A Critical Study of the Women of George Meredith

by

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The Women of George Meredith.

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I. Introduction.

George Meredith is essentially a man of the present era. When he began to write, Wordsworth and the early romanticists had had their day. Macaulay had just published his 'History of England', and Carlyle had thundered his doctrine of work. Dickens, Thackeray, and George Elliot were picturing the social conditions of the age, and Ruskin and Morris urging improvement of those conditions through the pursuit of beauty. Speculation in religion and science had given rise to the writings of Newman on the one hand, and of Darwin and Huxley on the other. Tennyson and Browning, whose poetry reflects so clearly the inquiring and individualistic spirit of the time, were at the height of their power, and Matthew Arnold, who mirrored equally perfectly, the doubt, perplexity and unrest of the mid-century, was turning from poetry to literary criticism. And not so much because Meredith was different from all of these, but because he drew from, and in some manner resembled all, do I think he belongs to the present era rather than to the past. He is neither a founder nor a disciple of any of the so-called schools. He is not a realist in the narrow sense of that term and yet he never lost touch with reality. Neither is he a romanticist in the narrow sense, although the fantastic element appears again and again throughout his work. He is not a mere scientist or a theologian. He accepted the evolutionary theory in its entirety and yet his teaching is essentially religious. To call him materialist or idealist, optimist or pessimist, is equally incorrect, for he
is all of these or none. He is just George Meredith whose keen intellect and inquiring spirit accepted the scientific teaching of the newer school, while his fertile imagination refused to give up the fantastic element, characteristic of the old, and whose clear vision effected the harmonious union of the two.

If Meredith had been asked what his chief interest was, he might well have replied, "people and all that they think and do," for no less comprehensive answer would have been correct. Human beings, their past, present, and future, the problems of their existence, the reason and result of their eternal struggle, their history, their politics,—in short the whole of human life, was his field of study.

And holding an important place in that study was the question of woman; not merely the limited notion of woman suffrage, but the much broader problem of woman in society; her 'place' in the world; her relation to man and man's relation to her in all social intercourse. For Meredith was not a feminist as such, although he has often been claimed by the supporters of the feminist movement. He was interested in the progress and development of society as a whole,—or perhaps it would be more correct to say a part of society; for while theoretically a staunch democrat, he is intellectually an aristocrat, and his observations are drawn very largely, although not entirely, from the more leisured class. And it was because he felt that woman was not occupying her proper
place,- that is the place proper to the best development of 1. society,- that he particularly stressed her position. In 1905, he wrote to a friend, "Since I began to reflect I have been impressed by the injustice done to women, the constraint put upon their natural aptitudes and 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." And progress is the underlying current of all Meredith's work, the central core of his philosophy. It is not, then, women as individuals, although his women are individual, but women in society, in whom he was chiefly interested.

Obviously, it would be impossible as it would be futile, in a study of this length, to make any attempt to discuss even the half of his women characters as individuals. Such is not the purpose of this essay. Meredith does, however, throughout his writings, speaking sometimes through his characters, sometimes in his own person, reveal very clearly his conception of the position of women, and it is this conception that I shall attempt to present.

1. When the word 'society' occurs in this essay it may be taken to refer only to that part of humanity of which Meredith wrote.

His position is of course most fully portrayed in the heroines of the novels, but the reasons for this position are revealed perhaps even more strikingly in some of the poems. The best introduction to any study of George Meredith, however, is to be found in the pages of that condensed but lucid, and altogether admirable Essay on Comedy. I shall therefore speak first of that essay, in so far as it reveals Meredith as the critic of women. In the second place I shall endeavour to point out from a study of some of the poems, what seem to me the fundamental reasons for that attitude. And lastly I shall discuss the women of the novels, exemplifying as they do these same principles, and try to show how the actual character portrayal reveals Meredith's conception of women, not only as they are, but as they may reasonably become.

To the average mind, the word 'comedy' suggests something amusing or ridiculous, perhaps even foolish, but in any case something at which to laugh; and the greater the number of people who are amused, and the louder the laugh, the better is the comedy judged to be. Nor is this view at all modern. Greek comedy was accompanied by rollicking and shouting; in the days of the miracle and morality plays, the English public loved the element of buffoonery; the court plays of the sixteenth century were written chiefly to amuse; and even Shakespeare's most popular productions were those which contained a good deal of horse-play.

In Meredith's writings, the term has quite a different meaning, and it is altogether impossible to grasp fully his attitude as a critic of society apart from a sympathetic understanding of his use of the word. It is not synonymous with farce, gaiety, satire, irony, or humour, although it may partake of all of these. His Comic Spirit resembles a Muse slightly withdrawn from, and watching over the actions of men and women, detecting with a keen eye, and pointing out in clear and unmistakeable language, the weaknesses, the inconsistencies, the affectations, the vanities and absurdities, the lack of a due sense of proportion, in social relations; but all the while with a kindly twinkle that reveals the entire absence of scorn or bitterness on the part of the Muse. "Its common
aspect", he says, "is one of unsolicitous observation, as if
surveying a full field and having leisure to dart on its
chosen morsels, without any fluttering eagerness."  

Moreover this Spirit is interested not in the
future primarily, but in the present, in men and their conduct,
what Meredith calls their "honesty and shapeliness". So long
as they are sincere, unaffected, reasonable and active, the
Muse stands silently by, but "whenever they wax out of pro-
portion, overblown, affected, pretentious, bombastical,
hypocrital, pedantic, fantastically delicate; whenever it sees
them self-deceived or hoodwinked, given to run riot in idol-
atries, drifting into vanities, congregating into absurdities,
planning short-sightedly, plotting dementedly; whenever they
are at variance with their professions, and violate the un-
written but perceptible laws binding them into consideration
one to another; whenever they offend sound reason, fair justice;
are false in humility or mined in 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."

Comedy of this sort is purely intellectual. It
has no connection with the "popular idea -- hit by the

1. Meredith, Geo., An Essay on Comedy.
2. Essay on Comedy: Page 83.
sculptured group of Laughter holding both his sides, while
Comedy pummels by way of tickling him." It is not an empty
bellow but 'thoughtful'. It is not scornful, contemptuous,
or satirical, for there is no spite in its nature; rather it
smiles, or breaks forth into peals of 'silvery laughter'. It
is kindly, but it never overlooks or passes by the foibles,
the pretences, the utter foolishnesses, of the sentimentalist,
which term Meredith uses to designate all who 'pose emotionally';
those who act not as they feel, but as they think tradition or
social elegance would have them act. These form the chief prey
of the Comic Spirit, and at them are its most pointed shafts
aimed. In the words of Crees, "Comedy is something which with
a keen sense of the incongruous wages truceless war against the
unreal masquerading as the true, against pretence in the guise
of reality, against the cowardice which refuses to look life in
the face. - - - - -To these he gives no quarter."

But this Spirit cannot exist except under favourable
conditions. It is, as I said a moment ago, an intellectual
force, and to be found only where "ideas are current and percep-
tions quick", that is in "a society of cultivated men and
women". An atmosphere of mere burlesque, giddyness or fever-
ish emotion will quickly stifle its finer nature.

And equally disastrous, writes Meredith, and this is of particular importance from the point of view of this essay, is "a state of marked social inequality of the sexes". For the Comic Spirit is bound up, he insists, with the proper position of women. In countries where they are merely slaves, or the cheap butt of a coarse humor, the Comic Spirit is unknown. "Where the veil is over women's faces you cannot have society", and without that society the existing state is not civilized but barbarous.

But Meredith goes even farther than this. He makes the treatment of women the measure by which civilization is to be gauged. "Arabs in this respect are worse than Italians", he writes, "much worse than Germans; just in the degree that their system of treating women is worse." And again, there not only is not, "but there never will be civilization where comedy is not possible; and that comes of some degree of social equality of the sexes".

Nor are women to be excused if instead of helping to place themselves on this plane of social equality, they are content to remain in the state of 'veiled virginal dolls' or 'servitantes', and he bids them for their own sakes, as well as for that of society in general, "look with their clearest

vision abroad and at home". "They will see", he says, "that where they have no social freedom, Comedy is absent: where they are household drudges, the form of Comedy is primitive: where they are tolerably independent, but uncultivated, exciting melodrama takes its place and a sentimental version of them."

In other words they will see that the development of comedy in any society is directly proportionate to the respect in which woman is held in that society.

Again in the same essay, he says, "Comedy is above all things the fountain of common sense, not the less perfectly sound on account of the sparkle"; and in another connection, "our civilization is founded on common sense". And just as it is impossible, as has already been pointed out, for the Comic Spirit to exist in a society which does not permit any social intercourse between men and women, so the greater the equality of such intercourse, the higher the type of comedy and therefore of common sense and civilization. For, says Meredith, "Comedy lifts women to a station offering them free play for their wit, as they usually show it, when they have it, on the side of sound sense".

But even in this higher stage of civilization, there may be, as he points out, a grave difficulty. A woman

1. Essay on Comedy: Pages 54-5.
may be charming in manner, witty in speech, and yet heartless; and he calls to mind Dorine in Moliere's "Tartuffe", and Millamant in Congreve's "Way of the World", two characters essentially witty and charming, but heartless both. Considering this fact, "is it not preferable", he asks, "to be the pretty idiot, the passive beauty, the adorable bundle of caprices, very feminine, very sympathetic, of romantic and sentimental fiction?"

And then follows the statement: "Our Women are taught to think so." This is the key of Meredith's whole war with society, so far as the position of women is concerned. He condemns utterly the false standard of education suggested above, expressed too in the 'Pilgrim's Scrip' in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel, and exemplified by scores of his characters. And he pleads in the poems, and at greater length in the novels, for a readjustment that will promote a more rational development, a broader outlook, a saner view of the whole situation. "More brain, O Lord, more brain", is his loudest and most insistent cry, and the reader cannot but feel that Meredith believed that lack of brain, sheer ignorance, was chiefly to blame for the disproportioned state of society.

To the mid-victorian mind, any suggestion of change in the relationship of men and women was most unwelcome. Surely there was already sufficient unrest arising out of political


(All the references to Meredith's poems and novels are to the Scribner's edition 1915.)
economic and religious situations. Moreover the British Tory preferred to have what he called his 'chivalrous ideal of womanhood', - whatever that might be, - left undisturbed. Particularly did he object to being 'pinned down' to any discussion of the why and wherefore of the actual conditions of life. He hedged, consoling himself with the vaporous belief that 'after all, things were not so bad'.

Well did Meredith realize the situation. There is, he says, "a large body - - - in England, who have a sentimental objection to face the study of the actual world. They take up distain of it when its truths appear humiliating; when the facts are not immediately forced on them, they take up the pride of incredulity. They live in a hazy atmosphere that they suppose an ideal one". His own position regarding the "study of the actual world" is made quite clear. He is neither complacently acquiescent nor mournful. To dismiss him, (as is sometimes done), with the label 'optimistic' or 'pessimistic', - terms which have so degenerated as to be now almost meaningless, - is quite useless. He is, in Mr. Trevelyan's phrase, "the inspired prophet of sanity". He knew as well as does Thomas Hardy that advance is not possible by closing the eyes to the unpleasant, the ugly, the sordid things of life; that only when one faces such facts unflinchingly and makes some attempt to understand their cause, can there be any hope of progress.

He realized too,—and in this he resembles Browning rather than
Hardy,—that there are many encouraging things in everyday life,
and through these he was led to a rational belief in the
possibility of an improved state of society.

The trouble with most of us, Meredith would say,
is that we do not see clearly. Either we have a very foggy
impression of a mixture of brightness and dullness, the bright spots
predominating at one time, the dull at another; or we turn the
search-light on a very small portion of humanity, make a more
or less careful study of that and ignore the rest. Such is
not the teaching of the Comic Spirit. It bids us to know the
'real world', to see actual facts, not form hazy impressions,
and to know men and women well enough not to expect too much
of them. Like Sophocles of old, it would have us

"see life steadily
And see it whole",
not merely all the parts, but those various and varied parts
arranged in their proper place so as to form a composite whole.

The essence of this Spirit is given in Meredith's
own words in the opening sentences of The Egoist, and I cannot
do better than quote him. "Comedy", he says there, "is a game
played to throw reflections upon social life, and it deals
with human nature in the drawing-room of civilized men and
women, where we have no dust of the struggling outer world,
no mire, no violent crashes, to make the correctness of the
representation convincing. Credulity is not wooed through
the impressionable senses, nor have we recourse to the small
circular glow of the watchmaker's eye to raise in bright relief
minutest grains of evidence for the routing of incredulity.
- - - - The Comic Spirit conceives a definite situation for a
number of characters, and rejects all accessories in the ex-
clusive pursuit of them and their speech. For, being a spirit,
he hunts the spirit in men; vision and ardour constitute his
merit; he has not a thought of persuading you to believe in
1. him".

The Comic Spirit is essentially philosophic. It
makes no attempt to represent life in all its 'wearisome
vastness', or even to picture in detail a patch of it. Rather
it moves about in society with eyes and ears wide open, and the
intellect as well as the senses keenly alert. Perceiving
certain maladies it aims to represent these in the belief, the
hope at least, that a "cultivated society" needs only to see
such to cure them. Its function is not to scold or punish,
but to hold back with laughter all who would avoid or seek to
divert others from following simple natural laws.

And this Spirit pervades all of Meredith's writing.
He is himself the very incarnation of the Comic Spirit. He
wrote to instruct others in its proper use, "not", as one
critic has expressed it, "to arouse the laughter of thoughtless
gaiety", but to check all extravagances in personal manners
and social habits, "that his readers might laugh and be laughed
at unto their souls salvation." 2.

One malady which Meredith perceives is a "primeval egoism" in the attitude of men towards women. Therefore many of his men are made to typify this characteristic. Similarly his great women characters typify his idea of what women would be under more favorable conditions. In his own wording, "The heroines of comedy are like women of the world, not necessarily heartless from being clear-sighted; they seem so to the sentimentally reared only for the reason that they use their wits and are not wandering vessels crying for a captain or a pilot. Comedy is an exhibition of their battle with men, and 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 some resemblance." And he places these "heroines of comedy", faultily educated and hampered by conventions as they have been, by the side of their passive sisters, and bids us choose between them.

