step. Diana is married, whereas Clara was merely engaged.

10- The Tragic Comedians, p. 61.

11- Ibid., p. 116.

12- Ibid., p. 119.

Diana is a more mature woman; she is able to maintain her position in society by force of character after leaving her husband, and she supports herself by writing novels. Her brilliant wit, as well as her beauty, is a matter of general acceptance. She talks politics like a statesman and maintains a salon to further the cause of her friend, Dacier, the cabinet minister. Diana is a mature Clara Middleton with a taste for politics.

Meredith's most widely read novels are Richard Feverel, The Egoist, and Diana of the Crossways. The latter has the distinction, also, of being the most misunderstood - the most argued over. Diana is undoubtedly one of Meredith's favorite heroines. He puts more loving care on the delineation of her and Clara Middleton than on any others. He understands the Rhoda Flemings, but he loves Diana and Clara.

Absolute perfection is not a requisite of a Meredith heroine; but rather possibility of growth and the courage to meet life's problems. So Diana's one weak spot does not ~~make~~ ^{dear} her the less to her creator - rather, the more. A brilliant intellect and scintillating wit do not presuppose a sound judgment and logical reasoning. Many critics say, "Here is Meredith's real idea of women, shown in this superb creature who writes novels and discusses politics with cabinet ministers. She can go so far, but she has her limitations, and when placed in a position of

trust she fails — reverts to type and acts on feeling and impulse as all women do in the last analysis." We cannot take Diana as ^{representing} Meredith's final judgment on women after we have met Rhoda Fleming, Rose and Lady Jocelyn, Janet Ilchester, the Princess Ottilia, Georgiana Ford, Aminta, Carinthia Jane, and others whose actions are entirely governed by their intellects and not their feelings. Meredith does not say in any instance that women are not fit for responsibilities, but he does say many times that their training has not fitted them for responsibilities. And in the case of every strong female character, he shows her developing a sense of responsibility and an independence of thinking and acting that makes her a fitting companion for his splendid men. And so Diana after the ordeal with Dacier is a much stronger character. Brownell fails to grasp Meredith's optimistic belief in the redemption of a human soul through suffering. He thinks of Diana as crushed mentally and morally: "But it is a little significant," Brownell adds, "that a man of exceptionally large heart combined with exceptional phlegm had to be provided for the appreciation of what is left of her." Diana, recovered from the disaster, has outgrown the man whom she formerly loved, and has come to appreciate the "man of exceptionally

large heart." Meredith does not believe that an emotional upheaval drags a woman down any more than it does a man. And he has no static characters -- that is, no important ones.

Diana is the true daughter of a typically volatile Irishman. She is charming and witty. By a series of hard knocks life has forced her to assume an independence of action that is not altogether natural to her. The men she has known have not inspired her with confidence in what should have been her natural protectors. She has several times had to assume a defensive attitude toward them, and it left its mark on her impressionable nature. Here is not the simple, direct, unified character of an Emilia or Rhoda. Diana is swayed by many conflicting motives and impulses. Her moods dominate her intellect. Now she is up on the heights of ecstasy as when in Switzerland she first felt the fascination of Dacier, then she is down in the depths, depressed, her judgment twisted and warped by offenses to her feelings. Many causes lead up to the betrayal of Dacier's secret. First, she is harrassed by money matters. She is maintaining a rather expensive house in London, where she entertains Dacier's friends in an effort to further his political career. She sells the Crossways, her family home, but the money does not last long. Work on her last novel is at a standstill, and her devotion to Dacier's

interests hinders her progress with it. Worry, work, and loss of sleep have lowered her vitality and her moral tone. Then at this inappropriate time, Dacier comes to her at night to tell her his wonderful news. And she, off her guard because of her excitement at the news and the unexpectedness of the visit, lays aside to a certain extent the dignity that has restrained Dacier's ardor during their intimacy. He takes advantage of her unguarded moment and forces his attentions on her. Her sensibilities are outraged. She is a wife, though estranged from her husband, and her keen sense of honor and delicacy cannot endure the appearance of deceit. She had been willing to go away with Dacier and so break irrevocably the tie that bound her to her husband and pave the way to freedom to marry Dacier, but she cannot compromise and live a lie. So she feels deeply humiliated and wounded by Dacier's action. She feels rather than reasons how unfair Dacier is. It is on his account that she is in money difficulties. And now he has, for want of a little self-control, deprived her of her self-respect. In her humiliation she overestimates the importance of the fancied insult and feels the need to rehabilitate herself, both in a financial way and in her own estimation. She has suffered another depressing experience on hearing the editor's insinuation that her political news has been stale. Her emotions are in a turmoil, her faculties

dulled; she is in a moral slump and loses the proper perspective of moral values, and then, after Dacier departs, the idea occurs to her to sell the secret to the rival editor and gain a threefold advantage, a renewed self-respect, money, and independence of Dacier; without stopping to reflect, on an impulse, she dashes down to the editor's office; returns with the money, and does not realize the enormity of her offense till Dacier confronts her with it the next morning. It seems to me that in a woman accustomed to act from impulse and trained by men's treachery to protect herself against them in any way she can, her action is not unnatural under the circumstances. Dacier, of course, cannot be expected to understand or condone it. Like most people, he cannot see over a moment of weakness to the devotion and honesty of a lifetime. Redworth, "the friend of women," sees the incident in its proper perspective, as a stage in the development of a woman's soul. He can condemn the sin while still maintaining his faith in the sinner. Dacier was not a man to appeal to her reason. He had no very high appreciation of a woman's sense of honor. She had had no contact with people who would have inspired her independence of thought. She was alone. Comradeship with Redworth such as Clara had with Vernon would have steadied her. She was cut off from Emma's influence by distrust of her husband's too ardent admiration. For women, she had

been forced to conclude, life was a battle.¹⁴

The catastrophe of the betrayed secret successfully disposes of the romantic lover, Dacier, and makes way for the true companion of her soul, Redworth, whom Meredith has kept handy waiting for his chance. In this more or less artificial story we cannot be sure that Meredith did not plan the whole scene with this sole object in view. For the rising young statesman seems eminently suited to the brilliant novelist: only a catastrophe could have separated them. But the Comic Spirit, in its role of champion of unappreciated womanhood, exposes Dacier's limitations in imagination and sympathy. Man's egotism is ever at its worst in his attitude toward women.

In this story the plot is complicated as well as the characters. The references are obscure, the language is artificial, and the situations, though logically reasoned out, are not convincing. Why it should be the most widely read of Meredith's novels is hard to understand. From the standpoint of artistic construction, clearness of portrayals and dramatic situations, it is, in my opinion, the least enjoyable of all - the only one I do not care to reread. To be sure, it shows Meredith's power of manipulating words and has many illuminating passages on life and human nature, and has his most brilliant heroine, but as

14- Diana of the Crossways, p. 194.

a whole is unsatisfactory.

