# THE WORKS OF GEORGE MEREDITH. MEMORIAL EDITION, VOLUME XXIII

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The works of George Meredith. Memorial edition, volume XXIII by George Meredith

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# **GEORGE MEREDITH**

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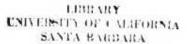
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VOLUME
XXIII

## GEORGE MEREDITH

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FACSIMILE REPRODUCTION OF A PAGE FROM AN EARLY
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#### ESSAY

#### ON THE IDEA OF COMEDY AND OF THE USES OF THE COMIC SPIRIT<sup>1</sup>

Good Comedies are such rare productions, that notwithstanding the wealth of our literature in the Comic element, it would not occupy us long to run over the English list. If they are brought to the test I shall propose, very reputable Comedies will be found unworthy of their station, like the ladies of Arthur's Court when they were reduced to the ordeal of the mantle.

There are plain reasons why the Comic poet is not a frequent apparition; and why the great Comic poet remains without a fellow. A society of cultivated men and women is required, wherein ideas are current and the perceptions quick, that he may be supplied with matter and an audience. The semi-barbarism of merely giddy communities, and feverish emotional periods, repel him; and also a state of marked social inequality of the sexes; nor can he whose business is to address the mind be understood where there is not a moderate degree of intellectual activity.

Moreover, to touch and kindle the mind through laughter, demands more than sprightliness, a most subtle delicacy. That must be a natal gift in the Comic poet. The substance he deals with will show him a startling exhibition of the dyer's hand, if he is without it. People are ready to surrender themselves to witty thumps on the back, breast, and sides; all except the

A lecture delivered at the London Institution, February 1, 1877.