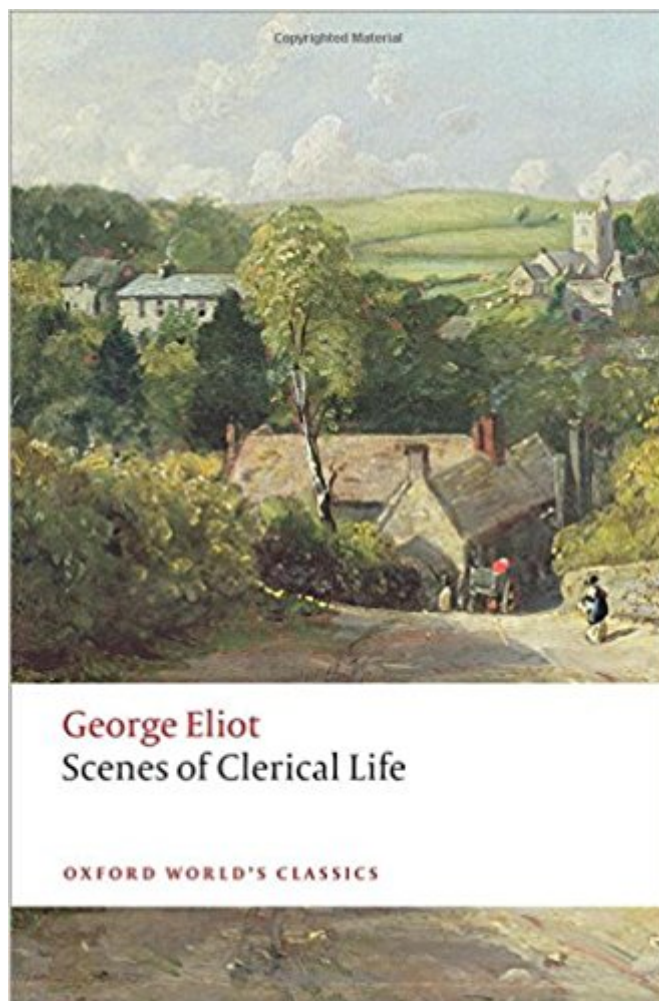


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# Scenes Of Clerical Life (Oxford World's Classics)



## Synopsis

'the only true knowledge of our fellow-man is that which enables us to feel with him' George Eliot's first published work consisted of three short novellas: 'The Sad Fortunes of the Reverend Amos Barton', 'Mr Gilfil's Love-Story', and 'Janet's Repentance'. Their depiction of the lives of ordinary men and women in a provincial Midlands town initiated a new era of nineteenth-century literary realism. The tales concern rural members of the clergy and the gossip and factions that a small town generates around them. Amos Barton only realizes how much he depends upon his wife's selfless love when she dies prematurely; Mr Gilfil's devotion to a girl who loves another is only fleetingly rewarded; and Janet Dempster suffers years of domestic abuse before the influence of an Evangelical minister turns her life around. These stories are remarkable for the tenderness with which Eliot portrays a bygone time of religious belief in a newly secular age, giving literary fiction an alternative language to religion and philosophy for the observation and understanding of human experience.

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## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

It's a little late for me to review a book that has been a prized classic of English literature for over a hundred years, so I'll confine my comments to the package - there are various editions of this book available, but given the choice I would opt for an Oxford World's Classic edition any day - the clarity of the typeface and the quality of the paper are superb, and the cover artwork is stunning. Brilliant new editions of two of George Eliot's timeless classics. \* Books Monthly \* These gripping stories depict the lives - gossip, rivalry, spats, loves and religious controversies - of ordinary 1800s people living in a provincial, God-fearing Midlands town. The unsolved everyday problems and confusions swirl and fascinate - much as they swirl and fascinate today. \* Val Hennessy, Daily Mail \*

Edited by Thomas A. Noble and Josie Billington. Josie Billington is Deputy Director, Centre for Research into Reading, Literature, and Society at the University of Liverpool.

I needed to become accustomed to 19th Century writing in the beginning of the first novella but once I did, all three of them flowed. The stories were both heartbreaking and extremely "modern" classic tales of life in the English countryside; they are stories we're all familiar with, even today. If I'd had to read them when I was in high school, I'm sure I wouldn't have liked them; I certainly wouldn't have 'gotten them'. However, as an adult "of a certain age", they resonate with what life is for so many of us. Ups and downs, people and personalities we've known, tragic events, all of the disappointments we experience...they're all here and remind me that there's really nothing new under the sun. George Eliot wrote her novels with compassion and a voice that still speaks to us today.

I realize that great Victorian novels are to some degree an acquired taste. To lovers of the genre, George Eliot stands out as perhaps its finest writer. *Scenes of Clerical Life* does not disappoint in this regard. The book is actually three books in one, each following a different character in their spiritual growth and worldly trials. Amos Barton, Maynard Gilfil, and Janet Dempster are indelible characters who endure believable tragedies. I found the story of Janet Dempster particularly inspiring. Janet is a battered wife who becomes an alcoholic to dull the pain of her life. Through a long and detailed personal and spiritual struggle, she learns forgiveness and not incidentally overcomes her alcoholism. I highly recommend *Scenes of Clerical Life*.