In conclusion one may say that the attitude of the Comic Spirit, or of Meredith, towards life is one of toleration, not foolish, scarcely benevolent even, but tonic and compelling. He attacks the foibles of men and women, their secret, perhaps unsuspected faults, but he never ridicules their frailties. He is not unreasonable, but he does not leave his victims in any fool's paradise. He would place men and women on the same footing, equal sharers in the joys and struggles of civilization, and he would urge both to be 'sensible', that is to follow the simple laws of nature; not to expect overmuch, but to believe

in progress. And progress, I have already said, is Meredith's creed. But that may be seen more clearly in the study of his poetry.
II. b. The Critic of Women in Society as revealed in the poems.

We have now seen Meredith's general attitude to society: the principles underlying that attitude are closely bound up with his conception of nature, and that conception is best illustrated in his poetry. It is not my intention to deal at all exhaustively with Meredith's poetry, or with his conception of nature as exemplified therein, but merely to draw from it those principles which seem to me fundamental to an understanding of the position he has taken as a social critic, and then from a brief study of those poems which deal more directly with women, to show how these principles have been illustrated.

The great majority of Meredith's poems treat of nature, but in a manner in which no previous poet had treated of her. Until the middle of the eighteenth century, nature had been considered hardly worthy of the Muse. She was a mere external force, a store-house from which pretty or forcible descriptive bits, suitable analogies or illustrations, might be drawn, but not of herself a fit subject for poetry. And to the early romanticists she was a sympathetic background rather than a vital force. To Wordsworth, Nature was vital enough, but an unknown and mysterious power from which one received inspiration. Life here was to him an exile.

"trailing clouds of glory do we come

From God who is our home."

he wrote in the famous ode and in the same poem he spoke of 1. Intimations of Immortality.
Earth not as the mother but merely the foster-nurse. To Wordsworth, 'high instincts' were not inherited from earth but were implanted in him from Heaven. In this idea of a dual home he is essentially different from Meredith, to whom Earth is the Mother, and the source of spirit and of brain as well as of the body.

To Meredith we are Nature. The term 'sons of Earth' occurs again and again throughout his writings. In The Woods of Westermain, he speaks of the mind going back through all the stages of development,

"Back to hours when mind was mud,"
and he adopted without reservation all that is implied in the theory of evolution. For him, as for Darwin, man with his thoughts and actions, his language and social relations,—every part of him, is just as truly as a tree or a flower, an outgrowth of earth. And he teaches that through observing what happens to other children of earth we may learn our own future.

Now everything in nature changes. In the same poem, Meredith sees that

"Change the strongest son of Life
Has the Spirit here to wife."
and he is quite content to accept this fate for himself. Unlike Tennyson he is altogether willing to

"Let the great world spin forever down the

1. The Woods of Westermain.
for change to him meant progress,

"The rapture of the forward view"
as he expresses it in 'The Thrush in February'. And not only
may we see our future in our 'Mother Earth', but it is im-
possible to accomplish anything unless we are in harmony with
her laws. If we oppose her dictates, we merely waste our
strength in useless effort; for while

"her aspects mutually swerve

her laws immutably reign."

The only wise course for us then, is to accept these laws, and
act in accord with them.

This idea of harmony with nature did not originate
with Meredith. It is the fundamental doctrine of Turgot and
the Physiocrats of eighteenth century France, and the scientific
investigations of the Victorians in England had led to its wide
discussion. Exactly the same idea was expressed by Huxley in
1870 when in "A Liberal Education and Where to Find it", he
wrote, "Education is the instruction of the intellect in the
laws of nature, under which name I include not merely things
and their forces, but men and their ways; and the fashioning of
the affections and of the will into an earnest and loving

desire to move in harmony with those laws." But although this

1. Tennyson: Locksley Hall.

2. A Faith on Trial.

3. Huxley: Lay Sermons - Quoted in Halleck R.P.
scientific investigation had a great influence on contemporary literature, notably in the case of George Eliot and of Browning, it was not widely accepted by the cautious conservative Britisher, and Meredith was perhaps the first 'literary man' to adopt it entirely and to carry it, in his writings, to its logical conclusion. As Chesterton says, he "takes nature naturally" and one might add absolutely.

"Nature is my God", he wrote in his old age, "and I trust in her." Do the leaves fall from the trees and die, he would ask, do the flowers wither and decay? That is well for they serve to increase and enrich new life. In the Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn he writes,

"She knows not loss
Earth knows no desolation
She smells regeneration
In the moist breath of decay."

Then why, he asks, should we, who are a part of nature, fear death?

"Death, shall I shrink from loving thee?
Into the breast that gives the rose
Shall I with shuddering fall?"

That is allowing reason to be blinded by pride, for

"The sighting brain her good decree

3. Ode to the Spirit of Earth in Autumn.
Accepts: obeys those guides, in faith
By reason hourly fed."

Meredith is not depressed by the outlook. It is nature's 'good decree' and in The Question Whither, he calls us "Children of Beneficence", not of blind chance, and as a part of that Beneficence, "in its being sharers". Again in the first edition of The Spirit of Earth in Autumn, the lines, omitted in the later editions,

"And are we the children of Heaven and earth
We'll be true to the mother with whom we are
So to be worthy of him who afar,
Beckons us on to a brighter birth."

suggest hope and trust in the future, through loyalty to the Earth Mother. The same faith is expressed in Lord Ormont and his Aminta, where, speaking through Matey Weyburn, he says,

"We do not get to any heaven by renouncing the Mother we spring from, and when there is an eternal secret for us, it is best to believe that earth knows, and to keep near her, even in our utmost aspirations". In The Dirge in the Woods, - to my mind the choice of all his lyrics, - he goes a step farther and expresses that calm acquiescence in the ways of nature which recalls Matthew Arnold at his best.

1. The Thrush in February.
"The pine tree drops its dead;  
They are quiet as under the sea.  
Overhead, overhead  
Rushes life in a race,  
As the clouds the clouds chase;  
And we go,  
And we drop like the fruits of the tree,  
Even we,  
Even so."

Meredith believes in a future, however, if not in  
an orthodox hereafter, and that "there is a soul for labour done", if not for the individual as such. Like Browning he  
'never doubted clouds would break', that good would triumph  
somehow, but his conception of that triumph is utterly opposed  
to Browning's. Meredith did not look for the intervention of  
any supreme power and he never even suggested perfection or  
'rest' either in this world or another. Rather his teaching is  

"let our trust be firm in Good  
Though we be of the fasting;  
Our questions are a mortal brood"

But  

"Our work is everlasting."

1. The Question Whither.  
2. Browning's Poems: Epilogue to Asolando.  
3. The Question Whither.
Meredith never lost sight of the individual in life, but he felt that the individual counted for less than the generation, and the generation for less than mankind. He was interested in man as man, but more, in man as a part of the race. Individuality is to him but a means of progress, not an end in itself. Each of us is "the vessel of the thought" and the fact that "the vessel splits" is of no great consequence, for "the thought survives". Indeed the whole burden of his philosophy, expressed over and over again in both prose and verse is

"Keep the young generations in hail
And bequeath them no tumbled house." 

Certainly Meredith is the prophet of the present, but it is the present as the basis, or foundation, of the future which interests him.

There is still another point in this conception of nature which must not be overlooked. It has been already suggested perhaps, but must now be definitely stated. That is, Meredith's belief that man derives strength, courage and inspiration, from actual contact with earth. Chesterton says, "Nature is always coming in to save Meredith's women; Nature is always coming in to betray and ruin Hardy's." And while that is an overstatement in usual Chestertonian fashion, there is much truth in it. Hardy's women very often have to struggle against the elements of nature, but Meredith's are like the

1. *Sense and Spirit.*
3. Chesterton: *The Victorian Age in Literature.* Page 144.
giant Antaeus, whose strength was increased each time he touched the earth. There are many illustrations of this belief, but it is most directly expressed in *Earth and a Wedded Woman*, a poem which is nothing more than a picture of spiritual recovery through contact with the elements of nature. Susan's husband had gone off to the war three years before and there has been no word from him. It is a season of drought, and the woman, like the earth, is "in withering unrevived". She is pitied by the village maidens, but she would not exchange her grief for their light-heartedness, for their happiness is merely surface. They have not

"struck the roots which meet the fires
Beneath, and bind us fast with Earth, to know
The strength of her desires
The sternness of her woe."

Like the parched earth, however, the woman is greatly in need of some reviving drought. During the night the rain comes, and her 'sacred mould', like the dust of earth is refreshed and her powers of endurance revived. The neighbours notice the change in her, and she herself knows that it dates from the night of reinvigorating rain.

In speaking of Meredith as a poet of nature, then, we must be careful to bear in mind that it is man in nature, or man as an integral part of nature, that concerns him, and that the chief reason for his interest in 'Earth' is a firm conviction that a knowledge of earth or nature is indispensable.
to a complete understanding of man.

And it is because I feel that a firm grasp of this conception is equally necessary for any sensible comprehension of Meredith as a critic of society that I have presented this phase at such length.

Man in nature is the first fundamental of Meredith's attitude to society. The second is his conviction that man is made up of the three elements of body, brain and spirit. This belief is stated quite simply in The Woods of Westermain. There he finds

"Each of each in sequent birth,
	Blood and brain and spirit,"
and this division, or perhaps more correctly this combination of elements, may be traced in all his work. Blood, body, heart, passion or the senses, as he uses the word on other occasions, is animal force, mere selfish desire, the satisfaction of the natural appetites, and, Meredith thinks, should be under the control of the brain or intellect. In Earth and Man, he cries woe to that person whose

"senses still
	Usurp the station of their issue mind,"
for brain marks a higher stage of development than blood. Indeed in Hard Weather, he speaks of brain as "nature's prize of gifts", and the children of brain as "champions of the race". The term 'brain' as here used does not mean cold logic or abstract reasoning, however, but rather sense. Higher still is the stage marked by what he terms spirit or soul. It is
more difficult to explain this term, particularly as Meredith himself has not explained it very clearly. I think he means the imaginative power, the creative force which is behind and above the object that one sees, the poetic impulse which prompts the poem,

"the light that never was on sea or land, 1
the consecration and the poet's dream."

or as Browning would state it, 'the God-like element', the 'divinity' in man. This force is mysterious and indefinable, but it exists, and Meredith's teaching is that it is not an alien heaven-sent gift, but a product of earth, developed from the interaction of body and brain. In _The Woods of Westermain_, he points out that it is quickened from the brain, through the blood. How the reaction takes place he does not say. His chief concern for the moment is to urge that spirit is not, as the ascetics would have it, altogether opposed to sane pleasure, the moderate and reasonable satisfying of the natural man. "She", that is Mature,—"is spirit in her clods", and although but "foot-way to the God of Gods", it is impossible to have spirit without her, for "from flesh unto spirit man grows". It is also impossible to have this third element without brain, for the growth is "out of the sensual hive" to 3.

the "flower of brain", which is spirit. It is

"Reason herself, tip-toe

1. Wordsworth's Poems: _Elegiac Stanzas_.

2. _The Woods of Westermain_.

3. _A Faith on Trial_.
At the ultimate bound of her wit
On the verges of Night and Day."

And in the same poem, Meredith uses the figure of the cherry-tree covered with white blossoms to illustrate his meaning. The tree is 'earth-rooted' and 'tangibly wood', but the blossoms prove that it is more, that it is

"a presence throbbing alive
a spirit, born of a tree"

And just as the blossoms of the cherry-tree depend for their existence on earth and wood, so it is impossible to have the blossom of spirit without the interaction of body and brain. We may have earth without either tree or blossom; we may even have earth and tree without blossom; but we cannot have blossom without both earth and tree. Neither can spirit exist without body and brain.

Moreover, the elements of earth, wood, and blossom, unite to produce the full development of fruit. And so with the elements in man,

"Each of each in sequent birth,
Blood and brain and spirit, three
Join for true felicity."

If any one is missing, the result cannot but be disastrous

"Are they parted, then expect
Some one sailing will be wrecked."

for

1. A Faith on Trial.
2. The Woods of Westermain.
"Earth that bread is. She hides
Joy from him who that divides
Showers it when the three are one
Glassing her in union."

That is, "true felicity" of life can exist only when the three elements of earth are united in man as in nature. To ignore any one is to curb if not utterly destroy growth. The soul needs the body as the body needs the soul and both need the brain. Of A Certain People Meredith writes,

"They need their pious exercises less
Than schooling in the pleasures."

An excess of spirit, that is mere emotion is as undesirable as is mere intellect or mere animalism. But when 'the three are one', Nature showers joy in approval.

In the book called A Reading of Life, this idea of triple union is carried a step farther and Mr. Trevelyan has so perfectly explained the study that I quote him.

"'The Huntress', he says, "is Artemis, the symbol of our development of body, brain and spirit in purity, in strife with the elements, the strenuous and open-air pleasures. The 'Persuader' is Aphrodite. 'The Test of Manhood' consists in giving each goddess her due and no more. In the introductory poem, called The Vital Choice, each of the rivals claims 'worship undivided':-

1. The Woods of Westermain.

2. The word 'emotion' as used here must be sharply distinguished from passion. Passion is body nature while emotion is spirit nature, often of a superficial kind."
"Or shall we run with Artemis
Or yield the breast to Aphrodite?
Both are mighty;
Both give bliss;
Each can torture if derided;
Each claims worship undivided.

- - - - -
Youth must offer on bent knees
Homage unto one or other;
Earth the mother
This decrees."

And it is Death to 'shun or too devoutly follow' either the Huntress or the Persuader. Viewing these two, the poet says of man that it is

"His task to hold them both in breast, and yield
Their dues to each, and of their war be field."

