Chapter II

George Meredith

BIOGRAPHY AND INFLUENCES

Normally it is the practice in literary theses to provide the biographical details of the authors concerned, though in some cases such details may not be so necessary, where as in some cases they are essential to know and understand the author and his work. George Meredith falls into the secondary category, because Meredith’s works are the natural products of the events of his life. Even his attitude or his ‘philosophy’ of life was evolved on the basis of the different vicissitudes underwent by him during his lifetime. So the important landmarks of his life are selected and presented in this chapter.

George Meredith was born on Feb 12, 1828, and he was the only child of Augustus and Jane Meredith. Actually the name ‘Meredith’ is of Welsh origin. His grandfather Melchizedek Meredith always felt convinced of his descent from the ancient chieftains and Kings. Though the alleged descent was glorious, it did not reflect in his financial condition. Mel Meredith was a tailor at Portsmouth, catering to the needs of the naval officers. He was very popular with all around for his
pleasing and courteous manners, prompt service and handsome and attractive personality.

Almost all of the biographers of George Meredith invariably present the biographical details of Mel Meredith because they find many similarities between the grandfather and the grandson.

Melchizedek Meredith was extraordinary and he was undoubtedly remarkable. To begin with, he was a fine figure of a man, tall, good looking, and agreeable. He had qualities of character which enabled him to be on friendly terms with many of his customers and patrons, among whom must have been most of the distinguished naval officers of the time and many of the country squires of the locality. With some of the latter he became so popular that he was a welcome guest at their dinner tables, and extremely well liked by their ladies. He kept horses and hunted, and was an officer in the Portsmouth Yeomanry Cavalry during the threat of Napoleonic invasion. In fact, he was a very passable imitation of a swell gentleman, and there is no need to disbelieve the story of his being mistaken for a Marquis during a visit to Bath.

His social aspirations, of course, were a handicap to the business. He lived beyond his means, seldom sent in a bill, and left large debts
when he died. Of his five beautiful daughters four married well: one to a brewer; one to a prosperous grocer and banker who was Mayor of Portsmouth in 1833; one to a Lieutenant in the Marines who subsequently rose to be General Sir S. B. Ellis, K. C. B.; and one to a purser in the Royal Navy who became Consul-General in the Azores. Two of these daughters died in 1812 and 1813. The other three figure conspicuously in the pages of *Evan Harrington*, along with the pervading personality of their defunct parent, ‘the Great Mel’. Their brother Augustus can only be described as ineffective and insignificant. At the time of his father’s death he was intending to be a doctor, but in obedience to the masterful ‘Mrs. Mel’ gave up this ambition and did his best to train himself for the distasteful profession which circumstances imposed on him. Good looking and gentlemanly, he evidently lacked ability and initiative. He was careless in money matters and fond of entertaining his friends, and after ‘Mrs. Mel’s’ death the business steadily declined.

When Mel Meredith died, his son Augustus was abroad, and he returned immediately. The grief of Augustus at his father’s death was doubled when he learnt that the finances of the shop were at the lowest. He had to take over the charge of the shop rather unwillingly. Augustus was a handsome young man with a fanciful nature lacking in
commonsense and business-like attitude. Augustus was brought up during the times of prosperity, and developed a speculative and romantic attitude toward life. His physical stature had a natural dignity, and his handsome features misled the onlookers to think him to be some Count incognito. He was inclined to be alone and interested more in books. He liked intellectual associations, and was a member of the Portsmouth Literary and Philosophical Society. If left alone to his effort and ambition, probably Augustus would have liked to become a writer. However Augustus obeyed the decree of his mother and took over his father’s tailoring shop. As the Napoleonic wars ended, the tailoring business slowly dwindled.

The stately life lived by Mel Meredith tells much about George Meredith’s early years and moulding of his mental attitudes. George was always sure that he had come of the Welsh blood and his mother had been of pure Irish. For proof of this, he had the names of Meredith and MaCnamara. In his notions of Race he was often at the mercy of the pseudo-science of his day, with its theories of fixed characteristics and its contrast of Saxon and Celt. He attributed a stolid and oppressive lack of imagination to the Saxons of England and found in the Celts of Wales and Ireland virtues of sympathetic communion and emotional insight. In his novels there are so many Welsh characters with admirable superior
moral fibre and humanist passion compared to the English with their class-forms, hypocrisy and egoism.