Dacier is a character we can see as well as think about. We get illuminating glimpses of the philandering Sir Lukin, Emma's husband. And Diana's friendship with Lord Dannisburg is convincingly shown. Her encounter with "one of the world's good women,"¹⁵ who tried to interfere and force her to return to her husband, is a bright spot.¹⁶

Lady Emma Dunstane is the woman with brains, the bluestocking, who studies Latin for the pleasure of it. The study of Latin seems to mark the line of demarkation between the mental capacity of the men and women. Tom Redworth, the man who was not afraid to pretend friendship for women, is neither as clearly portrayed nor as virile a character as Merthyr Powys. But Diana discovers that though self-controlled, Redworth is capable of deep feeling, and that there is real romance in being married from a cottage to an old friend and comrade. Diana, like Emilia, had to go through her ordeal and develop a soul. Redworth felt that Diana "was a soul; therefore perpetually pointing to growth in purification. She was a woman weak, that is, not trained for strength."¹⁷

15- Diana of the Crossways, chapter XXIII.

16- Ibid., p. 224.

17- Ibid., p. 353.

In this group, then, we see woman thinking for herself, and breaking away from an alliance in which her personality has no chance to develop freely and naturally. Diana says: "That is the secret of the opinion of us at present - our dependency. Give us the means of independence and we will gain it, and have a turn at judging you, my lords!"¹⁸ We see man beginning to suffer for his inability to realize that woman's mind as well as body must be considered in his relations with her. In Diana we see the height of Meredith's artificiality in plot construction,ⁱⁿ characterization, and in language. And in The Egoist the sharpest ridicule of man is found. We see the most charming women, Diana and Clara. In fact, The Egoist and Diana of the Crossways strike the highest mark in self-conscious striving for effect. In every line we find Meredith: his wit, his love of a neatly turned phrase, his involved habits of thought, his elliptical manner of speech, his epigrammatic style and love of metaphor. These qualities are so conspicuous that they mar the story. We can understand, then, why those critics who judge Meredith largely by these two books fall short of a full appreciation of his power.

18- Diana of the Crossways, p. 133.

CHAPTER IV

The Novels, Last Group.

In the last group of novels woman questions not only man's right to hold her to an agreement that is distasteful to her, but the institution of matrimony itself. Here Meredith's conception of womanhood has broadened. His heroines progress within the span of the stories, but they start from a higher plane. They are on a mountain top, viewing a wider field.

In the third group of stories we return to the more sober, narrative style of the first group. The thought is more complicated, ideas predominate over plot, but there is not the conscious play on words that is so conspicuous in the Egoist. To borrow a phrase from Mr. Brownell, Meredith is not now so "elaborately, systematically, awkwardly airy." There are not now any contests in wits, or exercises in verbal gymnastics. We see Meredith more than in the first group, but it is his thought processes, not his wit, that is most in evidence. His thought is more profound and his purpose more serious.

Five years after Diana was published, appeared One of Our Conquerors. It is the most difficult of all the

1- W.C. Brownell, Victorian Prose Masters, p. 261.

novels to understand, not so much because of the involved style, as of the complicated thought. It is one of the most profound in thought and feeling. The ideas could not be expressed in the simple language of Evan Harrington, although many of them could have been left out without spoiling the story.

It is not always easy to say why one likes Meredith; some people say that no admirer of his ever knows. In this book, especially, the attraction is elusive. You do not see clearly the cause, but when you lay down the book you feel that you have been through a stirring experience. It is like listening to a Beethoven symphony, or viewing the expanse of the Rockies from a lofty peak. You cannot grasp the full meaning, but you can sense underlying forces and emotions. The characters do not stride across the stage like Alvan, Beauchamp, and Robert Eccles, in the tempestuous Italian fashion; ^{they move} but more like the calm, restrained Japanese, concealing the fires of emotion by a placid exterior. Nataly sits with a patient, loving expression, or moves slowly around her home, looking after the comforts of her loved ones, or preparing for the concerts that they all delight in. And Nesta, her daughter, stands straight and tall, gazing with clear penetrating vision into the world, and deep into life itself. The tragedy is concentrated underneath the patient, worried face of Nataly Radnor. We can only

guess at the intensity of her silent suffering. The contrast between the unexpressed tragedy of her life and the light-hearted optimism of Victor Radnor, "one of our conquerors," is tremendous in its irony. Victor is the supreme self-deceiver. His all conquering optimism will not see anything that conflicts with his view of life. The shafts of the Comic Spirit are no longer playful and harmless, but pointed and vindictive. Victor's punishment is as much more severe than the Egoist's as his egoism is more dignified than Willoughby's. The Comic Spirit ^{now} wears a tragic mask, not a comic one. This is war, not play, although Victor is a truly admirable character, a kind and generous husband and father, a public benefactor, and an able statesman.

Nataly's weakness was certain to bring punishment. Influenced by Victor's tempestuous wooing, she had had the courage to take the decisive step and go away with her mistress's husband. Her mind approved the step — she was glad to give up her life — as she did literally in the end — for the man she loved and blindly trusted. But she did not have the courage to face the consequences of her act without intense mental and physical suffering. Her deep love for Victor would not let her blame him. There was nothing she could do but suffer. If she could have lived in quiet obscurity, away from the eyes of society and the danger of exposure, or if they had frankly

acknowledged their situation, and defied society's censure, she could have lived in peace; but Victor's expansive nature demanded society. So they tried to deceive themselves as well as the world and waited for Radnor's wife to die, when they could be in fact what they were pretending before the world. He was sensitive only on her account on whom he depended for his inspiration, but he could not completely feel her terror at the thought of the world's censure. Driven from home to home by the malignant power of the lawful wife who thought they were living in sin, she lived in constant fear of discovery. Victor's habit of succeeding at everything he undertook could scarcely keep up in her a semblance of peaceful spirits. The prospect of entering the vast estate of Lakelands where she would be constantly in the eyes of society was terrifying. Victor in his blindness had planned this estate as a joyful surprise. The constant gnawing fear that ^{her daughter} Nesta would learn their situation was a sword hanging over her. The final test came when Nesta, with a wonderful sympathy and an understanding beyond her years, became the champion of a woman living, like Nataly, with a man to whom she was not married. Nataly then saw clearly her own status. The bitter irony of being compelled to blame Nesta for being kind to a woman to whom

the world would compare her if it knew bit like iron into her soul. "Like mother, like daughter,"³ they would say. She felt compelled to urge Nesta to marry the conservative young Earl so that she would have the steadying influence that she feared she needed, being the logical offspring of Victor's courageous impulsiveness and her own susceptibility. She did not dare to think of her having the freedom that would be hers under the guidance of the sensible, sympathetic, but rather revolutionary "friend of women," Dartrey Fenellan, though she knew that he was a more suitable mate for Nesta than the Earl.