Such is The Test of Manhood. The Huntress and the Persuader are his 'tempters' in that each claims the whole, when each has only a right to a part:--

"Earth's nourishing delights, no more gainsaid
He tastes as doth the bridegroom rich in youth.
Then knows he Love, that beckons and controls;
The star of sky upon his footway cast;
Then match in him who holds his tempters fast,
The body's love and mind's whereof the soul's
Then Earth her man for woman finds at last,
To speed the pair unto her goal of goals."

1. The Test of Manhood.
So Aphrodite rather than Artemis seems to be the 'goal of goals', but only when her rival has her dues, and only when she herself has passed through the process of evolution, from blood through brain, to soul:—

'The body's love and mind's, whereof the soul's.'

In love, even more than in other human undertakings, it is disastrous to separate blood, brain and spirit. See that you love all three, says the poet, lest the object of your love prove to have been ill-chosen, and disaster follow. 'The senses running their live sap, and the minds companioned, and the spirits made one by the whole natured conjunction': that is the only perfect love. Those who do not wish women to be educated, or to understand the interests of man, impede the mind's love; ascetics deny us the body's love; sensualists the soul's. But when all three are joined in one then

"Beauty, like her star, descends the sky;
Earth's answer, heaven's consent unto man's cry,
Uplifted by the innumerable hosts."

And so too, outside the region of love, it is fatal to neglect either blood, or brain or soul. If we part company with any one of these three we shall be wrecked. The attempt to develop soul, without blood, or worse still, without brain, is to court certain disaster, of which the chronicles of religion are full. The athletic craze for training the blood alone is no better; and if the brain of the mere intellectual be a higher development, it is not in itself perfect or
From this explanation it is quite evident that by 'union of the three', Meredith means not only the actual presence, but the proportionate presence of each element, and it is on this basis that I wish later to discuss the women of his novels.

There are, however, several poems which treat particularly of women, which exemplify this same principle of triple union in close connection with nature; and it is of these that I now wish to speak.

I have already said that while Meredith arranges the three elements in the order of body, brain and spirit, he gives the preference to brain. His writings suggest further that he thought brain the most crying need of the race. This idea occurs repeatedly in both prose and verse but is most forcibly expressed in *Modern Love*, a very keen psychological study of man and wife who have ceased to love each other. Both are conscious of and regret their growing indifference, but the man tries to console himself with the thought that the law of nature should be the law of everything,—that even love has its season and must pass.

"Can we not teach our foolish hearts to learn

This lesson of our only visible friend?"

and so to


'Lose calmly Love's great bliss'

- while the woman weeps. Both seek distraction in other society but without finding any satisfaction. They meet in the wood one day, he with 'My Lady', a flame of his youth, the wife with another man, and as a result of the revulsion of feeling on both sides, husband and wife agree to forget the past and renew their love, although not without fears that they are taking up

"a lifeless vow to rob a living passion."

Both realise the hollowness, despite the sincerity, of the attempt and their kisses being 'unblest by love' serve merely to separate them again. The husband knows that it is pity, not love that he feels for his wife and his thoughts travel to 'My Lady'. Plucking a rose, "My Lady's emblem in the heart of me", he is musing on his early affection for her, when his wife joins him in the garden. She asks for the rose and his abstracted dropping of it reveals his thought and fills her with jealousy. She seeks an interview with the other man. The husband interrupts, but courteously, and before she can speak, assures her of his firm belief in her. A frank explanation follows.

"Love that had robbed us of immortal things

This little moment mercifully gave."

and

"Our inmost hearts - opened each to each."

But the husband's hope for a 'settled relationship' is vain. With his 'honest speech' of his 'lost Lady',— whose chief

1. Modern Love.
attribute, incidently, is that she holds "that rarest gift to beauty, Common Sense", - the wife is again filled with jealously. He may seek his Lady,-

"Jealous devotion bade her break the mesh,
That I might seek that other like a bird."
- she flees from him to suicide, 'the strength of the desperate weak'.

It is at this point that Meredith, through the husband, utters the cry which is the keynote of the whole poem:

"Their sense is with their senses all mixed in,
Destroyed by subtleties these women are,
More brain, O Lord, more brain, or we shall mar
Utterly this fair garden we might win."

And the cry is altogether compassionate. The husband despises the act but not the woman, and he attributes the act to a lack of reason,- to the fact that she has been altogether carried away by her passion. Her sense, that is her brain or common sense, instead of taking its proper place as the guiding power is "all mixed in" with her senses, her feelings, and the result is a tragedy.

The tragedy is all the greater, of course, because of the nobility of both,- a nobility which the husband, at least, realized, when, musing to himself, he said,

"I see no sin.

In tragic life, God wot,
No villain need be. Passions spin the plot,

1. Modern Love.
We are betrayed by what is false within."

And it is just because he is so fully convinced that the tragedy is due to "passions within", that he utters the agonizing cry for "more brain".

His grief is increased, too, for the moment, by the fear that the world will misjudge and he asks,

"Will the hard world my sentience of her share?"

But that is merely a passing thought, for he

"feels the truth,—so let the world surmise."

Meredith is at his best in this poem, and his attitude is revealed not only in the culminating cry for 'more brain' but also in his sympathetic treatment of the whole situation. Nowhere in the poem does one feel that he despises either of these people, or is in the least contemptuous, although he regrets the foolishness of the wife in wishing to keep her husband the "much-adored delightful Fairy Prince", and punishes the man for "freezing with commonplace" the wife's early advances towards an explanation. But throughout the poem one does feel that he is pleading for a greater frankness, more truth and therefore more tolerance. The dominant note left in one's mind, however, is 'what might have been' if these two, but particularly the woman, had had 'more brain',—not subtlety of brain, both had altogether too much of that for their happiness, but wisdom, that discerning power sometimes known as common sense.

1. Modern Love.
35.

The complement to Modern Love is Archduchess Anne, another psychological study. The former poem is a plea for reason, the latter points out the folly of the entire, or almost entire, suppression of the feelings. In brief the story is this: Archduchess Anne, a middle-aged married woman, falls in love with Count Louis, the chieftain of a band of warrior tribes, sometimes in revolt against her power. For a time Louis returns her love, but later he is attracted by a younger woman. Anne, seeing the two together, puts her hand to her heart, and Kracken, her faithful but savage old warrior adviser, notices the movement and guesses its meaning. He is much perturbed and determines to wipe out what seems to him a disgrace. He watches his chance and when a revolt headed by Louis breaks out, goes eagerly to meet the rebel. Louis is captured by treachery. Anne must pronounce judgment, and the struggle between her pride and her passion is a severe one. 'Carved in frost' she sits alone, weighing the advice of 'hate in love' which bids her 'smite', and 'love in hate' which urges her to 'spare' Louis. She reviews the past and the present, how he had 'brought her waning heart -- new message from the skies', and how he had betrayed and left her; then she crushes all 'tender memories', striving to leave aside the personal element, and to judge him merely as a rebel. Louis' young wife appears to plead for him, as woman to woman, and Anne's heart is softened although she will not admit it. In reality she wishes to spare Louis, but her pride will not let her write the definite order for pardon. She writes vaguely of mercy and Kracken, fearing that pardon will be construed to mean
infatuation for Louis, chooses to interpret her message to mean that the rebel is to be shot instead of hanged. Anne hates Kracken for the deed, but she herself is to blame, and she is forced to live on with a broken heart.

In this poem as in Modern Love, the ending is tragic, but for a counter reason. In Modern Love, the passions are uncontrolled; in Archduchess Anne they are almost entirely suppressed. In both cases the result is disastrous. Considering these poems together, Meredith's plea is clearly for moderation. To crush the passions entirely is as fatal as to leave them uncontrolled. The reasonable course is to let the two work harmoniously side by side, to have "passion guided by reason", "thought ennobled by emotion". And this combination is exactly what Meredith claims to be the third element of spirit.

One might expect to find a third psychological poem to complete this study of the three elements, but Meredith has not written one. He realized no doubt that a careful analytical study of anything as elusive and mysterious as spirit, would quite destroy the effectiveness of its suggestive power. But in Marian, a slighter poem and descriptive rather than psychological, this element is in the ascendancy. Marian unites wisdom with the capabilities of the artistic maiden.

"She can talk the talk of men,
And touch with thrilling fingers."

2. Marian.
She is loyal, passionate, courageous and satisfying.

"She is steadfast as a star,
And yet the maddest maiden:
She can wage a gallant war,
And give the peace of Eden." 1.

More, she has a soul, 'soft and loving',

"Swift and lofty soaring;
Mixing with its dove-like dole
Passionate adoring." 1.

That is the entire poem. And it is sufficient.

But the peak of Meredith's creation in this idea of three-fold development is the maid in Love in the Valley. In her he pictures the three elements happily united and colored by love, and he has placed her in very intimate association with nature. This poem, Mr. Trevelyan says, "is the finest expression he, (that is Meredith), has found for unadulterated joy in the beauty and vitality of earth, in the sap that runs in our veins through blood, brain and spirit." Any attempt to describe this maiden in prose would be very prosy indeed, but she is not at all vague. Whether asleep under the beech-tree, the leader of a joyful band of flower-pickers, or the dairymaid with the thirsty school-boys, she is a very real person. She is not perfect, the gossips count her faults but that does not matter for

"beauty that makes holy
Earth and air, may have faults from head to feet." 2.

1. Marian.
3. Love in the Valley. (Page 38.)
She is fairer even than the wild white cherry, — Meredith's own symbol of spirit. She is 'a seraph', 'fair as in an image'; she is 'morning light', 'strange and secret'. But I fear to say more, except that she is Meredith's ideal maiden.

There is still another principle underlying Meredith's attitude to society, which is expressed in his poetry, and which must not be omitted. In The Essay on Comedy, he lays great stress on the fact that no high stage of civilization is possible unless men and women share that civilization equally. His poetry teaches that true love must be based on this equality. There are three poems which deal directly with this subject; the first two of these, I shall refer to but briefly, the third, I shall discuss in greater detail.

A *Preaching from a Spanish Ballad*, is a tale of 'unequal yoke', in which the husband is indisputable master and the wife a meek, submissive slave. Both are faithless, but the wife pays the full penalty under the hand of her 'righteously wrathful' lord. And Meredith's teaching is that man, 'the muscular', will always hold sway over woman and treat her as 'temptress and betrayer',

"Till the giant thews and sinews
Meet their Godlike overmatch", 1.

which is reason; that for woman there will never be freedom from slavery until the heart, which bows to the superiority of mere animal strength, yields captaincy to the rule of head.

1. The *Preaching from a Spanish Ballad*. 
In the poem entitled, *The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady*, the Sage is attracted by the 'spouseless Lady' and becomes her shadow. The Lady realizes the situation and is forced by honesty and by compassion for the man to tell what had happened.

"Her free confession was to work his cure
Show proofs for why she could not love or wed."

And the rest of the poem reveals the results of that confession. The Lady makes no attempt to excuse herself, but, womanlike, accepts the decree of man,

"The great Irrational, who thunders power",
placing no blame on the man, but all on the woman. But the poet points out that this is not the decree of Nature. Her teaching is,

"Share your guilt
In common."

and he pleads for equal punishment for man and woman. He pleads too that there should be an end to this punishment, for after the Lady had been passed 'through the sermon's dull defile', she had

The joy of those who feel the world's heart beat,
After long doubt of it as fire or ice;
Because one man had helped her to breathe free;

And in conclusion the poet urges, that until the 'fraud' of making woman the sole sufferer is 'brayed', justice is best served through 'the wisdom of humaneness'.

But it is in *A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt* that

the plea for equality is most urgently set forth. The poem is in the form of a dialogue between the fair rebels and a conservative gentleman, while a second gentleman, standing silently by, acts as judge. The ladies are at war with conventionality and sentimentalism, and at the very beginning state quite frankly the conditions on which they may be won.

"Fair sirs, we give you welcome, yield you place, And you shall choose among us which you will, Without the idle pastime of the chase, If to this treaty you can well agree: To wed our cause, and its high task fulfil."

They are not susceptible to flattering remarks, "the manners of the market", regarding their beauty and their wit, but claim a higher lord than the old chivalrous love. The warning to beware of 'love scorned' and the threat of "darker wastes than unaccomplished dreams" is answered by a cry for the truth. The gentleman is not without sound arguments, however, and the possible dangers of the revolt are argued.

"your cause

Whetting its edge to cut the race in two, 1.
Is felony."

and

"You are few,

Scattered, ill-counselleed, blinded: for a proof 1.
I have lived and have known none like you."

Again

"So push you out of harbour in small craft,

With little seamanship; and comes a gale,

1. A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt."
The world will laugh, the world has often laughed, 
Lady, to see how bold when skies are blue, 
When black winds churn the deeps how panic-pale, 
How swift to the old nest fly you!

But the ladies are ready for him. If they are weak still, it is because they have walked beside man, not in union, but "as cat and serpent and poor slave" and they claim, too, that "force of brain" which has freed man, and which will enable them to escape wholly the "wild beast's paw". The warning that they are entering on "a strife that frets and sours" and that from it they can win nothing but 'sick disappointment' calls forth the reply that the case is desperate, for the choice is between darkness and rebellion. Moreover they are somewhat 'tired of Eden'. They have already waited long, and although it may mean a struggle, they are resolved not to give up. Then follows the old argument,

"But say, what seek you, Madam? Tis enough 
That you should have dominion o'er the springs 
Domestic and man's heart: those ways, how rough, 
How vile, outside the stately avenue 
Where you walk sheltered by your angel's wings, 
Are happily unknown to you."

And the answer is direct and sufficient.

"We hear women's shrieks on them. We like your phrase 
Dominion domestic! And that roar, 
"What seek you?" is of tyrants in all days.

41. A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt.
Sir, get you something of our purity,
And we will of your strength: we ask no more
That is the sum of what seek we.