It is not only interesting but also pertinent to note a fact related to the marriage between Augustus and Jane, which is recorded by Lionel Stevenson in his book “The Ordeal of George Meredith”. He writes,

“As a safeguard against the bridegroom’s impulse toward extravagance, the marriage settlement stipulated that he could never touch either the capital or the interest, and the trustees could not sell the annuities. After her death the trust fund was to descent any child or children who might survive. With this matter ratified, the wedding took place on May 1st 1828”. The dowry amount was a thousand pounds invested with 4% annuities. How this decision of Michael MaCnamara really proved prophetic can be seen shortly.

On 1st May 1823, Augustus married Jane MaCnamara, the daughter of an innkeeper, and George their only son was born on 12 Feb. 1828. The child had grown in an atmosphere of affection, luxury and care, in spite of the fact that Augustus’ financial condition was not very satisfactory. In addition to this Augustus had faced another type of humiliation. His sisters, who were married off in to high status families, always felt that the marriage with Jane MaCnamara was not up to their
status. Jane's father was only an innkeeper. However in July 1833, Jane Meredith died and George was too young to feel the grief of this loss. Augustus made all efforts to keep the child happy and comfortable. He was sent to St. Paul School, South Sea. In 1838 the business of Augustus ran into bankruptcy.

The death of Jane Meredith opened the case of invested annuities. In the Court Augustus testified that he was looking after the child George well, and so asked the invested amount be handed over to him. But the Court appointed a trustee to look after George and rejected the request of Augustus. So he surrendered his guardianship of George to Charles Henry Winstead, the solicitor-trustee. After some time Augustus left for London, along with the young housekeeper Matilda Beckett whom he married in 1839. This type of behaviour from Augustus was probably anticipated by Michael MaCnamara, and his prophecy actually came true. Though George did not feel the seriousness at that time, he was very unhappy with his father. It is said, "The consequence was lifelong contempt, which he expressed once in later years in the intemperate remark that Augustus was 'a muddler and a fool'".

When Augustus left for London, George was left at Hampshire, among his maternal relations. He definitely felt lonely and was even
disappointed by his father's behaviour. He described his emotional experiences of this period in the Harry Richmond. Here he narrates the different phases of adolescence, especially his past fellow friends and the new companions. He found the difficulty in adjusting in the new environment. He defines the advent of a sense of inner conflict, of a self-divided and bewildered state of mind. In the Evan Harrington also Meredith puts all his anguish of class feeling in a lad torn between the sense of native worth and an inculcated fantasy of high breeding.

The next important stage in Meredith's life was his stay in the Moravian School at Neuweid, on the Rhine in Germany. He stayed there two years from 1842, without any break of a holiday. In those days many English boys attended this school due to its reputation for moral training and scholastic discipline. The school was founded in 1756 by Prince Alexander. Here nature-studies were encouraged. Pupils were helped to make collection of butterflies, plants and minerals. 'Sack on back, staff in hand, the boys trudged out in to the country, with donkeys for the youngest'. There the pupils were taught 'to practise what you teach', and to do as you would be done by without insisting on dogmatic doctrines. They were also allowed full liberty of thought and worship. Here the boys practised austere habits. There was no doctrine of hell preached here by the Brothers; all emphasis was laid on the Brotherhood
of Man. During his stay here, Meredith read the Arabian Nights, which fed his imagination with the fantastic, which reflected in his novel 'The Shaving of Shagpat'.

There is no doubt that George Meredith was very much influenced by the training at the Moravian School. It helped him to rise higher from the narrow religious prejudices and to acquire liberal outlook. He imbibed the value of good manners and social courtesy, which he practised all through his life. In addition to these, Meredith imbibed the romantic and poetic associations, which recur in his novels. Summing up the influence of the Moravian School on George Meredith, Sassoon writes, “one can say that he gained more at Neuweid than he would have done had he shared the experience of Shelley and Swinburne at Eton”.

When Meredith left Neuweid, he was aware of the dichotomy of life in its two different shapes -- the life in Portsmouth and life in Neuweid. The former had deified the class values of the Victorian middle class, while over gilding them with vague aristocratic glamour of the 18th century leisured scorns. While the later displayed a totally opposed system of values, in which the world’s criteria of money and
power had no meaning and all that mattered was the individual’s intrinsic qualities, his readiness to work for the brotherhood of man.