Read this for the language. The plots suffer from the sentimentality found in so many great 19C novels. Eliot draws you into pastoral English life and observes the scenes there with images that

cannot be found in weaker fiction of the kind. There is a delightful description of vicar Barton by his fire with pipe and gin, enjoying the contrasting wet and dry. Her language here holds you, stops the reader and forces him to sigh. These stories are full of wonderful insights and descriptions, and these are what hold the reader. Of course, it should be understood that Eliot will not be read by anyone much amused by pop/tv culture. If only we could be entertained by tv we wouldn't have to put effort into our rewards.

I am a passionate George Eliot fan. I really enjoy Victorian era literature, and George Eliot is one of my favourite Victorian writers, so much so that I did my thesis for my Honours degree on three of her novels - *Mill on the Floss*, *Daniel Deronda* and *Middlemarch*. I found *Scenes of Clerical Life* to be quite different to these novels - a set of three novellas loosely linked rather than the complex plots of her big novels. I enjoyed the strong sense Eliot conveyed of some of the pettiness and power struggles that dominate a small village, and the many ways curates are used as pawns by various villagers. I remember being told by one of my lectures at University that one of the characteristics of Victorian Literature is that it focuses on the individual and his/her role within society, whereas modern literature tends to be solipsistic and driven by the individual desires of the central character. That is certainly the case with this book. I particularly enjoyed the first story where Eliot's marvellous descriptive powers painted a strong, clear picture of the setting and village life. It made me realise how challenging life is for clergy who are not wealthy and have the right connections. Those not used to Victorian writing may find the pace a bit slow and some of the physical descriptions long-winded, but once you get used to that style and persevere, the rewards are considerable. George Eliot uses metaphor and imagery so effectively. A delightful little gem.

George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) was born in Warwickshire in 1819. Her father was an estate manager and farmer. Little Mary Ann knew life in rural England. She would make rural Britain during the time of the industrial revolution her main fictional focus. She is the author of great classics "*Middlemarch*" "*Adam Bede*" "*The Mill on the Floss*" "*Romola*" and "*Daniel Deronda*." Prior to the publication of these classics there is the charming and touching work "*Scenes of a Clerical Life*." Mary Ann was living without benefit of clergy with the author/scientist/man of letters George Henry Lewes who couldn't divorce his mad wife to marry the homely but brilliant Mary Ann (she spoke seven languages and had written widely on biblical criticism, science, book reviews and essays of erudition and wit). Lewes suggested she try her hand at fiction. The result is this collection of three stories which was published monthly in the liberal "*Westminster Review*" owned by the Blackwood

Family in 1857. It was later published in book form under the pen name of "George Eliot". Charles Dickens was the only critic who correctly observed that these stories had to have been written by a woman. The three tales are: 1. The Sad Fortunes of the Rev. Amos Barton - The setting for this story as for the other two is the mythical Midlands town of Milby. Barton is an average clergyman who is not well liked by his parishioners. He is in dire poverty supporting several children and a sickly wife Millie. When Mrs. Barton dies we see how the church folks support Barton in his grief. The story is short and touching. 2. Mr. Gilfil's Love Story. This second clergyman in the trilogy of tales is a kindhearted old minister of the gospel. Eliot takes us back to 1788 to the story of his lost love for the beautiful Caterina. Caterina was born in Italy to an opera singer. When he died she was taken to England to be raised by a rich family. Her chief purpose is to sing for the family. She falls in love with a wealthy aristocratic soldier who dies. Mr. Gilfil who has loved her all along then marries Caterina. She herself dies in childbirth. Despite his grief Mr. Gilfil ministers for many years to the people in Milby. This tale is a tragic story of love and loss and redemptive service to other people. Eliot told realistic stories about ordinary people. She is a novelist of great psychological depth as well as able to puncture the balloons of hypocrisy always afloat in human society. Janet's Repentance. Janet is a wealthy woman who is also a battered wife. She is married to Mr Dempster who is a wealthy powerful attorney. Dempster is also an incorrigible drunk and wife beater. One night he cast Janet out into the cold. She is rescued by kind friends and the saintly Rev. Mr. Tryan. We see Janet rescued from despair to a life of useful service. We also overhear debates by the townspeople (serving as a Greek chorus in Eliot's works) commenting on the theological controversies of the day. These three stories would lead to George Eliot's name becoming known in the literary London world and among the reading public. Soon her authorial star would rise high in the wild blue yonder of literary immortality. Do yourself a favor and read this book.

I loved reading this book. I can now add this book to my collection of George Eliot books. I have 2 more books to read by George Eliot, then my collection will be complete. I am looking forward to reading the last 2.

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