We see the hand of the author, like the man who pulls the strings of the marionettes, in the end. Five hours before the death of Mrs. Burman, which would have set them free to marry, Nataly herself succumbed mercifully to the cruel strain and died. Not long after, Victor, only partially recovered from the mental collapse that followed Nataly's death, died also. And Nesta, married to Dartrey, was left to fight for the cause of women oppressed by the unfair edicts of society - Nesta, who was a proof that, in spite of weaknesses, her^{parents}_A had⁴ "kept faith with Nature!"

Victor himself had not quite the courage of his convictions. His ambition to live in splendor at Lakelands, to amass an immense fortune, to represent his county in

Parliament, and to marry Nesta to the young Earl was not entirely free from hypocrisy: he wanted to so dazzle society that it would countenance them in spite of the defiance of its laws. The evil effects of his mistakes were shown in the weakening of his character. It was the unconscious inspiration of Nesta's comradeship that saved him from making a fool of himself with the seductive widow. He was induced to wonder if it was always right to follow blindly where Mother Nature leads. But he never came to the point where he questioned his right to break away from his unnatural marriage with the rich old woman and live with his true mate. And it never occurred to him to blame himself for his selfish greed in marrying for money instead of putting all the blame on the rich woman for enticing a young, innocent boy into matrimony. He refused to feel responsibility, and his optimism saved him from feeling the punishment until he was forced to by Nataly's death.

Nataly came to recognize her weakness in blindly following Victor instead of relying on herself. That, Meredith would say, was not her fault but the fault of her training. But she, and not society, paid the penalty demanded by Mother Earth. The very intensity of her love for Victor, and the high plane of their relationship, made her pain the greater. She could not blame

him, she could not escape — she could only endure in dumb agony. Society was partly to blame, but the individual paid the price. Victor was not one who could see the possibility of women being independent. The growing forcefulness of his clear-eyed, courageous daughter frightened him, not only for its challenge to his own conduct, but for her safety in a world that would not sympathize with her radical ideas.⁴

Dartrey Fenellan is, next to Merthyr Powys, the most admirable of the "friends of women." He is courageous, sympathetic, and self-controlled; the only one except⁵ Merthyr who could be a mate to Nesta. Vernon Whitford would have been too modest and retiring. She must have a man capable of doing as well as thinking. Redworth was hardly progressive enough in his ideas. Both of them were in the process of working out their own problems. Only a mature, aggressive, self-reliant man could equal Nesta. Nesta seems the crowning achievement of Meredith's pen. So far he has been saying to women: "You must learn to think for yourselves, you must not allow yourselves to be imposed on by men. You have the necessary courage to stand up for your rights if you just think so." Now, he says to them: "Society is wrong; it is unfair to you,

4- One of Our Conquerors, p. 392.

5- Ibid., p. 394.

and you must do something about it." It is not so much that his conception of womanhood has grown, though woman does have a larger spirit here, a broader view. Nesta and Rose Jocelyn are similar in character and ability. But his conception of woman's place in society has changed. Rose was confronted with her own little problem and had the courage to meet it, though she allows circumstances to shape her destiny to a certain extent. Clara Middleton refuses to allow circumstances to shape her destiny, once she has waked up. But Nesta is confronted with the universal problem of womanhood and has the courage to meet it. She has not only courage but sympathy and intelligence, and the good sense to see the right man to help her in her work. In a book that is so clouded with figures, rhetoric, obscure allusions, and involved sentences that you can read an entire page without gaining a lucid idea, Nesta stands out in cameo-like relief, a flesh and blood, laughter-loving, sincere, high-souled and completely lovable girl. She has the girlish charm and boyish frankness of Rose Jocelyn, the stanch courage and strength of Carinthia Jane, the poise and tranquility of Aminta, and a broad understanding and loving sympathy for all womankind that none of the others have. Nowhere in literature can be found a more attrac-

tive character than Nesta Radnor, ^{a woman} portrayed with the simple directness that Meredith employed in his earlier books..

In simplicity of plot construction, One of Our Conquerors is superior to most of the novels. Events march onward with a firm tread, from the prophetic fall of the hero on the bridge in the first chapter to his last heroic gesture and final defeat. Such philosophy as the author indulges in seems -- when you can understand it -- more closely connected with the characters and not a mere digression. The characters make their own plot and are responsible for their own tragedy except in the final catastrophe. The continuous suspense of waiting for the invalid woman to die gives unity to the story and gets on our nerves as well as on Victor's and Nataly's. Meredith is no longer good-humoredly poking fun at his characters, or indulging his pleasure in the society of charming women, but he is hurling a bolt of defiance at society for committing a deadly sin, and ^{is} giving a heroic challenge to courageous women and sympathetic men to rise up out of their complacency and right the wrongs done to women, and men too. The Comic Spirit is no longer a grinning sprite, but a relentless Nemesis, determined to strike home a lesson to the morally slack and inert.

In Lord Ormont and His Aminta, we return to the

lighter tone of the former stories. Meredith's manner here is sincere and sober, but his characters are not tragic. Nor are they approaching the burlesque. The good and poor qualities mingle in all the novels; they do not progress uniformly. The style in Lord Ormont and His Aminta is still more or less artificial, but the description of the boys' school and the characters of the boys remind us of Richard and Ripton in Richard Feverel. And the character of Lady Charlotte Eglett is as clear and true a portrait as a photograph. Harriet Waters Preston, in The Atlantic Monthly, says, "With the exception of Shakespeare, I doubt if the other dramatist ever lived who could have portrayed so to the inmost palpitating life the rude, imperious, and at the same time intensely human and convincing character of Lady Charlotte Eglett." The light bantering tone has not returned; the Comic Spirit has grown up. Lord Ormont is dealt with severely, but sympathetically. His pride is brought low, and he is wounded through his love for his beautiful young wife, but he is left with life and self-respect.

For some reason we carry away no very definite impression of Aminta. We know she is beautiful, but her beauty is not visualized. In some unaccountable manner she gets herself married to Lord Ormont and behaves her-

7- H.W.Preston, "A Knightly Pen," Atlantic Monthly, XC, p.511.

self becomingly as his wife, until she wakes up to the fact that she has been unjustly treated. Then she is more clearly portrayed. In one vivid scene we see her as a human being: on the beach and in the water swimming a race with Matey Weyburn.

