

X GEORGE ELIOT.*

1820-1880.

Now and then comes into the world a great soul, combined with a powerful intellect, which has power to make its presence felt as one of the supreme facts of an age—a human being speaking to all other human beings—a man or a woman with a word for all other men and women. These are they who mark eras in history and literature. Such were some of the great minds whom we have already studied. Such preëminently was she whom I do not hesitate to call the novelist of the century, our great woman-writer, George Eliot.

All that George Eliot was, cannot be told. She had many phases. What her influence has been, cannot be estimated. Out of a heart, beating in passionate sympathy with universal humanity, she has spoken in fervent words that can never fall lightly. She appears to us in many lights—as woman, as scholar, as author, and as philosopher. In many lights, too, has she been held before the public—studied, discussed, criticised, condemned, admired.

To present her broad personality completely, would require the scope of volumes, and who would dare to expect success in the effort to do so? To attempt even to outline her life and work within the limits of a single afternoon's talk, produces a singular sense of embarrassment.

So large and important is the subject of George Eliot's work, her influence on literature and on life, that time can be taken for only the briefest sketch of her history, interesting as a more detailed account of it might be. For those who wish to study it further, there is excellent material provided in Miss Blind's "Life of George Eliot" (Famous Women Series), in "George Eliot, her Life, Writings and Philosophy," by George Willis Cooke, and in the only detailed Memoir, in three volumes, based upon the novelist's own journals and letters, and edited by her husband, J. W. Cross. In addition to these, Poole's Index will give references to almost innumerable magazine articles of biographical and critical interest.

* Paper read before a ladies' literary club, Toronto.