Back from Neuweid, Meredith found that his financial matters were not properly managed. So he started his job as an articled clerk with R. S. Charnock, a solicitor. Though his inclination was toward writing, he accepted this job in view of the financial constraints. It appears that Meredith did not like Charnock, who, as Meredith commented later on, ‘had neither business nor morals’. But he was fascinated with personal traits of Charnock like his long walks, robust and cynical jokes. But some biographers feel the favourable influence of Charnock on Meredith’s literary ventures.

But, during this period, a greater influence on Meredith was that of Thomas Love Peacock. Meredith and Edward, the son of Thomas Love Peacock, were very good friends, who shared long walks and pleasant discussion. The young Meredith was very handsome and attracted many especially women: one remembered his lavender gloves, another his crisp hair; and all were impressed by his gracious courtesy, and by the sudden access of shyness with which he always declined to give his name.
Their friendship enabled Meredith to visit Edward’s house very often, where he met the old scholar. He was a reputed man in the field of letters and also was known for his association with some of the Romantic poets like Shelley. Meredith’s meetings with Peacock were exciting, and their discussions definitely helped Meredith to consolidate his romantic conception of life and also sharpening his literary technique. Meredith had a more magnetic attraction in visiting the Peacocks’ house, and that was the widowed daughter of Thomas Love Peacock, Mary Edith Nicolls. She was married to Nicolls, a naval officer who was drowned within three months of the marriage. They felt like a perfect pair of ideal lovers in spite of many undesirable factors.

Mary Nicolls was beautiful, witty, literary minded, and an amateur poetess. She had the liveliness and social sophistication of one who had mixed with the world that rode in Rotten Row, and a nature susceptible to the attraction of men of genius or talent. Unquestionably, she was a bewitching apparition for young Meredith, and her charms have been immortalised by him in prose and verse seldom, if ever, surpassed as illuminations of the rapture of first love. Enthralled by the strong enchantment of her physical attraction, he also saw in her an intellectual brilliance fit to mate with his own. For this was the daughter of one who had been a friend of Shelley, whose graceful songs and
satiric novels had charmed the chosen spirits of his time, and whose social background was rich in literary associations and intimacies. Alluring and exciting must that brother and sister have seemed to his inexperienced, un-warned of their instability of temperament, oblivious to everything but Mary's fascinating qualities. She was six and a half years older than he was; she was sentimental and sarcastic by turns; she was argumentative and un-acquiescent. He had no premonition that any of these facts would be to his disadvantage. She was very beautiful, vivacious and actively participated in the intellectual and literary discussions. Meredith proposed to her, and she refused thrice. Her father also was not in favour of their marriage. But ultimately Meredith and Mary were married in August, 1849. The register was signed by T. L. Peacock, though he disapproved of the match, for obvious reasons, but cannot have failed to realise that he was acquiring a son-in-law whose mental abilities gave promise of high achievements.

The marriage proved to be a great blunder for both. It was hasty, and based on false idealism. It did not take much time for them to realise, that romantic love would be a disaster in the absence of stable job or regular income. After their honeymoon, the couple stayed in Peacock's house, where their life was full of tension, monetary problems and abortions. Meredith was trying his level best to make writing for
earning money, the father-in-law and his wife insisted on him to find out a regular job. However Meredith’s writings were not good enough to earn enough money to run a family and a house independently. Mrs Mary Meredith was habituated to a luxurious life, fashionable company of men and free indulgence in personal and social habits. During these days, when Meredith was working hard for writing for money, she was spending a happy time with a painter Henry Wallis. Meredith had his own suspicion about her keeping away from him. In 1858 Mary ran away with Henry Wallis, which shocked Meredith. His young son Arthur was with him. Abandoned by Wallis, Mary returned to London, and sought forgiveness and reconciliation with her husband. Meredith’s anger and rage were so high that he was not ready to see her, nor allowed his young son to see his mother. He even threatened with dire consequences if she attempted to meet him or the son. According to his biographers, this was the most bleak period of Meredith’s life.