The theme is revolt against marriage which is a mere joining together of two beings who are not suitable mates.⁸ And we return to the subject of the education of women.⁹ But here the characters do not merely talk. Matey Weyburn goes to Switzerland and starts a model school where boys and girls are trained together "as a scheme for stopping the mischief between them."¹⁰ And to this school with Weyburn goes Aminta; not slinking in shame and fear, afraid they will be discovered, but with courage, self-confidence and self-respect. For they did not feel that they were offending Divine law, though they realized that they were offending society. So they did not flaunt their offense in the face of society, but went off quietly by themselves. There was no attempt at compromise, and no pretense. They were willing to suffer the penalty for their revolt if one should be exacted. They wanted to serve society in the way which they felt themselves fitted for, and did not think they should be denied this

8- Lord Ormont and His Aminta, p. 249.

9- Ibid., p. 357.

10- Ibid., p. 164.

privilege because of the unjust laws of society. It is a much saner, healthier relationship than that between Victor and Nataly, though no purer.

Aminta's awakening is a result of Lord Ormont's neglect to acknowledge her before the world and give her her rightful place in society. She loses her affection for him and begins to think. Her childhood sweetheart, Matthew Weyburn, becomes Lord Ormont's secretary, and the contrast between the two helps to arouse her mind, and also helps her to discover that her love for Matthew has been slumbering, not dead. As usual, it is the influence of the friend of women who inspires the heroine to independent thinking. And when a woman begins to think, if she has courage, she will not remain in bondage to an unjust yoke. In describing the situation between Aminta and Lord Ormont, Meredith says,

He was unjust - he was Injustice. The weak may be wedded, they cannot be married, to Injustice. 11

Aminta began to question the right of society to compel her to obey its decrees.

And the process was a disintegration of her feminine principle of docility under the world's decrees. At each pause of her mental activity she was hurled against the state of marriage. 12

Her revolt was caused, not by her newly awakened love for

11- Lord Ormont and His Aminta, p. 357.

12- Ibid., p. 250.

Weyburn, but by her desire for independence.

And is happiness our cry? Our cry is rather for circumstance and occasion to use our functions, and the conditions are denied to women by marriage — denied to the luckless of women, who are many, very many. 13

of that day
From marriage an Englishwoman had no legal escape. Aminta felt that she was not to blame for the situation; so she refused to feel guilty over the consequences. "She saw the difference between men's decess for their convenience and God's laws."¹⁴ Lord Ormont, with his conception of womanhood, could never realize that he was unjust to her, and that her pride suffered from his neglect as did his by the Government's fancied slight to him.

And what is a woman's pride but the staff and banner of her soul, beyond all gifts? He who wounds it cannot be forgiven — never! — he has killed the best of her. 15

Lord Ormont has the two customary faults of the comic character: he takes himself too seriously, and does not give credit to woman for an intellect equal to his own. He is a great general, but does not receive the recognition that he thinks he deserves; so he thinks to avenge himself on the British public by withdrawing to himself and keeping his young wife with him, like an

13- Lord Ormont and His Aminta, p.234.

14- Ibid., p. 411.

15- Ibid., p. 123.

Achilles, selfishly sulking in his tent while his bride fights her battles with society without his support, as best she may. His utter incapacity for appreciating Aminta, steeped as he is in what Weyburn calls "Old world ideas about women,"¹⁶ is the cause of his discomfiture. He learns of her flight just as he is being reconciled with the government. He is one of the men whom Meredith disapproves of as having no qualities of the woman in him.¹⁷

Lady Charlotte Eglett is the woman with brains in this story, and one of the most clearly portrayed of all Meredith's characters. She is a strong, virile, honest and sincere figure, proud of her family and especially^{of} her famous brother. She has the mentality of a man, but the sympathy to feel for "her unfairly handled sisters - a strong party, if it were not so cowardly, she had to think."¹⁸ We seem to hear Meredith speaking in Lady Charlotte's terse, forceful utterances. She felt that women had an advantage over men which most of them did not realize. "She knew how much stronger than ordinary men the woman who can put them in motion. She said ... that the women unaware of the advantage Society gave them(as to

16- Lord Ormont, and His Aminta, p. 340.

17- Ibid., p. 44.

18- Ibid., p.39.

mastering men) were fools." She had a comprehensive understanding of both sexes. She valued the superior qualities of Weyburn, and only Lord Ormont's irrational conduct toward his wife kept her from understanding Aminta. With a firm stance and head held high she stands, and we can almost hear the tones of her voice as she defies her brother to make her change her mind, or to believe that he can be such an utter fool as to marry Aminta and not acknowledge her as his wife.²⁰ The conflict of wills between the two strong, stubborn characters is presented in an admirably dramatic manner. Lady Charlotte's logical mind compels her to reject her brother's claims that Aminta is really the Countess, and to accept the view that debases Aminta. If he had married her, he would have said so - that is logical. He did not say so; therefore he did not marry her, and she will not call on her or let her have the Ormont jewels. She can more easily believe her brother to be a liar than a fool. We are reminded of Rhoda Fleming's relentless persecution of her sister. In logical mind, strength of purpose, and stubbornness, Rhoda¹ and Lady Charlotte are alike. But Lady Charlotte is older and has developed a heart, which, when once it senses the truth, tempers her logic. She is hard as nails and abso-

19- Lord Ormont and His Aminta, p.38.

20- Ibid., p. 334.

lutely immovable where her principles and rights are concerned, but capable of sympathy and understanding when Weyburn's mother dies and when her brother loses his wife. Meredith does not describe Lady Charlotte: he draws aside a curtain and she moves before us, vividly alive, as she boldly faces her brother, or rides across the fields blustering at the neighbors who have dared to go against her wishes in the matter of trees and boundaries.

Lady Charlotte could read all men more accurately than she could her brother, being blinded by her love for him. She says to Weyburn, "Ah, well, you've a right to talk; you don't run miauling about women."²¹ She said that he was able "to read at any moment right to the soul of a woman,"²² and that he had the sympathetic face entirely absent from the philanderer Morsfield. Matthew Weyburn, like Vernon Whitford, was in a rather dependent position, until he went to Switzerland to found his school. And then his profession put him in an inferior position in the eyes of the world. In character, attitude toward women, tastes and habits, he is a copy of Vernon; your image of the two is identical, as they read, write, stride over the fields, teach admiring boys, or lend an ear to the problems of women: an attractive combination of the

21- Lord Ormont and His Aminta, p. 255.

22- Ibid., p. 356.

athlete, the scholar, and the friend.

The Amazing Marriage, the last of the three novels dealing with woman and marriage, shows another heroine who does not recognize the claims of her husband upon her. Carinthia Jane, Countess of Fleetwood, does not break her marriage vows; she ignores them and lives her own life as if she were single. The center of attention is not so much on the effect of man's treatment of women on her, as the reaction on himself. What part in a man's life does his conception of woman play? The word woman has been synonymous with man's sexual desires: note the use of the phrase, wine, women, and song. That conception of woman not only debases womanhood, but in his relationship with her drags man down to his conception of her. Woman has motherhood to dignify the indulgence of her physical desires; man suffers most in a merely physical relationship.

