



# George Eliot; a Critical Study of Her Life, Writings and Philosophy

*George Willis Cooke*

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The poet and the novelist write largely out of personal experience, and must give expression to the effects of their own history. What they have seen and felt, gives shape and tone to what they write; that which is nearest their own hearts is poured forth in their books. To ignore these influences is to overlook a better part of what they write, and is often to lose the explanation of many features of their work. Shakspeare is one of those who are of no time or place, whose words gain no added meaning in view of what he was and how he lived; but it is not so with a great number of the best and most inspiring writers. The era in which they lived, the intellectual surroundings afforded them by their country and generation, the subtle phases of sentiment and aspiration of their immediate time and place, are all essential to a true appreciation of their books. It is so of Goethe, Byron, Shelley, Hugo, Wordsworth, Emerson, and how many more! As we must know the eighteenth century in its social spirit, literary tendencies, revolutionary aims, romantic aspirations, philosophy and science, to know Goethe, so must we know the nineteenth century in its scientific attainments, agnostic philosophy, realistic spirit and humanitarian aims, in order to know George Eliot. She is a product of her time, as Lessing, Goethe, Wordsworth and Byron were of theirs; a voice to utter its purpose and meaning, as well as a trumpet-call to lead it on. As Goethe came after Lessing, Herder and Kant, so George Eliot came after Comte, Mill and Spencer. Her books are to be read in the light of their speculations, and she embodied in literary forms what they uttered as science or philosophy.

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