

# GILFILLAN, GEORGE (1813-1878)

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## FULL TEXT

The 'literary portraits' of George Gilfillan, literary critic, anthologist and reformist theologian, introduced literary and historical figures to a wide Victorian audience.

A minister of religion and an unstinting advocate of the poor and oppressed, Gilfillan also published many books and more than 100 articles and literary reviews in the *Critic*, *Hogg's Instructor*, *Eclectic Review*, *Palladium*, *Celtic Magazine*, *Scottish Review* and other mostly Scottish periodicals from 1845 to 1878. His articles were reprinted in three widely read *Galleries of Literary Portraits* (1845, 1849 and 1855), in which he sketched the 'genius' and sensibilities of a wide range of predecessors and contemporaries, among them younger poets such as Sydney Dobell, Gerald Massey and Alexander Smith.

In 1854, W. E. Aytoun followed a hostile *Blackwood's* review of the 'spasmodics' Smith, Dobell, and others with a verse-epic *Firmilian*, in which he parodied Gilfillan as a too enthusiastic promoter of the works of neophytes. The assault damaged Gilfillan's reputation, but he continued to publish literary reviews, many of which formed introductions to his 48-volume *Library of British Poets* (1853-1860) or called attention to the work of little-known Scottish writers such as working-class poet Janet Hamilton.

Itself little-known today, Gilfillan's literary and religious journalism merits more sustained attention.

Sources: Boos 2004, Cronin 2002, Fennell 1968, Pursglove 1994, Watson and Watson 1892.

### See also:

- BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE (1817-1980)
- CRITIC (1843-1863)
- ECLECTIC REVIEW (1805-1868)
- MASSEY, (THOMAS) GERALD (1828-1907)
- REVIEWING
- SCOTTISH PRESS
- SCOTTISH REVIEW (1882-1900)

## DETAILS

<b>Subject:</b>	BLACKWOOD'S EDINBURGH MAGAZINE (1817-1980); CRITIC (1843-1863); ECLECTIC REVIEW (1805-1868); MASSEY, (THOMAS) GERALD (1828-1907); REVIEWING; SCOTTISH PRESS; SCOTTISH REVIEW (1882-1900); Literary journalism; Poet; Religion; Theology; Celtic Magazine; Hogg's Instructor; Palladium; Scotland
<b>People:</b>	Aytoun, William Edmonstoune; Dobell, Sydney; Hamilton, Janet; Smith, Alexander
<b>Editor:</b>	Laurel Brake, Marysa Demoor
<b>Publication title:</b>	Dictionary of Nineteenth Century Journalism; London
<b>Publication date:</b>	2009
<b>Publication year:</b>	2009
<b>Publisher:</b>	Academia Press; Eekhout 2, B-9000
<b>Place of publication:</b>	London
<b>Country of publication:</b>	London
<b>Publication subject:</b>	Journalism
<b>ISBN:</b>	9789038213408
<b>Source type:</b>	Encyclopedia or Reference Work
<b>Language of publication:</b>	English
<b>Document type:</b>	Journalists/Editors
<b>Document note:</b>	View contributor record from the Wellesley Index
<b>ProQuest document ID:</b>	2743885587
<b>Document URL:</b>	<a href="http://login.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/c19index/encyclopedias-reference-works/gilfillan-george-1813-1878/docview/2743885587/sem-2?accountid=14663">http://login.proxy.lib.uiowa.edu/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/c19index/encyclopedias-reference-works/gilfillan-george-1813-1878/docview/2743885587/sem-2?accountid=14663</a>
<b>Last updated:</b>	2022-12-02
<b>Database:</b>	C19: The Nineteenth Century Index
<b>Index:</b>	Dictionary of Nineteenth-Century Journalism

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