The Earl of Fleetwood, England's wealthiest nobleman, is selfish, spoiled, and self-willed. The continuous conflict between his self-indulgences, for which he has an unusual number of opportunities, and his natural asceticism keeps him in a constant turmoil. He is constitutionally fitted to appreciate the simplicity and nobleness of Carinthia's character. If he had been placed in the social position of his philosopher friend,

Gower Woodseer, so that he could follow the dictates of his better nature, he would have become a real nobleman. But the demands of society and friends, his sensitiveness, and the responsibility of great wealth had so warped his nature that it took a series of humiliating experiences and sharp stabs from his "White Chappel Countess" ²³ to develop his latent nobility, and then it was too late to profit by it. He is not ungenerous if people will always conform to his will. But Carinthia, without the practical knowledge of the ways of men that would have guided her aright, offends his sensitiveness, and he treats her heartlessly. He first meets her in the mountains of Switzerland, in surroundings that show to advantage the simple naturalness of her character. He has come from a meeting with the woodland philosopher, Gower Woodseer, and his own good qualities are in the ascendant. Still under the influence of this situation, he proposes to her in the midst of a dance at the hotel, receives her shy acceptance, and promptly forgets all about it, for the mood never returns. But the simple mountain girl takes the proposal in good faith, not knowing that the mood that he was in was the least constant of many; she allows her uncle, anxious to be rid of his responsibility for her, to remind Fleetwood of his promise, and is not told of

his ungracious response to the overture. A slave to his word, Fleetwood marries her, leaves her almost at the church door, and allows her to shift for herself. She follows him to London, and in a series of incidents that display his stubbornness and her determination she makes him the laughing stock of London. His sensitive, over-civilized nature is rudely shocked, and she is finally forced to realize that he does not love her. Her simple directness of speech and action, her splendid courage, physical as well as mental, her loyalty to her brother and to her friends, of whatever station in life, her self-possession and poise shame him at every turn. Twice she saves him from physical danger — ²⁴intolerable to a highly sensitive man. Her awkwardness irritates him. Even her budding love for him irks him, and her motherlove seems ²⁵primitive and animal-like. Her naturalness irritates him the more deeply because some hidden and starved part of his nature responds to it. If she, belying her nature, had come to him on her knees, he would have graciously received her and forgiven her fancied offences. But he rebelled against her calm, dignified insistence on justice which condemned him, and tried to avoid acknowledging to her and to himself that she was right and he was

24- The Amazing Marriage, I, p. 304.

25- Ibid., II, p. 96.. II.

wrong, even if by so doing he knew that he would raise himself to a higher level. At first he labels her independence as unfeminine. "He had now to vindicate himself by extinguishing her under the load of her unwomanliness.... And young men do so love the feminine, the ultra-feminine, whom they hate for her inclination to the frail." ²⁶ Then he "took a shot at cynicism, but hit no mark." ²⁷ This woman protected her whole sex." ²⁷ He must revise his ideas of women. This was a new idea - that a beautiful woman could have a character.

Soul, some call it: generally a thing rather distasteful in women, or chilling to the masculine temperament. Here it attracts. Here, strange to say, it is the decided attraction, in a woman of a splendid figure and of a known softness. ²⁸

He acknowledged his pride in her and his regard for her long before he could bring himself to acknowledge her superiority and take the initiative in seeking a reconciliation.

Why should it be a contention between them? For this reason: he was reduced to admire her act; and if he admired, he could not admire without respecting; if he respected, perforce he revered; if he revered, he worshipped. Therefore she had him at her feet. At the feet of any woman! ²⁹

26- The Amazing Marriage, II, p. 60.

27- Ibid., p. 220, vol. II.

28- Ibid., p. 145, vol. II.

29- Ibid., p. 122, vol. II.

The struggle continues within his consciousness as he mingles in the life about him. His ideas of women and his views of life change. He is a philosopher at heart and muses on the new ideals to which his reflections have led him.

Respect seems a coolish form of tribute from a man who admires. He had to say that he did not vastly respect beautiful women. Have they all the poetry? Know them well and where is it? ...She is weak and inferior, but she has it. 30

Poetry, he explains, is the unseen, indefinable essence of the flowers, the secret of the myriad stars and the comfort of religion. Women he compares to flowers.

We do homage to those ungathered, and reserve our supremacy; the gathered, no longer courted, are the test of men. When the embraced woman breathes respect into us, she wings a beast. 31

This respect is more satisfying to the "civilized young man's needs and cravings" than "queenly physical loveliness," and ideal worships can be.

She brings us to the union of body and soul; as good as to say, earth and heaven. Secret of all human aspirations, the ripeness of the creeds, is there. And the passion for the woman desired has no poetry equalling that of the embraced respected woman. 31

Here is expressed Meredith's own idea of the dominion of the mind over the physical. Man cannot maintain this self-mastery, this subjugation of his physical desires to

30- The Amazing Marriage, .II, p. 182.

31- Ibid., p. 183, Vol. II

his spiritual self without respecting woman, and bringing about the "union of body and soul."

But circumstances, as well as his own diffidence, make acknowledgement of this new state of mind difficult for Fleetwood. He is as helpless in the grip of fate - his own warring nature - as is Nataly Radnor. When he finally develops to the point that he can acknowledge Carinthia's superiority and his own indebtedness to her, she has lost interest in him and has come to devote her life to her brother and child. She has outgrown him. Her absorption in her brother and Fleetwood's inarticulateness blind her to the fact that he has grown and developed as well as she. If he could have thrown himself on her mercy and confessed his sins in the thoroughgoing way that his nature demanded, she would have forgiven him, for there was a good deal of the mother in her. But he had no chance for confession. Her brother, frankly antagonistic, was present at the interview, and Carinthia herself repelled any sentimental approach by her unsympathetic manner. His utter desolation following the crumbling of old ties, his horror at the suicide of his friend, his appeal to her for comfort, like a hurt child to its mother, would have touched her feelings if she had not been blinded by his former treatment of her, and engrossed with her idolized brother. Fleetwood had been in love with the beautiful Henrietta, whose grace

and daintiness satisfied his taste. Though he comes to know within himself that she is not capable of arousing the best in him, as Carinthia is, he cannot forgive Chillon for marrying her. If he could prove her unworthy, his pride would be satisfied. Thus the conflict goes on.

They were two extremes: Carinthia the child of nature, relying on her instincts and under the domination of the teachings of her daring old father; Fleetwood the supersensitive, overcivilized child of man-made society. At one time a half-hearted reconciliation seemed sure, but she finally repulsed his overtures, and went with her brother to war, while he sought refuge in a monastery, where, never content with half measures, he died of his austerities. His bruised and sensitive feelings could find no solace in philosophy.