Mary’s elopement created various embarrassing situations for Meredith, from every side of life. He had to fight against odds, as the elopement actually resulted in a moral and psychological conflict. But fortunately Meredith could overcome these crises, only due to his friends and acquaintances. The greatest relieving factor at this juncture was his meeting with Janet Duff Gordon. Though he knew her when she
was a child, his second meeting with her was a surprise. Janet was seventeen, beautiful and matured, and Meredith was still in the valley of tragic despondency caused by Mary’s elopement. It is stated, that as a friend of her child-hood he was accepted on terms of uninhibited intimacy:****she and Meredith took long walks together over the Commons through the woods; trees-screened Black Pools being one of their favourite haunts”.

It was on this background that Meredith wrote ‘Evan Harrington’ and this novel is full of autobiographical under-tones and Rose Jocelyn was none else than Janet.

The ensuing period was comparatively better for Meredith. First of all Meredith was gradually emerging out of the shocking tragedy of his life. Secondly his companionship with Janet filled him with new hopes and even optimistic ends. Thirdly he acquired many friends who provided with a new climate of assurance, confidence and inspiration to work. Fourthly his financial difficulties eased to some extent due to his writing and also other jobs. In those days the young Arthur was his constant companion. Though he felt the burden of his care, Meredith involved in this job willingly and so with pleasure and contentment. The intensity of this relationship and the resultant problems kept Meredith busy and preoccupied.
However Meredith's make-believe romance with Janet seemed to end, when Janet was engaged to Henry James Ross. Meredith was mentally prepared for this. Since then he undertook the role of an elderly advisor to her and yet the intimacy between then continued.

In 1859, Meredith wrote these lines to Janet:

"We sat beneath the humming pines
We knew that we must part.
I might not even speak by signs
The motions of my heart.
And as I took your hand, and gazed
Subdued into your eyes,
I saw the arm of Fate upraised—
And stilled the inward cries.
I saw that this could never be
Which I had dared to part:
And in the tear that fell from me,
There fell my life that day!"

Re-reading Meredith's letters towards the end of her life, Janet Ross was heard to exclaim, 'Good God! My poet must have been in love with me!' Jack Lindsay adds, "But that was just part of playing the conventional game. She wasn't such a fool as all that.... In the tear in which he says his life fell, what actually fell was the remnant of his social allusions." However it is reported that Janet Ross, in her old age,
sold all the Meredith’s letters to pay for the losses in Egyptian speculative business.

The next two years Meredith spent on European tour, visiting his favourite places, including the Alps, along with his son. During the same period Mary Meredith fell ill in London. Her last days were filled with deep sorrow serious illness and her yearning desire to be with her son Arthur and to reconcile with her husband. In 1861 Mary died and Meredith responded very coolly and commented in his letter to William Hardman, “when I entered the world again I found that one had quitted it who bore my name”. In spite of his indignation for his wife, Meredith was never harsh with her. He also never blamed her for the tragedy because he accepted his own share in the mistakes and misunderstandings.

The tragedy of his marriage and the tragic death of his wife Mary opened Meredith’s heart and mind for a deep reflection. Though he was not ready to discuss on this issue openly, he was constantly reflecting on it. The whole story of his tragic marriage forced him to search his heart, mind and memory. This severe self-examination found its expression in that subtly introspective, almost self-torturing poem ‘Modern Love’. “Once again we are faced with that curious self contradiction which runs
through the life of Meredith. The man himself does not come too well, for he showed himself somewhat cold and implacable in the face of suffering and sorrow that reduced his injuries to mere trifles..... his pride would not allow him to speak a forgiving word and make the generous gesture. But the poet in him cannot be made a party to this conspiracy of cold silence, and he traces, with a rare subtlety and sympathy, the course of a tragedy, that shows us not an erring wife and a wronged husband but simply two unhappy lovers inevitably drifting apart. Meredith became for a time something of a misogynist, levelling sharp arrows of his against the creature Woman. But whatever man may have said and done, the writer took up a different attitude. Meredith, in his work, may have missed many opportunities, but he never afterwards missed an opportunity of championing a woman, and the arrows of his wit still quivering in the mark, are those that they can be seen transfixed complacent, tyrannical and egotistical males.’”

