

A PRIESTESS OF RIGHT.

A Study of George Eliot's "Romola."

TO prosper in one field of fiction by no means precludes the possibility of failure in another. The wonderful picture of 15th century life and character given by George Eliot in "*Romola*" offers the most brilliant testimony to the versatility of her powers. Lacking somewhat of the vigorous simplicity and powerful realism found in those works whose materials were drawn from her own associations, it atones for this by a completeness of detail and perspective, and a vividness of historical colouring, but little inferior to that of "*Ivanhoe*." And though Scott remains her superior in his power of becoming imbued with the time-spirit of days historically remote, the woman novelist far surpasses him in her comprehension of the human soul. He displays to us objective acts and their visible actors. She, in addition, analyzes underlying motives and forces, delineating life for us in those subjective aspects which remain unchanged throughout the sweep of centuries. In Sir Walter's characters we are struck chiefly with what is typical of their times; in George Eliot's we marvel rather at the essential continuity of human nature amid changes of age and race. Although destinies are shaped by the overwhelming powers of heredity and external forces, we are given her conscious recognition of the truth that in man's determining environment, as in his soul's response to it, there are throughout all time essentials unchangeable. "The great river-courses which have shaped the lives of men have hardly changed; and those other streams, those life-currents that ebb and flow in human hearts, pulsate to the same great needs, the same great loves and terrors." The warriors brave and maidens fair of Scott live and act in their own age, but they do not live

with us. The throbbing hearts and loving souls of Eliot belong to a race the world still knows. Whether or no they as truly typify Florentine life as the knights and ladies do that of Norman England, we cannot but absorb to the full the spirit of that life which they do possess. More romantic than "*Romola*," but less intensely human, the historical novels of Scott compare with it in some such way (but without the same disparity) as do the "*Leatherstocking Tales*" of Cooper with Hawthorne's "*Scarlet Letter*."

With its recognition of the supremacy of moral purpose, the awful reality of the soul's life, and its possibilities, grand or terrible, this book furnishes perhaps the most forceful instance of the author's constant presentation of the doctrine of retributive justice. With the unhurried certainty of Nemesis, the moral tragedy of a selfish life moves on to its climax in the career of Tito Melema, who at first "thought of nothing cruel or base," but who, "because he tried to slip away from everything that was unpleasant, and cared for nothing else so much as his own safety, came at last to commit some of the basest deeds."

Our sympathies incline towards the handsome Greek youth who arrives in Florence amid the tumult and discontent following the death of that magnificent tyrant, Lorenzo de Medici. We know not yet all that the false, selfish years are to bring forth, or that the bright, open-faced adventurer has an adopted father now in Moslem slavery. And Tito is possessed of jewels sufficient for a ransom; here comes the first subtle temptation. He knows not where to search for Baldassarre; he will wait for some clue, at least. He sells the jewels and invests the money. Why throw aside the literary and political career which his talents have already opened up for