The gentleman longs for an image to reveal to them their error and their perils, but there is no image forthcoming. His last plea is that as they "have erred in mind only", they may still escape the ensuing perils if they will give up the pursuit and "be true to nature". But the ladies reply that if the error is one of mind, that should be sufficient cause for the development of mind. And so it seems to the judge who gives them the decision.

Each of these poems expresses Meredith's plea for equality but the cases are not parallel. In A Preaching from a Spanish Ballad, the lord and master is all powerful, and the wife meekly submissive, "even unto death". In The Sage Enamoured and the Honest Lady, the Lady accepts her punishment without attempting to excuse herself, but 'one man' realizes the unfairness of the decree and treats her humanely. In the third poem, the Fair Ladies are rebellious against the existing conditions and refuse to be 'unequally yoked'. Meredith himself is, of course, the judge and he approves not only their 'cause' but also their rebellious attitude.

And the poems which I have discussed in this section, seem to me to express the basic principles of Meredith's position as a critic of society. He teaches that man is an integral part of nature; that there are in man the three elements of

1. A Ballad of Fair Ladies in Revolt.
body, brain and spirit, united in varying proportion; that the happy union of these three colored by love, is the ideal development; and that this ideal is only possible when men and women are regarded as equals and comrades.

I have said, too, that the thought underlying this position, is a firm belief in 'the forward view'. But Meredith has no illusions in this regard. He knows quite well that the advance must be slow, 'spiral' and 'the way of worms'. And while he cherishes 'the promise of its good intents', he warns men

"not one instinct to efface
Ere Reason ripens for the vacant place." ¹

His last word is likewise the teaching of the Comic Spirit, -

"Judge mildly the tasked world, and disincline
To brand it, for it bears a heavy pack." ¹

¹ The World's Advance.
III. The Women of the Novels.

I have already suggested that while Meredith's philosophy is best expressed in his poetry, the practical application of that philosophy is to be found at greater length in the novels. There are in the novels no new principles, but there are a hundred instances to illustrate the principles already suggested. And this is especially true of his attitude towards society. Not only is the Comic Spirit very clearly at work, but Meredith has developed in great detail, the idea of the union of body, brain, and spirit to produce a 'natural' whole. Here, too, the plea for equality is urged and the cry for more brain is particularly loud and insistent. Indeed it is this insistence on the importance of brain which chiefly distinguishes Meredith's women from those of other novelists. This may readily be seen from a brief survey of the work of the more outstanding of these writers.

Richardson, 'the founder of the English novel', presented but one type of woman,—the supposedly virtuous but altogether priggish Pamelas and Clarissas, the sentimental ideal which appeared again and again throughout the century. Nor did Fielding, who has, on the whole, represented the conditions of his age most admirably, portray one well-drawn woman. Sophia is perhaps his nearest approach to a living personality in women, but even she is rather vague. In Smollet and Sterne, too, the female figures are typal and statuesque. Tabby and Lydia in 'Humphrey Klinker' have a little individuality but they are hardly convincing. Goldsmith arouses neither
admiration nor pity for his feminine characters for they are mere sentimental artificialities or burlesques. And Scott's younger heroines are scarcely human. They are too perfect. It is only when he turns from these to Meg Merrilles or Jeanie Beans that one is satisfied. Jane Austin's people are convincing,—her women much more so than her men,—The spirited Elizabeth, the colorless Jane, the snobbish Lady Catherine, the garrulous Miss Bates, the managing Emma, the insufferable Mrs. Elton, and the childish Harriet are people whom we have all known. But Miss Austen's canvass, admirable as it is, is so very small, that it can scarcely be said to represent women. And Dickens is rather worse. He has pictured melodramatic Rose Dartles, grotesque Sarah Gamps, gentle demure Doras and Ruths of the dresden china species, and impossibly perfect Esthers and Agneses, but his nearest approach to any representation of mentality is the awful Mrs. Jellyby, 'with her glorious eyes fixed on Africa'. From Thackeray, with whom Meredith had more in common than with any other novelist,—I am speaking now of subject-matter, not of style,—one might expect a more correct portrayal, but even Thackeray failed to get very far from the conventional mid-victorian types. The clever scheming Becky is a happy relief from the 'baby dolls' so prevalent in the literature of this,—and the earlier,—period, but Becky, who has brains, is the rogue of the Spanish novel rather than a woman. Jane Eyre with her passionate intensity of feeling is far more real, but Jane too is a highly specialized person. And many of George Eliot's women are disappointing. They seem to lose their individuality and most
of their vitality about the middle of the story and 'dwindle' into mere females,—with Mrs. Poyser a notable exception.

Conrad's women are decidedly unusual. Some of them have brains too, but one never feels quite sure of their reality. And much the same is true of the creations of Shaw and of Wells. These creations, in some cases at least, have brains but they are not women primarily but puppets in the games of their makers. Hardy's women are real enough, but in the scores that he has portrayed there are only two types, the passive sort like Marty South, and the passionate, unreasoning and unreasonable rebels like Eustacia Vye and Bathsheba Everdene.

In this brief survey, I have made very broad general statements, and these statements like all generalizations, cannot be accepted absolutely. But they are, I think, suggestive of the attitude of these writers towards 'woman in the novel', and that is sufficient for our purpose. It may be seen then, that the women of the earlier novels,—with a few notable exceptions such as I have mentioned,—did not have brains and while some of the creations of Conrad, Wells, and Shaw had brains, these creations were not women primarily.

Hardy, in this as in most other respects, is in a class by himself, but he resembles Jane Austen, in that his feminine characters are not sufficiently diversified to be representative.

Meredith differs from all of these, first, because his women have brains, and being endowed with that ingredient do not lose their reality, and secondly, because they are representative. I do not mean that he has portrayed women in
every circumstance in life, but he has represented all the
types which are to be found in that 'cultivated society' which
makes up his literary world. It must not be thought, however,
that these characters are mere types or abstractions. Far
from it! They have without question, typical traits, but they
have also sufficient individuality to make them interesting.
He has pictured sentimentalists, but not of the clinging vine
variety; and the lady of chivalry is introduced only as an
offset to the modern maidens. His women are not without faults,
for they are human; but neither are they rogues. They are not
the 'pretty ladies' of mediaeval romance: they are beautiful
because they are healthy. They are not the demure drawing-room
figures who faint easily and gracefully, but active creatures,
who swim and ride, dance and run. Above all, their heads are
'furnished with brains'.

And it is, let me repeat, this insistence on brain
power, its presence, and the crying need for its development,
which particularly differentiates Meredith from other writers
in the portrayal of women. The eighteenth century ideal which
lasted well on into the latter half of the nineteenth century,
was that expressed by Edward Young in *Proverbial Lines*:

"Ladies supreme among amusements reign;
By nature born to soothe or entertain,
Their prudence in a share of folly lies
Why will they be so weak as to be wise?"

The one contribution of such a great poet as Tennyson even,
to the question of the suitable education of women, a question
widely discussed in his day, was a miserable failure. Apart
from Meredith, Browning is the only nineteenth century writer of note in whose works the equality of men and women is taken simply for granted. Meredith accepts this equality as a matter of course, but he does more. He makes a special plea for others to accept it also, not merely because he feels that it is the only sane position, but also because he considers it of supreme importance to the 'progress of the world'.

The women of Meredith's novels are both numerous and varied, but they may be grouped, as already suggested, according to the elements of body, brain, and spirit, and it is with this division in mind that I wish to discuss them. Now obviously, it would be quite impossible to draw a hard and fast line between women of body, and women of spirit, for in almost every case, Meredith's women possess both of these elements. They have also been endowed with some amount of brain power. The important thing from the point of view of this essay, however, is that these elements exist in varying proportion, and I have used these terms in a loose sense to suggest that variation. Under the heading 'women of body', I shall discuss those characters in whom the physical element preponderates over the elements of brain and spirit. The term 'women of brain', I shall use to refer to those who are primarily reasonable or 'sensible'. And the third term shall be applied to those few who possess, in a marked degree, that imaginative, indefinable and elusive element of 'spirit'.

It will be seen at once that this arrangement will not include all of Meredith's women. There will be left those
in whom the three elements are more happily united and whose union is 'blest by love'. It will also be noted that the members of this group are, - finally, - equally mated, and that they are, in a very literal sense, daughters of earth. In short, this section, which I have called the 'divine average' will include those heroines who most nearly approach Meredith's conception of ideal woman.

I shall make no attempt to discuss all the women of the novels, even in a general way. That would be an interesting but altogether too lengthy a task at the present time. I shall therefore confine myself to the study of representative members of each of these groups. Any general statements which I may make, however, may be taken to apply to the whole group of which it is said.
In discussing Meredith's poetry, I have tried to point out how his belief in the 'Earth Mother' was closely connected with his attitude to society, and I have also suggested his delight in "the mere material things" of earth. A glance at Box Hill Cottage, where he spent practically all his literary life, will serve to emphasize this delight. "The little brown house where Meredith had lived for fifty years, is situated half-way up a slope which inclines slowly towards a wood of firs: a little garden admirably kept surrounds it, - - - the convolvuluses were more than half-closed and the first drops of rain fell noiselessly upon the grassy slopes of the hillside. It was autumn and the day was calm and fresh. A light breeze just swayed the leaves of the lime trees and the elms which had begun to turn color. The blackberries were already ripe upon the brambles, and from the laurel hedges exhaled a bitter odour. - - - Through the window and the haze beyond, one can see at the bottom of the garden, the branches of a beech intertwined with ivy, and the little lawn and garden between the house and the road."

It was in this setting that he wrote such passages of haunting beauty as the following:

"An oppressive slumber hung about the forest branches. In the dells and on the heights was the same dead heat. Here where the brook tinkled it was no cool-lipped sound, but metallic, and without the spirit of water. Yonder..."
in a space of moonlight on lush grass, the beams were as white fire to sight and feeling. No haze spread around. The valleys were clear defined to the shadows of their verges; the distances sharply distinct, and with the colors of day but slightly softened. —— The breathless silence was significant, yet the moon shone in a broad blue heaven. —— Now and then a large white night-moth flitted through the dusk of the forest."

and

"The tones of her zither were little louder than summer gnats when fireflies are at their brightest and storm impends."

From one who so enjoyed the material earth,—and this enjoyment is again the very antithesis of the eighteenth century mind, which looked upon the country as a place of exile, or at best as a rest cure,—and who considered people to be 'things' of earth, the reader might reasonably expect to find country settings, and characters unhampered by the conventions of city life. And this is very largely what he does find. Only rarely are we taken to the city. True, Meredith has portrayed few peasants but he has chosen for his setting the estates and rolling downs of old England, and his people are people of nature, 'children of Adam', as Morris would call them.

Under such circumstances, too, one might reasonably expect to find the elemental passions of love and hate, joy and

sorrow, most clearly at work. And Meredith does picture these in a marked degree with all the variations from the rawness of Adeline Gosling, 'trembling with shyness under a cover of demureness', to the unhappy passion of Chloe and Dahlia and the womanly charm of Renée. Many of these are very slightly portrayed but they are not indistinct. They are real, but suggestive rather than definable. Others again are pictured in great detail. In this section also, but on a lower plane, will be found the two extremes of debased and perverted nature, the sensualists and the sentimentalists. And somewhere between these two planes, and like the types already mentioned, firmly rooted in earth, will be Mrs. Chump, Meredith's one outstanding example of the very crude but absolutely sincere 'body-woman'.

Let me illustrate, at the risk of the charge of pedantry, by a diagram - which need not be taken too seriously.

1. Rhoda Fleming.
2. Short Stories: Tale of Chloe.
4. Sandra Belloni.
Key:

A. - B. The host of 'natural women' from Adeline Gosling to Renée.
C. The sensualists.
D. The Sentimentalists.
F. Mrs. Chump.
E. The 'Earth Mother', in which all are firmly rooted.

Having 'placed' these women, it will now be possible to become more intimately acquainted with them. I shall speak first of the lowest order, then of the mid position, and finally of the upper level.

Meredith has drawn but few sensualists, and they are not very convincing. The enchantress Bella Mount is handsome, and clever perhaps, but one is never very sure whether she is a living person or a nightmare. On the yacht, and in her conversation with the Hon. Peter Brayder, she is natural enough, but her confabulations with Richard are rather far-fetched, and her penitential letter is sheer melodrama, worthy of Dickens. Mrs. Marsett is not quite so vague. She is one of those provocative creatures who bob up at inconvenient moments, but, for a while, one wonders with Nataly, whether there is such a person or if she is merely fiction. After he has seen her, Victor is satisfied that she is harmless, and so she is. She is merely foolish and unfortunate and therefore pitiable.

1. The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.
2. One of Our Conquerors.
But, as I have said, neither of these women is very convincing. One feels that they are merely a part of Meredith's 'hail of thwacks,' and introduced for no other purpose than to test Richard and Nesta. So too, the snake-like Mrs. Fryar-Gunnett, although real enough to Lord Dunstane, is a part of Meredith's thesis rather than a woman.

On the same plane as these sensualists, in that they also, although in a very different manner, are perverters of nature, are the sentimentalists, those affected creatures, who strive so hard to reach the heights, but who never get very far from earth, because they have neither sound reason nor healthy passion. They aspire to the rank of spirit-women, but they are mere bubbles, though brightly coloured in spots. The term sentimentalist, however, suggests more than the absence of pure reason and of simple and healthy passion. It suggests a studied insincerity, "the impulses of vanity or selfish craving, masquerading as those of the heart, and uttering phrases too big for the occasion or false to it". "If I did not take sentimentalists for objects of study they would enrage me past any tolerance," wrote Meredith, but while studying them he thoroughly enjoys laughing at them.