After 1862 Meredith concentrated on his work and published volumes of poetry, ‘Modern Love’ and ‘The Poems of English Roadside’. Besides, he also enjoyed the admiration of critics for his work. His new friendships and acquaintances provided him the necessary solace as well as inspiration. After the death of his wife and the marriage of Janet Meredith probably entertained the idea of a new
companion. In April 1863, Meredith was engaged to marry Marie Vulliamy, the daughter of a wool-manufacturer. They were married on September 28, 1864. During this time his son Arthur was not well, and he had continuous phases of ill health. On July 27, 1865, Marie Meredith gave birth to William Maxse Meredith. The young Arthur could not adjust with his stepmother, though she treated him with all possible love. It must be noted that Arthur had his own reasons not to have perfect satisfaction about his father. Arthur was pedantic minded and small in stature. Actually Arthur lived with his half-sister Edith Nicolls and there was no communication between the father and son for some time. However Meredith appeared to have done much to make Arthur’s career. Arthur fell ill and died on September 3 1890. The death of Arthur probably ended a relationship based on incompatibility of temperaments, which started with Meredith’s relationship with Mary Nicolls. It is pointed out, “nothing that could do to win his son’s confidence and affection”.6

Mrs Marie Meredith, the second wife, died in 1885, leaving George a widower a second time. From 1892 onwards, Meredith concentrated on his work, and his financial position increased. At the same time he was considered a celebrity. His house at Box Hill was a kind of pilgrimage centre for many English and foreign poets and critics.
"Prophet and apostle, he (Meredith) lived at Box Hill as John the Baptist lived in the desert as the John the Evangelist at Patmos."

Awards and rewards poured in plenty for the poet at this time. Meredith was elected as President of the Society of Author after the death of Tennyson in 1892. In 1905 Meredith was conferred with the Order of Merit by King Edward VII. Some full-length studies of his work also appeared during his lifetime. Some memoirs and personal interviews in the form of books appeared also at the same time. After a short illness, Meredith died on 18 May 1909.

Though in the last years of his life Meredith could not work hard due to old age and infirmity, the records say that he was active in his intercourse with his innumerable visitors. He also maintained his intellectual discussions. Meredith has always been a very entertaining conversationalist. He discussed high intellectual issues with the best thinkers of his day, with same ease as he discussed trivial things with young boys and girls.

George Meredith was fond of outward sports. He was interested in long walks and enjoyed the adventurous trips on to the hills and into the woods. Throughout his life he was devoted to boxing and swimming. It is interesting to note that his favourite metaphor is for
inward discipline was ‘whipping’. His life is a singular example of one who lived with full jest and delight. It is stated that life itself, life lived not by each single man alone, but as one of mankind, as part of a nature was so romantic so august, that Goethe hardly wished for further of divineness. The earth, in fact was god’s visible garment and the forces of life bring in their complex and endless interplay where weaving for him. His living vesture. Man was indeed a spirit and unutterable mystery of mysteries: looking inward he finds himself gazing at a whole sea of light and love.  

Meredith is always famous for his love of company, and he was always admired for his energetic nature. He always directed his energies not to turn away from life to some higher form, but placing himself nearer to life to support the soul on the body and through the body. Under the influence of Jean Paul Ritcher, Meredith always perceived the purity of immediate experience, and the whole chaos of life and its mysteries to be accepted and set forth not symbolically but as the fact is.

**INFLUENCES**

Meredith’s personality and his creative genius were moulded by some dominant influences. Meredith always felt that he had Welsh
blood in him and that his nature and temperament were more of the Celtic. During his school days at Neuweid, he imbibed much of German influences, like nature-mysticism and transcendental understanding of the problems of society and life.

Of all the formative influences on Meredith's personality the most significant was that of Neuweid brotherhood. It was a highly reputed institution in the mid-nineteenth century, which attracted the most promising young man from different European Countries. The institution was situated in a little town in the most romantic part of the Rhine country. The institution was specially singled out as a little Germanic principalities, with the aim of social progress and culture. Actually the Moravian school was founded by the liberal minded eighteenth century prince who thought that religious tolerance and liberty of thought and worship were essential for the moulding of the young minds. The education offered by the institution was inspiring. Along with Meredith there were several English men who had stayed there. Actually, it was described as the English period in that school. Prof. Henry Morley was a product of this institution. There was no formal process of education, but the association and the free and liberal syllabus allowed full freedom to the development of the wards' personality. Actually, it would be difficult to over estimate the
importance of his stay in the school, and in later years even Meredith credited this institution in a very generous fashion.