Neither Fleetwood nor Carinthia is vividly visualized, though logical and consistent. Our image of Carinthia is of a superbly athletic figure striding across fields with manly gait, braving the peril of the mad dog, wielding the big stick in a street fight at night. We can scarcely blame the Earl for forgetting her "known softness" and her beauty that appears to advantage only in fitting surroundings. We do not have a clear image of him, but we feel with him as he tries to patch up his shattered philosophy after the shock of Mallard's suicide and attempts to regain the love of his wife. The story

leaves us uncomfortable, as the Egoist does. We see Fleetwood's possibilities, and his complete failure to realize them. And we feel that Carinthia would have found in him -- as he might have become with her help -- more of a mate than in Owain Wythan, whom she eventually marries.

Gower Woodseer is the "friend of women," who proves his love for his sweetheart, Madge, by "making her laugh at herself."³² Here is a variation of Meredith's usual custom. Carinthia marries Owain, husband of her friend who dies, instead of Gower. Owain is the same type, but not so clearly portrayed. His dog-like devotion is his only characteristic we see clearly.

The Celt and Saxon deals only incidentally with the woman question. The union of the genial Captain Con and his wife, who "hasn't a taste for jokes," is compared to the union of Ireland and England, which is the theme of the book. This seems to indicate that Meredith is not trying to advance any consistently thought out theories about the difference between men and women, for impulsiveness, wit, and warmth are usually ascribed to women, and reason and judgment to men. The contrast between the two nationalities is the theme of the book, and not the

32-- The Amazing Marriage, II, p. 212.

woman question. Philip O'Donnell, Captain Con's cousin, says of the volatile Irishman and his wife, "I would not willingly see the union disturbed. He warms her, and she houses him. And he has to control the hot blood that does the warming and she to moderate the severity of her principles."³³ The captain says of his wife, "She's a worthy woman, but she was married at forty, and I had to take her shaped as she was, for moulding her at all was out of the question, and the soft parts of me had to be the sufferers, to effect a conjunction."³⁴ At another time he says, "She was cast in bronze at her birth." With true Irish diplomacy, he notes her whims and vagaries and governs his actions accordingly. "'Tis the secret of my happiness," is his constant remark.

If there is a mark for the Comic Spirit, it must be John Bull.³⁵ The Irish, it seems, must have a figure before them that they can admire and love. And the dignified rotundity of John Bull inspires neither admiration nor love. The English love the Irish, once they get over their distrust of them, but the Irish cannot love the English, and therein lies the tragedy.

Although Meredith is no longer concerned with women's conflict with man or society, he is still advancing theor-

33- The Celt and Saxon, p. 110.

34- Ibid., p. 83.

35- Ibid., p. 41.

ies for their education. The young Irishman, Patrick O'Donnell, sees a future where women will not be merely the fruit in the market waiting to be chosen, but will control the market. ³⁶ The women all seem to be dominated by intellect instead of impulse; Mrs. Jane Mattock, who runs a charitable laundry, is a conspicuous example. She, like Carinthia, is lacking in the wit and shrewd diplomacy that the Pilgrim's Scrip[^] ascribes to the "practical animal." She possesses the straightforward directness that is valuable in running a laundry, but she does not know how to break bad news to a grieving old man in a kindly manner. In speaking of her the author says, "We pay this homage to the settled common sense of women. Distinctly does she discountenance leaps in the dark, ³⁷ wild driving and the freaks of Radicalism."

The love and devotion of the two Irish brothers, Philip and Patrick O'Donnell, is a new note. We have seen the love of brother and sister, and in a lesser degree, of sisters: the Pole sisters, and Evan Harrington's sisters, but this is the first pair of brothers we have seen. They are clearly portrayed and attractive young men. Patrick resembles the "friends of women," with an added polish and friendliness. Philip is the one women fall in

36- The Celt and Saxon, p. 194.

37- Ibid., p. 184.

love with: quiet, almost morose. We wish Meredith could have finished the story and shown us the completed fortunes of the boyish and lovable Patrick and the reserved and inscrutable Philip. We hope that Philip is to be rewarded for his disappointment over the loss of the ravishing Adiante with the practical Jane and her millions. And it is not impossible that some trick of fate will bring back from the foreign kingdom for Patrick the original of the alluring miniature of Adiante, which he coaxed from Mr. Adester on the pretext that it would help his adored brother bear his loss more easily.

CHAPTER V

Conclusion.

We must conclude that Meredith's interest in ^{women} and his treatment of them is unique in literature. Not only does he give the most prominent place in his novels to women, but he gives them an unusual importance in shaping the lives of the men and events of society. Evan Harrington is moved about by the will of women. Sir Willoughby, Harry Richmond, and Fleetwood all have their destinies shaped by women. The "friends of women" and Nevil Beauchamp and Robert Eccles are independent and self-reliant, but even they are moulded to some extent by women. Merthyr Powys and Dartrey Fenellan are the only men in all the fourteen stories who, in courage, self-reliance, intelligence, and strength of character equal the heroines. Most of his men characters are mere pawns, moved about by fate and women, and serve to exemplify his theories of the effect of man's injustice towards women on the race. They are the victims of the Comic Spirit, and victims because of their failure to understand women. Their prominence ^{of this type of men} in the novels suggests his attitude toward the average man. The men he really likes are as rare and obscure in life as they are in his stories. On the whole, he gets more enjoyment from the society of women. He finds in them more often than in

men the combination of reason and intuition that he likes.
His women characters "eat well and are not ashamed."¹

"Of distinctions between the sexes not founded on organ-
ism he takes no account."² "Meredith holds that in all
the essentials of a thinking intellect, woman is not
only not inferior to man, but even gifted with a finer
innate perception of many of life's problems."³ He says
that the boy is like the girl "before his father has
taught him that he must act the superior, and you have
schooled the little maids to accept the fact supposed: -
for it is largely a matter of training. Courage is
proper to women, if it is trained, as with the infant
man."⁴

It is not possible to say conclusively what Mere-
dith's idea of the essential nature of woman is, or in
what ways she differs from man. I think it is clear that
he believes there is no necessary difference in the part
they take in the social order. He would agree with Plato:

In the administration of a state, neither the
woman as a woman nor the man as a man has any
special function, but the gifts of Nature are
equally diffused in both sexes; all the pursuits

1- Richard Le Gallienne, George Meredith: Some Charac-
teristics, p. 85.

2- Ibid., p. 86.

3- R.N.P. Curle, Aspects of George Meredith, p. 112.

4- Letters of George Meredith, p. 360.

of men are the pursuits of women also.

He does recognize, of course, that the education of women has not fitted them for participation in the world's work on an equality with men; and new methods of education is what he is advocating: not only academic education, but training by participation in the industrial, professional, and political life of the country.