The most pointed of these studies, among his women characters, is that of the Pole sisters in Sandra Belloni, or as the irreverent call them, 'Pole, Polony and Maypole'. And they are master portraits of the emotional pose, the acquired social elegance, the 'nice feelings', and 'fine shades' of

1. Diana of the Crossways.
the sentimental. They are three 'précieuses ridicules', "scaling society by the help of the arts, - - very ambitious damsels, aiming at they knew not exactly what, save that it was something so wide that it had not a name and so high in the air that no one could see it." Their sensitive natures are sorely tried by the 'unfinished' language of their father; the sudden and frequent outbursts of Mr. Pericles; the repellent coarseness of Mrs. Chump, and the crudities of their nearest rivals, the Tinleys,—those vulgar creatures, who "are to society what Dissenters are to religion". Poor Poles,—they are ludicrous. One chuckles again and again at their foolish poses, their attempts to keep Mrs. Chump down-stairs, and to keep their father quiet, at least; but they are not depraved. They are fond of their father and of Wilfrid; they are, in their way, fond of Emilia, also, although they adopt her chiefly because she reflects glory on them. Moreover they have ability,—and some courage. Not otherwise could they have carried the day at Besworth Lawn, a feat which caused Lady Gosstre, herself a social snob, to exclaim, "Those girls are clever. They don't bustle too much. They don't make too distinct a difference of tone with the different sets"; and forthwith decide to propose Miss Pole as secretary to the Pin and Needle Relief Society.

Their elaborate schemes, very often carefully planned at solemn midnight sessions, are directed to the sole end of elevating themselves to the social level of the despised

1. Sandra Belloni: Pages 3-4.
but envied Lady Gosstre. And knowing themselves to be affected and commonplace, they try to deceive not only their neighbours but also themselves into the belief that they possess innate grace and charm. They are clever enough, but they lack sincerity, truth, and honor. The shallowness of their affection is a decided contrast to the sincere passion of Emilia; their careful managing, the very antithesis of the straight-forward, often abrupt speech or action of Lady Charlotte; and their entire ignorance of honor, far removed from the principles exemplified by Merthyr Powys. And through these contrasts, even more than by direct attack, Meredith emphasises and condemns their superficiality.

Another type of the sentimentalist is the 'female annuitant' and Meredith is very fond of these, although of course he laughs at them. Whether the Ladies Eleanor and Isobel, who by Sir Willoughby's gracious permission worshipped him so devotedly; or the Misses Duvidney, those 'dainty ladies of a Chippendale elegance,' who were so perturbed at the suggestion of receiving the illegitimate Nesta into their home, they are all thoroughly conventional and typically Victorian. They resemble old china or Corot paintings, and in their pastoral setting are not displeasing, but out of that setting they would flutter and gasp in a most helpless manner. They are, writes Meredith, "of the order of the fragile minds which hold together by the cement of a common trepidation for the support of things established, and have it not in them to recognize the

1. The Egoist.
2. One of Our Conquerors.
unsanctioned. Good women, unworlidy of the world, they were perforce harder than the world, from being narrower and more timorous.

I think the Pole sisters might grow to a 'Chippendale elegance', but not the Tinleys, they are quite beyond the pale.

And of course there is the Countess de Saldar, peerless creature! It seems a pity to place her in the same group as the Poles and the Davidneys, and to mention her with the Tinleys is sacriligious. But fascinating, subtle, supremely self-confident, vivacious, adorable, as she is, she is essentially sentimental in the Meredithian sense. She is a female euphuist, but far-seeing, cautious, and a born diplomat. She is blest with more brains, or perhaps it would be more correct to say more craftiness than the Poles. She is a greater schemer, plays for higher stakes and wins more than they do. For sheer charming audacity she is unrivalled in English literature. Becky Sharpe is, I think, her nearest approach but not even the wonderful Becky could have lived through that awful dinner-party, when the Great Mel was 'served up', and have withdrawn with the same graciousness as did the Countess. And however affected and foolish she may be, she is never repellent, as Becky is, at times. One critic, - I have forgotten which one, - calls her 'the most accomplished liar in literature', but that is altogether too crude an expression to apply to such a 'finished' artist. She merely seized the opportunity, - every 1. One of Our Conquerors: Page 68.
2. Evan Harrington.
opportunity, and if such did not exist she could quickly create one, to further her plans. And she was wise enough never to despise the good opinion or the assistance of the servants and nonentities, for she realized that these make up the larger part of any household. The men of Beckley Court, and some of the women, were her slaves also, and she used them as she did the menials. Inimitably presumptuous, and with her deliberately syllabled drawl, the most affected of all Meredith's women, she is Queen of the Sentimentalists, but a wonderful Queen, clever, daring, and very charming.

Her two sisters are but moons in her orbit. Caroline, the beautiful wife of a brutal husband, is weak, but the stately grace with which she plays a pathetic rôle, rouses one's compassion in spite of all her faults. Harriet has not the attractive manner of the other two. She is stronger-willed and more Spartan-like. She is less artful, too, and realizing the fact, contentedly remains in the background, sacrificing herself for 'the cause' and supplying the funds for the struggle to forget, and particularly to make others forget, their humble birth.

1. The whole book, indeed, as is also Sandra Belloni, is Meredith's teaching of the foolhardiness of the attempt to appear to be what one is not.

The Harrington sisters do not fall quite so hard perhaps as do the Poles, at least one feels that they will regain their feet more quickly, for they are not as useless. 1. Evan Harrington.
When the bubbles burst, they are seen to have more of genuine worth.

All these sentimentalists resemble hot house plants rather than wild flowers. They seek shelter from the dazzling sunlight and invigorating winds of the open, but they too are primarily products of earth, although a very fantastic variety.

There is no suggestion of such fragility or delicacy about Mrs. Chump. Meredith himself compares her to an 'exuberant vegetable', and such she seems to the Brookfield ladies who feel that her presence in their midst would sound the death knell to all their social aspirations. Adela characterized the woman as well as the brogue when she said, "It's not simply Irish, it's Irish steeped in brine. It's pickled Irish." She is a chatterer and her coarseness is decidedly repellent to the 'nice feelings' of the three upon whom she thrusts herself. But more, to them she is redolent of the "unutterably sordid city life" they were striving to forget. However, she maintains a mysterious hold over 'Pole', as she calls him, and his daughters, to save themselves from ruin at Besworth, are forced to entreat her, to flatter her, to lie to her, and to drink champagne with her. Generally she is easily susceptible to flattery, and Wilfrid, through this means, manages her without any difficulty. But coarse and vulgar as she is, her sincerity and her kind, if misdirected, intentions are in startling contrast to the shallowness of the three who so despise her, and her victory over them is Meredith's teaching that sincerity, however crude,

1. Sandra Belloni: Page 98.
will always, in the long run, triumph over artificiality.

But the most important and the most interesting section of this group is what one might call Meredith's own children of earth: the frank, healthy, care-free maidens; the more passionate, and because of their passion, the tragic characters; and Renée, tragic also but pre-eminently charming. These, of course, are variously portrayed, many of the younger ones very slightly so, but again they are not indistinct.

Among the most attractive of these slighter char-
1. acters are the Irish Kathleen with the twinkling eyes, who prefers the open deck in a high wind to a poky cabin; Netty also with expressive eyes and a 'quaint simplicity', but with a 'squirish jaw' and a habit of thinking for herself; and Elizabeth, who has not yet reached the thinking stage, but who replies to all the General's suggestions with a 'yes papa' or a 'no papa', that is at times decidedly irritating. These and a dozen other equally wholesome natural girls have possibilities, 4. which Mabel Sweetwater, the Saxon maid 'beautiful as Solomon's bride', has not, for the latter is 'weak as water' and 'with about as much fire as a rushlight'. Mabel, of course, is introduced chiefly for the sake of contrast, and although beautiful, 'like a wonderful sunflower' in Harry's boyish term, is fat! - and, I fear me, indolent.

1. Celt and Saxon.
2. Short Stories: The House on the Beach.
A much more interesting 'child of nature' is Kiomi, the gipsy girl to whom Harry paid the highest compliment possible from a normal boy, when he told his friend Rip, that he liked Kiomi because she was so like a boy and yet unlike any boy he had ever known. She is the best of all comrades for a long day on the heath and her gipsy temper is in striking contrast to Mabel's passiveness or Janet Ilchester's correctness. Quick as a cat, and cool as a marble statue, she is well able to fend for herself, and is without question the favourite of these younger women of earth. She is Meredith's favourite too, "a superb savage, proof against weather and compliments, when she laughed she illuminated you, when she stepped she made the earth hers", - and worth a hundred Mabel Sweetwaters.

More restless, but not as interesting, is the sprightly Miss Paynam, whose romantic head is largely responsible for her discontent, and who is remembered chiefly because she is such a contrast to Diana. She reminds one somewhat of Rose Dartle, but she is scarcely as melodramatic as that creature. And much the same sort are the vain and flighty Henrietta, and the magnanimous but 'waspsish' Margravine.

These characters, although minor, are decidedly

1. The Adventures of Harry Richmond.
3. Diana of the Crossways.
4. The Amazing Marriage.
5. The Adventures of Harry Richmond.
'real', and I have drawn attention to them, chiefly because Meredith has been accused of having no ordinary women. None of these, with the exception of Kiomi, is in any way remarkable. True, they have, all of them, certain peculiarities or characteristics by which they are remembered, but that is merely because they are human beings, not abstractions. There is nothing wonderful about them. Even Kiomi, who seems somewhat remarkable, very largely no doubt because she is such a contrast to Harry's other chums, would, one feels, be called by George Borrow a not uncommon gipsy type.

Kathleen, Netty, and Elizabeth have possibilities, but they, along with Kiomi, and Henrietta and the Margravine, who are hopelessly mature, are primarily 'women of body', because the most vital part of each is what I have previously called the elemental passions. And although these passions, in the case of Elizabeth and Mabel are almost dormant, they too, at least have more 'feeling', than they have brain or spirit.

The other characters which fall naturally into this group, play more important roles; they are more passionate also; and for these reasons more interesting.

Of these, two, who in their unsuccessful struggle against 'blind circumstance', recall many of Hardy's women, are 1. Clare Doria Forey and Juliana Bonner. They, too, are slightly portrayed, but neither is easily forgotten. Neither is attractive in appearance, - and here as everywhere, Meredith is far from 1. The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.

2. Evan Harrington.
ignoring the importance of personal appearance. Clare is a pale little thing and Juliana positively ugly. Both are delicate and unable to join in the vigorous exercises of their relatives. Left much to themselves, they suffer from loneliness, depression, and even neglect. And both love passionately, without having that love returned in the slightest degree. Sensitive natures both, they suffer endlessly, and foolishly, as do all such sensitive souls, and finally lie down and die, because neither has any longer any desire to live.

Slight as they are, they are pathetic creatures. Clare seems to be a very colorless child, so much so that 'Ricky', whom she worshipped, was scarcely conscious of her presence in the house, and her everlasting "Yes Mama, "no Mama", makes the reader long to shake some spirit into her. But that this child,- for she never grows up,- who all her life has spoken nothing but commonplaces, possessed unsuspected depths of feeling, is evident from the pathetic entries in her diary.

"Mama says there is no one in the world like Richard, and I am sure there is not, not in the whole world. He says he is going to be a great general and going to the wars. If he does, I shall dress myself as a boy and go after him, and he will never know me till I am wounded. - - I wonder what I should feel if Richard was ever to die?"

and later, when she is leaving Raynarn,

"Richard was not sorry to lose me. He only loves boys and men. - - - I do not let anybody see I am unhappy, not even

Mama. She says I want iron. I am sure I do not."

Later still, just before her marriage, gone through with in obedience to her mother's wish, she wrote,

"I have seen Richard. Richard despises me. I cannot live, Richard despises me."

There is nothing sentimental about this. It is child-worship developing into a consuming passion, foolish perhaps, but sincere. Moreover, it is firmly restrained,- as far, that is, an any revelation to others is concerned. And there is nothing finer in all Meredith's writing than the calm simplicity with which her chapter closes.

"Clare lies in her bed as placid as in the days when she breathed; her white hands stretched their length along the sheets, at peace from head to feet. She needs iron no more. Richard is face to face with death for the first time. He sees the sculpture of clay - the spark gone."

To comment on such a conclusion would be utterly superfluous. There it is, and there is nothing more to be said.

Julia is pathetic also, but she does not arouse compassion in the same way. She is a little spit-fire of the feline variety, and one rather hopes she may create some interesting situations. She fails to do so, but I do not feel as Bailey puts it, that she is "on the whole - - a despicable little creature and the way in which she gloated over Evan's
bodily strength and physical attractiveness, makes her at times positively repulsive." There is nothing admirable about her, but neither is she worthy of disdain. She is merely a 'poor creature', whose one redeeming feature is that she left Beckley Court to Evan, and while this was entirely the result of her hopeless passion for him, it was the first step towards a sensible readjustment of the relations of the two families.

More passionate and far more tragic, because in neither case is the passion entirely self-centered, are Mrs. Barto Rizzo, whose devoted obedience to the command of her fanatical husband, fails but once, and that time with fatal results; and Chloe, who having squandered her fortune to redeem a rascal, dies, not merely because her heart is dead, as was Clare's, but to save another woman from the same rascal, and to prevent bloodshed. The revelation of her last message,

"I die because my heart is dead
To warn a soul from sin I die
I die that blood may not be shed."

does much to explain her seemingly strange conduct.

Tragic also is Dorothy Beltham, that handsome daughter of a crabbed old Anglo-Saxon squire. Richmond Roy, who, although unconsciously, was the cause of all her suffering, spoke of her as "the tenderest woman alive, with a voice sweeter than flutes", and she was esteemed and admired by the whole country side. But there is nothing priggish about her.

2. Vittoria.
She has courage, too, and when occasion demands it, can think and act for herself. She is almost blinded by her affection for Ricky,—and for Roy,—and when these two are concerned, her reason, which is quite awake at other times, is numbed. The final scene at the hotel, when the old squire unearths the source of Roy's annuity, is an extremely difficult one for Dorothy, but she goes through with it. Her physical strength all but deserts her, but her courage never wavers.

