

## ★ GEORGE ELIOT.\*

1820-1880.

In these four novels, which constitute the earlier works of George Eliot, common life is mainly treated, and that with a directness, freshness and vigor, that have never been surpassed by any writer. Many critics consider them the best of her books. They differ from her later and more elaborate works, largely in their more powerful realism, their clearer insight, their richer humor and deeper pathos, and their greater simplicity and conciseness of expression. They are written out of the author's own heart: materials are drawn from her own early surroundings and associations. The characters are sometimes sketched from among the people she knew and loved, and incidents which had actually taken place and were stored up in her wonderful memory are woven into the stories. Hence the remarkable vividness and skill in delineation, and the spontaneity and sympathy which characterize them. There is a vitality about them that fails to impress us in the later books, a more dramatic individuality in the characters. In these, too, the spiritual atmosphere, the religious and ethical spirit, has a spontaneous vigor which is exceptional.

When George Eliot began to write "*Romola*," she went to altogether new sources for her inspiration and material. The scene of the story is laid in Florence, in the fifteenth century, and the great Florentine reformer, Savonarola, is introduced as one of the leading characters. Its central idea is a great moral thesis, that found in all of George Eliot's books, based on the doctrine of retribution. Looked at from one point of view it is a study of impulse, and we have a powerful presentation of a spiritual truth in the delineation of the character of Tito Melema, the handsome Greek, with his gracious, winning manner, his rare intellect, and his affectionate disposition, who is brought, not by actual vice, but by his selfish love of ease and aversion to whatever is painful or disagreeable, to the most complete and terrible moral ruin. The character of *Romola*, from

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