It may be interesting to survey the Germanic Scene during those days. The Germany Meredith saw was the Germany of the year immediately presiding 1848. There was enthusiastic and romantic liberalism and naturalism, and they were inspiring the educated classes. It stressed on social service, and liberalism penetrated into theology and free thought was in the air. This educational career on foreign soil gave Meredith an opportunity to escape from the provincialism of the mid-nineteenth century. It becomes clear that in those two years Meredith's intellectual and emotional mores were conditioned in liberalism, nationalism and religious tolerance. Meredith owed Germany a great deal more than it is usually estimated. It may be stated that it shaped his mind and determined the course of his thought and gave him certain romanticism. Even in the highest moments of his romantic spirit, Meredith was always guided by a purely intellectual element. This particular influence throws much light on his capacity for pure comedy. Though the Germanic influence was of a general nature, the influence of Jean Paul Rischer is of an individual nature. It is plainly apparent in his thought and style. It cannot be stated that the Germanic influence had only the brighter side and positive side on Meredith. He also inherited
some of the inherent disadvantages. Primarily, he developed a sense of
intellectual superiority, and he considered himself to be more gifted than
the others who attended the English schools. This trait made him to
think that he is markedly original and brilliant. As a result of which he
always faced the danger of becoming merely wilful, deliberately
formless and unnecessarily fantastic. It had a very adverse affect on his
creative genius.

Meredith was also under the influence of his father-in-law
Thomas Love Peacock, and it helped him to absorb many new
conceptions regarding history and social traditions. More than anything
else, Meredith had formed his prose style from the various aspects of
Peacock. "He used to declare that it was a great advantage to him in his
youth to have been associated with Peacock, and that Peacock’s writings
had been a great model for him. It is easy in comparing the novels of
Mr. Meredith with those of his father-in-law to trace the influence that
helped him to form his style, and in doing so perhaps to regret that he
had not chosen another model". 9

Actually George Meredith was very uncomfortable in the late
Victorian Age. He was conscious of his own intellectual brilliancy and
dynamic attitude towards life. He looked down upon his contemporary
writers who indulged in realism. From a particular point of view, Meredith's comic theory was an outcome of his apathy for the so-called Victorian realism in fiction.

There were so many influences that moulded the personality, literary style and thought of Meredith. Carlyle's ideas are seen in action in *Beauchamp's Career*, where, too, the spirit of Ruskin haunts the Venetian scenes. Many of those most eminent in thought and letters were among his nearest friends; Cotter Morison, Leslie Stephen, James Thomson, Hyndman the socialist, John Morley, York Powell, G. W. Foote the rationalist, Edward Clodd, R. L. Stevenson. Stevenson and Leslie Stephen sat, and were aware that they sat, for two of his characters presented as types of modern man at his best. Meredith did not have much respect for Tennyson's poetry and said, that the "Sir Pandarus public... corrupted this fine singer...Isn't there a scent of damned hypocrisy in all this lisping and vowelled purity of the Idylls? It is fashionable. It pleases the rose-pink ladies, it sells".¹⁰

No religion can be valid that rejects knowledge. We may fail to arrive at truth; we must, at any rate, strive towards it unshrinkingly. Meredith accepted evolution as an hypothesis that cast flood-light on human history, and by enabling man to organise his life for attainable
ends provided a basis for morality. For what may lie beyond, man must have faith in the wider incidence of all that is revealed. Meredith and Swinburne, in different, ways, tried to bring the new knowledge into their general scheme of things, and both aimed to find an altruistic religion reconciling scientific thought with human idealism. In Swinburne's symbolical interpretation of Kantian metaphysics, the soul of all things attains its highest realisation in man:

"Man, pulse of my centre, and fruit of my body, and seed of my soul.

One birth of my bosom:

One beam of mine eye;

One topmost blossom

That scales the sky;

Man, equal and one with me, man that is made of me, man that is I.

Meredith told Edward Clodd:

"I wrote verse before I was nineteen some of it which I wished could be suppressed, as not been published in 1851 volume which I brought out at my own risk, losing £50 or £60 on the venture chiefly by
that in my poetry which emphasises the unity of life, the soul that
breadths through the Universe, do I wished to be remembered, ------ for
the spiritual is the eternal. Only a few read my verse and yet it is that
for which I care most. It is vexatious to see how judges from whom one
looks for discernment miss the point.”