But without question the most tragic of Meredith's women is Dahlia Fleming. Timid, fond of luxury, altogether ignorant of the world beyond the narrow bounds of her puritan home, she is an easy prey to flattery. Her story recalls that of Clarissa Harlowe, and "like Clarissa she will not suffer her wronger to right the wrong which is in truth impossible. With splendid chivalry for the distressed, Meredith paints Dahlia as chastened and purified by suffering and calamity, rising to heights of character that otherwise she might not have attained.

She is neither quite right as Ann Veronica would deem her, nor by any means quite sinful as Mrs. Grundy would pronounce. It is indeed possible 'both to think her saintly and have the sentiments inspired by the unearthly in her person', for she had the capacity to suffer evil and to pardon it. She must die, for to return to the monotonous humdrum of her early youth would be impossible." But the change is long in coming, and the close profoundly pathetic. "Dahlia lived seven years, her sister's housemate, nurse of the growing swarm. She had gone through

1. Rhoda Fleming.
fire, as few women have done in like manner, to leave their hearts among the ashes; but with that human heart she left regrets behind her. The soul of this young creature filled its place. It shone in her eyes and in her work, a lamp to her little neighbourhood; and not less a lamp of cheerful beams for one day being as another to her. In truth, she sat above the clouds. When she died she relinquished nothing. Others knew the loss. Between her and Robert there was deeper communion on one subject than she let Rhoda share. Almost her last words to him, spoken calmly, but with the quaver of breath resembling sobs, were: "Help poor girls."

That, and her other heartbroken cry, "It's ignorance that leads to the unhappiness of girls", sound the keynote of Meredith's view of such situations, and his study of Dahlia is his strongest plea for enlightenment.

In all these tragic studies Meredith makes one feel not only how regrettable, but how utterly unnecessary, so much of this distress is; how it is in every case due to a deplorable want of balance, a giving way to the senses and an absence of reason.

But this study of 'women of body' would not be complete did it not include some of the more appealing characters, tragic still, but not as tragic as Chloe or Dahlia.

2.
Lucy Desborough is the one 'milkmaid type' which

1. Rhoda Fleming. Pages 415-16.
2. The Ordeal of Richard Feveral.
Meredith has developed in any detail. In her pink and white girlhood she resembles the heroines of the sentimentalists. She recalls them, also, in her long-suffering and animal-like adoration of her absent husband; an adoration which is not so trusting as it is unthinking. Indeed she seems to have no mind or will-power of her own, until the night of Richard's return and departure. But that night, and during the days and nights that follow, she grows in strength and firmness and resolve. The growth is too long delayed, however, the strain has lasted too long, and she dies. And it is better that she should. Nothing less tragic would have proven the absolute failure of Sir Austin's reasoned but narrow and unreasonable 'system'. And had she lived she would have been a drag on Richard, for her clinging nature was quite incapable of keeping pace with his enthusiasm and energy. Moreover, he would quickly have realized the fact, and the disillusionment would have been even more painful than was the memory of her purity.

Much more fascinating, and far more lovable, is Renée, Meredith's one outstanding picture of the graceful and very charming French type, which appealed to him so strongly. Yet Renée too fails because of her lack of courage. Ordinary conventions have no meaning for her, but she is bound by her duty to her father and by her word. She breaks away finally, and trusting Beauchamp absolutely and believing that she reads his heart in her own, makes her way to London, alone. But it is too late. She has acted wholly on natural impulse, but she learns that such is not always a safe guide. She is calmly

1. Beauchamp's Career.
mistress of herself, however, and of her situation, and her withdrawal is graceful and dignified.

And Meredith's teaching here, as indeed in connection with all these women of body, is that the feelings alone, cannot be trusted to steer one aright. When she first met Beauchamp, Renée had lacked the courage even to question her father's right to dispose of her like so much property. Later, when her own feelings took more definite form, she went to the extreme of trusting them absolutely, and her entire disregard of reason was responsible for her distress. And if this disregard of reason is fatal to Renée, it is even more disastrous in the case of the sensualists, the sentimentalists, and those whom I have called the tragic figures, for none of these, not even the Countess de Saldar or Dahlia, possess in the same degree as does Renée that personal charm and sincerity which help to make her shortcomings at least less glaring. The less extreme members of this group, 'the simple natural maidens', suffer less because,—as yet,—they venture less. They are, as I have said, 'promising', but like young plants they are only just above the earth and it is too soon to say how normal their growth may be.
III. b. Women of Brain.

Of the three parts of the triad, Meredith has given the preference to brain, partly I think because he greatly admired intellectual strength, but more because he felt that brain was the crying need of the race, particularly of women. He has portrayed a host of 'body-women', more or less attractive, but altogether feminine. The 'spirit-women', also, although few in number are essentially womanlike. His intellectuals, particularly the more extreme ones, are different. In number they occupy the mid-position, but while manly rather than mannish, feminine is the very last word one would ordinarily think of applying to them. And one feels that Meredith valued these people very highly, for although comparatively few in number they bulk large in importance. Now it may be that he was merely typifying life in this respect,— and I dare say the intellectuals were, forty and fifty years ago, even more noticeable, because of their small number and also because of their eccentricities, than they are to-day,— but I think too, that he chose to emphasize this type by singling out its members and surrounding them by more 'natural',— that is more ordinary,— women.

Not only are these intellectuals comparatively few in number, but their portrayal, too, seems singularly slight. Lady Jocelyn,¹ Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, Lady Charlotte;² Evan Harrington.³ The Egoist. Sandra Belloni.
and the rest, do not stand out as clearly in the mind of the average reader as do Dahlia, Lucy, or Renée, certainly not as clearly as do the Countess de Saldar, Nesta or Diana. In short, although we may admire them, they are not our favourites.

On a more thoughtful examination, however, one quickly realizes that there is nothing shadowy or indecisive about them. They are far removed from the shrinking violet variety. They do not speak at great length, but their words carry weight. They do not even appear on the boards often, but the moment an appearance is made, their presence is felt; and more than felt, for they dominate the scene entirely. Their apparent action is slight. They are not the players, but the directors. Lady Jocelyn, for instance, is one of the 'quietest' characters in Evan Harrington, and yet it is she to whom one and all instinctively turn for directions; she before whose quiet good-bye even the Countess de Saldar is dumb,— and acquiescent.

And she is quite alone at Beckley Court: 'the only sensible woman' Rose knew, and Rose was no mean judge of character. To be sure Mrs. Mel is sensible,—eminently so, but Mrs. Mel did not belong to the Beckley Court circle, and it was of this circle that Rose was speaking.

Now Lady Jocelyn had brains. Her own relatives, most of whom thought her decidedly queer, would have granted that, even although they did not seem to admire those brains. That, however, was chiefly because Providence had not seen fit to endow them with a similar set. The Countess, too, knew very
well that Lady Jocelyn read character clearly, and was therefore not to be tampered with. A kind, genuine, strong-minded woman, wonderfully sensible in the disregard of mere conventions, as her attitude towards Evan, 'a tailor's son', proves, she is altogether without those feminine attractions which make Rose so fascinating or that delightful pose which so often helped the Countess to carry the day.

Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson resembles her a good deal, but Sir Willoughby's mother-confessor is more witty and perhaps more diplomatic,—diplomatic is scarcely the word to apply to the simple straightforward methods of Lady Jocelyn. And she is even more of a director, for she rules Sir Willoughby and through him the countryside. She has a happy knack of 'hitting off' a character with a phrase and these epithets, whether the 'racing cutter' or the 'dainty rogue in porcelain', are remembered because they are so apt. She spoke even more truely than she realized when she said of Sir Willoughby, 'He has a leg', for that creature is largely animal. And this penetrating insight into character, coupled with a reasonable and reasoned confidence in humanity, place her with Lady Jocelyn at the head of this group.

Of coarser clay are Lady Charlotte Chillingworth, and Lady Camper, eccentrics both and rather priding themselves on being such. Lady Charlotte 'looked and moved and spoke as if the earth were her own'. A cool, business-like woman of the

1. Sandra Belloni.
2. Short Stories: The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper.
world, she takes poor Wilfrid quite by surprise, when, in reply to his hesitating, wriggling, seemingly reluctant, but really hopeful announcement, that his father will never buy Besworth, she calmly answers, "We may do very well without it." A hopeless rebel against conventional laws that are mere convention, she is at heart sound, and wounds Emilia's feelings only in order to force her to see Wilfrid's duplicity. Lady Camper, too, ignored the usual conventions of village society although she admitted to the rector that she went to church now and then to save appearances. Her frank truthfulness in 'I rouge' and her bluntness in 'how much money will you give your daughter when she marries?' is very distressing to the gallant General, and her cleverly pointed caricatures drive the poor man almost to distraction; but she is always sensibly kind to Elizabeth.

And these two, like Lady Jocelyn and Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson, act as pilots. It is Lady Charlotte who finally rights the situation between Emilia and Wilfrid, the Pole sisters, Pericles and Tracy Runningbrook; and it is Lady Camper who keeps the young generations in hail' when General Ople is oblivious of everything except his immediate, personal, selfish, interest. Gruff and blunt as they usually are, they are reliable, and may in circumstances of any importance be depended on to do the wise thing.

These are splendid women all, quite admirable for the most part, but rather awesome. One respects them, but prefers—

2. Short Stories: The Case of General Ople and Lady Camper. (Page 281.)
ably at some slight distance. And one feels, too, that while Meredith delighted to portray this sort, the sort which provided most scope for his wit and whom he valued highly, they were not his favourites. What a pity it is that with such very desirable brain power, they had not combined some of Renée's charm, a little even of the fascinating pose of the Countess de Saldar.

Much less admirable, less attractive too, is 1. Laura Piaveni, Vittoria's Italian friend, 'with an excess of brain', who saw so clearly, and so coldly, the facts of life; the weakness of the King whom her heart bade her love, and the shallow conceits of her sister: but who crushed her feelings entirely, to follow the dictates of cold reason. She recalls Archduchess Anne, but one does not feel the same compassion for her that one feels for the Archduchess, chiefly, I think, because she is even more of an ascetic than the latter.

And the Baroness von Crefeldt, whom Alvan thought the best of comrades and best of friends, is an admirable logician but a cold, hard woman. Alvan of course was too blinded by his own conceit to be a correct judge of character. But Clotilde knew, after her own passionate appeal for help had been tossed contemptuously aside. "She is," writes Meredith, "one of those persons who after a probationary term in the character of woman have become men, but of whom offended man, amazed by the flowering up of a hard rough jaw from the

1. Vittoria.
2. The Tragic Comedians.
tender blooming promise of a petticoat, finds it impossible to imagine they had once on a sweet spring time the sex's gentleness and charm of aspect." She wore a moustache too, and more characteristic still, smoked dragoon cigars! "De gustibus -" 

But these two, although unattractive personally, are the controlling forces within their respective circles. Laura Piaveni is the shrewd and careful manager of various plots in the scheme for Italian liberty, and it is largely because she refuses to consider personal relationships that her schemes are so successful. And the Baroness, although brutal, helps more than anyone else to rouse what little power of self-reliance poor Clotilde possesses. The pity is that in following so closely the dictates of cold reason, they generally forget to be human.

To offset these two, there are, in this same group, Miss Isabella Current, that sprightly maid of fifty, without a wrinkle to show for it, who liked twenty shillings better than a sovereign; and the audacious and captivating Mrs. Lovell. Miss Current is what the modern youth would term 'a good sport'. With her quick wit, her fund of capital anecdotes and her readiness for an early morning tramp or a gallop over the downs, she combined a vast amount of common sense and was the natural leader of any group of wholesome live youth. Mrs. Lovell is more subtle, more fascinating, - and more dangerous. Beautiful,

2. Evan Harrington.
3. Rhoda Fleming.
witty, tactful, clear-headed and shrewd, audacious, yet mistress of herself in all that she did, she is not only adored by men but beloved by her own sex. "She was a woman who would do both harm and good, but she would never sanction a scheme of evil, or blink at it in alliance with another." Like Miss Current too, she is a woman of fine understanding and this quality would save her from too great excess in any direction.

And these two, also, although not as conspicuous perhaps, because not as eccentric as those women already mentioned in this division, are wholesome leaders of their particular groups. The younger members of the Beckley Court circle are suffering from an attack of sentimentalism when Miss Current's arrival checks, - and cures, - the disease, and Mrs. Lovell provides a happy escape from the stern puritanism which hangs like a cloud over Dahlia.

But the most subtle of these women of brain, - perhaps indeed of all Meredith's women, - is Rosamund Culling, that provoking but eminently efficient mistress of Romfrey Hall. At first she seems to be rather a weak vacillating creature. She is jealously fond of Nevil and the thought of what he may say or think, is ever present in her mind. Her sense of humor saves her from revealing her feelings too plainly, but her at times almost servile attitude to Nevil's boyish imperiousness, is boring. Her incoherent and misleading report of Doctor Shrapnel's reception of herself has distressing consequences but some such desperate tug is necessary to lift her from the 1. Beauchamp's Career.
state of rather contemptible acquiescence to one of vital
decision. And after the tug, while her heart remains as true
as ever, her intellect is considerably more alert and takes the
guiding part. She becomes a clever manager both of her house-
hold affairs and of Lord Romfrey and his Tory friends. All her
schemes are directed still toward the furthering of Nevil's
happiness, but they are prompted now, not so much by affection,
although that element is present, as by her recognition of the
claims of the 'young generation' and of the country's need of
vitalizing energy in place of superior complacency.

It is remarkable how many of these intellectuals,
particularly the more eccentric type, are titled personages.
And this is not due to mere accident. Meredith knew that these
women of wealth and position had more opportunity for observing
people and for developing the Comic Spirit. Lady Jocelyn had
her share of it, as had Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson; and
Lady Camper is almost Meredithian in her skill with the pointed
shaft.