He recognizes one distinguishing trait in women: a simple directness of approach to truth, that might be termed intuition. Woman is nearer to nature than man. She stands for the poetry of life that arrives at nature's secrets more surely and more quickly than reason. We find this trait in his lovely heroines; in Mrs. Mount, who wins her way through her wit and sex allurements; in Emma, the bluestocking; in Mrs. Sumfit and Mrs. Berry. With intellectual attainments or without, they are all nearer the divine source of truth than man. This idea is expressed in characteristic ways by different types of men. Gower Woodseer gives us the view of the philosopher; the spoiled society man, Lord Fleetwood, recognizes it in Carinthia; Adrian gives the cynic's interpretation; Kit Ines expresses it in the words of the prize fighter. From some it sounds like the highest praise; from others, ^{it seems} little short of slander; but we

find the idea in every story.

But the fact that women possess this directness of thought and action does not mean that they are moved by impulse to the exclusion of reason. Some are, and some are not. The intellectual woman that we find in each story is governed entirely by her reason: Lady Jocelyn, Emma, Lady Charlotte, Georgiana, and the Baroness. Intuition is a negligible quality in them. And even the impulsive ones have intelligence equal to the men's. And they do not all possess the practical common sense that is supposed to belong to the "practical animal." Emilia, Carinthia, Jane Mattock, and Rhoda are entirely without it. On the other hand, Robert Eccles, Nevil Beauchamp, and Alvan have, to a certain extent, this direct approach to truth that is called feminine. It is a question whether Meredith, after all, thinks that there is an absolutely essential difference in the mental and emotional make-up of men and women. There generally is a difference, but does it have to be so?

In Emilia we see the perfection of the intuitive type. He exalts her spiritual insight to such a height as to suggest that he places the power of reason beneath it. In Richard Feverel he says, "But honest passion has an instinct that can be safer than conscious wis-

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 dom." Emilia is almost infallible, a seeress, and all who associate with her seem to recognize it. And yet this quality is not independent of training. She makes mistakes in judgment because she does not know enough about life, men, and women. But she has gained more than she has lost by a lack of training. She has not learned any of the hypocrisies, false values, and pruderies of society. She exemplifies Meredith's optimistic conception of the supreme goodness of nature. Chesterton says, "Nature saves Meredith's women and ruins Hardy's." ⁷ He calls Meredith a pagan — a person who can take nature naturally. To ^{meredith} nature is omnipotent, omnipresent, but ever beneficent.

It is easy to discover Meredith's ideal woman. Probably Diana Warwick comes nearest to her, with Clara Middleton and Rose Jocelyn as second choice. They all have a frank, boyish manner. They have courage and sincerity, and a strength of body equal to their strength of character. And they all have an unusual intelligence. They do not flaunt their sex in your face, but their relation to men is as simple and natural as that between men. Mr. Cress said that if these charming women could walk the earth, there would be fewer bachelors, but the

6- Richard Feverel, p. 233.

7- G.K.Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p.144.

fact that a Meredithian heroine is capable of friendship with men presupposes men who are capable of friendship with women, and they are as rare in life as are his charming women.

Meredith's heroines are different from the common ideal of his time, yet they have an essential femininity. They are far from masculine. They have the good traits of man, and distinctly feminine ones besides. Meredith's women are not perfect. "They suffer like the men, and must depend on their intelligence to win their way out of it." ⁸ Emilia made mistakes but was too big to be hindered by them. Women, like men, must go through their ordeal and develop a soul. Those who do not have sufficient courage to meet their problems drop by the wayside. There are many examples of this sort. Mabel Sweetwinter has no character or courage. Dorothy Beltham and Dahlia Fleming are weak. Rosamond Culling is a coward and deceitful. The Countess de Saldar has no sense of honor or shame, and is the perfect snob. The Pole sisters are shallow, superficial, and snobbish. There are a few thoroughly bad characters, like Mrs. Mount, who deliberately lures Richard Feverel to his ruin, and Violetta, who attempts the same with Carlo Ammiani. Anna, in Vittoria, is also cruel, heartless, and vindic-

tive, though she does have a change of heart. In One of Our Conquerors, there is the hateful "good woman" who hounds Nataly to her death. In Diana of the Crossways, there is the equally "good," interfering gossip who attempts to be Diana's conscience.

But in delightful contrast is Mrs. Lupin, the little woman with the big sense of humor, and the vulgar but warm-hearted Irishwoman, Mrs. Chump. The faithful family housekeepers, found in the first group of novels, are practically the same in all, varying in minor traits and expressions, which, however, serve to individualize them.

In the face of the shocked surprise of the public, Meredith advocated changes in the state of marriage. "Why, the very foundations of society are being attacked!"⁹ said a horrified critic of One of Our Conquerors. Meredith meant to do just that. "Certainly, however, one day these present conditions of marriage will be changed,"¹⁰ he says. In various letters to friends he makes these prophecies:

All the old tales of women are going to be reversed. 11

9- E.J. Bailey, The Novels of George Meredith, p. 166.

10- Ibid., p. 150.

11- Letters of George Meredith, p. 534.

By and by the world will smile on women who cut their own way out of a bad early marriage, or it will correct the present rough marriage system. 12

At present our civilization is ill-balanced, owing to a state of things affecting women, which they may well call subjection. It depends chiefly upon women that this shall be altered. By not looking for immediate success they will learn to have patience, a primary virtue in all contests. 13

Good manners, he says, is the best weapon. The Comic Spirit is engaged in punishing the men who have not considered women intelligent co-partners in the marriage relation.

The temperament of the Comic Spirit changes as Meredith's philosophy develops and deepens. In the first group its attacks are generalized. It is not greatly concerned about the faults and foibles it points out. The comic characters are rather fantastic and their errors not so common. We do not feel with Sir Austin, Richmond Roy, and the Countess. They are rather ridiculous, and not suggestive of our own faults. Wilfrid is an exception. He is a more human and more pathetic egoist, and we feel with him. In the second group, the attacks of the Comic Spirit are more concentrated and self-conscious. The man whose boasting and self-preening make him ridiculous is not a romantic character unlike any we

12- Letters of George Meredith, p. 530.

13- Ibid., p. 596.

meet in life, but a man who does what any of us might do. In the third group the light bantering tone has gone, and the Comic Spirit is in earnest. Civilized man has got so far away from Mother Earth that he has lost the correct perspective of his place in the universe; the more highly civilized, the more difficult his problem of adjustment. It is no longer woman's happiness alone that is at stake, but man's soul and the organization of society. The theory that the ills of mankind can be remedied by the silvery laughter of the Comic Spirit accords well with Meredith's healthy optimism. But it is not the blind optimism of a Victor Radnor, and the Comic Spirit cuts deep with a surgeon's blade when a false sentiment has festered on the flesh of Mother Earth.