These words definitely recreate Meredith’s discouragement and
desperation, suffered at the beginning of his writing career. He was
caught in the midst of a triple predicament, financial difficulties,
domestic disturbances and lack of readers’ response and admiration.
But Meredith stuck to his aims. He clearly tells in the above passage
that even small reading public would be enough to receive his message
of life. It is prophetic of Meredith to anticipate only a select few reading
public would labour to read his words. Meredith also told Edward
Clodd about his method of writing novel. He said, “I never outline my
novels before starting on them; I live day and night with my characters.
As I wrote of Diana and other leading types I do nourishment, as it were
from their breast”.

His art of characterisation is definitely indicated in
these words. Meredith lives his characters and he feels and understands
them from inside, and he attempts to describe the various steps of their
mental processes.
Meredith's views on religion are liberal and unorthodox. He is a free thinker in the broadest sense. Meredith said, "The man who has no mind of his own lends it to the priest." Meredith supported secular education as the only solution of the religious problems. He strongly believes in Nature, "The expression of those firm loss which we name god." He never emphasises on a personal god or a future life. He trusted on the oneness between Mother Earth and Man. Meredith always regretted the lack of one thing. He said, "When I was young had there been given me a little sunshine of encouragement what an impetus to better work would have been mine". He adds, "So whenever I can give honest praise, I will not stint it, although I remind those who hunger of it that if they will be drenched with honey they must accept the wasps ---- Most of the young novelist seem to me not to have read and observed enough - their books lacks the elusiveness which is a note of culture and evidence of character and study". Meredith stated that history is inferior to fiction because history does not accommodate fiction but fiction absorbs history. When Carlyle asked him to write history, Meredith replied that he would write fiction only for this reason. Meredith opined, "You may have histories but you cannot have novels on periods so long ago. A novel can only reflect the moods of men and women around us, and after all, in depicting the present we are dealing
with the past, because the one is enfolded in the other. I cannot stomach the modern historical novel any more than I can novels which are three forth dialects”.

Edward Clodd recollected some of his meetings with Meredith. He commented, “Meredith was a born tease – the Comic Spirit was unquenchable in him, and not even the discomfort of his victim check it, till in the mellowness which in his case, old age happily brought the tartness banished”.

“Some years ago, as a result of an operation he was put on a low diet - farinaceous stuff and the like. One evening eating only half of the pudding which was his staple (Bhrmeside) feast, in contrast with the fair set before his guest, the maid in taking away the dish said – “Oh, if you please, Sir, does this puddin’ want savin’?” That was enough. Looking at her solemnly he said, “Now, my good girl, you, I believe, a church goer, ask me if this pudding wants saving. Do you think that the pudding has a soul that it stands in need of salvation, as we are told we all do? Take it away, Elizabeth and let me never hear you ask such a funny question again”. And, with trembling hands that boded ill for the safe deposit of the dish, it was carried to the kitchen.”
Meredith’s attitude to politics is more practical, and he shows a strong feeling of enlivened common sense. His democratic ideal is tempered by a comprehension of facts and the probable as well as the desirable future to which they may lead. His political precepts are founded on caution and wakeful knowledge. He was a radical and also liberal in his political views.

Meredith’s literary output was considerable. He wrote nearly fifteen novels, a volume of poetry, and a collection of short stories. Besides he published the “The Idea of Comedy and the Uses of the Comic Spirit”. His articles on different authors and themes appeared in the contemporary journals. Meredith’s letters are collected and edited by C. L. Cline in three volumes.
REFERENCE

1 The Ordeal of George Meredith, Lionel Stevenson, p.5
2 Meredith, Siegfried Sassoon: p.4
3 Lionel Stevenson p.79
4 George Meredith, p. 103-104
5 George Meredith. Priestly J. B., p 17-18
6 Sassoon. p. 181
7 Photiades George Meredith. His Life, Genius and Teaching. p.59
8 The Life of George Meredith. Sencourt R. E. p.13
9 Memories of George Meredith. Lady Butcher. p.92
10 quoted from Meredith’s Letters by Able, 47
11 George Meredith: Some recollections. Edward Clodd p. 223
12 ibid, p. 24
13 ibid
14 Quoted by Edward Clodd in his “Some reflections”.