In all of these, whether the eccentrics, the cold
Laura Piaveni and the Baroness von Crefeldt, the more attractive
Miss Current and Mrs. Lovell or Mrs. Culling, who is less ex-
treme than any of these others, 'brain power splendidly towers'.
But clever, sensible, admirable in many respects, as these
women are, they are not well proportioned. They are, on the
whole, more fortunate and more valuable than the members of the
first group, for brain, or reason, being the quality which
divides the human being from the mere animal, marks a higher
stage of development than body. In the pursuit of reason,
however, they have tended, too much, to ignore those natural feelings which, although secondary, have their place, with the result that although, on the whole, in advance of the members of the first group, they are still far from the 'golden mean'.

Less extreme but pre-eminently 'sensible' are 1. Mrs. Berry and 2. Mrs. Mel. Mrs. Berry recalls Mrs. Chump at times. Her continual chattering is wearying, but she is not always in the way, as Mrs. Chump is. She is almost as fond of flattery as the 'pot of simmering broth', but she has considerably more insight into character and discards much of what she hears. Above all, unlike Mrs. Chump, she takes for granted that thinking is the business of women fully as much as it is of men. Indeed she suggests that the other sex do not do their share in this particular, for she has seen enough of them to know that 'we must take them something like Providence, - as they come'. Crude but large-hearted; superstitious perhaps but capable of putting the conventionalities scornfully aside; 'mellifluous' but keen-witted, she is almost the only well-balanced person in Richard Feverel. Her pronounced interest in cooking reminds one of Mrs. Todgers in Martin Chuzzlewit, but even more her common sense ideas on morality and her shrewd observations on 'people and things' suggest Mrs. Poyser in Adam Bede. A Dickenslike 'bunch of simmering black satin', she provides a good deal of homely humor but as Lady Blandish says, "She has more sense than we all."

1. The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.
2. Evan Harrington.
Closely related to Mrs. Berry, although of slighter portrayal, are the 'dewy' Mrs. Waddy, who supervised Harry Richmond's boyhood, and Mrs Carthew, Admiral Fakenham's rather managing housekeeper. These are both, above all, kindly sensible souls, in spite of Mrs. Waddy's inclination to melancholy at the thought of the future, and Mrs. Carthew's tendency to disregard those directions which seemed to her foolish. Although slightly portrayed, they are far from being unreal, and one feels confident that an unexpected visitor would find Mrs. Waddy ready to move on very short notice indeed, and Mrs. Carthew ready, too, with breakfast on the table.

But it is Mrs. Mel who more than anyone else is the embodiment of Meredith's theory that sense, rather than the senses, must rule. Mrs. Mel is not an ascetic but she never allows her imagination to run riot or her feelings to overturn her principles. She is one of those numerous women, who always know themselves to be right, and the amazing thing, in this case, is that she always is right. One of her maxims was to 'let people speak', and when they had thus relieved their feelings and been made, by an expressive silence, to feel rather foolish, she would calmly state her intentions and proceed to carry them out. She always got the better of the argument too, whether her opponent chanced to be the 'silkenly insipid' Lady Rosely or Tom Cogglesby, that eccentric old democrat. And there was no mincing of words; when she spoke at all, she spoke briefly and forcibly. Unlike her daughters, she did not aspire to

1. The Adventures of Harry Richmond.
2. The Amazing Marriage.
greatness, but she was anxious that Evan should pay his father's debts. "Understand your choice", she said to him, "you will be a beggar, the son of a rogue, or an honest man who has cleared his father's name". There is never any question in her mind about expediency or discretion in the eyes of the world. It is merely a case of the proper, that is the natural and sensible thing to be done, which concerns her. And the calm assurance with which she meets every problem, and conquers it, is Meredith's teaching of the sure success of the rule of sense. 'Iron' is Danny's terse but expressive epithet and it suits her, for stern as Mrs. Mel is, she is dependable and worthy.
III. c. Women of Spirit.

Meredith has portrayed scores of women in whom the physical element predominates. There are, too, a goodly number to whom the term intellectual or sensible might reasonably be applied. There are but three, who seem to me, in any marked degree, 'women of spirit'. Let me repeat the phrase, in any marked degree, for the great majority of his characters possess some fraction of the finer element. It is not in these characters, however, the outstanding quality, as it is in the case of Emmy, and of Rhoda, and of Vittoria. And it is altogether fitting that the number of 'spirit-women' represented should be small, for in actual life they are few.

Before these three are discussed, however, there is one fact that should be noted. I have already stated Meredith's belief, that spirit is a development of earth, formed by the interaction of body and brain, and I have used his own illustration of the white cherry blossom to symbolize that development. Everyone knows that not all the blossoms on a cherry-tree are perfect. There will always be found some, which, on account of blight or other cause, do not mature properly. And these are not only useless, but if left alone, will be positively harmful to the growth of the tree. In a similar manner the elements of body and brain will sometimes unite to produce not spirit, but sham spirit, and in his study of women, Meredith has not omitted this type. I refer of course to the ascetics, and if one may judge from the few presented, 1. Diana of the Crossways. 2. Rhoda Fleming. 3. Vittoria.
these were, in Meredith's eyes, even more abominable, than were the sensualists, because they had a wider influence. I have included them in this section, because, although they are not women of spirit, in the best meaning of that term, they represent a form of perverted spirit. Moreover, they cannot be placed in either of the groups already discussed, for they have as little of natural passion as they have of reason. I shall discuss only the two most outstanding of the ascetics, Miss Constance Asper and her puritanic watchdog, Mrs. Wathin, and these but briefly.

Miss Asper is interesting chiefly as a foil to Diana. She is 'the altar candle' in contrast to 'the lamp of day'. Her only light is a sort of ghostly glimmer which flickers with each breath of air but which, unfortunately, never goes out. Like a ghost, too, she haunts one. Meredith calls her a 'devious filmy sentimentalist', and one feels that he is not only utterly out of sympathy with her, but so strongly opposed that he can restrain himself only with difficulty. Again he says 'she symbolizes purity' and the suggestion is that the symbol is empty. This suspicion is confirmed a little later when he speaks of her as being wealthily religious with a sham spiritualism. Pietistic, but cold as ice, she is the sort of creature who, literally, makes one shiver, and from whom one prefers to keep at a long distance.

1. Diana of the Crossways.

2. The constant use Meredith makes of such contrasts is remarkable, as is his irreverent habit of mixing, in unprecedented manner, the various social strata of his world, much to the horror and distress of the conventionally inclined.
Closely associated with Miss Asper is her admirer Mrs. Wathin, the only one of his women for whom I feel that Meredith himself had a decided repugnance. His description of her is brief but sufficient: "a lady of incisive features bound in stale parchment", — "with all the rewards together with all the expectations of the virtuous." With her aristocratic airs and her narrow, selfish, puritanic ideas she is a good deal of a trial to Diana and to Emmy; and the reader is glad when, on the settlement of the Constance Asper matter, she drops out of sight, — and out of hearing. One of the world's good women, she 'meant well', but she failed through lack of feeling and lack of imagination. She was considered respectable and conventional, indeed she shunned the very appearance of irregularity, but she was not able to distinguish between the true and the sham, and she failed to make her morality appeal, because she had not the brains to see below the surface and to discover the origin, nature, and right end of that morality she affected to preach. She is well named Mrs. Cramborne Wathin: crammed as she is, with a very thin morality!

"They have great aspirations", writes Meredith, "and they dwell in the odour of sanctity", but they are unnatural and unwholesome, and therefore, "they are the greatest obstacles to progress."

And Diana was always civil to these two; Truly, great was Diana's power of self-control. Had they been matched

1. Diana of the Crossways: Page 127.
2. Diana of the Crossways.
against Lady Charlotte Eglett, there would have been a different story to tell. But one learns from Meredith that it is wiser not to say too much of these people and to turn from the sham to the real, from the ascetics to the women of spirit: Emmy, Rhoda, and Vittoria.

Of all the characters in Diana of the Crossways, Emmy, Lady Dunstane, is, in interest, second only to the heroine herself. An invalid, she is prevented from taking part in many of Diana's activities, but she has that calm serenity of mind, which can enjoy such activities second hand. A woman of keen intellect, she does not sparkle, as does Diana, but she catches her friend's thought 'on the wing', before it has been given verbal expression. But more important, more striking, is the fact that she is the centre and sustaining power about which Diana hovers, and from which she derives help, courage, and inspiration. She possesses in large measure that discerning power which looks behind and beyond the mere facts of life. She is influenced not by the deed, but by the motive which prompted the deed, and she sees, too, not only the immediate but the later and more important developments which may arise. And it is, of course, because of this divining power that she is a steadying force as well as a source of inspiration to Diana.

Rhoda Fleming is a woman of spirit also, but a very different sort. She is affectionate, even passionate, although she prided herself on being untouched by love and she has a mind; but her natural feelings and her reason are both held in subjection. 1. Lord Ormont and His Aminta.
to her indomitable and fanatical will. Her puritanic upbringing is responsible for this Spartan-like devotion to principle, and her unflinching determination that Dahlia shall marry Sedgett is puritanic, but neither natural nor reasonable. She loses, for the time, not only her intelligence, - and Rhoda is intelligent, - but also her humanity; and her arguments with the old uncle, when she is pleading for money, seem strongly inconsistent with her attitude towards her sister. She is not quite as hard as her old father but she is equally determined. "A strange biblical girl with Hebrew hardness of resolution and Hebrew exaltation of soul", she is resolved to carry to the end the struggle of duty against inclination, cost what it may. It does cost. She, as well as Dahlia, suffers torture, but not for one moment does she relax.

It is this stoical determination, this blind fanaticism, which so differentiates her from Emmy. She is not a lovable person, but if with such passionate affection, such devotion to an idea, there had been mingled a predominating power of reasoning insight, what a magnificent creature she would have been!

Emilia Alessandra Vittoria is Emmy and Rhoda combined and strengthened. Her affectionate nature and her clear intuitive power recall Emmy, but her passionate devotion to music and to Italy is more suggestive of Rhoda's temperament. Her gratitude and devotion to her friends is animal-like rather than reasoned and her simple and unrestrained following of natural impulses not always 'discreet' in the eyes of society.

Rhoda Fleming: Page 346.
But even as the immature Emilia, of whom the untied bootlace is as typical as the fact that she sings in the wood by night, because her landlady objects to music indoors, she is recognised as being 'different'. She is immature and impulsive but sincere to her inmost soul, and her unconventionality is as far removed from the studied pose of the Pole sisters as her genius is from their superficiality. It is not conceit which makes her offer to sing for her friends, but a simple confidence that they desire to listen to her. And it is this same child-like confidence in herself, which carries her through the troublous days in Italy. She is tossed about but she never loses her courage or her dignity, and in those two great scenes, in the Stelvio Pass, and in the theater, when she sings the song of Italian freedom, she is Meredith's best exponent of nobility of character.

And these three, different as they are, represent Meredith's portrayal of woman in whom 'soul' is the predominating force. Emmy is the lovable, divining sort, magnificently comprehending; Rhoda is the stern Hebrew prophetess; and Vittoria is the 'soul of music', and the prophetess of Italian liberty.

But even these do not approach Meredith's ideal very closely. Emmy lacks the physical strength to carry out the promptings of her mind, with the result that there are numerous delays, serious delays, until Tom Redworth or Arthur Rhodes arrive unexpectedly,—just in time to save the situation. Rhoda's fanaticism permanently dulls both her feelings and her intellect to such an extent that she just escapes becoming an
ascetic. But Vittoria, being of finer mould, suffers most because of her shortcomings. As a girl, Emilia, as she was then called, had followed her instincts without hesitation and without thinking. She was a child in the ways of the world and ready to trust anyone,—except the 'Jew gentlemen',—who smiled on her. She suffers at the hands of the shallow Wilfrid but the loss of her voice and the animal-like actions of Pericles are almost more than she can bear. She loses herself for a while among simple folk, but life is for her a weary existence until her reason, under the careful tuition of her Welsh friends, begins to function. And it is not until that reason takes its proper place in controlling her feelings that she emerges as Vittoria.
III. d. The 'Divine Average'.

In these three sections, I have discussed not nearly all, not even the most favoured, but those women who seem to me to illustrate best, Meredith's theory. Even within these groups, as I have tried to show by my choice of characters, there is a good deal of variation, but in all the characters of each of these groups, there is one predominating element, and it is this predominance, whether of body, of brain or of spirit, which has led me to group these women as I have. I have discussed the first group at considerably greater length than the other two, because the number of 'women of body' in the novels is very much larger than the number of 'intellectuals' or of 'spirit-women', and also because there is more variation within this group. I have said, too, that it is impossible to draw a firm line between these sections. One might discuss such characters as Lady Blandish, who combines much of the intellectual diplomacy of Mrs. Mountstuart Jenkinson with a good deal of the superficiality of the Pole sisters; or 

1. Laetitia Dale, who is even more closely related to the members of the first group; and Nataly Radnor, most lovable woman, whose mind is keenly alert, although she is governed by Victor's will, and who seems at times to possess much of the intuitive power of Emmy or the 'soul' of Vittoria. But I have confined myself, in this study, to a discussion of those women who seem

1. The Ordeal of Richard Feverel.
2. The Egoist.
3. One of Our Conquerors.
to me to represent, in a more marked degree, the element of body, or of brain, or of spirit.

Meredith has also pictured a number of women like 1. Jenny Denham, Jane Wattick, Janet Ilchester, and Cecilia Halkett, in whom the three elements are combined more evenly than they are in those characters already discussed, and of whom one might say much. But these, partly because of their immaturity, partly because they are not, as the French say, 'distingués', although well on the way, are still at some distance from Meredith's ideal.

There are, however, half-a-dozen who, because the three elements of body, brain and spirit, are happily united in them, because they are, - finally, - equally mated, because they are, in a very real sense, daughters of earth, and because, with all this, they possess a great deal of womanly charm and are 'distingués', approach very nearly what I take to be Meredith's conception of ideal womanhood. And a discussion of these, whom I have called the 'divine average' will complete this study.