Richard Le Gallienne says, "The Egoist in elemental comedy challenges Congreve, or even Molière, but the elemental tragedy of Rhoda Fleming and Richard Feverel challenges Webster, or almost Shakespere." 14

Meredith has paid women the high compliment of placing the standards for their achievement high. That those standards are out of reach of a large part of women does not concern him. The challenge is unmistakable. Women are held to account for the progress of civilization equally with men. Men cannot share the responsibilities with them

14- Arthur Symons, review of Le Gallienne's George Meredith: Some Characteristics, Academy, XXXIX, p. 81.

unless they are fit to assume them. What holds back a half of the world, holds back all of it. A high social development and a wholesome individual development depend on the mutual respect of men and women. Men are not entirely responsible for the defects in women's training. Women must assume some of the responsibility. Meredith anticipated the progress women have made, ^{since his time} We can imagine what a joy the modern independent young girl would be to him. Woman suffrage, women in industry, and in the professions, and also women taking homemaking and motherhood more naturally and sanely as they are doing, would all meet with his approval. He was not trying to help bring about woman suffrage, but to help women prepare themselves for this and other new duties. He challenges them to develop strength and sincerity of character for the benefit of the race. On the question of suffrage, he says:

At this present time women need encouragement to look out upon affairs of national interest, and men should do their part in helping them to state publicly what has long been confined to the domestic circle - consequently a wasted force. That it can be a force men are beginning to feel. That the exercise of it is an education we see already in the enlargement of their view of life and of the country's needs. So there is hope that the coming generation will have more intelligent mothers.

By studying public matters diligently you will soon learn to perceive that there is no natural hostility between the sexes. Their interests are one when they have learnt to step forward together. It is amongst the lessons devolving upon

them to teach the male kind who are not yet enough enlightened in that direction. 15

And again,

After some taste of active life, their minds would enlarge - that is all we want: their hearts are generally sound. 16

The criticism has been made that women are capable only of devotion to a person, not to a principle. Meredith's heroines exemplify the opposite view. Emilia is as impersonal as nature herself. Rhoda Fleming, as relentless as fate, ignores the pleas of her adored sister and pursues the course she thinks right. Clara, Cecilia, Ottilia, Nesta, all have a more or less detached, impersonal attitude. This is, of course, one reason for the unpopularity of the novels: Meredith's own philosophic, detached personality pervades them. Carinthia is the character whose actions seem the most to be controlled by her affections. Her love for her brother blinds her to considerations for anyone else. Diana, perhaps, too, is moved somewhat by the personal equation. She is such a complicated character that she is difficult to analyze. Her author says of her;

She was capable of uttermost devotion to an object. She was uncertain when it was presented as an abstract idea. She was astray in the shock of pressing material claims, easily bewildered when

15- Letters of George Meredith, p. 557.

16- Ibid., p. 519.

plucked at by the sleeve.

There are characters that seem to bear out the theory that women are influenced by personal attractions exclusively, like Mrs. Lovell, Mrs. Mount, Polly Wheedle, and other minor characters. But like the views of the cynic and the prize fighter, they cannot be said to represent Meredith's views of women in general.

Some critics have recognized the effect that Meredith's sane, healthy treatment of the relations between men and women has had on literature. May Sinclair said^{17a} that Meredith delivered the English novel from the "devil of realism" on the one hand, and the "deep sea of sentiment" on the other. Mr. Trevelyan said that Meredith surpassed other great writers in the "power to make the reader feel the poetry, beauty and joy of life, even in the most ordinary or in the most tragic moments."¹⁸ Mr. Le Gallienne said: "In his delineation of them [women] his fearless adoption of the modern conception of the unity of body and spirit finds its poetry. No writer with whom I am acquainted has made us so realize the value and significance of flesh, and spirit as the flower of it. In his women¹⁹ we seem to see the transmutation in process."

17- Letters of George Meredith, p. 530.

17a- May Sinclair, "George Meredith," Outlook, XCII, p. 414.

18- G.M. Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy of George Meredith, p. 163.

19- R. Le Gallienne, George Meredith: Some Characteristics, p. 85.

But many do not see his point of view. Mr. Chesterton in speaking of George Eliot says: "There is nothing that is so profoundly false as a rationalist flirtation. Each sex is trying to be both sexes at once; and the result is a confusion more untruthful than any conventions."²⁰ His meaning is not

quite clear, but he seems to be complaining about the Meredith

very object that ^{Meredith's} was striving so hard to accomplish.

1. ideal character — man or woman — was one who had some qualities of both sexes. He hated the man who was all masculine and the woman who was all feminine. He wanted to see reason dominate the whole being — emotion as well as mind. He said of love, "It is a name men and women are much in the habit of employing to sanctify

21 their appetites." Sex love is regarded as normal and natural, for women as well as men. It is another aspect of a divine Mother Earth. But self-control and the direction of a person's life by his intellect is put ahead of everything. This is the outstanding teaching of the novels. He always subordinated the individual to the higher good. "All right use of life, and the one secret of life, is to pave

22 those who succeed us." "Character," he says, "is its

20- G.K.Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature, p. 108.

21- Richard Feverel, p. 149.

22- J.W.Cunliffe, English Literature During the Last Century, p. 35.

23

own punishment, its own reward, its own destiny." E.J. Bailey says, "He is a realist in the sternest sense of the term; and his problem is the presentation of man and woman in the making, of man and woman struggling, albeit with many reverses, towards that perfection of soul which Meredith himself believes is the purpose and secret of this world's existence."²⁴

G.M. Trevelyan says that he is "against asceticism and complete self-sacrifice on the one hand and against mere seeking for happiness and self-development on the other... Like Zola, Ibsen or Tolstoi, he goes down into the dark places; but he does not live there always, and ^{he} carries his lamp with him."²⁵

We find this statement in Tom Jones: "That refined degree of Platonic affection which is absolutely detached from the flesh, and is, indeed, entirely and purely spiritual, is a gift confined to the female part of the creation."²⁶ This Meredith did not believe, and he tried to make men see that it was not necessarily true. He believed that men were capable of a relationship with women on a spiritual plane; not only capable of it but, in order to maintain their own highest development, bound

23- E.J. Bailey, The Novels of George Meredith, p. 97.

24- Ibid., p. 120.

25- G.M. Trevelyan, Poetry and Philosophy of Geo. Meredith, p. 163.

26- Tom Jones, p. 737.

to attain it.

Meredith's appeal is to the most intelligent and most courageous men and women. To appreciate him one must be able to look the facts of life squarely in the face, to see one's shortcomings laid bare, and to fight on with faith in the final beneficent purpose of Mother Earth, even though he finds himself classed among Meredith's "little people," or the Tragic Comedians.

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