These favorites are to be found in what Elton so aptly calls "the real feudal Tory country world of old Victorian England, with its irreducible shades of caste-feeling, its surface gallantry, its reluctance to think, its vigour of physique and its excellent manners". They are of course "the 1. Beauchamp's Career.
2. Celt and Saxon.
3. The Adventures of Harry Richmond."
bravest and fairest that such a society can breed, or rather cannot prevent from being bred, but they stand out clearly and their development is their struggle to rise above the ordinary, the correct, the conventional, spiritual and mental level of this world." It is a struggle, and no easy one at that, but in every case they are women of courage, who do not turn back. They may slip, but they quickly regain their balance, and they do not make the same mistake twice. Brave and true, they are fearless of winds and weather, and also of Mrs. Grundy, for they are 'enquiring souls', who have learned to think things out for themselves. They are a trifle heedless of convention, but they lose none of their girlish or womanly charm in their resolute and courageous desire to throw off the old conception of women, to be natural and their best selves.

They are individual too,- more than that, they are distinctive. The name Carinthia will immediately suggest mountain climbing, long country walks, a hatred of sleep and passivity; Rose Jocelyn bespeaks riding, music, and silvery laughter; 'Browny' spells the open sea on a summer morning; Clara will never cease to be 'the dainty rogue in porcelain', or Diana the gracious hostess at 'intellectual' dinner parties, and Nesta all of these. But it is not their healthy delight in the open, not their wit,- and they have wit in abundance,- not even their discerning power, which makes them so attractive. It is their personality, which is all of these things and more, which is at once the most real thing about each and the thing

hardest to describe, which is, in short, themselves.

But to be more specific! Carinthia is not at first particularly interesting, except as an athlete. In her mountain home, and until the time of her marriage, she is largely animal. She is without imagination, and she has not yet learned to think. In her leaps from the window to the flower-bed, 'a dozen or so feet below', and from the high carriage to the ground, she suggests a Scotch collie more than anything else. But her marriage, and Lord Fleetwood's immediate departure stab her hitherto dormant reason. She begins to awaken, and although the process is slow, there is no relapse. More than anyone else, she is Meredith's embodiment of nature and like nature she is calm and patient. She waits, believing that there must be some explanation, and that the truth will be satisfying. When she learns the truth, however, and that her husband's unkindness is studied, she merely drops him out of her life, as quietly as the pine-tree drops its cones, and with as little apparent regret. Life becomes for her a new season, and there is no looking back. When Fleetwood,—too late,—begs her to restore the past, she is quite unmoved.

"Do not beg of me, my lord. I have my brother and my little son. —— God has given me a friend, too,—a man of humble heart, my brother's friend, my dear Rebecca's husband. —— See the splendid sky we have."

Like nature's laws she is 'immutable' and 'forward-looking'. And it is only as a symbol of nature, it seems to me, that one
can really understand her. She is largely ignorant of, and altogether indifferent to the conventional laws of society, but although 'gaunt and awkward like the cliffs of her mountain home', she never loses her dignity. She is calm and self-controlled, patient and restrained. Her beauty and her composure suggest the statue of a Greek goddess, but she is not cold. Once she risked her life to save an unknown child from a mad dog. She commands respect and admiration, rather than love; but she has a grandeur which raises her above the need of love,—the love of the many,—and she has her little son and her friend.

Rose Jocelyn, Browny Farrel, and Clara Middleton are less grand, and much more human. All three are healthy, natural girls, unreserved and vivacious but not forward; generous, brave, impulsive and daring but not foolhardy; affectionate but not sentimental. They do not develop without a struggle. As a school-girl, Browny had been sentimental in her idealization of Lord Ormont, and for that folly she pays in full. Rose, too, had an early aversion to tradesmen and 'that class of people', and Ferdinand, Lord Laxley, a brainless member of another class, is her punishment. Even Clara suffers torture from Sir Willoughby's inane egoisms, until she develops sufficient intelligent courage to break away from him. But the important thing is that in each case they do develop the courage necessary to rise above even the strictest of conventional decrees. And, moreover, in each case it is not an impulsive but a reasoned courage. Browny has too much respect for marriage laws, —as had Meredith,—to act hastily, or thought-
lessly, in leaving her husband. When she is convinced, however, that the step meditated, although an offence against society, is not an offence against Divine law, she hesitates no longer. Rose's test is less difficult. Her keen insight reads the Countess Countesa aright, and also Evan; and caring little for conventionality and worldly wisdom, she takes the lead, both before and after the willing of Beckley Court. But Clara has a hard struggle. She has to fight her 'booky', comfort-loving old father, as well as Sir Willoughby,—while they are the latter's guests. And she has given her word. That promise is to Clara the graver difficulty. To be sure the struggle is made easier by circumstances,—as it was also in the case of Browny and of Rose,—but I think Clara would have broken away, even if Crossjay had not overheard, and reported, Sir Willoughby's declaration, for she realizes more and more clearly each day, that she cannot be the sort of wife Sir Willoughby expects her to be, his echo and the passive recipient of his favors; and her natural truthfulness rebels strongly against the pretence.

It is this sense of honesty, and the courage to act according to its suggestion, which is the most outstanding thing about these three, and the quality which Meredith chiefly admired.

More interesting and more mature, is Diana of the Crossways. Her easy unconscious disregard of what the gossips may have to say,—except on one memorable occasion,—and her serene confidence in her own powers, recalls Sandra Belloni; her keen intuitive power, her ability to read character and
situation correctly, suggests Cecilia Halkett, or Emmy, Lady Dunstan; but most of all she resembles Clara Middleton. She is Clara intensified. Quite as fond of the open, and just as sincere, she passes through a somewhat similar, but much more severe ordeal, and she is infinitely more witty. Indeed, her sparkling epigrams become somewhat wearying before the end, and the reader finds himself hoping that Diana as well as Mr. Sullivan Smith, may play a silent part in the next act. Although hasty and impulsive, restless and passionate, she is generally ruled by reason, for she has that active and alert type of mind that is not easily lulled to sleep. On one occasion it did sleep, and sleep soundly, almost incredibly so, but when it wakened, its keenness was not found dulled. And that one occasion does not seem to me impossible or even altogether inconsistent in a woman of Diana's temperament. It was unusual, very; but Diana is by no means an ordinary person. Outwardly calm and collected, her keen sensibilities and her naturally impulsive manner, are not in evidence, only because they are so firmly controlled by her mind. Dacier thinks her cold and she seems so, but the moment he touches her, her self-control vanishes. She recovers partially, but her mind does not regain the ascendancy, and for the night, she is a creature of impulse. Her action is deliberate, but not reasoned, and until her reason is reawakened by Dacier's morning announcement, she has no comprehension of the situation. But it is not her wit, it is not even her natural and healthy buoyancy of spirit or her friendship with Emmy, which so attracts one. It is Diana herself, for she not only attracts, but what is far more
important, she holds the love and admiration of all who know her,- of all who are worth considering that is,- from her maid Danvers to the impossibly perfect and rather dull Tom Redworth.

Somewhat nobler, although less brilliant, perhaps even less charming, is Nesta Radnor, who seems to me to approach Meredith's ideal more nearly than do any of the others. She is sister to Clara but her wider acquaintance and more varied experience, her finer sensibilities and keener perceptions, added to the undaunted courage and enduring truthfulness which Clara shares, place her even higher than the 'Mountain Echo'. All of Meredith's novels are studies of youth developing through ordeals, but in no case is the ordeal more painful, more prolonged, and more intense, and the development more satisfying, than it is in One of Our Conquerors. Fanciful, imaginative, passionate, with an unusually active mind, Nesta has been kept ignorant of the fact that she is the daughter of a socially unrecognised union. Her perfect health, keen wit, and naturally buoyant spirit have been sufficient to place her at her ease in any company of men or women, but once the question of her parents' relation is raised, she must know the truth. Their social position, and the frequent movings, together with the evasive replies to her enquiries, have made her thoughtful; but it is her friendship with Judith Marsett which opens her eyes. The effect of this awakening is another psychological study like that of Modern Love, but Nesta does not go down in the struggle, severe as it is. Her clear reason and her warm understanding heart, unite to stand against the hard facts, and to see beyond them. A girl at the beginning of
the struggle, at the end she is a mature woman, and a woman who will not desert the unfortunate Judith. Moreover she is not embittered.

"There was the danger, that her aroused young ignorance would charge the whole of the misery about and abroad upon the stronger of those two: and another danger, that the vision of the facts below the surface would discolour and disorder her views of existence."

But her respect for her male friends and the steady balance of her nature averts these dangers. Far ahead she sees 'muffled things' she may do, and her marriage with Dartrey Fenellan, "her counsellor, her supporter and her friend" is an awakening to new life, "not to sink back upon a breast of love", but for "the having an ally and the being an ally, in resolute vision of strife ahead."

And it is in this study of Victor Radnor, Nataly, and Nesta that one finds more definitely perhaps than anywhere else, Meredith's attitude towards the position of woman in society. The entire study is a plea for courage, and for honesty, and for reason, the qualities which he finds so deficient in women, and which seem to him so very essential.

And he places the blame for this deficiency not so much on woman herself, as on her education, - or lack of it, - and on man for wishing to keep her in a state of "innocent ignorance".

"Not many men", he writes, "are trained to courage", but

1. One of Our Conquerors: Page 299.
2. One of Our Conquerors: Page 430.
"young women are trained to cowardice. For them to front an evil with plain speech is to be guilty of effrontery, to forfeit the waxen polish of purity, and therewith their commanding place in the market. I wonder in no degree that they indulge a craving to be fools or that many of them act the character. Jeer at them as little for not showing growth. You have reared them to this pitch, and at this pitch they have partly civilized you. Supposing you to want it done wholly, you must yield just as many points in your requisitions as are needed to let the wits of young women reap their due harvest, and be of good use to their souls. You will then have a fair battle, and a braver, with better results."

But Meredith does not suggest that woman's position will be perfected when the state of a 'fair battle' has been reached. In the case of each of these heroines to whom he has given such splendid strength of body, of mind, and of spirit, he suggests that completeness is only attained through union with a fitting mate, a comrade, but likewise one whom they will revere, one stronger than themselves. Even Diana, who in her conflict with society had 'cried out, "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."', changed her mind and looking at Redworth, "had to mask her being abashed and mastered."

1. Diana of the Crossways: Page 133.
And Nesta owned Dartrey "for leader, her fellow-soldier, warrior-friend, hero of her own heart's mould, but a greater."
IV. Conclusion.

To present adequately Meredith's conception of woman in society, nothing less than the novels themselves would be sufficient. It is possible, however, to approximate that conception, through a study of his attitude as revealed in theory in the *Essay on Comedy* and in some of the poems, and from the actual character portrayal in other poems and in the novels; and that is what this essay has attempted to do. There is, in the novels, much theorizing about woman, her 'rights' and her 'duties', her 'place' in society. Indeed I think Meredith has given expression, - in different wording generally,- to everything that had been said before in this regard, and to much that is still being discussed. But this theorizing, which I have barely mentioned, seems to me not only much less interesting, but much less important to an understanding of his own attitude that the actual character portrayal. It is as if the novelist, who is also in this case the Comic Spirit, had drawn aside the curtain with, - "Look on life itself. See clearly what the facts are. At the left here you may see a great assembly; fair young maidens, eager and hopeful; sad faces, which tell of much suffering; gay triflers who flit here and there as if they could never rest; and harder, less attractive faces: in all these the passions are uppermost. Farther over, you may see a smaller number, mature women for the most part, calm and confident: in these reason is the ruling force. At the right is a very small circle, toward which the members of the other groups turn at times, as if for help or inspiration: these are 'women of spirit'. And in the centre is another
small group, differing from these other, and yet bearing strong resemblances to each, for these women seem to combine some of the passion of the first group, with the intelligence of the second, and the 'soul' of the third. But they are not passive or complacent. They seem to be continually struggling with some difficulty, — That is life."

And it is life,— at least that part of life which is Meredith's literary world. His women are real and they are representative. The proportionate numbers of the various groups is not merely accidental; it is deliberate, studied, and truthful. The choice of these women, too, in whatever group they may be, are represented as struggling against existing conditions, not in rebellious mood, but thoughtfully, and not for selfish reasons primarily. And this, too, is life. But there is one thing that Meredith seems to have ignored in his theory of the suitable education of women and its result.

He is loud in his denouncement of the 'unnatural' education so largely prescribed for women. By 'unnatural' I mean the suppression, instead of the normal development of the healthy desires for exercise and amusement, and of what I have already more than once called the 'natural passions'. And chiefly, it seems to me, does he plead for courage, and for honesty, and for reason, in the business of life. With all that one is heartily in accord. But Meredith suggests that the ideal stage of mental development for men and women is the same, and with that one does not agree. He speaks repeatedly and admiringly of 'man-like brain', and in the Essay on Comedy
and more particularly in Lord Ormont and His Aminta, he recommends similar education for boys and girls, in the belief that similar education will lead to similar mental growth. And 'man-like brain' seems to be his ideal for both sexes. In carrying the idea of mental development to the extremity of 'sameness' for men and women, he seems to me to be ignoring the fundamental differences of the sexes, and thus to contradict, or at least be inconsistent with, his own theory of natural development. This is the more remarkable, also, because he recognizes, and accepts without question, essential differences of body and of spirit, and these, it seems to me, at least suggest essential differences of mind. Neither is 'sameness' the way of nature, for in what is generally called the 'natural world', development does not tend to make the species more similar, but to emphasise the points of distinction. And with regard to men and women it is not a case of equality or inequality but of difference, and 'natural development' will increase rather than lessen that difference.

But Meredith's portrayal of women,- again within his chosen field,- is, on the whole, more representative, more comprehensive, more lifelike, and at the same time, more idealistic, than that of any other English writer. One may forget the great majority of his clever sayings about these many of women; one may even forget the women themselves; but one will not forget the various types, the tragic figures, the eccentrics, the sentimentalists, the women of spirit, their false imitators the ascetics, and the care-free natural maidens; and one will remember particularly those heroines who represent the 'divine average'.
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